

Romanian Political Science Review

vol. XXIII, no. 2

2023

STUDIA POLITICA

Romanian Political Science Review

The end of the Cold War, and the extinction of communism both as an ideology and a practice of government, not only have made possible an unparalleled experiment in building a democratic order in Central and Eastern Europe, but have opened up a most extraordinary intellectual opportunity: to understand, compare and eventually appraise what had previously been neither understandable nor comparable. *Studia Politica. Romanian Political Science Review* was established in the realization that the problems and concerns of both new and old democracies are beginning to converge. The journal fosters the work of the first generations of Romanian political scientists permeated by a sense of critical engagement with European and American intellectual and political traditions that inspired and explained the modern notions of democracy, pluralism, political liberty, individual freedom, and civil rights.

Believing that ideas do matter, the Editors share a common commitment as intellectuals and scholars to try to shed light on the major political problems facing Romania, a country that has recently undergone unprecedented political and social changes. They think of *Studia Politica. Romanian Political Science Review* as a challenge and a mandate to be involved in scholarly issues of fundamental importance, related not only

to the democratization of Romanian polity and politics, to the “great transformation” that is taking place in Central and Eastern Europe, but also to the make-over of the assumptions and prospects of their discipline. They hope to be joined in by those scholars in other countries who feel that the demise of communism calls for a new political science able to reassess the very foundations of democratic ideals and procedures.

UNIVERSITY OF BUCHAREST
FACULTY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE



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vol. XXIII, no. 2
2023



EDITURA UNIVERSITĂȚII DIN BUCUREȘTI
BUCHAREST UNIVERSITY PRESS

STUDIA POLITICA

e-ISSN 3008-6566

ISSN-L 1582-4551

ISSN 1582-4551

Romanian Political Science Review

is published twice a year by the Faculty of Political Science at the University of Bucharest
and is printed and mailed by Bucharest University Press

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(Desktop Publisher Manuscript & Cover Graphic)

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Revistă înregistrată în BDI

DOI: 10.62229/sprps23-2

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ARTICOLI

LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES ARE ALSO SOCIAL DEMOCRACIES

ANTONY TODOROV*
(New Bulgarian University)

Abstract. Contemporary democracies have evolved over the course of two centuries, stemming from the democratization of representative government following significant revolutions in America (1776) and France (1789). However, it was the aftermath of World War II (1945) that marked a pivotal shift, as democracies embraced liberalism by adopting principles of human rights and the rule of law as foundational requisites. Concurrently, within the most successful Western democracies, the concept of the welfare state emerged as an essential prerequisite for effective democratic governance. This text argues that contemporary democracy constitutes a political regime in which liberal democracy and social democracy are inherently interconnected and indivisible.

Keywords: representative government, democratization, democracy, liberalism, socialism.

Introduction

Modern democracy is a political system that does not merely continue the ancient form of democracy as described by Aristotle. The Athenian democracy, a pioneering experiment in human history, endured for a century. However, transferring this unique political experience across the 2500-year gap separating us from the era of Pericles is implausible. In the European tradition, this ancient democracy was often termed “direct democracy,” contrasting with the modern concept of “representative democracy.”¹

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¹ Cf. Bernard Manin, *Principes du gouvernement représentatif* [Principles of Representative Government] (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1995), 39, 61.

Today, we are convinced that the pure form of ancient democracy is impractical. It is argued that *direct* democracy is unattainable in populous societies, where only *representative* democracy is feasible, built upon electoral processes. The Belgian historian David Van Reybrouck presents a compelling case in his thought-provoking book, *Against Elections*.² Drawing on prior research, he contends that ancient democracy was also representative, though not through *elections* as in contemporary democracy. It was “aleatory,” relying on lots. We must refrain from juxtaposing direct and representative democracy, as the core issue lies elsewhere.

In the book *The Principles of Representative Government* by the French historical sociologist Bernard Manin, the author commences with:

“Contemporary democratic governments have evolved from a political system that was initially conceived in opposition to democracy.”³

This is because classical democracy is rooted not in elections but in the drawing of lots. For a long time, we misunderstood this lottery-based democracy, interpreting it as an expression of divine will. Recent studies, such as those by Bernard Manin, have unveiled that this method of government selection in ancient democracies embodies a fundamental democratic principle – the genuine equality among the city’s citizens. The idea is that if you are a citizen, you should be capable of holding any political position within the government. Today, for various reasons, we struggle to embrace this seemingly straightforward notion.

During the early modern era in Europe, two distinct political regimes emerged: absolutism and later, representative government. Absolutism brought an end to protracted religious wars and political fragmentation in Europe, resulting in the establishment of modern centralized states. Representative government, originating in the English kingdom during the English Civil War, initially marked the aristocracy’s counterbalance against an absolute monarchy. It was far removed from the concept of representative democracy.

² David Van Reybrouck, *Contre les élections* [Against Elections] transl. Isabelle Rosselin et Philippe Noble (Arles : Actes Sud, 2014).

³ Bernard Manin, *Principes du gouvernement représentatif*, 11.

Democracy rests upon a fundamental principle: the equality of citizens. Modern democracy is the outcome of the democratic transformation and evolution of one of the two modern political systems – the representative government. The primary mechanism for this transformation was the expansion of voting rights, as elections emerged as the main means to achieve the “consent of the people,” a cornerstone of democratic governance.⁴ This process of democratizing the representative government traversed two centuries, catalyzed by the American Revolution of 1776 and the French Revolution of 1789. Throughout the nineteenth century, the representative government became the prototype for European states, gradually evolving into representative (parliamentary) democracies by the early twentieth century. While some of these democracies embraced a liberal character, such as those in the UK and France, civil liberties remained restricted.

Following the Great Depression of 1929-1932, certain Western democracies began adopting policies toward social democracy for the first time (*e.g.*, the Popular Front in France, the “New Deal” in the United States of America). These initial endeavors aimed to harmonize liberal capitalism with an evolving democracy that was not yet fully liberal or social.

The cataclysm of world wars shook these fragile democracies, and post-1945, with the defeat of Nazism, parliamentary democracies in most Western European nations concurrently embraced both liberal and social dimensions. In the aftermath of the atrocities of the Second World War, democratic nations embraced an expanded set of human rights and institutionalized them as a cornerstone of their democratic framework. The rule of law similarly became an inseparable principle, a prerequisite for a liberal democracy. Concurrently, in many Western European democracies, the welfare state emerged as an integral aspect of democratic governance – a means to uphold social coherence and foster a social democracy as a vital component of liberal democracy, a form of essential condition for existence.

Having in view the present debates on the difficult coexistence of political freedoms and growing inequalities in the Western democracies, which nourishes today the main populist rejection of this political regime, this article claims that there is no fundamental opposition between the

⁴ Bernard Manin, *Principes du gouvernement représentatif*, 115-117.

liberal and the social roots of the contemporary democracies. The symbiosis, even the coherence of the liberal and the social principles of the democratic regime, seems to be the main method for the improvement and the preservation of the Western democracies, which are today in risk.⁵

What Kind of Democracy Are We Talking About?

In post-communist societies (and by this the author means the societies that survived several decades under the conditions of Soviet communism), democracy is understood as a positive form of government, the antipode of the communist regime. But mostly as a successful political form in the most developed countries of the West. We associate democracy with social progress, understood as both increasing economic well-being and expanding political freedom. Therefore, the most frequently mentioned models today are Sweden, Germany, France, Finland.

We rarely ask ourselves questions about how this democracy actually developed? Traditionally, we associate it with the Athenian democracy from before 2500 B.C. as a political regime of fundamental civil equality. There, the main positions in the city were distributed by drawing lots, an institution almost forgotten today. And the drawing of lots means one thing – as soon as you are a citizen, you must be able to perform any public functions.⁶ Of course, such a form of government was possible because at that time the great part of the Athenian population had no civil status, and hence no rights (the women, the strangers, the slaves).

Modern democracy in name only is based on the ancient one, because it originates from a modern political regime – representative government. This type of government has parliamentarism as its main institution, and modern democracy is a parliamentary democracy. In it, majority elections are the main tool for the selection of the rulers, being both based on the expectation that the election is mostly meritocratic, but also

⁵ Chanu Peiris and Natalie Samarasinghe, "Open Society Barometer. Can Democracy Deliver," Open Society Foundations, 2023, accessed January 13, 2024, <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/uploads/e6cd5a09-cd19-4587-aa06-368d3fc78917/open-society-barometer-can-democracy-deliver-20230911.pdf>.

⁶ Bernard Manin, *Principes du gouvernement représentatif*, 42.

because through the election, the *consent of the people* is confirmed. At the same time, parliamentary democracy is based on another principle – political pluralism. Guaranteeing it means tolerating even critics of democracy, something no other political regime accepts.

Initially, representative government was aristocratic, representation was limited by numerous qualifications, participation in elections was treated as a *civil service*, but not as a right. For more than two hundred years, representative government, established initially in Western countries such as Great Britain, became representative democracy with the expansion of voting rights.

This parliamentary Western democracy, established in most countries of Europe by the middle of the nineteenth century, remained largely marked by its aristocratic origins until the end of the Second World War. It still contains numerous electoral qualifications that limit universal suffrage. Only then did it undergo two fundamental changes that make it so attractive today. The first change is related to the construction of the rule of law (state power is also subject to the law and guarantees equality through the law), and the guarantee of a wide range of human rights and freedoms. Parliamentary democracy thus becomes a liberal democracy based on freedom. But after the Second World War, in the most developed democracies, the welfare state was also built as a guarantor for the existence of society and its integration. Thus, parliamentary democracy also becomes social, based on equality, not only political, but also social in a broad sense.

The beginnings of these changes began after the First World War, a first-of-its-kind conflict based on mass mobilization. As Thomas Piketty notes in his study *Capital in the Twenty-first Century*, wars generally lead to an equalization of wealth.⁷ The succession of two world wars within a generation that lived through both (only twenty years separated the end of the first and the beginning of the second) led to a leveling of European societies, but also to expectations of greater equality. To respond to this,

⁷ Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, Trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), <https://dowbor.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/14Thomas-Piketty.pdf>, 55, 190.

and to the Soviet model's claim to have eliminated inequalities, the West turned to liberal and social democracy.

Parliamentary democracy developed as a political model throughout the world after 1945, although we cannot speak of a permanent process of democratization. Samuel Huntington theorized the process of democratization in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as three successive waves of the spread of democratic regimes.⁸ The first *long* wave of democratization began in the 1820s and lasted almost a century, during which time twenty-nine democracies emerged. The Allied victory in World War II ushered in a second wave of democratization that reached its zenith in 1962, with thirty-six democracies. The current era (1974-1990) of democratic transitions represents the third wave of democratization in the history of the modern world, with democracies reaching a number of sixty. Of course, Huntington notes that there are periods of regression between these waves, we can probably also assume such a possibility after the third wave.⁹

The Liberal Democracy

The main thesis of this text is that liberal and social democracy are two indivisible faces of contemporary democracy. But traditionally, liberal democracy and social democracy are seen and explained as two distinct political ideologies, not really as political regimes, even understood as opposed. In this traditional understanding, liberal democracy seeks the respect of individual rights, political freedoms, the rule of law, and limited government intervention. The same understanding for social democracy: it has emerged as an alternative ideological approach, seeking to balance free-market economies with social justice, equality, and solidarity. So, according to this traditional approach these two types of democratic ideologies are opposed, or at least social democracy is somehow additional possible development of the liberal democracy.

⁸ Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman OU: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

⁹ Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave*, 15.

This understanding of the opposition of liberal and social democracy in fact speaks about the opposition between two main modern ideologies: liberalism and socialism. Nevertheless, this text discusses the contemporary democracy as specific political regime, even though every political regime has some ideology of the polis. Contemporary democracies remain a structure of liberal and social elements despite the type of government, which could be liberal, conservative, or socialist.

Contemporary democracy established after 1945 is mostly liberal, because it includes human rights as one inseparable element. In fact, the world legal framework for the implementation and the respect of a large set of human rights, together with the enlargement of the voting rights during the first two decades following the end of the WWII, transformed the democratic representative governments in liberal democracies. In this sense, "liberal" is not an ideological characteristic: there is no "illiberal democracy" as the present PM of Hungary Victor Orbán claims. Because democracy is a political regime whose existence is impossible without the respect of individual freedom and human rights. Democracy is just liberal, otherwise it is not democracy, but just a kind of representative government.

Liberal democracy has some essential features. One of the fundamental advantages of liberal democracies is the protection of individual rights. Citizens enjoy various civil liberties, such as freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and freedom of religion. This fosters an environment where diverse opinions can be expressed without fear of persecution, encouraging innovation, and social progress. Liberal democracies provide opportunities for citizens to actively participate in the political process. Through voting, advocacy, and engagement with elected representatives, individuals can influence policy decisions and hold leaders accountable. This fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility among citizens, leading to more responsive and representative governance.

The rule of law is a cornerstone of liberal democracies, ensuring that all individuals, including government officials, are subject to the same laws. This prevents the concentration of power and guards against abuses of authority. Independent judiciaries act as checks on executive and legislative actions, guaranteeing the protection of citizens' rights. Liberal democracies recognize the importance of protecting the rights of minorities and marginalized groups. Equal treatment under the law

ensures that all citizens are entitled to the same opportunities and protections, regardless of their background or beliefs.

Liberal democracies are generally characterized by peaceful transitions of power. Regular elections allow for leadership changes without resorting to violence, fostering political stability and continuity. This stability contributes to economic growth, attracting investments and promoting social cohesion. Liberal democracies often embrace free-market economies that promote entrepreneurship and innovation. With limited government intervention, businesses can thrive and adapt to changing market demands. This environment encourages economic growth, job creation, and technological advancement.

Why did liberal democracy become the main democratic model after the Second World War? Samuel Huntington's arguments to explain the third wave of democratization that began during the Cold War are interesting, especially the "snowballing" effect, or the impact of transitions made earlier during the third wave that affect other transitions as well, especially in the age of the Internet, when information spreads instantly.¹⁰ Among other arguments, Huntington argues, are the increasing problems with the legitimacy of authoritarian regimes in a world where democratic values are already widely accepted. This is also the result of the incorporation of most democratic values into such international documents as the UN Charter and the series of human rights conventions. But no less important was the unprecedented global economic growth in the 1960s, which raised living standards and the level of education. This leads to the growth of social expectations in societies, including expectations for more visible participation of citizens in politics or at least demands on the rulers to comply with the wishes of the citizens. Last but not least, he points out that poverty is actually the biggest obstacle to democratization, which raises the question of whether or not democracy is the political regime of rich countries, difficult to implement in poor ones. And is the issue only about the average level of wealth of nations, or is it more about the great social inequalities, much greater in the poor than in the developed rich countries of the West?

¹⁰ Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave*, 46.

Liberal democracies have been confronted to many different risks, but among them one seems to be essential: the basic contradiction between the democratic principle of political equality of citizens and the capitalist logic of continuous production and maintenance of social inequalities. This contradiction, over long periods of time, is not so obvious because it is tempered by the usual conflation of capitalism with the market economy, which is the basis of citizen autonomy. But capitalism has transformed the market into a machine of inequality, and this is increasingly difficult to reconcile with the democratic principle of fundamental civil equality. This is the main mechanism that produces the conviction of more and more citizens in democratic countries that democratic governance is actually a great hypocrisy, that the proclaimed equality is formal, while the real levers of power are in the hands of the rich only.

Capitalism and Democracy

Robert Kuttner, a famous American liberal journalist, chose the title *Can Democracy Survive Global Capitalism?* for his 2018 book.¹¹ According to the author, this present-day “predatory capitalism” is reprehensible because it limits workers’ rights, frees the hands of bankers, allows corporations to avoid taxation, and prevents nations from providing economic security, and consequentially, this harsh capitalism undermines the very foundations of a healthy democracy.¹²

Two major crises in a row have shaken a rule-governed world of global capitalism: the 2008 financial crisis, and the 2019-2021 COVID-19 pandemic. Both crises have prompted many researchers and observers to question the legitimacy of power of large corporations over societies, the naive trust in the (self)regulatory power of markets, the universality of market competition as the main regulator in societies.

In the book published in 2010, *Market Without Morality. The Fiasco of the International Financial Elite*, Susanne Schmidt, professor at University

¹¹ Robert Kuttner, *Can Democracy Survive Global Capitalism?* (New York/London: Norton, 2018).

¹² Robert Kuttner, *Can Democracy Survive Global Capitalism*, 211, 283 and 309.

of Bremen, professor and daughter of former Chancellor of the German Social-Democratic Party, Helmut Schmidt, analyzes the causes and consequences of the 2008 crisis, drawing on her own experience in the City of London.¹³ In the introduction, she poses the question: “How did it become possible for the carefree raving of financial managers for more benefits and higher bonuses to push the world towards such a catastrophe?”¹⁴ But does the question rest only on the greed of these “addicted to risk” as the cause of the crisis? In the 2012 book *What Can't Money Buy? The Moral Limits of the Market*, Michael Sandel points out that this is only a partial diagnosis of the problem, though “partial” means that greed is undoubtedly part of the problem.¹⁵ Sandel argues that the issue is not the growth of greed, but the “expansion and penetration of markets and market values into areas of life where they do not belong.”¹⁶

To what extent do all these processes influence the established post-World War II liberal-democratic political systems of the Western world? The consequences of this series of crises seem at first sight to affect only market relations, but the latter are much more closely linked to the form of political government than it appears. The present world economic order is the order of the global corporate capitalism, which has not specific preferences for the needed political form. It is able to adapt to any possible political regime if the government guarantees the expected profit. Capitalism is perfectly compatible with both parliamentary democracy, and the one-party communist regime in China, but also absolute monarchy in Saudi Arabia or dictatorship in Myanmar.

Despite the many benefits of liberal democracy, it faces many challenges and criticisms.¹⁷ Unregulated capitalism can lead to income disparities, where a small segment of the population amasses significant

¹³ Susanne Schmidt, *Markt ohne Moral. Das Versagen der internationalen Finanzelite* [Market without morality. The fiasco of the international financial elite] (München: Droemer Knauer, 2010).

¹⁴ Schmidt, *Markt ohne Moral*, 6.

¹⁵ Michael Sandel, *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012).

¹⁶ Sandel, *What Money Can't Buy*, 10.

¹⁷ Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone* (London: Penguin, 2010).

wealth, while others struggle to meet basic needs. This concentration of wealth can undermine social cohesion and create divisions within society. Free markets are not infallible, and they can experience market failures, such as environmental degradation, monopolies, and economic recessions. Addressing these failures often requires government intervention and regulation. Not all citizens feel equally represented, and certain groups may experience political marginalization. Additionally, political apathy among citizens can weaken democratic participation and lead to reduced accountability of elected officials.

For a long time, the West saw the Soviet model as an alternative to capitalism, and in some respects a successful attempt to modernize societies. The latter is argued at length by Branko Milanovic, a well-known American researcher on inequalities, in his book *Capitalism Alone*.¹⁸ But his thesis is that the world during the last five centuries has lived only in a capitalist system. His understanding is radical and challenges Soviet communism's claim that it was an alternative to capitalism. Milanovich explains that Soviet society was also a class society, subject to the general capitalist logic. He points out that in Soviet communism there are market relations, money, measurement of contribution through labor, the presence of a de facto owner of the "public property," such as the *nomenklatura* (the upper layer of Soviet-type societies). In any case, the Soviet system was not a "free and equal association of the producers," according to Engels' definition of communism.¹⁹ Milanovich's thesis is that capitalism has always existed in recent centuries, and in the twentieth century in two varieties: liberal (Western) capitalism and political (Soviet) capitalism. For today's Popular Republic of China, the author points out that it is a typical political capitalism, regardless of the political form of the communist regime.

For the past forty years, the dominant form of capitalism has been global corporate capitalism operating according to the demands of neoliberal economic philosophy. Since the 1960s, the general tendency of

¹⁸ Branko Milanović, *Capitalism, Alone: The Future of the System That Rules the World*, (New York: Harvard University Press, 2019).

¹⁹ Frederick Engels, *The Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State* [1884], <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1884/origin-family/index.htm>, accessed January 13, 2024: 1993, 1999, 2000.

capitalist development has been towards the structuring as the main economic agents of multinational and transnational companies, which gradually become giant corporations. The logic is monopolistic, it implies the elimination (including buyout, acquisition) of competitors and continuous growth as capital and material assets, and recently, also through the growth of intangible assets, which is a new phenomenon, the consequences of which we do not know enough yet.²⁰

What is new in the situation of corporate neoliberal capitalism since the end of the twentieth century is that market competition becomes a universal principle for society, and it gradually subordinates other relations. The implications of this have been debated by many authors, but go far beyond what Karl Polanyi predicted in 1944, the ubiquitous “market society” he called “the great transformation.”²¹

The increased power of corporations weakens nation-states, limits their resources, and generally shifts the weight of power from the public to the private sphere. But this is not for the benefit of that part of the private sphere that we usually define as civil society, but for the benefit of the corporate private sphere. A consequence of this displacement is the weakening of democracy in many countries of the world, because as a political regime it has its foundations in the modern nation-state, and there are still no real supranational political democratic institutions (the European Parliament is an exception, but it is still not fully empowered), or as Colin Crouch notes in his famous study of post-democracy, “the real power of the political system has passed into the hands of a small elite of politicians and corporate rich people.”²²

All this creates the conditions for growing inequality in various dimensions, not only economic, but generally socio-political and cultural. The market is based on competition and the principle of elimination of the weaker. When this spreads to the non-market spheres throughout society, the consequences are above all in the rapid growth of inequalities. The most visible stratification is between the top 1% and the rest –

²⁰ Jonathan Haskel and Stian Westlake, *Capitalism without Capital: The Rise of the Intangible Economy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2017).

²¹ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001).

²² Colin Crouch, *Post-Democracy: After the Crises* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020).

according to research by Oxfam in 2015, 1% of the world's population owns almost 50% of the world's wealth.²³ For 2021, World Inequality Database data shows that the top 1% of the world's population receives 19% of total income and owns 38% of the world's wealth. And the top 10%, owns respectively 52% of the income and 86% of the wealth.²⁴

The question is, has capitalism become incompatible with the principles of modern liberal-social democracy? A 1988 study by the philosophers Agnes Heller and Ferenc Fecher points out that, from their inception, democracy and capitalism have been two parallel but autonomous logics of the Western world.²⁵ According to the logic of their reasoning, capitalism is neither a prerequisite nor a consequence of modern democracy. On the one hand, democracy is undoubtedly related to the market economy, because the latter provides autonomy and freedom to individuals. But democracy is not logically connected to two essential characteristics of capitalism – the pursuit of monetary profit and the elimination of competition in the market. On the other hand, capitalism is such a system that adapts to a wide variety of political regimes, including totalitarian ones. Modern democracy and capitalism converge only in the demand to abolish the old social stratification based on ancestry, and democratic movements have never raised capitalist demands.

Inequality as the Main Challenge

Democracies are generally a political regime based on the greatest possible equality between citizens. Modern democracy in economic terms is based on the market economy. The reason is that such a system ensures the independence of the citizen-producers, autonomy in relation to the

²³ Deborah Hardoon, "Wealth: Having It All and Wanting More," Oxfam International (2015), accessed 13 January, 2024, <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/wealth-having-it-all-and-wanting-more>.

²⁴ World Inequality Database (2017), accessed January 13, 2-24, https://wid.world/world/#sptinc_p99p100_z/WO;BG/last/eu/k/p/yearly/s/false/1.117000000000002/30/curve/false/country.

²⁵ Agnes Heller and Ferenc Fecher, *The Postmodern Political Condition* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988).

rulers. Civil independence is the basis of civil equality. But with its development in the last five centuries, capitalism, as a modern variety of the market economy, changes its content. Although it has always legitimized itself with free economic initiative, it changes the purpose of economic activity – from meeting the needs of producers to accumulating profit measured in money. With this, the holders of money, which becomes investable capital, acquire a higher social status. By removing the old stratifications based on origin or religion, capitalism does not eliminate inequalities, but transforms them mostly into economic inequalities.

Global corporate capitalism, the model of which has become mainstream over the last forty years, has deepened world inequalities despite the modern liberal and social democracies established since the end of World War II. As Colin Crouch rightly argues,

“There is a contradiction between the equality of citizens’ electoral votes and the inequality of their economic conditions - the main unresolved problem of liberal democracy.”²⁶

Numerous comparative studies show that societies where equality is effectively realized are also societies where the rule of law is the most solid and freedom the greatest.²⁷ But this undoubtedly raises again the classic question of the compatibility of capitalism with democracy.

As for market-based capitalism, after the collapse of the Soviet bloc and especially after the inclusion of Communist China in the world market, there is almost no country in the world that is not socio-economically capitalist. But not all capitalist countries are also democratic. Which shows that the relationship between democracy and capitalism is asymmetrical – all democracies are also capitalist, but the reverse is not true.

In a special study of the relationship between democracy and inequality, Daron Acemoglu, Suresh Naidoo, Pascual Restrepo, and James Robinson note that there is an expectation in the available research that democracy reduces inequality, but that this expectation is not borne out by the available data because democracy can exist in different modes: it

²⁶ Crouch, *Post-democracy*, 37.

²⁷ Jean-Pierre Derriennic, *Les inégalités contre la démocratie* [Inequalities Against Democracy] (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2019), 67.

can be seized and limited by the plutocracy; it can express the desires of the middle class, which incites redistribution only in its favor; it can open up new economic opportunities for the excluded. In the three cases, the effect of democratic governance on inequality is different.²⁸

In another text, Acemoglu and Robinson again explain that the influence of the democratic political regime on inequality is not unambiguous.²⁹ But in fact, in the first case, they look for the influence of democracy on redistribution, and in the second, the influence of democracy on taxation and hence on inequality. The question, therefore, must be asked differently – how inequality affects democracy, what are the limits of inequality compatible with democratic governance.

Why is there still a well-established and even increasingly enforced understanding in the literature that inequalities undermine democracy, that democracy is a political regime that is based on the principle of equality? Even Robert Dahl argued that inequality in the ownership and control of large enterprises over public life leads to unequal political resources in society and to severe violations of political equality.³⁰ A similar thesis is also advocated by John Rawls in *Theory of Justice*, who notes that a form of democracy corresponding to this theory would be the “democracy of owners,” *i.e.*, a democracy based on equality of ownership.³¹

These general philosophical reflections on inequality and democracy, however, cannot necessarily be confirmed empirically. Or rather, the impact of inequality on the functioning of democracy is complex, ambiguous, manifesting itself in different modes. There is undoubtedly an influence, but two questions arise: a) which dimensions of democracy are influenced by inequalities; b) which dimensions of inequality in society can affect democracy?

²⁸ Daron Acemoglu, Suresh Naidu, Pascual Restrepo, and James A. Robinson. *Democracy, Redistribution and Inequality*. NBER Working Paper No. 19746 (Cambridge, MA, NBER, December 2013), accessed January 13, 2024, https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w19746/w19746.pdf.

²⁹ Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson, *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty* (New York: The Crown Publishing Group, 2012).

³⁰ Robert Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 183.

³¹ John Rawls, *Theory of Justice* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 242.

Some studies indicate that societal inequalities have different effects on democratizing societies and on the stability of established democracies, as Christian Houle, professor at the University of Michigan, notes in his research:

“Inequalities do not systematically affect the likelihood that non-democratic societies will transition to democracy, but once established, egalitarian democracy is unlikely to collapse.”³²

Other studies show that inequalities are not the most active factor in democratization, or to put it simply: revolutions are not the work of the poor. But, on the other hand, social equality is a factor in the stability of democracies, the more equality, the more stable democracies. One recent study once again recalls that “a democratic regime is usually assumed to implement freedom and equality as the key and most important values,” a well-known idea developed by scholars and thinkers like Norberto Bobbio in 1980s.³³

Other studies distinguish modes of inequality and look for the impact of each on the functioning of democracy. John Ferejohn, professor at the University of New York, distinguishes different types of moods in society according to relations of inequality: (1) concern for the social bottom and those who fall from it; (2) concern about the amount of poor people; (3) concern about the enormous wealth concentrated at the top of society etc.³⁴ These different sentiments, according to Ferejohn, produce different risks to the legitimacy of the democratic regime. His approach is rather through the prism of the “objective legitimacy” of the democratic regime. He notes:

³² Christian Houle, “Inequality and Democracy: Why Inequality Harms Consolidation but Does Not Affect Democratization,” *World Politics* 61, no. 4 (October 2009): 589-622, accessed January 13, 2024, <https://christianhoule.files.wordpress.com/2014/06/houle-wp-2009.pdf>.

³³ Leonardo Morlino, *Equality, Freedom, and Democracy. Europe After the Great Recession* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 1; Norberto Bobbio, “The Future of Democracy,” *Telos: Critical Theory of the Contemporary*, no. 61 (1984): 3-16.

³⁴ John Ferejohn, “Is Inequality a Threat to Democracy?,” *The Unsustainable American State*, eds. Lawrence Jacobs, and Desmond King (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195392135.003.0002.

“there are two distinct ways in which inequality can undermine the legitimacy of a regime: inequality can itself directly produce (or even constitute) injustice, or it can subsequently introduce a regime that enables or encourages it.”³⁵

Inequality today exacerbates the problems of political governance. In a democratic regime, decisions depend on the mass citizenry (the middle class when it is in the majority) who will always demand a redistribution of wealth. But the wealthy classes will resist in at least two ways: (1) by convincing the majority that redistribution is not in their favor because it will kill the initiative; (2) by using their wealth to influence the decisions of elected politicians and push them not to conform to the expectations of the majority. In the first case, it is about taking economic redistribution out of politics in order to maintain social peace. In the second case, it is a question of the seizure of the state by the rich and a crisis of the legitimacy of democracy. But a crisis of the legitimacy of democracy can also arise from the actual impossibility of satisfying all mass expectations in modern societies where there is a huge diversity of interests, and if Ferejohn calls the first case active corruption, the second case is passive corruption.

Again, Aristotle distinguishes democracy from oligarchy:

“it is a democracy when those who are free are in the majority and have sovereignty over the government, and an oligarchy when the rich and more well born are few and sovereign.”³⁶

“All free” means accepting that democracy treats the well-to-do as well as the poor alike, although in his opinion “the greed of the rich destroys more than the greed of the poor.”³⁷ Aristotle adds that democracy is based on measure, on the rejection of extremes:

“Since then, it is admitted that what is moderate or in the middle is best, it is manifest that the middle amount of all of the good things of fortune is the best amount to possess.”³⁸

³⁵ John Ferejohn, “Is Inequality a Threat to Democracy?”, 13-14.

³⁶ Aristotle, *Politics*, in: Aristotle in 23 Volumes, vol. 21, trans. by H. Rackham. (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1944), accessed January 13, 2024, <http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0086.tlg035.perseus-eng1:4.1290b>.

³⁷ Aristotle, *Politics*, <http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0086.tlg035.perseus-eng1:4.1296b>.

³⁸ Aristotle, *Politics*, <http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0086.tlg035.perseus-eng1:4.1296b>.

The very rich do not obey anything and rule with despotic power, the very poor have a slave mentality. Therefore, according to this ancient thinker, the good state aims to consist as much as possible of equal and similar citizens. Consequently, the ancient model of democracy, which we take as the prototype of our present-day democracy, is based on the principle of equality of citizens, not only politically, but largely also materially.

Inequality may be compatible with a democratic political regime, but high inequality necessarily creates obstacles to the functioning of democracy, because it creates prerequisites for the seizure of democratic institutions by the richest and their transformation into a facade of an essentially oligarchic government; it also spreads social cynicism, which causes citizens to withdraw from participation in public affairs, and democracy has as a principle exactly the opposite – that everyone participates. This certainly contradicts a conclusion in the famous Trilateral Commission report entitled “The Crisis of Democracy” (1975), in which Samuel Huntington, Michel Crozier, and Joji Watanuki observed that

“the effective functioning of democracy requires a certain apathy on the part of some individuals and the non-participation of some individuals and groups.”³⁹

We see the effect of such social cynicism in the numerous manifestations of civic apathy, as says Thomas Courtot, prominent activist of the alter-globalist Attac movement): “decline in union membership, rise in authoritarian and traditionalist tendencies, cynicism and corruption of rulers, universal decline in electoral participation,” because, “social insecurity in general drives people away from the polls.”⁴⁰

Conclusion

The integration of social democratic principles within liberal democracies presents a promising path towards more inclusive and equitable societies.

³⁹ Samuel Huntington, Michel Crozier, and Joji Watanuki, *The Crisis of Democracy: On the Governability of Democracies. A report written for the Trilateral Commission*, 1975, 116.

⁴⁰ Thomas Courtot, *Démocratie contre capitalisme* [Democracy against Capitalism] (Paris: La Dispute, 2005), 40-41.

Liberal democracies have undoubtedly contributed to safeguarding individual rights, political freedoms, and economic prosperity. However, they are not without their limitations, as evidenced by income inequality, the lack of social safety nets, and market failures.

Social democracy offers a complementary approach that addresses these shortcomings and promotes social justice, solidarity, and a more egalitarian distribution of resources. By advocating for a mixed economy, where the state plays an active role in providing essential services and social welfare programs, social democracies strive to create a society where all citizens have access to education, healthcare, and social support.

Ultimately, the complementary nature of liberal and social democracy offers a potential pathway for societies to address the shortcomings of pure liberalism while preserving the core values of individual rights and political freedoms. By striking a balance between personal liberties and collective well-being, nations can create governance models that are more resilient, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of their citizens. As we navigate the complexities of the modern world, a nuanced and thoughtful approach to governance - one that draws on the strengths of both liberal and social democracy - can help us build societies that strive towards prosperity, fairness, and a shared sense of responsibility for the common good.

THE LEFT TURN OF THE ITALIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY (PD): PRIMARY ELECTIONS AND POLICY PREFERENCES

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Abstract. On February 26, 2023, for the first time in the history of the Democratic Party, the leading Italian progressive party, a woman, Elly Schlein, was elected leader through open primaries that contradicted the outcome of consultations among the membership. Observing the outcome of an exit poll conducted by the Standing Group Candidate and Leader Selection of the Italian Political Science Society focusing on the policy priorities of the electorate, it clearly emerges that the inclusive rules of intra-party democracy, under certain conditions, can impact the identity of the party, leading in this case to a sharp turn to the left.

More specifically, the positions of the electorates of the two candidates, Elly Schlein and Stefano Bonaccini, diverge significantly on issues that appear to be crucial for the political positioning of the party.

Keywords: Democratic Party, intra-party democracy, political impact, policy issues, left turn.

Introduction

On February 26, 2023, primary elections were held in Italy to select the leader of the Democratic Party (PD), the leading Italian progressive party. As provided for by the statute since the party's founding in 2007, these were open primaries, meaning that not only members but also casual supporters were allowed to participate in the vote.

As well illustrated by Piero Ignazi, primaries, and more generally forms of consultation with members and supporters, are now the most

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common form of intra-party democracy, to counter the deficit that has emerged from their disconnection with society – the so-called path of inclusion.¹ However, Ignazi is fully in tune with authors such as William Cross and Jean-Benoit Pilet when they state that “party elites are often able to control the process and limit the actual competitiveness of the races.”²

In the history of the PD primaries up to the moment, since 2007 there has never been a candidate who has won a truly competitive election, just as the vote of open primaries has never contradicted the vote of the members. In 2023, the two candidates in the running, Stefano Bonaccini and Elly Schlein, were selected through a consultation of party members, with Stefano Bonaccini prevailing with 52.9%, followed by Elly Schlein with 34.9%, Gianni Cuperlo with 8%, and Paola De Micheli with 4.3%.³

Nevertheless, the data on the distribution and concentration of the membership vote show deep distortions. The geographical area where most votes were cast, with almost forty per cent, was southern Italy and the islands (Sicily and Sardinia), while in the metropolitan area of Milan, with about 4,200 votes, there was about as much voting as in the small province of Potenza. In short, not only do these figures in no way reflect the actual distribution of PD votes, but they confirm the control of large packages of votes by big voters controlling the central and peripheral party.⁴

In a context of significant tension and difficulty for the Italian left, which suffered a heavy defeat in the 2022 general election, with the Democratic Party increasingly perceived as lacking a strong political and organizational identity, something unpredictable occurred in the open consultations.⁵ Contrary to all the polls, as well as the outcome of the

¹ Piero Ignazi, “The Four Knights of Intra-party Democracy: A Rescue for Party Delegation,” *Party Politics* 26, no. 1 (2020): 9-20.

² William Cross and Jean-Benoit Pilet, “Parties, Leadership Selection and Intra-party Democracy,” in *The Politics of Party Leadership*, eds. William Cross and Jean-Benoit Pilet (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015): 165–173.

³ According to the 2019 statute, access to open primaries is reserved for the two candidates who received the most votes in the consultation among party members.

⁴ Antonio Florida, “La nemesi delle primarie aperte” [The nemesis of open primaries], *il Mulino*, February 23, 2023, accessed December 10, 2023, <https://www.rivistailmulino.it/a/la-nemesi-delle-primarie-aperte?fbclid=IwAR3p8py29Z3Ze8DnopLeOChKWSYro1Vz3Y2rhH6q0dnJHKULoojBcipcoPc>.

⁵ Antonio Florida, *PD. Un partito da rifare? Le ragioni di una crisi* [PD. A Party to Be Rebuilt?] (Roma: Castelvecchi, 2022).

consultation among party members, Elly Schlein won the primaries with 53.75% of the votes, while Stefano Bonaccini stopped at 46.25%. The participants in the consultation numbered 1,098,623, a significant figure, although it was lower compared to the previous consultations in 2019 (1,569,628).

Faced with such a context, it is plausible to say that a great wave of protest against a candidate mostly perceived as an apparatchik, as well as the appreciation for an outsider such as Elly Schlein, reversed a foregone conclusion, laying the groundwork for the party's internal rules of democracy to subvert its identity.

Regarding her profile, Elly Schlein, the first female leader of the Democratic Party (PD), represented a departure from traditional leadership. In 2015, she left the party in open disagreement with the then-leader Matteo Renzi, asserting the need to reclaim a leftist profile. She returned in 2022 in anticipation of the Congress and the primaries, where she presented a motion titled *Parte da Noi! (It Starts with Us!)* strongly oriented to the left, which we will discuss further.⁶ As for Stefano Bonaccini, unlike Elly Schlein, he represented continuity with the traditional elite. He is the President of the Emilia-Romagna Region and has a moderate and pragmatic outlook, consistently aligning himself with the party establishment. His motion *Energia Popolare per il PD e per l'Italia (People's Energy for the PD and Italy)*, as we will discuss further, carries a strong consensus-oriented character.⁷

Having stated the general premises, this paper aims to explore the perceptions of selectors regarding some crucial national public policies. To this end, the contribution makes use of the data of a survey organized by the Standing Group Candidate and Leader Selection of the Italian Society of Political Science, of which the author is a member. The survey

⁶ Elly Schlein, "Parte da Noi! Mozione congressuale a supporto della candidatura di Elly Schlein a Segretaria nazionale del Partito Democratico" [It Starts with Us!], Partito Democratico, accessed December 10, 2023, https://www.partitodemocratico.it/wp-content/uploads/mozione_schlein_def.Pdf.

⁷ Stefano Bonaccini, "Energia Popolare per il PD e per l'Italia. Sintesi della piattaforma politico-congressuale a sostegno di Stefano Bonaccini segretario del Partito Democratico" [People's Energy for the PD and Italy]. Synthesis of the political platform in support of Stefano Bonaccini as secretary of the Democratic Party], Partito Democratico, Accessed December 10, 2023, https://www.partitodemocratico.it/wp-content/uploads/Bonaccini_Mozione_A4-1.Pdf.

consists of an exit poll administered to about 2,000 primary voters on various issues and facets.

Concerning policies, four areas were examined that relate to the traditional divide between left and right, both in its classical form, and in the one between the new left, characterized by libertarian and universalist values, and the new right, characterized by traditional and communitarian values.⁸ In general, the analysis focused on the perceptions of the selectors about migrant reception policies, tax and service policies, environmental policies, and equal opportunity policies for LGBTQ+ couples.

It should be pointed out right away that these issues found ample space in the congress motions of Elly Schlein and Stefano Bonaccini which, although not radically different, have placed different emphases on each of the issues under consideration in this analysis.

To begin with, on migration policies, in line with the provisions of the PD electoral program for the September 25, 2022 general election, both candidates declared themselves in favor of overcoming the Bossi-Fini law, which introduced a series of restrictive measures for immigration, especially regarding residence permits linked to the possession of a job, as well as the planning of regular migration flows that would cancel ex-post amnesties.⁹ Unlike Stefano Bonaccini, Elly Schlein also referred to a widespread reception model, as well as expressing the need to stop any policy of refoulement, and to promote a new *Mare Nostrum* on a European scale, given that thanks to *Mare Nostrum*, more than 100,000 migrants were rescued in the Central Mediterranean and beyond, nearly reaching the border of Libyan territorial waters.¹⁰ Stefano Bonaccini, on the other hand, did not mention the rescue policy, but the need to promote

⁸ Simon Bornschie, "The New Cultural Divide and the Two-Dimensional Political Space in Western Europe," *Western European Politics* 33, no. 3 (2010): 419-444; Sara B. Hobolt and James Tilley, "Fleeing the Centre: The Rise of Challenger Parties in the Aftermath of the Euro Crisis," *West European Politics* 39, no. 5 (2016): 971-991; James L. Guth and Brent F. Nelsen, "Party Choice in Europe: Social Cleavages and the Rise of Populist Parties," *Party Politics* 27, no. 3 (2021): 1-12.

⁹ Nicolò Pasini and Marta Regalia, *Twenty-eighth Migration Report. The Immigration Issue in Italian Political Elections* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2023): 166-178; Law 189 of 2002, Changes in regulations on the matter of immigration and asylum, Official Collection of Legislative Acts of the Republic of Italy (2002); Schlein, "Parte da Noi," 15; Bonaccini, "Energia Popolare," 34.

¹⁰ Schlein, "Parte da Noi," 15. *Mare Nostrum* was a maritime search and rescue operation launched by the Italian government in the autumn of 2013 in the Central Mediterranean.

“a quality integration inspired by criteria of humanity, legality and security,” with a perspective, therefore, at least partly security oriented.¹¹

Turning to fiscal policies, both candidates proposed lowering taxes on labor and increasing taxes on income, with an explicit reference to inheritances and gifts by Elly Schlein.¹² They also agreed that strengthening welfare was a matter of great importance.¹³

Concerning environmental protection, Elly Schlein’s motion clearly states its priority, making environmental compatibility a premise of any development policy, even at the cost of increasing the tax burden through *ad hoc* taxes such as the plastic tax.¹⁴ Circular economy and sustainable mobility underpin her vision of environmental protection.¹⁵ Also for Stefano Bonaccini, any development policy for the country must have environmental protection as a prerequisite. He does not mention the idea of new taxes, but highlights the opportunities represented by various proposals: from a large-scale reforestation plan to the acceleration towards the development of renewable energies, from the introduction of bonus systems for companies that reduce emissions to incentives for the circular economy, and the strengthening of sustainable mobility infrastructures.¹⁶ On this point, therefore, the two motions differ only in the greater articulation of the specific proposals by Stefano Bonaccini (who dedicates an entire paragraph to the environment), compared to the more radical tones of Elly Schlein, who makes environmental protection an inalienable value and worthy even of introducing of new taxes.

Finally, on civil rights, particularly those of the LGBTQ+ community, the candidates express proposals that differ only in a few nuances. Both express the need to pass a law against discrimination based on sexual orientation as soon as possible, to establish egalitarian marriage and to overcome Law 164 of 1982 to guarantee the right to gender identity of the individual.¹⁷ Stefano Bonaccini makes explicit reference to the need

¹¹ Bonaccini, “Energia Popolare,” 34.

¹² Schlein, “Parte da Noi,” 11.

¹³ Schlein, “Parte da Noi,” 8; Bonaccini, “Energia Popolare,” 24.

¹⁴ Schlein, “Parte da Noi,” 21.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁶ Bonaccini, “Energia Popolare,” 19.

¹⁷ Law 164/1982 provides for the possibility of changing gender identity, but only after surgery. Legge 14 aprile 1982, n. 164, *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana* 106 (1982).

to “reform the adoption system by overcoming all discrimination,” while Elly Schlein emphasizes schools, highlighting the need for them to “open their doors to affective and sexual education for the new generations.”¹⁸

These, in a nutshell, are the positions of the two leadership candidates on the four issues examined by the research. We will see whether and to what extent these positions are reflected in the respondents’ opinions, and how these are articulated with respect to other variables such as age, gender, level of education, political position along the left-right axis, and the party voted in the last general election.

Different Issues, Similar Polarization

On migration policies, the question was based on two opposing assertions: “some say we receive too many immigrants, others that we could easily take in more,” asking the respondents to express themselves on a scale of 1 to 7, with 4 being the middle position (“it is fine as it is”).

This question was posed in a certainly problematic context, in which the flows towards Italy appeared increasingly uncontrollable in the eyes of public opinion, given that from January 1 to May 12, 2023, 45,380 migrants had landed in Italy compared to 12,633 in the same period of 2022, and also given the increase caused by the crisis of the fragile Tunisian democracy.¹⁹ Thus, on the eve of the 2022 general elections, the share of Italians who considered it necessary to reduce the reception of immigrants was close to seventy per cent.²⁰ The right-wing government led by Giorgia Meloni then

¹⁸ Schlein, “Parte da Noi,” 14; Bonaccini, “Energia Popolare,” 33.

¹⁹ Cruscotto statistico giornaliero [Daily statistical dashboard], Ministry of the Interior, accessed May 15, 2023, https://www.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/202305/cruscotto_statistico_del_12_maggio_2023.PDF; “Sondaggio su elezioni politiche, immigrazione” [Poll on political elections, immigration], April 11-13, 2023, Termometro Politico, Dipartimento per l’Informazione e l’Editoria, Governo Italiani, accessed May 15, 2023, <http://www.sondaggiipoliticoelettorali.it/>; Konstantin Ash, “Protesting for Autocracy: Economic Vulnerability and Anti-democratic Protest Attendance in Tunisia,” *Democratization* 30, no. 2 (2022): 1-2.

²⁰ Marco Improta, Elisabetta Mannoni, Costanza Marcellino, and Federico Trastulli, “Voters, Issues, and Party Loyalty: The 2022 Italian Election under the Magnifying Glass,” *Italian Journal of Electoral Studies* 85, no. 2 (2022): 3-27.

took up this emergency perception, issuing a series of declarations aimed precisely at the urgent need to reduce the influx of immigrants.²¹

In such a context, more than fifty-six per cent of the interviewees state that “we could easily take in many more immigrants” (positions 6 and 7). About thirty per cent believe that the situation is acceptable as it is, while just ten per cent believe that we take in too many (Figure 1).

It is therefore a very polarized figure, with little variation concerning the main sociographic dimensions, and some significant (and predictable) deviations concerning self-ideological positioning and the party voted in the last general election.

Firstly, about the sociographic profile, slightly more mature cohorts are shown to be more inclined to accept more immigrants, particularly the over-50s (almost sixty per cent), women (fifty-eight per cent) and, more markedly, university graduates (63.4%). As for the ideological profile (calculated by asking respondents to self-place along a ten-point Likert scale), and party affiliation (calculated based on which respondents voted for in the 2022 general election), movement along the right-left continuum increases the willingness to accept more migrants, up to a maximum of 66% among those who place themselves further to the left.

Moreover, the highest percentage of those who believe that more immigrants could be easily accepted (75%) is found among selectors who voted for Alleanza Verdi-Sinistra, an alliance to the left of the PD, and +Europa, a small radical-libertarian party. Those who voted PD confirm the general tendency towards greater inclusion (56%), while more skeptical are the voters of the Five Stars Movement (M5S), the other large center-left party (50% believe we could welcome many more immigrants) and especially those of Azione-Italia Viva, an alliance to the right of the PD (with 40% willing to welcome more).

These data are not surprising for two reasons. Firstly, because migration policies, in addition to the right-left dimension, cross the libertarian-universalist *versus* traditional-communitarian dimension, which explains the very high values of +Europa. Secondly, several studies have highlighted how on migration issues, the M5S continues to maintain less open and tolerant

²¹ Riccardo Gibelli, Marta Ponte, and Martina Stevanato, “The News Agenda in the Election Campaign and in the First Months of the Meloni Government,” *Comunicazione politica* 1 (2023): 111-120.

positions than the PD, while on many other issues, such as peace and welfare it is more to the left.²² We have not considered, and will not be able to do so in the following, the positions of the selectors who voted for right-wing parties (Lega, Fratelli d'Italia, and Forza Italia) as they are numerically marginal.

Concluding the analysis of the migration issue, it may be useful to compare the data of our research with those of a recent survey on the relationship between Italians and immigration carried out by IPSOS. According to the poll, 41% of PD voters believe that Italy should set itself the goal of "increasing the number of immigrants," compared to a national average of just 17%.²³ It can be deduced from this that PD selectors are more accepting than PD voters, although the latter are to a significant extent in sharp contrast to the national figure.

The second policy area examined by the research is the purely economic one, classically structured along the left-right axis, *i.e.*, less taxes and less services, or more taxes and more services. This is the classic redistributive dilemma. Specifically, for the left, those who have more must pay more to increase the quality and quantity of welfare and community services.²⁴

Again, the question was based on two opposing assertions: "reduce taxes even at the cost of reducing service," or "increase services even at the cost of increasing taxes," asking the respondent to express themselves on a scale of 1 to 7, with 4 being the middle position ("it is fine as it is"). And in this case as well, the PD selectors took a clear line (Figure 2): almost 64% believed that services should be increased even at the cost of raising taxes (positions 6 and 7), and only 5% felt that the issue of taxes took priority over services.

The question does not specify which taxes and especially for whom they should be increased, but precisely for this reason the result of the

²² Rado Fonda and Salvatore Vassallo, "I temi e il leader" [The issues and the leader] in *Il bipolarismo asimmetrico. L'Italia al voto dopo il decennio populista* [Asymmetrical bipolarism. Italy on the ballot after the populist decade], eds. Salvatore Vassallo and Luca Verzichelli (Bologna: il Mulino, 2023).

²³ "Italiani e immigrazione" [Italians and immigration], March 28-30, 2023, Corriere della Serra, Dipartimento per l'Informazione e l'Editoria, Governo Italiani, accessed May 15, 2023, <http://www.sondaggipoliticoelettorali.it/>.

²⁴ Theodore Lowi, *At the Pleasure of the Mayor* (Gencoe Ill.: Free Press, 1964); Swen Hutter and Hanspeter Kriesi (eds.), *European Party Politics in Times of Crisis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

survey appears significant. Regardless of which taxes to raise, the perceived need for an improvement in services is such that the vast majority of those surveyed show no hesitation, even at the cost of raising taxes generically. This result also appears to be in line with the contents of the congressional motions mentioned in the introduction: both candidates express the urgent need to defend and strengthen services by raising taxes on income.

As far as the intersection with sociographic and political positioning variables is concerned, other interesting data emerges. Firstly, as far as age is concerned, support for policies to expand taxation and services grows as age increases: it is close to 70% among the over-65s, it stops at 57% among the under-35s. More than all the other categories, pensioners consider welfare a priority, even at the cost of increasing taxes, feeling more than anyone else threatened by further downsizing of services. As far as gender is concerned, it is a variable that does not discriminate, while concerning the level of education, it is university graduates who are most in favor of higher taxes in exchange for more services (almost 70%).

Few surprises on the side of political positioning: the further one moves to the left, the greater the support for expansive policies, up to 71% of the extreme left, while as far as the parties of origin of the electorate are concerned, in addition to those who declared to have voted Alleanza Verdi-Sinistra at the last general elections, even those who declared to have voted M5S settle on very favorable positions for expansive policies (respectively, 79% Alleanza Verdi-Sinistra, and 70% M5S). Those who voted for PD are exactly in the middle position (64% in favor), while those who chose Azione-Italia Viva and +Europa stop at 50%. So, on the economic variable, there are no surprises, as the left-right axis perfectly structures the division, with those parties that are more to the left clearly in favor of expanding welfare by raising taxes and those that are more to the center less clearly in favor of this option.

Turning to environmental policies, selectors were asked to express their agreement that the government should focus on economic growth even at the cost of making decisions to the detriment of the environment on a 4-point Likert scale ("not at all agree," "little agree," "fairly agree," and "very much agree") (Figure 3).

The primary voters endorsed the contents of the two candidates' motions, with over 85% agreeing little or not at all with the proposed statement. Age and gender do not significantly differentiate the distribution, while the level of education, political positioning, and the party voted in the last general election do exert a certain influence. Those most opposed to economic growth to the detriment of the environment are university graduates (over 90%), those in the most left-wing positions (90%), voters of Alleanza Verdi-Sinistra (97%) followed by those of +Europe (94%), M5S (90%), PD (86%), Azione-Italia Viva (80%). In this group, Alleanza Verdi-Sinistra (72% not at all agree) and M5s (60% not at all agree) stand out for "environmentalist intransigence," while Azione Italia-Viva stands out for the least intransigence (36% not at all agree). Once again, therefore, differences manifest themselves between the PD, M5S, Alleanza Verdi-Sinistra, on the one hand, and Azione-Italia Viva on the other.

The last policy area explored is the one most directly related to the cleavage between libertarian-universalist and traditionalist-communitarian values. Selectors were asked to express their opinion along a four-point Likert scale ("not at all agree," "little agree," "fairly agree," and "very much agree") on whether Italy should adopt a law allowing same-sex couples to adopt children.

Again, this is an issue on which the two candidates in the primaries expressed their positions very clearly and clearly in favor of extending the rights of the LGBTQ+ community. Also on this issue are the results of a poll conducted by IPSOS where a relative majority (47%) were in favor of adoption by same-sex couples.²⁵ Unfortunately, no differentiation by party was made in this case, but the results can nevertheless be a useful reference for our survey. As was to be expected, the PD selectors revealed much sharper positions on the issue than the average Italian citizen. Seventy-eight per cent of respondents agreed very much or fairly agreed, while less than ten per cent did not agree at all (Figure 4).

Moving on to the sociographic and political positioning variables, the most in favor of adoption were the youngest selectors (16-35), with 87% very or fairly in agreement, women (85% very or fairly in agreement *versus*

²⁵ The survey, entitled "Italians and homoparentality", was conducted by Ipsos on March 21, 2023, accessed May 26, 2023, <http://www.sondaggipoliticoelettorali.it/>.

75% of men) and the most educated, particularly university graduates (82% very or fairly in agreement), followed by high school graduates who confirm the overall average figure (78% very or fairly in agreement). The most advanced profile on the LGBTQ+ rights issue is therefore young, female, and highly educated. As for political positioning, those most in favor of adoptions for same-sex couples are in the first three positions from the left on the 10-point scale, with an average of 83.6% very or fairly in agreement. Concerning the parties voted in the September 2022 general election, on the other hand, the most libertarian voters are those who voted +Europa (94% very or fairly agree), Alleanza Verdi-Sinistra (92%), M5S (80%), followed by PD (whose 78% coincides with the national average), and lastly, well below the average, Azione-Italia Viva (65%). As with migration policies, the libertarian-universalist dimension emerges as an element that connotes and overlaps with the right-left dimension. This explains the very high adhesion to the proposal by a libertarian but not left-wing party such as +Europa, but also the lower percentage recorded by the voters of the parties of Carlo Calenda and Matteo Renzi (Azione and Italia Viva), undoubtedly connoted by greater traditionalism of values.

Between Schlein's and Bonaccini's Supporters: Signs of a Clear Differentiation

How did the supporters of the two candidates perceive the major domestic policy issues? Are there appreciable differences? If so, are these distinctions consistent with the different nuances that the two motions reveal on the issues under consideration? We will try to answer these questions in this section.

Let us start with migration policies and, specifically, the willingness to accept even more migrants. Our data reveal that there are very significant differences between those who said they voted for Elly Schlein, and those who said they voted for Stefano Bonaccini. Compared to an average of 56%, positions 6 and 7 (“we could easily take in many more immigrants”) total 67% among Schlein supporters, and 48% among Bonaccini supporters. A difference of almost twenty points seems to denote very different

sensitivities between the two electorates. Sensitivities that reflect the contents of the motions: Schlein's is much more open to welcome, Bonaccini's is more focused on management, security, and legality. In short, the profile of the two candidates seems to be reflected in the preferences and perceptions of their respective supporters, with Schlein's much more oriented towards libertarian-universalist values.

Even when it comes to fiscal policies and, specifically, the willingness to extend services even at the cost of raising taxes, there is a profound differentiation between the two. Against an average that, let us remember, amounts to 64% in favor of expansive and more onerous measures, among Schlein's supporters this share rises to 71.4%, while among Bonaccini's supporters, it drops to 55.3%.

Again, there is a certain coherence between the motions and the different sensitivities, not so much on the need to defend and promote welfare, but on the need to do so by introducing new taxes – a possibility made explicit by Elly Schlein but not by Stefano Bonaccini. This does not mean that those who went to vote in the primaries did so with an awareness of the contents of the motions then reflected in the poll, but, on the contrary, in some way, the sensitivities of the two seem to be reflected in the programmatic positions and value sensitivities of the candidates.

Moreover, in this case the left-right dimension seems to project itself with great precision on the two electorates, since the share of consensus to expansive policies on the part of Bonaccini's supporters (55.3%) is very similar to that of the selectors who declared having voted +Europa and Azione-Italia Viva (50%), while the share of support for expansive policies by Schlein's supporters (71.4%) is closer to that of selectors who said they voted Alleanza Verdi-Sinistra (79%) and M5S (70%).²⁶

On the other hand, if the differences between the two motions regarding environmental policies are more nuanced, the same is true for the perceptions of the two selectorates regarding the possibility of promoting economic growth at the expense of the environment. Out of

²⁶ On economic issues, the M5s can now call itself a left-wing party, both in terms of the measures it promotes and the content of its statute. Giancarlo Minaldi, "The Transformation of the Five Star Movement: The Normalization of Italy's Most Relevant Movement-Party," *Studia Politica. Romanian Political Science Review* 22, no. 2 (2022): 239-261.

an average of 85% of selectors not at all or little in agreement, those who decided to support Elly Schlein amount to 90.7%, and those who decided to support Stefano Bonaccini amount to 82.3%. A gap of about eight points does not seem particularly significant, even considering the very high percentages. It should be noted, however, that even in this case the share of voters most sensitive to environmental issues (little or not at all in agreement with the proposed statement) who support Stefano Bonaccini is very similar to the share most sensitive to environmental issues who voted *Azione-Italia Viva* (80%).

The last issue examined, that of the possibility of introducing a law in Italy allowing same-sex couples to adopt children, presents another notable differentiation. This is even though the two motions differ little on the merits of LGBTQ+ community rights. In particular, against an overall average of very or fairly favorable at 78%, the very or fairly favorable selectors who preferred Elly Schlein stand at 84.8%, while those very or fairly favorable who preferred Stefano Bonaccini stop at 70.8% (Figure 5), as well as registering a percentage of totally unfavorable (not at all in agreement) of over 14% (compared to 4.8% among Schlein's selectors).

Compared to Elly Schlein's selectorate, Stefano Bonaccini's selectorate is, therefore, less inclined to the extension of rights for LGBTQ+ communities, with 30% against the right to adopt (little or not at all in agreement) that does not seem at all negligible.

As for the overlaps with the parties voted in the last general election, there is once again a not insignificant closeness between the results recorded by the selectors who chose Stefano Bonaccini and those recorded by the voters of *Azione-Italia Viva*: 70% in favor of Bonaccini's selectors, and 65% among those who voted *Azione-Italia Viva*. This figure confirms the more traditional profile of Bonaccini's selectorate, even in the presence of a very libertarian-universalist programmatic platform.

Conclusions

The analysis of the four policy areas researched had rather clear-cut outcomes and was mostly consistent with the contents of the motions presented by the two candidates who remained in the running after the first congress phase.

But let us go in order. In general, it must firstly be said that, with some surprise compared to an image of the PD divided and fragmented between currents and different ideas on the “things to be done,” the selectors expressed themselves very clearly on the issues under investigation, placing themselves, in general, clearly to the left and/or on a libertarian and universalist value dimension.²⁷ To summarize, by a very large majority, the PD selectors agreed little or not at all with the idea that in the name of economic development, one can sacrifice the environment and similarly declared themselves in favor of introducing the right for same-sex couples to adopt children. Large but less consistent majorities were in favor of paying more taxes to obtain more services and accepting more immigrants. These positions tend to be more pronounced among younger people (except on the issue of tax and services), among women, among the better educated and among those who are more left-wing. Large but less consistent majorities were in favor of paying more taxes to obtain more services and accepting more immigrants. These positions tend to be more pronounced among younger people (except on the issue of tax and services), among women, among the better educated and among those who are more left-wing. The differentiation by party voted in the last general election is more articulated, but in general, those who place themselves more to the left (such as Alleanza Verdi-Sinistra) are those who consistently record the highest percentages in the polarization described.

That said, the other data that emerges very clearly is the differentiation between the share of selectors who said they voted for Elly Schlein, and those who said they voted for Stefano Bonaccini. As it was partly to be expected, both for the motion and for the general profile of the undoubtedly more moderate and apparatchik candidate, Bonaccini’s selectors tended to be more cautious concerning the issues in the poll. Put another way, the overall and clear left-wing and libertarian-universalist dimension is largely driven by Elly Schlein’s selectorate. In general, therefore, we can say that Elly Schlein’s candidature has contributed to characterizing the electoral base of the 2023 primaries on the left, defining a clear profile in stark contrast to the moderate leadership of the past, from Matteo Renzi to Enrico Letta.

²⁷ Florida, PD. *Un partito da rifare?*

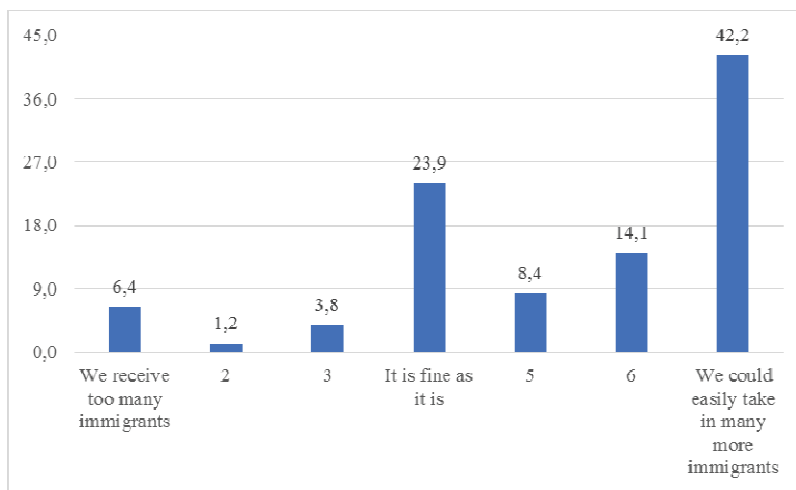


Figure 1. Selectors' preferences on migration policies, 2023

Source: Standing Group Candidate and Leader Selection of the Italian Society of Political Science <https://standinggroups.sisp.it/candidateleaderselection/> (last accessed on May 16, 2023).

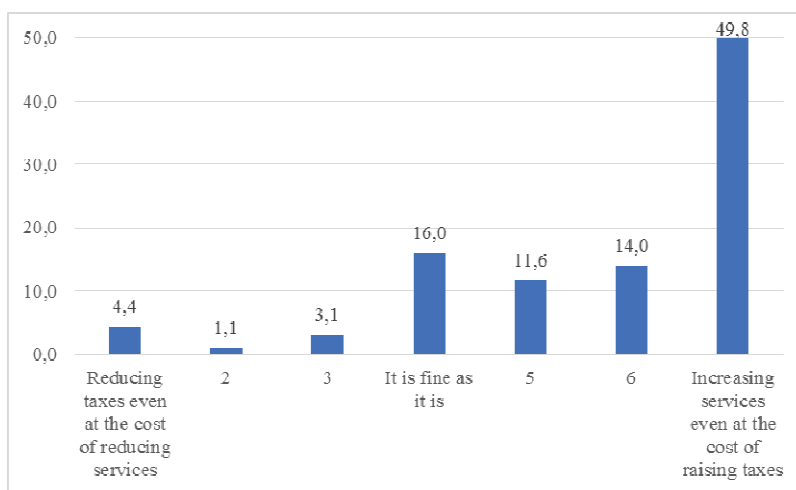


Figure 2. Selectors' preferences on fiscal policies, 2023

Source: Standing Group Candidate and Leader Selection of the Italian Society of Political Science <https://standinggroups.sisp.it/candidateleaderselection/> (last accessed on May 16, 2023).

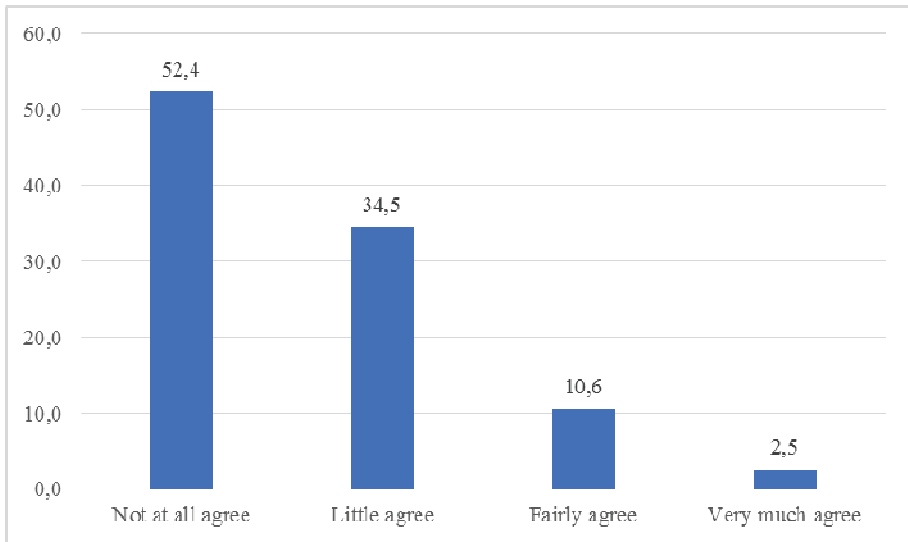


Figure 3. Selectors' Preferences on environmental policies, 2023

Source: Standing Group Candidate and Leader Selection of the Italian Society of Political Science <https://standinggroups.sisp.it/candidateleaderselection/> (last accessed on May 16, 2023).

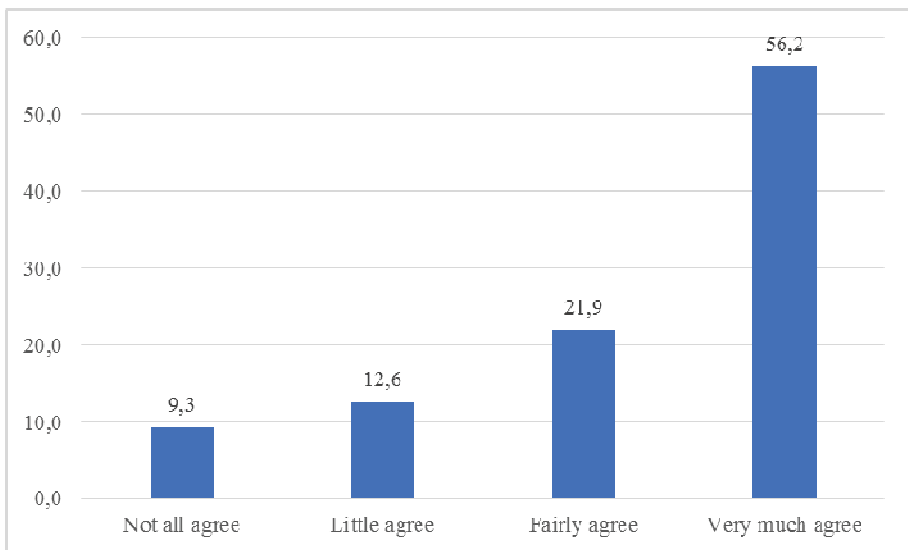


Figure 4. Selectors' Preferences on LGBTQ+ Rights, 2023

Source: Standing Group Candidate and Leader Selection of the Italian Society of Political Science <https://standinggroups.sisp.it/candidateleaderselection/> (last accessed on May 16, 2023).

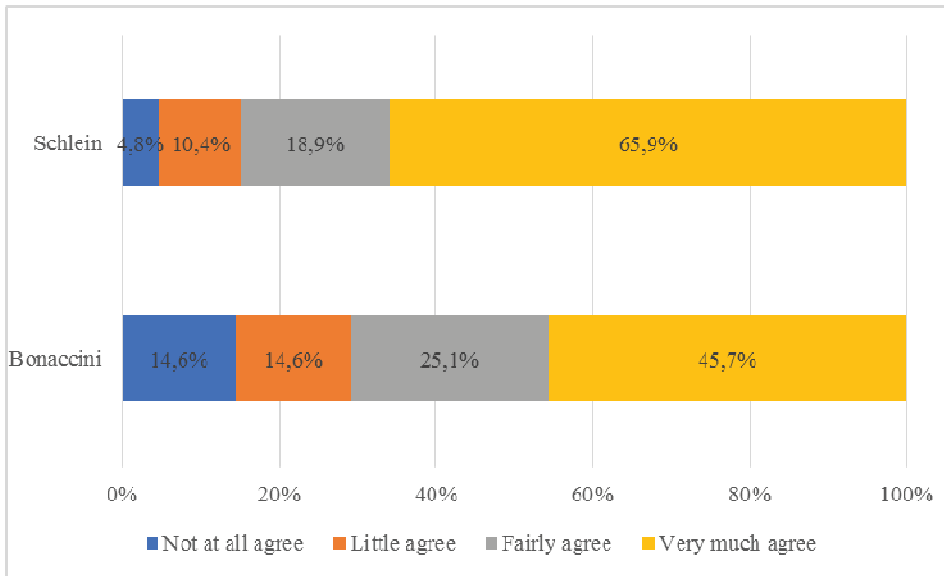


Figure 5. Candidate choice and selectors' preferences on LGBTQ+ rights, 2023
 Source: Standing Group Candidate and Leader Selection of the Italian Society of Political Science
<https://standinggroups.sisp.it/candidateleaderselection/> (last accessed on May 16, 2023).

THE BULGARIAN SOCIALIST PARTY ON THE PATH TO DE-EUROPEANIZATION

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Abstract. The article's main purpose is to shed light on the Euroscepticism of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) and its shifting identity towards European issues, liberal democracy, and in terms of party organization during the last decade. More than twenty years ago, the successor of the former Bulgarian Communist Party managed to achieve a difficult (and, it turns out, superficial) Europeanisation and Social-democratization. BSP supported the country's accession to the EU and the integration in NATO. Now, the party is identifiable as a pro-Russian actor, opposed to the Istanbul convention, spreading conservatism, and hysteria against the so called "gender ideology," fighting against economic neo-liberalism but also liberal ideas. The Russian war against Ukraine significantly impacted domestic politics and the structure of party competition, revitalizing the historic divide between pro-Russian and pro-Western camps. Isolated, the BSP lost its position as a major party of government and embraced anti-establishment and protest-party profile. The main research questions address the essence of the BSP's ethnonationalist and conservative turn, and its hybrid interpretations of "national interest" and "patriotism" in its discourses and documents. Special attention is paid to the BSP's positions towards the war in Ukraine. Our main approach is grounded on the path dependency theory and on the supply and demand sides of the fragmented party system.

Keywords: Bulgarian Socialist Party, path dependency, party change, Euroscepticism, Nationalism.

Introduction

This article studies the transformations of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) and its identities in the light of the different crises faced at the European

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and domestic level. Our focus is on the BSP's turn to ethnonationalism, illiberalism, its fierce opposition to respecting the rights of LGBTQ citizens, and its intolerance towards refugees and diversity. For a long time, the BSP has been known for its opposition to the European Union's sanctions against Russia. After the outbreak of the Russian war against Ukraine, the BSP has also been strongly opposed to any military aid to Ukraine.

The Bulgarian Socialist Party is identifiable as a pro-Russian actor, opposed to the Istanbul convention, spreading conservatism, and very vocal against the so called "gender ideology," fighting against economic neo-liberalism and globalization but also liberal ideas. As Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks wrote on the democratic backsliding in Hungary and Poland,

"Illiberalism is allied to a nationalist discourse of parochialism, conservatism, and anti-elitism which is mobilized against the perceived threats of foreigners, multinationals, and the European Union."¹

In Bulgaria too, political parties and the BSP, in particular, take more polarized stances on the GAL-TAN dimension of political contestation.

From 1990 to 2021, the Bulgarian Socialist Party constituted either the major party of government, or the main parliamentary opposition force. Since 2021, the party has been abandoned by its loyal voters, and nowadays its coalition potential is rather low, having been isolated by the pro-European camp.

The Bulgarian Socialist Party is characterized by several paradoxes. On the one hand, the BSP has lost its place as a major party, but it remains one of the oldest and most resilient parties since the fall of the Communist regime. The BSP diverges from the core progressive values and principles promoted by the European social democracy, as an expression of its de-Europeanization. The fact remains that it is the only political actor of the center-left defending values such as the welfare state, social justice, social protection, and equality. Another paradox is that the BSP, while following the general trend of a personalized style of leadership, is still a party with functioning and regulated intraparty democratic procedures,

¹ Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks, "Grand Theories of European Integration in the Twenty-first Century," *Journal of European Public Policy* 26, no. 8 (2009): 1113-1133, DOI: 10.1080/13501763.2019.1569711, 1127.

but at the same time there is no place for a true intraparty democracy. Besides, it is the only party in Bulgaria which very early introduced and has maintained internal quotas for women's and young people's representation. Moreover, in 2017 the BSP decided to change the election method for the party's leader, to direct voting by party members, and in 2020 it organized the first direct election of its leader. Another paradox is the changing nature of the party - from an established government party to an anti-establishment challenger, which joins protest movements and very often resorts to mechanisms of direct democracy.

Our main goal is to shed light on the BSP's sovereigntist and nationalist turn, veiled as *patriotism* – throughout the analysis of party's decisions and resolutions, as well as its positions on geopolitical and foreign policy issues. With the Russian aggression against Ukraine, BSP's positions affected the actions of Bulgarian government and showed that party politics do not necessarily stop at the *water's edge*, and that the foreign policy is affected by parties' positions.

Our research questions concern the meaning of the proclaimed *patriotism* and the party's position since February 2022 on foreign policy issues.

The research methods include content analysis of party documents, official resolutions, decisions, votes in the National Assembly, and declarations. The analysis is based on the approach of path dependency and on studies related to effects of new challengers on established parties.² From the perspective of path dependency, we argue that nationalism has always been a component of the Bulgarian Socialist Party ideology, because of the transformation trajectory chosen by the former communists. There is a double language and radical shift of positions of party leaders who twenty years ago were the most pro-European within BSP.

The study is structured in five sections. The first one reviews studies of party Europeanization and focuses on Euroscepticism in Bulgaria. The second section presents briefly the BSP's electoral upheaval. The third part introduces the discussion on nationalism and the left. The fourth section analyses BSP's documents from 2008 to 2019 with regards

² Bálint Magyar and Bálint Madlovics, "Stubborn Structures: A Path-Dependence Explanation of Transitions in the Postcommunist Region," *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 86, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 113-146.

to nationalism. In the fifth section the BSP's positions on the Russian war against Ukraine are presented.

Parties, Europeanization and Euroscepticism

The impact of the European integration on national political parties and party systems is a widely researched topic.³ For some scholars, the European Union has had a limited impact on national parties.⁴ Others analyze processes of de-Europeanization going along with processes of de-democratization in Eastern Central Europe.⁵

Paul Taggart defines four criteria to evaluate the significance of Euroscepticism in national party systems: (1) participation of Eurosceptic party in national government; (2) whether the leadership of any of the major parties of government was decided by conflict over European issue; (3) whether the EU related issue has strongly defined the fate of a national government; (4) whether the issue of European integration has determined the issue of a national election.⁶

³ Claudio M. Radaelli, "Europeanisation: Solution or Problem?," *European Integration online Papers (EIoP)* 8, no. 16, (2004), <https://ssrn.com/abstract=601163>; Robert Ladrech, "National political parties and European Governance: The Consequences of 'Missing in Action,'" *West European Politics* 30, no. 5 (2007): 945-960, DOI: 10.1080/01402380701617365; Christian Lequesne and Etienne Behar, "Européanisation et résistance à l'européanisation" [Europeanization and resistance to Europeanization] in *Études européennes* [European Studies] eds. Olivier Costa and Frédéric Merand (Bruxelles: Bruylant, 2017), 505-534; Sara B. Hobolt and James Tilley, "Fleeing the Centre: The Rise of Challenger Parties in the Aftermath of the Euro Crisis," *West European Politics* 39, no. 5 (2016): 971-991, DOI: 10.1080/01402382.2016.1181871; Hooghe and Marks, "Grand Theories of European Integration in the Twenty-first century".

⁴ Peter Mair, "The Limited Impact of Europe on National Party Systems," *West European Politics* 23, no. 4 (2000): 25-51.

⁵ Attila Ágh, "De-Europeanization and De-democratization Trends in ECE: From the Potemkin Democracy to the Elected Autocracy in Hungary," *Journal of Comparative Politics* 8, no. 2 (2015): 4 - 23.

⁶ Paul Taggart, "Europeanization, Euroscepticism, and Politicization in Party Politics," in *The Member States of the European Union*, eds. Simon Bulmer and Christian Lequesne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 341-348.

According to the typology in Table 1, the Bulgarian case, especially since the political crisis which started in 2020-2021, falls between the type of constrained contestation on EU issues, and the type of open contestation, with significant parties' Euroscepticism, with the European issue having played a role in determining the party's leadership and the outcome of an election.

In Bulgaria, there is no strategy of containment of the far right or radical populists, such as the *cordon sanitaire* in Belgium, or the *front républicain* in France on behalf of democratic parties. Far right parties in Bulgaria have had great coalition or blackmail potential, and some of them have successfully found their way to national government by ensuring parliamentary majority of the ruling party and thus influencing the policy making process. The party Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB) normalized and institutionalized the radical right actors in parliament and government.⁷ In all three cabinets of Boyko Borissov (2009-2013, 2014-2017, and 2017-2021), radical right parties were either part of the parliamentary majority, or a coalition partner – especially the United Patriots (2017-2021).

However, the BSP has also collaborated with national populists either in its electoral coalitions, or in Parliament. During the short-lived minority government of BSP with the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (2013-2014), the parliamentary majority was ensured by the far-right Attaka party. The local coalition of the BSP and the Left for the 2023 municipal elections in Sofia includes parties like Attaka, the coalition Neutral Bulgaria, and Russophiles for Revival of the Homeland.

In the summer of 2020, a mass citizens protest movement erupted in Sofia and in several cities against corruption, the government of Boyko Borissov and its party Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB), and against the prosecutor general Ivan Geshev. During this protest cycle, a new cleavage structured the party competition: new protest and

⁷ Petia Gueorguieva, "Les Patriotes unis aux rênes du pouvoir" [United Patriots holding the reins of power], *L'Action nationale* CVIII, no. 3 (March 2018): 104-118; Petia Gueorguieva, "La «normalisation» de la droite radicale populiste en Bulgarie après 2009" [The "banalization" of populist radical right in Bulgaria after 2009], in *L'Etat face à ses transformations* [The State in front of transformations], ed. Benjamin Biard (Louvain-La-Neuve: Academia-L'Harmattan, no. 22, 2018), 259-278.

anti-establishment parties *versus* GERB and all established parties which were stigmatized as corrupt and in acting in a cartel. The appearance of several new protest parties challenged the role of BSP as the main opposition to the dominant GERB. The socialists fell into the category of established parties. However, in 2020 the BSP attempted to present itself as a protest party, its MPs left the Parliament and joined the protesters.

The crisis of the party system, marked by fragmentation and polarization, led to five national elections in two years (from April 2021 to April 2023). The Parliament elected in November 2021 managed to form a majority and to support the short-lived government led by the prime minister Kiril Petkov (December 2021 – August 2022), a four-party heterogeneous coalition of anti-GERB parties, including the BSP. The government fell apart when the populist party *There is Such a People!* withdrew from the coalition, as it opposed Kiril Petkov, and – together with the BSP – the French-sponsored EU proposal on resolving the crisis between Bulgaria and North Macedonia, in order to unblock the European integration of the later.

The Russian war against Ukraine significantly impacted domestic politics and has revived the historical divide between pro-Russian and pro-Western parties. The fourth election round held in October 2022, together with the fifth election held in April 2023 revealed a new main cleavage, with the pro-European and pro-NATO parties on one side *versus* the pro-Russian, anti-NATO parties on the other side. The BSP and the far-right party *Vazrazhdane* (Revival) are the main parliamentary parties with pro-Russian positions. The Bulgarian Presidency represents another center of influence. During the unprecedented parliamentary crisis, the Presidency gained in terms of political power and influence. From May 2021 to June 2023, for seventeen months the country was ruled by four different caretaker cabinets, appointed by the President at his discretion and which often operated without any parliamentary supervision. President Roumen Radev, a former general from the Bulgarian Air Force, who repeatedly declared his rejection of any supply of weapons to Ukraine and attacked pro-NATO and pro-EU parties *We continue the change!* and *Democratic Bulgaria* for their full support to Ukraine. Ahead of an early election in April 2023, President Radev declared:

“Let the parties of the war win the elections, let them form a government, let them take responsibility for the decision Bulgarian army to hand over weapons to Ukraine! People who understand absolutely nothing about military affairs are doing everything possible to involve us in the processes of escalation, which they cannot control... I am categorically against sending armaments.”⁸

During his meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in 2023 in Sofia, Radev appealed for a cease-fire, and for a peaceful solution through the means of diplomacy.⁹ Later he affirmed that “Ukraine insists on continuing to fight the war, but the bill has been paid by entire Europe.”¹⁰

In 2023, the socialist party supported the initiative of the far-right party *Vazrazhdane* on the organization of a national referendum against the adoption of the Euro and for the preservation of the Bulgarian Lev until 2043. Furthermore, the BSP started its own initiative in April 2023 for a national referendum against the “gender ideology” with the question:

“Do you support the introduction of a ban on any education, upbringing and propaganda related to the change of gender and the concepts of a gender other than male and female among children and students in the Bulgarian educational system?”¹¹

Among the party’s arguments for holding a referendum are the rejection of any European pressure to ratify the Istanbul Convention; the non-acceptance of “more than 30 genders, preached by gender ideology” and

⁸ “Radev napadna PP i DB: Partiite na voynata purvo da spechelyat izborite,” [Radev attacked We continue the change! and Democratic Bulgaria: let the parties of war win the elections first], *Sega*, February 14, 2023, accessed January 22, 2024, <https://www.segabg.com/hot/category-bulgaria/radev-napadna-pp-i-db-partiite-na-voynata-purvo-da-spechelyat-izborite>.

⁹ Krassen Nikolov, “In Sofia, Ukraine’s Zelenskyy clashes with “peaceful” narrative of Bulgaria’s Radev”, *Euractiv*, July 6, 2023, accessed January 22, 2024, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/in-sofia-ukraines-zelenskyy-clashes-with-peaceful-narrative-of-bulgarias-radev/>

¹⁰ “Radev obvini Ukraina, che nastoyava da vodi voynata, koyato Russia zapochna” [Radev accused Ukraine for institing to fight the war that Russia started], *Svobodna Evropa*, July 14, 2023, accessed January 22, 2024, <https://www.svobodnaevropa.bg/a/radev-voyna-ukrayna-rozhen/32503610.html>.

¹¹ Notification for the establishment of an Initiative Committee for holding a National referendum, National Assembly, April 24, 2023, accessed January 22, 2024, <https://parliament.bg/pub/referendum/305aa937aceac0fcefd1a133eb56b6576d9407c5.pdf>.

the will to protect the family with “a mother and a father and their children – a son and a daughter.”¹² The initiative failed because the signatures collected were below the 400,000 threshold required by the law. It was not the first attempt of the BSP to call a referendum on the topic. In 2018, the party leader Kornelia Ninova provided with the most insistent opposition to the ratification of the Istanbul Convention and threatened to initiate a referendum. The Bulgarian Socialist Party is also the first party to use the mechanism of direct democracy since it was initially regulated by the Direct Citizen Participation in State and Local Government Act, passed in 2009.¹³ The first national referendum held in 2013 was initiated with the support of BSP in favor of the construction of a new nuclear energy plant in Belene with Russian participation. The low voting turnout invalidated the referendum.

From Major Party to the Margins

The Bulgarian Socialist Party appeared as a result of the intraparty referendum held by the Bulgarian Communist Party in April 1990, on changing of the name of the party. The BSP – a successor party –, has struggled since its beginnings to achieve a clear ideological identity, and to adopt a coherent European social-democratic profile. The BSP maintained organizational continuity and blurred ideological orientations. The party preserved a long-lasting cohabitation of different internal ideological factions (including Marxists, Russophiles, leftists, and centrists) until 2001. The party went through a phase of social-democratization, and in 2003 it was accepted in the Socialist International and later in the Party of European Socialists (PES). From 2011 to 2022 the former leader of the BSP and former PM Sergei Stanishev presided over the PES.

The BSP has been spreading attitudes of nostalgia idealizing the communist regime. The party has failed to attract new younger and dynamic “middle classes.”

¹² Notification for the establishment of an Initiative Committee for holding a National referendum, 3.

¹³ Direct Citizens Participation in State and Local Government Act, promulgated SG. no. 44/ June 12, 2009.

Along with its electoral decline, since 2014 the party also faced the competition of a range of radical populist actors from the right, which were successful with their nationalist, anti-establishment and anti-party appeals. Then, instead of reaffirming the values of progressive European socialism, the BSP started abandoning its European face and entered the race from a right-wing populist and nationalistic stance.

Since the 2014 early elections' severe defeat, the BSP choose a turn to the left in terms of social, fiscal, and economic policies. After 2016, this turn was coupled with stances against neo-liberal globalization, against some progressive achievements, with Euroscepticism and reinforced nationalism. Until 2021, the BSP remained one of the main pillars of the party system as the first or second parliamentary political party. This resilience of the BSP contrasts with the failures of the Polish and the Hungarian socialists, and of Czech social-democrats, who did not reach the threshold to enter their countries' parliaments in 2021.

The de-Europeanization of the Bulgarian Socialist Party received a new impetus with the election of a new chairwoman in 2016 - Kornelia Ninova. The party has since implemented changes in mechanisms of intraparty decision making, in its statutes, political positions, relations with intraparty opposition, and all this has led to the coalescence of national-populist and conservative identity in contrast with other party members of the Party of European Socialists. However, the nationalist and conservative turn did not stop the decline of the party or increased the electoral support of the BSP.

The BSP adoption of themes of the radical populist right has not prevented the rise of new national-populist radical right parties. On the contrary, the new course led to an unprecedented crisis for the BSP. The crisis had been unfolding for years but manifested itself during the long electoral year 2021 when three parliamentary elections were held, and the party was reduced from second to fourth political force in the Bulgarian parliament.¹⁴

¹⁴ Antony Todorov, "Elections of Change or Failure?," *Bulgarian Political Science Association*, no. 1-2 (2021): 5-27.

Left and Nationalism

The relationship between the left and nationalism has been a subject of several studies and analysis from different approaches, both from scholars and practitioners.

David Miller points out the various forms of nationalism, and the difficulty in providing a short definition of this concept, nevertheless it is characterized with three core elements. The first element is,

“the idea that the nations are real, that there is something that differentiates people who belong to one nation from those who belong to its neighbors”.¹⁵

The national identity and its essential features can be understood “in terms of common belief in membership or will to belong and for nationalists the features are language, religion, or race.”¹⁶ The second element is related to the ethical significance of nationality.¹⁷ Nationals have a duty to preserve valuable communities and it can involve a personal sacrifice. For one extreme, “the nation as the highest form of ethical life,” while for other extreme is the deny to any significance of the nationality.¹⁸ The third political element of nationalism is based on the idea that a nation should have its own political freedom and institutions. Nationalism differs from patriotism because it places the cultural traits at the core of the definition of national identity – the language, the religion, the national style of arts and music, etc.

Exploring the relationship between the left and nationalism, several studies pointed out that the left wing has allowed the right wing to take the monopoly on national and patriotic issues.¹⁹ The left should:

“confront nationalism seriously both intellectually and politically (...) Nationalist rhetoric has been and still is very powerful on the poor, the unemployed, frustrated

¹⁵ David Miller, “Nationalism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory*, eds. John S. Dryzek, Bonnie Honig and Anne Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 529.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 530.

¹⁸ Ibid., 531.

¹⁹ Maurizio Viroli, *For Love of Country: An Essay on Patriotism and Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 15.

intellectuals, and the declining middle classes. Socially humiliated and disconnected people find in the membership of the nation a new sense of pride, a new dignity."²⁰

That is why the Democratic Left should provide its own answer on issues related to national identity, in a clearly differentiated manner from the way in which these questions are answered by the nationalistic approach.

The main fault of socialism is to have left aside symbolic issues which greatly concern the working classes. The fears and reactions aroused by the evolution of national cultures under the effect of globalization and emigration have been slow to be considered, according to Fabrice d'Almeida.²¹

Massimo d'Almeida has reminded that,

"the fight against poverty, ignorance, social exclusion, precarity and humiliation at work must become again the absolute priority of the reformist Left."²²

Because the left has ceded the ground to the rightwing populism exactly amongst the most vulnerable social groups,

"in this popular world which did not feel protected, who paid the high price of globalization and who found an illusion of protection in the call for protectionism, for hatred against immigrants."²³

Studying the historic relationship between the socialist internationalism and the nationalism, John Schwarzmantel claims that,

"the socialist internationalism can be considered as historically the main challenge to nationalism, being its main rival in the field of political ideologies and in terms of movements inspired by those ideologies."²⁴

²⁰ Viroli, *For Love of Country*, 15.

²¹ Fabrice D'Almeida, "Socialisme et mondialisation" [Socialism and globalization] in *Le socialisme à l'épreuve du capitalisme* [Socialism to the Test of Capitalism] eds. Daniel Cohen and Alain Bergounioux (Paris, Fayard: Fondation Jean Jaurès, 2012), 357.

²² Massimo D'Allema, "L'avenir du socialisme européen" [The Future of European Socialism] in *Le socialisme à l'épreuve du capitalisme*, eds. Daniel Cohen and Alain Bergounioux (Paris, Fayard: Fondation Jean Jaurès, 2012), 375.

²³ D'Allema, "L'avenir du socialisme européen."

Nationalism won over internationalism after the end of the Cold War, but new forms of internationalism developed, such as the “alternative globalization movement,” and a “cosmopolitanism from below.”²⁵

In a brilliant study, Daniele Conversi has analyzed the links of nationalism with the left and the right, particularly in the age of globalization and climate crisis:

“Insofar as nationalism can be defined as a political practice founded on «boundaries building,» the Right becomes the absolute master, the Left a mere apprentice.”²⁶

The dilemma of the left toward nationalism is if there can be a consistent form of leftist nationalism, if the left

“renounce[s] nationalism in the name of cosmopolitical principles (...) that would mean offering the Right the monopoly of the most potent cotemporary ideology of mass mobilization.”²⁷

Furthermore, in the age of Anthropocene and the climate crisis, the left could

“redefine nationalism, depriving it of its anti-plural intolerance and transform it into an inclusive ideology... by accepting that nations are plural entities rather than the monolithic leviathans envisaged by the far Right.”²⁸

It seems that for some Central and Eastern European left parties, there is no such dilemma, because oftentimes the left is associated with nationalism. Dominique Reynié affirms that in the wave of anti-liberalism and populism, only the left-wing populists (nationalist and xenophobe) in Central and Eastern Europe have the odds to succeed over the radical populist right.²⁹

²⁴ John Schwartmantel, “Nationalism and Socialist Internationalism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Nationalism*, ed. John Breuilly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 635.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 651.

²⁶ Daniele Conversi, “The Left and Nationalism: From the French Revolution to the Anthropocene,” in *Research Handbook on Nationalism*, eds. Liah Greenfeld and Zeying Wu (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2020), 40-41.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

²⁹ Dominique Reynié, *Les Nouveaux Populismes* [The New Populisms] (Paris: Pluriel, 2013), 301.

Path Dependence, the Bulgarian Socialist Party, and Nationalism

Bulgarian nationalism is rooted in the pre-state period, and its centrality is on language and religion.³⁰ During the Communist regime, after the death of Stalin, the Bulgarian Communist Party imposed national communism. The policy to rename the ethnic Turks in Bulgaria, launched in 1984, can be assessed as the cumulation (and the biggest miscalculation) of a long-term nationalist line of the Zhivkov regime.³¹ For Maria Todorova,

“nationalism and communism are a line of development until the very end of the 20th century and form what I will call an (almost) continuous nationalist continuum.”³²

Martin Mevius deconstructs the two main myths on the relationship between communism and nationalism – the first, that

“the nationalism and the communism are wholly antagonistic and mutually exclusive; and the second that in communist Eastern Europe, nationalism was oppressed before 1989, to emerge triumphant after the Berlin Wall came down. Communist states of Central and Eastern Europe constructed «socialists patriotism,» a form of loyalty to their own state of workers and peasants.”³³

Valery Bunce argued that the national idea in Eastern Europe has had a strong influence for ending communist regimes and for shaping post-communist political and economic developments.³⁴ “Nationalism has either slowed or facilitated transitions to democracy and capitalism in Central and

³⁰ Maria Todorova, “The Course and Discourses of Bulgarian Nationalism,” in *Eastern European Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Peter F. Sugar (Washington: The American University Press, 1995), 55-102.

³¹ Todorova, “The Course and Discourses of Bulgarian Nationalism,” 97.

³² Maria Todorova, “Etnos, Natzionalizan I komunisticheskoto nasledstvo v Iztochna Evropa” [Ethnicity, Nationalism and Communist Legacy in Eastern Europe], *Liberalen Pregled*, February 25, 2013, accessed April 4, 2022, <https://www.librev.com/index.php/discussion/bulgaria/1962-2013-03-29-10-47-42>.

³³ Martin Mevius, “Reapprising Communism and Nationalism,” *Nationalities Papers* 37, no. 4 (July 2009): 377-400, translated in Bulgarian [“Komunizum i natzionalizum”], *Liberalen Pregled*, July 24, 2013, accessed April 5, 2022, <https://www.librev.com/index.php/prospects/science/2122-2013-07-24-20-21-08>.

³⁴ Valerie Bunce, “The National Idea: Imperial Legacies and Post-Communist Pathways in Eastern Europe,” *East European Politics and Societies* 19, no. 3 (2005): 407.

Eastern European countries."³⁵ Bunce has defined the nation as "political community united by a common culture," and nationalism as a "political project motivated by popular sovereignty, freedom and equality of rights."³⁶

Herbet Kitschelt defined the Bulgarian communist regime as a "patrimonial communism" – a system organized on

"hierarchical chains of personal dependence between leaders in the apparatus and their entourage, buttressed by extensive patronage and clientelist networks. Opposition is severely repressed or coopted [...]."³⁷

The outcome of this type of patrimonial communism is a left-oriented (successor) party carrying economic populism, nationalism, authoritarianism, lenient decommunization, and a certain hostility to democratization.³⁸ John Ishiyama has underlined the place of nationalism in countries like Bulgaria, Romania, and Russia, where the red-brown vote was far more sizeable than in Central Europe.³⁹ According to him, extreme right voters supported the successor parties at the beginning because they were well organized and because of the nostalgia to the communist regime. He did forecast that,

"if bona fide leftist socialist party were to emerge that vehemently opposed Europeanization, immigration and capitalism, it is likely that this might mobilize the red-brown impulse again" [because] "the support for statism, socialism and nationalism is likely to remain an important part of the political scene in post-communist politics."⁴⁰

The Bulgarian Socialist Party and Nationalism

The analysis of the Bulgarian Socialist Party's expression of nationalism since Bulgaria's accession to the EU is based on three fundamental

³⁵ Bunce, *The National Idea*, 408.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 409.

³⁷ Herbert Kitschelt, "Formation of Party Cleavages in Post-Communist Democracies: Theoretical Propositions," *Party Politics* 1, no. 4 (1995): 453.

³⁸ Kitschelt, "Formation of Party Cleavages in Post-Communist Democracies," 465-467.

³⁹ John Ishiyama, "Historical Legacies and the size of the red-brown vote in post-communist politics," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 42 (2009): 499.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 501.

documents adopted by the party in different periods, under different leaders: the party's program "For Bulgaria – Free Citizens; Fair State; Solidary society" from 2008; the Political Declaration "Time for Justice!" which marked the attempt for a left turn in 2015; and the document "Vision for Bulgaria" from 2019.⁴¹ We will try to explore the connections between the left, international cooperation, and nationalism.

The way in which the BSP labels its electoral coalitions is illustrative of the inclusion of the EU or the national state. The *social-democratization* of the party in 2001 matched its coalition format, called New Left, which assembled the historic Social-Democratic party and other social-democratic formations. Usually, the coalitions are named "Coalition for Bulgaria," "Left Bulgaria," "BSP for Bulgaria." Only in 2007, for the first (partial) elections of Bulgarian MEPs to the European Parliament, the coalition's name referred to the European level – PES (Platform European Socialists – BSP, and Party "Movement for Social Humanism"). Antony Todorov underlines that the change of the names of the BSP's electoral coalitions bears specific messages putting the accent on "European," on the nation state "Bulgaria," or on the "Left."⁴² In 2021, the BSP's "Coalition For Bulgaria" has nationalist and patriotic accent, and it includes one of the three marginal Communist parties; the nationalist formation *Nova Zora* (*New Dawn*); the political club *Ecoglasnost* (center-left) and the political club *Trakia* (a nationalist and patriotic organization). Until 2017, the BSP's coalitions included nine small communist and social-democratic organizations that have been since excluded.

⁴¹ Programa na BSP "Za Bulgaria - Svobodni grazhdani; Spravedлива darjava; Solidarno občestvo" [For Bulgaria - Free Citizens; Fair State; Solidary Society], adopted by the decision of the Forty-seventh congress of BSP, November 22-23, 2008, accessed April 2, 2022, https://bsp.bg/documents/osnovni_dokumenti.html; Politicheska deklaracija na BSP "Vreme za spravedlivost!" [Political declaration of BSP "Time for Justice!"], adopted by the decision of the Forty-eighth congress of BSP, April 5, 2015, BSP.bg, accessed March 30, 2022, <https://bsp.bg/files/attachments/2015/07/31/deklaracija-sled-kongres.pdf>; "BSP. Vizija za Bulgaria 2019" [BSP. Vision for Bulgaria 2019], adopted by the decision of the Forty-ninth congress of BSP, January 26, 2019, accessed April 5, 2022, https://bsp.bg/files/vizia_za_bulgaria.pdf.

⁴² Todorov, "Elections of Change or Failure?," 7.

The Bulgarian Socialist Party's European Moment

The Prime Minister and leader of the BSP Sergey Stanishev declared at the conference of the party organization of district Vazrazhdane in Sofia, on November 8, 2008, that the European integration of the country:

“[...] was a historical task for the BSP and we should be proud that our party has been in power when this goal was achieved and which was the fundamental horizon for the years of the Bulgarian transition(..) The membership in the EU, that we achieved, is a historical success not only for Bulgaria but also for the Bulgarian Socialist Party.”⁴³

The New Program of the BSP “For Bulgaria. Free Citizens. Just State. Solidary Society,” was adopted at the Forty-Seventh Congress (November 22-23, 2008). The program stated that:

“The BSP has more than 100 years of history and it is the successor of the Bulgarian Social-democratic Party created in 1891 [...]. The most invaluable in the long party's history is the defense of the interests of the large popular masses, of the principles of the social justice and of solidarity, equality, republicanism, patriotism, and internationalism.”⁴⁴

The document defines BSP as a patriotic, mass party, a left social party of democratic socialism and calls for a new kind of internationalism. Patriotism is defined as:

“our priority is to stand up for the sovereignty and for territorial integrity of the Bulgarian state; to fight for the conservation and the popularization of the Bulgarian cultural and historical legacy, and for the affirmation of the Bulgarian identity and its development. The chauvinism and all forms of national haughtiness and xenophobia are strange to the BSP.”⁴⁵

⁴³ Sergey Stanishev, “Ima kakvo da dadem na Bulgaria” [We have something to give to Bulgaria], speech at the conference of BSP district's organization in Sofia, November 8, 2008, *Savremeneni pokazatel*, Sofia: Informative publication of the Supreme Council of the BSP, no. 19, November 10, 2008, accessed March 31, 2022, <https://bsp.bg/files/savremeneni-pokazatel/bsp-noemvri.pdf>.

⁴⁴ Programa na BSP “Za Bulgaria - Svobodni grazhdani; Spravedлива darjava; Solidarno obchtestvo” [For Bulgaria – Free Citizens; Just State; Solidary Society], 4.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

As a mass party,

“the BSP gathers the socialists from all social strata regardless of their educational and property status, gender, ethnicity, and faith. The BSP is a part of the European and the World Left [...] The global challenges require a global solidarity, and a new kind of internationalism.”⁴⁶

The BSP is a member of the Socialist International and of the PES – “an irrevocable prerequisite to the success of our fight for social justice and prosperity.”⁴⁷

Looking to the Left

The party’s left turn is visible in its electoral platform ahead of the European elections in 2014 “For a Social Europe! For a Social Bulgaria!”⁴⁸ The document is pro-European and stands for a progressive and social European Union. Mihail Mikov has been elected as a chairman of the BSP at the Forty-Eighth party Congress in July 2014, after the resignation of Sergey Stanishev which came as a result of the party’s defeat at the elections to the EU Parliament. Under the leadership of Mikov, the party declared a Left turn.

The Political Declaration “Time for Justice!” adopted by the Forty-Eighth Congress on April 5, 2015, put the accent against the neo-liberal globalization, and on concerns about the nation and the national identity:

“We need to defend our national interests from neo-liberal financial, economic, and political dictates. We cannot be resigned to the wild capitalism, and to the deleterious neoliberal course of the government, when in Europe the dissatisfaction and the resistance against them are rising. We are against the division in Europe. We are for an EU which actively overcomes economic and social inequalities. Together with the parties of the European socialist family we are fighting for an EU which ensures sustainable employment and justice.”⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Programa na BSP “Za Bulgaria – Svobodni grazhdani; Spravedлива darjava; Solidarno obchestvo,” 5-6.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁸ BSP. Electoral Platform “For a Social Europe,” BSP.bg, European Elections 2014, adopted by the decision of the Forty-eighth congress of BSP, February 8, 2014, accessed January 22, 2024, https://bsp.bg/documents/resheniq_kongresi.html.

⁴⁹ BSP political declaration “Time for Justice,” 3.

The formal signs of Euroscepticism appear in this document:

“Our socialist values are obliging us to defend the national priorities of Bulgaria and to stand up for the interests of Bulgarian citizens and their rights.”⁵⁰

The BSP denounces some perceived injustices stemming from the EU:

“We insist for equal conditions for the Bulgarian producers [...] We are against the economic dumping inside the EU at the expense for Bulgarian producers. [...] We stand for a just redistribution of the EU funds without divisions on center and periphery in the EU, for their effective investment in favor of more citizens.”⁵¹

The BSP opposes the signature of the Treaty of Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). The document calls also for

“The spiritual revival which requires the mobilization of the intellectual potential of the nation. Only educated and spiritually enlightened citizens can preserve the Bulgarian cultural identity, the patriotism, and the love for homeland. They will restore the national self-confidence and the dignity of Bulgarian people not only on its history and the past but also of the present.”⁵²

All this is necessary to consolidate the statehood, and “to conserve the Bulgarian nation in the name of the progress of Bulgaria!”⁵³

...And to National Populism and Euroscepticism

The Forty-Ninth Congress of the Bulgarian Socialist Party, held in May 2016, elected a new party leader – Mrs. Kornelia Ninova. The new chairwoman successfully managed to marginalize or to oust opponents, social-democrats, or the pro-Europeans from high-ranking positions in the party. New elites took over the organization with a new line – conservative, nationalist, Eurosceptic. The BSP since 2016 has neither been leftist, nor European or progressive. In 2017, a new direction of action has been outlined by

⁵⁰ BSP political declaration “Time for Justice,” 3.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 4.

⁵³ BSP political declaration “Time for Justice.”

Ninova – against the government of the party GERB, against its corruption and its “authoritarian style.”⁵⁴ She tried to reposition the BSP as a protest anti-establishment populist party. She launched the concept of the “parallel state” of the corrupt elites against the people; she positioned the political organization against the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA).⁵⁵ The BSP opposes “the People” to the government of the GERB and CETA; “the People” to the government of GERB, and then to the integration of refugees. The party has also been against the EU sanctions on Russia, imposed after the annexation of Crimea.

The migrant crisis in 2015 fueled xenophobic tendencies in the Bulgarian society, and the BSP was not keen on accepting refugees. The BSP formulated a vision for a “social state” only for nationals. Ninova has been against policies of integration of refugees and has criticized the Decision of the Council of ministers for the integration of refugees, under the argument that it would not be fair for the Bulgarian state to ensure for refugees’ health insurance, free accommodation, and rights that are not ensured for its own citizens. Dominique Reynié defines the concept of “patrimonial populism,” characterized by positions against taxes, political conservatism, cultural liberalism, individualism, identity secularism, and targeting immigrants as the main scapegoat for negative effects on the nationals.⁵⁶ In his analysis, Emmanuel Dalle Mulle defines the concept of “welfare chauvinism,” which is

“a conditional conception of solidarity primarily based on the deservingness criterion of identity. It is more vulgarly expressed by the expression «our own people first.”⁵⁷

In the case of poor countries, like Bulgaria, the ethnic approach to social transfers and conception of solidarity can be seen as a form of a “poor’s

⁵⁴ Speech of the president of the BSP, Kornelia Ninova, at the Forty-ninth Congress of the party, March 6, 2017, accessed January 22, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EZFepdm-tFM>.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Reynié, *Les Nouveaux Populismes*, 298-299.

⁵⁷ Emmanuel Dalle Mulle, “The Nationalism of the Rich,” in *Research Handbook on Nationalism*, eds. Liah Greenfeld and Zeying Wu (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2020), 234.

nationalism” towards other vulnerable people, who are perceived as a threat for the ethnic nationals, the *other*, ethnically different from the major ethnic or national group.

Also, the BSP started to criticize the failure of the democratic transition and to boost nostalgia for the Communist regime. The Political declaration made on the Forty-ninth congress of the party, “Contemporaries of the future. 125 years BSP,” affirms that:

“During these decades (of the communist regime), despite the dogmatic decisions and acts of violence in the first years, the country reached a comprehensive economic and spiritual development, industrialization, and modernization of production. It succeeded in state building, in the social sphere, health, education, science, culture, and sports. It ensured the parity between men and women. Bulgaria reached its place among the first thirty nations in the world in its economic and human development. That is why even after the dramatic fall of the state socialism in Eastern Europe the BSP has survived.”⁵⁸

On the contrary,

“the transition failed because it did not guide Bulgaria to a higher level of social economic and spiritual development or to a better life for a majority of people.”⁵⁹

The BSP proclaims itself a party of the Bulgarian statehood, which defends the republican and the constitutional government, the Bulgarian history and culture, and which preserves “the Slavonic and orthodox roots of the Bulgarian nation.”⁶⁰

The Forty-Ninth congress of the BSP approved in October 2017 a declaration “On the Bulgarian politics and the Left alternative for Bulgaria,” and a political vision statement titled “More Social Europe – in the interest of the people.” The BSP’s electoral platform started to promote protectionism, and patriotism regarding the country’s economic production. The same year, it proposed a bill aimed to

⁵⁸ Political declaration of BSP, “Contemporaries of the future. 125 years BSP,” BSP.bg, adopted by the decision of the Forty-ninth congress of BSP, May 8, 2016, accessed January 23, 2024, https://bsp.bg/documents/resheniq_kongresi.html: 2-3.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

“guarantee the interest of Bulgarian farmers on the Bulgarian market, the introduction of new requirements for the usage of the label «Bulgarian» for products, the reduction of deadlines of the payments for perishable products.”⁶¹

The bill of the socialists proposed to sanction the supermarkets that would not respect the requirement to hand over up to ten per cent of their annual turnover for assistance to the local agricultural production. The bill would have violated the European freedom of movement of goods and competition, and it was rejected.

The Bulgarian Socialist Party’s ambivalent positions toward the EU can be defined as a soft Euroscepticism. The party is Eurosceptic on some European issues, and is pro-European on other issues, but fundamentally the BSP does not question the integration of the country in the EU or the European values.

The next document analyzed, “Vision for Bulgaria 2019,” is a comprehensive program for the development of Bulgaria, elaborated by experts, debated by the grassroots party members, and approved by the party national leadership. We will point out only the relevant parts related to nationalism.

In what regards the severe demographic crisis in Bulgaria, the document states that,

“The ethnic trends in the natality cannot and should not be underestimated. Knowing the condition of life of some ethnic communities, the policy for the improvement of the child wellbeing should not ignore the need for a comprehensive and sustainable integration of Roma in the Bulgarian society.”⁶²

On emigration issues, the document states that it is in the “defense of the national interests to determine the educated Bulgarians of active age to return back to the country, and to attract ethnic Bulgarians abroad.”⁶³

The BSP opposes the Pact on migration and the acceptance of refugees:

⁶¹ Bill for amendment and complement of the Foods Act N 754-01-7, submitted on May 18, 2017, by Kornelia Ninova and MPs, accessed January 22, 2024, <https://parliament.bg/en/plenaryst/ns/55/ID/5964>.

⁶² BSP “Vision for Bulgaria,” 6.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 10.

“The Bulgarian Socialists affirm categorically that the migration [issue] needs an encompassing European solution. This is only possible based on the international law on refugees and asylum seekers, which distinguishes refugees from economic migrants. The adoption of the Global Pact on migration poses significant contradictions and problems. We do not want Bulgaria and Europe to live in fear of migrant invasion.”⁶⁴

The document appeals for a clear defense of national interests at the international level and exemplifies the BSP’s categoric opposition against the Istanbul Convention and the Pact on migration of the UN, and mentions that the support for these international agreements was withdrawn under social and political pressure.”⁶⁵

In November 2018, party leader Ninova required explanations from the party in government, GERB, asking when and how the Global Pact on migration had been approved by Bulgaria, and protesting that it was against “the national interests.”⁶⁶

In a Position of the National Council of the BSP on the Resolution of the European Parliament on October 8, 2020, concerning the principles of the Rule of law and the fundamental rights in Bulgaria (adopted on October 11, 2020), the party rejected some positions of the European Parliament regarding Bulgaria and declared as inadmissible the

“calls of the European Parliament for the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, because of the decision of the [Bulgarian] Constitutional Court that the Istanbul Convention contradicts the Constitution and could not be ratified by the National Assembly and based on the official position of the BSP in the National Assembly in 2018 on not supporting the convention.”⁶⁷

The cultural nationalism and the expression of patriotism of BSP switched to national populist positions. On the issues of welfare state and social

⁶⁴ BSP “Vision for Bulgaria,” 35.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁶⁶ National Assembly of Republic of Bulgaria. Kormelia Ninova’s speech on the Global Pact on migration, Transcripts of the 195th Plenary session of the NA, November 9, 2018, accessed January 23, 2024, <https://www.parliament.bg/bg/plenaryst/ns/55/ID/6509>.

⁶⁷ Position of the National Council of the BSP on the resolution of the European Parliament from October 8, 2020, concerning the principles of the Rule of law and the fundamental rights in Bulgaria, issued October 11, 2020, BSP.bg, accessed April 4, 2022, https://bsp.bg/documents/resheniq_nacionalen_syvet.html.

policies, the BSP gives priority to the poor ethnic nationals. To some degree, the BSP is very close to the national radical right: it is against refugees, and it opposes the Istanbul convention. An important historical element of the BSP's patriotism is its pro-Russian stance.

The Bulgarian Socialist Party and the War Against Ukraine

The Bulgarian Socialist Party opposes sanctions against Russia. The slogan of the socialist mobilization can be defined as follows: "With the EU, but never against Russia." The Bulgarian socialists have always been pro-Russian, and several of the party's officials have promoted Russian interest, particularly the energy quasi-monopoly in Bulgaria. The "Movement of Russophiles" was a part of the party. The BSP was strongly opposed to NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999. The former Bulgarian President Gueorgui Parvanov (2002-2012), and former leader of BSP, has supported the country's integration in NATO despite the strong opposition inside the party. Later, Parvanov very actively promoted the Russian energy mega-projects in the Balkan region which failed. In fact, it was Boiko Borissov and GERB who accomplished the Russian "Turkish Stream."

Table 4 reflects the geopolitical preferences of the supporters of parliamentary parties. It is evident that the BSP supporters are the most favorable to an alliance with Russia, while those of *Vazrazhdane* are less supportive to an alliance with NATO and EU. The most pro-EU and NATO are the supporters of Democratic Bulgaria and "We Continue the Change!" The less pro-Russian are the supporters of Democratic Bulgaria, GERB, "There is Such a People!" and "We Continue the Change!".

The BSP's document "Vision for Bulgaria 2019" declares that:

"Our membership in NATO remains at the center of our defense policy. Our country will continue to be an active and predictable member of the Alliance... Bulgaria will continue to work for the development of the European common defense policy."⁶⁸

However, two phases can be distinguished regarding positions of BSP related to the country's foreign policy in relation with the Russian war

⁶⁸ BSP "Vision for Bulgaria 2019," 32.

against Ukraine. The first phase covers the period when the BSP returned to power, as a part of the coalition government of Kiril Petkov (December 2021 – August 2022). During this period, the socialists managed to block any decisive action for military aid to Ukraine. However, the BSP had acceded to governmental power for the first time since 2014 and being part of the government was a factor moderating its stances.

The second phase started with the end of Petkov's government and the return of the BSP in opposition. The party was in isolation and without a real potential to block decisions on foreign policy issues. The socialists continued to lose electoral support in the two early elections in October 2022 and April 2023, and they hardened their positions against all pro-NATO and anti-Russian parties and decisions. The BSP designated these parties "the coalition of the war."⁶⁹ The BSP's positions can be summed up as follows: (1) The BSP is opposed to sanctions against Russia; (2) The BSP is opposed to any supply of military aid insinuating that it would directly involve Bulgaria in the war. This is presented also as a "principled position" because the BSP is a party for peace and against war; (3) The BSP's vision for Bulgaria is as a mediator to end the war; (4) The BSP is not openly opposed to NATO, but in fact it has been opposing all actions of fulfilment of Bulgarian duties as a NATO member.

On February 22, 2022, the BSP Parliamentary group issued a declaration calling for direct negotiations on the conflict in Ukraine under the leadership of the UN.⁷⁰ For the socialists, the recognition of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics by the Russian Federation is a violation of international law. During the BSP's participation in the coalition government of Kiril Petkov (December 2021 – August 2022), the party supported some Ukraine aid actions but formally rejected others. The BSP voted for the Declaration of the National Assembly on February 23, 2022, condemning Russia. In May 2022, the party made it clear that it would not support any supply of armaments to Ukraine. Later, the BSP opposed all decisions for military aid to Ukraine.

⁶⁹ Borislav Goutsanov, "We continue the Change!, Democratic Bulgaria and GERB are the coalition of the war," BSP.bg, March 8, 2023, accessed August 20, 2023, https://bsp.bg/news/view/24023borislav_goutsanov__pp_db_i_gerb_sa_koalitsiya_na_voynata.html.

⁷⁰ "BSP appeals to direct negotiations on the conflict in Ukraine under the lead of UN," BSP.bg, February 22, 2022, accessed August 11, 2023, https://bsp.bg/news/view/21783-bsp_prizovava_za_preki_pregovori_za_konflikta_v_ukrayna_pod_egidata_na_oon.html.

This position is based on the supposed effects of the war on the Bulgarian economy.

“BSP condemns the military actions in Ukraine. We also condemn the violation of the principles of international law...but the parliamentary group of «BSP for Bulgaria» did not support the introduction of sanctions against Russia.”⁷¹

Among the arguments against the sanctions is that these sanctions would harm small countries like Bulgaria which would pay the price, not the big economies.

“The purpose of the sanctions was to weaken the Russian economy (...) The only and the biggest loser from these sanctions is the European Union, including Bulgaria.”⁷²

As a coalition partner of “We Continue the Change!” on March 1, 2022, the BSP supported the decision of the PM Kiril Petkov who required the resignation of the minister of Defense Stefan Yanev as he refused to use the term “war” and referred to Russian invasion as a “special operation.”⁷³

Another argument against any military aid has been that this will directly involve Bulgaria in the war. Kornelia Ninova stated that:

“Categorically and firmly, the coalition’ partner «BSP for Bulgaria» with all the means at our disposal – legal, parliamentary, executive power, will not allow Bulgaria to be involved in the war through the supply of weapons, ammunition and dual-use goods and technologies.”⁷⁴

⁷¹ Alexander Simov, “BSP: We condemn the military actions, but we don’t support sanctions against Russia,” BSP.bg, February 24, 2022, accessed January 23, 2024, https://bsp.bg/news/view/21800aleksandyr_simov_bsp_osyjdame_voennite_deystviya_no_ne_podkrepyame_sanktsii_sreshtu_rusiya.html.

⁷² “BSP: The EU including Bulgaria are the only loser from the sanctions against Russia,” BSP.bg, May 5, 2023, accessed January 23, 2024, https://bsp.bg/news/view/24466-bsp_edinstveniyat_i_golyam_gubeshht_ot_sanktsiite_sreshtu_rusiya_e_es_v_tova_chislo_i_bylgariya.html.

⁷³ “Prime minister Petkov demands resignation of Bulgaria’s defence minister,” BNR.bg, February 28, 2022, accessed January 23, 2024, <https://bnr.bg/en/post/101608233/prime-minister-petkov-demands-resignation-of-bulgaria-s-defence-minister>.

⁷⁴ Kornelia Ninova, “BSP won’t allow Bulgaria to be involved in the war,” BSP.bg, April 1, 2022, accessed January 23, 2024, https://bsp.bg/news/view/21966-korneliya_ninova_bsp_nyama_da_pozvoli_na_bylgariya_da_byde_namesena_vyv_voynata_chrez_dost_avka_na_oryjiya.html.

This was defined as a “red line” for the party’s participation in the government of Petkov. Kristian Vigenin declared that,

“[the] BSP has principles and would not compromise them. There are red lines beyond which we will not cross - any aid to Ukraine will receive our full support, but weapons will not.”⁷⁵

The refusal to support Ukraine with armaments is presented also as a principled party’s position. According to Ninova,

“the issue of arms exports to Ukraine has been posed as a civilizational choice. For us – «BSP for Bulgaria,» the peace is the highest civilizational value. We are a party for peace. Our view is that this conflict must be ended, negotiated, hostilities stopped, and a peaceful solution sought.”⁷⁶

At the same time, however, the BSP is not opposed to NATO:

“The BSP has always treated Bulgaria’s membership in the European Union and NATO with respect. It was our president who signed our NATO accession treaty. We should be a consistent and loyal member of the Pact but let’s not be overly aggressive about armaments when it is not required by the documents we signed.”⁷⁷

However, on March 11, 2022, the BSP’s ministers in Petkov’s cabinet did not vote to allow eight Dutch fighter jets to protect the Bulgarian airspace in the framework of the NATO Air Policing mission.

The ambivalence of the socialists as a partner in Petkov’s government was also visible in May 2022 when they voted for the proposal of “We Continue the Change!” on the “Decision to Take Action in Relation to the War in Ukraine” (State Gazette, 35, May 10, 2022).⁷⁸ The Decision

⁷⁵ Kristian Vigenin, “BSP niama da napravi kompromisi s principite si” [BSP will not compromise with its principles], BSP.bg, March 1, 2022, accessed August 14, 2023, https://bsp.bg/news/view/21821kristian_vigenin__bsp_nyama_da_napravi_kompromis_s_printsipite_si.html.

⁷⁶ Kornelia Ninova, “BSP e partiya na mira” [BSP is a party of peace], BSP.bg, November 3, 2022, accessed January 22, 2024, https://bsp.bg/news/view/23415-korneliya_ninova__bsp_e_partiya_na_mira.html.

⁷⁷ Borislav Goutsanov, “BSP’s Position is ‘no’ to the war and ‘no’ to the participation in the war,” BSP.bg, May 4, 2022, accessed January 22, 2024, https://bsp.bg/news/view/22182-borislav_goutsanov__pozitsiyata_na_bsp_e_ne_na_voynata_i_ne_na_uchastieto_v_neya.html

⁷⁸ “Decision to Take Action in Relation to the War in Ukraine,” adopted by the National Assembly, May 5, 2022, 2.

gave a mandate to the Council of Ministers to implement a package of measures related to the war in Ukraine and its consequences by providing humanitarian, financial and *military-technical* assistance to Ukraine. Also, while Ninova declared that Bulgaria was not exporting weapons, ammunition or dual-use goods and technologies to Ukraine, some media started revealing that Bulgaria is exporting weapons to Ukraine, indirectly through third countries Poland and Romania since the beginning of the war.⁷⁹

On June 27, 2022, PM Kiril Petkov decided to expel seventy Russian diplomats and Russian Embassy staff members.⁸⁰ The BSP strongly opposed the decision.

In face of electoral downturn from one election to another, the BSP leadership has been further hardening stances against military aid. After the early election in October 2022, the “BSP for Bulgaria” announced four priorities including “guaranteeing the peace to Bulgarian people and the preservation of his dignity.”⁸¹

⁷⁹ Kornelia Ninova, “BSP nyama da pozvoli Bulgaria da byde namesenavuv vojnata chrez dostavka na orujiya” [BSP won’t allow Bulgaria to be involved in the war because of the supply of armaments], BSP.bg, April 1, 2022, accessed January 22, 2024, https://bsp.bg/news/view/21966korneliya_ninova__bsp_nyama_da_pozvoli_na_bylgariya_da_byde_namesena_vyv_voynata_chrez_dostavka_na_oryjiya.html; Nikolay Marchenko, “Sofia secretly selling old weapons meant for Ukraine via Romania and Poland,” Bivol, July 19, 2022, accessed January 22, 2024, <https://bivol.bg/en/sofia-secretly-selling-old-weapons-meant-for-ukraine-via-romania-and-poland.html>; Philip Volkmann-Schluck, Welt “Bulgaria to the rescue: How the EU’s poorest country secretly saved Ukraine,” Politico, January 18, 2023, accessed January 22, 2024, <https://www.politico.eu/article/bulgaria-volodymyr-zelensky-kiril-petkov-poorest-country-eu-ukraine/>; John Henley “Bulgaria secretly supplied Ukraine fuel and ammunition in early months of war,” The Guardian, January 18, 2023, accessed January 22, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/18/bulgaria-secretly-supplied-ukraine-fuel-ammunition-first-months-war-russia>.

⁸⁰ Tsvetlina Tsolova, “Bulgaria expels 70 Russian diplomatic staff over espionage concerns,” Reuters, June 28, 2022, accessed January 22, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/bulgaria-expels-70-russian-diplomatic-staff-over-espionage-concerns-2022-06-28/>.

⁸¹ “Ninova: Imame chetiri prioriteta: blagosystoyanie, razvitie na ikonomikata, borba s koruptsiyata i mir” [Ninova: We have four priorities: welfare, development of economics, faith against corruption and peace’], BSP.bg, October 19, 2022, accessed January 22, 2024, https://bsp.bg/news/view/23329-ninova__imame_chetiri_prioriteta__blagosystoyanie__razvitie_na_ikonomikata_borba_s_koruptsiyata_i_mir.html.

“We believe that the peace is the highest human good. We have condemned Russia’s aggression in Ukraine. We have helped the Ukrainian refugees...but the provision of weapons from Bulgaria to Ukraine means involving the country in the war.”⁸²

The party rejected several parliamentary decisions: for the supply of military help to Ukraine passed in November 2022; the Declaration in support of Ukraine’s accession to NATO; the visit of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Sofia on July 6, 2023; the parliamentary “Decision for additional provision of military-technical support to Ukraine,” adopted on July 21, 2023, declaring that Bulgaria

“will provide Ukraine with armored transport equipment with its available armament, as well as spare parts for its service, with no longer needed for the needs of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.”⁸³

The BSP warned on November 3, 2022, that:

“a coalition of the war which sooner or later will bring a heavy political cost to all... We from the BSP say: “NO to war, YES to peace!”⁸⁴

The so-called “coalition of the war” included all parties supporting military aid to Ukraine: GERB, the Movement for Rights and Freedoms DPS, Democratic Bulgaria, “We Continue the Change!,” and “Bulgarian Ascent.”⁸⁵ The MPs from “BSP for Bulgaria” raised placards reading “No to guns! Peace!” in the plenary hall, on November 3, 2022, when the Parliament

⁸² “Ninova: Iame chetiri prioriteta: blagosystoyanie, razvitie na ikonomikata, borba s koruptsiyata i mir.”

⁸³ Decision for additional provision of military-technical support to Ukraine,” adopted by the decision of the Forty-ninth National Assembly on July 21, 2023 (SG 63/2023), Parliament.bg, accessed August 28, 2023, <https://dv.parliament.bg/DVWeb/showMaterialDV.jsp?idMat=197060>.

⁸⁴ Kristian Vigenin, “BSP: Delivery of military aid to Ukraine is irresponsible and the people will pay the price,” BSP.bg, November 3, 2022, accessed January 22, 2024, https://bsp.bg/news/view/23413-kristian_vigenin_bsp_predostavyaneto_na_voenna_pomosht_na_ukrayna_e_bezotgovornost_tsenata_na_koyato_shte_plashtat_horata.html.

⁸⁵ Kornelia Ninova, “The supply of weapons to Ukraine is a risk for the involvement of Bulgaria in the war,” BSP.bg, December 9, 2022, accessed August 28, 2023, https://bsp.bg/news/view/23587-korneliya_ninova_predostavyaneto_na_oryjie_e_risk_za_vyvlichane_na_bylgariya_kato_strana_vyv_voynata.html.

approved weapons export to Ukraine. The decision was supported by 175 deputies from all parliamentary groups excluding the MPs from Vazrazhdane and BSP who voted against it.

The BSP Electoral platform for 2023, "PEACE. Prosperity, Solidarity, Progress" highlights that the party "puts at the first place our national interests," and that it is standing for "a world without wars."⁸⁶ In foreign policy, the goal is "the defense of Bulgarian national interests and the guarantee of favorable external conditions for the development of the country."⁸⁷ This includes:

"the assertion of possibilities for international political dialogue and diplomatic efforts to end the war in Ukraine;" "the opposition to politics of sanctions and countersanctions from which suffer citizens;" the "categoric opposition to actions which could involve Bulgaria into the military conflict."⁸⁸

Also, the BSP is against "the tendencies of militarization of the Black Sea."⁸⁹ The party is for the normalization of diplomatic relations and maintenance of constructive dialogue with the Russian Federation.

The BSP opposes the decision of the new coalition government "We Continue the Change!" – *Democratic Bulgaria* with GERB –, formed on June 6, 2023, led by PM Nikolay Denkov for joining the EU initiative to provide a million ammunition shells to Ukraine, funded through the European Peace Initiative.

The BSP, along with *Vazrazhdane*, and President Roumen Radev, form the camp opposed to anti-Russian forces and actions. The three share and diffuse similar stances and messages to Bulgarian citizens even though they differ in degree and communication styles.

Since 2014, the BSP has shifted to leftist positions coupled with nationalism and populism in a conservative direction. The BSP's relations with nationalism are pragmatic and fluctuant: the party became pro-European in the name of the "national interest," then developed international

⁸⁶ BSP Electoral Platform 2023 "PEACE. Prosperity, Solidarity, Progress," BSP.bg, accessed August 28, 2023, https://bsp.bg/predizborna_platforma.html.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

cooperation in order to work for the “national interest.” Later, its Euroscepticism is explained again by defending the same “national interest.” The BSP is opposed to neo-liberal globalization, and it has rejected the TTIP and CETA, but stands for the deepening of the European integration in several fields including common defense. The conception of the national interest for the BSP includes good relations with Russia, China, India, and other countries. Further consolidation of Euroscepticism and the illiberal stances of the BSP, in case of new electoral upswing, could impact the country’s place among its partners in the EU and NATO, distancing it from the West and approaching it to the East. Another scenario leads to the marginalization or the disappearance of the party. Finally, the continued decline of BSP did not open a window of opportunity for the appearance of a new modern and progressive left political actor in Bulgaria. As during the two first decades since the fall of the communist regime, the resilience of the BSP continues to be a hurdle to the appearance of any new strong left party. Therefore, the party system suffers from an asymmetry abandoning progressive leftwing voters, not allowing them real representation.

Table 1

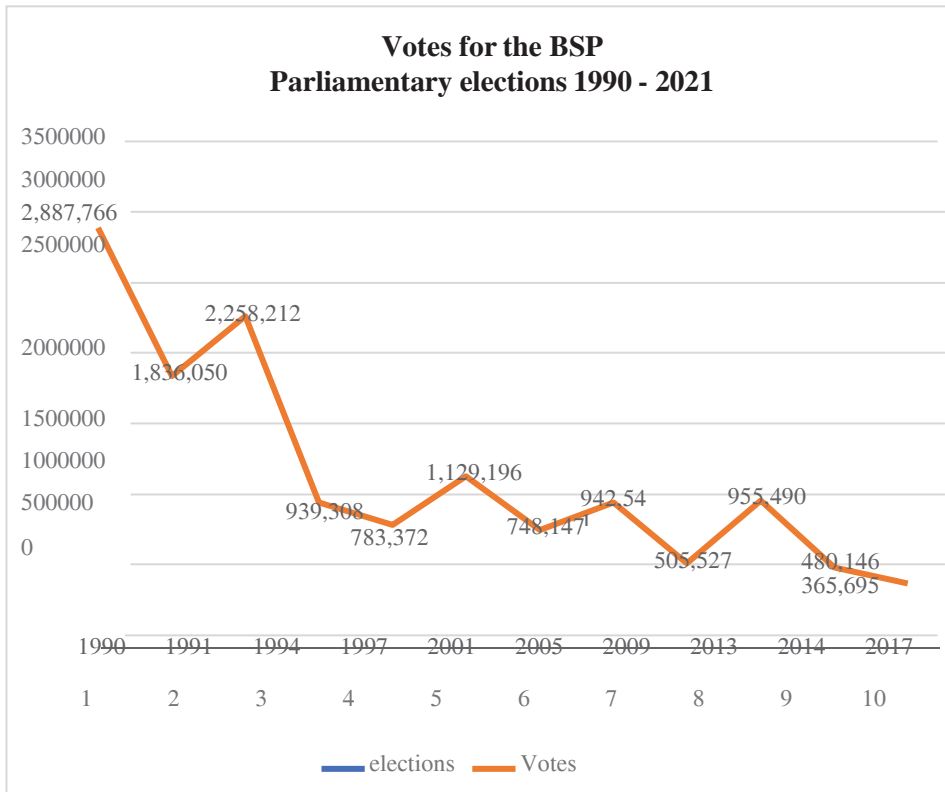
Party Euroscepticism: issues, criteria of assessment and types of party competition

Issues of Euroscepticism	Euroscepticism's significance – assessment criteria	Types of party system competition, related to the European issue
Economic crisis	Eurosceptic party's participation in government	Limited contestation: absence of significant parties expressing Euroscepticism. No competition on European issues. No significant effect on party's leadership or elections' outcome
Immigration crisis	Conflict over a European issue significantly determines the leadership of a major party	Constrained contestation: Euroscepticism is confined to the periphery of the party system. It is not an issue of contestation between major parties. No impact on major parties' leadership or elections' outcome
Democracy and Sovereignty	European issue determines the fate of a national government	Open contestation: significant Euroscepticism expressed by parties. European issues are contested between and within major parties and have at times impacted either their leadership or an election's outcome.
Values Traditional, religious vs liberal/globalist/metropolitan	European Issue significantly determines the outcome of a national election	Embedded contestation: Euroscepticism is embedded in party competition; high degree of politicization of European issue.

Source: author's own elaboration, based on Paul Taggart, "Europeanization, Euroscepticism, and Politicization in Party Politics" in *The Member States of The European Union*, eds. Simon Bulmer and Christian Lequesne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020): 331-353, 341-348.

Table 2

Trends of the electoral support for the BSP at parliamentary elections from 1990 to 2021



Source: author's own elaboration, based on Central Election Commission, accessed June 29, 2022, <https://www.cik.bg/>.

Table 3

Alpha Research-OSI Sofia: Dominant parties' attitudes in favour of alliance with NATO and EU, June 2022, Q: "If there is a new division in Europe, similar to the Cold War, where should Bulgaria position itself?"

Party	For an alliance with NATO and EU	For an alliance with Russia	Other	Cannot decide
Overall, for Bulgaria	39%	23%	7%	2%
Supporters of Democratic Bulgaria	96%	0%	0%	4%
Supporters of We Continue the Change	68%	14%	6%	12%
Supporters of There is Such a People!	65%	13%	0%	22%
Supporters of GERB	58%	12%	6%	24%
Supporters of Bulgarian Ascent	25%	38%	7%	30%
Supporters of DPS	23%	21%	8%	48%
Supporters of BSP	21%	56%	3%	20%
Supporters of Vazrazhdane (Revival)	17%	49%	17%	17%

Source: "Dva puti poveche bulgari predpochitat sauz s NATO i ES pred sauz s Russia" [Twice as many Bulgarians prefer an alliance with NATO and EU than an alliance with Russia] Open Society Institute Sofia, June 29, 2022, accessed June 29, 2022, <https://osis.bg/?p=4151>.

Table 4

Parties' votes on issues related to Ukraine, February 2022 – July 2023

Parties: Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB); Union of Democratic Forces (UDF); We Continue the Change! (CC), Democratic Bulgaria (DB), Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS), There is Such a People! (TSP); Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP); Bulgarian Ascent (BA)

Date	Decision	For	Against	Abstained
24/02/2022	"47th NA Declaration in connection with the aggressive military actions of the Russian Federation against Ukraine" The declaration was voted point by point on the insistence of BSP			
	For the entire Declaration with its preamble	214 MPs voted for: GERB, CC, DB, DPS, TSP and BSP	Vazrazhdane	
	1. categorically condemns the flagrant violation of international law by the Russian Federation and the encroachment on territorial integrity through military intervention against Ukraine	213 MPs from GERB, BSP, DPS, DB, CC, TSP		Vazrazhdane
	2. Supports its partners and allies in the EU and NATO in discussing a package of measures, including sanctions, to de-escalate the conflict.	192 MPs from GERB, DPS, DB, CC, TSP	Vazrazhdane + 1 MP of BSP voted against	19 MPs from BSP + 2 MPs from GERB
	3. Supports the Bulgarian government to take the necessary measures, corresponding to the seriousness against the challenges to the international security architecture.	227 MPs including Vazrazhdane and BSP		

	4. Supports the Bulgarian government to consider and offer assistance to Ukraine, corresponding to the capabilities of the Bulgarian state.	228 MPs including Vazrazhdane and BSP		
	5. Supports the Bulgarian government in insisting that the protection of the life and health of civilians from the region be an absolute priority	228 MPs including Vazrazhdane and BSP		
	6. Supports the Bulgarian government to assist in obtaining immediate assistance for Bulgarian citizens living in Ukraine and Bulgarians with Ukrainian citizenship, including if evacuation is necessary.	226 MPs, including Vazrazhdane and BSP		
	7. Expects the Bulgarian government to propose and present a plan for dealing with the consequences of the military actions.	212 MPs		13 MPs from Vazrazhdane abstained
	8. Urges the Russian Federation to immediately cease hostilities and return to full compliance with international law.	210 MPs from GERB, BSP, DPS, DB, CC, TSP		13 MPs from Vazrazhdane abstained
	Vote on the title of the Declaration	191 MPs from GERB, BSP, DPS, DB, CC, TSP	Vazrazhdane 13 MPs	1 MP from CC abstained
4/05/2022	47th NA “Decision to take action in relation to the war in Ukraine” Official Journal 35, 10/05/2022 The Decision gave a mandate to the Council of Ministers to provide military-technical assistance to Ukraine	200 MPs from GERB, BSP, DPS, DB, CC, TSP	16 MPs voted against: 13 from Vazrazhdane ; 1 from BSP; 1 from CC; 1 from TSP	1 MP from TSP

3/11/2022	48 th NA “Decision for providing military and military-technical support to Ukraine and strengthening Bulgaria's defense capabilities” Official Journal 89, 8/11/2022	175 MPs from GERB, CC, DPS, DB, BA	49 MPs: 27 from Vazrazhdane and 22 from BSP	1 from CC
4/11/2022	48 th NA “Project for investment expenditure “Acquisition of a new type of combat aircraft - second stage”	162 MPs from GERB, CC, DPS, DB and BA	49 MPs: 27 from Vazrazhdane; 21 from BSP; 1 from CC	11 MPs: 10 from CC; 1 from BSP
9/12/2022	48 th NA “Decision of National Assembly for providing military and military-technical support to Ukraine” Official Journal 99, 12/12/2022	148 MPs from GERB, CC, DB, DPS, BA and 1 from BSP (Yavor Bozhankov, who was expelled from the BSP group after this vote)	46 MPs: 26 from Vazrazhdane and 20 from BSP	1 from CC
1/02/2023	48 th NA Declares as a Genocide the Holodomor in Ukraine 1932-1933	134 MPs from GERB; CC; DB; DPS; BA and 1 independent MP	Vazrazhdane (25 MPs) and 1 from BA	BSP' MPs left the Parliament as a demonstration against the text
6/07/2023	49 th NA “Declaration in support of Ukraine's membership in NATO” Official Journal 59, 11/07/2023	157 MPs from GERB, CC-DB; DPS and TSP	57 MPs: 37 from Vazrazhdane; 20 from BSP	
6/07/2023	49 th NA “Decision to assign the Minister of Energy to carry out negotiations with the Minister of Energy of Ukraine or his representative for the purpose of selling equipment intended for the Belene NPP Project” Official Journal 59, 11/07/2023	155 MPs from GERB, CC-DB; DPS and TSP	57 MPs: 36 from Vazrazhdane; 21 from BSP	

<p>6/07/2023</p>	<p>49th NA “Decision to speed up the process of renewal of the departmental wartime stocks of the Ministry of Defense Official Journal 59, 11/07/2023</p>	<p>163 MPs from GERB, CC-DB; DPS and TSP</p>	<p>54 MPs: 37 from Vazrazhdane; 17 from BSP</p>	
<p>21/07/2023</p>	<p>49th NA “Decision for additional provision of military-technical support to Ukraine” Official Journal 63/202 Bulgaria “will provide Ukraine with armored transport equipment with its available armament, as well as spare parts for its service, with no longer needed for the needs of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.”</p>	<p>148 MPs from GERB-UDF; CC-DB; DPS, TSP</p>	<p>52 MPs: 37 from Vazrazhdane; 15 from BSP</p>	

Source: author’s own elaboration, based on National Assembly data.

**OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE
IN COLOMBIA: CHANGES AND CONTINUITIES
OF THE PEACE AGREEMENT. CASE STUDY
OF THE UNITED STATES
AND THE EUROPEAN UNION (2012-2021)**

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Abstract. The objective of this research article is to conduct the identification of the possible changes and continuities presented in the dynamics and the Official Development Assistance (ODA) received by Colombia from the United States of America and the European Union, after the signing of the Peace Agreement between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army (FARC-EP). A qualitative case study methodology is used by consulting databases and information from official sources on ODA projects granted to Colombia. The period 2012-2021 was set at four years prior to the signing of the agreement and five years after it. The results show significant changes in the amounts and number of projects financed by the United States and the European Union since the signing of the Agreement.

Keywords: International Cooperation for Development, Peace Agreement, Official Development Assistance, Negotiation Process, Colombia.

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Introduction

Defining International Development Cooperation (IDC) is not a simple task, since its evolution and understanding responds to changing dynamics in internal and external policies, as well as to the changing dynamics of the international system. Lisbeth K. Duarte and Carlos González on one side, and on the other side Isaline Bergamaschi, Juana García and Carolina Santacruz point out seven characteristics that identify elements inherent to IDC.¹ These characteristics include the following: they respond to the criterion of co-responsibility; are based on the condition of solidarity among peoples; respect and protect Human Rights; include the voluntary collaboration of governments or private entities; share a common set of goals and strategies, and emphasize the importance of clear and constant dialogue. It is also important to note that the cooperating partners must remain neutral without interfering in the internal or external policies of the countries.

Since the 1990s, Colombia has become a noteworthy recipient of international development cooperation (IDC) flows, with a substantial aspect of its foreign policy directed towards attracting IDC resources². Nevertheless, uncertainties emerged during the negotiation process between the Colombian government and the FARC-EP in Havana, specifically regarding the potential challenges and changes that an eventual post-conflict scenario might introduce to the country's cooperation dynamics. There are many research studies that address this issue. For instance, Juana García Duque considers that cooperation in a post-conflict framework is an

¹ Lisbeth K. Duarte and Carlos González, "Origen y Evolución de La Cooperación Internacional Para El Desarrollo" [Origin and Evolution of International Development Cooperation], *Panorama* 8, no. 15 (2014): 117-131; Isaline Bergamaschi, Juana García and Carolina Santacruz, "Colombia Como Oferente y Receptor de Cooperación Internacional: Apropiación, Liderazgo y Dualidad" [Colombia as an Offeror and Recipient of International Cooperation: Appropriation, Leadership, and Duality] in *Nuevos Enfoques Para El Estudio de Las Relaciones Internacionales de Colombia* [New Approaches to the Study of International Relations in Colombia], eds. Arlene B. Tickner and Sebastián Bitar (Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, 2017), 331–60.

² González Parias Carlos Hernán, *Política exterior colombiana, 2010-2018; entre la percepción de los tomadores de decisiones y la cultura estratégica* [Colombian Foreign Policy, 2010-2018; Between the Perception of Decision Makers and Strategic Culture] (Medellín: Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana, 2021).

opportunity to address development problems.³ Authors such as Jenny Camelo, Juan David Mambuscay Burbano, Lisbeth Katherine Herrera Duarte, Carlos Hernán González, Juan Camilo Mesa Bedoya, Jenny Astrid, Camelo Zamudio, and Miguel Barreto Henriques reflect on the possible changes in the structure and dynamics of the cooperation flows received by Colombia because of the post-conflict scenario.⁴ Another issue that has been addressed is the possible role played by the Colombian military forces as providers of international development cooperation in security, as a result of the knowledge and experience accumulated over decades of conflict.⁵

For the past two decades, the United States and the European Union have been Colombia's main bilateral cooperation partners. From 1998 to 2018, of the total ODA received by Colombia, 53% and 41% came from the United States and the European Union, respectively.⁶ A large part of

³ Juana García Duque, "Acuerdo de Paz de La Habana y Cooperación Internacional Para El Desarrollo En Colombia" [Havana Peace Agreement and International Cooperation for Development in Colombia], *Revista española de desarrollo y cooperación*, no. 39 (2017): 127-35.

⁴ Camelo Zamudio, Jenny Astrid, and Juan David Mambuscay Burbano, "El Laboratorio de La Cooperación Internacional al Desarrollo En Colombia. Estudio de Caso" [The Laboratory of International Cooperation for Development in Colombia. Case Study], *Revista Internacional de Cooperación y Desarrollo* 6, no. 1 (2019): 5-26; Lisbeth Katherine Duarte Herrera, González Parías Carlos Hernán and Juan Camilo Mesa Bedoya, "Retos de la Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo en Colombia" [Challenges of International Development Cooperation in Colombia], *Estudios Internacionales* 49, no. 188 (2017): 111-46, <https://doi.org/10.5354/0719-3769.2017.47922>; Miguel Barreto Henriques, "Preparar El Post-Conflicto En Colombia Desde Los Programas de Desarrollo y Paz: Retos y Lecciones Aprendidas Para La Cooperación Internacional y Las Empresas" [Preparing for Post-Conflict in Colombia through Development and Peace Programs: Challenges and Lessons Learned for International Cooperation and Businesses], *Revista de Relaciones Internacionales, Estrategia y Seguridad* 9, no. 1 (2014): 179-97.

⁵ Carlos Enrique Álvarez Calderón and Felix Antonio Duque Cruz, "De La Construcción Del Estado a La Construcción de La Nación Colombiana: Aportes y Reflexiones Desde Los Estudios En Seguridad y Defensa" [From the Construction of the State to the Construction of the Colombian Nation: Contributions and Reflections from Security and Defense Studies] in *Fuerzas Militares de Colombia: Nuevos Roles y Desafíos Nacionales e Internacionales*, eds. Eduardo Pastrana Buelvas and Hubert Gehring, (Bogotá: Fundación Konrad Adenauer, 2014), 181-208.

⁶ Davide Riccardi and Jairo Agudelo Taborda, "Cooperação Internacional Para a Paz Na Colômbia: Divergências e Convergências Entre Os Estados Unidos Ea União Europeia" [International Cooperation for Peace in Colombia: Divergences and Convergences between the United States and the European Union], *Estudos Internacionais: Revista de Relações Internacionais Da PUC Minas* 9, no. 3 (2021): 133-51.

these cooperation resources were raised in a context of internal armed conflict. Now, in a new context marked by the signing of the Peace Agreement, new challenges and needs are emerging, where the IDC stemming from these actors is also considered to play an outstanding role.

The main objective of this article is to comparatively analyze the possible changes and continuities of the IDC received by Colombia from the United States and the European Union since the signing of the Havana Peace Agreement. This includes the flows, mechanisms, programs, and allocation of funds, among other aspects.

The relevance of this endeavour is underscored by examining the evolving landscape of IDC in Colombia, particularly in the aftermath of the Havana Peace Agreement. This study contributes to the understanding of official development assistance and international development cooperation by delving into the dynamics, challenges, and continuities of IDC received by Colombia from key partners, the United States and the European Union. By analyzing shifts in flows, mechanisms, and programs, it aims to shed light on the intricate relationship between post-conflict scenarios, foreign policy, and developmental assistance. Additionally, this research provides insights into how Colombia's experience compares and contrasts with other cases, offering valuable perspectives on the broader implications for countries transitioning from conflict to peace.

Literature Review

The context of IDC is based on the actions of international communities and their influence on developing countries. For this reason, it is important to understand the concept of IDC, which is established as a foreign policy instrument comprising the set of actions of all types, and of the resources, whether financial, human, material, or technological involved:

“The scope of International Development Cooperation (IDC) falls within the framework of international relations, where there is a global interest. Through IDC, the aim is to contribute to an international context that enhances living conditions for the population while simultaneously promoting human rights, security, and

good governance. The goal is to foster the well-being and development of communities to achieve tangible progress.”⁷

In arguably the clearest synthesis, Duarte & Gonzales identify seven key characteristics of ICD. Some of these characteristics respond to the criterion of co-responsibility; are based on the criterion of solidarity among peoples; respect and protect Human Rights; include the voluntary collaboration of governments or private entities; share a common set of goals and strategies, and emphasize the importance of clear and constant dialogue. It is also important to note that the cooperating partners must remain neutral without interfering in the internal or external policies of the countries. The authors thus conclude as follows:

“International Development Cooperation is currently an extremely significant and effective tool for correcting evident disparities, gaps, and shortcomings of integrationist processes in globalization. The internationalization of certain problems no longer corresponds only to the territory or state that faces them, but rather they transcend national borders, and their solution, control or eradication becomes the responsibility of the international community.”⁸

Later, following the signing of the Peace Agreement in Colombia, Duarte and González analyze the main challenges faced by the IDC in Colombia. A major challenge for the Colombian government is to adjust the institutional framework, guide diplomacy, and define international aid, minimizing variations in resources since they are intended to finance a large part of public policies. Cooperating partners may feel strongly motivated to contribute financially since a Peace Agreement has been signed; however, they shall be strictly committed to ensuring the fulfillment of the objectives for which the funds are earmarked.⁹

⁷ Mónica Liliانا Baracaldo Rincón, “La Cooperación Internacional Como Instrumento Para El Desarrollo Integral En Colombia” [International Cooperation as an Instrument for Comprehensive Development in Colombia] (Bogotá: Universidad Militar Nueva Granada, 2015), <http://hdl.handle.net/10654/7171>.

⁸ Lisbeth K. Duarte and Carlos González, “Origen y Evolución de La Cooperación Internacional Para El Desarrollo” [Origin and Evolution of International Development Cooperation], *Panorama* 8, no. 15 (2014): 117-131.

⁹ Juan Mario Díaz, Henry Staples, Juan Miguel Kanai, and Melanie Lombard, “Between Pacification and Dialogue: Critical Lessons from Colombia’s Territorial Peace,” *Geoforum* 118 (2021): 106-16.

Once the contexts that help understanding IDC in greater depth have been identified, it is important to further reflect on the fact that IDC should bring joint benefits for the parties involved. IDC relies on high financial investments that the beneficiary countries receive, but which may not be sustained over time, or may not yield the expected results. The development of public policies, millennium strategies and others are not necessarily on a long term, because the expected scope is not achieved in due time, and the activities that should be conducted to fulfill it are not developed in coordination with the actors, beneficiaries, and executors.¹⁰ IDC generates an essential and profound question as to how, despite large investments, poverty remains a constant. Therefore, thinking about IDC in the long term can be ambitious, especially when the continuation of policies or the achievements obtained depend on social and political dynamics.

The post-conflict scenario in the Catatumbo region of Colombia is a clear example of how social dynamics make the objectives set out by the IDC be fulfilled only in the short term, despite the agreements signed in Havana that sought to restore physical and emotional calm to the inhabitants and victims of the conflict.¹¹ They were not fulfilled on the long run because some of the actors took arms again, while others were not included in the agreement, and for this reason they continued with their illegal activities:

“Regarding the management of the IDC in the Catatumbo area, it is evident that there is a lack of coordination between the state government, non-governmental organizations, and the territorial entities that make up this region. As a result, there is no planned or organized structure that allows this cooperation to operate in the most effective way possible.”¹²

¹⁰ Bruno Ayllón, “La Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo: fundamentos y justificaciones en la perspectiva de la Teoría de las Relaciones Internacionales” [International Development Cooperation: Foundations and Justifications in the Perspective of International Relations Theory], *Carta Internacional* 2, no. 2 (2007): 32-47.

¹¹ Luis Jimenez, Carlos Vera, and Ramiro Gamboa, “Gestión de Paz Con Alianza de Cooperación Internacional Para La Región Del Catatumbo” [Peace Management with International Cooperation Alliance for the Catatumbo Region], *Revista de Ciencias Sociales (Ve)* 25 (2019): 187-207.

¹² Fabio Andrés Díaz and Magda Catalina Jiménez, “Trumping the Agenda? The Continuity and Discontinuity in Foreign Affairs Between the U.S. and Colombia,” in *The Future of U.S. Empire in the Americas: The Trump Administration and Beyond*, ed. Tim Gill (Oxford: Routledge, 2019), <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3429529>.

Theoretical Framework

Since the configuration of modern states, war and cooperation have been factors of interaction between them; however, the IDC and its institutional framework have only been developed since the 1950s and 1960s.¹³ At the end of World War II, the countries that took part in it needed to invest in development and reconstruction in general. It was not only a question of physical structures, but also of everything that a society required to progress and be stable. Third World countries, formerly known as underdeveloped countries, required international investment from those who were economically better positioned in the market to invest, compete, or to develop projects. Cooperation is fundamentally an aid to poor countries. Over the years, the IDC has changed in pursuit of the objective of fighting poverty, and the actors in charge are now governments, private companies, and international non-profit organizations.¹⁴

From the vantage point of idealism theories, IDC can be understood as a tool aimed at fostering peace and global cooperation. Under this approach, states provide assistance to impoverished nations with the objective of improving their living conditions, and reducing social and economic disparities. This action not only seeks to address the immediate needs of disadvantaged communities but also aspires to contribute to the construction of a world characterized by peace and widespread prosperity.¹⁵

¹³ Manuel Galán Gómez and José Antonio Sanahuja, *El sistema internacional de cooperación al desarrollo: una aproximación a sus actores e instrumentos* [The International System of Development Cooperation: An Approach to its Actors and Instruments] (Madrid: CIDEAL, 1999), <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14352/61220>.

¹⁴ Carlo Tassara, "Paradigmas, Actores y Políticas. Breve Historia de La Cooperación Internacional al Desarrollo" [Paradigms, Actors, and Policies. Brief History of International Development Cooperation], *Revista Unaula* 31 (2011): 41-97.

¹⁵ Claudia G. Jiménez González, "Las Teorías de La Cooperación Internacional Dentro de Las Relaciones Internacionales" [The Theories of International Cooperation Within International Relations], *POLIS: Investigación y Análisis Sociopolítico y Psicosocial* 2, no. 3 (2003): 115-47; Gino Pauselli, "Theories of International Relations and the Explanation of Foreign Aid," *Revista Iberoamericana de Estudios de Desarrollo = Iberoamerican Journal of Development Studies* 2, no. 1 (2013): 72-92, https://doi.org/10.26754/ojs_ried/ijds.65.

An illustrative example of this perspective is the action of the European Union, which has offered support to African countries with the purpose of promoting democracy and protecting human rights. This commitment reflects the idealism underlying International Development Cooperation, where aid is conceived as a means to promote fundamental values that underpin peaceful coexistence and global progress.

Once its origins are fully clear, it is important to understand that IDC in itself is a set of actions and resources that actors from different countries voluntarily exchange according to their strategies and interests; it is a means to an end. It should be noted that IDC is dynamic and therefore changeable.¹⁶ During the 1980s, Latin American countries that were considered middle class received aid for the development of public policies and the creation of technological centers, which promoted scientific and technological development and fostered research.

In Colombia, there are different cooperation modalities, which are reflected at both central and lower administrative levels. According to the Colombian Presidential Agency of International Cooperation, at the central level, there are the following types of cooperation: Official Development Assistance, South – South cooperation, Triangular cooperation, Col-Col cooperation, and in-kind donations.¹⁷ At the decentralized level, there are tools such as decentralized international cooperation and south-south decentralized international cooperation.¹⁸

Official Development Assistance was defined in the 1970s as transfers received in the form of donations, financial or intellectual transfers, aiming to promote the development of a country at the economic, political,

¹⁶ Horario Rodríguez Vázquez, “La cooperación internacional para el desarrollo desde una perspectiva latinoamericana” [International Development Cooperation from a Latin American Perspective] in *Temas de cooperación internacional para el desarrollo: criticar, proponer, sistematizar* [International cooperation issues for development: criticize, propose, systematize], ed. Aaron Pollack, (San Juan Mixcoac: Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luis Mora, 2010), 9–34.

¹⁷ APC Colombia, “Modalidades de Cooperación” [Modalities of Cooperation], 2021, accessed (November 12, 2022), <https://www.apccolombia.gov.co/modalidades-de-cooperacion>.

¹⁸ Juan C. Mesa Bedoya, Carlos H. González Parías, and Carolina Yepes Hernández, “Cooperación Internacional Descentralizada Sur-Sur: El Caso de La Ciudad de Medellín (Colombia)” [Decentralized South-South International Cooperation: The Case of Medellín City (Colombia)], *Revista Espacios* 41, no. 21 (2020): 238-253.

or social level, received from partner countries, whether unilaterally, bilaterally, or multilaterally. This aid has undergone different adaptations or, to be more precise, has been adjusted over time, so that it does not become a political element that can be used for manipulation purposes by the different parties. The main objective of such aid is to promote the development and economic well-being of developing countries.¹⁹ The effectiveness of ODA in promoting development is a matter of debate. Some studies suggest that ODA can be effective in reducing poverty and promoting economic growth, while others indicate that it has a limited impact or can even be counterproductive.²⁰ The allocation of ODA is often influenced by political considerations. Donor countries may provide more aid to countries that are strategically important or that share their political values.²¹ The use of ODA can also be subject to corruption and mismanagement. In some cases, aid funds are diverted from their intended purpose and used for personal gain or political purposes.²²

This article centers on the idealistic perspective of International Development Cooperation (IDC) within the realm of international relations. It specifically delves into the contributions made, particularly before and after the peace process in Havana. Hence, it is crucial to recognize that this dynamic is subject to change, contingent on internal and external political circumstances, as well as the historical context that unfolds within cities or towns. It will be different in each case, since the development needs are different, given that the objective of the IDC is to

¹⁹ APC Colombia, "Análisis Del Comportamiento de La Cooperación Internacional No Reembolsable Recibida Por Colombia En El Año 2019" [Analysis of the Behavior of Non-Reimbursable International Cooperation Received by Colombia in 2019], 2020, accessed (November 17, 2022), link to the article. <https://www.apccolombia.gov.co/sites/default/files/2021-02/Ana%CC%81lisis%20de%20comportamiento%20de%20la%20cooperacio%CC%81n%20internacional%20no%20reembolsable%20recibida%20por%20colombia%20en%20el%20an%CC%83o%202019%20cc2019.pdf> .

²⁰ William Hynes and Simon Scott, "The Evolution of Official Development Assistance: Achievements, Criticisms and a Way Forward," OECD Development Co-operation Working Papers No. 12 (December 2013).

²¹ David H. Bearce and Daniel C. Tirone, "Foreign Aid Effectiveness and the Strategic Goals of Donor Governments," *The Journal of Politics* 72, no. 3 (2010): 837-51.

²² Graham Hancock, *Lords of Poverty: The Power, Prestige, and Corruption of the International Aid Business* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1989).

promote support for poor countries. Colombia has had multiple fluctuations in receiving such cooperation. In the late 1980s and 1990s, according to the World Bank, Colombia was classified as an upper middle-income country, which led to a loss of interest on the part of multiple agencies to continue promoting development in this nation. We could be under the impression that the interest in peace and the fight against drug trafficking reactivated the international interest in the IDC, since this cooperation would boost and help reduce the impact that drug trafficking has had on the world.

Methodology

In order to achieve the proposed objective, this article adopts a qualitative approach, and carries out a thorough documentation and textual review of the different ODA projects implemented in Colombia in the 2012-2021 period. The period chosen for this study covers four years prior to the signing of the Peace Agreement between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army (FARC-EP), 2012-2016, and five years after the signing of the Agreement, 2016-2021. This is justified by the need to analyze the ODA received by Colombia from both the United States and the European Union.

One of the main sources of data is the database of projects systematized by the Presidential Agency of International Cooperation (APC-Colombia), which contains a record of different IDC projects implemented in Colombia from 2010 to the present. A total of 5,415 projects were identified between 2010 and 2022, divided into two main areas: regional and national. After retrieving these records, the projects were filtered by applying the following criteria: (1) time period 2012-2021, (2) ODA projects, (3) donors: The United States, EU Trust Fund for Peace, U.S. Embassy in Colombia, European Union, U.S. Department of State. A total of seventy-nine projects resulted from the application of these criteria. In order to avoid bias and possible errors, the filters were applied twice by each of the authors of the article, each time reaching the same number of records. Subsequently, the projects were divided into sub-periods: 2012-2016 and 2017-2021.

When addressing variables 4 and 5 from Table 1, a triangulation of information was conducted between the project's objective, the project's name, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), crossed with the points of the Peace Agreement. This was done to determine the level of coincidence or alignment of the analyzed projects, either with the SDGs or with the points agreed upon in the Havana Peace Agreement. Following a content analysis, a score ranging from 1 to 5 was assigned (1 – no alignment, 2 – poor alignment, 3 – moderate alignment, 4 – good alignment, 5 – perfect alignment). For the analysis of the results, scores of 3 and above were considered.

Results

The results and discussion based on the application of the proposed methodology and the indicators are presented below. The discussion starts with a general description of IDC and ODA received by Colombia in the context of the armed conflict. Subsequently, a characterization of ODA received by Colombia from the United States and the European Union is presented. Finally, it concludes with the identification of changes and continuities in ODA as a result of the signing of the Government-FARC-EP Peace Agreement.

General Characteristics of International Development Cooperation (IDC) and Official Development Assistance (ODA) Received by Colombia in the Context of the Armed Conflict

Colombia's recent history has been marked by the longest armed conflict in Latin America. For more than sixty years, Colombia has been immersed in a clash that has plunged the country into a bloodbath, with thousands of dead, displaced, and grieving people throughout the country. It is a heterogeneous conflict due to the characteristics of the actors involved, and the territories in which it has taken place. It is worth noting that some areas of the country are characterized by being constant victims of this intersection of interests, since their geographic location is favorable for the maintenance of the economic objectives of illegal groups.

Jonathan Calderón offers a reconstruction of the different stages of the Colombian conflict. As shown in Figure 1, it is divided into three stages: initial, intermediate, and final stage, each with different dynamics and characteristics of the conflict.²³

However, despite the long duration of the conflict, its internationalization and the search for IDC for its resolution date back to the late 1990s. Nevertheless, IDC in Colombia started decades before this internationalization process, and its inception is not linked with the armed conflict.

In fact, the IDC emerged after the World War II, when the United Nations (UN) consolidated the need for such a policy tool in the San Francisco Charter in order to support common interests. These included the fight against poverty, equity, and accessibility to resources by all countries, since it is evident that some of the countries that make up the IDC have greater economic and technological resources. In the 1960s, most of the agencies of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) committee were created; initially, the IDC had a welfare nature.

Another important milestone for Latin America and Colombia is the Alliance for Progress. It was a North American program initiated during the Cold War as a strategy to stop and prevent the advance of communism in the region. According to Diana Rojas, between 1961 and 1969 Colombia was the second recipient country, only behind Brazil and on a par with Chile.²⁴ In that period, Colombia received \$885 million corresponding to 12% of the total resources delivered by the program in Latin America, while Brazil accounted for 30%.

In 2000, the Millennium Development Goals were set by the United Nations, which also included the eradication of poverty. The process to achieve the goals differed from country to country. Thus, for Colombia, IDC went from being strictly assistance-based to a tool for strengthening institutional capacities, with the scope of achieving integral development in a context of peace for more than ten years. The money received through

²³ Jonathan Calderón Rojas, "Etapas Del Conflicto Armado En Colombia: Hacia El Posconflicto" [Stages of the Armed Conflict in Colombia: Towards the Post-conflict.] *Latinoamérica. Revista de Estudios Latinoamericanos*, no. 62 (2016): 227-57.

²⁴ Diana Marcela Rojas, "Plan Colombia II: ¿más De Lo Mismo?" [Plan Colombia II: more of the same?] *Colombia Internacional* 1, vol. 65 (2007): 14-37, <https://doi.org/10.7440/colombiaint65.2007.01>.

these programs has made it possible to maintain reintegration programs, guaranteeing the laying down of arms and reparations for victims.

Due to the long conflict, Colombia is a *sui generis* case of IDC. Firstly, based strictly on the eligibility criteria, Colombia is considered an upper middle-income country, which does not make it a priority target for aid and cooperation programs. Secondly, the conflict conditioned the cooperation agenda. In this sense, Isaline Bergamashi, Juana García, and Carolina Santacruz consider that the distribution of cooperation has been determined, for the most part, by the domestic agenda and not by Colombia's foreign policy priorities, *i.e.*, mainly to address the internal issues of conflict and drug trafficking.²⁵

Since the internationalization of the Colombian conflict, there have been several events that have marked the dynamics of the IDC for the country, such as (1) the London Declaration in 2003, where government representatives expressed their support to Colombia, in order to "address threats to democracy, terrorism, drug trafficking, violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, and the serious humanitarian crisis," (2) the Cartagena Declaration in 2005, where the first steps were taken for the National IDC Strategy, (3) Bogotá 2007, when the second IDC Strategy for Colombia 2007-2010 was announced.

As of 2019, Colombia had received a total of \$713,436,605, with \$34,255,490 allocated for Peace with Legality programs. These funds supported eighteen projects aimed at achieving this objective by identifying specific needs within each program. The main four actors from which donations were received are the United States, followed by Canada, Germany, the European Union and Norway (APC Colombia, 2020).

Characterization of International Development Cooperation (IDC) as received by Colombia from the United States

The main purpose of this section is to characterize the IDC received by Colombia that comes from the United States and the European Union. The criteria used to carry out the characterization are: (1) projects for

²⁵ Isaline Bergamaschi, Juana García and Carolina Santacruz, "Colombia Como Oferente y Receptor de Cooperación Internacional," 331-60.

each year of the analysed period, (2) total value in US dollars of the projects, (3) number of projects and their respective percentage, before the signing of the Agreement (2010-2015) and after the signing of the Agreement (2016-2021).

U.S. Official Development Assistance (ODA)

With the application of the filters, a total of forty-eight ODA projects from the U.S. government and USAID were recorded for the analyzed period. Of these, thirty correspond to projects with national coverage, the remaining eighteen with local coverage.

The number of ODA projects of U.S. origin shows (Figure 2) an irregular behavior during the selected timeframe, reaching a maximum peak of twelve projects initiated in 2012, with a subsequent decline up to 2014. Then, a recovery is observed in 2015 and from this point on a steady decrease in the number of projects becomes evident, until reaching a minimum (zero projects) in the years 2018 and 2019.

Even when observing the behavior in two time periods, before and after the signing of the Agreement, it becomes evident that almost 75% of the ODA projects financed by the United States in Colombia were presented in the period prior to the signing (2010-2015). Twenty-five percent of the projects were submitted after the signing of the Agreement in 2016. These results may seem contradictory, since this considerable decrease occurs precisely after the signing of the Peace Agreement between the Colombian government and the FARC-EP.

However, the causes of this behavior respond to external and systemic factors. The arrival of Donald Trump to the presidency of the United States, under the slogans “America first” and “Make America great again,” marked a populist nationalist orientation that deeply permeated the foreign policy of the United States. According to Gilberto Aranda Bustamante and Jorge Riquelme Rivera, Trump conceived foreign policy in a utilitarian sense, oriented to business affairs and imposing one’s own advantages and interests on the other, to the detriment of international stability. Under this conception of the country’s foreign policy, according to Trump, there should not be any concerns with the

construction and stabilization of nations in crisis nor in the spread of democracy and Western values in the world.²⁶ This foreign policy orientation directly affected the different assistance and cooperation programs of this country with the rest of the world, including Colombia.

However, despite the decrease in the number of projects between both periods (2012-2016 and 2017-2021), the amount of value of these projects maintains a certain parity (Figure 3). For the first period, the total amount of projects was \$57.28 million, while for the 2017-2021 period it was \$54 million. This is explained by the 2020 project “Resilient Youth Activity,” which aims to build the capacity of vulnerable youth who have disengaged from armed groups and youth who committed crimes in the past, to overcome the effects of crimes, as well as to reduce the risks of recidivism and foster more inclusive social and economic stability. The project amounted to \$50 million.

Alignment of the Projects with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and the Points of the Peace Agreement

Of the forty-eight projects observed in the overall period of analysis (2012-2021), a total of thirty-one are not aligned with any SDG. This is explained by the fact that these projects were initiated before the adoption of the SDG by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015. The data collected shows that seventeen of the projects initiated after this year are aligned with one or more SDG (Table 2).

However, the aligned projects do not cover the total amount of the SDGs. Of the seventeen established SDGs, seven ODA projects from the United States and USAID are identified, leaving out objectives such as: zero hunger, health and well-being, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, affordable and non-polluting energy, industry, innovation and infrastructure, responsible production and consumption, underwater life, life of terrestrial ecosystems, alliance to achieve the objectives (Table 3).

²⁶ Gilberto Aranda Bustamante and Jorge Riquelme Rivera, “Carthago Delenda Est. La Impronta de Donald Trump En La Política Exterior de Estados Unidos” [Carthago Delenda Est. Donald Trump’s Imprint on United States Foreign Policy], *Relaciones Internacionales* 30, no. 60 (2021): 191–207, <https://doi.org/10.24215/23142766e131>.

Since 2016, after the signing of the Peace Agreement between the Colombian government and the FARC-EP, twelve projects supported by the United States and USAID have been identified. Of these, seven have considerable alignment with the points of said agreement, that is 58% alignment.

Notwithstanding, twelve of these 48 projects are found to indirectly point to some of the agreed points. As an illustration, the funds were utilized to support the initiatives of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights across six strategic areas:: (1) strengthening of monitoring and observation of human rights; (2) promotion of a culture of human rights; (3) strengthen and promote policy reforms and implement human rights in the security sector; (4) support a safe environment for the work of human rights defenders; (5) improve the Colombian government's response to human rights violations; (6) contribute to the effective application of the Victims and Land Restitution Law.

Characterization of the International Development Cooperation as Received by Colombia from the European Union

The purpose of this section is to present the different projects that were carried out in Colombia with the support of the European Union. A total of seventy-eight projects were identified, with sixty-two projects completed before the signing of the Peace Agreement (2012 to 2016). Between 2017 and 2021, fourteen projects were undertaken, and currently, two projects are in progress (Figure 4).

Analyzing the temporal and overall number of executed projects based on these data points revealed a heterogeneous pattern. The results indicate notable support from the European Union, which increased from 2012 and declined after 2016. This coincides with the signing of the Peace Agreement. Of the seventy-eight projects executed, 79% of these are established in the period prior to the signing of the Peace Agreement, and only 20% in the period after the signing of the Agreement.

Figure 5 illustrates the last two five-year periods between 2012 and 2021, in relation to the economic contributions received from the European Union, in which their decrease is evidenced, due to signing the Peace Agreement.

The European Union's engagement in conflict resolution in Colombia commenced in 2007 with the establishment of Peace Laboratories in the Magdalena Medio, Cauca, Nariño, and eastern Antioquia regions. This initiative encountered various limitations, along with political, ideological, and territorial contradictions. The economic contributions received over time in the different projects allowed solidifying the policies that were consistent with the agreements of the parties involved. However, the uniqueness of the political dynamics that wanted to be imposed by the European Union were not well received. For this reason, once this analysis was prepared, we can see how economic contributions and project support were withdrawn.²⁷

It should be noted that the maintenance of policies to guarantee the Agreements in Colombia have undergone significant changes in relation to the lack of commitment by the parties related to the conflict to maintain the Agreements, such as the laying down of arms, reparations for victims, among others. After the signing of the Peace Agreement, guarantees have not been maintained on the part of the perpetrators of the conflict, since groups outside the law, self-proclaimed as FARC-EP dissidents, are constantly re-emerging.

Alignment of the Projects with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and the Points of the Peace Agreement

In this section, we seek to identify the projects aligned with the SDG which were initiated starting 2015. There are thirty-seven projects that meet these parameters, as it can be observed in Table 4.

Eleven of the seventeen SDGs are reflected in the projects. The remaining six were not included in previous phases or in the current one: health and well-being, quality education, clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, sustainable cities and communities, climate action and underwater life. In addition, considering the six points of the

²⁷ Miguel Barreto Henriques, "El rol de la Unión Europea en la resolución del conflicto armado en Colombia: un análisis desde el terreno" [The Role of the European Union in the Resolution of the Armed Conflict in Colombia: An Analysis from the Ground], *Aldea Mundo* 15 (2010): 19-30.

Peace Agreement, sixteen projects financed by the European Union were analyzed, with only six projects being found to align with the provisions of the agreement, excluding: the end of the conflict, the solution to the problem of illicit drugs and the implementation, the verification and the endorsement. It is important to note that some projects focus on post-conflict construction, with objectives aimed at preventing forced displacement, recruitment and other types of violence that occur during the conflict. All of these would be achieved through education and community strengthening.

The agenda of the Peace Agreement established six points: comprehensive rural reform, political participation, end of the conflict, solution to the problem of illicit drugs, agreement on the victims of the conflict, implementation, verification, and endorsement. The projects aligned with the points of the Peace Agreement that received the most interest from donors were: comprehensive rural reform, political participation, and victims. The United States also backed the implementation, verification, and endorsement of various projects but did not address the resolution of the illicit drugs issue. This situation might arise because the narcotics control division, which falls under the program for eradicating and controlling illicit crops, is responsible for addressing this aspect.

In addition to the fact that the points of the Peace Agreement are structurally limited from the start, their scope, the strategies for achieving them, and the responsible actors are not very explicit either. We could assume that the international SDG agenda complements this set of objectives and strategies that pursue the same goal. However, the SDG broadened the coverage, allowing a greater part of the community to benefit.

In the Colombian context, the analysis of ODA trends following the signing of the Peace Agreement in 2016 reveals a gradual decline in support from major cooperating countries like the United States and the European Union. While this decrease cannot be solely attributed to Colombia's internal dynamics, it is essential to consider the broader geopolitical landscape, and the evolving priorities of donor nations. Despite the reduction in ODA, idealism emphasizes the enduring impact of development projects, highlighting their ability to strengthen public policies, transform communities, and advance progress in critical areas such as security, education, health, and economic development. However,

they also acknowledge the limitations of these projects, particularly their time-limited nature and the challenges of ensuring long-term sustainability.

It is notable that the influence of the projects, regardless of who sponsors them, strengthens public policies. These in turn transform the communities, allowing progress in security, education, health, economic development, improving the quality of life of those involved. But this is limited to the time of execution of the projects with limited permanence, and it is reflected in the recurrence of outbreaks of disease, unemployment, school dropouts, and decline and loss of the basic elements that ensure an adequate quality of life. The problem is not only due to the lack of permanence of project financing, but also to the re-emergence of illegal groups that impose a new social change.

In essence, the idealist perspective envisions a world where international cooperation, driven by a shared sense of responsibility and mutual respect, plays a pivotal role in empowering developing nations to achieve sustainable development and improve the lives of their citizens. ODA, when implemented effectively and aligned with long-term development goals, can serve as a powerful catalyst for positive change, contributing to a more peaceful, equitable, and prosperous global community.

Conclusions

This type of research enables us to explore an influential subject and gain contextual understanding of the purpose of Official Development Assistance (ODA) in social and political environments. It also has repercussions on the manner in which the conflict and post-conflict developments are understood. The contributions made in the interest of mitigating the impact of the war in Colombia are limited in time and coverage. This analysis provides a starting point from which future research can be developed in order to improve the scope and approach of the programs and adjust them to specific needs in the context and nature of society.

The limitations of this type of research are linked to the lack of research on these topics in Colombia, since scientific or informative

publications are only published by a limited group of people interested in the topic. This means that access to information does not allow for adequate dissemination. On the other hand, much of the research in Colombia corresponds to the fulfillment of academic requirements, so the topics tend to have little coverage and analysis without having sponsorship for its awareness.

The findings presented here are not representative for the total cooperation aid that Colombia receives from cooperating partners. Therefore, it is not possible to affirm that, in terms of cooperation, the United States and the European Union are not committed to the implementation and support of the Peace Agreement. To reach this conclusion, all the dimensions in which cooperation is expressed must be considered: triangular, private flows, multilateral financial cooperation, technical cooperation, bilateral, humanitarian and emergency aid, IDC, among others.

This article is presented as a starting point for future research on different aspects of the subject, for example: the changes experienced by the IDC in Colombia in the post-conflict framework; generating post-conflict changes in the agenda of donors in Colombia; the strategies employed by Colombia to finance via IDC the post-conflict development; the role played by IDC in Colombia's foreign policy.

Table 1

Variables analyzed

Variables	Description	Aim
V1: cooperation and armed conflict in Colombia	Characteristics of IDC in Colombia in the context of the armed conflict and its internationalization.	This variable aims to explore how cooperation has been shaped by the challenges posed by conflict and its international dimensions, providing insights into the complex interplay between development assistance and conflict resolution
V2: ODA projects received by Colombia	Projects financed by the United States (Government and USAID) and by the European Union in the ODA category in the period analyzed.	This variable provides insights into the priorities and strategies of major donors, shedding light on the nature of aid projects in Colombia
V3: total amount of projects	Evolution of the amounts (USD) of the ODA projects received by Colombia from the United States and the European Union during the period of analysis.	This variable allows for a quantitative analysis of the financial commitments made by the United States and the European Union, offering a perspective on the changing financial landscape of development cooperation.
V4: alignment of projects with the SDG	ODA projects oriented to at least one of the Sustainable Development Goals.	This variable offers insights into the strategic orientation of aid projects towards achieving sustainable and inclusive development goals.
V5: alignment of projects with the points of the Havana Agreement	ODA projects oriented to at least one of the commitments and points negotiated in the Havana Agreement.	This variable allows for an evaluation of the extent to which aid projects contribute to the implementation of peace agreements and reconciliation efforts in Colombia.

Source: author's own elaboration, the variables were constructed in accordance with the problem statement, research question, and specific objectives.

Table 2

U.S. projects aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals

SDG	Projects	Number
End of poverty	Investing for Peace Fund – Acumen.	1
Quality education	To provide graduate and leadership training opportunities for emerging Afro-Colombian leaders who are committed to serving their communities, enabling them to better contribute to community development.	1
Decent work and economic growth	SEAF – Colombian Agribusiness Fund	2
Reduction of inequalities	Economic recovery and market systems, risk management policy and practice – OFDA. Resilient Youth Activity.	3
Sustainable cities and communities	Support USAID/OFDA – National Forest Mobilization, Colombia.	1
Climate action	Earthquake preparedness – OFDA.	1
Peace, justice, and strong institutions	Electoral process program. Public opinion program. Support to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Alternative development projects, refugees, public relations, eco-pol (State Department). Support to MSPP (Mission to Support the Peace Process) – OAS. Support for the Ombudsman's Office. Reconciliation and business laboratory	8
Total projects aligned with the SDG		17

Source: author's own elaboration based on SDG and data from the Colombian Presidential Agency for International Cooperation (APC-Colombia).

Table 3

U.S. projects aligned with the Peace Agreement points

Agreed point	Projects	Number
Comprehensive Rural Reform	Support to the Peace Process – USAID – OAS (also aligned with points 3, 5 and 6). The goal of this project is to carry out support activities to MSPP related to transitional justice, which is divided in three main areas: 1. Reparations, truth, and reconciliation; 2. Monitoring and support for the restitution of lands and territories; 3. Peace, justice and other transitional justice mechanisms. This agreement also supports the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration tasks of the OAS.	1
End of the conflict	Reconciliation and business laboratory: support the transformation in the relationship between the private sector and its interest groups as a way to strengthen peacebuilding processes at the regional level.	1
Victims	Public policy program project – operated by AECOM International (also aligned with point 1).	3
	Support to the MSPP – OAS: strengthen the capacity of the MSPP/OAS to strengthen the competence of the Colombian government in fulfilling its mandate to conduct and monitor transitional justice activities. These include reparations, revelation of the truth, and reconciliation; monitoring and support for the restitution of lands and territories; and justice, peace, and other transitional justice mechanisms.	
	Support for the Ombudsman's Office. Increase access to justice for citizens in the regions most affected by the conflict, by supporting the ombudsman and the early warning system of the Ombudsman's Office.	
Implementation, verification, and endorsement	Public opinion program: contribute to the strengthening of capacities and the generation of territorial conditions for the future implementation of the agreements and the construction of stable and lasting peace.	2
	Resilient Youth Activity: build the capacity of vulnerable youth who have disengaged from armed groups and youth who committed crimes in the past. The objective is to overcome the effects of crimes, reduce the risks of recidivism and foster more inclusive social and economic stability.	
Total projects aligned with the agreement points		7

Source: author’s own elaboration based on Final Agreement to End the Armed Conflict and Build a Stable and Lasting Peace (Colombia and Farc-EP) and data from the Colombian Presidential Agency for International Cooperation (APC-Colombia).

Table 4

European Union. Projects aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals

SDG	Projects	Number
End of poverty	Promote more effective humanitarian actions that meet the needs of affected populations.	3
Zero hunger	Capacity building for agricultural innovation systems: scaling up the common framework of the Tropical Agriculture Platform – TAP GCP /GLO/017/EC.	1
Health and well-being	Working together to combat antimicrobial resistance AMR – UNJP/SLS/001/EC	1
Gender equality	Promotion and protection of women in the defense of human rights in the framework of the implementation of the Peace Agreement.	1
Decent work and economic growth	Sectoral reform contract for strategic territorial competitiveness in Colombia.	5
Industry, innovation, and infrastructure	Technical assistance for the implementation of digital TV in Colombia.	1
Reduction of inequalities	Protection and humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons in Colombia and PINP in western Venezuela.	2
Responsible production and consumption	When we have the soil, the seed will grow.	1
Life of terrestrial ecosystems	Budget support: sector reform contract for sustainable local development, DCI-ALA/2015/38166.	1
Peace, justice, and strong institutions	Economic security from ICRC for internally displaced persons and protection of civilian population activities in Colombia.	20
Partnerships to achieve the goals	Support to the implementation of the SDG in Colombia – preliminary actions LA/2020/412-052	1
Total projects aligned with the SDG		37

Source: author's own elaboration based on SDG and data from the Colombian Presidential Agency for International Cooperation (APC-Colombia)

Table 5

European Union. Projects aligned with the Peace Agreement points

Agreed point	Projects	Number
Comprehensive Rural Reform	Colombia Inheritance: territorial governance in a sustainable, productive, and resilient landscape – GCP/COL/120/EC – European Union contract 416210.	2
	Capacity building for agricultural innovation systems: scaling up the common framework of the Tropical Agriculture Platform – TAP GCP/GLO/017/EC.	
Political participation	Territorial governance with public consent.	3
	Thematic line with civil society organizations: enhancing the contributions of women in governance and development processes at the country level.	
	Promotion and protection of women in the defense of human rights in the framework of the implementation of the Peace Agreement.	
Victims	Support for the fulfillment and national and territorial development of the mandate of the commission for the clarification of truth, coexistence, and non-repetition – ICSP/2019/410-491.	1
Total projects aligned with the agreement points		6

Source: author’s own elaboration based on Final Agreement to End the Armed Conflict and Build a Stable and Lasting Peace (Colombia and Farc-EP) and data from the Colombian Presidential Agency for International Cooperation (APC-Colombia).

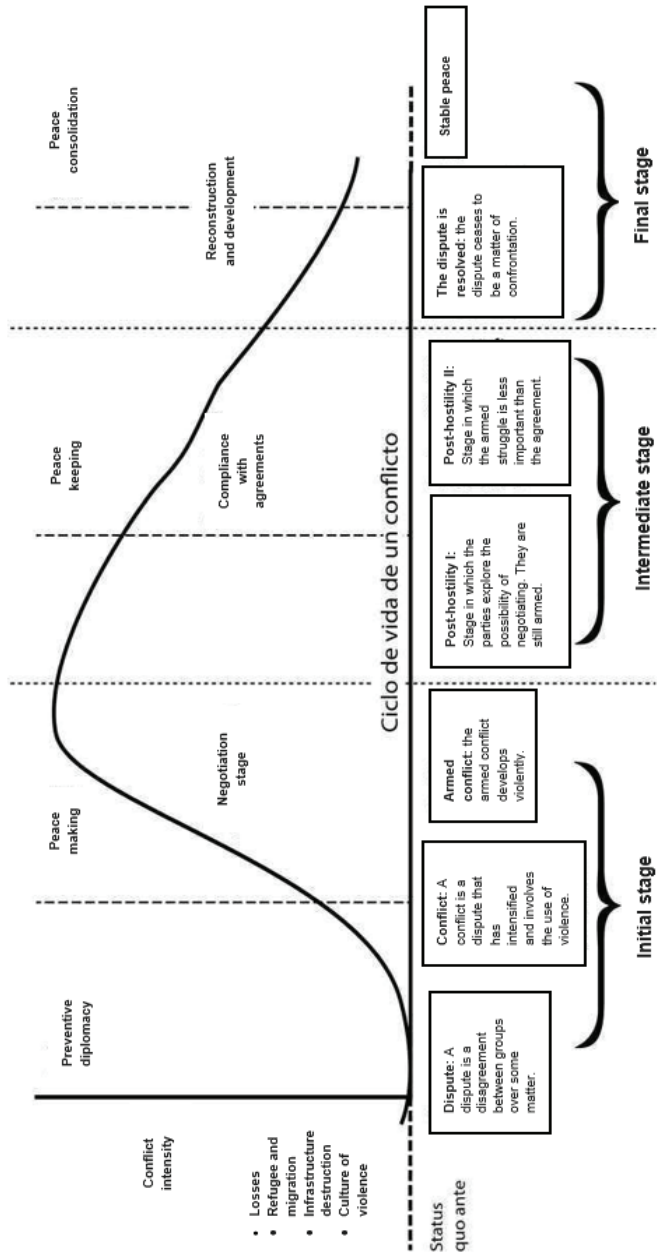


Figure 1. Stages of the Colombian Conflict

Source: Figure translated from Jonathan Calderón Rojas, "Etapas Del Conflicto Armado En Colombia: Hacia El Posconflicto" [Stages of the Armed Conflict in Colombia: Towards the Post-conflict.] Latinoamérica. Revista de Estudios Latinoamericanos, no. 62 (2016): 227-57.

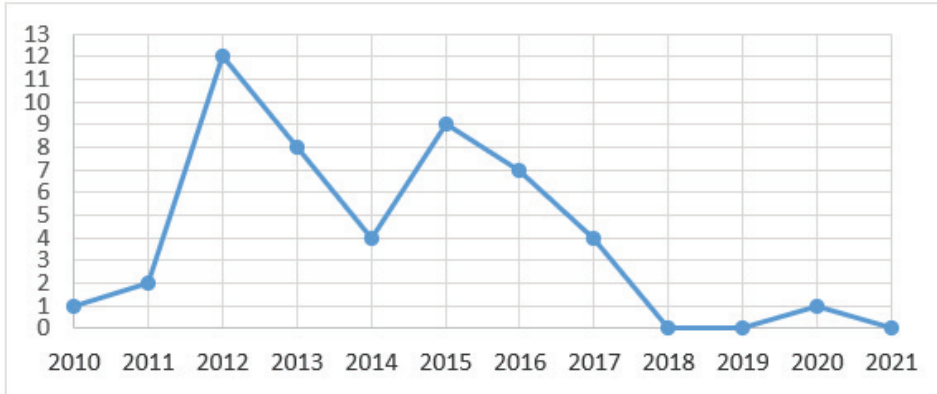


Figure 2. ODA Projects. U.S. and USAID donors, 2010-2021

Source: author's own elaboration based on data from USAID and data from the Colombian Presidential Agency for International Cooperation (APC-Colombia).



Figure 3. Cumulative amount per period 2012-2016 and 2017-2021 in million USD

Source: author's own elaboration based on data from USAID and data from the Colombian Presidential Agency for International Cooperation (APC-Colombia).

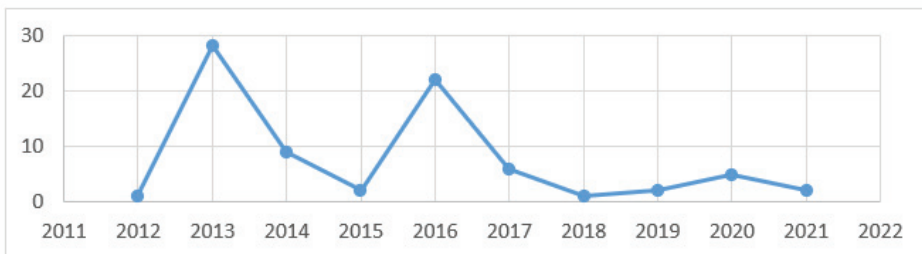


Figure 4. ODA Projects. European Union donors, 2012-2021

Source: author's own elaboration based on data from European Union Donors and data from the Colombian Presidential Agency for International Cooperation (APC-Colombia).



Figure 5. Cumulative amount by period 2012-2016 and 2017-2021 in million USD
Source: author's own elaboration based on data from European Union Donors and data from the Colombian Presidential Agency for International Cooperation (APC-Colombia).

VICTORY DAY OR EUROPE DAY? THE POLITICS OF MEMORY IN MOLDOVA IN THE SHADOW OF RUSSIA'S WAR IN UKRAINE

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Abstract. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 had a profound impact on the Republic of Moldova. The aftermath witnessed an unprecedented influx of Ukrainian refugees, a significant rise in inflation, a decline in political stability, and a deepening energy crisis. The root causes of political instability in Moldova are diverse, with issues of identity and memory playing a central role in the nation-building process since the Soviet Union's collapse. Moldova, situated between its Romanian roots and Russian-Soviet heritage, confronts numerous challenges in reconciling its past and navigating its future. The Russian occupation of its neighboring country has accentuated these challenges, serving as a crucial test for Moldova's European-oriented government. The response to this new geopolitical reality, however, has led to some measures that intensified ideological divisions within the population, particularly regarding matters of memory and identity. The contested memorial heritage in Moldova was notably evident during the May 9 celebrations, coinciding with Europe Day and Victory Day. While many European Union countries consider Europe Day a peripheral holiday promoting European values, Moldovan politicians and the public are increasingly giving it attention, with a growing belief that it should replace the Soviet-style Victory Day. Using the "struggle" over the significance of May 9 as a case study, this article explores contemporary Moldovan memory politics influenced by the realities of war.

Keywords: Moldova, memory politics, identity, Victory Day, Europe Day.

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Introduction

The Republic of Moldova, an Eastern European country located between Romania and Ukraine, offers a remarkable example of European borderlands. Moldova's identity and memorial landscape are dynamic and fluid, reflecting the intricacies of life in a region where diverse cultural and political influences converge. This article explores the evolving nature of Moldovan memory politics, a concept that relates to how groups, collectives, and nations construct and connect with specific narratives regarding historical periods or events. Memory politics emphasize a shared past and destiny, seeking to establish social cohesion, legitimize authority, and socialize society through constructed versions of history disseminated to the broader public through public commemorations, the educational system, mass media, and popular culture.¹

On February 24, 2022, Moldova awoke to a new reality shaped by the initiation of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The occupation of Moldova's neighboring country prompted Moldovan politicians to re-evaluate their positions and adapt to the new wartime reality in Eastern Europe. This article delves into the shifts in Moldova's memory politics triggered by the Russian military aggression. The analysis focuses on two concurrent celebrations, markedly distinct despite occurring on the same day. Victory Day, initially a commemoration of World War II that has evolved especially in Russia into a propagandist event glorifying Soviet and Russian mythologized past, now faces challenges from Europe Day, a holiday that promotes European values and serves as part of the EU's soft power strategies. Through them, the EU tries to build relationships, influence global affairs, and project a positive image of the European project on the international stage, especially in the Eastern Partnership countries.² To this end, Europe Day is one of the events that help to convey the EU's message to a broader public.

¹ Katherine Hite, *Politics and the Art of Commemoration: Memorials to Struggle in Latin America and Spain* (London, United Kingdom: Routledge, 2012).

² The Eastern Partnership is a specific Eastern dimension to the ENP that was launched in 2009. The aim of the partnership is to strengthen and deepen the political and economic relations between the European Union, its Member States and six Eastern European and South Caucasus partner countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia,

The article is organized into five sections, commencing with an exploration of the modern history of Moldova and its intricate terrain of contested identities and memorial heritage. Subsequently, a chapter delves into the historical shifts within Moldovan memory politics prior to the Russian invasion. The following chapters examine the consequences of Russia's war in Ukraine, explain changes in the politics of memory, and assess Moldova's response to the war's dynamics. Additionally, the article scrutinizes Victory Day and Europe Day celebrations, unravelling their significance and evolving dynamics within the changing socio-political landscape of Moldova.

The article draws upon ethnographic fieldwork in Moldova from February 2022 to July 2022, with additional observations made in May 2023. The primary data collection methods involved participant observation during both the 2022 and 2023 celebrations. Additionally, the author worked as a humanitarian coordinator in the refugee crisis response team during the initial months of the Russian full-scale invasion, providing valuable insights into the evolving situation. Other data collection methods included media content analysis to scrutinize the events' portrayal in various media outlets, and politicians' public releases and statements to discern their stances and responses to the changing geopolitical landscape.

Moldova as a Mnemonic Field

In-betweenness is frequently associated with Moldova and its historical context. Moldova's geographical position at the crossroads of multiple empires and influential regional entities has led to a continuous amalgamation of varied cultures, languages, ethnicities, religions, and powers. Historically, from the Middle Ages until 1812, the territory of the Republic of Moldova was part of the Principality of Moldova, experiencing varying degrees of influence from the Ottoman Empire. In

Moldova, and Ukraine. "Eastern Partnership," European Commission, accessed May 29, 2023, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/european-neighbourhood-policy/eastern-partnership_en.

1812, the Russian Empire annexed the eastern portion of the Principality of Moldova, corresponding primarily to the contemporary territory of the Republic of Moldova, and named it Bessarabia. After the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in 1917, Bessarabia declared short-lived independence, only to give it up soon afterwards and become part of the Kingdom of Romania in 1918. In 1940, Bessarabia was ceded to the Soviet Union after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. In 1941, the allied armies of Romania and Nazi Germany regained control of the territory, but in 1944 they were pushed back by the Red Army, and Bessarabia was definitively annexed to the Soviet Union.

It is evident that throughout its history, Moldova has been a subject of interest for more influential players in regional geopolitics. Each ruling power, with its distinct cultural, social, economic, and political perspectives, has imposed its visions, standards, and expectations upon the Moldovan inhabitants. This dynamic has inevitably influenced the process of Moldova's identity formation, self-determination, and, consequently, its collective self-esteem. Much like other nations speaking from subaltern positions, Moldovans have seldom been afforded the opportunity to determine their fate independently, with their agency in the process of self-determination significantly restricted.³ The frequent change of rulers and their corresponding ideologies, together with the multicultural and multi-ethnic nature of the territory, prevented the Moldovan population from completing a process of building a common shared identity.

³ I draw here on the scholarship produced by the Subaltern Studies Group, a collective of South Asian scholars who sought to critically engage with existing historiography that they found neglecting the experiences and perspectives of marginalised communities. The concept of "subaltern" refers to having "insufficient access to modes of representation," the one whose agency is limited by the existing social order – "a structured place from which the capacity to access power is radically obstructed." Swati Chattopadhyay and Bhaskar Sarkar, "Introduction: The subaltern and the popular," *Postcolonial Studies* 8, no. 4 (2005): 357-363, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790500375066>; Rosalind C. Morris, *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); Viacheslav Morozov, *Russia's Postcolonial Identity: A Subaltern Empire in a Eurocentric World* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Madina Tlostanova, "Can the Post-Soviet Think? On Coloniality of Knowledge, External Imperial and Double Colonial Difference," *Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics* 1, no. 2 (2015): 38-58.

Numerous scholars have highlighted the challenges and complexities associated with the “failed” project of Moldovan nation-building, pointing to the belated nationhood development that has impacted subsequent societal development.⁴

Within the complex landscape of Moldovan identity, a notable divide emerges between two predominant ideological and identity groups: the pan-Romanianists and the Moldovanists. In short, pan-Romanianists contend that Moldovans share an ethnic, cultural, and historical background with Romanians. They argue that Russian and subsequent Soviet political interventions have artificially created any perceived differences between the two groups. Conversely, Moldovanists acknowledge the close relationship between Moldovans and Romanians, but maintain that each group possesses distinct identities with unique histories, languages, and cultures. In their perspective, Moldovans and Romanians, while connected, remain separate nations.⁵

These two ideological factions harbor significantly different interpretations of the recent past, shaping their respective visions of the present and the future in ways that often stand in stark contrast to one another. Pan-Romanianists underscore the shared origins of Moldovans and Romanians. Among the more radical proponents, there is an assertion that the Republic of Moldova, as an independent state, should not exist, advocating for reunification with Romania as the only path to “historical justice.” This narrative highlights the perceived injustice imposed by the

⁴ Charles King, “Moldovan Identity and the Politics of Pan-Romanianism,” *Slavic Review* 53, no. 2 (1994): 345–68; Luke March, “From Moldovanism to Europeanization? Moldova’s Communists and Nation Building,” *Nationalities Papers* 35, no. 4 (2007): 601–25; Cristina Petrescu, “Contrasting/Conflicting Identities: Bessarabians, Romanians, Moldovans,” in *Nation-Building and Contested Identities: Romanian and Hungarian Case Studies*, ed. Balazs Trencsenyi (Iași: Editura Polirom, 2001), 153–78; Petru Negura, “The Republic of Moldova’s Transition between a Failed Communism and an Un-Commenced Capitalism?,” *Studia Politica. Romanian Political Science Review* 16, no. 1 (2016): 541–68; Wim Meurs, “Moldova: Nested Cases of Belated Nation-Building,” *Revue d’études Comparatives Est-Ouest* 46 (2015): 185–209, <https://doi.org/10.4074/S0338059915001084>.

⁵ Alexandr Voronovici, “A Tangle of Memory: The Eternitate Memorial Complex in Chisinau and History Politics in Moldova,” *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society* 5, no. 2 (2019): 225–60.

Soviets and romanticizes a purported “Golden Age” during the Romanian Kingdom. Notably, pan-Romanianists frequently omit the controversial aspects of Romanian history, such as the fascist tendencies in the 1930s, the notorious rule of the inter-war dictator Ion Antonescu, and the Romanian-perpetrated Holocaust in regions of Bessarabia and Bucovina.⁶ In their vision for Moldova, pan-Romanianists aspire for political, economic, and cultural alignment with Romania and the European Union. It is no surprise that this ideological wing is predominantly composed of Romanian speakers.⁷

In contrast, Moldovanists acknowledge the similarities between Moldova and Romania, yet they contend that distinctive differences exist, justifying the recognition of Moldovans as an independent nation. It is important to note that Moldovanists possess diverse perspectives, and their conceptualization of Moldovan identity can vary significantly. The umbrella term of *Moldovanism* bounds a range of approaches, spanning from those who embrace a Soviet-influenced Moldovan identity to others who perceive Moldovanism as a civic concept encompassing the multi-ethnic population of Moldova.⁸ Those informed by Soviet identity politics tend to view the Soviet period positively, attributing responsibility for historical wrongs to Romanians and German Nazis, amalgamated under the label of “fascists.” Consequently, this faction often exhibits a greater fondness towards Russia than the European Union, which they equate with Romania. Notably, this group vehemently rejects the prospect of reunification with Romania, viewing it as a form of cultural and political Romanization that threatens the preservation of Moldovan identity. The Moldovanist side encompasses Romanian/Moldovan and most Russian

⁶ Svetlana Suveica, “From Heroisation to Competing Victimhoods. History Writing on the Second World War in Moldova,” *Südosteuropa* 65, no. 2 (2017): 388-411, <https://doi.org/doi:10.1515/soeu-2017-0023>.

⁷ Charles King, “Moldovan Identity and the Politics of Pan-Romanianism,” *Slavic Review* 53, no. 2 (1994): 345-368, doi:10.2307/2501297; Piotr Oleksy, “Discourse on National Identity in Moldovan Politics after 2009,” *Przegląd Strategiczny*, no. 2 (2012): 127-35.; Alexandr Voronovici, “A Tangle of Memory: The Eternitate Memorial Complex in Chisinau and History Politics in Moldova,” *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society* 5, no. 2 (2019): 225-60.

⁸ Piotr Oleksy, “Discourse on National Identity in Moldovan Politics after 2009,” *Przegląd Strategiczny* 2 (2012): 127-35, <https://doi.org/10.14746/ps.2012.2.10>.

speakers, including various ethnic minorities like Gagauz, Bulgarians, and Ukrainians.⁹

As evident, the construction of Moldovan identity has been profoundly shaped by the collective memory and historical narratives surrounding World War II and the subsequent Soviet period. Moldova experienced the so-called “double occupation,” involving sequential occupations by the Red Army and a joint Romanian-Nazi army. The inhabitants of Moldova went through forced Soviet deportations, political persecutions, Romanian-perpetrated pogroms, and the mass killing of Bessarabian Jews, as well as alleged Communists and Socialists, resulting in a significant loss of life and pervasive silence.

Therefore, establishing a unified narrative that comprehensively explains these events and provides guidance for addressing this uneasy recent past has proven to be challenging. As a result, Moldovan society remains fragmented, with contested historical perspectives and competing narratives. Pan-Romanians tend to omit the memory of Romanian and Nazi atrocities, often remaining silent or ignorant about the extensive Romanian forces’ role in the Holocaust of Bessarabian Jews. In contrast, Moldovanists often play the “fascist card” to undermine the positive image of Romania and, by extension, the European Union. This narrative perpetuates the fear of an alleged coercive Romanization that they associate with European Union integration.¹⁰

The “mnemonic wars” culminate on May 9, traditionally marked in this region with the celebrations of Victory Day over fascism. However, on the same date, Europe Day, which is dedicated to the European Union and European integration, is also celebrated. On May 9, the Moldovanists gather to celebrate victory in World War II, while the pro-European Moldovans meet to celebrate Europe Day. The way of celebrating both events has changed significantly over the years, but since the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, these two events have become adversary celebrations. The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 marked an entirely new chapter in Moldova’s memory politics and hastened some processes that were previously considered too radical.

⁹ Oleksy, “Discourse on National Identity in Moldovan Politics after 2009,” 129.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 134.

Memory Politics in Moldova Before the Full-scale Russian Invasion

As already mentioned, the memory policy aims to unite certain communities and manifest their common values through shared versions of the past. These serve as social representations of the past that seek to explain how things are and how they should be and to connect individuals to the collective.¹¹ Memory scholars, Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, argue:

“Our understanding of the past has strategic, political, and ethical consequences. Contests over the meaning of the past are also contests over the meaning of the present and over ways of taking the past forward.”¹²

Peter J. Verovšek notes: “Politicians frequently make use of mythologized understandings of the past to mobilize memory as an instrument of politics in the present.”¹³ Thus, memory politics have the power to bring certain events into the national consciousness, silence or forget others, interpret and reinterpret the past and offer visions of the present and future through these interpretations.

To understand the complexities of Moldova’s memory politics, a brief historical overview of its discursive shifts is necessary. In the 1990s, outspoken pan-Romanianist politicians advocated for the reunification of Moldova with Romania and a revival of what they considered the “authentic” Romanian culture. However, these efforts proved unsuccessful in fostering closer integration between Moldova and Romania. Instead, the economic reforms initiated after gaining independence in 1991 plunged Moldova into a severe financial crisis, resulting in a decline in living standards and a substantial emigration of skilled individuals.¹⁴

¹¹ James Liu and János László, “A Narrative Theory of History and Identity,” in *Social Representation and Identity*, eds. Gail Moloney and Iain Walker (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 85–107, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230609181_6.

¹² Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 18.

¹³ Peter J. Verovšek, “Collective Memory, Politics, and the Influence of the Past: The Politics of Memory as a Research Paradigm,” *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 4, no. 3 (2016): 529, DOI: 10.1080/21565503.2016.1167094.

¹⁴ Nina Orlova and Per Ronnas, “The Crippling Cost of an Incomplete Transformation:

The dismal performance of the Moldovan economy left the population disillusioned, prompting many to reminisce about the purportedly “better” and “easier” times during the Soviet Union era.

In response to widespread dissatisfaction, the parliamentary election of 2001 saw the emergence of the Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM) as a dominant force. This party, openly embracing Moldovanist and Soviet nostalgic sentiments, secured victory and subsequently formed a new government. Among its priorities was the reform of memory politics in alignment with Moldovanist perspectives. The PCRM actively promoted the Soviet heritage and adopted a favorable stance towards the Soviet past. Their initiatives included reinstating compulsory Russian language instruction in schools and revising history textbooks published after the Soviet Union’s collapse. These changes aimed to highlight the Moldovan identity as distinct from the Romanian one. However, such endeavors faced significant criticism and widespread protests from those who perceived them as an ideological return to a Soviet-style interpretation of Moldovan history and identity. Critics argued that these measures, rooted in the Soviet concept of self-determination, contributed to an effort to re-Russify Moldova.¹⁵

In the election year 2009, the Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM) secured victory once again, but allegations of election fraud by the opposition triggered popular protests. In response to the unrest, a snap election was conducted, resulting in a new government led by a coalition of pro-European parties known as the Alliance for European Integration. The Alliance, openly advocating pan-Romanianist views, adopted an anti-Communist and anti-Soviet discourse while emphasizing historical events and figures associated with Romanian identity. Taking cues from other former Eastern Bloc countries, the new government established academic bodies focused on examining Soviet and Communist regime repressions. Notable examples include *The Commission for the Study and Evaluation of the Communist*

The Case of Moldova,” *Post-Communist Economies* 11, no. 3 (1 September 1999): 373-97, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14631379995931>.

¹⁵ Sergiu Musteață, *About Us and Our Neighbours: History Textbooks in the Republic of Moldova, Romania and Ukraine* (Eckert. Dossiers 7: Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research, 2017).

Totalitarian Regime of the Republic of Moldova and the Centre for the Study of *Totalitarian Regimes & Cold War*. As part of their initiatives, history textbooks underwent revisions, with students now being taught the *History of Romanians* and *World History*.¹⁶ This shift framed the recent past as a struggle between the periods of unfreedom and repression under Soviet rule versus the perceived “Golden Age” within the Romanian Kingdom. The reinterpretation of history reflected the broader ideological orientation of the new government towards European integration and a rejection of the Communist and Soviet legacy.

In the 2014 elections, the Socialist Party won but was unable to establish a government. The strongest of the “pro-European” parties was the Democratic Party of Moldova (PDM). The PDM was best known for its chairman, a notorious oligarch Vlad Plahotniuc, whose governing strategy was relatively simple; he was formally very pro-European and pro-Romanian, but these tendencies were only a smokescreen for diverting money from European funds. At the same time, he was very open to Soviet nostalgia and pro-Russian attitudes. As a result, his government organized events commemorating victims of Soviet crimes and, at the same time, promoted celebrations linked to a positive image of the Soviet period.

The 2019 elections led to a diverse government coalition consisting of the Socialist Party (PSRM) and the ACUM electoral alliance. ACUM comprised pro-European liberal parties, the Action and Solidarity (PAS), and the Dignity and Truth (DA) platform political party, with Maia Sandu and Andrei Năstase as respective leaders. The primary motivation for these ideologically distinct parties to collaborate was a shared objective: to remove Vlad Plahotniuc from power and eliminate his substantial influence. However, this coalition government faced internal challenges and dissolved only six months after its establishment. The dissolution was primarily attributed to ideological clashes, particularly concerning the approach to memory politics. Despite their initial alignment against Plahotniuc, the inherent ideological differences within the coalition contributed to its eventual breakdown.¹⁷

¹⁶ Sergiu Musteață, *About Us and Our Neighbours*: 22.

¹⁷ Madalin Necsutu, “PM’s Plan to Commemorate Victims of Totalitarianism Divides Moldova,”

In 2020, Maia Sandu returned to a prominent state position by winning the presidential election defeating the incumbent President Igor Dodon from the Socialist Party. The subsequent year saw her PAS party secure a majority in snap parliamentary elections, getting fifty-three per cent of the vote. Sandu and PAS adopted a center-right, pro-European stance and a nuanced approach that rejected a simplistic black-and-white understanding of Moldovan politics. They were committed to European integration while recognizing the importance of maintaining positive relations with Russia.¹⁸

However, this approach underwent a dramatic shift following the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Moldova's previous pragmatic stance toward Russia transformed into open criticism and vocal condemnation of Russia's war and foreign policy. The ruling party and President Sandu took an unequivocal stance against the conflict in the neighboring country. In response to Russian threats and blackmail, Moldova shifted its economic, political, and cultural allegiances almost exclusively towards the European Union. This shift also extended to the politics of memory, particularly evident in the heightened controversy surrounding Victory Day and the increased emphasis on EU-related celebrations, specifically Europe Day. The changing geopolitical landscape prompted Moldova to re-evaluate its alliances and priorities, significantly departing from its prior diplomatic posture.

The Russian Full-scale Invasion of Ukraine and the Moldovan Response

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine has had a profound impact on the Republic of Moldova. Moldova unexpectedly found itself at the forefront of a Ukrainian refugee crisis, as people escaping the Russian war, especially from Southern Ukraine, flooded across the Ukrainian-Moldovan borders. From February 24 to May 9, 2022, over 400,000

Balkan Insight, August 15, 2019, accessed May 29, 2023, <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/08/15/pms-plan-to-commemorate-victims-of-totalitarianism-divides-moldova/>.

¹⁸ Mikhail Polianskii and Rebecca Wagner, "Breaking the Vicious Circle: Can the New Moldovan President Sandu Succeed in Balancing Relations with the EU and Russia?," *Peace Research Institute Frankfurt* 19 (2020), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep28582>.

individuals passed through Moldova, with approximately 90,000 opting to stay, making Moldova host the largest number of Ukrainian refugees per capita at one point.¹⁹

The refugee crisis presented a significant challenge for Moldova on multiple fronts. Firstly, no predefined crisis scenario was available to navigate the country through the initial chaos. Moldova, with its decentralized structure, responded awkwardly to the influx of war refugees. In the initial weeks, the bulk of assistance relied on the spontaneous solidarity and commitment of local individuals who independently went to the border, offering aid to Ukrainians in the form of warm meals, clothing, transportation, and accommodation. The non-profit and civil society sector, despite being severely underfunded, stepped in on the brink and effectively filled the void until the state authorities and international organizations like the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR) and the World Food Programme (WFP) organized and systematic aid. Among others, *The Moldova pentru Pace* (Moldova for Peace) movement, a non-hierarchical collaborative effort involving activists, NGO workers, and public figures, were pivotal in establishing an organization to assist refugees in various domains, such as accommodation, transportation or legal services.²⁰

The first wave of Ukrainian refugees comprised mainly people with means and connections abroad. However, subsequent waves included people who were reluctant to leave but compelled to do so by Russian violence, predominantly the elderly and those with limited financial, cultural, and social capital. These individuals arrived in Moldova without a clear plan for their future, prompting Moldova to develop a crisis management system to address their immediate needs and later facilitate integration. This meant unexpected expenses for the state coffers (although international NGOs and humanitarian organizations provided the vast majority of monetary assistance to refugees and host households), but also the need to focus its attention on solving the crisis and postpone some important projects.

¹⁹ "Situation Ukraine Refugee Situation," Unhcr.org., accessed May 29, 2023, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine/location/10784>.

²⁰ "Moldova for Peace," accessed May 29, 2023, <https://moldovapentrupace.md/en/>.

The food crisis has become a concomitant of the war in Ukraine for Moldova. Moldova is currently not self-sufficient in food and must import most of it. Before the war, Moldova's biggest importer was Ukraine, from which it mainly imported food and household goods. The war and the disruption of trade routes from Ukraine have put Moldova in a very problematic situation. It had to start importing many products from the European Union and Turkey, significantly increasing prices. It also took several weeks for new trade links to be established. In the weeks after the war began, even something as common as buckwheat or salt was not easily available in Moldova. The regions directly adjacent to Ukraine were the worst affected. Unfortunately, these regions often correspond to Moldova's poorest regions. Due to the underdeveloped infrastructure, importing goods (not only) to regions far from the border with the European Union is costly.

Initially, on the political level, Moldova took a neutral stance on the war, condemning it but refraining from joining Western sanctions. Instead, it has increased exports of agricultural products to Russia, taking advantage of newly accessible markets that were previously unavailable due to Russian sanctions following the signing of the Association Agreement with the EU. Moldova's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nicu Popescu, emphasized the country's constitutional neutrality, citing economic dependence on Russia as a factor:

"Moldova is a neutral state. We will not take any side in the conflict. Moldova will not join any sanctions either [...] The Moldovan economy is too integrated and dependent on Russia. The decision to impose sanctions on Russia is not easy; this is a very hard decision that could be made by stronger and more prosperous countries than Moldova. It was decided after the annexation of Crimea in 2014 that Moldova would not join the sanctions imposed on Russia by the European Union or the US, and we adhere to this course. The decision was made based on economic considerations, as the Moldovan economy is too dependent on relations with Russia."²¹

However, Moldova's neutral position faced challenges under Russian pressure, particularly during an impending energy crisis. Russia, the primary

²¹ Mamuka Komakhia, "Review of Russia's Policy in the Post-Soviet Space/ Russian Aggression in Ukraine: Response of Moldova and Its Refusal to Impose Sanctions," Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies, accessed May 29, 2023, <https://www.gfsis.org.ge/russian-monitor/view/3179>.

gas supplier, openly blackmailed Moldova, threatening energy disruptions unless its political stance changed.²² Therefore, the Moldovan government had to try to find a way out of the crisis in various ways. In June 2022, Moldova was granted EU candidate status, from which the government expected economic aid and new political alliances. Already in 2021, 61% of Moldova's exports were with EU countries, which is likely to increase since its acceptance as a candidate country. Similarly, Moldova has been promised significant investment in five priority pillars: rule of law, good governance, sustainability, competitiveness, and regional cooperation.

Realizing the limited benefits and guarantees of maintaining positive relations with Russia, Moldova gradually shifted towards a pro-European course. The country condemned Russian aggression in Ukraine more strongly, moving away from the influence of "Russkiy mir" and prioritizing European integration, a shift echoed by President Maia Sandu and the PAS government.

Anti-propaganda Measures

In April 2022, the Moldovan government implemented measures to counter pro-Russian and pro-war propaganda. These initiatives included enacting a law to revoke the licenses of several pro-Russian media outlets and prohibiting certain Russian TV channels. A strong stance against Russian propaganda was taken by banning the Saint George's ribbon along with the letters Z and V. According to the new legislation, individuals found making, wearing, or displaying the striped ribbon could face a minimum fine of 900 lei (\$49) or 69 hours of community service. Lilian Carp, a PAS MP and the Chair of the Parliamentary Standing Committee for National Security, Defense, and Public Order, affirmed this legislative move:

²² Daria Alekseeva, "Какой смысл нам поддерживать прозападный курс Молдовы». Пушков о поставках российского газа" ["What's the Point Supporting Moldova's pro-Western Direction? Pushkov about Russian Gas Supplies to Moldova"], NewsMaker, accessed May 29, 2023, <https://newsmaker.md/rus/novosti/kakoy-smysl-nam-podderzhivat-prozapadnyy-kurs-moldovy-pushkov-o-postavkah-rossiyskogo-gaza/?fbclid=IwAR3mnqvzVZWSTpq0J06RL88fy90ZacGbATPB2fhXq5l598epjdyXyEeqw8>.

“The amendments were adopted in the context of the war in Ukraine. These symbols, used in Russia’s military aggression in Ukraine, shall be banned in the Republic of Moldova territory as they justify the military aggression against Ukraine. We considered it necessary to amend the Code of Offenses in order to prevent propaganda of war in the territory of our country.”²³

Objections from the Communist and Socialist parties led their representatives to leave the chamber in protest during the passage of the bill. However, the most vocal critics of the St. George’s ribbon ban were from Gagauzia, an autonomous territorial unit in southern Moldova. Gagauz politicians even voted in their parliament that the ban does not apply to the territory of ATO Gagauzia, allowing the ribbon to continue being worn in that region. The bill’s sponsor, Sergei Cimpoș, labelled the ban a “mistake” by the Moldovan parliament, citing discontent among the Gagauz population and asserting that: “You cannot sell or buy remembrance.”²⁴

The St. George’s ribbon has a complex history, dating back to the time of Russian Tsarina Catherine II. Originating as an addition to the Order of St. George in 1769 during the Russo-Turkish War, the ribbon gained prominence during World War II when the Soviet army reintroduced it. In 2000, the Russian Federation elevated the Order of St. George to its highest decoration. Since 2005, the ribbon has symbolized victory over Germany and fascism, holding a privileged position in Victory Day celebrations on May 9. A significant resurgence of the ribbon occurred in 2014 during Euromaidan and the Revolution of Dignity, with pro-Russian and pro-Yanukovych supporters using it as a symbol against what they perceived as neo-Nazi and fascist forces in Ukraine. Viewing Euromaidan as a coup by new-generation fascists, they positioned themselves as anti-fascist fighters. Since 2014, the St. George’s ribbon has also symbolized opposition to the pro-European direction and a desire for closer ties with Russia.²⁵

²³ “Parliament Prohibits Saint George’s Ribbon and Symbols z and v, Which Russian Troops Use in Ukraine,” Infotag.Md., April 8, 2022, accessed May 29, 2023, <https://www.infotag.md/politics-en/298584/>.

²⁴ “St. George’s Ribbon “Permitted’ in Gagauzia in Defiance of National Ban,” IPN, April 29, 2022, accessed May 29, 2023, https://www.ipn.md/en/st-georges-ribbon-permitted-in-gagauzia-in-defiance-of-7965_1089479.html.

²⁵ James Hudzik, “The St George Ribbon and Why Are They Wearing It?,” *Euromaidan Press*, 2014, accessed May 29, 2023, <https://euromaidanpress.com/2014/02/09/the-st-george-ribbon-and-why-are-they-wearing-it/>.

Regarding the media ban, six TV channels broadcasting in Romanian and Russian languages were prohibited. The channels had their licenses revoked “for disseminating incorrect information when covering events in Moldova and the war in Ukraine.”²⁶ Then Prime Minister Natalia Gavrilița offered comments on the ban:

“After almost 300 days of the war in Ukraine, the propaganda in the Republic of Moldova has not stopped; in fact, it has intensified. [...] In the situation where not only an energy war is being waged against our country, but also an information war, we have the responsibility and even the obligation to protect our citizens and the country.”²⁷

Interestingly, all six TV channels were linked to Moldovan oligarch and businessman Ilan Șor, who is currently in exile in Israel due to a corruption warrant. Șor is a prominent figure in the political party ȘOR, which is openly antigovernmental and pro-Russian. Șor personally owns three of the banned TV channels, two are owned by his close associates, and the sixth sympathizes with him.

These measures sparked various reactions. In Balti, Moldova’s second-largest city known for its significant Russian-speaking minority, protests against the president and government occurred in the main square. Opponents of the new law gathered at a World War II memorial featuring a tank on a pedestal with an eternal flame, chanting anti-government slogans and singing patriotic military songs. Similar protests occurred in the Gagauz capital, Comrat, and other cities across Moldova. Moscow took notice of these actions, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Maria Zakharova issued repeated warnings to Chisinau, urging it to reconsider such decrees. Zakharova said:

²⁶ Alexander Tanas, “Moldova to temporarily ban six TV channels over broadcasts about war,” *Reuters* (online), December 16, 2022, accessed January 20, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/moldova-temporarily-ban-six-tv-channels-over-broadcasts-about-war-2022-12-16/>.

²⁷ “Moldovan Government Suspends Licenses of Six TV Stations to «Eliminate Propaganda,»” *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, December 17, 2022, accessed January 20, 2024, <https://www.rferl.org/a/moldova-ilan-shor-tv-stations-licenses-suspended-russia-war/32180842.html>.

“We consider this ban as an unprecedented act of political censorship, as an abuse of the principle of media pluralism and a flagrant violation of the right to freedom of access to information, to which the political leadership of the Republic regularly declares its adherence.” She added: “In light of the unprecedented consequences of its implementation for the Russian-speaking part of the country’s population, we also qualify it as a cynical infringement of the rights of national minorities.”²⁸

Other forms of protest were also present. In the Gagauz villages of Копчак and Томай, signs spray-painted on the road read “Роосия (sic!), мы с вами” [Ruusia (sic!), we are with you] and “Гагаузия с Вами!” [Gagauzia is with you].²⁹ Stickers supporting the Russian invasion began to appear on cars.³⁰ At the beginning of the war, the façade of the former National Hotel in Chisinau was painted in the colors of the Ukrainian flag.³¹ After the anti-propaganda bill was passed, someone repainted it in the St. George Ribbon colors (orange and black). Later, it was partially repainted to the Ukrainian colors again.³²

²⁸ “Russia denounces Moldova’s ban of TV channels as ‘political censorship,’” Reuters, December 17, 2022, accessed May 29, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-denounces-moldovas-ban-tv-channels-political-censorship-2022-12-17/>.

²⁹ “«Россия, мы с вами». В Копчаке неизвестные нарисовали на асфальте символы Z и V” [‘Russia, We Are with You.’ In the Village of Копчак Unknown People Painted Symbols Z and V], NewsMaker.md, April 15, 2022, accessed May 29, 2023, <https://newsmaker.md/rus/novosti/rossiya-my-s-vami-v-kopchake-neizvestnye-narisovali-na-asfalte-simvol-y-z-i-v/>; “(ФОТО) На асфальте при въезде в Томай в Гагаузии появилась надпись с запрещенными знаками Z, V и георгиевской лентой” [translation in English], Nokta.md, May 4, 2022, accessed May 29, 2023, <https://nokta.md/foto-na-asfalte-pri-vezde-v-tomaj-poyavilas-nadpis-s-zapreshhenny-mi-znakami-z-v-i-georgievskoj-lentoj/>.

³⁰ “Чем рискуют водители, которые наклеивают на свои автомобили букву «Z»?” [What Are Risking Drivers which Put Stickers with Z and V on their Cars?], Noi.md, March 25, 2022, accessed May 29, 2023, <https://noi.md/ru/v-mire/chem-riskuyut-voditeli-kotorye-nakleivayut-na-svoi-avtomobili-bukvu-z?prev=1%D0%A3>.

³¹ “(ФОТО) В Кишиневе гостиницу National покрасили в цвет флага Украины” [Somebody Has Painted the National Hotel in Chisinau in the Colours of the Ukrainian Flag], NewsMaker.md, February 27, 2022, accessed May 29, 2023, <https://newsmaker.md/rus/novosti/foto-v-kishineve-gostinitsu-national-pokrasili-v-tsvet-flaga-ukrainy/>.

³² “(UPD/ФОТО) Здание бывшей гостиницы ‘Националь’ в Кишиневе наполовину окрашено в цвета георгиевской ленты” [The Former National Hotel in Chisinau Has Been Partially Painted in the Colours of the St. George’s Ribbon], Nokta.md, April 20, 2022, accessed May 29, 2023, <https://nokta.md/upd-foto-zdanie-byvshej-gostinitsy-natsional-v-kishineve-napolovinu-okrasheno-v-tsveta-georgievskoj-lenty/>.

In May 2022, IPIS (Institutul pentru Inițiative Strategice) and WatchDog.md released a survey regarding the perspectives of Moldovans on the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The findings revealed some concerns: 20% of Moldovans supported Russia, 31% supported Ukraine, and 30% remained undecided, expressing that they did not find any party in the conflict justified. Regarding responsibility for the war, 25% directly blamed Putin, 19% attributed blame to the United States of America, and 13% held the Ukrainian government accountable. The survey also inquired about opinions on accepting refugees, foreign financial aid, and the ban on the St. George Ribbon. Regarding the ribbon ban, 35% expressed support, 24% disagreed, and 27% strongly disagreed.³³

As noted earlier, the government led by Natalie Gavrilița and Maia Sandu encountered substantial challenges in 2022, as Moldova faced unprecedented inflation and escalating prices, particularly in essential areas such as food, energy, and housing. The sharp increase in rental prices in Chisinau was linked not only to the influx of refugees but also to the growing presence of international organizations requiring accommodation for their personnel. Escalating petrol prices further exacerbated the challenges. In September 2022, protests and demonstrations erupted in Chisinau and other Moldovan cities, with demonstrators calling for the resignation of the pro-Western government, alleging its failure to address soaring prices, and advocating for a normalization of relations with Russia. These protests, orchestrated by the ȘOR Party led by the openly pro-Kremlin politician Ilan Șor, gained significant traction.³⁴ On September 18, approximately 20,000 people participated in a protest in Chisinau, and on September 25, protesters established about a dozen tents in front of the presidential palace. Numerous protests persisted through the autumn of 2022, extending into 2023.³⁵

³³ "Sondaj Socio-Politic MAI 2022" [Socio-Political Survey], Ipn.Md, accessed May 29, 2023, <https://www.ipn.md/storage/ckfinder/files/Sondaj%20la%20comanda%20WatchDog%20si%20IPIS%20Mai%202022.pdf>.

³⁴ Tony Wesolowsky, "Ilan Șor: The Kremlin's New Man in Moldova," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, November 3, 2022, accessed May 29, 2023, <https://www.rferl.org/a/moldova-shor-kremlin-businessman-destabilize/32114352.html>.

³⁵ RFE/RL's Moldovan Service, "Moldovan Anti-Government Protesters Set up Tents Outside President's Residence," RFE/RL, September 25, 2022, accessed May 29, 2023, <https://www.rferl.org/a/moldova-presidency-shor-protests/32051416.html>.

Against this backdrop, concerns arose about the observance of Victory Day on May 9. There were apprehensions that the celebrations might incite violence or even prompt a coup attempt. Speculation about a potential Russian-backed coup had been circulating, creating a tangible fear of a violent takeover. In response to the uncertain situation, some international organizations evacuated their personnel to Iasi, Romania. This underscores the contemporary significance of Victory Day in Russian discourse and the evolving nature of the celebrations.

Victory Day: (Not Only) a Propaganda Tool

Victory Day, commemorating the end of World War II and the triumph over fascism, holds significant historical importance in numerous former Soviet Union countries. While most of Europe observes the holiday on May 8, in post-Soviet republics, including Russia, it is marked on May 9. This deviation is attributed to the timing of the German surrender, which occurred so late at night that by Moscow time, it was already the next day, May 9.

Immediately following the end of World War II, a Moscow parade was organized, laying the foundation for all subsequent May 9 celebrations. Its purpose was to unite Soviet citizens, showcase their strength and military prowess, and assert the superiority of the USSR, which had defeated the technologically advanced Germans. The goal was to instill pride in ordinary citizens for their country and foster belief in the capabilities of its people. The message was that without the USSR, the West would not have emerged victorious, and consequently, they owed a perpetual debt to the Soviets. The triumph in the war justified the hardships of the 1920s and 1930s industrialization and repression era, as it demonstrated that the struggles were worthwhile, enabling the Soviet Union to become a global power. However, regular commemorations did not commence until 1965, when May 9 was proclaimed a public holiday. Initially, these commemorations were characterized by sorrow rather than pride.³⁶

³⁶ Jeanmarie Rouhier-Willoughby, "Victory Day Celebrations: Memory and Validation," *Folklorica. Journal of the Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Folklore Association* 8, no. 2 (2003): 24-34.

Since Vladimir Putin came to power in 2001, he has invested heavily in creating a common Russian identity to cover up the economic problems and increasingly authoritarian policies of the Russian establishment.³⁷ He used the politics of memory and historical narratives to convince people of a certain image of the past, which then justified current policies, including the ongoing genocidal war in Ukraine. May 9 proved to be an ideal occasion for Vladimir Putin, as few other moments could bring together the diverse population of the Russian Federation. Over recent years, Victory Day has evolved into a holiday embodying state ideology centered on militarism, the memory of the heroic struggle against fascism, and the glory of the Soviet Union. It has become a cornerstone of Russian and, to a large extent, post-Soviet identity – a momentous victory in which the inhabitants of the post-Soviet space continue to take pride, creating an aura of exceptionalism. Russia has effectively claimed exclusive ownership of the triumph over Nazi Germany, with its interpretation excluding the acknowledgement of other nations that contributed to defeating Nazism. According to Russian minds and propaganda, Victory Day is a day reserved for Russians and all the “brother nations” who fought alongside the Red Army.³⁸

Victory Day typically comprises three components: a military parade featuring a veterans’ march (now transitioning to the Immortal Regiment due to the scarcity of veterans), a commemoration at the local central memorial to World War II, and a family meal. The primary aim of the parade historically was to showcase Soviet military might and technological advancements. This function persists today, highlighting the “glorious” armed forces of post-Soviet countries, particularly Russia. With only a few living veterans remaining, the Immortal Regiment concept was introduced. It involves participants carrying photographs of relatives or family friends who served in the Red Army during World War II. The movement’s origin dates to May 9, 2012, when residents of Tomsk, Russia, initiated a procession, marching through the city streets with banners adorned with photos of their war veteran relatives. The rally saw over 6,000 participants carrying over 2,000 portraits of wartime participants.³⁹

³⁷ Elizabeth A. Wood, “Performing Memory: Vladimir Putin and the Celebration of World War II in Russia,” *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 38, no. 2 (2011): 172-200, doi.org/10.1163/187633211X591175.

³⁸ Jeanmarie Rouhier-Willoughby, “Victory Day Celebrations,” 31-32.

³⁹ “О движении” [About the Movement], Moypolk.ru, accessed May 29, 2023, <https://www.moypolk.ru/letopis-polka>.

In Moldova, the observance of May 9 has undergone significant transformations, aligning itself more closely with the Russian model. The celebration has evolved from a relatively neutral event to a demonstration of pro-Russian and Soviet nostalgic sentiments, serving as a platform to question Moldova's pro-European orientation. However, concluding solely based on this shift would be overly simplistic. While the celebration undoubtedly acts as a conduit for Russian propaganda, it also highlights the government's challenges in engaging non-Romanian-speaking citizens in broader discussions about Moldova's identity and the country's future trajectory.

May 9 is among the last holidays that link the present with the past. For many people, especially among the Russian-speaking and Moldovanist-minded population, it is one of the few national holidays with which they can identify and, therefore, remains an integral part of their Moldovan identity. Many participants see Victory Day as an opportunity to express their patriotism, national and family pride. This is especially true in a situation when certain pro-Romanian politicians and some sections of the public question the very existence and legitimacy of the Moldovan nation. The loud Victory Day celebrations are supposed to be a warning to these politicians that there exists a significant number of people who would not allow Moldova to unite with Romania and lose its independence. Moreover, for those whose family members or friends fought in the war, Victory Day is a way to honor and pay tribute to the veterans and their heroism. As such, the celebrations often foster a sense of unity; meeting fellow citizens to recall a shared history creates a sense of belonging and solidarity.⁴⁰

In the last few years, there has been a noticeable withdrawal of the state from the celebrations. During Victory Day in 2022 and 2023, the ruling PAS party and the government limited their participation to a modest presence at the Eternitate [Eternity] Memorial, the main World War II memorial in Chisinau.⁴¹ In 2022, Prime Minister Natalia Gavrilița

⁴⁰ Misha Gabowitsch, *Памятник и Праздник: Этнография Дня Победы* [Monument and Celebration: An Ethnography of Victory Day] (Saint Petersburg: Nestor-Istoriia, 2020).

⁴¹ Alexandr Voronovici, "A Tangle of Memory: The Eternitate Memorial Complex in Chisinau and History Politics in Moldova," *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society* 5, no. 2 (2019): 225-60.

and Speaker of the House Igor Groșu attended the commemorative event. President Sandu, citing health issues, did not participate, though pro-Russian and Russian media construed this as a symbolic gesture against the celebration.⁴² The government has communicated its decision not to observe Victory Day during an ongoing war in the neighboring country. President Sandu delivered a speech on May 8, proposing the celebration of a Day of Peace instead of Victory Day. She stated:

“We will celebrate peace on May 9, when we honor the fallen of World War II, which took millions of lives. We will celebrate peace on Europe Day, which united to stop wars on the continent and gave Europeans prosperity and progress. Peace begins in the family and the community. We can keep it if we do not fall prey to division. We are different, but we must live together and build a future in our country. In peace, Moldova has a future.”⁴³

Noticeably, she employs the term “World War II” instead of “Great Patriotic War,” which is commonly used in Russia and several post-Soviet nations. This choice reflects a shift toward Western terminology and a departure from the post-Soviet lexicon.

In 2023, the scenario repeated itself, with government officials restricting their participation to a morning visit to Eternitate. They observed a minute of silence and laid wreaths. President Sandu joined the commemorative event, but she had written earlier on her Facebook page:

“Europe has united to prevent wars and ensure the right to life and happiness for all European citizens. Now, Europe unites us – all the people of Moldova – to earn our rightful place among European countries. Moldova will strengthen and enrich the European Union. [...] On May 9, we honor our grandparents and great-grandparents who paid the heavy price of war to defend their family, nation, and dignity. They sacrificed themselves so that life would triumph, and war would never again cross the threshold of their homes. War brings only death, suffering and destruction, and those who start wars value neither the honor of heroes nor human life. No man who loves his family and his country can be on the side of murder.”⁴⁴

⁴² “Президент майя санду не участвовала в мероприятиях по случаю дня победы из-за проблем со здоровьем – пресс-служба президента” [The President Maia Sandu did not Participate in the Victory Day Events Due to Health Issues], Infotag.Md, May 9, 2022, accessed May 29, 2023, <https://www.infotag.md/politics-m9/299171/>.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Vitalie Călugăreanu, “Ziua păcii și dezbinării naționale în Moldova” [Day of peace and national division in Moldova], Deutsche Welle, May 9, 2023, accessed May 29, 2023,

Other Moldovan high officials conveyed a similar message. Minister of Foreign Affairs Nicu Popescu stated:

“May 9 is the day we celebrate peace and unity in Europe – particularly important values in the current regional context. Today, we mark Europe Day and remember the ones fallen during World War II. Sadly, 78 years after the Allies brought peace to the European continent, the Russian Federation brought war back to Europe, defying international law and the memory of those who fought in World War II for peace and the suppression of Nazism. For Moldova, May 9 reflects our European aspirations and a firm commitment to EU values and standards. The future of our country can only be in the great European family, with whom we share aspirations and a common path of development and modernization.”⁴⁵

In their addresses, representatives of the Moldovan government underscored European values, Moldova’s aspirations to join the EU and the prosperity of a united Europe. They referenced World War II (not the Great Patriotic War), framing it within the context of human loss, sorrow, and mourning, connecting fallen soldiers and war heroes to the vision of a united and free Europe, specifically the European Union. Subsequently, on May 25, the ruling PAS party introduced a bill advocating for a shift in the May 9 celebrations from Victory Day to Remembrance Day and proposed moving the commemoration to May 8, ostensibly aligning with EU standards.⁴⁶

Without official state-organized celebrations, the primary commemorative events were orchestrated by two opposition parties – ȘOR and a coalition comprising Communists and Socialists. Both parties capitalized on the void left by the government’s disengagement. ȘOR and the Communists-

<https://www.dw.com/ro/ziua-p%C4%83cii-%C8%99i-dezbin%C4%83rii-na%C8%9Bionale-%C3%AEn-moldova/a-65561259>.

⁴⁵ “Mesajul vicepremierului Nicu Popescu cu ocazia Zilei Europei: «Astăzi marcăm Ziua Europei și ne amintim de cei căzuți în cel de-al Doilea Război Mondial»” [Deputy Prime Minister Nicu Popescu’s message on Europe Day: ‘Today we mark Europe Day and remember those who fell in the Second World War’], TVR Moldova, May 9, 2023, accessed May 29, 2023, <https://tvrmdoia.md/article/ff04e03da36219f2/mesajul-vicepremierului-nicu-popescu-cu-ocazia-zilei-europei-astazi-marcam-ziua-europei-si-ne-amintim-de-cei-cazuti-in-cel-de-al-doilea-razboi-mondial.html>.

⁴⁶ “Партия социалистов осудила намерение пас «попирать память о победе в великой отечественной войне» [The Socialist Party condemned PAS’ intention to “trample on the memory of the victory in the Great Patriotic War”], Infotag.Md, May 25, 2023, accessed May 29, 2023, <https://www.infotag.md/politics-m9/307702/>.

Socialists strategically exploited this opportunity, utilizing it to advance their political agendas rooted in discontent with the current administration, Soviet nostalgia, and varying degrees of overt pro-Russian sentiment. Additionally, these parties positioned themselves as stalwarts of the traditional Moldovanist identity, emphasizing ideological affinities with “Russkiy mir” and opposing perceived coerced Romanization linked to closer ties with the EU and Romania.

In 2022, the parade organized by the Communist-Socialists was relatively modest and took place against the backdrop of the recent war in Ukraine and the passage of several anti-propaganda laws, as detailed above. It started in the main square in front of the Government House. The participants gathered for the Immortal Regiment, where they displayed photographs of their deceased relatives who had served in World War II. Many carried red flags and flowers, while some wore outfits reminiscent of Red Army soldiers, with military boots, red stars, and period headgear. Notable was the smaller presence of military equipment compared to previous years. A number of participants waved Moldovan flags, and Russian flags were also present. In response to the ban on the St. George’s ribbon, an alternative ribbon appeared, this time red, with the Moldovan emblem at one end and the image of St. George at the other. In addition, many people dressed in black and orange, the classic color scheme of the St. George’s ribbon. Participants wore orange accessories, including ties, hats, scarves, and jackets, and some wore orange caps with “Victoriei” or “Pobeda” written on them, which the organizers distributed. To chants of “Pobeda” and “Fascism will not win,” the procession, led by a van with megaphone, made its way to the *Eternitate* memorial complex, where flowers were laid.

The parade was relatively peaceful, with a brief verbal confrontation at the statue of Stephen the Great in central Chisinau involving opponents carrying Ukrainian, Romanian, and European Union flags. Some attendees responded to “Glory to Ukraine” chants with “Glory to Russia,” but no major skirmishes occurred. A larger police presence, including police minivans and an anti-conflict team, was noted.

In 2023, the parade witnessed notable differences. A larger and more organized crowd participated, equipped with professional materials such as banners, flags, and dove-shaped pins. The hesitancy observed in 2022

was replaced by a full-scale display of Soviet nostalgia and pro-Russian sentiment. Two parades were held, one organized by ŞOR and the other by the Committee Pobeda, associated with the Russian Cultural Centre in Moldova and supported by Communist and Socialist parties. The "Pobeda" parade convened at the main square in front of the House of Government, featuring participants with banners displaying slogans like "May 9 – Victory Day," "Fascism Will not Succeed," and "Moldova Is a Peaceful Country."

The slogans, asserting that May 9 is Victory Day, served as a signal to the government, which attempted to reschedule the celebrations to May 8. Emphasizing Moldova's status as a peaceful and neutral country aligned with the narrative advocating for diplomatic solutions to the Ukraine war rather than increased military involvement. It lines up with Russian propaganda that attempts to obscure the aggressor in the conflict. The concept of Moldova as a neutral country sought to pressure the government to cease official support for Ukraine and normalize relations with Russia, which are progressively deteriorating. The symbolism of peace was reinforced by the release of white doves by the former president and Chairman of the Socialist Party, Igor Dodon, and the distribution of dove-shaped peace pins to participants.

Europe Day as EU's Soft Power

As mentioned, the current Moldovan government was elected for its pro-European agenda but was also assumed to maintain friendly relations with Russia. However, in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, this political program has undergone a significant transformation. In the face of pressure and blackmail from Russia, the government changed its position to an openly pro-European and pro-Western course. This shift has been reflected in strong statements by Moldovan leaders who have openly accused Russia of aggression, blackmail, and intimidation.

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine has opened new opportunities for Moldova, particularly in the context of its possible accession to the EU. On 23 June 2022, the European Council granted Moldova candidate status, which was accompanied by liberalizing trade in certain Moldovan

agricultural products and a promise of increased exports to EU countries. The rapprochement with the EU met with approval in certain segments of Moldovan society but also encountered strong opposition. The aforementioned mass protests broke out in Chisinau, organized by supporters of the ȘOR party, led by Ilan Șor, and financially supported by Russia. The protesters demanded the government's resignation, a change of the pro-European course, and normalization of relations with Russia.

Amidst apprehensions of potential Russian aggression, fueled by both hostile statements from senior Russian officials and reports of a possible coup organized by Russia, the Moldovan government sought to align itself with the European Union and demonstrate its commitment to the European project. Raising the visibility of Europe Day, an instrument of the European Union's soft power, was a logical and natural step. Soft power involves influencing others through attraction, culture, and shared values, as opposed to coercion or force. In the EU context, Europe Day serves as a diplomatic and public relations instrument, aiming to promote the EU's values, unity, and positive image among its citizens and in neighboring regions.

This ideological shift had to be demonstrated to the national and international public. To this end, the emphasis on EU-related public holidays increased, and existing holidays began to be reinterpreted with a pro-European perspective. Among these, Europe Day has earned a prominent position. Observed annually on May 9, Europe Day commemorates European peace and unity. This date marks the anniversary of the historic Schuman Declaration, which was presented by the French statesman Robert Schuman. The Declaration outlined Schuman's vision of a new form of political cooperation in Europe, with the ultimate aim of preventing war between European nations. This proposal was seen as the starting point for what later developed into the European Union. Europe Day celebrations in Moldova, especially these days, seek to manifest a commitment to European integration. By commemorating the Schuman Declaration, the Moldovan government is publicly demonstrating a shift towards seeking to deepen its ties with the EU and to integrate into the wider European community.

The first celebration of Europe Day in Moldova took place in 2006. It was a closed event, primarily attended by diplomats and state officials.

Over the years, the celebration gradually became more open to the general public; however, it remained somewhat peripheral compared to Victory Day, which held a firm place on May 9. It is noteworthy that the Europe Day celebrations were scheduled for the closest Saturday after May 9, not the exact date. As the Head of the European Commission Delegation to Moldova, Cesare De Montis said:

“We want Moldovan citizens to know why we, the Delegation of the European Commission, are here, what we are doing and how the population benefits from our work [...] We want to show to wider public what assistance we are offering to the Republic of Moldova, what are the concrete projects funded by the European Union, what is their aim and what are the results that we have achieved together.”⁴⁷

However, the utilization of Europe Day as a manifestation of a pro-European orientation was not invented by the current government. Already in 2010, Europe Day was very useful to the politicians of the Alliance for European Integration. As already mentioned, in April 2009, there was civil unrest in the country following the parliamentary elections, which were labelled as rigged. As a result, the Communist Party lost its majority and a coalition of pro-European parties, known as the Alliance for European Integration, was formed, consisting of the Liberal Democratic Party, the Liberal Party, the Democratic Party and the Our Moldova Alliance, which formed the new government. Although it was vocally pro-European, most of the promised reforms and anti-corruption measures remained on a proclamatory level. The leaders of the alliance, including Vlad Filat, Mihai Ghimpu, Marian Lupu and Seraphim Urechean, were preoccupied with internal power struggles, which prevented the implementation of the proclaimed reforms.⁴⁸

Despite this, the Alliance successfully persuaded EU donors to continue financial aid and secured substantial funding for their oligarchic activities.

⁴⁷ “Europe Day Has Been Celebrated in Moldova since 2006,” IPN Press Agency, April 27, 2012, accessed May 29, 2023, https://www.ipn.md/en/europe-day-has-been-celebrated-in-moldova-since-2006-7967_997370.html.

⁴⁸ Hrant Kostanyan, “Why Moldova’s European Integration Is Failing,” CEPS, March 3, 2016, accessed May 29, 2023, <https://www.ceps.eu/ceps-publications/why-moldovas-european-integration-failing/>.

This situation persisted even when the Alliance was replaced by the “pro-European” Coalition, which included many of the same people. The misuse of European funds, ongoing politicization of the state, and the rise of oligarchic influence continued. In the 2014 parliamentary election, the Democratic Party, closely associated with Vlad Plahotniuc, emerged strongest from the Coalition parties. Plahotniuc, a prominent figure in the new government, faced allegations, along with another oligarch, Ilan Șor, in the “Theft of the Century,” a corruption scandal involving the disappearance of approximately one billion dollars from Moldovan banks. Plahotniuc is currently convicted for corruption and state capture and is living in exile in Turkey. This person, widely known as the most dangerous and powerful oligarch in the region, was very vocally supporting European integration and publicly advocating for the pro-European direction of the country.⁴⁹ It is important to note that Moldovans’ trust issues with the EU were also influenced by the Alliance and Coalition ruling period.

The decision to expand the celebration of Europe Day aligned with the pro-European parties’ approach, serving as a clear signal to both Brussels and Moldova’s pro-EU population that the country was committed to the pro-European path, even if no tangible results were evident. In 2010, the celebration transformed into a rather generous concept of the “European Village,” situated in Cathedral Park. During this event, embassies of European Union countries showcase tourism and business opportunities, host discussions on European topics, and provide programs for children. To engage a larger audience, embassies also offer food and drink specialties from their countries, such as Czech beer, Spanish paella, and Italian tortellini. In recent years, the European Village relocated from the park to the Great National Assembly Square due to its growing popularity, exceeding the park’s capacity.

A notable instance was the 2018 Europe Day celebration when the government chose to commemorate both Europe Day and Victory Day on the same day. Officials and representatives made numerous statements emphasizing the interconnection of Europe Day and Victory Day as

⁴⁹ Ion Marandici, “Taming the Oligarchs? Democratization and State Capture: The Case of Moldova,” *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 29, no. 1 (2021): 63-89.

mutually inseparable. For example, the then Speaker of the Parliament, Andrian Candu, stated:

“Never do the horrors that people went through in World War II must be repeated. I talked to the veterans. I shook hands and thanked them for the sacrifice. Today, we are reminded of the heroes who made the creation of Democratic Europe possible. #EuropeDay and #VictoryDay have reconciled people and united them.”⁵⁰

Vlad Plahotniuc, the then Chairman of the Party, commented:

“From year to year, every day, our people are growing stronger, and finally, May 9 is just a celebration of peace and freedom. With fellow Democrats and friends, we were with people and happy to see them friendly, supportive, and patriotic. This shows us that we are on the right track and that together, we will be able to achieve what we have set out for our country.”⁵¹

Currently, Europe Day in Moldova is celebrated in the main square of Chisinau and various regional centers like Cahul, Leova, Ungheni, etc. The program takes the form of an European village, filling the main square with stalls, stages, and tents hosting various events, performances, and debates. Each EU country has its stand, offering information, selling specific products (mostly food), and providing leaflets and flags. Additionally, there's a dedicated area for various NGOs funded by EU funds to present their activities. The European Commission, representatives of the EU Eastern Partnership, and other EU institutions also have stands. There's a designated area for children to play, and attendees can relax, enjoy refreshments, and more. Europe Day takes on the form of a festival, serving as a showcase for EU projects.

In 2023, Europe Day was celebrated on May 13, the first Saturday after May 9. The opening ceremony, held on and next to the massive stage in front of the Government House, commenced with video calls from other Moldovan cities. Schoolchildren outside their schools waved EU and Moldovan flags, chanting pro-EU slogans. Unfortunately, due to

⁵⁰ Zhala Sultanli, *Commemorations and the Politics of Memory: Narrative Dynamics and the Memory of the Second World War in Moldova* (Dissertation, Fairfax, USA, George Mason University, 2020), 158.

⁵¹ Ibid.

technical issues, some greetings were interrupted. Following regional greetings, a group of young people with blue and yellow umbrellas ran in front of the stage, chanting additional pro-European slogans, ultimately forming the shape of the EU flag with their umbrellas. The ceremony continued with a performance by the police orchestra, which played popular songs and the EU anthem. Finally, three policewomen on horseback gave a horse dressage demonstration. The event climaxed with concerts featuring popular Moldovan bands, including Eurovision veterans Zdob și Zdrub and rapper Satoshi. The stage remained open until night for attendees to enjoy watching the Eurovision finals on a huge screen directly at the main square after the live performances.

Overall, the event was peaceful and family-friendly, contrasting Victory Day's somewhat aggressive rhetoric. The organizers spared no expense, and the stark difference in state officials' engagement between Victory Day and Europe Day illustrates Moldova's shifting landscape of memory politics.

Conclusion

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine has significantly changed Moldova's geopolitical anchorage. Moldova, which had previously been strictly neutral and tried to maintain good relations with both the EU and Russia, has shifted significantly towards a pro-European orientation in the face of the war. This change was reflected, among other things, in the official memory politics. Memory politics is a concept that refers to the ways in which official versions of history are shaped to emphasize a collective past and a common destiny. The article focused on the contrasting Victory Day and Europe Day celebrations occurring on the same day, May 9.

Although in recent years, the Victory Day celebrations have largely become a tool of Russian propaganda, for many people, especially among the Russian-speaking and Moldovanist-minded population, it is one of the few national holidays they can identify with, and therefore it remains an integral part of their Moldovan identity. Under Vladimir Putin's leadership, Victory Day has been heavily invested in and has become

Russia's most important national holiday, celebrating a mythologized past, military power, might and technological progress. This narrative aims to create a shared historical identity and inspire national pride. Russia has exported this approach to other post-Soviet countries to promote Russian influence and nostalgia for the Soviet era. The popularity of Victory Day celebrations in Moldova demonstrates the limited ability of the Moldovan government to engage non-Romanian-speaking and Moldovanist-minded people in a broader discussion about the country's present and future.

Europe Day in Moldova, on the other hand, is designed to celebrate the European project and serves as a soft power tool for the European Union to promote its values in Eastern Partnership countries like Moldova. Initially, celebrations in Moldova were modest, starting with a small reception for diplomats in 2006. Since 2010, pro-European governments have opened celebrations to a wider public. Nevertheless, their European ideals have often been perceived as superficial, serving mainly for self-promotion and access to European funds. For instance, Vlad Plahotniuc, a vocal advocate of European integration, was one of the most powerful oligarchs in the country, who basically privatized Moldova for his own profit. His ostentatious support for the European Union served as a smokescreen for corruption; he played a convincing show of support for European integration to domestic and international pro-European audiences while he was capturing the state.

Since the onset of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Moldovan leaders have distanced themselves from Victory Day, limiting their involvement to laying flowers at the Eternitate memorial. Instead, they began to celebrate Europe Day in a spectacular way to prove their aspiration for integration into the European Union and the apparent breaking of friendly relations with Russia. In 2023, President Maia Sandu proposed renaming Victory Day to Remembrance Day and celebrating it on May 8, aligning with the EU model. Therefore, changes in memory policy represent one of the measures the pro-EU government took on its mission for European integration.

CAUGHT IN THE ELECTION TRAP: VOTER FRAUDULENCE AND DYSFUNCTIONAL DEMOCRACY DURING THE 2021 ALBANIAN GENERAL ELECTIONS

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Abstract. There is a growing consensus that data driven elections are a winner, irrespective of variables that may affect the elections. The question of how these data are obtained in the first place is highly disputed. This paper analyzes Albania and looks at one of its prime indicators like voter fraudulence that leads to distorted election results. Our findings show that the factors that have led to such an outcome are the patron-client relationship, shadow financing, and the use of public administration as an arm extension of the ruling party. There are many mechanisms used by ruling political parties in non-consolidated democracies to obtain an outright advantage in elections, ranging from political assassination or imprisonment of political opponents to staffing the ballot boxes. But as the Albanian case testifies, more refined measures are more legitimate both domestically and in seeking international legitimacy. This article advances the present debate on the impact of patronage schemes on electoral competition and results in semi-consolidated democracies.

Keywords: Dysfunctional democracy, voter fraudulence, distorted elections, Albania.

Introduction

Albania held parliamentary elections on April 25, 2021, with a voter turnout of 46.3%, virtually unchanged compared to 2017, despite the

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COVID-19 pandemic. The Socialist Party earned seventy-four of 140 seats in Parliament – the same number of seats garnered from the 2017 parliamentary elections – securing an unprecedented third consecutive term.

On April 11, 2021, two weeks before the general elections, an Albanian media portal (*Lapsi.al*) published a database that revealed personal data of 910,000 citizens, equivalent to one-third of the population, around half of those eligible to vote. The database that was leaked to the press was used by the ruling Socialist Party (SP) to track voters' political preferences and potentially to intimidate them. Furthermore, the leaked database contained the names of more than 9,000 political patrons, most of which were working as “public sector employees, police officers and even army personnel.”¹ By political patronage we refer to Henry E. Hale's definition of the term, meaning the “the use of state resources to reward individuals for their electoral support.”² This revelation caused “massive shockwaves across the country.”³

The use of patron's data to receive electoral favor, instead of being viewed with criticism, was on the contrary praised by the incumbent prime minister. A week before the election and a week after the patronage list leak, the socialist premier Edi Rama, in an electoral rally with his own party patrons admitted that, “[p]atronage is the first class of a large political school and whoever has the ambition to move on to higher political stages, starts with patronage,” continuing further in stressing the long-term political linkages between patrons and voters that,

“[...] can't say anything bad about my patrons. And don't forget, don't ever forget, the patrons know who you are. Don't even let it cross your mind that you can hide even your thoughts from our patrons. We know who you are, and we are coming after you. On the 25th of April, you will see how well we know you!”⁴

¹ Transparency International, “Albania: Alarm over Indications of Personal Data Breach, Elections Campaign Violations,” accessed April 2, 2021, <https://www.transparency.org/en/press/albania-alarm-over-indications-of-personal-data-breach-election-campaign-violations>.

² Henry E. Hale, *Patronal Politics: Eurasian Regime Dynamics in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 9-10.

³ Gjergj Erebara, “Albania Prosecutors Investigate Socialists Big-Brother-Style Database,” *BalkanInsight*, accessed October 5, 2022, <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/04/16/albania-a-prosecutors-investigate-over-socialist-party-big-brother/>.

⁴ Euronews, “Rama meeting with the Patrons: We know who you are and we know your campaign, you can't hide your thoughts from us,” accessed April 18, 2021, <https://euronews.al/en/albania/2021/04/18/rama-meeting-with-the-patrons-we-know-who-you->.

This is a step too far even for weak states such as Albania, characterized by dysfunctional democracy and poor rule of law enforcement.⁵ As Collin J. Bennet and David Lyon have recently argued: “[p]olitical micro-targeting, and the voter analytics upon which it is based, are essentially forms of surveillance.⁶ In Albania this was taken to another level in the last parliamentary elections.

Albania has had a tumultuous democratic journey and a difficult transition, which continues to date.⁷ But instead of progressing toward democratic and rule of law consolidation throughout the last decade, it has muddled and even regressed in some significant components of state-building. Recently, it has shown signs of institutional corruption growth, and the political process has been captured by clientelist practices and private funding of electoral campaigns.⁸ As we demonstrate, it has taken another step toward backsliding through voter intimidation and influences by political patronage as in April 2021 general elections, which threaten both the fragile democracy and the rule of law.⁹ The Socialist Party’s patronage scheme used during electoral campaign confirmed the vulnerability of voters to political pressure, and concerns remained regarding the misuse of public

⁵ Blendi Kajsiu, Aldo Bumçi and Albert Rakipi, “Albania - a Weak Democracy, a Weak State. Report on the State of Democracy in Albania” Albanian Institute for International Studies, (2003) <http://pdc.ceu.hu/archive/00004893/>; Ilir Kalemaj, “Transitional justice and democratic consolidation in post-communist Eastern Europe: Romania and Albania,” *Eastern Journal of European Studies* 11, no. 1 (2021): 81-103.

⁶ Collin J. Bennet and David Lyon, “Data-driven Elections: Implications and Challenges for Democratic Societies,” *Internet Policy Review* 8, no. 4 (2019) <https://doi.org/10.14763/2019.4.1433>.

⁷ Ilir Kalemaj, “Albania’s democracy challenges: External stimuli and internal factors at play,” *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 5, no. 3 (2016): 107-112, DOI: 10.5901/ajis.2016.v5n3p107.

⁸ Daniela Irrera, “The Balkanization of Politics: Crime and Corruption in Albania,” *EUI Working Papers RSCAS*, no. 18, (2006); Gentiana Kera and Armanda Hysa, “Influencing votes, winning elections: clientelist practices and private funding of electoral campaigns in Albania,” *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 20, no. 1 (2020): 123-139, doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2019.1709698.

⁹ Voter intimidation is defined as “the act or process of attempting to deter voters from registering to vote or from casting a ballot, by force or intimidation, including the dissemination of personal information that would make voters the target of harassment, illegal or inappropriate monitoring or surveillance of voters, and threats of either violence or prosecution.” See: <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/voter-intimidation>. more elaborated treatment on the topic see: James J. Woodruff, “Where the Wild Things Are: The Polling Place, Voter Intimidation, and the First Amendment,” *University of Louisville Law Review* 50 (2011): 253-285, 253. SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1828483>

resources and functions, the allegations of pervasive vote buying, and leaking of sensitive personal data covering political preferences of citizens.¹⁰

The current article seeks to dissect the connection between voters' manipulation and lack of democratic consolidation by taking as its proxy the distorted election results in the Albanian case. Jessica Fortin-Rittberger, Philipp Harfst and Sarah C. Dingler have convincingly argued that "high levels of electoral fraud are, indeed, linked to less satisfaction with democracy."¹¹ The recent deterioration of democracy in Albania, "thus materializing longstanding fears of rising authoritarianism and a dysfunctional system of mechanisms to check and balance government powers," has become the "elephant in the room" and more attention should be given to the underlying root causes such as voters' intimidation, privacy abuse and human rights violations.¹²

We have more and more politicians worldwide who are fixated with the idea that data driven elections are a winner, irrespective of other internal and external factors that might impact the outcome of the results. However, there is a thin but important line that divides the usual electoral canvassing *versus* abusing of voters' data to intimidate or arm-twist them to vote in a certain direction. Therein, in this paper we identify as our dependent variable the distorted elections through voter fraudulence, while the independent variables are patronage politics used to distort electoral result. Our primary hypothesis is the use of institutional mechanisms and patronage system to ensure that the winning party would have been the incumbent party.¹³ The evidence we

¹⁰ "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Albania," Human Rights Report, Department of State, accessed November 29, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-country-report-s-on-human-rights-practices/albania> (2021); "Albania Report," European Commission, accessed November 29, 2022, file:///C:/Users/user/Downloads/Attachment_0%20(1).pdf.

¹¹ Jessica Fortin-Rittberger, Philipp Harfst and Sarah C. Dingler, "The Costs of Electoral Fraud: Establishing the Link between Electoral Integrity, Winning an Election, and Satisfaction with Democracy," *Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* 27, no. 3 (2017): 350-368, doi: 10.1080/17457289.2017.1310111.

¹² "Albania. Nations in Transit Report 2023," Freedom House, accessed November 29, 2023, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/albania/nations-transit/2023>.

¹³ An alternative name which is used concurrently with *patronage system* is *spoils system*. Both of them refer to cronyism and nepotism in distributing jobs, public tenders, and other benefits to political supporters after winning elections. It goes back to the phrase first mentioned by New York Senator William L. Marcy in 1828 after the election of Andrew Jackson as President of the USA, "to the victors the spoils." Carl Joachim Friedrich, "The Rise and Decline of Spoils System," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 189, no. 1 (1937): 10-16.

use are the reports of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)/OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the European Commission progress-reports, data from Transparency International, Freedom House, State Department's country-reports and other international indexes, independent international and national reporting, statistical data and other secondary sources.

In this article, we argue that the control and the use of public resources, institutions, and the use of non-official channels as the patronage's database or clientelist practices by a political party for electoral purposes can determine the electoral result in favor of the ruling party. Previous studies on elections in the Western Balkans have demonstrated the practice of political clientelism as a non-programmatic political relationship between citizens (clients) and political parties or office-seekers (patrons), which is personalized, instrumental, reciprocal, and asymmetric in terms of distribution of power and resources.¹⁴ In Albania clientelist policies are mostly drafted and implemented with a view to the next elections. Therefore, "clientelist linkages are forged in informal clientelist practices and clientelist relations in the use of public resources, vote-buying, employment, selective distribution of social benefits, carousel voting, ballot's photographing, and compilation of guaranteed voters."¹⁵

We first discuss the theoretical overview on elections approaches, before discussing the elections in Albania, particularly the last parliamentary election. This paper contributes several insights to our understanding of the impact of patronage schemes on electoral competition in Albania, their relations to political cleavages among voters, as well their influence on electoral coordination.

¹⁴ Misa Popovikj, Borjan Gjuzelov and Jovan Bliznakovski, "How to Sustainably Decrease Clientelism and Ensure Fair Political Competition in the WB? The Case for Introducing Standing Parliamentary Committees," in *Meaningful Reform in the Western Balkans. Between Formal and Informal Practices*, eds. Eric Gordy and Adnan Efendic (Bern: Peter Lang, 2019), 106.

¹⁵ Armanda Hysa et al., "Informal and Clientelist political practices in Albania: The case of the 2017 general elections," accessed October 8, 2022, <https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/documents/downloadPublic?documentIds=080166e5b99f7a07&appId=PPGMS> (2018); Gentiana Kera and Armanda Hysa, "Influencing Votes, Winning Elections: Clientelist Practices and Private Funding of Electoral Campaigns, in Albania," *Journal of Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 20, no. 1 (2020): 123-139, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2019.1709698>.

This paper suggests that in the case of elections in Albania, there is a cross-level linkage between patronage scheme and political clientelism, through which politicians connect materially with voters, thus influencing the election's result. Finally, the paper highlights the role of the incumbent party in relying on patronage schemes during the electoral competition.

Patronage Networks and the Electoral Process

Periodic and fair elections are the ultimate test of democracy. It is the only testable means of getting public approval other than referendums, which are rare even in the most consolidated democracies. In Albania, where the sole referendum took place in 1994, the elections remain the sole democratic device. As an anonymous reviewer correctly pointed out: "there are many non-electoral democratic mechanisms such as protests, petitions, citizen initiatives, community organizing, participatory budgeting, citizen lobby, etc." While all these instruments have much leverage in consolidated democracies, we refer here specifically to Albania, where these instruments either do not exist or they are very weak to have any significant impact. The political parties are the only ones that can contest elections notwithstanding the strength of the civil society. Therefore, the bets are all high when it comes to elections while hybrid democracies, such as Albania, find plenty of room to distort its results or skew them in favor of the ruling party.

Election manipulations vary from political assassination or imprisonment of political opponents to outright stuffing the ballot boxes or direct vote buying.¹⁶ On the other hand, voter fraud may take more sophisticated forms, such as deliberate changes of procedures that affect electoral law, gerrymandering or constitutional changes that benefit the ruling party. It is important to note that,

"even when ballot rigging is an integral part of electoral competition, it is infrequently decisive. Fraud, nevertheless, undermines political stability because, in close races, it can be crucial."¹⁷

¹⁶ Nick Cheeseman and Biran Klaas, *How to Rig an Election* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2018).

¹⁷ Fe Lehoucq, "Electoral Fraud: Causes, Types and Consequences," *Annual Review of Political Science* 6 (2003): 233-256.

These more polished ways to bend the electoral result in favor of the ruling party are way more preferred in Eastern European states. On one hand, we have the Visegrád group, ranging from Orbán's "illiberal" Hungary to Polish "semi-consolidated democracy."¹⁸ On the other hand, in the Western Balkans, democracy is also far from consolidated. None of these countries rank high in indexes that measure democracy, rule of law and fight against corruption such as Freedom House or Transparency International. These hybrid democracy regimes, Albania among which being recently "categorized as a Transitional or Hybrid regime in the Nations in Transit 2023," are alternatively been described as *stabilitocracies*.¹⁹ This term actually originates in Albania as, back in 2012, Antoinette Primatarova and Johanna Deimel identified Albania as a country that "provides stability externally but domestically oscillates between democracy and autocratic tendencies."²⁰ Therefore, stabilitocracy can be understood as one of the variations of hybrid democracies.

Not only do these tendencies continue, but they have actually worsened. The Albanian stabilitocracy is influenced by the clientelist ties.²¹ A typical aspect where the electoral process is damaged is that of political clientelist interventions in the electoral processes, where mainly the incumbent political parties take advantage of weak institutions to implement clientelist practices. In the case of Albania, after the parliamentary boycott from opposition parties in February 2019, and the subsequent local election boycott from same parties in 2021, the incumbent Socialist Party took over the institutions, apart from the presidency, which ultimately led to state capture. The term *state capture* was first defined in a World Bank paper in 2000 to imply

¹⁸ Andras Bíró-Nagy, "Illiberal Democracy in Hungary: The Social Background and Practical Steps of Building an Illiberal State" in *Illiberal Democracies in the EU: The Visegrad Group and the Risk of Disintegration*, ed. Paul Morillas (Barcelona: CIDOB. Barcelona Center for International Affairs, 2017).

¹⁹ "Albania: Nations in Transit," Freedom House, 2023, accessed December 13, 2023, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/albania/nations-transit/2023>; Florian Bieber, *What is Stabilitocracy* (Graz: BiEPAG, 2017).

²⁰ Antoinette Primatarova and Johanna Deimel, *Brigde Over Troubled Waters: The Role of Internationals in Albania?* (Sofia: Center for Liberal Studies, 2012).

²¹ Eric Gordy and Adnan Efendic, "Engaging Policy to Address Gaps Between Formality and Informality in the Western Balkans," in *Meaningful Reform in the Western Balkans. Between Formal and Informal Practices*, eds. Eric Gordy and Adnan Efendic (Bern: Peter Lang, 2019), 7-20.

“firms shaping and channeling firms’ strategies in the direction of more affecting formulation of the rules of the game through legitimate forms of influence, involving societal «voice,» private payments to public officials and politicians.”²²

According to Anna Grzymala-Busse, it has recently been a common phenomenon for the Western Balkans countries.²³ However, we also consider that state capturing may be also favored by weak opposition parties and their lack of appeal to the electorate, but these factors mostly derive from the rising level of autocracy in the region and a closing space for political pluralism.

Research and country reports on elections in Albania have shown that the political party organizations have continuously provided an infrastructure for delivering votes, buying support via clientelist linkages, and stealing votes. In Albania, clientelism is considered as a flawed generated system of bureaucratic relations derived from the totalitarian regime, in line with the argument advanced by Claude Lefort in his seminal work.²⁴ In line with this, Mirela Bogdani and John Loughlin have argued that the clientelism, which existed in various forms during the communist period, worsened after the fall of the Communism due to the absence of pressure on the political elite, a weak public administration, and a difficult economic situation, resulting in scarce public funding and employment opportunities.²⁵ They have also noted various forms of abuse of public offices including clientelist appointments, bribes for public work contracts, and provisions of illegal benefits.²⁶ Randomly, during elections in Albania,

²² Joel S. Hellman, Geraint Jones and Daniel Kaufmann, “State Capture, Corruption and Influence in Transition,” Policy Research Working Paper Series 2444, The World Bank (2000).

²³ Anna Grzymala-Busse, “Beyond Clientelism: Incumbent State Capture and State Formation,” *Comparative Political Studies* 41, no. 4-5 (2008): 638-673.

²⁴ Claude Lefort, *The Political Forms of Modern Society Bureaucracy, Democracy, Totalitarianism* (n.p.: The MIT Press, 1986).

²⁵ Mirela Bogdani and John Loughlin, *Albania and the European Union. The tumultuous Journey towards Integration and Accession* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 150-151.

people get involved in clientelist relationships, as several studies have shown.²⁷ Moreover, informal and clientelist practices contribute to favor the incumbent party, by distorting the elections. Informal practices as vote buying, selective investments, party-affiliated state employment, and inauguration of public works during electoral campaign were used as a strategy by the political actors.

Hence, the incumbents “spoil the public office” and its benefits, including political power, patronage resources, and policy influence. As long as the incumbents are in power, they create incentives for long-term loyalty and a long lasting, dyadic, and face-to-face relationship between a patron and a client.²⁸ The holders of political offices spoil the public office through distribution of public resources, direct payments, access to jobs, goods and services in forms of favors, in exchange for political support at the polls.²⁹ The party patronage system allows political parties to staff public sector institutions with their rank and file, in order to extract resources to ensure the incumbent’s continuous dominance. Hence the patronage system assists the incumbent in various informal activities, the most important being rigging the elections in favor of the incumbents, consequently, forging long-lasting relations between patrons

²⁷ Vjollca Krasniqi, Nenad Markovikj, Ilina Mangova, Enriketa Papa-Pandelejmoni and Jovan Bliznakovski, “Leader’s Meetings: Facilitating or Replacing the Formal Political Processes in the Western Balkan Countries,” in *Meaningful Reform in the Western Balkans. Between Formal and Informal Practices*, eds. Eric Gordy and Adnan Efendic (Bern: Peter Lang, 2019), 117-132; Armanda Hysa et al., “Informal and Clientelist Political Practices in Albania: The Case of the 2017 General Elections,” accessed on October 9, 2022, <https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/documents/downloadPublic?documentIds=080166e5b99f7a07&appId=PPGMS>.

²⁸ Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, “Beyond Patronage: Violent Struggle, Ruling Party Cohesion, and Authoritarian Durability,” *Perspectives on Politics* 10, no. 4 (2012): 869-889; Tina Hilgers, “Clientelism and Conceptual Stretching: Differentiating among Concepts and among Analytical Levels,” *Theory & Society* 40, no. 5 (2011): 567-588.

²⁹ Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson “Citizen-Politician Linkages: An Introduction,” in *Patron, Clients, and Policies: Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition*, eds. Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Javier Auyero, “Poor People’s Lives and Politics: The Things a Political Ethnographer Knows (and Doesn’t Know) after 15 Years of Fieldwork,” *Perspectives on Turkey* 46, no. 1 (2012), 95-127; Leonard Wantchekon, “Clientelism and Voting Behaviour: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Benin,” *World Politics* 55, no. 3 (2003): pp. 399-422.

and clients.³⁰ Although Dirk Tomsa and Andreas Ufen have questioned this long-term linkage between patron (party) and clients (voters), contemporary party apparatuses have grown bigger, and patrons no longer know how many clients they have, and they know very few personally.³¹ And as we will demonstrate in this paper, this is also true for Albania's 2021 elections, in the case of the incumbent Socialist Party patronage list. However, parties themselves can function as impersonal patrons. Hence informal rules complete or fill gaps in formal institutions and operate parallel to formal institutions in regulating political behavior.³²

In Albania, political parties suffer from weak structures, while its electoral system is a proportional one, thus leading to a fragmented political spectrum, yet clientelist ties between political parties and the business sector are strong and persistent. The politicization of public administration institutions has been a major problem since 1992. A very concerning development has been that, upon seizing power, every political party replaced entire staffs of the previous administrations with its own loyal members or supporters. This phenomenon has weakened the stability and continuity of the institutions, and undermined their legitimacy and efficiency.³³ Sashenka Lleshaj has argued that the clientelist party system at the local and national levels is so consolidated that the results of local elections would not influence the citizens' everyday life.³⁴ During elections, the employees make efforts to keep their jobs while opposition parties promise their clientele new positions. Considering the high unemployment, political parties have become the

³⁰ Dušan Pavlović, "How Political Parties in Hybrid Regimes Help the Incumbent Maintain a Democratic Façade," *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* XX, no. 10 (2020): 1-20, Doi: 10.1177/0888325420941101; Petr Kopecký et al., *Party Patronage and Party Government in European Democracies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

³¹ Dirk Tomsa and Andreas Ufen (eds.), *Party Politics in Southeast Asia: Clientelism and Electoral Competition in Indonesia, Thailand and Philipines* (Routledge: Oxon, 2013), 6.

³² Julia R. Azari and Jennifer K. Smith, "Unwritten Rules: Informal Institutions in established Democracies," *Perspectives on Politics* 10, no. 1 (2012): 37-55.

³³ Bogdani and Loughlin, *Albania and the European Union*, 47.

³⁴ Sashenka Lleshaj, "Albanien vor den Kommunalwahlen. Probleme einer unvollendeten Reform" [Albania before the communal elections. Problems of an unfinished Reform], accessed October 20, 2022, http://www.fes-tirana.org/media/pdf/pdf_2015/t-150617-komunalwahlen-albania.pdf.

largest “employment agencies.” In their analysis of internal democracy within political parties, Afrim Krasniqi and Ardian Hackaj have confirmed the existence of political clientelist pattern in Albania through which the electoral strategy appears to bear the same importance as the employment of supporters.³⁵ For this paper, we use the leaked patronage list of SP, and also rely on data produced by international and domestic election observation missions and media reports depicting electoral fraud and clientelist practices in the last 2021 elections in Albania.

Unilateral Changes of the Electoral Code and the Democratic Deficit

All in all, Albania has conducted ten general elections, and while all of them have been stained by some irregularities, most of them have been outrightly disputed. Only the results of the 1992, 2005, and 2013 elections have been accepted by the opposition.³⁶ It should be noted that as a result of these three elections, the incumbents left the office, and a peaceful rotation of power ensued. Usually, each pre-election period is tense and as studies have shown, elections are undermined by informal practices in ensuring votes, clientelism, vote buying, and other illegal activities.³⁷

In reference to the Albanian elections, the effective functioning of electoral systems is closely linked to the nature of political parties, to the constitutional devices, and to a range of institutional prerogatives. The success of any electoral system and the process that results from it supposes also its acceptance as a legitimate system, both by the main political

³⁵ Afrim Krasniqi and Ardian Hackaj, *Albanians and the European Social Model. Internal Democracy in Albanian Political Parties* (Tirana: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2015), 57.

³⁶ Ioannis Armakolas and Bledar Feta, “Can Albania Exorcise the Ghost of Elections Past? The Milestone April 2021 Elections,” Policy paper no. 67 (April 2021) Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and the Hellenic Foundation for European & Foreign Policy.

³⁷ Armanda Hysa et al., “Informal and Clientelist Political Practices in Albania: The Case of the 2017 General Elections,” accessed on October 9, 2022, <https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/documents/downloadPublic?documentIds=080166e5b99f7a07&appId=PPGMS>; Kera and Hysa, “Influencing Votes, Winning Elections,” 13-14.

parties and, even more, by the citizens themselves, as direct participants in the democratic process and as bearers of popular sovereignty.³⁸

Despite the trial of various electoral systems and the presence and supervisions of permanent internationals, Albanian elections are characterized by political distrust and politicization of the electoral management process. The losing parties repeatedly contest them. Furthermore, the opposition's boycott of the electoral process from early 2019 set a negative precedent with repercussions for the democratic system and minimized the opposition's role. Hence, the boycott challenged the entire frame of democratic elections as a peaceful mechanism for channeling political conflict, thus introducing a dangerous precedent for the future. Such precedent is that any party or institution can attempt to block the electoral process at whim.³⁹

The evolution of the state capturing process and distorted elections to favor the incumbent parties has been evolving through time. Before each election, the Albanian Electoral Code has been modified and refined. Lastly, it was modified after a prolonged political deadlock on June 5, 2020, in a typical informal political mechanism often observed in the Western Balkans. This so-called phenomenon of "leadership meetings" was an *ad hoc* negotiation process of major political parties with the involvement of external actors that sought consensual resolution on contentious issues, outside formal institutions such as the Parliament. This agreement on changing the Electoral Code was negotiated among the delegated representatives of the main parties, known as Political Council (SP-DP-SMI), who met at the premise of the US Embassy, with the US ambassador and EU Country representative serving as negotiators. The last had to guarantee and ensure that what was agreed in the meetings would be honored. This however was not the case, as the ruling SP broke the terms of the June 5 Agreement by amending the Constitution and adopting the Electoral Code in its favor. The major cause of disagreement that arose from these imposed changes was the proportional system that

³⁸ Elton Meka and Ilir Kalemaj, "Gracka e Votuesit: mes alkimisë elektorale dhe demokracisë hibride" [The Voter's Trap: Between Electoral Alchemy and Hybrid Democracy], (Tiranë: UET Press, 2018).

³⁹ "Country Report – Albania," Bertelsmann Stiftung, accessed December 20, 2022, <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/ALB#pos14>.

now had a national threshold, although the candidates' competition was still left on regional basis (Buna, 2020).⁴⁰ Only the parties that achieved the national threshold of one per cent could now benefit from the distribution of mandates, but they simultaneously needed to pass the regional threshold. This double threshold proved impossible for smaller parties, mostly from the opposition where the spectrum is more fragmented. Not only the opposition but also the President of the Republic was vehemently opposed to such changes, although we take his opposition with a grain of salt given his political alignment. However, he was quick to write that:

“[t]oday’s act of the unilateral change and with unjustified urgency of the Constitution by the Albanian Parliament, is anti-constitutional and unacceptable.”⁴¹

Although EU officials criticized Prime Minister Edi Rama on changing the Electoral Code without consensus, the Constitution was changed on July 30, 2020, infuriating the opposition parties, as the adoptions aimed to prevent pre-election coalitions between parties and introduced preferential voting. The Electoral Code was subsequently amended on October 5 – it replaced the regional thresholds with a national threshold of one per cent, it provided for a minimum number of candidates on the party lists, and allowed leaders of political parties to be nominated as candidates in up to four electoral districts.⁴²

The one per cent threshold also challenged the principle of standing on equal terms for all candidates. This is because it was particularly challenging for the independent candidates, as they would require a

⁴⁰ Ardita Buna, “Opinion lidhur me ndryshimet e reja Kushtetuese në Shqipëri” [Opinion related to the new Constitutional Changes in Albania], *EuroSpeak* 22 September 2020, <https://www.eurospeak.al/news/nga-shqiperia/19076-opinion-lidhur-me-ndryshimet-e-reja-kushtetuese-ne-shqiperi/>.

⁴¹ Fatjon Cuka, “Kuvendi i Shqipërisë miraton ndryshimet kushtetuese për reformën zgjedhore” [The Assembly of Albania approves the constitutional amendments for the electoral reform], Anadolu Press, June 30, 2020, accessed December 20 2022, <https://www.aa.com.tr/sq/balkani/kuvendi-i-shqip%C3%ABris%C3%AB-miraton-ndryshimet-kushtetuese-p%C3%ABr-reform%C3%ABn-zgjedhore/1927518>.

⁴² Council of Europe, “Observation of the parliamentary elections in Albania,” May 21, 2021, accessed November 18, 2022, <https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2052142/doc.+15293.pdf>, 3.

significantly higher number of votes to enter the Parliament in the respective district.⁴³ The constitutional changes to partially open party candidate lists and change coalition rules just a few months before the elections also faced criticism. Hence, in December 2020, in the aftermath of the electoral reform, the Venice Commission and ODIHR issued a Joint Opinion related to the amendments of the Constitution (July 30, 2020) and to the Electoral Code (Law 118 of October 5, 2020), stating that the procedure for the adoption of the amendments to the Constitution as well as of Law No. 118 was extremely hasty. They also stated that wide consultation among the political stakeholders and non-governmental organizations should have taken place before the amendment of such fundamental texts.⁴⁴

The unilateral Constitutional amendments by the parliamentary majority (SP) proved the fragility of the bipartisan agreement of June 5. Despite the pressure to adopt legislative reforms proposed solely for the purpose of compliance with the *acquis communautaire*, these legislative changes frequently amounted to “empty shells,” or “fabricating reforms.”⁴⁵ Therefore, the legislative changes were adopted exclusively to the benefits of the incumbent SP. Even the gerrymandering right before the elections favored the incumbent SP. Tirana gained two seats, while the constituencies of Dibër and Gjirokastër both lost a seat. Therefore, this clearly favored the SP in gaining more parliamentary seats in their left-wing constituencies, while the DP boycotted the decision-making.

⁴³ Council of Europe, “Observation of the parliamentary elections in Albania,” 3.

⁴⁴ Venice Commission and OSCE/ODIHR, “Joint Opinion on the amendments to the Constitution of 30 July 2020 and to the Electoral Code of 5 October 2020,” accessed December 23, 2022, [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD\(2020\)036-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD(2020)036-e) (2022).

⁴⁵ Antoaneta L. Dimitrova, “The New Member States of the EU in the Aftermath of Enlargement: Do New European Rules Remain Empty Shells,” *Journal of European Public Policy* 17, no. 1 (2010): 137–148; Gordy and Efendic, “Engaging Policy to Address Gaps.”

The Persistence of Voting Distortion during the 2021 Parliamentary Elections

The elections of 2021 were Albania's tenth parliamentary elections in the past three decades of democratic transition. The ruling Socialist Party had a decisive victory obtaining a solid majority of 74 out of 140 deputies with a turnout of 46.29 percent.

Meanwhile, the pre-election environment was marked by partisan acts of localized violence, including one homicide. Allegations of vote-buying and voter intimidation, including SP's alleged misuse of public resources and personal data for electoral purposes, punctuated a politically tense atmosphere in the run-up of the election. A relatively large proportion of 5% of cast ballots were recorded as invalid, as compared to rates below 2% in the 2013 and 2017 elections.⁴⁶

However, the Socialist Party still claimed to have won a resounding victory and unprecedented third mandate in a row by a comfortable majority. See Figure 1 and Figure 2 for a graphic description of the result, which also shows the dividing of the territorial map in political winning colors.

Although there were more or less the same patterns as those witnessed in previous general or local elections in Albania, some of the generated data was more accurate. One such example was the level of expenditures from the political parties, which was triple of what they are entitled under the Law from state's budget and what they had officially received. See Figure 3 for this and other relevant data.

The legal framework on elections in Albania prohibits the misuse of administrative resources, reduces the advantage of incumbency, and limits budgetary spending during the four months prior to the elections. Prohibited activities include the distribution of permits validating illegal constructions, registration of property titles, use in the election campaign of the resources of central or local state administration, employment, or dismissal of staff of public institutions. Furthermore, the law prohibits increasing wages, pensions, financial or social support, reducing or abolishing taxes, waving fines/taxes, or privatization.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ "Albania: April 21 Parliamentary Election Report," NDI, accessed December 13, 2023, <https://www.ndi.org/publications/albania-april-2021-parliamentary-election-report>.

⁴⁷ OSCE, *REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA. PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS, 25 April 2021. ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission Final Report* (2021) <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/albania/493687>.

The economic procurement and public investments prior to 2021 election continued to be high, although the Electoral Code prohibits the unfair use of resources and assets of the central and local state administration by the incumbent. During the first four months of 2021, about 22% of the annual national investments program was used in the election process, such as for the electronic identification of voters, concession projects, reconstruction of individual dwellings due to the consequences of the 2019 earthquake.⁴⁸ Hence, during the first four months of 2021, the government transferred to the Municipalities affected by the earthquake 56% of the total Post-Earthquake Reconstruction Program Fund.⁴⁹

The media reported on the misuse of state resources through different schemes. There was a huge increase in the distribution of municipal grants approved in the week prior to elections under the relevant reconstruction program. For many grant recipients there was also an increase in the cash value of the awards authorized by the municipalities. Attempts were made to influence the vote through the provision of incentives, such as the issuance of permits validating illegal construction. The reports also alleged that many civil servants, a group vulnerable to pressure, were encouraged to vote for the ruling party.⁵⁰

The use of public funds by the government for electoral benefits is related to political clientelism as it favors the incumbent party in distorting election results. While the legal framework prohibits the implementation of public works and the release of financial resources prior to elections, this was not always the case and media reported problematic cases. The legal moratorium on authorization of new employment started on the December 25, 2020. According to INSTAT (apud ODIHR), in the last quarter of 2020, employment in the public

⁴⁸ Monitor, "Censi i Partisë Socialiste nga "patronazhistët" për Tiranën, 69% e votave janë të pasigurta" [The Socialist Party's Census by the "patrons" for Tirana, 69% of the votes are uncertain], April 14, 2021, accessed November 2, 2022, <https://www.monitor.al/censi-i-partise-socialiste-nga-patronazhistet-per-tiranen-69-e-votave-jane-te-pasigurta/>.

⁴⁹ "The Election Campaign Period and the Reconstruction Fund, Additional Budget allocated to 11 municipalities as Unconditional Transfers," Open Data Albania (ODA), accessed December 13, 2022, <https://ndiqparate.al/?p=11936&lang=en>.

⁵⁰ OSCE, *ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission Final Report*, 16.

sector increased by 6% (from 171,975 to 182,547). Increases in the same quarter in 2018 and 2019 were 1 and 0%, respectively. On December 24, the government authorized an additional 2,472 positions in state agencies.⁵¹

Open Data Albania has investigated into the “Unconditional Transfers” allocated to eleven beneficiary municipalities from the Reconstruction Program Fund, focusing on the Unconditional Transfers approved by Decisions of the Council of Ministers (DCM) during the electoral campaign period – March 25 until the April 25, 2021 (Figure 4). In this period, as ODA investigated, the budget transfer for eleven municipalities from the Reconstruction Fund from January 1 to the of April 25, 2021, was EUR 124,44 million. From this fund, 56% of the total Annual Reconstruction Fund, or about EUR 69,1 million were delivered within the electoral campaign month. A significant part of these transfers went directly to individual beneficiaries.⁵² The municipalities of Vora (549%), Kurbin (340%), Tirana (250%) and Shijaku (228%) had the highest increase of funds compared to the previous year.⁵³

The problematic aspects of the elections were worsened using the public administration to support the ruling Socialist Party. For example, the chairwoman of the OSCE/ODIHR fact-finding mission, Ursula Gacek, mentioned about “the misuse of the resources of public administration” and the “fuzzy position between the [Socialist] party and the state.”⁵⁴ OSCE/ODIHR reflected it as well in its final report. See Figure 5 for a representation of the unconditional voting impact transfers from Reconstruction Fund for Socialist-run municipalities right before the 2021 elections from Open Data Albania.

Denouncements were raised to the State Election Office not only by the opposition parties but also by civil society actors. For example, the denouncement made by the Albanian Institute of Science over the

⁵¹ OSCE, *ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission Final Report*, 16.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ “Misuse of Public Money in Elections, Legislation and Institutions Do Not Guarantee the Process,” Open Data Albania (ODA), November 26, 2021, accessed December 13, 2022, <https://ndiqparate.al/?p=14575&lang=en>.

⁵⁴ Andi Bushati, “Nuk fitoi PS-ja, na grabiti shteti” [The SP did not win, the state robbed us], *Lapsi*, May 1, 2021, accessed December 13, 2022, <https://lapsi.al/2021/04/30/andi-bushati-nuk-fitoi-ps-ja-na-grabiti-shteti/>.

Reconstruction Funds (after the earthquake) used in the region of Durrës with the specific intention of favoring the SP.⁵⁵

The opposition also accused the government and SP for using illicit funds and other favors to massively buy electoral votes, which dictated the overall result. Right after the election, DP and SMI expressed their will to enter the parliament, therefore not making the previous mistake of refusing to participate in 2019 local elections, which negatively impacted their legitimacy. However, they conditioned their full participation in Parliament with an investigative committee to make sure that electoral crimes were fully exposed and punished. According to DP's main electoral expert Ivi Kaso, the electoral crimes were particularly affecting the results in the districts of Elbasan and Shijak, and he indicated that DP has made more than 180 criminal charges in prosecution office.⁵⁶

Further traces of clientelist habits in using public resources during the electoral campaign indicate the existence of a tendency to strengthen political clientelism and vote-buying in distorting elections. Clientelist behaviors and relations could be traced in an investigation of an Albanian NGO (AIS). It showed that the government violated the Electoral Code in the case of transferring public resources to individuals through the framework of Earthquake Reconstruction Fund Program during the electoral campaign. During the election campaign period, the Albanian government has created Unconditional Transfers for the Earthquake, which has affected municipalities through the Reconstruction Fund in the amount of ALL 8.5 billion (about EUR 69.1 million), equal to 30% of the Fund for 2021 (ODA 2021).⁵⁷ This was particularly noted in the Municipality of Durrës, where beneficiary individuals were transferred

⁵⁵ Albanian Institute of Science (AIS), *Administrative Report*, May 31, 2021, accessed October 22, 2022, <https://ais.al/new/wp-content/uploads/Kallezim-KQZ-Finale-ne-dy-gjuhe-1-this1.pdf>.

⁵⁶ "PD përgatit për ankimim dosjen me shkeljet gjatë zgjedhjeve, Kaso: Cilat janë zonat me krimin më të lartë zgjedhor" [DP prepares for the appeal the file with the violations during the elections, Kaso: What are the areas with the highest election crime], *Politiko*, May 3, 2021, accessed October 28, 2022, <https://politiko.al/ditari-i-opozites/pd-pergatit-per-ankimim-dosjen-me-shkeljet-gjate-zgjedhjeve-ka-i435243>.

⁵⁷ ODA, *Misuse of Public Money*.

USD 1,000-5,000 days before elections.⁵⁸ Other violations consisted of the creation of an extra fund by the Central Government for the Municipality of Durrës during the electoral campaign, without a Normative Act or Law; the classification of the fund as “Transfer to Individual Beneficiaries” and not as “Capital Expenditures;” the approval of the beneficiaries list without verifying the status of “housing emergency” or “need for assistance,” while favoring the change of status and level of benefit, with such changes being made on election campaign dates; the execution of Treasury payments one week before the Election Day, which is sixteen months after the disaster and four months after the start of the Budget Year.⁵⁹ In a nutshell, less than a month before elections day, the Municipality of Durrës with its Council’s decision on March 31, 2021, prioritized the funds that have been used as a transfer to individual beneficiaries that did not merit the status.⁶⁰ The list of beneficiaries did not contain information on whether it was the beneficiaries’ house, or if they were “in need of financial assistance.”⁶¹ Money transfers to beneficiary individuals were done between April 12 and April 24. Other public institutions were also involved in influencing the vote toward the incumbent ruling party through *pork barrel* politics. For example, the Ministry of Reconstruction, which had delayed the assistance to the homeless affected by the earthquake for more than sixteen months (November 2019 – April 2021), suddenly approved it during the electoral campaign.⁶² Clearly the central and local decision-making, the use of money from the earthquake’s reconstruction fund program, the wire transfer to individuals, and the use of vulnerable groups in time of elections, constitute a form of abuse of public funds and a sign of distorting the elections by the ruling party.

⁵⁸ ODA, Misuse of Public Money.

⁵⁹ Albanian Institute of Science (AIS), *Administrative Report*.

⁶⁰ The municipality did this by changing their earthquake damages status from DS1, DS2 and DS3 to the vulnerable emergency of the DS4 and DS5 groups, thus increasing the number of votes that as gratitude would vote for SP. On April 14 and 20, 2021, the Municipality of Durrës approved the Grant and the List of Beneficiaries of Financial Aid for Individuals.

⁶¹ Albanian Institute of Science (AIS), *Administrative Report*.

⁶² Ibid.

Widespread allegations of vote-buying, as a practice that involves material handouts of various forms such as food or money in exchange for votes, have been regularly voiced during parliamentary and local elections in Albania. The ODIHR Report on 2021 election in Albania indicated that vote-buying remains a pervasive and wide-spread phenomenon in distorting elections.⁶³ According to Simeon Nichter, clientelist vote buying is the distribution of rewards to individuals or small groups during elections in exchange for their vote.⁶⁴ Rewards are defined as cash, goods (including food and drink), and services. Armanda Hysa, Gentiana Kera and Enriketa Papa Pandelejmoni have asserted in their ethnographic report on 2017 elections in Albania that vote buying is not necessarily a component of political clientelism, precisely because it is an immediate exchange that does not create any form of (short or long term) relationship.⁶⁵ Rather, vote buying is a strategy that has been brought forward by political actors precisely because both their policies regarding the use and distribution of public goods and resources in a formal way (formal politics), and their informal practices applied for this use and distribution (political clientelism) have failed a considerable part of population.⁶⁶ Political parties use their clientelist machinery to implement vote-buying, but vote buying in return brings only momentary profit. There is no guarantee whatsoever that the anonymous vote-sellers will sell their vote again, or that they will do so for the same party (patrons).⁶⁷

For the 2021 elections, in its election observation report the Council of Europe stressed that, in spite of the general improvements, allegations of

⁶³ OSCE, *ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission Final Report*.

⁶⁴ Simeon Nichter, "Conceptualizing Vote Buying," *Electoral Studies* 35 (2014): 315-327.

⁶⁵ Armanda Hysa et al., "Ethnographic Report. Informal and Clientelist political practices in Albania: The case of the 2017 general elections," accessed October 9, 2022, <https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/documents/downloadPublic?documentIds=080166e5b99f7a07&appId=PPGMS>.

⁶⁶ Alternative explanations may analyze vote buying through rent seeking, "whereby it is meant that the expectations of excess returns motivate value-increasing activities in the economy," but this does not particularly explain our selected case study. Robert Tollison, "Rent Seeking – A Survey," *KYKLOS: International Review for Social Sciences* 35, no. 4 (1982): 575-602.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

widespread practices of vote buying throughout the election process remain a serious problem in Albania, and this has a negative impact on the public trust in the electoral process.⁶⁸ As in the previous elections, credible allegations of vote-buying were present during and after the campaign, and investigations were initiated in a number of cases. The DP, the most vocal against vote-buying activities even adopted potentially illegal interventionist methods to “protect the vote,” self-justified in public statements.⁶⁹ The Special Anti-Corruption Structure (SPAK) had opened over thirty cases related to vote buying. Prosecutor offices in Berat and Shkodër municipalities had launched official investigations into vote-buying incidents. Meanwhile the DP filed a complaint with SPAK containing dozens of allegations of vote-buying incidents in Elbasan.⁷⁰ In turn, this led to other incidents during the election period, especially in this municipality. For example, four days before elections, on April 21, one person was killed and three injured, in a shooting incident in the city of Elbasan. The Elbasan Police arrested ten people, under suspicion of illegal deprivation of liberty by force, and stated that some of them were armed.⁷¹

During the electoral campaign, the political machinery of the incumbent party was employed in establishing new clientelist relationships or maintaining the old clientelist practices and networks, ensuring that SP would stay in power. Usually during electoral campaign, political parties, mainly the incumbent, work toward creating a *new clientelism* through the distribution of public resources, or by the power networks established by the elites within the political parties.⁷² Throughout the electoral campaign, although the Electoral Code prohibited certain public shows preceding election day, ministers continued with official engagements. They regularly appeared at “inspection visits” of key facilities such as vaccination centers, wearing facemasks or t-shirts with “No. 12” (the SP ballot number),

⁶⁸ Council of Europe, “Observation of the parliamentary elections in Albania,” 3.

⁶⁹ OSCE, *ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission Final Report*.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Council of Europe, “Observation of the parliamentary elections in Albania.”

⁷² Jonathan Hopkin, “Clientelism, Corruption and Political Cartels: Informal Governance in Southern Europe,” in *International Handbook on Informal Governance*, eds. Thomas Christiansen and Christine Neuhold (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 2012).

which drew significant publicity and constituted electioneering. The Prime Minister also inaugurated several major infrastructure projects during the campaign period. These types of events provided the SP with a significant advantage, which had been already reinforced by the dominance of the SP in the local administration. In addition, public employment increased significantly in the lead up to the elections.⁷³

Elections and Patron's Data Leak

For a long time, international actors have focused on promoting quick-fix institutional change, ignoring the ongoing patronage system that in fact makes institutions powerless. Often, international capacity-building aims to improve technical conditions and train people that have been politically nominated. Thus, international capacity-building has often helped to cover up and even reinforce the political patronage system.⁷⁴

Hence, we should bring to attention the difference between electoral and relational clientelism. Electoral clientelism is understood as client relationships, which are established only during election campaigns, in particular on the election day.⁷⁵ On the other hand, relational clientelism is based on long-term relationships, and the exchange of benefits is much less direct.⁷⁶ The practices of relational clientelism range from examples of party patronage in employment where permanent benefits, usually from the state are secured to party's loyalists, establishing thus long-term relations between the patrons (party) and the clients (voters, employees). Unlike electoral clientelism, the relational clientelism is much more nuanced and often situated in a grey area of the political domain – between legal and illegal influence on election outcomes.

⁷³ OSCE, *ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission Final Report*, 16.

⁷⁴ Bertelsmann Stiftung, "Country Report – Albania," 9.

⁷⁵ Jordan Gans-Morse, Sebastián Mazzuca and Simeon Nichter, "Varieties of Clientelism: Machine Politics During Elections," *American Journal of Political Science* 58, no. 2 (2014): 415-32.

⁷⁶ Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson, "Citizen-Politician Linkages: An Introduction," in *Patron, Clients, and Policies: Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition*, eds. Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

These types of clientelist practices are carried out mostly through the abuse of public resources so that advantage accrues to the incumbent political parties that act as their distributors. The most notable practice of controlling the elections is through turnout or voting outcomes. This is done mainly by compiling voting lists where those employed in the public administration have to bring in a certain number of sure votes.

In defiance of optimistic expectations, the 2021 elections were marked by the same irregularities as all previous elections in Albania, plus the new heights of voter manipulation such as the leaked patronage list of the Socialist Party in the main district of Tirana. This infamous list, by which the personal data of 910,000 citizens were divulged to having been systematically used by the Socialist Party, revealed not only sensitive information, but also according to the opposition, these data was used as intimidation forms to arm-twist the non-affiliated citizens to vote for the Socialist Party or not to vote at all. This data was allegedly taken from the Civil Registry and provided to the Socialist Party for use in the electoral campaign. It was confirmed that SP assigned “patrons” to voters who tracked their political preferences. The data provided included their ID number, name, father’s name, surname, date of birth, voting center, place of birth, residence code, list number, phone number, emigrant status, whether they were likely to vote for the Socialist Party, birthplace, employer, and patron. The data was then leaked to the public domain and was shared widely amongst the public. The leaked database reportedly contains names of 9,000 “patrons.” These have been identified by various journalists as public sector employees, police officers, and even army personnel.⁷⁷

The leaked SP patronage lists is the first officially confirmed manifestation of political clientelism ever in Albania, igniting public outrage over potential misappropriation of personal data for partisan

⁷⁷ Alice Taylor, “Exit Explains: The Leak of Over 910,000 Albanians Personal Data to Politicians and the Public,” April 21, 2021, accessed October 28, 2022, <https://exit.a1/en/2021/04/16/exit-explains-the-leak-of-over-910000-albanians-personal-data-to-politicians/>; “Albania: alarm over indications of personal data breach, elections campaign violations,” Transparency International, April 2, 2021, accessed December 21, 2022, <https://www.transparency.org/en/press/albania-alarm-over-indications-of-personal-data-breach-election-campaign-violations>.

purposes. While SP said that the data had been gathered by canvassers and not obtained from any government agency, media coverage suggested that the data was obtained from E-Albania, a governmental electronic platform that offers e-services to citizens, thus casting doubt on SP's explanation.⁷⁸

The media reports suggest that the vast majority of SP patrons in the database are employed in the central and local public administration, including people employed in public institutions who are prohibited by law to attend political activities, such as the Guard of the Republic, the Armed Forces, or the State Police. According to Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN), all individuals in the database have the right to vote and are residents of Tirana district. About one in every five citizens in the database have named the public institution or private company where they are employed, while for nearly 70,000 voters, patrons have left different notes. BIRN has identified the names of the SP patrons and compared them with the voter list to find out their number and place of work. From the analysis resulted a total of 9,027 patrons, or approximately one for every hundred voters.⁷⁹

The data revealed the indirect pressure to vote "the right way" for citizens that wanted to solve an existing bureaucratic problem with state offices. The database of around one million Albanians confirms what the scholarly literature on political clientelism describes as relational clientelism.⁸⁰ This is a long-term relationship between client (voters) and

⁷⁸ "Albania: Parliamentary election report," National Democratic Institute (NDI), accessed November 17, 2022, <https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20April%202021%20Albania%20Parliamentary%20Post-Election%20Report.pdf>.

⁷⁹ Of these, 1,984 were not included in the database as voters, which suggests that they are patrons in Tirana, but not voters in Tirana district. Of the remaining 7,133 patronage voters, 4,205 have unique names, meaning their first and last names match only one individual on the list of patronage voters, which means their employment can be identified with a high degree of certainty. The names of the rest of 2,928 people are repeated in the database two or more times. In one case, the name and surname of a patronage officer are also carried by 36 other citizens. Gjergj Erebara, "Nëpunës, policë dhe ushtarakë në listën me mbi 9,000 "patronazhistë" socialistë" [Clerks, policemen and soldiers on the list of over 9,000 socialist "patrons"], BIRN, April 19, 2021, accessed November 19, 2021, <https://www.reporter.al/2021/04/19/nepunes-police-dhe-ushtarake-ne-listen-me-mbi-9000-patronazhiste-socialiste/>.

⁸⁰ Simeon S. Nichter, *Politics and Poverty: Electoral Clientelism in Latin America* (PhD diss., UC Berkeley, 2010).

patron (party), implemented before and during the electoral campaign, with the aim of strengthening the clientelist benefits, ranging from party patronage in employment to long-term or permanent benefits, typically at the expense of public resources. Several thousand of the patrons identified by BIRN work mainly in public, central or local administration, as well as in a multitude of state-owned companies. The Municipalities of Tirana, Kavaja, and Rrogozhina have a large number of patrons employed by them. The database lists around three hundred patrons that work in or for the Municipality of Tirana, 190 for the Municipality of Kavaja, and 60 for the Municipality of Kamza.

Besides the municipalities of the district of Tirana, from the analysis that BIRN undertook, it seems that several public agencies based in Tirana have as their employees SP patrons, such as the aviation company Albcontrol, Albanian Post, AKSHI (the agency accused for the data's leak), tax offices, as well as agencies and companies owned by the state, such as the Electricity Distribution Operator, the Distribution System Operator, the Albanian Electric Corporation, followed by other public agencies in the field of education, such as educational directorates or the administration of nurseries and kindergartens, and the State Cadaster Agency.⁸¹ Hence, we can presume that clientelist linkages are forged continuously for the sake of political support, harming thus the concept of democracy through fair and free elections.

BIRN reports that information collected by patrons in the database includes even the most private and sensitive information, including comments on whether someone has been sick or belongs to a certain religion, or in two cases, the voters have identified as being part of the minority communities (Roma, Egyptians, LGBT). In many cases, patrons have specifically identified voters as "Roma" by noting that they are trying to convince them to vote for the incumbent party. There is also identification of voters as "sick" or with "Down syndrome," and "maybe

⁸¹ Gjergj Erebara, "Albania Prosecutors Investigate Socialists' Big-Brother-Style Database," *BalkanInsight*, accessed October 5, 2022, <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/04/16/albania-prosecutors-investigate-over-socialist-party-big-brother/>.

he won't come [to vote]. He is in diapers, but we will grab him roughly by clothes [to the poll station]."⁸²

The patronage list of SP provides a very rough illustration of the extent of its influence, suggesting that political parties devote significant energies to establishing clientelist linkages for the sake of political support. Pre-election and election period practices establish a system of maintaining influence that derives its power from informal relations and is stronger than the power of rules to regulate it, and at the end it can swing election results.

The SP patron database for the district of Tirana provides interesting data on demographic developments, employment, emigration, and above all voter preference. As *Monitor* magazine reports, out of 782,000 potential voters living in Albania, it can be seen that the incumbent SP was not sure on 69% of the total potential voters. Of the potential voters who were in Albania, 24% of them, from the verifications of the so-called "patrons," usually vote for the Socialist Party, while for the other 7% there is no information. The *Monitor*, in its database analysis, divided the voters in Tirana in two clusters, residents and emigrants. According to the clusters, about 40% of individuals in the database would vote for the SP, 18% for DP, 3% for the Socialist Movement for Integration (Alb. LSI), and 1% for the PDIU (Figure 6). Almost by the same percentages, the results for immigrants. Nevertheless, patrons failed to collect information for 28% of the voters and did not clearly divide the preference for 8% of the voters, while 2% of them were left blank.⁸³

If we compare the SP patrons' provision with the results of the April 2021 parliamentary results for the districts of Tirana, it turns out that SP won 48.67%, DP 39.12% and LSI 6%.⁸⁴ Another big problem that

⁸² Gjergj Erebara, "Nëpunës, policë dhe ushtarakë në listën me mbi 9,000 "patronazhistë" socialistë" [Clerks, policemen and soldiers on the list of over 9,000 socialist "patrons"], BIRN, April 19, 2021, accessed November 19, 2021, <https://www.reporter.al/2021/04/19/nepunes-police-dhe-ushtarake-ne-listen-me-mbi-9000-patronazhiste-socialiste/>.

⁸³ "Censi i Partisë Socialiste nga "patronazhistët" për Tiranën, 69% e votave janë të pasigurta" [The vote of the Socialist Party by the "patrons" for Tirana, 69% of the votes are uncertain], Revista Monitor, April 14, 2021, accessed November 2, 2022, <https://www.monitor.al/censi-i-partise-socialiste-nga-patronazhistet-per-tiranen-69-e-votave-jane-te-pasigurta/>.

accompanied the 2021 parliamentary elections was the very high number of irregular votes, which came in total of 83,028 or more than 5% of the total number of votes cast on election day.⁸⁵ On this aspect, the interpretation varied. While for the SP, the invalid votes were the result of voter confusion,

“for the opposition and independent candidates, a lot of such votes were deliberately forged (by Socialist commissioners), in order to lower the count of the votes that they had fairly received.”⁸⁶

Conclusions

The Socialist Party won the Albanian general elections of 2021. It came first in these elections by a comfortable majority, securing an unprecedented third consecutive term for the Albanian elections post-communist history.

However, we argue that the control and use of public resources, institutions and the patronage's database by the incumbent party has influenced the election result. We tested our main hypothesis that employing the institutional mechanisms and patronage system was efficiently maneuvered by the ruling party to win the elections. The evidence we have used constituted of several international reports and databases, including the ones that were leaked to the public by the independent press. Our findings demonstrated that the control and the use of public resources, institutions, as well as the use and abuse of patronage database, shaped the outcome of these elections. Therefore, the last parliamentary elections continued the past tradition of rigged elections, but with a touch of sophistication that showed the improved

⁸⁴ “Rezultati në Qarqe ndarja e mandateve në Zgjedhje Parlamentare 2021” [The result in the Regions, the allocation of mandates in the 2021 Parliamentary Elections], ODA, accessed December 13, 2022, <https://ndiqparate.al/?p=11683>.

⁸⁵ Ilir Kalemaj, “Parliamentary Election in Albania, 25 April 2021,” *Elections in Europe: December 2020 – May 2021* (2021): BLUE - Electoral Bulletin of the European Union, *Groupe d'étude géopolitiques* (Paris: Ecole normale supérieure), <https://geopolitique.eu/en/articles/parliamentary-election-in-albania-25-april-2021/>.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

ways of voter fraudulence to gain domestic legitimacy and international recognition.

Among the paper contributions, we may list our better understanding of the impact of patronage schemes on electoral competition, their relations to further electoral cleavages among voters and to influence the electoral results by the governing party in semi-consolidated democracies. Empirically, the current article sheds light toward our understanding of the impact of political patronage in Albania and their influence on electoral results. We have demonstrated that there is a cross-level linkage between the patronage scheme and political clientelism through which politicians connect materially with voters, thus influencing the election outcome. Finally, the paper highlights the role of the incumbent party in relying on patronage schemes to secure an outright victory and prevent political rotation.

In a nutshell, the findings presented here may help open new avenues of research in the expanding scholarship of political patronage and clientelism, electoral fraud and voter manipulation, especially among still-transitioning countries of Central-Eastern Europe.

2021 General election



**Turnout:
46.29%**

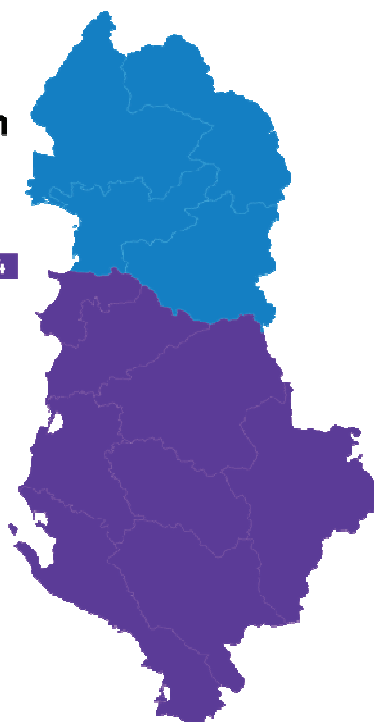


Figure 1. Elections' turnout

Source: Ilir Kalemaj, "Parliamentary Election in Albania, 25 April 2021," Elections in Europe: December 2020 – May 2021 (2021); BLUE - Electoral Bulletin of the European Union, Groupe d'études géopolitiques (Paris: Ecole normale supérieure), <https://geopolitique.eu/en/articles/parliamentary-election-in-albania-25-april-2021/>.

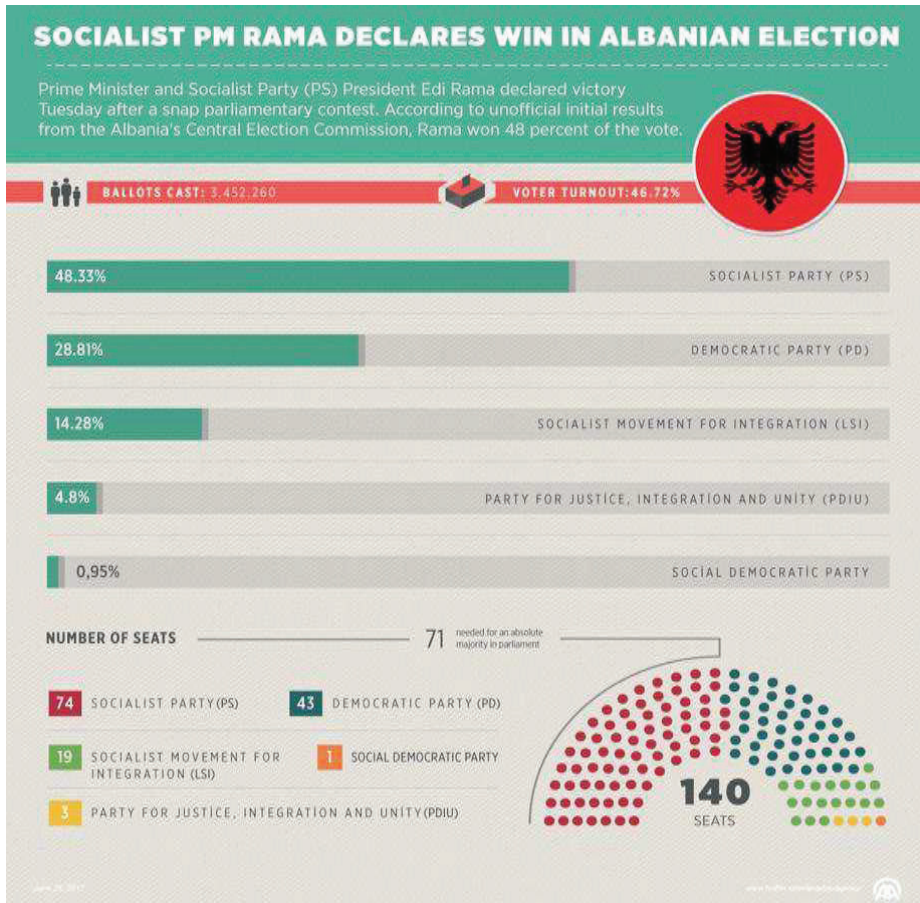


Figure 2. Election results across parties

Source: Ilir Kalemaj, "Parliamentary Election in Albania, 25 April 2021," Elections in Europe: December 2020 – May 2021 (2021): BLUE - Electoral Bulletin of the European Union, Groupe d'études géopolitiques (Paris: Ecole normale supérieure), <https://geopolitique.eu/en/articles/parliamentary-election-in-albania-25-april-2021/>.

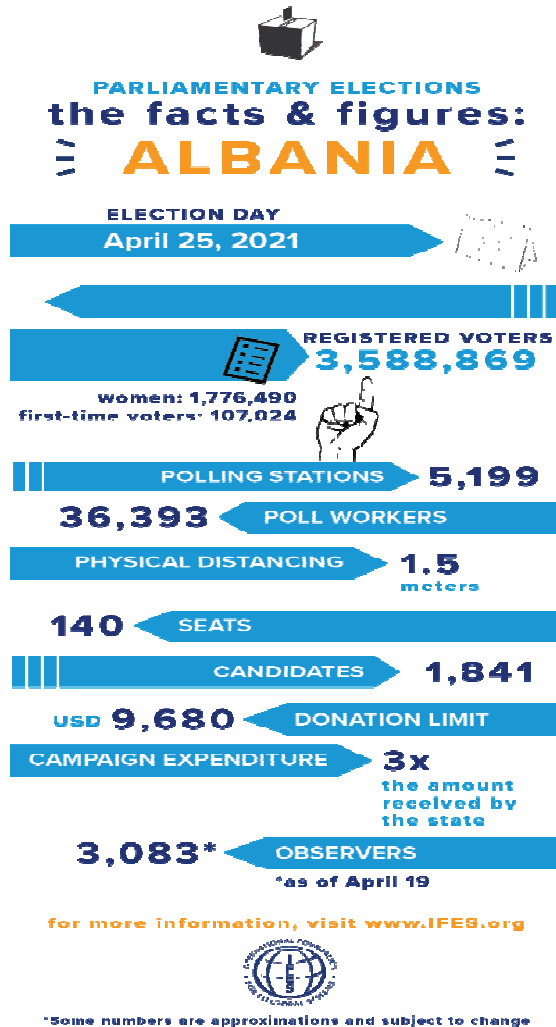


Figure 3. Parliamentary elections. The facts and figures

Source: Ilir Kalemaj, "Parliamentary Election in Albania, 25 April 2021," Elections in Europe: December 2020 – May 2021 (2021): BLUE - Electoral Bulletin of the European Union, Groupe d'études géopolitiques (Paris: Ecole normale supérieure), <https://geopolitique.eu/en/articles/parliamentary-election-in-albania-25-april-2021/>.

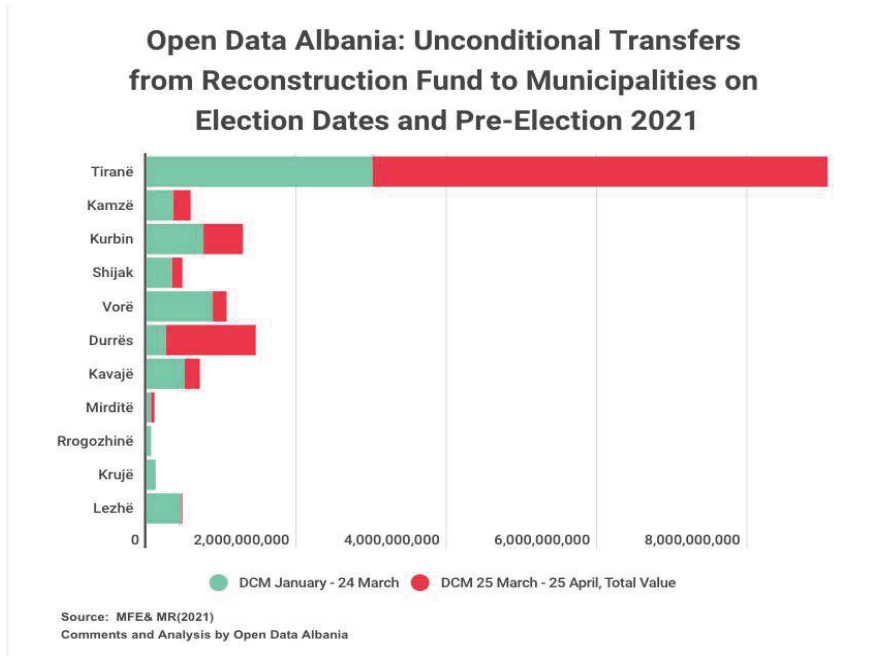
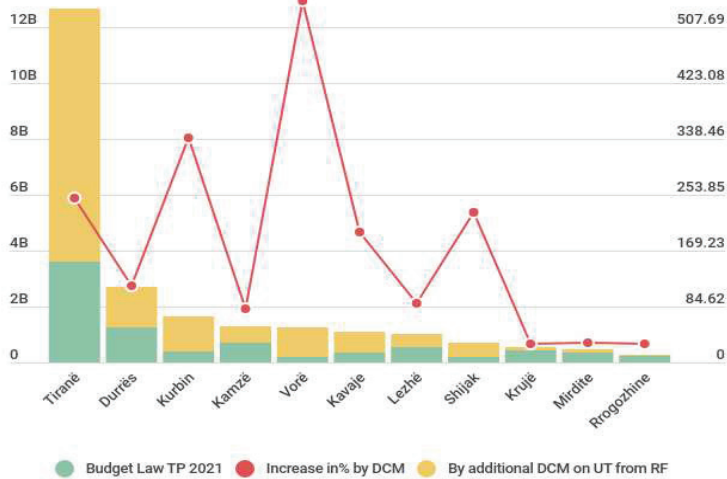


Figure 4. Funding transferred to eleven Municipalities on the first four months and during the electoral campaign of 2021

Source: "The Election Campaign Period and the Reconstruction Fund, Additional Budget allocated to 11 municipalities as Unconditional Transfers," ODA, accessed December 13, 2023, <https://ndiqparate.al/?p=11819&lang=en>.

Open Data Albania: Unconditional 'extra' transfers from Reconstruction Fund per Municipality 2021 before elections



Source: MFE& MR(2021)
Comments and Analysis by Open Data Albania

Made with infogram

Figure 5. Unconditional extra transfers of reconstruction fund to 11 Municipalities on the first 4 months before elections 2021

Source: "Unconditional 'extra' transfers from Reconstruction Fund per Municipality 2021 before elections," ODA, accessed December 23, 2023, <https://infogram.com/unconditional-extra-transfers-from-reconstruction-fund-per-municipality-2021-before-elections-1h7g6k0nxyeyo2o>.

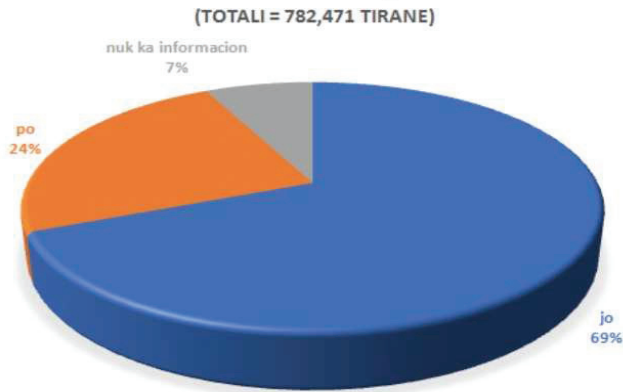


Figure 6. Patrons' provision of voters' preferences in the district of Tirana

Source: "Censi i Partisë Socialiste nga "patronazhistët" për Tiranën, 69% e votave janë të pasigurta" [The vote of the Socialist Party by the "patrons" for Tirana, 69% of the votes are uncertain], Revista Monitor, April 14, 2021, accessed November 2, 2022, <https://www.monit.or.al/censi-i-partise-socialiste-nga-patronazhistet-per-tiranen-69-e-votave-jane-te-pasigurta/>.

ANNALES

CHRONOLOGY OF THE ROMANIAN POLITICAL LIFE APRIL 01 – SEPTEMBER 30, 2023

April 03

- Romania's President, Klaus Iohannis, promulgates the Law 76/2023 on the organization and functioning of the National Signalling Information System (i.e. *Sistemul Informatic Național de Semnalări, SINS*) and on Romania's participation in the Schengen Information System. This bill creates the necessary legal framework for the exchange of data with the Member States of the Schengen Area.

April 04

- The ruling coalition agrees on reducing budgetary expenditures by LEI 20 billion, without cutting the investment budget, in order to meet the deficit target of 4.40% of GDP. It does so through a reduction in the number of board members of state enterprises.
- On the occasion of the NATO Foreign Ministers meeting in Brussels, Minister Bogdan Aurescu announces a new contribution of €830.000 in support of Ukraine.

April 05

- The Chamber of Deputies adopts the draft law amending the Criminal Code on abuse and negligence in office, with 191 votes for, 66 against and 12 abstentions (PL-n no. 245/2023). The thresholds for these abuses are removed, rejecting all the amendments aiming at introducing a value threshold for abuse of authority, as requested by the Constitutional Court of Romania (CCR). Moreover, the Chamber of Deputies approves by 168 votes in favor, 75 against, and 20 abstentions the draft law amending the Code of Criminal Procedure (PL-x no246/2023) that introduces a controversial article concerning the recordings obtained by collecting information, which allows Romanian Intelligence Service's (SRI) analysis to be mixed into criminal cases.

The Alliance for the Union of Romanians' (AUR) MPs and non-affiliated members from the Force of the Right Party (FD) announce that they will submit complaints to the CCR. The Minister of Justice, Cătălin Predoiu (The National Liberal Party, PNL), states that the draft respects all the constitutional norms.

- The Government approves an ordinance that redirects \$1.6 million to NATO Trust Funds intended to strengthen Ukraine and Republic of Moldova's defense capacity. This decision is in line with the objectives set through the 2021-2024 Government Program.
- In the context of the constant increase in the price of compulsory insurance, the Government approves through a government decision the proposal made by the Financial Supervisory Authority (ASF) to prevent the increase in motor third-party liability insurance (RCA) prices for the next six months.

April 06

- The National Liberal Party (PNL) decides in its national permanent office to create a working group responsible for a draft law that would merge parliamentary and local elections.
- The General Prosecutor's Office closes the file concerning the allegations of plagiarism in the doctoral thesis of former Prime Minister Nicolae Ciucă's, stating that the deed was prescribed. Concerning the aggravated use of forgery, the decision concludes that the event did not occur.
- PNL's National Political Bureau appoints Hubert Thuma, the regional Vice President for the Bucharest-Ilfov region, as the interim president of the Bucharest branch. The decision comes after Ciprian Ciucu – the mayor of Sector 6 – resigned in February. Thuma has a maximum of 90 days to organize the internal elections of PNL Bucharest.

April 07

- Amidst growing discontent among Romanian farmers who are protesting against the decisions made by the Minister of Agriculture, Petre Daea, Prime Minister (PM) Nicolae Ciucă urges the minister to take immediate measures to support them. These decisions are also contested by opposition leaders, such as Ionuț Moșteanu, the

deputy leader of Save Romania Union (USR), who are calling for the minister's resignation.

April 11

- The Ministry of Labour and the Romanian Orthodox Church (BOR) sign a collaboration protocol to develop the national network of social services for long-term care aimed at disadvantaged social groups. The protocol involves 800 BOR institutions and social services.
- The members of the Supreme Council of National Defense (CSAT) adopt the concept of achieving operational air defense capability with 5th generation multirole aircraft. The analysis of the military aviation in Romania is discussed and it is decided that the necessary modernization process will continue with the purchase of F-35 military aircraft.

April 12

- The Save Romania Union (USR) and FD Party MPs submit a simple motion against Petre Daea, the Minister of Agriculture, entitled "From Europe's granary to Europe's shame. Minister Daea knowingly destroys Romanian agriculture". This motion is as a response to the minister's inability to obtain adequate compensation for Romanian farmers, as he only secured €10.5 million from the European Commission. The farmers have calculated a loss of at least 200 million euros and are calling for stronger negotiations between the Ministry of Agriculture and the European Commission.
- AUR President George Simion demands a ban on cereals, milk and other products imported from Ukraine. A draft law is initiated by AUR concerning the sealing of any shipment coming from Ukraine to avoid affecting domestic production made by Romanian farmers.

April 13

- Under the aegis of the Crimea Platform, in collaboration with the Ukrainian counterparts, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bogdan Aurescu, and the Minister of National Defense, Angel Tîlvăr, are welcoming the first conference regarding the security in the Black Sea. This inaugural meeting between the two states reaffirms

Romania's commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty in the context of the Russian aggression.

- President Iohannis signs the decree appointing Alina Barbu as Chief Prosecutor of the Directorate for Investigating Organized Crime and Terrorism (DIICOT) for a three-years term, following a proposal from Minister of Justice, Cătălin Predoiu. Alina Barbu works at DIICOT since 2008 and has been involved in high-profile cases such as the Romanian Criminals Academy in 2015 and the crimes in Caracal in 2019.

April 18

- Romania is invited by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to be part of the Working Group on Bribery and to adhere to OECD's Convention on Bribery.

April 19

- The Chamber of Deputies rejects the simple motion filed by USR and FD against the Minister of Agriculture, Petre Daea, with 174 votes against, 83 in favor, and one abstention.
- The European Commission (EC) requests Romania to waive the restrictions imposed on the export of electricity as these restrictions violate the European Directive 2019/944 concerning the internal energy market policy. The restrictions are not justified and are incompatible with Articles 35 and 36 of the TFEU. These two articles stipulate that states cannot restrict imports or exports unless justified.
- In the joint plenary session of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, George Niculescu (PNL) is appointed as the new president of the National Energy Regulatory Authority (ANRE) with 256 votes in favor. Niculescu was appointed as Secretary of State for the Minister of Energy in 2021 during Nicolae Ciucă's Government. The Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) did not participate in this meeting as a form of protest against PNL and PSD for not offering a post in ANRE to a UDMR candidate.
- The EC launches an infringement procedure against Romania for incorrectly transposing the right of access to a lawyer and the right

to communicate upon arrest. Romania has two months to solve this issue, otherwise the EC may send a reasoned opinion.

- The spokesperson for USR, MP Ionuț Moșteanu, declares that PNL and PSD rejected the proposal to include the project for the elimination of special pensions on the agenda of the Chamber of Deputies. Moreover, he underlines that this normative act is a milestone in the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR). On March 30th, USR initiated a signature-gathering campaign to exert pressure on PNL and PSD to eliminate special pensions.

April 20

- The Government approves a decision to grant €20 million in financial aid for agricultural producers in the cereals sector who have been affected by the increase in imports from Ukraine. The aid is provided by the Ministry of Agriculture with a €10 million contribution from the European Commission.

April 24

- FD President Ludovic Orban accuses ministers for committing two crimes, abuse of office and obstruction of the exercise of electoral rights, by refusing to organize local elections in 57 localities with vacant mayoralty positions. Orban also calls for the dismissal of Finance Minister Adrian Căciu for providing false information about the state budget and the social insurance.

April 26

- The Government approves the memorandum regarding Romania's accession to the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention establishing legally binding standards to criminalize bribery of foreign public officials in international business transactions. Through this memorandum, Romania commits to adhering to the organization as soon as possible.

April 27

- Although the Romanian and Austrian Foreign Ministers have met bilaterally on April 26th, Austria maintains its veto on Romania's Schengen accession. The reason given is that Austria is facing a

large number of asylum applications and will continue to object to Schengen enlargement until this number decreases.

April 28

- FD Party leader Ludovic Orban continues his pressure on the government to organize elections in the 57 localities with mayoralty vacant positions by sending a "warning letter" to PM Ciucă. Orban warns that he will take legal action at the Supreme Court for abuse of office and for hindering the exercise of electoral rights if no action is taken.

April 29

- Kelemen Hunor is reelected as the president of UDMR for a fourth term, during the XVI Congress of the party, at Timișoara. Hunor states that the union is not in favor of merging the elections and that it is unacceptable for a magistrate to retire at 50 years old.

May 02

- The Minister of Agriculture, Petre Daea, announces that Romania will receive approximately 30 million euros from the EC to support farmers who have been negatively impacted by low-priced grain imports from Ukraine. Additionally, all cereal imports from Ukraine will be halted until June 5th, following the negotiations between President Iohannis and PM Ciucă. This decision was made in accordance with the agreement between the EC and the five countries affected by the Ukrainian grain situation, which was concluded on April 29th, 2023.

May 03

- The draft law approving the emergency ordinance concerning the solidarity tax for companies in the energy sector is adopted by the Chamber of Deputies with 182 votes in favor, 38 votes against and 44 abstentions. The tax will be levied on companies operating in the oil, gas, coal and refining sectors, and the revenue generated will be used to finance support measures for vulnerable households.

May 04

- The Government approves a draft law that grants it the power to issue ordinances during the parliamentary recess in July and August. The areas covered by ordinary law include: finance and economy; development, public works and administration; internal affairs; health; transport and infrastructure; sport; culture; research; investment and European projects; as well as the extension or modification of deadlines provided for in legal acts.

May 05

- PM Ciucă suggests that the governing coalition is considering merging two of the four elections scheduled for 2024. The Prime Minister argues that this is based on opinion polls that show two thirds of the electorate in favor for this measure. Additionally, the merger would prevent the entire year of 2024 from being taken up by elections, which could delay the implementation of government projects concerning, including the PNRR.

May 06

- Ramona Strugariu and Dragoș Pîslaru are re-elected as REPER co-presidents at the party's General Assembly, with 659 votes in favor and 101 abstentions.

May 07

- PSD is launching the "Romanian villages with European money" campaign to draw attention to the issues faced by the rural communities and highlight the need for support from the European Union. As part of this campaign, PSD members and PES Activists Romania will visit rural areas to gather feedback from the local population, such as rural entrepreneurs. Their input will later be presented as a petition to the European Parliament.

May 08

- PM Ciucă announces that he and his coalition partners have decided to cut spending in the ministries by 10% and to freeze

state hiring, with the exception of health and education systems, which still need employees.

- The Committee of Parliamentary Group Leaders in the Senate approves the urgent debate on the legislative initiative of the USR deputies Stelian Ion and Silviu Dehelean. Their proposal amends the Code of Criminal Procedure in order to allow the judge to take preventive measures after a first instance conviction has been pronounced. USR justifies its request by the large number of convicts who have left the country after receiving a final sentence.

May 10

- Violent protests coordinated by the AUR party are taking place both in the courtyard and inside the Palace of the Parliament, due to the implications of the bill approved by the Chamber of Deputies which provides for the prevention of situations of separation of children from their families, when they are unable to support them, through state intervention in the form of social assistance. At the same time, several AUR deputies are protesting in front of the Chamber of Deputies' plenary rostrum, and a party member was denied access to the institution because four bullets were found on her, which she explained that were souvenirs.
- The REPER party call on all democratic parties in Romania to cease all cooperation with the AUR party and asks politicians to refuse any association or dialogue with this organization, both in the legislature and in broadcasts. This protest comes after the AUR party organized a protest in Bucharest on May 6 in which more than 10,000 members and supporters of the party took part, shouting anti-government and anti-Western slogans such as "We are not selling our country", "Thieves, thieves".
- George Simion, leader of AUR, says the protest was organized by MP Dumitru Coarnă's ARCA of the Romanian Nation party, with AUR members not guilty of violence.
- In Bucharest, 15,000 teachers are protesting against the education laws. However, the participants renounce the demonstrations so as not to be associated with the AUR, accusing this party of wanting to steal their protest.

- Due to the National Bank of Romania (BNR) abolishing the authorization stage of the bank, the Government has made changes to the conditions of establishment, organization and operation of the Investment and Development Bank (BID). These changes include limiting the term of office for the first members of the Supervisory Board and the Management Board to two years, with no possibility of renewal. The remuneration scheme has been revised, and payments will be made monthly without affecting the state budget. The funds will come directly from BID, and appointments will be made by the Ministry of Finance upon the order of the Minister of Finance.
- The plenary of the Chamber of Deputies adopts the two bills proposed by the Minister of Education, Ligia Deca: the Pre-University Education Law and the Higher Education Law.
- Agriculture Minister Petre Daea is accused of illegitimately employing his wife and daughter-in-law. Specifically, his wife is the head of the Human Resources Department at the Agency for Payments and Investments in Agriculture, and in 2020, when Petre Daea was not Minister, his daughter-in-law was hired as an advisor at the Agency for Payments and Intervention in Agriculture (APIA). It should be noted that she applied for this position on her own.

May 12

- The Emergency Ordinance approved by the Government reduces budget expenditure by eliminating the doctoral bonus from the salary law. Monthly spending limits have been set, and there is also a 10% cut in spending on goods and services, except for education and health spending. This ordinance was introduced after the National Agency for Fiscal Administration (ANAF) announced in April that it had collected almost LEI 3 billion less than the initial estimation.
- The Minister of Development, Public Works and Administration, Cseke Attila, signs 37 new financing contracts through the National Investment Programme "Anghel Saligny", worth a total of LEI 574 million.

May 15

- The EC raises Romania's economic growth forecast from 2.5% to 3.2% due to the country's faster-than-expected performance. The forecast is based on technical assumptions regarding exchange rates, interest rates and commodity prices.

May 16

- The Legal Affairs Committee of the Chamber of Deputies decides to sanction several members of the AUR party and one non-affiliated member. This is due to their disruption of the plenary session on May 10 and the meeting of the Committee on Economic Policy, Reform and Privatization on May 9. It is decided that the members will be sanctioned with a 50% reduction in their allowance for a period of six months. However, the Permanent Bureau of the House will decide whether to take this sanction into consideration or not.
- The PSD National Political Council mandates the party leadership to request a reduction in the number of ministries, a reduction in the number of secretaries of state and a reduction in the number of government agencies during the governing coalition negotiations for the next government. This comes after a day earlier, MPs Oana Cambera, Simina Tulbure and Andrei Lupu, who are members of REPER, have proposed a bill to reduce the number of secretaries of state, limit the number of dignitaries, and hire on the basis of professional skills and experience. This proposal comes amidst discussions to form a new government in the coming weeks.
- The Ministry of Defense is launching a new recruitment campaign for citizens interested in performing reserve military service as voluntary reservists. There are currently around 2,200 available positions.

May 17

- The CCR decides that the crime of abuse of office can be criminalized even without a value threshold, the judge being the one who can decide on the seriousness of the fact. Therefore, the proposal to amend the Criminal Code and Criminal Procedure Code in this regard is deemed unconstitutional.

- Negotiations between labor unions and the Government fail, resulting in labor unions announcing a general strike in pre-university education starting on Monday, May 22. The government's promises were deemed unsatisfactory as the issue of pay scales will only be addressed in the next government program. A day earlier, the Minister of Education signed an order to form the negotiating team for the collective agreement in education. The minister stated that representatives from the labor union federations will be invited to being discussions.
- According to a report by the NGO Expert Forum, parliamentary parties collected and spent more money in 2022 than in 2021. The highest revenues came from subsidies, which totaled LEI 258 million. Data available for 93 parties show total revenues of LEI 276.7 million and expenditure of LEI 239.7 million. Out of these, 27 parties reported no income.
- PM Ciucă announces that Romania has agreed with the EC to approve investment projects worth €10 billion from the 2021-2027 Financial Framework. These investments will cover projects related to transport infrastructure, water and sewer systems, natural gas, as well as education, health, and urban mobility.

May 19

- USR senators protest by leaving the debates on the Education laws in committees, after the PSD-PNL coalition voted against their amendment to eliminate the dual system of high school admission. The amendment proposed would have brought back the uniform admission system based on a standard national assessment and computerized distribution.
- The Committee of Parliamentary Group Leaders extends the deadline for the submission of reports to the education committee for the draft laws on pre-university education and higher education. The Senate Education Committee provided a favorable report on the draft law for higher education, including accepted and rejected amendments, with USR voting against. The Senate is the final decision-making body in this matter.

May 21

- A first negotiation meeting took place at the Victoria Palace between PM Ciucă, the President of the Chamber of Deputies, Marcel Ciolacu, representatives of the Executive, and the leaders of the union federations in education following warnings of a general strike in the education sector due to poor salaries. The government's offer to the protesters includes bonuses for new teachers, bonuses for teachers in disadvantaged areas, and rises for non-teaching staff. The leaders of the groups requested for a new meeting with the Government, but did not receive a response. As a result, the labor unions, including National College of Leaders of the Federation of Free Labour Unions in Education (FSLI) and the European Science Foundation (ESF), rejected the government's offer and decided to continue the indefinite general strike.

May 22

- President Iohannis referred the law supplementing the Code of Civil Procedure with provisions on the order of civil proceedings to CCR, as it violates the principle of bicameralism.
- More than 150,000 teachers and 70,000 non-teaching staff members are going on an indefinite general strike, as they have not received a new invitation to negotiations from the Executive. The PNL-PSD coalition leaders have postponed public talks on the government handover until the situation stabilizes.
- Romania joins a group of nine countries, including Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Slovenia, Spain and the Netherlands, in calling for the abolition of member states' vetoes in two key areas, namely foreign policy and security. The nine initiating countries launched the plea for major change in the EU on May 4. However, the Romanian authorities have not publicly discussed Romania's position on the issue in Parliament or other forums. After observing previous meetings, Romania is participating as a member of the Group at this meeting.
- The Senate, as the decision-making chamber, adopts the draft education laws as follows: the draft law on pre-university education with 82 votes in favor and 28 against, respectively the

draft law on higher education with 79 votes in favor and 28 against. USR and FD contend that the new laws infringe upon the principle of equal opportunity.

May 23

- The National Council for Ethics in Scientific Research, Technological Development and Innovation announces that Lucian Bode's PhD thesis is not plagiarized. According to the Council, an advisory body without legal personality attached to the State authority for research and development, the percentage of similarity is between 14-18%. The Council also added Lucian Bode's work contains a large number of citations, indicating that his intention was not to plagiarize.
- George Simion, the leader of AUR, and several MPs from the party entered the office of the Speaker of the House, Marcel Ciolacu, to discuss limiting the speaking time to 10 seconds during debates on bills. This was after five members of the AUR parliamentary group were sanctioned by the Legal Committee of the Chamber of Deputies for their participation in the May 10 protest in front of the Palace of Parliament.

May 24

- CCR accepts the complaint regarding the law that permits a 25% salary increase for neuropsychic overload to be granted to the staff of the National Integrity Agency (ANI). USR, together with FD, referred the matter to CCR in March, citing violation of the principle of bicameralism, as well as a violation of the principle of legality. The measure was not justified or substantiated by PSD-PNL.
- President Iohannis sends to CCR a petition of unconstitutionality on the law on the order of trials in civil matters. The head of state argues that the law violates the principle of bicameralism, as it was rejected in the Senate and adopted with amendments in the Chamber of Deputies. Additionally, he also contends that the draft violates the provisions on the quality of the law and the respect of the rules of legislative technique regarding the integration of amendments into the body of legislation.

- USR and FD are challenging the new Education Laws at CCR on the grounds that they contain several unconstitutional provisions, such as limiting children's right to education and violating the principle of equal rights.

May 26

- PM Ciucă announces that he will not resign as stipulated by the agreement between PSD and PNL. He will postpone his resignation until the teachers' strike is resolved and an agreement is reached between the labor unions and the Government.

May 28

- Education unions are continuing their strike after negotiations with the government failed to meet their demands for increasing the salary of junior teachers.

May 30

- PM Ciucă participates in a discussion with representatives of the Sanitas Labor Union on funding priorities in the healthcare system. As a result of the discussion, the Government will approve the unblocking of 14,000 posts in the health system and funding will be allocated to complete the payment of holiday vouchers for all employees in the system.

June 1

- The Romanian Government adopts an emergency ordinance to increase the salaries of the teaching and auxiliary staff, as well as non-teaching staff in educational institutions. The teaching and auxiliary staff will receive a gross increase of LEI 1000, while the non-teaching will receive a gross increase of LEI 400.

June 6

- PSD submits a legislative initiative to eliminate and repeal parliamentarians' special pensions.
- According to a poll conducted by the European Parliament, 61% of Romanians are interested in the upcoming elections for the European Parliament, which is an increase from the 58% reported in 2018.

June 7

- Eugen Tomac, PMP President, and Cătălin Drulă, USR President, discuss the possibility of creating a right-wing alternative to the PSD-PNL coalition.
- The AUR president, George Simion, initiates the Pact for the Future of Education in Romania, which aims to address the demands made by teachers during the recent strike.

June 9

- The government adopts a memorandum regarding salary increases for education staff through the new Payroll Law. The memorandum ensures that the salaries of the junior teachers and university assistants will be brought to the level of the average gross salary in the economy.

June 11

- The Romanian Government adopts an emergency ordinance that modifies the calendar of activities related to the end of the school year. The ordinance includes provisions for the equivalence of the oral tests from the baccalaureate exam with the grades obtained during high school. Additionally, the tenure exam will only be conducted through a written test. Furthermore, due to the ongoing teachers' strike, the Baccalaureate skills tests supposed to take place on June 12 is rescheduled for June 14.

June 12

- The Government approves the emergency ordinances to increase salaries in education and award premiums for teacher and non-teaching staff.
- Following the completion of the strike, PM Ciucă resigns. According to the Coalition's Governing Act, the mandate allows for the initiation of government rotation, as negotiated between PNL and PSD parties. The official decrees announcing the resignation of PM Ciucă and the temporary appointment of Minister of Justice Cătălin Predoiu are published in the Official Journal (*Monitorul Oficial*). A meeting of the Governing Coalition was held, with

UDMR MPs in attendance. Consultations with parliamentary party leaders regarding the appointment of a new prime minister also took place at the Cotroceni Palace. The leaders of the opposition parties are against Marcel Ciolacu's appointment as PM.

- The Government approves by decision the National Strategy in the field of Public Procurement 2023-2027. This public policy document continues the reform of the national public procurement system and is a component of C14-Good Governance in PNRR. The strategy aims to create efficient and responsible governance in the field of public procurement.

June 13

- The new government's structure includes two deputy prime ministers, one without a portfolio, and 18 ministries. The Ministry of Sports and the Ministry of Tourism have been removed. Tourism joins the Economy, and Sport becomes a government agency under the PM's authority. The National Political Bureau of PSD approves the list of Social Democratic ministers proposed in the Cabinet: Prime Minister – Marcel Ciolacu; Deputy Prime Minister – Marian Neacșu; Minister of Transport and Infrastructure – Sorin Grindeanu; Minister of Investments and European Projects – Adrian Căciu; Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development – Florin Barbu; Minister of Economy, Entrepreneurship and Tourism – Radu Oprea; Minister of National Defense – Angel Tîlvâr; Minister of Family, Youth and Equal Opportunities – Gabriela Firea; Minister of Research, Innovation and Digitization – Ivan Bogdan-Gruia; Minister of Labor and Social Solidarity – Marius Budăi; Minister of Health – Alexandru Rafila. The National Political Bureau of PNL approves the list of Liberal ministers proposed in the Cabinet: Cătălin Predoiu – deputy prime minister and minister of Internal Affairs; Marcel Boloș – Minister of Finance; Adrian Veștea – Minister of Development, Public Works and Administration; Mircea Fechet – Minister of Environment, Waters and Forests; Luminița Odobescu – Minister of Foreign Affairs; Ligia Deca – Minister of Education; Raluca Turcan – Minister of Culture; Alina Gorghiu – Minister of Justice; Sebastian Burduja – Minister of Energy. Furthermore, Nicolae Ciucă

is proposed as president of the Senate. The list of ministers for the PNL-PSD Cabinet and the government program, for which the appointed PM Ciolacu is requesting a vote of confidence from the Legislature, are to be submitted to the Reunited Permanent Offices of the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies.

- The joint plenary of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate revokes Daniel Iovănescu from his position as Deputy Ombudsman. This decision comes after the Parliaments' legal committees voted in favor of a request from the Ombudsman, Renate Weber, on May 23. She believed that Iovănescu's work would negatively impact the institution's proper functioning.

June 14

- All the ministers proposed for the new Government receive a favorable vote from the Parliament.

June 15

- The Plenary of the Chamber of Deputies have vacated the positions of President and Vice-President of the legislative forum following the resignations of Marcel Ciolacu, Ciprian Constantin Șerban (PSD) and Claudiu Florin Roman (PNL). Deputies Lucian Bode and Alfred Simonis are appointed Vice Presidents, with 223 votes in favor, 14 against, and two abstentions. Alfred Simonis also holds the position of interim President of the Chamber of Deputies.
- The Chamber of Deputies and the Senate convened to vote on the investiture of the proposed Prime Minister, Marcel Ciolacu. The government program and the list of proposed ministers are approved with 290 votes in favor and 95 against.
- President Iohannis signs the decree appointing the Government led by Marcel Ciolacu. Members of the Government are taking the oath of office before President Iohannis, in a ceremony held at the Cotroceni Palace.
- Bogdan Aurescu, the former Foreign Minister, is appointed by degree as a presidential adviser.

June 17

- USR is voting for a right-wing coalition in the 2024 elections at their party congress.

June 19

- Dumitru Coarnă, an unaffiliated deputy, joins the AUR parliamentary group. In March 2022, he was expelled from PSD after attending a meeting with the Russian ambassador in Bucharest, Valeri Kuzmin, alongside with Diana Șoșoacă.

June 20

- USR and the FD party bring to CCR the changes made by PSD parliamentarians to the civil code that regulate the lease regime. The changes establish a mandatory minimum period of 7 years for leases. They argue that these regulations infringe on the right to private property.

June 21

- The High Court of Cassation and Justice (ICCJ) releases Cristian Popescu Piedone, the former Mayor of Sector 5, after he was convicted on December 16, 2019 in the file „Colectiv”, opened following the catastrophic fire at the club of the same name in 2015. The appeal has been upheld, and the decision is final. The rule is based on the fact that the deed does not exist. The High Court ruling eliminates the effects of the previous conviction, and it states that there is no reason for him not to be reinstated in his previous position as mayor.
- CCR rejects USR and FD’s submission regarding the unconstitutionality of the Education Laws. The two parties complained about that procedure that was the basis for the adoption of the draft laws, the introduction of the parallel entrance exam to high school, the provisions on student transport, as well as the expulsion of students during compulsory education. USR is urging President Iohannis to refer the Education Laws back to Parliament. In their opinion, the adoption of these laws in their

current form could lead to polarization and discrimination in the educational system.

- At the request of USR Senator Raoul-Adrian Trifan, the Senate plenary added the dismissal of Alin Nica to its agenda. Nica is a member of the National Integrity Council (ANI) and also holds the position of President of the Timiș County Council. He has been investigated by ANI for conflict of interest and misuse of his position to benefit certain individuals. During his term as Mayor of Dudeștii Noi commune from 2016 to 2020, he took part in decisions that benefited an entity in whose Council he was a member.

June 22

- A special commission from the State Secretariat for Revolutionaries rejects Marcel Ciolacu's request to be declared a decisive fighter in December 1989.
- Deputy Prefect Diana Artene signs the order of reinstating Cristian Popescu Piedone as Mayor of Sector 5. This document will be sent to the Local Council of Sector 5, the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MAI) and the Permanent Electoral Authority (AEP).

June 23

- The Bucharest Tribunal cancels the decision made during AUR's congress on March 27, 2022, which resulted in the election of George Simion as the president of the party. Ciprian Ciubuc, a former AUR party member, opened up the case on the grounds that the decision violated the party's statute. The decision is not final and can be challenged on appeal.
- Senator Claudiu Mureșan announces his resignation from USR due to the conflicts within the party. He will continue his activities as an unaffiliated MP.

June 24

- During a demonstration organized by AUR's president, George Simion, in Mureș, he states that the era of ethnic terrorism and thievery by UDMR has come to an end. Hundreds of participants at this march display the tricolor and the map of Greater Romania.

June 26

- The Chamber of Deputies and the Senate meet in joint session and adopt – with 382 votes in favor, and 3 abstentions – the elimination of parliamentarians' special pensions.

June 27

- The Rules of Procedure for the Joint Activities of the two legislative chambers are amended during the joint session of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. The aim was to curb the increasingly aggressive and extremist attitudes in Parliament that are affecting the conduct of joint sittings. The amendments tighten the rules on discipline, including a reduction in the allowance of senators and deputies by up to 50% for a maximum period of six months in the event of physical or verbal violence against a colleague or other dignitaries. The vote count is 264 in favor, 36 against, and 61 abstentions.

June 28

- President Iohannis enacts the law on the elimination of special pensions for MPs.
- President Iohannis enacts a law on empowering the Government to issue ordinances during the parliamentary holiday covering issue in areas that are not subject to organic laws.
- The Chamber of Deputies, as the decision-making body, adopts with 215 votes in favor, 3 against, and 49 abstentions a draft law prohibiting the accumulation of pensions with state salaries. Some individuals, such as teachers or those with clerical or artistic functions, are exempted from this regulation.
- USR and FD deputies submit a notification of unconstitutionality to CCR regarding the law that establishes the position of assistant judge. According to MEPs, the legislative proposal adopted by the Senate on June 26 introduces a position into the mechanism for the administration of justice that is improperly assimilated to the status of magistrate, without being provided for in the Constitution.

June 29

- The Minister of Education, Ligia Deca, officially joins the National Liberal Party.

- ICCJ decides to refer the matter of the special pension law, which allows for the accumulation of the pension with the state salary, and the normative act regarding the increase of the retirement age, to CCR. The Court finds that these two legislative acts suffer from both extrinsic and intrinsic defects of unconstitutionality.

June 30

- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs announces that 40 employees of the Russian Embassy in Bucharest will be leaving Romania. The decision is based on the current state of bilateral relations in the context of the outbreak of war in Ukraine, in accordance with the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of 1961.
- The Government issues an emergency ordinance to limit the trade surcharges on a number of basic foods such as sugar, oil, potatoes, milk, eggs, for a period of three months. This measure aims to combat excessive price increases of certain agricultural products and foodstuffs.

July 3

- The Executive Bureau of PNL votes to exclude the deputy Dan Vîlceanu from the party, following his vote against the investment of Ciolacu's Government.

July 4

- President Iohannis signs the decrees for the promulgation of the Education Laws, during a ceremony held at Cotroceni Palace, while USSR deputies are staging a protest in front of the Palace.
- Following an investigation by journalists Bianca Albu and Ovidiu Vanghele from the Bucharest Bulletin and the Media Investigation Center, prosecutors and police officers from DIICOT search several asylum centers in Voluntari, Ilfov County. Nearly 100 elderly people in a vulnerable situation were found in inhumane conditions. According to investigators, since November 2020, two organized criminal groups have been established to exploit people with disabilities or in vulnerable situations, the exploitation of the victims being carried out by subjecting them to inhuman or degrading

treatment, by exploiting their unpaid work or by coercion and physical violence. The network that exploited the victims was associated with Gabriela Firea (PSD), Minister of Family, Youth and Equal Opportunities, her husband, Florentin Pandele, Mayor of Voluntari, and her adviser, Ligia Gheorghe. At the same time, the Minister of Labor, Marius Budăi (PSD), was aware of the situation and forbade the access of independent observers into the centers.

July 5

- President Iohannis signs the decree for the promulgation of the Criminal Procedure Code and of the Criminal Code. The Chamber of Deputies re-examined and re-adopted the law at the end of June, after the Constitutional Court declared unconstitutional the amendment establishing a mechanism to control the use of intercepts collected by intelligence services as evidence in criminal cases, including two new articles guaranteeing that “the legal provisions governing the obtaining of these registrations are respected”.
- An INSCOP analysis shows that AUR is recording the largest increase in the polls from 14.2% to 20.1%, while PNL loses from 26.6% to 18%. About 1,100 people who have the right to vote participated in the survey, conducted during June 2021 and June 2023.
- PM Marcel Ciolacu orders state inspections in all nursing homes, through the National Authority for Consumer Protection (ANPC), the National Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Authority (ANSVSA), National Agency for Payments and Social Inspection (ANPIS), National Authority for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (ANPDPD), Public Health Directorate (DSP), following searches carried out a day ago in asylum centers in Voluntari.

July 6

- Dragoş Pîslaru, co-chair of the REPER Party, asks PM Ciolacu to dismiss the ministers Gabriela Firea and Marius Budăi immediately.

July 7

- During the government meeting, PM Ciolacu asks the Minister of Justice, Alina Gorghiu, to refer the case of the elderly tortured in asylums to DIICOT, in order to dismiss the leadership of the National Agency for Payments and Social Inspection (ANPIS) and the Ilfov County Agency.

July 10

- The reunited plenary of the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies approves the decision on the resignation of Eduard Hellvig, the director of the Romanian Intelligence Service, and the vacancy of his position. On July 3, Eduard Hellvig resigned, claiming that all the goals he had set for himself had been achieved. The position was taken over by the first deputy director of the Romanian Intelligence Service, General Răzvan Ionescu.

July 12

- USR MPs and the FD party submit a request to the Permanent Bureau of the Chamber of Deputies to create a parliamentary commission of inquiry into the abuses in the social centers.

July 13

- The Minister of Labor, Marius Budăi, announces his resignation, after a discussion with PM Ciolacu regarding the scandal of torture in the old people's centers. Deputy Prime Minister Marian Neacșu takes over as Minister of Labor on an interim basis.

July 14

- The Minister of Youth, Family and Equal Opportunities, Gabriela Firea, resigns following the discovery abuses committed by her network in social centers in Voluntari. The position will be filled on an interim basis by Bogdan Ivan who serves as the Minister of Digitalization.

July 17

- Gabriela Firea is suspended from the positions of president of PSD Bucharest and first vice-president of the party and Paul Stănescu takes over the interim leadership of the organization.

July 19

- Simona Bucura-Oprescu (PSD) is appointed Minister of Labor and Social Solidarity, and Natalia-Elena Intotero (PSD) as Minister of Family, Youth and Equal Opportunities, by presidential decree. Natalia Intotero has been leading the Education Commission in the Chamber of Deputies since December 2020.
- President Iohannis promulgates the Law on the establishment of the National Museum of Roma History and Culture in Romania.

July 20

- PM Marcel Ciolacu requests that the new Minister of Labor suspend the heads of the County Agencies for Payments and Social Inspection in seven counties, as well as in Bucharest. The investigative bodies have opened 47 criminal cases following the controls carried out in the social assistance centers for the elderly, children and people with disabilities.
- AUR's leadership presents the list of candidates for next year's European Parliament elections, during an event organized at the Roman Arenas in Bucharest. AUR's list has 44 candidates for the European Parliament, including Claudiu Târziu, Gheorghe Piperea, Ramona-Ioana Bruynseels, Mugur Mihăescu and Cristian Terheș.

July 24

- The Hungarian Ambassador to Bucharest is summoned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs due to a speech given by Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán a day before. In his speech, Viktor Orbán stated that Transylvania and Szeklerland are not Romanian territories. He also criticized Western values and accused the EU of starting a program to replace the population of the Union with citizens from outside the community bloc. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Viktor Orbán's public statements at the

Summer Camp in Băile Tuşnad do not align with the goal of promoting a pragmatic and constructive relationship of good neighbourliness between the two states.

July 25

- Russia is attacking the ports of Reni and Ismail with drones, targeting grain deposits. This is the first time Russia has attacked Ukrainian infrastructure in the Danube, after Moscow withdrew from the Istanbul Agreement a week ago, which had allowed for the export of Ukrainian cereals on the Black Sea. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs announces that a Romanian ship sustained minor damage during the Russian attack, but was able to continue moving. No Romanian citizen was injured.

July 27

- Rareş Hopincă, president of PSD Sector 5, is appointed Prefect of Bucharest, following a decision by PM Ciolacu. He has been General Director and General Counsellor in Sector 5 (since 2017 and 2021, respectively). The prefect's position was temporarily occupied by the Deputy Prefect Diana-Anca Artene, after Toni Greblă took over the AEP leadership at the end of March.

July 28

- A protest is organized in Victoriei Square by AUR President George Simion which gathered dozens of supporters. Simion states that the protest is related to the poor conditions in schools and elderly asylums in Romania. He announces that the party has decided to buy 20 school mini buses for isolated communities where students have no means of transportation to attend classes. Additionally, AUR will submit a note to Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu asking him to take the necessary steps to legally allow the donation of these vehicles.
- The leaders of REPER Bucharest submit a petition against George Simion to the National Council for Combating Discrimination for a series of homophobic and hate speech messages he has published on Facebook.

August 1

- MEP Eugen Tomac, President of the Popular Movement Party (PMP), announces that he has filed a lawsuit at the Court of Justice of the European Union against the Council of the EU in the case of the refusal of the Justice and Home Affairs Council (JHA) to accept Romania's entry into the Schengen Area and invites any legal entity in Romania that considers itself affected by the refusal of accession to the Schengen Area to join as a party in this lawsuit.
- Health Minister Alexandru Rafila calls for the honorary resignation of Urziceni Municipal Hospital Manager Daniela Ianuş after a woman was forced to give birth in front of the hospital due to lack of gynaecologists on duty. A criminal investigation file for defective performance was opened in this case.

August 2

- CCR admits the referral of amendments to the law on service pensions to the CCJ. The law will now be returned to Parliament to align it with the Court's decision. The draft concerns special pensions for magistrates, military personnel, diplomats, parliamentary officials, Court of Auditors staff, and aeronautics. The reform of special pensions is conditional on the allocation of funds from the PNRR.
- The Ministry of National Defense reports that there are no identified direct military threats to Romania's territory or territorial waters in the context of the Russian attacks on the Ukrainian port of Izmil. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs once again condemns Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine.

August 3

- According to the NGO Expert Forum, the six political parties that received state subsidies after the 2020 elections (PSD, PNL, AUR, USR, PMP, and Pro Romania) will receive a total of LEI 258 million in subsidies in 2023. AEP transferred LEI 48.2 million to PSD, LEI 40.8 million to PNL, LEI 22 million to USR, and LEI 9.7 million to AUR. Recently, AUR has been using public funds to purchase a caravan providing medical services and 20 buses for students.

August 5

- PM Ciolacu announces that the control authorities will inspect shops to ensure correct application of the emergency government ordinance on limiting trade surcharges for basic products, adopted on June 30. This measure aims to protect the purchasing power of Romanians with low and medium incomes.

August 8

- The National Bank of Romania warns the government that the fiscal measures they plan to impose to raise revenues are the main source of uncertainty that could lead to higher inflation. This warning comes a day after the Superior Council of Magistracy (SCM) commented on the Government's Emergency Ordinance, which introduces a series of fiscal measures in the area of public expenditure to correct the budgetary slippage in the first semester. The SCM has announced that implementing this project in the judiciary could cause major dysfunctions in its operations. They have requested that the Government ensure that fiscal measures do not apply to judicial institutions. One proposals in this draft is to cancel unfilled vacant positions. At the court level, 1,127 out of 5,065 positions are currently unfilled. At the prosecutors' offices, 903 out of 3,040 positions are also vacant.

August 9

- USR parliamentarians and USR youth representatives start the "DNA of the forests" caravan in Constanta county, with the aim of collecting signatures to support the bill of the same name. This project seeks to put an end to the illegal logging.

August 10

- Dozens of Ministry of Finance employees are protesting in front of Minister Marcel Boloş' office due to the plan to eliminate overtime pay, holiday pay and food allowances as a measure to reduce budget spending.

August 11

- Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu claims that the Government's measures to fight inflation are successful, after the National Institute of Statistics (INS) announced that the annual inflation rate for August 2023 compared to August 2022 is 9.4%. Additionally, INS also reports that the inflation rate at the beginning of 2023 is 4.9%.

August 14

- Former Finance Minister Darius Vâlcov (PSD) is being brought from Italy to be taken to Rahova prison. He received a final six-year prison sentence in May for influence peddling and money laundering and fled abroad. Vâlcov was convicted by Romania's High Court of Cassation and Justice in the "Paintings" case for his time as Mayor of Slatina when he charged a company 20% of the value of a project signed with the city hall.

August 16

- USR convenes Parliament in an extraordinary session from 17 August to 1 September to re-examine the draft law on special pensions. USR considers that the postponement of the bill's re-examination by the governing coalition of PSD-PNL indicates that they do not want to abolish special pensions.

August 17

- An AUR protest is held in front of the Ministry of Health, attended by members, MPs and supporters of the party. The protest is organized against a draft law that they claimed would introduce compulsory vaccination, despite the lack of legislation in place on the matter. The protesters are demanding the resignation of Minister Alexandru Rafila and the withdrawal of the National Vaccination Strategy from public debate.

August 18

- Through the Annual Plan for International Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance for the year 2023, the Republic of Moldova will receive funding of LEI 4.285 million in funding from

Romania's bilateral international development cooperation policy making Moldova Romania's priority beneficiary.

- Former Prime Minister Victor Ponta is appointed as an honorary advisor to Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu in the field of International Economic Relations.

August 19

- The National Conference of the Right Force party is attended by Nicușor Dan, the Mayor General of the Capital, and Eugen Tomac, the President of PMP among over 1400 other participants. The meeting presents and will adopt the political strategy of the FD for 2024, with the aim of selecting a center-right candidate to win the presidential elections. The governmental program's main directions are discussed, including liberal-conservatism, Christian values, and the internal elections calendar. The congress to elect the leadership of the FD is scheduled for March 24, 2024.

August 22

- The Minister of Development, Public Works and Administration, Adrian Veșteă, signs 100 funding contracts worth LEI 1,135,215,117 through the Anghel Saligny program. The contracts are for the modernization of road infrastructure, drinking water supply systems, the establishment of sewerage networks, the construction of bridges and the rehabilitation of bicycle paths.

August 23

- Alexandra Ivanov, a 25-year-old pregnant mother, died in the maternity ward in Botoșani, due to lack of medical care. USR urges the immediate establishment of the Patient's Advocate, an independent body that defends patients' rights and investigates cases of maladministration, abuse or discrimination in the health system. The Government has allocated LEI 50,000 from the Reserve Fund available to the Prime Minister to support the family of the young woman who died 9 hours after being admitted to the Maternity Hospital in Botoșani.

August 24

- The Government announces it will be accountable to Parliament for the fiscal reform project, which aims to change the state apparatus, tax measures and combat evasion. AUR announces that it will table a motion of censure against the Marcel Ciolacu-led government after the opening of the parliamentary session. USR is also considering tabling a motion of censure, but without AUR.

August 28

- Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu orders the start of a nationwide control on the fulfilment of the conditions of authorization, operation and exploitation of all fuel storage and marketing facilities in the context of the events that took place in Crevedia, where an LPG station operating without authorization exploded.
- George Simion, President of AUR, meets with Israeli Ambassador Reuven Azar and acknowledges Romania's responsibility for the Holocaust of Romanian Jews. Alexandru Muraru, PNL MP, stated in a Facebook post that Ambassador Azar's gesture legitimizes the activity of an extremist, xenophobic, racist, legionary party. Initially, Israel's Foreign Ministry had a policy of rejecting the AUR party, which was accused of having anti-Semitic positions. The embassy' change of policy was requested by the country's foreign minister, Eli Cohen, and is being made in response to pressure from right-wing personalities in Israel who have been working with AUR for a year.

August 30

- Development Minister Adrian Veșteea announces that other contracts worth over LEI 22 billion have been signed through the Anghel Saligny program.

September 2

- The mayor of Crevedia, Florin Petre, is excluded from PSD after the explosion at the LPG station in this commune, resulting in three dead and 56 wounded.

September 4

- The Senate and the Chamber of Deputies begin the second ordinary parliamentary session of the year. Daniel Suciuc (PSD), Alfred Simonis (PSD), Lucian Bode (PNL), Dan Barna (USR) are elected as Vice-Presidents of the Chamber of Deputies with 211 votes in favor, 38 votes against and 5 abstentions. The composition of the new Permanent Bureau of the Senate is also voted. PSD's parliamentary group consists of 48 members of , PNL 39, USR PLUS 21, AUR 12 and 9 members from UDMR. Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu presents the main legislative objectives of the Government, which include reforming the social assistance system, combating tax evasion, extensively restructuring the administration, developing new anti-drug legislation, and removing gambling terminals from cities.
- PNL's leader Nicolae Ciucă states that there are currently no projections regarding the possibility of PNL allying with PSD in the next elections. He notes that the party plans to approach the 2024 election year alone.
- ALDE's Central Political Bureau decides to continue the ALDE merger process with PNL and the Negotiating Commissions are appointed for the merger to take place.
- The Ukrainian Foreign Ministry spokesman says that Russian drones fell and detonated on Romanian territory during last night's attack in the Danube area. However, the Defense and Foreign ministers in Bucharest are denying this information.

September 5

- USR MP Cosette Chichirău resigns from the party and announces she will continue her activity as an unaffiliated deputy.
- President Iohannis denies that any drone has reached Romanian territory following the latest Russian attack on Ukrainian Danube ports on Monday.

September 6

- The Summit of the Three Seas Initiative is held in Bucharest at the Cotroceni Palace, which brings together 12 EU states between the

Adriatic, Baltic and Black Seas. The Summit aims to increase convergence and cohesion, interconnectivity in the region, and strengthen transatlantic links. The topics addressed reached Romania's accession to the Schengen area, the war in Ukraine and the export of Ukrainian cereals.

- USR demands the dismissal of Angel Tîlvăr and Luminița Odobescu, the Defense and Foreign Ministers, and the expulsion of the Russian ambassador to Romania in the context of the Russian drone collapsing on Romanian territory two days ago. Cătălin Drulă, the president of USR, accuses President Iohannis of lying for two days since the drone collapsed on the night of September 4 to 5. Angel Tîlvăr announces that fragments of equipment that can be assimilated to a drone have been found in the Tulcea County. The fragments are to be verified to identify their origin.

September 7

- A report of the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) of the Council of Europe criticizes the Government of Romania for frequently using emergency ordinances to legislate and for failing to provide public information of public interest, which hinders transparency and public consultation. This report was made following a visit of an evaluation team in Romania (30 October - 4 November 2022), and using Romania's answers to GRECO's Evaluation Questionnaire in 2016, among and other sources, including from civil society.

September 8

- The Government approves the supplementation from the Budget Reserve Fund of the budget of the Ministry of Investments and European Projects (MIPE) with LEI 50 million. This funding will be used to finance payment and reimbursement requests for beneficiaries of the Large Infrastructure Operational Program (POIM). The goal is to avoid the risk of decommitment of EU funds, as beneficiary payments made until 31 December 2023, limit the eligibility of expenditures.
- AEP has initiated an investigation into the revenue sources and legality of the expenses incurred by the Alliance for the Union of

Romanians. This decision was taken following complaints received by the AEP and press articles regarding AUR activities. The party launched several campaigns, including the AUR Medical Caravan. In its first two years of parliamentary activity, AUR received LEI 38,268,951 from state subsidies. However, it only incurred significant expenses in 2023, amounting to LEI 12,833,943.

September 9

- The *ad interim* business representative of the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Bucharest is urgently convened at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. During the meeting, the Secretary of State for Strategic Affairs, Iulian Fota, expressed Romania's protest regarding the violation of its airspace. Fragments of a drone were found on Romania territory near the border with Ukraine, which were similar to those used by Russian forces in their aggression against Ukraine. The Secretary of State says that these attacks generate a security risk for Romanian citizens, which also affects transportation safety on the Danube and on the Black Sea.

September 11

- USR parliamentarians protest in front of the Cotroceni Palace at the beginning of the school year, expressing concerns and dissatisfaction with the state of the education system. They criticized the PSD-PNL government for cutting funds for education and accused them of failing to achieve the goal of an "Educated Romania" promised by President Iohannis during his term. They also mentioned the decline in higher education and stressed that, although they have allocated significant resources through PNRR for education, the government is not fulfilling its commitments.
- The Minister of Health, Alexandru Rafila, announces that the European Council has decided to adjust the PNRR. This will decrease the ministry's budget component consisting of grants from the PNRR funding amounting to 740 million euros, which represents 26% out of a total of 2.85 billion.

September 12

- The USR Group of Senators submits a request to call the Minister of Defense, Angel Tîlvăr, at the „Government’s Hour” to provide explanations regarding the collapse of Russian drones on Romanian territory and what are the preparations being made in the context of the border war.
- Unaffiliated senator Claudiu Mureșan joins PSD, after leaving USR in June.

September 14

- Austria continues to block Romania and Bulgaria’s accession to the Schengen Area, despite the EC President Ursula von der Leyen’s favorable call for accession. Austria’s argument is that the expansion of the free movement area is meaningless due to concerns about illegal migration and border controls. Regardless of counterarguments, Austria remains firm in its position, citing concerns that the two countries cannot effectively control their borders. Von der Leyen stated that Romania and Bulgaria have demonstrated their readiness to join Schengen and called for the prompt initiation of negotiations.
- Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu has announced support measures for farmers affected by the conflict in Ukraine. These measure include emergency financial support and additional funding for the *Tomata Program*, a governmental financial aid scheme for gardeners who grow tomatoes in protected spaces, such as greenhouses and solariums. Simultaneously, he requested that the Ministry of Agriculture prepare for the European Commission's decision regarding the import of cereals from Ukraine. He also pledged to compensate Romanian farmers for any losses incurred.
- If the ban on the import of cereals from Ukraine is not extended, Romanian farmers have threaten to block ports and customs. Additionally, other Central and Eastern European countries are contemplating implementing comparable measures if the EU does not extend the ban until September 15th.
- The Government approves the agreements between Romania and the Republic of Moldova signed on May 9, 2023 in Chișinău

regarding the construction of a new road bridge over the Prut river between the localities of Albița and Leușeni, as well as the modernization of the existing bridges between Sculeni (Romania) and Sculeni (Republic of Moldova) and between Oancea and Cahul.

September 15

- USR decides that its list of candidates for the 2024 European elections will be opened by four important members: Elena Lasconi, Dan Barna, Vlad Voiculescu and Vlad Botoș. They will bring experience in administration, European funds and foreign policies to Brussels. USR also aims to build a right-wing alternative to PSD, PNL and AUR, collaborating with other right-wing parties, such as PMP and the Force of the Right to form a common list of candidates.
- President Iohannis announced the closure of the Verification and Cooperation Mechanism. This mechanism was created in 2007 upon EU accession to monitor judicial reforms and the fight against corruption. The President stressed that Romania is now a rule of law state with a functioning justice system, but stressed the need to intensify the fight against drugs and tax evasion. The EC has officially confirmed the closure of this mechanism for Romania and Bulgaria, initially applied as a temporary measure to the two countries joining the EU.

September 19

- The Romanian Ministry of Finance proposes a draft law that includes a minimum tax of 1% on turnover for large companies with lower profit tax, an additional tax of 1% for banks on turnover, changes in the taxation of micro-enterprises with shares of 1% or 3% depending on income and activities, limitations and reductions of tax facilities for certain activities, reductions of the social security contribution for certain activities, special taxes for residential properties and high-value cars, reductions of public sector spending and measures to combat tax evasion. The estimated positive financial impact is evaluated to over LEI 22.9 billion on average over the next five years. The project must receive parliamentary approval to become law.

- The PM Ciolacu participates in a meeting at the Palace of the Parliament with several members of UDMR, including the president of the party, Kelemen Hunor. During this meeting, the Prime Minister is expected to present the fiscal measures that the Government will take responsibility for to the UDRM representatives.

September 20

- The Chamber of Deputies rejects the simple motion against the Minister of Health, Alexandru Rafila, with 161 votes against, 15 abstentions and 89 votes in favor. This motion was initiated by the deputies of USR and FD.
- The Plenum of the Romanian Chamber of Deputies adopts a draft law that gives priority to pregnant women and parents with children under five years-old at counters and cash registers in public and private institutions, as well as parking spaces. The draft passed with 259 votes in favor, two against, and seven abstentions is to become law after promulgation. Failure to comply with the law may result in fines.
- Three important contracts were signed for the construction of highways, as follows:
 - Sibiu – Făgăraș Highway (Lot 4) with a contract value of LEI 1.19 billion (excluding VAT) and an execution period of 48 months.
 - Târgu Mureș – Târgu Neamț Highway (Leghin Section – Târgu Neamț) with a length of 29.91 km, at a price of LEI 1.56 billion (excluding VAT) and a deadline of 30 months.
 - Bucharest North Belt Highway (Lot 1) with a length of 17.5 km and a contract value of LEI 815,075,249.74 (excluding VAT). The execution deadline is 34 months.
- These projects are part of the efforts to expand the highway network in Romania, aimed at improving transport infrastructure and road connectivity.
- The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Romania and the Federal Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Austria have approved an administrative agreement to simplify and reduce the processing of applications for taking over asylum seekers. The agreement aims to combat abuse of asylum. The designated authorities responsible

for the application of the measures outlined in the agreement are the General Inspectorate for Immigration in Romania and the Federal Office for Immigration in Austria.

- The President of AUR announces that the entire County Bureau of AUR Ialomița resigned, following rape accusations launched by a teenager, after attending AUR's summer school.
- The Government adopts an emergency ordinance that outlines measures to support a control and verification system for the recovery of amounts that were unduly paid or incorrectly used through PNRR.

September 21

- Due to personal reasons, the deputy mayor of Bucharest, Horia Tomescu (USR), resigns. The party will make a new proposal for this position to ensure the continuation of their projects and the fight against corruption in the city.

September 22

- The president of the Vaslui County Council, Dumitru Buzatu, is caught red-handed by DNA while receiving a bribe worth LEI 1.25 million. The bribe was a 10% cut from a contract awarded by the County Council and was offered to him by a DNA collaborator who had denounced Buzatu.

September 25

- The Government adopts a bill aimed at combating tax evasion and ensuring tax equity. The law includes changes to meal vouchers, VAT on event tickets, and taxes on multinational companies. The draft will be sent to Parliament for amendments, and the government will then take responsibility in a joint meeting of the two chambers. Other changes include decisions on cultural institutions with less than 50 employees and the separate regulations for minimum wages in construction and agriculture. If this law will be approved, the minimum salary will increase by ten percent to LEI 3,300.
- REPER representatives organize a protest in Victoriei Square against the package of fiscal measures on behalf of entrepreneurs.

The purpose of this protest is to pressure the government to change the package of fiscal measures which they believe it negatively impacts both the economy and entrepreneurs.

September 26

- The Ministry of National Defense (MAPN) has requested the approval of the Parliament for the purchase of 32 F-35 aircraft under the endowment program "5th Generation Multirole Aircraft, F-35". This initial phase is estimated at \$6.5 billion. The MAPN emphasizes the importance of this acquisition for strengthening Romania's defense capabilities and submitted the request to Parliament's defense committees for evaluation.
- The Romanian Government presents its draft law on some fiscal budgetary measures to ensure the country's long-term financial sustainability (PLX 546/2023). After assuming responsibility, parliamentarians have three days to submit a motion of censure against the Government, as stipulated in Art. 114 paragraph 2 of the Constitution. If a motion of censure is not filed, the law will be considered adopted in the form in which the Government has assumed responsibility.

September 28

- The Government approved the increase of the minimum gross salary guaranteed in payment by 10%, from LEI 3,000 to LEI 3,300 starting with October 1, 2023. This increase will benefit around 1,867,000 employees and will have an impact especially in the fields of transport, trade and small and medium-sized enterprises. The minimum net salary resulting from this increase is estimated at LEI 2,079, an increase of LEI 181 compared to the current level.
- The Government approves the budget supplementation of the Single National Health Insurance Fund (FNUASS) to unlock payments for medical services, medicine and health programs. The budget appropriations limit of LEI 1.5 billion and the commitment limit of approximately LEI 1 billion are supplemented. This decision is taken to ensure the prompt payment of health services and to resolve the financial situation in the social health insurance system.

- Romania receives the second tranche of the non-reimbursable support and a loan from PNRR, totalling € 2.75 billion. This comes after Romania successfully managed to meet 49 out of the 51 milestones.

September 29

- USR, FD and PNL are filing a complaint with the Constitutional Court against the package of laws for which the Government has assumed its responsibility in Parliament – the fiscal and budgetary package. They argue that the procedure for incurring liability has been correctly followed, and the draft law contains provisions that violate the Constitution, including the principles of legal certainty and equality before the law. Through this notification, the package of laws is temporarily blocked and will not take effect until the Constitutional Court issues its decision.

RECENSIONES

MARIA BUCUR

The Nation's Gratitude:

World War 1 and Citizenship Rights in Interwar Romania

(London: Routledge, 2023), 231 pp.

Although an increasingly voluminous scholarship has contributed to unpacking Central and Eastern European (CEE) “hybrid welfare regimes,” significant gaps still remain, particularly vis-à-vis the very first policy choices.¹ This occurs due to a preference for macro-structural approaches which do not fully dissect the layered and complex “etatization of welfare programs” (9). Picking up the gauntlet, Maria Bucur offers an in-depth historical analysis on the transformation of individuals into socio-political stakeholders, via state centralization (9). Echoing recent fashionable trends in the literature on welfare state development, the book zooms in on two distinct facets of policy creation – the development of citizenship, entailing a change in welfare benefits from rights to entitlements *and* the role of agency, not just at the level of policy entrepreneurs², but also at the level of individual citizens. To pursue such a wide aim, Bucur draws on a range of primary sources (laws, government reports, bulletins, periodicals and correspondence – p. 12), which allow unpacking the umbrella-term of a “welfare state” to its very core.³

¹ Tomasz Ingłot, *Welfare States in East–Central Europe 1919-2004*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2008; Tomasz Ingłot, Dorottya Szikra, Cristina Rat, *Mothers, Families, or Children? Family Policy in Poland, Hungary, and Romania, 1945-2020*, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburg, 2022.

² Elisabeth Anderson, *Agents of Reform. Child Labor and the Origins of the Welfare State*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018.

³ Julia Moses, *The First Modern Risk: Workplace Accidents and the Origins of European Social States*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Elisabeth Anderson, *Agents of Reform. Child Labor and the Origins of the Welfare State*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021).

In a very broad sense, the book argues, following historical institutionalists, that particularly in “unsettled times”, political elites can pick and choose welfare “winners” and “losers” leading to the enfranchising of otherwise small socio-economic groups⁴. This is immediately visible in the very broad and inclusive definition of “sacrifice” included in the establishing 1919-1920 IOVR Laws (National Office for Invalids, Orphans and War Widows), which departed drastically from the pre-1914 ethnicized definition (18; 30-33). In fact, the 1920 law instituted low eligibility qualifications such as voluntary signing of a document declaring loyalty to the Romanian state, covering in this situation even dependents of former hostile combatants (39). By extending pension rights to heirs and sometimes even to parents (30), and adding further benefits regarding employment and education, the nationalizing “Greater Romania” essentially sought to highlight its “commitment to all citizens, who served it” (20).

Yet, despite the crucial legal clarification that emerging benefits were social rights and not simple acts of charity (68-69), the emerging legal-institutional picture was however far more complicated. On a superficial level, the IOVR suffered from many of the conventional problems associated with (re)constructing and centralizing a state – porous institutional structure, hence unstable budgeting (46) and lack of implementation capacities due to segmentation, respectively lack of adequate time and resources to train relevant personnel (67). Despite an increasing volume of beneficiaries’ complaints over the 1920s, it was only in the latter half of the 1930s that the Romanian state actually clamped down on implementation, through the establishment of a control and verification committee (CVC), which would only come to reify the problems of a highly centralized approach (69). On a deeper level, further complications stemmed from issues of class and gender. For instance, while officers constituted barely 3% of the total veteran population, which was in and of itself a highly unclear statistic (84-86), due to the army’s strong institutional standing and emerging classist assumptions of nationhood, they came to receive a disproportionate

⁴ Pieter Vanhuysse, “Silent Non-exit and Broken Voice: Early Post-communist Social Policies as Protest-preempting Strategies,” *Comparative Southeast European Studies* 67, no. 2 (2019): 150-174, <https://doi.org/10.1515/soeu-2019-0012>.

amount of benefits (50-52). Similarly, for all its success in remedying some of the accountability issues in the IOVR central administration, the CVC was ultimately woefully ignorant of women's distinct grievances (76). The gender issue is particularly relevant for the macro-level shift in defining welfare benefits - women's increasing usage of the language of "rights" throughout the 1930s highlights their growing self-understanding as "engaged citizens", via the unique route of expanding citizenship to accommodate for those who had "served the nation" (159-161).

In this particular line of thought, Bucur's highly detailed presentation on the gendered aspect of expanding citizenship also points to a clear top-down bias in studying nation building in interwar Romania, to the detriment of bottom-top studies. Above and beyond atomized stories of suffering stemming from invalids, widows and orphans (Chapters 4 and 5 in particular), the book also offers an important overview of nation-state-building through the co-constitutive roles of agency, structure and contingency.⁵ On the one hand, IOVR policies brought new categories of citizens into a more direct relationship with the state, allowing the latter new avenues into the private life of individual inhabitants (143). The newly enfranchised individuals also understood that rights effectively meant a legal obligation taken on the part of the state (143). This opened up new possibilities for bottom-top mobilization and ensuing policy entrepreneurship. For instance, the increasing 1930s activism of widows and the coming of age of orphans enabled "politically hungry veteran activists", who had burst onto the scene already from the early 1920s, to find new voting constituencies for national as well as local elections (159). Similarly, the detailed inquiry into veterans' complaints also reveals differential difficulties across institutional levels, from the central authorities (84-86 for instance), to the local implementing agents (Chapter 5 in particular). At this level, the book also engages the case-specific literature on social radicalization⁶, showing why and how "Greater Romania's" failure to live up to its social policy commitments, did not entail a full-fledged migration of veterans towards the Iron Guard.

⁵ Alexander George, Andrew Bennet, *Case Studies and Theory Development in Social Science*, (MA: MIT Press), 2005.

⁶ Philip Vanhaelemeersch, *A Generation "Without Beliefs" and the idea of Experience in Romania (1927-1934)*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

Quite clearly, in order to offer a finely-tuned historical analysis of such intricate developments, some facets of the discussion are either limited or omitted. For example, the looming sense that Greater Romania's abnormally high commitment to minority veterans was due to international commitments rather than inclusivity is mentioned but not fully explored (208). Similarly, in the attempt of giving voice to hitherto unknown policy entrepreneurs and agents, the author sacrifices some of the space devoted to disentangling how broader power holders debated the issue of citizenship, veterans' rights and emerging welfare benefits. While some discussion is present (Chapter 2 and Chapter 4), it does not fully engage the macro-level transformations of modernity that typically lead to the emergence of national welfare states. In this sense, while the detailed historical analysis prompts a re-consideration of some typical conceptual tenets of historical institutionalist literatures, it does not offer fully fledged hypothesis regarding the emergence of welfare institutions in late-developing Romania.

On the whole, Maria Bucur's book impresses through an in-depth historical narrative that brings to the surface an otherwise poorly explored area of welfare state history. By going beyond conventional political structures, the author offers a finely tuned analysis on the creation of new social policy constituencies and their emerging interaction with state institutions, focused at the level of war veterans. While the dialogue with conventional historical institutionalist studies is protracted, the book does manage to send out the strong message that the development of welfare states unfolds as a multi-layered process of inclusion and construction of institutions, above and beyond an underlying social-democratic thinking.⁷

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⁷ Franz-Xaver Kaufmann, *European Foundations of the Welfare State*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013).

SABRINA P. RAMET

East Central Europe and Communism, Politics, Culture, Society, 1943-1991
(New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis, 2023), 326 pp.

The book *East Central Europe and Communism, Politics, Culture, Society, 1943-1991*, was published in 2023 by Sabrina P. Ramet – professor of Political Science at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, specialized in Central-European societies, politics and cultural evolutions. The author depicts in a comprehensive analysis the establishment of the communist regime, the development, the critical points and its collapse in the Soviet Bloc. The construction of a new society on Communist bases meant the monopoly of political power, a planned society, social equality, the creation of a new man, respectively of a new woman (1). A central part of her research is represented by analyzing the unintended consequences of the enforced control and regulations, coupled with specific dysfunctions arising from historical circumstances in each country, that have disrupted the viability of this utopian political system.

The diverse theoretical background revolves around three key aspects: (1) politics in its classical sense, examining power, policy, programs, and values; (2) cultural advancements with connections to visual arts, music, literature, etc.; and (3) societal dimensions, delving into areas such as the economy, religion, and women's rights. The examination emphasizes the contrasts between ideological claims and the challenges in realizing those ideals. It explores repressive measures aimed at eliminating opposition, attempts to reform the economic system, and the regime's responses to the growing economic crisis. The focus extends to changes in the cultural sphere and the emergence of resistance movements within society. Studies about the fall of Communism in East-Central Europe represent one of the main themes covered by political history studies, with an added focus during the past few years. An illustration

of this is the recently published book by David S. Mason.¹ Unlike Sabrina P. Ramet's work, Mason's volume has a less extensive timespan and does not employ the same methodological approaches.

The author uses the comparative approach in order to stress out the particularities, the similarities and the antagonistic characteristics of the communist regime in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, and German Democratic Republic (GDR). Furthermore, the author provides a comprehensive and well-documented timeline of significant historical events during the communist era in the Soviet Bloc, which has been less accessible until now. This chronology contributes significantly to the development of the main arguments in the study. Regarding methodology, the author asserts that functionalism stands out as the most effective tool for researchers in the social sciences to analyze the relationship between government policies and their unintended consequences (8).

The opening chapter starts by analyzing the communist regime, conceived as an ideal society based on hegemonic organization. This envisions a single party dominating the political, social, and cultural realms, striving for equality in rights for men and women and between classes, economic growth in an industrialized system, new cultural ideals. The author focuses on the six aforementioned countries and opts for Yugoslavia and Albania as case studies. This choice allows for the exploration of the dynamics between these communist nations that were not aligned with the USSR. She differentiates two types of communist leaders: on one hand the Muscovite wing, attached to the soviet model of leadership who lived in Moscow, and on the other hand the national communists, who lived in their countries, being more focused on the development of their homelands (14). She also points out the positioning of the church towards the communist parties which had evolved differently across the Soviet Bloc, as the sanctions imposed by the political regime were more or less severe, depending on each country.

Throughout the six chapters of the book, the author employs a division into five phases to trace the evolution of the communist regime

¹ David S. Mason, *Revolution in East-central Europe: The Rise and Fall of Communism and the Cold War*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis, 1992).

in the Soviet Bloc. In the first phase (1943/44-1948/49), the accent is on the installation of communism in a specific political and economic context. On November 29, 1943, the commencement of the communist era in Yugoslavia marked the beginning of a gradual expansion into the other six countries addressed in this volume (19). Following World War II, Poland faced economic and demographic devastation, and the Communists assumed legislative control following the 1947 elections (22). Hungary had a temporary non-communist government situated in Debrecen, while the Communists held influence in more crucial territories (25). In Czechoslovakia, a governmental crisis followed by a series of resignations among non-communist ministries gave the opportunity to vote a new constitution instrumentalized by the Communists in order to become the national leading force (28-29). Bulgarian Communists, organized in Fatherland Front, took control of the government and key institutions. Romania experienced a distinctive scenario with the formation of the Romanian Workers Party having resulted from a forced coalition (35). In the German Democratic Republic (GDR), the Red Army played a coercive role in the creation of the Socialist Unity Party, or SED (38).

The second phase (1948/49-1956) covers mainly the Stalinist era aiming to construct the socialist modernity, dominated by a state of terror, land collectivization, the setting-up of women's rights organizations, and at the same time, numerous trials, executions, imprisonments, in order to enforce authority and to eliminate inter-elite rivalries. The author notes that the ongoing conflict between the church and the state in Poland stems from violations of the agreement of non-interference by the state in its internal affairs, as well as the restrictions imposed or the promotion of atheism (60). On the contrary, in East Germany we find a more convenient situation for the Protestant Church because of its anti-fascist positioning, the social benefits brought by its hospitals, and the opportunity left by Stalin for the unification of the two German states. The chapter also develops on the evolutions regarding culture and ideology. As a general rule, the arts and literature were in all the countries legally forced to follow the patterns of the official socialist realism. That meant, for example, avoiding dissonances in music in favor of triumphant choral or formalism, or the representation of abstract figures in paintings.

The beginning of the third phase (1956-1971) was marked by an early economic growth followed in the 1960s by a slowdown, as the imperfections of the centralized system started to stand out, constraining the regime to develop reform plans. Moreover, this was accompanied by the monotony, the apathy or the open resistance in the society, all unintended consequences of the socialist realism doctrine. Thus, to preserve power, a set of liberalization measures had to be adopted, such as limiting the power of the state in setting economic policies or the beginning of privatization, the right to travel outside the national frontiers, closing forced labor camps, a reduced censorship, a relaxation in arts. Women become more visible in political and economic spheres, particularly at the local level, rather than occupying central decision-making positions. These measures instigated the Soviets, a phenomenon culminating with the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Romania was an exception, as the Communist leaders thought that liberalization could destabilize the regime. Ceaușescu also decided to distance the country from the Warsaw Pact, and claimed for neutrality in the Soviet Union – China dissensions (143). In Romania, the church cooperated with the regime in order to develop relations with the Western countries and the collective self (146, 147), while in Bulgaria the subsidies represented the main reason for this collaboration (151).

During the fourth phase (1971-1980), a constant degradation of living standards was experienced. The rising indebtedness toward Western countries created a sort of dependence. The legislation banning abortions affected the status and health of women, and gender inequality remained an obvious problem after decades of communism. Consequently, the bloc was shaken by protest movements, strikes, and the emergence of civic activism such as The Committee for the Defense of the Unjustly Prosecuted, and Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia (164), or the Movement for the Defense of Human and Civil Rights in Poland (167). In this same period, Bulgaria started to build links with the West, while the Romanian exceptionalism is marked by Ceaușescu's admiration for Mao's cultural revolution, his tough coercive measures, and a rapprochement of the Non-Aligned Movement (172).

The last phase (1980-1989/90) marks the failure of an adventurous reform plan instituted because of the dysfunctional communist system, a

deepening economic crisis, the loss of confidence in the communist leadership, the dissemination of conflicting opinions towards the regime between intellectuals, political disintegration, and a growing frustration among citizens. The visible opposition was represented at various levels: political parties (the United Peasant Party and the Democratic Party which started to act independently in Poland) (201), journals (samizat journal *Beszélő* in Hungary) (209), independent organizations for environmental protection (this was the case in Bulgaria), or different manifestations in arts (like the apocalypse culture in rock music) (210-211). Solidarity activists in Poland orchestrated the underground opposition (204), emphasizing the significance of individual freedom, non-interference in the economy, and freedom of speech. In Romania, the underground opposition exhibited a more diverse and sporadic nature.

As for the two case studies, Yugoslavia and Albania, the author explains the communist regimes had basic resemblances with the rest of the Soviet Bloc, but Kremlin did not exercise an active role of control over their governments. The Anti-Fascist Council of the Peoples's Liberation of Yugoslavia (AVNOJ) reorganized Yugoslavia as a federation of republics based on ethnic criteria, which eventually split up after the fall of the Communist regime, as the unification ideals of Josip Broz Tito disappeared, and the decentralized system provided more power to the republics than to the central government (233). On the contrary, in Albania, the unstable economic system limited investments in development and research, and strong resistance to collectivization led to the gradual disintegration of communism (298-299).

In her comprehensive work, Sabrina P. Ramet constructs a comparative theoretical analysis that considers the political context and socio-cultural dimensions, employing a chronological approach. She establishes a holistic framework for understanding the nature of both intended and unintended consequences, illustrating how these factors contributed to the gradual collapse of the communist regime across the Soviet Bloc. What makes her publication valuable and original is the focus on the need to look for the impacts of what she calls "unintended consequences" which are operating in a latent form and are preponderantly neglected by the decision-makers in a state (6-7). According to the author's perspective, identifying unintended consequences in the context of a set

of government policies entails analyzing all components of society that either interfere with or are affected by a given policy.

From a critical standpoint, the author mentions from the beginning the use of functionalism to figure out the cause-and-effect relationship regarding the promulgated public policies by the communist political establishment. In the same time, taking into account the typology proposals of Patrick Baert, we affirm that this study explains the emergency of unintended consequences, but it does not provide a methodological framework in order to classify the dimensions and the types of effects encountered during every phase of communism.² Furthermore, the extensive literature review can outbalance the research, risking to become a historical narrative.

To conclude, in our point of view, the ultimate message of this volume lies in illustrating the destructive potential of both intended and unintended consequences of policies for a political regime. Thus, it highlights that prioritizing written ideology over pragmatic reality makes historical junctures consistently unpredictable.

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² Patrick Baert, "Unintended Consequences: a Typology and Examples," *International Sociology* 6, no. 2 (1991): 201-210.

ABSTRACTS

ANTONY TODOROV (New Bulgarian University)

Liberal Democracies Are Also Social Democracies

Contemporary democracies have evolved over the course of two centuries, stemming from the democratization of representative government following significant revolutions in America (1776) and France (1789). However, it was the aftermath of World War II (1945) that marked a pivotal shift, as democracies embraced liberalism by adopting principles of human rights and the rule of law as foundational requisites. Concurrently, within the most successful Western democracies, the concept of the welfare state emerged as an essential prerequisite for effective democratic governance. This text argues that contemporary democracy constitutes a political regime in which liberal democracy and social democracy are inherently interconnected and indivisible.

GIANCARLO MINALDI (Kore University of Enna)

The Left Turn of the Italian Democratic Party (PD): Primary Elections and Policy Preferences

On February 26, 2023, for the first time in the history of the Democratic Party, the leading Italian progressive party, a woman, Elly Schlein, was elected leader through open primaries that contradicted the outcome of consultations among the membership. Observing the outcome of an exit poll conducted by the Standing Group Candidate and Leader Selection of the Italian Political Science Society focusing on the policy priorities of the electorate, it clearly emerges that the inclusive rules of intra-party democracy, under certain conditions, can impact the identity of the party, leading in this case to a sharp turn to the left. More specifically, the positions of the electorates of the two candidates, Elly Schlein and Stefano Bonaccini, diverge significantly on issues that appear to be crucial for the political positioning of the party.

PETIA GUEORGUIEVA (New Bulgarian University)

The Bulgarian Socialist Party on the Path to De-Europeanization

The article's main purpose is to shed light on the Euroscepticism of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) and its shifting identity towards European issues, liberal democracy, and in terms of party organization during the last decade. More than twenty years ago, the successor of the former Bulgarian Communist Party managed to achieve a difficult (and, it turns out, superficial) Europeanisation and Social-democratization. BSP supported the country's accession to the EU and the integration in NATO. Now, the party is identifiable as a pro-Russian actor, opposed to the Istanbul convention, spreading conservatism, and hysteria against the so called "gender ideology," fighting against economic neo-liberalism but also liberal ideas. The Russian war against Ukraine significantly impacted domestic politics and the structure of party competition, revitalizing the historic divide between pro-Russian and pro-Western camps. Isolated, the BSP lost its position as a major party of government and embraced anti-establishment and protest-party profile. The main research questions address the essence of the BSP's ethnonationalist and conservative turn, and its hybrid interpretations of "national interest" and "patriotism" in its discourses and documents. Special attention is paid to the BSP's positions towards the war in Ukraine. Our main approach is grounded on the path dependency theory and on the supply and demand sides of the fragmented party system.

JUAN CAMILO MESA BEDOYA (CEIPA)

CARLOS HERNÁN GONZÁLEZ PARIAS (Tecnológico de Antioquia)

CRISTINA CHICA GUARÍN (Esumer)

Official Development Assistance in Colombia: Changes and Continuities of the Peace Agreement. Case study of the United States and the European Union (2012-2021)

The objective of this research article is to conduct the identification of the possible changes and continuities presented in the dynamics and the Official Development Assistance (ODA) received by Colombia from the United States of America and the European Union, after the signing of the Peace Agreement between the

government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army (FARC-EP). A qualitative case study methodology is used by consulting databases and information from official sources on ODA projects granted to Colombia. The period 2012-2021 was set at four years prior to the signing of the agreement and five years after it. The results show significant changes in the amounts and number of projects financed by the United States and the European Union since the signing of the Agreement.

KATEŘINA FUKSOVÁ (Charles University)

Victory Day or Europe Day? The Politics of Memory in Moldova in the Shadow of Russia’s War in Ukraine

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 had a profound impact on the Republic of Moldova. The aftermath witnessed an unprecedented influx of Ukrainian refugees, a significant rise in inflation, a decline in political stability, and a deepening energy crisis. The root causes of political instability in Moldova are diverse, with issues of identity and memory playing a central role in the nation-building process since the Soviet Union’s collapse. Moldova, situated between its Romanian roots and Russian-Soviet heritage, confronts numerous challenges in reconciling its past and navigating its future. The Russian occupation of its neighboring country has accentuated these challenges, serving as a crucial test for Moldova’s European-oriented government. The response to this new geopolitical reality, however, has led to some measures that intensified ideological divisions within the population, particularly regarding matters of memory and identity. The contested memorial heritage in Moldova was notably evident during the May 9 celebrations, coinciding with Europe Day and Victory Day. While many European Union countries consider Europe Day a peripheral holiday promoting European values, Moldovan politicians and the public are increasingly giving it attention, with a growing belief that it should replace the Soviet-style Victory Day. Using the “struggle” over the significance of May 9 as a case study, this article explores contemporary Moldovan memory politics influenced by the realities of war.

ILIR KALEMAJ (University of New York Tirane)

ENRIKETA PANDELEJMONI (University of Tirana)

Caught in the Election Trap: Voter Fraudulence and Dysfunctional Democracy during the 2021 Albanian General Elections

There is a growing consensus that data driven elections are a winner, irrespective of variables that may affect the elections. The question of how these data are obtained in the first place is highly disputed. This paper analyzes Albania and looks at one of its prime indicators like voter fraudulence that leads to distorted election results. Our findings show that the factors that have led to such an outcome are the patron-client relationship, shadow financing, and the use of public administration as an arm extension of the ruling party. There are many mechanisms used by ruling political parties in non-consolidated democracies to obtain an outright advantage in elections, ranging from political assassination or imprisonment of political opponents to staffing the ballot boxes. But as the Albanian case testifies, more refined measures are more legitimate both domestically and in seeking international legitimacy. This article advances the present debate on the impact of patronage schemes on electoral competition and results in semi-consolidated democracies.

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Corp A, Intrarea A, etaj 1-2, Sector 5, București, România; tel.: + (4) 0726 390 815
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Librărie online: <https://editura-unibuc.ro/magazin/>
Centru de vânzare: Bd. Schitu Măgureanu, nr. 9, parter (holul Facultății de Sociologie
și Asistență Socială)

e-ISSN 3008-6566

ISSN-L 1582-4551

ISSN 1582- 4551

tipografia.unibuc@unibuc.ro

Bd. Iuliu Maniu 1-3, Complex LEU
tel: 0799 210 566

Tiparul s-a executat la Tipografia
Editurii Universității din București – Bucharest University Press (EUB – BUP)