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THE VIRTUE OF DIVERSITY: PERCEPTIONS FROM THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA OF YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED IN CIVIL SOCIETY REGARDING SELF-IDENTIFICATION AND THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL ACTORS IN THE CONTEXT OF EU ACCESSION

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Abstract: *The military aggression of Russia against Ukraine has provoked collective anxiety within the population of the Republic of Moldova around a potential targeting of the country, while increasing collective efficacy and nationhood. The article explores the construction of identity among young Moldovans in civil society, particularly in the context of EU accession. Moldova, as a multiethnic state, has been grappling with identity disputes since its first multiparty elections in 1994. The authors investigate ethnic identification and positioning towards international actors, aiming to understand how internal and external loyalties overlap and can emerge in building a new civic identity beyond the post-Soviet legacy. The study shows a reevaluation of ethnic components and the connection with geopolitics. Before the Ukrainian war, the prolonged economic and political crises in the country, as well as the great power politics, had prompted the younger generations to be disconnected from the political, economic, and social aspects of public life. As such, they maintain a sense of social integration within their familial and friendship networks, which contributes to their sense of belonging within Moldovan society. The article examines the connection between self-identification and the geopolitical structures within the Republic of Moldova. The empirical part of the research involves 18 semi-structured interviews with Moldovan youth involved in civil society organizations, focusing on patterns of self-identification, including Pan-Romanianism, Moldovianism, Transnistrian ideology, and Gagauzian regional identity. The study also highlights the importance of pluralistic identification in which economic development is crucial in building up a consistent identification narrative.*

Keywords: : post-Soviet identity; multiethnic state; youth organizations, EU enlargement policy, Russian leverage.

1. Introduction

The article provides a theoretical and empirical analysis of the multiple layers that are negotiated in the construction of identity among young people involved in civil society activities in the Republic of Moldova, in the context of EU accession. Fifteen years after the initiation of the Eastern Partnership (EaP), the Republic of Moldova started its transition from the geopolitical division between two conflicting alliances - the European Union (EU) and Russia - and is finally moving towards the EU as, in 2023, the two sides decided to open accession negotiations. Brussels employs its normative and economic influence with the explicit objective to integrate the Republic of Moldova, but Russia utilises its cultural, energy, and military leverage to maintain close ties with its “near abroad”.

Since 1991, the Republic of Moldova, as a multiethnic state, has been characterized by a dialectical relationship between language/dialect, ethnicity, and kinship claims. Identity disputes have been a significant concern since the country’s first multiparty elections in 1994 (Danero–Iglesias 2015). The debates revolve around the meaning and content of Moldovan identity and nation, with the most debated aspects being, before 2023, the naming of the state’s language and the content of its history. In 2023, the official language of the Republic of Moldova was proclaimed to be Romanian (Official Gazette 97-99/2023), which was a significant milestone in the quest to disengage from the post-Soviet legacy and to look forward. Nevertheless, the disputes on Romanian versus Moldovan identity, the shadow economy or mass migration have contributed to the perception of the Republic of Moldova as a weak state with fluctuant positioning between the EU and Russia, struggling over strategic decisions. Externally, scholars argue that the Republic of Moldova is weakened by the geopolitical pressures of irredentism, while internally, the state attempts to generate loyalty when pre-existing allegiances still exist (Schrad 2004: 479). Such critics ignore the Millennials and the Z generation of the Republic of Moldova, who are civically more active and conscious. In addition, they do not pay attention to the multiethnic character of the state, the divergent interests of the international players or the Transnistrian file, which all contribute to shaping the internal discussions. As such, the authors investigate two factors: ethnic identification, and positioning towards international actors. The goal of the present article is to bring together perceptions of the way in which internal and external loyalties overlap and can be overcome in building a new civic identity beyond the post-

Soviet legacy. Despite the importance of ethnicity, kinship and language use in the Republic of Moldova, academic research seldom explores the meanings of identification (Kennedy 2010: 516). The latest census acknowledged Moldovans as forming a clear majority (75.1% in terms of ethnicity and 38.6% as mother tongue, see National Bureau of Statistics 2014), Romanians to be a minority (7% in terms of ethnicity and 25% as mother tongue), as well as Russians as being a minority (4.1% in terms of ethnicity and 21.8% as mother tongue), while other data collection efforts have not gone beyond these mutually exclusive categories. Many scholars have taken positions on what Romanian and Moldovan civic identities represent (Arambosa 2008; Ciscel 2006; Gherasim 2012; Heinz 1991), often exacerbating political or personal biases while ignoring the potential plurality of meanings or blurring of these categories of identification. The present paper is an endeavour to decrypt the relationship between two overlapping dimensions which massively influence identity - identitarian foundation, as well as international actors.

To understand the salience of perception of the Moldovan nation and identity, discussions with young active citizens have primarily centred around self-identification, civil activism and great players, all having undergone significant changes after 2020, due to the reconfirmation of a pro-European path and the identification of a more insecure international context after the war in Ukraine. Additionally, the present study shows that there has been a reevaluation of the role of the individual components of nationalism (pride, loyalty) and of the reconnection between young individuals and the international arena (Brubaker 1996; Jones and Wallace 1992; Helve and Wallace 2000). As many of them acknowledge, they are more engaged today than four years ago in the civil society. Young individuals become active citizens through their progression in a biography that is established by the family, the state, and the international arena (Heinz 1991).

2. Theoretical framework

Geopolitical competition over a territory or regime change is crucial in understanding the emergence of nationhood and national identities. According to Soehl and Karim (2021), a turbulent geopolitical past decreases the speed of building liberal nationalism and amplifies restrictive forms of self-identification. It is indeed the case of the Republic of Moldova, which has faced numerous structural transformations over the last century.

Even in the '90s and early 2000s, amid the post-Soviet context of the Republic of Moldova, the state failed to provide essential services and what was perceived as the formerly established and secure transitions of young people were replaced by a variety of uncertain and risky life paths. Due to high rates of youth unemployment, many individuals were compelled to pursue professional opportunities abroad or engage in informal economic activities (Roberts et al. 2000; Herța-Șerpi 2022). The connection between young individuals and the government met with low levels of trust as the government ceased to offer a range of social and economic opportunities. This led to a prevailing sense of scepticism and disappointment towards traditional politics and geopolitical partnerships in general (Spanning et al. 2000). Several studies have observed the significant familial bonds that have aided young individuals during these challenging decades (Roberts and Jung 1995). Additionally, informal networks of friends and acquaintances have played a significant role in offering social support and facilitating access to resources for the young (Roberts et al. 2000).

In the present study, the authors test the following hypotheses: (1) the youth of the Republic of Moldova increase their loyalty towards the state (in terms of trust in state institutions and prospects) as they react to EU accession; (2) the Russian aggression in Ukraine has impacted the way in which they perceive themselves and societal change in the country; (3) civil engagement is increasing and bi-partisan national loyalty is reduced.

The constructivist approach to the study of ethnicity and nation – as a prominent perspective on post-Soviet space (Suny 1993; Herța 2017) – views social and political groupings as ongoing processes shaped by subjective self-perception. This theoretical approach will be linked in the following with the geopolitical element (Soehl-Karim 2021), as an attempt to define the identification of Moldovan youth beyond the ethnic dimension. Other layers of identification are not considered in the present study, even though on the one hand, sociologists have highlighted the significance of networks and family in identification (McAdam et al. 2001), whilst scholars in International Relations, on the other hand, are focused on the impact of institutional change and recollections of past imposed identities (Suny 1993).

3. Research Design

The authors use qualitative data collection, by conducting 18 semi-structured interviews between November 2023 and January 2024 with youth from the Republic of Moldova who are involved in civil society organisations (CSOs), i.e. current and former personnel within the 18-35 age limit (Striepe 2021). The structure of the interview is displayed in Table 3 and the list of interviewees appears in Table 4, at the end of the paper.

Fourteen interviews were conducted in Romanian, while four interviews were conducted in Russian, the predominant language of communication in Transnistria, with the help of a local translator. Aside from conducting interviews, the authors were also engaged in observation in the cities of Chişinău, Tiraspol, and Comrat from November 2023 to January 2024. The in-person interviews took place in those localities, while two interviews were conducted online. The inquiries directed at young CSO members mostly revolved around their self-identification and the political and geopolitical preferences, with specific emphasis on the conditionality and constraints they face in daily interactions with linguistically different co-nationals.

Through the fieldwork, the authors tested patterns of self-identification: Pan-Romanianism, Moldovanism, Transnistrian ideology, and Gagauzian regional identity. The main debates - between Moldovanism and pan-Romanianism - have developed a concept of Moldova that is either partially European or completely pro-European (Suveica 2017). Moldovanist discourses, as a reminiscence of the official Soviet position on the Moldovan nation, frame the Republic of Moldova as having a language, ethnicity, culture, and history that are separate from Romania and, sometimes, from the EU (Protsyk–Osoian 2010: 15). The findings on the field have revealed nuances of Moldovanism and pan-Romanianism that augment the findings of Knott et al. (2022) in the context of EU accession. The authors consider Transnistrian political identity and Gagauz ambiguous self-identification as distinct categories. The findings of the interviews show that there is no Transnistrianism *per se*, as the citizens of the so-called Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic define their identity through territorial *status quo* and belonging to the *russkiy mir*. Prior to the extensive identity-building exercise led by the Transnistrian leadership, particularly the first “President”, Igor Smirnov, the concept of a “Transnistrian people” did not exist. As a consequence, the present paper interprets this identification as an ideological construction or a political identity, and not as a socially assumed

designator. In the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia (AUG) the identity is neither defined linguistically (with the inhabitants using primarily Russian in their everyday interactions), nor ethnically (as the territory is heterogenous in terms of ethnicity and there is a low number of active speakers of Gagauz language). Such an ambiguous regional identity depends upon donors and shows how these diverse, pluralistic spaces, without economic development, cannot build up a consistent identification narrative.

The following table indicates the findings on the field through semi-structured interviews:

Table 1 Mapping identification into inductive categories							
Inductive category	Number of interviews	Age range	Language	Identification of the Others at international level	Pro-Europeanism	Pro-Russism	Relational implication
Pan-Romanianism	6	18-35	Romanian	The Russian Federation	Clear acknowledgment	Clear rejection	Embedded within Romania or with a European path
Moldovanism	6	18-35	Romanian and Russian	Moderate, but blurred answers	Nuanced acknowledgment	Blurred answers	Separated from Romania, but not competing
Transnistrian pro-Russian ideology	4	18-35	Russian	EU	Clear rejection	Clear acknowledgment	Competing with Romania or with a European path
Gagauzian irregular identity	2	18-35	Russian, Gagauz, and Moldovan	Blurred answers	Ambiguous acknowledgment	Nuanced acknowledgment	Separated from Romania, but not competing

4. From Soviet passport to EU citizenship

The Republic of Moldova has been confronted with the challenges of defining its identity in the aftermath of the Soviet Union's collapse (Cash 2007). The Communist regime in the Republic of Moldova from 2001 to 2009 sought to establish a cohesive "Moldovan identity" by means of official ideology, employing public diplomacy and educational initiatives. Nevertheless, the implementation of this strategy elicited a mixed response from the heterogeneous population, comprising a substantial Russian, Gagauz, and Ukrainian minority. The enduring impact of Soviet identity is seen via the persistence of cultural and linguistic differences within the country (Crowther 2001; Katagoshchina 2002).

To have a comprehensive understanding of the Republic of Moldova's current identity struggle, it is essential to examine the historical, social, and economic aspects that have influenced the country's citizens' self-perceptions. The dissolution of the Soviet Union resulted in both the emergence of independence for the Republic of Moldova and a subsequent era characterised by political and economic upheaval. The turbulent times significantly influenced the development of the country's identity, as it grappled with reconciling its historical connections to the Soviet Union and its aspiration for a renewed national identity. The political structure and cultural character of the Republic of Moldova had been dominated by Soviet structures, as noted by Casu (2001), who emphasizes the importance of rural-urban division as a significant part of the identity. The interviews conducted for the present paper were held in urban settings, even though the interviewees often evoked the opposition between urban and rural, the pro-Europeans and the admirers of *russkiy mir*.

Nevertheless, the dominant characteristic of the Moldovan identity is its link to the Romanian one. As mentioned in the interviews, Moldovan identity is a Romanian identity:

We have the same language. However, there is no such thing as Moldovan as a distinct entity; it solely refers to the territory. Nevertheless, our collective identity, as a group of individuals belongs to a specific nation, the Romanian one. This identity is closely tied to our language. The term "Moldovan" is not recognised or does not refer to a distinct entity. From our perspective, there is no distinct Moldovan identity; it is simply a variation of Romanian. (D.B.)

They expressed a perception of consistency in relation to a persistent effort to uphold the "accurate" interpretation of history for a revived Moldovan identity intertwined with the Romanian identity.

The present-day situation is similar to a situation where an older brother assists his younger brother. Romania is the older brother, while Moldova is the younger sibling. Assistance is needed due to a situation involving blood and language. (L.E.)

The Republic of Moldova faces challenges in establishing its identity due to geopolitical factors as well.

With such neighbours as Russia not so far away, you have to be careful who you declare yourself to be. (D.M)

Balancing independence and managing its position between the EU and Russia has impacted the Republic of Moldova's identity development (Demińska and Iglesias 2013). When examining the Soviet identity, the literature takes into account the viewpoints of different socioeconomic factions, such as ethnic minorities, political groupings, and cultural establishments. Each of these groups fulfils a distinct function in influencing the development of the Republic of Moldova's collective self-perception, contributing in an intricate way to the overall portrayal (Wolfschwenger–Saxinger 2020; Casu 2001). The combination of these variables has influenced the course of the Republic of Moldova's identity development and continues to influence its sense of the self in the present day (Casu 2001).

As it was mentioned in two interviews, Moldovanism is still present:

I am fluent in Romanian, citizen of the Republic of Moldova, and I identify as Moldovan. (C.I.)

Regarding yourself as Moldovan is seen by many not only as disrespectful, but also as an entirely incorrect perspective. Ștefan cel Mare was a Moldovan in the truest sense. It is worth noting that he wrote in Cyrillic script. (O.B.)

Furthermore, the political and educational programmes that were put into effect during the Soviet era have had a significant influence, including bilingual education and access to Russian media, which are widely used today by those who engage with Moldovanism or by ethnic Russians. The spread of official ideology and the encouragement of a single “Moldovan identity” in the multiethnic, stratified milieu of the Republic of Moldova with divergent ideological preferences have created the current complex relationship between loyalty to the state and supranational entities and the protection of various types of cultural and linguistic heritage. This ongoing contradiction resonates in current discussions on national civil identity and is a focal point of disagreement within Moldovan communities.

As it is expressed in an interview:

My father consistently refuses to acknowledge his Romanian heritage. Due to manipulation. Moldova was under Russian rule for over a century. And a hundred years don't pass so easily. Both my parents identify themselves as Moldovans. They are unwilling to declare themselves as having Romanian ethnicity. My father claims fluency in Moldovan, as he was instructed in the language during his education at a Soviet institution. They were unable to express themselves in Romanian language. (F.J)

The argument of a generational shift to Romanian self-identification is the result of changing political regimes and education systems.

The four inductive categories presented above are linked to geopolitical preferences. The self-identified Romanians (unionists or not, pragmatic or just nostalgic) generally hold a dual citizenship and express a pro-European ideology. The interviewed Moldovanists, even though they often hold a Romanian citizenship as well, offer the most varied answers regarding self-identification as they are both for EU integration and willing to maintain strategic ties with Russia. They used the most religious and Soviet nostalgic terms in their narrations, even though they were willing to give the interview in Romanian language. The political way Transnistrians self-identify is as Russians by language and cultural preference and they see their lives in terms of destiny, in spite of the economic impoverishment they face. Many of them already hold a Moldovan citizenship. The most ambiguous self-identification patterns are noticeable in the case of the Gagauz community. Even though they embrace Russism and speak Russian in their daily lives, many of them have already applied for the Romanian or Bulgarian citizenship. In order to present these contradictions, the next chapter will focus on the question of dual citizenship.

5. Experiencing dual citizenship

The dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia resulted in the establishment of new states and the emergence of new forms of politics related to identity and citizenship outside national borders (Eyal and Smith 1996). Considering the legal dimension of the issue, the Moldovan citizenship law has evolved from conditional *jus soli* to unconditional *jus soli*, which defines membership of the Moldovan nation at birth (Vink and Groot 2010). The 1991 Citizenship Law, which was the first of its kind in post-Soviet states, led to widespread anxiety over the meaning of citizenship and the requirement to choose between Moldovan and Soviet

citizenship. In 2002, the constitution was amended to drop the ban on holding multiple citizenships, leading to the “Law on Dual Citizenship” signed by President Voronin in 2003 (Recent updates to Moldovan citizenship legislation 2021).

Similarly, in North Macedonia, Kosovo, Taiwan, and Republika Srpska, many Moldovans hold multiple citizenships. Kin majorities are the demographic groups within a certain geographical area that are acknowledged as having the same ethnic background as an external kin-state (Knott 2022), in this particular case Romania. International organizations like the Venice Commission and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) have tolerated the use of leverage by kin-states against home-states to offset discrimination toward minorities. The OSCE has repeatedly warned the external actors not to grant “citizenship en masse to citizens of another state, including if this happens as the result of a sum of individual applications” (Knott 2022: 48), because it might threaten bilateral relations. Moldovans as a kin majority hold state power and are not exposed to discrimination and marginalisation as minorities within the kin-state. Nevertheless, almost one third of the citizens of the Republic of Moldova hold a dual citizenship (Necșuțu 2021).

The Romanian citizenship policy is a favourable circumstance. Undoubtedly, our grandparents and parents were unjustly deprived of their citizenship through coercive means. While the citizens, who were Romanian, did not voluntarily relinquish it, the then Communist policy of the Soviet Union wrongfully confiscated it from them. (R.U.)

Individually, we gradually adopt the identity of being European. By acquiring the Romanian citizenship, every citizen of Moldova obtains the European citizenship. Once five million Moldovan citizens obtain the Romanian citizenship, this will effectively address the issue of Europeanisation and European integration in Moldova. (A.L.)

For Moldovans, the value of the Romanian or Bulgarian citizenship has significantly increased due to its association with European Union membership. The Romanian citizenship quickly became a means for Moldovans to gain legal rights pertaining to employment, and migration to European Union member states. This choice became available when there were limited alternatives (Guțu–Gheorghiu 2004).

What is the reason behind Romania issuing passports in Moldova and why does Russia provide passports to citizens of separatist districts in Moldova? The reason is identical: by having citizens present, one can eventually assert their own authority or entitlement. However, the exact number of passports issued in Chișinău and the number of individuals residing here remains unknown. (J. G.)

In addition, the ideological component regards Romanian citizenship as serving as a sort of compensation, acting as a “remedial right” (Dumbrava 2014: 109), which corrects the historical injustice faced by close relatives who involuntarily lost their Romanian citizenship due to Soviet occupation. Nevertheless, this duality might affect the development of the current national identity. The interviewees deeply appreciate the opportunity of a dual citizenship, often invoking maternal grandparents, who had their Romanian citizenship revoked against their will.

6. Two elephants in one room: the separatist region and the autonomous territory

The Transnistrian region encompasses 12% of the Republic of Moldova's landmass. The population is composed of three nearly equal ethnic groups: Moldovans, Russians, and Ukrainians, who identify themselves politically and through linguistic denomination as Russian speakers. The complex geopolitical dynamics of the territory prompts an examination of border-making practices, considering the interplay between Moldovan and Transnistrian authorities, international actors and the main donors (Morar 2021). The literature emphasises that each actor controls critical resources such as access, funding, know-how, energy supplies, military force, and symbolic capital, as there is a bargaining leverage on both sides of the Dnister river. Consequently, the restricted civil society – which is under constant surveillance – exhibits agency both locally, when interacting with *de facto* authorities and national authorities, and at regional and international levels, when engaging with external donors and organisations (Comai 2017; Borgen 2006; Blakkisrud–Kolstø 2011).

We are Russians who are captured at the border with Moldova. We continue to fight for our ideals and our state. (A.V.)

I am a Moldovan citizen, but having a Romanian passport grants me the ability to travel to Transnistria. I volunteer at an elementary school to teach them Romanian and help the kids to develop their Romanian language skills. (P.J.)

I am an athlete, and I coach football to kids for free and for fun. I had been interrogated by the police about why I don't do something more useful and lucrative (A.V.).

In contrast, the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia (ATUG) is ethnically more diverse, but Russian serves as the *lingua franca*. The autonomous status and economic impoverishment of Gagauzia have hindered its ability to engage in identity construction throughout its relatively brief existence. The lack of substantial initiatives aimed at constructing a common identity and the absence of policies promoting nationalism have resulted in a vague

environment where individuals can express and encounter apparently contradictory allegiances and senses of belonging (Holsapple 2022). The residents can embrace a wide range of ethnic and national identities, but these are strategically employed when expressing their sense of belonging. This is because they find themselves in a sub-cultural position (Fellerer et al. 2020) with affiliations and identities that may not align with each other. This phenomenon is marked by the contrasting utilisation of historical heritage in rebuilding discussions about identity, and strategies of altering loyalties to maximise benefits from Turkey, Russia, or Romania. Subsequently, the civil society lacks initiatives or policies for the preservation of the Gagauz language or support for private initiatives.

The ethnic identity of the area is characterised by a diverse and intermingling nature. We are accustomed to residing in a diverse community comprising not only Gagauzians but individuals from many backgrounds. There is no distinction made between being purely Gagauzian or being Moldovan or any other nationality. There is no longer a clear differentiation. We are accustomed to the notion that there are a large number of individuals, each possessing unique characteristics. (R.O.)

M.N., a secretary in Comrat, provides an elucidation as to why, notwithstanding her lineage having a Bulgarian father and Gagauz mother, she aligns herself with the Russian identity:

Unfortunately, I am not proficient in the Gagauz language. I identify myself as Russian. (M.N.)

The response demonstrates how the Soviet legacy of associating ethnicity with language may still heavily influence the perspectives of many people in Gagauzia.

In a 2008 address, Mikhail Formuzal, the former leader of Gagauzia between 2006 and 2015, supposedly made a relevant declaration in this regard:

Our former president asserted that our nation is an integral component of the Russian world because the mastery of the Russian language serves as a safeguard for our self-preservation, encompassing the preservation of our ethnic identity. (M.N.)

As a result of historical events involving territorial changes among the Russian Empire, Romania, the Soviet Union, and independent Moldova in the past 150 years, the people from Gagauzia often choose whether or not to align themselves with dominant geopolitical narratives of different nation-states like Russia, the Republic of Moldova, Romania or even Turkey.

7. Conclusions

The debates around pro/anti-European and ambiguous loyalties in the Republic of Moldova are widespread these days in the country, as well as in the diaspora and internationally, testifying to the ample post-Soviet cleavages that run rampant in Moldovan society and beyond.

Our study captures the zeitgeist of such debates in a new context, marked by a decidedly pro-EU official governmental stance, influenced by a war of aggression on the borders of the Republic of Moldova involving one of the principal stakeholders in the matter of shaping identities within the country, i.e. the Russian Federation, and with considerable reforming pressure stemming from the EU itself and from Romania, as another key stakeholder in the process.

The study has investigated two factors, ethnic identification, and positioning towards international actors, through the lens of young people involved in the civil society, whose weight has gained more prominence of late. By utilising the inductive schemes of Pro-European, pro-Russian and ambivalent loyalties, we have been able to highlight the expectations and identity shifts in the country. As such, the liberal pro-Europeans of the Republic of Moldova are willing to establish a shared non-bipartisan political initiative, similar to the one undertaken by Romania throughout the process of joining the European Union. This is of interest because in the case of the latter, a country whose cultural and linguistic fabric stands out as similar to that of the Republic of Moldova, such a stance became the driving force behind the protracted, but ultimately successful, EU integration bid. Moldovans adopting a similar position for their country tackle one of the incontestable hurdles in the accession file, namely the separatist region of Transnistria. In so doing, they express their opposition to the federalisation of Transnistria and seek a comparable administrative status to that of the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia. To substitute distrust and multiple loyalties, the pro-Europeans envision a nationwide endeavour overseen by the principles of the rule of law, as a prerequisite for resolving the territorial hindrance that precludes the country from making swifter progress on the EU-bound path.

On the other hand, those with ambivalent loyalties advocate the abandonment of a pro-European trajectory as a result of the Soviet heritage and the Transnistrian file, therefore marking a stark form of political and social polarisation within the country. In addition, they highlight the

presence of the Russian minority in the Republic of Moldova, which continues to play a significant role in the process of reshaping identity and has the potential to harmonise conflicting narratives. In keeping with such views, they support the resolution of the Transnistrian issue by means of federalisation. This paints a divisive and unpredictable picture of the social fabric of the Republic of Moldova, with little precedent in the countries of the region that sought EU accession in previous decades, and with unforeseen consequences for the political future of this recently recognised EU candidate.

The authors acknowledge the limitations of the present study, stemming, *inter alia*, from the narrow access to first-hand, reliable information beyond the Dniestr River, as well as from the amount of content gathered through the sociological investigation performed. However, the geographical and social breadth of the targeted audience does provide significant trend indicators for the present situation within the borders of the country. It thus becomes of interest that future research should focus on the Moldovan diaspora as well, while looking at the Transnistrian file from a constructivist perspective, which is bound to provide more insights and foster more elaborate predictions on the evolution of the issue at hand.

Table 2| Respondents' profiles

No.	Initials	Gender	Age	Residence	Profession	Civil Organization	Society
1.	N.P.	Woman	35	Chişinău	Pharmacist	Faith-based organization	
2.	O.B.	Man	29	Chişinău	Waiter	NGO for animal rights	
3.	F.J.	Woman	22	Chişinău	Student	Faith-based organization	
4.	D.E.	Man	31	Chişinău	Taxi driver	Sports club	
5.	A.L.	Woman	22	Chişinău	Student	NGO for children	
6.	P.N.	Man	35	Chişinău	Chef	Faith-based organization	
7.	R.U.	Man	32	Chişinău	Salesman	Sports club	
8.	C.I.	Woman	35	Chişinău	Cleaner	Faith-based organization	
9.	I.I.	Man	30	Chişinău	Doctor	Faith-based organization	
10.	J.N.	Woman	22	Chişinău	Journalist	Labour union	

11.	D.B	Man	22	Chişinău	Teacher	Professional organization and educational NGO
12.	I.I	Woman	29	Chişinău	Artist	NGO for art education
13.	M.N	Man	32	Tiraspol	Fireman	NGO for elderly
14.	D.F.	Woman	35	Tiraspol	Electrician	Labour union
15.	E.I.	Man	30	Tiraspol	Businessman	Faith-based organization
16.	A.V.	Man	22	Tiraspol	Unemployed	Sports club
17.	M.N.	Woman	19	Comrat	Secretary	NGO (unspecified)
18.	R.O.	Woman	35	Comrat	Accountant	Faith-based organization

Table 3 | Interview guide

Basic introductory questions

What is your age?

What does your organization do/What do you study?

What about your parents' family?

How many family members are working abroad?

Culture and politics

What do you think about politics in the Republic of Moldova?

What do you think about political culture in the Republic of Moldova?

Self-identification

For ethnicity, how do you feel yourself?

What makes you feel [ethnicity]?

What about language? Culture?

Majority-minority relations

Do you think that there are differences between [different groups] in [case]?

Do you feel near or far to the EU/Russia? How do you feel in that area?

What do you think about the relations between the EU/Russia and [fieldwork site]?

Kin-state policies

What do you think about the policies of the EU/Russia towards the Republic of Moldova?

Have you applied for the Romanian citizenship?/ Have you applied for the Russian citizenship?

When did you apply? When did you receive it?

Why did you apply for the Romanian citizenship?

Has the Romanian citizenship changed how you feel about the Republic of Moldova?

What can you do as a Romanian/Russian citizen?

Trust

Whom do you trust?

Describe the trust level you have in the family, public administration, and great powers.

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THE MULTISTAKEHOLDER INITIATIVE APPROACH TO EUROPEAN CRISIS MANAGEMENT. CIVILIAN CSDP AND ENGAGEMENT WITH LOCAL NON- STATE ACTORS

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Abstract: *The Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions are deployed in complex operational environments, where a plethora of national, regional and international actors are present. These present circumstances enable the existence of an - either direct or indirect - but inexorable engagement between all stakeholders involved in similar activities. While the vast majority of current debates and research focus solely on the cooperative dimension of the CSDP in the framework of multilateralism and regionalism, the topic of the EU's engagement with local stakeholders is scarcely explored. Therefore, drawing on the multistakeholder initiative approach (MSI) in economic theory, this paper assesses the engagement of CSDP missions with civil societies and private sector entities in theatres of operations. Employing a single case study approach of inquiry, consisting of the EUCAP Somalia mission this paper aims at answering the research questions: how does EUCAP Somalia engage with local non-state actors, what are the opportunities associated with this engagement and to what extent can a MSI approach be implemented by EUCAP Somalia? By deploying a qualitative research design, this paper uses document analysis within a single case study approach of inquiry. The results of this approach show two distinct tendencies. While EUCAP Somalia informally engages with local non-state actors, this engagement is rather insufficient. Results of this research further show that CSDP missions represent an important tool of EU diplomacy and their engagement with local non-state actors positively impacts the implementation of two of their core principles: local ownership and human security.*

Keywords: CSDP, crisis management, multistakeholder approach, civil society, public-private sector partnership.

1. Introduction

EU's crisis management domain encompasses all civilian and military missions and operations and is the most visible element of the European Union's external action (Koenig, 2016). Moreover, the EU crisis management domain has nevertheless an evolutive character, marked by institutional reforms and based on significant practical experience (Smith M. , 2017). However, there are some core elements of the CSDP action which not only shape its distinct identity, but also help achieving its outcome, namely being an effective peacebuilding tool. Among these, ensuring local ownership while fostering a human security approach is paramount in all CSDP missions. While these are embedded in the EU rhetoric, how to practically implement these principles in the ever-complex operational environments in which CSDP missions are deployed remains the main challenge.

Moreover, challenging environments, particularly on the African continent, are attracting the attention and interest of a plethora of international and regional actors. In the context of major power competition's return, with the ongoing war in Ukraine and in its pursuit of becoming a more strategic and autonomous actor in the field of security and defence, the EU needs an even more consistent capacity to act and deliver in the security field globally. While a vast number of elements contribute to the EU's capacity to deliver efficient solutions in the crisis management domain, local ownership holds a central place, given the per se contested nature of peacebuilding activities.

In these circumstances, assessing the EU crisis management domain from various perspectives and disciplines becomes a priority for the EU to adapt to new challenges and to be an efficient security provider. Drawing on the EU's highly effective economic model, the connection between a policy which deals with "high politics" issues - the CSDP - and economic theory is not nevertheless surprising. It is a very useful perspective in assessing the main challenge that all CSDP missions face: the practical dimension of their mandate implementation. Given the complexity of their operational environment and the multitude of actors involved in related activities, CSDP missions can be analysed through the multi-stakeholder initiative approach (MSI). Since MSIs are mostly an instrument characterised by pragmatism, they can be a valuable tool for better understanding the nature of CSDP activities and challenges at the operational level, as well as contributing to finding tailor-made solutions to these.

Therefore, this paper aims to assess the European crisis management domain through the lens of MSI approach, to deeply understand its practical dimensions. Moreover, a case study is the most appropriate method of inquiry of such a topic, being intrinsically connected to the terms of complexity, particularity, uniqueness and particular interest (Stake, 1995). In this regard, a clear establishment of the research's delimitations is necessary. To this end, the case of the civilian CSDP mission deployed in Somalia - EUCAP Somalia - has been selected as a case study, due to its complex and particular nature. Thus, the paper envisages the assessment of the interaction between EUCAP Somalia and local stakeholders, namely non-state actors such as civil society organisations (CSOs) and the private business sector involved in civic action. Furthermore, the paper advances two hypotheses: there is a direct relation between a CSDP mission's engagement with local stakeholders and the mission's local ownership and CSDP engagement with local stakeholders positively affects the mission's effectiveness.

Consequently, the purpose of this paper is to understand what could be the potential benefits and challenges associated with the CSDP missions' engagement with local non-state stakeholders within the framework of the MSI approach. Although the strategic aspect will be assessed as well, the paper focuses on the operational one. Therefore, the first research question of the study is: how does EUCAP Somalia engage with local non-state actors? Moreover, since the security environment in Somalia is characterized by the presence of a vast number of actors, the current paper is considering a second research question: what are the opportunities associated with the engagement between the civilian CSDP mission in Somalia and local non-state actors for the overall missions' effectiveness?

To this end, the paper envisages the operationalization of two concepts: European crisis management and local non-state actors. The overall approach follows the framework of the multistakeholders initiative one derived from business and economy theories within the wider umbrella of constructivism in security studies. It is against this theoretical backdrop that a qualitative case study approach to inquiry is being deployed in this paper, together with a SWOT analysis. The research is being addressed both employing a descriptive content analysis of relevant policy documents (declarations, decisions, action plans, implementation reports), official press declarations, official social media posts, and informal conversations. The descriptive analysis is followed up by a single-case study, in which the functionality of the MSI

framework is assessed. This research employs qualitative primary and secondary data. Data will be collected via desk research.

Subsequently, this research has a diverse target audience: from academia interested in European security and peacebuilding to scholars, EU officials and the general European public. Nevertheless, Somali non-state actors' representatives are also part of the target audience of this paper. Since an assessment of the practical dimension of working through multiple frameworks in crisis management involving non-state actors in Somalia is scarcely assessed, this research aims at revealing the practice of this engagement. Moreover, the paper will assess whether higher levels of engagement between CSDP missions and local non-state actors can contribute to higher levels of missions' effectiveness.

Finally, the structure of the paper consists of five sections. The first one addresses the literature review, followed by the one depicting the conceptual map of the paper and the one describing the methodology pursued. The main section of the paper, namely CSDP in Somalia - engaging with local non-state actors, consists of two parts: the first one addresses the current state of affairs from a strategic perspective, while the second one consists of a SWOT analysis of the EUCAP Somalia's engagement with local non-state actors. This section is followed by one discussing the findings of the research, reduced to specific themes, with an emphasis on threats and opportunities associated with the MSI approach in the particular case of civilian CSDP in Somalia. The concluding section summarizes the central themes found and further opens the prospects of new ways of assessing CSDP through the lens of a multidisciplinary approach and the applicability of this approach to other contexts.

2. Literature review

While the topic of applying the MSI framework to CSDP is innovative, there are two current categories of literature which have a certain relevance to it. Firstly, there is a vast literature written on the topic of civil society organizations' implication in the EU's domestic policy fields (Greenwood, 2009); (Huller & Kohler-Koch, 2009). Furthermore, these have constituted the basis of other research focusing on the interaction between civil society and CSDP from a democratic theory's perspective, namely CSOs' democracy-enhancing effect over the CSDP (Dembinski & Joachim, 2014). However, this perspective takes into account civil

society and its influence on the CSDP referring to European CSOs, not CSOs from countries where CSDP missions are deployed. Secondly, there is another body of literature which focuses on the cooperation between CSDP missions and civil society on a case-by-case approach, emphasizing its informal character (Shapovalova, 2016). Nevertheless, these take into account the same European perspective over CSO's influence on the CSDP.

Assessing the interaction between CSDP missions and operations and local CSOs needs to be conducted on a case-by-case scenario, the status of CSOs being at times sensitive in particular countries where CSDP missions are being deployed. This statement holds a particular significance in a vast majority of countries from Sub-Saharan Africa where the environment for CSOs is often highly complex. Despite the fact that the EU acknowledges and supports the role that CSOs play in its policies, studies have pointed to a wide array of opinions on the matter in African countries (Misoiu & Petrica, 2023). In some countries where CSDP missions are present, such as Somalia, CSOs are viewed by government officials with hostility, at times being subject to intimidation or threats (Menkhaus, Sheikh, Quinn, & Farah, 2010). Therefore, the level of engagement between various CSDP missions and local CSOs can vary to a greater extent, being dependent on the social, political and legal context of the host country. Moreover, the situation changes in time, as these countries experience peacebuilding processes, transition processes or changes in the social and political spectrums.

For instance, in the case of EULEX Kosovo, CSOs became part of the mission's planning process, while several conferences with their members took place in various stages of the process (Palm, 2017). Moreover, if certain missions can have an official CSOs liaison officer, for others, an informally appointed staff member manages this task, as it was the case of EUPOL COPPS (Palm, 2017).

Another connected topic is the one assessing the interaction between local NGOs - mainly those from the African continent - and different EU bodies (such as the European Community Humanitarian Office) in the context of humanitarian aid (Irrera, 2016)

The engagement between CSDP missions and other local non-state actors, such as the business sector, remains largely underexplored in the existing literature. While the subject has been mentioned in passing, there is a noticeable lack of dedicated scholarly analysis on this specific aspect.

Thus, the topic of CSDP missions' engagement with local non-state actors in host countries from a MSI approach represents a gap within the literature written. Moreover, due to its innovative character, it advances a plethora of questions. Among these, how CSDP missions engage with local non-state actors in the framework of MSI approach and what are the opportunities associated with this engagement relative to a CSDP mission's effectiveness are the two research questions that this paper is focusing on.

Nevertheless, to provide an answer to the above-mentioned research questions, several conceptual delimitations, together with the limits of this paper need to be addressed in the upcoming sections of the paper.

3. Theoretical framework

Having as a general background security studies theories and the philosophical assumptions of social constructivism, this paper applies the MSI approach to CSDP missions.

Derived from sociology, the argumentation and the constructivist ideas make their appearance in the 1980s (Agius, 2019). Consequently, by emphasising the social dimension as opposed to the material one, constructivists advance the idea that security can be socially constructed (McDonald, 2018).

In terms of security, constructivist authors assume that security threats vary over time, thus being the product of social interactions between actors. By summarising the main concepts employed within the constructivist theory argumentation, it is observed that the concept of ideas, followed by that of identity and finally by the interaction between actors are the central ones. Constructivists have taken from social theories the idea that identity is formed by the interaction of political actors (Berger & Luckman, 1991). Consequently, security is a social construct, with emphasis on the interaction between actors involved in the same type of activities.

Therefore, it's within this philosophical framework that this paper is further assessing the interaction between CSDP missions and local stakeholders within the framework of MSI approach. Thus, this section further explores what is a MSI, what is its connection to the security field and European crisis management. Subsequently, the next step is to operationalize the concept of a local non-state actor in the context of CSDP.

MSIs have appeared as a natural consequence of pragmatically tackling complex issues in the international business environment. Consequently, they have a considerably pragmatic character, oriented towards problem-solving. While there is no universal definition of a MSI, most authors in the economic/business realm refer to it as being "an interactive process in which business, CSOs and possibly other stakeholder groups interact to make business processes more socially and/or environmentally sustainable" (Van Huijstee, 2012). The name itself - MSI - is nevertheless suggestive: more than two key entities need to be involved, while they all share a particular interest or are involved in the same type of activity.

Apart from the business sector, MSIs have been employed in various settings to tackle complex problems, most notably in the areas of humanitarian aid or, more recently in addressing cyber security concerns (Ciglic & Hering, 2021). Within the security domain, engaging MSIs has been a valuable strategy in various peacebuilding processes, fostering a space for dialogue, negotiation or debate (GPPAC's Preventive Action Working Group, 2017).

Further connecting the MSIs and CSDP requires a conceptualisation of the European crisis management domain. Encompassing all civilian missions and military missions and operations, the CSDP is thus seen as a *sui generis* instrument, designed to address complex global security challenges (Koenig, 2016). Moreover, by implementing its integrated approach to external conflicts and crises, the EU depicts itself as a security actor in the overall broad peacebuilding arena, addressing both immediate consequences and root causes of a conflict. The peacebuilding dimension of the CSDP is further emphasized by its continuous institutional evolution and practical experience (Kmec, 2022); (Smith M. , 2017). This dimension is even more evident in the case of capacity-building and training CSDP missions.

Lastly, establishing a connection between MSIs and CSDP missions requires the conceptualisation of local non-state actors. While this conceptualisation of non-state actors has as a general background the provisions of the Cotonou Agreement, which has been replaced by the Samoa Agreement, it also takes into account the specificity of the selected case study. Therefore, in this paper, local non-state actors refer to CSOs and business entities within the private sector which have been involved in civic actions.

Consequently, this section introduces the concepts and the theoretical lenses through which their interaction is being assessed. This approach has its limitations to particular case

studies, characterised by an articulated civil society and bustling business sector. Since CSDP missions are usually deployed in challenging operational environments, this approach has been the subject of critics as not being applicable in settings where democratic dialogue cannot be fostered (Faysse, 2006). While introducing the paper's methodological approach to inquiry, the next section further elaborates on this matter.

4. Methodology

Researching the topic of CSDP from a business theory perspective requires the use of methodological approaches specific to both domains: security studies and business. Taking into account this aspect, it becomes thus imperative that the selected approach to inquiry has to respond to the main research aim while being viable from a practical perspective. If one refers to the practical aspect, the researcher should make use of methods, techniques, theories and approaches which best serve the main research question, in what Chernoff (2006) describes as analytic eclecticism. Therefore, this paper is deploying qualitative research, "understanding" being the main aim of the research. To this end, it employs the case study approach of inquiry, exploring the topic in-depth and utilising multiple sources of information to answer the research questions (Yin, 2018) (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The main characteristic of this approach is the context's specificity, this being the main parameter for bounding the case study. The context refers not only to the presence of three CSDP missions and operations in Somalia but also to its specificity in social, economic, political and cultural terms.

Therefore, the case study is an intrinsic one, in which the context prevails and for which the researcher is reluctant to generalise its findings (Stake, 1995). From another perspective, the case study is an exploratory one, since the epistemological focus is to produce an in-depth understanding while exploring it through multiple sources of information. From a temporal perspective, the case study will be conducted in January-October 2022.

In terms of data collection, the paper employs two categories of data: data gathered through document analysis of official reports, documents and official social communication networks and secondary data from various articles written on the topic.

The next step within the methodological architecture consists of data analysis and representation strategy. To this aim, a tool mostly utilised in the business domain will be

employed: a SWOT analysis (Evaluation methodological approach SWOT (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, Threats), 2015). This strategic analytical tool will assess the strengths, weaknesses, as well as opportunities and threats associated with the interaction between EUCAP Somalia and local NSAs. This tool adds a layer of understanding of the researched topic and contributes to providing an answer to the research questions from a different perspective.

By deploying such an eclectic methodological design, this paper aims at emphasizing its innovative and multidisciplinary character. Nevertheless, the common and consistent characteristic of this research consists in the irrefutable commitment to the ethical conduct of the research during all of its stages.

5. CSDP and local NSAs: the strategic level.

The role of CSOs in the field of crisis management is well acknowledged by the EU. Moreover, European NGOs and think tanks that are committed to peacebuilding and conflict prevention are connected at the European level through the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO). Several programmes, action plans and frameworks of cooperation with NGOs and CSOs were adopted throughout the time. EU Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflicts was first proposed in 2001 and introduces the concept of effective partnership with civil society, without being very specific about it (Draft European Union Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflicts, 2001). Subsequently, the European Council recommends a solid interaction between civilian CSDP missions and NGOs and CSOs in the Action Plan for Civilian Aspects of the European Security and Defence Policy, adopted three years later (Action Plan for Civilian Aspects of ESDP Adopted by the European Council (17-18 June 2004), 2004). Furthermore, the Council's Recommendations for Enhancing Cooperation with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and CSOs in the Framework of EU Civilian Crisis Management and Conflict Prevention emphasizes for the first time the local dimension of NSAs, by promoting the enhanced cooperation between civilian missions and these through: "exchanges of views with and feedback from partners, local stakeholders and local populations, as appropriate, in view of mission evaluation/lessons learned processes" (Recommendations for Enhancing Co-operation with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in the Framework of EU Civilian Crisis Management and Conflict

Prevention , 2006). Furthermore, in 2022 the European External Action Service (EEAS) published a guideline titled “Civilian Operations Commander Operational Guidelines on Civil Society Engagement” addressed to all CSDP civilian missions. The document highlights the people-centered approach of the missions and advances several principles that will guide the missions in their engagement with local CSOs (European External Action Service, 2022).

In terms of the engagement of CSDP missions and other local NSAs such as private sector entities involved in civic initiatives, the EU does not have a specific strategic framework.

6. Peacebuilding and Local Non-State Actors. The case of Somalia.

Somalia is an extremely complex case in security, social, economic and political terms. Somalia is part of the Horn of Africa region, a region where a vast majority of cross-border threats is encountered: the existence of different types of conflict, illegal migration, organized crime, violent extremism, forced displacement, climate change etc, all representing threats to the EU and global security.

Gaining worldwide recognition as the most failed state in the world for several years, Somalia is associated with the maritime piracy phenomenon, which appeared against the background of the extremely precarious socio-economic situation, characterized by poverty, extreme weather conditions and numerous waves of recurrent famines. Moreover, the political spectrum characterized by the clan system, warlords, the lack of a central state apparatus and the lack of the rule of law led to the creation of an environment conducive to corruption and organized crime (Lewis, 2002). However, after numerous international interventions within the area of crisis management, peacebuilding, conflict resolution, humanitarian aid or capacity building in the security sector, Somalia currently overcame its political crisis, concluding its lengthy election process in April 2022 (Mahmood, 2022). While Somalia's road to democracy is still an ongoing and challenging process, progress has been made in this domain. It is against this backdrop that a vast number of CSOs and a bustling business domain have emerged. It is precisely the state of crisis that Somalia has witnessed for more than 20 years that catalysed the emergence of non-state actors. Following the collapse of Siad Barre's regime in 1991, the Somali political spectrum has been characterised by a vast number of peace initiatives, mostly of international or regional origins. At the same time, Somali NSAs have attempted to establish

informal mechanisms for solving the perpetual state of conflict. Consequently, CSOs in the form of NGOs, professional associations, academics or women's groups have emerged. Moreover, the business sector has begun to play an active role in civic action initiatives related to peacebuilding and conflict resolution activities as is the case of the Somali Leadership Foundation (Mekuriyaw, 2017).

Currently, the vast majority of Somali CSOs are based in urban areas. In the areas controlled by al-Shabaab associations and assemblies are fully restricted, as any civic action is the principal target of the terrorist group's attacks (BTI 2022 Country Report Somalia, 2022). However, the Somali spectrum of community-based initiatives and organisations is a very dynamic one, mostly oriented towards peacebuilding, conflict resolution and humanitarian aid, despite their weak role in the political domain. Consequently, the civic society domain in Somalia has a prominently particular characteristic, in comparison with the Western meaning attributed to it, which is mostly focused on providing solutions to community issues (BTI 2022 Country Report Somalia, 2022). Although still in its infancy and under severe constraint, the role of CSOs in the act of governance in Somalia remains of particular importance.

The EU in Somalia: engagement in the security domain

Somalia represents a particular case in which the European Union has committed itself to an integrated approach, characterized by a multi-dimensional approach, a multi-phased approach, a multi-level approach and a multilateral approach. Therefore, the European Union has an articulated strategy for regional engagement which has been stipulated since 2011 in the document entitled "The EU Strategic Framework for the Horn of Africa". According to this document, the EU has the following priorities in the Horn of Africa: conflict prevention and resolution, good governance, growth and cooperation (The EU Strategic Framework for the Horn of Africa: a critical assessment of impact and opportunities, 2012). The entire approach of the European Union in the region follows the concept of human security, applied through an integrated approach. The multi-dimensional characteristic of the integrated approach brings together the application of all instruments and policies the European Union has at its disposal for the particular case of Somalia, structured in four areas of action: political engagement, security, development and humanitarian aid.

Thus, concerning the EU engagement in Somalia in the security domain, there are currently three CSDP missions and operations deployed. In December 2008, the first EU naval operation was launched, the EUNAVFOR Atalanta operation as part of a then comprehensive approach of the European Union to the Somali crisis, a crisis also including piracy. This operation was the Union's short-term response to the Somali crisis. Two other missions followed: EUTM Somalia launched in April 2010 to address the cause of the crisis by supporting and training SNA (Somali National Army), and later EUCAP Nestor, renamed EUCAP Somalia, launched in 2012 aimed at enhancing regional capabilities in the field of maritime security (Common Security and Defence Policy European Union Training Mission - Somalia, 2019; European Union Capacity Building Mission in Somalia EUCAP Somalia, 2019). In this sense, the purpose of the activities carried out within EUCAP Somalia mission is to support the rule of law and the judiciary and as well as the development of coastal police.

While the EU engagement with Somali NSAs is a central characteristic of the European Union's approach in the country, it has been thus far achieved and implemented through Commission's instruments and most notably through a long-term partnership between the EU Delegation in Somalia and CSOs (EU Roadmap for engagement with Civil Society in Somalia for the period 2021-2025, 2021). Moreover, the EU approach to local NSAs in Somalia is mostly oriented from the perspective of building its capacity within the Somali society. This current state of affairs advances the idea of whether and how civilian CSDP missions in Somalia engage with local NSAs, and what are the opportunities and threats associated with this approach, a question that will be addressed in the following section. Furthermore, while EUCAP Somalia doesn't have a current official public strategy for engaging with local NSAs, there are various ad-hoc instances in which there is an engagement with CSOs.

7. CSDP in Somalia and its engagement with local NSAs - a SWOT analysis

Strengths

EUCAP Somalia has a vast *experience* of 10 years in the support of the development of Somali maritime security and wider police capacity building. Currently, EUCAP Somalia is based in the Somali capital Mogadishu, having additional field offices in Hargeisa (Somaliland), Garowe (Puntland), Berbera (Somaliland) and a back-office in Nairobi, Kenya (European Union

Capacity Building Mission in Somalia, 2022). The mission, therefore, has its "*boots on the ground*" in three of the four targeted areas of action as stated in its mandate, the exception being Lower Juba (port of Kismayo).

From an internal perspective, EUCAP Somalia currently totals a number of 181 members, of which 35 are women, while 45 are local nationals (European Union Capacity Building Mission in Somalia, 2022). This contributes to the overall local ownership of the mission. Moreover, the mission has a human rights advisor who ensures the expertise on human rights mainstreaming throughout all the mission's activities and promotes human rights awareness and standards among Somali counterparts (How EUCAP promotes human rights and gender equality?, 2021). It is within this approach that EUCAP Somalia has engaged with authorities but also with various CSOs in promoting women in maritime security (Women in the Maritime Security project). Projects like beach cleaning are a common way of raising awareness on both the maritime environment and the potential of the Blue Economy, being thus successfully implemented by the mission in collaboration with its partners (Somali women want bigger roles in the maritime sector, 2019). Furthermore, within the mission, there is a Gender Adviser who not only provides expertise on the matter but is also actively involved in engaging with civil society on issues related to gender mainstreaming. A recent example of such an engagement consists of the meeting held with Plan International organisation regarding the project Champions for Change Program.

EUCAP Somalia is part of the EU integrated approach to external conflicts and crises in Somalia. Therefore, it works in close *cooperation and coordination* with other EU instruments in the security field such as EUTM Somalia and EUNAVFOR Atalanta. Moreover, the mission coordinates with EUDEL (European Delegation) Mogadishu as well as with other EU long-term instruments such as development aid, humanitarian aid, security aid, economic assistance etc. Furthermore, the cooperative dimension is emphasized by the systematic engagement that the mission has with all the major international actors that are present in Somalia such as bilateral donors (Member States or other countries), regional organisations (such as IGAD or African Union) or international organizations like the UN, within the framework of multilateralism. This extensive practice of cooperation and coordination in a challenging operational environment,

where various actors try to exert their influence represents a key factor in engaging with local NSAs as well.

Drawing upon its significant practical experience, EUCAP Somalia has undergone several mandates extensions. Even if the initial mandate proved to be too ambitious and not embedded in local realities, the following ones have been recalibrated according to the local context. Therefore, the latest mission's OPLAN was created upon consultations with the Federal Government of Somalia (Ejdus, 2017). This not only proved to be a serious contribution towards *local political buy-in* of the mission, but it also paved the road to future commitments. It is in this context that at the beginning of 2020, a "Status of Mission Agreement" (SOMA) for the EUCAP Somalia mission has been signed by both parties (EU and Federal Government of Somalia sign agreement on status of EUCAP Somalia, 2020). This milestone, along with EUCAP Somalia's achievements, emphasizes the mission's high degree of local political buy-in.

Consequently, EUCAP Somalia enjoys a series of strengths which can be summarized as follows: a significant presence in the field, a high degree of expertise in human rights and gender issues, a significant experience in cooperation and coordination with various entities, and high degree of local political buy-in. All these elements could positively impact the mission's engagement with local NSAs and have a role in implementing the local ownership dimension of the mission.

Weaknesses

The main weakness of EUCAP Somalia concerning its engagement with local NSAs is the lack of an official public strategy for such an engagement. Since other CSDP civilian missions in the same security sector reform area, such as EUAM Iraq, have an official public framework of engagement with the local civil society, it becomes thus notably important for EUCAP Somalia to develop a similar strategy (EUAM Iraq Strategy for engaging with civil society, 2022). Nevertheless, EUCAP Somalia engages with local civil society but in an ad-hoc manner. Furthermore, the impact of such an engagement in correlation with the force generation challenges and high rate of mission staff turnover count as weak points that can be addressed. It is estimated that seconded personnel spend on average of 1.5 years in the mission (Ejdus, 2017). Along with the short mandates (usually two years long), these circumstances work against two

aspects. Firstly, the mission's personnel need to gain a deep understanding of the state of affairs in the field. Secondly, they need to engage through a trustworthy relationship with local authorities and local NSAs to ensure the mission's local ownership. Both these aspects need time to be thoroughly implemented.

Moreover, some of the local NSAs are not aware of the mission's achievements, and the main way the mission disseminates this information is through its online presence on various social media platforms or the official website. With an internet penetration rate of just 13.7%, more than 85% of Somali people are offline, while Twitter users represent just 1% of eligible Somalis (Digital 2022: Somalia, 2022). These numbers show that the internet is not a channel to engage with either the local public, or with local NSAs.

Furthermore, with a plethora of actors involved in security sector reform activities, (most notably Turkey), the dissemination of the EUCAP Somalia's achievements and activities among local stakeholders becomes even more necessary.

Opportunities

There are several aspects concerning the opportunities associated with the engagement of EUCAP Somalia and local NSAs. They take into account two distinct directions: the opportunities associated with the mission's effectiveness and the improvement of the overall security and political situation in Somalia.

Firstly, engaging with local CSOs provides the mission with valuable input from the grassroots level, that can be of use in future mission strategic reviews and in implementing more effectively the human security and local ownership concepts. At the same time, while being better rooted in people's daily security concerns, the problem-solving capacity of the mission increases. Moreover, by disseminating its achievements and activities directly through CSOs, EUCAP Somalia's transparency and effectiveness as well as the overall EU actorness increase. Furthermore, the prospects of engaging with private sector associations can contribute to the implementation of the second pillar of the mission's mandate, namely "advocating for the importance of maritime security for the development of the Blue Economy (European Union Capacity Building Mission in Somalia, 2021).

Secondly, by engaging with local NSAs, EUCAP Somalia can actively contribute to strengthening the Somali civil society spectrum. This in its turn can promote local institutions' accountability and the overall democratisation process. By initiating a multi-stakeholders approach, mutual trust and understanding increase, as well as the problem-solving characteristic of the overall engagement. To a large extent, by raising awareness on human rights or gender mainstreaming through the engagement with CSOs promoting the same values, the overall Somali social dynamics could experience a positive change, by enhancing dialogue and openness within various clan leadership.

Moreover, engaging with the private sector associations involved in civic actions, such as diaspora associations can help fill in a financial gap. According to the United Nations, it is estimated that the Somali diaspora sends in the country annually 1.6 billion US dollars in remittances (Somali diaspora's remittances cast a lifeline, n.d.). By raising awareness of the activities and achievements of EUCAP Somalia, the active promotion of the Blue Economy development initiatives within the private sector can be achieved.

Subsequently, such an approach would be beneficial to both sides. However, a possible implementation of a multistakeholder initiative approach of EUCAP Somalia and local NSAs has to be carefully considered, due to the context sensitivity and challenges. Thus, the next section will assess what are the possible threats associated with such an approach.

Threats

The main threat to applying a multistakeholder initiative approach in the case of EUCAP Somalia and local NSAs is related to the volatility of the Somali socio-political spectrum and its particularly challenging context. Until recently, Somali politics have been in a crisis due to the overextension of the election date. Moreover, during the Gulf Crisis in 2018, the centre-periphery cleavage deepened, while the fragmentation trends present within the Somali society increased, with socio-economic consequences (Somalia and the Gulf Crisis, 2018). In such a context it is considerably difficult to engage with local NSAs, a thorough mapping of these actors being mandatory.

Moreover, despite the guaranteed freedom of assembly, speech and association, the Somali legal framework concerning NGOs activities are promoting the government's control

over CSOs activities and lacks clarity regarding several aspects (EU Roadmap for engagement with Civil Society in Somalia for the period 2021-2025, 2021) (IRIN, 2011).

Furthermore, the lack of public support for some local NSAs can represent a threat to a MSI approach. This happens primarily due to a perpetual climate of mistrust among different stakeholders. At the same time, while some CSOs compete with each other for funding, the clan system has a direct effect on the CSO spectrum. Therefore, the Somali civil society spectrum is a challenging one.

Consequently, although EUCAP Somalia engages with local CSOs on an informal basis, the findings of this analysis show that applying a MSI approach in this context can prove to be beneficial both to the mission's effectiveness and the overall security situation in Somalia. MSIs have been applied to every major global industry, becoming the "gold standard" for bringing different stakeholders together around a central interest. Moreover, MSI can foster a vast array of functions: from enhancing dialogue, creating mutual understanding, creating mutual trust, raising awareness and nevertheless informing, all of each being much needed for any CSDP mission. Although implementing a MSI approach in the case of EUCAP Somalia can prove to be beneficial to both the mission's effectiveness and local security spectrum, it is a signally challenging process. Conversely, applying a MSI approach can put an extra burden on the mission's already ambitious mandate, as well as on its budget and human resources. Therefore, such an approach requires careful planning and strategic support.

SWOT Matrix for EUCAP Somalia's Engagement with Local NSAs

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vast experience and presence in the field; • Expertise in human rights and gender issues; • Strong cooperation and coordination with various entities; • High degree of local political buy-in. 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of an official public strategy for engagement with local NSAs; • Short mission mandates and high staff turnover; • Limited awareness of the mission's achievements among local NSAs; • Internet penetration and social media limitations in Somalia .
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement with local CSOs for grassroots input and problem-solving capacity; • Increased transparency, effectiveness, and EU actorness through engagement with CSOs; • Engagement with private sector associations for promoting maritime security and Blue Economy development; • Strengthening Somali civil society spectrum for accountability and democratization. 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volatility and challenging context of Somali socio-political spectrum; • Government control and lack of clarity in the legal framework for NGOs; • Lack of public support and mistrust among different stakeholders; • Competition and clan system's impact on the CSO spectrum.

8. Discussion

The SWOT analysis applied to EUCAP Somalia's engagement with local stakeholders provides insights that can impact the validation or invalidation of the two hypotheses: (1) there is a direct relation between a CSDP mission's engagement with local stakeholders and the mission's local ownership, and (2) CSDP engagement with local stakeholders positively affects the mission's effectiveness.

With regards to the first hypothesis, the SWOT analysis reveals the mission has an extensive presence on the ground, having offices in various cities of Somalia. Moreover, EUCAP Somalia has a close coordination and/or cooperation with different stakeholders, a trait which is embedded in its *modus operandi*. Although not having stated explicitly in its mandate the close collaboration with local NSAs, the mission collaborates with organizations such as Plan International and supports its initiative of promoting women in maritime security. This proves the mission's commitment to foster dialogue and to build ties with local NSAs, thus promoting the mission's local ownership dimension.

However, the SWOT analysis identified several weaknesses of EUCAP Somalia's engagement with local NSAs. Among these, the lack of an official strategy of engagement with local NSAs along with the lack of effective communication channels could negatively impact the overall mission's full local ownership. Overall, the findings from the SWOT analysis partially support the first hypothesis, the fact that despite not having a formal engagement strategy with local NSAs, EUCAP Somalia engages in particular instances with local CSOs further supports the hypothesis.

Furthermore, by enhancing local participation, dissemination of information regarding its activities, fostering dialogue with different stakeholders, EUCAP Somalia's effectiveness can be enhanced. This opens up the discussion about the second hypothesis, namely, CSDP engagement with local stakeholders positively affects the mission's effectiveness. Not only do other CSDP missions have a formal strategy of engagement with local NSAs, but, as the SWOT analysis revealed, also EUCAP Somalia interacts in particular instances with local CSOs. These insights fully support the second hypothesis, emphasizing several opportunities associated with such an engagement with local NSAs: enhanced problem-solving capacity, delivering solutions embedded in local realities, promoting information-sharing, improving the relevance and impact

of its activities. These opportunities represent important pillars of the overall mission's effectiveness.

Consequently, the SWOT analysis reveal several strengths of EUCAP's Somalia's engagement with local stakeholders, along with opportunities. While the cooperation trait is embedded in the mission's modus operandi, as well as its adaptability and commitment to tailoring its actions to the local context, a MSI approach could be applied in this context. However, the SWOT analysis emphasizes weaknesses and threats associated with the mission's engagement with local NSAs. It is against this backdrop that the strategic dimension comes as a signally important aspect, especially in the form of strategic planning and resource allocation.

9. Conclusion

The EU engagement in Somalia consists of a unique combination of instruments which reflects the EU's commitment towards supporting world peace. Among these, CSDP missions and operations are the "boots on the ground" instrument, the instrument that is best understood in terms of actual achievements and problem-solving to actual stringent security issues.

EUCAP Somalia's achievements in building the capacities, establishing the Somali Coast Guard and reforming the Somali police sector are nevertheless remarkable. Despite the mission's high political buy-in, local ownership and fostering a human security approach are a continuous challenge. To be effective, one has to deliver not only solutions to specific issues, but these solutions have to be embedded in local realities. Furthermore, peacebuilding activities, including interventions in the security domain, especially in Africa, are a contested topic. In the context of a vast array of international actors involved in similar activities in Somalia, it becomes thus prominently important to prioritize the local ownership dimension of CSDP missions deployed.

While the vast majority of current research and debates around CSDP's local ownership dimension focus on the strategic aspect as well as on the general challenges associated with this approach, this paper is trying to fill a gap within the literature. Therefore, it applies a theory derived from economics and more precisely from the business domain, the multi-stakeholder initiative approach, on CSDP.

Drawing on document analysis and secondary data, this paper advances three arguments. Firstly, a MSI approach is a valuable tool to be used by civilian CSDP missions operating in the

security sector reform domain. Secondly, civilian CSDP missions have an important role in the diplomatic engagement of the EU in the country of deployment. They represent the Common Foreign and Security Policy at the action level. Therefore, through their cooperative nature of activities, they could serve as a bridge between different local stakeholders. Furthermore, their input from the field is of paramount importance for the overall EU strategic engagement in the specific context. Thirdly, in the particular Somali context, a MSI approach in the security sector reform domain is needed to raise the awareness of certain stakeholders (such as private sector business entities and diaspora associations) towards the importance of security in rebuilding the state.

Lastly, for the EU to become a global player in international security, not only solutions to security threats are needed, but also winning hearts and minds. Therefore, working towards a context-specific strategy towards local ownership implementation for civilian CSDP, working towards a mutual understanding between all stakeholders involved in common activities, as well as strengthening civilian CSDP are much needed.

The SWOT analysis provides a valuable insight into the opportunities and threats that EUCAP Somalia faces in its engagement with local NSAs. While the mission possesses a series of strengths that can be used in increasing its effectiveness, resource allocation, strategic planning and structured engagement strategies are equally important in leveraging these, as well as countering the weaknesses and mitigating the threats encountered. Moreover, this analysis emphasizes the importance of a thoughtful and adaptive approach through which EUCAP Somalia could enhance its effectiveness and substantially contribute to the overall maritime security and police capacity building in Somalia through its engagement with local NSAs.

While this analysis is limited to EUCAP Somalia and Somali NSAs, further research can explore engagement strategies in challenging contexts, thus providing a valuable tool on how to better understand such contexts, how to establish trust and cooperation among different stakeholders. Furthermore, by conducting comparative analyses of other CSDP missions' engagement with local NSAs, both similarities and differences in engagement strategies are being identified, thus establishing a set of best practices and lessons learnt that can positively impact the process of strategy development and the overall CSDP's effectiveness and local ownership.

Resources:

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ON THE METHOD AND TOOL OF INTELLECTUALIZATION OF PUBLIC MANAGEMENT OF ENERGY SUPPLY SECTOR IN UKRAINE

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Abstract: *By analyzing the strategic documents on the development of the energy sector of the national economy of Ukraine, the article states that one of the key problems of the development in the context of the energy transition is that these documents lack goals and objectives to change the mentality of the population of the country and the human resources of the industry, as well as of public authorities and the administration of their activities. The article outlines the practical lack of conscious consideration of behavioural factors of human resources in the energy sector of national market economy, which is defined as one of the most difficult components to change given the energy transition of global national economies. To theoretically substantiate the possibilities of improving the public management of the energy transition strategy of the national energy supply system through the intellectualization of its managerial and executive personnel, the article proposes the use of technology of change management in the intellectual orientation and mentality of human resources involved in energy generation, distribution and consumption by intellectualizing and changing their mentality. For this, the article uses an original method and algorithm to create personal and group intellectual portraits based on the graph-analytical model of a person's economic temperament. Ideal, desired and real portraits of a person were formalized, and recommendations were made on their possible participation in the energy supply processes. The article demonstrates that new mechanisms for using the intelligence of each employee and the collective intelligence of the system can be formed in the country's energy management system through selecting human resources for the public management and administration system according to the reasonable and recommended intellectual dominants of the individual. These mechanisms are directed towards accomplishing tasks and ensuring the achievement of the goals of energy transition and sustainable development of the country, as outlined in the government document "Energy Strategy of Ukraine until 2050.*

Keywords: energy transition, public administration, intelligence, mentality change, intellectual portrait.

1. Introduction

Almost over a decade ago now, the UN Global Initiative "Sustainable Energy for All" (SEforAll, 2012) and the initiative "2014-2024 – the Decade of Sustainable Energy for All" (United Nations GAD, 2012) set goals and objectives for humanity to provide the affordable energy to the world's population, and to drive innovative technologies in the use of renewable energy sources and energy efficiency. In this regards, Ukraine's Mission of the Energy Strategy until 2050 (approved by the Government upon the proposal of the Ministry of Energy in May 2023) declares the need to "create conditions for the sustainable development of the national economy by ensuring access to reliable, sustainable and modern energy sources" (Energy Strategy, 2022).

Ensuring movement towards the goals declared by the mentioned documents is an important and quite difficult task for the governing bodies of any national economy, even in the conditions of sustainability and predictability of its development, and this is especially difficult

for Ukraine. With the Russian military aggression and precise targeting of Ukraine's civilian infrastructure as means of achieving military objectives and political goals, the development of Ukraine's governmental energy policy, as well as the quality of strategic and operational planning and management of its effective implementation have become immeasurably complicated.

Therefore, the relevance of finding, identifying and using opportunities to improve these processes in the public administration system is essential, as the energy transition is a challenge for Ukraine on its way to the EU, and requires close cooperation between the government, educational sector, science, and industry.

Considering the fact that the document "Energy Strategy of Ukraine until 2050" was prepared by the Ministry of Energy with the participation of market leaders and system operators such as NNEGC 'Energoatom', NPC 'Ukrenergo', NJSC 'Naftogaz of Ukraine', LLC 'Gas Transmission System Operator', PJSC 'Ukrhydroenergo', and others, and building on the advice of the International Energy Agency, the US Department of Energy, the German Energy Agency, the Berlin School of Economics, the Danish Energy Agency, the auditing company KPMG, etc., it should be noted that such a concentration of intellectual resources for the development, discussion and adoption of an important document involving both national and foreign experts and the public has never been observed in the practice of national public administration before.

It is also worth noting that, despite involving experts from the National Institute for Strategic Studies, the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine and other scientific institutions from the fuel and energy sector, the goals declared in similar documents – "Energy Strategy of Ukraine until 2030" (Energy Strategy, 2006) and "Energy Strategy of Ukraine until 2035" (Energy Strategy, 2017) – were not achieved for a number of reasons.

We consider that one of the most significant of these reasons is the total neglect of the situation and the lack of understanding what changes in the mass consciousness of the country's population must be introduced as a certain aggregate of individual and group intelligences, which, in the process of thinking, interaction and cooperation, generate ideas, feelings, thoughts, attitudes, behaviours, etc. that resist change due to habits, traditions, beliefs or fear of the unknown.

At the same time, for example, citizens – as household energy consumers – and the

personnel of institutions, organizations, business entities – as energy consumers – should accept and use new energy technologies in everyday life; national politicians and public administration officials should develop an effective policy and strategy for the implementation of the energy transition; while the personnel of energy sector enterprises, scientists, researchers, engineers-innovators, etc. should generate the necessary technical, technological and social innovations and insist on their introduction.

To illustrate this, mention should be made that the Government introduced technical regulations and requirements for household appliances to comply with and reflect the level of their energy efficiency and safety. These requirements should serve as a criterion for conscious choice of purchasing and using such appliances, which will be determined by the consumer's existing and formed awareness of the purpose and criteria for such a choice.

It should be emphasized that both the national public administration system as a whole and the Ministry as the central executive body for energy sector are the components of the system of direct state regulation of processes in the field of energy supply and, undoubtedly, need constant improvement and reform based on the consideration of new energy trends in the global and European markets (new generation and transmission technologies, new energy sources, new combinations of them, etc.). However, emphasizing the need for radical changes in the thinking and behaviour of participants in the energy transition process, the experience gained by the global schools of change management (including the systems of energy provision of national economies) demonstrates the significant psychological complexity of improving and transforming the value system: perceptions, feelings, thoughts, beliefs, goals, habits, mentality and behaviour of people who are participants in the processes of energy production, distribution and consumption (Steg, Perlaviciute, & Van der Verff, 2015; Upham, Bogel, & Johansen, 2019; Gerdien de Vries, 2021; Chappin & Blomme, 2022).

It is this set of important mental factors that was not taken into account in the process of forming and setting relevant priorities, goals and objectives in any of the above-mentioned strategic state documents in the field of national energy. This can be confirmed by the fact that even in a thorough study of possible scenarios for the development of Ukraine's energy sector, carried out by the Institute for Economics and Forecasting of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine in 2015 (Yevdokimov, 2015), the expediency and necessity of changes in the public

consciousness, mentality and behaviour of human resources in all spheres of the country's life, including the energy sector, were not analyzed, and no goals and objectives in the context of changing the mentality were even set.

Meanwhile, in the 2019 review and assessment of Ukraine's energy sector, its structure, regulatory and governance systems (OECD, 2019), the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) pointed to the "ineffective corporate governance of state-owned enterprises" (OECD, 2019, p. 22), due to which "energy sector companies remained unprofitable" (OECP, 2019, p. 24), while "the electricity market still faces corruption and competition problems" (OECP, 2019, p. 39). Nonetheless, we believe that the ineffective and improper governance, corruption and unfair competition result not only and not so much from imperfect laws, regulations, structures and components of the system, but also from the intellectual, moral state, mentality and life orientation of the people who fill these structures and their components.

The lack of conscious consideration of the behavioural factors of human resources in the energy sector is the key managerial problem of the energy transition in Ukraine, and can be identified in many dissertation studies (Popovchenko, 2003; Hrubá, 2005; Stavytska, 2005; Sukhodolia, 2006), analytical notes (Sukhodolia, 2013; Biehun, 2015; Riabtsev, 2018), scientific articles on assessing the state of mechanisms and results of state regulation and management (Stavytska, 2005; Dovgalova, 2009; Bedin, 2013; Amosov & Halushko, 2013; Yevdokimov, 2015; Kushlyk, 2018), as well as objectives (Diachuk, Chepeliev, Podolets et al, 2017) and existing threats in the energy sector and ways to avoid them (Mokhova, Shcherbak, 2020; Biehun, 2015; Riabtsev, 2018, etc.). In these works, the authors studied the organizational, legal, technological, and economic foundations as well as the mechanisms of state regulation of energy supply processes, but not the moral and mental beliefs of those who must implement these regulations accurately, efficiently, and effectively. In this regard, researchers have long been recording the facts that in the Ukrainian energy sector "the introduced mechanisms of state administration have not had a proper impact on the processes that determine the level of energy efficiency of the national economy", that "the energy intensity of the Ukrainian economy remains a lot higher than in our closest neighbours, the EU countries: <...> and even the CIS countries", that "the vast majority of introduced and actually all active economic mechanisms

for stimulating energy saving are aimed at supporting enterprises – “producers”, that “economic mechanisms for stimulating <...> “consumers” of energy resources” need to be clarified (Sukhodolia, 2013), and that the industry is “dominated by administrative methods of management” (Biehun, 2015).

The best example of avoiding the need to take into account the human factor can be found in the conclusion of one of the analytical notes stating that “criminalization and corruption in the energy sector are primarily due to the lack of and backwardness of accounting and quality control” (Biehun, 2015, p. 3). The above statement illustrates and makes obvious the fact that the traditional search for deficiencies in the functioning of systems lies not so much in the characteristics of the personnel of the systems as in the technical, technological, legal, economic, and other conditions of their functioning. After all, the introduction of advanced high-precision technological solutions for automating the data transmission from metering devices, and even the inclusion of artificial intelligence to predict leaks and losses in both the electricity and the natural gas markets, cannot and will not eliminate the possibility of malicious interference or unprofessional behaviour of natural intelligence carriers.

Since the basis of any socio-economic system includes such structural elements as productive forces and their socio-economic, technical and technological, organizational and economic relations in the functioning of the state regulatory and economic mechanism, it is the specific characteristics of these productive forces, along with the past experiences, their religious, moral, professional, legal knowledge, norms and rules, habits and traditions, that will determine the state of managing the implementation of tasks and achievement of planned outcomes of activities. Therefore, in the context of energy transition, the primary task for the energy supply system of Ukraine is modernizing and aligning with the standards of the European Union.

2. Theoretical Background

Since the purpose of the article is to provide a theoretical justification for the need and feasibility of improving the public management of the energy transition strategy in the national energy supply system of the national economy on the basis of intellectualization of its managerial and executive personnel, it becomes evident that there is a need to identify ways and tools for

making appropriate changes in the intellectual orientations and mentality of the personnel of this system.

It should be noted that in the dissertation “Management of changes in the energy supply of Algeria using the potential of influence on human resources”, which was recently completed and defended in Ukraine for obtaining the scientific degree of Doctor of Philosophy in “Management and Administration”, the author states that the so-called transition of Algeria to the new conditions of energy supply requires “substantiation of the feasibility and determination of the necessary changes in the management of the energy transition of Algeria using the potential of influence on human resources” (Ghandir, 2021, p. 18), and suggests including “the stage of mandatory changes in the mentality of human resources” for managing technical and technological changes and ensuring the necessary results in socio-economic systems (Ghandir, 2021, p. 21).

As the mass consciousness and mentality of the population of a democratic country is the result of joint practical activity and intellectual interaction of certain sets of people under the influence of certain social institutions, any changes proposed by these institutions should provide for necessary and mandatory changes at the levels of intelligence, professional knowledge and experience, behaviour and performance of all participants, which requires careful planning and implementation of the relevant goals, objectives and measures for their intellectualization.

Despite numerous theoretical studies and practical documents on the problems of state regulation of Ukraine’s energy sector (Yevdokimov, 2015; OECD, 2019; Hrubá, 2005; Stavytska, 2005; DSTU, 2006; Dovhalova, 2009; Bedin, 2013; Amosov & Halushko, 2013), on energy supply (Kushlyk, 2018) and energy security (Biehun, 2015; Riabtsev, 2018), studies on energy saving (Popovchenko, 2003) and energy efficiency (Sukhodolia, 2006; Sukhodolia, 2013; Mokhova & Shcherbak, 2020), on the development of renewable energy (Stoyan, 2013; Diachuk, Chepelev, Podolets, et al., 2017), there are no studies in the area of the managerial influence on the mentality and behaviour of human resources and, consequently, no recommendations.

Thus, it is obvious that planning and implementing any changes (including strategic) in the national energy policy, improving the existing and introducing new regulations, legal acts and policy influences of the institutions of the public management of the national energy supply processes require simultaneous and proactive planning and implementation of measures to form

the necessary changes in the participants' beliefs, goals, habits, mentality and behaviour. This requires a radical revision and improvement in the existing mechanisms of public management of energy transition processes in Ukraine by strengthening intellectual factors of influence on the participants' knowledge, experience, motives, incentives, behaviour and, most importantly, the way of their thinking.

3. Methods

In this regard, it is worth mentioning that, in response to the challenges and requirements of behavioural economics, the researchers of the problems related to the national system of public administration and management have recently turned to the topic of intellectualization of the processes of public authorities (Dzvinchuk & Petrenko, 2018; Dzvinchuk & Liutyi, 2020), to the topic of innovative, regulatory and organizational support for the intellectualization of management processes in their activities (Yakobchuk, Tyshchenko, & Puhacheva, 2018; Zaporozhets, 2020), to the intellectualized management of the state and its components as an object of post-war reconstruction (Olshanska, Oleshko, Shatska et al., 2022), etc.

However, if intellectualization is understood only as an increase in the “share of mental labour” or “enhancing the importance of intellectual activity of personnel, the level of their intelligence, professional and general educational knowledge, which are ensured by continuous development of personnel” (Zubchynska, 2012, p. 6), then criminal activities and corruption also require from their potential creators both “mental labour” and “significant intellectual activity” to plan and implement actions aimed not at satisfying the needs and demands of society, but at satisfying the personal or group interests and needs of certain groups.

Consequently, developing, testing and implementing effective mechanisms to intellectualize the management of the energy transition and energy supply problems of the national economy should be considered as an urgent and necessary step to improve both the existing regulations and mechanisms in the system and to develop recommendations for intellectualizing the processes of staffing the system with appropriate human resources.

It should be noted that the positive results of the theoretical substantiation and practical implementation of recommendations for the intellectualization of the management and functioning of individual enterprises and industries have already been demonstrated in a number

of dissertation studies (Shvydkyi, 2012; Kis, 2016; Sytnyk, 2018).

However, the nature of the problems of intellectualization in the field of public administration radically distinguishes this sphere of human intelligence from the already established paradigm of intellectualization of labour, management, economics, entrepreneurship, enterprises and institutions, education and science, art and trade, etc. The specificity of public administration lies in the fact that the goals, objectives, criteria of behaviour, etc. of the carriers of personal intelligence operating in the system of government and those operating in other spheres of society can and quite reasonably should be different. As a matter of fact, if we assume that intellectualization processes are based on personal intelligence, which is characterized by its creative way of thinking, generation of ideas and solutions, desire for new experience, morality, goal-setting, responsibility, etc., we should recognize that all these components should be present to some extent in every healthy and competent person.

Yet, the intelligence of a public administration employee should be different from the intelligence of an employee in business, education, art, science, etc., and to explain this, we should refer to the well-known conclusion of R. Descartes, who once stated that “the difference in our opinions does not stem from the fact that some people are smarter than others, but only from the fact that we direct our thoughts in different ways and do not experience the same things” (Dekart, 2015, p. 37).

It means that the positioning of an individual in society, their belonging to various structural parts of the society as a carrier of intelligence can and will influence the formation of differences in their intellectual and mental characteristics. It is this feature that the authors of the publication (Khamchuk, Karpyk, & Petrenko, 2021) drew attention to regarding the new possibilities of using the laws of Carlo M. Cipolla (1987) in public administration, proposing to use his model to differentiate various personalities according to the “direction of thoughts” and manifestations of creativity for themselves or for the benefit of others.

The authors of the study on the identification of the conditions for the interaction of intellectual resources of human communities proposed a method and an algorithm for the study, as well as an analysis and an evaluation of personal and group intellectual portraits in order to develop recommendations for their necessary and appropriate changes (Dzvinchuk, Petrenko, & Khamchuk, 2022). The proposed differentiation of people by their individual intellectual

portraits based on the use of graph analytical interpretation of Cipolla’s model made it possible to evaluate them according to the characteristics of intellectual orientation in the Cartesian coordinates of “benefits and losses to oneself – their benefits and losses to others” (Fig. 1).

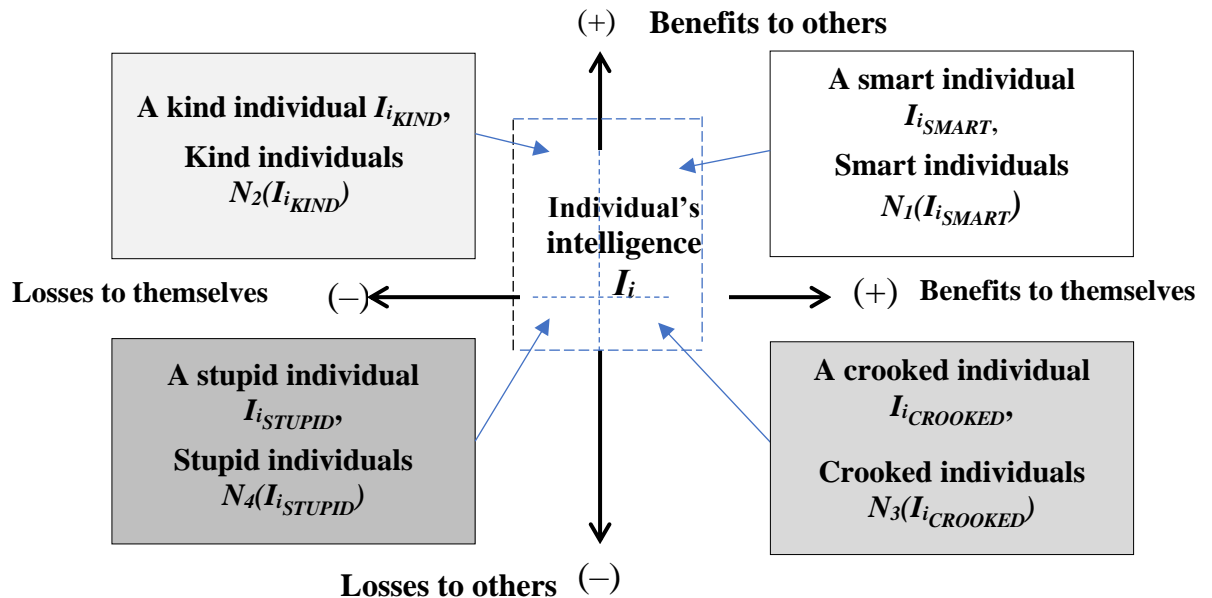


Fig. 1 – The reinterpreted model of Cipolla’s differentiation of individuals and their groups by “direction of thoughts” (Cipolla, 1987)

Furthermore, it was proposed to use the results of the assessment for making decisions regarding the compliance of an individual with the requirements, needs and limitations of functioning in the system of public administration and management.

To experimentally verify the assumptions about the possibility and feasibility of using individual and collective intellectual portraits for the intellectualization of public administration, we assessed and analyzed the components of intellectual dominants in students of Public Administration and Management with the help of the Individual Difference Research Labs test (IDRLabs, 2023). The results of the testing performed demonstrated the real division of respondents (both individuals and collective) according to the recorded values of their intellectual characteristics in the categories of “smart”, “kind”, “crooked”, and “stupid”, and the existence of dominant and minor components in them.

At the same time, a generalized view of the individual’s intellectual portrait was

interpreted as the following equation:

$$I_i = I_{iSMART} + I_{iKIND} + I_{iCROOKED} + I_{iSTUPID} \quad (1)$$

where I_{iSMART} refers to intelligence; I_{iKIND} stands for kindness; $I_{iCROOKED}$ is crime; $I_{iSTUPID}$ is stupidity (Dzvinchuk, Petrenko, & Khamchuk, 2022).

The intellectual portrait of the group, presented as a set of N individuals, is divided into

$$N = N_1(I_{iSMART}) + N_2(I_{iKIND}) + N_3(I_{iCROOKED}) + N_4(I_{iSTUPID}), \quad (2)$$

where $N_1(I_{iSMART})$ refers to the number of intelligence agents whose dominant component is the mind, $N_2(I_{iKIND})$ – kindness, $N_3(I_{iCROOKED})$ – evil intentions, $N_4(I_{iSTUPID})$ – lack of intelligence.

The reason for using Cipolla's model to identify a person's predisposition to public service was the interpretation of those individuals who can act as "givers", "helpless", "naïve", and "kind" in different versions of his model, and are described by him as "doing good for others, while neglecting to do good for themselves (win-lose), generous but too good for this world" (Cipolla, 1987).

Such people are undoubtedly known in the history of mankind as heroes, defenders, warriors, passionate personalities, saviours of nations and people. They are the society members who, being intellectuals, are ahead of others in terms of their willingness to sacrifice for the benefit of others; they demonstrate the behaviour of a person whose calling is to serve others – a public servant whose priority is to serve the interests of the country and its population. In a newspaper article by Professor S. Proleiev, such people are called the elite as they are the ones who "care about the common good of society. They, like others, have their own interests, but give priority only to the public interest" (Proleiev, 2023).

In this case, the desirable intellectual portrait of an ideal (kind and smart) public servant should have been expressed in the following equation

$$I_i = I_{iKIND} + I_{iSMART} \quad (3)$$

provided that $I_{iKIND} \approx I_{iSMART}$, $I_{iCROOKED} = 0$, and $I_{iSTUPID} = 0$.

The actual representation of various variants of intellectual portraits should look like a set of inequalities of

$$I_i = I_{iSMART} > I_{iKIND} > I_{iSTUPID} > I_{iCROOKED} \quad (4)$$

where $I_{iSMART} \rightarrow \max$ and $I_{iKIND} \rightarrow \max$, $I_{iCROOKED} \rightarrow \min$ and $I_{iSTUPID} \rightarrow \min$.

Figure 2 illustrates the examples of the tangible results of the IDRLabs test taken remotely by the students of the Public Administration and Management at Ivano-Frankivsk National Technical University of Oil and Gas.

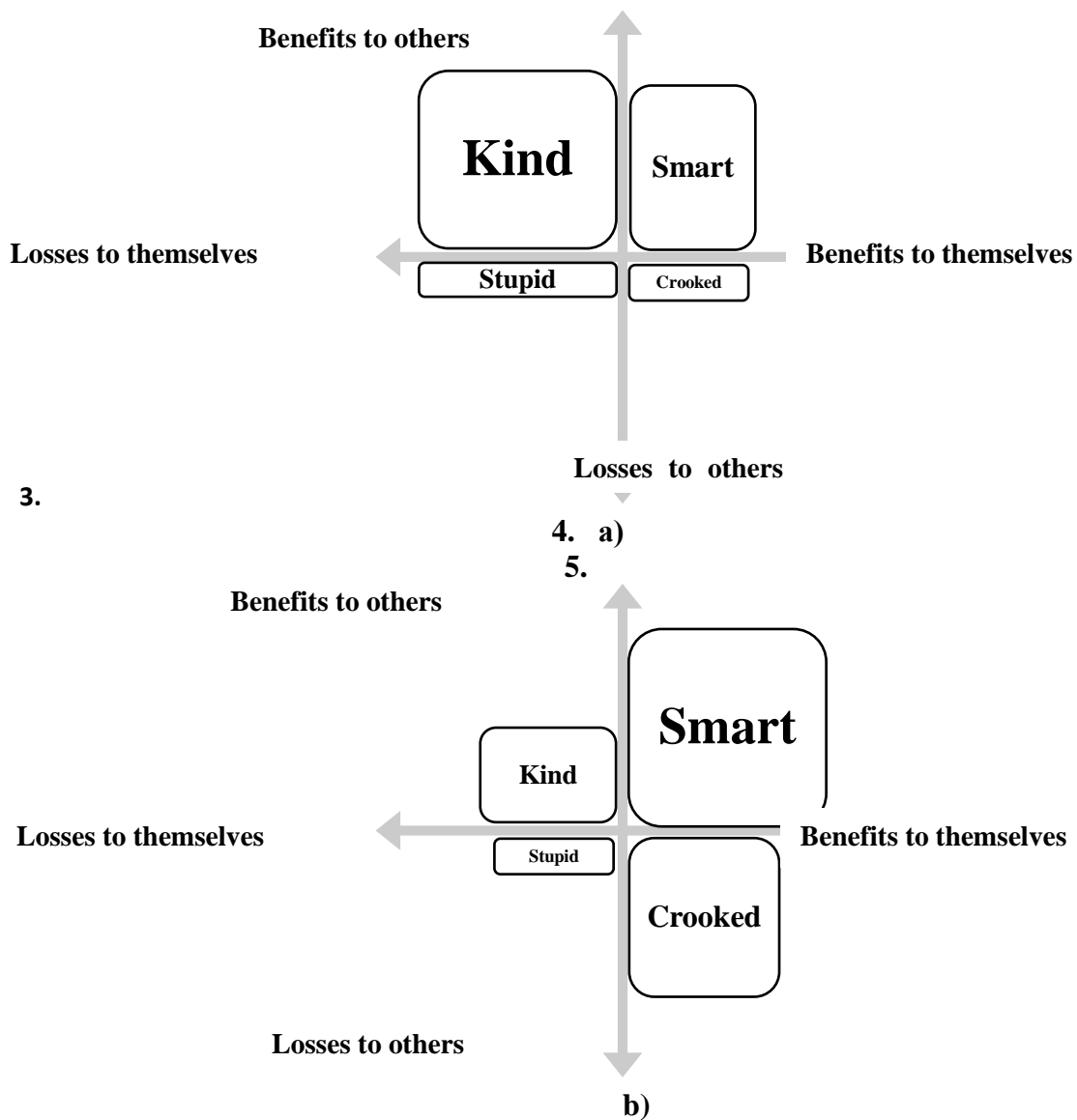


Fig. 2 –Real intellectual portraits of the students of Public Administration and Management

Obviously, the respondent's set of intellectual orientations, the results of which are presented in Figure 2a, looks as follows:

$$I_i = I_{i_{KIND}} > I_{i_{SMART}} > I_{i_{STUPID}} > I_{i_{CROOKED}} \quad (5)$$

And the respondent's set of intellectual orientations, the results of which are shown in Figure 2b, is

$$I_i = I_{i_{SMART}} > I_{i_{CROOKED}} > I_{i_{KIND}} > I_{i_{STUPID}} \quad (6)$$

Without resorting to a comparative analysis of the given examples, we note that the set N of such individual intellectual portraits can and should become the basis for obtaining, analyzing, and evaluating individual and collective intellectual portrait of any deterministic part of society (subdivision, institution, organization, enterprise, industry, etc.) in the form of different variants of a set of N inequalities. At the same time, we suppose that the most desirable option for any group should be

$$N = N_1(I_{i_{KIND}}) > N_2(I_{i_{SMART}}) > N_3(I_{i_{CROOKED}}) > N_4(I_{i_{STUPID}}) \quad (7)$$

where $N_1(I_{i_{KIND}})$ represents a number of people in the group, for whom the intellectual dominant component is $I_{i_{KIND}}$, $N_2(I_{i_{SMART}}) - I_{i_{SMART}}$, $N_3(I_{i_{CROOKED}}) - I_{i_{CROOKED}}$ and $N_4(I_{i_{STUPID}}) - I_{i_{STUPID}}$.

Table 1 shows the results of testing in three groups of higher education students majoring in 281 "Public Management and Administration". The results of the IDRLabs test demonstrated by the respondents are interpreted with numbers, where 0 shows lack of an intellectual component in the intellectual portrait of a person, 1 shows the highest rated intellectual dominant, 2 is the dominant of lower value, 3 and 4 are their decreasing values.

The table also presents individual and collective intellectual portraits of full-time undergraduate students and master's students who study remotely and are current public servants.

Table 1 – Personal intellectual portraits of the students of Public Administration and Management and interpretation of their collective intellectual portrait

№	Intellectual priorities demonstrated by respondents				Intellectual portraits of each respondent
	Positive		Negative		
	$I_{i_{KIND}}$	$I_{i_{SMART}}$	$I_{i_{CROOKED}}$	$I_{i_{STUPID}}$	$I_{i_{KIND}} > I_{i_{SMART}} > I_{i_{CROOKED}} > I_{i_{STUPID}}$
Group 1 – first-year students (bachelor's)					
1	1	3	2	4	$I_{i_{KIND}} > I_{i_{CROOKED}} > I_{i_{SMART}} = I_{i_{STUPID}}$
2	1	2	0	3	$I_{i_{KIND}} > I_{i_{SMART}} > I_{i_{STUPID}}$
3	1	2	3	4	$I_{i_{KIND}} > I_{i_{SMART}} > I_{i_{CROOKED}} > I_{i_{STUPID}}$

4	1	4	2	3	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iCROOKED} > I_{iSTUPID} > I_{iSMART}$
5	1	3	4	2	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iSTUPID} > I_{iSMART} > I_{iCROOKED}$
6	2	1	3	4	$I_{iSMART} > I_{iKIND} > I_{iCROOKED} = I_{iSTUPID}$
7	1	2	4	3	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iSMART} > I_{iSTUPID} > I_{iCROOKED}$
8	1	3	4	2	$I_{iKIND} = I_{iSTUPID} > I_{iSMART} = I_{iCROOKED}$
9	4	1	2	3	$I_{iSMART} > I_{iCROOKED} > I_{iSTUPID} > I_{iKIND}$
10	2	1	3	4	$I_{iSMART} = I_{iKIND} > I_{iCROOKED} = I_{iSTUPID}$
11	1	2	4	3	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iSMART} > I_{iSTUPID} > I_{iCROOKED}$
12	1	2	3	4	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iSMART} > I_{iCROOKED} > I_{iSTUPID}$
13	1	2	0	3	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iSMART} > I_{iSTUPID}$
14	1	2	4	3	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iSMART} = I_{iSTUPID} > I_{iCROOKED}$
15	1	2	4	3	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iSMART} > I_{iSTUPID} > I_{iCROOKED}$
Number of respondents' choices by model dominants					Collective intellectual portraits of the first-year students (bachelor's)
$N_1=12$ $N_2=8$ $N_3=4$ $N_4=5$					$N_1 > N_2 > N_4 > N_3$
Group 2 – second-year students (bachelor's)					
1	3	1	4	2	$I_{iSMART} > I_{iSTUPID} > I_{iKIND} > I_{iCROOKED}$
2	1	2	3	3	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iSMART} > I_{iCROOKED} = I_{iSTUPID}$
3	1	2	4	2	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iSMART} = I_{iSTUPID} > I_{iCROOKED}$
4	2	1	4	3	$I_{iSMART} > I_{iKIND} > I_{iSTUPID} > I_{iCROOKED}$
5	1	2	2	4	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iSMART} = I_{iCROOKED} > I_{iSTUPID}$
6	1	3	4	2	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iSTUPID} > I_{iSMART} > I_{iCROOKED}$
7	1	2	4	2	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iSMART} = I_{iSTUPID} > I_{iCROOKED}$
8	1	2	3	4	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iSMART} > I_{iCROOKED} > I_{iSTUPID}$
9	1	2	3	4	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iSMART} > I_{iCROOKED} > I_{iSTUPID}$
10	1	2	4	3	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iSMART} > I_{iSTUPID} > I_{iCROOKED}$
11	2	1	3	4	$I_{iSMART} > I_{iKIND} > I_{iCROOKED} > I_{iSTUPID}$
12	2	1	3	4	$I_{iSMART} > I_{iKIND} > I_{iCROOKED} > I_{iSTUPID}$
13	2	1	4	3	$I_{iSMART} > I_{iKIND} > I_{iCROOKED} > I_{iSTUPID}$
14	2	1	4	3	$I_{iSMART} > I_{iKIND} > I_{iSTUPID} > I_{iCROOKED}$
15	1	2	4	3	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iSMART} > I_{iSTUPID} > I_{iCROOKED}$
16	2	1	4	3	$I_{iSMART} > I_{iKIND} > I_{iSTUPID} > I_{iCROOKED}$
Number of respondents' choices by model dominants					Collective intellectual portraits of the second-year students (bachelor's)
$N_1=9$ $N_2=8$ $N_3=5$ $N_4=5$					$N_1 > N_2 > N_3 = N_4$

Part-time master's students					
1	1	2	4	3	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iSMART} > I_{iSTUPID} > I_{iCROOKED}$
2	1	2	2	4	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iSMART} = I_{iCROOKED} > I_{iSTUPID}$
3	1	3	2	4	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iCROOKED} > I_{iSMART} > I_{iSTUPID}$
4	1	2	0	0	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iSMART}$
5	2	1	3	3	$I_{iSMART} > I_{iKIND} > I_{iCROOKED} = I_{iSTUPID}$
6	1	3	4	2	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iSTUPID} > I_{iSMART} > I_{iCROOKED}$
7	1	3	4	2	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iSTUPID} > I_{iSMART} > I_{iCROOKED}$
8	1	2	0	0	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iSMART}$
9	2	1	0	3	$I_{iSMART} > I_{iKIND} > I_{iSTUPID}$
10	1	2	3	4	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iSMART} > I_{iCROOKED} > I_{iSTUPID}$
11	1	3	4	1	$I_{iKIND} = I_{iSTUPID} > I_{iSMART} > I_{iCROOKED}$
12	1	2	3	0	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iSMART} > I_{iCROOKED}$
13	1	2	0	3	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iSMART} > I_{iSTUPID}$
14	1	2	4	3	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iSMART} > I_{iSTUPID} > I_{iCROOKED}$
15	1	2	3	3	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iSMART} > I_{iCROOKED} = I_{iSTUPID}$
16	1	2	2	3	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iSMART} = I_{iCROOKED} > I_{iSTUPID}$
17	1	2	2	3	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iSMART} = I_{iCROOKED} > I_{iSTUPID}$
18	1	2	3	4	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iSMART} > I_{iCROOKED} > I_{iSTUPID}$
19	1	2	2	0	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iSMART} = I_{iSTUPID}$
20	1	3	2	4	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iCROOKED} > I_{iSMART} > I_{iSTUPID}$
21	1	3	4	2	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iSTUPID} > I_{iSMART} > I_{iCROOKED}$
22	1	2	3	3	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iSMART} > I_{iCROOKED} = I_{iSTUPID}$
23	1	1	2	2	$I_{iSMART} = I_{iKIND} > I_{iCROOKED} = I_{iSTUPID}$
24	1	3	4	2	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iSTUPID} > I_{iSMART} > I_{iCROOKED}$
25	1	1	2	1	$I_{iKIND} = I_{iSMART} = I_{iSTUPID} > I_{iCROOKED}$
26	1	2	0	3	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iSMART} > I_{iSTUPID}$
27	1	1	4	3	$I_{iSMART} = I_{iKIND} > I_{iSTUPID} > I_{iCROOKED}$
28	1	3	0	2	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iSTUPID} > I_{iSMART}$
29	1	2	0	0	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iSMART}$
30	2	1	3	4	$I_{iSMART} > I_{iKIND} > I_{iCROOKED} > I_{iSTUPID}$
31	1	2	2	3	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iSMART} = I_{iCROOKED} > I_{iSTUPID}$
32	1	2	2	1	$I_{iKIND} = I_{iSTUPID} > I_{iSMART} = I_{iCROOKED}$
33	2	1	4	3	$I_{iSMART} > I_{iKIND} > I_{iSTUPID} > I_{iCROOKED}$
34	1	3	0	2	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iSTUPID} > I_{iSMART}$

35	1	4	3	2	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iSTUPID} > I_{iCROOKED} > I_{iSMART}$
36	1	2	0	3	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iSMART} > I_{iSTUPID}$
37	1	2	4	3	$I_{iKIND} > I_{iSMART} > I_{iSTUPID} > I_{iCROOKED}$
	Number of respondents' choices by model dominants				Collective intellectual portraits of a group of part-time master's students of Public Administration
	$N_1=33$	$N_2=20$	$N_3=8$	$N_4=6$	$N_1 > N_2 > N_3 > N_4$

If we use the comparative analysis for the results of testing in all three groups of learners, where the first-year students' intellectual portrait is

$$N_1(12) > N_2(8) > N_4(5) > N_3(4), (8)$$

and the second-year students' intellectual portrait is

$$N_1(9) > N_2(8) > N_3(5) = N_4(5), (9)$$

and the intellectual portrait of the part-time master's students, who already work in the system of public administration and management, is

$$N_1(33) > N_2(20) > N_3(8) > N_4(6), (10)$$

We can see that there is a clear improvement in the redistribution of intellectual dominants in favour of smartness and kindness in individual and group portraits, depending on the level of education and experience of their carriers.

The 2017 analysis of the possibilities, prospects and recommendations regarding cooperation between Ukraine, the EU and the Russian Federation in the energy sector (Brusylovska, 2017) predicted complications due to the Russia's use of energy as a weapon against Ukraine and the EU. Therefore, the intellectualization of public management personnel in the energy sector and energy supply of the national economy requires innovative approaches and effective changes in shaping interaction between Ukraine and the EU.

This also requires the personnel of the public management system to be committed to priorities and tasks, which should not be based on unqualified decisions or criminal intentions and plans but be built on universal human and civilizational values of kindness and reason of the New Europe.

4. Results and discussion

Thus, the data on intellectual orientations of individuals in the system as well as their collective intellectual portraits provide valuable and relevant information about the human resources potential of any socio-economic system, which can be skilfully used in management processes. The proposed method can be applied not only to future changes in the mentality of its personnel, but also to the selection of smart and good employees for the public administration system of the country's energy supply sector, while minimizing the possibility of hiring "crooked" personalities "who do harm to others and think about their own benefit; who are dishonest and infringe on the rights of other people," and "stupid" personalities who "cause damage without receiving benefit: goods are destroyed, society becomes poorer" (IDRLabs, 2023).

Although every participant N_i of any socio-economic system takes part in shaping the collective intelligence, in the context of public administration tasks, special attention should be given to forming a managerial subset n_j exclusively of people whose intellectual characteristics satisfy conditions (3) or (4). This will limit the possibility of access to the system's management processes for self-confident, ambitious and convinced of their imaginary advantages individuals whose intellectual dominant components include evil, corruption, harm to others for their own benefit.

It is worth mentioning that the research (presented by Dzvinchuk, Petrenko, & Khamchuk, 2022) was carried out solely for educational purposes in order to identify the real proportions of the dominant components of the intellectual orientations of groups of students, to evaluate their real state, and to plan appropriate measure to improve the process of professional training within the Public Administration and Management programme.

We believe that the proposed method and tools for obtaining information about the intellectual orientations of human resources can be used for developing recommendations and managing the introduction of the necessary changes in the collective intelligence of any socio-economic system, its units and subdivisions through planning and implementing mental changes in the process of forming the national mentality, which is "an urgent task of the modern Ukrainian state" (Lopushynsky, 2006) or the so-called reengineering of the mentality of its human resources (Andybur, Melnytskyi, Petrenko, A., & Yasinska, 2017; Panasiuk, Petrenko

V., Popova, & Yasinska, 2018).

Obviously, when making final decisions about assessing the intellectual preferences of an individual or a community, one should not confine oneself to the results of the IDRLabs test alone. However, if the proposed method and tool for creating and using intellectual portraits is supplemented with other psychological tests or if a new special test is developed, it can significantly improve the validity of the results, assessments and recommendations.

If human resources are selected on grounds of reasonable intellectual dominants, the Ukrainian energy supply system will receive new mechanisms for using the collective intelligence of the public administration system of the energy sector, its enterprises and business partners, with the latter focused on ensuring the achievement of the goals of energy transition and sustainable development. This way the mechanisms of traditional management will not change, but the proposed approach to intellectualization of both managerial and executive personnel of the system through the selection and use of human resources with appropriate intellectual characteristics will ensure a number of synergistic effects in the process of synthesizing the so-called social and professional components of the intelligence of managerial personnel n_j , since it will take into account the needs, capabilities, knowledge, skills, practical experience of all personnel N_i and will ensure systematic and effective management of the system through standard organizational, economic and social measures at all levels of management. It will minimize the use of traditional administrative methods in the system, ineffective and inappropriate corporate governance and unprofessional decisions, problems with corruption, etc.

At this stage of the study, we cannot yet estimate the impact that the proposed method of intellectualization will have on the efficiency, effectiveness and quality of public administration. Nonetheless, it is expected that the impact on improving the quality of staffing of the public management bodies of the energy supply of Ukraine will be positive, provided that qualified and morally sound (“smart” and “kind”) employees are attracted, and incompetent and harmful individuals (“stupid” and “crooked”) are excluded, or their presence is minimized.

5. Conclusions

Thus, using the example of the goals and objectives of public management and

administration of Ukraine's energy supply system in the conditions of the energy transition, we demonstrated that traditional approaches to the intellectualization of labour and its management, based on the performance of certain tasks aimed at developing and increasing the level of knowledge, experience and intellectual level of human resources in any community and developing intellectual activity in this community, can be effectively supplemented by one more approach to enhancing the collective intelligence of human resources, which involves the identification, analysis, evaluation and use of information about the active and specially formed characteristics of the intellectual dominants of the carriers of intelligence.

It has been proven that it is expedient to use the method and algorithm for creating intellectual portraits of individuals and their groups based on the results of testing the human resources of public administration bodies according to the reinterpreted model of C. M. Cipolla with the subsequent use of these portraits in the processes of targeted changes in the intellectual, moral and mental characteristics of the personnel.

The models of ideal, desirable and real intellectual portraits of employees of the public administration and management system have been described, and recommendations for their use in the processes of intellectualization of management and functioning of the system have been made.

The feasibility and expediency of using intellectual portraits of individuals and their groups have been demonstrated not only within the system of public administration and management, but also in the processes and procedures of intellectualization of the management of any other socio-economic system.

It is recommended that all technical and technological goals and objectives of the government document "Energy Strategy of Ukraine until 2050" on energy supply, energy security, energy saving, energy efficiency, etc., be supplemented in the part of the implementation plans with corresponding goals and tasks for preparation and development, selection and provision, and retention of professional and effective, but necessarily "kind" and "smart" human resources both in the system of public administration and management of Ukraine's energy industry, and in all its possible institutions and organizations and enterprises.

By using the method and tool of creating individual and collective intellectual portraits in the process of training and preparing public management personnel for the energy sector,

Ukraine can substantially accelerate its modernization and adapt its internal regulations and rules to the European standards of energy market functioning.

Further research should be directed to the improvement and testing of a set of test tools for creating real individual and group intellectual portraits and the practical use of the latter for the intellectualization of institutions and organizations of the domestic system of public management and administration, both in the energy sector and in other sectors of the national economy of Ukraine.

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Appendix

Inflation rate in EU accession candidate countries and potential candidates (rate of change)

	Albania	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Kosovo	Serbia	Montenegro	Turkey	North Macedonia
2010	:	1.3	:	6.2	:	8.6	1.1
2011	:	4.4	:	11.2	:	6.5	3.2
2012	:	6.3	:	7.4	:	9.0	1.8
2013	:	4.8	:	7.7	:	7.5	2.7
2014	:	4.3	:	2.3	:	8.9	0.0
2015	:	-0.7	:	1.5	:	7.7	0.1
2016	:	-1.2	:	1.3	-0.1	7.7	0.2
2017	3.2	-0.5	1.5	3.3	2.7	11.1	2.1
2018	1.8	1.1	1.1	2.0	2.6	16.3	2.3
2019	1.7	1.3	2.7	1.9	0.5	15.2	0.7
2020	2.2	-0.3	0.2	1.8	-0.5	12.3	1.2

Sources: Compiled by the authors on the data from Eurostat (2023b)

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DYNAMICS OF THE EU STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS REGARDING THE EUROPEAN INTEGRATION OF UKRAINE¹

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Abstract: *This research covers the analysis of changes in the strategic communications of the European Union regarding the European integration of Ukraine during 2000-2023. Specifically, it pays attention to the reactions of key EU officials to significant political events and foreign policy challenges. Having used the semantic analysis of official documents and speeches, the study presents the evolution of approaches and perspectives, revealing the hidden strategies, intentions, and ideological influences that shape the EU policy. The analysis emphasizes the growing importance of Ukraine in the strategic plans of the EU, while the geopolitical context significantly affects the European integration process. Examining the communication activity of the main EU institutions since 2022, the study has revealed specific messages regarding Ukraine's prospects for becoming a member of the EU, recognizing the successes in carrying out reforms and the country's efforts to achieve the goals underlying its status as a candidate for membership.*

Keywords: EU strategic communications, EU public diplomacy, European integration, semantic analysis, sentiment analysis.

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1. Introduction

In the context of modern geopolitical processes, the European integration of Ukraine becomes crucial both for Ukraine and the European Union. In less than a year and a half, Ukraine went from applying to starting accession negotiations in June 2024. All this goes on against the background of armed aggression by the Russian Federation. For decades, Ukraine's efforts to obtain the prospect of membership have been unsuccessful. That was outlined in the statements of EU officials reflecting the Union's strategy. Understanding the dynamics and features of the EU's strategic communications regarding Ukraine's European integration will allow a deeper analysis of the political processes shaping the future of both Ukraine and the EU.

The research goal is to analyze the changes in the EU strategic communications as to the European integration of Ukraine in the period from 2000 to the beginning of 2023 when the formal process of obtaining membership was finally confirmed. Statements and actions of influential EU officials, their responses to foreign policy challenges are to be scrutinized taking into account the geopolitical context.

This study is aimed at filling the gaps in the scientific understanding of the interaction between the EU and Ukraine emphasizing strategic communications. In this article, we will focus on public diplomacy which the European Commission understands as delivering EU information and guaranteeing effective communication (EEAS, 2022). The main goal of the EU public diplomacy is to create an effective general image of the EU in the international system, to protect and realize the EU's interests, and to promote the universal EU's values and ideas.

Public diplomacy as a means of the EU's strategic communications is implemented in verbal statements of the leaders of the Community institutions on various issues, including the European integration of Ukraine. Close cooperation between Ukraine and the EU has been going on for a long time (at least since the early 2000s). It is determined by the Association Agreement (2014). Throughout the entire period, leaders of the EU institutions made official statements and commented on social networks. Their public rhetoric reflects the attitude towards the potential of Ukraine's European integration. We assume that the analysis of statements and comments will make it possible to follow how / whether the rhetoric of the EU institutions leaders has changed regarding the potential accession of Ukraine to the European Union and whether this serves as a kind of signal of readiness to accept Ukraine into the European family. Our research covers a

long period - from 1991, when Ukraine gained its independence, to 2023. This is a conscious decision to demonstrate the dynamics of strategic communications of high-ranking EU officials regarding the integration of Ukraine, because the very concept of “strategic” refers to long-term activities.

The analysis is focused on the following research questions:

RQ 1: How have EU messages regarding Ukraine’s European integration perspective changed since the beginning of the country’s aspirations for closer cooperation with the EU in the early 2000s?

RQ 2: How have the EU’s messages regarding Ukraine’s accession changed since Ukraine was granted candidate status?

RQ 3: What specific messages does the EU emphasize in its strategic communications regarding Ukraine’s accession to the EU?

RQ 4: How have the EU’s messages been influenced by the wider geopolitical context, in particular tensions between the EU and Russia and Russia’s large-scale armed aggression against Ukraine?

2. Research Context of the EU Strategic Communications

The development of the EU strategic communications dates back to the mid-2010s and to the period after the beginning of Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014. After the annexation of Crimea and support for separatists in eastern Ukraine, Russia significantly increased its investments in a diversified toolkit of mass media aimed at foreign audiences. In its Conclusions in March 2015, the European Council sought to challenge Russia’s actions and reach out to people both in the EU and in neighbouring countries to convey the European Union’s narrative (European Council, 2015). The 2018 Disinformation Action Plan offered three main objectives: to support the EU’s policies and values towards its Eastern neighbours; to improve the regional media environment, and to raise awareness of disinformation campaigns while improving the EU’s response capacity (EEAS, 2018a). Among the key areas of activity, the Action Plan is aimed at expanding public diplomacy initiatives in the region and involving the local population, especially youth, academia and civil society.

The 2016 Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy states that the EU will strengthen strategic communications, invest and integrate public diplomacy in various areas, connect EU foreign policy with citizens and improve communication with other countries, especially communicating with local residents through social networks (Shared Vision, 2016). X (Twitter) is one of the main channels used by EU officials for public diplomacy as to international cooperation. EU officials often prefer X (Twitter) because it is real-time, public and interactive. This allows them to quickly spread information, interact with other users and promote their messages and initiatives on a global level. In addition, X has a wide user base that includes media, think tanks, NGOs and other stakeholders relevant to EU international cooperation (EEAS, 2021).

Strategic communications on the EU enlargement are an integral part of the EU accession process, helping to build support for enlargement both in the candidate countries and within the EU itself. Using a range of channels and platforms, including the Enlargement Package, social media and targeted public diplomacy efforts, the EU can engage a wide range of stakeholders and promote the benefits of EU membership. However, since Croatia's accession in July 2013, the emergence of illiberal democracies in the EU and the inability of EU institutions to effectively deal with these failures fueled reluctance to further enlargement and raised questions about the sustainability of reforms adopted before joining the Union. Therefore, there is a need to change the "traditional" bureaucratized approach to strategic communications regarding enlargement to demonstrate that the country's accession to the EU is a success story (Kyuchyuk & Loiseau, 2020).

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has changed the EU's calculus about the costs and benefits of admitting new states to the Union. European leaders long dismissed Ukraine's membership but opinions have shifted dramatically since the start of the war. Many EU officials and citizens saw Russia's invasion as their so-called 9/11 moment: a game-changing event that posed a catastrophic risk to their values and way of life. Securing Ukraine's place in Europe is now a top priority. Even enlargement skeptics, notably France, are now in favour (Besch & Ciaramella, 2023).

3. Theoretical and Methodological Background

Strategic communications are purposeful communications carried out by the organization to fulfill its mission. They combine all types of communication activities aimed at ensuring the mission and sustainability of the organization. Their meaning lies in the purposeful impact on key audiences related to the organization's activities (Hallahan, et al., 2007, Holtzhausen and Zerfass, 2015).

In the field of politics, strategic communications are used to achieve the strategic goals of states, international organizations, and associations and are implemented in the context of foreign and security policies. In the National Framework for Strategic Communications, former US President Barack Obama's Administration defines them as "the synchronization of our words and deeds as well as deliberate efforts to communicate and engage with intended audiences" (White House, 2010, 1).

Modern publications on strategic communications largely reflect the security concept of the problem. This approach is taken as a basis in the analytical study of EU strategic communications by Doyle and Desta (2020). Molnar et al. (2021), researching peacekeeping missions, claim the importance of strategic communications for the external legitimation of the EU. Márquez-Carrasco et al (2016) analyze the common foreign and security policy of the EU regarding challenges of Russian disinformation and manipulation relating to the war in Ukraine and point to the formation of a new communication paradigm. In the same context, the EU Institute for Strategic Studies analytical document outlined a new policy vision of EU information security which concerns strategic communications of the European Parliament (European Parliament, 2016). This issue is also developed by James (2015). Valenza (2021) offered a more systemic view of the EU's strategic communications: "Strategic communication – combining reactive messaging and proactive narrative-building – is a key element of the EU's response to increasing global contestation" (Valenza, 2021, 1). He claims that the strategic communications of the EU are focused mainly on Russia.

Hence, two main directions in the development of EU strategic communications issues have taken shape today: 1) security and 2) functional, related to the achievement of strategic goals in certain sectoral or horizontal policies. And while the second direction referred to the

sphere of public diplomacy and public relations of the Community's official institutions actually from the beginning of their formation, then the first became relevant only during 2010-2020.

Since 2019, when Ursula von der Leyen headed the European Commission, an approach connecting strategic communications with current strategic priorities in foreign policy has become increasingly apparent. Valenza (2021) emphasizes the geopolitical direction of EU strategic communications, arguing that against the background of such competitive and security challenges as the policies of the USA, China and Russia, the coronavirus pandemic, manipulation of foreign media information, instability in the region, geopolitics should become an integral part of the EU rules of the game. Preda and Chiriac (2021) define problems of a strategic nature that could be solved by the EU strategic communications.

We should mention that the EU strategic communications research focus changes over time. During the formation of the security concept, the authors centered on countering negative information influences as a response to the challenge of Russian disinformation and hybrid threats (Doyle and Desta, 2020; Salnikova et al., 2019). Today, they also include the geopolitical dimension of the European Union's activities, so the study of EU public diplomacy is relevant and this area is considered as an integral component of StratCom.

A review of publications focused on the empirical analysis of public diplomacy documents proved the effectiveness of semantic analysis (Sevin and Ingenhoff, 2018; van Atteveldt et al., 2016). Yang et al. (2012) succeeded in investigating the use of public diplomacy for strategic purposes, namely solving a particular developing international situation (similar to the procedure for acquiring membership in the EU). EU public diplomacy is carried out by the strategic goals of the Union in the form of clearly defined documents (statements, communiqués, speeches of officials), messages on institutional accounts in social networks and on the official websites of the europa.eu portal. Yoon and Chung (2020) showed that in the study of EU strategic communications, the use of methods of semantic and sentiment analysis combined with quantitative calculation automation tools gives a relevant result.

The analysis of the semantics of documents as to the research of strategies is a separate issue. Fierke and Wiener (1999) analyze the parallel process of NATO and the EU enlargement and examine how changes in discourse contributed to the redefinition of institutional interests at the end of the Cold War. Through the strategic use of discourse which included appeals to pan-

European values and identity, the EU and NATO were able to reframe their approaches to enlargement, thereby overcoming material and ideological obstacles to the integration of new members. The study illustrates how semantic analysis can reveal the dynamics of political discourse and its influence on political processes (Fierke and Wiener, 1999).

Schimmelfennig (2001) analyzes how the EU used rhetorical strategies to promote its expansion to the East, particularly through appeals to liberal norms and values. The author shows how candidate countries were “caught in the community trap” (Schimmelfennig, 2001, 47) where they could not abandon integration without violating their commitments to the ideals of liberal democracy.

Fløttum (2010) applies linguistic analysis to reveal the polyphony and ambiguity in EU discourse, particularly in former British Prime Minister Tony Blair's speeches on Europe and European integration. The study demonstrates how different voices and perspectives interact to shape complex European political discourse (Fløttum, 2010).

Such studies provide the basis for an integrated view of the use of strategic communications in the context of EU enlargement, demonstrating how semantic analysis of official documents and speeches can reveal the hidden strategies, intentions and ideologies governing international relations and enlargement policies.

Hence, we may conclude about the limitations of studies that specifically focus on the semantics of documents and speeches in the context of EU enlargement. The insufficiency of the analysis of the relations between the EU strategic communications and their impact on the enlargement process is also noticeable. However, there are no comprehensive studies that would combine semantic analysis, theoretical understanding and practical consequences of strategic communications. In this aspect, our research is aimed at a deeper understanding of the EU strategic communications, especially in the context of its enlargement, to better comprehend the mechanisms of interaction between the EU and potential member states.

We focus on a detailed analysis of the semantics of official documents and speeches of EU politicians to understand exactly how strategic communications shape the EU enlargement process and what messages they convey to potential member states and society as a whole. Thus, our research aims not only to fill existing knowledge gaps but also to contribute to the practical

application of strategic communications to support effective and mutually beneficial EU enlargement processes.

In the study, we applied semantic analysis of public diplomacy documents posted on the EU official web resources and posts of officials (Enlargement Commissioners, leaders of the European Commission and the European Parliament) on social networks.

Content analysis online tools were used for quantitative semantic analysis of texts (<https://voyant-tools.org/>; <https://www.webtools.services/text-analyzer>; <https://www.online-utility.org/text/analyzer.jsp>) which made it possible to find the most used phrases and words, the number of words, the semantic core of the text, that is all significant and keywords and the most used word combinations, semantic relations of the text core and related terms, correlation coefficients of words related in content, localization distribution of significant words by text segments, etc.

Sentiment analysis (<https://monkeylearn.com/sentiment-analysis/>) is a tool to analyze sentiments and detect emotions in text data. In the field of public diplomacy, it was tested by van Atteveldt et. al (2008) and successfully applied in the analysis of EU strategic communications by Yoon and Chung (2020). Sentiment analysis is the process of detecting positive or negative sentiment in a text, focusing on the polarity of the text with gradations from positive to neutral and negative expressed as a percentage.

4. Research Results

a. Communication by 2014

For the first time, the issue of Ukraine's potential accession to the EU appeared on the EU agenda during the great expansion of the Union in the late 1990s and early 2000s, with the accession of the Central and Eastern European countries. In Ukraine, at the state level, this issue had already entered the list of priorities. However, EU institutions and officials did not formulate this problem and did not give a clear answer to the questions related to it. Thus, when in 1998, Ukraine adopted the Strategy of Integration into the European Union, stipulated "creating the prerequisites for Ukraine's acquisition of membership in the European Union" (President of Ukraine, 2000) and started the preparation on institutional, legal and public communication levels, the EU tried to ignore this issue.

In September 2000 in an interview with the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* Günter Verhegen, the then European Commissioner for Enlargement, said that the EU had not yet decided on Ukraine but the overall goal was the closest form of cooperation, not EU membership (Odushkin, 2001, 365). Subsequently, he believed that the European prospects of Ukraine did not mean the prospects of membership in the EU, at least in the next 10-20 years (Solodky, 2002). In autumn 2002, Günter Verhegen, the Commissioner responsible for enlargement, and Romano Prodi, the EC President, tended to put Ukraine into one box with Belarus and Moldova and to create a category of “never-members” (Moshes, 2003, 40). However, in 2003, during a visit to Kyiv, he stated that for the EU, Ukraine was a priority country, because it could overcome the obstacles on its way to future EU membership (Amchuk, 2003). In 2013, when Verhegen was no longer a European Commissioner, in the context of preparations to sign the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU, he said: “Our long-term interest is to organize step-by-step the integration of Ukraine into our structures. If the association agreement enters into force, it will mean that Ukraine has made an irreversible choice and will no longer be in a limbo between the EU and President Putin’s Eurasian Union” (EURACTIV.com., 2013). However, he expressed skepticism about Ukraine’s chances of joining the EU in the near future because of the country’s political instability and lack of progress on key reforms.

The next European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy (2004 – 2010), Olli Rehn, focused on the policy towards the Balkan countries and Turkey and avoided statements about the European prospects of Ukraine. Specifically, he stressed that the EU should avoid overexpansion, as “the current enlargement agenda is already quite full” (Beunderman, 2005).

Stefan Füle, European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy (2010 – 2014), spoke in favour of signing the EU-Ukraine AA while pointing out the need for Ukraine to continue reforms, particularly in the judicial system (RBC.UA, 2013). During the period of active discussions on the mentioned Agreement, Füle emphasized that the European Community would continue to support Ukraine on its path to Europe, despite the statements of the Ukrainian authorities that could cause concern (Ukrainska Pravda, 2013).

In March 2014, when the political part of the Agreement was about to be signed and Russia launched its operation to seize Crimea, Füle, perhaps for the first time among European

politicians, said that the EU should consider the issue of expansion because “it has unprecedented effective and stabilizing power” (Zaxid.net, 2014).

When Füle headed the EU enlargement and neighborhood policy sector in the European Commission, 163 documents related to Ukraine were adopted with his participation (the results of a search in EurLex). The issue of the accession prospects was widely discussed and eventually became one of the benchmarks at the beginning of the Euromaidan in 2013. However, if we compare the EU’s rule-making activity regarding the enlargement and neighbourhood policy about Ukraine, a much larger number of documents were adopted with the participation of European Commissioner Rehn (210), which is associated with the intensification of relations between Ukraine and the EU in 2005-2010 and the active period of preparation of the AA (for comparison, only 77 such documents were adopted with the participation of Verheugen).

Jose Manuel Barroso, the 2004 – 2014 European Commission President, spoke positively about the European integration of Ukraine, but only in the context of the AA and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area. In his speech at the Ukraine-EU summit on February 25, 2013, he raised the issues of energy cooperation and visa liberalization and the need for Ukraine’s commitment to reforms and the rule of law (Barroso, 2013). During Barroso’s presidency, the context and tone of his statements changed, reflecting the evolution of the political situation in Ukraine and the region as a whole. For example, in the first years of his tenure, Barroso expressed optimism about the prospects of Ukraine’s European integration and highly evaluated the country’s progress in implementing reforms (Council of the European Union, 2007). Instead, after the pro-Russian government led by V. Yanukovich came to power in Ukraine in 2010, Barroso’s statements became more cautious and emphasized the need for Ukraine to continue progress on key reforms in the areas of democracy, the rule of law and human rights. In an interview with a Ukrainian newspaper, he stated that he would continue to use all his influence to try to convince the Ukrainian leadership that it needed to focus on the future rather than constantly look back at the past (LB.ua, 2011).

Unlike the EC, the European Parliament, represented by its leadership, disseminated broader statements regarding Ukraine’s potential membership in the EU. Already after the declaratively pro-European President V. Yushchenko came to power in 2005, the EP expressed support for the possibility of Ukraine’s membership in the European Union, calling on the new

Ukrainian political leadership to reform the country, restore free-market reforms, to develop an open democratic society and prosperous economy, which could lead to greater integration of Ukraine with the EU (European Parliament 2005). The EP Vice-President, Jacek Saryusz-Wolski, speaking on behalf of the largest faction – the European People’s Party, stated the necessity to finally offer the prospect of membership for Ukraine. It would encourage Ukraine to continue and deepen the course of reforms and it met the interests of democracy in the whole of Eastern Europe (Drach, 2005). Jerzy Buzek, the 2009 – 2012 President of the European Parliament (and one more representative of Poland), spoke in favour of Ukraine’s step-by-step accession to the EU. He emphasized the importance of strengthening democratic institutions, improving the rule of law and fighting corruption as key steps on the way to Ukraine’s integration into the Union (Zaxid.net, 2010).

We should mention that since 2009, i.e., the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy has been engaged in the sphere of active foreign affairs policy. Catherine Ashton held this position from 2009 to 2014. She was not an active participant in law-making activities related to Ukraine (10 documents for 5 years), but she made several statements regarding the progress in signing the AA and support to Ukraine during the Revolution of Dignity in 2013-2014 (Ashton, 2013).

Summarizing the 2000 – 2014 messages of EU officials directly related to the enlargement, we can identify two periods regarding the prospects of European integration of Ukraine: 1) by 2005, when the European leaders “had not yet decided”, and 2) from 2005 to 2014, when they repeatedly stated that Ukraine had a clear European perspective and could become a member of the EU in the future, provided that it met the necessary criteria and implemented the necessary reforms. The semantics of the European leaders’ statements corresponded to the trends in Ukrainian foreign policy, i.e., from the pro-European aspirations of V. Yushchenko’s administration (the beginning of conversations about the European perspective of Ukraine) to the generally pro-Russian policy of V. Yanukovych’s government (the caveat that everything depends on the Ukrainian people and government). Throughout the period, the importance of implementing political and economic reforms, fighting corruption, strengthening the rule of law and ensuring democratic governance was emphasized. The more optimistic position of representatives of Poland regarding Ukraine’s European integration prospects was demonstrated,

although they did not represent those EU institutions that had a real influence on the enlargement and neighbourhood policy.

b. *Communication from the Victory of the Revolution of Dignity to the Beginning of the FR's Large-scale Armed Aggression (2014-2022)*

During this period, the leading role of the institute of the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs was established, in particular regarding relations with Ukraine and the prospects of its European integration. For example, during her visit to Kyiv in 2015, Federica Mogherini, High Representative/Vice-President of the EC (2014 – 2019), spoke almost exclusively about the current issues of the AA implementation, the need for reforms and the fight against corruption in Ukraine, as well as about supporting the territorial integrity of Ukraine (EEAS, 2015). In September 2017, in her statement on the entry into force of the EU-Ukraine AA, Federica Mogherini stated: “It shows that we share the same objectives and that the Ukrainian people can count on the European Union’s support and cooperation for the years to come” (European Commission, 2017). In March 2018, speaking to the students of the Taras Shevchenko Kyiv National University, Mogherini emphasized the prospect of Ukraine’s long journey to the European family: “I believe the path for Ukraine has just begun. <...> We will continue to be with you every step of the way – the easy ones, the not-so-easy ones, the ones that will require even more energy from your side, because we consider we are exactly on the same side” (EEAS, 2018b).

Thus, Mogherini supported Ukraine’s integration formally outlined in the AA but she never directly stated that Ukraine should become a member of the EU. Instead, she focused on encouraging the implementation of the Association Agreement as a basis for deepening cooperation between Ukraine and the EU.

Johannes Hahn, European Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (2014-2019), spoke only about the AA (emphasizing the need for reforms) and signaled the long-term perspective of closer cooperation: “Generations of Ukrainian citizens to come will reap the benefits of closer association with the EU. <...> The European Union will continue its support for Ukraine’s reform efforts, with both expertise and financial support.” (European Commission, 2017).

Since the beginning of his term until Ukraine submits an application for accession in 2022, Josep Borrell, Mogherini's successor, has also consistently expressed support for Ukraine's European aspirations exclusively within the AA, without mentioning its potential EU membership. Borrell underlined the EU's commitment to the European future of Ukraine and assessed the country's progress in implementing key reforms and assured the EU's support for Ukraine in its reform efforts. As a High Representative, he emphasized the rapprochement of Ukraine and the EU, their common desire to strengthen political ties and economic integration based on the AA, but no more than that (European Pravda, 2021). His position on this issue remained consistent. By February 24, 2022, he had repeatedly stated that the EU supported Ukraine's European aspirations, but he had not considered membership as a realistic option. Moreover, he emphasized the troubles in anti-corruption in Ukraine. In September 2020, during his visit to Kyiv, he claimed that strong, independent and effective anti-corruption institutions and reform of the justice system were of key importance to meeting the expectations of the people of Ukraine (Sydorenko, 2020).

The European Commission leaders also spoke about Ukraine's integration aspirations. Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the EC (2014 – 2019), did not express support for Ukraine's EU membership. Instead, he underlined the need to continue reforms, to fight against corruption and bolstered up the AA implementation aimed at deepening the political association and economic integration between the EU and Ukraine. In July 2017, in a joint briefing in Kyiv, Juncker emphasized the need for Ukraine to increase its efforts to combat corruption as it undermined the nation's progress and efforts in aligning with EU norms (Voice of America, 2017). Juncker's commentary around the EU-Ukraine AA reflected his support for Ukraine's reform agenda. He underscored the EU's commitment to assisting Ukraine with the necessary reforms for modernization and stabilizing the economy as part of the broader process of EU integration, a theme consistent throughout his tenure (Holub, 2017). Thus, Juncker's stance regarding Ukraine's accession fully complied with the framework of the AA and did not change during his tenure as the EC President.

Ursula von der Leyen, the EC President since 2019, made several statements regarding Ukraine and its EU prospects before the beginning of the RF's large-scale armed aggression against Ukraine. In December 2019, von der Leyen met with the President of Ukraine,

Volodymyr Zelenskyi, and expressed support for Ukraine's European aspirations. She stated that the EU sought to help Ukraine in carrying out reforms and strengthening democracy and expressed unconditional support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine (LB.ua, 2019). In October 2021, during the 23rd EU-Ukraine Summit, significant discussions regarding Ukraine's relations with the EU were documented. European leaders, including von der Leyen, reiterated the EU's support for Ukraine's reform process and its alignment with EU standards which are prerequisites for further integration and potential EU membership. These discussions are detailed in the joint summit statement (European Council, 2021).

Thus, although before Ukraine applied for accession, von der Leyen did not make any statements directly related to the prospects of Ukraine's EU membership, her general stance was oriented towards encouraging European integration and reforms in Ukraine. In general, von der Leyen was a supporter of Ukraine's European aspirations and emphasized the need for Ukraine to continue its reform efforts. However, she also acknowledged the challenges and complexity of the situation, especially in the context of ongoing Russian aggression in eastern Ukraine.

Donald Tusk, the President of the European Council (2014 – 2019), a representative of Poland, spoke quite differently as he repeatedly expressed his support for the European integration of Ukraine and its potential membership in the EU. In February 2019, in the Verkhovna Rada, Tusk said: "There can be no just Europe without an independent Ukraine. There can be no safe Europe without a safe Ukraine. To put it simply: there can be no Europe without Ukraine!". He assured that the doors of the EU were open for Ukraine (Laurenson, 2019). Having finished his powers as President of the European Council, in 2021, Tusk wrote on Twitter: "There is no safe and legal Europe without an independent, sovereign Ukraine" (Tusk, 2021).

Charles Michel, Tusk's successor as the head of the European Council, was not in favour of Ukraine's membership in the European Union until February 2022. Instead, he supported the EU's partnership with Ukraine through the AA and the provision of financial assistance to the country. For example, in March 2021, during the talks with President Zelenskyi, Michel emphasized the EU's support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and expressed his belief in Ukraine's strong partnership with the EU. The Ukrainian side raised the

issue of revising the AA in terms of potential accession to the EU, but Michel did not mention the prospects of Ukraine's membership in the EU (President of Ukraine, 2021).

Therefore, from 2014 to February 23, 2022, the features of the EU strategic communications regarding the prospects of Ukraine's membership in the Union are as follows:

- a clear formulation of the integration goals within the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement (primarily a deep and comprehensive free trade area), without the prospect of membership;

- providing signals about the potential possibility of opening the prospect of membership, provided that its criteria are met;

- the “encouraging” hints about the prospect of membership, but not in the speeches of the European Commission representatives (an institution that plays a decisive role in the implementation of EU strategies).

c. EU Strategic Communication after February 24, 2022: Analysis of Key Documents

The large-scale Russian aggression against Ukraine on February 24, 2022, had a significant impact on the EU strategic communications regarding Ukraine. Immediately after the Russian invasion, EU messages took on a more urgent tone, stressing the need to support Ukraine. The EU condemned the invasion and imposed a series of sanctions against Russia. The EU also reaffirmed its commitment to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine and emphasized the importance of democracy, the rule of law and human rights as European values.

The sudden migration wave of Ukrainians who arrived in the EU after the beginning of Russian aggression became a serious crisis that required a coordinated response from the EU institutions. The EU strategic communications focused on providing the public with accurate and up-to-date information about the situation, eliminating concerns, debunking rumors and emphasizing the EU's support for Ukraine and its people. The EU web portal became one of the main communication channels where information and the EU reaction were regularly updated. The heads of EU institutions also used social media to inform about the crisis and the EU's response. They stressed the need for a coordinated and compassionate approach to the situation and underlined the EU's commitment to supporting Ukraine and its people. The EU strategic communications also emphasized the need for urgent action, including the provision of

humanitarian aid, the supply of military equipment and the mobilization of financial resources. The EU also called for greater coordination with NATO and other international partners to support Ukraine’s defense and deter further Russian aggression.

However, the Russian invasion created new challenges for the EU’s strategic communications regarding Ukraine’s accession. The war underscored the urgency of Ukraine’s European aspirations but also raised concerns about the risks and challenges of EU enlargement in a region of heightened geopolitical tension. The war also highlighted the importance of countering Russian disinformation and propaganda, which has intensified since the invasion. The EU increased its efforts to counter Russian disinformation with the help of the East StratCom task force of the European External Action Service.

Since February 28, 2022, when Ukraine applied for membership in the EU, the countdown to official communication as to acquiring membership has begun.

We analyzed the Twitter (X) activity of EU officials and institutions that directly relate to the expression of the Union’s position on the issue of Ukraine’s accession up to the end of 2022.

Table 1
Twitter activity of EU officials and institutions on the accession of Ukraine
(number of tweets with keywords)

	Ukraine		Ukraine + Membership		Ukraine + EU	
	2022	Before	2022	Before	2022	Before
Ursula von der Leyen, President of the EU Commission	91 (36 popular)	1 (since July 2019)	6	0 (since July 2019)	61 (44 popular)	0 (since July 2019)
Josep Borrell, HR/VP	86 (31 popular)	0 (since June 2018)	0	0 (since June 2018)	75 (42 popular)	0 (since June 2018)
European Commission	85	2 (since June 2010)	1	0 (since June 2010)	85	0 (since June 2010)
European Council	60	42 (since October 2010)	4	0 (since October 2010)	58	27 (since October 2010)
European Parliament	52	56	2	0	19	13

		(since April 2009)		(since April 2009)		(since April 2009)
Olivér Várhelyi, European Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement	61	0 (since March 2016)	3	0 (since March 2016)	48	0 (since March 2016)

Rhetoric of Ursula von der Leyen

We can see, Ursula von der Leyen is the most active politician in discussing issues related to Ukraine and its path to EU membership. In 2022, she was (Lüfkens, 2022) and remains the most subscribed EU official on Twitter. Three tweets with the semantic core “Ukraine, Accession” were published in 2022 starting in September 2022. These were short messages about events involving von der Leyen, like her trip to Kyiv on September 15: “So much has changed. Ukraine is now a [EU flag] candidate. I’ll discuss with @ZelenskyyUa and @Denys_Shmyhal how to continue getting our economies and people closer while Ukraine progresses towards accession” (von der Leyen, 2022).

We explored the social network response, specifically the semantics and sentiment of comments. The above tweet received more than 17,700 likes, no less than 2,364 retweets and 330 first-order comments. Regarding the comments,

- 23 were unrelated to the message content,
- 15 referred to EU relations with other states (mainly with Armenia regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict),
- 67 expressed unequivocal support for Ukraine,
- 32 demonstrated a positive reaction,
- 47 can be assessed as constructive (paid attention to procedural, economic and social issues of accession),
- 91 demonstrated a negative attitude towards Ukraine and the EU,
- 46 objected to Ukraine’s accession to the EU (“Not my problem”, references to corruption in Ukraine, etc.). It is important to mention that among those who left negative comments, most of the accounts appear to have fictitious names, while the authors of positive comments appear under names that are more likely to belong to real people.

Considering the high level of von der Leyen’s communication activity regarding the accession of Ukraine to the EU, we analyzed the documents published on her behalf in detail. Statement by President von der Leyen on the Commission’s Opinions on the EU Membership Applications by Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia was the first document formulating the perspective of membership (European Commission, 2022b). The document concerns the applications of three states, but its semantic core consists of a combination of terms around the words “Ukraine”, “European”, “country”. The words “important”, “perspective”, “path”, “deserves”, “understanding” and others carry a significant semantic load. (Fig. 1). The combination of the two most frequent words – “Ukraine” and “European” is present in 7 out of 10 selected segments of the text (the word “Ukraine” is in all ten) (Fig. 2).



Fig. 1. Semantic relations of the most frequent words in Statement by President von der Leyen on the Commission’s Opinions on the EU Membership Applications by Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia (June 17, 2022).

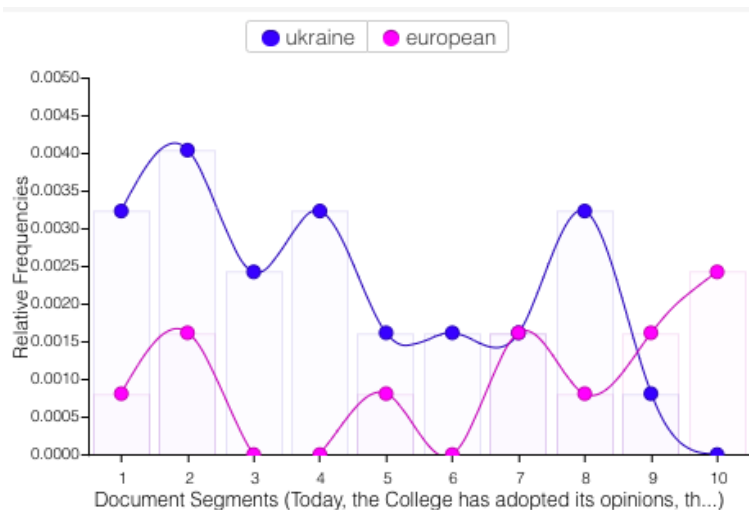


Fig. 2. Distribution by document segments of the most frequent words

The key message is best reflected by a quote from the concluding paragraph: “We have one clear message, and that is: Yes, Ukraine deserves a European perspective. Yes, Ukraine should be welcomed as a candidate country. This is on the understanding that good work has been done, but important work also remains to be done” (European Commission, 2022b). Its essence generally corresponds to the terms of the AA implementation but with the perspective of membership. We will remind that the Ukrainian side has insisted on including such a perspective in the text of the Agreement since 2007. In total, the document contains 1,239 words, its “mood” is rated as positive with an index of 57.1%, which is typical for official documents. Overall, the text orients the audience to a generally positive perspective.

We draw attention that the word “corruption” occurs 6 times in the document (0.0048%) which was typical for EU documents in the sphere of relations with Ukraine in previous years. Instead, the word “membership” occurs only twice, and both times outside the main context of the document. In addition, this statement is filled with insignificant words (the “wateriness” index is 70.1%) which is typical for documents of a declarative nature.

President von der Leyen’s statement at a joint press conference with President of Ukraine Zelenskyi following the results of the EU-Ukraine summit in February 2023 has a completely different semantics (European Commission, 2023).

The text has 1,880 words, its wateriness is 54.3%, the mood is distinctly positive (the index of “positivity” is 87.7%). This document also contains the word “corruption”, but its frequency is three times lower than in the June 2022 statement (0.0016% (2 occurrences) vs. 0.0048% (6 occurrences)). The word “membership” is used twice in direct connection with the topic of the document (0.0016%). Fig. 3 presents the semantic relations of keywords which help us conclude the importance of security, energy, and Russian aggression for European-Ukrainian cooperation. The figure reflects the level of correlation between the terms. The proximity of the terms “Ukraine”, “start”, “join” and “prepared” may indicate preparation for the start of the procedural phase of admission. There is also a high level of correlation between the most frequent words “Ukraine” and “European” by document segments (Fig. 4).



Fig. 3. Semantic relations of the most frequent words in Statement by President von der Leyen at the joint press conference with Ukrainian President Zelenskyi (February 2, 2023)

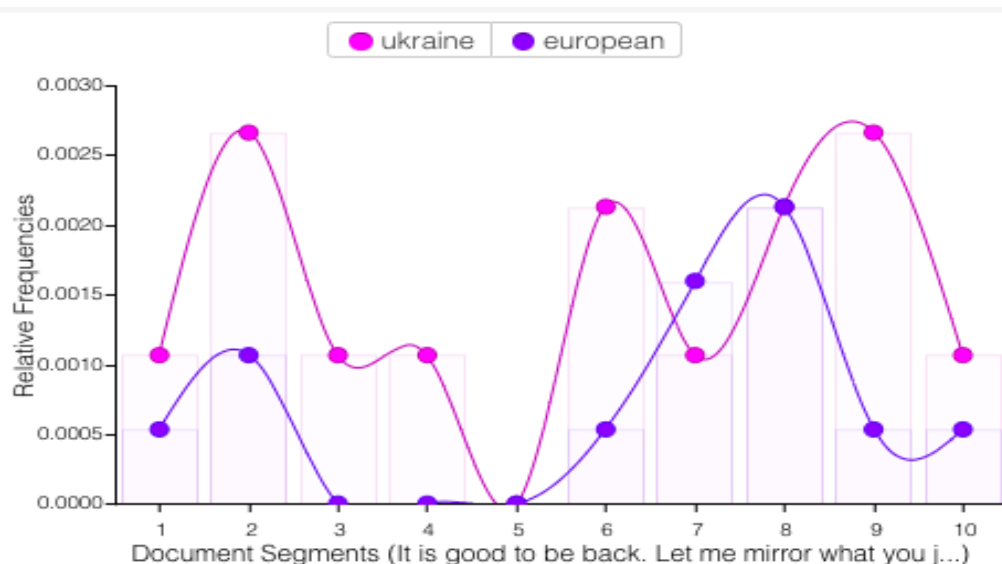


Fig. 4. Distribution of the most frequent words by document segments

We compared this statement with a similar formal document, i.e., von der Leyen’s statement at a joint press conference with Volodymyr Zelensky following the results of the EU-Ukraine summit in October 2021 (European Commission, 2021). The keywords include “Ukraine”, “energy”, “gas”, “cooperation”, “European Union”, “reforms”, “level” (Fig. 5). This semantics fully reflects the rhetoric of EU officials typical for 2014-2021 period, related to the integration exclusively within the Association Agreement emphasizing the need to strengthen reforms in Ukraine, as well as assurances of all possible support. There is no mention of Ukraine’s membership in the EU in any context. The peculiarity of this document is the stress on the words “energy” and “gas” which can be explained only by the concern of European officials about the current situation in the European energy market because of the sharp increase in the price of natural gas due to the export policy of Russia as the main supplier of the resource to the markets of EU countries. European officials closely link Europe’s energy security with Ukraine’s foreign policy, particularly regarding its cooperation with the EU. The distribution of words by segments of the text indicates the central position and clear accentuation of “gas” and “energy” messages in combination with the mention of “Ukraine” (Fig. 6).



Fig. 5. The most frequent words and their visualization frequency in Ursula von der Leyen’s statement at a joint press conference with Volodymyr Zelenskyi following the results of the EU-Ukraine summit in October 2021.

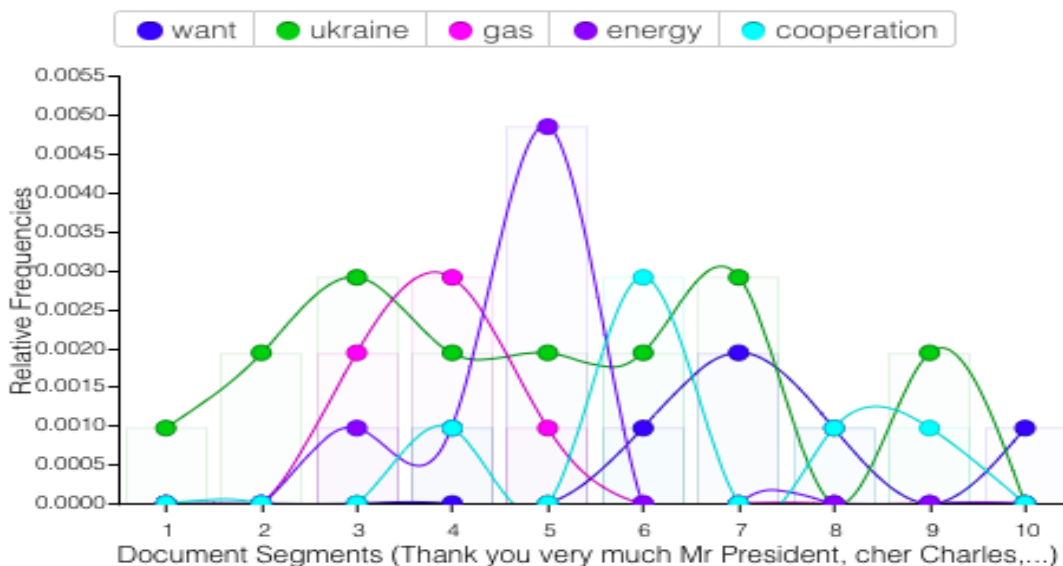


Fig. 6. Distribution of the most frequent words by document segments

Fig. 7 shows the interrelations of words where the basis of the semantic core includes the combination of “Ukraine”, “gas”, “energy” with related words that form a word combination.

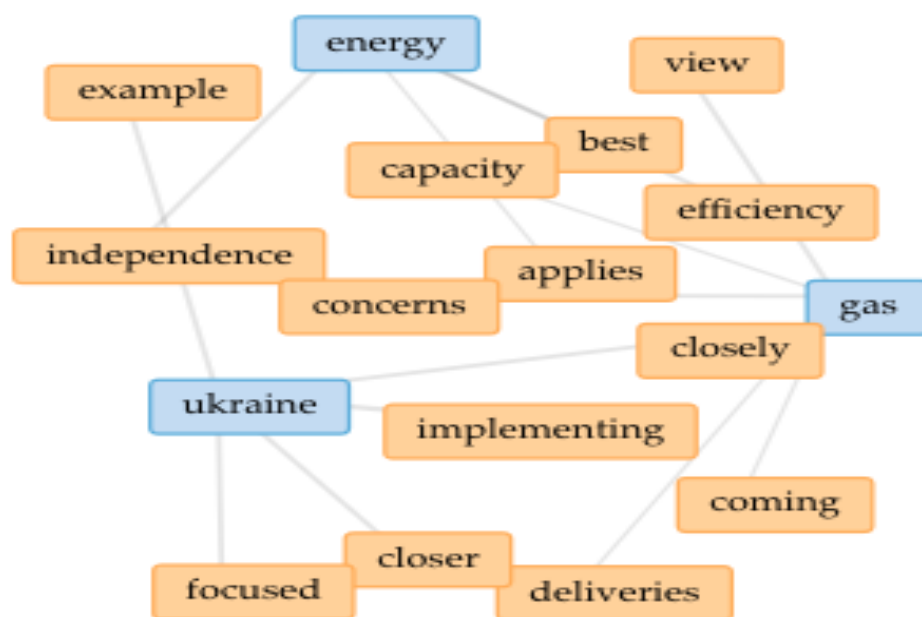


Fig. 7. Semantic relations of the most frequent words in Ursula von der Leyen's Statement (October 2021)

So, the text semantics is fully oriented to conveying several utilitarian messages to the audience as to current challenges and sectoral policy of the EU. The strategic communication message remains unchanged and corresponds to the position formulated in 2014, i.e., maximum possible cooperation, its level depends on the success of democratization in Ukraine, but no more than within the AA. This is illustrated, e.g., by the following quote from the document: “How can we improve our cooperation and take it to the next level? By tapping into the potential of the Association Agreement. It still has a lot to offer – we have been discussing that – for example in the digital area.” (European Commission, 2021).

We also compared von der Leyen’s speech after the summit on February 2, 2023, in Kyiv (European Commission, 2023) with her speech in the autumn of 2021 discussed above and the statement regarding the conclusions of the European Commission on Ukraine’s membership in the EU (European Commission, 2022b). The 2023 document is comparatively less loaded with keywords, indicating its more pragmatic and less declarative nature. Moreover, the number of

such words as “reform”, “agreement”, “to do” is significantly lower which indicates a shift in focus from the previously emphasized problem of reforms and implementation of the AA.

The key phrases that differ the 2023 document from the previous two are the following: “how to build a future for Ukraine in the European Union”, “You continue to make impressive progress”, “Ukraine to join key European programmes”. The following fragment best reflects the main message of von der Leyen's speech: “I am comforted to see that your anti-corruption bodies are on alert and effective in detecting corruption cases. I also commend you on reacting so rapidly at the political level to make sure that the fight against corruption is delivering tangible results and is further stepped up. And while Ukraine advances on the European path, we are tearing down barriers between our economies and societies even further” (European Commission, 2023).

The semantics of the joint statement by Ursula von der Leyen and Charles Michel on February 3, 2023, was more restrained, but contained the following phrases (European Council, 2023): “to recognise Ukraine’s European perspective”, “Ukraine underlined its determination to meet the necessary requirements”, “considerable efforts that Ukraine demonstrated in the recent months”.

Hence, we can draw a conclusion about a significant change in semantics in the rhetoric of the chief executive officer of the EU which may indicate compliance with the new strategy. The general tone is focused on constructive work in the direction of Ukraine’s rapprochement with the European Union, and the key messages are approval of Ukraine’s success in carrying out reforms which were emphasized in previous years, and Ukraine’s determination to realize its goals. We can claim that the EU no longer formulates previously “insurmountable” obstacles to Ukraine’s integration into the EU in the form of unfinished reforms and the need to “go a long way” to cultivate European values and strengthen democracy.

Charles Michel’s rhetoric

We analyzed the joint statement of the European Council President, Charles Michel, the European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, and the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyi, on the results of the EU-Ukraine summit on February 3, 2023, in the part related to the European integration of Ukraine. The semantic core includes such words: “EU”,

“Ukraine’s”, “Ukraine”. For the first time, the term “membership” was included in the semantic core of the EU public communication document. Fig. 10 shows that the semantic relations of the core with the term “application” form a semantic cluster of the terms: “acknowledged”, “alignment”, “efforts”, “determination”, “reiterated”, “acquis” (EU legal act). Accordingly, “European”, “membership”, “determination”, “EU” are associated with the word “Ukraine's”.

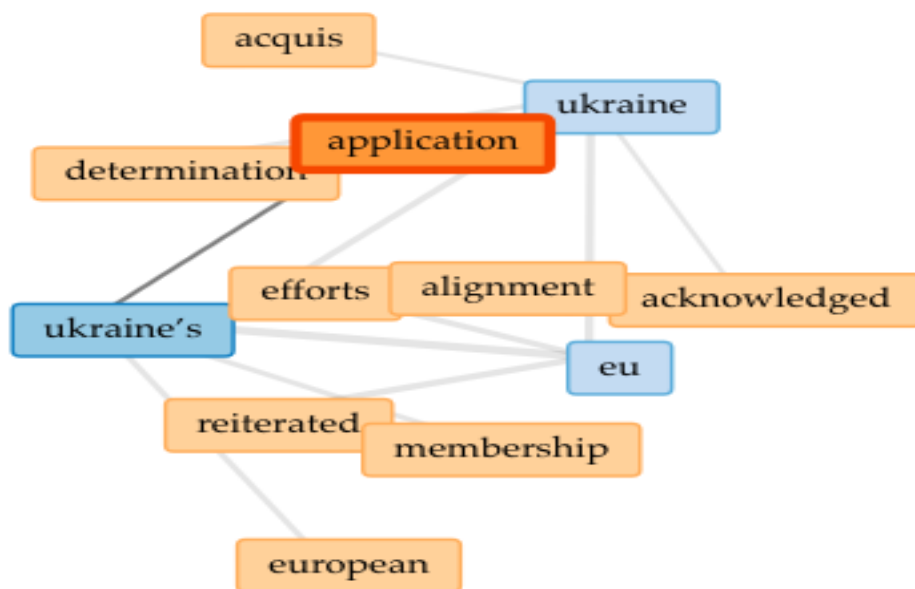


Fig. 10. Semantic relations of the most frequent words in the Joint statement following the 24th EU-Ukraine Summit (February 3, 2023).

Fig. 11 shows the values of pairwise correlation coefficients of the localization of some words in the text array. We underline that a high or close to a high level of correlation is determined for such pairs: “membership – reform” (0.81) and “EU - ukraine's” (0.73) (for the last pair, the frequency by text segments is also given in Fig. 12). On the other hand, for such significant pairs as “enlargement – ukraine’s” and “accession – ukraine’s”, the coefficient values are about 0.42 - 0.45.

Term 1	←	→	Term 2	Correlation...
membership			reform	0.81325006
eu			ukraine's	0.731066
application			ukraine's	0.5921565
commission			ukraine's	0.5921565
enlargement			ukraine's	0.45226702
order			ukraine's	0.45226702
recalled			ukraine's	0.45226702
report			ukraine's	0.45226702
accession			ukraine's	0.42379344
process			ukraine's	0.42379344

Fig. 11. Pairwise correlation coefficients

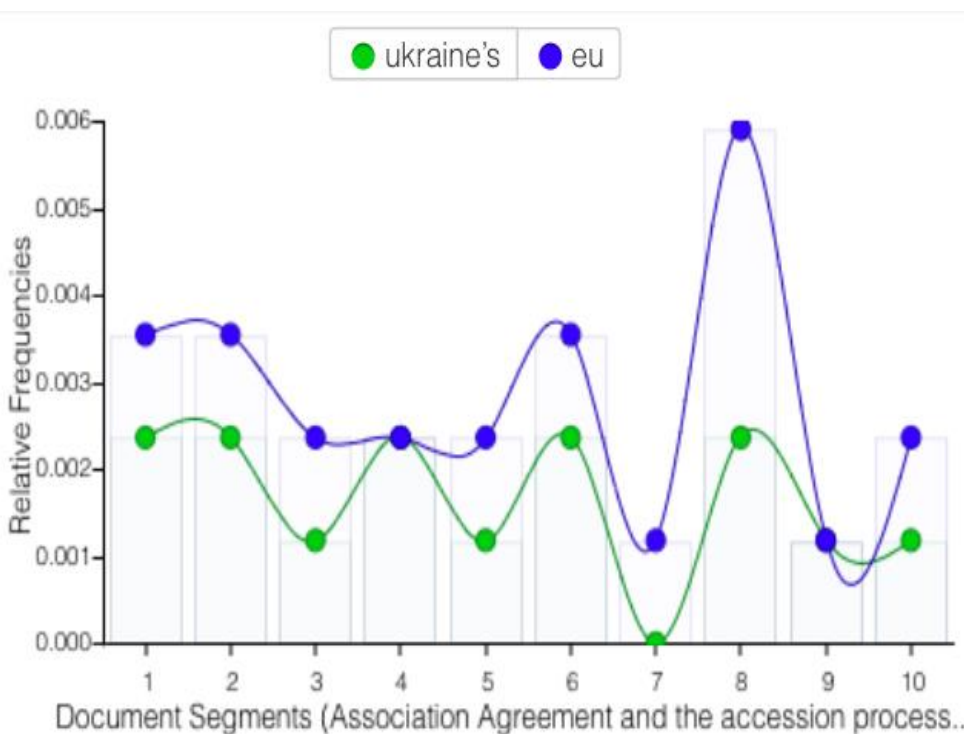


Fig. 12. Frequency of the two most used words by text segments

The interpretation of the semantic characteristics of the above document enables us to state that, compared to previous EU documents on relations with Ukraine, for the first time, this

statement contains specific messages regarding the prospects of Ukraine acquiring formal membership in the EU. In particular:

1) the document semantic core consists of terms related to the procedural aspects of the accession (“recognize”, “determination”, “acquis”), eg., “The EU welcomed Ukraine’s intention to prepare the National Program for the Adoption of the Acquis (NPAA) based on the Analytical Report on the preparedness of Ukraine in the acquis chapters following the Commission’s Opinion on Ukraine’s application for membership of the European Union”;

2) in contrast to all previous statements in the history of EU-Ukraine relations, here the success of Ukraine in carrying out reforms is affirmed (“effort”, “determination”), eg., “The EU acknowledged the considerable efforts that Ukraine demonstrated in the recent months towards meeting the objectives underpinning its candidate status for EU membership, welcomed Ukraine’s reform efforts in such difficult times, and encouraged the country to continue on this path and to fulfill the conditions specified in the Commission’s opinion on its membership application to advance towards future EU membership”;

3) the EU’s comments regarding the need to continue reforms foresee a clear perspective of membership and are formulated as a specific list of “homework” measures contained in paragraph 5 of the document.

To study civil relations with the public, we conducted a semantic analysis of the “EU Solidarity with Ukraine” web page – a second-level page of the EU web portal Europa (europa.eu), which appeared already on February 25, 2022. The page is localized under the title “In Focus”. The EU position is formulated in the first sentence of the text block: “The EU is united in its solidarity with Ukraine and will continue to support Ukraine and its people together with its international partners, including through additional political, financial and humanitarian support.” (European Union, 2022).

Using Voyant online analysis software (<https://voyant-tools.org/>), we established that the most frequent words on the page include “Ukraine” (105), “EU” (86), “2022” (75), “Commission” (59), “support” (32), “Russian” (29), “European” (27), “activities” (24), “sanctions” (23), “billion” (22), “assistance” (22).

Semantic relations of words that make up the semantic core of the page are given in Fig. 13. “Ukraine” is in the center of the core, it is semantically most closely related to “EU”, “2022”,

“support”, “fleeing”. In turn, “EU” is directly related to “Ukraine”, “2022”, “solidarity”, “Commission”; and through the word “solidarity” - to “European” and “support”. “2022” is directly related to “support” and “Commission”.

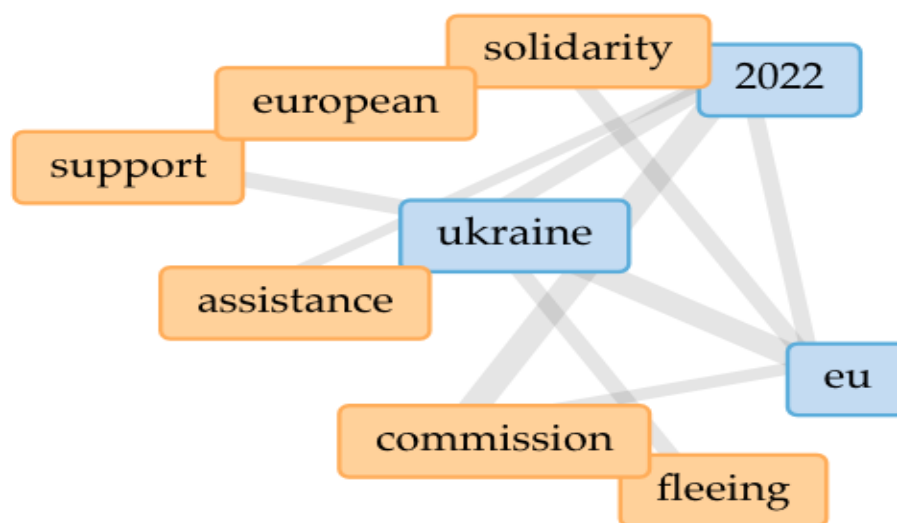


Fig. 13. Semantic relations of the most used words on the EU Solidarity with Ukraine web page

“Ukraine” as the central word of the semantic structure is most closely related to “eu” (37); “2022” (18); “support” (17); “fleeing” (15); “solidarity” (14); “people” (12); “assistance” (15); “aggression” (9); “Commission” (9). In combinations it correlates with the following phrases “ukraine how the eu is supporting”, “ukraine eu solidarity with ukraine”, “ukraine how the eu is”, “ukraine and its people”, “ukraine eu solidarity with”, “ukraine how the eu”, “ukraine and in”, “ukraine and its”, “ukraine as the”, “ukraine eu solidarity”, “ukraine how the”, “ukraine the eu”, “ukraine these measures”.

In general, the content of the page is aimed at conveying the message that the EU stands in solidarity with Ukraine and provides it with European support, and the activities of the European Commission in 2022 are related to assistance to Ukraine.

Similar results were obtained after the semantic analysis of the Factsheet on the website of solidarity with Ukraine, which contains the main factual data regarding the EU support of

Ukraine (European Commission, 2022a). The document is intended for communication with a wide audience, although according to the readability index (readability index=15.848), it corresponds to professional or scientific literature. Fig. 14 shows that the semantic core consists of the chain “Ukraine-EU-million” and terms connected with them, namely “solidarity”, “assistance”, “support”, “budget”, “billion”.



Fig. 14. Semantic relations of the most used words in the Factsheet: EU Solidarity with Ukraine”

Such semantics in an information-rich document for PR communication claim that its author(s) intended to convey constructive messages based on a significant factual ground to the target audience. We can assume that in this case it reflects a strategic approach and is not just a reflection on current challenges.

5. Conclusion

The European Union first publicly acknowledged Ukraine's aspiration for membership following the 2004 Orange Revolution, during the EU 2004-2007 extension and the initiation of the Association Agreement. At that time, Ukraine began implementing a state program to inform the public about European integration.

Over time, however, EU communications shifted in response to Ukraine's evolving political landscape. Optimistic rhetoric in 2007 regarding integration prospects and reforms gave way to more cautious statements, emphasizing the need for continued progress in key areas. Before 2005, the EU made no explicit statements about Ukraine's membership prospects. Between 2005 and 2014, the EU consistently recognized Ukraine's European trajectory, noting that membership would depend on meeting specific criteria and implementing reforms.

From the Revolution of Dignity in 2014 until Russia's large-scale invasion in 2022, EU officials refrained from making direct statements about Ukraine's membership prospects. Instead, the EU's communications focused on supporting Ukraine's reform efforts under the framework of the Association Agreement, emphasizing the challenges posed by ongoing Russian aggression in eastern Ukraine. Signals about membership remained tentative and came primarily from non-decisive EU institutions, which hinted at a potential future opening for membership if Ukraine met the necessary criteria.

Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 profoundly influenced the EU's strategic communications. The EU's messaging underscored its unwavering support for Ukraine, reaffirming its commitment to Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty. European values, such as democracy, the rule of law, and human rights, were central to the EU's communications, as it condemned the invasion and imposed sanctions on Russia. In response to the rapid influx of Ukrainian refugees, the EU focused on delivering accurate, up-to-date information to the public, addressing concerns, dispelling disinformation, and emphasizing solidarity with Ukraine and its citizens. The EU's communications highlighted the need for urgent action, including humanitarian aid, military assistance, financial mobilization, and enhanced coordination with NATO and other international partners to support Ukraine's defense and counter Russian aggression.

The heads of key EU institutions, particularly the European Commission, played a leading role in communications concerning Ukraine's potential accession to the European Union. Prior to Russia's invasion in 2022, EU rhetoric, typical of the 2014-2021 period, focused on integration within the framework of the Association Agreement, emphasizing the need for Ukraine to strengthen reforms. During that period, Ukraine's EU membership was not actively discussed, and cooperation was framed within the context of immediate EU challenges, such as energy policy. Communication primarily centered on practical messages addressing current issues and EU sectoral policies.

However, after Ukraine's formal announcement of its intention to join the EU, the tone of EU documents became more pragmatic and less declarative. Key messages highlighted Ukraine's progress in implementing reforms and its commitment to achieving its goals. The EU no longer emphasized previously insurmountable obstacles to Ukraine's membership, such as the need for extensive reforms to uphold European values and democratic principles, signaling a shift toward a more favorable stance on Ukraine's integration.

By early 2023, EU communications began including specific messages regarding Ukraine's potential for formal membership. Their semantic core consists of terms related to the procedural aspects of accession. The EU recognized Ukraine's reform efforts and outlined clear steps toward membership. Those messages increasingly framed membership as achievable, contingent upon Ukraine's completion of specific reform "homework."

Public relations efforts, particularly through the europa.eu website, have been a central tool for communicating EU solidarity with Ukraine. These communications emphasize the EU's support for Ukraine, particularly through European Commission activities aimed at aiding Ukraine during the ongoing conflict. The content signals a commitment to constructive, supportive messaging aimed at the general public.

Hence, the EU's enlargement strategy has historically been adaptive and reactive to both geopolitical conditions and internal developments within candidate countries. The EU's cautious approach to eastern enlargement, especially in the early 2000s, reflected uncertainty about Ukraine's membership prospects. However, from 2005 onward, as Ukraine pursued reforms and declared a European integration course, EU messages became more specific regarding Ukraine's potential membership, while consistently emphasizing the need for continued reforms.

External political challenges, such as the annexation of Crimea and the conflict in eastern Ukraine, significantly influenced the EU's rhetoric and prompted more active support for Ukraine. The turning point occurred immediately after the start of Russia's full-scale armed aggression against Ukraine. That is, the geopolitical context, relations with Russia and other international challenges often forced the EU to adjust its approaches to enlargement.

We deliberately covered a long period (1991 – 2023) and several EU decision-makers to show exactly the dynamics of changes in EU discourses on Ukraine. The following studies may relate to the discourse of one EU leader, perhaps with a special emphasis on their Twitter activity, and thus can demonstrate an individual trajectory of strategic communications regarding Ukraine.

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REGIONAL COOPERATION IN CENTRAL EUROPE: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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Abstract: *The paper systematically reviews ten years of academic literature published from 2014 to 2023 and indexed in the Scopus database to establish the current state-of-the-art on how Central European regional groups operate. The review includes 52 publications on six regional cooperation formats: the Central European Defence Cooperation, the Slavkov/Austerlitz Triangle, the Salzburg Forum, the Three Seas Initiative, the Visegrád Group and the Bucharest Nine. The paper finds that regional cooperation research is very concentrated on selected aspects of Visegrád cooperation and follows poor methodological reporting practices. The majority of studies analyse the V4 in relation to migration and foreign policy issues, whereas research on cooperation dynamics in other policy areas and within other active regional groups is marginal. After identifying promising future research directions, the paper calls for greater methodological and topical diversity in Central European regional cooperation research.*

Keywords: regional cooperation, minilateralism, Central Europe, Visegrád Group, Three Seas Initiative

1. Introduction

In recent years, the number of regional cooperation groups has increased globally. Amidst a growing number of crises and transnational challenges, states have increasingly turned to minilateral formats that promise to better address issues they cannot properly solve alone. These formations offer flexibility and the pooling of resources without tying states to long-term commitments that come with institutionalised multilateralism (Kirch, 2021). In Europe alone, the past decade has seen several new ad hoc and active regional cooperation groups uniting countries to work together on sectorial policies or solve concrete problems.

In recent years, Europe has faced numerous crises that have called for new solutions and better cooperation between countries. The emergence of a new multipolar world order, the

almost permanent crises of the European Union (EU), and the revisionist politics and warmongering of Russia have been major challenges which have resulted in calls and action for more EU integration and/or flexible minilateral responses. Central Europe, in particular, has turned to regional cooperation to address these challenges by creating new (Bucharest Nine, Slavkov Triangle, Three Seas Initiative) and reinvigorating old regional formats (Visegrád Group).

Against this backdrop, the present paper aims to systematically review a decade's worth of international peer-reviewed academic publications on Central European regional cooperation to take stock of what we know about how regional groups operate. On which policy areas have they been active? How did they achieve results? What role do they play in the individual strategies of Central European states? What impact have the recent crises had on how states approach regional cooperation in Central Europe?

To answer these questions, this paper reviews academic articles, books, and book chapters published between 2014 and 2023 and indexed in the Scopus database. It focuses on six new and established regional groups: the Central European Defence Cooperation (CEDC), the Slavkov/Austerlitz Triangle (S3), the Salzburg Forum, the Three Seas Initiative (3SI), the Visegrád Group (V4), and the Bucharest Nine (B9). Previous work on the topic either only dealt with the V4 in the context of other European regional groups (Kirch, 2021; Molnár, 2021b) or reviewed Central European regional groups without a defined selection criterion (Cabada, 2018). Moreover, since the publication of the latter review, new groups have formed, and old ones have changed course, which calls for new stock-taking. Building on Cabada's (2018) precedent and Cooper and Fabbrini's (2021) analysis of regional groups, this review offers a twofold contribution to the literature. On the one hand, it appraises the methods and types of data used in this field and recommends new methodological approaches to diversify the data and methods employed by regional cooperation scholars. On the other hand, it provides a state-of-the-art summary of the functioning of Central European regional groups and identifies major research gaps for future study.

The paper argues that contemporary regional cooperation research has not been able to comprehensively map and evaluate how established regional groups mediate the interactions of

Central European states and facilitate the emergence of common positions and approaches to amplify participants' voices in international affairs. Although research has identified some key features of the Visegrád Group by analysing their behaviour during the migration crisis and on foreign policy issues, it is yet to examine how different policy fields and levels of cooperation shape countries' relationships and ability to work together. Given the recent abundance of regional cooperation formats that are engaged in a range of policy issues, the nearly singular academic focus on the V4, migration, and foreign policy hinders our ability to understand international political dynamics in Central Europe properly. The article develops as follows. First, I introduce contemporary efforts to understand and categorise European regional groups, followed by a short description of each reviewed group. Second, I present my methodology based on the PRISMA 2020 principles (Page et al., 2021). Third, I evaluate the corpus methodologically, highlighting recurring failures in reporting on data and methods. Then, I establish the state-of-the-art on Central European cooperation, highlighting significant gaps in our knowledge. I conclude by recommending some future areas of research and ways to improve methodological diversity and transparency in the field.

2. Regional cooperation in (Central Europe): the rise of minilateralism

Minilateralism has been on the rise in international politics. Naím (2009, p. 137) defined minilateralism as a more targeted approach to multilateralism in which we '...bring to the table the smallest possible number of countries needed to have the largest possible impact on solving a particular problem, whether trade or aid.' His remarks were followed by many policy-focused contributions to improving multilateral cooperation and the practicality of global governance (Molnár, 2021a).

In the European context, this new debate has reinvigorated earlier scholarship on regional cooperation conducted under the concept of subregionalism. Most of these contributions are case studies focusing on a single group, while some are comparative studies between two or three groupings. Taking note of the ever-increasing number of European regional groups, some recent papers have attempted to understand this phenomenon more generally (Lang and von Ondarza, 2018; Cooper and Fabbrini, 2021).

Lang and von Ondarza (2018, p. 2) adopt the minilateral perspective, defining minilateral groups in the context of the EU as ‘associations of three or more EU countries that either exchange views on European policy issues at government level with a certain degree of continuity and agree on common positions, or implement cooperation project.’ They also add that such formats usually have some limited institutional substructure or well-established coordination and consultation mechanisms. In contrast, Cooper and Fabbrini (2021) conceptualise these groups as intra-EU bottom-up regional groups (BUGRs) which have five common characteristics: (1) institutionalisation defined as having some form of regularly reproduced manifestation (e.g., repeated meetings of ministers); (2) being active, although there may be some gaps in their recent activity; (3) having only EU member states as participating countries; (4) institutional separation from the EU; and (5) geographic proximity.

Despite their similar approach, the two different definitions led to alternate counts of the number of regional groups in the EU. Lang and von Ondarza (2018) differentiate between 14 minilateral groups, whereas Cooper and Fabbrini (2021) identify 13 BUGRs. They only agree on six groups: the Baltic Assembly, Benelux, the Nordic-Baltic Eight, the Three Seas Initiative, the V4, and the Weimar Triangle. Although some differences can be attributed to the different definitions (e.g., not including two-country formats such as the Franco-German Cooperation), this also demonstrates the subjectivity of what counts as an active group or cooperating on European policy issues.

In the Central European context, Cooper and Fabbrini (2021) provide a more exhaustive list of cooperation formats than Lang and von Ondarza (2018); thus, this review uses their list as its starting point. The two authors identify five fully or partially Central European BUGRs: the CEDC, the Salzburg Forum, the S3, the 3SI, and the V4. However, recent events warrant a revision of this list. The Bucharest Nine, created by EU member states on NATO’s Eastern flank, is not part of Cooper and Fabbrini’s (2021) original collection despite formally satisfying all inclusion criteria. This is presumably because the format was created as an intra-NATO regional group rather than an intra-EU one. However, as the Russia–Ukraine War has increased the relevance of defence and the Eastern neighbourhood in EU decision-making, the Bucharest Nine group has also become relevant in the EU.

In general, it has been noted that established regional groups can increase the political weight of states by facilitating building coalitions (Wivel, 2021) or improving status under a more recognisable brand (Szalai and Garai, 2024). This is especially important for small states, which are many in Central Europe. Regional groups may also improve the domestic legitimacy of policies they adopt as a common position, and they can be an important source of policy idea creation and implementation (Lang and von Ondarza, 2018).

Cooper and Fabbrini (2021) distinguish between four ideal-typical functions of BUGRs, which may serve as a useful starting point for the upcoming analysis. First, they argue that BUGRs may act as integration vanguards by promoting further EU integration. A classic example of this function is the Benelux group of Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg, which often preceded forms of institutional cooperation later adopted by the EU. Second, BUGRs may serve as functional cooperators, that is, as fora whose purpose is to foster internal cooperation among participating countries. This is their most frequent use. Their focus can be on various issues, from foreign policy to energy and tourism. Third, they may also function as policy coordinators, where members of the BUGR coordinate their positions to advance their interests in EU policy-making more successfully. A subcategory of this function is the fourth type, resistance cell. Its purpose is to oppose EU norms and efforts.

2.1. Visegrád Group

The Visegrád Group is the oldest and most institutionalised Central European BUGR, which was created in 1991 as a political cooperation between Czechoslovakia (Czechia and Slovakia since 1993), Hungary, and Poland to facilitate signatories' democratic transition and Euro-Atlantic integration. The founding declaration envisioned cooperation across multiple policy areas (economic, communication, ecology, culture, national minorities, local self-governments) via intergovernmental meetings at various levels (Visegrad Group, 1991). The structure of V4 has been clarified and modified in 1999 and 2004, although its intergovernmental nature has not changed. It currently has three main mechanisms: parliamentary cooperation, meetings of heads of state, and, most importantly, multi-layered government cooperation. The latter consists of a rotating presidency, meetings of prime ministers and ministers, regular

consultations of V4 national coordinators and permanent representations to international organisations (Visegrad Group, 2004). It has also had the International Visegrad Fund since 2000 as the only formally institutionalised aspect of the cooperation.

2.2. Salzburg Forum

The Salzburg Forum was created in 2001 as a home affairs cooperation forum of Austria, Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia, focusing on five areas: police cooperation, border control, people trafficking, asylum, and consultation on relevant EU matters (Salzburg Forum, 2001). Bulgaria, Croatia, and Romania are now also members. Originally chaired by Austria as the initiator of cooperation, the Forum adopted a six-month rotating presidency system in 2004 (Salzburg Forum, 2003), later replaced by an 18-month trio presidency system (Salzburg Forum, 2010). In 2006, the Forum concretised its operational strategy, linking membership to signing the EU Accession Treaty and creating an ‘external dimension’ that allowed non-member countries to participate in some of its activities (Salzburg Forum, 2006). The Forum’s work currently comprises at least two ministerial meetings a year, police chiefs, directors-general for migration, and Salzburg Forum coordinators, as well as expert meetings to exchange information and best practices. The Salzburg Forum Agenda 2030 named stronger cooperation on the EU level as its most important objective (Salzburg Forum, 2021).

2.3. Central European Defence Cooperation

The Central European Defence Cooperation was launched in 2010 by Austria, Croatia, Czechia, Hungary, Slovakia, and Slovenia to coordinate security policy amongst the participating countries. Poland also joined as an observer. The first meeting of defence ministers was held in 2012, with the groundwork laid in a series of informal meetings between defence policy directors and experts in the previous year (Kurowska and Németh, 2013). In 2016, it was decided that the cooperation would have three elements: (1) political oversight via annual ministerial meetings, (2) a steering element for which defence policy directors are responsible, meeting twice a year, and (3) national experts meet as needed at the working level. The CEDC

also has an annual rotating presidency system and regular meetings of chiefs of defence (CEDC, 2016).

2.4. Slavkov Triangle

The Slavkov Triangle was created in 2015 by the social democratic governments of Austria, Czechia, and Slovakia to work together on issues where V4 and V4+ political cooperation became difficult due to the radically populist and nationalist policies of Hungary and Poland in some areas (Kačan, 2015). The group has a rotating presidency, regular meetings of ministers and heads of government, and an annual work plan coordinated by state secretaries of the foreign ministries. The S3 works on a range of issues, such as EU affairs, energy, digital transformation, transportation, and development (MZV SR, 2024).

2.5. Bucharest Nine

The Bucharest Nine (B9) or Bucharest Format was also formed in 2015 on the initiative of the presidents of Romania and Poland in response to Russia's aggressive actions in Ukraine. Its members are Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. The B9 consists of annual summits of presidents and meetings of foreign and defence ministers, although ministerial meetings do not occur yearly. Similarly to the Slavkov Triangle, it is a very weakly institutionalised BUGR with no organisational structure (e.g., the rotating presidency), strategy or action plan, or website.

2.6. Three Seas Initiative

The Three Seas Initiative (3SI) was created in 2016 on the initiative of Croatia and Poland. It was created as an informal platform to facilitate the realisation of strategic cross-border and macro-regional projects in energy, transportation, digital communication and the economy (Three Seas Initiative, 2016). It comprises twelve EU member states: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. The initiative has begun to develop rapidly by establishing the annual 3 Seas Business Forum in 2017

(Three Seas Initiative, 2017), the 3SI Network of Chambers of Commerce, and the Three Seas Investment Fund (Three Seas Initiative, 2018). The 3SI has annual high-level meetings of heads of state with other high-level officials from the United States, Germany, and the European Commission regularly participating. Although no formal rotating presidency exists, the annual presidential summit and the concurrent business forum are hosted in a different participating state each year. Romania is the only country that has organised two summits, in 2018 and 2023.

3. Methodology

The study follows the PRISMA 2020 reporting guidelines for writing systematic reviews (Page et al., 2021). PRISMA 2020 is a comprehensive checklist of reporting items created to ensure that reviews are transparent about what and why is included and how it was evaluated. Originally developed in 2009 and updated in 2020, PRISMA has become the industry standard in the medical sciences, and it has also been applied in the natural and social sciences.

This systematic review includes academic publications indexed in the Scopus database published between 1 January 2014 and 31 December 2023. The database was searched on two occasions, on 29 September 2023 and on 3 January 2024, for items published between 2014–2022 and 2023, respectively. Table 1 contains all search terms used to scan for relevant publications in the title, abstract or keywords sections. Each search was limited to works in the social sciences, and Scopus was explicitly told not to search content under other subject areas. The appendices contain an example of the search queries used.

Table 1: Applied search terms and their results in Scopus (2014–2023)

Search term	Results
“Central Europe*” W/3 cooperation	12
“Eastern Europe*” W/3 cooperation	23
“Central and Eastern Europe*” W/3 cooperation	22
“East-Central Europe*” W/3 cooperation	1
“Central-Eastern Europe” W/3 cooperation	1

“Central European Defen?e Cooperation”	3
“Salzburg Forum”	2
(“Slavkov”) OR (“Austerlitz”)	9
(“Three Seas Initiative”) OR (“Intermarium”) OR (“3SI”)	28
(“Bucharest Nine”) OR (“Bucharest Format”) OR (“B9”)	5
(“V4”) OR (“Visegr?d”)	282

The initial search yielded 386 results, which were filtered by reading their abstracts or introductions (in the case of book chapters without an abstract). The filtering of initial results was done in the following steps:

1. Removal of duplicates. After filtering duplicates out, 344 papers remained.
2. Removal of edited volumes. In the case of edited volumes, only the separately indexed chapters were retained. After step 2, 334 papers remained.
3. Removal of papers that only refer to other regional groups. As the search terms included expressions not specific to the six chosen regional groups, the results included papers on non-European BUGRs (e.g., China-CEEC format) and bilateral cooperation. Moreover, some keywords could also refer to things other than one of the chosen regional groups, such as geographical location (e.g., Austerlitz, Visegrad) or software (e.g., V4). After filtering these out, 251 papers remained.
4. Removal of papers that do not discuss any of the six groups in a substantive sense. Several papers only referred to BUGRs as geographical descriptors of the countries that make them up (e.g., Visegrád countries, Intermarium region). These papers are comparative analyses of Central European (and other) countries, not studies on the functioning of BUGRs. Other papers only refer to selected BUGRs in passing and discuss other phenomena. Borderline cases were kept.

After the four-step filtering process, 54 papers remained out of the 386. Two papers could not be obtained, which reduced the final number to 52 items. It is 13% of the original corpus, which aligns with general practice (e.g., Xiao and Watson, 2019). Forty-eight papers were written in English, two in French and one in Polish and Russian. The Polish and Russian papers were translated into English using the free version of DeepL.

4. How has Central European cooperation been studied?

This section overviews the research design and reporting features of the corpus (Table 2.) The vast majority of papers contain concrete statements about the document. Most papers formulated a research objective or posed one or more research question(s) to orient readers about the publication's content. Sixteen publications did both, whereas 11 did none of them. The use of hypotheses and the identification of research gaps were less common, with only eight and six papers using either of the two, respectively. I also found that only one paper uses all four methods of defining purpose (Kirch, 2021), and three others contain a definition of the research objective, question(s), and hypotheses (Wieclawski, 2016; Bauerová, 2018b; Krzymowski, 2021). In contrast, there were 11 publications without explicit indication of what they were trying to achieve or why they exist (Grodzki, 2016; Gura and Rouet, 2017; Natanek, 2017; Strážay, 2017; Cabada and Waisová, 2018; Klemeshev and Vorozheina, 2018; Calheiros, 2019; Ušiak, 2020; Glied and Zamęcki, 2021; Kugiel, 2021; Bartoszewicz, 2023). One of these papers is a special issue introduction (Cabada and Waisová, 2018), so it has a purpose unlike the other three items.

Moreover, although half of the reviewed papers disclose information about their data and/or methods, only nine publications adhere to the strictest standards of methodological rigour and transparency by providing sufficient details about their methodology (Duszczyk, Podgórska and Pszczołkowska, 2020; Koß and Séville, 2020; Bedea and Osei Kwadwo, 2021; Braun, 2021; Glied and Zamęcki, 2021; Kirch, 2021; Osička et al., 2021; Kaniok, Havlík and Zapletalová, 2022; Lehoczki, 2022). These are transparent about their data sources, provide details about the time and method of data collection (if they use their own data), and name and justify their choice of analytical method. On the other end of the spectrum are half of the reviewed publications, which provide no details about their methodology, and five additional items, where authors

declare that they followed a qualitative or mixed methods research design without actually disclosing what they did to reach their conclusions. Thus, 31 papers (60%) have insufficient methodological details to ascertain the validity of their content, which casts doubt on the soundness of our collective knowledge about the workings of Central European regional groups.

Table 2: A research design overview of the reviewed corpus

Characteristic	No. of docs	% of docs
Indicator of purpose		
research gap	6	12%
objective	28	54%
research question	28	54%
hypothesis	8	15%
Methodology type		
quantitative	2	4%
qualitative	24	46%
mixed	5	10%
unknown	21	40%
Description of methodology	26	50%

As Table 2 shows, the qualitative approach is the most popular methodological design in regional cooperation research. The analysis of documents is the most popular method in the field, as ten publications employ qualitative content analysis (Klemenčič, 2016; Schmidt, 2016, 2020; Griessler, 2018; Hlaváčková, 2020; Koß and Séville, 2020; Polegkyi, 2020; Orzelska-Staczek and Bajda, 2021; Osička et al., 2021; Kaniok, Havlík and Zapletalová, 2022), three use discourse analysis (Merheim-Eyre, 2017; Bedea and Osei Kwadwo, 2021; Glied and Zamecki, 2021), and one-one paper chose historical document analysis (Duszczyk, Podgórska and Pszczółkowska,

2020) and narrative analysis (Braun, 2021). A further three papers use an undisclosed type of document analysis (Neuman, 2017; Kirch, 2021; Radovici and Danko, 2023). They analysed political statements and policy documents produced by governments and regional groups, with a one-on-one study using parliamentary speeches, court rulings, voting records and media reports to complement other data sources. The comparative method was also used by multiple papers, either to compare the functioning of regional groups to another (Klemenčič, 2016; Kirch, 2021; Lehoczki, 2022) or to highlight how members of a regional group use cooperation to further their foreign policy agenda (Ušiak 2018; Ušiak et al. 2020). Interviews were used five times as a method and source of data, but always in conjunction with other methods (Onderco, 2014; Neuman, 2017; Kirch, 2021; Orzelska-Staczek and Bajda, 2021; Kaniok, Havlík and Zapletalová, 2022). Participant observation was used once (Krzymowski, 2021).

Quantitative methods were disclosed in six studies. Five papers employed basic statistical analysis using either trade (Schmidt, 2016, 2020; Döring, 2019), migration (Koß and Séville, 2020), and demographic indicators (Duszczyk, Podgórska and Pszczółkowska, 2020). Finally, two papers ran a quantitative content analysis on political statements (Döring, 2019; Koß and Séville, 2020).

5. What do we know about Central European cooperation?

5.1. Visegrád Group

Most research has been conducted on the Visegrád Group, with 42 papers (81%) dealing fully or partially with it. The earliest paper in the corpus deals with the V4's voting behaviour in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) (Onderco, 2014). It shows that V4 countries do not formally coordinate their positions in the UNGA and are more likely to agree with Russia than the United States. However, the gap significantly narrowed after 1990.

Two papers analyse the group's position within the EU on the group's 25th anniversary (Schmidt, 2016; Wieclawski, 2016). On the one hand, Schmidt (2016) argued that the Visegrád Group had been important in the European Union. She noted that despite some challenges in accepting and efficiently using the established institutional framework of the EU, the V4 had given its four participating countries a better geopolitical position and benefits than other post-

socialist countries in the region had enjoyed. In contrast, Wieclawski (2016) posited that the East-Central European region was advancing towards disintegration. He based his arguments on the weak coordination of policy positions between V4 countries, which impeded the group from acting as an efficient unified platform in EU negotiations. Although the group successfully defended its economic interests in EU budget negotiations, it failed to act in unison on other key issues, such as EU institutional reforms in the 2000s and the Ukraine crisis in the 2010s. In sum, research suggests that until the 2015-2016 migration crisis, the Visegrád Group made its members more successful than the regional average. Still, they did not reach the efficiency of other European regional groups.

However, despite some sceptical voices (Wieclawski, 2016), the migration crisis seemed to have been a turning point for the group. Authors have noted that the V4 emerged as a collective actor on migration policy, pushing for stronger controls of the EU's external borders, defending the internal freedom of movement of the Schengen zone and warning against religious and cultural troubles should a large number of refugees be permitted to stay (Glied and Zamecki, 2021). Unified on migration, the Visegrád Group successfully opposed the mandatory migrant relocation quotas, changing European public opinion and forcing the European Commission to abandon the mandatory scheme in favour of a voluntary one (Duszczyk, Podgórska and Pszczółkowska, 2020). Their success served as a catalyst that transformed the V4 from passively complying with Western European ideas into a proper regional actor with their own ideas (Bedeá and Osei Kwadwo, 2021).

How did this unity come about, and how does it function? Koß and Séville (2020) argue that the emergence of the unified position of Visegrád countries on migration could not be fully explained by either intergovernmentalism or post-functionalism. Intergovernmentalism did not apply fully because the politicised identity was a key factor of cooperation. In contrast, post-functionalism did not apply fully either, as the main actors of politicisation were governments who focused primarily on economic issues instead of identarian ones. As such, the Visegrád Group after 2015 can be viewed as an example of politicised transnationalism where politicisation is used to achieve transnational objectives (e.g., maintenance of freedom of movement).

On the level of political practice, the Visegrád Group functions as a ‘political tool.’ Cooperation occurs mostly at the highest political level via consultations and joint statements in which they reactively discuss proposals already presented by the European Commission (Kirch, 2021). Bauerová (2018a) argued that when it forms a common position, the Visegrád Group functions on two levels. On the one hand, V4 countries identify their shared interests and objectives as a group. Agreed on the prime ministerial level, they generally maintain their unity during European negotiations, as was shown by most European Council meetings during the migration crisis. On the other hand, they implement their joint position individually on the state level. According to her, although V4 states employed similar discursive strategies to communicate their opposition to refugee acceptance, they introduced different national policies to combat migration. They favoured different alternatives at the EU level. These alternatives concurred with the joint ideological position but represented different degrees of divergence from the mainstream European position.

However, Kaniok et al. (2022) argued that because they execute policies individually at the state level, V4 countries fall short of devising and executing any constructive plan that could be harmonised, even in the foreseeable future. In this context, the V4 is a protective barrier, legitimising and safeguarding individualistic national aspirations and stances. The inadequate presence of efficient internal frameworks, limited standardisation, and substantial divergence among its constituents hinder and will continue to impede the V4 from assuming a significant role in the EU.

Kirch (2021) argues in a similar wane. Although the joint opposition to EU relocation quotas was the first time when the group properly coordinated a position, which then also had an impact on the broader EU, it only managed to act as a unified ‘resistance cell’ according to the terminology of Cooper and Fabbrini (2021). Even though the intensity and regularity of consultations significantly increased during the crisis, the V4 failed to develop joint alternatives to the relocation mechanism to tackle the internal dimension of the EU migration crisis. During Council negotiations, they presented separate, albeit similar, national positions and comments on European Council conclusions. Instead, they focused on its external dimension, such as border control and addressing root causes in third countries (Kirch, 2021).

The V4 success on migration revitalised the group's foreign policy ambitions. Following their successful EU integration, the V4 countries had already been marketing themselves as successful models of post-socialist transition that should be models for Eastern European and Balkan countries. This manifested in strong support for the EU's Eastern Partnership programme and European Neighbourhood Policy (Cabada and Waisová, 2018; Ušiak, 2018), as well as advocating for EU enlargement in the Western Balkans for whom they see themselves as role models (Griessler, 2018).

The V4 deepened ties with non-EU countries in Central and Eastern Europe through visa liberalisation. To achieve this objective, they adopted a normative agenda that departed from their exclusionist Fortress Europe approach, which they had taken during the migration crisis. Instead, they approached the issue more inclusively and normatively, acknowledging the transformative influence of cross-border mobility in various domains, such as the protection of minority rights, the advancement of democratic governance, and the promotion of economic cooperation (Merheim-Eyre, 2017). They also increased economic support towards the Western Balkans and spearheaded several initiatives to increase their interconnectedness with Central Europe. Although the intensity of collective action regarding the Western Balkans showed a high degree of volatility in the 2019-2023 V4 presidency cycle, the development of the region was a constant priority (Radovici and Danko, 2023).

Beyond strengthening ties with existing partners outside the EU, the V4 also opened up towards regions outside of Europe. For example, the V4 grew more interested in engaging with countries on Europe-bound international migration routes, such as the countries of the Mashriq region. However, development cooperation is difficult because Visegrád countries lack specialised knowledge about these regions. The group also needs a clear strategy for its external relations (Döring, 2019).

Nevertheless, the most significant of the V4's external action was its alternative vision for the West and the EU (Cabada and Waisová, 2018), which has been conceptualised as illiberal revisionism (Kazharski, 2020). This notion denotes an internal challenge to Western liberal internationalism that is enabled by the economic and military security provided by institutions of the criticised liberal order, the EU and NATO, respectively. Visegrád's post-liberalism

emerges not as ‘a new order, but rather [as] disorder that arises from the crises of the previous liberal one. The crises include both exogenous shocks (e.g., the rise of the so-called rest, a generic international relations term for non-Western great powers such as China, Russia, or India and their alternative developmental models that may not necessarily be built around liberal democracy or market capitalism) and endogenous erosion, such as the election of Donald Trump, Brexit, and, among other things, the rise of illiberalism in Central and Eastern Europe’ (Kazharski, 2020, p. 251).

Comparative research showed that the Visegrád Group is not the only regional group critical to the established liberal order. Lehoczki’s (2022) research on the Mercosur and the V4 highlighted how second-wave regional groups on the semi-periphery of the Western core have attempted to improve their positions by improving ties with emerging great powers such as China, as well as by forming a unified front when opposing liberal initiatives from the core.

However, the findings on the V4’s disruptiveness in the EU are all rooted at least partially in their handling of the migration crisis, which can be considered an exception rather than the rule. As Kaniok et al. (2022) demonstrated with the examples of the Brexit negotiations and the debate on the future of the EU, the migration crisis has been the only high-profile case when the Visegrád Group acted together in opposition to the Western mainstream. During the Brexit process, they fell in line with the rest of the Union, whereas they only voiced alternative conceptions of the future of the EU as individual countries; their positions were not harmonised.

After the migration crisis, the V4 group achieved few successes within the EU. Environmental policy is one policy area where cooperation proved to be difficult. Central European countries’ divergent physical and political geography hinders effective V4 cooperation because many of their shared concerns go beyond the region and require broader collaboration to address (Waisová, 2018).

Another field where cooperation achieved limited success was energy policy because the V4 remained largely reactive and uncoordinated. Although all four countries have a strong interest in energy security and favour technological neutrality and nuclear energy, they have been unable to find concrete issues to formulate joint policy proposals (Osička et al., 2021). Bauerová and Vošta (2020) identified two factors hindering common policy position formation. First, the

Polish coastline and the Czech and Polish coal reserves mean that Czechia and Poland have quite different options to secure their energy needs than Hungary and Slovakia. Second, V4 countries are divided on how to relate to Russia, the region's traditional chief energy provider. While Hungary developed a strong working relationship with Russia, the other Visegrád countries, mostly Poland, had a more reserved and critical attitude towards it. Thus, V4 energy cooperation has been rather unsuccessful for geographical and political reasons.

Their different political relationships with Russia also hindered the defence cooperation of Visegrád countries. Even though V4 countries were united in symbolic support for Ukraine after the illegal occupation of Crimea by Russia, they were not united on the severity of desired sanctions to punish Russia for its transgression. Moreover, although the creation of the V4 EU Battlegroup opened up the possibility of joint deployments (Ušiak, 2018), this is yet to be realised in practice. In fact, V4 countries stopped using the 'show-the-flag' strategy in the 2010s and participated in fewer international missions than before (Hlaváčková, 2020).

However, EU commercial policy negotiations show that when V4 countries act proactively and talk with one voice, they can achieve a positive result. For instance, the 'Visegrad soft power' amplified the national concerns of Visegrad governments at the EU level of international investment negotiations (Cristani, 2021).

Despite the mixed picture of V4's success, the regional group has been important in advancing the national interests of its member states. Studies from the Czech perspective highlight that the Visegrád Group is a core platform for national interest advocacy where cooperation is based on equality, mutuality, flexibility, and informal structures (Strnad, 2019). As such, the V4 is the first group sought out by its members to form a coalition at the EU level, playing a key role in advancing national interests even during the EU Council Presidency (Neuman, 2017).

5.2. Three Seas Initiative

In contrast to the Visegrád Group, research on the 3SI makes up only a quarter of reviewed papers. It also differs from the V4 in that it defines itself as a functional regional group focusing on infrastructure development instead of coordination within the EU. Research has shown how

the development of the initiative was driven by Russian revisionism in Europe, motivating several CEE countries to seek alternative energy supplies (Górka, 2018; Pricopiuc, 2023). Its activities mostly focus on completing large cross-regional projects (Lehoczki, 2022), although there are plans to use the group as a political instrument as well (Zięba, 2023).

The 3SI is rooted in the Polish geopolitical concept of 'Intermarium.' It denotes the idea of a Polish-led Central and Eastern Europe as an allied block or a federation, first made popular in the interwar years (Ištók, Kozárová and Polačková, 2021). In its modern form, the initiative represents a local heterarchical partnership that makes a bid for a polycentric Europe (Bartoszewicz, 2023) while also being a tool for safeguarding US interests on the continent (Ištók, Kozárová and Polačková, 2021).

Indeed, as the first group to bring together all post-socialist EU member states, it also has the potential to advocate for Central and Eastern European interests in the EU, thus challenging the balance of power in the Union (Grgić, 2023). Common interests, such as opposition to multi-speed EU integration and accelerated development to reach the level of Western EU states, were identified as issues on which participating countries could act jointly in EU negotiations (Zięba, 2023). However, political and economic differences hinder the formation of common 3SI positions (Calheiros, 2019). First, as the sole non-post-socialist country in the group, Austria has a higher level of development. It is a net contributor to the EU budget, leading to having different interests in EU development policy (Zięba, 2023). Second, as a European middle power, Poland has different political priorities and opportunities than the small states that comprise the rest of the group. Under the PiS government, it also pursued a nationalist agenda shared by only a few fellow 3SI states (Grgić, 2023). Third, even though Russian revisionism was a key driver behind the formation of the initiative, member states have had different perceptions of Russia as a threat. For example, Austria and Hungary were less afraid of Russia than Poland and the Baltic states (Calheiros, 2019). Fourth, the strong US support behind the group may cause a rift between states which would prioritise EU relations over trans-Atlantic ones, as American engagement with the 3SI raised scepticism about the compatibility of the group's goals with EU objectives (Lewkowicz, 2020; Grgić, 2023).

5.3. Other Central European BUGRs

The literature on other Central European BUGRs is scarce. We know the least about the Slavkov Triangle because existing studies only speculate that it could rival the Visegrád Group but are yet to test this hypothesis with empirical analysis (Wieclawski, 2016; Cabada, 2018). Our knowledge about the Bucharest Group is similarly limited. The sole study on the subject depicts the B9 as the security arm of the 3SI (Pricopiuc, 2023). Still, the different geographical scope and the lack of empirical analysis supporting this claim cast doubt on its veracity.

In contrast, we have some knowledge about the Salzburg Forum and the CEDC. Drawing on the vast literature on Europeanisation, Müller (2016) identified these schemes as a platform for sharing national preferences (vertical Europeanisation) and promoting the exchange of experiences and lessons learned (horizontal Europeanisation). He showed how these groups developed a collaborative network structure to support horizontal coordination. Such a network includes joint operation centres, joint programmes and operations, and exchanging personnel, ideas, and experiences. As Nemeth's (2018) research demonstrates, this network was used when migration and border control were militarised during the migration crisis. This reshaped the original mission of the CEDC, which, together with the SF, became focused on controlling mass migration from the Balkans. Although the CEDC defence ministries were not enthusiastic about their new role, their involvement in addressing the crisis allowed them to flesh out procedures, frameworks, and cooperation mechanisms to be better prepared to work with the interior ministries during the next crisis.

6. Discussion and conclusions

The paper systematically reviewed 52 peer-reviewed publications on how various regional cooperation formats operate in Central Europe, using the Scopus database and the PRISMA 2020 principles. The analysis highlighted that our knowledge about the region's cooperation formats is very uneven. Forty-two reviewed papers (81%) focus fully or partly on the Visegrád Group and 13 papers (25%) on the Three Seas Initiative. In contrast, only two papers dealt with the Central European Defence Cooperation and the Bucharest Nine, whereas only one dealt with the Salzburg Forum and the Slavkov Triangle. Given newfound speculation about the potential

marginalisation of the Visegrád Group in the 2020s due to Hungary's reluctance to cut ties with Russia after its open invasion of Ukraine, future research should focus more on what other BUGRs have achieved and what role they play in Central European diplomacy.

Analytical attention is perhaps most needed regarding the Slavkov Triangle. Despite having been founded in 2015, detailed research is yet to be conducted about how this forum functions and under what conditions it is used as a vehicle for promoting national interests. As the format has been gaining importance in some EU and foreign policy matters since 2022 (Holányi, 2024), in-depth case studies ought to analyse the causes and consequences of the relative rise of the S3 compared to other BUGRs.

The paper identified a similarly high level of disparity in the quality of knowledge on how BUGRs operate. The rich literature on the V4 demonstrated that policy coordination between the four countries does not go beyond an agreement on key rhetoric and objectives; the states tend to develop policy recommendations and implement national policies independently. Scholarship has also shown that the Visegrád Group is less successful than its reputation suggests, with the 2015-2016 migration crisis having been the only case in recent years when they maintained a common front. In contrast, the emerging literature on the 3SI is yet to analyse the intricacies of cooperation and evaluate its outcomes. Instead, it examined its origins, founding rationale, and its potential as a political and economic cooperation forum. These studies suggest that the 3SI was borne out of and developed mainly due to geopolitical considerations linked to Russian revisionism and re-emerging great power rivalry. Despite the shallow literature on the subject, research showed that the CEDC and the Salzburg Forum comprise collaborative network structures that enable horizontal cooperation. Prior work also demonstrated that crises impact the functioning regional groups, as the CEDC was given new tasks related to border protection during the migration crisis.

Nonetheless, there are considerable gaps in the reviewed literature compared to the stated objectives of BUGRs. For example, most groups aim to be a cooperation platform at the EU level. Still, the realisation of this goal was only empirically analysed in the case of the Visegrád Group. Even in the latter case, research is skewed towards the migration crisis and foreign and security policy matters. Existing analyses of how regional groups operate have focused primarily

on identity formation and brand-building and less on how joint positions and common initiatives emerge. We also know little about these groups' achievements and failed joint initiatives, with the V4's stance on migration during 2015-2016 being the exception. Thus, future research should explore these groups' role in sectoral policy development at the national and EU levels.

Scholarship could also benefit from analyses which examine the operative aspects of regional cooperation. What happens between high-level summits? How and by whom are the agenda of regional groups formed? How do cooperating governments coordinate on issues of common concern? How do national organisational processes shape countries' engagement with cooperation formats? Research on the more practical, day-to-day aspects of regional cooperation may yield better insights into how political will is transformed into concrete results and what factors facilitate and hinder the realisation of common objectives.

Furthermore, the analysis revealed some areas of concern regarding the quality of the research on Central European groups. First, it was found that only a minority of papers refer to theory, and even fewer make it an integral part of their argument. Causal explanations for the creation and continued operation of regional groups privilege historical and geopolitical explanations, with functionalist and other theoretical explanations rarely discussed in conclusions. Moreover, although some excellent in-depth analyses exist, many articles are rather descriptive. Recounting historical and current events often takes up significant portions of texts, while the explanations of causes and mechanisms are regularly marginalised. Thus, future research should consider integrating their empirical results with theoretical contributions to make their findings more generalisable.

Second, the quality of research shows significant variance in relevance, methodological rigour, and analytical depth. Near half of the reviewed publications failed to meet the most basic methodological reporting criteria, remaining silent about their methodological approach, chosen method(s), and data source(s). This forces readers to trust authors that their conclusions are not based on hearsay and anecdotal evidence alone. Even though academia is ultimately based on trust, this should be earned by transparent research and disclosure practices, not taken for granted. In contrast, only eight papers provided sufficient details and justification about their data and methods that allow readers to make informed judgements about how well-grounded the

authors' arguments are. Therefore, future research ought to be more methodologically rigorous and transparent.

A promising avenue for further research work on regional cooperation is the adaptation and utilisation of computational social science approaches. The automated analysis of large amounts of textual data has the potential to massively expand content analytical work and reinvigorate process tracing research to test hypotheses about when regional cooperation is mobilised effectively to realise national interests (Grossman and Pedahzur, 2020). Available large language models are now capable of identifying named entities, policy agendas, topics, sentiments, and emotions in large textual corpora, offering new insights into how certain people, organisations, and events are talked about. The combination of open-source annotated data (Sylvester et al., 2024) with a validated no-code classification application (Sebök et al., 2024) enables researchers to explore new connections across social and traditional media, parliamentary documents, and executive speeches between the intensity and efficiency of regional cooperation and a range of economic, social, and political phenomena.

In conclusion, our knowledge of Central European regional cooperation is uneven, with most active groups being seriously understudied. Future research should engage more with these ignored regional groups, pay attention to the operative dimension of cooperation, and explore the applicability of computational social science methods to deepen our understanding of regional cooperation platforms while also adopting the best methodological standards presented in the paper. Striving for methodological rigour, transparency, and theoretical engagement would also extend the global reach of scholarship in the region.

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Appendix

Sample search query:

TITLE-ABS-KEY (“Central Europe*” W/3 cooperation) AND SUBJAREA ((soci) AND NOT (medi OR nurs OR vete OR dent OR heal OR mult OR agri OR bioc OR immu OR neur OR phar OR ceng OR chem OR comp OR eart OR ener OR engi OR envi OR mate OR math OR phys OR arts OR busi OR deci OR econ OR psyc)) AND PUBYEAR > 2013 AND PUBYEAR < 2023

Resources:

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THE IMPACT OF DIGITALIZATION ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE AGRO-FOOD SPHERE

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Abstract: *The agro-food sphere is one of the key industries in the country's economy and plays a major role in ensuring food security. The development of the agro-food sphere requires the development and implementation of innovative projects in this field. The creation and implementation of such innovative projects require the availability of information support, which includes complete and up-to-date information about the objects and processes related to the project. It has been proven that the innovative development of the agro-food sphere is closely related to the digitalization process in this field. It is noted that digitalization in the management of agriculture and the agro-food sphere opens up new opportunities for increasing the efficiency, transparency, and sustainability of this industry. The main directions of implementing digitalization in the agro-food sphere have been studied, including the creation of electronic registers and databases, and the development of decision support systems. The integration of e-government services in the agro-food sphere offers significant opportunities for improving the efficiency of public administration, enhancing service delivery, improving interaction between public authorities and agricultural market entities, and ensuring sustainable agricultural development. The author has developed a methodology for the integral assessment of the level of e-government development in the country. The integral assessment is based on initial indicators, including those defined by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. The method of the modified principal component was used to determine the weighting coefficients of these indicators in the integral assessment. Integral assessments of the components of the agro-food sphere have been determined: the food industry, retail trade in food products, and indicators related to the protection and preservation of the environment associated with the agro-food sphere. A significant correlation has been found between these integral assessments and the integral assessment of digitalization.*

Keywords: digitalization, agro-food sphere, integral assessment, e-government

1. Introduction

An important component of the country's national security is food security, which involves the state ensuring the population's needs for essential quality food products for their livelihood. The agro-food sphere, a key sector of the economy, plays a major role in ensuring the country's food security. The development of the agro-food sphere, which enables the achievement of the necessary level of food security, requires the development and implementation of innovative projects in this field. These projects involve the use of modern equipment, the introduction of the latest technologies in production, the production of environmentally friendly products, the use of renewable energy sources, environmental protection, the organization of production management using information and communication technologies, the use of internet technologies in marketing activities, and the development of measures aimed at improving the social living standards of the population. The creation and implementation of such innovative projects require the availability of information support, which includes complete and up-to-date information regarding the objects and processes related to the project. Since the volume of this information is very large and accumulates rapidly, a set of tools and methods of Big Data must be applied for processing and utilizing the data. Thus, the innovative development of the agro-food sphere is closely linked to the process of digitalization in this sector.

The concept of digitalization is the subject of many scientific studies and is interpreted differently by various authors. The consulting company Gartner considers digitalization to be the improvement of business organization based on the modification of business models using digital technologies (Digitalization, 2024). According to the definition proposed by the OECD (OECD, 2019), digitalization is the process of using interconnected data and digital technologies to create new and modify existing types of activities.

Digitalization encompasses almost all forms of political, economic, and social life, with digital technologies having advantages over analog ones. Among the main areas of digitalization implementation in Ukraine are the digital economy, agriculture, environmental protection and natural resources, social development of local communities and territories, public safety, and e-government.

The basis of the digital economy and the main factor of its growth is the digitalization of business and industry. The implementation of digital technologies in Ukrainian industry increases its efficiency, and in some cases, such technologies become the foundation of production and product strategies. The driving force of digital technologies fundamentally changes existing business models and production stages, leading to the emergence of fundamentally new innovative products. The digital transformation of industry occurs thanks to cloud technologies, new industrial applications, Big Data, robotics, smart applications, 3D printing, cyber systems, and more.

To encourage businesses to use digital technologies, it is necessary to make these technologies accessible in Ukraine so that there is a desire to connect to the digital infrastructure. This will significantly accelerate the development of their own business, increase the level of modernization, and optimize operations.

2. Literature overview

The problems of innovative development in the agri-food sector in Ukraine are the subject of research by many scientists. In the work of (Goncharenko et al. 2023), it is noted that as a result of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine, global food security is under threat, causing damages of \$2.1 billion due to the destruction of agricultural lands. Using correlation-regression analysis, multivariate statistical analysis, and the taxonomy method, the authors show that the greatest negative impact on the innovative development of Ukrainian agriculture is the reduction in spending on research and development in this field. The results of the study emphasize the necessity of supporting scientific investments to ensure the resilience of the agricultural sector.

The current issues in the development of Ukraine's agricultural sector include ensuring global food security in the context of military actions, increasing the production efficiency of agriculture, and overcoming the contradictions between private interests and public interests. Scientists consider production optimization in this sector an important means to solve these problems, which will significantly reduce production costs, increase profit, account for risks, and achieve balanced development (Ilchuk et al., 2023).

An important factor in the development of agribusiness, improving agricultural production, and increasing the efficiency of resource use is digital transformation. The role of

digital transformation in the sustainable development of the country's economy is studied in the work of (Musiiets, Riabets, 2023). The authors believe that the digital transformation of the global economic system is a key imperative for ensuring sustainable development on an innovative basis. They emphasize the undeniable role of digital innovations in enhancing the competitiveness of entrepreneurial structures and national economies. The authors also identify significant risks of the uncontrolled spread of digitalization and propose mechanisms for their mitigation, which are already being implemented by democratic governments or have clearly defined timelines for future implementation. The scientific results obtained by the authors can be effectively applied to solve the development challenges of the agro-food sphere.

The implementation of digital technologies, such as big data and artificial intelligence, allows for the analysis and prediction of production processes, which improves product quality and creates a transparent supply chain. Scientists are studying the impact of digital transformation on agricultural relations and their connection with general economic processes in Ukraine. Innovations aimed at increasing the efficiency and competitiveness of the agricultural sector under digital transformation are considered in the work of Buiak (2023).

Several authors explore specific aspects of digitalization in the agro-food sphere. In the article by Rotz et al. (2019), the authors focus on aspects such as the implementation of digital technologies in the agro-food system and the neglect of political factors in the decision-making space. They address key issues in managing agricultural technologies and data systems, including data ownership, production, and security, and assess how the political and economic landscape can be changed to support greater equity in agriculture. The authors propose providing marginalized farmers with open-source platforms and scalable technologies, which will create shorter and more democratic supply chains.

A program for creating a digital platform for cooperation and balancing agricultural production, aimed at a wide range of users including agricultural producers, rural residents, consumers of agricultural products, environmental organizations, and government authorities, is proposed in the work of Iarmolenko (2019). It is noted that the digitalization of the agricultural sector occurs in real, virtual, and institutional environments, each of which has its specific tasks and functions. The authors have proven that priority projects for the sustainable development of agricultural production should include improving the regulatory environment, developing ICT

infrastructure, ensuring accessible digital education, and forming an agro-digital platform as the core of a national digital business ecosystem. The agro-digital platform helps reduce transaction costs and contributes to achieving national goals while considering regional peculiarities.

An important component of the agro-food sphere is the organization of environmental protection and preservation. The legal regulation of digitalization in environmental protection is the subject of research in the work of Ilkiv (2024). The author analyzes the legal support for the digitalization of public participation in making environmentally significant decisions in Ukraine, emphasizing the significant potential of digital technologies for ensuring environmental safety and sustainable development. The author also underscores the importance of improving procedures for public involvement in environmental processes, noting that digitalization contributes to the creation of an inclusive society, improving environmental quality, and expanding ways for citizens to collaborate with the authorities and businesses.

Korczelli-Oleinychak Y.K. and Kazmir L.P. (2021) investigate the role of digital technologies in industrial development. The scientists argue that the progress of digital technologies promotes economic growth and the activation of industrial production. They propose a matrix structure for forming program tasks to support the digitalization of the region's industrial system, which will coordinate the activities of government authorities, local self-government, scientific and educational institutions, businesses, and public organizations to support measures aimed at digitalizing the region's industrial system, generating, and absorbing relevant innovations. Since the food industry is an important component of the agro-food sphere, the results obtained by the authors can be used in the implementation of digital technologies in this field.

The object of study in the article (Sgroi, 2022) is digital food centres. The author defines the Food Hub and describes the models used in its structures.

The influence of business networks within research projects on digital innovations of small and medium-sized agri-food enterprises is investigated in (Silvestri, et al., 2023). The authors note that digital innovations contribute to the competitiveness and sustainability of these agri-food enterprises.

The article (Glaros, et al., 2023) examines how and by whom the transformation of the digital agri-food system is carried out. Three transformation frameworks are identified: digital

tools for optimising enterprise productivity; overcoming inequality in access to digital tools; and technologies for creating traceable agri-food systems. The authors recommend that public and private actors cooperate with scientists and involve farmers in the development of new transformational approaches.

The new opportunities provided by digitalisation for trade in the agricultural and food sectors are discussed in (Jouanjean, 2019). The author notes the importance of digital transformation for all participants in the value chain, including support services, logistics, and governments.

In the article (Nwafor, et al., 2022), the authors note that information and communication technologies play an important role in the transition to a sustainable food chain, which includes the production, processing, distribution and consumption of food. The key challenges to the effective use of these technologies are lack of access to ICT tools, low computer literacy, and lack of funds.

The authors of the article (Rotz, et al., 2019) believe that management decisions made in the agri-food system are predominantly technocentric, and the impact of digital technologies on supporting agro-ecological systems is not given enough attention. It is noted that decision-makers in this area need a timely assessment of agri-food digitalisation that takes into account political and economic factors.

The institutional structure for Industry 4.0, designed to guide and support the development of techno-entrepreneurs in the field of digital agriculture, is proposed in (Smidt & Jokonya, 2023).

The state of agriculture and its potential in the context of digitalisation is assessed through systemic and situational analysis (Rodino, et al., 2023). The introduction of digital technologies is leading to a significant transformation of management and production processes in agriculture, with scientific and technological progress playing a crucial role. Digital transformation affects material and human resources, and contributes to increased crop yields and livestock productivity. Investments in digital infrastructure development help to improve the living conditions of the rural population, develop farms, and promote agriculture

The main obstacles to the introduction of digital technologies in the agricultural sector are low skills, insufficient investment, uncertainty of economic benefits, and insufficient data

protection (Bachev, 2020). The main tasks of the state administration are to implement measures to improve the skills of employees, encourage young professionals, introduce internationally recognised standards, improve the legal framework for data protection, and provide access to high-speed Internet.

3. Article Purpose

Development of a methodology for integral assessment of the level of digitalization in Ukraine and assessment of its impact on comprehensive assessments of the development level of components in the agro-food sphere.

The work employs methods of integrated assessment, modified principal component analysis, and correlation analysis.

4. Methodology and Results

Digitalisation in the management of agriculture and the agri-food sphere opens up new opportunities for increasing the efficiency, transparency and sustainability of this industry. The main areas of digitalisation in the agri-food sphere include the creation of electronic registers and databases, development of decision support systems, use of precision farming, automation and robotisation of production processes, and automation of financial support to farmers.

The introduction of electronic land registers, crop and livestock registers provides up-to-date information on available resources and their use, which makes it possible to plan activities based on accurate data. To support decision-making in the areas of resource allocation and plant protection, it is advisable to develop and implement information systems that analyse large amounts of data. The use of data obtained through satellite imagery, drones and other sources to monitor crop conditions, determine the need for fertilisers and plant protection ensures more efficient and cost-effective farming. The introduction of robotic systems for field cultivation, harvesting and animal care reduces the need for manual labour and increases productivity. The effective use of robotics in agriculture is inextricably linked to the processes of obtaining, processing, storing, transmitting and using large amounts of data. The accuracy, relevance, and reliability of this data determines the efficient operation of artificial intelligence and, as a result, the correctness of decisions made in automatic mode. Thus, the form of information presentation

largely determines the effectiveness of robotics. The technologies used in agricultural production provide data that needs to be digitised and analysed, and significant correlations between indicators need to be identified. Thus, the introduction of robots in agricultural production is closely linked to the digitalisation process.

Food processing companies that process agricultural raw materials and produce food products from them play a significant role in the agricultural sector. To improve the efficiency of these enterprises, it is necessary to implement operational production management systems. Automated Manufacturing Execution Systems (MES) are an effective means of production management that enables the rapid implementation of large-scale projects. These systems provide users with up-to-date, complete and reliable information on the status of production processes and thus facilitate optimal management decisions.

ERP systems are an effective tool for managing enterprises, including those in the agri-food sphere. They provide comprehensive management of production, human, financial and other resources, carry out monitoring and analytical research, and keep records of interaction with partners and customers. ERP ensures the integration of various business processes into a single system, which makes it possible to optimise them, avoids re-entering the same data, and creates a user-friendly interface. Such integration is of particular importance in the agri-food sector, which combines the processes of production, transportation and sales of products. ERP systems include artificial intelligence technologies, machine learning, the Internet of Things, and other modern technologies to improve the efficiency of economic system management (Lapchuk, 2021).

The Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine is the central executive body that forms and implements the state policy of digitalisation and informatisation of society. This ministry is responsible for integrating digital technologies into all spheres of public life, thereby contributing to the development of the digital economy and digital democracy. One of the main tasks of the Ministry of Digital Transformation is to manage the development of the infrastructure of electronic registers, which are the basis for many types of administrative and commercial services.

The State Agrarian Register is a key tool for the effective management of Ukraine's agricultural sector. The registry stores information on land plots, ownership and use rights, as

well as on agricultural enterprises and their status. Open access to the registry's information helps farmers, investors and regulators to obtain the necessary data to make informed decisions. The agrarian registry allows the government to effectively monitor the agricultural sector, plan agricultural policy and control the implementation of legislation.

Automation of financial transactions for managing subsidies, loans and insurance through automated systems based on the state agricultural registry ensures timely provision of financial support to farmers, objectivity and transparency in the process of subsidies allocation, contributes to more efficient use of public resources and is a key factor in strengthening farmers' trust in state institutions.

There is a need to work on further integration of the registry with other public and private information systems to ensure a unified digital ecosystem. It is also important to provide ongoing education and training for users of the system to increase their digital literacy.

E-governance is a central element of the transformation that ensures the integration of modern IT solutions into public administration and service processes. E-governance involves the use of information and communication technologies that facilitate the effective operation of the government and facilitate access to public services.

The introduction of e-governance in the agri-food sphere ensures an increase in production productivity through the efficient use of resources and optimisation of production processes, improvement of product quality based on the controlled use of agro-technologies, reduction of production costs, optimisation of logistics, environmental sustainability and rational use of natural resources.

The integration of e-government services in the agri-food sphere opens up significant opportunities to increase the efficiency of public administration, improve service delivery, improve interaction between government agencies and agricultural market players, and ensure sustainable agricultural development. E-governance plays a key role in simplifying economic processes, reducing corruption and increasing the transparency of public administration.

An important component of e-governance is the development of Internet penetration. The percentage of the Ukrainian population with access to the Internet increased from 34% in 2011 to 71.8% in early 2022. However, Internet access rates in rural areas remain low, indicating the need for further development of digital infrastructure.

Priority areas for the implementation of e-governance include data integration and standardisation, cybersecurity, development of e-services, e-democracy, development of digital literacy, electronic identification and trust services.

4.1. Integral assessment of digitalisation development in Ukraine

We will assess the impact of digitalisation in governance on the development of the agri-food sphere. Since one of the most important components of digitalisation in governance is e-governance, we will define a comprehensive integrated assessment of e-governance development in Ukraine.

For an integrated assessment of the level of e-governance development in Ukraine, we will use the indicators defined by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, a list of which is given in Table 1.

Table 1 Indicators for assessing the level of e-government development in Ukraine

Designation	Index	Description
x_1	Online Service Index (OSI)	An indicator that reflects the provision of online e-government services and is calculated on the basis of the indices of institutional framework (IF), service provision (SP), content provision (CP), technology (TEC) and e-participation (EPI)
x_2	Human Capital Index (HCI)	The indicator is composed of four components: adult literacy rate; gross primary, secondary and tertiary enrolment rates; years of schooling expected; and average years of schooling
x_3	E-Participation Index (EPI)	The index measures online participation using a three-point scale that distinguishes between information provision, consultation and decision-making
x_4	Percentage of Individuals using the Internet	Percentage of people who used the Internet from any location in the last three months
x_5	Mobile cellular telephone subscriptions per 100 inhabitants	Mobile/cellular telephone refers to a portable telephone subscribed to a public mobile telephone service using cellular technology

x_6	Fixed (wired)- broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants	Fixed subscriptions to high-speed public Internet access or TCP/IP connections with a downstream speed equal to or greater than 256 kbps.
x_7	Wireless broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants	The number of mobile broadband data and voice subscriptions and mobile broadband data-only subscriptions to the public Internet.

Indicators x_1 and x_2 , together with the Telecommunications Infrastructure Index (TII), are used to determine the composite index – the e-Government Development Index (EGDI). When calculating the EGDI index as a weighted average of these components, the weighting coefficients of these indicators are assumed to be equal. However, in an integrated assessment of the level of digitalisation in Ukraine, it is necessary to take into account the existence of correlations between these indicators, which makes it advisable to use the modified principal component method to determine their weighting coefficients. Indicators x_4 , x_5 , x_6 and x_7 are components of the Telecommunications Infrastructure Index (TII), but in determining this index, the weighting of the indicators is assumed to be equal, i.e., the existence of correlations between them is not taken into account. Therefore, in this case, when using these indicators to determine an integrated assessment of the level of digitalisation in Ukraine, it is advisable to use the modified principal component method.

The peculiarity of the integrated assessment of the level of digitalisation development in Ukraine is that the primary indicators are indices calculated using certain methods. The author used a similar approach when assessing the level of corruption in the country (Panassenko et al., 2021).

The research is based on the values of these indicators for the retrospective period from 2014 to 2022 (United Nations E-Government Survey, 2014-2022). The value of the indicator x_i in the t -th year of this period is denoted by $x_i(t)$.

To determine the integrated assessment of the level of digitalisation development in Ukraine, the indicators x_i should be normalised, that is, brought to a comparable form. The normalised indicators y_i should be dimensionless, linearly dependent on x_i and vary in the range $[0;1]$, with the value 1 corresponding to the best value of the indicator x_i . This will make it possible to create a linear combination of the resulting normalised indicators, which we take as

the desired integral score. Since all indicators x_i are stimulants, that is, their growth corresponds to an increase in the level of digitalisation, we use the equality:

$$y_i(t) = \frac{x_i(t) - x_i^{min}}{x_i^{max} - x_i^{min}} \quad (1)$$

where x_i^{min} – the minimum value of the indicator x_i during the retrospective period, and x_i^{max} – is its maximum possible value.

The integral estimate $W(t)$ of the level of digitalisation development in Ukraine is determined by the equation:

$$W(t) = \sum_{i=1}^7 \alpha_i y_i(t) = \sum_{i=1}^7 \alpha_i \frac{x_i(t) - x_i^{min}}{x_i^{max} - x_i^{min}} \quad (2)$$

where α_i – weighting coefficient of the indicator x_i .

To determine the weighting coefficients α_i , we use the principal component method, which makes it possible to significantly reduce the dimensionality of the data set while ensuring minimal loss of useful information (Eremenko, Osintseva, 2022).

According to this method, to determine the weighting coefficients α_i we calculate the covariance coefficients between the indicators $y_i = \frac{x_i(t) - x_i^{min}}{x_i^{max} - x_i^{min}}$ according to the formula:

$$cov(y_{i_1}, y_{i_2}) = \sum_{t=1}^T (y_{i_1}(t) - \overline{y_{i_1}})(y_{i_2}(t) - \overline{y_{i_2}}) \quad (3)$$

Where $\overline{y_{i_1}}$ and $\overline{y_{i_2}}$ – are the average values of y_{i_1} and y_{i_2} during the lookback period.

Determine the maximum eigenvalue λ of the matrix K , whose elements are these coefficients. This value is equal to the maximum root of the equation $\det(K - \lambda E) = 0$, where E – unit matrix of dimension 7×7 , a $\det(K - \lambda E)$ – determinant of a matrix $K - \lambda E$. The value of λ corresponds to the eigenvector $L = \{l_1, l_2, \dots, l_7\}$, whose components l_i are solutions to the system of equations $KL = \lambda L$. The weighting coefficients α_i are determined from the equation:

$$\alpha_i = \frac{l_i^2}{\sum_{i=1}^7 l_i^2} \quad (4)$$

The covariance matrix for the set $\{x_i\}_{i=1}^7$ of e-government indicators in Ukraine is as follows:

$$K = \begin{pmatrix} 0,061 & 0,002 & 0,035 & 0,043 & -0,013 & 0,008 & 0,064 \\ 0,002 & 0,005 & -0,007 & 0,010 & 0,002 & 0,001 & 0,014 \\ 0,035 & -0,007 & 0,053 & 0,012 & -0,016 & 0,001 & 0,011 \\ 0,043 & 0,010 & 0,012 & 0,061 & 0,000 & 0,007 & 0,064 \\ -0,013 & 0,002 & -0,016 & 0,000 & 0,006 & -0,001 & -0,006 \\ 0,008 & 0,001 & 0,001 & 0,007 & -0,001 & 0,002 & 0,013 \\ 0,064 & 0,014 & 0,011 & 0,064 & -0,006 & 0,013 & 0,100 \end{pmatrix} \quad (5)$$

The maximum eigenvalue of this matrix is $\lambda=0.2031$. This value corresponds to the eigenvector:

$$L = \begin{pmatrix} 0,512 \\ 0,068 \\ 0,213 \\ 0,482 \\ 0,072 \\ 0,083 \\ 0,666 \end{pmatrix} \quad (6)$$

The weighting factors α_i are proportional to the squares of the components of this vector:
 $\alpha_1 = 0,262$; $\alpha_2 = 0,005$; $\alpha_3 = 0,045$; $\alpha_4 = 0,232$; $\alpha_5 = 0,005$; $\alpha_6 = 0,007$; $\alpha_7 = 0,444$.

Thus, an integral assessment of the level of digitalisation development in Ukraine is as follows:
 $W(t) = 0,262y_1 + 0,005y_2 + 0,045y_3 + 0,232y_4 + 0,005y_5 + 0,007y_6 + 0,444y_7$. The values of the integral assessment for 2014-2022 determined using this equation are shown in Table 2.

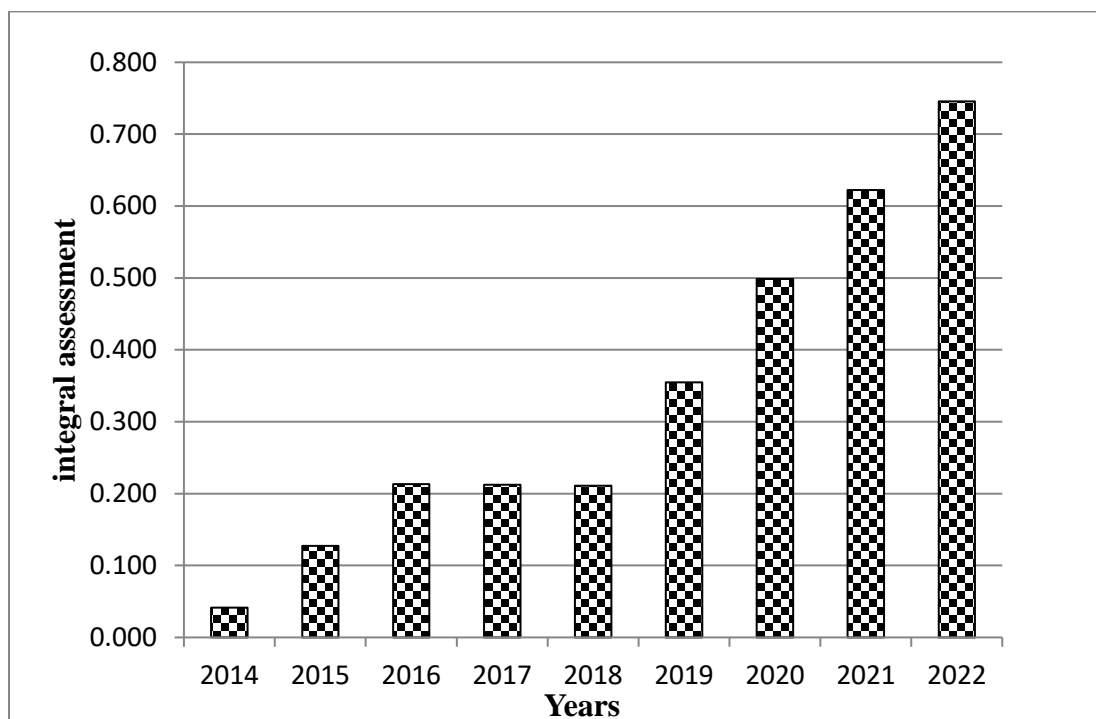
Table 2 Comprehensive integral assessment of the level of e-government development as an element of digitalisation in Ukraine

The year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Integral assessment	0,041	0,127	0,213	0,212	0,211	0,355	0,499	0,622	0,746

Source: author's own research

The dynamics of this integral assessment is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: An Integral Assessment of the Level of E-Governance Development in Ukraine (2014-2022)



Source: author's own research

Three periods can be distinguished in the dynamics of the integral assessment: in 2014-2016, the assessment increased, from 2016 to 2018 it remained virtually unchanged, and from 2019 to 2022 it showed a significant increase.

4.2. Integral assessment of the level of development of the agri-food sphere in Ukraine

Digitalisation in the agricultural sphere is fundamentally changing the approach to the collection, processing, storage and use of information data, reducing production costs and increasing productivity, and hence profitability. With the development of innovative technologies, Ukrainian business entities in the agribusiness system are gradually digitising their operations. The first stage is the spontaneous digitisation of information, which gradually forms a large array of data in the form of BigData. The second stage is the process of systemising and

structuring data. The problem with the second stage is that it becomes impossible to work with them for a certain period of time. It is only with the transition to the third stage of BigData grouping that agricultural enterprises have the opportunity to catch up with the latest global trends in technology. The fourth stage is a complete digital transformation of agribusiness, which is something all agricultural producers should strive for. Conducting business in a purely digital format will allow farmers to maintain electronic document management, conduct business negotiations online and work freely without being tied to an office. The last stage of digitalisation cannot be achieved without gradual work on data conversion. However, one of the main barriers to the development of Ukraine's digital economy is the digital divide, which hinders this development by restricting agricultural producers' access to technologies, competencies, digital production and interaction tools. The technology gap is characterised by the lack of widespread adoption of high-speed Internet technologies. The level of access to 4G mobile Internet in rural areas is one of the lowest in Europe, at around 66%.

In order to quantify the impact of digitalisation on the development of the agri-food sector, we will determine the correlation coefficients between the integrated assessment of e-government development as an element of digitalisation and the integral assessments of the volume of food industry products sold, sales of basic food products in the retail network of enterprises, and indicators of environmental protection and preservation related to the agri-food sphere. The integral assessment of the volume of food industry products sold is determined on the basis of primary statistical indicators of meat and meat products production, fruit and vegetable processing and preservation, oil and animal fats production, dairy products production, flour and cereals production, starches and starch products production, bread, bakery and flour products production. The integral assessment of sales of basic food products in the retail network of enterprises is determined on the basis of primary statistical indicators of sales of meat and poultry (fresh and frozen), smoked meat, salted meat and sausages, rennet, processed and fermented cheese butter, eggs, vegetable oil, sugar, bakery products (except confectionery), flour confectionery products, sugar confectionery products (including ice cream), flour, cereals, pasta, fresh vegetables, fresh fruit, berries, grapes, nuts, processed vegetables and fruits (2024). The integral assessment of environmental protection and preservation indicators is determined on the basis of primary statistical indicators of pollutant emissions, carbon dioxide emissions, capital

investments in environmental protection and current environmental protection costs, with each of these indicators considered for both agriculture and the food industry. The weighting of these indicators in the integrated estimates is determined by the modified principal component method, which ensures the objectivity of the estimates.

Let us denote the obtained integral estimates of the volume of food industry products sold, sales of basic food products in the retail network of enterprises, and indicators of environmental protection and preservation related to the agri-food sector as W_1 , W_2 , and W_3 , respectively. The values of these integral estimates in the retrospective period of 2014-2021 are shown in Table 3.

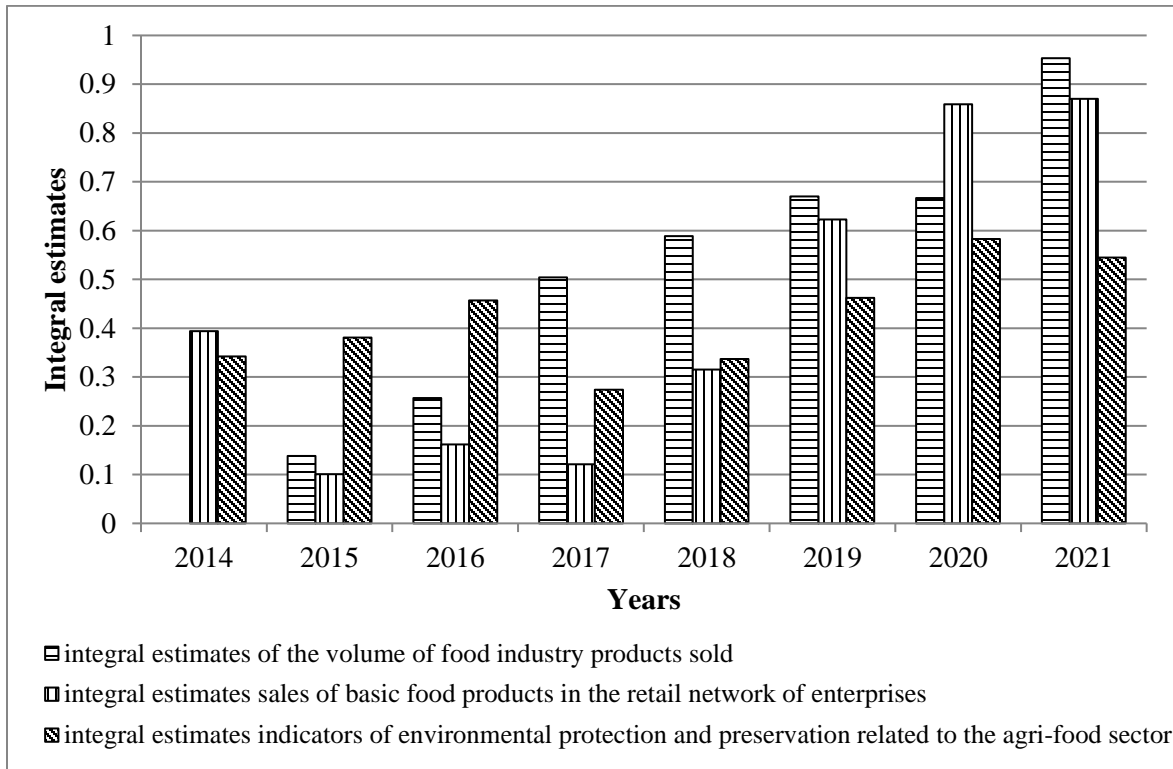
Table 3 Integral assessments of factors reflecting the level of development of the agri-food sphere in Ukraine

Assessment	Years							
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
W_1	0,000	0,138	0,257	0,504	0,589	0,670	0,667	0,953
W_2	0,394	0,101	0,162	0,121	0,315	0,623	0,859	0,870
W_3	0,342	0,381	0,457	0,274	0,337	0,462	0,583	0,545

Source: author's own research

The dynamics of these integral assessments is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Integral assessments of factors reflecting the level of development of the agri-food sphere in Ukraine (2014-2022)



Source: author's own research

4.3. Assessment of the impact of digitalisation on the development of agri-food sphere components

The correlation coefficients ρ_i between the scores W_i and the integral score W of the level of e-government development as an element of digitalisation are determined from equality:

$$\rho_i = \frac{\sum_{t=1}^T (W_i(t) - \overline{W}_i)(W(t) - \overline{W})}{\sqrt{\sum_{t=1}^T (W_i(t) - \overline{W}_i)^2} \sqrt{\sum_{t=1}^T (W(t) - \overline{W})^2}} \quad (7)$$

where \overline{W}_i ra \overline{W} – are the average values of the integral estimates of W_i and W during the retrospective period, T – is the duration of this period.

The significance of these correlation coefficients is checked by the Student's criterion. The calculated value of this criterion is calculated by the formula:

$$t_i = \sqrt{\frac{\rho_i^2}{1 - \rho_i^2}} (T - 2) \quad (8)$$

The critical value $t_{kr}(\alpha; k)$ of this criterion is determined by the confidence level α , which we assume to be 0.95, and the number of degrees of freedom $k=T-2$. This value is 2.447. The correlation coefficient ρ_i is significant if there is an inequality $t_i > t_{kr}(0,95; T - 2)$. The results of testing the significance of the obtained correlation coefficients are presented in Table 4.

Table 4 Verification of the significance of the correlation coefficients between the comprehensive integral assessment of the level of e-government development and the integral assessments of factors reflecting the level of development of the agri-food sphere in Ukraine

Integral assessment	Correlation coefficient ρ_i	Calculated value of the Student's t-test	The critical value of the Student's criterion	Conclusion
W ₁	0,904	5,166	2,447	Significant
W ₂	0,844	3,856	2,447	Significant
W ₃	0,814	3,438	2,447	Significant

Source: author's own research

Thus, the significance of all correlation coefficients ρ_i is confirmed. Thus, there is a correlation between the integrated assessment of the level of development of e-government as an element of digitalisation and the integrated assessments of factors that reflect the level of development of the agri-food sphere in Ukraine.

In our opinion, the process of digitalisation has an active impact on all components of the agri-food sphere. In particular, the introduction of digitalisation in the food industry allows to increase production efficiency, introduce innovations in production processes, optimise logistics schemes for the supply of agricultural raw materials, effectively use scheduling models, ensure product quality control and compliance with standards, obtain up-to-date information on food demand and form a product range based on this information. In the food retail sector, digitalisation makes it possible to accumulate information on customer preferences to ensure the sustainability of the competitive position, organise online sales, use social media to advertise products, and use multimedia screens to organise customer interaction with brands. Implementation of digitalisation processes for environmental protection and preservation involves the use of digital tools and artificial intelligence to collect data on the state of the

environment, accumulate the information received, analyse it, forecast trends in environmental changes, and assess the likely environmental impact of strategic development projects.

5. Conclusion

The innovative development of the country's agri-food sphere requires the active use of information and communication technologies. The digitalisation process makes it possible to ensure efficient, transparent and sustainable development of this industry. An important element of digitalisation that significantly improves the quality of economic process management is e-governance.

The article develops a methodology for an integral assessment of the level of e-government development in Ukraine, which uses the indices of online services, human capital and e-participation, defined by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, and indicators of the spread of modern means of communication among the population. The peculiarity of this model is that it takes into account correlations between indicators, which is achieved by applying the modified principal component method.

The article reveals the existence of correlations between the obtained integral assessment of the level of development of e-government as an element of digitalisation and the integral assessments of factors reflecting the level of development of the agri-food sphere in Ukraine, namely, the volume of food industry products sold, sales of basic food products in the trade network of enterprises and indicators of environmental protection and preservation related to the agri-food sphere.

The main directions of influence of the digitalisation process on the components of the agri-food sphere of Ukraine are indicated.

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