Romanian Political Science Review

vol. XXIII, no. 1
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

Romanian Political Science Review

STUDIA POLITICA

vol. XXIII, no. 1
2023

EDITURA UNIVERSITĂȚII DIN BUCUREȘTI
BUCHAREST UNIVESITY PRESS

STUDIA POLITICA

(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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Revistă înregistrată în BDI

DOI: 10.62229/sprps23-1

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THE ELECTORAL SUCCESS OF THE (NORTHERN) LEAGUE IN ITALY (2008-2018). IS THE ECONOMIC DECLINE OR THE IDENTITARIAN ISSUES THE MAIN REASON FOR IT?*

INXHI BRISKU[**]
(Bulgarian Academy of Sciences & Charles University)

Abstract. This article aims to analyze the rise and electoral success of the (Northern) League in Italy, for the period 2008-2018. The purpose of this analysis is to determine whether the economic difficulties encountered by the electorate or other factors, such as political and cultural ones, have influenced the growth and electoral success of the League in Italy. By analyzing both demand and supply-side data, the analysis shows that the League has had better electoral results in the years after the crisis when the economy has been improving than in the years when there has been a major economic shock. Regarding survey data on the supporters of the League, the analysis shows that the economy is among the least influential factors for them to support a right-wing populist party. On the contrary, the analysis shows that the main triggers for radical right populist mobilization have more to do with group values, identity issues, ethnic and cultural affiliation, xenophobic sentiments, skepticism towards foreigners, multiculturalism, and forms of Euroscepticism.

Keywords: populism, the Northern League, economic decline, national identity, Euroscepticism.

Introduction

Studies on the rise of populism can be traced back to the early 1960s and have become increasingly significant after the 1990s. Those initial studies focused mostly on Latin America and the so-called new populism.

* This article is a revised excerpt from the author's master's thesis, "The Influence of Economic Decline in the Rise of Right-Wing Populist Parties in Europe-Two Case Studies," defended at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University (Prague, Czech Republic).

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However, after the financial crisis of 2008, there has been a shift in studies of populism from left-wing to right-wing and from Latin America to Europe. Europe saw a resurgence of populist discourses with new and old populist parties or groups emerging as relevant political actors. Some of those parties even became part of coalition governments. The rise and electoral success of right-wing populist parties have been inquired by many authors, such as Cas Mudde, Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell, Pippa Norris, and Ronald Inglehart, etc., whose studies and conclusions have provided different lenses for explaining the reasons behind the growth of right-wing populism.[1] One of the approaches that analyzed the rise of right-wing populist parties is the so-called *economic crisis* approach. The core idea of this strand of literature is that during an economic crisis, there is a rise in electoral support for right-wing populist parties in line with a diffused search for material and immaterial security among the voters.

Although different other causal factors are mentioned in the existing economic theories, the general idea is that a specific economic situation, *e.g.*, a financial crisis, globalization, or the development of technology, leads to the transformation of the labor market, and generates economic insecurity and consequent social reactions asking for protection. These developments make citizens lose faith in the political system and traditional political parties. Relevant percentages of citizens direct their hopes towards populist parties that present themselves as outsiders, promoters of a change that brings appealing solutions to the voters' economic problems. Those solutions can be protectionism, building a border wall, or, regarding the European Union, forms of Euroscepticism that can even include an exit from the European Union.

The main purpose of this article is to test this *economic crisis* approach. The financial crisis of 2008 offers a solid opportunity to test this approach with regard to the populist increased electoral performance, as it was a

[1] Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell, "Introduction: The Sceptre and the Spectre," in *Twenty First Century Populism*, eds. Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 11; Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, "Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism: Economic Have-nots and Cultural Backlash," *American Political Science Association Annual Meeting*, Philadelphia (1-4 September 2016).

financial crisis that hit simultaneously the United States of America and Europe and had substantial social consequences: bankruptcy of many businesses, unemployment, the rise of inequality, as well as a rise of right-wing populist parties in Europe after the crisis, in the general sense. This article can open perspectives for the study of populist parties, and further tests for the link between the increase of their electoral support and economic problems, as well as other non-economic factors that affect their success.

Case Study, Research Question, and Data Presentation

This article aims to analyze the rise and electoral success of the Northern League in Italy for the period 2008-2018. This is because the League was a successful right-wing populist party, with good election results that have brought the party to be a regular presence in the government, initially in a center-right coalition, and more recently in an innovative coalition with the Five Star Movement, the Mario Draghi's Grand Coalition. This case is also a good opportunity for study because Italy has been one of the European countries mostly affected by the financial crisis of 2008-2009. In line with the above, the research question that this article will try to answer is formulated as follows: is there a relation between the economic hardship in the aftermath of the Great Recession and the rise of electoral support of the Northern League in Italy? In this vein, the purpose of this analysis is to determine whether the economic difficulties encountered by the electorate became the main catalyst for the increased electoral performance of the Northern League in the post-2011 period or other factors, such as political and cultural ones, mattered more. In this article, a period of economic hardship is defined regarding a wide range of difficulties caused by the lack of resources to fulfil (basic) economic needs. To measure this, the analysis uses economic data such as: gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, unemployment rate, and the level of general consumption.

However, in line with the literature, this article assumes that it is not possible to explain the performance of the populist galaxy using exclusively economic-focused arguments; in line with the definitional features of

radical right populism, identity issues, group values, anti-immigration stances, and forms of resistance to the diffusion of multiculturalism are equally important. In line with this assumption, the paper focuses first on the relation between the economic crisis and the electoral performance of the League. Then it describes how the main concerns in terms of economic, social, and political aspects impact on the electoral behavior of the League's followers. It is important to see how these aspects are perceived by the Italian voters in general and what the specificities of the League's voters are. This implicit comparison also concerns other aspects such as migration, refugee crisis, multiculturalism, and liberal values.

In the attempt to provide an answer to these inquiries, the article looks first at the main consequences of the financial crisis and then at the electoral results with the aim to assess if there is a form a synchronization between the Great Recession and the increased electoral appeal. In the second part, data on the profile of the Leagues' supporters will be provided to examine the reasons why they mobilize in favor of the party, as well as what their stances on some of the main social and political issues are. This section will also provide data on the general characteristics of these supporters on issues such as the economy, immigration, foreign policy, national identity, culture, and the arrival of immigrants. These data will be provided firstly to clarify the social, economic, and cultural profile of the supporters of these parties, as well as the reasons for their mobilization.

Populism and its Main Features

Populism is a word that comes from the Latin word *populus*, which means "the people," in other words a collectivity, one of the most common features of the populist leaders and parties' discourse and their appeal to the community of ordinary people. Note also that populist leaders claim that their legitimacy and power stem from this collectivity, the community of ordinary people. This aspect of populism is somehow similar to the etymological definition of democracy. Democratic systems are founded on the concept of "people," the power of the people. The people are the sovereign source of power and legitimacy. However,

there is a difference between how liberal democracy and populists define the people. For the former, "people" are all (different) citizens of a country, members of a community defined by rights and duties, while for populists, "people" is a narrower concept, the "ordinary people" and, most importantly, a homogenous community in which differences are not perceived. This idea of the people, namely the "ordinary people," is a crucial point for the understanding of populism. Populism not only relies on the "ordinary people" to fight the elite but also tries to justify a form of political change, a revolution of the and for the people.[2] Furthermore, populist parties view both groups, the people and the elites, as being antithetical to each other: the people are good while the elites are evil, the people are hardworking while the elites are lazy, the people are moral while the elites are immoral. So, populism has a Manichean and moralistic view of the founding dyad *people* versus *elites*; the opposition is not only objectively justified, based on difference in terms of wealth or income, but also a moral one echoing the antagonism between good and evil, between friends and enemies.[3] The people, in the attempt to protect this moral supremacy, is supposed to not collaborate with the elite.

Although populism considers the people as a homogeneous group, the bonds that make this group homogeneous vary across time and space. Not surprisingly, for populist leaders, the concept of people is always in the process of making and remaking, it acquires a different shape through time and space. In this process of reconstructing and reshaping, "the people" are always in a remaking process.[4] The building of this collective identities in populism is sometimes based on a negative identity in the sense that it lays emphasis on hat we are not. This reinforces the antagonism of the groups, *us* versus *them*. The antagonism between *the elite* and *the people* becomes the cornerstone of populism. Their relationship is symbiotic in the sense that without the elite, the people would not have reasons to fight.

According to Cas Mudde, populism is not an ideology that intends to transform a society economically and politically. It is a thin-centered

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2 Margaret Canovan, "Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy," *Political Studies* 47, no. 1 (1999): 2-16.

3 Cas Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist," *Government and Opposition* 39, (2004): 542.

4 Ibid., 553.

ideology that sticks to other ideologies according to the needs of the populist leader(s) or the context. In addition, it can be seen as a set of ideas or mentality that try to explain the world, to make sense of it. Populism differs from classic ideologies such as liberalism, socialism, and nationalism, which all have a structural approach toward society and aim to transform it profoundly.[5] Populists use these ideologies interchangeably, depending on the specific situation to which they react to. Populism is an incomplete ideology that is grafted with other ideologies or even divergent groups of ideas. Unlike full ideologies, populism considers the general principles or ideas as insufficient to solve problems and tries to find "its new path" in each case.[6]

So even though there are many definitions of populism, most scholars agree that populists main definitory feature is the division of society into two antagonistic groups, *the elite* and *the people*. In left-wing forms of populism, the definition of "the people" has a socio-economic basis, echoing the Marxist class. Hence, *the people* is generally depicted as the poor ones, the exploited, the subdued by the group of rapacious "elites."[7] In the right-wing forms, the concept of "the people" is often overlapping to that of nation, generally perceived in the ethnic terms. The right-wing populism has a strong exclusionary dimension, in the sense that radical right populists consider people as a community made of "*pure*" ethnic individuals that needs to fight the out-groups and all other threats coming from "perverting" minorities. When defining "the elite," populists sometimes speak about the need to fight the political establishment, sometimes the economic elites (particularly true for left-wing populists) but also the media, equally considered as part of the corrupted "evil" ones.[8] Last but not least, populists also denounce mainstream parties as part of those corrupted elites. Importantly, they do not refuse the logic of political competition, as they are legally registered and, as such, part of the competition and the consequent dynamics in the post-electoral period.

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5 Ibid., 560.

6 Francisco Panizza, *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy* (New York: Verso, 2005), 10.

7 Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 6.

8 Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist," 545.

The Economic Explanation for the Rise of Right-Wing Populism

A wide literature shed light on the triggers of support for populist movements, leaders and parties. In their famous book, *Trump, Brexit and the Rise of Populism: Economic Have-Nots and Cultural Backlash,* Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart show that populist parties were mostly supported by those with lower incomes, lower education levels, and those with long experience of unemployment. This argument supports the claim that economic insecurity fosters populist views among the general population.[9] In a similar vein, Johannes Lindvall has studied the first elections in twenty countries after two financial crises, the Great Depression of 1929-1933, and the recent Great Recession and has found significant results regarding the economic voting mechanism during both periods. The research shows that there is more substantial support for the right-wing parties in the crisis period, and voters tend to vote mostly for the right in the elections following a crisis. Also, he has shown that voters punish the parties in government, considered to having been incompetent and having failed to respond to the crisis with effective policies.[10] Similarly, Manuel Funke, Moritz Schularik, and Christoph Trebesch tested the interaction between the financial crisis and the electoral success of right-wing populist parties through econometric instruments. In this study, they found out that in the string financial crisis, extreme right parties increased their votes by thirty percent, but this happened only when there was a constant crisis.[11] The thirty percent increase corresponds to an approximate five percent-point increase in the total vote share captured by far-right parties, which is consequential. Alan De Bromhead, Barry Eichengreen, and Kevin O'Rourke found that there is a correlation between economic difficulties, the decline of economic growth, the rise of unemployment, the decrease in incomes, and the electoral success of far-right parties.[12] The electoral success of far-right

[9] Inglehart and Norris, "Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism," 6.

[10] Johannes Lindvall, "The Electoral Consequences of Two Great Crises," *European Journal of Political Research* 53 (2014): 748-749.

[11] Manuel Funke, Moritz Schularik and Christoph Trebesch, "Going to Extremes: Politics After Financial Crises, 1870-2014," *European Economic Review* 88 (2016): 237.

[12] Alan De Bromhead, Barry Eichengreen and Kevin O'Rourke, "Political Extremism in the 1920s and 1930s: Do German Lessons Generalise?," *The Journal of Economic History* 73, no. 2 (2013): 375.

parties was however strongly dependent on other aspects such as internal social problems, the political culture, and the experience with democracy.[13] Therefore, countries that have had a previous democratic experience cope better with populist challengers in the sense that there is less significant increase in voting preferences for parties challenging the status quo.

Note also that a vast part of the literature focused on more detailed overviews of the by-effects of stressful economic situations. Hilde Coffé, Bruno Heyndels and Jan Vermeir scrutinized aspects such as unemployment rate, income, and the welfare state as individual dimensions of macro-scarcity, as well as interactions between these variables.[14] Unlike GDP per capita, which masks the distribution of income, and inflation, and "underweights the unhappiness caused by jobless," the unemployment rates provide a more immediate image of the economic costs.[15] Unemployed individuals suffer both income and non-income losses, with the latter outweighing the former by as much as five-time. In direct connection, Daron Acemoglu, David Autor, David Dorn, Gordon H. Hanson, and Brendan Price studied the rise of unemployment in the United States of America. They highlighted that since the 1990s, the traditional economic sectors, especially manufacturing, have been transferred from developed to developing countries where the low wages attracted many companies.[16] This has led to massive job losses in developed countries and has increased dissatisfaction among these social categories. This phenomenon became more evident especially after China's entrance in the World Trade Organization (2001), when many of these industrial goods produced in the country began to be imported to the US. This situation caused a shock in US industries, which could not compete anymore with Chinese goods. Those industries were bankrupted and caused massive unemployment. A large part of the labor market in the US related to these

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13 Ibid., 384.

14 Hilde Coffé, Bruno Heyndels and Jan Vermeir, "Fertile Grounds for Extreme Right-wing Parties: Explaining the Vlaams Blok's Electoral Success," *Electoral Studies* 26 (2007): 145.

15 Rafael Di Tella and Dani Rodrik, "Labor Market Shocks and the Demand for Trade Protection: Evidence from Online Surveys," *NBER Working Paper* 25705 (2019): 3.

16 Daron Acemoglu, David Autor, David Dorn, Gordon H. Hanson and Brendan Price, "Import Competition and the Great US Employment Sag of the 2000s," *Journal of Labor Economics* 34, no. 1 (2016): 168.

industrial sectors and the bankruptcy of these industries brought a great shock to the labor market, a wave of mass unemployment.[17] On this ground, many studies relate the rise of right-wing populism in the US and, overall, in developed countries to the changes in the international arena, and generally to the consequent economic gap between the richest and other social strata, especially the impoverishment of the middle class, blue collars and small medium enterprises. Right-wing populists had been traditionally appealing to the low-skilled, blue-collar workers, who had low wages and were insecure about their jobs. This social group remained among the most vulnerable in turbulent situations. However, in recent times, the rhetoric of right-wing populists has become increasingly appealing to the low middle-class as well, primarily in line with their rhetoric related to economic protectionism, national based-economy, and anti-globalization.

The argument goes further, in that not only does it deal with economic vulnerability going beyond financial difficulties, but it also points to consequences on the human psychology. More concretely, this line of analysis finds out that when people are in insecure economic situations, they experience feelings of fear and anxiety about their economic and social status; people can compensate for these fears by increased participation.[18] Populist parties offer them a sense of security and belonging in times of deep insecurities; moreover, solidarity between group members offers them support for interior peace and perceived security. Participation in these groups also generates forms of inner solidarity, conformity towards the rules of the group, and, in direct connection, total rejection of the outgroup, the alien, the foreigners. In this view, the populist leader is considered an additional guarantee of group cohesion, and consequently, a provider of inner solidarity and security. The leader is a *protector* of the group from the menaces coming from outside.

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[17] David Autor, David Dorn and Gordon Hanson, "The China Syndrome: Local Labor Market Effects of Import Competition in the United States," *American Economic Review* 103, no. 6 (2013): 2128.

[18] Ronald Inglehart, "Modernization, Existential Security, and Cultural Change: Reshaping Human Motivations and Society," in Michele J. Gelfand, Chi-yue Chiu, and Ying-yi Hong (eds.), *Handbook of Advances in Culture and Psychology*, Volume 7, Advances in Culture and Psychology (New York: Oxford Academic, 2018), 10.1093/oso/9780190879228.003.0001.

Two events have dramatically strengthened this argument: the 2015 refugee wave with migrants originating from conflict zones in the Middle East and Northern Africa, and consecutive terrorist attacks in Western countries. Many of these attacks were carried out by terrorists born and raised in the West, later radicalized. This has led to increased skepticism toward citizens of Muslim descent. On this ground, voters from Western Europe were challenged by two sources of anxiety: one related to the growing economic inequality, the second related to a pervasive sense of physical insecurity. It is exactly on this ground that across Europe and in the United States of America, radical right populist parties and leaders won visibility with an electoral platform voicing the need to provide a sense of belonging and increased economic and physical security. The reader should also consider that what this wide literature shows is that economic difficulties are not the only trigger for an increased populist mobilization. The context, the democratic mechanisms of accountability, the political culture, the legacies of the past or more technical aspects such as the peculiarities of the electoral system are equally important.

The (Northern) League in Italy

A Short History of the Party

Since the 2018 general election, the Northern League has dropped the geographic reference and held the name The League. This came in line with a change in the party leadership and more specifically Matteo Salvini's endeavor to give the party a national character. In the following part of this paper, the analysis refers to the *the League*. Prior to the 2018 elections, the party's name echoed the regional anchorage and defense on the so-called Padia's people; the party name "The Northern League" (*Lega Nord*), however, the name the League (*Lega*) was regularly used in the media.

The Northern League originated from the merger of several regionalist parties and organizations, which operated in northern Italy in the 1980s. The most important of these organizations was *Lega Lombarda* (the Lombard League), whose leader, Umberto Bossi, later

became the leader of the Northern League.[19] Until the election of Salvini in 2013, the crucial elements in the League's discourse were related to the need to promote increased political and economic autonomy in the Northern Italian regions, as part of an imagined community, Padania, culturally and ethnically different from the Southern part of Italy. Since its foundation, the League has been voicing two main concerns. Firstly, there was the need to defend the richness of the industrialized north against the waste and corruption characterizing the underdeveloped south, and the denunciation of bad political economic, social, and cultural management promoted by the government in Rome. On this basis, the League asked for a reduced role of the central government and increased powers to the regional authorities. The second characteristic feature was the populist dimension in the core of an ethno-regionalist party. As mentioned above, an essential element of populism is the division of society into two homogeneous and antagonist groups, "the elites" and "the people."[20] In the case of the League Nord, *the elites* were the political and economic elites from Rome, accused of subduing and exploiting the good and hard-working people of the North.[21] The League referred to the Northern people as an ethnic organic community, with a strong exclusionary message.[22] The positive description of the Northern people was put in direct opposition not only with the Rome-based political elites but also with the negative features of the southerners, the Italian from the Southern region accused of laziness and other negative aspects. Considering the immigration flows originated in the post-communist area and the increased number of Eastern European immigrants in the industrialized North, the League progressively added an anti-Eastern European immigrant discourse, which eventually extended to the wider category of immigrants.

In the context of the 2013 primary elections, the rising star Matteo Salvini became the third federal secretary, defeating the founder of the

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19 Pietro Ignazi, *Partiti politici in Italia* [Political parties in Italy] (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2008), 88.

20 Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, 6.

21 Albertazzi and McDonnell, *Populists in Power*, 44.

22 Cass Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, "Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism: Comparing Contemporary Europe and Latin America," *Government and Opposition* 48, no. 2 (2013): 147.

party, Umberto Bossi.[23] Since the beginning of his leadership, Salvini launched a fierce campaign against the European Union, especially against the Euro currency, which he called a "crime against humanity."[24] The new leader increasingly accused the national government (Prime Minister Matteo Renzi) to be a *collaborator* of the EU elites in exploiting the honest Italian people.[25] Like other European right-wing populists, the League also has Eurosceptic stances.[26] Under his leadership, the League broadened the international collaboration with other radical right-wing populist parties, among which the National Front, led by Marine le Pen, and the Dutch Party for Freedom, led by Geert Wilders. Ahead of the 2014 European Parliamentary elections, they strengthened the cooperation even more with a shared critical assessment of the European Union (EU) and the migration and asylum policy.[27] What these parties voiced was a common denunciation of the EU and the European elites as the promoter of a failed strategy to fight the economic crisis and their solidarity with migrants as a threat to the national identity and well-being of native European citizens.

Right after the election of Matteo Salvini as the Federal Secretary, a federal congress of the party was held in July 2014. This congress approved Salvini's political line. Primarily, there was an essential change in the approach that the League had towards the central and southern regions. The Congress approved the formation of a "sister party" for these regions, *Noi Con Salvini* (We with Salvini). The party's congress also endorsed Salvini's liberal economic agenda and what shall become a core element in the successive electoral programs, the flat tax.

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23 Repubblica, "Matteo Salvini è il nuovo segretario della Lega Nord: «No all'Ue, è un gulag»" [Matteo Salvini is the new secretary of the Northern League: "No to the EU, it's a gulag"], December 7, 2013, accessed November 20, 2022, www.repubblica.it/politica/2013/12/07/news/lega_nord_il_giorno_delle_primarie_salvini_e_bossi_in_corsa_per_la_segreteria.

24 Lettera 43, "Lega Nord, Salvini: «Euro è crimine contro l'umanità»" [The Northern League, Salvini: Euro is a crime against Humanity], December 15, 2013, accessed November 20, 2022, www.lettera43.it/lega-nord-salvini-euro-e-crimine-contro-lumanita.

25 Mateo Salvini, *Secondo Matteo: Follia e Coraggio per Cambiare il Paese* [According to Matthew: Madness and Courage to Change the Country] (Milano: Rizzoli, 2016), 138.

26 Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*, 15.

27 Politica Semplice, "Partiti Politici, Lega Nord" [Political Parties, the Northern League], accessed November 20, 2022, politicasemplice.it/partecipazione-politica/partiti-politici/lega-nord.

Note that since Mateo Salvini has been elected Federal Secretary of the League, there has been a significant shift in the discourse and advocating policies of the League. A symbolic act was the change of the party's name, from The Northern League to The League. Shortly after his election as Federal Secretary, Salvini apologized for the tough discourse on the southern Italians, while claiming that Italy could be saved only if treated as a whole, a community, and this was the interest of the Northern part also.[28] The formation of a sister party was part of this effort to turn the League into a national party. In the 2018 general elections, this sister party was dissolved, and the League changed its name. As noted by Daniele Albertazzi, this is a peculiar case, since it is quite a rare that a regionalist party goes national.[29] Under Salvini's leadership, the informal role of the leader increased. It was visible in the party name also, the League-for Salvini Prime Minister (*Lega per Salvini Premier*).

In the 2018 general elections, the League ran as part of the center-right coalition composed of The League, We With Salvini, (its counterpart for central and southern Italy), Go Italy (*Forza Italia*), and the recently created Brothers of Italy. This coalition presented a joint list with the Union of the Center (*Unione di Centra*). With a new electoral symbol and a new agenda promoted by Salvini, the party obtained the best electoral result in its history, with more than 17% of the votes both in the Chamber and the Senate, becoming the first party of the center-right coalition. After the elections, none of the main competing coalitions and parties (center-right, center-left, The Five Star Movement) was able to gather a governing majority. The Five Star Movement (*Movimento Cinque Stelle*) started the negotiation process with The League to form a government. After successful negotiations, a coalition government between The League and the Five Star Movement was formed, with Giuseppe Conte as Prime Minister and Matteo Salvini with the double position of vice-prime minister and Minister of Interior.[30] The League's

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[28] Daniele Albertazzi, Arianna Giovannini and Antonella Seddone, "«No Regionalism Please, We Are Leghisti!» The Transformation of the Italian the League Nord under the Leadership of Matteo Salvini," *Regional & Federal Studies* 28, no. 5 (2018): 655-657.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Corriere della Sera, "Governo Conte, la lista di tutti i ministri: Salvini all'Interno e Di Maio al Welfare. Saranno vicepremier" [Conte government, the list of all ministers: Salvini at the Interior and Di Maio at Welfare. They will be deputy prime minister], August 31, 2018, accessed November 21, 2022, roma.corriere.it/notizie/politica/18_maggio_31/governo-conte-moavero-milanesi-esteri-savona-affari-europei.

period in government was turbulent and short, marked by many divergences (even public) between the two governing parties. In August 2019, Salvini announced that the League would leave the government and called for new elections.[31]

As was mentioned above, the 2008-2009 financial crisis is a good opportunity to test the relation between the by-effects of the Great Recession and the electoral performance of a radical right populist party. The following section will describe some of the consequences of the financial crisis in Italy, as well as the main indicators of the performance of the Italian economy, GDP, unemployment rate, and general consumption. On this basis, the next part tries to identify a possible synchronization between the post-crisis election results and the effects of the economic crisis. The concluding remarks provide an overview of the League's online supporters with a focus on the reasons why they support the party, as well as their opinions about mainstream political and social issues.

Electoral Results after the Crisis

In the grip of the financial crisis, the Italian government of Romano Prodi lost the Senate vote of confidence in January 2008, and general elections were held on 13-14 April 2008. The winner of the elections was the center-right coalition led by Silvio Berlusconi, who became Prime Minister. One of the members in the center-right coalition was The Northern League, at that time led by Umberto Bossi.[32] The third party in the elections, the League increased its votes by 3.7 percent at the Chamber of Deputies and 3.4 percent at the Senate.[33] As a result, the League obtained sixty mandates at the Chamber (out of 630) and twenty-six at the Senate

[31] The Guardian, "Italy's Matteo Salvini calls for fresh elections as coalition fractures," August 9, 2019, accessed November 21, 2022, www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/09/italys-matteo-salvini-calls-for-fresh-elections-as-coalition-fractures.

[32] BBC News, "Italy returns Berlusconi to power," May 15, 2008, accessed November 21, 2022, news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7347618.

[33] Archivio storico delle elezioni, Senato – Area Italia [Historical archive of the elections, Senate – Italy area], April 13, 2008, accessed November 21, 2022, elezionistorico.interno.gov.it.

(out of 315 members). Overall, if compared to the 2006 results, the League had increased the number of its representatives in the Italian Chamber of Deputies by thirty-two members and thirteen members in the Senate. It was the best result that the League had achieved since the general elections of 1996. On this ground, the League continued to be the most important ally of the Berlusconi government, although with limited success regarding the fiscal autonomy of the northern region.

Consider that even before the break of the financial crisis, Italy had problems with massive public debt, low productivity, and unemployment. The campaign of the Berlusconi's coalition was based on the need to guarantee financial stability, and the revival of the Italian economy.[34] The collapse of Lehman Brothers in September 2008 showed the seriousness of the crisis and produced the first consequences on the Italian economy. During the first period of the US financial crisis, Italy did not face many by-effects, the Italian financial institution did not own a large number of subprime bonds.[35] Subsequently, the financial crisis, however, had a high impact on the Italian economy with a colossal drop in the GDP and the rise of unemployment. The main problem for Italy after the crisis was the reduction of liquidity. However, the support of the Government limited the losses. Nonetheless, due to insecurity, second-level banks reduced lending to a maximum, which made the small companies reduce investments. Also, the consumers began to save and stopped spending. As a result, many industrial sectors had difficulties surviving. They reduced the number of workers and businesses which could not make payments to subcontractors, who went bankrupt. Therefore, the main effects of the financial crisis were on the small enterprises and the working class who lost their jobs.[36] The economic recession affected the entire Italian production system, although this manifested differently across economic

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[34] Roberto Di Quirico, "Italy and Global Economic Crisis," *Bulletin of Italian Politics* 2, no. 2 (2010): 4.

[35] Ibid., 6.

[36] Matteo Bugamelli, Riccardo Cristadoro and Giordano Zevi, *La crisi internazionale e il sistema produttivo italiano: un'analisi su dati a livello di impresa* [The international crisis and the Italian production system: an analysis of firm-level data], Occasional Papers 58 (Rome: Banca d'Italia, 2009), 7.

sectors and geographical areas. Generally, the crisis had influenced large companies, but it had a chain effect on their subcontractors too.

The first elections in which the League took part after the beginning of the crisis were the European Parliamentary Elections, in June 2009. In these elections, the League obtained a positive result, more than double if compared to the 2004 elections (from 5 to 10.2 percent of the votes). The League had a group of nine MEPs to which five MEPs were added if compared to the previous elections. In the 2010 regional elections held in thirteen out of the twenty Italian regions, the League maintained its place as the third party in the country. It won the regional presidency in Piedmont and Veneto and supported The People of Freedom (Silvio Berlusconi's party) in most of the northern regions.[37] Under Roberto Maroni's leadership, the League competed in the general elections in February 2013, with a negative performance. Cut by half if compared to the 2008 performance, the League obtained only 4.1 percent of votes at the Chamber (a decrease of forty-two MPs if compared to 2008 elections) and 4.3 percent of the votes at Senate (a decrease of eight MPs).[38]

The economic performance of Italy in the year before the elections (2012) was poor, the country had an economic recession, the GDP declined by three percent, the unemployment rate increased to 10.4 percent, and consumption declined. All the economic indicators were deteriorating, and there was a difficult financial situation. The economic difficulties and the fact that the League was in opposition for a year and a half did not influence the elections' results positively. The League performed worse than in the previous elections. This implies that the economic difficulties do not necessarily impact positively the votes for radical right populist parties. The electoral loss is, however, contingent on contextual factors, among which we mention the corruption scandal in which the founding leader Umberto Bossi was involved in, as well as the party internal crisis, with the short leadership of the former Minister Roberto Maroni.

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[37] Archivio storico delle elezioni, Regionali [Historical archive of the elections, Regionals], March 28, 2010, accessed November 21, 2022, elezionistorico.interno.gov.it.

[38] Archivio storico delle elezioni, Senato - Area Italia [Historical archive of the elections, Senate – Italy], February 24, 2013, accessed November 21, 2022, elezionistorico.interno.gov.it.

In December 2013, Matteo Salvini became the party leader. As mentioned above, the party changed its discourse and amended the core of its credo, embraced a national approach, and toughened the anti-EU and anti-immigration stances. The next elections in which the League under Salvini was tested were the European Parliament elections held in May 2014, just a few months after Salvini took the leadership. In this election also the electoral results worsened: minus four percent less than in the previous 2009 elections and a loss of four MEPs if compared to 2009.[39] Part of the explanation is connected to the exceptional result the Democratic Party obtained in those elections, in direct connection with the honeymoon of the Prime Minister Matteo Renzi. In the next local elections, for the first time, the League marked a successful penetration in the formerly red regions from the Center, like Tuscany, Umbria, and Marche. It makes sense to consider that the poor results in the first round of elections after the election of Salvini (December 2013) are less a reflection of the appeal of the new leadership and more the by-effect of the internal problems that plagued the party at the end of Bossi's Presidency and the short-lived Maroni's.

The years 2012 and 2013 were challenging for the Italian economy; GDP contracted by 2.4 percent and 1.8 percent respectively, and unemployment reached 12.5 percent in 2013, the highest level on record.[40] Despite a message targeting the bad economic management in Rome and the EU austerity measures, the League had a bad performance. The impact of economic performance on the results of a challenger party like the new League remains limited and most probably internal tensions count more. Although Italy suffered from political instability, economic stagnation, and lack of structural reforms, the upcoming years 2014-2018 saw a moderate improvement in the Italian economy. After negative economic growth for two years, 2014 was the first year with positive economic growth (+0.2 percent) and it continued in a positive trend, having the highest score in 2017 (+1.7 percent) until 2018 when it fell to 0.7 percent. Also, in those years, there was a reduction in the unemployment

[39] Archivio storico delle elezioni, Europee – Area Italia + Estero [Historical archive of the European elections – Italy + Abroad area], May 25, 2014, accessed November 21, 2022, elezionistorico.interno.gov.it.

[40] Focus Economics, "Italy Economic Forecast," May 2, 2023, accessed November 22, 2022, https://www.focus-economics.com/countries/italy/.

rate.[41] It is in a relatively optimistic scenario that Italian parliamentary elections were held in March 2018, after the dissolution of parliament in December 2017. In the meantime, Salvini's League had shifted from a regional to a national party. In these elections, the League showed an extraordinary appeal with 17.4 percent of votes at the Chamber (124 deputies) and 17.6 percent of votes at the Senate (fifty-eight senators out of 315, forty more than the previous ones).[42]

During the years 2014-2017, the Italian economy was improving. There was positive economic growth and a decrease in unemployment. Contrary to the theory, the success of right-wing populist parties was not supported by a bad economic period, the League having achieved its best result ever, although the economy had not been at its worst performance. Meanwhile, in the 2013 elections, when the Italian economy was facing its hardest time, the party did not have a good electoral performance. The transformation of the League, from a regionalist party to a national one, had influenced the 2018 election results. The League did not aim any longer for autonomy or separatism of the Padania region but took a national stance against migrants and the European Union. The "enemies" were not the Central Government and southerner citizens anymore, but Brussels and the migrants. The League achieved its electoral success in a period when it had drastically changed its aims and its discourse. As a regional party, the main objective of the League was achieving fiscal and political autonomy for the Padania region. Rarely, the party also talked about the transformation of the Italian republic into a confederation. During Bossi's leadership, the League aspired to become the first political party in the Northern Regions region, getting a crucial role in deciding who will form the central government. Through this, it could condition the autonomy of Padania.

When the League transformed itself into a national party, it changed its platform, its profile, its intentions, and its discourse. From that moment, the League intended to become the first party in the country, it aimed for

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41 Ibid.

42 Archivio storico delle elezioni, Camera – Area Italia [Historical Archive of the Elections, Chamber – Italy], March 4, 2018, accessed November 22, 2022, elezionistorico.interno.gov.it; Archivio storico delle elezioni, Senato – Area Italia [Historical Archive of the Elections, Senate – Italy], April 4, 2018, accessed November 22, 2022, elezionistorico.interno.gov.it.

nationwide successful electoral results, not only in a region. Since its transformation, the League significantly increased its votes and fulfilled its aims to become a nationwide relevant party. From the elections' results, it can be noticed that there was no direct relation between the hardest economic times and the League's electoral success. The reasons can be found in the party's transformation and the change in its aims. By calling to the national Italian identity, the national language, culture and values, Christian identity, anti-migrant, and xenophobic discourse, the League achieved a nationwide mobilization, which was translated into rapid electoral results. Another aspect that needs to be specified is the crisis of the main party from the center right, Forza Italia. The decline of Forza Italia, a decrease in consensus for Berlusconi's party at the national level, left a considerable gap in the right-wing electorate, which was filled by the League.[43] Especially in central Italy, a region that had usually been hostile towards the League, but under Salvini's leadership, the party had successful results there too.[44]

Who and Why Supported the League?

As mentioned above, it is important to consider the demand side of the aspect under scrutiny. This last part focuses on an overview of the profile of the League's supporters, the reasons why they support the party, and their opinions on some major social and political issues. This analysis can allow a more fine-tuned understanding of the relevance of the economic determinants for voting together with other traditional aspects related to identity, group values, and so on. In this way, the reasons why these individuals support the League, as well as their cultural, economic, and social background, will become clearer. A study by Demos has analyzed who has voted for the League, and who the party supporters were in the online milieu.[45] Based on this survey, among the Facebook supporters of the League, seventy-eight

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[43] Moreno Mancosu and Riccardo Ladini, *The 'New' League Success in the Red Belt and Its Post-fascist Inheritance: Evidence from 2018 National Elections*, Working paper, (2018): 3, DOI: https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/u2rq7.

[44] Ibid., 2.

[45] Jamie Bartlett, Jonathan Birdwell, and Duncan McDonell, *Populism in Europe: Lega Nord*, (London: Demos 2012), 38-49.

percent are male and twenty-two percent female. These percentages show a relevant gender split within the League's followers. The party's supporters were among the youngest if compared to their European counterparts (sixty-nine percent were under twenty-five years of age). However, this does not represent the League's typical voter; there is a bias in the sample of reference, probably due to the young age of Facebook users in Italy. Regarding the level of education, fifty-nine percent have a high school diploma, and twenty percent have a university degree. The League's Facebook supporters are more likely to be unemployed (fourteen percent) than the average unemployment rate in Italy (7.9 percent) at that time. Supporters of the League generally do not believe in politics and are skeptical about the effectiveness of politics. Nevertheless, they do not link *politics* with their party. Politics is considered to be a feature of the underground and corrupted elite in the Rome central government. Asked for the reasons why they support the League, the most important reasons were group values, anti-migration stances, northern autonomy, and identity, while the economy is the less voted - only six percent of respondents.

Respondents who support the League for groups values have said:

> *"Because it is close to my ideas and, most of all, it is the only party which seems to want to improve things in Italy."*
> *"It is the only party strongly linked to the grassroots and its voters."*
> *"Because of the principles for which the movement was created: protecting our areas, culture, and traditions."*[46]

About anti-immigration the League's supporters have claimed:

> *"Because I am tired of seeing my country being destroyed by people that were not born here and of seeing those close to me being afraid of those we have welcomed."*
> *"I do not want immigrants in MY country. There are too many of them."*[47]

About identity:

> *"Because, at the moment, it is the only political party that represents the values of ordinary people without denying and rejecting cultural traditions and identities."*

[46] Ibid., 51.
[47] Ibid., 52.

> *"Because it is a political party that keeps local identities alive. It respects and promotes centuries-old traditions."*
> *"Because it is a political party that REALLY gives a voice to the ordinary citizen."*[48]

A survey done by Pew Research Center in October-December 2017 (a few months before the 2018 Italian general elections) shows that only fifteen percent of the League supporters are satisfied with the Italian economy. That is closely to the general Italian public view – only eighteen percent are satisfied with the Italian economy.[49] Meanwhile, in terms of feelings and ideas about national and cultural identity, there is a considerable difference between League supporters and other Italian citizens. The League's supporters have a sense of superiority of their nation and culture over the others. Forty-eight percent of its supporters strongly agree that "people are not perfect, but their culture is superior to others."[50] Another factor that has influenced the voters of right-wing populist parties is the sentiment toward Islam. Fifty-four percent of the League supporters, strongly agree with the claim: "Islam is fundamentally incompatible with their culture and values." The superiority of national culture and this sentiment towards Islam is far less prevalent among the rest of the public in the country. This tendency is confirmed and, in a later survey, where sixty-seven percent of the League supporters have a negative opinion of Muslims, while forty-five percent of non-supporters have the same opinion.[51]

Nativism is the ideology that best suits right-wing populism. Supporters of these parties have a similar approach. Seventy-six percent of the League's supporters say that "it is important to have been born here to be one of us truly."[52]

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48 Ibid., 53.

49 Bruce Stokes, "Populist views in Europe: It is not just the economy," Pew Research Center July 19, 2018, accessed November 22, 2022, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/07/19/populist-views-in-europe-its-not-just-the-economy/.

50 Ibid.

51 Kat Devlin and Mara Mordecai, "Supporters of European populist parties stand out on key issues, from EU to Putin," Pew Research Center, November 18, 2019, accessed November 22, 2022, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/11/18/supporters-of-european-populist-parties-stand-out-on-key-issues-from-eu-to-putin.

52 Kyle Taylor, "Many Italians are deeply pessimistic ahead of general election," Pew Research Center, March 2, 2018, accessed November 22, 2022, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/03/02/many-italians-are-deeply-pessimistic-ahead-of-general-election.

Supporters of right-wing populist parties consider more important familiar heritage than other citizens. Eighty-six percent of the League supporters agree with the claim, "it is important to have our country's family background to be one of us truly."[53] Reactions against immigrants by League supporters also have an economic factor, as seventy-three percent of the League's supporters consider migrants "a burden on the Italian economy."[54] In comparison, forty percent of Italians think the same. However, the main concerns about immigrants have to do with multiculturalism, and they say: "having an increasing number of people of different racial, ethnic, and national backgrounds made their country a worse place to live."[55] Likewise, sixty-nine percent of the party's supporters consider that migrants "increase the risk of terrorist attacks in the country," while forty-seven percent of other Italians have the same opinion. Eighty percent of the League's supporters think that it "is necessary for the migrants to adopt Italian customs and traditions."[56]

Since Salvini was elected the League's Federal Secretary, the anti-EU discourse has been toughened. Sixty-three percent of its supporters do not have a "favorable opinion" of the European Union. Seventy-seven of the League supporters think that "some EU powers should be returned to the national governments," while fifty-five percent of other Italians share this opinion. Also, sixty-eight percent of the League's supporters consider that "EU membership has been bad for the Italian economy," while only forty-two percent of the Italians have the same idea.[57] About foreign policy, forty-nine percent of the League supporters have a positive view of Putin, while thirty percent of other Italians share the same opinion.[58]

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53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.

57 Laura Silver, Courtney Johnson, and Kyle Taylor, "The Populist Parties that Shook Up Italy's Election," Pew Research Center, May 30, 2019, accessed November 22, 2022, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/05/30/views-of-italian-populist-party-supporters.

58 Devlin and Mordecai, "Supporters of European Populist Parties Stand Out on Key Issues, from EU to Putin."

Discussion and Conclusions

The main point of this article is to argue that by comparing election-to-election the results of the League after the financial crisis of 2008, this party had the most satisfactory electoral results in the periods when the Italian economy was improving. By analyzing this case study, it can be concluded that there is no direct relation between times of economic hardship, the latter measured by GDP, the level of unemployment and the level of consumption, and the electoral success of this right-wing populist party. The League has had better electoral results in the years after the crisis when the economy has been improving than in the years when there has been a major economic shock. The demand-side focus confirms this observation: the supporters of this party, instead of economic issues, mostly emphasize group values, cultural and identity issues, skepticism towards multiculturalism, and Eurosceptic tendencies, as reasons for their support of these parties. Even when the supporters of these parties speak out against immigration, more than because of economic terms they are against immigration for cultural and identity reasons. The economic dissatisfaction of the supporters of these parties is not much higher than that of the rest of the population. Also, when asked about the reasons why they support these parties, the economy ranks among the last reasons.

Although the economic problems have been present in the discourse of Matteo Salvini, especially when they are related to other issues such as immigration and refugees, who are presented as "stealers of jobs from Italians," the research on the League's supporters shows that the economic aspect is among the least influential factors for them to support the right-wing populist parties.[59] Their perceptions of the economic situation in Italy are not much different from the rest of the population. On the contrary, the main reasons why these people support right-wing populist parties have more to do with group values, identity issues, ethnic and cultural affiliation, xenophobic sentiments, skepticism towards foreigners, multiculturalism, and growing Euroscepticism. Their opposition to immigration is part of their opposition to a heterogeneous

[59] Mateo Salvini, *Secondo Matteo: Follia e Coraggio,* 140.

society in ethnic and religious terms, fear of growing terrorism, and loss of national identity. Overall, the main triggers for mobilization are group values, anti-immigration, and identity than about the economy. Meanwhile, when voices are raised related to the need of social security, efficient policies to fight unemployment, and a more solid welfare state, most of the reasons are supported by anti-migration, xenophobic, anti-Muslim stances, *in genera* a highly critical assessment of a society made of multiculturalism, tolerance, and cohabitation of different ethnicities and religions, as well as against European Union, as a representative of transnationalism, globalization, an enemy of national identity; there are less discussions about economic factors.

After the Second World War, mainstream political groups in Western Europe, traditional right and left-wing, talked mostly about economic points such as unemployment, taxation, inflation, trade unions, public services, healthcare, housing, education, and the welfare state. For that reason, usually there was a class-based vote, with workers voting mostly for left-wing parties, while the middle to the upper classes voted for the right-wing parties. Topics related to cultural and national identity, international situations, and membership in international bodies have been left in silence, outside the public sphere. For a long time, the system of political parties in Western Europe was frozen. It was dominated by two mainstream political groups, which were lined up as per the main direction of political cleavage, left and right, which had the economic dimension as the primary variable. As a result of the political changes in the world, the decline and fall of the Soviet Union, and the acceptance of the market economy by the mainstream left parties, the economic dimension became faded in the political discourse, and later on, the system of political parties in Western Europe was dissolved. As there was a consensus on the economic dimension, what distinguished the political parties became the cultural dimension, identifications with specific values, conservative versus progressive.

In a comprehensive study about the causes of the rise of right-wing populists in Europe and the United States of America, Norris and Inglehart demonstrate that the shifts toward post-materialist values starting in the 1950s caused a strong counter-war from the conservative parts of society.[60] The

[60] Inglehart and Norris, "Trump, Brexit, and the rise of populism," 27.

change of values from materialist to post-materialist in Western Europe has caused strong counter-reactions from those segments of the society which felt alienated in this new reality. Before this shift, society was much more homogenous in ethnic, religious, and cultural terms. The heterogeneity of the society, multiculturalism, and tolerance towards the *other* has changed the hegemony of the public discourse towards those new values. This caused a *counterattack* from those affected most by this new reality. They felt threatened in their country.

The discourse of right-wing parties about topics such as migration, and national, religious, and cultural identity is an expression of an essential shift in the political struggle between parties, from economic topics to cultural ones. This struggle between political parties is not focused only on migrations and attitudes towards foreigners. It includes other cultural topics, such as gender equality, LGBT+ rights, sexual freedom, the role of the European Union in internal issues, secularism, the decline of traditional values, race, and demography. These topics have become an essential argument in defining identity. The economic question has not disappeared from political discourse; populists present the migrants as an economic threat, under the approach of "foreigners who will come and steal the local citizen's job."[61] Nevertheless, the most volatile issues raised by these leaders concern the identity topic.

This perspective can also be seen in the criticism of the EU by the (Northern) League. It continues to present the economic dimension, accusations of the enslavement of *the people* for the economic interests of the elite. Most importantly European Union is described as a representative of globalization, multiculturalism, liberal values, free movement of people, migration, tolerance to foreigners, and ethnic minorities, as well as a loss of national power. For those reasons, the discourse of the League generally goes in two lines: the xenophobic, anti-migrants, anti-Muslim, on one hand, and the anti-EU discourse, loss of national identity, on the other hand. The change of discourse from economic issues to identity issues, and the rise of support for the League in the periods when they speak about threats to national identity show that the most prominent question which disturbs the society is the identity one.

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[61] Mateo Salvini, *Secondo Matteo: Follia e Coraggio,* 138.

DOI: 10.62229/sprps23-1/2

THE STRATEGY PECULIARITIES IN THE PROTEST FOR SAVING URBAN FABRIC IN TBILISI*

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Abstract. After gaining its independence in 1991, Georgia faced significant challenges on all levels like all other post-communist countries. Therefore, against this background, care for urban historical and cultural heritage, and ecological health was less visible on the agenda. As a result of the Rose Revolution of 2003, various reforms were carried out. After strengthening state institutions, the re-urbanization of cities was gradually included on the agenda. At the same time, growing urbanization resulted in an acute shortage of green space and an uprising of the urban grassroots movements in Georgia. We have selected three cases of urban movement developed in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia. "Save Gudiashvili Square," "Defend Vake Park,"and "No to Panorama Tbilisi!". Even though these cases occurred almost simultaneously, and the activists involved were quite the same, their achievements are different. The presented research attempts to determine the challenges that arose during the formation of the urban movement agenda and study the activism strategy and how it influenced the results of the movements. By triangulation of multiple methods – analyzing primary and secondary sources and interviews of involved actors –, we argue that the strategy of the movements played an important role, while not crucial, with regard to the studied civic activism.

Keywords: Urban activism, urban re-development, Georgia, political context, strategy, investment.

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* This research was financed by the Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia (SRNSFG) [Grant number FR-19-124].

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Introduction

After seventy years of forced stay in the Soviet Union, Georgia regained its independence in 1991 and set the goal of building a democratic state. To achieve this goal, Georgia had to overcome many obstacles: social-economic problems, territorial and political conflicts, civil war, etc. Considering all this, for years, Georgia was considered as being among the failed states.[1] After the collapse of the Soviet Union, among other problems, one of the noticeable signs was the deformation of the urban environment. The desire to expand housing and rampant privatization heavily affected the state of cultural observation of the urban environment. However, in the period when people were fighting for survival, there was no room for post-materialist concerns, such as analyzed by Ronald Inglehart.[2] Anyone thinking about protecting ecological or cultural monuments under broken political institutions had to play with the non-institutional rules of the game and seek patronage.[3]

The opportunity for the emergence of an urban movement focused on policy change was accelerated by the shock wave of reforms after the Rose Revolution (2003), accompanied by the simplification of the regulations for business and attracting investment. President Mikheil Saakashvili stated, "Georgia needs 10 percent economic growth every year for the next ten to fifteen years to become like Singapore.[4] This idea of the "Singapurization" of the country allowed investors to implement business ideas at the expense of social spaces, especially in Tbilisi. Although public protests did not immediately follow these initiatives, the revolutionary government of Georgia had a significant vote of confidence under the

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1 Georgia Ranks 60th Most Failed State, HumanRights.ge, 2006, accessed September 10, 2022, http://www.humanrights.ge/index.php?a=text&pid=6137&lang=eng.

2 Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel, *Modernization, Cultural Change, and Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

3 D. Sitchinava, D. Chigolashvili, and N. Zazanashvili, *The city is ours! Urban protest and politics in Tbilisi* (Tbilisi: Heinrich Boll Stiftung, 2016).

4 საკაშვილი ეკონომიკის სინგაპურიზაციას იმედოვნებს, 20 მარტი, 2012 [Saakashvili Hopes for the Singapurization of the Economy, March 20, 2012], accessed September 17, 2022, http://saqinform.ge/news/9418/saakashvili+ekonomikis+singapurizacias+imedovnebs.html.

conditions of high legitimacy. The government evaluated its policy as "an attempt to save the country."[5]

It should also be noted that public participation in this period was mainly limited to going to the elections and holding rallies. The protest repertoire was poor and mainly focused on the demand of government change.[6] Only since 2012 activism began to take a regular character and expanded thematically as well as its advocacy strategies.[7] Gradually, urban centers and public spaces become a critically important expression of local life and set a benchmark for the vitality of a particular city.[8] Added to this is the intensification of the sense of cultural identity and the need to control local politics, contributing to the emergence of urban movements in Georgia.

Thus, our study aims to analyze the methods used during the selected activist movements and provide an answer to the following question: how did the chosen strategy influence the results of the movements? During the selection of research cases, emphasis was placed on the movements in the urban center of Tbilisi. Three cases were selected from the existing movements: *Save Gudiashvili Square*, *Defend Vake Park*, and *No to Panorama Tbilisi!*. Several factors determined their selection. First, these movements are characterized by a certain periodicity. The involved activists are the same persons but with different roles. All three are cases well covered by the media and characterized by high public involvement. At the same time, all of them were driven by different trajectories, and the results were also different, making the comparative analysis more attractive.

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5 სააკაშვილი მეორე ვარდების რევოლუციას იწყებს [Saakashvili starts the Second Rose Revolution], civil.ge, September 24, 2008, accessed August 13, 2022, https://old.civil.ge/geo/article.php?id=19596).

6 Agnes Gagyi, "Social Movement Studies for East-Central Europe? The Challenge of a Time-Space Bias on Postwar Western Societies," *Intersections, East European Journal of Society and Politics* 1, no. 3: 16–36, doi:10.17356/ieejsp.v1i3.93.

7 Lia Tsuladze, Nana Macharashvili and Ketevan Pachulia, "SOS Tbilisi: Challenges to Environmental Civic Participation in Georgia," *Problems of Post-Communism 65*, no. 3: 1-17. doi:10.1080/10758216.2017.1308228.

8 Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society, The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, Volume 1 (Cambridge, Massachusetts; Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1996), 9.

Social Movements: Theoretical Aspects

Introducing the concept of urban social movements in the social sciences is associated with Manuel Castells.[9] For him, the urban social movement is the result of the unification of trade unions, political groups, and urban organizations.[10] Gradually, the study of the relationship between urban development and the growth of social resistance becomes even more relevant.[11] The study of urban or any civic activism is conducted from different points of view: for collective behavior theorists, people involved in civic activism are viewed negatively; they are framed not as political actors but as irrational actors and socially marginalized.[12] However, for many authors not supporting collective behavior theorists, people involved in social movements are considered wholly rational and thoughtful.[13] A different interpretation is provided by scholars focused on resource mobilization.[14] For example, for John McCarty and Mayer Zald, the aggregation of resources based on collective goals and some self-organization is essential for the success of social movements.[15]

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9 Manuel Castells, *The Urban Question. A Marxist Approach* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977).

10 Chris Pickvance, "From Urban Social Movements to Urban Movements: A Review and Introduction to a Symposium on Urban Movements," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 27, no. 1 (2003): 102–109, doi:10.1111/1468-2427.00434.

11 David Slater, "Spatial Politics/Social Movements Questions of (b)orders and resistance in global times," in *Geographies of Resistance*, eds. M. Keith and St. Pile (London: Routledge, 1997), 258-276; Helga Leitner, Eric Sheppard and Kristin M. Sziarto, "The Spatialities of Contentious politics," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 33, no. 2 (2008): 157-172, doi:10.1111/j.1475-5661.2008.00293.

12 Steven M. Buechler, *Social Movements in Advanced Capitalism: The Political Economy and Cultural Construction of Social Activism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani, "Action Forms, Repertoires and Cycles of Protest," in *Social Movements: An Introduction,* eds. Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 163-193.

13 Ralph H. Turner and Lewis M. Killian, *Collective Behavior. Englewood Cliffs* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1972); John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, *Social Movements in an Organizational Society* (New Jersey: New Brunswick, 1987).

14 John Wilson, *Introduction to Social Movements* (New York: Basic, 1973); Charles Tilly, "Does Modernization Breed Revolution?," *Comparative Politics* (1973): 425–47; William A. Gamson, *The Strategy of Social Protest* (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1975).

15 John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory," *The American Journal of Sociology* 82, no. 6 (1977): 1212-1241, https://www.jstor.org/stable/i329018.

Drawing on the existing theoretical schools in the study of social movements, our research is mainly focused on using political process theory, according to which the political process mainly determines the outcomes of movements.[16] Alongside with the political process, the crucial importance has a proper framing process defined as "the conscious strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and themselves that legitimated and motivated collective action."[17] Correspondingly, the framing process promotes the consolidation of actors and develops shared identities. The failure of citizens' mobilization when external factors are favorable usually results from unappropriated "master framing."[18] Protest strategy includes not only framing processes but also protest tactics.[19] For Tilly, the continuing repertoire is a component of tactics that can include demonstrations, rallies, strikes, or other similar types of actions.[20] Tilly attaches particular importance to an appropriately selected repertoire in the process of activism. However, it is not easy to choose a repertoire, especially to use new, previously unknown methods, as often innovative ways fail to achieve success.[21] Each theory is an ideal type that operates differently in distinct spaces. However, for critics of the Political Process Theory (PPT) theory, it focuses too much on the political process, and sometimes even the notion of political opportunities could be more specific. Simultaneously, much attention is paid to the government's readiness for change, when often this readiness does not exist, but movements still succeed. Thus, despite the wide variety of social movement theories, it is

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16 Sidney Tarrow, *Struggling to Reform: Social Movements and Policy Change During Cycles of Protest* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1983).

17 Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, *Comparative perspectives on Social Movements* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 6.

18 David Snow and Robert B. Benford, "Master Frames and Cycles of Protest," in *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, eds. Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

19 Neal Caren, "Political Process Theory," in *Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Sociology*, ed. George Ritzer (Malden: Blackwell, 2007), 3455–3458.

20 Charles Tilly, *Why? What Happens When People Give Reasons… And Why* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

21 Charles Tilly, "To Explain Political Processes", *American Journal of Sociology* 100, no. 6 (May 1995): 1594–1610.

challenging to study the cases we have selected for research within the framework of a single model.

Research Methodology

We have combined the following qualitative research methods to respond to the mentioned research goals. We use the case study strategy defined by David Snow and David Trom[22] as a richly detailed and thorough, thick elaboration of the phenomenon. By triangulation of multiple methods, we have analyzed a wide variety of primary and secondary sources. In analyzing the secondary sources, we studied the vast Western literature on social movements and movements developed in Georgia. In addition, we have studied the decisions, statutes, treaties, agreements, or memoranda made at the central and local self-government levels related explicitly to the research issue. At the same time, we requested all the available documentation associated with the selected cases from the Tbilisi City Hall and the City Assembly, in order to analyze the communication between governmental circles and activists.

We have processed articles, interviews, and announcements published around the issue in the highest-rated online media in Georgia from 2009 to 2018 (244 pieces, statements, interviews, or information during movement development).[23] While information about events held during the studied movements was mainly spread through social networks, we analyzed the posts, calls, materials, comments, and reviews on various Facebook and Twitter pages using content analysis. This technique was suitable for the purpose of tracing debates and comparing the arguments of the involved sides.

The primary data came from thirty-eight semi-structured interviews conducted in order to fully recover the protest cycles during the research process. Eighteen women and eighteen men aged 20 to 60 have been interviewed (all had attained higher education). From the studied movements, respondents

[22] David Snow and David Trom, "The Case Study and the Study of Social Movements," in *Methods of Social Movements Research*, eds. Bert Klandermans and Suzanne Stagenborg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 146-172.

[23] We have examined news agencies: Netgazeti, Interpresnews, Civil.ge, For.ge; online publishing: Liberali, Tabula, et al.

were selected based on their engagement, functions, and attitudes: movement organizers, representatives of civil society organization and opposition political parties (none of the representatives of the ruling "Georgian Dream" party agreed to the interview), "rank-and-file" activists (periodically involved in different activities) and the investor. The anonymity of all respondents in the text is maintained. The interviews were conducted from December 2019 to August 2020, when none of the movements studied was active.

We identified a small set of *a priori* codes during the study's initial stage. These were based on media research and included assumptions about movement strategies, communication forms of involved actors, perception of the opposite side, and solidarity among the activists. The inductive codes created for the research were (1) level of engagement, (2) roles and responsibilities, (3) methods to protect or produce new order, (4) timeframe, (5) authority, (6) metaphor, (7) assessing others, and (8) self-assessment. By processing and comparing the primary data obtained from interviews, we could fully identify the origins and stages of the studied movements and meet the research goals.

Political Process and the Emergence of Urban Civic Activism

The origin of urban (and non-urban) movements has its determinants. While discussing these preconditions, different researchers underline different factors. Manuel Castells was the first to single out and introduce the notion of urban social movements.[24] They emerge from unifying trade unions, political groups, and urban organizations.[25] The study of the relationship between urban development and the growth of social resistance gradually becomes even more relevant. According to Pruijt, citizens try to gain control over their urban environment through urban social movements.[26]

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[24] Manuel Castells, *The Urban Question. A Marxist Approach* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977).

[25] Chris Pickvance, "From Urban Social Movements to Urban Movements: A Review and Introduction to a Symposium on Urban Movements," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 27, no. 1 (2003): 102–109, doi:10.1111/1468-2427.00434.

[26] Hans Pruijt, "Urban Movements," in *Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Sociology*, ed. George Ritzer (Malden: Blackwell, 2007), 5123–5127.

In post-communist countries in the late 1980s during the *glasnost* and *perestroika* reforms, civic activism developed on a solid national bias. It was driven by local dissidents fighting for independence and aimed to build a Western democracy.[27] Georgia was no exception in this regard. After gaining independence in 1991, Georgian authorities' urban policy was spontaneous and inconsistent, driven mainly by Soviet inertia.[28] Severe socio-economic problems began in Georgia, including a civil war in Tbilisi. In the given context, all types of civil activism were mainly aimed at implementing political changes.[29] There was no political will to involve citizens in city governing processes.[30] Even more, urban issues were not put on the political agenda, or, as Kubicki notes, urban development problems, and generally, "the question of cities was relegated to a side note in mainstream political discourse."[31]

Before that, due to the Rose Revolution of 2003, attitudes toward city politics changed. The post-revolutionary pro-Western government of Mikheil Saakashvili and the United National Movement (UNM) carried out rapid, accelerated, and fundamental reforms in all areas of public policy.[32] They supported rapid economic growth and foreign direct investments.[33] Growing urbanization increased the population of

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27 Grzegorz Bakuniak and Krzysztof Nowak, "The Creation of a Collective Identity in a Social Movement: The Case of 'Solidarnosc' in Poland," *Theory and Society* 16 (1987): 401-429, doi:10.1007/BF00139488; Janusz Bugajski, *Czechoslovakia: Charter 77's Decade of Dissent* (New York: Praeger, 1987).

28 Joseph Salukvadze and Oleg Golubchikov, "City as geopolitics: Tbilisi, Georgia – A globalizing metropolis in a turbulent region," *Cities* 52 (2016): 39-54, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2015.11.013.

29 Olena Nikolayenko, "The Revolt of the Post-Soviet Generation: Youth Movements in Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine," *Comparative Politics* 39, no. 2 (2007): 169-188.

30 Levan Khutsishvili, "Factors of Participatory Urban Policy: Urban Activism through the prism of Post-materialistic Theory Levan Khutsishvili," *Eastern Europe Regional Studies* (2018).

31 Przemysław Pluciński, "Forces of Altermodernization: Urban Social Movements and the New Urban Question in Contemporary Poland," *International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 29, no. 4 (2018): 699, doi:10.1007/s11266-018-0007-x.

32 Sandro Tabatadze, "Party-Based Euroscepticism: The Case of Georgia," *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 30, no. 2 (2022): 239-260.

33 Vladimer Papava, "Microeconomics of post-Soviet post-industrialism and the model of economic development of Georgia and Russia," *Journal of Business and Economics* 6, no. 5 (2015): 976-983, DOI: 10.15341/jbe(2155-7950)/05.06.2015/012.

Tbilisi almost twice and congested the city. As a result, massive construction projects began in Tbilisi. Although the city's budget increased, the unsystematic development seriously damaged the urban design and threatened cultural heritage and green zones.[34]

The urban policy mainly stayed the same even after 2012, when an opposition party, Bidzina Ivanishvili – Georgian Dream (GD), won the parliamentary elections. Although one of the election promises of the newly elected political team was to stop illegal constructions and restore the city's appearance, Tbilisi City Hall continued its pro-business policy. It is often pointed out that despite radically different political beliefs and platforms, the attitudes of both political forces toward attracting investment in the tourism sector and reorganizing the cities are similar. Accordingly, similar policies of both – acting and previous governments primarily served the interests of favored groups and befriended businesspeople rather than any well-thought-out urban policy.[35]

All studied movements began in this period of rapid urbanization. *Save Gudiashvili Square* and *Defend Vake Park* movements started during the UNM's rule and continued after GD came to power. In contrast, *No to Panorama Tbilisi!* started and completed during the administration of the GD.

Save Gudiashvili Square – Activism

Gudiashvili Square is a complex of buildings from the second half of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with a high degree of authenticity. Gudiashvili Square is still one of the most important centers of the old city. The square and the buildings in it, bearing the status of a historically

[34] Inga Grdzelishvili and Roger Sathre, "Understanding the urban travel attitudes and behavior of Tbilisi's residents," *Transport policy* 18, no. 1 (2011): 38-45, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tranpol.2010.05.006.

[35] David Gogishvili and Suzanne Harris-Brandts, "Coinciding practices of exception in urban development: mega-events and special economic zones in Tbilisi, Georgia," *European Planning Studies* 28, no. 10, (2020): 1999-2019, https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2019.1701995; Joseph Salukvadze and Kristof Van Assche, "Multiple transformations, coordination and public goods. Tbilisi and the search for planning as collective strategy," *European Planning Studies* (2022): 1-19, https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2022.2065878.

valuable cultural heritage monument, required reconstruction. The UNM, which came to power in 2003, actively started restoration works of several old districts and streets of the city. Although the historical buildings of the square have been owned by the Old Tbilisi Rehabilitation and Development Fund and afterward sold to the investor Irao Magnat Group, no restoration or strengthening works were carried out.

As a result of this inaction, the condition of the historical buildings worsened even more. Due to the government's inattention to cultural heritage monuments, Tiflis Hamkari, a non-governmental organization founded in 2005, whose main goal was to preserve Tbilisi's cultural heritage, started the protest movement *Save Gudiashvili Square*:[36]

> "We went to the street because the government did not take any steps to save the square, and all the resources to negotiate with it were exhausted. It was the only way left" (Interview 30).

The movement lasted for nine to ten years and became one of Georgia's most prolonged and consistent urban activism campaigns. This movement had three distinguishable phases.[37] The first phase aimed to increase awareness of the square and its cultural-historical significance among the citizens. Even though the square is located in the historical and tourist part of Old Tbilisi, only a few people had information about its cultural and historical importance.

The transition to a new stage of the protest cycle in 2011-2012 had its causes. According to the entry in the Tbilisi Development Fund charter, the fund was supposed to

> "Organize close cooperation with the non-governmental sector, private agencies, public organizations, and mass media in the process of working on the city's development strategy, to involve them in the rehabilitation and development processes actively."[38]

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[36] ტფილისის ჰამქარი – Tiflis Hamkari, accessed April 20, 2021, https://www.facebook.com/pg/TiflisHamkari/about/?ref) =page_internal.

[37] Salome Dundua, Tamara Amashukeli and Sandro Tabatadze, "What makes social movements successful: The case of Gudiashvili Square," *Europe-Asia Studies* 74, no. 8 (2022): 1413-1432, https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2021.2012559.

[38] Accordingly, framing the first stage mainly took the form of an educational campaign to raise awareness of the square among the citizens; article 2 of the charter of the "Tbilisi

However, the first stage of the protest cycle revealed a completely different situation. On the one hand, the fund delayed taking practical steps to fulfill its obligations. On the other hand, it was quite a closed structure and less open to cooperation with movement activists (Interview 1). On December 19, 2011, the information about the Gudiashvili Square development project prepared by the Austrian company Zechner & Zechner appeared on the internet and became the impetus for starting the new, second phase of the movement, *Strengthen Gudiashvili*.

According to the Austrian company's project, cultural heritage monuments should be replaced with new buildings. The square should have been turned into a shopping center.[39] At this stage, we can distinguish the organizer's movement strategy in two directions: on the one hand, negotiations and meetings with the ordering and performing companies, and on the other hand, further increasing the population's interest. Therefore, the tactics implemented by Tiflis Hamkari have somehow changed: the physical rescue of the buildings through permanent actions has become the primary framing. In the second stage of the protest, the movement maintained the main direction of the protest repertoire of the previous stage – a positive cultural and educational character. However, some changes could still be distinguished. For example, the repertoire acquired more protest charges than in previous years (interview 1). Furthermore, at this stage, the choice was more on spontaneous and unplanned activities. Because the actions of 2011-2012 had a permanent character, as they were held once every two weeks, the choice was made to present the square as a free space and the campaign as a free platform offered to artists.

Political changes were related to the transition to the third stage of the protest cycle, *I will wait for you in Gudiashvili Square*. After the government changed for the first time in the history of independent Georgia through elections (2012), the GD political coalition replaced Mikhael Saakashvili's government. However, the Tbilisi Mayor post and

Development Fund", paragraph 2.3.13, accessed March 21, 2022, http://www.tdf.ge/images/kallyas_images/docs/cesdeba1.pdf).

[39] Gudiashvili Square renovation project, netgazeti.ge, December 20, 2011, accessed March 25, 2022, https://netgazeti.ge/news/12010/.

other vital positions at the local self-government level were still held by representatives of the UNM government.

The *I will wait for you in the Gudiashvili Square* campaign meant holding permanent protests on the square again. Because of the joint efforts of the Ministry of Culture and Monuments Protection, the organization involved in the process, and citizens, in 2013, Irao Magnat Group refused to implement the project. As the reason for terminating the contract, the Irao Magnat Group maintained that "the technical parameters agreed with the contract will no longer have government's support. The buildings around Gudiashvili Square and all real estate returned to the ownership of Tbilisi Development Fund.[40] In addition to the permanent meetings on the square, the movement's third stage was characterized by a new element – the beginning of cooperation with political parties and politicians. As a result of public meetings with the political parties participating in the elections and the Tbilisi mayoralty candidates regarding cultural heritage issues, the Tbilisi mayoralty candidates from the opposition parties signed the memorandum developed by Tiflis Hamkari." Thus, the politicians were obliged to save the square in case of victory in the local self-government elections. As the official candidate of the GD won the mayoral elections, the memorandum became the impetus for the beginning of the square restoration. After a long and detailed rehabilitation, Gudiashvili Square's restoration was finished in 2021.

Defend Vake Park – Activism

The park rehabilitation project triggered activism toward defending Vake Park (2013). According to it, the construction of a five-story hotel in the park was envisaged.[41] In this case, the investor is a local company,

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[40] კულტურა: "გუდიაშვილის სკვერის რეაბილიტაციის კონტრაქტი შეწყვეტილია" [Culture: "Gudiashvili Square Rehabilitation Contract Has Been Terminated"], April 19, 2013, accessed on February 20, 2021, https://netgazeti.ge/culture/21090/. Despite this, the government still did not rehabilitate the square.

[41] It should be noted that in this same territory from the Soviet period has been located the restaurant "Budapest." Eva Maghaldadze, "ვაკის პარკის დამცველების შუალედური

Tiflis Development. Although Vake Park has no cultural value, it remains an essential and significant recreational zone for Tbilisi's inhabitants. The announcement of a hotel construction during the presentation of the park rehabilitation project by the Tbilisi City government on October 20, 2013, caused a protest among civic activists.[42] In Vake Park, which had the status of "Recreational Zone 2," it was not allowed by law to build similar buildings. However, on November 25, 2011, the authorities changed the rules of governing and developing the Tbilisi territory, and the status of "Zone 2" was removed from Vake Park.

Soon after the information spread, a petition called *Defend Vake Park* was launched. Events of the same name were held near the City Council and Vake Park.[43] Though participants demanded a meeting with the city's acting mayor, their protest and demands were unsuccessful; as in the case of Gudiashvili's protest movement, "the government was not going to negotiate" (Interview 4). The protest was led by the association Guerrilla Gardeners, which organized a permanent camp near Vake Park. Activists were on duty in the park all day and night to prevent the investor from suddenly starting construction. The protest soon became permanent.

In 2014, civic activists tried to take the protest to court. Three lawsuits were filed in the city court, where the plaintiffs demanded the annulment of the construction permit. The City Court partially satisfied the plaintiffs' request, invalidated the construction permit, and returned the issue to the City Hall as undecided. It became known that the City Hall offered the investor a change of location, which was refused because the potential construction site was not specified.

However, later the Court of Appeal overturned the decision of the City Court, and the Supreme Court did not even admit the NGO Green

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გამარჯვება" [The Middle Victory of Vake Park Defenders], *Liberali*, March 3, 2016, accessed April 11, 2021, http://liberali.ge/articles/view/21228/vakis-parkis-damtsvelebis-shualeduri-gamarjveba.

[42] Eva Maghaldadze, "შეხვედრა ვაკის პარკის რეაბილიტაციის პროექტთან დაკავშირებით" [Meeting Regarding the Vake Park Rehabilitation Project]," *Liberali*, October 20, 2013, accessed April 11, 2021, http://liberali.ge/news/view/9534/shekhvedra-vakis-parkis- reabilitatsiis-proeqttan-dakavshirebit.

[43] მოქალაქეთა პეტიცია "გადავარჩინოთ ვაკის პარკი" [Citizen's Petition: "Defend Vake Park," *Liberali*, December 24, 2019, accessed February 11, 2022, http://liberali.ge/news/view/10001/moqalaqeta-petitsia-gadavarchinot-vakis-parki.

Alternative's lawsuit. As a result, the construction permit issued in 2013 by Gigi Ugulava, the UNM Tbilisi Mayor, remained in force.[44] However, the situation changed after the GD's new mayor, Kakha Kaladze, came to power. On January 16, 2019, Kaladze said he would do everything to prevent Vake Park. Finally, due to negotiations with activists, investors, and the city government, it was agreed that no hotel or other type of building or structure would be built in Vake Park.

> "Vake Park won, and I want to congratulate you; I want to congratulate Tbilisi and the citizens of Tbilisi. Nothing will be built in Vake Park on this particular site. Thanks to all those people, those activists who have been involved and protected this particular green space since the first days." - Kakha Kaladze.[45]

No to Panorama Tbilisi! – Activism

Another movement – *No to Panorama Tbilisi!* also dealt with the city's historical and ecological issues. On March 25, 2014, the Georgian Co-investment Fund presented the half-billion-dollar investment project Panorama Tbilisi.[46] Soon, The Georgian National Committee of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) stated that the mentioned project contradicts the regulations defined by the legislation and the guiding principles of the World Heritage.[47] In 2014, at

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[44] "მშენებლობის ნებართვა გვაქვს" - კომპანია ვაკის პარკში მშენებლობის გაგრძელებას გეგმავს ["We have a Construction Permit" – the Company plans to continue Construction in Vake Park], *Liberali*, January 16, 2019, accessed May 11, 2021, http://liberali.ge/news/view/42510/msheneblobis-nebartva-gvaqvs--kompania-vakis-parkshi-msheneblobis-gagrdzelebas-gegmavs.

[45] კახა კალაძე: ვაკის პარკში სასტუმრო "ბუდაპეშტი" აღარ აშენდება [Kakha Kaladze: Hotel "Budapest" will no longer be built in Vake Park], Business Media, January 25, 2019, accessed April 7, 2021; https://bm.ge/ka/article/kaxa-kaladze-vakis-parkshi-sastumro-budapeshti-agar-ashendeba-/28887.

[46] პროექტ "პანორამა თბილისის" ამსახველი ვიზუალური მასალა [Visual Material Depicting the "Panorama Tbilisi" Project), *Liberali,* March 26, 2014, accessed April 16, 2022, http://liberali.ge/news/view/10562/proeqt-panorama-tbilisis-amsakhveli-vizualuri-masala.

[47] "პანორამა თბილისი" კანონმდებლობასა და მსოფლიო მემკვიდრეობის სახელმძღვანელო პრინციპებს ეწინააღმდეგება ["Panorama Tbilisi" is against the Legislation and Guiding Principles of World Heritage], April 23, 2014, accessed May 11, 2022, http://l

the meeting held in the City Hall, it was decided to change the site's status intended for the project, and instead of "Recreational Zone 3", the status of "Residential Zone 2" was assigned. As city planner David Bakradze stated, this "allowed them to build here everything they want".[48] As in both cases discussed above, there were practically no public project debates. As a result of the legislative changes made by the city government, the investor could start the construction of the project at any time, without even having a final project. On January 31, 2015, in front of the City Council, a rally was held against the still unapproved project - "No to Panorama!".[49]

Although there are some similarities in the development of previously studied projects, this case is distinguished for two reasons. Firstly, the Panorama Tbilisi is the largest project ever implemented in Tbilisi, and the planned investment of more than $500 million was unprecedentedly high for the Georgian reality. Secondly, the author and financial implementer of the project idea was the former Prime Minister, the founder of the Georgian Dream, party and an influential political figure, billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili, according to whom, "if not his whim, no investor would agree to invest in this project."[50]

In September, international non-governmental organizations appealed to the Georgian government to react and stop the project.[51] In turn, the

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iberali.ge/news/view/10688/panorama-tbilisi-kanonmdeblobasa-da-msoflio-emkvidreobis-sakhelmdzghvanelo-printsipebs-etsinaaghmde.

48 "პანორამა თბილისისთვის" საჭირო ტერიტორიის ნაწილს ლანდშაფტური ზონის სტატუსი შეეცვალა [Part of the Territory Needed for "Panorama Tbilisi" was changed to Landscape Zone Status), *Liberali,* December 26, 2014, accessed April 11, 2022, http://liberali.ge/news/view/14043/panorama-tbilisistvis-sachiro-teritoriis-natsils-landshafturi-zonis-statusi-sheetsvala).

49 საპროტესტო აქციის "არა პანორამას" მონაწილეები სოლოლაკის ქედისკენ მსვლელობას მართავენ [Participants of the Protest Action "No Panorama" are marching towards the Sololak Ridge], *Liberali,* January 31, 2015, accessed April 8, 2021, http://liberali.ge/news/view/14431/saprotesto-aqtsiis-ara-panoramas-monatsileebi-sololakis-qedisken-mslelobas-martaven.

50 Ivanishvili interview with *Guria News Agency*, July 28, 2015, accessed April 14, 2021, https://gurianews.com/?p=730368.

51 საერთაშორისო NGO-ები პანორამაზე: ისტორიული დედაქალაქი, ამჟამად საფრთხის ქვეშაა [International NGOs on the Panorama: the Historic Capital, now under Threat],

NGOs involved in the protest filed a lawsuit against the construction in the Panorama landscape area. However, the court date was assigned so late that the lawsuit could no longer be taken into consideration due to the statute of limitations. In the end, the actions of the *No Panorama Tbilisi!* movement turned out to be fruitless, and the government was able to implement the planned project.[52]

Framing and Tactics

As it was noted above, appropriate strategy plays a significant role in the success of any social movement. Proper framing and tactics as the components of a long-term strategy in these three cases have not been uniform, nor has it always been consistent.

The *Save Gudiashvili Square* movement differed from other previous protests developed in Georgia. It was a movement without protest, without any rallies or political demands.[53] Despite its historical significance, the information about Gudiashvili Square among Tbilisi citizens was so scarce that, as one of the protest organizers noted:

> "People were asking us where Gudiashvili square is. How do we come to the action? "We explained that near the Purpuri Cafe. People knew where Cafe Purpuri was, but they did not know that it was on Gudiashvili square" (Interview 3).

Accordingly, the proper framing process has a significant influence. Firstly, the main direction of the framing process was to inform the population about the historical and cultural significance of Gudiashvili Square. For this purpose, various activities were held on the square, the

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Liberali, September 21, 2019, accessed April 18, 2021 http://liberali.ge/news/view/18371/saertashoriso-NGOebi-panoramaze-istoriuli-dedaqalaqi-amzhamad-safrtkhis-qveshaa.

[52] "პანორამა თბილისის" საქმეზე საია-ს სარჩელი სასამართლომ ხანდაზმულობის მოტივით არ განიხილა [In the "Panorama Tbilisi" case, GYLA's claim was not considered by the court on the grounds of statute of limitations), *Liberali,* June 22, 2017, accessed January 11, 2022, http://liberali.ge/news/view/30043/panorama-tbilisis-saqmeze-saias-sarcheli-sasamartlom-khandazmulobis-motivit-ar-ganikhila.

[53] Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani, *Movimenti senza protesta? L'ambientalismo in Italia* [Movements without Protest: Ecology in Italia] (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2004).

main goal of which was to bring its historical significance to the public. At the same time, providing information to citizens about these activities has acquired great importance. Social networks were selected as the primary means for this. A Facebook page was created for the campaign, where all available information was gathered. Also, the date and topic of the campaign were announced on this page. As a result of correct framing and consistent, uniquely positive information campaigns through TV and social networks, citizens' involvement in protest was quite active. It was not a protest with thousands of protesters. According to organizers, no one expected a cultural heritage theme to bring tens of thousands of people to the streets (Interviews 3, 1). Still, it maintained diversity by involving people of different social strata, ages, professions, genders, religions, and ethnicities.

The framing process in the *Defend Vake Park* case required the least effort. Vake Park, located in one of the most elitist areas of the city, was the only well-equipped park in Tbilisi that is not distinguished by the abundance of green spaces. In addition to the high awareness of this park among the city population, Tbilisi citizens have particular emotional sentiments toward Vake Park that date back to their childhood (Interviews 31, 5). Accordingly, in this case, the activists needed much less effort to inform the population adequately. Consequently, the attitude was that "Vake Park was saved by being Vake Park" (Interview 30) does not seem ungrounded.

In the case of *No to Panorama!* the framing process was different. Like the Gudiashvili Square movement, the population needed more information about the significance of that part of the old city where the Panorama project was planned to be built. However, unlike Gudiashvili, the number of citizens involved in the protest was relatively small. Several factors could have caused this. On the one hand, propaganda by the government to portray the benefits of construction was very active whereas on the other hand, there was a need for precise framing to raise public awareness and engagement. The propaganda of the goodness of construction was much more active by authorities than the "small education-oriented activities" made by the activists (Interview 23). Even the population that would potentially suffer due to the project implementation – was not intensively involved in the protest (Interviews 9, 32). At the same time, unlike the Gudiashvili Square case, nothing would be destroyed,

new facilities would build, significant investments would be made, and jobs would be created due to this project implementation. All these factors played an important role.

Consequently, the part of the population for which the re-modelling of the city is a source of benefit and economic prosperity has been overrun.[54] One of the manifestations of the lack of a *No to Panorama Tbilisi!* proper framing is that it was built more on an emotional charge than on pre-written, consistent activities because "something caused anger, and then we reacted angrily" (Interview 22).

The permanent rallies (held every two weeks) throughout the protest cycle were uniquely cultural, educational, and cognitive. Despite some differences of opinion around the protest repertoire, organizers univocally rejected all types of disruptive actions previously commonly used in Georgia: demonstrations, protest marches, roadblocks, and so on. They chose to present the square as a free space and the protest campaign as a free platform offered by the artists. As one of the organizers noted:

> "A constant component of the rallies was a concert. We organized live music concerts at every rally. The musicians participated in the activities, and the organizers paid only for the equipment. A separate place was set aside for children to learn sculpting and painting, familiarize themselves with Tbilisi's history and Gudiashvili Square, and exhibit their works. Materials needed for this activity: pencils, clay, papers, etc., were bought by us. Thus, we were reminding the city authorities that the city belongs first and foremost to the citizens" (Interview 1).

The protest repertoire included activities such as, for example, revitalizing empty houses through video projections, concerts, conducting a social campaign, meeting with interested parties, media communication, and preparing announcements and press releases. Thus, during the campaign, Gudiashvili Square became a space where anyone could express themselves in the way they wanted.

The protest repertoire in Vake Park, at the initial stage, was of a more traditional, disruptive type – rallies, pickets, setting up tents, and "breaking down the fences" (Interview 31). However, the form of activism changed.

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[54] Massimiliano Andretta, Gianni Piazza and Anna Subirats, "Urban Dynamics and Social Movements," in *Oxford Handbook of Social Movements*, eds. Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 200-215.

As in the case of Gudiashvili Square, the protest took a creative form: theatrical performances were staged, exhibitions and various creative lessons were held – drawing, the printing of stencils, open lectures, and seminars. According to the activists themselves, the transformation of the repertoire was influenced by the successful experience of an entirely positive type of activism repertoire in the *Save Gudiashvili Square* case "because people were tired of swearing and all this negative repertoire and this would not work anymore" (Interview 5). Thus, it became activism with a positive repertoire of "enthusiast people who wanted to change" (Interview 10). Such activities allowed citizens to express their attitudes and feelings towards the city because, as Castells notes, "people tend to consider cities, space, and urban functions and forms as the mainspring for their feelings."[55]

At the same time, the tactic of the protest organizers toward involving Vake residents in the protest was very active. Involvement included participation in concerts and other cultural events and support in critical moments. As one of the organizers noted:

> "For people in their 60s and 70s who did not care about social media, we made a network connection to Twitter. When we tweeted in case of danger, a message was sent to everyone connected to this network. Therefore, receiving an SMS means there is an alarm in Vake Park. If you are nearby and can, you should come. Thus, these people were included in the movement with this method. They realized we were there to protect their territory when they arrived and expressed their desire to help us. It was crucial to see someone willing to be there for twenty-four hours a day and devote time and energy from their life to protecting this place" (Interview 5).

In contrast to the above-mentioned cases, the message box of the actions against the Panorama construction was unequivocally negative. Interestingly, unlike the other two cases, the name of the activism itself was built not on the positive - defend or save something, but on neglecting to do something. It is true that "the repertoire of collective action will differ in different contexts."[56]

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[55] Manuela Castels, *The city and the grassroots: A cross-cultural theory of urban social movements* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

[56] Kerstin Jacobsson, "Introduction: The Development of Urban Movements in Central and Eastern Europe," in *Urban grassroots movement in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Kerstin Jacobsson (New York: Routledge, 2016), 7.

In Panorama case existing inter-group differences influenced the strategy of activism. because "when there is a misunderstanding inside, one has to quarrel, the other to sing, the third to protect the pensioners, the fourth – Marx, nothing comes out" (Interview 22). Accordingly, the entirely negative repertoire of this movement was aimed at the complete political and moral discrediting of the supporters of the project and authority in general, as "it was ordinary bullying with attaching labels such as homeland seller, sold to the government, enslaved, and so on" (Interview 6).

Protest Organizing Structures: Monolithic or Split?

In the process of civil activism, the composition of the movement organizing structure often dramatically influences the determination of the strategy. The intra-group and inter-group connections of the selected movements' organizing structure allow us quite exciting observations. The Gudiashvili Square defending movement was organized by a single organization, Tiflis Hamkari, which maintained intra-group unity throughout the campaign. Also, the single organization "Guerilla Gardeners" initiated the Vake Park movement.

Ernesto Castaneda's advice not to describe movements as clearly cohesive and coherent is perhaps most notable in the case of *No to Panorama*![57] According to one of the protest organizers,

> "Politically and financially most powerful person in Georgian politics was the author and developer of the Panorama project idea. Only Guerilla gardening and Tiflis Hamkari could not defeat him. So, the great war was about to begin" (Interview 3).

As a result, the driving force of the process became *Ertad* (translated as "together") – the alliance of twenty-seven civil society organizations with different visions, ideological and political beliefs, and experiences. Despite this sharp inter-group differences, "we considered *Panorama* a topic we could turn a blind eye to and unite" (Interview 19).

[57] Ernesto Castaneda, "Social Movements, 1768-2018," in *Analyzing Contemporary Social Movements*, eds. Charles Tilly, Ernesto Castaneda, and Lesley J. Woods (New York: Routledge, 2020), 167-177.

Nevertheless, the organizers' efforts to unite left-wing and right-wing activists failed. All the groups involved perceived the protest from their ideological perspective, reflected in the slogans and symbols. Active left-wing groups' appearance at protest meetings with red flags and signs became the subject of sharp inter-group confrontation. According to one of the organizers, "we were protesting urban issues, and there was no place for Marx's ideas or demonstrating someone's ideological platforms" (Interview10).

On the other hand, left-wing groups identified some activists as neoliberal forces who "everyone knows what they were fighting for – only buildings and landscapes and not surviving ordinary people" (Interview 30). Finally, the method used in the case of *No to Panorama!* - to unite people despite their political and ideological beliefs – did not work. So "this union was created and completed in *Panorama*" (Interview 22).

Although often the involvement of politicians and political parties in urban activism is considered positive, activists' attitude toward participation in the protest movement has not been uniform in the cases studied.[58] On the one hand, the people who planned and led the activism process realized that without the involvement of politicians, the movement's success was impossible. For example, in the case of *Panorama*,

> "There was a significant phobia – the fear of politicians. At first, I was like that, but after we met politicians, a few people and I would assume that we should call no one opposition party but any politician who wants to" (Interview 22).

In contrast to the organizers of the movements, in all three cases studied, the involvement of politicians in the protest campaign among ordinary activists was entirely unacceptable. The given attitude from the activists' side is not surprising, as the rate of trust in the Georgian party spectrum among the population of Georgia was very low – eight percent.[59] Because "there was no trust in politicians" (Interview 9), activists realized that the government could easily use the involvement of opposition political forces to discredit the movement and marginalize its members. It was an

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[58] Massimiliano Andretta, Gianni Piazza and Anna Subirats, "Urban Dynamics and Social Movements," 200-215.

[59] Caucasus Barometer 2015 Georgia, accessed January 11, 2022, https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2015ge/TRUPPS/.

objective point: the politicians who wanted to be involved in *Vake Park* and *Panorama* movements were "mostly UNM members and their remnants" (Interview 10). The only accepted way for politicians to be involved was "that they should take off a politician's hat and close the hat of a Tbilisian" (Interview 11).

Despite the above-mentioned facts, cooperation between politicians and activists still took place. In the case of *No to Panorama Tbilisi!* civil activists were receiving information about the discussion of the issue in the City Assembly from its opposition political party members. By obtaining the so-called permits, they could attend the gatherings while discussing the case and had very close coordination. The cooperation between the City Assembly opposition party members and the representatives of the society was very institutionalized in this process (Interview 33). As noted, institutional political actors are ready to help activists when they benefit from it. Gudiashvili Square's case is interesting in this regard.[60] Gudiashvili Square protest leaders had determined this moment in time, and before the Tbilisi Mayor elections in 2014, they changed their past four-five years-approach of non-cooperation with politicians. Publicly, in Gudiashvili Square, they signed memorandums with several Tbilisi Mayoral opposition candidates. Through this act, they pledged to meet the activists' demands in case of winning elections. Due to this step toward cooperation, the organizers of the activism faced a significant challenge because they were "sharply criticized by the young people who were supporting the movement" (Interview 3). Nevertheless, none of the organizers perceived this step toward cooperation with politicians as a mistake.

Activist Perceptions about the Results of the Movements

First, let us determine the results of these movements according to the involved persons. Suppose we measure it according to the achievement

[60] Melinda Kane, "Social Movement Policy Success: Decriminalizing State Sodomy Laws, 1969-1998," *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 8, no. 3 (2003): 313-334, doi: 10.17813/maiq.8.3.q66046w34wu58866; Paul Almeida and Linda Brewster Stearns, "Political Opportunities and Local Grassroots Environmental Movements: The Case of Minamata," *Social Problems* 45, no. 1 (1998): 37-60, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3097142.

of the goals stated by the activists. In that case, we can attribute the movement *Saving Gudiashvili Square* to the successful movement called "a great victory" (Interviews 1, 17). The campaign achieved the main goal: the square was preserved mainly in its authenticity and was wholly rehabilitated. At the same time, it also had a long-term result: "the protection of cultural heritage and the urban issue in general" (Interview 3) has become a political agenda item and significantly impacted the update of the re-urbanization theme among citizens. Unlike Gudiashvili's activism, the results of the *Vake Park* movement are vague. On the one hand, according to some activists, it was successful; as long as whomever comes to power, everyone should know - no one will be able to do what the previous government intended to do (Interview 5).

On the other hand, some of the activists are more skeptical – nobody can guarantee what could happen in the case of a new government accessing to power. The activists have lost in the legal dispute with the investor, and everything will depend on the "goodwill of new city authorities in the future" (Interview 22). Assessing the *No to Panorama Tbilisi!* case is also interesting: most movement organizers and ordinary activists perceive the movement as a defeated movement; even more, "it was a failure of environmental campaigns, in general" (Interview 25), and "authority repulsed us very easily – simply, ironed us and evaporated from sight" (Interview 22).

Nevertheless, let us consider the social movement as a resource for social change, giving the impetus to the emergence of public debate. There may be no entirely failed movements. The defeated movement can also contribute to the emergence of new movements. They could also constitute an example for future movements, and through them, ideas, coalitions, strategies, networks, and experiences are spread.[61] In this regard, the *Panorama* case is exciting. While it was a factually unsuccessful case, the participants' assessment of the results of *Panorama*-related activism is different. Some involved actors think that it is possible to

[61] Raza Saeed, "Conceptualizing Success and Failure for Social Movements," *Law, Social Justice & Global Development Journal (LGD)*, no. 2 (2009). http://www.go.warwick.ac.uk/elj/lgd/2009_2/saeed; Michael Brown, "Measuring the Success of Social Movement Organizations," *Annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association* (Chicago, 2005), http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p85636_index.html April 1, 2008.

distinguish several positive outcomes, among which are the bias and shortcomings of the court, rising awareness of the media and citizens. Also, the unification of organizations with different political and ideological beliefs, which is rare in Georgia's civic activism scene. According to some respondents, the actual result is the discreditation of the government. It should be noted that the members of the opposite political parties mainly discuss the positive results of government political defamation due to the *Panorama* movement:

> "We showed the citizens what Ivanishvili was doing and how he did it as a politician. The damaged reputation of a person for whom public reputation should be necessary is not of minor importance" (Interview 5).

The actors' perceptions differ regarding the appropriateness of protest tactics and repertoire. According to some of the activists, the tactic of focusing mainly on street protests was wrong:

> "They [the organizers of *Panorama* movement] needed to be oriented correctly. Those focused on taking rallies in the streets. They do not spend time sitting down and searching within the law, writing, and filing timely claims. Accordingly, it was too late to go against the administrative laws already passed." (Interview 25).

In selecting the protest repertoire, on the one hand, the unity/difference of the organizing group, and on the other hand, the factor of the investor played an important role. In the cases of the Gudiashvili Square and Vake Park movements, the protest had a single-leader organization, and there was no petty narrow-minded confrontation or differing views toward using positive repertoire. Unlike them, in the result of intra- and inter-group differences, in the *Panorama* Tbilisi protest, "instead of having a positive energy, here (in Panorama Tbilisi), we would go and hit each other" (Interview 22). However, according to the protest organizers, the repertoire in the case of *Panorama* could not be similar to that of Vake Park or Gudiashvili Square. If, in these cases, an "ordinary" investor stood on the opposite side of the activists, in the case of Panorama, "we were dealing with such a strong enemy that we could not do anything with dancing or singing" (Interview 2).

Speaking of the reasons contributing to the results of all three movements, almost all actors indicated the role of the political situation in the country (see Table 1). In the case of Gudiashvili Square and Vaki Park, the change of government contributed to the success of the movement. *Panorama* "happened at a politically unprofitable time" (Interview 5). Nevertheless, all interviewed activists noted that, unlike the Gudiashvili Square and Vake Park movements, in the case of *Panorama*, the movement's organizers needed a clearer and better-defined action strategy:

> "Our biggest shortcoming was that we did not have any pre-written strategy. We were reactive and acted depending on what surprises the government offered us. All our actions were characterized by emotions and spontaneity" (Interview 12).

Conclusion

The main goal of the research was to analyze the main strategies of the selected movements and highlight how the movement strategies influence the outcome. Based on the analyzed data, we fond out that all three selected movements: *Save Gudiashvili Square, Defend Vake Park and No to Panorama Tbilisi!* developed over the same period of time, that is 2009-2016. The general actors – activism organizing NGOs and stakeholders were the same, but the action strategy and repertoire were different.

Analyzing these cases, the starting point is the actors' choice of how to achieve a civic goal by means of collaboration of advocacy groups and resistance or confrontation. Also, we have to consider the fact that these social movements occurred in environments where the Soviet and post-Soviet experience determines political culture, and cultural heritage or ecological issues are on the very bottom of the social life.

The essential factor is the constitution of the social movements. Thus, when movement members lack shared identity, values, and ideologies, being homogenous is considered more effective than being heterogeneous. Homogeneous groups easily define strategy, and a variety of followers cannot correct it, they manage to set long-term goals and collaborate with the decision-makers. The level of social capital is another additional variable influencing this process. *Save Gudiashvili*

Square and *Defend Vake Park* are the best examples of the above-described case, while the third was a controversial case: heterogeneous groups equipped with their controversial strategies attempted to be the leader of the movement; time and time again in the process they corrected the concerned tactic; they had different vision on the cooperation of the government; part of them wanted to use the best practice of Gudiashvili case, while the others thought that confrontation is the best way. The addressee of the negative messages were decision makers as politicians as well as persons. This fact determines personal unacceptability and decreases the chance of negotiation.

Development in more or less the same period is not the precondition for the positive outcome of the movements. Nevertheless, the unity of the internal and external factors was the primary determinant. The cases of *Save Gudiashvili Square* and *Defend Vake Park* were supported by the UNM government. Usually, resistance movements have more chance of positive influence if the government changes, especially if the opposition parties come to power. However, if the ruling party supports the initiatives, and if this ruling party has solid trust among the citizens, the chances of the movement's success are limited, as happened in *Panorama Tbilisi* case.

Also, correctly guided strategy plays an essential role in the results of the discussed movements. The best example to illustrate this point is the case of the *Save Gudiashvili Square* movement. Although the changes implemented in the political system significantly contributed to the movement's success, if it were not for the movement organizers' strategy, calculated from a long-term perspective, including changing tactics, suitable framing, and innovative protest repertoire, the movement would have hardly achieved its goal. As one of the protest organizers noted:

> "If we had not used the government change by using a properly planned strategy – today there would probably be a shopping center or some other modern building on Gudiashvili Square" (Interview 1).

A properly conducted strategy also played an essential role in the case of the *Defend Vake Park* movement. However, like the Gudiashvili square, this movement coincided with a politically favorable regime, and the organizers could use it more or less successfully.

The case of *No to Panorama Tbilisi!* is entirely different. On the one hand, the movement started and developed at a politically unprofitable time, when the newly arrived government was at the zenith of popularity. On the other hand, the disunity of the movement's organizers, the lack of a pre-calculated strategy, and the resulting inconsistent and largely spontaneous actions led to its failure.

Annexes

Table 1

Main features of activist movements

Movements	Activism period	External factors	Internal factors
Save Gudiashvili Square	2009-2015	Favorable political context: Changing UNM Tbilisi Mayor and local government with GD Mayor and local government (2014)	Single organizing structure, positive repertoire, well-defined strategy, and proper use of political opportunities
Defend Vake Park	2013-2019	Favorable political context: Changing UNM Tbilisi Mayor and local government with GD Mayor and government (2014)	Single organizing structure, positive repertoire, well-defined strategy, and proper use of political opportunities
No to Panorama Tbilisi!	2014-2016	Unfavorable political context: a newcomer to power GD City Mayor and local government with quite a high level of citizen truth.	Organizing structure united multiple NGOs with different political ideologies, values, and visions, Sharp inter-group controversy's disruptive repertoire.

Table 2

Interview

Anonymized interlocutor	Reference
Civic activists, organizers	Interviews 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 10, 12, 17, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27, 30, 34
"Rank-and-file" civic activists	Interviews 5, 9, 11, 15, 19, 20, 21, 24, 28, 29, 31, 32.
Political party members, deputies of Tbilisi City Council	Interviews 6, 13, 14, 16, 18, 33.
Investor	Interview 8

DOI: 10.62229/sprps23-1/3

WHY SHADOW ECONOMY AND INFORMALITY SHOULD BE SEPARATED AS CONCEPTS: RESULTS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE SHADOW ECONOMY SURVEY IN THE POST-SOVIET REGION[1]

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[1] This research was supported by a Marie Curie Research and Innovation Staff Exchange scheme within the H2020 Programme (grant acronym: SHADOW, no: 778118).

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Abstract. The current article is intended to bring two contributions to the study of informality. Empirically, it shares the result of the shadow economy survey for the 2017 and 2018 fiscal years for Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Ukraine. These results are used to calculate the shadow economy index estimated as a percentage of the GDP. Already established as an annual exercise for Latvia and the Baltics since 2010, the survey has been applied to Moldova and Romania (since 2016), Poland (2015-2016), and Kosovo (in 2018). In the frame of the project "SHADOW: An Exploration of the Nature of Informal Economies and Shadow Practices in the Former USSR Region," the scope of the survey was expanded to Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Ukraine, keeping the same methodology and used for direct measurement of underground activities.[2] By doing this, we discuss the use of direct measurement approaches to suggest that, while quantitative approaches are useful to estimate the size of shadow economies, direct approaches can be used to integrate these data and look for deeper correlations between the persistence of shadow transactions and some societal tendencies that are not necessarily economic.

Keywords: Shadow economy, informality, informal economy, informal practices, post-Soviet region.

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[2] Tālis J. Putniņš and Arnis Sauka, "Measuring the Shadow Economy Using Company Managers," *Journal of Comparative Economics* 43, no. 2 (2015): 471-490.

Introduction

Across regions of the world, incomes are hidden, companies fail to report activities to the authorities, and workers face precarious employment situations. A recent report of the International Labour Organization's (ILO) estimates that two billion workers are active in the informal economy.[3] Although widely present in more prosperous economic systems, developing and emerging economies are disproportionately affected. Indeed, ILO estimates that Africa, Asia, and Latin America host 93% of the world's informal employment, with a peak in Africa (where 85.8% of employment is informal) followed by Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America (68.2%, 68.6%, and 40% respectively). These percentages are likely to increase due to the devastating effects of COVID-19 on business activities. These figures unveil frightening projections given the negative effect of informal employment and shadow economy on state capacity – reducing the tax revenue and thus the state's capacity for intervention and discouraging foreign investments. In addition, informal employment also puts workers in precarious positions, depriving them of employment security, long-term perspectives, and medical and social security. Accordingly, national governments and international organizations (ILO, the World Bank, and more recently, the European Commission) have, with growing persistence, proposed measures to curb the informal sector and tackle issues such as informal labor, tax fraud, informal practices, and payments.[4]

Because of persistent informality in several spheres of public life, several scholars tended to regard post-Soviet countries as kleptocracies where a restricted elite circle capitalizes on the returns of the mining of natural resources and/or foreign aid and investments.[5] However, despite a

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[3] Stefan Kuhn, Santo Milasi and Sheena Yoon, "World Employment Social Outlook: Trends 2018," Geneva: ILO (2018).

[4] Colin Williams and Slavko Bezeredi, "Explaining and Tackling the Informal Economy: A Dual Informal Labour Market Approach," *Employee Relations; Bradford* 40, no. 5 (2018): 889-902, DOI:10.1108/ER-04-2017-0085; Colin Williams and Frédéric Lapeyre, "Dependent self-employment: Trends, challenges and policy responses in the EU," *ILO Employment Working Paper* 228 (2017).

[5] Alexander Cooley and Jason C. Sharman, "Blurring the Line Between Licit and Illicit: Transnational Corruption Networks in Central Asia and Beyond," *Central Asian Survey* 34, no. 1 (2015): 11-28; Saipira Furstenberg, "State Responses to Reputational Concerns: The Case of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative in Kazakhstan," *Central Asian Survey* 37, no. 2 (2018): 28.

growing body of literature on the region, there is still little agreement on what makes the region so adverse to the development and enhancement of its governance standards, as well as the boundary between the acceptable and unacceptable.[6] It has been argued that societal attitudes must be considered when choosing measures to tackle informality at the country and regional levels. But this had scarcely been attempted for these countries despite its potential to open new avenues of research and increase the understanding of why people, and economic actors, would decide to comply or not with state instructions and international standards.

Framed in the above debates, the current article attempts to fill this gap. This manager's survey that our team conducted in Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Ukraine for 2017 and 2018 offers three major contributions to the debates. Empirically, this is possibly the first attempt to measure the shadow economy in the region using a direct measurement method. Our results are similar to the ones obtained through indirect measurements methods but can be regarded as complementary rather than competing since they allow us also to break down the shadow economy into three components (envelope wages, underreported employees, and revenues) and explore the motifs to remain in the shadow.[7] This idea introduces our second major contribution. We suggest that direct measurement methods can be used to capture not only the relevance of the phenomenon but its intrinsic causes. Indirect methods can help us tell what people are engaging in, but direct methods can also shed light on why they are engaging in these informal practices. Liaising with a number of studies that developed in this direction, we believe that it is by understanding the motives behind

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6 Hartmut Lehmann and Anzelika Zaiceva, "Informal Employment in Russia: Incidence, Determinants and Labor Market Segmentation," *Quaderni – Working Paper DSE*, no. 903 (2013): 1-74; Irina Kuznetsova and John Round, "Postcolonial Migrations in Russia: The Racism, Informality and Discrimination Nexus," *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 39, no. 1/2 (2019): 52-67; Ainur Begim, "How to Retire Like a Soviet Person: Informality, Household Finances, and Kinship in Financialized Kazakhstan," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 24, no. 4 (2018): 767-785; Claudia Baez-Camargo and Alena Ledeneva, "Where Does Informality Stop and Corruption Begin? Informal Governance and the Public/Private Crossover in Mexico, Russia and Tanzania," *Slavonic & East European Review* 95, no. 1 (2017): 49-75.

7 Rafael Alvarado, Brayan Tillaguango, Michelle López-Sánchez, Pablo Ponce and Cem Işık, "Heterogeneous Impact of Natural Resources on Income Inequality: The Role of the Shadow Economy and Human Capital Index," *Economic Analysis and Policy* 69 (2021): 690-704.

the choice to remain in the shadow that policymaking can eventually better address societal needs.[8] Finally, by distinguishing between what people do and why they do so, we can propose the main distinction between two phenomena often clustered together: the shadow economy and informality. The two terms were, and sometimes still are, used almost as synonyms in some disciplines. However, recent scholarship has tended to develop in two different directions. It defines the shadow economy as the aggregate of economic activities that are willingly and intentionally concealed from the state. In particular, we refer to three main components: envelope wages, under-declared income, and under-declared workers that eventually affect a state's fiscal revenues and, therefore, state capacity.[9] By contrast, informality has come a long way from its initial understanding as an only economic phenomenon; more recent definitions refer to a range of activities, not necessarily monetary or even strictly economic, that affect policymaking and become a vital component of state governance.[10] Informality may be regarded as "the art of bypassing the state, but the very, often rational, act of bypassing a state affects the relationship between the state and society".[11] It forces state institutions to take into account, directly or indirectly, the role of unwritten rules and alternative currencies used to renegotiate power relations between individuals, groups of citizens, and the state itself.[12]

These considerations have informed the logic behind our questionnaire design. We were interested not only in measuring the shadow economy but

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8 Michael Burawoy, Simon Clarke, Peter Fairbrother and Pavel Krotov, *What About the Workers? Workers and the Transition to Capitalism in Russia* (London: Verso Books, 1993), 1-248; Javlon Juraev, "Rational Choice Theory and Demand for Petty Corruption," *Journal of Eastern European and Central Asian Research* 5, no. 2 (2018): 24-33.

9 Tālis J. Putniņš and Arnis Sauka, "Measuring the Shadow Economy Using Company Managers," *Journal of Comparative Economics* 43, no. 2 (2015): 471-490.

10 Titos Ritsatos, "Tax Evasion and Compliance; From the Neo Classical Paradigm to Behavioural Economics, A Review," *Journal of Accounting & Organizational Change* (2014): 244-261; Michael Pickhardt and Aloys Prinz, "Behavioral Dynamics of Tax Evasion – A Survey," *Journal of Economic Psychology* 40 (2014): 1-19.

11 Abel Polese, "What Is Informality? (Mapping) "the Art of Bypassing the State" in Eurasian Spaces and Beyond," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* (2021): 1-43; Alexander Shvarts, "Russian Mafia: The Explanatory Power of Rational Choice Theory," *International Review of Modern Sociology* (2002): 69-113.

12 Italo Pardo, "Managing Existence in Naples: Morality, Action and Structure", *Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology* 104 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Michael Burawoy, "Transition Without Transformation: Russia's Involutionary Road to Capitalism," *East European Politics and Societies* 15, no. 2 (2001): 269-290.

also in identifying possible factors that could explain the attitude of the entrepreneurs. This has been embedded in the survey to shed the basis for an interpretation of the persistence of shadow transactions as depending not only on the economic and business environment as well as governance indicators but also on socio-cultural factors such as the perception of institutions, authorities, and the level of interaction between members of society.

Measuring Shadow Economy/Informality in the Eurasian Region and Beyond

Being a phenomenon that is not directly observable, shadow economies are difficult to measure. The last measurement in the post-socialist region took advantage of a Multiple Indicators Multiple Causes (MIMIC) approach in 2015.[13] It is likewise true that this was in the frame of a longitudinal study encompassing many countries in the world and thus "incidentally" also the region.

Several studies showed attempts to engage with similar concepts and were useful in identifying the most popular fields of informality research in the region, namely informal payments in the health and education sectors, housing and informal dwellings and transportation, and governance in prisons, which somehow mirror the main tendencies in the region reported in Table 1.[14]

What emerges from a literature survey, there are two main gaps that this article has been designed to address. First, there is little, if

[13] The shadow economy index is calculated as the percentage of the GDP by the Global Economy, accessed May 21, 2022, https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/shadow_economy/Asia/.

[14] Rakhal Gaitonde, Andrew D. Oxman, Peter O. Okebukola and Gabriel Rada, "Interventions to Reduce Corruption in the Health Sector," *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 8 (2016); Jane Falkingham, Baktygul Akkazieva and Angela Baschieri, "Trends in Out-of-pocket Payments for Health Care in Kyrgyzstan, 2001–2007," *Health Policy and Planning* 25, no. 5 (2010): 427-436; Angela Baschieri and Jane Falkingham, "Staying in School: Assessing the Role of Access, Availability, and Economic Opportunities – the Case of Tajikistan," *Population, Space and Place* 15, no. 3 (2009): 205-224; Eliza Isabaeva, "«A Proper House, Not a Barn:» House Biographies and Societal Change in Urban Kyrgyzstan," *Methodological Approaches to Societies in Transformation: How to Make Sense of Change* (2021): 165-186; Lela Rekhviashvili and Wladimir Sgibnev, "Theorising Informality and Social Embeddedness for the Study of Informal Transport. Lessons from the Marshrutka Mobility Phenomenon," *Journal of Transport Geography* 88 (2020): 1-9; Alexander Kupatadze, "Kyrgyzstan–A Virtual Narco-state?," *International Journal of Drug Policy* 25, no. 6 (2014): 1178-1185; Camila Nunes Dias, Michelle Butler and Gavin Slade, "Prison Gangs," in *Prisons and Community Corrections*, eds. Philip Birch and Louise Sicard (London: Routledge, 2020), 160-172.

anything, exploration of the way shadow economies are generated, performed, and lived by those very actors that policies are supposed to address. Second, there is a significant gap concerning the study of informality and shadow economies in the Eurasian region, two things that, although conceptually separated, often account for two sides of the same tendencies and phenomena. Accordingly, the empirical section explores the relationship between actions (here referred to as shadow economy) and the perceptions and attitudes generating them (what is rather referred to, at least in the region, as informality). Besides, it will also show the way shadow economies are performed in practice, what sectors are the most important and what is the attitude toward a series of activities.

Methodological Reflections: Why is a Direct Approach Needed to Study Informality?

The scholarship has proposed various approaches to estimate the phenomenon in a given country, and they can be classified into "direct" and "indirect" methods. Indirect methods usually draw on macro data (such as data supplied by the System of National Accounts Statistics), whereas direct methods use tax audits or surveys.[15]

Data supplied by the System of National Accounts Statistics was used to develop discrepancy methods used to measure both hidden and illegal activities, between national expenditure and income statistics, the discrepancy between official and actual labor force.[16] The "electricity approach" uses electricity consumption as a proxy for overall economic activity and, therefore, production, while the "transaction approach" relies on measurement for a given year and calculation of its variations, and the "currency demand approach," based on the assumption that an

[15] Tālis J. Putniņš and Arnis Sauka, "Measuring the Shadow Economy Using Company Managers."

[16] György Gyomai and Peter Van de Ven, "The Non-observed Economy in the System of National Accounts," *Statistics Brief* 18 (2014); Bruno Contini, "Labor Market Segmentation and the Development of the Parallel Economy - the Italian Experience," *Oxford Economic Papers* 33, no. 3 (1981): 401-412; Daniela Del Boca, "Parallel Economy and Allocation of Time," *Micros (Quarterly Journal of Microeconomics)* 4, no. 2 (1981): 13-18.

increase in the size of the shadow economy will increase demand for currency.[17] Previous measurements of the shadow economy in the region have used Multiple Indicators Multiple Causes.[18]

Direct approaches have been criticized from different standpoints: from risks of under-reporting to the incapacity to consider figures from unregistered companies.[19] Indeed, basing their sampling techniques on the national database of registered businesses, they risk missing the complete picture when too many are unregistered. Yet, this can become an advantage because companies producing illegal goods are automatically excluded, providing cleaner data than indirect surveys. Also, through a deeper investigation, direct methods offer the opportunity to explore the causes of the engagement of business actors with informal practices.

The shadow economy of a country will be most likely in between figures from (under-reporting) direct and (over-reporting) indirect approaches. However, direct approaches offer the possibility to ask questions and explore why people remain in the shadow. Indirect ones are at risk of overreporting (because they include illegal economies), but they also provide macro explanations correlating the increase of the shadow economy with one or several tendencies in the country. The shadow economy thus focuses on productive economic activities that would normally be included in national accounts, but which remain underground due to tax or regulatory burdens.[20]

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17 Simon Johnson, Daniel Kaufmann and Pablo Zoido-Lobatón, *Corruption, Public Finances and the Unofficial Economy*, vol. 2169, World Bank Publications, 1999.

18 Lars P. Feld and Friedrich Schneider, "Survey on the Shadow Economy and Undeclared Earnings in OECD Countries," *German Economic Review* 11, no. 2 (2010): 109-149; Colin Williams and Friedrich Schneider, *Measuring the Global Shadow Economy: The Prevalence of Informal Work and Labour* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2016).

19 Joy De Beyer, Chris Lovelace, and Ayda Yürekli, "Poverty and Tobacco," *Tobacco Control* 10, no. 3 (2001): 210-211; Rosalie Liccardo Pacula, Beau Kilmer, Michael Grossman and Frank J. Chaloupka, "Risks and Prices: The Role of User Sanctions in Marijuana Markets," *The BE Journal of Economic Analysis & Policy* 10, no. 1 (2010).

20 Abel Polese and Friedrich Schneider, "Main Approaches Used to Estimate Illicit Markets Worldwide and What Should We Take into Account in an Estimation Exercise to Ireland," *Department of Equity and Justice of Ireland* (unpublished manuscript, 2021).

Methodology: Direct Approaches to the Measurement of Shadow Economies

The above deficiencies are the reason why, in our project, we measured the level of the shadow economy relying on a direct approach, surveying owners and top managers of companies. Before this project, the Shadow Economy Index had been applied to Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia to provide policymakers with information for policy decisions and foster a deeper understanding of entrepreneurship processes. This business survey was implemented between March and May 2019 based on random stratified sampling, and it covered all sectors and companies' sizes, from macro to micro.

Given the topic's sensitive nature, surveys face the risk of underestimating the total size of the shadow economy due to non-response and untruthful answers. Our method minimizes this risk by employing data collection techniques shown in previous studies, increasing the effectiveness of eliciting truthful responses. These techniques include confidentiality concerning the identities of respondents; framing the survey as a study of satisfaction with government policy; phrasing misreporting questions indirectly, asking about "similar firms in the industry" rather than the respondent's actual firm; excluding inconsistent responses, and controlling for factors that correlate with potential untruthful responses, such as for tolerance towards misreporting. Phone interviews are conducted with owners, directors, and managers of companies, and they last five minutes on average. The questionnaire contains four main sections: (1) external influences and satisfaction; (2) shadow activity; (3) company and owner characteristics; and (4) entrepreneurs' attitudes.[21] In line with other studies, to increase the response rate and its truthfulness, the questionnaire begins with non-sensitive questions about satisfaction with the government and tax policy, before moving to more sensitive ones about the shadow activity and deliberate misreporting.[22] Even

[21] Arnis Sauka, *Productive, Unproductive and Destructive Entrepreneurship: A Theoretical and Empirical Exploration*, vol. 3 (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2008).

[22] Klarita Gërxhani, "«Did You Pay Your Taxes?» How (Not) to Conduct Tax Evasion Surveys in Transition Countries," *Social Indicators Research* 80 (2007): 555-581; Brugt Kazemier and Rob Van Eck, "Survey Investigations of the Hidden Economy: Some Methodological Results," *Journal of Economic Psychology* 13, no. 4 (1992): 569-587.

when asked indirectly, some entrepreneurs choose not to answer sensitive questions about the shadow activity. One way to avoid providing untruthful answers is to give a score of "0" to all the questions, suggesting that no shadow activity has taken place during the years under scrutiny. These cases are treated as non-responses, hence minimizing downward bias in estimates of shadow activity.

Once data has been gathered, we determined the index as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) calculated through the income approach. GDP is hence the sum of the gross remuneration of employees (gross personal income) and the gross operating income of firms (gross corporate income). Computation of the Index proceeds in three steps: (1) we estimate the degree of underreporting of employee remuneration and underreporting of firms' operating income using the survey responses; (2) we estimate each firm's shadow production as a weighted average of its underreported employee remuneration and underreported operating income, with the weights reflecting the proportions of employee remuneration and firms' operating income in the composition of GDP; (3) we calculate a production-weighted average of shadow production across firms.

In the first step, underreporting firm *i*'s operating income, $UR_i^{OperatingIncome}$ is estimated directly from the corresponding survey question (7). Underreporting of employee remuneration, however, consists of two components: (1) underreporting of salaries, or "envelope wages" (question 9); and (2) unreported employees (question 8). Combining the two components, the firm *i*'s total unreported proportion of employee remuneration is:

$$\boldsymbol{UR_i^{EmployeeRemuneration}} = 1 - (1-UR_i^{Salaries})(1-UR_i^{Employees})$$

In the second step, for each firm we construct a weighted average of underreported personnel and underreported corporate income, producing an estimate of the unreported (shadow) proportion of the firm's production (income):

$$\boldsymbol{ShadowProportion_i} = \alpha_c UR_i^{EmployeeRemuneration} + (1 - \alpha_c) UR_i^{OperatingIncome}$$

where α_c is the ration of employees' remuneration to the sum of employees' remuneration and gross operating income of firms. We calculate α_c for each country, *c*, in each year using data from Eurostat.[23]

In the third step, we take the weighted average of underreported production, $ShadowProportion_i$, across firms in country c to arrive at the Shadow Economy Index for that country:

$$\boldsymbol{INDEX}_c^{\boldsymbol{ShadowEconomy}} = \sum_{i=1}^{Nc} w_i \, ShadowProportion_i$$

The weights, w_i, are the relative contribution of each firm to the country's GDP, which we approximate by the relative amount of wages paid by the firm.

The Shadow Economy Index: Results and Discussion

Size of the Shadow Economy

Table 2 reports the aggregate size of the shadow economy as a percentage of GDP in Russia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan during 2017-2018.

The size of the shadow economy in 2017–2018 is considerably larger in Russia and Kyrgyzstan than in Ukraine (*e.g.*, in 2018, the shadow economy is estimated at 44.7%, 44.5%, and 38.2% in the three countries, respectively). The size of the shadow economy has been declining in all three areas between 2017 and 2018. In Russia and Kyrgyzstan, the size of the shadow economy in 2018 contracted by 1.1% and -1.6% of GDP compared to the level in 2017, respectively. Ukraine experienced a modest contraction of 0.3%. Leandro Medina and Friedrich Schneider estimated the size of the shadow economy in Russia at 36.5% of GDP, Ukraine at 42.3%, and Kyrgyzstan at 29% in 2017 using the multiple indicator-multiple cause (MIMIC) approach.[24] The most

[23] The ratio is calculated using the employees' remuneration and gross operating income of firms for each country: Eurostat Database, accessed May 21, 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/main/data/database.

[24] Leandro Medina and Friedrich Schneider, "Shedding Light on the Shadow Economy: A Global Database and the Interaction with the Official One," CESifo Working Paper no. 7981 (Munich, 2019).

significant discrepancy in the projected size of the shadow economy using the two methodologies is registered in the case of Kyrgyzstan.

Unlike Schneider's indirect latent variable method, our method may offer more precise information on the components of the shadow economy and develop a comprehensive understanding of the shadow economy in each country. Specifically, Figure 1 illustrates the relative size of the components of the shadow economy in Russia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan in 2018. The structure of the components of the shadow economy in Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan are similar – the most important contributing factor was unreported company income (58% and 55%, respectively), with the other two components being comparably lower. Our findings also show that unreported business income accounts for 35.3% of the total shadow economy in Russia, whereas underreporting of salaries and underreporting of employees account for, accordingly, 32.1% and 32.6% of the entire shadow economy in Russia.

Figure 2 illustrates the underreporting of business income (profits), underreporting of the number of employees (percentage of the actual number of employees), and underreporting of salaries (percentage of actual salaries) in Russia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan. The highest magnitude of underreporting of salaries (percentage of actual salaries) is recorded in Kyrgyzstan; companies in Kyrgyzstan most often underreport 31%-50% of actual salaries. Similarly, more than 50% of companies in Russia and Kyrgyzstan underreport 11-50% of actual business profits.

Regarding the underreporting of the number of employees, the most substantive positive component change was observed in Ukraine, from 27.6% in 2017 to 19.8% in 2018. However, almost 70% of the Kyrgyzstan respondents believe that companies in their sector underreport their number of employees by 11%-50%. In the absence of a documented job contract, workers are unable to use formal enforcement measures. Market reforms that address worker-employer information asymmetry and enhance reputational mechanisms to punish opportunistic agents might help to alleviate contract enforcement issues.[25]

[25] Karthikeya Naraparaju, "Impediments to Contract Enforcement in Day Labour Markets: A Perspective from India," *Journal of Institutional Economics* 12, no. 3 (2016): 651-676.

Institutions impact how a country allocates entrepreneurial resources, influencing the quality of entrepreneurship by influencing the "rules of the game."[26] On the other hand, entrepreneurs react actively to the environment they find themselves in by influencing the institutions.[27] Figure 3 indicates the magnitude of bribery (percentage of revenue spent on "getting things done"); the figures for Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan are lower. Russian companies spend approximately 26.4% of revenue on payments "to get things done" and around 20.6% to secure a contract with the Government. Needless to say, these are very high numbers indicating major challenges concerning bribery in Russia. Figure 4 further shows the distribution of bribery: to "get things done" and secure contracts with the Government within a given range, indicating that more than one-third of companies in Russia pay in bribes more than 25% of the revenue or contract value.

Figure 5 summarizes how the size of the shadow economy varies by sector, showing that the size of the shadow economy in all sectors is close to 40% or more. For instance, the survey in Kyrgyzstan showed that in 2018 the shadow economy permeated 50% of wholesale and 47.1% of the manufacturing sector. The results are staggering also in the retail (46,3%), services (43.4%), and construction sectors (38%). The miscellanea category covered by all the others is affected at 33%.

Figure 6 shows that shadow activity in Russia and Ukraine is not a phenomenon that can only be observed in relatively small companies. Even though the shadow economy is relatively low in companies that employ 6-10 employees in Russia and 61-100 employees in Ukraine, in all other groups, we find the level of the shadow economy close to 40% and higher.

The Influence of Attitudes and Beliefs on Shadow Economic Activity

Rational-choice theory of crime, applied to tax evasion, argues that individuals decide whether to evade taxes by weighing up the expected

[26] William J. Baumol, "Entrepreneurship: Productive, Unproductive, and Destructive," *Journal of Business Venturing* 11, no. 1 (1996): 3-22.

[27] Magnus Henrekson and Tino Sanandaji, "The Interaction of Entrepreneurship and Institutions," *Journal of Institutional Economics* 7, no. 1 (2011): 47-75.

benefits of not paying taxes on the one hand against the risk of being caught and the penalties if caught on the other.[28] Thus, we include additional questions about entrepreneurs' perceptions of the likelihood of being caught for underreporting business profits, number of employees, salaries, and bribery involvement. We also ask entrepreneurs to evaluate potential consequences for the firm if it were caught for deliberate misreporting. Figures 7 and 8 summarize the results on perceived probabilities of being caught and expected consequences. Despite the high figures suggesting that informality is widely present in the region, many entrepreneurs in Russia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan perceive the risk of being caught when underreporting income, salaries, and employees as relatively high (Figure 7).

Regarding consequences, only approximately one-third of respondents in Russia and Ukraine expect the penalty to be a severe fine that would impact competitiveness, while 55% of Kyrgyz businesses believed that the consequences would be substantial (Figure 8).

Tax Morale

Existing empirical evidence suggests that higher levels of tax morale lead to less involvement in tax evasion.[29] Thus, smaller shadow economies at the aggregate level. Tax morale is usually defined as a moral obligation to pay taxes and "a belief in contributing to society by paying taxes."[30] Figures 9 and 10 present the results related to tax morale. In summary, entrepreneurs in Russia have an "average" tax morale of 2.4 to 2.8 (on a scale from 1-5, where 1 is very high tax morale and 5 is very low tax morale). Approximately 40% of respondents in Russia are highly tolerant of bribery. This relatively high tolerance for bribery may explain (at least to some extent) the fairly high levels of bribery in Russia

[28] Michael G. Allingham and Agnar Sandmo, "Income Tax Evasion: A Theoretical Analysis," *Taxation: Critical Perspectives on the World Economy* 3, no. 1 (1972): 323-338.

[29] Michael Pickhardt and Aloys Prinz, "Behavioral Dynamics of Tax Evasion – A Survey," *Journal of Economic Psychology* 40 (2014): 1-19.

[30] Benno Torgler and Friedrich Schneider, "The Impact of Tax Morale and Institutional Quality on the Shadow Economy," *Journal of Economic Psychology* 30, no. 2 (2009): 228-245.

compared to other countries. In Ukraine, interviewees seem less forgiving of tax evasion, with 75.7% believing it is unacceptable. However, tax avoidance is acknowledged as the most tolerated practice.

When Kyrgyz respondents were asked if they believed that other companies would consider tax avoidance an acceptable behavior, 30.9% disagreed, and 23.5% strongly disagreed with the statement. However, when asked to express themselves whether tax avoidance was a legitimate behavior, 38% agreed, and 45.2% disagreed, corroborating the suggestion that a certain behavior seems more unacceptable when performed by others, but, when you are concerned in the first person, one can always find a moral justification, a finding also remarked for Ukrainian entrepreneurs.[31]

Satisfaction Degree toward the Government and Tax Authority

An increasing number of studies show that trust in public officials, as well as entrepreneurs' satisfaction with tax policies and business legislation, are among the factors that foster higher tax compliance and a greater willingness to report corruption.[32] When entrepreneurs believe an institution is unfair or unbeneficial, they might try to evade its effect or move to change it through institutional entrepreneurship.[33] Accordingly, we measure firms' attitudes using four questions about their satisfaction with the State Revenue Service, the Government's tax policy, business legislation, and state support for entrepreneurs. Our findings suggest that firms in all three countries are more satisfied with the State Revenue

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31 Abel Polese, "Informal Payments in Ukrainian Hospitals: On the Boundary Between Informal Payments, Gifts, and Bribes," *Anthropological Forum* 24, no. 4 (2014): 381-395.

32 Chiara Amini, Elodie Douarin and Tim Hinks, "Individualism and Attitudes Towards Reporting Corruption: Evidence from Post-communist Economies," *Journal of Institutional Economics* 18, no. 1 (2022): 85-100; Sofie Marien and Marc Hooghe, "Does Political Trust Matter? An Empirical Investigation into the Relation Between Political Trust and Support for Law Compliance," *European Journal of Political Research* 50, no. 2 (2011): 267-291; Eugen Dimant and Thorben Schulte, "The Nature of Corruption: An Interdisciplinary Perspective," *German Law Journal* 17, no. 1 (2016): 53-72.

33 Magnus Henrekson and Tino Sanandaji, "The Interaction of Entrepreneurship and Institutions," *Journal of Institutional Economics* 7, no. 1 (2011): 47-75.

Service and less satisfied with the Government's support for entrepreneurs (Figure 11). Overall satisfaction with the Government and the tax system is relatively low, which may explain (at least to some extent) the fairly high levels of the shadow economy.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this article, we have examined the dynamics of the shadow economy in Russia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan from 2017 to 2018 and identified the primary elements that impact entrepreneurs' participation in the shadow economy. When surveying the region, it is easy to gather the impression that the shadow economy is ubiquitous.[34] This is misleading in at least two ways. First, analysts and practitioners often advise local governments based on ultimate models of institutions and practices that exist only in an ideal world but not necessarily in any country, regardless of its development. By doing this, they deceive local elites into thinking that the proposed model represents a blanket solution for everything and is feasible. Yes, the experience of countries with smaller shadow economy sizes tells us that it is possible to reduce it, but there is no evidence that informality, as a broader phenomenon also considering non-monetary transactions, will be reduced. This is also, inter alia, depending on the way state-citizen and state-society relationship are constructed.[35]

Business reputation, power relations in an office, or even elite politics are largely based on informal relations between concerned actors. In large companies, posts demanding a high degree of responsibility (*i.e.*, the top manager of a large corporation) are rarely distributed through open

[34] Leyla Sayfutdinova, "Post-Soviet Small Businesses in Azerbaijan: The Legacies of the Soviet Second Economy," *Caucasus Survey* 5, no. 1 (2017): 11-26; Kristof Van Assche, Anastasiya Shtaltovna and Anna-Katharina Hornidge, "Visible and Invisible Informalities and Institutional Transformation in the Transition Countries of Georgia, Romania, and Uzbekistan," in *Informality in Eastern Europe*, eds. Christian Giordano and Nicolas Hayoz (Bern: Peter Lang, 2013), 89-118.

[35] Ruth Dukes and Wolfgang Streeck, "From Industrial Citizenship to Private Ordering? Contract, Status, and the Question of Consent," *MPIfG Discussion Paper*, no. 20/13 (2020): 1-42; Wolfgang Streeck, "Taking Capitalism Seriously: Towards an Institutionalist Approach to Contemporary Political Economy," *Socio-Economic Review* 9, no. 1 (2011): 137-167.

competition. It is more likely that an informal pre-selection would take place, and current managers would have to propose someone they see as trustworthy.

Traditional shadow economy measurements allow quantifying some socio-economic phenomena correlated with low state efficiency.[36] To be able to address a deficiency in governance, it is essential to understand why people engage in such behavior.[37] By understanding their motives, incentives can be identified and used to enhance compliance by the citizens.[38] This is where informality (theory) may help better understand how things work in a region or a particular situation. We calculated the level of the shadow economy in the country as a share of the GDP, thus mostly in economic terms while taking into account non-monetary practices. Acknowledging informality means accepting that human agency plays a significant role in public policy and state management and suggests two things.[39]

First, work on trust. If citizens trust their state, and in turn, the state has reasonable claims, they are more likely to abide by the state's instructions. The other is to stop being obsessed with informality, which is not bad per se. Informality can help people deal with a situation where formal rules do not apply and where they don't have any previous knowledge of how to solve a given case. The problem arises when informality systematically replaces formal rules and affects state capacity at the macro level.[40]

Second, what we know about informality could be combined and used to improve the quality of governance. We do not suggest that

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36 Ruslan Dzarasov, *The Conundrum of Russian Capitalism: The Post-Soviet Economy in the World System* (London: Pluto Press, 2014); Tobias Holzlehner, "Shadow Networks: Border Economies, Informal Markets, and Organized Crime in Vladivostok and the Russian Far East," (PhD diss., University of Alaska Fairbanks, 2006), http://hdl.handle.net/11122/8913.

37 Jake Fleming, "Toward Vegetal Political Ecology: Kyrgyzstan's Walnut–fruit Forest and the Politics of Graftability," *Geoforum* 79 (2017): 26-35; Olga Sasunkevich, "«But I liked it, I liked it:» Revealing Agentive Aspects of Women's Engagement in Informal Economy on the EU External borders," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 26, no. 2 (2019): 117-131.

38 Christian Schubert, "Exploring the (Behavioural) Political Economy of Nudging," *Journal of Institutional Economics* 13, no. 3 (2017): 499-522.

39 Ruth Dukes and Wolfgang Streeck, "Labour Constitutions and Occupational Communities: Social Norms and Legal Norms at Work," *Journal of Law and Society* 47, no. 4 (2020): 612-638.

40 Amartya Sen, Master Amartya Sen, James E. Foster, Sen Amartya and James E. Foster, *On Economic Inequality*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

coercion or tighter controls will not work.[41] But they will be more effective when combined with measures reinstating trust in the state and making entrepreneurs feel part of a community, addressing their responsibility and contributing to their society's development.[42]

Evidence suggests that economic damage resulting from high levels of informality has been best reduced only by prompting changes in individual (and then societal) behavior and attitudes towards the state.[43] This has included creating incentives to re-channel shadow companies and activities into more legal spheres of the economy and offering attractive opportunities in the formal economy to informal workers. Morality is contextual and the overlapping of individual, societal, and state morality is not automatic but rather the result of the efforts by a state to create the conditions to encourage its citizens to comply with state morality.[44]

The main question here is not "what is the size of the shadow economy." There is no real difference if the final calculations show 30 or 40%. What is essential is that the shadow economy occupies a significant share of the daily economy, is composed of widely spread practices, and affects state capacity. As a corollary, and possibly even more critical, interventions should consider the socio-cultural and policy elements that have led to an increase in the shadow economy. This is not necessarily

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41 Ricciuti, Roberto, Antonio Savoi and Kunal Sen, "How do political institutions affect fiscal capacity? Explaining taxation in developing economies," *Journal of Institutional Economics* 15, no. 2 (2019): 351-380.

42 Amartya Sen, "Maximization and the Act of Choice," *Econometrica: Journal of the Econometric Society* (1997): 745-779; Thomas Piketty, "Hypercapitalism: Between Modernity and Archaism," in *Capital and Ideology*, ed. Thomas Piketty (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020), 648-716; Thomas Piketty, "Capital and Ideology," in *Capital and Ideology*, ed. Thomas Piketty (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020), 862-966.

43 Rustamjon Urinboyev, "Migration and Transnational Informality in Post-Soviet Societies: Ethnographic Study of Po Rukam ('Handshake') Experiences of Uzbek Migrant Workers in Moscow," in *Migrant Workers in Russia*, eds. Anna-Liisa Heusala and Kaarina Aitamurtopp, (London: Routledge, 2016), 80-103; Balihar Sanghera, "The Moral Economy of Post-Socialist Capitalism: Professionals, Rentiers and Fraud," in *Neoliberalism and the Moral Economy of Fraud*, eds. David Whyte and Jörg Wiegratz (London: Routledge, 2016), 57-71.

44 Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. J. G. Richardson (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 241-258; Pierre Bourdieu, *The Social Structures of the Economy* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005).

visible through indirect methods but becomes more understandable when we consider informality as "the act of bypassing the state." Informality is here to stay, but what we can try to influence are the aspects of public life in which informality stays.[45]

Therefore, we, hope that our work can be a starting point for a new stream of investigations about the motifs behind informal behavior and that can allow identifying possible ways to improve public governance.[46] Deviation from state morality is common in most societies and results in criminal or antisocial behavior. However, when a vast portion of the citizens, or whole segments of a population, do not manage to comply with these rules, this should prompt a reflection. Are we observing a special population where deviation from standards is higher because people are particularly evil-oriented? Or simply, the state is asking for too much (or too fast or with no clear instructions) for things people cannot give in the short run or that conflict with what citizens can offer. The question initially asked by James C. Scott in his studies on the moral economy is of utmost relevance to debates on the welfare state.[47]

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45 Morris, Jeremy, and Abel Polese, "Conclusion: Agency Strikes Back? Quo Vadis Informality?" *Informal Economies in Post-socialist Spaces: Practices, Institutions and Networks* (2015): 294-299.

46 Nils C. Köbis, Daniel Iragorri-Carter and Christopher Starke, "A Social Psychological View on the Social Norms of Corruption," *Corruption and Norms: Why Informal Rules Matter* (2018): 31-52; Roberta Muramatsu and Ana Maria Bianchi, "Behavioral Economics of Corruption and Its Implications," *Brazilian Journal of Political Economy* 41 (2021): 100-116.

47 James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant Subsistence and Rebellion in Southeast Asia*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976).

Annexes

Table 1

Main tendencies of informality in the Eurasian region

Classic	Contribution to debates
Corruption	In addition to bribing, informal payments have shed light on the personal side of economic relations that sometimes drifts into activities simplistically classified as "corrupted"
Shadow economy	In addition to attempts to measure shadow economies, some regional studies have tested novel measurement methodologies
Informal governance	Before and after the "corruption line" there are activities that depend on inter-personal relations that influence top or mid-range politics
State-citizen relations, dependency and the everyday	Citizens not respecting the rules, or engaging in illegal activities, can be seen as attempting to survive, boycotting, or protesting the state

Source: adapted from Polese 2019.[1]

Table 2

Size of the shadow economy[2]

Country	2018	2017	2017-2018
Russia	44.7% (42.4%, 46.9%)	45.8% (43.4%, 48.1%)	-1.1% (-1, -1.2)
Ukraine	38.2% (35.3%, 41.2%)	38.5% (35.5%, 41.5%)	-0.3% (-0.2, -0.3)
Kyrgyzstan	44.5% (40.9%, 48.1%)	46.1% (42.4%, 49.6%)	-1.6% (-1.5, -1.5)

Source: This table was made by the authors based on the analyzed collected data.

[1] Abel Polese. "Informality in Ukraine and beyond: one name, different flavours... with a cheer for the Global Encyclopaedia of Informality" (2019), accessed Mai 21, 2022, https://www.in-formality.com/wiki/index.php?title=Informality_in_Ukraine_and_beyond:_one_name,_different_flavours...with_a_cheer_for_the_Global_Encyclopaedia_of_Informality

[2] The size of the shadow economies as a percentage of GDP is calculated using point estimates and 95 percent confidence intervals in this table. The last column shows the shadow economy's proportional size change from 2018 to 2017.

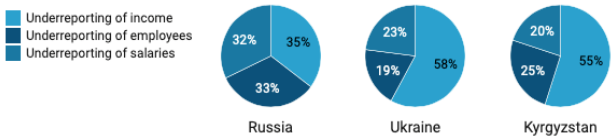

Figure 1. Components of the shadow economy, 2018
Source: This table was made by the authors based on the analyzed collected data.

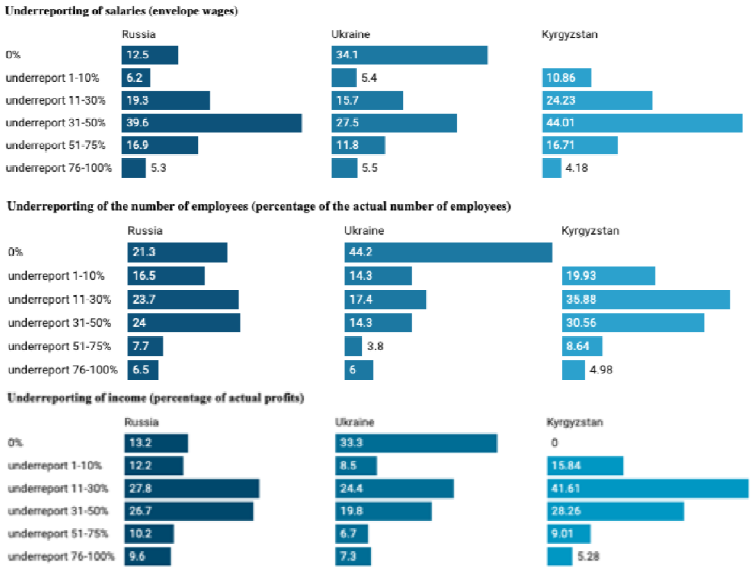

Figure 2. Underreporting of income (percentage of actual profits), underreporting of the number of employees, and underreporting of salaries, 2018
Source: This table was made by the authors based on the analyzed collected data.

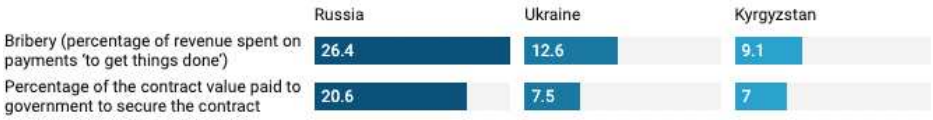

Figure 3. Bribery (percentage of revenue spent on payments "to get things done") and percentage of the contract value paid to the government to secure the contract, 2018
Source: This table was made by the authors based on the analyzed collected data.

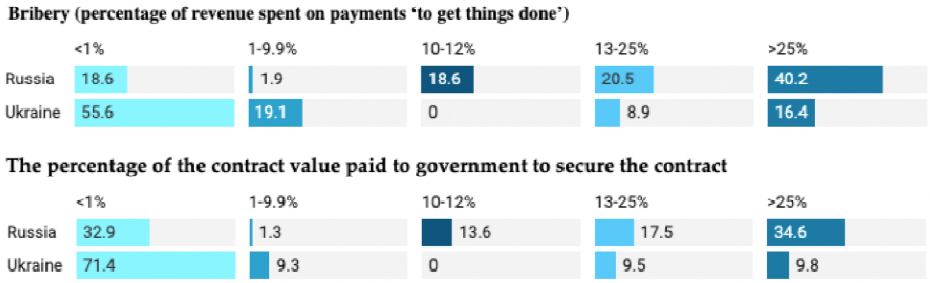

Figure 4. Bribery (percentage of revenue spent on payments "to get things done") and percentage of the contract value paid to the government to secure the contract, 2018
Source: This table was made by the authors based on the analyzed collected data.

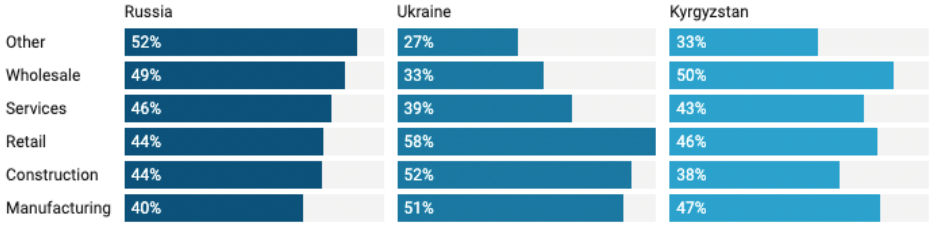

Figure 5. Size of the shadow economy (% of GDP) by sectors, 2018
Source: This table was made by the authors based on the analyzed collected data.

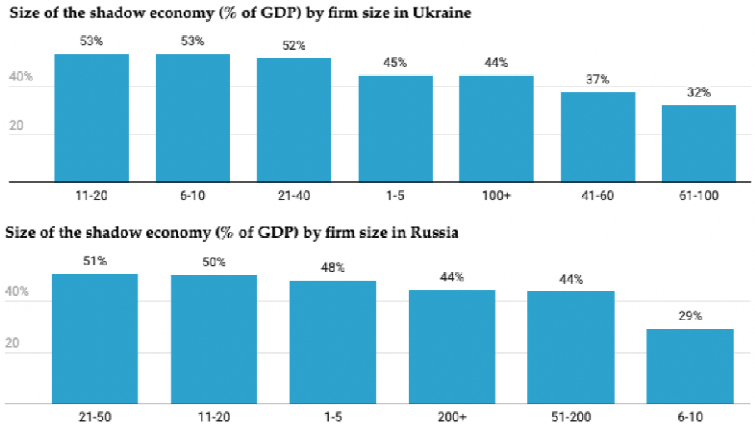

Figure 6. Size of the shadow economy (% of GDP) by firm size (number of employees), 2018
Source: This table was made by the authors based on the analyzed collected data.

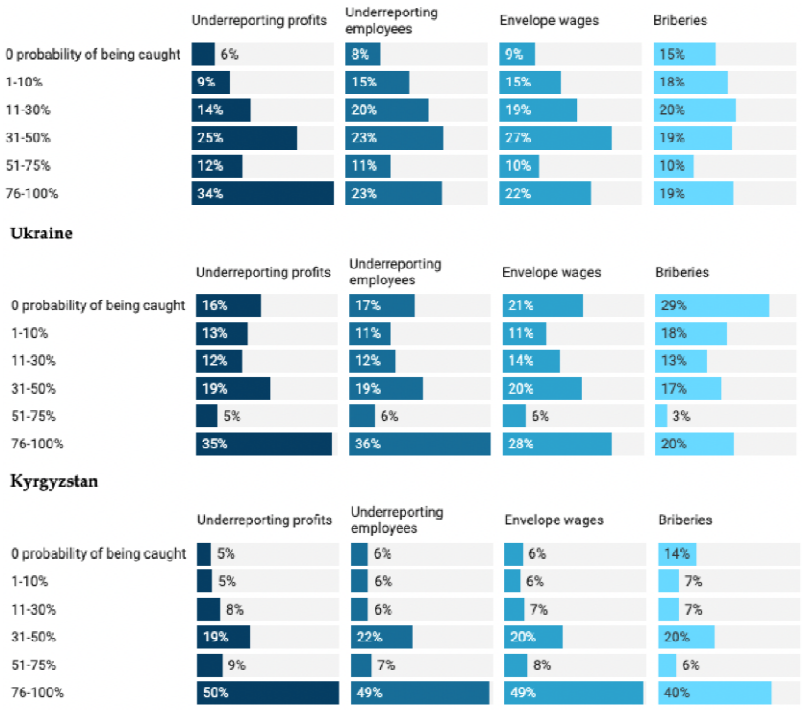

Figure 7. Business people's perceptions of the chances of being caught, 2018
Source: This table was made by the authors based on the analyzed collected data.

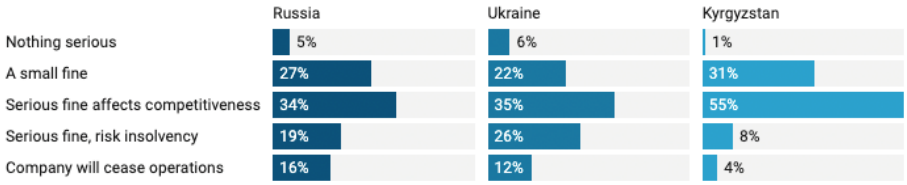

Figure 8. Most likely consequences if caught deliberately underreporting, 2018
Source: This table was made by the authors based on the analyzed collected data.

Figure 9. Tax morale, 2018
Source: This table was made by the authors based on the analyzed collected data.

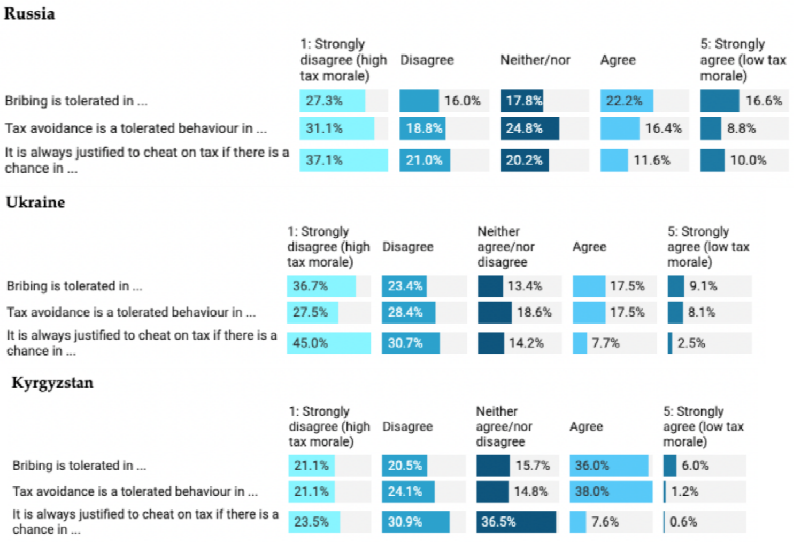

Figure 10. Tax morale: the distribution of responses, 2018
Source: This table was made by the authors based on the analyzed collected data.

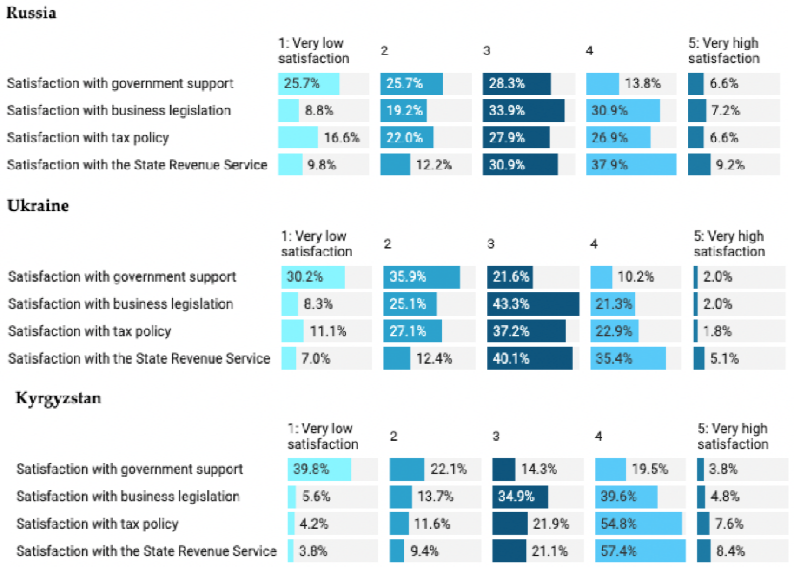

Figure 11. Satisfaction with the State Revenue Service, the government's tax policy, the quality of business legislation, and with government's support for entrepreneurs, 2018
Source: This table was made by the authors based on the analyzed collected data.

DOI: 10.62229/sprps23-1/4

SOFT POWER PROJECTION OF ASPIRING MIDDLE EASTERN POWERS TOWARDS YEMEN: THE CASE OF THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA AND IRAN

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Abstract. The multiple hard power engagements of the aspiring Middle East powers (the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Iran) in Yemen are self-evident. However, the disposition of foreign interference in Yemen is multifaced. Current research papers have primarily focused on using hard power military or economic tools, but soft power tools were left behind. Therefore, this article explores soft power's nature influencing the countries above assert towards the Yemeni population. It focused on three ostensibly distinct areas of soft power – education, religion, and media – within each particular analysis since those three areas are key elements of the Saudi and Iranian soft-power toolkit. Multiple religious, educational, and media tools towards Yemen were detected in each case.

Keywords: Yemen, Yemeni Civil War, Middle East, The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Iran, soft power, soft power tools, media, education, religion.

Introduction

Even though the civil war in Yemen belongs to the category of the most recent and still ongoing conflicts, it seems like there is not so strong political, public, and – to a lesser extent – academic interest in it, as it is

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the case with different events in the Arab world.[1] The reasons explaining the lack of interest can be found on multiple levels. Firstly, in the Middle East, there are already conflicts that attract worldwide attention – wars in Syria and Libya. Moreover, if we step out of the Middle East context, the war in Ukraine has drawn the attention of the Euro-Atlantic World. Secondly, Yemen is not considered a key regional actor. In comparison to Middle Eastern major players, it lacks size and sufficient natural resources. In the eyes of international actors, these characteristics potentially make it less significant. However, this statement cannot be applied to the other actors in the region. Even though Yemen's general description is still the same, their view of the whole situation is different. The war in Yemen represents one of many events (as an example of other events, we can mention the Arab Spring, the war in Syria, Qatar's situation, etc.) that have the power to reshape the geopolitical order in the Middle East. It can also be seen as an opportunity to solidify the aspiring Middle Eastern Powers' position in the region by widening the regional geopolitical influence.[2]

Since the beginning of the Yemen crisis, significant focus has been on the manner in which Iran and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) have done in terms of the use of hard power tools. In the case of Yemen, both the academic and non-academic sphere is often preoccupied with research concerning "hard" power.[3] The reasons behind this are quite

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1 Amanda Taub, "Why Some Wars (Like Syria's) Get More Attention Than Others (Like Yemen's)," *New York Times*, March 8, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/02/world/why-some-wars-like-syrias-get-more-attention-than-others-like-yemens.html; Matthias Von Hein and Oliver Pieper, "War in Yemen: 'The World Isn't Paying Enough Attention,'" *DW*, December 11, 2017, https://www.dw.com/en/war-in-yemen-the-world-isnt-paying-enough-attention/a-41750040; Annie Slemrod, "Why Does No One Care about Yemen?,'" *New Humanitarian*, February 11, 2016, https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2016/02/11/why-does-no-one-care-about-yemen.

2 Marek Čejka, "Rozkrytá spojenectví, probuzené spory. Na Blízkém východě vzniká nový geopolitický řád" [ANALYSIS: Uncovered alliances, awakened conflicts. New geopolitical order is being created in the Middle East], ČT24, March 26, 2018, https://ct24.ceskatelevize.cz/svet/2429767-analyza-rozkryta-spojenectvi-probuzene-spory-na-blizkem-vychode-vznika-novy.

3 May Darwich, "The Saudi Intervention in Yemen: Struggling for Status," *Insight Turkey* 20, no. 2 (2018): 125-142; Merve Akin, *A Self-Defeating War: Merve Akın Regional Powers and Local Actors in Yemen* (Washington, DC: Research Centre, TRT World, 2019); Seed Al-Batati,

obvious. Hard power is easily approachable.[4] Simply said, tanks, soldiers, and the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) are visible, traceable, and countable. Most scholars continue to analyze the hard power tools since they serve as "rough but reliable" sources of power being easily available in databases.[5] On the contrary, the "second face of power" – soft power – is often overlooked. Due to its character, soft power does not create extensive interest among scholars. However, as several scholars state, it is first of all a crucial element of national influence, secondly more advantageous to use due to low input costs, and thirdly it implies a significant venture to understand it.[6]

Soft power is a part of the foreign policies of both Iran and Saudi Arabia. For example, Iran uses soft power in Iraq and Syria, while Saudi Arabia operates with it in Indonesia.[7] Various works suggest that their strategy toward Yemen includes also soft power.[8] The aforementioned

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"Iran's arms shipments to Houthis el war in Yemen, experts say," *Arab News*, June 30, 2020, https://www.arabnews.com/node/1697466/middle-east.

4 Gregory Treverton and Seth Jones, *Measuring National Power* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2005), xi.

5 Michael Beckley, "The Power of Nations: Measuring What Matters," *International Security* 42, no. 2 (2018): 7-44.

6 Giulio Gallarotti, "Soft Power: What it is, Why it's Important, and the Conditions Under Which it Can Be Effectively Used," *Division II Faculty Publications,* Paper 57 (2011): 1–51; Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004); Joseph Nye, "The Benefits of Soft Power," Harvard Business School, February 8, 2004, https://hbswk.hbs.edu/archive/the-benefits-of-soft-power; Colin Grey, *Hard Power And Soft Power: The Utility of Military Force as an Instrument of Policy in the 21st Century* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 2011).

7 Ahmad Majidyar, "Iran's soft power: Islamic Azad University opening branches in major Syrian and Iraqi cities," *Middle East Institute*, March 1, 2018, https://www.mei.edu/publications/irans-soft-power-islamic-azad-university-opening-branches-major-syrian-and-iraqi; Carolyn Nash, "Saudi Arabia's Soft Power Strategy in Indonesia," *Middle East Institute*, April 3, 2018, https://www.mei.edu/publications/saudi-arabias-soft-power-strategy-indonesia.

8 Ali Al-Dahab, *Regional conflict over Yemen: Agendas and outcomes* (Doha: Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, 2020); Katarzyna Czornik, "Hard and Soft Power in Saudi Arabia's Foreign Policy in the Second Half of the 21st Century. The Case of Bahrain and Yemen," *Stosunki Międzynarodowe – International Relations* 52, no. 1 (2016): 189-210; Jonathan Fenton-Harvey, "Saudi Arabia's Soft Power Strategy in Yemen," *Carnegie Endowment*, April 2, 2019, https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/78749.

works are successful in naming which tools Iran and the KSA use but without developing much on the subject, the analytical dimension is often missing as they limit to mere description. However, to understand the role of soft power in Yemen and why it is used, we assume it is vital to analyze particular soft power tools Iran and the KSA deploy. By doing so, we should be able to detect how are those tools used and what they are supposed to achieve.

The article aims to analyze which soft power tools connected to religion, education, and media the KSA and Iran project towards Yemen, but without seeking to map and analyze all soft-power tools both of the aforementioned countries use in Yemen. Such an approach would, in connection to the extent of this paper, lead to vague results. The research will, therefore, mainly focus on specific soft power tools connected to religion, education, and media (examples of such tools are mentioned in the part below). The selection of these "areas" of soft power was driven by a combination of more factors. On one hand their undeniable importance for any state and society (more on that below). Secondly, their mutual interconnection, especially in the Middle East. Thirdly, the availability of the source material. Thus, the goal of this article is to detect the aforementioned soft power tools, analyze them, and subsequently uncover why they are used, i.e. what both KSA and Iran want to achieve.

This article explored that KSA and Iran use particular religious, educational, and media soft power to their advantage in the Yemeni war. The analysis has shown Iran's strategy is more complex and elaborate, including a major focus on education. The KSA concentrates more on hard power activities, whereas Iran uses the Yemeni war to present itself as a leader of all Arabs in comparison to the KSA's effort to balance Iran. Furthermore, on one hand, Iran's strategy is not only to balance the KSA but also to present itself as a viable leader of the Arab world. On the other hand, since the KSA focuses more on hard power activities, their soft power ones aim more to balance Iran than to promote Saudi Arabia. Lastly, interconnection and mutual reinforcement of the analysed soft power areas since both KSA and Iran use them to a greater or lesser extent.

Regarding the structure of the article, first, we present why soft power tools can be the basis of the foreign policy toolkit and what role is

played by religion, education, and media. In the second part, the research design of the article is developed. Consequently, we analyze the soft power tools connected to religion, education, and media used by the KSA and Iran in Yemen.

Religious, Educational, and Media Soft Power Tools as the Basis of the Foreign Policy Toolkit

The term *soft power* became important right after it was coined by Joseph Nye more than three decades ago. Nye wanted to express the double-faced nature of power and showed that the USA had *another* type of power beyond the military and economic one.[9] Since then, the term has evolved and even included military and economic power. For example, Nye himself stated that the economic dimension is "hybrid" and also belongs among soft power policy tools.[10]

To better understand how soft power is used, it is important to define soft power tools. Those tools constitute "the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion and payment."[11] They are also frequently associated with intangible factors like institutions, ideas, values, culture, and perceived legitimacy of policies.[12] On the contrary, hard power tools draw on the use of a "policy of coercion resting on a threat of use and/or use of military force against a given country."[13] It is important to point out that both hard and soft power tools have the same objective but different ways how to achieve it.

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9 Eric Li, "The Rise and Fall of Soft Power," *Foreign Policy*, August 20, 2018, https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/08/20/the-rise-and-fall-of-soft-power/.

10 Joseph Nye, "Hard, Soft, and Smart Power," in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy*, eds. Andrew F. Cooper, Jorge Heine and Ramesh Thakur (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 4.

11 Joseph Nye, "Public Diplomacy and Soft Power," *Academy of Political and Social Science* 616, no. 1 (2008): 95.

12 Joseph Nye, "Hard, Soft, and Smart Power," 4.

13 Olga G. Leonova, "Soft Power as a State's Foreign Policy Resource," *Globalistics and Globalization Studies* (2014): 4.

Concerning the Middle East and especially Yemen as a proxy war between the two aspiring regional powers, we tend to perceive the importance of religion, education, and media as one of the building blocks of each power's strategy. Moreover, according to many scholars, the analyzed soft power areas belong among the key sources of soft power itself. Hence, those three concepts will be defined below.[14]

With regards to religion, according to Natalia Paunic, both Iran and the KSA perceive religion as a key soft power source since they position themselves as leaders of Shi'a, respectively Sunni Islam.[15] This strategy is heavily influenced by the role of Islam in the Middle East. It manifests in not only the ordinary life of people, but also in the political, social, and cultural ones. For illustration, according to the estimation (since there are no official statistics), more than 99% of the Yemeni population is Muslim, with approximately 55–65% being Sunni Muslims and 35–45% Zaydi (Shi'a) Muslims.[16] There are various existing religious soft power tools. However, the most imminent examples of what is considered to be religious tools according to the current scholarship are the following: the construction of mosques, celebrations of religious events, renovations of religious places, or activities of imams (speeches, social media activities).[17]

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[14] Joseph Nye, "Public diplomacy and soft power;" Irene S. Wu, "Soft Power Amidst Great Power Competition," *Wilson Center*, May, 2018, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/2018-05-soft_power_-_wu.pdf; Ansgar Jödicke, *Religion and Soft Power in the South Cau*casus (London: Routledge, 2018); Zikun Yang and Li Li, "Positioning Religion in International Relations: The Performative, Discursive, and Relational Dimension of Religious Soft Power," *Religions* 12, no. 940 (2021): 21–23; Terry Flew, "Entertainment media, cultural power, and post-globalization: The case of China's international media expansion and the discourse of soft power," *SAGE Journals* 1, no. 4 (2016): 278–294.

[15] Natalia Paunic, "The Rising Shi'a Crescent: Iranian Smart Power and Implications for the Middle East, Central Asia, and the Persian Gulf," *Carleton Review of International Affairs* 3 (2016): 71.

[16] U.S. Department of State, "2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Yemen," undated, https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/yemen.

[17] Yasmine Farouk and Nathan J. Brown, *Saudi Arabia's Religious Reforms Are Touching Nothing but Changing Everything* (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment For International Peace, 2021); Frederic Wehre, *Islamic Institutions in Arab States: Mapping the Dynamics of Control, Co-option, and Contention* (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment For

Education is another significant element. For example, Romy Haber mentions how Houthis, a Shia group fighting the Sunni Yemeni government, engaged themselves in education to use it as a possible tool to gain control over future generations.[18] Moreover, Aigerim Raimzhanova clearly states that education is one of the most effective resources of the soft power toolkit when influencing populations.[19] Prime examples of educational soft power tools are the production and distribution of culturally specific exercise books, the training of teachers, student exchange programs, and the curriculums modifications.[20]

The media world (TV channels, social media, radio, and so forth) is also seen as a key area of soft power since it can be used to easily spread specific worldviews to masses of people and thus influence them accordingly. Steve B. Rothman stated that the actor is considered very powerful at influencing the locals once the actor dominates in the media discourse.[21] For example, Massoumeh Torfeh points out the important role of media in Iran's soft power strategy in the region of the Middle East, especially in Iraq and Syria.[22] Media tools can be constituted of self-promoting TV and radio production, newspaper distribution, and regime-supporting social sites campaigns.

The aforementioned soft power areas are also mutually reinforced and interconnected. This statement holds true, especially in the Middle East, where religion, as stated above, plays a crucial role in every aspect

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International Peace, 2021); Nina Shea, *Saudi Publications On Hate Ideology Invade American Mosques* (Washington D.C.: Center for Religious Freedom Freedom House, 2005); Anthony Chase, *Routledge Handbook on Human Rights and the Middle East and North Africa* (London: Routledge, 2016).

18 Romy Haber, "The Houthis and the Hijacking of Yemen's Education Sector," *The Euro-Gulf Information Centre*, February 9, 2021, https://www.egic.info/houthis-hijacking-education-yemen.

19 Aigerim Raimzhanova, *Power in IR: Hard, Soft, and Smart* (Bucharest: Institute for Cultural Diplomacy and the University of Bucharest, 2015), 15-16.

20 William Racimora, *Salafist/Wahhabite Financial Support to Educational, Social and Religious Institutions* (Brussels: Policy Department DG External Policies, 2013); Anthony Chase, *Routledge Handbook on Human Rights and the Middle East and North Africa*; Ann E. McDougall, *Engaging with a Legacy: Nehemia Levtzion (1935-2003)* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

21 Steve B. Rothman, "Revising the Soft Power Concept: What Are the Means and Mechanisms of Soft Power?," *Journal of Political Power* 4, no. 1 (2011): 60.

22 Massoumeh Torfeh, *The Role of Iran's Regional Media in its Soft War Policy* (Doha: Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, 2017).

of human life. Therefore, religious, educational, and media soft power tools represent a powerful combination if used together.

Research Design

In the part above, we discussed the variety and importance of soft power tools which are often neglected when studying the conflict in Yemen. Therefore, this article aims to analyze what religious, educational, and media tools are used by KSA and Iran in order to project their soft power towards Yemen and how they potentially differ. The timeframe of this paper coincides with the Yemeni crisis which started in 2011. Nevertheless, for contextual purposes, we may sometimes get out of the aforementioned period.

The empirical outcomes will strictly focus on religious, educational, and media activities carried out by the KSA and Iran or via affiliated intra-state actors. We will use the theoretical framework outlined above where the tools are described in detail. We would also like to clarify how we will differentiate religious, educational, and media soft power tools from others, particularly economic ones. In general, we are interested in every soft power tool connected to the areas of religion, education, and media. If there is uncertainty about whether a specific tool falls under cited areas, we will use the purpose of the tool at hand as a decisive criterium. For example, a mosque construction can be seen as both an economic and religious soft power tool. However, the purpose of the construction is more likely to be religious (attempt to spread Islam, specific information, etc.) than economic one. Therefore, such activity would be assessed as a religious tool. Furthermore, if a tool exhibits signs of more than one of analysed soft power areas, the decisive criterium will be proportionality. For example, the provision of a religious educational program certified by the university can be seen as both a religious and educational soft power tool. However, even though the program concerns religion, it is an educational program provided by the university. As proportionally it has more in common with education than religion, it belongs to the area of education. If a teacher or university professor gives religious lectures in the mosque, such activity would be seen as a religious one.

We also acknowledge the role of intra-state actors, not necessarily officially affiliated with the KSA and Iran, who can indirectly project the Saudi and Iranian soft power tools. This is especially the role of local preachers who could have been influenced by Saudi and Iranian values in the past and now they disseminate them in Yemen, independently of the aforementioned states' official governments.

In terms of the methodology, we present a qualitative exploratory case study to develop an initial understanding of the use of soft power tools used by the KSA and Iran in Yemen. We will primarily use the so-called secondary research methods of open-source intelligence research, literature research, qualitative content, context and text analysis. The source base includes academic journals, media articles, and governmental and non-governmental policy papers. If possible, we use data triangulation to ensure the accuracy of information. This approach is especially important with regard to the existence of propaganda connected to the Yemeni war.[23]

In the following section, we will present two case studies. Each one of them will analyze religious, educational, and media soft power tools used towards Yemen. In conclusion, we will sum up the particular tools used by each of the case studies and present them area by area – religious, educational, and lastly media tools.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

To better understand the KSA's role in Yemen, it is essential to mention that it is not circumstantial. Instead, Saudi soft power tools are part of the broader framework of the KSA's current foreign policy which focuses on fostering stability and security.[24] Additionally, it can be considered that the conflict in Yemen represents a proxy war not only for the KSA, but also for Iran – Saudi Arabia's regional rival. Therefore,

[23] See Elisabeth J. Wood, "The Ethical Challenges Field Research in Conflict Zones," *Qualitative Sociology* 29, no. 3 (2006): 373-383.

[24] Turki Al-Saud, "Saudi Arabia's Foreign Policy," MEPC, October 22, 2013, https://mepc.org/saudi-arabias-foreign-policy; Arlinda Rrustemi, Rob De Wijk and Connor Dunlop, *Geopolitical Influences of External Powers in the Western Balkans* (Hague: The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, 2019).

the Yemeni war provides the KSA with an opportunity to lessen Iranian influence over the Middle East and increase its own.[25] As depicted above, that is why it is not very easy to identify which vectors run the KSA's ambitions in war-torn Yemen. Given these reasons, the KSA tries to limit the influence of other external actors.[26]

Religious soft power tools play a crucial role in the KSA's foreign policy due to the fact that KSA is the world protagonist of the Wahhabism – version of Sunni Islam. Whereas Wahhabism is a key Saudi regional concept, it is necessary to shortly introduce it to better comprehend the following analysis. Wahhabism became the fundamental creed of KSA in 1932, and since then, Wahhabism has shaped domestic and foreign policies and its thoughts have been spread through Saudi missionaries abroad.[27] Nevertheless, the KSA promoted Wahhabism globally for the first time in the 1970s.[28] Since that time, "Wahhabism's export has systematically inflicted on Muslim communities globally for at least two generations."[29] And Yemen is not an exception. Wahhabism was first introduced in Yemen in the 1980s by religious cleric Muqbil bin Hadi al-Wadi`I who gained his education at the Islamic University of Medina and was active in widening the thoughts of Wahhabism until his death in 2001.

In the Yemeni conflict context, Wahhabism has been introduced to thousands of Yemeni students either during their studies in the KSA or Yemen itself.[30] In order to support the Wahhabi influence, we found that Saudis operate via a specific institution to widen Wahhabism abroad – Special Office for Yemen Affairs founded by the late defense minister,

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25 Laura Hartmann, *Saudi Arabia as a Regional Actor: Threat Perception and Balancing at Home and Abroad* (Paris: SciencesPo, 2016).

26 Jonathan Fenton-Harvey, "Saudi Arabia's Soft Power Strategy in Yemen."

27 Carol E. B. Choksy and Jamsheed K. Choksy, "The Saudi Connection: Wahhabism and Global Jihad," *World Affairs* 178, no. 1 (2015): 23-34; Maysam Behravesh, "The Sectarian Dimension," *Dandc*, September 20, 2019, https://www.dandc.eu/en/article/both-iran-and-saudi-arabia-are-instrumentalising-religious-doctrines-political-purposes.

28 Hamad Albloshi, "Ideological Roots of the Ḥūthī Movement in Yemen," *Journal of Arabian Studies* 6, no. 2 (2016): 143-162.

29 John Hannah, "It's Time for Saudi Arabia to Stop Exporting Extremism," *Foreign Policy*, May 3, 2019, https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/05/03/its-time-for-saudi-arabia-to-stopexporting-extremism/.

30 Laurent Bonnefoy, "Deconstructing Salafism in Yemen," *CTC Sentinel 2*, no. 2 (2009): 1-3.

Prince Sultan. This special small royal committee reclaimed a wide network of contacts and informants to facilitate Saudi activities in Yemen. To be certain, the commission funded countless religious leaders since its annual budget is approximately $3,5 billion.[31] Besides this, the special royal committee has also supported politicians, tribal sheiks, religious leaders, and military officers.[32] However, after the death of Prince Sultan in 2011, the committee decreased its activity due to the alteration of the domestic situation in the KSA. And the House of Saud stopped the committee's financing operations, mainly given the lack of a clear strategy and coordination.[33] Nowadays, it appears that the Committee instead plays a marginalized role, but in the past, its work had significantly influenced the Yemeni population, who can pass Wahhabi thoughts to further generations.

Furthermore, some authors such as Andrew McDonell, Henry Burbridge, and Yara Z. Salloum argue that due to the extensive influence the KSA exercises, the KSA has become somehow enmeshed in Yemeni religious institutions that consequently cultivate the patronage of formal and informal networks that favor the Saudi-led intervention.[34] Besides, in 2015, Saudis stepped into the conflict with the nationalist narrative of the kingdom presenting itself as the defender of the 'Sunnis' in the region.[35]

When analyzing the KSA religious influence, we were confronted with various considerably followed (mainly through the social sites) clerics who spread their worldviews regarding Yemen. The first one, Saudi religious cleric and Muslim scholar Salman al-Awda noticeably influenced the religious as well as the social environment in the Arab

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31 Stig Stenslie, *Not Too Strong, Not Too Weak: Saudi Arabia's Policy Towards Yemen* (Oslo: NOREF, 2013).

32 Ibid.

33 Stig Stenslie, *Not Too Strong, Not Too Weak*; Ginny Hill and Gerd Nonneman, *Yemen, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States: Elite Politics, Street Protests and Regional Diplomacy* (London: Chatham House, 2011).

34 Andrew McDonnell, Henry Burbridge and Yara Z. Sallum, *Addressing Jihadi-Salafism in Yemen* (Washington, DC: International Center for Religion and Diplomacy, 2017).

35 Toby Matthiesen, *The Domestic Sources of Saudi Foreign Policy: Islamists and the State in the Wake of the Arab Uprisings* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institutions, 2015); Luíza G. Cerioli, "Roles and International Behaviour: Saudi-Iranian Rivalry in Bahrain's and Yemen's Arab Spring," *Contexto Internacional* 40, no. 2 (2018): 295-317.

world, especially through public interviews and his Twitter account (@salman_alodah) which gathers around 7 million followers.[36] Additionally, al-Awda strongly supported the intervention in Yemen and even announced that the killing of the Houthis could be religiously justified.[37] Similarly, Mohamed al-Arifi, another prominent Saudi cleric with millions of followers on Twitter, announced the Yemenis fighting with Houthi rebels should abandon those Houthis "in order not to be used by the «Safavid» state, a reference to the Persian Safavid Empire."[38] Last but not least, another prominent preacher, Ayid al-Qarni, endorsed the KSA's role in Yemen and designated the Yemenis opposing the Houthi movement as "soldiers of God."[39] Based on the information mentioned above, it can be assumed that these sectarian narratives have been fruitful in calling up for Islamic support for the regime's foreign policy.[40] Given their influential positions, we assume their thoughts have considerably impacted the local population.

Another influential person is Saad bin Ateeq al-Ateeq who is a Saudi preacher with long-standing ties to the kingdom's government. Ateeq can be indisputably considered a hardliner among Saudi preachers. In 2015, Ateeq declared on the Saudi state news channel al-Ekhbariya "that Yemen's lands were designated «purely for monotheism» and may not be polluted, neither by Houthis nor Iranians."[41] Additionally, Ateeq labelled Houthis as "rats that need to be cleansed."[42] Undoubtedly, such strong expressions coming from the KSA's territory could negatively influence the inter-religious reconciliation in Yemen and could only incite the Yemeni Sunnis against Shiites. According to Daniel Byman, there is also evidence that Saudis, for a long time, have been trying to

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36 Toby Matthiesen, *The domestic sources of Saudi foreign policy.*

37 Ibid.

38 Toby Matthiesen, "Saudi Arabia," in *Rethinking Political Islam*, eds. Shadi Hamid and William McCants (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 127.

39 Ibid.

40 Peter Mandaville and Shadi Hamid, *Islam as Statecraft: How Governments Use Religion In Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2018).

41 Oren Adaki and David Weinberg, "Preaching Hate and Sectarianism in the Gulf," *Foreign Policy*, May 5, 2015, https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/05/05/preaching-hate-and-sectarianism-in-the-gulf-saudi-arabia-qatar-uae-saad-bin-ateeq-al-ateeq/.

42 Ibid.

prompt specific bottom-up activities to advance the KSA's austere and anti-Shiite interpretation of Islam.[43] These particular activities are mainly carried out by Saudi Wahhabi preachers operating in Yemen.

Of course, these activities created a fertile ground for Saudi religious authority in Yemen in the sense that individual Yemeni Sunni believers keep relatively close ties with Riyadh. For instance, in August 2016, a group of over one hundred Yemeni Sunni scholars gathered at the Saudi Ministry of Islamic Affairs in order to issue an agreement concerning Islamic ethics. This particular agreement aimed to lessen the influence of Iranian religious/ideological activities. According to the contracting parties, it is believed that the Quran and Sunnah inspired this agreement. Therefore, Yemeni Islamic scholars needed to sign it.[44] In 2019, the Royal Court Advisor Sheikh Saad bin Nasser Al-Shathri invited a group of Yemeni scholars and preachers to reaffirm "the importance of their role in stabilizing the nation on monotheism and Sunnah and fighting deviations in Yemeni society."[45] The meeting also stressed out that:

> "the absolute commitment to Islam, and maintaining the unity of the nation and the entity of the state, will defeat the Iranian project, or any project that wants to undermine the homeland."[46]

In terms of educational soft power tools, to support the Wahhabi line of thinking, Saudis have financed a large number of Wahhabi schools that are officially called "scientific centres" where young students are educated according to Wahhabi beliefs and credence.[47] For example, the Dammaj Institute, funded and supported by the KSA, helped spread the Salafist

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43 Daniel L. Byman, "Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have a disastrous Yemen strategy," *Brookings*, July 17, 2018, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/07/17/saudi-arabia-and-the-united-arab-emirates-have-a-disastrous-yemen-strategy/.

44 Halaa Al-Dosari, "Saudi Arabia's Struggle for Sunni Leadership," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, September 7, 2016, https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/64501.

45 Saudi Press Agency, "Scholars and preachers of Yemen praise the role of Kingdom and stress: Yemen in good hands," October 29, 2019, https://www.spa.gov.sa/1987895.

46 Ibid.

47 Hillridge, "Religions and Ethnic Groups in Yemen," January 12, 2010, https://hillridge.nl/2010/01/12/religions-and-ethnic-groups/; Fanack, "Yemen," 2020, https://fanack.com/yemen/population/.

ideology in the KSA's approach through specific Yemeni-based schools. This institute was built near Saadah, the Houthi center, to counterbalance the Houthi's form of Islam.[48] Such educational interference supports Raimzhanova's argument, stating that education is one of the most effective resources of a soft power toolkit when influencing the population.[49] It seems the KSA is aware of it. From the KSA perspective, it would also be way cheaper to build schools than purchase guns, as we argue elsewhere in this article that soft power tools can have similar significance as hard power tools but for lower costs. For instance, the German-based organization WAAI states that school in Yemeni conditions can be built for approximately USD 540,000, which is a negligible amount of money compared with military purchases worth millions of dollars.[50]

It appears that KSA primarily focuses on the Sunnis. However, the KSA has also been working on influencing the Shia population with Wahhabism for a long time, namely in traditionally Zaydis areas.[51] Also, it can be taken into consideration that the KSA showed a certain interest in Zaydis areas because their branch of Shia Islam has more similarities with the Sunni than Shia Islam.[52] Incidentally, it can be assumed that the KSA's activities in the Zaydis areas were one of the catalysts of the Houthi movement to balance the KSA's soft power.[53]

Although it was already partially mentioned that numerous prominent preachers have used TV channels to cultivate the KSA's religious authority in Yemen, it appears that the media's soft power role is rather complex. With this in mind, Saudi control over the media space became even more prevalent in 2015 after the Saudi intervention.[54] Therefore, this

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48 Ben Buchholz, *The Forgotten War: The Ongoing Disaster In Yemen* (New York: The Soufan Center, 2018).

49 Aigerim Raimzhanova, Power in IR, 15-16.

50 WAAI, "Help us build a school in Yemen," 2019, http://waai-org.com/help-us-build-a-school-in-yemen-en/.

51 Adam Baron, "Mapping the Yemen Conflict," ECFR, 2019, https://www.ecfr.eu/mena/yemen.

52 Minority Rights Group International, "Zaydi Shi'a," 2018, https://minorityrights.org/minorities/aydi-shias/.

53 Adam Baron, "Mapping the Yemen Conflict."

54 Afrah Nasser, "The Yemen War, Media, and Propaganda," Atlantic Council, May 3, 2017, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/the-yemen-war-media-and-propaganda/.

issue deserves special attention. Before we take a closer look at this issue, it is inevitable to realize that while exerting external influence, the KSA as well as Iran are the key actors which perform "[…] in the Arabic-language media market, transforming it into an arena for confrontation and quests for popularity."[55] The media also serves as the determining element to win the hearts and minds of Arabs. The KSA has also invested a considerable amount of money into the regional media sphere, making the KSA one of the most influential owners and lobby actors in the Middle East's media business.[56]

In the first instance, Saudi-owned or supported media had played a key role in enforcing the soft power influence before the Yemeni conflict even started. Saudis have tried to shape the Yemeni social discourse according to the political-cultural context for their purposes, (1) to fight Iran, and (2) to exert Saudis influence among the Yemeni population. Tehran has been purposely described as the destructive and demonic element, while Saudis as stabilizers to be admired. In the Yemeni context, the KSA also realizes that is vital to portray itself in a rather positive way.[57] Therefore, for Saudis, it is crucial to display their politics, society, culture, and religion which are often purposely depicted as liberal, reformist, moderate, or modern.[58]

Besides, Saudi-owned media accompanied by religious authorities have tried to postulate among the Yemenis the Saudi narrative that the conflict in Yemen can be perceived as the clash of civilizations – meaning the clash of Sunnis and Shiites – where Shias are presented as a threat to Yemen and the region as a whole.[59] Due to this information, it comes as no surprise that the KSA is also buying the so-called *media silence*, which is pursued by professional PR companies to polish the KSA's image in the Yemeni media space in the context in which, as Zainab Sultan noted,

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55 Anne Hagood, "Saudi Arabia and Iran: The Tale of Two Media Covering Conflict in Yemen," *Arab Media and Society*, March 30, 2010, https://www.arabmediasociety.com/saudi-arabia-and-iran-the-tale-of-two-media-covering-conflict-in-yemen/.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid.

59 May, Darwich, "The Saudi Intervention in Yemen: Struggling for Status," *Insight Turkey* 20, no. 2, (2018): 125–142.

the KSA desperately needs to change its image, mainly due to civilian losses because of military operations.[60] In other words, each KSA's military action that results in civilian losses tends to change the Yemeni mood in the society, weakening the KSA's endeavors to portray itself as a leading power in the region.[61] Moreover, the KSA also aimed to influence Yemeni women with particular religious narratives through religious programs. For instance, one of the most prominent Saudi channels is called *Iqraa* – a Saudi-based satellite channel that is devoted to religious programming.[62] However, there is currently a lack of data exploring to what extent *Iqraa* has impacted Yemeni women.

Based on the analysis of educational instruments, we assume that the media activities are way more coherent in contrast with religious and educational activities. Saudis realize that controlling the information domain is a key to future development.

Iran

One cannot speak about Iranian foreign policy or Iran in general without mentioning the Islamic revolution in 1979. This event marks a major turning point in the history of Iran and the Middle East as well. Since the revolution, Iran has abandoned the pro-Western course of its foreign policy. Except, Tehran has been targeting states with a significant amount of Shia population (e.g. Iraq, Lebanon, or Yemen) that lie within Tehran's sphere of influence but also projected influence to other Muslim states outside the Middle East region, particularly to sub-Saharan Africa.[63] Iranian ideas, hand in hand with its "new" policy, had

[60] Afrah Nasser, "The Yemen War, Media, and Propaganda," Atlantic Council, May 3, 2017, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/the-yemen-war-media-and-propaganda/; Zainab Sultan, "Why the press struggles to cover the war in Yemen," *Columbia Journalism Review*, September 2, 2019, https://www.cjr.org/analysis/yemen-war.php.

[61] May Darwich, "The Saudi Intervention in Yemen: Struggling for Status."

[62] Sophia Pandya, "Religious Change Among Yemeni Women: The New Popularity of 'Amr Khaled,'" *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 5, no. 1 (2009): 50-79.

[63] Eric Lob, *Iran's Reconstruction Jihad: Rural Development and Regime Consolidation after 1979* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

an important inspirational dimension as well. For example, Simon Fuchs described the impact of the revolution on Pakistan stating:

> "Pakistani scholars strove to become associated with the Islamic Republic and the appeal of transnational Shi'ism."[64]

With the revolution, Iran caused an earthquake in the regional and international order and enter the power competition (at least) in the Middle East. However, such a step brought not only followers but also adversaries (see Iran–Iraqi war).

Yemen, the main focus of this paper, plays an interesting role in the Saudi–Iran power competition. Iran has been asserting its influence on the Yemeni Shia community since the 1980s, however, Tehran's involvement escalated since the start of the Yemeni civil war. Iran has been providing its resources and assistance to Houthi rebels. These efforts greatly increased in 2015 when the Houthis took over the capital city of Sana'a. Since then, Iran has started to provide them with significant material resources (e. g. weapons) and, more importantly, it has also been heavily using various educational, religious, and media soft power tools.[65]

Eldad Pardo stated, "education became a focal point for Tehran's empire builders."[66] This notion alone shows the importance that is being put on education. Iran tries to be very active in several areas – (1) provision of educational programs and scholarships, (2) supervision of curriculums, and (3) institutional establishment, financing, and cooperation. Tehran provides Houthi students with programs that take place in both

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[64] Simon Fuchs, *In a Pure Muslim Land: Shi'ism between Pakistan and the Middle East* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 187.

[65] Farea Al-Muslimi, "Iran's Role in Yemen Exaggerated, but Destructive," *Century Foundation*, May 19, 2017, https://tcf.org/content/report/irans-role-yemen-exaggerated-destructive/?agreed=1; Saad Hasan, "How much influence does Iran have on the Houthis?," *TRT World*, September 19, 2019, https://www.trtworld.com/middle-east/how-much-influence-does-iran-have-on-the-houthis-29911; Mohammed Al-Qadhi, *The Iranian Role in Yemen and its Implications on the Regional Security* (Riyadh: Arabian Gulf Centre for Iranian Studies), 38.

[66] Eldad Pardo, "Foreword," in *Review of Houthi Educational Materials in Yemen 2015-19*, ed. Itam Shalev (Ramat Gan: IMPACT-se, 2021), 2.

Yemen and Iran. In Iran, the students are attending religious seminars (Hawzas) in the city of Qom. Their studies concern the theology of Twelver and the principles of the Iranian revolution. For example, one of the Qom institutions is Al-Mustafa International University which is attended by hundreds of Houthi students. In Yemen, the students enroll at Twelver's (Ja'fariyah) institutes located in Sana'a and Sa'da. The Iranian Embassy in Yemen offers various scholarships that cover either whole studies or at least their part. Graduates of said institutions subsequently advocate the teachings they have received in different Yemeni regions. They shall spread Iranian values, the Twelver version of Shia Islam, and support Iranian and Houthis interests in Yemen. It is important to add that Iran does not only target youngsters. It organizes visits and training for lawyers, writers, journalists, etc. with the same goal as was in the case above.[67] A danger connected to educational visits to Iran was sensed by the Yemeni government. In 2017, the Yemeni Ministry of Education stopped scholarships to Iran, as students were taught "destructive ideas."[68] At that time, there were 7,000 Yemeni students in the aforementioned city of Qom.[69]

Iranian influence on the Houthi community is also visible in its curriculums. Several sources describe how Houthis, directly or indirectly assisted by Iran, have shaped curriculums and the whole education sector to accommodate their needs.[70] For example, they promote their

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[67] Mohammed Al-Qadhi, *The Iranian Role in Yemen and its Implications on the Regional Security* (Riyadh: Arabian Gulf Centre for Iranian Studies), 39-42; Abdo Albabesh, "The Relations of Houthis with Iran and Hezbollah," *Medium*, November 4, 2018, https://medium.com/@drabdoalbahesh/the-relations-of-al-houthis-movement-with-iran-and-the-lebanese-hezbollah-5a54f05bd544; Saeid Golkar and Kasra Aarabi "The View From Tehran: Iran's Militia Doctrine," *Tony Blair Institute for Global Change*, February 11, 2021, https://institute.global/sites/default/files/2021-05/Tony%20Blair%20Institute%2C%20The%20View%20From%20Tehran%2C%20February%202021.pdf.

[68] Memo Middle East Monitor, "Yemeni government stops scholarships to Iran," January 18, 2017, https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20170118-yemeni-government-stops-scholarships-to-iran/.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ben Hubbard, "Yemen's Houthis Went From Ragtag Militia to Force Threatening Gulf Powers," *New York Times*, April 17, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/17/world/middleeast/yemen-houthis-gulf.html; Ahmad Majidyar, "New Houthi-imposed university curriculum reportedly glorifies Iran, promotes sectarianism," *Middle East*

foreign allies (Iran, Syria, and Lebanon), establish new school subjects – one is called 'The Arab-Israeli Conflict' and glorifies Shiites and Hezbollah for their fight against Israel, etc. Itan Shalev reviewed several Houthi educational materials published between 2015–2019 and even though, as he mentions, "[t]he connection to Iran […] is downplayed in the examined educational materials," it is undeniable.[71] Some of his major findings include (1) the US is called 'Great Satan' and causes all the negatives in the Middle East region, (2) ISIS, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Israel are all being portrayed as the US tools to maintain hegemony over the Muslim world, and (3) materials depict only Iranian sphere of influence, e. g. Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Bahrain. Interestingly enough, Iran is shown as a friend of all Arabs, Shiites as well as Sunnis. Arabs are not enemies of Iran, particular states are. Therefore, the aforementioned states like Saudi Arabia and the UAE, Saudi's allies, are subjects of hate, not their Sunni citizens.[72] Clearly, Tehran tries to put itself in the position of the only leader of the Arab world that will help the region against its Western foes and their 'tools' (Saudis and the UAE).

The cited changes were also commented on by the Yemeni teachers. The Yemeni Teachers Syndicate was well aware of those changes and stated that through curriculum changes, Iran is trying to establish a "policy of cultural colonialism" and introduce the "ideology of the Khomeinist revolution in Yemen through public education."[73] Furthermore, except for curriculum changes, the vast majority of school

Institute, March 1, 2018b, https://www.mei.edu/publications/new-houthi-imposed-university-curriculum-reportedly-glorifies-iran-promotes; Romy Haber, "The Houthis and the Hijacking of Yemen's Education Sector," *The Euro-Gulf Information Centre*, https://www.egic.info/houthis-hijacking-education-yemen, December 11, 2021; Muhammed Ali, "Houthis hijack education in Yemen," *Arab News*, May 3, 2018, https://www.arabnews.com/node/1295651/middle-east.

71 Itam Shalev, *Review of Houthi Educational Materials in Yemen 2015-19* (Ramat Gan: IMPACT-se, 2021), 3.

72 Ibid, 4-6.

73 Christopher Hamill-Stewart, "Yemeni teachers' union slams Houthi curriculum takeover," *Arab News*, April 15, 2021, https://www.arabnews.com/node/1843536/middle-east.

headmasters were replaced by Houthi supporters.[74] Iran is pursuing a similar strategy in other Middle Eastern states. To give an illustration, Iran and Syria signed a memorandum that enables Iran to "supervise the overhaul of Syria's school curricula and to print Syrian textbooks in Iran."[75] Additionally, Iran participated in teacher training, vocational education, etc. Tehran's involvement in Syrian education is, as well as in the case of Yemen, often met with criticism.[76]

Iranian activities also include institutional financing, establishment, and cooperation. Tehran is involved in financing various institutions around Yemen (e. g. the Badr Alami Center in Sana'a, the Center for Islamic Studies in Sana'a, or the Dahyan Center in the Sa'da province) which are subsequently supposed to spread the Iranian *Twelver* version of Shia Islam.[77] Tehran's influence may be also found in the tertiary education. With its assistance, the Persian language and literature departments were open at the Sana'a and Dhamar Universities. Additionally, there have been talks about cooperation between the aforementioned Sana'a University and the Iranian Imam al-Sadiq University.[78] All these activities further strengthen the mutual relationship between the Houthis and Iran.

The second category of examined soft power tools consists of religious ones. Major example of such a tool can be demonstrated in the Houthis' position toward the Baha'i community. The Baha'is are a religious non-

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74 Christopher Hamill-Stewart, "Yemeni teachers' union slams Houthi curriculum takeover," *Arab News*, April 15, 2021, https://www.arabnews.com/node/1843536/middle-east; Arab Weekly, "Yemen's teachers' union accuses Houthis of indoctrinating children," April 20, 2021, https://thearabweekly.com/yemens-teachers-union-accuses-houthis-indoctrinating-children#off-canvas; Republican Yemen, "Yemeni Teachers Syndicate: Houthi changes in school books meant to instill racism, glorify their leader," February 12, 2022, https://republicanyemen.net/archives/30291.

75 Nabil Al-Tamini, "Yemeni educators oppose Houthi curriculum changes," *Al-Mashareq*, August 11, 2020, https://almashareq.com/en_GB/articles/cnmi_am/features/2020/08/11/feature-01.

76 "Syrian Journalist: Education Agreement with Syria Will Allow Iran To Control Syrians' Minds," *Memri*, March 12, 2020, https://www.memri.org/reports/syrian-journalist-education-agreement-syria-will-allow-iran-control-syrians%E2%80%99-minds.

77 Mohammed Al-Qadhi, *The Iranian Role in Yemen and its Implications on the Regional Security* (Riyadh: Arabian Gulf Centre for Iranian Studies), 39-40.

78 Gerald Feierstein and Joshua Koontz, "Iran Ramps Up Its Exchange Programs for the Houthis in Yemen," *Middle East Institute*, January 27, 2017, https://www.mei.edu/publications/iran-ramps-its-exchange-programs-houthis-yemen.

Muslim community originally from Iran that, however, also resides in Yemen. The religion itself was established in 1844 but was persecuted during the years leading up to the revolution of 1979 and subsequently banned in 1982, due to the violation of the Iranian law against heresy. The Iranian government even created a specific memorandum that deals with the Baha'i community. It was published in 1991 and expressed a strict goal – the destruction of the Baha'is.[79] It is fair to say that Tehran's opinions and actions toward the aforementioned community have the power to affect other actors to act in the same way.

According to several reports, Houthis use: (1) similar language as Iran – portraying the Baha'i community as agents of imperialism or Jews, (2) similar threats of disbanding the community and handing death sentences, and (3) they have the same goal of forcing the community out of the country while gaining their assets.[80] Arab Weekly went as far as stating that the hostility against the Baha'i community is a reflection of ideological subordination to Iran.[81] A spokesman of Baha'is stated that

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[79] James Mohajer, "'We will butcher every Baha'i': How a small religious minority in Yemen became a key target for the Houthis," *LSE*, June 18, 2018, https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/religionglobalsociety/2018/06/we-will-butcher-every-bahai-how-a-small-religious-minority-in-yemen-became-a-key-target-for-the-houthis/; "Yemen's Houthis accused of targeting Bahai minority under 'directives from Iran,'" *Middle East Eye*, December 24, 2020, https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/sham-trial-houthi-court-accused-targeting-bahai-community-under-directives-iran; Maysaa Al-Deen, Casey Coombs and Abdullah Olofi, "The Baha'is In Yemen: From Obscurity To Persecution And Exile," *Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies*, June 18, 2021, https://sanaacenter.org/files/The_Bahais_in_Yemen_en.pdf.

[80] Al-Deen, Coombs and Olofi, "The Baha'is In Yemen," *Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies*, June 18, 2021, https://sanaacenter.org/files/The_Bahais_in_Yemen_en.pdf; Bahá'í International Community, "Houthi judicial farce puts Baha'I lives at risk in Yemen," February 4, 2021, https://www.bic.org/news/houthi-judicial-farce-puts-bahai-lives-risk-yemen; Ahmad Majidyar, "Iran Allegedly Motivates Houthis to Crack Down on Baha'i Minority in Yemen," *MEI*, June 2, 2017, https://www.mei.edu/publications/iran-allegedly-motivates-houthis-crack-down-bahai-minority-yemen; Seed Al-Batati, "Iran's arms shipments to Houthis fuel war in Yemen, experts say," *Arab News*, June 30, 2020, https://www.arabnews.com/node/1697466/middle-east.

[81] "Iran-backed Houthis push Baha'is out of Yemen," *Arab Weekly*, August 8, 2020, https://thearabweekly.com/iran-backed-houthis-push-bahais-out-yemen.

Tehran is "exporting their policy of persecution."[82] There may be debate whether Houthis are acting under direct Iranian orders or not. For example, Maysaa Al-Deen, Casey Coombs and Abdullah Olofi haven't registered any concrete evidence proving that they are.[83] Therefore, Houthis may be, in true 'power of attraction' fashion, simply inspired by Tehran's actions toward the Baha'i community and subsequently try to act in the same manner.

Iran is also trying to enhance the *Twelver* version of Shia Islam and build a deeper connection with the Houthis through certain symbolic acts and celebrations. The latter is supported by the Iranian Embassy in Sana'a whose representatives are keen to participate in various events (*e.g.*, the Event of Ghadir Khumm, Ashura, etc.). As an example of the former activity, Al-Qadhi mentions the renovation of the Shrine of Nasser Haqq, an important historical Imam.[84]

Lastly, Tehran uses different soft power tools in the area of the media as well. Iranian interests cover not only TV and radio but also the training of media personnel. Many media workers (directors, TV/radio anchors, etc.) from Yemen have been trained in Iran, Syria, and Lebanon to strengthen the Iranian influence in the country. Regarding TV, Iran is sponsoring various satellite channels (*e.g.* Mayadeen Maserah channels residing in Beirut or Aden Live channel that belongs to the Southern Movement) that are supporting different Yemeni revolutionary groups and movements.[85] A slightly different approach is used in the case of the radio. The main protagonists influencing the radio broadcast are the Houthis because they effectively control all the main radio stations in the country (former Hayat FM, Eram FM, and Sam FM). Except for the pro-Houthi broadcast, Eram FM and Sam FM openly support Iran and Hezbollah. The Houthis (through Sam FM) even organized a campaign raising funds for the Lebanese movement. In only ten days, the amount

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82 Ahmad Majidyar and Lama Al-Jarallah, "Iran-backed Houthi rebels step up persecution of Baha'i minority in Yemen," *MEI*, October 2, 2018, https://www.mei.edu/publications/iran-backed-houthi-rebels-step-persecution-bahai-minority-yemen.

83 Maysaa Al-Deen, Casey Coombs and Abdullah Olofi, "The Baha'is In Yemen."

84 Mohammed Al-Qadhi, *The Iranian Role in Yemen and its Implications on the Regional Security* (Riyadh: Arabian Gulf Centre for Iranian Studies), 41.

85 Ibid., 42.

of raised money almost topped USD 300,000.[86] In Yemen, Iran is also using the newspaper and domestic/allies' sources of TV broadcasting. As an example of the newspaper supported by Iran, Al-Qadhi lists Al-Masar, Demokrati, Balagh, or Ummah. Additionally, broadcasting mainly includes Al-Alam news channel, The Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting, and Press TV. Through all those media tools, Iran portrays itself as a savior of the oppressed and persecuted. As Al-Qadhi states, "Iran's media arms have worked to depict the Yemen crisis as an 'Islamic awakening.'"[87]

Iranian support for Houthis fits perfectly Thomas Juneau's explanation of Tehran's choices of non-state actors.[88] Except for gaining access to the territory under Houthi control, both actors share the anti-Saudi, anti-Israeli, and anti-US sentiments. Moreover, anytime Saudi Arabia's influence is diminished somewhere in the Middle East, it opens space for Tehran. Regarding Iranian soft power use in Yemen, the objectives are clear. Tehran doesn't want to be 'present' in Yemen only now but also in the future. Therefore, it targets the education sector. Indoctrination is then carried out on young students as well as journalists, lawyers, etc. Iran provides its values and worldview to be spread all around Yemen, at a minimum. With that, Tehran is creating more and more loyal followers that should help him during the current power competition in the region. Furthermore, thanks to the curriculums, Iran is portrayed as a friend of all Muslims and the leader of the region. Although Tehran supports Houthis, a Shiite group, it also needs to attract Sunnis. Therefore, the enemies are particular Middle Eastern states and not their populations. Tehran's undeniable impact on the Houthis is also demonstrated by their position toward the Baha'i community. This religious group is ostracized in Iran and based on the Houthis' behavior, it is safe to assume they mimic Tehran's actions and rhetoric in this very matter. The fact that Iran is successful in influencing the Houthi community in

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[86] Joshua Holmes, "Radio Becomes New Battlefield in Yemen War," *The Medialine*, August 25, 2019, https://themedialine.org/people/radio-becomes-new-battlefield-in-yemen-war/.

[87] Al-Qadhi, *The Iranian Role in Yemen and its Implications on the Regional Security*, 43.

[88] Thomas Juneau, "Iran's policy towards the Houthis in Yemen: a limited return on a modest investment," *International Affairs* 92, no. 3 (2016): 649-661.

various ways presented above also disproves opinions stating that Tehran's role in Yemen and Houthis' decision-making is marginal.[89]

Conclusion

The Yemeni conflict represents a case study of an active civil war that is, due to different reasons, being constantly overlooked. However, this fact offers scholars a chance to research the conflict and provide interesting conclusions regarding various topics. The Yemeni conflict can also be seen as a 'regional' war, without major non-regional actors' interventions (opposite to *e.g.* Syria). Lastly, it provides an opportunity for regional powers to raise their influence over the region, strengthen their status, and potentially change the established order in the Middle East.

Similarly to many other Middle Eastern conflicts, both Saudi Arabia and Iran try to play their role in the Yemeni war. Although their "presence" in Yemen reaches far back in history, it escalated since the Houthis took over the capital in 2015. Moreover, the aforementioned presence cannot be deduced to only hard power terms (e.g. weapons and soldiers) but needs to be understood in wider terms. As we outlined above, hard power occupies the prime spot in connection to Yemeni war research. However, we demonstrated that soft power may play a crucial role in both Saudi Arabia's and Iran's foreign policy strategies toward Yemen. Through soft power tools, the cited Middle Eastern powers influence domestic Yemeni actors in various ways, achieve strategic goals, and try to assure long-lasting success.

Religion-wise, the KSA and Iran can be designated as the crucial actors that seek to approach the Yemeni society with their particular interpretation of Islam. The KSA primarily asserts Wahhabi thoughts towards the Sunni population. However, evidence indicated that Riyadh also tried to focus on the dominantly Shia areas occupied by Zaydis. Therefore, the nature of Saudi religious clout is multifaced. Our research

[89] Mareike Transfeld, "Iran's Small Hand in Yemen," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, February 14, 2017, https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/67988; Thomas Juneau, "Iran's policy towards the Houthis in Yemen," 647.

also found that Saudis especially portray Wahhabism through prominent Saudi or Yemeni clerics that have been either operational in Yemen itself or in the social media sphere. Surprisingly, it appears that Saudi religious activities lack a comprehensive approach. We did not trace any apparent connection between some aforementioned Wahhabi preachers and the House of Saud. These preachers carried out their activities on their own without any external incentives, therefore can be regarded as actors indirectly supporting the Saudi religious position. The KSA then does not have to put any significant emphasis while those preachers, successfully influenced by Wahhabism, carry out the religious activities on KSA's behalf. It is also very implausible that KSA would not be monitoring those individuals to ensure they follow religious suit. This argument is supported by further research revealing that imminent preachers are being controlled by Saudi intelligence or preachers are on the Saudi payroll.[90] Lastly, the KSA seeks to determine the conflict by religious terms; thus, the Yemeni war is the war between Sunnis and Shias. Nevertheless, it can be suggested that Wahhabi thoughts represent a crucial factor.

On the contrary, Iran primarily focuses on the Shia population through the lenses of the Twelver version of Shia Islam. Except for various religious celebrations and acts, the main manifestation of the use of religious soft power is the Houthis position towards the Baha'i community. Houthis use the same language and actions toward Baha'is as Iran does which is a clear sign of them being influenced by Tehran. This notion has also been shared by the spokesmen of the Baha'i community. The goal is to get the community out of Yemen. Even without proven direct orders from Teheran, Houthis accepted Iran's values and worldviews, so the Baha'is have become a problem for them as well. This fact is also supported by sheer numbers. According to statistics from 2010, there were only around 1,300 Baha'is in Yemen compared to 251,000 in Iran.[91] It is fair to assume that without shared

[90] Anthony Chase, *Routledge Handbook on Human Rights and the Middle East and North Africa*; William Racimora, *Salafist/Wahhabite Financial Support to Educational, Social and Religious Institutions*.

[91] These are the most recent statistics: Arda, "Most Baha'i Nations (2010)," https://www.thearda.com/QL2010/QuickList_40.asp.

worldviews, Houthis would hardly persecute the community as marginal as Baha'is are.

Interesting findings were also detected after having analyzed educational soft power tools. Firstly, the present findings confirm that both actors are trying to influence the educational sphere. All of them own or support specific educational centers or schools that interpret their way of being. Saudi schools inevitably focus on Wahhabi teaching, while Iran pursues via educational institutions Iranian 'Twelver' Shia theology. Iran is very effective in spreading its teachings. Not only does Tehran do it 'at home' through scholarships but it managed to modify curriculums to do so in Yemen as well. Even though the scholarships and education programs target specifically Houthi students who should subsequently advocate the 'Twelver' faith and values connected to it, the aim of curriculums is different. The audience of those is wider, as well as presented thoughts. In curriculums, Tehran itself is not the main topic. It is barely explicitly mentioned. The main topic is represented by Iran's values and worldviews – who is the enemy (the US, Saudi Arabia), who is the friend (Lebanon, Iraq), what is good (Khomeini's revolution), what is wrong (the actions of the US, Saudi Arabia), etc. Additionally, the curriculums are not solely focused on targeting Shiites. Sunnis are presented as regular Arabs and Muslims that are on the same level as Shiites. So, the problem is not Sunnis, but certain states, e. g. Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Tehran is thus portrayed as a leader of all Arabs, not only Shiites. Naturally, if Iran wants to play a prominent role in the Middle East, it needs to address the majority population. Without the support of Sunnis, Iran cannot take the next step in the power rivalry with Saudi Arabia.

In terms of the media soft power tools, both states use their national broadcasting stations or affiliated media for their purposes, with religion being the main topic. The media is used to defame the other state and are instrumentally used to portray their specific Saudi and Iranian worldviews to support their cause. A summary of all detected soft power tools is shown in Table 1.

This paper argues that Saudi Arabia and Iran use particular religious, educational, and media soft power to their advantage in the Yemeni war. The analysis has shown what each country does to affect

Yemeni domestic actors, how they do it, and what they want to achieve. Several interesting conclusions may be drawn from the aforementioned information: (1) Iran's strategy is more complex and elaborate, including a major focus on education. It seems that Saudi Arabia knows the importance of soft power, but Ryijad concentrates more on hard power activities; (2) Tehran uses the Yemeni war to present itself as a leader of all Arabs in comparison to Rijad's effort to balance Iran. This notion goes hand in hand with the previous one. Iran's strategy is not only to balance Saudi Arabia but also to present itself as a viable leader of the Arab world. On the other hand, since the Saudis focus more on hard power activities, their soft power ones aim more to balance Iran than to promote Saudi Arabia; (3) interconnection and mutual reinforcement of the analyzed soft power areas since both KSA and Iran use them to a greater or lesser extent.

With the end of the Yemeni war nowhere near, it will be interesting to follow future developments of the Iran – Saudi Arabia rivalry. As we demonstrated in this paper, the strategy and involvement of both countries change over time, so the evolution of soft power influence of the aforementioned (and other) actors should be worth monitoring. The authors also believe this article may be starting point for discussion concerning (1) the research of specific and distinct soft power tools (e.g. religious, educational, and media ones) that may not always be at the center of scholars' attention, (2) the development of such concepts, and (3) the use of soft power tools within an armed or non-armed conflict.

Annexes

Table 1

Detected religious, educational, and media soft power tools

	Religious	**Educational**	**Media**
The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia	Saudi or Yemeni Wahhabi preachers (mainly operational in social media); Special Office for Yemen Affairs'; support of Yemeni religious scholars	Wahhabi schools near Saadah	Saudi-owned or supported media such as the Iqraa channel
Iran	Participation of Iranian representatives at various events (Ghadir Khumm, Ashura); religious buildings renovation (Shrine of Nasser Haqq); persecution of the Baha'i community through Houthis	Newly opened departments at universities (e.g., Persian language and literature departments at Sana'a and Dhamar University); financial support for educational institutions; scholarships for Shia theology students in Yemen or Iran; changes of academic curriculums in Houthi-run schools	Training of the media personnel; sponsorship of various TV channels (Mayadeen Maserah channels, Aden Live); the use of newspapers (Al-Masar, Demokrati) and broadcasting for own promotion (Al Alam news channel, Press TV)

Source: based on the authors' conclusions.

DOI: 10.62229/sprps23-1/5

SOME SPECIFIC FEATURES OF THE GENESIS OF MODERN BELGIAN POLITICS

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Abstract. This article discusses the symbolism of the year 1830 in the transition from the old political order to the establishment and gradual consolidation of the modern Belgian state. Modern constitutionalism was characterized by the struggle against monarchical absolutism and the concentration of political power in the hands of a single person. In addition, it supported the respect of civil rights and liberties, the individual being at the center of liberal philosophy, along with the idea of a representative government, the separation of powers in the state and the supremacy of the rule of law. The spread of the revolutionary wave from 1830 throughout the country opened a new period in the history of Belgium, in which the ideas of centralizing the state and asserting national independence merged with the urgency to give a direction to the state by choosing the representative monarchy as a form of governance and with the introduction of the Senate as an intermediate power. By analyzing the Belgian deputies' speeches, this article aims to make an introduction in the way the deputies imagined the construction of the state and to advance the idea of a mutual trajectory of the Belgian society in accordance with the young European nations.

Keywords: separation of power, monarchy, Senate, bicameralism, Belgium, modern constitutionalism.

Introduction

A revolutionary wave crossed the whole of Europe in 1830. The popular insurrection in Brussels on August 26-27, 1830, was quickly suppressed by the bourgeoisie. However, the revolutionary wave spread throughout the country. On October 4, 1830, the decree of the provisional government promulgated the violent detachment of Belgium from Holland and the establishment of an independent state. The Belgian revolutionaries implemented

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the only feasible model of political organization in the first half of the 19th century: a unitary and centralized state. But this state seems to be dominated by a French-speaking bourgeoisie, essentially secured because of the property-based voting system. In addition, due to its proximity, France exerted a great influence on political ideas and attitudes in Belgium. Starting with 1830, a period opens in which for the first time the centralization of the state follows its course at the same time as national independence.[1] Until that time, Belgium had seen different regimes, moving from absolutism to modern constitutionalism.

The hypotheses of this article are configured starting from the following assumptions: the socialization pattern had a considerable role in the choice of the representative monarchy as the optimal form of government by the Belgian deputies; the need to ensure a balance of power and to prevent its monopolization by a single chamber leads to the introduction of the institution of the Senate. In order to ensure the conceptual coherence of the research carried out, this article aims to answer some fundamental questions in accordance with the studied area: What is the role of the socialization pattern for the justification of the Belgian deputies' expositions in the official sessions of the National Congress? What are the reasons why the division of legislative power between two chambers proves to be essential for the Belgian political imaginary?

This article focuses on a more in-depth analysis of several elements intrinsic to the transition from the old to the new regime: the separation of powers in the state; the responsibility of political representatives; constitutional monarchy; liberalism; and the establishment of the institution of the Senate. Therefore, the research aims to ensure the outline of a theoretical and analytical framework for understanding the above-mentioned elements. In order to do so, we study of the parliamentary debates within the Belgian National Congress related to the revolutionary wave and the discussions about the optimal form of government and the pertinence to establish the Senate, as well as the presentation of the way of implementing the principle of separation of powers in state and the functioning of the Belgian institutional system.

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[1] Xavier Mabille, *Histoire politique de la Belgique* [Political History of Belgium] (Bruxelles: Éditions du Centre de recherche et d'information socio-politiques, 1986).

The analysis of parliamentary debates from 1830 derives its importance from the perspective of knowing the ways in which the Belgian deputies imagined the construction of the state, by choosing the representative monarchy as a form of government and by introducing the institution of the Senate as a source of balance at the level of central power. Although the reports of the Belgian parliamentary debates have been less analyzed, they contribute to clarifying and interpreting the intention of the legislator and they allow keeping their memory, precisely the positions taken by the officials in the public sessions.[2] Born from the liberal spirit of the revolution of 1830, the Belgian state became a model for European nations in the process of consolidation, modernization or proclamation of independence, and through the Constitution of 1831, it introduced fundamental principles into the European political imaginary, such as representative government, the separation of powers, the limitation of monarchical power and the immovability of judges.

Some of the first constitutions promulgated on this Belgian model was that of the Kingdom of Saxony (September 4, 1831), but in reality, this constitutional text was very different from its model. Those that borrowed the most provisions were the constitutions of Spain (1837), Greece (1844, 1864), Romania (1866), as well as Holland (1848), Luxembourg (1868), Prussia (1848), the Kingdom of Sardinia-Piedmont (1848). Overall, in 1848, the influence of the Belgian constitution was generalized mainly under the work of the liberal bourgeoisie in countries such as Italy, Germany, Hungary, which considered it an ideal form of state organization. Most often these borrowings concerned the enumeration of fundamental liberties, as was the case with the German federal constitution of 1849 or the constitution of the Swiss confederation of 1848.[3]

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[2] Hugo Coniez, "L'invention du compte rendu intégral des débats en France (1789-1848)" [The Invention of the Full Report of the Debates in France], *Parlement[s]. Revue d'histoire politique* 14, no. 2 (2010): 146-158; Hugo Coniez, *Écrire la démocratie. De la publicité des débats parlementaires* [Writing Democracy. Publicity of Parliamentary Debates] (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008).

[3] John Gilissen, "La Constitution belge de 1831: ses sources, son influence" [The Belgian Constitution of 1831: its Sources, its Influence], *Res Publica (Revue de l'Institut Belge de Science Politique)* (1968): 135.

Senate legitimacy has been a feature of traditional democracies since its emergence in 1789. In the case of Belgium, the matter was debated by the National Congress as early as December 1830. Proposed in the Constituent Assembly, the bicameralism was unanimously approved by the Congress, after three long public debates. By setting the eligibility threshold at 2,116 francs, limiting the minimum age to 40, refusing to pay compensation to senators, and extending their mandate to eight years, most members of Congress reaffirmed as mission of liberal bicameralism the aristocratic, conservative and conciliatory chamber.[4] The context in which the question of the establishment of the Senate was addressed refers to precise historical models, but which nevertheless complicates the correct understanding of these interventions, which translates into a heterogeneity of the invoked ways of thinking, which have liberalism as a common characteristic.[5]

The research methodology is based on the rigorous and critical examination of primary (Belgian parliamentary debates from 1830-1831) and secondary sources (bibliographic reference works for the studied area). This research is based on a qualitative investigation, which involves the consultation of specialized literature, the analysis of historical sources, with an emphasis on archival documents, valuable sources that can provide accurate and truthful information with reference to the subject being treated, more chosen due to the historiographic character of the work. Therefore, the main method of analysis is the textual analysis.

Event history is the basis of political history, where one prefers to write about society, not about political actors. This method can usefully serve this article from a methodological point of view by treating from a chronological perspective the main events on the constitutional path of Belgium up to its proclamation as a monarchy. The article looks specifically at the use of key concepts, such as representative government, the separation of powers in the state, the accountability of political representatives before citizens, the parliamentary regime, constitutionalism, and liberalism. These concepts have been analyzed in the studies such as those by Norberto Bobbio, Andras Sajo, Els Witte, Émile

[4] Véronique Laureys et al., *L'histoire du Senat en Belgique de 1831 à 1995* [The History of the Senate in Belgium from 1831 to 1995] (Bruxelles: Racine, 1999), 21.

[5] Ibid., 22. The historical models were: the English model after the Glorious Revolution; the French model after the Revolution of 1789; the American model due to the success of the senatorial organization.

Huyttens, Véronique Laureys, Silvia Marton, Radu Carp, Xavier Mabille, Raz Joseph, etc.[6] Therefore we cannot talk about a discontinuity of this work in relation to the assumed direction, especially since it aims to continue the previous approaches - the references that have supported the argumentation of the ideas proposed by the present article.

The Separation of Powers in the State and the Monarchical Principle

The 19th century recorded a triumph of parliamentarism in most Western states, where it was considered that "the elaboration of a common political line brings together the diverse interests of society (...) resulting from free, rational and concerted discussions in parliament."[7] Keeping reports related to parliamentary debates is a decision-making transparency tool, becoming a principle of representative democracy, which also applies to the Belgian legislative framework from 1830.[8] Their role was

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6 Silvia Marton, "«La Belgique de l'Orient» et les chemins de fer: les raisons d'une comparaison. La construction politique de l'État-nation dans le Parlement roumain (1866-1871)" [The Belgium of the East and the Railways: the Reasons for a Comparison. The Political Construction of the Nation-state in the Romanian Parliament (1866-1871)], *Studia Politica. Romanian Political Science Review* VIII, no. 1 (2008): 27-44; Émile Huyttens, *Discussions du congrès national de Belgique. 1830-1831* [Discussions of the National Congress of Belgium. 1830-1831] (Bruxelles: Société typographique belge, 1844); Laureys et al., *L'histoire du Senat en Belgique*; Xavier Mabille, *Histoire politique de la Belgique*; Joseph Raz, "The Rule of Law and its Virtue," *Law Quarterly Review* 93 (1977); Els Witte, *Le Moniteur Belge, le gouvernement et le Parlement pendant l'unionisme* [The Belgian Monitor, the Government and the Parliament during Unionism] (Bruxelles: Édition du Moniteur Belge, 1985); Andras Sajo, *Limiting Government. An Introduction to Constitutionalism* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1999); Radu Carp, *Responsabilitate ministerială* [Ministerial Accountability] (Bucharest: All Beck, 2003); Norberto Bobbio, *Democrație și liberalism* [Democracy and Liberalism] (Bucharest: Nemira, 2007).

7 Els Witte and Jan Ceuleers, "La publicité des débats parlementaires à la Chambre des représentants" [The Publicity of Parliamentary Debates in the House of Representatives], in *Histoire de la Chambre des représentants de Belgique. 1830-2002* [History of the House of Representatives of Belgium. 1830-2002], eds. Éliane Gubin et al. (Bruxelles: Chambre des représentants, 2003).

8 Jean-Noël Ferrié et al., "Comprendre la délibération parlementaire. Une approche praxéologique de la politique en action" [Understanding Parliamentary Deliberation. A Praxeological Approach to Politics in Action], *Revue française de science politique* 58,

to accurately describe the parliamentary debates on one hand, to introduce them into posterity, that is developing them to constitute a valuable source for researchers, political scientists, historians and jurists on the other hand, without forgetting the need to make the decision-making process and the position of the representatives known to citizens.[9]

On November 10, 1830, the deputy Louis de Potter reiterated in front of the National Congress the idea that the representatives elected by the nation have the sacred mission of laying the foundations of the edifice of the new social order on the solid basis of freedom, the main guarantee for the prosperity of the state. For a more vivid image of the importance that had to be given to this desideratum, the deputy recalls the sad episode of the imposition of the constitution of 1815 by the Dutch that has been rejected by the Belgian people:

> "violated consciences, education put under chains, the press condemned to be only an instrument of power or forced to censorship; the arbitrary substitution of government decrees by a legal system established through the social pact; right of petition not recognized; the confusion of all powers, becoming the domain of one; the despotic imposition of a privileged language; the immovability of judges, reduced to the role of commissioners of power; complete absence from the guarantee of publicity and from that of judgment; an enormous debt and expenses (…); taxes overwhelming by their size and distribution (…); laws voted by the Dutch only for Holland and against Belgium (…); the seat of all the great constituent bodies and of all the important institutions in Holland; scandalous embezzlement of funds specially intended to favor the industry; the revolting partiality in the distribution of civil and military employment by a government in whose eyes the quality of Belgian was a title of reproach; in a word, the whole of Belgium treated as a conquered province, as a colony."[10]

Therefore, one of the holiest goals of the young European nation was to fight against the despotism, in which the Belgians were partakers with

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no. 5 (2008): 795-815; Claire de Galembert et al., *Faire parler le Parlement: Méthodes et enjeux de l'analyse des débats parlementaires pour les sciences sociales* [Making Parliament Speak: Methods and Challenges of Analyzing Parliamentary Debates for the Social Sciences] (Issy-les-Moulineaux: Librairie générale de droit et de jurisprudence, 2013).

9 Benjamin Morel, "Ce que conte le compte rendu: l'institution d'un ordre parlementaire idéalisé" [What the Record tells: the Institution of an Idealized Parliamentary Order], *Droit et société*, no. 98 (2018): 182-183.

10 Belgian Parliamentary Debates: Session 1830-1831, Parliamentary Annals – Plenary Sessions, House of Representatives, 100-101.

the union of their territories with the Dutch. In addition, Louis de Potter drew attention to the need for a permanent government, summarizing the main achievements of the Provisional Government: the abolition of the abusive tax; full transparency granted to criminal proceedings; offering new guarantees to the defendants before the courts; the establishment of the promised judicial institutions; abolishing the degrading punishment of caning; the organization of popular elections for the first magistrates of the Belgian communes and direct elections of deputies in the National Congress; the establishment of several general police directorates; the abolition of the lottery; transparency of municipal accounts and budgets; the freedom of press, education, association, opinion and worship.[11] At the end of his speech, the deputy pleaded for the maintenance of the principle of non-intervention of other states in the internal affairs of Belgium, a principle which, although universal in the sense that it should be used as the basis of international relations, takes into account the various possible situations on the international scene.[12]

During the session of the National Congress on November 15, 1830, the deputy Alexandre de Robaulx supported the separation between the legislative and the executive, considering the latter a moral being, which in the circle of its attributions should benefit from independence, proposing as a form of communication, the transmission of messages between the two, a proposal accepted by Congress.[13] The importance of the executive as an institution stems from the fact that it has a monopoly on coercion, controls the physical resources of a state, ensures the implementation of policies and the functioning of a society, but its action need to be continuous and led to unity:

> "The nation must be represented and through its representatives it participates in the legislative power. Laws are not written in vain, if they are not punctually executed."[14]

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11 Ibid., 100-101.

12 Ibid., 101.

13 Ibid., 144.

14 Andras Sajo, *Limiting Government. An Introduction to Constitutionalism*, (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1999), 155-174; Belgian Parliamentary Debates: Session 1830-1831, Parliamentary Annals – Plenary Sessions, House of Representatives, 194.

The representative mandate was introduced in 1791 in France, becoming a basic principle of the parliamentary regime and a social value in itself. The policies are initiated, elaborated and implemented based on the requests coming from the society through this representative mandate.

On the one hand, in a parliamentary system, the government depends on the parliament, otherwise the legislative cannot exercise control. If the parliament is unstable, this dependence threatens to leave the executive without a leader, which in turn endangers the proper functioning of the state.[15] The parliamentary regime is the political system in which the executive power and the legislative power depend on each other. In this case, we can talk about a flexible separation of powers, characterized by the cooperation and mutual control of the legislature and the executive. Executive power is generated by the legislative power, which has a number of forms of control, such as impeachments and motions of censure.

On the other hand, the government in turn influences the activity of the legislature, being able to act by assuming the parliamentary initiative:

> "Born on the ruins of the absolutist monarchies of Western Europe, the parliamentary regime in its classical form essentially involves an executive consisting of a politically irresponsible head of state and a ministerial cabinet responsible both for its own acts done in the exercise of its powers and for the head of state," based on the idea that "the head of state reigns but does not govern."[16]

In his pleading for the proclamation of national independence, Abbé de Foere brings into discussion his creed regarding the importance of justice, which "must be the supreme law, the only law regulating diplomacy and the internal politics of states."[17] From the perspective of Joseph Raz, the law is meant to be transparent, clear and stable, and the activity of state bodies governed by the adoption of open, permanent, general and explicitly stated rules. The independence of the courts must be guaranteed,

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15 Sajo, *Limiting Government*, 185.

16 Tudor Drăganu, *Începuturile și dezvoltarea regimului parlamentar în România până la 1916* [The Beginnings and Development of the Parliamentary Regime in Romania until 1916] (Cluj Napoca: Dacia, 1991), 19.

17 Belgian Parliamentary Debates: Session 1830-1831, Parliamentary Annals – Plenary Sessions, House of Representatives, 173.

so that their discretionary powers are subject only to the law.[18] Continuing this idea, a correlation can be made with Montesquieu's way of thinking, according to which the judiciary cannot fulfill this condition unless it functions as an independent branch of power, separately from the legislative and executive powers, if not freedom would be limited and the principle of separation of powers in the state would lose its primacy. This is the point from which two possible scenarios arise, First, the situation in which the judicial power would become arbitrary with regard to the life and freedom of citizens, if it were to approach the legislative power, with judges also taking over the powers of some legislators. Second, the situation in which the actions of the judges would acquire an oppressive character, in the event that the judicial power would unite with the executive power:

> "There is also no freedom, if the judicial power is not separated from the legislative and the executive power. If it were combined with the legislative power, the power over the life and liberty of the citizens would be arbitrary, because the judge would be the legislator. If it were combined with the executive power, the judge could have the force of an oppressor."[19]

In order to avoid these two scenarios, the complete separation and self-determination of the judiciary, which has a strong control over the legislative and executive branches, and turn it into a means of political surveillance, are absolutely necessary. Following the appointment of judges, the other branches cease to exercise influence over the judiciary, which is subject only to the law.[20] The impartiality and the independence of the judiciary are two constitutional requirements designed to guarantee the people's rights. This is the context, which leads Charles Destouvelles to support the idea that "without institutions there is no freedom, there is no stability," a phenomenon that could be reached through the system of concentration of powers, which prevents a coherent organization and functioning of society.[21] According to Abbé

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18 Joseph Raz, "The Rule of Law and its Virtue," *Law Quarterly Review* 93 (1977): 198.

19 Montesquieu, *Despre spiritul legilor* [The Spirit of Laws], vol. I (Bucharest: Editura Ştiinţifică, 1964), 196.

20 Sajo, *Limiting Government*, 220.

21 Ibid., 241.

de Foere, the principle according to which the general interest is the supreme law becomes by its nature a diplomatic one, even if it gave rise to the purely material considerations of balance and general security, such as revolted groups of citizens, interventions in society under the name of defending citizens' interests and causes or civil discords and even bloody and interminable wars:

> "These are the horrible consequences of the material principle of diplomacy, a principle which arbitrarily leads to all injustices, to all outrages, to all upheavals, to all tyrannies, to all anarchies; principle under whose empire there is neither faith, nor law, nor natural right, nor right of people, nor general protection, nor particular security".[22]

Thus, the deputy blames the state of violence to which the Belgian state has been brought, which could culminate from an arbitrary application of power to a concealment of private interests under the pretext of the general interest through the degrading subordination of justice, in order to subsequently arrive at a state in which the general liberty and security are threatened, under the pressure of the danger of complete dissolution. This is the context that explains all the usurpation and diplomatic violence exerted on Belgium, a fact for which it was imperative to transform justice into "the invariable law of diplomats and statesmen."[23] This is the starting point of the proposal to establish several diplomatic offices with the aim of making known the right of the Belgian nation and to overcome the state of humiliating subordination in which the country found itself, all in the name of the "eternal justice:"

> "The principles of eternal justice are of inflexible rigor. Everything that does not fit exactly is mutilated, deformed, fought by the irresistible power of human consciousness."[24]

The worries of the Belgian deputy stemmed from the political experience of the country because what has corrupted the proper functioning of a society and throughout history has attacked the right of nations and

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[22] Belgian Parliamentary Debates: Session 1830-1831, Parliamentary Annals – Plenary Sessions, House of Representatives, 172.

[23] Ibid., 172.

[24] Idem

individuals has been the principle according to which whatever politics advise, justice authorizes. This is the principle that dominated the diplomacy of the Congress of Vienna (1814-1815), the Treaty of Paris (1815) and London Conference (1830), sacrificing the right to independence of Belgium in favor of purely material interests and erasing the name of the Belgian people from the list of European nations. The independence of Belgium without the territory belonging to Luxembourg was unanimously proclaimed by the National Congress during the session of November 18, 1830, with 188 votes in favor.

The issue of popular consultation has been brought up since those times by Baron Jean de Pélichy van Huerne, who advocated for "a republican monarchy" as a form of government, following a calculation of the advantages and disadvantages this could bring to general welfare by investing in power through universal suffrage a constitutional monarch to rule using republican institutions[25] Inevitably, the idea of ministerial responsibility is subtly noted together with the proposal that no act of the monarch should have effect if it is not covered by a minister who takes responsibility for it. Continuing his ideas, the deputy makes pro-monarchy arguments, considering this form of government as a vital configuration for guiding the state towards development and defining it as:

> "the oldest, most frequently used and most active form of government. I see it surrounded by strong and stable authorities and founded on the greatest liberty. Constitutional and representative hereditary monarchy suits both customs, morals, and the geographical situation. Acting in this way, we will not cause any harm to the other powers and thus we will avoid war."[26]

From this perspective, the deputy claimed that ensuring a continuity of governance at the European level could contribute to the recognition of the rights of the new nation. Mathieu Leclercq started his speech in front of the assembly with the idea that a hereditary ruler of the state could proclaim liberty and law but destroys moral customs. Thus, the identification of a sure tactic to guarantee the respect for law and freedom proves paramount, especially since in the absence of law,

25 Ibid., 185.

26 Ibid., 185.

licentiousness and anarchy would dominate society as a whole. The same deputy urged moderation with the transition from one form of government to another, because each of them has advantages and disadvantages.[27] An elected head of state, as in the case of the republic, seeks to ensure his continuity, and later his retirement, for which he tries to surround himself with partisans, giving him a large part of the state's affairs. But gaining trust and loyalty cannot be done without some rewards, which is why public offices are often distributed not to the worthiest, but to those who can support it better. So, this fact can be treated as a custom, that the rules of equity do not always dominate politics, a sector where ambitions have free rein. In a representative monarchy, the nation intervenes in the affairs of power, but in an indirect manner. Power is conferred by the citizens to those chosen, considered the worthiest and most interested in the general good.[28]

In addition, Mathieu Leclercq supported the need to introduce an education intended for all, able to develop the faculties and the way of thinking of an individual, the knowledge of the rights and duties, which derive from his role as a citizen, as well as the principles of the political organization of the state in which he lives. The appearance of this ideal in Belgian political consciousness occurred against the background of the American experience, because as the deputy claimed, there "everyone knows how to read; a general instruction developed the spirit of reflection in all classes; all deal with public interests, all confuse them with private interests (…); all, when the law hath spoken, stop and listen," which Belgium seemed to be far from at the time of his lecture.[29] He concludes his pleading by mentioning the fact that "the republic is not in relation to our traditions, our morals, nor our customs," especially since at the European level most of the powers were monarchies.[30] Thus, Mathieu Leclercq does not shy away from making a brief comparison between the American and Belgian cases, starting from the geographical

[27] Ibid., 186.
[28] Ibid., 188.
[29] Ibid., 189.
[30] Ibid., 189.

positioning, in the context in which Belgium was surrounded only by absolutist and representative monarchies.

According to Charles Liedts, heredity has a neutral character at the level of political power, because it is not only linked to a certain form of government or a certain state of society, it adapts to time, needs and situations.[31] In consonance with this idea, Jean-Joseph Raikem explains the fact that if ministerial responsibility were to become a reality, the rule of a hereditary chief would be most likely to ensure respect for public liberties and guarantee general security. Thus, he supported a representative constitutional government with a hereditary head. An ambitious prince will seek to stabilize his power, while a weak one would only end up being manipulated by other politicians.[32] Pierre Seron declares himself a supporter of the representative form of government with the head of the executive power elected by the congress for a period of ten years, a proposal however rejected by the rest of the members of the Congress.[33]

According to Viscount Charles Vilain XIIII, the imposition of a federal republic would lead to general discord, he himself being a great follower of heredity to the throne.[34] As Paul Wyvekens argued before the National Congress during the session of November 19, 1830, "constitutional monarchy, far from being a state of transition to a more ideal regime, is on the contrary a more learned, more ingenious political combination than the republic itself," thus emphasizing the superior character of a monarchy, even if other members of the Congress had contrary views, such as the case of Paul Devaux, for whom the predilection for the election of the republic came from the lower costs that a president entailed compared to a hereditary king.[35] However, even the republic does not seem perfect, because "no system of government favors foreign intervention more" than this and the domination of political parties by strong interests.[36]

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31 Ibid., 191.
32 Ibid., 198.
33 Ibid., 198.
34 Ibid., 199.
35 Ibid., 208.
36 Ibid., 214.

Starting from the debates of the Belgian deputies regarding the choice of an optimal form of government for the young European nation, the primacy of the monarchy is highlighted, which proves to be the main instrument by which the freedom of a nation can resist foreign intervention and domination, because there is not the same level of ambition and discord among the political elite. The power of the monarch plays the role of a barrier to the interests of conquest, transforming himself in a conciliatory power. This is also the argument, which explains Paul Devaux's preference for representative monarchy.[37] For Charles-Joseph de Roo, however, a form of government had to be found starting from the ideal that the nation would be protected and the confidence in the future assured. Here the duty of the constitution to fight against the usurpation of power and social instability can be added, as well as against all phenomena that could threaten freedom and the country's independence. According to him, the main guarantees that the young nation needed to fight in asserting its own identity, aimed: "direct and popular elections, the accountability of those in power, the organization of the judiciary, judicial order, civic hosts, freedom of public instruction and the press," all to prevent despotism, aristocratic and oligarchic power, thus he declares himself a supporter of representative monarchy.[38]

Constantin Rodenbach advocated for hereditary constitutional monarchy, just like Charles Blargnies or Charles Destouvelles, "under the condition that this government be organized in such a manner that all powers emanate from the nation, taxes be moderate and tyranny be impossible," insisting thus on popular sovereignty and the need to abolish any form of abuse of power.[39] This represented a major danger according to the philosophy of Montesquieu, who argued that "experience always teaches us that every man who possesses power is inclined to abuse it, and he goes on like this until he reaches the limits," so for the abuse of power to be prevented, "power must be restrained by power through

[37] Ibid., 214.
[38] Ibid., 220.
[39] Ibid., 236.

established order."[40] Concretely, this desire could be fulfilled by introducing the principle of separation of powers in state and clearly establishing the specific functions of each power in order to prevent despotism:

> "When the legislative power and the executive power are united in the hands of the same person or the same body of rulers, there is no freedom, because the fear may arise that the same monarch or the same senate will not draw up tyrannical laws to apply tyrannically."[41]

In the exposition of his ideas, Constantin Rodenbach based his speech on the interpretation of the constitutional monarchy from the perspective of the purest form of government of the law, not of people, campaigning for "ministerial responsibility, independent magistracy, (...) complete freedom of religion, press and education."[42] Drawing a parallel with the French model, Pierre Seron recalls the principles formulated by Condorcet on February 15, 1792, within the French National Convention, considering that heredity produces a form of social discrimination. In support of his ideas, he brings the argument that there is a risk that the head of state will not try to fight for the general good since the low chances for the danger of taking away his powers:

> "All political heredity is both an obvious violation of natural equality and an absurd institution because it presupposes the inheritance of one's own qualities for the performance of a public office. Any exception to the common law made in favor of one person is a violation of the rights of all. Any power above which no other person rises cannot be entrusted to a single individual, either for his life or for a long period, without conferring on him an influence attached to his person and not to his offices, without giving his ambition the means of lose public freedom or at least try."[43]

According to Hubert Masbourg, "in hereditary monarchies the interest of the chief is identified with that of the state; the public good must

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40 Montesquieu, *Despre spiritul legilor*, 195.

41 Ibid., 196.

42 Belgian Parliamentary Debates: Session 1830-1831, Parliamentary Annals – Plenary Sessions, House of Representatives, 240.

43 Ibid., 251.

naturally be the object of all his desires and of all his efforts."[44] Thus he is maintaining his optimistic belief despite any contrary opinions. Beyond this, in a monarchy there is a tendency that moral affection makes its appearance, manifested by the respect of the citizens towards their king. Once put to the vote, the question of choosing the optimal form of government for the Belgian state gathered 187 members in the National Congress, of which 174 voted in favor of the representative constitutional monarchy under a hereditary head, and 13 in favor of the republic. The deputies who voted against the monarchical regime were Pierre Seron, Alexandre de Robaulx, François Lardinois, Jean Goethales, Pierre David, Abbé Désiré De Haerne, Pacifique Goffint, Justin de Labbeville, Eugène Fransman, Louis Delwarde, Camille de Smet, François Pirson and Thiers, during the meeting of November 22, 1830.[45]

The Senate in the Belgian Parliamentary Debates from 1830-1831

In Belgium, the question of the Senate was also one of the great debates of the National Congress of December 1830, and included numerous proposals that it should be appointed for life only by the head of state. The number of members was to be well determined: one senator to two deputies. To occupy the position, the census character was established, with a land contribution of 1,000 florins. In provinces where none of 10,000 citizens were eligible in this respect, the citizen who paid the most taxes was eligible to be elected. Senators did not enjoy privileges, and the minimum age to occupy the seat of senator was 40 years.[46]

The desire for a chamber elected for life came from the ideal of introducing an incorruptible institution. According to popular conceptions, corruption does not simply represent the violation of a moral or political custom but expresses the transgression of a higher universal norm. Corruption is a human condition and an ancient phenomenon. In a limited sense, corruption is based on human choice and depends on the

[44] Ibid., 259.
[45] Ibid., 260.
[46] Ibid., 370 (Session of December 7, 1830).

will of each individual to allow himself to be dominated by self-interest or to contribute to the common good. As for corruption at the state level, it results from the interaction of individualism with political and economic inequality.[47] The state unaffected by the phenomenon of corruption guarantees some forms of economic, legal, and political equality, but without demanding absolute equality in all aspects of life.

Laws must be applied equally to all citizens and properly administered for the general interest, not the private interest. As a rule, ethics associates political corruption with moral decay, degeneration, and decadence[48] The problem of corruption was inextricably linked to the fact that it was rather present in mixed regimes, not dependent on the personal will of a single leader or the collective will of a single group or faction. The conceptualization of corruption as a process of degeneration allowed the development of two types of discourse in medieval and modern times. The first describes corruption as the process of moral or physical disintegration of the human being, including the degeneration of the earth and the cosmos. The second type describes corruption as the end of a process of decay with harmful effects, as it can lead to the disappearance of the state or the total destruction of society.[49]

Count Félix de Mérode advocated for the appointment of a Senate for life, with members elected on the basis of the census criteria, which would guarantee the national spirit and collective freedom.[50] The bicameral parliament was an institution with tradition in England and an innovation in France and Belgium, as Jean-Baptiste Nothomb begins his pleading for the introduction of the Senate.[51] According to several members of the National Congress, a single chamber "could usurp excessive power, diminishing the royal prerogative (…). The lower

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47 Patrick Dobel, "The Corruption of a State," *The American Political Science Review* 72 (1978): 961.

48 Bruce Buchan and Lisa Hill, *An intellectual history of political corruption* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 44.

49 Ibid., 44.

50 Belgian Parliamentary Debates: Session 1830-1831, Parliamentary Annals - Plenary Sessions, House of Representatives, 421.

51 Ibid., 424.

house will always dominate the other powers, so long as it is the expression of public opinion, because the lower house represents the nation from which all powers emanate."[52] Therefore, the representative government is most interested in defending the stability of the throne, but also the freedom and prosperity of the country, as Jacques Fleussu argued before the members of the National Congress in his attempt to criticize the democratic government, in which he saw an instrument of imposition of political demagoguery.[53] The almost universal belief was that through the operation of a single chamber, there was a risk of exercising a monopoly over the legislative power. According to Charles de Brouckère, "a single chamber, the product of a good electoral law, will not preserve nationality," while Pierre Van Meenen considered it necessary to introduce a second chamber, so as to balance the powers and functions as an intermediary between the sovereign and the legislative power. Also, according to him, the upper chamber could function as a preventive, not a repressive tool, its usefulness stemming from the control exercised over the acts of the elective chamber.[54]

According to Jean Ghisbert de Leeuw, the establishment of the Senate was necessary for "the aristocracy to be represented; to function as a body balance; (…) to prevent the attacks of an eminently popular chamber from reaching the executive power directly."[55] Thus, for him the main three factors to take into account for the establishment of the Senate were: the representation of the aristocracy, the introduction of a moderating body to prevent the monopoly of power, and the prevention of the attacks of an eminently popular chamber on the executive power. The lower chamber was the one that usually represented the nation, from where all the powers of a state usually emanate.

For Pierre Van Meenen, the introduction of a second chamber was a necessity, in the context in which it could function as an intermediate power in relation to the head of state, exercising control over the operations carried out by the elective chamber. The biggest disadvantage that the

52 Ibid., 427.
53 Ibid., 439.
54 Ibid., 428-430.
55 Ibid., 444.

deputy identified was not a possible break between the two powers, but their complicity, because in the attempt of the majority of the chamber to get into the graces of the sovereign, it could lead to a violation of citizens' liberties by applying the constitutional provisions in the sovereign's own interest. In the situation where the sovereign would dissolve the elective chamber, also in absence of a higher chamber to take over its powers, then the sovereign would enjoy absolute powers in the state.

Moreover, Pierre Van Meenen interpreted the existence of the upper chamber "more as a preventive means than as a repressive means," proving itself "useful through the control it must exercise over the acts of the elective chamber."[56] Regarding the matter of the Senate, Pierre Seron reiterates the idea that "an aristocratic chamber can only be useful to despotism."[57] Barthélémy de Theux de Meylandt saw "as indisputable the advantages of a Senate for the improvement of legislation and the maintenance of internal peace," in the context in which Belgium was a country without privileges, and "the constitution guaranteed all popular institutions so that the Senate would not have a personal interest in opposing any useful law."[58] Thus, the country's position was at a favorable point for the adoption of the Senate institution:

> "the Belgian people, united in the same interests, will directly elect a chamber dominated by the national spirit and strengthened by new guarantees, such as the annual tax vote, a commission of accounts appointed by this chamber, and revocable at her will, and a well-organized ministerial responsibility, which will place the chief power in her hands."[59]

Campaigning for the election of the members of the Senate by the people, deputy Robert Helias d'Huddeghem pointed towards an independence of this chamber in relation to the sovereign, which could be ensured by introducing an incompatibility between the position of senator and the possibility of occupying another position around the monarch, to limit the desire to obtain as many personal advantages as possible. Among

[56] Belgian Parliamentary Debates: Session 1830-1831, Parliamentary Annals – Plenary Sessions, House of Representatives, 428-430.

[57] Ibid., 433.

[58] Ibid., 434.

[59] Ibid., 434.

the special powers granted to the Senate requested by this deputy were: ”the maintenance of public and individual liberty, of freedom of conscience and of the press, of the power to order and give remunerative rewards.”[60] Viscount Charles Hippolyte Vilain XIIII supported the lifelong appointment of senators by the king, considering this option optimal for preserving the independence of the vote and justifying this choice in the name of the public good. The king could not thus limit their role, nor could corruption divert them from their intended purpose in the exercise of their duties. However, the excess wealth accumulated at the level of this institution could cause the Senate to acquire “the claims and traditions of oligarchy, contrary to general liberties,” and “a guarantee of its independence will be the publication of its meetings and acts. This publication will serve as a brake on the issuance of principles contrary to general liberties.”[61]

Hubert Masbourg advocated for the establishment of the Senate as an intermediate power to “maintain and restore harmony” at the level of the central power, to put a barrier in the way of ministerial despotism and factional interests, to guarantee the fundamental law and preserve the social order.[62] The absence of such a system of balance of powers led most of the time to bloody revolutions in free states, Cicero’s thought being brought as justification, according to which the best form of government turns out to be the one composed of three powers, because in this form they can temper one another.[63]

As baron François Van den Broucke de Terbecq supported before the other deputies, the act of giving to a nation a constitution involves a rigorous process, as it must guarantee all the rights of the citizens and remove arbitrary power from the society through a form of government capable of providing a solid basis for liberties,. He reasons the balance arising from the existence of three powers in terms of the fact that a single power will eventually be destroyed, and the two powers will fight

60 Ibid., 443-444.
61 Ibid., 448.
62 Ibid., 459.
63 Ibid., 459.

until one of them is losing.[64] According to Mathieu Leclercq, in the absence of intelligence, freedom is just a meaningless word, arguing that a higher chamber like the Senate would cause inequality and distinction between social classes, the biggest fear being that of coming under the captivity of despotism or aristocracy.[65] In general, the functioning of a representative type of government is based on the introduction of the Senate as an upper chamber, in order to prevent the seizure of power by the Chamber of Deputies, balance the power, prevent disorder, anarchy, possible uprisings and oppressions in society.[66]

In support of his point of view regarding the establishment of the institution of the Senate during the session of the National Congress of December 15, 1830, Alexandre de Robaulx recalls the moment when the monarchy was chosen as a form of government, the republic being rejected as considered to provide only temporary power in terms of the eligibility of the term of government, as each time a president changes the nation goes through a succession of transformations. Instead, the hereditary character of a monarchy proves to be the best tool for ending political dissension.[67] This is the context that transposes Étienne de Gerlache into a promoter of the idea that a hereditary chamber could offer greater guarantees of stability, "more spirit of independence, wisdom and conservation."[68]

The introduction of the Senate would have produced a change in the Belgian society, and in order for it to prove sustainable and effective, a slow and rational process of managing the political upheaval was necessary, taking into account all the circumstances and challenges of the moment, a perspective proper to the liberal ideology. But change can also produce fear. The reluctance to introduce the institution of the Senate came from the anxiety that once composed of aristocratic elements, it would no longer ensure an egalitarian respect for the main freedoms of the citizens. However, the speech delivered by Josse Delehaye and

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64 Belgian Parliamentary Debates: Session 1830-1831, Parliamentary Annals – Plenary Sessions, House of Representatives, 461.

65 Ibid., 480 (Session of December 15, 1830).

66 Ibid., 481 (Session of December 15, 1830).

67 Ibid., 487.

68 Ibid., 473.

Pierre Van Meenen before the National Congress sums up the most edifying role of the Senate, being described as "a power, which by its nature and position, apart from opposing popular rebellion as well as the despotic tendency of the head of state," becomes an instrument capable of watching the acts of each party, a faithful guardian, who ensures that the law is observed.[69]

Once the favorable or adverse interventions of the Belgian deputies are completed, the question of establishing the Senate was put to vote during the National Congress session of December 15, 1830. The situation was as follows: 128 votes in favor and 62 votes against, because the latter deputies saw the Senate as a threat rather than a way to maintain order and stability in the state. However, the negotiated compromise on the form of the senatorial assembly is a good illustration of the tension between the conservative and liberal currents, with the latter emerging victorious. Based on general practice at European level, the Senate proved to be less impetuous than the Chamber of Deputies, belief clearly presented in the interventions within the Belgian National Congress. Taking into account the balance of forces in Europe, the creation of this upper chamber became a sign of political development of the Belgian nation that aspired to the recognition of the legitimacy and independence of this young state by the great powers. The creation of Belgium changed the map of Europe, which made the role of political representatives more difficult, because they did not want to take the risk of worrying the great powers at a time when the existence of the new state was not yet unanimously accepted at the European level. But the decision to create a second chamber also expressed the choice to take into account the economic and social realities of the time. The Senate was a means of integration into the political system of the great landed families whose local influence was considerable. Social inequality was quite prominent in Belgian society in the first half of the 19th century. If the big landowners were not given an important place in the new institutional formats, there were two risks: either to become opponents of these institutions, which would have weakened the political regime,

[69] Ibid., 490 (Session of December 15, 1830).

or to dominate the single chamber, thus stopping the political expression of other components of the population.[70]

Partisans of the single chamber motivated their choice starting from the idea of equality between citizens and the guarantee of everyone's rights before the law, the Senate being for them the equivalent of privileges. According to Lucien Jottrand, the proposal to establish the Senate institution has as main explanation the social desideratum of "having a guarantee of maturity and calmness in legislative discussions and resolutions," while the supporters of a single chamber did not want this proposal to materialize for fear of seeing the state constitution affected by aristocratic privileges.[71] In Jottrand's opinion, the only viable method of achieving a fusion between these two opposing views was for senators to be elected by the citizens from among those who were of a certain age and possessed a certain wealth, considering that by this method a tribute could be paid to the homogeneity of the opinions and national interests of the Belgian people.[72] Félix de Mûelenaere drew attention to the fact that it was necessary to ensure that the Senate did not become a danger to public liberties, in the context in which it should have played the role of a protection against social oppression, whereas for Joseph Forgeur, if the upper chamber was appointed by the provincial councils, and not by the electors, this would give it a neutral character, and render it safe from any attempt by the government to corrupt it.[73]

According to art. 56 of the Constitution, the main conditions for the election of a senator were: to be born in Belgium or subject to the great naturalization, to possess civil and political rights, have residence in Belgium and respectively to respond to census and age conditions.[74] The history of the Senate is deeply connected to the general politics and institutional developments of Belgium. At the formation of the country, Catholics and Liberals overcame philosophical differences to face the threat that Holland constituted. This Unionist period between moderate

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70 Laureys et al., *L'histoire du Senat en Belgique*, 33.

71 Belgian Parliamentary Debates: Session 1830-1831, Parliamentary Annals – Plenary Sessions, House of Representatives, 508 (Session of December 16, 1830).

72 Ibid., 508 (Session of December 16, 1830).

73 Ibid., 520 (Session of December 16, 1830).

74 Émile Huyttens, *Discussions du congrès national de* Belgique, 34-35.

and progressive elements was characterized by compromise solutions and the growing influence of the king and of the government.[75] After the signing of the peace treaty with Holland in 1839, internal dissensions arose, ideological struggle took shape, and Parliament began to challenge royal power. Unionism only managed to hold on until 1847, losing its strength because of internal conflicts. After the 1848 election, the first liberal non-unionist government came to power, and in 1856 the king made an unsuccessful attempt to restore unionism.

Conclusions

Following the analysis of the Belgian deputies' speeches during the parliamentary session of 1830-1831, we came to the conclusion that the Belgian society does not deviate from the line of young European nations. Thus, immediately after gaining independence, under the auspices of the National Congress, a perfect form of government of the new state is sought, and the most notable way to do this is to appeal to the model of the great European powers, which explains the pattern of socialization by taking over elements of culture specific to nations at a higher stage of development. This attitude is explained both by the urgency to give a direction to the state, and by the prestige of neighboring countries with a great tradition of representative monarchy. This form of government proves to be the main instrument by which the liberty of a nation can oppose foreign intervention and domination in the context where the power of the monarch acts as a barrier to the interests of conquest. As a general rule, in hereditary monarchies the interest of the chief is identified with that of the state, so that all his efforts are focused on implementing the grievances of society.

The Senate as an intermediate power has the role of maintaining balance between the other two powers, of putting a barrier in the way of ministerial despotism and factional interests, so as to contribute to the guarantee of the fundamental law and the preservation of social order. The absence of such a system of balance of power has often led to revolts

[75] Laureys et al., *L'histoire du Senat en Belgique*, 62-63.

or bloody revolutions in free states. As the best form of government proves to be that composed of three powers, so that they may temper one another, the advantages of the operation of the institution of the Senate for the improvement of legislation and the maintenance of general security are proved indisputable, notwithstanding the general consideration of that era, that it defends the interests of the aristocratic class.

Starting from the question of the three models, the senatorial institution discussed in 1830 is not a new creation but is inspired by existing examples and political theories with diversified accents. However, they reflect the dominant political ideology of the time: the liberalism, which proves more concerned with the development of forms of government characterized by a set of institutions and principles, such as the separation of powers in the state, free elections, and representative system, than with the establishment of democratic foundations. From this point of view, the debates in Congress correspond perfectly to the liberal moment in the turbulent but irreversible history of democracy. Thus, it cannot be denied that the idea of democracy was not constantly present during the discussions. The fundamental problem posed by the organization of the Senate concerns the representativeness of this assembly and, in a certain way, its democratic legitimacy.[76]

The doctrinal references clearly reflect the heterogeneity of the thoughts invoked, even if they are all related to the liberal system of thought. Following three other major public debates, Congress adopted representative constitutional monarchy as the foundation for the new Belgian institutions. Emphasizing the separation of powers and proclaiming the responsibility of ministers, Congress adopts the parliamentary system, thus following the French example of July 1830. The political responsibility of the ministers was one of the main demands of the Belgian representatives under the Dutch regime, which also explains the urgency of its application.

As Émile Huyttens argued,

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[76] Henry Leroy, "Le Sénat dans le nouvel État belge. Questions et perspectives" [The Senate in the new Belgian State. Questions and Perspectives], in *La réforme du Sénat. Actes du colloque organisé à la Maison des Parlementaires le 6 octobre 1989* [The Senate Reform. Proceedings of the Symposium Organized at the Maison des Parlementaires on October 6, 1989], Centre de droit public de la Faculté de Droit de l'Université Libre de Bruxelles (Bruxelles: Bruylant, 1990), 72.

> "a good constitutional government consists of a more or less equal balance of democratic and aristocratic elements, and I believe that, consequently, two chambers must be admitted. The existence of two chambers also seems essential for the stability of the government. This is the only way to prevent changes that are too sudden and resolutions that are too hasty; even the United States felt the need to create a Senate alongside the other chamber. It would be impossible for power to fight against the impetuosity and passions of a body which, recognized as omnipotent (…) would impose its passions and whims on power and, consequently, on the nation (…). Through repeated use of the veto, the executive power would end up becoming unpopular and discredited. Moreover, the history of the French Revolution demonstrates that the use of the veto is almost impossible for a monarch who finds himself face to face with a single legislative assembly, unless he wants to expose himself to seeing his power destroyed. (…) The Senate must be a moderating power."[77]

In this quasi-programmatic passage, the principle of separation of powers in the state can be identified from Montesquieu's perspective. Despite the establishment of this double mechanism of dividing legislative power and representing within it different social groups, the risk of a possible coalition of the two assemblies leading to the paralysis of the executive or one chamber by the other does not completely disappear.

The Senate was most often perceived as an institution of compromise: a consolidation of the liberal institutional balance and the maintenance of the class privileges of newly independent Belgium. Belgian bicameralism corresponds to the transition from the old to the new regime: an upper chamber representing the aristocracy face to the lower chamber, of a more bourgeois composition, anticipating the antagonism between liberals and democrats that would manifest later in the era. During the first years of national independence, the political situation was dominated by external affairs. During the period of unionism, ideological clashes were replaced by non-denominational clashes between moderate and progressive elements. Thus, the period 1831-1839 was often called the golden period of unionism.[78] In the first years of the country's existence, the parliament did not influence the foreign policy of the government, and the Senate remained a defender of the monarchy, enjoying the full confidence of the king. This is the reason why for a long time the Senate hesitated between the role of defender of royal interests and the function of controlling the executive power.[79]

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77 Émile Huyttens, *Discussions du congrès national de* Belgique, 7.

78 Laureys et al., *L'histoire du Senat en Belgique*, 52.

79 Ibid., 59.

ANNALES

DOI: 10.62229/sprps23-1/6

CHRONOLOGY OF THE ROMANIAN POLITICAL LIFE OCTOBER 1, 2022 – MARCH 31, 2023*

October 2

- The Alliance for Romanians' Unification party (AUR) organizes an anti-Government protest in Bucharest, resulting in clashes between supporters of George Simion, the party's president, and Diana Șoșoacă, member of Parliament (MP) and former member of AUR. The protest was triggered by the surging inflation and the energy crisis. Around 4,000 people gathered in Victoria Square, in front of the Government headquarters. After the intervention of the gendarmerie, George Simion and his protesters left for the Social-Democratic Party (PSD) headquarters.

October 3

- Ligia Deca, former presidential adviser, affiliated to the National Liberal Party (PNL), is appointed by Presidential decree as the new Minister of Education, following the resignation of Sorin Cîmpeanu.
- Former liberal leader Ludovic Orban, currently president of the Force of the Right Party (FD), calls for the dismissal of Prime Minister Nicolae Ciucă, on the grounds that he plagiarized his doctoral thesis. The accusation of plagiarism was documented by journalist Emilia Șercan, but the case was buried in bureaucracy.

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October 4

- The Minister of Justice, Cătălin Predoiu (PNL), urges for the reintroduction of the Whistleblower Law in Parliament, with amendments based on recommendations from the European Commission (EC). The proposed changes aim to enable anonymous reporting of complaints related to corruption or legal violations. He argues that this bill is significant because the funds in the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) are conditioned by the amendments made to this law.
- The draft law on the status of judges and prosecutors is adopted by the plenum of the Chamber of Deputies, with 198 votes in favor, eighty votes against, and four abstentions. The Senate is the decisional Chamber.
- Finance Minister, Adrian Câciu, announces, following the meeting of the Economic and Financial Affairs Council in Luxembourg, that Romania will receive almost €1.4 billion for energy independence projects as the sixth beneficiary country in the EU through REPowerEU. The funds will be provided by auctioning the greenhouse gas emission allowances of the Innovation Fund (75%) and by the advance of the auctioning of national Emission Trading Scheme allowances for the period 2027-2030 (25%).

October 5

- The Government approves the establishment within the General Secretariat of the Government (GSG) of a structure with a role in monitoring and controlling the execution of the judgments pronounced by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) involving Romania.
- PM Nicolae Ciucă signs with the European Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms, Elisa Ferreira, a new Partnership Agreement, under which Romania will benefit from €31 billion in funding between 2021 and 2027. Actual investments in the territory cover eight regional programs and nine national programs.
- The Government approves the decision on the establishment and operation of the Investment and Development Bank that will target large infrastructure and strategic projects. Diversification of financing

instruments is necessary against the background of increasing funding needed at the national level.

- The Save Romania Union (USR) opposition party submits a complaint to the Constitutional Court of Romania (CCR) on the law approving General Emergency Ordinance 115/26.08.2022 through which the allowances of mayors and presidents of County Councils are increased by RON 2,000. The complaint was also signed by the members of the Force of the Right Party (FD).
- PM Ciucă gives a negative opinion to the legislative proposal launched by USR to limit to two (eight years) the number of mandates for university Rectors, invoking the principle of the autonomy of universities.

October 7

- USR MPs and volunteers transcribe Liberal Interior Minister Lucian Bode's doctoral thesis in order to make it public and subject it to anti-plagiarism checks. Emilia Șercan disagreed with the initiative, citing her reluctance to be associated with a political initiative. The Interior Minister denied that his doctoral thesis is secret, as it is available at the Babeș-Bolyai University (UBB) Library in Cluj and at the National Library. He announces that he will sue those who deny the quality and transparency of his PhD. The President of the Committee for Culture of the Chamber of Deputies, Iulian Bulai (USR), invited to the Parliament the director of the Romanian National Library, Adrian Cioroianu, to identify legal-administrative solutions for accessing doctoral theses under the aegis of the institution, but Cioroianu refused the invitation.

October 10

- Suceava Senator George (Gheorghiță) Mîndruță, former USR member, joins PSD.

October 11

- The Chamber of Deputies, as the decisional Chamber, with 250 votes in favor and one against, adopts two legislative initiatives raised by USR. These prohibit individuals who have been irrevocably

convicted to prison from running and being elected to positions such as MP, Mayor, President of County Council, County Councilor, or Local Councilor, unless they have been rehabilitated, granted post-conviction amnesty, or had the crime decriminalized. President Klaus Iohannis promulgates the law on November 4.

- In the context of the joint NATO effort to strengthen the Eastern flank, France sends additional troops, armored vehicles, and Leclerc tanks to Romania, in order to deter possible Russian aggression.

October 13

- USR calls on PM Ciucă to dismiss Vasile Dîncu as Minister of National Defense in the context of his declarations on the war in Ukraine, according to which the only solution to the war in Ukraine is the negotiation with Russia. The Standing Bureau of the Chamber of Deputies invites Dîncu to the plenary to give explanations.
- The Plenary of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopts a favorable report on Romania's compliance with its obligations, recognizing the progress made in areas such as administration, justice, and the fight against corruption. It also condemns the lack of progress in what regards the press freedom or the inclusion of Roma citizens and underlines the high number of unenforced cases to ECHR.

October 15

- The Minister of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Bogdan Aurescu says Romania will contribute $1.4 million to NATO funds to strengthen the resilience of Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, and Jordan in the face of the danger posed by Russia.

October 17

- The Chamber of Deputies is debating the simple motion against the Minister of Internal Affairs, Lucian Bode, entitled: "Safety and trust or rout and theft? Minister Bode must be held accountable for the disaster he created," tabled by 55 USR MPs and non-affiliated members of the Force of Right Party. Bode is accused of poor

administration and corruption, while the allegations of plagiarism in his PhD thesis are reiterated.

- The plenary of the Senate adopts, by eighty-six votes in favor, thirty-seven against and three abstentions, the draft law concerning the organization of the Superior Council of Magistracy (SCM): its members shall be elected from among the judges and prosecutors appointed by the President of Romania with a seniority of at least seven years in office, if they have not been subjected to a disciplinary sanction in the last three years, except in the case of a sanction removal.
- Liviu Dragnea, the former PSD President, is being prosecuted by the National Anticorruption Directorate (DNA) in the Tel Drum case, opened in 2017, for creating an organized criminal group, abuse of office and forgery in documents. The damage amounts to LEI 31 million in the period 2001-2017.

October 18

- USR notifies the National Council for Attestation of University titles, Diplomas and Certificates (CNATDCU) regarding the suspicion of plagiarism in the doctoral thesis of Minister Lucian Bode.
- The plenary session of the European Parliament (EP) adopts, by 547 votes in favor, forty-nine against and forty-three abstentions (Dutch MEPs), a non-legislative resolution urging Member States to allow Romania and Bulgaria to join the Schengen Area.

October 19

- PM Ciucă announces the signing of a memorandum between the Romanian company ROMGAZ and the Azerbaijani company SOCAR for a joint investment in a liquefied natural gas facility on the Black Sea.
- The Chamber of Deputies rejects the simple motion against the Minister of Internal Affairs, Lucian Bode, with eighty-eight votes in favor and 162 against.

October 20

- Former President Traian Băsescu's lawyer submits a request to the Bucharest Court of Appeal stating that he will not challenge the Court Decisions of September 2019, which confirm the National Council for Studying the Securitate Archives (CNSAS) conclusion that he collaborated with the Securitate.

October 24

- Vasile Dîncu (PSD) resigns from the office of Minister of National Defense, invoking "the impossibility to collaborate" with President Iohannis. The interim of this Ministry is taken over by PM Ciucă.

October 27

- 103 members of USR Prahova, including MP Mihai Polițeanu, resign from the party, accusing that the county leadership is subordinated to PNL Prahova, which took decisions without consultation and intervened in the illegitimate internal elections.
- PM Ciucă says that the first tranche of €2.6 billion from the NRRP was paid by the EC, and it represents the confirmation of the achievement of the objectives assumed by Romania. The amount covers reforms that contribute to the digital transition, sustainable mobility, decarbonization, audit and control, education, and health, but also preliminary measures in reforming the pension system, taxation and includes measures to support businesses and ensure the good governance of the country.
- Former PM Victor Ponta and former PSD MP Sebastian Ghiță are acquitted in the 2016 DNA case ("Tony Blair") in which they were charged for money laundering and for using party leadership influence to obtain benefits. The classification was made in the absence of evidence to prove the allegations.

October 28

- The United States Agency for Trade and Development grants Romania a non-reimbursable financing of $14 million for the development of the first nuclear power plant with mini-reactors. The grant will be used for the preliminary engineering and design

study to advance the project of developing the first Advanced Small Modular Reactors in Romania.

November 1

- USR Deputy Cristian Seidler is demanding for Lucian Bode's resignation as Minister of Internal Affairs, after the Ethics Commission belonging to UBB published the results of the evaluation of his PhD thesis, in which citation errors and a 3% share of plagiarized fragments were identified.

November 2

- The Government approves the memorandum on "Measures on strengthening the partnership with development regions for the implementation of regional programs 2021-2027," signed between the Ministry of Investments and European Projects (MIEP) and Regional Development Agencies that will allow the MIEP to coordinate at national level the management of European funds.

November 3

- The Section for Judges of SCM approves the requests for retirement of sixty magistrates, in the context of the reopening of discussions regarding the elimination of special pensions.

November 4

- Romania has signed the purchase agreement for thirty-two F-16 aircrafts from Norway. The total cost is €88 million, and the first aircraft will arrive in Romania in 2023.

November 7

- The Senate approves in plenary by 109 votes in favor and one abstention the amendment of the Regulation on the procedure for waiver of parliamentary immunity, in agreement with the recommendations made by the Venice Commission, so that the report of the legal Committee includes both arguments in favor of and against the request.

- PSD Bucharest Sector 1 organization demands the resignation of Mayor Clotilde Armand (USR), who is in a situation of incompatibility and criminal suspicions, following the notification of the National Integrity Agency (ANI). This scandal concerns the disposition given by her through which she appointed herself project manager on a project financed with European funds, thus collecting additional revenues in February-August 2022.

November 8

- In the context of the energy crisis, the Chamber of Deputies, as the decision-making chamber, adopts a draft law approving Emergency Ordinance 108/2022 on the decarbonization of the energy sector, which regulates the closure and conservation of energy groups based on lignite and coal, closure of lignite quarries and coal mines as well as support measures for closure and conservation of lignite and coal-based electricity generation capacities.

November 9

- CCR rejects the referrals made by USR, AUR and the Ombudsman regarding the three laws on justice, adopted by the Parliament, namely: the Law on the status of judges and prosecutors, the Law on judicial organization and the Law on the SCM. USR and AUR ask President Iohannis not to promulgate the laws as they violate the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (CVM).
- At the Sharm El-Sheik Conference in Egypt, EximBank addresses two letters of intent to the Minister of Energy, Virgil Popescu, for two loans worth $50 million for the construction of units 3 and 4 of the Cernavodă Plant. Additionally, an extra $3 billion loan is allocated for the project's construction. The project is expected to conclude in 2030.
- The Minister of Family, Youth and Equal Opportunities, Gabriela Firea, together with the President of the Chamber of Deputies and of PSD, Marcel Ciolacu, and other members of the Parliament are submitting a bill stipulating that thirty percent of the candidates on the lists of local elections and boards of state enterprises should be women.

November 11

- The Government is adopting Emergency Ordinance 153/2022 regarding the centralized energy procurement mechanism between January 1, 2023 – March 31, 2025, which will ensure the compensation of energy prices. The categories that will benefit from compensation include churches, single-parent families, and water companies that provide public utilities. One day earlier, the ruling coalition agreed on the electricity price for household consumers to be set between 0.68 lei/kWh and 1.3 lei/kWh. These measures are to be applied for at least one year from January 1, 2023.

November 15

- President Iohannis promulgates the Laws of Justice, namely the Law on the status of judges and prosecutors, the Law on judicial organization and the Law on SCM. Renewing Romania's European Project (REPER) Party accuses Iohannis of not waiting for the Venice Commission's opinion and argues that the head of the state ignores the concerns raised by this organization and that by this decision he favors some political parties.
- The European Commissioner for Internal Affairs, Ylva Johansson, says Romania is ready to join the Schengen Area, alongside Bulgaria and Croatia. Two days ago, President Iohannis announced that Emmanuel Macron assured him of France's support.
- The Chamber of Deputies, as the decisional Chamber, approves by 157 votes in favor and ninety-one against the reduction of fuel prices by LEI 0,5 until December 31, 2022.

November 16

- The National Council's College for Combating Discrimination (CNCD) publicly condemns – by five votes in favor, three votes against and one abstention – the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban's declarations, made in Tușnad on July 23, 2022. His statements have been considered as promoting hate speech, as he declared that non-Europeans mixing with Europeans would create a mixed race transforming countries into "people conglomerates".

- The Government supplements the budgetary support directly offered to the Republic of Moldova with LEI 1,695 million, amounting to €50 million, in the context of the Annual Plan of International Cooperation for Development and Assistance 2022.
- The EC issues a positive report through the College of Commissioners regarding Romania's accession to the Schengen Area. The Commission requested the European Council to make the necessary decisions as fast as possible, in order to allow Schengen accession for Romania, Bulgaria, and Croatia.
- USR deputy Cătălin Drulă accuses the National Institute of Statistics of offering inaccurate data regarding economic growth, stating that the growth was of 1,5%, not 5,3%, the latter being the percentual value publicly presented.
- President Iohannis promulgates the normative act amending Law 227/2015 on the Fiscal Code. Thus, from January 1, 2024, the contribution to the second pillar of pensions will no longer be taxed, and only earnings will be taxed.

November 17

- The Government approves two draft emergency ordinances regarding the revision of the state budget and the state social security budget for 2022, in order to fulfill commitments in European projects and to ensure wage rights and social benefits. The revenues of the consolidated general budget are thus increased by LEI 521 million, and the expenditures of the consolidated general budget are increased by LEI 522 million. PM Ciucă declared on November 2 that the Government has allocated the largest amount of the budget for investments (about €18 billion).

November 18

- The EC is asking the Romanian Government to implement the reform by which the public pension system complies with the 9.4% of GDP threshold, otherwise Romania will not receive all the money offered by the NRRP. The EC adds that military pensions are considered special pensions, which would require the reduction of special pensions expenses and that no new categories of this

kind would be created by the end of December. These reforms aim to maintain stable long-term (2022-2070) total gross pension expenditure and are in line with the World Bank recommendations aiming at gradually increasing the retirement age (sixty-five years), experience requirements (minimum thirty years) and pensions calculated as 65% of the average gross income instead of the current 80%. However, these changes will not apply to military pensions in the context of the war in Ukraine.

- The Venice Commission urgently criticizes the hasty adoption of the Laws of Justice by President Iohannis, without consultation. It recommends longer appointments periods for the Directorate for Investigating Organised Crime and Terrorism (DIICOT) and DNA prosecutors without the option of renewal, and that the judicial police do not report their activity to the Interior Minister. Among the positive aspects is noted the fact that there is no political interference in the work of DNA, and the Attorney General cannot overturn the decisions of the DNA or DIICOT.
- Deputy Lilian Carp (Action and Solidarity Party), President of the Defense Committee of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, announces joining USR, in the context of the enlargement of the USR in the neighboring country for citizens with dual citizenship.

November 19

- The USR President Cătălin Drulă's Program regarding the 2024 elections has been released. "The New USR" aims to lead an authentic right-wing pole to give the next PM, to create a future based on equity, rule of law and honesty, to expand and fight against privileges, to stop the waste of public money, to modernize the state and transform it into a developed European country.

November 21

- In the context of the war in Ukraine, President Iohannis signs the decrees denouncing the Intergovernmental Agreement on the establishment of the International Investment Bank and its Statute (since July 10, 1970) and the Convention on multilateral settlements in transferable rubles, as well as the organization of the International

Bank for Economic Cooperation (since October 22, 1963). The International Investment Bank and the International Bank for Economic Cooperation were created by the Kremlin in order to finance the states from the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon).

- The plenary of the Chamber of Deputies approves, by 243 votes in favor and ten against, the DNA request for computer perquisition in the case of PSD MP Daniel Tudorache, former mayor of Bucharest Sector 1, prosecuted for illegal purchases during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- PSD President Marcel Ciolacu announces that from January 1, 2023, all pensions will increase by 12.5%, the pension point becoming LEI 1,784, and retirees with pensions less than LEI 1,700 will continue to receive social vouchers of LEI 250 throughout 2023. AUR supports raising pensions by a fixed amount and reducing special pensions.
- Cseke Attila, Minister for Development, Public Works, and Administration (MDPWA), signs fifty-eight contracts financed by Component 10 of the Local Fund of NRRP (C10 of NRRP), aiming to carry out the documentation regarding territory planning and urban planning, with a value of LEI 33,120,373.
- Amid the current energy crisis and the need to use Romania's full energy potential to ensure the functioning and stability of the energy system, President Iohannis requests OMV management to urgently start offshore operations within the Neptun deep perimeter owned by Romgaz and OMV Petrom.

November 22

- The EC lifts the CVM for Romania as it has met the recommendations and objectives. However, Romania will now be monitored like all member states in the cycle of the report on the rule of law, with a focus on the functioning of the Judicial Inspection, human resource allocation in the judicial system, and implementation of judicial decisions by the public administration.
- The Government approves the contracting of reimbursable financial assistance from the European Investment Bank amounting to €229

million for investments, to be used in the health sector, within the portfolio of the MDPWA.

November 24

- After the meeting of the Council for Social Dialogue, the Tripartite National Council decides to increase the minimum wage to LEI 3,000, and in the construction field to LEI 4,000 of which LEI 200 will be exempt from tax and insurance contributions.
- The Chamber of Deputies, as a decisional Chamber, adopts by 177 votes in favor, seventy-five against and eleven abstentions the draft approval of Emergency Ordinance 119/2022 on energy, accepting all the conditions of the governing coalition. Thus, a maximum electricity price of LEI 1.3/kWh is set for all consumers regardless of the consumption level.

November 25

- After a year in Government, PM Ciucă reports that the current coalition provided Romania with the security, stability, and predictability it needed. He underlines the lifting of the CVM, the measures taken under the Support Package for Romania, the modernization of the administration. USR party conducted a door-to-door survey (25-28 November, 4,086 citizens), which revealed that 92% of the respondents felt they were living worse than the previous year, 67% thought wages and pensions were too low, 66% reported an increase in prices and bank installments, and 95% believed thar the PSD-PNL-UDMR Government is not concerned about the welfare of the population.

November 29

- Former PSD Senator Niculae Bădălău is dismissed from his position of Vice-President of the Court of Auditors by the joint Standing Bureaus of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. Bădălău was detained by the DNA for twenty-four hours on November 27 and was arrested for 30 days for bribery (€170,000) and influence peddling in connection with a contract worth over LEI 7 million, as ruled by the Bucharest Court of Appeal a day ago.

- The MDPWA Cseke Attila signs 139 new contracts from NRRP, worth LEI 540 million for energy efficiency and seismic safety works for residential blocks and public buildings, but also for documentation, territory and urban planning.
- The USR and the FD Party contested at CCR the PNL-initiated draft law reducing the right of NGOs to appeal to justice regarding construction projects that violate the law. The project in question requires that the act challenged in Court should represent the object of activity and the purpose of the organization, a minimum of two years of activity for the organization, and also for the NGO to deposit a security of 1% of the investment value. A day ago, the *Declic* Organization asked in a public letter to President Iohannis to send for review to Parliament the law that provides the establishment of the thirty-day deadline for NGOs to attack in Court building permits and urbanism documentation that violate the law.
- According to a draft emergency ordinance published by the Ministry of Finance, the salaries of the state employees, financed from public funds, are increased by 10% starting January 1, 2023. The budget impact amounts to LEI 3-3.5 billion.
- Cezar Stancu is suspended from PSD and resigns from the position of Vice-President of the National Authority for Citizenship, following his referral to court in a case handled by the DNA for bribery.

November 30

- As decisional chamber, the Senate adopts a draft law on the Administrative Code, for the establishment of administrative consortia within the NRRP. This law contributes to territorial reform by associating neighboring administrative-territorial units in the form of administrative consortia, to which a budget will be allocated for the transfer of expertise. It aims to carry out the administrative tasks given by law and by administrative-territorial units with insufficient capacities.

December 2

- AUR President George Simion claims at the Party's Extraordinary Congress, in Alba Iulia, that Romania should no longer finance the

Government of the Republic of Moldova, considering that there is no need to and that too many funds have been allocated for the Ukrainian refugees, considering it as financing the Romanian separatism.

December 5

- The Parliament's Committees on Budgets - Finance jointly dismiss Niculae Bădălău, former PSD Senator, as adviser to the Court of Auditors and as Vice-President of the Audit Authority (308 votes in favor and one abstention), after his detention by DNA, on the November 28, 2022, for bribery and influence peddling.
- The EC presents – three days before the Justice and Home Affairs Council due to discuss Romania's accession to the Schengen Area –, the plan to combat illegal migration along the Western Balkans route in order to alleviate the concerns expressed by Austria. This plan identifies five pillars of operational measures aimed at strengthening the following: border management, asylum procedure, combating smuggling, cooperation on readmission and returns, and political alignment on visas.
- AUR MP George Simion forcibly enters the Ministry of Energy headquarters to question Minister Virgil Popescu about the so-called "tax on the sun," introduced by the emergency ordinance approved by the Government on November 29. The tax affects consumers who have invested in photovoltaic panels and was introduced to complete the legal framework for promoting the use of renewable energy. USR criticized the text the day before, arguing that it discourages consumers.

December 6

- The MDPWA Cseke Atilla signs thirty-six financing contracts through C10 of NRRP, worth LEI 820,996,245 for the renewal of the public transport fleet, the purchase of clean vehicles and charging stations to encourage green transport.
- Austria does not support Romania's accession to the Schengen Area due to illegal immigration.

December 7

- The Bucharest Tribunal informs the Standing Bureau of the Chamber of Deputies that the unaffiliated MP Daniel Gheorghe Rusu (elected on AUR lists) was sentenced to the penalty of the criminal fine amounting to LEI 40,000 for compromising the interests of justice. He was sent to court by the Prosecutor General's Office in the early of 2022 because during the electoral campaign for the local elections in 2020, while being investigated for illegally bringing 120 Moldovan citizens to vote for him, he publicly presented the minutes before the report was concluded.

December 8

- The draft budget for Romania in 2023 is adopted with a 2.8% increase, which is lower than anticipated. The budget allocates 2.5% of GDP for the National Defense Ministry, while the Ministry of Agriculture receives a 7% increase of LEI 25 million. The Ministry of Internal Affairs obtains a budget growth of 12.17%, and the Ministry of Research receives a 69.7% increase, with the aim of dedicating 1% of the GDP by 2025. For the Ministry of Education 2.1% of the budget is allocated.
- The Council of Justice and Home Affairs rejects Romania's accession to the Schengen area. Of the 27 EU member states, Austria and the Netherlands vote against, the Netherlands specifying that it votes only against Bulgaria's accession. Following this rejection, PM Ciucă announces that he will resume the accession process.
- After initially submitted by the Parliament on November 19, 2022, President Iohannis sends back to legislative the law regarding the establishment of Romanian community centers abroad as it contained unclear phrases, such as "third state," and did not clearly mention the duties and salaries of the directors of these community centers.
- The Bucharest Tribunal acknowledged the action of the Civic Association for Dignity in Europe (ADEC) against the mayor of Sfântu Gheorghe, Antal Arpad, forcing him to respect the official language of the state and to inscribe according to the law the bilingual street names plates in the city: the upper position should

be the official language of the state (Romanian), not at the same level as the Hungarian language.

December 9

- The Permanent Electoral Authority (AEP) announces that in December grants allocated to political parties summarized LEI 24,787,794, with PSD receiving LEI 9,543,798, PNL – LEI 8,090,738, USR – LEI 4,361,545, AUR – LEI 1,931,589, People's Movement Party (PMP) – LEI 499,339 and Pro Romania - LEI 360,782.

December 13

- The Chamber of Deputies, as the decisional Chamber, adopts by 191 votes in favor, three against, and sixty abstentions the draft law on the protection of whistle-blowers for public interest, after President Iohannis sent the law back to Parliament. This law translates into national law the European Directive 2019/1937 on the protection of people reporting breaches of Union law and applies to reporting breaches of law within public authorities and institutions. Through this law, anonymous reporting discourages the investigation of complaints because these reports will only be examined if they contain thorough information about violations of the law. This has sparked reactions from several Romanian NGOs, including *Active Watch*, *Funky Citizens*, and *Expert Forum*.

December 15

- Romania submits the Memorandum of Accession to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

December 16

- The law on the protection of whistle-blowers is promulgated by President Iohannis.

December 17

- EC President Ursula von der Leyen meets with President Iohannis at the Cotroceni Palace and expresses full support for Romania's accession to the Schengen Area. They discuss finding a solution as

quickly as possible. Additionally, an agreement is signed between the Republic of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Hungary, and Romania regarding a strategic partnership in the field of green energy development and transport. This agreement involves building a 1,195 km cable under the Black Sea.

- President Iohannis promulgates the law on the state budget; the law on the state social security budget for 2023 that forecast an economic growth of 2.8% and an average annual inflation of 9.6%; the law on empowering the Government to issue ordinances in areas which are not subject to organic laws, between the parliamentary recess; the law on social dialogue, which aims to strengthen the role of trade unions, to redefine the institution of representatives of employees and to establish a clear procedure regarding triggering, solving and monitoring collective labor conflicts and strikes. The normative act envisages as forms of social dialogue the following: negotiation, consultation, or information exchange between representatives of the Government, of the employers and of the employees on issues of common interest in economic and social policy. To form a Trade Union, one needs at least ten employees from the same unit or at least twenty employees from different units in the same sector.
- The USR is filing a draft law to remove special pensions from workers in the domain of Security involved in political police and thus violating human rights, and for which there exists a court order.

December 20

- In an official visit in Bucharest, EP President Roberta Metsola states that Romania and Bulgaria must be accepted in the Schengen Area.

December 21

- The Senate adopts, as decisional Chamber, by eight-one votes in favor, twenty-nine against and three abstentions, the draft law on the establishment of the National Cyber Security System, a general framework for cooperation of authorities in order to ensure cyber security in the field of defense, public order, national security, justice and emergency situations.

December 22

- The control carried out by the AEP for the upholding of the legal provisions regarding the incomes and expenses registered during the last year by the 189 political parties listed in the Electoral Register results in fines amounting to LEI 3,555,000 and confiscations amounting to LEI 414,418.
- According to an INSCOP survey issued in December on respondents' voting intentions between February 2021-December 2022, roughly 1,100 people who have an intention to vote, both before and after the refusal of Romania entering Schengen, PSD dropped from 34.9% to 31.5% compared to November, PNL from 20.8% to 20.2%, USR from 11.2 to 10.9%, while AUR is the only party that has grown from 16.1% to 18.1%.

December 23

- President Iohannis promulgates the law amending the Emergency Ordinance 57/2019 on the Administrative Code regarding the creation of an association mechanism between administrative-territorial units in order to build administrative consortia. The aim is to stimulate the associative phenomenon and the transfer of expertise and unitary practices.
- President Iohannis signs the decree on the promulgation of the Law amending and supplementing the Government Emergency Ordinance no. 28/1999, related to the obligation to use fiscal electronic cash registers, by which the tip is set at maximum 15% of the consumption value and is highlighted on the tax receipt by economic operators.

December 28

- The Executive approves the Urban Policy project of Romania, which has among its top priority objectives the creation of climate-smart cities. The reform is assumed within the NRRP and proposes a vision of resilient, inclusive, and durable urban development for Romania during 2022-2035.
- The Government decides that starting with January 1 the fuel subsidy of LEI 0.50/liter will no longer be granted. At the same

meeting, a draft EO is adopted that implements EU Regulation 2022/1854 aiming to overtax energy companies with a tax of 60% of profits in 2022 and 2023. Money will be redirected to the Ministry of Finance for investments in renewable energy.

December 29

- The MDPWA Cseke Attila signs twenty-five new financing contracts under the National Investment Program "Anghel Saligny," worth LEI 234,368,692 for twenty administrative-territorial units, aimed at modernizing road infrastructure and paving, building bridges, expanding and modernizing wastewater treatment plants, as well as setting up or expanding water supply and sewerage networks.
- The AEP transmits to the GSG the draft amendment of the Law on financing the activity of political parties and electoral campaigns, Law no. 334/2006. The project aims to increase transparency and integrity regarding the financing of political parties and electoral campaigns, such as the publication in Part one of the Official Journal of the total amount of income from levies obtained in the previous fiscal year. The project proposes specific actions for the implementation of measures from the General Anti-corruption Strategy and the National Strategy on the rights of people with disabilities.

January 3

- After the publication of the population census results, The Magyar Alliance from Transylvania accuses a "silent genocide against Hungarians." They claim that the Hungarian community has lost a fifth of the population since the last review (from 1,227,623 in 2011 to 1,002,151 in 2022) due to the poor economic situation of Hungarians compared to the national average, and to the crisis of values. UDMR President, Kelemen Hunor, says "there is no cause for celebration, but also no cause for panic," as almost 2.5 million citizens have not declared their ethnicity, so the number of Hungarians could actually be higher.

January 4

- During the Government meeting, PM Ciucă states that Romania managed to absorb €11,3 billion from European funds in 2022, the highest level achieved since accession, with a rate of over 70%.

January 6

- USR MPs, Cosette Chichirău and Remus Negoi, submit, for the second time, a request addressed to the MFA Aurescu and the Director of the Romanian Cultural Institute (ICR), Liviu Jicman, for information on the headquarters and rents related to the branches of ICR. The request follows the scandal over the £6,500 monthly rent paid for the London apartment of ICR head, Catinca Maria Nistor.
- MDPWA Cseke Attila signs 156 new contracts financed by C10 of NRRP, aimed at providing infrastructure for green transport at local level and monitoring systems of public space, worth LEI 201,698,245.

January 7

- The National Board of Directors of AUR decides to exclude Dumitru Viorel Focşa from the party, after the public scandal and the internal investigation conducted by the AUR Honor Jury, that showed he physically assaulted his wife during a domestic conflict. The party is asking him to give up his parliamentary term.

January 9

- MDPWA Cseke Attila signs 242 new contracts financed by component C10 of NRRP, worth LEI 400,471,379, aiming to provide infrastructure for green transport, by purchasing charging points for electric vehicles, developing smart local management systems, and building or expanding video surveillance networks.
- ANI notifies the Prosecutor General's Office in the case of the President of the AEP, Constantin Mituleț Buică, on the grounds that he illegally hired his sister-in-law as an adviser at the office of the Vice-President of the AEP. In this context, USR submits a request to the Standing Bureau of the Chamber of Deputies for the convening of the joint legal commissions and the dismissal of the

official. As a result, Buică submitted his resignation from office to the two Chambers of Parliament.

January 11

- The Government approves the action plan for the implementation of the National Strategy for the long-term renovation of the residential and non-residential building fleet by 2030, with a view to saving energy, reducing CO_2 emissions, and increasing the share of energy from renewable sources.
- The budget of the Ministry of Energy is fed with LEI 335 million to ensure the compensation of energy prices, noting that this money comes from the collection of tax on revenues obtained from the sale of onshore and offshore gas.
- The Ethics Commission of the UBB of Cluj-Napoca found that the doctoral thesis of the Minister of Internal Affairs, Lucian Bode, is plagiarized. As a result, the Commission requested him corrections and the withdrawal of the book published based on it and will notify CNATDCU for further legal steps. Bode rejects the decision and states he will go to court to settle the case he considers inaccurate, describing the UBB decision as a dangerous precedent for the academic world and for the governing principles of the rule of law. On November 11, USR accused Minister Ligia Deca of blocking Lucian Bode's PhD thesis from being verified, due to her and State Secretary Gigel Paraschiv's presence at CNATDCU.

January 16

- MDPWA Cseke Attila signs eight new financing contracts under the National Investment Program "Anghel Saligny," which targets local roads, the water supply and sewerage networks, totaling a value of LEI 72,546,213. He also signed thirty new financing contracts under component C10 of NRRP, worth LEI 39,7 million for the development of infrastructure for green transport, including the provision of recharging points for electric vehicles.

January 18

- The Court of the EU declares Romania victorious in the action regarding the annulment of the decision of the EC through which financial corrections of over €18,717 million had been applied. This sum aimed at payments made in 2017-2019 under the National Rural Development Program 2007-2013. The decision appealed by Romania was thus annulled.

January 26

- Energy Minister Virgil Popescu states that he has ordered the emergency remediation of the transport conditions for the personnel from the Oltenia Energy complex. The new management is expected to present a clear investment plan on the safe exploitation of the targets and the provision of the necessary work protection equipment for employees. The decision is based on an accident at work that resulted in three deaths and thirteen injuries, in the mine from Jilț Sud, due to the use of inadequate means for transporting workers to work and poor road conditions.

January 30

- Member of the European Parliament (MEP) and of Renew Group, Nicu Ştefănuță, announces on his Facebook page that he is resigning from USR as the party no longer has a clear direction.

February 1

- The Minister of Education, Ligia Deca, withdraws the duties of the State Secretary in the Ministry of Education, Florin Lixandru, by ministerial order, that he deplores as a measure for an offense of opinion during a public debate.
- The USR and the FD Party are filing a simple motion against the Interior Minister, Lucian Bode, entitled "Romania deserves more than thieves in public office," stating that Romania needs a negotiator to be respected by the European partners regarding the Schengen Area, bringing into discussion the recent scandal on plagiarism in his PhD thesis.

February 2

- PNL declares that it does not support the tax increase, nor the 1% surcharge applied to all companies with high and very high incomes, because them this will lead to a generalized price increase and destabilization of investors. The liberals also mention that, the ruling coalition had committed to not introduce new taxes and to not increase the existing ones this year.

February 3

- MSPWA Cseke Attila signs forty-two new financing contracts under the National Investment Program "Anghel Saligny," totaling LEI 460,753,430. The money aims at the rehabilitation and modernization of streets and roads of local interest, as well as the establishment, modernization or expansion of water supply and sewerage networks.
- AEP announces that in 2022 the political parties spent 72% of the total subsidies from the state budget, amounting to over LEI 256 million. The largest share was spent on press and propaganda for the PSD (58.54%), PNL (70.72%), and PMP (27.62%) parties. In terms of staff expenses, the largest share was used by the Pro Romania (44.3%) and USR (29.28%) parties.

February 6

- AUR supporters protest in front of the Government against the lack of reaction of the authorities after the rejection of Romania's candidacy to the Schengen Area.
- The leader of the FD Party, Ludovic Orban, submits to the Bucharest Court of Appeal an administrative-litigation action in which he asks the Government to issue a decision for the organization of local elections in over fifty localities.

February 7

- The Hungarian Ambassador to Bucharest is summoned to the MFA Aurescu to communicate the Romanian state's disapproval of the request of the President of the Foreign Policy Committee of the Parliament of Budapest, Nemeth Zsolt, to raise the flag of Szeklerland on the Romanian territory. No specific official sign can be displayed

publicly in the context in which there is no administrative-territorial unit bearing the name of the Szeklerland.

- Minister of Internal Affairs, Lucian Bode, and PM Ciucă are submitting to the Senate a draft law whereby the limits of punishment for acts of violence are increased by a third in the case of actions taking place in the public space or if they are directed at a minor. Lucian Bode adds that the changes are also proposed in relation to Article 371 of the Criminal Code on the disturbance of public order and tranquility. USR spokesman, Ionuț Moșteanu, asks PM Ciucă and Interior Minister Lucian Bode to withdraw the "totalitarian" law, by which the punishment limits for violent acts are increased by one third, as they "intend to use it against protests." In reply, Lucian Bode states that the proposals to tighten some punishments in the Criminal Code do not concern honest citizens or those who protest, but those who commit violence or destruction in the public space.

February 8

- The Chamber of Deputies rejects by ninety votes in favor, 189 against and one abstention the simple motion tabled against the Minister of Internal Affairs, Lucian Bode.

February 13

- The Senate tacitly adopts the draft initiated by the PNL MP Florin Claudiu-Roman on granting rights to the victims of the Bucharest Mineriads from June 13-15, 1990. It provides benefits to the descendants of people killed, injured, arrested, or detained as a result of participating in the violent movements.
- PNL MPs propose a legislative initiative aimed at eliminating the over-taxation of part-time work contracts.

February 15

- As a result of the series of earthquakes that took place in the Oltenia area, shortly after one with a magnitude of 5.7 degrees on the Richter scale, PM Ciucă forms an inter-institutional working group to prevent and prepare reactions in emergency situations, under his direct coordination.

- Justice Minister Cătălin Predoiu is called to the Senate by USR to explain the recent statements regarding the acquittal of Dan Hosu, a former police officer, sentenced in 2020 in first instance to a three- year prison sentence on suspension by the Bucharest Court, under four charges, including influence peddling, as a result of which his company was the beneficiary of large sums of money. USR accuses that the Minister announced the acquittal during a TV show although the case was not closed. He stated that the mistake was made because he had not verified the information he received from unofficial sources. USR asks the Justice Minister to resign.

February 16

- ANI notifies the Prosecutor's Office regarding accusations against Nicușor Dan, the General Mayor of Bucharest. ANI has accused him of committing crimes of abuse of office and using his position to favor certain people, as well as incompatibility and conflict of interest. ANI alleges that Dan held other four management positions while serving as mayor, and that he used his position to request an addition of LEI 3,000,000 to the budget of the Administration of Lakes, Parks and Leisure Bucharest (ALPAB) during the period of August 7 – September 7, 2021, both as General Manager and General Mayor.
- The Minister of Environment, Waters and Forests, Tanczos Barna, wants to prevent all works on the Bâstroe canal that could endanger the biodiversity and ecosystem of the Danube Delta, as neither the Romanian nor the Ukrainian legislation allows it. On the Ukrainian side, there are dredging works of the Bâstroe Canal that could affect the Danube Delta.

February 17

- USR representatives submit a legislative initiative to amend the law on the protection of whistleblowers. The initiative puts the text of the law in line with the European Directive (EU) 2019/1937 which provides for the protection of persons reporting breaches of European Union law for the purpose of defending the public interest, and with the provisions of the NRRP, requiring parties to

adopt it in order to unlock its payment of €2.8 million, money from the NRRP.

- MSPWA Attila signs fifty-six financing contracts amounting LEI 481,030,662 through the National Investment Program "Anghel Saligny" aimed at modernizing road infrastructure, rehabilitating bridges, modernizing or expanding water supply systems, and also modernizing and expanding sewage systems.

February 20

- PSD and PNL support legislative changes that would compel all NGOs in Romania to make public the names of the people who redirected 3.5% of their income tax. The automatic dissolution is proposed for those who do not make the lists public and the prohibition to set up NGOs for those who have had an association that has become insolvent. MEP Ramona Strugariu, the REPER party co-president, is calling on senators to withdraw this legislative proposal that limits civil society access to justice.
- The activity of the Russian Center for Culture and Science in Romania is suspended by the MFA Aurescu, as it had contributed to misinforming the Romanian public in the context of the war in Ukraine.
- The USR and the FD deputies submit the simple motion against the Labor Minister entitled "Marius Budăi – the Minister for Saving Special Pensions," as he built a shield around the special pensions and their beneficiaries, thus endangering the funds Romania would receive for development.

February 22

- The Government approves a project through which it will be able to set up, on behalf of the state, state-owned companies in Romania and abroad in compliance with the legislative provisions in the field of state aid, at the proposal of the relevant ministries whose specialty area is the main object of activity of the company or under whose authority the autonomous administration operates.
- The High Court of Cassation and Justice definitively and irrevocably rejects the use by the Municipality of Sfântu Gheorghe of the Szeklerland flag.

February 23

- The President of the Republic of Moldova, Maia Sandu, is visiting Romania, mentioning the support given to her country regarding the supply of electricity and gas through the Iași-Chișinău gas pipeline.
- The leader of the Târgu Mureş branch of AUR, Dragos Burghelia, and the Vice-President, Liviu Natea, call on doctors and nurses to volunteer in the medical caravan initiated by the political party, for providing medical assistance in disadvantaged areas. The costs of this caravan are covered by the subsidy from the state budget received by the party.

February 27

- The Ministry of Education publishes the draft Laws of Education – "Educated Romania" (Law of Pre-University Education and Law of Higher Education). USR criticizes the project, stating that it is politicized, too technical, without analysis of costs and not reformist enough.

February 28

- The latest INSCOP survey, conducted at the request of PNL, shows the vote intention in the parliamentary elections in February. PSD occupies the first place (31.7%), followed by PNL (22.3%), AUR (18.2%) and USR (11.2%). The survey was conducted on February 5-19, 2023, on a sample of 3,000 people.
- CCR rejects USR's notification on the bill to increase the allowances of Mayors and Presidents of County Councils, voted on September 27, 2022. This complaint was made because of the lack of indication of the source of funding for salary increases, and the adoption of the law before the expiry of the deadline for the submission of amendments. In this context, the project remains in force and mayors would receive more than up to LEI 2,200.
- MDPWA Cseke Atilla signs 162 new financing contracts submitted through component C10 of NRRP. The contracts are concluded between the local public authorities from 146 administrative-territorial units and the Ministry of Development, with a total value of LEI 556,499,633. These contracts aim at the moderate

rehabilitation of public buildings, the construction of Nearly Zero Emission Buildings Plus housing for young people and service housing for health and education specialists.

- The plenary of the Chamber of Deputies, as a decisional Chamber, adopts a draft law establishing the National Agency for the Development of Infrastructure in Health (ANDIS), as a specialized body of the central public administration and a public institution with legal personality, subordinated to the Ministry of Health, fully funded from the state budget. The role of ANDIS is to develop health infrastructure by preparing, implementing, and finalizing investment projects of considerable importance in health infrastructure.

March 1

- PM Ciucă presents the robot named ION, the first government adviser based solely on artificial intelligence. The purpose is to improve governmental activity by quickly capturing the opinions and needs of Romanians, using the information available in the public space, but also giving them the opportunity to communicate these opinions directly. Research, Innovation and Digitalization Minister Sebastian Burduja mentions that the ION project is a world premiere.
- The Bucharest Court of Appeal obliges the Romanian Government to organize elections for the City Hall of Sector 5 after the USR candidate, Alexandru Dimitriu, appealed to the court. Former Mayor of Sector 5, Cristian Piedone, was definitively sentenced to prison in May 2022 and thus the position ended up vacant.

March 3

- MEP and PMP leader, Eugen Tomac, announces the launch of the national signature-raising campaign for the petition "Romania deserves to be in Schengen," after bringing an action against the EU Council before the Court of Justice of the EU to cancel the illegal vote of December 8, 2022, which denied Romania the entrance into the Schengen Area.
- President Iohannis promulgates the law approving the Emergency Ordinance 152/2022 which provides the granting of a salary

increase of up to 50% for the staff from public institutions and authorities dealing with projects financed from European non-reimbursable or reimbursable funds, consistent with the implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Mechanism. According to the normative act, this increase is applied in proportion to the actual time allocated to the activities for each project.

March 6

- PSD President Marcel Ciolacu states that Gabriela Firea is the Social-Democrat candidate for Bucharest City Hall in the 2024 elections.

March 7

- The Chamber of Deputies rejects, by eight-six votes in favor, 177 against and two abstentions, the simple motion against the Minister of Labor, entitled "Marius Budăi, the Minister for the Rescue of Special Pensions." The simple motion was submitted by fifty-six deputies belonging to USR and FD.
- Opposition USR MPs, Iulian Bulai and Remus Negoi, bring a funeral wreath at the headquarters of the Romanian Cultural Institute (ICR) to mark the symbolic death of Romanian cultural diplomacy. The two deputies accuse the governing coalition formed by PSD-PNL-UDMR of appointing in the positions of management of ICR branches abroad nepotist and unprofessional persons.
- The Chamber of Deputies, as a decisional Chamber, adopts a draft law with 220 votes in favor and fifty-three abstentions on the prevention and control of terrorism, also establishing that the Director of Romanian Intelligence Service (SRI) will have the prerogative to approve the execution of the counterterrorism intervention in the event of the occurrence of victims or of significant damages, when it is not possible to urgently assemble the Supreme Council of National Defense.

March 8

- USR President Cătălin Drulă calls on the management of the Financial Supervisory Authority (ASF) to explain the 40% increase in motor third-party liability (RCA) policy prices, indicating that

the invitation made in February to the Economic Policy, Reform and Privatization Commission of the Chamber of Deputies of the President of ASF, Nicu Marcu, remains unanswered.

March 9

- USR and FD MPs challenge the appointment of Monica Gubernat as president of the CNA, respectively of Camelia Pricopie as Adviser to the Court of Auditors. The USR claims that in the plenary sitting of the Parliament on March 7, before the vote on the appointments to the CNA and the Court of Auditors, there were less than sixty-nine senators in the Chamber, and the chairman of the meeting refused to verify the quorum, therefore violating the constitutional norms.
- INSCOP publishes a poll ordered by the Green Party in order to assess the voting intentions of Romanians. In first place in preferences is PSD with 30.4%, followed by PNL with 21.6%, and in third place is AUR with 19.1%. The survey was conducted by telephone interviews between February 1-13, 2023, and the sample was representative of 1000 people. The maximum permissible data error is ±3.1 at a 95% confidence rate.

March 10

- The Bucharest Court of Appeal orders the release from the pre-trial detention of MP Niculae Bădălău (PSD), who will be investigated in freedom, under judicial control. He is accused of bribery and influence peddling while he was an adviser to the Court of Auditors from August to November 2022.
- AUR announces the intention to collaborate with NGOs to provide free medical services and preventive medical education activities to citizens with difficult access to facilities. The partnership aims to create a mobile caravan that will combine the promotion of the AUR political party.
- The President of the Neamț County Council and of the county branch of PSD, Ionel Arsene, is definitively sentenced by the Braşov Court of Appeal to six years and eight months in prison with execution for influence peddling. He was sent to trial by DNA

in 2018, accused that in 2013, while Deputy and President of PSD Neamț, he received €100,000 to use his influence on the ANI management in order to establish non-compliance with the legal provisions on the conflict of interests of a person with a management position in the local administration at that time.

- The Szekler National Council requests again the territorial autonomy of the Szeklerland, in a petition addressed to the Parliament, the Government, and the President of Romania. They accuse the Romanian State of not complying with European Recommendation 1201/1993 Article 11, which stipulates that in regions where the majority is formed of persons belonging to a minority, they have the right to have adequate autonomous local governments or a special status.

March 13

- PSD begins public consultations on the projects of the Education Laws, namely the law of pre-university and university education.

March 14

- The Minister of Environment, Water and Forestry, Tanczos Barna, announces that the Ukrainian side has stopped dredging, deepening, and maintenance work on the Bîstroe Canal.
- Representatives of PNL Bucharest Sector 1 are demanding the resignation of Mayor Clotilde Armand, after the decision of the Bucharest Court of Appeal to reject her request to cancel the ANI report notifying her incompatibility. In November 2022, ANI established that the mayor of sector 1, Clotilde Armand, was appointed manager in a project financed with European funds carried out by the City Hall of Sector 1, the two functions being incompatible.

March 15

- USR warns that Romania will lose at least €1.4 billion if it does not urgently complete two PNRR milestones - the whistleblower law and the decarbonization one. In addition, the party points out that at this time the application for the second payment, submitted three months late, is out of the two-month evaluation deadline,

and the EC has already sent two letters urging the MIPE and the Government to provide clarifications and supporting documents for several of the targets and milestones that are still unfinished in accordance with PNRR requirements.

March 16

- Transgaz, OMV-Petrom and Romgaz sign a document for the development of the Tuzla-Podișor gas pipeline, with a length of over 300 km, aiming to transport gas from the Black Sea to households and economic agents in the country.
- USR MP Mihai Badea asks the Minister of Justice, Cătălin Predoiu, to withdraw Alina Albu's proposal for the position of Chief Prosecutor of DIICOT, who obtained a negative opinion from the members of the Section for Prosecutors of the Superior Council of Magistracy. He asks the Minister to resume the appointment procedure for this position.
- USR President Cătălin Drulă states that there are negotiations with the FD and the PMP to build a right-wing pole as an alternative to PSD and PNL for the 2024 elections, and that they will propose a model of government in the interest of the community.

March 17

- The President of FD Party, Ludovic Orban, wins the lawsuit against the Government by which the executive is obliged to hold partial local elections in localities where the mayoral mandates have been declared vacant or where the local council has been dissolved.

March 20

- The FD MPs have passed a bill banning gambling advertising of any kind. This initiative comes from the party's youth organization. According to the statements of deputy Ionel Dancă, the Parliament must intervene radically and completely ban gambling advertisements.
- Representatives of the Financial Supervision Association are called to the Parliament for a joint meeting of the Economic and Budget-Finance Committees to provide explanations for the bankruptcy of Euroins, the biggest insurance company on the Romanian market up to this

date. USR demands the resignation of the ASF management on March 17, due to its inability to act to prevent the bankruptcy of Euroins and City Insurance companies.

March 21

- Diana Șoșoacă submits a draft law requesting the withdrawal of the Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Cooperation between Romania and Ukraine, ratified by Law no. 129/1997. As a result, Romania would annex the territories it held during the interwar period. On her last visit to the Kremlin embassy in Bucharest, the ex-AUR senator went to celebrate the "results of the special operation" in Ukraine.
- The EC declared that the special pension bill does not respect the principle of equity and would only make very limited savings, suggesting that in the case of military pensions the income replacement rate should be 45% and the calculation basis should be related to income throughout the career. At this time, the replacement rate is 65% of the last six months. In the draft law, the replacement rate is 65% of the revenues achieved in the last twelve months, without taking into account the non-permanent increases. Romania is obliged to comply with the requirements of both the European Commission and the World Bank, because otherwise the European Commission would not consider the PNRR milestone to be met.
- The Chamber of Deputies, as a decision-making body, adopts the amendment to the whistleblower law necessary following the request of the European Commission in order to unlock the second payment request of the PNRR. The main element to be amended from the text of the law is the term "thorough" which describes the indications that a report of a case of violation of the law, corruption and fraud must contain. This term has been removed, and now the whistleblower must present "the indications regarding violations of the law." President Iohannis promulgated the law on March 28.

March 22

- The Government adopts a decision repealing the decision which provided for the postponement of the closure of energy capacities

operating on lignite and related mining operations. Thus, it is decided to preserve 660 MW of lignite-based electricity generation capacities. The repeal is made to meet the requirements approved by the EC for PNRR.

- The leader of USR deputies, Ionuț Moşteanu, states that PSD and PNL refused to start the parliamentary procedure for appointing a new leadership to the National Energy Regulatory Authority and dismissing the current leadership of the Financial Supervisory Authority.

March 24

- The Government approves a draft decision on Romania's participation in the International Student Assessment Program (PISA 2025), pointing out that it is important to participate as Romania is a member of the EU and a future member of the OECD.
- During the Government meeting, the Financial Supervisory Authority withdraws the Government decision on the motor third-party liability insurance (RCA) price cap. PM Ciucă says that there was no consensus on this draft decision and that it will be postponed until one is reached.

March 25

- MEP Eugen Tomac is re-elected as President of the PMP Party with 705 votes in favor from a total of 708 participants in the Extraordinary Congress. He announces that the National Peasant Maniu-Mihalache Party and the Ialomițenilor Party are joining the PMP. He emphasizes the need to coagulate a right-wing alternative on the Romanian political scene and criticizes the current leadership of the right represented by PNL, because they have teamed up with PSD.

March 27

- The President of the European Council, Charles Michel, carries out a formal visit to Bucharest and officially supports Romania's accelerated accession to the Schengen Area, declaring himself concerned about the rise of Euroscepticism in Romania.

March 28

- The plenary of the Parliament decides to appoint PSD proposal Toni Greblă as president of the AEP for an eight-year terms. The other candidates were Iulia Andreea Băbeanu, proposed by AUR, who obtained thirty-seven votes in favor and 324 against and Cristian Preda, proposed by USR, who obtained seventy-three votes in favor and 288 against. The government approves a decision on the release of Toni Greblă from the position of Prefect of Bucharest.
- The joint plenary of the Parliament approves the establishment of a special Commission to support Romania's accession process to the OECD. The Commission will examine the necessary legislative initiatives to harmonize legislation with the accession process. It will consist of twenty-one members appointed by the parliamentary groups of the two chambers.

March 29

- PM Ciucă announces that he will support the proposal of the Ministry of Justice regarding the establishment of the threshold of LEI 9,000 for the crime of abuse of office and that he mandates the leader of the PNL group from the Chamber of Deputies, Gabriel Andronache, to table this amendment on behalf of PNL. The Senate had previously adopted the draft law of the Government for amending the Criminal Code and setting the threshold for abuse of office at LEI 250,000. The need to adopt a threshold for abuse of office is given by the fact that the CCR has demanded that a value threshold is needed, without imposing a limit.
- The draft of the Education law is approved at the Government meeting and will be submitted for debate and adoption in Parliament, in an emergency procedure. The legislative package is a milestone in the PNRR and will benefit from a funding of €3.6 billion for implementation.

March 30

- USR launches a signature-gathering campaign on a dedicated website, https://stoppensiispeciale.ro/, to put pressure on PNL and PSD to eliminate special pensions. The Senate adopted the draft law that does not remove special pensions.

RECENSIONES

DOI: 10.62229/sprps23-1/7

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Rolling Transition and the Role of Intellectuals. The Case of Hungary, 1977-1994
(Budapest-Vienna-New York: Central European University Press, 2022), 620 pp.

Transition to democracy in Eastern and Central Europe occurred as a consequence of the way communist regimes dismantled. Not as a momentum, but rather as a continuous overlapping series of phenomena, events around 1989 happened because of the actors, especially the intellectuals, that created them. This is the main thesis of András Bozóki's book published in 2022, *Rolling Transition and the Role of Intellectuals. The Case of Hungary, 1977-1994*. This work fills the gap in a literature that focuses mainly on the democratic transition in Eastern and Central Europe as a unitary space or on the Ruling Elites in a newly capitalist system.[1] More recently, political writings on Hungary discuss the democratic backsliding and the illiberal turns of the regime, including it in a regional framework affected by populism, and Euroscepticism.[2]

András Bozóki, professor at the Department of Political Science at the Central European University and founding editor of the Hungarian *Political Science Review*, offers in his work a complex and complete analysis of the Hungarian transition to democracy, describing in what manner intellectuals forged multiple strategies for adapting to the then contemporary democratic wave in the former communist bloc, between 1977-1994. Why this period? Because, comparatively to other Central European communist countries, Hungary met the prerequisites of the transition before it actually happened. Consequently, a mild de-communization happened under this domino effect as it depended upon the negotiation process

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1 Lavinia Stan (ed.), *Transitional Justice in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union: Reckoning with the Communist Past* (BASEES/Routledge Series on Russian and East European Studies, 2009), 326; Gil Eyal, Ivan Szelenyi, and Eleanor Townsley, *Making Capitalism without Capitalists: Class Formation and Elite Struggles in Post-Communism Central Europe* (London: Verso, 2001), 288.

2 András Körösényi, Gábor Illés, Attila Gyulai, *The Orbán Regime: Plebiscitary Leader Democracy in the Making* (London: Routledge, 2020), 202; András L. Pap, *Democratic Decline in Hungary: Law and Society in an Illiberal Society* (London: Routledge, 2017), 176; Andrea L. P. Pirro, *The Populist Radical Right in Central and Eastern* Europe*: Ideology, Impact, and Electoral Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 222.

and the Roundtable talks mutually accepted by the state apparatus and the opposition.[3] Bozóki adopts the Weberian interpretive sociology method by creating types and categories that summarize the essence of change (9). More precisely, intellectuals changed attitudes, hence adopting various strategic positions. Was it dissidence, political activism, negotiation, or emerging multipartyism, they all adapted to the context and were analyzed by the author in a sociological way based on empirical research (10).

To begin with, developed throughout nine chapters, the book offers a chronological perspective fragmented into five periods, that is the dissent (1977-1987), open-network-building (1988), roundtable negotiations (1989), parliamentary politics (1990-1991), and the new pro-democracy initiatives (1991-1994) (11). Although contextual analysis is the path leading strategy, methodological pluralism is mobilized, associating sociological and politico-historical point of view, interviews, biographies, and eventually data analysis. In this way, the qualitative and the quantitative approaches give a panoramic perspective over past events, allowing readers to put into perspective the Hungarian democratic path until nowadays. Precisely, András Bozóki's considerable merit is to deconstruct intellectuals' roles, whether they were mediators, truth-tellers, reformers, activists, elite negotiators, professional politicians, or "founding fathers" (28). Sometimes their individual path crosses regime politics, especially during the dissent era and the late János József Kádár's regime (1956-1988), but this aspect will be treated later as it represents a paramount contribution to the general overview.

The book starts with a theoretical introduction concerning several theories about intellectuals, from Seymour Martin Lipset's classical trans-contextual concept, that describes them as "all those who create, distribute, and apply culture, that is the symbolic world of man" (37), passing through the New Class approach, according to which intellectuals catalyze a cultural capital and acquire the monopoly of interpretation (32).[4] It eventually arrives at Daniel Bell's theory of *épater la bourgeoisie* intellectual attitude (41) and to Gil Eyal and Larissa Buchholz' network-

[3] Lavinia Stan, *Transitional Justice in Post-Communist Romania: The Politics of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 103.

[4] Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics* (New York: Doubleday, 1960), 331.

based approach that qualifies intellectual *intervention* depending on their position within the *epistemic community* (46).[5] The distinction between established intellectuals and movement intellectuals is particularly important within this book, for it explains how intellectuals, as socially active participants, and politics interfere and determine each other:

> "In short, it is usually the established intellectuals who raise the problem, but there is a need for external reaction so the issue will be regarded important by susceptible, critical social groups." (51)

Additionally, the author argues that, after the Hungarian revolution in 1956, within Central Europe similar political strategies have been observed, especially in Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary: intellectuals were coopted and integrated into the party, within what seemed to be a moderated system, despite the fact that it was actually a milder form of control (through selective repression and social isolation). Populism was thus the "organic development" (96) of the solidarity movement on a national basis, and it could be identified in Samizdat journals such as *Hírmondó* [Messenger], or *Beszélő* [Speaking] alongside other topics such as moral politics, national minorities, churches and peace activism, environmentalism, cultural criticism – that is, everything that was not aligned with the state-party ideology. However, other states from the communist bloc (*i.e.*, Romania and East Germany) could not follow the same path, given the hermetic regime and the direct repression of all forms of opposition (61). When it comes to the politics of memorialization (chapter III), Samizdat publication contested "Bibó forgetting phenomenon," in accordance with the distinction between *Goulash Communism* intellectuals and the then created opposition. Demands for democracy and for liberal values emerged with 1956 revendications that continued even after 1989 regime fall. Despite that, the author underlines that, in terms of politics of remembrance, the link between 1956 and 1989 exists only as a theoretical construction, based on a "linguistic, conceptual, and visual framework of remembrance" (138) through which intellectuals canonize

[5] Daniel Bell, *Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1976); Gil Eyal, Larissa Buchholz, "From the Sociology of Intellectuals to the Sociology of Interventions," *Annual Review of Sociology* 36 (2010): 117-37.

the history of events. By this means, András Bozóki looks at the bigger picture of the transition and the practices favored by it, showing almost dialectically how social strata and actors interact in moments of political turmoil.

Furthermore, civil society, as a collective identity, spurred the need for dialogue: exchange between the elite and the individuals enhanced the idea of civil disobedience as a duty (181). Perceived as "fidelity to universal human justice," the antipolitical movement (lead by antipolitical intelligentsia) put morality into politics in such a way that only liberal system could have valued freedom, critical thinking, and out-of-party moral conscience. As such, the author states that before 1988, opposition was seen only as opposed to the system; afterwards it became the forum of pluralistic structuration translated into an open network building guided by such liberal values and aspirations. Deficiencies were not absent, as András Bozóki underlines: compared to the Polish case, where *Solidarnosc* was also articulated by a religious feature, Hungary was hit by the passivity of the workers translated into the lack of a cross-class mobilization (195).

Advancing, the fifth chapter starts with a more general discussion on theoretical grounds concerning regime change and elite change, emphasizing three theories of post-communist elite change during the 1980s: Elemér Hankiss' convergence of power, Jadwiga Staniszkis' political capitalism as a hybrid form of Westernization, and Erzsebet Szalai's technocratic continuity (236).[6] These theoretical paths open the discussion on the mechanisms used by the regime threatened by the emerging opposition, especially under János Kádár and, later on, under Imre Pozsgay. Given the official attitudes, the Hungarian opposition developed mirroring behavior which eventually led to a fragmentation of the new parties into ultra-moderate (Bajcsy-Zsiliszky Friendship Society, Christian Democratic People's Party), moderate (Hungarian Democratic Forum) and self-limiting radical ones (Alliance of Free Democrats). It is paramount to recall the existence of such different postures in order to better understand how post-communist politics

[6] Elemér Hankiss, *East European Alternatives* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); Jadwiga Staniszkis, "Political Capitalism in Poland," *East European Politics and Societies* 5, no. 1 (1991): 127-41; Erzsébet Szalai, *Gazdaság és hatalom* [Economy and power] (Budapest: Aula, 1990).

transitioned to split interests and contrasting attitudes towards democracy. Therefore, during the Round Table Talks, EKA (Opposition Round Table) converted the rhetoric of model change into regime change politics, because "socialist pluralism" (as defended by the Hungarian Socialist Worker's Party) was not an alternative anymore. Thus, the election of a new Parliament was perceived as an imperative in order to accelerate the transition to democracy. The reburial of Imre Nagy, as part of the transitional justice, symbolized a reformed perception of the past, a new stage in the democratization course, being followed by the debates around the Constitution. In this point of the book, the weaknesses of the Hungarian post-communist society are pointed out by András Bozóki, as the limited results of the constitution-making process become visible: contradictory discussions about the presidency, introduction of the word "socialism" in the new Constitution (as endorsed by the Hungarian socialists), establishment of a Constitutional Court, and most importantly the debate on who should elect the president. This latter issue split the political scene into the opponents to the popular election of the President (including FIDESZ, the social-democrats, and the Alliance of Free Democrats) and those who advocated in favor of this possibility. Although there was a consensus on "Back to Europe" national goal, popular sovereignty, individual freedoms, ideal of moderation, and cleavages in the Hungarian society were soon present, despite the "negotiated revolution" pronated by the elite:

> "Left-wing parties were discredited already at the starting point of the new regime, and they also fell victims of their own modernizing-centrist policies; their voters unsurprisingly turned to the extreme right-wing populist forces who offered security and protection" (317).

Within this wide-ranging classification, individual-focused analysis is put forward for the sake of a class-structured perspective. Thus, intellectuals as legislators emerge from past, deterministic events (such as the 1968 revolutionary wave or the emergence of younger parties), opening the way for a more competitive, and sometimes cooperative, interaction between political actors. In this point of the book, the author discusses the new categories of intellectuals created because the political

context forced them to manage the newly liberal regime, and to eventually implement the negotiated reforms: professional politicians, civil servants, CEOs, technocrats, or economists, they had to coagulate into a New Class of "post-communism managerialism" (428). In this matter, liberation from the old regime was a collective experience in need of trans-contextual knowledge provided by the intellectuals, during anti-fascist demonstrations in 1992, or during the decline of the Democratic Charter in 1993. That is to say, the polarization of the political scene started a fight against the emerging *democradúra* and asked for the self-mobilization of the elite in order to back up the democratization process. Indeed, embracing the European liberalization wave needed a form of metapolitics, involving the civil society, and connecting the intellectual elite to the isolated actors or dissident movements.

Finally, the book ends with a more quantitative approach (throughout thirty-nine events precisely inventoried) concerning the rotating agency of intellectuals within the political scene. During the five periods illustrated earlier in the book, the rolling transition operated as a mechanism through which different groups of intellectuals replace each other and transgress fixed roles in order to comply to varying contexts:

> "To sum up, in Hungary, as a rule three fourths of the participants were replaced by newcomers in each period of transition, while a fourth of them went through to the next stage. This has been the formula of rolling transition in the Hungarian case." (525)

To this extent András Bozóki's work exploits patterns and overlapping categorizations, since transition happens because individual, rational and self-conscious political actors get involved and act according to circulating interests.

However, nowadays Hungary is struggling with a democratic backsliding connected, paradoxically, to those actors that participated in the 1990s to the transition to democracy. Failed democracy, illiberal regime, electoral autocracy, these are the attributes describing the actual political situation.[7] Starting with the 2010 elections, when Fidesz won

[7] Michael Bernhard, "Democratic Backsliding in Poland and Hungary," *Slavic Review* 80, no. 3 (2021): 585–607; Fareed Zakaria, "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy," *Foreign*

two thirds of the seats in the Parliament, Hungary became an ideal type of a worst-case scenario, framed by a general regress of Western democracy model.[8] It is thus a good moment to question how a consensus-based transition (exceptional in Central-Eastern Europe) turned out to be problematic for Hungarian society. For this matter, András Bozóki's book offers a paramount contribution to the subject in the way he puts into a conceptual and historical frame intellectuals' contribution to the transitional process, thus allowing the readers to better understand current political phenomena.

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Affairs 76, no. 6 (1997); Attila Ágh, "The Decline of Democracy in East-Central Europe," *Problems of Post-Communism* 63, no. 5–6 (2016): 277–287.

[8] Attila Ágh, "The Decline of Democracy in East-Central Europe;" Pippa Norris, "Is Western Democracy Backsliding? Diagnosing the Risks," *Social Science Research Network*, March 7, 2017.

DOI: 10.62229/sprps23-1/8

KACPER SZULECKI
Dissidents in Communist Central Europe. Human Rights and the Emergence of New Transnational Actors
(Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 242 pp.

The book *Dissidents in Communist Central Europe: Human Rights and the Emergence of New Transnational Actors*, written by Kacper Szulecki, Polish professor, and researcher at Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, was published in 2019. As one of the few books to focus on such a topic, the piece dissects the conception and evolution of the phenomenon of "dissidentism" and its dimensions, in the context of Central European regimes during the Cold War.[1] The author aims to provide the readers with a detailed narrative and analysis of four specific Central European states, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, and East Germany, and the manifestations of dissidents and dissidentism in those countries. Szulecki makes use of historical sources, letters, and journals belonging to famous dissident figures, analyzing all four cases in parallel. The book consists of ten parts, the first being the Introduction, while the following nine chapters are set in chronological order.

In the introductory chapter, Szulecki reviews the previous studies on dissidents, and the use of the first empirical study of the concept of "dissidentism." In relation to the latter, the author also provides a triangular scheme – "the dissident triangle," as he calls it – which requires open, legal, and nonviolent action, Western attention, and domestic recognition (3). The author tests this scheme on the cases of the four Central European states which are subjected to the investigation.

Kacper Szulecki further explains why, in the context of "dissidentism," he prefers a transnational approach to an international one, while putting an emphasis on the several layers of such an approach, like that of cross-border exchanges, contacts, face-to-face meetings, and the spreading/

[1] Bernard Ivan Tamas, *From Dissident Party to Party Politics – The struggle for democracy on post-Communist Hungary* (New York: East European Monographs, 2007); Ilya Budraitskis, *Dissidents among Dissidents: Ideology, Politics, and the Left in Post-Soviet Russia* (London: Verso, 2022); Peter Reddaway, *The Dissidents: A Memoir of Working with the Resistance in Russia*, 1960-1990 (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2020).

circulation of ideas and texts. His theoretical ground is diverse, with the author deriving his ideas from the fields of cultural sociology, political science, cultural, and media studies. As he suggests, his goal is "to produce theoretically grounded historical narratives of the emergence and evolution of dissidentism" (6). Lastly, the author denotes that his methodology is rooted in the Weberian tradition of interpretive social science, followed by a categorization of the sources he used, and an overview of the structure of the book, which ends the introductory chapter.

Moving forward, in the first chapter of the book, Szulecki tackles the process of defining the word "dissident." His analysis is based on three elements: the historical roots of the term, the meanings/contexts which were used by the Westerners, and the meaning and definition dissidents themselves approved of or dismissed (21). After tracing the Latin roots of the word, and its use in the 1920s by the American press, the author ends with five dimensions (plus two variations) of the definition; thus, a dissident could be: (1) a former Communist dissenting from the party's line; (2) a solitary moral oppositionist; (2a) a solitary member of a minority group, a non-conformist outsider; (3) a person fighting for human rights in an authoritarian country; (4) a general label encompassing most political opposition activity; (5) a rebel; (5a) a non-conformist intellectual (24).

Presenting those dissident meaning variations with their different concepts, uses, and interpretations, the author proposes his own broad definition: "public and deliberate manifestation of political disagreement" (30) for the common good. Lastly, by continuing with the terminology assessments, the author points out that in the context of understanding, conceptualizing, and categorizing the term of dissidentism with the phenomenon per se, one shall note that the actions of defiance must be nonviolent, and they should be followed by repressive measures and/or sanctions, or otherwise they would be categorized as protests. The author ends the chapter with the aim of further providing his readers with a new analytical framework on the phenomenon of dissidentism (32).

In the second chapter, Szulecki points to the distinction between anti-communists and revisionists, who manifested as political oppositionists inside communist Eastern Europe. It is further highlighted that after Stalin's death, "the space for internal critique opened" (41). Revisionism

is mentioned as a heresy in faith since it maintained and preached anti-totalitarian beliefs, and not anti-Marxist ones (41-42). Lastly, the chapter narrates the events of the Soviet invasion of Hungary, and the evolution of the matters that took place in Poland and Czechoslovakia, in relation to revisionists and neo-positivists, and to the revolutionary 1968 spring experienced by both of them.

In the third chapter, the author shifts his lenses to the prominent figures of the 1960s dissidentism, and to the phenomenon of emergence of names and faces. Jacek Kuron, Adam Michnik, Petr Uhl, Václav Havel, Milan Kundera – these, along with some other dissident names, are presented as individuals who had played a crucial role in the oppositionist movements (65-66). Moreover, three acts of modern dissidentism are assessed by the author, and an understanding of the first real dissident act (as Szulecki declares it) – the Open Letter by Kuron and Karol Modzelewski – is provided.

Moving on to the fourth chapter of the book, the author presents the landscape after the events of 1968. The transnational stage of dissidence is also explored, in accordance with the role the exiles had after that specific year. A part of the chapter is also dedicated to the circulation of the dissidents' texts and ideas, and the way in which these were published (samizdat and tamizdat) (93). The chapter ends with a reference made to the Helsinki Act of 1975, and the subsequent and consequent implementation of human rights in the (political) agenda.

Chapter five of the book dives more into the cases of the dissident groups, such as KOR in Poland, and Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia. Focusing on their moment of inception, 1967-77, Szulecki narrates the story and the circumstances in which these two movements in question emerged, as well as their plans for action. An important highlight is made here, that both groups presented themselves as transparent and open from the beginning (121, 126).

Continuing the case study, in chapter six, Szulecki analyzes and presents the movements established after the implementation of the Helsinki Accords, namely Vons in Czechoslovakia, and ROPGiO in Poland. Furthermore, he argues on how the Western media molded the dissident image, following the theoretical basis of Edward Said's

seminal piece, Orientalism.[2] An important factor highlighted by the author is the absence of women. The latter had played a crucial role in the oppositionist movements, but they were generally disregarded as important or active figures (156).

Chapter seven deals with the terms and definitions the dissidents themselves accepted as being representative, but which, at times, were interpreted in different ways. Using once again his historical narration tools, Szulecki presents the transnational contacts and exchanges between the dissident groups across Central Europe (170) to be included as acts of dissidentism as well. More specifically, the author presents the historical meetings that took place between KOR and Charter 77, at the border between Poland and Czechoslovakia. Another point is made about the dissidents, who, compared with other oppositionists, were in a safer position as public figures (171), having attracted mainly indirect forms of repression (173).

In the second to last chapter, the author presents the generalization, as he calls it, of the dissident figure. With his focus still on Czechoslovakia and Poland, Szulecki argues that the generalization enabled new groups to adopt and make use of the dissident label (188). Finally, as we move closer to the 1989 events, he maintains that dissidentism moves from a non-governmental activity to an openly political sphere (191).

In the last part of the book, Szulecki notes that while in the previous chapters his focus had gone mainly on empirical materials, in this section he proposes an ideal typical model of dissidentism (207). Moreover, he goes over the dissident triangle again, and simultaneously highlights that once the critique towards dissidents began increasing, a loss in their credibility and fame was noted, thus analyzing the trajectory of the movement, all the way from its rise to becoming a mainstream and criticized phenomenon.

Before concluding, it is worth looking at the strengths and weaknesses of the book, at least as perceived in this study and review of the piece in question. It goes without doubt that Szulecki, based on concepts of political sociology and political science, offers to his readers a thorough insight into the phenomenon and layers of dissidentism in

[2] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2019).

Communist Central Europe, backing up his analysis of dissidentism, dissidents, and dissent with unique materials – from letters and journals to newspapers from the Cold War period. Being one of the few books to provide such a study on the matter, the readers get to understand not only the history behind dissidentism, but also the history of communism, as manifested in East and Central Europe. A weaker point of Szulecki's piece is represented by the often-repetitive details and ideas maintained by the author throughout the book, an aspect that, at certain points throughout the lecture, creates an interruption in the flow of events and ideas.

To conclude, within this context, a final point of this research is to propose a continuation of the study of these specific social movements (i.e., dissident movements during and after the Cold War), with concern to how they influenced the democratic transitions in their respective countries, and in general, to the importance they held in the process of democratization of those states. Nevertheless, this source-based piece is a must-read for anyone interested in and willing to dissect the study of dissident movements across Central Europe, conferring a unique insight into the rise of social movements, as a phenomenon.

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ABSTRACTS

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The Electoral Success of the (Northern) League in Italy (2008-2018). Is the Economic Decline or the Identitarian Issues the Main Reason for It?

This article aims to analyze the rise and electoral success of the (Northern) League in Italy, for the period 2008-2018. The purpose of this analysis is to determine whether the economic difficulties encountered by the electorate or other factors, such as political and cultural ones, have influenced the growth and electoral success of the League in Italy. By analyzing both demand and supply-side data, the analysis shows that the League has had better electoral results in the years after the crisis when the economy has been improving than in the years when there has been a major economic shock. Regarding survey data on the supporters of the League, the analysis shows that the economy is among the least influential factors for them to support a right-wing populist party. On the contrary, the analysis shows that the main triggers for radical right populist mobilization have more to do with group values, identity issues, ethnic and cultural affiliation, xenophobic sentiments, skepticism towards foreigners, multiculturalism, and forms of Euroscepticism.

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The Strategy Peculiarities in the Protest for Saving Urban Fabric in Tbilisi

After gaining its independence in 1991, Georgia faced significant challenges on all levels like all other post-communist countries. Therefore, against this background, care for urban historical and cultural

heritage, and ecological health was less visible on the agenda. As a result of the Rose Revolution of 2003, various reforms were carried out. After strengthening state institutions, the re-urbanization of cities was gradually included on the agenda. At the same time, growing urbanization resulted in an acute shortage of green space and an uprising of the urban grassroots movements in Georgia. We have selected three cases of urban movement developed in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia. "Save Gudiashvili Square," "Defend Vake Park," and "No to Panorama Tbilisi!". Even though these cases occurred almost simultaneously, and the activists involved were quite the same, their achievements are different. The presented research attempts to determine the challenges that arose during the formation of the urban movement agenda and study the activism strategy and how it influenced the results of the movements. By triangulation of multiple methods – analyzing primary and secondary sources and interviews of involved actors –, we argue that the strategy of the movements played an important role, while not crucial, with regard to the studied civic activism.

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Why Shadow Economy and Informality Should Be Separated as Concepts: Results and Implications of the Shadow Economy Survey in the Post-soviet Region

The current article is intended to bring two contributions to the study of informality. Empirically, it shares the result of the shadow

economy survey for the 2017 and 2018 fiscal years for Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Ukraine. These results are used to calculate the shadow economy index estimated as a percentage of the GDP. Already established as an annual exercise for Latvia and the Baltics since 2010, the survey has been applied to Moldova and Romania (since 2016), Poland (2015-2016), and Kosovo (in 2018). In the frame of the project "SHADOW: An Exploration of the Nature of Informal Economies and Shadow Practices in the Former USSR Region," the scope of the survey was expanded to Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Ukraine, keeping the same methodology and used for direct measurement of underground activities. By doing this, we discuss the use of direct measurement approaches to suggest that, while quantitative approaches are useful to estimate the size of shadow economies, direct approaches can be used to integrate these data and look for deeper correlations between the persistence of shadow transactions and some societal tendencies that are not necessarily economic.

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Soft Power Projection of Aspiring Middle Eastern Powers towards Yemen: The Case of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Iran

The multiple hard power engagements of the aspiring Middle East powers (the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Iran) in Yemen are self-evident. However, the disposition of foreign interference in Yemen is multifaced. Current research papers have primarily focused on using hard power military or economic tools, but soft power tools were left behind. Therefore, this article explores soft power's nature influencing the countries above assert towards the Yemeni population. It focused on three ostensibly distinct areas of soft power – education, religion, and media – within each particular analysis since those three areas are key elements of the Saudi and Iranian soft-power toolkit. Multiple religious, educational, and media tools towards Yemen were detected in each case.

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Some Specific Features of the Genesis of Modern Belgian Politics

This article discusses the symbolism of the year 1830 in the transition from the old political order to the establishment and gradual consolidation of the modern Belgian state. Modern constitutionalism was characterized by the struggle against monarchical absolutism and the concentration of political power in the hands of a single person. In addition, it supported the respect of civil rights and liberties, the individual being at the center of liberal philosophy, along with the idea of a representative government, the separation of powers in the state and the supremacy of the rule of law. The spread of the revolutionary wave from 1830 throughout the country opened a new period in the history of Belgium, in which the ideas of centralizing the state and asserting national independence merged with the urgency to give a direction to the state by choosing the representative monarchy as a form of governance and with the introduction of the Senate as an intermediate power. By analyzing the Belgian deputies' speeches, this article aims to make an introduction in the way the deputies imagined the construction of the state and to advance the idea of a mutual trajectory of the Belgian society in accordance with the young European nations.

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B-dul Mihail Kogălniceanu 36-46, Cămin A (curtea Facultății de Drept),
Corp A, Intrarea A, etaj 1-2, Sector 5, București, România; tel.: + (4) 0726 390 815
e-mail: editura@g.unibuc.ro
Librărie online: https://editura-unibuc.ro/magazin/
Centru de vânzare: Bd. Schitu Măgureanu, nr. 9, parter (holul Facultății de Sociologie și Asistență Socială); tel. + (4) 021 305 37 03

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 Bucureşti – Bucharest University Press (EUB – BUP)