CIVIL SZEMLE

POLITICAL PARTIES AND CIVIL SOCIETY: A CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

Radu Carp, István Péter Németh, Cristina Matiuță, Orsolya Falus, Zoltan Zakota (Eds.)

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BETWEEN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL SPHERE
— CIVIL SOCIETY DILEMMAS IN THE THIRD REPUBLIC OF POLAND

Arkadiusz Lewandowski–Łukasz Perlikowski

Introduction

The idea of civil society is an undisputable, commonly recognized principle that animates Polish society. Not to mention the rich traditions of civil society of the past centuries, there is a natural drive to civil society ideals after emancipation from the communist regime. As the development of civil institutions was the primary purpose of political activities at the time of the rebirth of the sovereign people of Poland at the beginning of '90 the later events made things more and more complicated. The variety of interests and values that constitute a pluralist society led to the multiplication of groups of interest and organizations that have started to have their purpose of existence incongruent with the universal ideal of civic society. According to the commonly recognized division of civil society into three main sectors: the public sector, private sector, and a combined one called just the third sector of civil society, there should be some autonomy within each sector. However, since things related to social dynamics are more volatile, the sectors are intertwined and dependent on each other. This fact affects the shape of civil society in practice. It is hard to maintain an equal balance among the given sectors and to prevent the domination of one over another. We propose a hypothesis that in the current situation in Poland, we are dealing with the power of the public sector (represented by political parties and direct governmental activities) over the third sector of civil society. The former manifests itself in the colonization of self-governance policy by political parties, which is in vivid contradiction with the bottom-up logic of civil society. The latter is palpable in determining the

shape of the so-called third sector of civil society by using government subsidies, again a form of dismissal of efforts typically belonging to bottom-up civil society. In the proposed paper, we would like to draw a comprehensive picture of the abovementioned issues to display the condition of civil society in Poland. To do so, we need to examine the following topics: a) the politicization of local elections; b) non-competitive elections on the lower level of self-governance; c) differentiation of voter turnout in different levels of elections; d) form and instruments of influencing associations and foundations of the third sector of civil society—all these elements together to allow us to obtain a complete perspective of civil society in contemporary Poland. In conclusion, we would like to consider the pros and cons of this socio-political situation. The methodological characteristic of the research is associated with theoretical analysis based on empirical evidence accompanied by desk research.

Theoretical framework

Embracing such a great scope with limited research requires specific determinations of the subject matter. There is a distinction of primary importance for our investigations. We want to employ a perspective of the split between the political sphere that manifests itself in government and political parties' activity and the social sphere that is constituted by citizens' active participation in decision-making processes oriented toward the public interest. We shall regard the institutional dimension exclusively to compare these two fields consistently. Although this kind of assumption can lead to a significant reduction of data to be analyzed, it will also ensure the quality of research by operating on common ground. Regarding such objects as procedures, institutions, and patterns of decision-making will let us obtain some conclusions based on measurable factors which are suitable to be interpreted and assessed objectively. Hence, amongst many possible ways of grasping bottom-up initiatives, only these materialized into forms of local elections, participatory budgets, and associations or foundations will be regarded as subjects of analysis. By assuming this, we aim to understand how the competition between political and social proceeds will become clear. The outcome of this competition is related to controversies around goods commonly recognized as desirable and scarce. These are mainly financial resources and political power. That being assumed as a substantial scope of the research, one should indicate the method of consideration and selection, which is a case study. Selected issues of the social and political life of the Third Republic of Poland will be chosen by taking the relevancy criterion.

As a most apparent phenomenon of rivalry mentioned above, we have chosen local elections as a struggle between representatives of the political and social spheres. The central hypothesis to be verified is that in the context of the contemporary Republic of Poland, we are dealing with the colonization of the public

sphere by the political one. Even if that hypothesis is proven, there will remain the need to evaluate this state of affairs which is far from being a black-or-white issue.

The last theoretical element worth noticing here is the concept of civil society. The split for social and political spheres underlies the idea of civil society, which was intended to be an alternative for the government since its beginning. This is to be found in classical considerations of the political philosophy of the post-revolutionary age in Europe and America. Thus, the civil society in the theoretical approach of Alexis the Tocqueville and that of Georg Wilhelm Hegel was designed as free from governmental control. Social needs were supposed to be satisfied by the social means of citizens gathered in local communities. Although this concept has been evolving toward the modern form, the gist of that account remains.

Taking the current Polish political context into account, the interventions of the political sphere toward civil society are twofold. First, it is to be observed on the examples of politicization of local elections, competition between political parties in local elections, non-competitive elections in self-governance elections, and differentiation of attendance degrees. These elements are indicators of political parties intervening in civil society. The second type of determining the shape of civil society by politics is central government regulations that manifest themselves in the weakness of local civic activities and political control over associations and foundations of the so-called third sector of civil society. The next step of our research is to analyze these elements from the perspective of the struggle between social and political spheres to control civil society.

The politicization of local elections

The level of local self-governance is the one that is most associated with the idea of civil society. Competition between political and social institutions and actors at this level is an excellent example of the broader process we are considering in this paper. One of the essential goals intended to be achieved by the designers of the Polish electoral system is reducing the degree of politicization of local authorities. The withdrawal of political parties' impact from this field of social activity was the crucial element of these resolutions (Lewandowski–Musiałkiewicz–To-maszewski 2022: 108; Ganowicz–Opioła 2017: 139). Hence, local elections should allow voters to exercise their political rights by choosing independent candidates. It creates opportunities for local leaders not associated with a political party or ideological stance. (Wojtasik 2013: 65–66). On the other hand, we are witnessing an ongoing process of the colonization of local policy by political parties (Żabka 2011: 136). That process leads to imposing some constraints on non-governmental civil activities.

In the case of local elections, we witness the phenomenon of pushing representatives of local communities away from the institutional level of political activity. This problem is to be analyzed on the examples mentioned above. These are

the following phenomena: a) attendance degree in different levels of elections; b) local elections as a platform of political parties rivalry; c) non-competitive elections on the lower level of self-governance (in units with a population under 20 thousand). In analyzing local elections, we consider the period from 1998–2018. In 1998 there was a significant turn in the Polish political sphere due to the restoration of a three-levels self-governance system (gmina, powiat, województo). Since then, there have been periodic elections every four years when local communities could vote for candidates to the collective organs of local authorities. However, since 2002 there appeared a procedure that allowed people to vote in direct elections for executive officers at the commune (gmina) level (wójt, Burmeister, president – differentiation of titles dependent on the unit size). What is worth noting, according to the legal rules, there was a right to nominate candidates who did not belong to any political party (Miernik 2019: 100–101). This right was granted to associations, social organizations, and voters what was intended to underlying local communities' role and significance.

Differentiation of voter turnout in different levels of elections

Local elections are regarded as an inextricable element of Poland's broader political democratization process after 1989. Their social importance can be emphasized by the fact that the character of these elections is peculiarly local. It does mean that citizens can fully exercise their rights to participate in public issues related to their closest social environment. Thus, we employ the category of attendance as a measure of civil society development (Opioła 2018: 35).

Elections of every kind (presidential, parliamentary, local) that took place in Poland during the period of the last 30 years made citizens able to be a part of the democratic decision-making process. This fact allows us to consider attendance as a relevant indicator. Thus, one can ask: How are the local elections situated in the background of other elections (parliamentary, euro parliamentary, presidential)? It seems to be that the local elections stand out as second to the lowest outcome of attendance regarding all kinds of elections. *(Figure 1.)* The average voter turnout in local elections after 1989 is 45,17%. For comparison, in the least popular euro parliamentary elections, 28,73% of citizens entitled to vote have exercised their right. Considering elections to the Polish parliament, voter turnout reached 51,33%.

In the case of presidential elections, it was respectively 51,33% in the first round and 57,8% in the second round. It is worth adding that the average outcome of voter turnout in local elections has been lifted by the unusually high result of elections in 2018 when the voter turnout hit 50% (precisely 54,9%). The abovementioned tendencies follow Waldemar Wojtasik's (2010: 254) findings about recognizing local elections as less relevant than presidential ones and parliamentary ones voters themselves. Along the same line, elections to European Parliament are identified as least suitable. The degree of attendance that is to be found in the example of local

elections leads us to conclude that they are elections of minor importance. Their significance in the context of the political system is perceived as less relevant than presidential or parliamentary. The salient feature of these elections (besides the low degree of attendance) is the inclination of voters toward experiments. They choose smaller and new parties as well as newcomer candidates. In higher elections, the stake is riskier, and well-known candidates are preferred to a black horse pick. Other features relate to an immense amount of invalid votes and decreased support for the party in power (Miernik 2019: 96; Reif–Schmitt 1980: 9–10).

It is necessary to note that attendance in Polish elections has been increasing in the last few years, regardless of the type of election *Figure 2.* This tendency does not lead to the conclusion that citizens' interest in democratic procedures flourishes. It is instead a consequence of the polarization of socio-political conflicts which has emerged from the cleavage between "Liberal" and "Solidary" Poland (Bojarowicz 2018; Obacz 2018). Although the relationship between political polarization and electoral attendance is presented unanimously in literature, it seems to be a valid assertion that these two factors have a positive correlation. Some researchers do not see any relevant connections between these elements (Najbar 2017: 106), while others point out a positive relationship between these factors (Hutter–Leininger 2023: 639; Ortoleva–Snowberg 2013; Hetherington 2008, Borbáth–Wessels–Schmitt 2008).

Figure 1. Average, lowest, and highest voter turnout in local government, parliamentary, European Parliament, and presidential elections in Poland after 1989
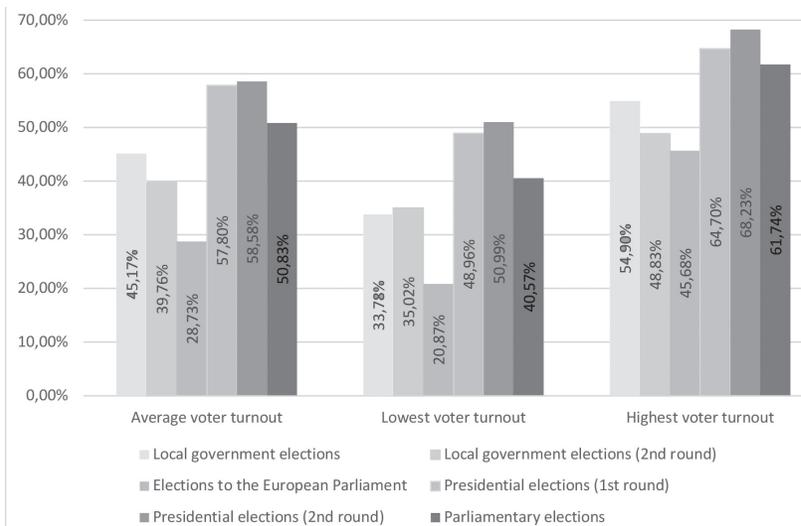
Source: Own elaboration based on data from National Electoral Commission.

Figure 2. Voter turnout during local government, parliamentary, European Parliament, and presidential elections in Poland after 1989
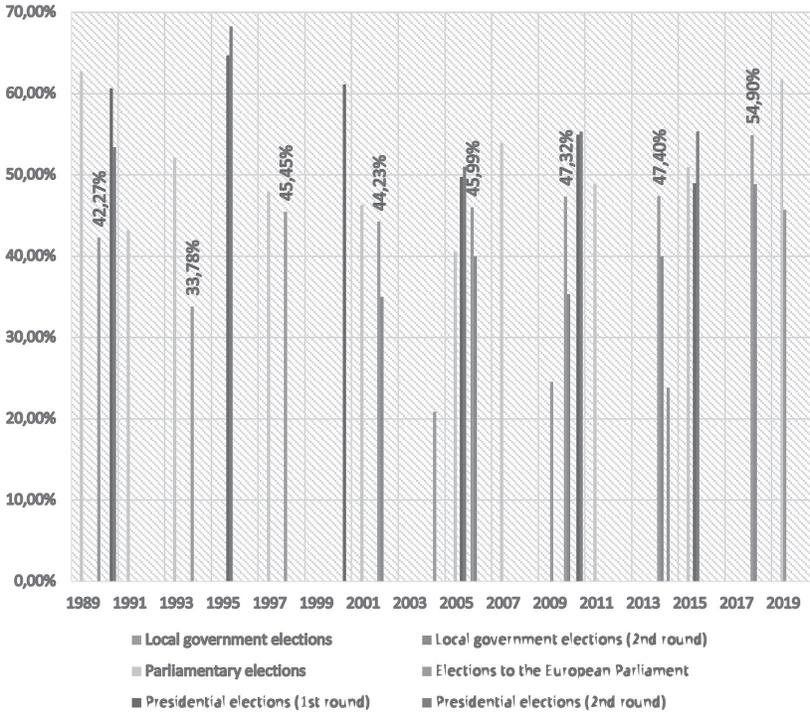
Source: Own elaboration based on data from National Electoral Commission.

The differentiation of the self-government voting system causes the mediocre degree of involvement of citizens in local elections. It is one day when citizens ask about choosing their representatives in each of the three levels of the local authority. Additionally, at the level of commune, elections are conducted for municipal council (collective) and single-person office (Burmeister, wójt, president) simultaneously. The very worthful finding is of Jarosław Flis, who points out that we are dealing with the differentiation of voter turnout to commune's size. Local elections in Poland constitute an exceptional case, where attendance is diminishing along with the increase of commune (Flis 2018: 2). Analyzing the local elections gives us some elucidation of the structure and elements contained in the democratic process on the local level. As Waldemar Wojtasik (2013) argues, the local elections are to be seen as plebiscitary government assessments, and their results are correlated with opinions about the current activities of those in power. Moreover, the relevant factor is time. The temporal gap between local and parliamentary elections plays a crucial role. It can be an occasion to express a disagreement or withdrawal of support to a political program.

Local elections reflect the situation on a higher level of politics. It is always an opportunity to use local elections as a platform of rivalry between political parties. They are treated instrumentally in this case – just another tool for maintaining or acquiring political power. The election in 2018 was a manifestation of this situation on a scale even more extensive than in previous elections. An aggressive election campaign based on the conflict between the ruling party and the opposition has involved supporters of both sides. The context has determined the relevancy of this election, which became extremely important for the ruling party, which took the satisfying result as a form of confirmation of the way assumed in the 2015 election. On the other hand, the opposition has reverted this argument as the last call to shift the government before the ruling party is too strong and institutionally profoundly rooted in the system of power (Miernik 2019: 98).

Another proof of the politicization of local elections in Poland is the postpone-ment of local polls from the fall of 2023 to the spring of 2024. An official argu-ment sounds that the local elections would collide with the parliamentary ones (Domagalski 2022). There are no doubts, though, that it was a vital interest of the ruling party, which preferred to be immune from unwanted results in both elec-tions simultaneously.

All the above mentioned elements lead us to assert that local elections were paradoxical. However, the closest environment to local communities does not en-courage members of society to active participation, which is proved by the low degree of attendance in polls. Moreover, even the increased attendance in the recent election cannot be perceived as progress in civic participation but rather as an element of the broader phenomenon of politicization. Another conclusion is that taking attendance as an indicator of civil society's development could be more extensive.

Local elections as a competition between political parties

Analysis of local elections, found in hitherto literature, shows that the commit-ment of citizens, media, and politicians is focused on election to voivodship sejmik and elections which president, Burmeister, and wójt personalize. A lower degree of engagement characterizes elections to municipal councils. Elections to powiat are even less attractive to voters, a second-level unit of Polish self-governance (Miernik 2019: 88). This problem directly manifests the thesis of colonization in local elec-tions by political parties. Two processes materialize it. On the one hand, we are dealing with the principle that the higher the level of self-governance authority, the higher degree of political party interference is to be found. On the other hand, one can grasp the phenomenon of penetrating the lower level of self-governance by political parties, which appears in the case of a commune, a basic unit of local self-governance. These processes lead to the weakening of local movements, civic initiatives, and NGOs. It is accompanied by refusing the strategy of performing

fake labels intended to be local ones. The tendency is toward introducing directly party-focused branding (Molewicz 2015: 53–54).

This is where the category of political rivalry is determined by a set of political parties in the domain that is supposed to belong to local communities (Ganowicz–Opioła 2017; Drzonek 2015; Molewicz 2015; Nikolski 2011; Ptak 2011). Ewa Ganowicz and Wojciech Opioła claim that local elections necessitate the change of the political party function. The rivalry over the best position is conducted not only between parties but also between local committees, local movements, associations, or private entities. It means the competition goes far beyond political competition, as seen in parliamentary elections. However, the functions of political parties differ depending on the level of self-governance. The critical factor in this situation is an electoral ordinance that grants special status to municipal councils in communes below 20 thousand inhabitants. It could be seen since the half of the previous decade that political parties became designers of local political strategies from the level of cities with powiat right (as well as Warsaw) through powiat councils to voivodeship sejmiks (Ganowicz–Opioła 2017: 139). This trend seems to be more and more intense. On the one hand, the degree of political parties interventions increases along with the level of self-governance (Kaczmarczyk–Marmola 2021; Lewandowski 2019; Ganowicz–Opioła 2017: 140; Dojwa 2011: 26; Kostka 2008: 149). Nevertheless, on the other hand, political parties do not abstain from interfering in local elections at the commune level, where they get rid of "non-parties" or "free associations" labels. Instead, they create committees with an official title that is promoted on the range of the whole country (Molewicz 2015: 53–54; Gendźwiłł–Żółtak 2012: 102-103; Ptak 2011;).

One can make a fundamental distinction that embraces types of rivals in electoral competition. These are a) mainstream political parties starting with their label and brand; based on their structures; b) associations, local movements, local committees, etc.; c) candidates with non-partisanship camouflage but equipped with political party assets such as structures, supporters, etc. (Ganowicz–Opioła 2017: 140; Geńdźwiłł 2010). The latter type is an interesting one from the perspective of our analysis. The non-partisanship is utilized as a label and advantage of a candidate, who is at the same time allowed to use political party resources.

Starting the analysis from the higher level of local elections, one can look at voivodeship elections. These elections are specific because they are also regarded as symbolic support or lack of support for given political party candidates. Leaders and relevant figures may appear in this rivalry, which can be utilized in general elections. It is also traditionally an opportunity to examine possible lines of alliances for future parliamentary coalitions (Wojtasik 2013: 62; Molewicz 2015: 53–54). It is a matter of fact that in the voivodeship elections, political parties have played a central role since 1998. The aggregation of political party votes is at least 80% of the pool of votes. In six elections, the average result is 89,49%. The global impact of political parties is immense if counts mandate in voivodeship sejmiks, which the table below depicts in detail.

Table 1. Support and number of seats won by party committees in local government elections at the voivodeship level

Elections	% Votes obtained in elections	The number of seats won	% of seats won
2018	94,47%	529 (per 552)	95,83%
2014	92,31%	535 (per 555)	96,40%
2010	86,62%	541 (per 561)	96,43%
2006	92,72%	553 (per 561)	98,57%
2002	81,98%	534 (per 561)	95, 19%
1998	88,87%	836 (per 855)	97,78%
Average	89,49%	----	96,7%

Source: Own elaboration based on data from National Electoral Commission

On the lower levels of self-governance, one should be aware that the electoral ordinance differs slightly from that dedicated to the Voievodship level because of different specifics and single-member districts. This is the reason why a comparable indicator is the number of mandates. In local elections for municipal council (on the level of the commune), the outcome related to political party mandates has been around 25%–30%. In the case of executive organs, the result is set between 18%–25%. The decreasing tendency is in these elections, as depicted in *Figure 3.*

The data allows us to grasp the main tendencies of this phenomenon. Firstly, political parties have relatively limited influence at a lower level than voivodship. Secondly, there is some stabilization in the direction of local elections at the lower levels of self-governance. Thirdly, as Geńdźwiłł–Żółtak (2020: 57–58) point out, the political party influence is more potent in more giant communes and cities with populations of more than 100 thousand. Political parties are weakest not in the smallest communes but in communes of medium size (5–10 thousand and 10–20 thousand).

Figure 3. Percentage of seats in local government elections at the level of the smallest communes (up to 20,000 inhabitants) won by party committees
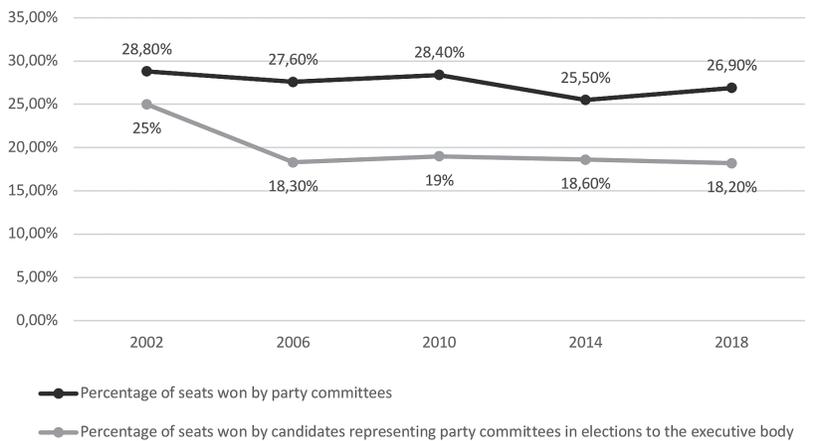
Source: Gendźwiłł–Żółtak 2020: 54–55.

According to Gendźwiłł and Żółtak, the peculiarity of minor communes manifests itself in difficulties in creating political party structures. The size of the communes has a remarkable impact on social relations and the bounds of communities. Recently, Marcin Czyżniewski (2019) investigated the topic of political party interference in local elections in 2018. In his research, he considered communal councils and executive office candidates. Another exciting element of this work is analyzing the registration stage and rivalry over mandates *(Tables 2 and 3)*.

Table 2. Partisanship of local government elections in 2018 at the commune level (elections to collegial resolution-making councils)

The level of self-government	Percentage of party committees among all that registered electoral lists	Rate of party committees among all committees that won at least one seat	Allocation of seats won by party committees
Municipalities with up to 20,000 residents	27	27	27
Municipalities with 20-100 thousand residents	40	40	23
Municipalities with over 100,000 residents	52	60	70
County	51	53	54
Voivodeship	74	88	96
Generally	27	30	30

Source: Czyżniewski 2019: 624–625.

Table 3. Partisanship of local government elections in 2018 at the commune level (elections for the office of commune head/mayor/president)

The level of self-government	Percentage of candidates for the office of commune head/mayor/president registered by party committees	Percentage of party candidates who were elected to office
Municipalities with up to 20,000 residents	35	30
Municipalities with 20-100 thousand residents	41	36
Municipalities with over 100,000 residents	57	53
Generally	40	32

Source: Czyżniewski 2019: 627–628.

It is necessary to highlight that political parties' lower degree of interference in local elections (on the level of the commune) does not infer that the free public space is owned by civil society. A relatively good position of non-partisanship candidates is caused by clientelism (Bartnicki 2019). Hence, non-partisanship does not necessitate an increase in civil society but entails something contrary to it. The strong position of a person in charge of exercising the executive office in the commune can monopolize the local public sphere and dominate the rivalry. It leads directly to diminishing the influence of political parties (Stepień–Pierzgalski 2022: 198; Bartnicki 2016). In effect, political parties, in the majority of cases, withdraw the candidates from smaller communes, and local leaders are free to organize policy and administration in their interest (Gendźwiłł–Żółtak–Rutkowski 2015). In such cases, we are dealing with a confusing situation with no civil society or political party impact. For many reasons, this is even worse than political party monopoly or failures of civil society.

Three issues may be inferred from the above analysis and remarks. First, the size of the commune correlates positively with the degree of political party interference. This conclusion is highly manifested in voivodship elections, which are more likely parliamentary than local self-governance ones. Second, even at the power level of local elections, where a certain peculiarity appears, there is a relatively high level of political party engagement – 30%. Third, there is a paradox that political parties play a crucial role in larger cities, where civil society is supposed to grow. On the other hand, local leaders in minor communes are strong enough to compete with political parties' candidates (Gendźwiłł–Żółtak–Rutkowski 2015).

Non-competitive elections on the lower level of self-governance

The problem that refers to the considerations mentioned above, particularly the party-based elections at the commune level, is the issue of non-competitive elections. We also connect this issue with civil society and its capabilities and condition.

In the literature on the subject, the term non-competitive elections mean a situation where the number of candidates registered in a given district is equal to or lower than the number of seats assigned to that constituency. In cases like this, there is usually no voting, and registered candidates are considered elected (Michalak–Sokala–Uziębło 2013: 278), or a plebiscite is organized in which the only candidate must receive more votes "for" than "against."

The reasons for non-competitive elections are varied and often depend on the local characteristics of a given country. We can include systemic conditions in this group, such as single-mandate electoral districts (Stępień–Pierzgalski 2022: 196; Flis–Stolicki 2017; Konisky–Ueda 2010; Sharman 2003), incumbency advantage, i.e., the benefit of people who have previously held their office (Stępień–Pierzgalski 2022; Hogan 2004), or the aforementioned regional factors and contextual issues, such as proximity to victory, term of office, salary, the attractiveness of the office (Stępień–Pierzglaski 2022: 196–197; Squire 2000: 142). Researchers of the phenomenon also note that the non-competitiveness of elections is more common in rural areas. As indicated in the last part of the text, political parties are less active (Stępień–Pierzgalski 2022: 197).

The case of Polish non-competitive elections has been the subject of several analyzes in recent years (Stępień–Pierzgalski 2022; 2023; Stępień 2021; Mazurkiewicz 2020; Gendźwiłł–Żółtak–Rutkowski 2015). Previous studies have pointed out that the above-mentioned single-member districts, the specificity of small local communities, and clientelistic links at the local level may be significant for this phenomenon (Bartnicki 2019). However, what we are most interested in is what this phenomenon means for the condition of civil society and participation. Some researchers dealing with this topic in recent years (Stępień–Pierzgalski, 2022; 2023; Mazurkiewicz 2020) see this process as a counter-argument to the thesis expressed in the literature on the subject (Newton 1982; Dahl–Tufte 1973) about the better functioning of democracy in units more minor in terms of population, in which it would, for example, electoral participation would be easier and more frequent.

In this context, non-competitive elections, meaning the lack of an alternative and often the absence of the electoral act itself, are an essential factor determining the decline of citizens' interest in the public sphere and lead to the gradual obliteration of the habit of participation (Stępień–Pierzgalski 2022: 198). A problem noticeable in Poland at the level of small communes is the deficit of candidates not only in elections but also for local elites. This is a common phenomenon in local democracy at the level of small territorial units. The size of such units translates into the size of the local elite, which is personally limited to already socially active people (Gendźwiłł–Żółtak–Rutkowski 2015: 68).

The discussed problem is essential as its scale in Poland has increased in recent years. Analyzing the occurrence of this phenomenon in the 21st century, Stępień −Pierzgalski (2022: 206) indicate that between the local government elections in 2002 and 2018, the%age of non-competitive seats in municipal councils increased from 0.82% to 7.75% in 2018. Equally intense is the phenomenon's scale in the elections of executive bodies at the commune level. Accordingly, the%age of non-competitive mandates of this type increased from 3.87% in 2002 to 13.40% in 2018 (detailed data is presented in *Figure 4*).

Figure 4. Percentage of non-competitive mandates in elections to municipal councils and municipal executive bodies in 2002–2018
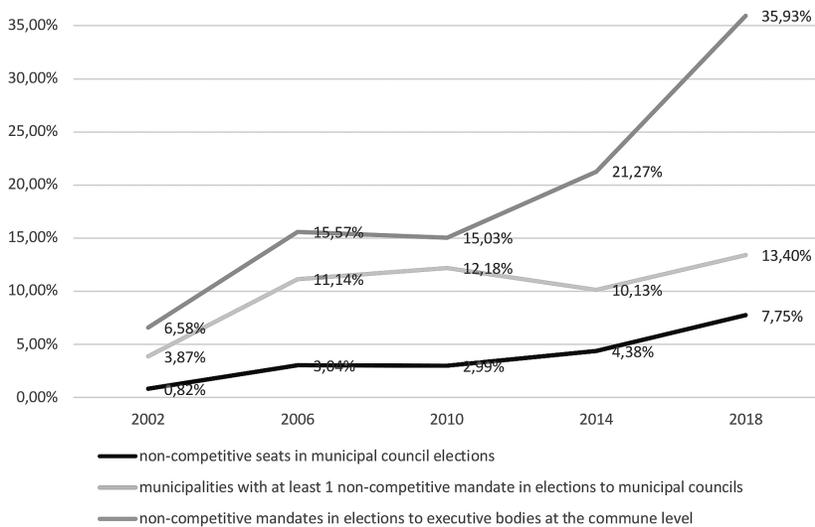
Source: Stępień and Pierzgalski 2022: 206.

The scale of the phenomenon is also noted by Marek Mazurkiewicz (2020: 102), who emphasizes that the problem of non-competitive elections to commune councils is the domain of the smallest Polish communes: up to 20,000 (the cases of such polls in larger communes and at the county and voivodeship level are cases unit). The scale of the phenomenon in absolute numbers is shown in *Figure 5.*

Figure 5. Number of non-competitive seats to municipal councils (communes with up to 20,000 inhabitants) in local government elections in 1998–2018
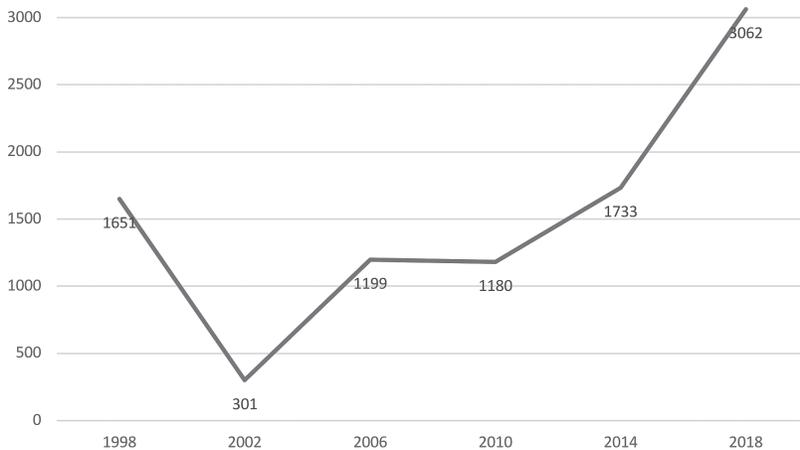
In the period we are interested in, the number of communes in which at least one councilor is elected in a non-competitive way is also growing. In 2006, this type of choice was recorded in 440 communes, in 2010 in 425 communes, in 2014 in 601 communes, and 2018 in a record-breaking 889 communes. An example of the problem's scale is that in 2018, in 15 communes in the country (in 11 voivodeships), full councils were elected without voting (Mazurkiewicz 2020: 103).

From the perspective of the issue we have raised, non-competitive elections reveal three basic processes: firstly, statistically, a situation in which elections do not take place, and the only candidate or a plebiscite takes over the councilor's mandate is held in which the candidate for the mayor/president must obtain more votes "for" than "against"; secondly, civil society at the level of small communes is personally convergent with political actors (social leaders are often councilors or employees of public institutions), and if it does exist, it still loses to local, often clientelistic power systems; thirdly, non-competitive elections are one of the reasons for low voter turnout and political participation and can lead to social apathy.

Form and instruments of influencing associations and foundations of the third sector

Civil society was intended as a hybrid to bridge the gap between the private and public sectors. Hence, the potential contradiction underlies the whole civil society project from its essence. The third sector is to get the balance over two

others; consequently, there are infringements upon the limits of private and public spheres. Are associations and foundations private or public entities? They are supposed to be initiatives undertaken by citizens to achieve commonly shared goals. This assumption manifests itself in methods of collecting resources. The organizations can use private funds, and the central government authorities can subsidize them. Public grants and funding programs have a remarkable influence on the shape of civil society. Considering the distinction between market-oriented and statist approaches, there are no straightforward solutions if one would like to name this situation. Paweł Załęski states it should be defined as: "a non-state public sector determined by the competition for grants, subsidies, and public contracts, which should be identified with demonopolized, free-market bureaucracy. We are dealing with free-market rivalry for public funds" (Załęski 2012: 210).

Although it seems to be a central problem of civil society in practice and theory, it is instead the issue evaded in public discourses. As a result, we are dealing with various tensions on the edges of civil society sectors. Disproportional support from governmental resources leads not only to unjust privileges of some institutions and disadvantages of others. It also disturbs the natural stream of social initiatives and blocks social activity from the bottom. It is worth noting that although the third sector of civil society is not focused exclusively on economic benefits and the gaining of profits, and inequalities between institutions affect the structure of the whole system. It is similar to the market situation, which is why Załęski's remark is straight to the point—introducing entities with public support to the environment of NGOs can shape its structure in a very ineffective manner. NGOs lose spontaneous energy when the attention of society becomes an object of unfair competition between institutions. So the weakness of social initiatives is, to some extent, caused by taking the public sphere by pseudo-independent subjects. That is the one side of the coin, but the reverse is even more perplexing. In cases when NGOs are getting successful, the aggravation of the struggle between the public sector and the third sector of civil society becomes more intense. It can be seen in many different examples from various dimensions of social life.

The controversy over the issue of which institutions should be in charge of post penitentiary system is an excellent example of this problem. This is a real social problem – how to deal with people who are former prisoners? After serving a sentence in prison, they are no longer the elements of the penitentiary system. Is the third sector of civil society a proper institution to deal with that kind of issue? As practice shows, it is. In their storyline, NGOs concerned about the fate of people with episodes in jail create a system of houses with basic aid in steps towards everyday life successfully. Whereas public subsidies and private resources supported these institutions, some public institutions responsible for controlling and providing audits exposed mistakes and abuses in their functioning (Supreme Audit Office 2019). This is not to judge what is true in this controversy but to show that the question of which institution is competent to provide a service in issues relevant from the perspective of society remains open.

Examples could be mainly multiplied–similar doubts about disability care services, granting funds to cultural enterprises, sports organizations, etc. The distribution of resources and claims to have competencies to provide public service is at stake everywhere, and the controversy between NGOs and governmental authorities appears. This situation creates another case of clientelism. Those in power are situated as a distributor of goods and resources. In contrast, the entities of third sectors became passive receivers or suppliers of services that are not in response to social needs but instead political orders. Each act of such distribution entails the question of distributive justice and social values. Moreover, this model of managing civil society has a significant side effect. Foundations and organizations participate in the ongoing process of struggle with each other. It makes civil society full of conflict instead of cooperation. Hence, the effect is opposite to what was assumed. Let us focus on one example worth considering, especially for relevancy and the scale enterprise undertaken by the project's authors. There is in Poland a proactive and dynamic think tank named Strategy&Future. This is the institution of experts and researchers devoted to geopolitics, international studies, military strategies, etc. Since it operates as a foundation, it is maintained by private subscribers and donors. Being a civil organization, it significantly impacts public opinion about military strategy, activities of governmental authorities, and assessment of geopolitical processes (Bartosiak 2023). The civil sector has acquired the competencies and capabilities traditionally belonging to politicians and their administrations. It is not easy to assess this situation. We just intended to show that the tension between sectors reflects the tension between the social and political spheres. The metaphor proposed by Niall Fergusson and utilized by authors from Strategy&Future is worth referring to, which says that this rivalry can be described in terms of the tower and the square (Fergusson 2019). A strict hierarchy determines the tower's structure, while the square's domain works in the networking modes (Fergusson 2019: 3–58). Some frictions and tensions are to be found between these two figures, and this observation is also valid in the Polish context.

The point of controversy lies in the dimension of competencies. Some opinions say the service can only be authorized by the central power institutions accountable for fulfilling their duties. However, on the other hand, the principle of subsidiarity remains valid. According to this principle, social needs should be satisfied using the instruments in their closest environment. That is to shorten the distance between decision and effect and to avoid communication noises within the frame of the political system. Hence, from the general point of view, the remedy for all social inconveniences consists of the proper circulation of data and knowledge. This is why nowadays, in Poland, there is growing interest in deliberative democracy, which is the project intended to enhance democracy by rational factors based on discussions and consultations. Furthermore, there is another struggle between the political and social spheres. While the deliberative ideal is worth pursuing, practicing deliberation shows that it can also be an instrument of manipulation. Politicians often take advantage of their position and set up debates in a form that favors

their interests. It is like that because deliberation and politics come from different origins and serve other purposes (Perlikowski 2020: 289–296). Nonetheless, on the local level, deliberation can supplement some civil society initiatives. One of the examples is a participatory budget, a form of plebiscite dedicated to local activities (Marczewska-Rytko–Maj 2021; Tybuchowska-Hartlińska 2016). Supporting this form of the enterprise through deliberation lifts local policy to a higher level of quality (Popławski 2018). Thus, in the case of local politics, deliberation seems to be a shield against partisanship and should be perceived as an action in honor of civil society.

Conclusions

As we reach the final stage of the paper, it is to recall the central hypothesis. It claims that in the current situation in Poland, we are dealing with the domination of the public sector (represented by political parties and direct governmental activities) over the third sector of civil society. Although it should be regarded as verified positively, an additional comment is needed here. It has been shown clearly that in Poland, we face the phenomenon of domination of the public sector over the others. Some vital points of analysis are to be reminded as follows. The low voter turnout rate in local elections is a significant indicator of the weakness of civil society. Another thing is an ongoing process of partisanship in local elections which is a clear symptom of political intervention in local communities. In direct connection to these points, there is a situation in which even the lack of political parties' presence in a given commune does not guarantee a democratic and full-fledged election. This problem manifests itself in proportionally high outcomes of non-competitive elections. Another thing is that the public sector has an overwhelming impact on the functioning of foundations and associations. On the one hand, the selected organizations are supported by public funds even if they have not found any attention amongst citizens. However, on the other hand, the organizations that have succeeded are sometimes marginalized because of the conflict of competencies. In this case, public deliberation seems contrary to political authorities, like networking opposes hierarchy. These are our findings, but to provide an auto-critical element, it is to be said that rationales are to be found behind the phenomenon of domination of the public sector. The main reason for involving political institutions in civil society is that the public sphere still needs to be developed in Poland. Although, as stated above, there are rich traditions of civil society, the democratic regime is a relatively new solution. To achieve the level of consolidated democracy, there needs to be proper timing of it. Hence, the term politicization can be equalized in this context with professionalization. As seen in the examples mentioned above, some elements are lacking in organizing the democratic procedure, and difficulties with making citizens interested in their local community issues. Thus, hopefully, the perplexities of civil society in Poland might be related to a particular stage in democratic development, not an irreversible process of decline.

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CIVIL SOCIETY, POLITICAL PARTIES, AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF DEMOCRACY IN SLOVENIA

Igor Bahovec

Introduction: the context of civil society and political parties in the period of transition from communism to democracy

■ According to Robert Schuman, one of the founding fathers of the European Union, the central characteristic of a democratic state is that it 'is at the service of the people and acts in agreement with it. /.../ This is closely akin to President Lincoln's definition: "A people's government by the people and for the people'" (Schuman 2010 [orig. 1964]: 42). But what does this include, how can we achieve it, what are the core social actors of democratic engagement?

The history of totalitarian, authoritarian and absolutist political systems clearly shows that the basic pre-requisite of democracy is party pluralism and freedom to associate. One cannot ignore Durkheim's (1983 [orig. 1933]) observation that the French Revolution, by abolishing guilds and fraternities – the remains of a powerful intermediate sphere in the Middle Ages – drastically emptied the space between the state and the citizen. The state is too big institution and too distant from the individual citizen, and without strong intermediary institutions it can become a 'sociological monster'. In the area of the social division of labour, he thus stressed the importance of the development of trade unions and professional associations. Almost at the same time, Tönnies (1971: 304–305), and later many other authors of different theoretical perspectives and political orientations, made a similar point: voluntary associations, organisations and social movements, civic initiatives and other forms of free association in the intermediate social sphere are irreplaceable components of democratic societies.

Today, the term intermediary institutions are used much less than the term civil society and, in recent decades, social capital (Berger–Luckmann 1995; Bahovec 2007). We think that these approaches are complementary, because they largely reflect the same social sphere, but each of them emphasises a specific aspect.

In the 20th century, Slovenia experienced all three collectivist totalitarian systems - fascism, national socialism, and communism. The path from communist dictatorship to democracy was not an obvious one and, in the process, civil society associations, organisations and initiatives have been one of the key factors of change. In this, Slovenia is similar to many other post-communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe.

However, what is specific to Slovenia – like other ex-Yugoslav countries – is that the beginnings of democracy took place at the same time as the quest for an independent state. The end of communist Yugoslavia marked the collapse of a state that had emerged as an artificial creation after the First World War. The peoples of Yugoslavia had never before in history been in a common state. Their cultures and histories were too dissimilar to have formed cohesiveness necessary to bind the country together after the end of communism.

Civil society, political parties and political change

Slovenia has undergone two major social changes at the same time – the transition to democracy and national independence. We think that this is one of the key reasons why political parties and civil society groups, which were in many ways ideologically and politically different, managed to work together before the first democratic elections in 1990.

The elections were won by the coalition of pro-democratic parties: DEMOS, Democratic Opposition of Slovenia, won with 54% of votes. All the parties which formed DEMOS had emerged after December 1989, when the communist regime could no longer prevent the emergence of free political parties.

 The DEMOS parties were also called the parties of the Slovenian Spring, as democracy brought about a political spring. It should be added: all the DEMOS parties emerged from previous formal or informal civil society associations. The subject areas of DEMOS' civil and later party associations included intellectual and cultural dissent, social democracy, rural and ecological issues.The key intellectual-cultural civil circle of the Slovenian democratic spring was the academic-artistic circle that gathered around the independent magazine *Nova revija* (New Review; published since 1982). It was composed of intellectuals holding different ideological views, but most of them sharing a critical attitude to the communist regime. In the mid-1980s, *Nova revija* was the central voice of change. A special issue of *Nova revija* published in 1987 (the 57th issue) included the Contributions to the Slovenian National Programme. This expressed a fundamental rethinking of Slovenia's development towards a democratic future and national sovereignty.

Of course, the communist regime strongly opposed the orientations of this programme.

The collaborators of *Nova revija* did not restrict themselves to their cultural and intellectual efforts; when it became possible, they founded a liberal party, the Slovenian Democratic Union. Many of the magazine's contributors became ministers in the first and/or subsequent governments.

A decisive turning point for the social-democratic side of civil association was the strike of 5,000 workers at Litostroj (one of the central companies of the steel industry in Slovenia; 9– 15 December 1987), which led to the founding of the first free trade union and called for the creation of a social-democratic party. The party was joined by Jože Pučnik, Slovenia's most important political dissident and a critical intellectual, who became the leader of DEMOS. Their circle was also the initiator of the first confederation of free trade unions in Slovenia.

The forerunner of the Farmers' Alliance was an independent civil association of farmers, which was formed at a meeting of 1500 people on 12 May 1988.

The link between the civil sphere and the Slovene Christian Democrats is also interesting. The Catholic Church in Slovenia was able to operate quite freely during the last period of communism, as long as it kept to the private sphere, parishes and work with families. Nevertheless, some of the groups within the Church at that time can be understood as part of the wider civil society and not as a strictly intra-church issue. One such group was, for example, the Inter-Diocesan Committee for Intellectuals within the Slovenian Catholic Church. In the last years before independence, this Committee was headed by Jože Strgar, who in 1990 became the first democratically elected mayor of Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia. Among the committee's close associates was Lojze Peterle, who became the first democratically elected Prime Minister of Slovenia in 1990.

It is evident that civil society has been one of the central actors of Slovenia's democratic change. However, we believe that the key to success has been synergy, the integrated action of many actors. The breakthrough embodied several aspects of civil society, both the pluralism of voluntary associations and organisations and the similar understanding of the values of civil action (Jobert–Kohler-Koch 2008).

However, it should be added: not all civic associations acted in the direction of democracy and/or Slovenian independence. At that time there was a quite strong 'socialist civil society' (Mastnak 1992; Adam 1987; Gantar 1994). During the last period of communism, many social movements (e.g. peace, ecological, feminist, spiritual, LGBT) emerged, which, together with the youth subculture associated with (protest) punk music and the weekly (liberal-socialist) magazine *Mladina*, and some social initiatives, created a civil social space which, although outside the dominant political control of the Communist Party, was nevertheless dominated by Marxist thinking. The characteristic feature of 'socialist civil society' was that it opened up a space for creative exploration of social problems and challenges, which the narrower political leadership of the Communist Party was unable to do. Often it was a modified version of ideas and practices that already existed in the left-wing circles of Western society.

The civic aspirations for 'democratic socialism'at that time were also expressed to some extent in some post-communist parties that emerged from the political organisations of the communist system.

The most important were the Party of Democratic Renewal (formed from the Union of Communists), the Liberal Democratic Party (formed from the ZSMS, the Union of Socialist Youth of Slovenia, formerly the Union of Communist Youth of Slovenia) and the Socialist Party of Slovenia (formed from the SZDL, the Socialist Union of the Working People).

Therefore, in his analysis of civil society in Slovenia, Adam (1987) points to several approaches to – and different understandings of – civil society. One is the (self-managed) socialist conception of civil society, which draws on Marx and Gramsci, in particular the conception of civil society as a socio-cultural 'hegemonisation'. Adam (1987: 14) quoted the analysis of C. Mouffe: 'Gramsci's conception of hegemony is not only compatible with pluralism, it presupposes it. But it is a pluralism that is located within the hegemony of the working class.' In the Yugoslav situation this meant within the hegemony of communism or socialism. Civil society, which is an integral part of real political pluralism, is different.

Analyses of civil society from that period show quite clearly that one of the central differences in understanding the role of civil society was the perception of (party) politics. Some understood the newly emerging civil society as a way of transforming socialism, while others saw civil society as actors in the transition to end communist totalitarianism (Mastnak 1992: 159–165; Keane 1998; Bežovan 2004; Adam and Tomšič 2002). This is not actually something very new: it is an 'echo' of the situation before World War II, when Slovenian political and civil-society realities were deeply divided.

Briefly on the transition period

After 1990, a period of transition took place. Although, structurally, the political system became a multi-party parliamentary democracy with a few decisionmakers (parliament, government, referendum), a comprehensive change takes time. Laws can be changed quickly, but a change in the functioning of institutions, organisations and, above all, the creation of a democratic political culture takes time.

The Slovenian transition is quite specific. To mention just a few characteristics:

Shortly after the democratic change and state independence, there was a division and disintegration in the government between the democratic parties of DEMOS. The new government was led by the president of the Liberal Democracy of Slovenia, Janez Drnovšek, who had previously been the last president of the presidency of Yugoslavia (1989–1990). Since then, the post-communist (left-liberal) bloc has led Slovenian governments for the vast majority of the time (24 out of 31 years).

Drnovšek was a very successful politician: prime minister for 10 years, then president of the country until a few months before his death. For some periods he ruled with parties from both groups, from the post-communist group of parties (centre-left and left) and from the spring parties (conditionally speaking centre-right and right), and for a while only with the post-communist parties.

It should be emphasised that the fundamental division in Slovenian politics is still related to the communist past (Bahovec 2014; Tomšič 2017; Avbelj 2017). Although some parties were newly formed, and some failed, most of the strongest parties emerged from the political developments in the early years of democracy. An exception is what happened to the Liberal Democracy of Slovenia party. After its failure in the aftermath of the Drnovšek era, the post-communist block did not find its way to a permanently dominant position. But a surprising political novelty has happened.

At the 2011 elections the relative majority was surprisingly won by a newly established party Positive Slovenia (PS) led by the Mayor of Ljubljana (Tomšič 2017: 43). He did not manage to form a majority coalition in Parliament immediately after the elections, but after one year, in 2013, a centre left coalition succeeded in establishing a new government led by Alenka Bratušek (PS). The centre-left government coalition won again in the next elections (2014) – but in a unique way. It was another new party which won that election : the Party of Miro Cerar, later renamed The Modern Centre Party. In the following election (2018), another new party won the most votes in the centre-left: The List of Marjan Šarec. This party, however, did not get enough votes to enter parliament in the most recent election (2022). A new political movement or party, The Freedom Movement (in the Slovene language: stranka Gibanje Svoboda) won that with a strong majority (34%). This party and the current Slovenian government are led by Robert Golob, who was previously a member of Liberal Democracy and Positive Slovenia, but later left party politics.

Since the post-communist bloc has been in power for most of the time, this is strongly reflected in many aspects of the transition processes. For example, according to the research of Adam and Tomšič (2002) the share of the retentionist elite in Slovenia was and is extremely high. As Avbelj (2017: 77–82) has shown with regard to the judiciary, the reform of the rule of law in Slovenia is incomplete. The reason is broader than the narrower jurisdiction – in this respect, Bugaric's quote is typical:

'Second, many "rule of law" institutions (courts, the civil service, and the media) have been deeply politicized by former "nomenclature officials". Instead of defending the rule of law, these institutions, unable to withstand the strong political pressure of their "principals", were engaged in legal enforcement favouring partisan political interests." The postcommunist block dominated the political space and so "strongly impacted the formation of Slovenian elite in general. Consequently, the majority of Slovenian elite gravitated towards the "retention" elite /…/ This elite managed to create better contacts with the business sector, media, and academia and, most importantly, with a substantial part of the public sector, including the judiciary, civil service, state-owned companies etc.'

Civil society in Slovenia today

Discussions on civil society show that there is no universally agreed theoretical understanding of civil society (Kaene 1998; Bežovan 2004; Jobert–Kohler-Koch 2008; Gawin–Glinski 2006). In this paper, we follow an approach that places civil society between the state and families or friendship groups and outside the for-profit sector of the economy. Many consider that voluntary associations and organisations are a central part of civil society.

According to Slovenian legislation voluntary associations, private institutes and foundation have status of Nongovernmental organisation (NGO). Civil society includes also humanitarian organisations, professional chambers and chambers of commerce and industry, trade unions, religious and youth organisations, social movements, advocacy groups and civil society initiatives.

Let us add, however, that civil society should not be limited to organised associations, organisations or movements, because such a definition does not cover the whole of the civil sector. In addition to organised forms, the civil sphere is co-shaped by informal or semi-formal associations, initiatives such as temporary and loosely organised networks and activities (campaigns, events, social actions). There is also a third area of civil action based on individual engagements such as active citizenship and volunteering.

According to data obtained by the Slovenian Center for Information Service, Co-operation, and Development of NGOs (CNVOS, 2023), 27486 non-governmental organisations were registered in Slovenia (23344 associations /societies/, 3887 (private) institutes and 2567 foundations (situation on 1 July 2023). Of these, more than 26000 are active.

The largest number of associations are cultural and artistic associations (17%), followed by associations for helping people (12.9%), associations for scientific research, education, vocational and professional associations (9.4%), associations for environmental protection, animal and plant breeding and rearing (7.1%), associations for local development (6.4%), and professional associations (5.8%). 6.5% of the total number of associations are other associations. The number had been increasing for a long time, but in recent years the number of NGOs has not changed significantly.

From the European Values Survey it can be seen that after 1992 the number of members of voluntary associations increased steadily. Looking at EVS 2017, as many as 35% of the adult population are members of voluntary sports / recreation associations, compared with 8.3% in 1992. There is a similar large increase in cultural activities (2017: 25.1%; 1992: 3.3%), and voluntary religious organizations (2017 34%, 1992: 2.7%). The proportion of people who are not members of any voluntary organization has also decreased significantly: from over 60% to less than 30%!

Table 1. Belonging to voluntary association …, Slovenia, (EVS 1992, 1999, 2008, 2017; % of adult population)

	EVS 1992	1999	2008	2017
Sports or recreation	8,3	16,9	20,3	35,3
Education, arts, music or cultural activities	3,3	9,2	12,5	25,1
Religious organization	2,7	6,7	9,4	34,0
Social welfare services for elderly, handicapped or deprived people	1,4	5,4	7,7	
Humanitarian or charitable organization				23,9
Youth work	1,9	4,5	5,6	
Conservation, the environment, ecology, animal rights	1,7	3,3	5,4	13,8
Voluntary health org.	1,2	2,9	5	
professional associations	5,9	6,7	7,2	15,4
Political parties or groups	3,3	3	3,9	4,3
Trade unions	19,2	16,9	13,4	12,0
Do you belong to: none	61,4	39,9	42	26,8

Data for 2017 show values similar to or greater than in countries in Western Europe with a similar socio-cultural profile. More specifically, the membership level in Slovenian voluntary associations is in all areas greater than the average value for the ex-communist Central European countries and achieves the value (or even exceeds those) for volunteer participation in Romance and Germanic speaking countries of Western Europe; the only exception to this pattern is Scandinavia (Bahovec–Rožič 2017: 102–106).

Based on these data, one could conclude that civic life is very alive and active. However, other data suggest the situation is more complex. The sheer numbers of voluntary associations or members do not reveal their 'quality' or 'civility', i.e, their role in the democratisation process, nor the strength of their contribution to social cohesion and to the common good of society.

In a study of civil society after 20 years of democracy in Slovenia, Cepin–Ko-zoderc–Kronegger (2014: 27) conclude that Slovenia has been one of the success

countries in terms of political and democratic development and market liberalisation. However, according to their research, the state of civil society is different: 'Slovenian civil society is one of the least developed of the entire post-communist region.' According to the USAID data of 2009 (the NGO sustainability index). Slovenia scored last among the ten countries that joined the EU in 2004 and lower than most of the ex-communist Balkan countries. How did this happen, 'what factors explained this outstanding weakness of civil society in Slovenia?', and 'what does it reveal?' ask the authors of the research.

According to Cepin et al (ibid.: 62–64), there is considerable ignorance among citizens about the concept and role of civil society. People are quite familiar with some of the activities offered by civil society associations: voluntary fire brigades, sports and cultural associations, aid organisations (especially the Red Cross and Karitas).

Other research shows a similar picture. According to a data from 2010, for example, the 'civil society organizations ("CSO") are predominantly active in cultural, art, sports, recreational and leisure activities (41% of Slovenian CSOs)' (Hafner-Fink–Novak 2017: 134). Many are also involved in the area of social services (5.4%) (ibid. In 2012, more than half of volunteer hours were in the field of social work (ibid. 133). Around 13% were in the field of Human Rights and Civil Liberties, and in the fields of education, recreation and art and culture a total of 20%.

Regarding citizens' attitudes towards civil society, Cepin et al. (2014) showed that people are mainly interested in whether a particular activity is accessible or whether they are given the opportunity to participate. What the source of a service might be - civil society, the state, or the market, is a matter to which they are quite indifferent. The authors also note that some functions of civil society are better understood and accepted than others. The least recognised function of civil society is its advocacy dimension.

The latest data show a slightly better picture (United States Agency for International Development 2023). In 2021, Slovenia's Overall CSO Sustainability Index is the same as Slovakia (3.0) and only slightly worse than Poland (2.9). All three Baltic States and the Czech Republic have an index that is significantly better (by 0.5 or more). In terms of specific aspects, however, there has been a significant improvement in the advocacy (1917: 3.1; 2021: 2.6)!

According to Our World in Data (2023) in 2022, Slovenia was only 27th among European countries in the Democratic Culture Index. It was slightly better on the Deliberative Democracy Index (2022: 19) and the Civil Liberties Index (2022: 23). In terms of civil rights (2021), it ranked lowest among the Central European post-communist countries.

Trends and dilemmas in the development of civil society in Slovenia

Despite these rather poor comparative data, which show an ambivalent picture of civil society in some aspects in particular, there has been a strong development of civil society in Slovenia (Hafner Fink–Novak 2017, Bahovec–Rožič 2017). Slovenia's accession to the European Union and the post-accession processes has contributed to this to a significant extent. However, a number of open questions and dilemmas remain.

Regarding the development of civil society, Hafner Fink–Novak (2017: 138–139) highlight four trends, two of which relate directly to the relationship between civil society and political parties, and the other two indirectly. The first trend is the increasing role of CSOs in the provision of social services (including some services that were formerly functions of the state), including pressing the government on the issue of migrants and human rights. The second trend relates to the funding of CSOs. A decrease in public funding causes 'marketisation, projectisation, and precarisation of CSOs'. Many CSOs are forced to spend much of their time 'searching for additional funding, either on the market or by applying for grants from various EU project calls and programs'.

Regarding linkages between political parties and CSOs, 'the trend toward CSOs and political parties exchanging resources has become evident since the transition period'. In Slovenia, there is a clear /noticeable ideological-political coalitions among particular parties and like-minded CSOs. 'Party-CSO linkages can, to some extent, also explain why particular groups have better access to certain EU-related funding distributed by national political elites. The significance of party-CSO linkages is unlikely to disappear in the near future.'

'The fourth trend is the low and declining inclusion of CSOs in policymaking. Although the number of CSOs in Slovenia is one of the highest per capita in Europe, and although the social partnership has been institutionalized, the overall political participation and inclusion of CSOs in policymaking remains lower than in older democracies.'

These trends highlight some of the problems of civil society transition in Slovenia. Some of the problems are quite similar to problems in other countries. For example, on the one hand we have CSOs that are very close to the ideological or value orientation of a particular party or group – this was also very evident in the 2022 elections. Whether civil society groups are an 'extended arm' of a political party or whether the influence is in the opposite direction is difficult to determine, because there is often a pattern of a kind of symbiosis. Such a pattern was typical of socialist civil society before the democratic changes. During the transition period, the part of the Slovenian civil society that is ideologically close to the post-communist parties seems to have adapted to the new situation but retained its essence.

The link between civil society and a particular political party exists in many countries, of course, and is not limited to either the left or the right part of the political spectrum. In fact, the problem is broader than that and is not related only

to political parties. As Berger–Luckmann (1995) have shown, for example, some civil associations of the intermediary sphere represent an 'extended arm' of social macro-structures, political parties, lobby groups, narrow ideological groups, religious organisations or international social movements.

We have identified three distinctive approaches in the relationship between the civil society   and political parties, in terms of content and working methods.

1) Part of the civil society functions in a politically and ideologically 'neutral' way; it wants to operate at a distance from ideological divisions. It works for the individual and common good of society. This attitude can be seen in most humanitarian associations, many (by no means all!) professional associations, many sports and cultural organisations, as well as in some specific areas (e.g. children's rights, large families, parents of school-age children, etc.).

Of course, sometimes politics enters these CSOs through 'other' doors. There are many examples of ex-politicians being given leadership positions in some 'prestigious' CSOs, for example a former minister becoming president of the Red Cross, and the president of a political party becoming the long-standing president of the Slovenian Olympic Committee. The problem is not so much that these links exist, the problem is that practically all the cases are linked to leading politicians of the same political group (post-communist or centre-left). Another way is when political parties recruit top athletes or media-recognised CSO leaders for elections (without them having previously been party members). This is also not unusual in Slovenia.

2) A different type of civil society has a specific ideological orientation or expresses adherence to a particular (political) ideology. This part of civil society is divided into two sub-groups. Some link the pluralism of political parties in a democracy with the view of civil society as a space of pluralism. Despite their differences, they are aware that there is often a need to find a balance between competition and cooperation, and that on some issues of importance to society, there is a need to come together, to find some kind of agreement. This was the modus operandi of key civil society actors in the transition from communism to democracy. It is important to remember, however, that this was not only the way in which the very ideologically diverse democratic CSOs and political parties operated – to a certain extent, it was also the way in which some of the post-communist CSOs and parties operated. The result was to the benefit of the whole society (e.g. independence). This seems to be the best way to address the key challenges and problems of a society. Some problems may be solved differently, but society remains divided. The question is whether the synergies needed for development and social cohesion can take place in such a society. The Slovenian case does not show this.

3) Different again are the ideologically narrow groups of civil society which impose their views without somehow entering into a real dialogue with others who think differently. Such groups exist everywhere in democratic countries, but in Slovenia they seem to be relatively more prevalent. As we have shown above, this

is a mode that presupposes pluralism but in fact strives for hegemony (Mouffe in Adam 1987). This was the socialist civil society in the 1980s and it seems that a part of civil society and NGOs have maintained something of this attitude after three decades of democracy. This should not actually be surprising. In this sense, Lev Kreft's (1897: 84) words at the 1987 Symposium on Civil Society, 'that the conversation about civil society /.../ must become a conversation about strategy and tactics, about the organisation of a new political alliance' – in other words, must move towards a new type of socialist alliance – have a lot to say.

Political developments and engagement of politically interested civil society

In the parliamentary elections in April 2022 The Freedom Movement party (stranka Gibanje Svoboda) won by a large relative majority (34% of the vote, 46% of the seats in Parliament). How is it possible that a party formed only a few weeks before the elections could win so strongly? It is true that the strong reason was the opposition to Janez Janša and the disappointment with the 'old' parties of the centre-left political group. But it is still surprising that the centre-left voters trusted the newly formed party, despite the fact that three successive attempts with new parties have shown that such parties have only been successful for one term. We believe that the most important reason is that there has been a combined effect of several factors. One of the key ones are is the engagement of civil society and the overwhelming support of the mass media.

As for the formers, these were Friday protests – cycling around some politically symbolic points in Ljubljana (most often the Parliament, the Square of the Republic, the National Radio and Television buildings, the Prešeren square). The initiative linked many left-leaning civil society groups and individuals. Anti-government protests often had a thematic focus, e.g. in the areas of culture, ecology, human rights and the rule of law, mass media, public health.

The initiative's main goal was to bring down the centre-right government, but this was not achieved. However, as the protests were strongly supported by the mainstream mass media throughout the two-year period, they had a strong impact on public opinion. In total, there have been a total of 105 protests leading up to the April 2022 general elections.

Probably the most important result of the protests was the establishment of the civic initiative the Voice of the People (Glas ljudstva; in 2021), whose main purpose was to influence the (parliamentary, local and presidential) elections in 2022. Civic initiative the Voice of the People 'brings together more than 100 civil society organisations and thousands of individuals from many sectors of social life from all over Slovenia. These are professional organisations in the fields of democracy, human rights, environment, social, labour, housing, media, culture, infrastructure, global justice, health, education, economy and other key areas for our future' (Glas ljudstva 2023).

In addition to many Slovenian NGOs, such as the Peace Institute, Umanotera (Slovenian Foundation for Sustainable Development), the 8th March Institute, the Legal Network for the Protection of Democracy, the Cultural Workers' Aktiv, the Amnesty International Slovenia and the Greenpeace Slovenia are also involved, as well as the United Nations Association for Slovenia.

Although they are not a political party, they have organised 'various rallies, meetings, advocacy actions, campaigns, online internet tools, etc.' before and after the elections. According to their website, they want to 'bring politics closer to the people, thereby strengthening democracy' and to get 'as many people as possible involved in decision-making on public affairs'.

Before the elections, the Voice of the People formulated a list of 138 expert demands in 11 key areas, as well as campaigns to inform, empower and mobilise the people. The parties of the then opposition and the newly formed Freedom Movement – the parties that together form the new government – made several joint public appearances with the leading representatives of the Voice of the People.

They agreed with these parties that if they formed a government, they would work more closely with civil society and implement 122 of their demands.

Civil society in the programmes and visions of political parties

The programmes of the parties elected to Parliament in the 2022 elections show that there are significant differences in their understanding of civil society.

The parties agree on a few areas where the contribution of the civil society is necessary: most strongly in the social field, but also to a large extent in youth work, culture and sport, and other activities that do not have a direct political tone. However, there are major differences on the role of the civil society in some other areas.

Because the government parties strongly supported the vast majority of the demands of the Voice of the People initiative in the pre-election period, it is understandable that each party has many of the demands explicitly written into its programme. For example, all of them (some more, some less) emphasise the role of the CSO in human rights and rule of law, environmental issues and mass media. All of them also stress the importance of culture and NGOs in the field of culture – this aspect is most strongly expressed in the Left Party. This is not surprising, as the Left Party has strong links with NGOs in these areas, including those close to 'democratic socialism' and ecosocialism.

The Social Democrats Party is very systematic about the integration of CSOs. Interestingly, it specifically highlights the topic of sport. This aspect is also not surprising, as in the past party cadres were very often the leaders of sports NGOs. The link between politics and sport (and the economy) has long worked in a similar way to socialism: leading politicians were also leading officials in sport (phenomenon of retention elite). Example: the president of the Slovenian Olympic Committee

from 1991 to 2014 was also the president of the United List of Social Democrats (formerly the Communist Party, now the Social Democrats) for the first six years.

Civil society is most strongly integrated into the programme and vision of the Freedom Movement Party. This is not surprising, as the party was formed just before the elections and much of its programme and vision for the future was adopted from the message of the protests against the last government. They promise to work for the cooperation of politics (parties and government), civil society and the profession. Among the topics they particularly emphasise are, for example, the civil society's involvement in public mass media management, advocacy for public health, the rule of law and human freedoms, the siting of buildings, migration, etc.

The opposition Slovenian Democratic Party and New Slovenia – Christian Democrats party emphasise the importance of volunteering much more than the government parties. They also see the role of volunteering in terms of learning for citizenship, social responsibility, and an active citizenship. They therefore see it as an important component of youth education. New Slovenia wants to strengthen the role of citizens in NGO funding.

It should be added that there are also CSOs with close links to centre-right political parties, such as institutes and forums or networks, but they are much weaker in terms of numbers and influence. Nevertheless, the above observation of Hafner–Novak (2017) about the interconnectedness of political parties and CSOs is still valid now, except that the polarisation has caused it to intensify. We therefore think it is appropriate to ask whether this state of civil society and politics contributes to the common good of society in terms of a balanced consideration of the diversity of citizens' views.

Conclusion: dilemmas and perspectives on the relationship between politics and civil society

While civic participation increased in the period following the democratic changes, its development did not come without divergences and dilemmas. As we show, problematic contents exist here, representing a serious obstacle to the development of a genuine pluralistic civil society in which civil society would proportionally represent the diversity of public interests of citizens, different civil groups may have an equal chance of social influence, and he whole of society will benefit from the relationship between political parties and the civil society.

Let us look at some aspects which, in our opinion, point well to the dilemmas and challenges that need to be addressed in the future.

1) In the three decades of Slovenia's independence development of civil society has not been evenly spread across all spheres. In terms of relations between political parties and the civil society, the most obvious difference is the disproportion between the ideologically differently oriented parts of the civil society. Left-oriented (including post-communist) groups and organisations are more numerous,

more engaged, more active and also have a greater influence on political public opinion than the right-oriented ones. Why has this happened?

Immediately after the democratic changes, a large part of the democratic civil society actors took on an active political role. A side-effect of this shift was the decline of civic associations with a democratic and pluralist understanding of the civic sphere. Main objective of many associations was to promote democracy and independence. Once these objectives had been achieved, many associations were unable to find other new reasons for their very existence.

A different dynamic was typical of many civic associations whose identity was based on a 'socialist civil society'. Many were able to adapt to the new situation and remain important players in civil society. Ideologically, they remained loyal to the left (socialist) political orientation. Financially they have adapted to the new capitalist situation – in this they benefited from good connections with the economic, political and academic elite, but this would not have been enough if they had not developed the competence to apply successfully for Slovene and international projects. Many found a way to become a success story. It is important to add: a big share of CSOs, which are closely linked to post-communist political parties, understand civil society in Gramsci's conception of civil society as a bearer of cultural and social hegemony. On the one hand, such a civil society is self-sufficient and sees no need for dialogue with those who think differently, on the other hand, it acts as if representing the whole of society, which in fact it does not.

2) Two things have contributed to current situation: the (mis)understanding of the importance of a spread of associations/organisations with a Christian political orientation by the majority of the leadership of the Slovenian Catholic Church, and a certain misunderstanding of the role of civil society in democracy on the part of the parties of the Slovenian Spring.

While centre-right parties understand the civil society in a pluralist liberal-democratic way, they often underestimate its contribution to democracy – or perceive the civil society's work primarily in terms of benefits for the political party. It is not enough to endorse Putnam's understanding of the civil society that an organised association promotes civic citizens. It is necessary to strengthen the possibility of developing an autonomous civil society – a task to which these parties have not paid enough attention.

Regarding Christianity – up until 1941, the number of Christian civil associations was very high and then it plummeted after the Second World War. After the fall of communism, the door to free associational life was open, and new associations were soon formed in some areas (social-charitable work (Caritas), cultural organisations and certain youth work (Catholic Scouts)). In many other areas, however, there has been no development of the civil association of Christians as citizens, or it has remained very weak. Why should this be so? According to our analysis internal reasons are stronger than external ones. Many Christians are more intensely dedicated to life in the family and to the inner-Church-life than to civil action, which extends into the public space (Bahovec 2009; 2020).

Another reason for this situation is that for a long time following the democratic changes the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church considered the relationship between the head of the Church and the head of the government as being a far more important task than the active participation of Christians in the civil sphere. The synergic effect of the above-mentioned facts and substantial powerlessness in obtaining financial resources has contributed to the fact that there is a very low level of awareness and commitment to political civil action among Christians as citizens. The situation has only improved somewhat in recent years. But, greater engagement in itself is not necessarily problem-free. There are certain Christian civic associations that more resemble an 'extended arm' of the official Church than an autonomous association of Christians as citizens with common values.

3) As we have shown, there is a strong politicisation of civil society in Slovenia. This is one of the reasons why Adam (2008: 307–308) argues that 'it is time for a radical revision of standpoint according to which civil society is presented as a panacea for the plethora of problems linked to (post-) modern societies', including the problem of democratic deficit on the national and EU level. In articulating their political demands, many civil society organisations forget that 'they are based on private initiative and often represent very particular (material or ideological) interests.' Therefore, it is also not possible to say that they have 'basic (general) legitimacy to "speak for" the whole of society'.

To conclude: it is quite obvious that the relationship between political parties and civil society is an important part of democratic life. Civil society is often a space that draws attention to urgent social issues and creates new social solutions. But it is naïve to expect civil society to be good itself. Case of Slovenia demonstrates clearly that civil actors may be acting for the good of one part of society rather than for the common good of society, and in fact reinforce polarisation and divisions.

A major challenge for Slovenian civil society is how to develop the possibility of a true and genuine dialogue between the different CSOs and in society at large. Despite many attempts, it seems that we are only at the beginning of such a process (in fact, many people of good will are rather pessimistic). The problem is also that a large part of society does not even want to do this, either because it benefits from the conflict situation for its own sake, or because it has somehow adopted an apathetic attitude that there is not much that can be done.

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CIVILS IN OPPOSITION
CSOs IN PARTY POLITICS AFTER THE 2010 ELECTIONS

Dúró József

Introduction

◼ The paper aims at mapping the impact of civil society organisations (CSOs) on the Hungarian party system after 2010. As in the past 13 years, the options to finance the CSOs have worsened during the governance of the Orbán cabinets (Havasi, 2022: 52), and the government also had some actions or attacks against certain NGOs and CSOs (Móra et al., 2021). Therefore, some CSOs chose to directly enter the (party) political sphere. The fate and impact of these attempts is quite unresearched in political science despite the fact that at least three parties were able to gains seats in the National Assembly with such background. Hence, the article does not pay attention to other initiatives closely connected to politics, such as the movement of teachers Tanítanék ("I would teach"), the protest movement against the institutional reform of the University of Theatre and Film Arts (FreeSZFE) or the mobilisation against the handling of the migration crisis or the Central European University because these initiations have had only a very limited effect on party politics.[1]

The first attempt of the renewal of the political left in Hungary is relatively well-researched, so the paper only mentions the case, as its story started in 2009 (i.e. before 2010) with the establishment of the Politics Can Be Different (LMP) party. The party has had a really deep civil background, as most of its leaders came from Védegylet, an environmentalist NGO and from other NGOs (Pogátsa, 2013: 186), e.g., the former parliamentary leader and co-chairman András Schiffer worked at

Védegylet and Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (TASZ). LMP was formed partly because of the scandals closely related to the then-government of the Socialist Party and prime minister Gyurcsány, and had an anti-elitist image as well (Havlík, 2012: 143–151). Though the party's aim was to create a third pole in Hungarian politics (Pogátsa, 2013: 189), it failed and became part of the left-wing opposition.

The paper focuses on the entry of three actors to politics, namely the Together mostly made up by three CSOs in 2012–13, the Momentum Movement established in 2017 and the success of an outsider ("civil") candidate (Péter Márki-Zay) in the 2021 opposition primaries. It analyses the path of these parties and the role of CSOs in it. It concludes that even though there is a low level of trust in political parties in Hungary, it is almost impossible to have a deeper impact on the decisions without party background, hence CSOs aiming at influencing the functioning of politics transformed themselves to political parties. Another important factor which led these organisations to enter party politics is the long-lasting crisis of the traditional political left in Hungary.

The definition of political parties

Although the word "party" is widely used in political science, it has always had a lot of various definitions. Probably the most minimalist one was given by Sartori who defined the concept of political party as "any political group identified by an official label that presents at elections, and is capable of placing through elections (free or nonfree), candidates for public office" (Sartori, 1976: 63). Hence, all the organisations which stand candidates to take the power are parties in the sense of political science. Maurice Duverger defined parties in a very similar way, as according to him, political parties' primary goal is to take the power and get their support from a quite broad part of the society (Duverger, 1963: 1–2). Duverger also distinguishes parties from pressure groups which represent only a limited number of people with particular interests (Ibid.). These concepts imply that a CSO ceases to exist as a civil organisation at the moment when it stands candidates in (national or local) elections. However, parties can exist with strong connections or deep past in the civil sphere.

The other approach is the legal one. Most countries have some kind of regulation over the functioning of political parties, and these acts usually define the political party from a legal perspective. In Hungary, it has some relevance, as only political parties (or independent candidates) have the right to stand candidates in the elections to the National Assembly. In European and local elections, also other organisations such as associations may nominate their candidates. Nonetheless, these organisations are political parties according to the definitions of Sartori or Duverger. Therefore, the border between parties and CSOs is not simple and crystal clear. This article focuses on organisations which are not political parties according to the Hungarian law, or parties which have a past as a civil society organisation.

Transformation of Hungarian Party System After 2010

The 2010 parliamentary elections fundamentally changed the Hungarian party system. The landslide victory of the right-wing Fidesz–KDNP alliance[2] ended what Soós (2012) called a two-bloc system made up by two large parties: Fidesz and the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), and two small ones: the conservative Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) and the liberal Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ). Over the years, Fidesz clearly became a dominant party, while the opposition remained weak and divided, as newly emerged parties – the radical right-wing Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik) and the environmentalist LMP refused to cooperate with the Hungarian Socialist Party. These changes resulted in a central party system in the sense that there has been a strong, dominant party which faces opposition parties both from left (MSZP, LMP) and right (Jobbik).

Though several new parties have been established since then (sometimes CSOs transformed themselves to political parties), the logic of the party competition has remained the same. Between 2010 and 2014, the former Socialist prime minister, Ferenc Gyurcsány was forced to leave MSZP, and he formed the Democratic Coalition (DK). Later another former PM, Gordon Bajnai established his own political party (Together) with the help of various civil organisations. The question of cooperation with other left-wing parties caused a split in LMP, and the ones who were in favour of collaboration founded the Dialogue for Hungary.

The governing parties have been able to win four consecutive parliamentary elections *(see Table 1)* with supermajority despite the various strategies of opposition groups from election to election. In 2014, the left (i.e. parties on the left of Fidesz) ran in a joint list made up by MSZP, DK, Together, Dialogue and the tiny Liberal Party, however, they only gained roughly one quarter of the valid votes. LMP refused to join that alliance. Four years later almost all of these parties and the newly established Momentum Movement ran in separate lists resulting in another supermajority of Fidesz. In the 2022 elections, all the important opposition parties – DK, MSZP, LMP, Jobbik, Dialogue, Momentum – joint their forces without any real electoral breakthrough.

Although some scholars raised the question whether the central party system still existed (e.g., Csernák–Tordai, 2021), or even stated that there was only one oppositional space (Péli, 2021), the 2022 elections proved that there is still a significant number of opposition voters on the right of the Fidesz, who refused to vote for the united opposition and chose the Our Homeland Movement (Mi Hazánk), a splinter group of Jobbik. The Our Homeland Movement can be considered the ideological successor of the former radical right party which moderated itself after 2015 and joined the left-liberal opposition bloc in 2020. Hence, the central party system survived the shift of Jobbik in the party system despite the right-wing opposition of Fidesz is significantly weaker than it used to be (Dúró, 2022b).

Table 1. The results of the past 4 parliamentary elections in Hungary.

Party	2010		2014		2018		2022	
	Votes (%)	Seats	Votes (%)	Seats	Votes (%)	Seats	Votes (%)	Seats
Fidesz-KDNP	52,73		44,87	133	49,27	133	54,13	135
MSZP	19,30		25,57	38	11,91	20	DK	(10)
DK	–	–	MSZP	(4)	5,38	9	34,44	57
Together	–	–	MSZP	(3)	0,66	1	–	–
Momentum	–	–	–	–	3,06	0	DK	(10)
LMP	7,48	16	5,34	5	7,06	8	DK	(5)
Jobbik	16,67	47	20,22	23	19,06	26	DK	(10)
Our Homeland	–	–	–	–	–	–	5,88	6

Source: National Electoral Office (NVI), 2010; 2014; 2018; 2022. In 2014, MSZP, DK, Together, the Liberals and the Dialogue formed a joint list, while in 2022, DK, Jobbik, Momentum, MSZP, LMP and the Dialogue ran together.

As *Table 1* demonstrates, the share of seats and the share of votes are not necessarily equal because both the old electoral system (used between 1990 and 2011) and the new one have been mixed systems. It means that voters have two votes: they can pick a candidate in single-member constituencies and vote for a party in the party-list ballot paper. The electoral threshold has been 5% since 1994. Although both systems have contained some elements of compensation, because of the limited number of compensatory seats, the proportionality of the system has not always been close to perfect (the experiences show that in a case of a tight race between two large blocs and with only a very limited number of "lost votes" the old system could behave in a relatively proportional way). The most important change which has had a deep impact on the strategy of the parties was the reduction of the number of rounds in the SMCs. Before 2011, MPs in single-member districts were elected in a two-round system which ensured the chance for the parties to make pacts and withdraw their candidates from the second round in favour of each other. From 2011 (when the new electoral law was approved by the Parliament), the elections has had only one round, hence, the parties need to build alliances and coordinate to stand candidates in SMDs before the elections.

CSOs in Party Politics After the 2010 Elections

Following the democratic transition, CSOs remained quite marginal from the perspective of everyday politics. Parties evolved to be the only relevant actors of the political representations, which was not endangered by NGOs (Enyedi–Tóka, 2007). Before the 2010 elections, the civil sphere was not exclusively attached to the political left. As Greskovits (2020) points out, Orbán himself occupied some civil sphere in order to involve more activists to party building after his 2002 electoral defeat (civic circles). Another example is the Hungarian Guard, a paramilitary organisation founded in 2007, which was quite close to Jobbik. In both cases, leaders of political parties established CSOs to involve new members to their political parties, and both Fidesz and Jobbik was able to enhance the level of their local embeddedness due to the civic circles and the Hungarian Guard, respectively.

Following the collapse of the support of the Hungarian Socialist Party, some CSOs were formed to retake some of the tasks of opposition parties. Probably it has two main reasons. First, the most important left-wing party (MSZP) was busy with its internal struggles: the new party leadership wanted to get rid of Gyurcsány (prime minister between 2004 and 2009) because of his strong but extremely unpopular character.[3] Secondly, trust in as well as the number of members of political parties in Hungary was extremely low in those years (Hooghe–Kern, 2015: 952–953). Therefore, there is a contradiction in the situation in Hungary. People did not have trust in political parties (nor do they now), but they did not build alternative channels to influence the political decisions, and the civil sphere remained weak.

In 2012, 4K! (Fourth Republic!), a CSO criticising the Orbán government also announced its transformation to a political party. However, 4K! was unable to present its national list in the 2014 elections, and in October 2016 it dissolved itself (24. hu, 2016).

An attempt to unite the left: the Together

Because of the above-mentioned factors, it seemed reasonable to establish CSOs instead of political parties. Havasi (2022) gives a very good summary of these various CSOs. The most successful one was probably the One Million for the Freedom of Press in Hungary (Milla), originally established as a facebook group, as a reaction to the newly approved media law in 2011. Milla successfully used the tools of digital activism. It has more than 135,000 followers (Wilkin et al, 2015: 693) and between 2010 and 2014, it was able to organise huge demonstrations along various issues such as for freedom of press, against the new electoral law. Although it was a rather informal network without formal leadership, the founder (Péter Juhász, former leader of the Hemp Seed Association) was clearly one of its most influential figures (Ibid. 688). In October 2012, Juhász and his co-organisers established

the Milla Association, a political movement, but they refused to become a political party (Index, 2012).

A couple of days later Bajnai (prime minister in 2009– 10) announced his return to politics by establishing Together 2014, an umbrella organisation (like the Olive Tree in Italy) aiming at uniting the left-wing opposition. The Milla and the Solidarity Movement joined the new initiation, however, LMP refused to participate in it, resulting in a split in the party: the pro-cooperation wing left it and established the Dialogue for Hungary and started cooperating with the Together. Bajnai himself established the Homeland and Progress Foundation after the 2010 elections to present policy alternatives of the actions of the right-wing government.

Along the Milla and the foundation of Bajnai, the third important civil organisation of Together was the Solidarity Movement of Péter Kónya. As a result of the cooperation of these three CSOs, the Together 2014 was born and became a political party in early 2013. The new party had three co-chairpersons: along with Kónya and Juhász, Viktor Szigetvári (former chief of staff of Bajnai) was the third on behalf of the Home and Progress Foundation. Although at the time of its foundation, Together was a relatively popular party among the Hungarian voters. In December 2012, Medián polled the party at 16% just behind the Socialist Party (19%) and Jobbik (18%) (HVG, 2012). On the other hand, the data also shows that most of the voters of the new party came from other left-wing parties.

Even though the polls showed a relative success of the party, their attempt to unite the left behind Bajnai was almost totally unsuccessful. They were unable to cooperate with LMP because of its anti-establishment profile, while at the end of the negotiations with the Socialist Party, Attila Mesterházy, then-leader of MSZP became the joint candidate for premiership. Moreover, ahead of the 2014 parliamentary elections, Gyurcsány's Democratic Coalition also joined the Unity opposition alliance (Lakner, 2017: 161). By 2014, the new left-wing alliance failed to significantly enhance the voter base of the left from the level of 2010 (Table 1), however, the opposition became extremely fragmented. As a consequence of the disillusioning electoral result, Together won only 3 seats in the National Assembly: Bajnai, who was soon replaced by Zsuzsanna Szelényi, Péter Juhász and Péter Kónya. Bajnai retired from politics and soon Szigetvári became the only leader of the party which almost disappeared from the political scene by 2018.

Referendum initiatives

During the 2014– 18 parliamentary term, the CSOs more or less engaged to the left rather focused on initiating referenda against certain actions of the government, though there was a series of huge demonstrations against the planned introduction of internet tax in the autumn of 2014 as well. In 2015, the government launched the compulsory close of supermarkets on Sundays. After several failed attempts, at the end of 2015 the National Electoral Committee gave its consent to

collect signatures in order to initiate a referendum over the issue, however, in April 2016, the parliament withdrew the act, so the initiative became pointless (HVG, 2016).

The second initiation was the "NOlimpia", i.e. the opposition of hosting Summer Olympic Games in Budapest. In January 2017, the Momentum Movement started collecting signatures in order to force the government to withdraw its application for hosting the 2024 Summer Olympic Games in Budapest. The campaign was also supported by three parties: Together, LMP and Dialogue. Due to the success of the initiation (they collected 266,000 signatures instead of the necessary 138,000 by the mid of February), the government withdrew its application (HVG, 2017), while the movement became a political party in March aiming at replacing the existing and unsuccessful opposition of the Orbán regime. In that sense, the Momentum Movement – similarly to LMP – wanted to replace the old elite of the opposition as well. However, the newly-born party was unable to gain enough votes to enter the Parliament in the 2018 elections, though later it successfully broadened its popular support.

Primaries Ahead of the 2022 Parliamentary Elections

In the run-up of the 2018 elections, the Common Country Movement (KOM) led by radical left-wing political activist Márton Gulyás aimed at helping the co-ordination of nominating only one joint candidate of the opposition parties in single-member districts. However, parties required the stand candidates at least 27 SMDs in 9 counties and in the capital to have a national list, and all the opposition parties (except for the joint list of the Socialist Party and the Dialogue which has never ran independently in an election) decided to nominate their own party list. It made impossible to stand only one opposition candidate in SMDs, nonetheless, KOM called for mutual withdraw of opposition candidates and helped the voters to choose the candidate with the most chance to win against the nominee of Fidesz by conducting polls in various constituencies (Tóka–Popescu, 2021: 670). The Momentum accepted to cooperate and in the last minute, also some nomi-nees of LMP withdrew in favour of other opposition candidates, however, Jobbik refused to take part in this process.

The third consecutive electoral defeat of the left-wing and liberal parties forced them to change their strategy, join their forces and organise primaries to let the voters decide over the candidates of the opposition. This new strategy was tried before the 2019 local elections, when aHang (theVoice, a CSO) organised the pri-mary to choose the nominee who runs for the position of mayor of Budapest. In the pre-primary, Gergely Karácsony, then co-chairman of the Dialogue and Csaba Horváth, nominee of the Socialist Party competed to gain the nomination of MSZP and Dialogue. Karácsony won against Horváth with an extraordinary margin (Index, 2019a).

Three candidates were able to participate in the primaries. On behalf of MSZP and Dialogue, Karácsony ran for the position. The Democratic Coalition nominated Olga Kálmán former TV presenter, while the Momentum Movement backed Gábor Kerpel-Fronius. Karácsony won the primaries with 33,000 votes, while Kálmán got 25,000 and Kerpel-Fronius less than 10,000 (Index, 2019b). Hence, Karácsony was the joint candidate of the above-mentioned parties for the position of the mayor of the capital, and in October he won against incumbent István Tarlós of Fidesz. The result of the local elections can be understood in at least two ways. First, the concept of the united opposition and the primary itself was a success, as the cho-sen candidate won against the incumbent mayor. On the other hand, Budapest has always been a stronghold for left-wing and liberal forces, and the chances of the opposition was reinforced by the Borkai scandal[4], so the results were not surpris-ing. The opposition parties accepted the first interpretation and started negotiat-ing on the form of a united opposition.

In December of 2020, the Parliament voted for changing the rules of the nomi-nation of a national list in the electoral law. From then on, parties have needed to stand candidates in at least 71 constituencies (out of the 106) in 14 counties (out of the 19) and in Budapest to have a national party list. It meant that coordinated nomination of various parties became impossible in SMDs, and the opposition parties needed to form a joint list (they were moving towards a joint list anyway), so the cooperation in the elections became a necessity (Tóka–Popescu, 2021: 670). At the end of 2020, six parties declared their intention to run together: the Democratic Coalition, the Hungarian Socialist Party, the Politics Can Be Different, the Dialogue, the Momentum Movement and the formerly radical right-wing Movement for a Better Hungary. They agreed to select the joint candidate for the premiership and the candidates in the single-member constituencies in primaries in the autumn of 2021. Once again, aHang ensured the technical infrastructure of the primaries (Tóka–Popescu, 2021: 674).

Five nominees run for the candidacy for premiership. Karácsony who has been mayor of Budapest was supported by his own party (Dialogue), the Socialist Party and the LMP. Klára Dobrev, an MEP of DK and wife of party leader Ferenc Gyurcsány was backed by the tiny Hungarian Liberal Party along her own one. Jobbik and Momentum nominated their own leaders, Péter Jakab and András Fekete-Győr respectively. The fifth candidate was Péter Márki-Zay, mayor of Hódmezővásárhely and leader of the Everyone's Hungary Movement (MMM). *Table 2* shows the re-sults if this primary. In the second round, Momentum and Karácsony who became runner-up in the first round, supported Márki-Zay in the second one.

Table 2. Results of the opposition primaries for the joint candidate of premiership

Candidate	Supporting parties	1st round		2nd round	
		Votes	%	Votes	%
Klára Dobrev	DK, Liberals	216,248	34.84	283,677	43.29
Gergely Karácsony	Dialogue, MSZP, LMP	169,434	27.30	withdrew	–
Péter Márki-Zay	– (MMM)	126,628	20.40	371,560	56.71
Péter Jakab	Jobbik	87,378	14.08	DNQ	–
András Fekete-Győr	Momentum	21,050	3.39	DNQ	–

Source: Előválasztás, 2021

There are three main consequences of the primaries. Márki-Zay ran on an anti-government but also an anti-opposition platform, i.e. his aim was also to change the leading figures of the opposition. His victory means that some voters of the opposition were dissatisfied also with the opposition parties. Secondly, Jobbik and Momentum lost voters because of the poor performance of their leaders. And thirdly, Democratic Coalition is the only party in the united opposition which has a nationwide stable network of local party organisation and committed voters, which is too small to rule the opposition but too big to disregard the party (Dúró, 2022a: 121). Moreover, it seems that Dobrev was able to gain votes from Jobbik voters in the second round, which cannot be surprising, as Gábor Vona, former leader of the party published an article on the possible deal between Jakab and Dobrev (Ibid. 122).

As far as the candidates in single-member districts are concerned, the pure competition was overshadowed by two factors. First, every nominee needed to choose a parliamentary group out of the six parties which intended to join in the case of her/his election. It made impossible to run on a civil basis. Secondly, in several constituencies, parties made pacts and deals to support each other's candidates. This latter factor limited the number of SMDs in which real competition could have been established. For example, the Democratic Coalition supported 14 out of the 34 candidates of Jobbik, while Jobbik backed 16 nominees of DK (Dúró, 2022a: 123).

As *Table 3* shows, the real winner of the primaries was the party of Gyurcsány (DK) which won the most SMDs and earned the support of the other opposition parties in these constituencies. However, also the Dialogue was successful in the sense that the party's candidates won in 7 constituencies, however, 5 out of them was considered secure seats for the opposition. Although Márki-Zay aimed at establishing a seventh political group, six parties obstructed his initiation.

Table 3. Party affiliation of the winners of primaries in the 106 SMDs and their number in 'winnable' constituencies.

Party	No. of candidates	No. of candidates in winnable SMDs	No. of winning candidates in 2022 in SMDs
DK	32	15	5
Jobbik	29	13	0
MSZP	18	9	5
Momentum	15	8	5
Dialogue	7	5	3
LMP	5	2	1

Source: Dúró, 2022a: 123

The victory of Márki-Zay raises the question of the status of his political movement, Everyone's Hungary Movement, as he can be considered a civil candidate, while MMM was established to represent the civils in the unite opposition. As choosing one political group was obligatory for the candidates in the primaries, a "civil" political group was unimaginable. However, some "civil" (i.e. non-partisan) candidates ran successfully during the primaries, such as Márki-Zay himself in the Hódmezővásárhely district where he later lost to incumbent Fidesz politician János Lázár in the 2022 elections or András Jámbor, former chief editor of Mérce (a radical left-wing news site), and founder and leader of Spark Movement (Szikra Mozgalom) who won in his constituency based on the 8th district of Budapest and joined the Dialogue parliamentary group. However, MMM remained unrepresented in the parliament, as Márki-Zay resigned from his seat gained in the party list, after the electoral defeat of the united opposition. Hence, in theory the primaries offered the chance to change some politicians of the opposition to other ones with civil background, however, due to the deals among the parties and the obligatory party affiliation mostly helped the locally embedded party candidates against the newcomers. Moreover, parties did not ensure too much seats for civils in the national list of the united opposition.

Following the electoral defeat of the opposition, Márki-Zay declared his intention to establish a "party of civils" by transforming the Everyone's Hungary Movement (Telex, 2022). However, the presidium of MMM did not support this idea (HVG, 2022), so Márki-Zay needed to establish a new party under the name of Everyone's Hungary People's Party (MMN). According to an opinion poll carried out by Medián, one year after the elections, MMN did not have the support to gain seats in the parliament in opinion polls, nor some other parties of the united opposition (e.g., MSZP, Dialogue or LMP) (HVG, 2023).

Conclusions

The most important conclusion of the above-mentioned dates and processes that if a CSO aims at being involved into politics, it is almost necessary to transform itself to a political party, otherwise it remains marginal, as in Hungary, political parties have not really got alternatives in political representation at the national level. It seems to be a contradiction, as trust in political parties have constantly been low, as well as their membership.

Secondly, following the 2010 elections, the left fell into crisis, hence, some CSOs made efforts to replace the 'old' elite of the Socialist Party and later that of the political left, i.e. they tried to renew the left-wing and liberal side of the political landscape. First, former PM Bajnai announced his return in order to unite the left behind himself. His party (Together), however, failed to achieve the total collaboration of the left-wing opposition. Moreover, his party did not become a real challenger of MSZP. In 2017, the Momentum Movement made an attempt to replace the left-wing elite, nonetheless, it failed to even enter the Parliament in the 2018 elections. The third real challenger of the 'old left' was Péter Márki-Zay, who surprisingly won the opposition primaries in 2021. On the other hand, partly because of the rules of the primaries, he was unable to change the party candidates in SMDs, and he also performed rather poorly in the 2022 parliamentary election campaign.

The strength of the old party structures is very well highlighted by the fact that the Democratic Coalition, a splinter party of MSZP replaced the Socialists as the most supported party in the opposition. His long-time leader, former PM Gyurcsány successfully built a relatively strong party organisation and committed voter base, despite the fact that in 2011 he was forced to leave the Socialist Party and needed to start building a new party. Most attempts to renew the left aimed at getting rid of him, as he became one of the most unpopular politicians in Hungary in 2006 because of the announced austerity measures and of his rather infamous 'Őszöd' speech. Hence, if former CSOs' (now parties) goal was to replace the old elite, they failed and remained in a relative opposition position even within the benches of the opposition.

At local level, sometimes even the opposition parties create some kind of CSO to run in the elections as their cover organisation. Along these organisations, other local associations also exist. Nevertheless, from the perspective of political science, they can rather be considered local parties than civil society organisations because their aim is to take the (local) political power. The role of CSOs has always been important in organising demonstrations (which is clearly a task of an interest organisation).

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Notes

[1] About the demonstrations, see Mikecz (2020).

[2] Although the Fidesz and the Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP) are formally two separate parties, in practice, only the former one has relevant popular support, while KDNP functions as a quasi-platform of Fidesz (Balázs–Hajdú, 2017: 97).

[3] For the renewal attempt of the party, see Lakner, 2017.

4 Just a couple of days before the elections, a video was published on the internet which shows Borkai, the mayor of Győr (a big city in Western Hungary) who was an influential member of Fidesz, naked on a yacht in Croatia and making love with young women. Borkai refused to withdraw, and the scandal hit the popularity of Fidesz.

Photo/István Péter Németh

„FROM CIVIC MOVEMENTS TO NATION BUILDERS: THE RISE OF THE MACEDONIAN RIGHT"

Aleksandar Nacev–Dragana Kostevska

Roles and responsibilities: citizen movements and political parties

◼ Over the past few decades, citizen movements have become very important participants in the in the political environment of the countries. Citizen movements are neither as structured as a political party or interest group nor as unstructured as a mass trend without goals – they are somewhere in between. Citizen movements can be defined as 'networks of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups, and/or organizations, engaged in a political or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity.'[1]

Citizen movements usually aim to challenge the status quo through reform, revolution or by reversing societal developments. Commonly used tactics include mass demonstrations, sit-ins, marches and verbal appeals, but there is also evidence that citizen movements may actively affect voter participation. As the relevance of protest or quest for some rights has grown in different regions of the world, so have citizen movements. Some of the movements have disappeared over time. Others have transformed and entered political competition, because the movement chose to formalize its structures and become a political party if this is considered a legitimate and effective way of achieving its goals.

On the other hand, a political party is defined as 'any political group identified by an official label that presents at elections, and is capable of placing through elections (free or non-free), candidates for public office.'[2] Political parties differ from citizen movements because they stand in elections, make and adopt laws and policies, coordinate among politicians, and in parliamentary countries form governments.

Political parties face serious challenges in effectively combining their representative and institutional roles, leading to the high level of citizen dissatisfaction with political parties, that is evident around the world in the last few decades.

And what is a norm in the world, it is also relevant in the post-communist countries arriving in the world scene after the fall of the Iron Curtain and the appearance of several „new" countries, who were once part of the now defunct USSR, Czechoslovakia and SFR Yugoslavia. One of those countries was the Republic of Macedonia, a country which had to find it's standing in the tumultuous Balkan region, and pave the way for democracy and political plurality.

The Macedonian road to pluralism

The Macedonian "pluralization" took its own form in the 1980's. Devoid of Tito's legacy of suppressing narrow republican interests, Macedonia witnessed rise of plethora of groups, movements, and associations that gradually emphasized elements of Macedonian ethnos and culture that were largely ignored during the previous period.[3] The first signs of the emergence of new pluralist tendencies were to be found in the Macedonian cultural scene. The emergence of Padot na Vizantija, Macedonian "Byzantine rock" group in the early 1980's followed by the establishment of Aporea, a multimedia "new art" project that underlined the Macedonian language and culture, signalized the birth of a new Macedonian culture.[4] Mizar, another Macedonian "authentic sounds" group founded in 1981, and Padot na Vizantija were the two avant-garde music bands that juxtaposed the vibes of Leb i Sol, the most popular Macedonian rock group, also highly successful on the Yugoslav rock scene. The difference between the two seemed trivial, but it is essential in understanding the rise of a new pluralistic culture in Macedonia; while the former sang in Macedonian and drew inspiration from the wealth of Macedonian historical and folk traditions, combined with the legacy of the Byzantine culture, the latter, sang in Serbocroat and were famous as a great all-Yugoslav band. While the communist party leadership largely ignored the manifestations of the former, still, in contrast to Tito's time when it would have probably outlawed them, now, it did let them perform. During the late 1980's the Youth Cultural Center (better known as "MKC") served as a medium where new "authentic" Macedonian cultural manifestations could take part.[5]

Meantime, the Macedonian party elites did, in a sharp contrariety to the general communist tradition of suppressing religion, tolerate a growing assertion of the Macedonian Orthodox Church (MOC) in public life. During the 1980's MOC was able to commence building of a colossal Orthodox cathedral in the center of the Macedonian capital, Skopje. Contrary to what was expected, the Macedonian communist leaders endorsed the project, which was finished only in 1990, with much sympathy from the Macedonian public.[6] Furthermore, in 1987, a group of young Macedonians established, what was fundamentally, a soccer fans asso-

ciation, Komiti. Although largely focused on sport events, this group was vibrant in provoking historical issues and questions concerning the status of Macedonia within the Yugoslav federation. Energized by the successes of the main Macedonian soccer club Vardar (it won the federal championship for the first and only time in the 1986–1987 season) Komiti, in their public gathering before and after the soccer matches, raised to the surface of the Macedonian public specific, but during Tito's time largely ignored, if not forbidden to discuss, historical issues.[7]

One of these issues was the treatment of Macedonian minorities in the countries neighboring the Macedonian part of the Yugoslav federation, Greece, Bulgaria, and Albania. Faced with rising nationalistic tensions in Kosovo, and subsequent discussions on federal level about minority rights, Macedonians felt that their own agenda within the Yugoslav federation was being left out. Aegean Macedonians who left Greece during the Greek Civil War and who were not allowed to return to their homes by the Greek government, were vocal in bringing to the public the issue of misconduct of the Macedonian minorities. Following an upsurge of activities of the transnational Macedonian human rights network, active in Greece, USA, Canada, and Australia, an Aegean Macedonian association was also established in Macedonia proper. Founded in 1986, by an initiative of the Aegean Macedonians living in Canada, the Association of Child Refugees from Aegean Macedonia had its headquarters in Skopje and established branches in Romania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Canada, and Australia.[8]

The Macedonian political elites looked upon with sympathy to the gradual proliferation of pluralistic views in Macedonia. They sought to instrumentalize the "pluralization" to their needs, tolerating critique as long as it did not directly threatened party interests. However, at the moment when the Yugoslav crisis deepened to an extent that the Serbian and the Slovenian leadership mobilized their societies and promoted two diametrically antagonistic options to solve the Yugoslav crisis that were unacceptable to Macedonia, the Macedonian elites made use of the growing Macedonian pluralistic society to legitimize and magnify the Macedonian public support for their position in the federal level debates. Combining advancement of a relatively reasonable policy towards the solution of the Yugoslav crisis, and image of the party as of one that cares for and affirms the Macedonian national interests, the Macedonian party elite estimated that it would inevitable carry victory in a multi-party elections.[9] However, they could not correctly foretell the potential power of the even more national oriented forces within Macedonia.

The middle ground of the old elites

The conservative "shirts" enabled the Macedonian party elites to preserve the status quo of Yugoslavian politics, that is decentralized and communist Yugoslavia. However, in the second half of the 80s, and especially towards the end of these years, the liberalization of the media leads to the "pluralization" of Macedonian

society, which makes the discrepancy between the liberal and conservative camps in the communist leadership more and more obvious.[10] Hence, the affirmation of the liberal faction in the ranks of the Macedonian communists led to the seizure of power at which point he began to change the course of Macedonian politics.[11]

In 1989, a change took place in the republican constitution, especially in the part of redefinition regarding the condition of the "Macedonian people" and not, as before, "the state of the Macedonian people and of the Albanian and Turkish minorities". Among other things, the change of the constitutional amendments in preserving the Macedonian interests, was another indicator of the many that clearly, precisely, and concisely put the party to the test to examine its intentions and concerns for the real interests of the Macedonian people.

Although defeated within the party, the Macedonian communists towards the end of the 1980s expressed maximum commitment in terms of supporting Macedonian national interests, while the liberal faction was increasing the opinion that the introduction of a multi-party system will not reduce their influence and position of power within the Macedonian society. Hence, until the end of the first half of 1989, the Macedonian communists were deeply committed to the introduction of a multi-party system in Macedonia.[12]

Namely, the looming elections and the emergence of right-wing parties were more and more evident during that period. Among other things, the process of liberalization in Macedonia went gradually and without any significant disturbances, while the party elite were characterized by a transformation into "One Party" which rules multi-party elections. The ultimate expectations were in the direction of a democratic contest and victory to preserve power. However, the multi-party system in Macedonia led to the emergence of different oppositional positions.

MAAK party (Movement for All-Macedonian Action)

Organization in a political association, with the aim of promoting the well-being of the Macedonian nation and state, was characteristic of Macedonian intellectuals in that period. This political constellation led to the founding of the MAAK party (Movement for All-Macedonian Action) on February 4, 1990. It is especially significant to affirm the party's core, considering that they comprise the more nationally oriented Macedonian intelligence, especially recruits from the sections of the Writers' Union of Macedonia, which in the late 1980s expressed strong pro-Macedonian sentiments. It was characteristic of MAAK that it very often addressed and expressed criticism of Bulgaria and Greece in relation to issues related to human rights, and in the meantime it was noticeable that the Macedonian course of action was being favored in the Yugoslav scene.[13]

As a consequence of the overtly nationalistic name, and the lion as the party emblem, MAAK was initially seen as very radical. However, the party soon became seen as the party of intellectuals. MAAK's platform promoted the party as the

party of all Macedonians, "regardless of social, national or religious affiliations, who accept the party's Program Declaration and Manifesto on free, independent and sovereign Macedonian state."

Although the party participated in all election cycles from the introduction of the multi-party system until the Parliamentary elections in 2002, it never managed to win a seat and enter the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia. After the military conflict in the Republic of Macedonia in 2001, at a meeting of the leadership, the party changed its name from MAAK – Conservative Party to MAAK – United Macedonian Option (MAAK–EMO). The party ceased its political activity after the 2002 elections, when the leadership changed Strasho Angelovski from the party's presidency and decided to join the party completely to VMRO–DPMNE. Prior to the 2016 parliamentary elections, the party renewed its platform and joined a VMRO–DPMNE-led coalition called Macedonian Action.

VMRO–DPMNE (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Macedonian Party for Macedonian Unity)

In late June 1990, another nationalist party emerged on the Macedonian scene.

Supported by the Macedonian emigration and founded by such eminent Macedonian dissidents as Dragan Bogdanovski and Goran Jakovlevski, the new party was named VMRO–DPMNE (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Macedonian Party for Macedonian Unity). The party platform previously published in the March issue of *Mlad Borec* largely related to the ideals of the historical VMRO, nationalist organization that had aimed to liberate Macedonia from the Ottoman rule.[14]

The first section of the acronym "VMRO' which forms the party's name derives from a rebel movement formed on October 23rd 1893. On this day, several Macedonian intellectuals and patriots in Solun (Thessaloniki) formed the Macedonian Revolutionary Committee, which later on became the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation (VMRO) or Internal Macedonian Odrin Revolutionary Organisation (VMORO). VMRO's establishment marked the start of an organised struggle by Macedonian people and other nationalities for the formation of an independent country. The day symbolises the continuity of Macedonian struggle for independence, which resulted in establishing a modern, sovereign Macedonian state.

The modern revival of the movement started in the 1980's, when a proclaimed Macedonian rights movement activist, Dragan Bogdanovski had made a blueprint for a *Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity* (which is now the second part of the acronym, DPMNE). Finally, under the name VMRO–DPMNE, the party was officially founded on 17 June 1990 in Skopje. VMRO–DPMNE has been a political factor in Macedonia since the country gained its independence in 1991.

After the first multi-aprty elections in the country in 1990, VMRO–DPMNE became the strongest party in the Parliament. It did not form a government because it did not achieve a majority of seats; this forced it to form a coalition with an ethnic Albanian party, but it refused to do so. The party boycotted the second round of the 1994 elections, claiming fraud in the first round. After winning the 1998 elections, VMRO–DPMNE came to power forming a coalition government with an ethnic Albanian party.

The focus in the political discourse of VMRO–DPMNE following the country's independence after the referendum of September 8, 1991 was oriented toward establishing the state continuity. The position of the right "nationalist" party in Macedonia was characterized by its claim to the ancient Macedonian heritage and especially to the personalities of Philip of Macedonia and Alexander the Great. Also, symbols like the flag representing the "Star of Kutlesh (Vergina)", symbol associated with Alexander the Great, are being promoted during the Macedonian "quest for origins", feature for the construction of each nation. However, the later evolution of the discourse of VMRO–DPMNE unlike the extreme right parties in neighboring countries is moving more towards a moderate right-wing political party supporting and promoting multiculturalism. The evolution of VMRO–DPMNE political discourse and political program during election campaigns proves whenever the change and the adaptation of its political, ideological and organizational profile.

VMRO–DPMNE is a party on the political right. The party has a Christian Democrat-style orientation and advocates admission to the European Union. It views itself as a moderate conservative party and is member of the European Political Party, an interest organisation for conservative political parties in Europe.

First elections: parties and platforms for nation building

SKM–PDP during that period was particularly two-dimensionally oriented. Namely, on the one hand, there was a typical promotion of Macedonian interests, while on the other hand, the party was careful enough to leave the open door for the possibility of a transformed Yugoslav state. The opponents of SKM–PDP were those parties that essentially had even more Macedonian agenda in their program, MAAK, and VMRO–DPMNE. The Macedonian agenda was reflected in a nationally ambitious program of MAAK, where the commitments moved in the direction of a "spiritual union of all Macedonians", i.e. for a sovereign Macedonian state that would be part of confederated Yugoslavia, but no more subjected to Serbian "hegemonism."[15]

On the other hand, the efforts of VMRO–DPMNE tended more towards the commitments for Macedonian sovereignty, but not necessarily and only within the framework of the Yugoslav confederation: the party was aimed at a wider confederal union of Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Greece, which it would de facto incorporate all Macedonians in the region under the protection of a single state.

The only and simple solution of VMRO–DPMNE was complete separation from Yugoslavia.[16] Hence, this projection saw significant support from Macedonians in the diaspora, with a particularly significant thread of nationalist rhetoric, VMRO–DPMNE sent compelling messages to large segments of Macedonian society. In this direction, the party opposed the illegal immigration of Albanians from Kosovo to Western Macedonia, at the expense of returning the property of the disadvantaged Mace-donians in Greece and "the spiritual, economic and ethnic union of the divided Macedonian people and the creation of a Macedonian state in the future united Balkans and united Europe", which contributed to the significantly increased popularity of VMRO–DPMNE among Macedonian voters.[17]

The results of the parliamentary elections demonstrated in action the underestimation by the Macedonian communist elite of the potential strength of the parties that demonstrated interest and put more emphasis on Macedonian affairs in relation to SKM–PDP.[18] At the end of the nineties, although Macedonian communists came up with a range of reasonable solutions for Macedonian interests in the overall Yugoslav discourse, however, SKM–PDP still could not win the parliamentary elections in 1990.

VMRO–DPMNE was the most successful party with 38 parliamentary seats (31.7%) in the legislature, followed by the reformed communist party with 31 seats (25.8%), and a coalition that represents the interests of the Macedonian Albanian minority with 23 parliamentary seats (18.3%) and the economically oriented Alliance of Reform Forces with 17 parliamentary seats (14.2%). The outcome of the elections gave rather fragmented and unclear results.[19]

Conclusion

The beginning of the nineties was marked by difficult times, filled with blood, violence, and wars. Starting the first fight in Slovenia, then the violence spread all over Croatia, President Gligorov, and the new Macedonian government, facing serious security challenges in terms of the survival of the state, decided on new egregious steps. On September 8, 1991, a referendum was held in Macedonia in which more than 95% of the voters voted for a sovereign and independent state. After nine days of holding the referendum, a Declaration was adopted to announce the results of the referendum. The uninstructive results of the 1990 parliamentary elections brought the major Macedonian parties to adopt a more balanced and stable constitution.[20]

The promulgation of the new constitution in November 1991 created an atmosphere of complicated debates between the largest Macedonian parties. According to the Constitution, Macedonia is a republic with parliamentary democracy and division of state powers into legislative, executive and judicial. The Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia is a representative body of citizens and a legislative branch of power. The Assembly is unicameral and it can be composed of 120 to

140 members of the Assembly. Members of the Assembly are elected on general and direct elections by secret ballot and their mandate lasts for 4 years.

Krusevo Republic in 1903[21] and ASNOM in 1944[22] laid the historical foundation of the Assembly of Republic of Macedonia, and it continued to develop with the National Assembly of NRM in 1946 and the Assembly of SRM in 1963 and 1974.

Macedonia completed the democratization process on November, 21, 1991, when it declared independence from rump Yugoslavia.

Notes

[1] Diani, M. (1992): 'The Concept of Social Movement'. *The Sociological Review,* 40., (1.), pp. 1–25.

[2] Sartori, G. (1976): *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[3] Danforth, Loring (1994) « Ethnic Nationalism in a Transnational World : Greeks and Macedonians at the Conference for Cooperation and Security in Europe », an unpublished essay, Bates College.

[4] Ramet (Sabrina), Balkan Babel (op.cit.), pp. 26-27

[5] Židas, Daskalovski (1999): „Elite Transformation and Democratic Transition in Macedonia and Slovenia". *Balkanologie* [Online], 1999, Online since 04 June 2008, connection on 01.05.2023. http://journals.openedition.org/balkanologie/281 ; DOI : https://doi.org/10.4000/balkanologie. 281

[6] *Nova Makedonija,* 01/04/90

[7] Nothing has been written so far on the influence of the soccer fans associations on the political developments in former Yugoslavia although some of these groups, like the Croatian "Bad Blue Boys", or Serbian "Delije", were politically vociferous during the Yugoslav crisis in the late 1980's. See Perašović (Benjamin), « Youth Subcultures and the War in Croatia », In: Prpić, Katarina–Despot, Blaženka–Dugandžija, Nikola (Eds.): *Croatian Society on the Eve of Transition.* Zagreb: Institute for Social Research, 1993. See also Mihailović (Srećko), « The War Started on May 13, 1990 » In: Slapšak, Svetlana–Milošević, Milan et al. (Eds.): *The War Started on Maksimir,* Belgrade: Media Center, 1997, who explains the media manipulations of the nationalist tendencies of some of these associations, and the conflict between "Delije" and "Bad Blue Boys" in May 1990, that symbolized the beginning of the violent disintegration of former Yugoslavia.

[8] On the Macedonian transnational human rights organizations see Danforth, Loring. *The Macedonian Conflict.* New Jersey: Princeton UP. 1995.

[9] See Maleska, Mirjana (1998): « Politički, Kulturni i Međunarodni Okolnosti, koi Vlijaat Vrz Efikasnosta na Sistemot » (Political, Cultural, and International Circumstances that Affect the System Efficacy). In: *Efikasnosta na Parlamentarnata Demokratija 1991–1992.* (Efficiency of Parliamentary Democracy). Skopje: Institut za Sociološki I Političko Pravni Istražuvanja, p. 159.

[10] See Gerovski, Branko: art.cit., p. 42.

[11] Maleska, Mirjana (1998): « Rizikot na Demokratijata : Slučajot na Makedonija » (Danger for Democracy: the Case of Macedonia), in Godišnik na Institutot za Socijalno Pravno Politički Istražuvanja, (1.), p. 160.

[12] Poulton, Hugh: op.cit., p. 172.

[13] Židas Daskalovski (1999): „ Elite Transformation and Democratic Transition in Macedonia and Slovenia", *Balkanologie* [Online], Vol. III, n° 1 | Online since 04 June 2008, connection on 01.05.2023. http://journals.openedition.org/balkanologie/281 ; DOI : https://doi.org/10.4000/balkanologie. 281

[14] On the development of the 19th century Macedonian national movement climaxed with the foundation of VMRO and its liberation struggle see: Katardžiev, Ivan (1993): *Sto Godini od Formiranjeto na VMRO, Sto Godini Revolucionerna Tradicija.* [Hundred Years of the Foundation of IMRO, Hundred Years of Revolutionary Tradition], Skopje: Misla.; Perry, Duncan (1988): *Politics of Terror : The Macedonian Revolutionary Movement, 1893–1903.* Durham–London: Duke UP. and Daskalovski, Židas (1998): *Development of Macedonian Nationalism 1814–1913.* unpublished M.A. thesis, Budapest: CEU.

[15] Cohen, Lenard: op.cit., p. 148.

[16] Poulton, Hugh: op.cit., p. 176, and Maleska, Mirjana: « *Politički, Kulturni i Međunarodni Okolnosti* » (art.cit.), p. 156.

[17] Perry, Duncan M.: art.cit., pp. 241–242.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Poulton, Hugh: op.cit., p. 150.

[20] On the importance of party pacts formation on democratic institutions see Przeworski, Adam: art.cit., pp. 87–88. for a theoretical explanation of this phenomenon.

[21] August 2, 1903 Ilinden Uprising started in order to liberate Macedonian people from the Ottoman rule. On August 3, after the liberation of Krusevo, the constitution of the new revolutionary-democratic national rule was initiated; and this, in historiography, is known as the Krusevo Republic, which lasted for 10 days. In order to elect the governing bodies in a democratic manner, an Assembly which consisted of the 60 most prominent citizens was convened; they were representing all national groups in the town of Krusevo (Macedonians, Albanians and Vlachs), and this served as a kind of a representative-parliamentary body. The Assembly elected a six-member interim executive government. The progressive democratic ideas of the revolutionaries, desires for cohabitation, equality among nationalities, brotherly concord and unity against the Ottoman despotism are incarnated in the Manifesto of the Krusevo Republic. The Manifesto of the Krusevo Republic is one of the most important documents in the history of the Macedonian national liberation movement.

[22] August 2, 1944 – The first session of ASNOM (Anti-fascist Assembly for National Liberation of Macedonia) took place in the St. Prohor Pcinski monastery. The Macedonian nation achieved its national liberty, by participating in the Second World War and the National Liberation War against fascism, and created its own state on the first session of ASNOM. Nine legislative acts were adopted at the First session of ASNOM, four of which were of state-forming character. These acts laid the foundations of the Macedonian state, as a federal state within the Democratic Federal Yugoslavia. The Democratic Federal Macedonia was solemnly constituted on this session.

Photo/István Péter Németh

THE CLASH BETWEEN MAINSTREAM AND NEW PARTIES — ADAPTING TO THE DIGITAL WORLD: A CASE STUDY OF THE SLOVAK POLITICAL SPACE ON SOCIAL NETWORKS[1]

Jaroslav Ušiak–Petra Jankovská

Introduction

In the Slovak political landscape, we are witnessing an increasing influence of the digital world on the relationship between traditional and new political parties, as well as the rise of radicalization tendencies in society. (Behr–Edwards–Griboon –Rreading 2018)

This situation has also manifested in the political realm when Marian Kotleba was elected as the head of the Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region on November 9, 2013. Kotleba had previously been investigated for criminal offenses related to extremism and was conditionally sentenced for this crime in 2022, resulting in the loss of his parliamentary mandate in the National Council of the Slovak Republic (NR SR), which he held at the time.

Political parties affiliated with extremist groups subsequently became part of the political scene in Slovakia, and even several mainstream political parties began adopting their rhetoric, controversial opinions, and, in some cases, their self-presentation methods and communication strategies.

In the present day, as the majority of people rely on the internet and social media for personal, professional, and even public and political activities, it has become much more challenging to verify the accuracy and quality of information. Various entities, including extremists, take advantage of this situation and attempt to manipulate public opinion through disinformation, hoaxes, and conspiracy theories. (Bahna 2015) Their goal is to promote their own political agenda and discredit their ideological opponents.

The spread of misinformation, fake news, and conspiracies is a serious threat to democracy today, and in many countries, deliberate dissemination of such content has even been shown to influence election results. This phenomenon is increasingly evident in Slovakia and affects how people perceives public events. According to a 2020 survey conducted by the GLOBSEC organization, up to 56% of Slovaks believe in conspiracy theories (GLOBSEC 2020). Such an environment contributes to radicalization and emotionally charged public discourse, in which even traditional politicians and political parties gradually engage. Extremist entities not only gain greater relative legitimacy for their positions but also capitalize on growing social insecurity and distrust towards the media and political authorities, which struggle to adapt to the rapidly changing societal discourse.

Even traditional political entities are aware of this situation and reflect it in their election campaigns, with some of them also using similar polarizing narratives and disinformation. This modern form of communication and political marketing through social media is susceptible to populism as well as increased tension and societal radicalization.

When preparing a case study, which is described in more detail in this article, it was necessary to consider that sociopolitical phenomena such as extremism, populism, and radicalization often coexist and may have direct relationships between them. The methods and elements may vary, but their fundamental characteristics and goals are the same - the entities that employ them seek to attain and maintain power by capitalizing on societal dissatisfaction and promising quick and simplistic solutions, usually disregarding the social context and rights of all population groups. (Kuchta 2022)

The article analyzes the communication styles of selected political parties and politicians, identifying elements of extremism, radicalization, and populism in their posts, as well as their interconnections. Empirical research examines the communication of political actors on Facebook in Slovakia through the analysis of quantitative information, such as metadata on interactions between political actors and users/voters on social networks. Two specific periods are compared: February 2020, characterized by the pre-election campaign before the NR SR elections, and January 2022, a period marked by increasing tension between Ukraine and Russia, significantly influenced by the COVID–19 pandemic.

Critical discourse analysis and a case study of communication by politicians and political parties on Facebook in 2020 and 2022, particularly in the months of February 2020 and January 2022, were utilized for the analysis of political communication in the article. The comparison of content in the selected periods was conducted by collecting aggregated data using Zoomsphere and Crowdtangle API tools.

The selection of political parties and individual political representatives for the case study was based on three main criteria: 1) their representation in the NR SR, 2) estimated voter preferences, and 3) overall reach on social networks. In the case of opposition parties, mainly those with representation in the NR SR or estimated

voter support higher than 5% during the observed period, were included in the study. As the first part of the case study took place in 2020, it was necessary to replace some political parties and politicians in the second observed period (2022) to reflect the current socio-political situation. Additionally, some parties that had higher voter preferences in 2020 lost relevance for this case study in 2022 as their overall reach significantly decreased and their political influence weakened.

A case study mapping the content and impact of political posts on social media in 2020

In 2018 a murder of an investigative journalist sparked public outrage and massive protests across the country, leading to the resignation of several prominent political figures, including Interior Minister Robert Kaliňák and Prime Minister Róbert Fico (Vančo 2019). However, their governing party, SMER–SD, subsequently formed a new government with Peter Pellegrini as the new prime minister.

These events also had an impact on three important elections held in Slovakia in 2019 and 2020 (Řádek 2020). Their campaigns were closely linked: two rounds of presidential elections (March 16 and March 30, 2019); European Parliament elections (May 25, 2019); and parliamentary elections (February 29, 2020).

After these elections, six political parties had their representatives in the National Council of the Slovak Republic (NR SR): Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OĽANO), who won with 25.02% of the votes (53 NR SR members); SMER–SD (18.29%, 38 members); WE ARE FAMILY (SME RODINA) (8.24%, 17 members); People's Party Our Slovakia (Kotlebovci–Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko or ĽSNS; 7.97%, 17 members); Freedom and Solidarity (Sloboda a Solidarita or SaS; 6.22%, 13 members); and FOR THE PEOPLE (ZA ĽUDÍ) (5.77%, 12 members) (Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2020).

The leader of OĽANO, Igor Matovič, became the prime minister and formed a coalition government with the parties WE ARE FAMILY, SaS, and FOR THE PEOPLE. The political parties that had previously governed with SMER–SD, the Slovak National Party (SNS), and the Hungarian party Most–Híd, did not enter the NR SR as they failed to reach the required 5% threshold (Statistical office of the Slovak Republic 2020).

Within this section of the case study, the 10 posts with the highest number of interactions published by selected politicians and political parties during the observed period were analysed.

Table 1: Comparison of the total reach of selected political representatives on Facebook in February 2020

Public profile of a political figure (profile name)	Average number of interactions per 10 posts with the highest impact in the reporting period	Highest number of interactions per post in the reporting period
Peter Pellegrini	11 881	25 094
Boris Kollar	8 051	21 999
Milan Uhrík	7 809	19 781
Richard Sulik	7 354	18 741
Ľuboš Blaha	10 107	16 893
Michal Truban	6 105	11 303
Andrej Kiska	4 939	7 616
Miroslav Beblavý	4 242	7 712
Robert Fico	5 021	7 221
Alojz Hlina	2 126	3 591
Andrej Danko – predseda SNS	2 247	3 309
Bugár Béla	355	625

Source: Own processing based on data downloaded via Zoomsphere.

Table 2: Comparison of the total reach of selected political parties on Facebook in February 2020

Public profile of a political party	Average number of interactions per 10 posts with the highest reach over the period	Highest number of interactions per post in the reporting period
Sloboda a Solidarita (Freedom and Solidarity)	7 632	44 770
OBYČAJNÍ ĽUDIA a nezávislé osobnosti (CITIZENS and Independent Personalities)	14 654	30 718
Sme rodina (We Are Family)	8 851	23 687
Slovenská národná strana (Slovak National Party)	4 235	22 224
SMER – SD	5 934	11 775
Za ľudí (For the People)	1 493	2 723
KDH	875	1 805
Progresívne Slovensko (Progressive Slovakia)	781	1 589
SPOLU - občianska demokracia (TOGETHER - Civil Democracy)	814	1 503
Most-Híd	688	1 143
Kotlebovci - Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko - oblasť Banská Bystrica, Brezno (Kotleba - People's Party Our Slovakia - Banská Bystrica, Brezno region)	211	853

Source: Own processing based on data downloaded via Zoomsphere.

CITIZENS and Independent Personalities (OĽANO)

The leader of OĽaNO, who was very active on social media, used a personal Facebook profile with information that was not equally accessible compared to other politicians. Therefore, his profile was individually analysed.

Thanks to his online activities, he managed to increase his Facebook followers from the original 50,000 to 284,457 during the month of February 2020. Among the most frequently shared party posts in February 2020 were a video of Matovič's TV discussion with the ĽSNS leader Marian Kotleba (24,496 interactions, including 6,545 shares) and a video of a debate where he shouted at representatives of SMER–SD and accused them of stealing from the state. The video contained strong language and vulgarities (15,101 interactions and 2,791 shares). Matovič consistently used this aggressive and informal communication style and self-presentation

methods, which formed the basis of his online communication during the pre-election period.

A strong media campaign was one of the factors that contributed to OĽaNO's victory in the elections. Among the main elements of populism identified in the examined posts were a campaign primarily based on finding someone to blame for people's problems, the use of simplistic rhetoric, and promises of quick solutions without comprehensive underlying strategies (such as proposing a solution to the mailbox-company problem or the state confiscation of illegally acquired assets abroad, which was not practically achievable). In this case, the targeted use of elements of participatory democracy in an online questionnaire was also questionable, as it was mainly focused on selected groups of people.

We Are Family (SME RODINA)

The leader of the political party WE ARE FAMILY, Boris Kollár, frequently utilized a populist style of communication for his promotion during the observed period. His posts contained short slogans, emotive expressions, the use of colloquial language and vulgarity, and appeals to the emotional rather than rational side of his followers. A paradox of his online communication was that the posts with the most interactions often focused on his controversial personal life, which contrasted with the party's official conservative agenda. WE ARE FAMILY regularly shared posts from their leader.

During the observed period, the authors identified instances of manipulative use of emotive posts, simplification, and several conflicts between the self-presentation of politicians and the political agendas of the associated parties.

SMER–SD

Chairman of SMER–SD, Róbert Fico, depicted opposition leaders as cartoon characters dancing to music in his campaign videos, accompanied by satirical text portraying them as incapable of governing. He claimed that if they were elected to government, they would invite immigrants to the country, legalize drugs, deny social care to citizens, and constantly argue. The post generated 6,024 interactions.

In the analysis of SMER–SD posts, it was important to examine the online communication of NR SR member Ľuboš Blaha. The analytical website Populi labeled him as the most influential politician on Facebook (Populi, 2021). Among his posts with a high number of interactions was a video in which he referred to information allegedly leaked from an investigative report about Marian Kočner, who was involved in multiple cases and linked to the murder of journalist Ján Kuciak. The information he presented suggested that the demonstrations that took place in Slovakia after Kuciak's murder were an attempted coup d'état.

Fico and Blaha repeatedly made accusations against political opponents during the pre-election campaign, which were not based on credible sources and, in some cases, involved disinformation (particularly regarding migration and an alleged coup d'état). The communication style was significantly populist, and given the reach of individual posts (especially in the case of Blaha), it could have had a polarizing and even radicalizing effect on society.

The communication of Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini, who held the position during this period, was considerably calmer and more factual. However, he also used the titles of his posts to attract readers' attention and appeal to the emotions of followers before they read the entire post. At the same time, it was possible to identify his effort to build a personal brand outside of SMER–SD.[2]

Slovak National Party (SNS)

Chairman of SNS Andrej Danko is known for his controversial public statements and press conferences, but his social media posts had limited reach. Among his posts with the greatest reach during the pre-election period were „Let's do everything to prevent liberal democrats from destroying our beloved Slovakia" (February 23; 3,309 interactions) and „Progressives are furious, and we must stop them... If you find out I'm an alien, don't be surprised" (February 5; 2,097 interactions). In his posts, he repeatedly used the term „gender ideology," mostly in the context of the Istanbul Convention, as did other politicians during this period. However, the document was controversial, and some parts were misinterpreted.

Despite SNS not being elected to parliament in the 2019 elections, we decided to include it in the analysis because their statements could contribute to the polarization of society during this period. Although the reach of SNS and its chairman Andrej Danko was limited on Facebook, their posts on this social network reflected their communication through other media. One of the main populist features of the party's posts was accusing ideological opponents and categorizing them into broadly defined unacceptable categories. Some of the party's statements could be defined as disinformation.

Kotleba – People's Party Our Slovakia (ĽSNS)

In the context of using populist rhetoric to radicalize society, attention needs to be given to the political party ĽSNS. Among the common narratives that appeared in ĽSNS disinformation campaigns, the most frequent topics were migration, the decline of the West, EU or Brussels dictatorship, threats to sovereignty, threats to cultural identity, the menace of liberalism, and undermining traditional values. The presented solutions included nationalism, mobilization, and directing voters towards pro-nationalist politicians.

These attitudes helped ĽSNS enter the National Council of the Slovak Republic (NR SR) in 2016. They received 7.92% of the votes and secured 14 seats in parliament.

In examining the use of disinformation and populist-extremist content during the pre-election campaign, it was necessary for this study to consider posts from other members of ĽSNS, the first of which came from Milan Uhrík. The text of his most impactful post was:

„SHOCKING NEWS FROM THE STREETS OF LONDON WAS DELETED! SHARE IT! The news from the Kulturblog in London was deleted along with several other pages presenting illiberal news on Facebook. Modern censorship has fully arrived, so I'm making this document available through my official profile as a Member of the European Parliament. Let Slovakia not resort to inadequate information and censorship like London... PLEASE SHARE!"

The article included a 10-minute video showing footage from London with the central theme of migration and an increased number of Muslim immigrants in the city, linking them to rising crime and the infringement of rights of „white native inhabitants." This post generated 19,781 interactions and 14,339 shares.

Facebook subsequently blocked Kulturblog (a blog primarily describing the threat of multiculturalism and its connection to ĽSNS) and six other Facebook pages, claiming that they violated user rules and spread disinformation. Similar blogs to Kulturblog were repeatedly blocked – the original page created in October 2018 had 16,000 fans at the time of deletion, and the page created in September 2019 had 14,000 fans (Struharík, 2022). At the time of writing this article, the Facebook portal of Kulturblog had 28,846 fans and 39,147 followers.

For a similar reason, it was not possible to analyse the posts of ĽSNS chairman Marian Kotleba precisely because his page was blocked, and he created his current Facebook profile only in July 2020.

As part of Uhrík's and other ĽSNS members' public communication, attacks on liberal politicians became common in February 2020, and such posts had the greatest impact during this period. For example, „CAUTION: KISKO'S PEOPLE, SETTLERS, AND DRUG USERS ARE COMING" suggests that liberal politicians are gaining votes from Roma people and drug users. Other posts linked liberal politicians to support for migration and the Istanbul Convention, which they labelled as dangerous.

ĽSNS and its members' posts contained elements of populism, radicalism, and disinformation, along with conspiracy theories and extremist content. An important aspect of their communication was the ability to quickly respond to the deletion of content that violated Facebook's rules and the high number of interactions generated by their posts.

The rest of the parties, such as ZA ĽUDÍ or SaS, did not show elements of extremism or the use of radicalisation narratives in the period under review. In the case of SaS, elements of populism partially appeared.

A case study on mapping the content and impact of political posts on social networks in 2022

Period after the elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic (NR SR) was influenced not only by the change of political parties in government but also by the broader social context, which was greatly impacted by the outbreak of the COVID–19 pandemic and the implementation of measures to prevent the spread of the disease. The first anti-pandemic measures in Slovakia were implemented just six days after the elections and were issued by the government of Peter Pellegrini. (Bačík–Przybyla 2021: 48) Therefore, the pandemic significantly influenced the formation of the new government and had an unprecedented impact on overall societal events. The initial months were largely marked by fear of the new unknown disease, but resistance to the measures quickly escalated, such as the closure of establishments, the requirement to wear masks in public, and mandatory state quarantine upon returning from abroad. At the same time, disinformation related directly to the pandemic began to increasingly surface during this period. (Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic 2022a) The growing dissatisfaction with the management of the pandemic also led to a coalition crisis in March 2021. These circumstances heavily shaped the topics addressed by politicians and political parties in their social media posts.

To gain a deeper understanding of how the communication of these political entities evolves, the second part of the case study analysed posts published from January 1, 2022, to January 31, 2022. The data were analysed for 13 politicians and 11 political entities, including regional Facebook pages associated with the ĽSNS party, which is often used for communication. For key politicians who utilize personal Facebook accounts or individuals directly mentioned in the posts, individual analysis was conducted, and they are therefore not included in the following overview.

Table 3: Comparison of the total reach of selected political representatives on Facebook in January 2022

Public profile of a political figure (profile name)	Total number of posts	Average number of „likes" on the page	Average number of followers on the page	Average number of interactions	Highest number of interactions	Average number of views	Highest number of views
Ľuboš Blaha	55	119 623	168 027	15 087	68 575	17 552	303 639
Milan Mazurek • Republika	64	109 563	162 140	3 946	54 658	30 252	427 253
Robert Fico	26	94 405	161 063	12 299	32 197	92 939	277 613
Milan Uhrík • Republika	57	91 758	125 600	6 701	25 309	17 169	205 422
Andrej Danko - predseda SNS	50	78 850	86 644	2 667	15 136	16 858	222 894
Peter Pellegrini	46	190 786	313 838	3 139	14 138	33 544	198 873
Boris Kollar	20	137 922	145 629	772	6 727	11 714	175 580
Irena Bihariová • Progresívne Slovensko	12	20 695	24 657	1 151	6 302	1 187	9 938
Eduard Heger - predseda vlády SR	35	36 536	40 821	1 248	5 992	849	8 395
Richard Sulik	12	123 686	142 698	1 427	4 919	0	0
Veronika Remišová	55	53 488	56 722	1 179	4 838	2 950	76 695
Marian Kotleba	19	35 070	47 100	1 771	4 639	1 550	16 761
Milan Majerský	28	8 877	9 190	381	1 487	949	16 463

Source: Own processing based on data downloaded via Crowdtangle API.

Table 4: Comparison of the total reach of selected political parties on Facebook in January 2022

Public profile of a political party	Total number of contributions	Average number of „likes" on the page	Average number of followers on the page	Average number of interactions	Highest number of interactions	Average number of views	Highest number of views
SMER – SD	43	82 584	117 216	4 429	27 755	21 591	157 793
OBYČAJNÍ ĽUDIA a nezávislé osobnosti (CITIZENS and Independent Personalities)	94	165 755	220 840	607	5 879	8 748	113 774

Slovenská národná strana (Slovak National Party)	108	86 834	88 071	923	4 765	1 246	31 443
Progresívne Slovensko (Progressive Slovakia)	39	39 432	43 347	606	4 355	398	7 991
Kotlebovci–Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko	23	11 774	16 438	655	3 832	1 952	37 794
Sme rodina (We Are Family)	29	105 656	119 618	437	3 053	5 346	27 472
Kotlebovci - Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko - okresy Žilina a Bytča (Kotleba - People's Party Our Slovakia - Žilina and Bytča districts)	32	7 661	8 390	376	2 845	4 276	41 263
Sloboda a Solidarita (Freedom and Solidarity)	94	132 637	130 583	396	2 747	942	29 723
Za ľudí (For the People)	73	18 203	20 536	250	2 071	1 008	25 118
KDH	24	18 026	18 624	456	1 759	3 591	40 299
HLAS - sociálna demokracia (HLAS – Social Democracy)	90	25 389	43 022	376	1 441	2 997	20 421
Republika (Republic)	108	7 470	9 030	145	1 109	451	19 604
Kotleba–Ľudová Strana Naše Slovensko - Trnavský kraj Kotleba – (People's Party Our Slovakia – Trnava municipality)	53	7 209	7 316	71	454	39	930
ĽS Naše Slovensko v NR SR (People's Party Our Slovakia – in National Assembly)	4	20 849	25 459	138	409	1 055	4 218
Kotlebovci - Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko – oblasť Banská Bystrica, Brezno (Kotleba – People's Party Our Slovakia – Banská Bystrica, Brezno region)	4	8 184	8 455	34	102	81	197

Source: Own processing based on data downloaded via Crowdtangle API.

CITIZENS and Independent Personalities (OĽANO)

Similarly, to 2020, the Facebook profile used by OĽaNO chairman Igor Matovič during the observed period was private, making it impossible to analyse his data in the same way as the other selected politicians and political parties. Therefore, his profile was individually analysed, maintaining the same period of observation.

The total number of interactions, however, cannot be precisely determined in his case. Some posts contain populist elements, but none show signs of radicalization or extremism.

Regarding the OĽaNO political party, the analysis also considers the change of prime minister that occurred on April 1, 2021. Since Eduard Heger became the new prime minister of the Slovak Republic, his Facebook posts were included in the analysis.

The official Facebook page of OBYČAJNÍ ĽUDIA a nezávislé osobnosti (Ordinary People and Independent Personalities) stands out for its relatively high frequency of post publications, with a total of 94 posts during the observed period. In about 40% of the posts (38.3), Robert Fico, Peter Pellegrini, SMER and HLAS parties, and members of the opposition were directly mentioned.

Some of the posts also addressed the topic of extremism. Specifically, they reacted to a racist joke published in the online newspaper Plus jeden deň. Although the newspaper removed the joke from its page after criticism, OĽANO member Peter Pollák, who is also the chairman of the National Council of the Slovak Republic Committee for Human Rights and National Minorities, condemned this action and compared it to the behaviour of Milan Mazurek, a member of parliament who repeatedly shared racist and/or extremist posts.

Within this theme, the party shared two posts focusing on the victims of fascism and extremism. The first one was published on January 21, 2022, commemorating the 77th anniversary of the tragic massacre of the residents of Ostrý Grúň and the village of Kľak, where 148 people were murdered for aiding partisans. The text also highlights the growing support for the far right in Europe and Slovakia, with extremists becoming louder and more aggressive, calling for greater vigilance.

The second post was published on January 27, 2022, on the occasion of International Holocaust Remembrance Day, reflecting on the current situation.

We Are Family (SME RODINA)

The Facebook posts of Boris Kollár, the leader of SME RODINA, are characterized by being shorter in text and focusing more on adding videos (especially recordings from press conferences and TV discussions), images with embedded descriptions, and sharing posts from other party members. Two of his posts referenced articles and his statements for the Hlavný denník portal, which was inaccessible

at the time of the case study due to the National Security Authority issuing a block order under Section 27b of the amended Act No. 69/2018 Coll. on Cyber Security. The page had previously regularly published disinformation and pro-Russian propaganda. On International Holocaust Remembrance Day, a post from the official SME RODINA Facebook page was shared, but it received relatively few interactions (95).

SMER–SD

Chairman of the political party SMER–SD, Robert Fico, published a total of 26 posts during the observed period, with 14 of them directly addressing the Agreement on Defence Cooperation between the government of the Slovak Republic and the government of the United States of America. These posts also had the highest level of engagement.

Robert Fico's posts had significantly higher reach compared to selected members of the governing parties during the same period. His posts in January 2022 had an average of 12,299 interactions.

Similarly, to February 2020, posts by another representative of the SMER–SD party, Ľuboš Blaha, were separately analysed in January 2022 due to his significant social media reach. Ľuboš Blaha published 55 posts during the observed period, with the post from January 4, 2022, receiving the most interactions – 68,575. On average, his posts had 15,087 interactions. The main theme dominating his Facebook communication was the Agreement on Defence Cooperation between the government of the Slovak Republic and the government of the United States of America, as well as accusations against political representatives for advancing U.S. interests. In 16 posts, he used terminology comparing current political and social events to fascism or Nazism, directly accusing the President or some coalition politicians of behaviour resembling that of Nazi Germany.

HLAS–Social Democracy (HLAS–SD)

Between the two observed periods, some members of SMER–SD had split from the party, so the posts of Peter Pellegrini were analysed considering that he was already serving as the leader of the political party HLAS–SD in January 2022.

During this period, Peter Pellegrini continued to communicate in a similar manner as he did in 2020. Several of his posts focused on his personal life, his work activities, the party's positions, and records from press briefings. Some posts expressed criticism towards the work of coalition parties or specific politicians, as well as the Agreement on Cooperation in the Area of Defence between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of the United States of America. However, their frequency and formulation were not as intense as in the case of SMER–SD.

Pellegrini also published a video during the International Day of Holocaust Remembrance. Apart from that post, he did not mention any form of extremism in further communication. He also did not address the issue of disinformation.

The official Facebook page of the HLAS–SD party largely mirrors the communication style of its leader.

Kotleba—People's Party Our Slovakia (ĽSNS)

When it comes to identifying extremism and radical elements in the communication of politicians and political parties, it is crucial to pay particular attention to ĽSNS. The party's communication is characterized by its multi-level approach, wherein information is conveyed differently to the general public compared to their own community of supporters. For the sake of objectivity in this case study, we will focus on the party's external communication through its public Facebook page and its members, rather than closed groups of party supporters on social media. However, the analysis will also consider the contextual adaptation of communication to local conditions, which the party often employs by creating smaller regional pages that are partially autonomous externally but maintain direct ties to the party. Although these subpages may have individually fewer followers, their combined promotional and influential power is significant.

Even ĽSNS leader Marian Kotleba did not have a particularly significant impact on Facebook. During the observed period, his post with the highest interactions received a total of 4,639. It was a 4-minute and 17-second video titled „Marian Kotleba: January 12, 2022, will be remembered as the day of government treason!" In the video, he accused government members of treason for allegedly approving three „inhumane, anti-national, and anti-state resolutions." These included: 1) approving a proposed amendment to the judicial map, where Kotleba accused government members of attempting to subordinate the judiciary to the government, 2) approving the wording of the Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Defence between the government of the Slovak Republic and the government of the United States of America, which he labelled as „occupational," warning of alleged threats of storing weapons of mass destruction on Slovak territory and endangering citizens, and 3) approving the modification of the COVID automat, which, according to him, would contribute to „further harassment" of citizens.

The topics mentioned in this post also had the highest representation in the party's communication on social media. The Facebook page „Kotlebovci–Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko" received the most interactions during the observed period for a post featuring a video of a Czech healthcare worker claiming that the number of COVID–19 cases was increasing due to overestimating the counts and falsely diagnosing some patients as COVID–19 positive even without a positive test result. According to her, this was motivated by incentives for healthcare workers working in COVID–19 departments. The entire video lasted 5 minutes and 51 seconds and

received a total of 3,832 interactions. An important indicator is also the number of views, which reached 52,708.

One reason for this is that although the reach of the post on the main page was not particularly significant, the video was also published on many other platforms and Facebook pages of regional branches of ĽSNS. However, it brought together the party's supporters in the region where the party originated and has a strong voter base.

While regional Facebook pages largely adhere to a similar rhetoric as the main page, discussions in the comments are often more heated. They also attempt to redirect their followers to other platforms. An example is a video titled „Okupačná zmluva s USA – časť 1: generálne dôvody na celkové odmietnutie zmluvy" (Occupational Agreement with the USA – Part 1: General reasons for rejecting the agreement), which was published on the Facebook page „Kotlebovci–Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko – oblasť Banská Bystrica, Brezno" on January 11, 2022. It had negligible reach and only 20 interactions on Facebook. However, by being published on various smaller pages that referenced the main source video on the „Kotlebovci" YouTube channel, the video's reach and view count multiplied. The video received a total of 13,361 views, and the discussion in the comments included not only supportive comments for ĽSNS but also links to disinformation media, accusations of treason against selected (mostly coalition) politicians, as well as profanity, insults, and even death threats.

Despite the direct death threat contained in a comment like „Pravda, pravda všetkých vlastizradcou zradkyňu treba povešat!!!" (True, true, all the traitors of the nation must be hanged!!!), which was posted by an anonymous user, it had already been on YouTube for three months at the time of writing this article. This occurred on an online platform that has established rules for use and communication and utilizes moderation mechanisms.

Republic (REPUBLIKA)

The Facebook page of the political party Republika, which separated from ĽSNS, was created less than a year before the second period studied. It was established on March 9, 2021, and has been an active communication channel. During the observed period, they posted a total of 108 updates. The page had an average of 7,469 followers, with a growing trend, although the interaction numbers remained relatively low. The party's topics were similar to ĽSNS but slightly broader in scope. Notably, they quoted politicians from other European Union countries in their Eurosceptic posts. The posts included statements from Jarosław Kaczyński, the leader of Poland's Law and Justice party, and Balázs Hidvéghi, a Hungarian MEP from the Fidesz party. They also shared excerpts from European politicians criticizing certain views and measures.

Milan Uhrík, on his Facebook account, published an open letter addressed to Russian Ambassador Igor Borisovich Bratčikov. The letter expressed gratitude for the cooperation between the Russian Federation and the Slovak Republic and expressed disagreement with the Agreement on Cooperation in Defence between the Slovak government and the United States government. The post included an image with the text „Milan Uhrík writes to the Russian Ambassador: Will Slovakia be a target of Russian missiles because of Naď?"

Most of the posts were civilized in content but often contained suggestive questions or implied causal relationships between various socio-political events in Slovakia and abroad. The posts that received the most interaction were those that directly called for action, including two out of the top three posts, which focused on expressing resistance through sharing or participating in protests. The fourth post, which had 18,155 interactions, featured the most provocative rhetoric during the observed period and summarized one of Milan Uhrík's speeches in the European Parliament.

Milan Uhrík's posts had a significant reach. During the observed period, his Facebook page had an average of 91,758 likes and 125,600 followers. It is also important to include another member of the Republika party, Milan Mazurek, who has a considerable presence on social media. His Facebook page had an average of 109,562 likes and 162,139 followers during the observed period.

Most of the posts shared common themes with the Republika Facebook page and Milan Uhrík's posts. However, Milan Mazurek regularly published recordings of discussions and statements on the Kulturblog portal. Kulturblog was previously linked to the ĽSNS party and faced criticism and blocking for spreading disinformation and extremist content.

The discussions on Kulturblog are politically oriented, with a consistent critique of liberalism. Several videos contain references targeting minorities, such as specific cases of violence allegedly committed by individuals of different ethnicities. They also criticize media for presenting only positive examples, express disapproval of high LGBTQ+ support in Nordic countries, and denounce laws criminalizing denial and approval of the Holocaust as dangerous censorship.

The topic of freedom of speech restrictions regularly appears in the videos, with a message at the bottom suggesting a move to the Telegram platform due to censorship concerns. Although Kulturblog's videos are still uploaded to YouTube and shared on Facebook, there is an increasing shift towards other platforms, although not yet dominant. At the time of writing, Kulturblog had 33,971 likes and 60,284 followers on Facebook, over 35,100 subscribers on YouTube, and over 9,300 subscribers on Telegram. Telegram has become a platform where extremist groups, particularly right-wing and Islamist extremists, are increasingly moving due to greater anonymity, less content control and blocking, and the ability to communicate more openly with a closed group of supporters while controlling new member acceptance. (Ebner, 2021)

Further monitored parties did not show significant signs of radicalization like SaS, where some posts also addressed disinformation and accused opposition MPs of intimidating people, mainly as a response to false information that was spreading at that time regarding the Agreement on Cooperation in Defence between the government of the Slovak Republic and the government of the United States of America. Another party was ZA ĽUDÍ, which did not show signs and manifestations of radicalism and populism. And among the other non-parliamentary political parties included in the case study, the party with the highest number of interactions during the monitored period was the Slovak National Party (4,765), followed by Progressive Slovakia (4,355) and KDH (1,759), reflecting the reach they had on the Facebook social network as well – Andrej Danko (15,136), Irena Bihariová (6,302), and Milan Majerský (1,487).

Comparison of policy contributions

The analysed time period between the two study periods, along with the development of the socio-political situation, contributed to changes in the thematic focus and communication style used by selected politicians and political parties in their posts. The communication of these entities on Facebook became more polarizing, influenced by external unprecedented events such as the COVID–19 pandemic and growing tensions related to the conflict in Ukraine, as well as internal disputes among political parties. The society itself started to react more intensively, particularly online, to the heightened communication style.

The results of the case study do not indicate an increase in openly extremist content in the posts of the subjects on Facebook between the monitored periods. However, the posts more regularly contained populist and radicalizing elements. Many of these posts were formulated as calls to action, such as urging people to participate in protests, which resulted in increased interactions and reach on social media platforms. This was reflected in a higher level of public response, with people mobilizing and participating in events such as the May 1, 2022 protest organized primarily by the SMER–SD party. However, these events also witnessed offensive statements and accusations against several members of the Slovak government and the president, leading to intervention by conflict resolution teams as one participant physically attacked a man who displayed a photograph of the murdered journalist Ján Kuciak. Several other events were organized in collaboration between political parties SMER–SD and ĽSNS or Republika.

Political parties connected to extremist entities increasingly utilize a strategy of communication similar to those used by like-minded groups abroad. They adopt a more moderate communication style in open forums but engage in more direct discussions with their supporters, employing similar narratives, symbolism, and positions as the movements from which they have evolved.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that due to declining voter preferences, some traditional parliamentary parties have begun to employ populist rhetoric and, in some cases, advocate or even promote extremist and nationalist political solutions. This study primarily analyzed the gradual transformation of online communication through the examination of specific statements made by political parties and their representatives (selected politicians) on Facebook. The case study revealed that the online communication of these political parties displayed populist elements that could influence people's social attitudes. While extremist elements were identified only in a minimal number of statements from standard political parties, they were also evident in posts from entities that are not generally considered extremist.

The comparison of political parties revealed several examples of a shift in their rhetoric. In the case of SMER–SD, there was a transition from using satirical elements in 2020 to direct accusations against political opponents in 2022. These accusations included allegations of fascist practices, such as the implementation of COVID–19 measures or promoting foreign interests. This shift in communication style was observed not only online but also during press conferences and protests organized by the party. It led to increased polarization and, in some cases, escalated aggression, including violent incidents and threats towards healthcare workers and volunteers involved in COVID–19 testing and prevention measures.

A parallel in content and style was observed between ĽSNS and Republika, considering them originally as one entity before Republika separated. While both periods showed elements of extremism, parties generally attempted to present a more moderate image on Facebook. However, they increasingly employed radicalizing and provocative elements, leading to hate speech and direct threats in comments by their supporters. Social media platforms have struggled to adequately respond to this type of content.

The political competition between parties, which persisted beyond the first observed period, also contributed to the radicalization of posts. Criticism of specific parties and politicians, including those within the same coalition, was recurrent. A specific trend in the second period was the accusation of coalition parties embracing fascism, allegedly reflected in the implementation of anti-pandemic measures, „harassment of the population," restrictions on freedom of speech, and censorship related to combating disinformation. Interestingly, members of ĽSNS, Republika, and even SMER–SD employed this narrative. Disinformation content was spread by multiple parties, including the opposition party SME RODINA, which shared posts from the disinformation outlet Hlavné správy. On the other hand, many political actors started addressing the issue of disinformation, its utilization by „alternative groups" (including extremist entities and parties), and the overall rise of extremism and radicalization.

The subsequent communication of followers and supporters on social media is particularly dangerous, as they comment on and share the posts, creating multiple lines of communication where people react to polarizing texts and topics. Under the influence of heightened emotions, this leads to the writing of hateful and

threatening comments. Similar trends have been observed abroad, prompting social media platforms to tighten usage conditions and content monitoring. Political entities have responded by expanding the number of platforms they use, shifting communication to platforms offering greater anonymity, and employing varying degrees of communication across different platforms.

While it is natural for political party communication to reflect societal and political events, the communication style and credibility of sources are crucial in determining whether public discourse remains substantive and constructive or veers towards polarization. Prolonged polarization, combined with an unfavourable social situation, acts as dangerous catalysts for radicalization. The abundance of conflicting information, which is challenging to verify in terms of truthfulness and sources, creates an environment that gradually blurs the line of acceptance for radical and extremist content and ideas.

Therefore, it is necessary to focus on finding comprehensive solutions that address the multifaceted nature of this problem and the interconnectedness of various societal phenomena, including the spread of disinformation, radicalization, and extremist content, as well as the adoption of polarizing narratives by traditional political parties and politicians.

Conclusion

The analysis of political posts reveals some interesting patterns and allows us to draw certain conclusions. Firstly, the party Republika, which separated from ĽSNS, emerged as a highly active communication entity on Facebook. Despite being relatively new, it quickly gained a growing number of followers and regularly published posts on a wide range of topics, often citing statements from politicians in other European Union countries to support their arguments.

Furthermore, the analysis includes other parties such as SMER–SD, which displayed some signs of radicalization in their posts by spreading disinformation and accusing opposition MPs of intimidating people.

In conclusion, the analysis of political posts suggests that Republika, SMER–SD, and other parties utilized various communication strategies, including citing foreign politicians, sharing excerpts from European politicians critical of certain opinions and measures, and using suggestive language and questions. The posts that encouraged action, particularly participation in protests, garnered the most interactions. The findings also indicate a shift towards alternative platforms like Telegram, as well as the importance of social media presence for political parties and their leaders in shaping public opinion. In conclusion, the article examines the communication styles of selected political parties and politicians on Facebook in Slovakia, focusing on elements of extremism, radicalization, and populism in their posts. The study compares two specific periods: the pre-election campaign in February 2020 and a period in January 2022 characterized by tension between Ukraine

and Russia, influenced by the COVID–19 pandemic. The findings indicate that the communication of these entities became more polarizing, with increased populist and radicalizing elements in their posts. While openly extremist content was minimal, the study reveals a shift in rhetoric among traditional parliamentary parties towards populist and nationalist political solutions. The analysis also identifies connections between political parties and extremist entities, with the adoption of similar communication strategies. The study highlights the potential influence of online communication on people's social attitudes and emphasizes the need for comprehensive solutions to address disinformation, radicalization, and extremist content, as well as the adoption of polarizing narratives by political parties.

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Notes

[1] This study was prepared within the framework of VEGA project no. 1/0578/23 „Cyber-social security threats in contemporary world: case study on threats on disinformation and emerging security threats in the societal context."
[2] Pellegriniho politická strana HLAS – sociálna demokracia bola na Ministerstve vnútra SR zaregis-trovaná 11. 9. 2020.

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OVERVIEW OF THE POSITIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LEADING POLITICAL PARTIES IN CROATIA IN DEALING WITH THE COVID–19 PANDEMIC

Ivica Kelam–Darija Rupčić Kelam

Introduction

The COVID–19 pandemic arrived in Croatia on February 26, 2020, when the first case was confirmed in Zagreb's capital city. The patient was a young man who had recently returned from Italy, which was at that time experiencing a surge in COVID–19 cases (Government of Croatia 2020). The Croatian Government immediately implemented measures to contain the spread of the virus, including quarantining the patient and his close contacts and increasing surveillance and testing. However, as the weeks went on, more and more cases were reported, and the Croatian Government introduced additional measures to control the outbreak. Finally, on March 11 2020, Croatia declared a national epidemic and imposed restrictions on public gatherings and events. These measures were later extended to include a nationwide lockdown from March 23 to May 4 2020. Despite these measures, the number of cases continued to rise throughout the spring and summer of 2020, with several outbreaks reported in various parts of the country. Therefore, the Croatian Government continued to adjust its response, introducing new measures and guidelines as needed to try to slow the spread of the virus.

Croatia started a mass vaccination campaign in December 2020 and the beginning of 2021, prioritising healthcare workers, the elderly, and other high-risk groups. As a result, as of September 2021, 50% of the population had been fully vaccinated, leading to a significant drop in new cases and deaths (World Health Organization 2021). The Croatian citizens, already tired of living in a pandemic, began

behaving like the coronavirus no longer existed. Although the end of the pandemic has not yet been officially declared, it has not been in the public's focus for a long time. The war in Ukraine and the fight against inflation have occupied the media space. Summarising the period of the pandemic in the Republic of Croatia and the behaviour of the ruling political elites, the pandemic had a disastrous effect on the social cohesion of society, destroying the already low trust of Croatian citizens in politicians.

Moreover, political structures used the pandemic to promote their goals under the guise of fighting it. In the paper, we will emphasise the process of the collapse of public trust in political structures, and what is even more dangerous is the loss of public trust in science, primarily medicine, a significant rise of various conspiracy theories, which further undermine the loss of trust in scientific truth and institutions. The paper consists of 4 parts. In the first part of the paper, we will analyse the introduction of the first lockdown and the political affair that began to undermine public confidence in the decisions of the Government and NCHFTCP. In the second part of the paper, we will look at the Parliamentary elections 2020 in the context of the COVID–19 pandemic and the further loss of public trust in politics. In the third part, we will explain the destruction of the public's trust using the example of two funerals. In the fourth final part, we will look at the role of opposition parties in undermining public trust in institutions. In conclusion, we will explain the consequences of the pandemic on the social cohesion of Croatian society and, consequently, the role and responsibility of the political parties led by the HDZ.

The brief history of the COVID–19 pandemic in Croatia – from the idyll to the loss of public trust

Media monitoring of the COVID–19 pandemic in Croatia began at the end of 2019 when the first cases of a new unknown disease were recorded in the Chinese province of Wuhan. The tremendous increase in interest in the coronavirus in Croatia followed when the number of infected people increased drastically in Italy. As Italy is not far from Croatia, the danger of COVID–19 began to be treated as a real risk and not an abstract danger that happens elsewhere. When it became evident that the importation of the virus into Croatia, often accompanied by the adjective "deadly" in the media, was inevitable, the preparation of the Croatian health system to fight the virus intensified, and citizens began stockpiling food (Žažar 2022). The executive branch headed by the Prime Minister of the Government of Croatia, Andrej Plenkovic, responded to the possibility of the emergence of the COVID–19 pandemic in Croatia by establishing the „National Crisis Headquarters for the Coronavirus Pandemic" (further NCHFTCP), the central entity in charge of dealing with the COVID–19 pandemic. NCHFTCP has become a place for crafting strategic responses and from where all key activities are directed. Davor Božinović,

the Minister of the Interior, was appointed the head of NCHFTCP. The other members were the Minister of Health Vili Beroš, chief epidemiologist and Director of the Croatian Institute of Public Health Krunoslav Capak, and Director of the University Hospital for Infectious Diseases (Zagreb) Alenka Markotić. It is important to note that they were also members of the ruling HDZ political party, which will be immediately visible in their actions. It is important to note that although a state of emergency was not declared in Croatia due to the COVID–19 pandemic, the NCHFTCP became an institution that made critical decisions about the lives of all Croatian citizens during the pandemic, albeit of very questionable legality.[1] At the beginning of the lockdown, prime minister Andrej Plenkovic's statement on March 13 is illustrative: „We are at war with the virus, panic and socio-economic effects of this pandemic" (Index hr, 2020). The lockdown is mainly characterised by general closure, the slowing down and cessation of numerous economic and social activities, the introduction of restrictions on movements and recommendations about physical distancing. One of the drastic measures introduced was the ban on leaving the county, and all those who needed to go to another county had to ask for special permits from the NCHFTCP.[2]

It is worth mentioning that according to research conducted by the University of Oxford, COVID–19 government response tracker, at one time during March 2020, Croatia was the country that took the most restrictive measures in Europe (Večernji.hr 2020). After introducing the lockdown, NCHFTCP held daily conferences for the public, with careful and clear professional explanations of the situation regarding the spread of the virus and the number of infected people. This had the effect of reducing the fear of the virus among ordinary citizens. The public's positive reaction to the decisively introduced lockdown is followed by unprecedented, almost plebiscite trust in state institutions, so with the recent announcement of generous programs for economic stabilisation and saving jobs, the Government is winning unprecedented support from citizens, as can be seen from the text of journalist Jelena Lovrić. „The most surprising thing is the spectacular leap of social optimism (…) in the conditions of a difficult, never-greater health, economic and social drama (…) The Government has never enjoyed such undivided, almost plebiscite support (…) On the wings of the crisis, the HDZ emerged again as the strongest party in the country, and the Minister of Health Beroš, an icon of the fight against the virus, became the most popular politician in Croatia in a month" (Lovrić 2020). The tremendous public trust in the way the political authorities deal with the COVID–19 pandemic is confirmed by a public survey conducted at the end of March by Dnevnik Nova TV showed that 94% of the respondents supported the Government in the implementation of public health measures, and 63% thought our measures were better than those in the rest of the E.U. (Telegram 2020). The highlight of the idyllic period between the public and the members of the NCHFTCP happened when some of the members of NCHFTCP began to be perceived in public almost as some superheroes who defend the entire nation from the supervillain embodied in the coronavirus.

A prominent example was the famous case of the drawing of a boy who drew Vili Beroš as Superman, Krunoslav Capak as Batman, Davor Božinović as Flash Gordon and Alenka Markotić as Wonderwoman. The boy sent his drawings to the NCHFTCP along with a letter of thanks as encouragement for the further fight against the COVID–19 pandemic. Although pathetic, this case had a positive impact through media reports in raising a positive attitude of the public toward the official and epidemiological measures that were in force at the time (Jutarnji. hr 2020a).

One of the consequences of the understanding between the Government and the citizens of Croatia led to the emergence of a widespread thesis that it is the socialist heritage (Erceg 2020), including mass vaccination, public health, efficiency in the fight against infections takes the reason for the slow spread of the pandemic and the low death rate in post-socialist countries, including Croatia (Al-Jazeera 2020) precisely. Furthermore, another thesis was launched that the speed and effectiveness of the lockdown, which was followed in some countries, including Croatia, by the excellent reaction of the population, was a direct consequence of the population's habituation to the *socialist mentality*, which includes various restrictions and limitations of human and civil rights by the state. Unfortunately, it will later turn out that the high mortality in post-socialist countries (including Croatia) compared to the European average will completely deny these theses mentioned above (Kostanic 2021).

If we had to mark the critical moment in which the irreversible process of losing public confidence in the decisions of the Government of Croatia and NCHFTCP began, then it would undoubtedly be the holding of the ancient traditional religious manifestation Za križem (Behind the Cross) a procession through the central part of the island of Hvar in Dalmatia, which took place on the 9th and the 10th of April, 2020. Even though the NCHFTCP had banned all religious gatherings almost a month before, it allowed this procession during the peak of the coronavirus pandemic in Croatia. The media exposed the ridiculous explanations of the officials who denied that it was against the established epidemiological measures and pointed out are also interesting that Prime Minister Andrej Plenković and Minister of Health Vili Beroš have family roots in Hvar (Tomšić 2020; Luzar 2020).

The public reacted with disbelief to this event, wondering if Croatia had double rules. Many interpret that the NCHFTCP's permission to hold the procession on Hvar is not only a concession and favour to the Church but also a "message of non-solidarity" (Gruenfelder 2020). Nevertheless, this event showed that the Catholic Church has a privileged role in Croatia, primarily because of its undoubted historical role in promoting the HDZ party among the faithful. It is worth noting only as an indicator that a few months later, the Christian Brotherhood of Jelsa (the main organiser of the manifestation on the island of Hvar Behind the Cross) gave Prime Minister Plenković and the NCHFTCP an official public charter of gratitude (Grund 2020).

The event that probably most damaged the reputation of the Government and NCHFTCP and further undermined public confidence was the Government's decision to allow a mass gathering during the Vukovar Victims' Memorial Day 1991 on November 18, 2020, during the second wave of the pandemic in Croatia. Whereby they gave ridiculous excuses and explanations for the non-observance of epidemiological measures. Thus, the NCHFTCP stated in its decision to allow gatherings that a maximum of 500 people are allowed who march very cautiously while maintaining appropriate social distance. However, several thousand people gathered, disregarding epidemiological regulations or rules. On the contrary, it turned out that there were around 10 000 people, many of them gathering at official masses, with most of the state leadership, including Prime Minister Andrej Plenković, minister of Health Vili Beroš and almost all ministers of the Government (P. N. 2020). Unlike other countries that, due to the pandemic and epidemiological restrictions, had very modest celebrations on their national holidays or cancelled them entirely. In Croatia, 10,000 people gathered in one place in Vukovar, even though gatherings of more than 25 people were strictly prohibited at the same time (Duhaček 2020a). No wonder the public was appalled and outraged, and heavy criticism followed, including that of Croatian President Zoran Milanović, who publicly pointed out the incredible hypocrisy and violation of their own decisions by Prime Minister Andrej Plenković and the Government. (Indeks vijesti 2020a). At the same time, Prime Minister Plenković and other ministers pretended to know nothing about violating epidemiological regulations and were utterly ignorant of these events. For example, Minister Božinović, head of the NCHFTCP, commenting on the mass non-compliance with the measures in Vukovar, said that the measures were well thought out, and fewer people were than ever. However, there were at least 10,000 people, and according to Božinović, "Anything else in the sense of prohibition and repression would send would give the wrong picture" (Duhaček 2020b).

Parliamentary elections 2020 in the context of the COVID–I9 pandemic – further loss of public trust in politics

After the lifting of lockdown measures at the beginning of May 2020 and the opening of Croatia to foreign tourists. Prime Minister Andrej Plenković HDZ announcing that the country would hold its parliamentary elections on July 5 emphasised: "[A]fter showing in recent months how to deal with the coronavirus pandemic, [...] and all the economic challenges Croatia faces in the future, the new mandate of the future Parliament and Government should be focused on the economic recovery of the country [...] The epidemiological situation in Croatia is such that we have practically single-digit numbers of infected people, and with very responsible behaviour of all fellow citizens, we will have the opportunity to organise elections [...] (VPP/Hina 2020). Political scientist Čepo, commenting on the calling of parliamentary elections, points out: "For example, any criticism of the

NCHFTCP and the government is difficult, especially in a discourse in which the fight against the virus is identified with war because to criticise a leader in war means to be against, and therefore to be an enemy. Also, the pandemic will make it impossible to talk about some big problems of the HDZ and the government because they have become less interesting compared to what and how it is being done in the 'war' against the virus. Above all, I am referring to the huge corruption and other affairs of HDZ members" (Duhaček 2020c). Prime Minister Andrej Plenković, during the parliamentary election campaign, declared victory over coronavirus and stated: „Croatia has won COVID–19, this Government has won COVID–19, we have overcome the epidemic. What would it be like in the atmosphere in Croatia if we had 3000 dead? Moreover, it could have happened. Instead, we managed to limit the number of infected and the number of dead, and I am sorry for every life" (Indeks Vijesti 2020b). The following data confirm that this statement is meaningless, made for the election campaign, and has no contact with reality. According to the official data of the Ministry of Health, as of April 5, 2023, a total of 18,069 people died in Croatia due to the coronavirus (Ministry of Health 2023). All in all, six times more Croatian citizens have died from the coronavirus in Croatia compared to the fearmongering statement of Andrej Plenković from 2020. Unfortunately, these data about the number of deaths only confirms the disastrous management of the COVID–19 pandemic in Croatia, for which Prime Minister Andrej Plenković and his colleagues in the Government and NCHFTCP are most responsible.

According to some scientists, the reason for holding the elections earlier than planned, while most other countries were postponing elections, was officially grounded on the belief that the virus would spread more slowly during the summer and that a second wave of the pandemic would hit the country in autumn. Therefore it would be wiser to carry out the elections in the summer. However, most would agree that the governing HDZ's plan to swiftly capitalise on its arguably successful handling of the first wave of the pandemic by holding the elections before it became apparent how much the lockdown had hurt the Croatian economy (Čepo–Petrović–Karlović, 2020).

Furthermore, before it became evident that the HDZ had adapted the entire anti-pandemic policy to its own needs, thus, the official motto of the HDZ pre-election campaign was Safe Croatia, alluding to the fact that they led the country successfully and safely through the first wave of the pandemic (Čepo–Petrović–Karlović 2020). HDZ's election tactics proved successful, and HDZ was the relative winner of the parliamentary elections and, with the help of coalition partners, formed a new government with the new-old Prime Minister Andrej Plenković. It is interesting to mention that the most significant number of preferential votes won by Vili Beroš, Minister of Health and a public face of NCHFTCP, won in his electoral constituency. Ultimately, Beroš received 35,678 preferential votes, even more than Prime Minister Andrej Plenković, who won 32,208 preferential votes in his district (Izbori.hr 2020). Of course, this number of preferential votes directly results from the public's positive perception that Minister of Health Vili Beroš had at the be-

ginning of the pandemic, including the period of the parliamentary elections. Of course, after the election, the situation will change dramatically, and Beroš, the nation's hero, will soon become the object of mockery and public anger because of all the failures and wrong decisions made by the Croatian Government and NCHFTCP. The loss of public trust in Minister Beroš is evident in public ratings. From April to September 2020, „Beroš's drop in ratings became a phenomenon; that man slipped from 30 to 3 per cent in 6 months" (Frlan Gašparović 2020) and, from the most beloved became a most despised politician in Croatia.

The cautionary tale of two funerals

Two of the most shameful cases of blatant disrespect for prescribed epidemiological measures that destroyed the public's trust occurred in the second year of the COVID−19 pandemic and thus contributed to the feeling of complete disrespect of the elites towards the public. It happened during two funerals. The first was the funeral of Miroslav Tuđman, the son of the first president of Croatia and a member of HDZ, the leading and ruling political party in Croatia. Regardless of the currently valid epidemiological measures that have been in force since January 29, 2021, which stated that: "A maximum of 25 people can be present at funerals, last farewells and urn laying, condolences to the bereaved must not be expressed through close contact, and cemetery administrations are obliged to monitor compliance with anti-epidemic measures" (Lexpera 2022). At least 100 people attended the funeral of Miroslav Tuđman on January 31 (Telegram 2021). In times when people were emotionally disturbed because they could not attend the funerals of those due to the measures mentioned above, the funeral of a prominent member of a leading political party seemed to have no visible restrictions. To make matters worse, the entire state leadership was present, including Prime Minister Andrej Plenković (HDZ), Speaker of the Parliament Gordan Jandroković (HDZ), and many others. The shame of the event does not stem only from the fact that there was no express apology or regret from government officials.

On the contrary: they tried to justify the event by explaining that they adhered to epidemiological measures and that everything was adequately organised (HINA, 2021a). It was offensive and deeply frustrating for everyone who wanted to – obey the epidemiological measures – attend the funeral of their family members, friends, or colleagues. The hypocrisy of the political leadership was fully exposed and undermined public trust.

If the funeral of Miroslav Tuđman caused public indignation due to non-compliance with epidemiological measures, then the funeral of Milan Bandić, the mayor of the Croatian capital Zagreb controversial politician, deepened, and probably wholly destroyed, the public's trust in the imposed epidemiological restrictions. However, the mentioned epidemiological limit of a maximum of 25 people present at the funeral was in effect on March 3, when thousands came to the mayor's

funeral. The entire state leadership was present, including Prime Minister Andrej Plenković, most of the ministers in the Government, many members of parliament, other politicians, celebrities and public figures (Index.hr 2021). Analysing this funeral and its impact on public opinion in Croatia, it is difficult to say whether the dominant feeling among the public was indignation or some kind of resignation. The fact that over 5,000 people gathered at the funeral causes disbelief that such a thing is possible, such a level of non-compliance with epidemiological restrictions.

Nevertheless, even more worrying is the complete loss of trust in public officials, their authority, and the legality of prescribed epidemiological measures. The selectiveness of authorities lost all sense of order and planned activity for fighting the pandemic in their adherence to the ongoing measures. The arbitrariness of leading politicians and members of NCHFTCP reflected a blatant injustice and dishonesty towards other members of society. People felt insulted, betrayed and disrespected because they were not treated as equal members of society (Eterović, 2022). The opposition representative in the Croatian parliament, Mirela Ahmetović, best expressed the great indignation of the general public: "Today, all Croatian citizens are once again treated as idiots. While they send their loved ones off following the NCHFTCP measures of up to 25 people to the funeral, the elites once again say they are above those they imposed restrictions on. This country is not equal for everyone, neither for the living nor for the dead" (Jutarnji.hr 2021)

On the one hand, the justifications for gathering so many people at a funeral were utterly ridiculous. For example, the Minister of Health, Vili Beroš, tried to justify the presence of so many people at the funeral by claiming that "the virus is not a long jump champion" (tportal.hr, 2021). Although it was a blatant and massive violation of epidemiological measures, the judiciary and the police did not sanction those responsible for organising the funeral. On the contrary, they made several procedural errors, and several official reports for non-compliance with epidemiological measures were rejected (Pandžić 2021). Let us mention that just over a month after the funeral of Zagreb Mayor Milan Bandić, Prince Phillip, the husband of Queen Elizabeth II of England, died. According to current epidemiological measures, Prince Phillip's funeral was very modest, in a strict family circle. Without any doubt, this made the Croatian citizen's discontent more evident, and the journalists in Croatia reacted immediately, making clear parallels between those funerals and conduct, further underscoring citizens' dissatisfaction and indignation with the situation with (non)compliance with epidemiological measures in Croatia (Paraf 2021).

The role of opposition parties in undermining public trust in institutions

Although the HDZ, as a party in power, bears a great deal of responsibility for the loss of citizens' trust in institutions, below we present examples of opposition politicians who, with their statements and statuses on social networks, contribute to the additional loss of citizens' trust in institutions. Opposition parties in Croatia primarily made a profile in their justified criticism of managing the COVID–19 pandemic. However, with their anti-vaxxer stance, some opposition parties further deepened the public's mistrust of political structures and institutions. In this context, we will look at the activities of the two right-wing opposition parties in Croatia, MOST (the bridge) and Domovinski pokret (the Homeland Movement), characterised by extreme populism. Finally, let us mention the example of Marin Miletić, a member of the Croatian parliament of the right-wing clerical political party MOST, who uses social networks to spread distrust and fear of vaccines and thus manipulates the masses.

Miletić's primary occupation is as a Catholic religious teacher, and in his views, he refers to the Catholic faith while promoting nume-rous conspiracy theories and misinforming the Croatian public. In June 2021, just at the time when public interest in vaccination against COVID–19 began to decline dramatically, Marin Miletić published several posts on social networks, primarily videos, in which he questioned the safety and effectiveness of the vaccine against COVID–19. With his public posts on social networks and statements, Miletić encourages people, mainly the younger population, to refuse vaccination, portraying a personal decision as an act of resistance to the state system (Vidov 2021a). In addition to spreading conspiracy theories and instilling fear in the Croatian public, the MOST party started collecting signatures for the referendum in early December 2021 with the goal defined by the parliamentary representative Marija Selak Raspudić at a press conference in front of Most's stand on Zagreb's main square „We started collecting signatures for this decisive referendum on taking away the powers of the NCHFTCP, restoring democracy and abolishing illegal covid certificates" (HINA 2021b).

Although in the end, MOST collected a sufficient number of citizens' signatures to call a referendum on the abolition of the NCHFTCP and covid certificates, the ruling party HDZ completely ignored the citizens' signatures for the referendum for months and thus further undermined faith in democratic procedures in Croatia. Finally, the Constitutional Court resolved the whole situation, which decided that the referendum questions of Most were not in accordance with the Constitution and concluded this MOST initiative (The Constitutional Court 2022). Although the referendum initiative did not succeed, MOST brought a significant increase in popularity among the citizens and became the third most popular party in Croatia since they profiled themselves populistically as defenders of the little man in the fight against bureaucracy and corrupt Government. The destructive political activity of MOST was perfectly summed up by Marko Luka Zubčić: „MOST spread mistrust towards vaccines and national and international institutions. They promote old ideas of

"cleansing" the political space from enemies of the "real" people – political opponents become traitors involved in a conspiracy against Croatia, while the members of the MOST party are ordinary people who respond to the call to fight for the freedom of Croatia" (Zubčić 2022).

In addition to the MOST party, in the context of the spread of conspiracy theories and the destruction of public trust, it is also necessary to highlight the activities of the right-wing party Domovinski pokret, in particular Stephen Nikola Bartulica, Member of Parliament and President of the Parliamentary Club of Domovinski pokret, should be singled out. Bartulica came into the public spotlight when he published an unfounded claim that forced mass vaccination of children is being prepared, i.e. that the state is preparing to vaccinate children en masse without the consent of their parents: „Capak's deputy Ivana Pavić-Šimetin announced today the mass vaccination of children. It will not go that way without parental consent, and I am the first to express my opposition to this decision. I argue that from the beginning, hysteria about the Chinese virus has been dangerous and very harmful, especially for our children. Unfortunately, of the total number of deaths in Croatia, six are children under the age of 19, confirming that this disease is not a threat to minors. Such pressures are sure to provoke great and justified resistance from parents. Now they would impose the vaccination of children who are not a risk group in any way!"(Vidov 2021b). However, Pavić-Šimetin never said that the state was already preparing for any mass vaccination of children, but only that it was preparing for that possibility. More importantly, Pavić-Šimetin did not say that the vaccination of children would be mandatory or that it would be carried out against the wishes of the parents. Vaccination against COVID–19 in Croatia was voluntary. After stirring up the public with his interpretation of the mass vaccination of children, Bartulica declared himself not an anti-vaccine but shifted the responsibility to the politicians in power: "I am not like that. I am for freedom, and if the people do not want to be vaccinated, it is up to politicians who have failed to convince them of that" (HINA 2021c). Bartulica does not understand that he is responsible to the Croatian public as a politician and member of parliament. This spread of false news does not help the vaccination campaign in Croatia. It is especially worrying that Miletić and Bartulica are prominent politicians – and yet, with their statements, they systematically undermine the public's trust in institutions, intending to score cheap political points.

Is there any trust left in institutions in Croatia

According to the research, in the last few decades, modern democratic states have faced a significant decline in citizens' trust in institutions (Boda–Medve-Balint 2014; Gronlund–Setala 2012; Van der Meer 2017). This decline in citizens' trust in institutions is evident in the former communist countries of Eastern Europe. Moreover, the decline was further intensified and accelerated by the economic crisis in

2008, as citizens felt abandoned by the state due to austerity measures. According to Henjak, this situation called into question the mere mandate of the state because democratic political regimes "require at least the tacit consent and passive support of citizens' democratic political institutions" (2017: 344). The issue of low levels of citizens' trust in institutions is a significant problem in most democratic countries and undoubtedly not inherent only to post-communistic states.

Nevertheless, researchers point out that post-communist countries are marked by considerably high levels of public discontent with the democratic system of government as such (Boda–Medve-Balint 2020; Andrews; Jilke; Van de Walle 2014; Ejrnæs 2016; Lipps; Schraff 2020). A lack of trust in political institutions is a danger for the country because it can lead to a democratic deficit and a lack of support for government policies aimed at solving existing social problems, as shown in the paper in the case of Croatia during the COVID–19 pandemic. The fundamental prerequisite for the loss of trust of Croatian citizens in the COVID–19 pandemic is made possible by the fact that Croatian citizens have a long history of low levels of trust in institutions of representative democracy such as parliament, government and political parties (Baloban–Rimac 1998; Rimac 2000). The reason for such an attitude of Croatian citizens is that Croatia, like other post-communist countries, is faced with a high level of corruption, a low level of political literacy, economic deprivation, and social inequalities, but also high polarisation and political division based on predominantly ideological differences (Henjak 2017; Sekulić 2016; Šiber 1998). Štulhofer, in his research, points out that a high level of perception of corruption could be a reason for low levels of institutional trust, stating: "fragmentation of trust in institutions was found to be the increasing public perception of corruption among civil servants" (2004: 83–84).

Moreover, several studies have been conducted on the institutional trust of young people in Croatia (Ilišin–Gvozdanović–Potočnik 2018; Gvozdanović 2014, 2015; Franc–Međugorac 2015). The research results confirm that young people in Croatia show great institutional mistrust. What leads to "an increase in criticism and distrust towards political institutions, regardless of their effectiveness, it can be assumed that there will be no "recovery" of political trust in Croatia anytime soon. In addition, the strong social stratification, the growth of unemployment, the spread of corruption and clientelism, the inequality of educational opportunities and the collapse of social security, which have been burdening Croatian society for two decades, significantly complicate the social integration of young people and reduce their life chances" (Gvozdanović 2014: 24). In conclusion, we will refer to the research *Surviving and living – Croatian society at the time of the corona crisis.* Furthermore, research into the mental health and social consequences of Croatian citizens facing the coronavirus pandemic was conducted on a national probabilistic sample at the end of August and September 2020 was the first of this kind conducted in Croatia during the pandemic. The results showed that trust in persons, institutions and organisations is highest in family members (score 8.35 out of 10), very low in NCHFTCP (score 3.95 out of 10) and lowest in political parties (score 2.18

out of 10). Furthermore, the research showed a worrying level of public distrust in political parties and institutions like NCHFTCP (Čorkalo et al. 2020). From all of the above, it is unsurprising that the COVID–19 pandemic has irreversibly worsened this long-standing problem of a low level of institutional trust in Croatia.

Conclusion

During the pandemic, Croatia experienced a decline in public trust in political institutions. The ruling party HDZ is primarily responsible. At the very beginning of the pandemic in the spring and summer of 2020, it became apparent that the management of the health crisis in Croatia is guided by an ad hoc normative apparatus, which is unevenly implemented, and the adopted decisions are often guided by political interests and not the public's welfare. This conclusion was confirmed by the Minister of Health Beroš himself in an interview in the summer of 2020 when he said, "NCHFTCP is a political body, but none of its decisions was politically motivated" (Jutarnji 2020b). Unfortunately, those political calculations prevailed over the public interest despite Beroš's statement that the decisions were not politically motivated. As can be seen from our analysis, the decisions made by the NCHFTCP, after initially relying on the opinion of experts at the beginning of the pandemic, quickly became fully politically motivated to bring political benefits to the ruling HDZ party and the government.

The results of the politicisation of NCHFTCP activities are visible, for example, in the Government's attitude towards vaccination, since the Government has never prescribed mandatory vaccination for entering closed spaces, justifying its decision with NCHFTCP recommendations. However, entry into public institutions became conditional on possession of a Covid pass in the second half of 2021 after the population vaccination campaign stopped utterly. The result is one of the lowest levels of population vaccination in the E.U. One of the consequences of the loss of public trust is the significant increase in conspiracy theories and the profiling of populist parties such as MOST and Domovinski pokret, which sought to profit from the public's distrust of institutions. The impact of the COVID–19 pandemic in Croatia has led to a phenomenon known in Western countries as „authoritarian populism". (Peters 2017; Bugarič 2019). In Croatian politics, „authoritarian populism" was not so visible to the general public, but the COVID–19 pandemic brought this strange mixture of anti-expert, anti-elite, Eurosceptic, and even conspiracy theories into the spotlight. Parliament members of the MOST party emphasised such discussions the most and successfully exploited public dissatisfaction and deepened public distrust in political parties in Croatia. In conclusion, the COVID–19 pandemic has shown that the current crisis of public distrust towards political structures and institutions is deeply rooted in public perception. Unfortunately, the fight against the COVID–19 pandemic by the NCHFTCP and the Government and the measures adopted further deepened public distrust. The COVID–19 pandemic

will remain in Croatian history as an example of how a public health crisis can turn into a decisive blow to democracy due to the particular political interests of the ruling HDZ party and dramatically reduce the already deeply shaken public trust in institutions. One of the biggest victims of the COVID–19 pandemic, in addition to over 18,000 dead Croatian citizens from the coronavirus, is the irretrievably lost public trust in experts and scientists. Let us hope that the Croatian public will learn from the pandemic experience, and next time they will not allow political structures to take precedence over experts and scientists in creating solutions to a new crisis.

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Notes

[1] The legitimacy of the NCHFTCP has been hotly debated by the public since its inception. Several constitutional lawsuits were launched that questioned the legitimacy of the NCHFTCP, which was finally declared by the Constitutional Court, which legalized all decisions of the NCHFTCP, but a good part of the public interpreted the decision of the Constitutional Court as another sign of the general politicization of court decisions in Croatia. See more about this topic: Bačić Selanec, N. (2021). COVID–19 and the Rule of Law in Croatia: Majoritarian or Constitutional Democracy? https://verfassungsblog.de/Covid–19-and-the-rule-of-law-in-croatia-majoritarian-or-constitutional-democracy/, accessed 16. 3. 2023.

[2] This measure was particularly traumatic for the author of this paper since his old and sick parents lived in another county. Although I received permits to leave the county for a valid reason, it was a humiliating experience in my own country to be stopped and questioned by the police at the border of the counties just because I wanted to go help my elderly parents.
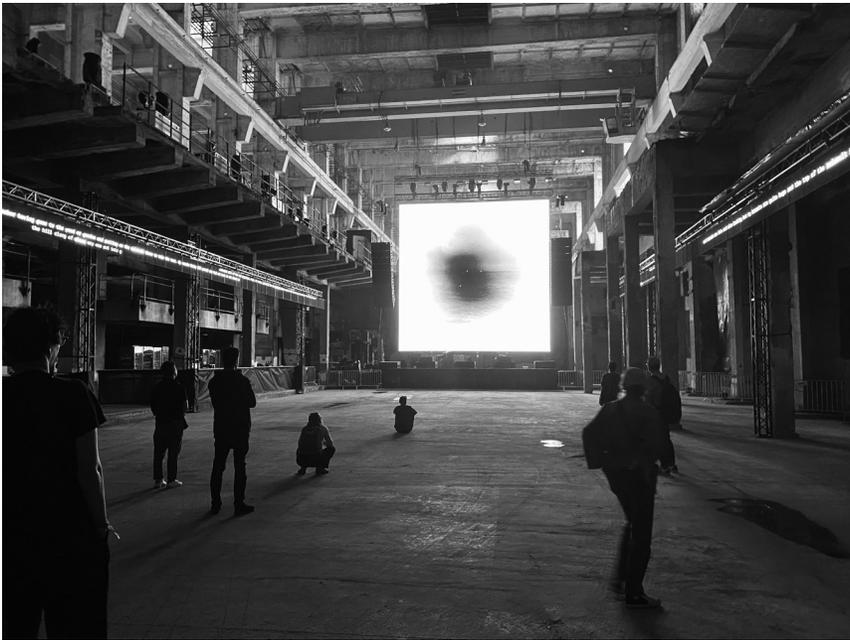
Photo/István Péter Németh

The Rise and Fall of Digital Parties — Searching for a Common Model

Radu Carp

◼ On 4th of May 2021 the leader of Podemos, the former MP Pablo Iglesias, has announced that he will leave politics, after the Popular Party won the Madrid regional elections. Former lecturer of political science at the Complutense University of Madrid, he declared that it is proud to led "a project that has changed the history of our country".

Iglesias was in fact right. In the 9 years since it emerged in January 2014 on the Spanish political stage this left – oriented populist party has radically changed the Spanish politics.

Indignados movement[1] emerged because of the austerity measures promoted by the former center – right government of Zapatero. Everywhere in Spain protests have been organized against the political establishment. The leaders of this movement have pretended that they are nor right, neither left oriented but they are "coming from above to reach the top" and that "democracy is in fact a dictatorship of two parties".

Pablo Iglesias, at the beginning of his academic career, started to discuss about the emergence of a new political party. In fact, Iglesias was initially a member of the Spanish Communist Party. He founded Podemos ("we can") in order to show the similarity with Obama slogan "yes we can". Iglesias thought that the Spanish Communist Party betrayed Marx ideals and approached itself to the left-oriented populists of Latin America from that period, including Hugo Chavez in Venezuela

and Evo Morales in Bolivia. Together with his colleague from Complutense at that time, Iñigo Errejón, Iglesias denounced the conflict between *"la gente"* and *"la casta"*, between elites and the people. This is the favorite cleavage of populists. According to Iglesias, the traditional right – left divide has gone, being replaced with this new one. His new party had as task to focus on "the people who is not represented by the dominant political castes.

"The dominant political caste", namely the traditional right and left oriented political parties determined in fact the final defeat of Iglesias and his retirement from the political life.

Podemos attracted first the young people from great metropolitan areas. Madrid and Barcelona elected as mayors Podemos candidates. Spain transformed itself rapidly from a bipartite system to a multiparty one. Nevertheless, Podemos did not succeeded to replace the Spanish socialists of PSOE, even if Iglesias used many times the term *sorpasso* (taking over – of the left electorate). Syriza had more success to dislocate the Greek traditional left represented by PASOK,[2] although since the 2019 elections it seems that Syriza left the gained quasi-monopoly of the left. At some point, in 2015 Iglesias participated in a Syriza rally in Athens, declaring together with Tsipras on the stage that "first we take Athens and then Madrid" (inspired by the Leonard Cohen song, "First we take Manhattan, then we take Berlin"). Syriza came to power in Greece and established itself as a mainstream party, being now the most important part of the opposition to the current right-wing Mitsotakis government.[3] Podemos was in power after the November 2019 elections, gaining 12,8% of the votes and becoming part of the Sanchez II government together with PSOE, the first multi-party cabinet after Spain returned to democracy. Iglesias has benn replaced as Podemos leader by Ione Bellara Urteaga who currently serves as Minister of Social Rights and 2030 Agenda. The latest 2022 local elections witnessed a massive decline of Podemos, the party won only 3 out of 109 places in Andalusia and 1 out of 81 places in Castila y Leon. Therefore, the Podemos inheritance from Iglesias era is a complete failure. As Podemos slowly disappears, another populist outfit, Vox, extreme-right oriented, emerged.

What happened in Greece (2019) and Spain (2021) was followed by what happened in Italy (2022).

After a brilliant debut in Italian politics, a result of 32,7% at the Parliament elections in 2018 and after being part of the government from 2018 to 2022, *MoVimento 5 stelle* (M5S) gained only 15,4% at the 2022 Parliament elections, more than half decrease from previous results. Electing in August 2021 the former prime minister Giuseppe Conte as leader of M5S did not help so much. A leading member of M5S said about the current situation that "M5S is like former Yugoslavia after the death of Tito, different factions are fighting inside the party."

Initially an anti-system party that all the Italian parties were afraid, M5S is now in a bad position. While part of the Draghi government, M5S splits along the lines of the Ukraine war. Giuseppe Conte has been a supporter of a "diplomatic solution" to the Ukraine war, while Luigi Di Maio, the Foreign Affairs minister, has

been a supporter of the government policy of supporting Ukraine and delivering weapons to protect itself from the Russian invasion. As a result, Di Maio formed a new political group, *Insieme per il future (Together for the Future)*, together with 61 parliamentarians, but the split reflects also the internal power struggle.[4] This group lasted until the 2022 Parliament elections and ceased to exist in October 2022, but the split between Conte and Di Maio still exist. In the European Parliament, after gaining 14 seats in 2019,[5] M5S has now only 6, its members migrated to the European People's Party, Renew Europe or the Greens. Currently, M5S after a failed negotiation with the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in 2021,[6] is part of the Non-Inscrits group. The fact that M5S wanted to be part of a European political party that represent the traditional left is an unexpected denouement for a party that labeled himself as an anti-establishment party. Currently M5S shows a slight increase in the polls, having almost 18% in February 2023, more than 3% more than in the September 2022 parliamentary elections.[7]

Haw this return to the traditional left - right cleavage has been possible after the leaders of Podemos, M5S and Syriza gave many times assurances that this cleavage is part of history? Hw can we explain the emergence of all these parties and their rapid decline? What have iu common these parties, apart from the fact that they belong to the left-wing populism?[8]

We may find an explanation by using political science instruments. Paulo Gerbaudo in his seminal work *The digital party. Political organization and online democracy* from 2019[9] consider that we are in the era of the digital parties that promise a radical change of democracy. The keywords of these parties are: transparence, reaction, change, connection, community. In this category we may place Podemos, M5S, *La France Insoumise* of Jean-Luc Mélenchon and the constellation of Pirate parties that had a meteoric appearance after the 2008 financial crisis. These parties propose a new model of internal political organization, ultra-democratically. All of them are promising an intense political participation inside and outside the party, in the society. The 2008 financial crisis generated a very high demand for transforming the political participation. Democratic societies witnessed a post-crisis evolution, what Paolo Gerbaudo call "connected outsiders." These are people with an Internet access more than the average, they are sensitive to the economic and social problems, have a very high expectation level from the politicians and they are deeply disappointed of what is going on in the political life. The digital parties consider themselves to be the exponents of this social category, long time quiet. According to Gerbaudo, at the beginning we had mass parties, after that in the beginning of the 1990s we had "television parties," namely the parties that put in the foreground media appearances, even without any substance (the first such a party has been Forza Italia of Silvio Berlusconi). Because the television has been replaced by the big tech oligopolies like Facebook or Twitter, the favorable conditions have been created for the emergence of the digital parties. These parties have reduced significantly the number of people employed in the technical staff, they adopted a particular way of online communication with his

own members and they have created the illusion of absolute internal democracy. In fact, these parties failed to get detached from what Robert Michels called in 1911 "the iron law of oligarchy."[10] any party evolve across the trend of being oligarchic. M5S, Podemos or the "pirate parties" have promised to build another style of leadership, decentralized, based on direct democracy. In fact, on the contrary, their leaders gained very much power, the decisions were taken in a narrow circle. This was the cause for internal complaints and for a weak electoral mobilization and finally to poor results in the elections. Rick Falkvinge, the founder of the Swedish Pirate Party, Beppe Grillo or Pablo Iglesias had in common a strong charisma and a strong decisions centralization inside some parties that proclaimed to be something different from the mainstream, traditional parties. None of the parties they ruled is currently a significant political force in these countries.

M5S is an extreme centralized party, with a small number of decision-makers that offered the illusion of direct democracy through the Rousseau platform, a form of online consultation. Davide Casaleggio is the president of the Rousseau foundation, Rousseau Associati, that owns this platform. Until recently, M5S did not had any control on the content available on this online platform that has been used daily by the party members. In April 2021 the platform and the party separated from one another, because of the disagreements between Davide Casaleggio and Giuseppe Conte. Before this separation, the most important political decisions of M5S were taken by the people who run the platform, as it is shown by Nicola Biondo and Marco Canestrari in a book published in 2019.[11]

In another book published in the same year, two Italian political scientists, Mauro Calise and Fortunato Musella describe what they call "the digital prince": the party leader in the time of "web-populism,"[12] the ultimate consequence of the politics personalization that manifest in the modern era.[13] According to Calise and Musella, we live in the time of virtual democracy where the "digital prince" is part of a "digital ecosystem." Other parts of this ecosystem are the parties that are called *cybercratico*, "cybercratics" (a mixture between the digital features and autocracy). Calise and Musella consider that the personalization of politics trend will continue and the leaders of these "cybercratic" parties will compete on a long run with mainstream parties that are also in favour of the personalization of politics.

The literature on digital parties is quite recent but the issue of how the new online communication tools change democracy started to be studied some years ago. Two authors from the Delft University of Technology, Engin Bozdag and Jeroen Van den Hoven published in 2015 an article[14] that introduced in political science a new explanation paradigm, taken from another area: the notion of "filter bubble," a term coined by Eli Pariser.[15] Internet has produced a segregation, the citizens follow the trend to group themselves into their own "bubbles", sharing the same political views and losing the contact with the reality. The voters may find an easy refufe in the "bubble" of a political party website or Facebook account, refusing deliberately any information coming from other parties that could change their perspective. The personalized algorithms developed by Facebook or Google are made such

that any views that are different from the one shared by some people are hard to find or even are totally missing. A Democrat Party voter, if wants to find data about a Republican voter politician will find rather information from Democrat sources than from Republican sources. Thereby, the big tech oligopolies decision-makers are favoring by these "filter bubble" what Bozdag and Van den Hoven call the "digital balkanization" of the sources of information related to politics. Another Italian political scientist, Damiano Palano went even further and affirmed in a book published in 2020 that the existence of an increasing number of online political "bubbles" leads to a "bubble democracy."[16] This kind of democracy is, according to Palano, the perfect context for the emergence of digital parties. Nevertheless, the digital parties go into decline, as at the end of the 1990s the "television parties" started to be absent from the foreground of the political life. The explanation is that what Robert Michels said in 1911 is still valid today: any political party is born as democratic but become authoritarian. When the lack of internal democracy is seen by the ordinary party members, the ecstasy related to the emergence of a new anti-system party is replaced with the agony of the same party that disappear or become a satellite of the mainstream, traditional parties.

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Notes

[1] About the *Indignado*s movement and its relationship with Podemos, see Judis 2016, pp. 109–130.

[2] Cas Mudde draws the same parallel between Podemos and Syriza, both parties are seen as a reaction to the austerity measures after the financial crisis of 2008 promoted by the Zapatero and Papandreou governments (Mudde–Kaltwasser 2017: 110).

[3] About how Syriza emerged as a political party and about its nature of populist left-oriented party, see Kirchick 2017.

[4] Martin Bull: *Whatever happened to the Italian Five Star Movement?* https://theloop.ecpr.eu/whatever-happened-to-the-italian-five-star-movement/.

[5] About the performance of M5S in the 2019 European Partliament elections, see Piccolino, Puleo and Soare 2019: 113–137.

[6] Andrea Capati–Marco Improta: *The Italian Five Star Movement takes a pro-European turn*. https://theloop.ecpr.eu/the-italian-five-star-movement-takes-a-pro-european-turn/

[7] About M5S there are numerous articles and interpretations in the political science literature. One of the most complete approaches belongs to Tarchi 2015.

[8] About the distinction between left-wing and right-wing populism, see Carp 2018.

[9] Gerbaudo, 2019.

[10] Michels, 2016.

[11] Biondo–Canestrari, 2019.

[12] Another author is using the term "digital populism" (Del Lago, 2017) but he is referring to populist leaders rather than to digital/populist parties: only the case of M5S is discussed. From our perspective, "digital populism" covers Podemos and Syriza.

[13] Calise–Musella, 2019.

[14] Bozdag–Van den Hoven 2015: 249–265.

[15] Pariser 2011.

[16] Palano 2016.

PIRATE PARTIES AND CIVIL ORGANIZATIONS IN THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

Zoltan Zakota

From information society to network society

Currently, there is no generally accepted theory of what exactly can be called an information society and what cannot. Most theorists agree that we are witnessing a transformation that began sometime in the 1970s and is radically changing the way societies fundamentally function. According to the conceptual framework of the information society, the production, distribution, dissemination, use and management of information in society is a significant economic, political and cultural activity. The economic co concept of this is the knowledge economy, according to which social value is created through the economic utilization of information. In the following, I mention two concepts closely related to that of information society, which illuminate it from different sides, but roughly cover it: post-industrial society and network society.

The peculiarity of the information society is the central role of information technology in production, the economy and society in general. The information society is also considered by many to be the heir of the industrial society, such as Daniel Bell, who introduced the concept of the post-industrial society. He also writes about the previous two hundred years as having been "the 'axial age' of technology, a 'breakthrough' in human powers that is the basis for the transformation of nature and of the material world." (Bell 1999, p. The Axial Age of Technology Foreword: 1999) The term axial age is used here in the sense coined by Karl Jaspers. (Jaspers 1953) Bell outlines the main post-industrial changes that took place in the last quarter of the twentieth century, as follows. (Bell 1999)

1. changes in the character of manufacturing due to the transition from manufacturing to services;
2. changes in the character of work induced by the rise of professional and technical employment and the relative decline of skilled and semi-skilled workers;
3. education has become the basis of social mobility;
4. both human capital and technology are integrated into an endogamous feature of growth;
5. the spread of computer-aided design in manufacture and the merging of communications systems;
6. integrated communication became the infrastructure of post-industrial societies;
7. knowledge became the source of invention and innovation, creating value-added and increasing returns to scale.

The second term, *network society*, was coined by Jan van Dijk in his 1991 book De *netwerkmaatschappij* (The Network Society). In his view, "the birth of integrated networks implies a combination of allocution, consultation, registration and conversation in a single medium […]. This would make such a medium important enough in social communications to enable us to speak of a communications revolution […]." As an effect, "[f]or the first time in history, the new media will enable us to make a deliberate choice between mediated and face-to-face communication in a large number of social activities." (van Dijk 2006: 12) In order to compare old and new media in terms of their capacities, van Dijk proposes a systematic integrated approach. He uses nine communication capacities to compare their particular potentialities. According to this framework, there are five capacities in which new technologies are net superior to the old ones, namely speed, geographical and social reach, storage potential, accuracy and selectivity and four others, in which they show serious limitations in front of face-to-face communication, scilicet interactivity, stimuli richness, complexity and the capacity for privacy protection. (van Dijk 2006: 14–16)

But it was Manuel Castells who made the term really notorious with the first volume of his trilogy *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, entitled *The Rise of the Network Society* and published in 1996. Although neither the idea of social networks, nor that of information society was new, the way he synthesized them led to a new perspective of society. As he concludes it in the aforementioned book: "as an historical trend, dominant functions and processes in the Information Age are increasingly organized around networks [which] constitute the new social morphology of our societies […]." (Castells 2010: 500) A precursor of this idea is James Martin, who coins the term of *Wired Society* in the title of his book, in which he presents the immense technological force put at our disposal by the electronic communication technologies. (Martin 1978)

Castell asserts that "[n]etworks are open structures, able to expand without limits, integrating new nodes as long as they are able to communicate […] A network-based social structure is a highly dynamic, open system, susceptible to innovating without threatening its balance." (Castells 2010: 501–502) From his point of view, network society transcends information society, because technology is not the only factor defining modern societies. It actually penetrates all societal subsystems: economy, culture, as well as politics.

In the context of this article, we have to point out another important idea of the author, namely the existence of "a fundamental split between abstract, universal instrumentalism, and historically rooted, particularistic identities", due to which *"[o]ur societies are increasingly structured around a bipolar opposition between the Net and the self."* (Castells 2010: 3) Although technology, by its means, like the World Wide Web or the Internet of Things, penetrates deeper and deeper the private sphere, it often fails in bringing closer the individuals or user groups. Due to the superficial and often impersonal nature of the interactions, this often leads to the alienation of individuals and isolation of groups. One of the main goals targeted by pirate parties is the alleviating of these biases by the means of copyright and patent reform, Internet privacy and neutrality, data protection, and even government transparency and accountability.

Civil organizations in the network society

The term civil society became popular in the public discourse in the 1980s as an attribute of social movements opposing dictatorial regimes, mainly in Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe. Over time, the concept has undergone many changes and is still used in many senses. According to the Collins online dictionary, civil society comprises "the organizations within a society that work to promote the common good, usually taken to include state-run institutions, families, charities, and community groups." (Collins 2023) Unfortunately, from our point of view, this definition has two major biases. First, the term *common good* is one of the most complex terms used in ethics and political philosophy, so hereinafter we have to restrain its meaning to the political sphere. For a detailed discussion, see e.g. (Hussain 2018). Second, the range of organizations included in the civil society is too broadly defined, so we have to restrain it.

It seems a bit more appropriate for our approach the viewpoint of the Encyclopedia Britannica that defines civil society as a "dense network of groups, communities, networks, and ties that stand between the individual and the modern state." (Kenny 2023) Although this definition quite correctly places civil society between the state and personal spheres, it leaves the private sphere out of the picture. Considering a widely used four-pillar society model, which consists of the public (state), private (business), civil (not-for-profit) and personal (individuals and households) spheres, the place of the civil sphere can also be more easily determined.

It is usually built from below, from the personal level up, while trying to influence public and business actors, using formal and informal means, to enforce the interests of the personal sphere.

From a practical point of view it is pretty convenient to outline the notion by its components, the civil society organizations (CSO), as it is done by the World Bank: "CSOs include non-governmental organizations, community groups, labor unions, indigenous peoples movements, faith-based organizations, professional associations, foundations, think tanks, charitable organizations, and other not-for-profit organizations." (WB 2023)

Pirate parties are usually rooted in and related to civil society. Therefore, when examining the phenomenon, the question of the social embeddedness of the civil sphere cannot be ignored either. In the new, networked society, traditional approaches are no longer satisfactory, because "they tend to view the civil society sector, at best, as a tangential independent variable that helps to explain broader political outcomes (e.g., the formation of political parties and the consequent structuring of political institutions) while paying less attention to the factors that shape the civil society sector itself.". (Salamon–Sokolowski–Haddock–Associates 2017) In order to overcome this, drawing on the work of Barrington Moore, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Theda Skocpol and others, the authors provide insight into the non-profit sector's ability to thrive and perform its distinctive roles. The authors posit a novel *Expanded Social Origins Theory of Civil Society Development* that roots the variations in civil society strength and composition in the relative power of different social groupings and institutions. Although there is no space for further theoretical explanations within the present framework, it should be mentioned that the theory developed by the authors provides a suitable framework for the analysis of the embeddedness of pirate parties in civil society and their transition to politics.

Digital piracy and pirates

Regarding the concepts of *pirate* and *piracy*, there is quite a lot of confusion and inaccuracy among the general public. Many people only know their negative connotation and undoubtedly, there is such one. According to the Cambridge Dictionary a pirate is: "a person or organization that makes illegal copies of software, films, recordings, etc., to sell them at much cheaper prices" (Cambridge Dictionary 2023)

"Digital piracy refers to the illegal copying or distribution of copyrighted material via the Internet. It negatively affects the creative industries, including film, TV, publishing, music and gaming. Online piracy has an economic impact, as it affects government revenue streams and puts [the consumer] at risk of financial loss. It also opens up security risks to consumers such as ID theft or exposing children to inappropriate content." (INTERPOL n.d.)

Digital piracy, often called also *online piracy*, belongs to the realm of digital crime. Digital piracy can generate considerable revenues through several channels, like: advertising, affiliate marketing, subscriptions and data selling or even donations. They can do considerable economic and financial harm by depriving creative industries, distributors and streaming companies as well as tax authorities of revenues to which they are legitimately entitled. Pirate sites can also harm users by stealing personal data, scamming, or spreading malwares. Sometimes even organized crime groups can hide behind them.

One of the most well-known pirate sites is Pirate Bay, a search engine designed to facilitate the sharing of online content via magnet links used to reference resources available for download via peer-to-peer networks which, when opened in a torrent client, begin downloading the desired content. The content sharing was partly illegal, consisting of copyrighted material, particularly movies, games, music and computer applications. A trial against the men behind the Pirate Bay started in Sweden on 16 February 2009, they being accused of breaking Swedish copyright law. After years of being harassed by the authorities and representatives of the cultural industries, those responsible for the Pirate Bay ended up being sentenced.

The Pirate Bay affair has sparked endless controversies about the legal aspects of file sharing, copyright, and civil liberties. It induced political mobilization and developed into an internationally supported movement. It has become a platform for political initiatives against established intellectual property laws and a central figure in an anti-copyright movement. And, what is really important from our point of view, it lead to the founding of the Swedish Pirate Party. (Beyer 2014: Chap. 3)

Despite the many negative connotations, when entering the political arena, the term pirate underwent a radical metamorphosis. As we can read on the Pirate Parties International (PPI) website: "The name 'Pirates' itself is a reappropriation of the title that was given to Internet users by the representatives of the music and film industries, and do not refer to any illegal activity." (PPI 2023)

Pirate parties

A *pirate party* is a political formation having one foot anchored in the civil society and the other one in the information society that advocate for civil liberties, digital rights, and government transparency. Many of the goals of such a party are information society-related. They usually support reform of copyright and patent laws, free sharing of knowledge, open content, information and online privacy, freedom of information and net neutrality. Due to the fact that they are often rooted in civil society, they are also advocating for civil rights, transparency, anti-corruption, free speech, direct democracy, e-democracy, or other alternative forms of participation in government.

Pirate parties are deeply rooted in civil society, many of them having started as anti-establishment protest movements. As Ivan Bartoš, leader of the Czech Pirate

Party used to say: "we were activists, protesters who couldn't stand the status quo." (Bartoš 2018) The same idea is expressed on the website of PPI, maybe in a little pompous way: "The Pirate Parties are political incarnations of the freedom of expression movement, trying to achieve their goals by the means of the established political system rather than through activism." (PPI 2023) The phrase is also stressing two of their most important features: the embeddedness in civil society activism and the later shift from the fuzzy field of activism to the established political arena.

The movement gained momentum with the rise of file-sharing technologies and the increased enforcement of copyright laws. Although the term *pirate parties* is derived from the concept of *piracy* in the digital world, referring to unauthorized sharing and distribution of copyrighted material, it is important to note that they do not condone or support illegal activities. They rather seek to challenge existing copyright laws perceived as outdated or overly restrictive, arguing that these should be reformed in order to adapt to the digital age, balancing the interests of copyright holders with the principles of free expression and access to information.

Pirate Parties typically advocate for several key policy positions, such as:
– *copyright reform:* they propose shorter copyright terms, non-commercial file sharing allowances, and greater flexibility in fair use and transformative works;
– *patent reform:* aiming to reduce the influence of patent trolls and promote innovation;
– *internet privacy:* they emphasize the importance of protecting individuals' online privacy rights, oppose mass surveillance programs and censorship;
– *internet neutrality:* they support the principle that all internet traffic should be treated equally, without discrimination, prioritization or preferential treatment by internet service providers; they argue that net neutrality is crucial to maintaining a free and open internet;
– *data protection:* they advocate for strong data protection laws and against data retention policies, they strive to ensure that individuals have control over their personal information online;
– *government transparency:* they promote open government, transparency and accountability initiatives, advocate for increased access to government information, often push for open data initiatives, aiming to make government information and public resources more accessible and usable.

Pirate Parties have spread to many countries worldwide, including Germany, Finland, Iceland, the Czech Republic, Switzerland, and others. While their success varies from country to country, they have achieved notable electoral victories in some instances. However, the influence and prominence of Pirate Parties have fluctuated over time, depending on the specific political landscape and the issues at hand.

The first pirate party: the Pirate Party of Sweden

The first pirate party to be established was the *Piratpartiet*, the Pirate Party of Sweden (PPS), whose website was launched on 1 January 2006. This was soon followed by similar political formations in the United States of America, Germany and Austria in the same year and Finland in 2008. Several countries witnessed the birth of pirate parties, but the PPS remained the main driver of the movement for a long time.

The Swedish Pirate Party, founded in 2006, emerged as a prominent political movement advocating for digital rights, copyright reform, and privacy protection. It was formed by a group of activists led by Rick Falkvinge and its primary focus was on intellectual property issues, including copyright and patent reform, as well as the protection of online privacy and freedom of speech. The movement gained traction, especially among young people and technology enthusiasts who felt that existing copyright laws were outdated and restrictive. The popularity of the PPS was largely due to the high-profile trial of the Pirate Bay.

On the opening page of its site, PPS shares its vision for a pirate community: "The Pirate Party wants to strengthen the individual's empowerment by guaranteeing his freedom, dignity and participation. We want to see an open, free and democratic society with freedom of thought and expression and the opportunity for everyone to share and share knowledge and culture. [sic]" (Piratpartiet 2023)

The PPS's rise to prominence has been largely attributed to its grassroots engagement and utilization of digital platforms. It has effectively used social media, online forums, and digital campaigning strategies to mobilize supporters, reach a wider audience, and galvanize political action. The party's ability to connect with tech-savvy individuals and young voters has contributed to its success in engaging and energizing a previously disenchanted demographic.

The PPS has made a significant impact on both the political landscape and public discourse. Its case, in a country where there was already a strong culture in favour of free content sharing on the Internet, led many to support the PPS. In 2009, the party achieved a milestone by securing two seats in the European Parliament, reflecting its growing electoral support by attaining 7.13% of the votes in the 2009 European elections. The presence in the European Parliament was a spectacular achievement, but after that its popularity began to decline. In the next tables we summarize the evolution of the PPS in the Swedish and European parliamentary elections, based on the Swedish Election Authority's site. (Valmyndigheten 2022)

Table 1. Participation of the PPS in the parliamentary elections

	Number of votes	Proportion	Number +/-	Proportion +/-
2006	34918	0,63%		
2010	38491	0,65%	+3573	+0,02
2014	26515	0,43%	-11976	-0,22
2018	7326	0,11%	-19189	-0,31
2022	9135	0,14%	+1809	+0,03

Table 2. Participation of the PPS in the European Parliament elections

	Number of votes	Proportion	Number +/-	Proportion +/-	Number of mandates
2009	225915	7,13%			2
2014	82763	2,23%	-143152	-4,90	
2019	26526	0,64%	-56237	-1,59	

According to the "Svenska Dagbladet" website, the PPS lost 20% of its militants, after a peak of 50,000 people, reached in August 2009. „I would say that we will lose even more during the next week and we will fall to somewhere between 25000 and 30000", admitted to the newspaper the MEP of the party Christian Engström. [Cited in (Pereira 2010)].

In the opinion of Henrik Alexandersson, former employee of Christian Engström (PP) in the European Parliament between 2009–2014, now freelance writer and libertarian blogger, the PPS "was the media's favourites, as the protruder and underdog of the EU election." Instead of building on their foundation of a very sympathetic free humanism, they became quite unpredictable. The party's activity was mostly characterized by lack of experience, improvisations, tiring campaigns and inefficient communication. (Alexandersson 2014)

The PPS did not achieve the same electoral success in national elections as it did in the European Parliament. However, its influence extends beyond electoral victories, as it continues to shape political discourse and push for digital rights reforms. Moreover, the party's impact transcends borders, inspiring the formation of pirate parties in other countries and contributing to a global movement for digital rights and civil liberties.

Despite its achievements, the PPS faces several challenges. The fluid nature of digital rights issues and the complexities surrounding copyright reform pose ongoing hurdles. Additionally, maintaining a coherent party structure, expanding

beyond single-issue politics and addressing a wider range of societal concerns are critical for long-term sustainability. That the party now tries to meet these challenges to a large extent is also reflected in the Principle Program adopted on January 2, 2021. (Piratpartiet 2023)

The Swedish Pirate Party has played a significant role in advocating for digital rights, copyright reform, and privacy protection. By challenging traditional political norms and championing issues pertinent to the digital age, the party has reshaped the political landscape in Sweden and inspired similar movements worldwide. Although facing challenges, the Swedish Pirate Party remains a catalyst for the pirate movement worldwide.

A success story: the Czech Pirate Party

The former communist states did not remain untouched by the new political visions either. Among them, the first pirate party was established in the Czech Republic in 2009 and although such parties has been grounded in almost all Central and Eastern European countries, to this day it can be considered the most successful.

The Czech Pirate Party (Česká pirátská strana, abbreviated Piráti, ČPS) originated as a response to growing concerns about government surveillance, copyright laws, and political corruption. It was founded as a student-driven grassroots movement campaigning for political transparency, civil rights and direct democracy. The party's core principles revolve around some crucial values, like: protection of civil liberties, digital freedom, transparency and accountability in governance. It seeks to champion these principles by utilizing technology, advocating for progressive policies and empowering citizens. They advocate for open government practices, ensuring that citizens have access to government information, decision-making processes and public resources.

The ČPS vehemently opposes political corruption and promotes ethical conduct in politics. They strive to establish mechanisms that prevent conflicts of interest, lobbying abuses and undue influence on political decision-making. By advocating for clean politics, the party aims to restore public trust and integrity in government institutions.

The Party has made a notable impact on Czech politics, sparking important discussions and influencing public opinion. It has successfully introduced and supported legislation promoting digital liberties, government transparency and civil rights. Its electoral success has grown steadily, winning seats in the Czech Parliament and several local governments. This success demonstrates the increasing support for their agenda and the recognition of the need for political reform in the country. In the following tables we present the evolution of the party on the elections, based on the data published by the Czech Statistical Office.

Table 3. Participation of ČPS in the elections to the Chamber of Deputies
of the Parliament of the Czech Republic (ČSÚ, 2023)

	Number of valid votes	Proportion	Number +/-	Proportion +/-	Number of mandates
2010	42323	0,80%			
2013	132417	2,66%	+90094	+1,86	
2017	546393	10,79%	+403976	+8,13	22/200
2021	839776	15,62%	+293383	+4,83	37/200

For the 2021 legislative election, Piráti formed a coalition with the liberal progressive centrist political alliance Mayors and Independents (STAN), called Piráti a Starostové. Together they won 37 seats in the Chamber of Deputies, from which 4 for the pirates. They joined the governing coalition with the centre-right alliance Spolu. The party nominated three ministers for the incoming Cabinet of Petr Fiala, one of them being the party leader Ivan Bartoš, as Minister of Regional Development and Digitalization. Another significant achievement of the party was the victory of Zdeněk Hřib, a healthcare manager and politician, who served as the Mayor of Prague from November 2018 to February 2023. Actually, their presence in the Czech Parliament started in the 2012 Senate election, when one of their three candidates, the whistleblower Libor Michálek, was elected as Senator in the second round of voting. Since then, the number of the ČPS senators increased constantly, reaching five by 2020. The party also performed well in the EP elections, as can be seen from the following table.

Table 4. Participation of ČPS in the European Parliament elections (ČSÚ, 2023)

	Number of valid votes	Proportion	Number +/-	Proportion +/-	Number of mandates
2014	72514	4,78			
2019	330844	13,95	+258330	+9,17	3

The ČPS's effectiveness lies, to a considerable extent, in its grassroots engagement and capability to mobilize citizens. The party has utilized social media platforms, online forums and community-driven initiatives to connect with constituents listen to their concerns and involve them in decision-making processes. The party's ability to engage a diverse range of individuals, including tech-savvy citizens and young voters, has been instrumental in its growth and influence.

While the Party has achieved significant milestones, it faces challenges that come with being a political disruptor. Building a cohesive party structure and expanding its policy platform beyond digital liberties are necessary steps for long-term viability.

Moreover, addressing concerns about economic policies, healthcare, and other social issues is crucial to appeal to a broader electorate. (Bartoš 2018)

The ČPS has also faced resistance from traditional political parties, who often perceive it as a threat to the status quo. Overcoming institutional barriers and countering negative stereotypes will require perseverance and strategic alliances. Furthermore, navigating the complex landscape of international relations, particularly within the European Union, is vital for the party's goals of advancing digital rights and policy reforms. The Czech Pirate Party has emerged as a powerful force in Czech politics, advocating for digital liberties, government transparency, and civil rights. By challenging established norms and championing progressive policies, the party has significantly influenced the political discourse in the country. As it continues to grow and evolve, its commitment to defending citizens' digital rights and driving political reform will undoubtedly shape the future of Czech politics and inspire similar movements across the globe.

Umbrella organizations in Europe and beyond

There are some international umbrella organizations in Europe and around the world that bring together certain pirate parties. At European level, there is The European Pirates (PIRATES) or European Pirate Party (PPEU) an association of pirate parties aspiring to be recognised as a European political party, founded on 21 March 2014, in Brussels, in the context of a conference on 'European Internet Governance and Beyond'. It consists of 18 of European pirate parties, which cooperated to run a joint campaign for the 2014 European Parliament elections. The PPEU has also 6 observer members. Most of its members are national parties, but a European (Young Pirates of Europe) and some regional organizations (Potsdam and Bavaria) are members too. The Pirate Party International is also a member with observer status. (PPEU 2023) Currently, the Party has 4 members in the European Parliament, in the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance, one on the part of the German and three on the part of the Czech Pirate Party. (PPEU 2023)

When it comes to their attitude towards the Internet as a means of communication, the PPEU takes a decidedly traditional pirate party stance: "The Internet as a medium of communication offers tremendous opportunities for political development, overcoming top-down, one-way communication. Pirates will therefore defend the freedom of the Internet with fierce determination at European level as well as on a global scale." (PPEU 2023)

Although they preserved the original goals of the pirate parties, which were related to the digital society, they significantly expanded the range of their political goals. As stated in the preamble of the PPEU: "Pirates believe that Europe should be organized in the common interest of all European citizens, as well as the interests of member states." They militate against the democratic deficit within the EU and for building a solid democratic foundation for the Union.

They "encourage the development of a common European space for culture, politics and society […]" One of their basic principles are: subsidiarity, the fair and equal treatment of all people and the respect for the rights of minorities. (PPEU 2023) As it can be seen from the following list, the Party practically intends to cover the entire range of EU policies:
– Agriculture–Fisheries,
– Civil Society,
– Education, Culture, Research–Free Knowledge,
– Environment, Climate and Energy,
– Finances,
– Human Rights in the Digital Era,
– Free Software,
– Open Data,
– Net Policy,
– International Affairs,
– Social Affairs–Healthcare,
– Space Program,
– Transport.

Young Pirates of Europe is basically a youth organization. It is "the umbrella organization of young European digital rights and Pirate organizations". According to their website, they have more than 7 000 members all over Europe. Their prime goal is "technology improving the lives of everyone on this planet" and that "young people will be the driving force in achieving this goal and set out to enable them in fighting for a fair distribution of power on- and offline, for free and open participation as well as access to knowledge, science and culture for everyone." (YPE, n.d.)

Maybe the most important pirate party organization worldwide is the Pirate Party International (PPI), a global political movement that advocates for digital rights, civil liberties, and government transparency. Born out of the digital age and fueled by concerns over copyright laws, privacy, and freedom of expression, the PPI has gained momentum across several countries. Due to the rapid widening of the "pirate movement", the Pirate Parties International (PPI) was rapidly established, in 2010, as a transnational organization of political parties having similar ideology and orientation. Its rather combative aim was presented by Gregory Engels, a member of the German Pirate Party and one of the co-chairs of the International at a press conference: "The content industry is making organized efforts around the world to try to limit civil liberties. Today [Sunday], we took the first step towards counterattacking." (Pereira 2010)

The International works together on points of agreement to co-ordinate activity of their members. Among their priorities: legal rights to hold private copies of copyrighted material, Internet privacy, free circulation of online content and changes in intellectual property laws. The goals of the association are (PPI 2023):
– to act according to the major interests and goals of its Members,
– to raise awareness and widen the spread of the pirate movement, and

– to support the pirate movement and strengthen its bonds internally and externally,
– to promote and support Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

Most of the members are national organizations, but there are also regional ones. Even the European Pirate Party is an observer member of the PPI. The party currently has 31 ordinary and 24 observer members, mostly from Europe. Due to frequent changes, exits, dissolutions and dissolvements 13 ordinary and 4 observer members left the organization. (PPI 2023)

Conclusions

Pirate parties are relatively new political formations typical for the digital society. They are deeply rooted in civil society, many of them having started as anti-establishment protest movements. In less than two decades, they managed to spread worldwide and enter the political world by walking the road from grass-roots activism to established politics. On the one hand, they are targeting specific digital society goals, such as: reform of copyright and patent laws, free sharing of knowledge, open content, information and online privacy, freedom of information and net neutrality. But they quickly realized that in order to successfully politicize, they also need to represent traditional democratic values. So, on the other hand, they are advocating for civil rights, transparency, anti-corruption, free speech, direct democracy, e-democracy, or other alternative forms of participation in government. We cannot predict how their role and presence will develop in the European and wider political space, but we can already say that by challenging traditional political norms and championing issues pertinent to the digital age, pirate parties have reshaped the political landscape in Europe and inspired similar movements worldwide.

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POLITICAL PARTIES ROOTED IN CIVIL SOCIETY
THE CASE OF THE SAVE ROMANIA UNION (USR)

Cristina Matiuța

Introduction

Romania's post-communist history has been the scene of several experiments of civic associations' involvement in political life, meant to contribute to country's democratization and institutional reconstruction. The phenomenon has several explanations, some related to the country's communist past. Romania was a special case among the other communist countries of East-Central Europe, both in terms of the harsh and repressive nature of the communist regime, which annihilated any form of civil society manifestation and in the way the separation from totalitarianism took place. While in Poland, Czechoslovakia or Hungary civil society was activated through a series of initiatives (some of them on a large scale, if we think at several million members of the Polish trade union Solidarność, almost a decade before the end of communism or the Charter 77, known around the world as an expression of the "power of the powerless"), in Romania the dissents were individual, isolated and did not find an echo in a society completely obedient to the regime. The extreme intolerance of the communist regime towards any form of civic association and the control of the party-state over the entire public sphere marked the (re)construction of civil society and the party system after the collapse of communism. Deprived of any civic structures that would have kept alive the pluralistic dimension of society and of any consistent reformist group within the communist party that would lead to its democratization from within and would create the conditions for a peaceful and negotiated transition, Romanian civil society

had to be rebuilt on other bases, "from top to bottom", giving priority to the strengthening of civic associations (Matiuța 2007: 26–27).

Shortly after the collapse of communism, several civil society associations were established, with the aim of rebuilding civil society. The most representative of them, the Civic Alliance, played an important role in the first post-communist decade. Guided by the motto "We can only succeed together", the Civic Alliance founded, together with other civic associations and political parties that opposed the government of the heirs of the communist regime, the Romanian Democratic Convention (CDR), which took power in 1996. After a mandate marked by numerous frictions between its members and poor governance performance, the Democratic Convention fell apart, disappearing from the political arena. Other civic initiatives which later became political parties were established both in the second and third post-communist decades, following the same pattern of political action: "the establishment of civic associations and their transformation into political parties with the intention of capturing the energy of the citizens who wanted a clean and new party which never was in relationship with the old ones that managed the transition and modeled political society" (Dima 2017: 172). However, the success of such initiatives was limited, especially because they were founded by more or less credible people who migrated from different political parties.

The electoral success of the USR in the legislative elections of 2016 is all the more important as the party achieved a unique performance until then: to enter the parliament as a newly created party, becoming the third political party by its own forces, not in an alliance. This study seeks to explain this performance, as well as the subsequent evolution of the party. It aims to realize a brief radiography of the USR evolution based on the content analysis of the electoral programs of the party and election results, the official website, leaders' speeches, press articles. The paper is structured as follows. It begins with a short description of USR's genesis, followed by an analysis of party's programs, messages and election results. The next sections refers to the short experience of the USR as junior partner in the ruling coalition, to its leadership, mergers and splits inside it, while the conclusion summarizes the main findings.

The genesis of the Save Romania Union (USR)

The USR has its roots in the Save Bucharest Association, founded in 2006 by several civic activists, led by Nicușor Dan (currently mayor of Bucharest) with the declared aim to prevent the destruction of the city's cultural heritage by various real estate projects, to save heritage buildings from demolition, to denounce corruption, abuses and the lack of transparency of local authorities.[1] The association blocked dozens of real estate projects in court, contested urban plans that destroyed the city's green area, organized numerous public protests, gaining visibility and credibility. To make his voice heard better, the leader of the association,

Nicușor Dan, ran as an independent in the local elections of 2012 at the Bucharest City Hall and managed to win 8.48% of the votes, even if he was not supported by any political party and the pre-election polls credited him with only 3% of the votes.[2]

Encouraged both by this good result in the competition with well-rooted political parties that dominated the political arena and by the simplification of the conditions for the registration of political parties as a result of the change in the legislation in 2015,[3] Nicușor Dan and his colleagues decided to create a political party, the Save Bucharest Union (USB), to continue at the political level the actions started by the civic association. "We are addressing an entire category of people who are disappointed with the way politics has been done so far and especially, in Bucharest, we are addressing those citizens who have started to fight for their rights", declared Nicușor Dan at the launch of the party in July 2015.[4] He also said that in the 2016 elections, USB intends to run for all mayoral offices and local councils in Bucharest and that, after local elections, the party intends to expand nationally.

USB managed to follow this strategy. The party competed in 2016 local elections in Bucharest and got a very good result: 15 mandates in the General Council of the Municipality of Bucharest and 39 mandates in the Sector Councils of Bucharest. Nicușor Dan, the party's candidate for the general mayor's office of the capital is ranked second with 30.5% of the votes (while Gabriela Firea from the Social Democratic Party- PSD wins with 43% of the votes). Actually, for the first time in its history, PSD wins both the General City Hall and all the sector city halls in Bucharest, at a turnout of only one third of the electorate (and 48.17% turnout at national level, meaning less than 9 million voters, the lowest in the post-communist history of local elections).[5] Two months later, in August 2016, the Save Bucharest Union becomes the Save Romania Union (USR), aiming to save the whole country, not just Bucharest, from the old politicians.

The question is how a new party managed to win such a good score in such a short time. The explanations relate both to the immediate contextual factors and to the wider transformations undergone by the Romanian society. Among the first, it should be mentioned the failure of the National Liberal Party (PNL) to propose a candidate able to fight with PSD and the successive designation of no less than four candidates (Cristian Bușoi, Ludovic Orban, Marian Munteanu, Cătălin Predoiu) which confused even more PNL sympathizers and voters and made them go towards the newly born party. Secondly, in the third post-communist decade we are witnessing a revival of civil society, Romania experiencing the largest civic protests since the fall of communism, meant to renegotiate the relationship between citizens and political power. The most relevant of them began in 2013 and continued in the following years, reaching the peak in February 2017, when hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets in Bucharest and the main cities of the country, protesting against the government's intention to modify several laws in the field of justice (Matiuța 2023).

At least two protest movements should be mentioned here because USR was born as part of this revival of the civic spirit. The first one, started at the end of August 2013 as a revolt against the exploitation of gold and silver deposits in Rosia Montana perimeter (a mining village in Transylvania known from Roman times, having the Europe's largest opencast gold mine) and turned into the into the largest civic protest after the anti-communist protests in Bucharest in 1990. As a result, politicians have postponed a decision on the draft law on starting exploitation of gold and silver deposits with cyanide, concluding that they cannot ignore public opinion. The law was rejected by the Parliament, not meeting a majority. The second crucial protest movement took place during the month of November 2015, following a devastating fire that happened in the "Colectiv" nightclub in Bucharest and which led to the death of over sixty people and the injury of many others. It was the deadliest fire in the country's history, caused by a lack of appropriate safety measures. People gathered to protest against the way licenses for public places are granted, but also against the conditions in the hospitals that treat burn patients. In fact, the revolt was directed against an incompetent political class, considered responsible for all main problems in Romanian society. Tens of thousands of people gathered in Bucharest and in the big cities of the country, mobilized on social networks, and in the diaspora as well, chanting slogans against the government and the corruption that kills. The participants to these protest movements were people from all social layers, especially young professionals, students, teachers, NGO activists, artists, engineers etc., united not by a common ideology, but rather by indignation against a style of governing, a way of doing politics, accusing politicians that they don't act in the interest of citizens who elected them. USR was born in the extension and as one of the consequences of these protests, some of its future members being active participants in them.

The immediate consequence of these protests was the resignation of the Victor Ponta government. After an interim period provided by the Minister of Education, Sorin Cîmpeanu, and in the absence of an agreement of the parliamentary political parties for organizing early elections (as proposed by the PNL), President Klaus Iohannis decided to appoint Dacian Cioloş, technocrat, former European Commissioner for Agriculture, as prime minister. The proposal was accepted by the majority of political parties, therefore the Cioloş Cabinet, consisting mainly of apolitical ministers, was invested by the Parliament on November 2015, remaining in office until the 2016 parliamentary elections (Matiuța 2018). Dacian Cioloş showed no interest in participating in these elections, wishing to finish his mandate as a political non-affiliate, but launched the Platform *Romania 100* (based on 10 principles proposed to the political parties in the year of Romania's Centenary, for country's prosperity and the renewal of the political class).

Party program, messages and election results

The 2016 parliamentary elections have re-legitimized the main political parties of the post-communist transition (PSD and PNL) and gave one of them (PSD) the status of dominant party. With a turnout of only 39.49%, PSD wins over 45% of the votes, more than double the score won by PNL (20.4%). USR succeeded to create a breach in the old party system, being ranked third with 8.9% of the votes *(Table 1)*. It was a remarkable performance for a party in its first electoral competition at the national level, reinforcing its success in the local elections in Bucharest. It was also a performance for the post-communist Romanian party system, being the first political party legitimized by voting which corresponds to the classic sociological definition of a political party. Thus, unlike "traditional" political parties, which were born around a leader and his entourage, and later tried to build a social base, the party led by Nicușor Dan "has its roots in civil society, being perceived as a true agent of social representation" (Radu–Buti 2019: 201).

Table 1: The electoral results of USR (2016–2020)

The type of ballot	Turnout%	The number of votes	Percentage of the total votes
Local elections 2016 (USB-Save Bucharest Union)	48.13%	143.544	1.73%
Parliamentary elections 2016 (USR)	39.42%	625.154 (Chamber of Deputies-CD)/ 629375 (Senate-S)	9%-CD/ 8,92%-S
European elections 2019 (USR–PLUS)	51.07%	2.028.236	22,36 %
Presidential elections 2019 (USR–PLUS)	47,66%	1.384450	15,02%
Local elections 2020 (USR–PLUS)	46.02%	439.324	6.04%
Parliamentary elections 2020 (USR–PLUS)	33,30%	906.965 (CD)/ 936.864 (S)	15.37%-CD/ 15,85% -S

Data source: The Central Election Office- www.bec.ro.

Dissatisfaction with political parties that governed post-communist Romania maintaining corruption and clientelism led, in addition to a drastic decrease in voting participation, to the orientation of a part of the voters towards this new party, which built its message around the general concepts of integrity and transparency, fight against corruption and against the old party system. Ideological ambiguity has characterized USR since its beginnings, the message being that it does not

want to be "seized" by any ideology. It was rather a trans-ideological party made up of people who assumed common civic causes and who did not belong to the old political parties. The party's official position was that we are not at the right time to divide ourselves on ideological criteria, given the widespread and cross-party corruption. The following passage, retrieved from the party website, is relevant from this point of view: "In USR there are people from the left and the right and from the center. It is a crucial moment when a choice will be made between the old corrupt way of doing politics and a different kind of politics based on integrity and competence, made in the interest of the citizens. Romania's important problems are a generalized and cross-party corruption and the split between politics and society, and USR aims to solve these emergencies, an objective that unites people regardless of ideological values. We do not have the right to miss this moment and divide ourselves on ideological criteria. It would be lacking in pragmatism to believe that several new ideological parties will enter the Parliament. Quantified, the difference between the programs of the left and right parties in Romania is several hundred million euros, less than the theft from public procurement of 4 billion euros."[6]

With the December 2016 elections and especially with the subsequent political developments, Romania has definitively joined the populist spectrum flows in Europe, present from Greece to Great Britain (Carp 2017). The new government formed by the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and the Alliance of European Liberals and Democrats (ALDE), sought, from the first days of its mandate, to "reform justice", the tendency of the populists everywhere they came to power. The changes to the criminal code by decriminalizing abuse of office often committed by party representatives while in public office (through a government decree, avoiding the parliament) triggered the largest protests since the revolution of December 1989. More than half a million people took to the streets across the country on February 5, 2017 at the largest rally in post-communist Romania, widely reflected in the international press, demonstrating not only against these changes (repealed on the same day), but also a way of doing politics completely defying the expectations of the population and threatening the constitutional foundations of the rule of law ("In the night, like thieves!", "We see you!", "We woke up!", "Traitors!"- were the most chanted slogans). USR, as a parliamentary party with 34 mandates of senators and deputies, was very active both in the parliament, demanding the repeal of these changes, and in the street, along with protesters.

The fight against corruption and against the weakening of the rule of law was one of the USR's priorities in the 2016–2020 legislature. In March 2018, the party launched a campaign to collect signatures for the initiative entitled *Without convicted in public office!*, with the purpose to prohibit the citizens who were definitive sentenced to imprisonment in the past to hold public positions in the state institutions.[7] The initiative gathered over a million signatures of citizens in its support.

The anti-corruption message characterized the party's campaign for the European elections in May 2019 as well, summarized by the slogan "Without theft we get far!" In these elections, the USR has run in the alliance with the Party for Freedom, Unity and Solidarity (PLUS), founded in autumn 2018 by Dacian Cioloş, former Prime Minister (November 2015–January 2017). The electoral offer of the Alliance has focused on the priorities of its representatives in the future European Parliament (such as Romania's accession to the Schengen area; protection of the rights of Romanians living and working in the EU; integration of Romania into the euro area and the attraction of structural funds to recover the development gaps; introduction of common European quality standards in different areas etc.), while the Alliance's election campaign turned more on domestic policy issues, such as the need for constitutional reform, the fight against corruption and the need for the renewal of the political class, debated in the electoral rallies in Cluj, Timisoara or Bucharest (Matiuţa, 2020). The elections recorded an increased voter turnout (51,07%), well above previous rounds of European elections (29,47% in 2007; 27,67% in 2009; 32,44% in 2014), and the USR–PLUS alliance consolidated its position within the political system with a very good score, 22,36%, (with only 12,500 votes less than PSD), sending 8 MEPs to the European Parliament. PNL ranked first, with 27% of the votes (well above its performance in the previous rounds of European elections, in which it never exceeded 15%) and PSD ranked second, with 22,5% of the votes (far below its previous results, falling by almost half in the number of MEPs., from 16 to 8; 9 after Brexit).[8] Both the increased turnout and the hierarchy of competitors were the result of deep discontent and polarization of the society after two and a half years of PSD governance. The results indicated that new political parties, USR and PLUS, are gaining ground over the traditional ones, due to the need to renew the political class. This need has also been felt in other Member States, leading to the weakening of traditional political groups and the emergence of new ones. The two new parties in Romania, USR and PLUS, have joined the new Renew Europe Group, led by Dacian Cioloş.

Shortly after the European elections and encouraged by the good result won, the USR–PLUS alliance nominated its candidate for the presidential elections of November 2019. He was Dan Barna, who became president of USR since the fall of 2017 and who previously held the position of State Secretary within the Ministry of European Funds in the technocrat government led by Dacian Cioloş. Barna was going to form a tandem with Dacian Cioloş, nominated the candidate of the Alliance for prime minister, if the Alliance would have obtained a good result in the parliamentary elections next year that would allow him to occupy this position.[9] Fourteen candidates ran in the electoral campaign for the presidential elections, but despite this diversity, it was a very predictable competition. The acting president, Klaus Iohannis, supported by the PNL, had preserved his popularity quite well, especially through the anti-PSD rhetoric. PSD, in decline in the European parliamentary elections especially as a result of its initiatives in the field of justice which generated people's revolt, resorted to an emergency solution, nominating

Viorica Dăncilă (prime minister for nine months[10] and president of the party after the arrest of its leader Liviu Dragnea) as a candidate in the presidential elections (Radu–Butiri, 2019a). Despite the decline of the party and her limited personal potential, Viorica Dăncilă (the first female prime minister in the country's history) reached the second round of the elections (with 22,26% of the votes in the first round), while Klaus Iohannis won 37,82% in the first round. Dan Barna ranked only third (with 15,02% of the votes).[11] The modest%age of the USR–PLUS candidate (who did not even convince the voters of the USR–PLUS alliance in the European elections) has several explanations, such as the fragmentation of the center-right, pro-European and anti-PSD voters, which had to choose between several candidates (Klaus Iohannis, Dan Barna, Toader Paleologu); the lack of Dan Barna's vision and political experience and the hesitations of his party to enter the government in a time of political instability when several governments came to power; the lack of solid territorial organizations of the new USR and PLUS parties that could compete with those of well-established parties like PSD and PNL, with many members and disciplined voters; and last but not least the low voter turnout, of only 47,66%, the lowest in the entire history of post-communist presidential elections. Klaus Iohannis won by a wide margin the second round, with 66.09% of the votes cast, in a dull electoral confrontation, devoid of any debate between the two candidates.

After the presidential elections of 2019, the idea of organizing early elections has often appeared in the public discourse (especially of the President Iohannis and PNL and USR–PLUS leaders), as the PSD government, which had lost both the European and presidential elections, no longer represents the will the majority of the population. After the dismissal by motion of no confidence of the government led by Viorica Dăncilă, the government has taken over by a PNL minority government, led by Ludovic Orban. USR refused to enter the government without early elections that would give a new parliamentary majority capable of implementing the priority reforms of the party (such as the adoption of the *No convicted in public functions* initiative and the election of mayors in two voting rounds).[12]

The 2020 election year was marked by the Covid–19 pandemic, with many restrictions on the exercise of rights and freedoms, imposed by the conditions of health emergency. Due to the large number of contaminations, the local elections were postponed from June to September 2020. For USR–PLUS alliance, these elections meant the real start in the public administration, by winning 45 mayoralties, five of which in the country's big cities: Bucharest, Timisoara, Brasov, Bacau, Alba-Iulia (Drăgulin–Rotaru 2020). Nicușor Dan, founder of USR and resigned from the party in 2017, ran as an independent candidate for the General Mayor of Bucharest, supported by PNL and USR–PLUS and won against PSD candidate Gabriela Firea. USR–PLUS also won the mayoralties of Sectors 1 and 2 in Bucharest, removing PSD from the local administration of the city.

The electoral campaign for the parliamentary elections of December 6, 2020 was conducted mainly online and took place both in the context of the increase in infections with the Covid–19 virus and the growing dissatisfaction in society

against the unpopular measures taken by the government (such as closing schools, markets, restaurants, banning public events with a large number of participants, including religious services). The campaign messages of USR–PLUS focused on the differences between them and the old political parties and on the anti-corruption fight.[13] Tragic events such as the one that happened at the hospital in Piatra Neamt (where the intensive care unit was destroyed by a devastating fire on November 15th, 2020 and several Covid–19 patients died) were used to attack the corrupt practices (the hospital was run in one year by eight managers appointed on political criteria) of the old political parties. The electoral slogan of the alliance- *A Romania without theft*- is the extension of the USR's messages from the previous rounds of elections. The Alliance's program promised "a revolution of good governance" and contained 40 commitments that the USR–PLUS would undertake if it came to power. They referred to the reform of local and central administration, a fair pension system, investments in health and education, the encouragement of entrepreneurship, the fight against poverty through social inclusion programs, the development of road infrastructure, etc.[14]

Voter turnout was 33.30%, the lowest ever recorded in a parliamentary election, and USR–PLUS ranked third with over 15% of the votes (see *Table 1*). PSD, although ranked first with 29%, loses in the number of votes compared to the 2016 parliamentary elections. PNL, on the second place, remains about at the level of 2016 in the number of the votes cast, while USR won over 300,000 votes (meaning an increase of 6%) compared to the previous legislative elections. The big surprise of these elections was the rise of a new far right party, the Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR), which managed to enter the Parliament with over 9% of the votes, capitalizing on votes not only from the old parties but also from USR–PLUS. Both the low voter turnout and the orientation of a part of the voters towards AUR attest people's disappointment not only towards the mainstream parties but also towards the USR–PLUS which refused to enter the government together with the PNL, refusal perceived as a lack of political responsibility in a complicated context of pandemic and economic crisis.

USR in the ruling coalition

Shortly after the December 2020 legislative elections, negotiations to form a parliamentary majority consisting of PNL, USR–PLUS and UDMR (Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania) have begun. USR–PLUS set several conditions to take over the government alongside the PNL, which to put into practice the priorities from its electoral program (including zero taxes on the minimum wage, restricting access to public positions for criminally convicted persons, the elimination of special pensions in the first 100 days of government, a reform of the electoral system and the election of mayors in two voting rounds, reducing the number of Parliament members to 300 etc.) and committed to support a credible candidate for the position of prime minister, able to unify the right-wing parties.[15]

Florin Cîțu from the PNL was appointed by President Iohannis for the position of prime minister, and the PNL, USR–PLUS and UDMR government received the Parliament's investiture vote on December 23, 2020. USR–PLUS holds in the new government a position of deputy prime minister (occupied by USR leader Dan Barna) and six important ministries: European Investments and Projects, Justice, Transport, Health, Economy and Digitalization. The Cîțu government led the country for 9 months, one of its priorities being the management of the health emergency in the pandemic context. The government negotiated the National Recovery and Resilience Plan for Romania, which means almost 30 billion euros of European funds for investments and reforms, USR–PLUS ministers having an active role in this process.[16] But the divergences between the main governing parties, PNL and USR–PLUS, expressed publicly on several occasions, have eroded the working of the coalition. An example of this kind was the dismissal of the Minister of Health, Vlad Voiculescu, by the Prime Minister Florin Cîțu, which caused much dissatisfaction among the USR–PLUS members. The Minister of Transport, Cătălin Drulă, called the Prime Minister "a political zombie."[17] The frictions culminated by the dismissal of the Minister of Justice, Stelian Ion, on September 1, 2021, on the grounds that he refused to approve the National Program for Local Development (PNDL 3), the main source of funding for local infrastructure and therefore an important source of money for mayors across the country (especially those of the PNL, who were going to support the Cîțu's election as president of the party).[18] The dismissal caused the breakup of the governing coalition and USR–PLUS's move into opposition. USR–PLUS leaders accused PNL of disrespect and the removal of two of their ministers from the government without real reasons, deliberately violating the coalition agreement. A day later, USR–PLUS joined forces with AUR to support a no-confidence motion for the dismissal of the Cîțu government, a party they had previously categorized as "extremist" and xenophobic", with which they will never sit at the same table.[19]

Thus ended the short experience of only eight months of USR–PLUS as a governing party. The Cîțu government was dismissed in October 2021 through a no-confidence motion voted by all the opposition parties (PSD, USR–PLUS, AUR) and the new governing coalition was formed by PNL and PSD.

Leadership, mergers and splits inside the party

Not only the alliance with the governing partners was weakened by disagreements, they also existed inside the party. A brief retrospective look at the internal fight, mergers and splits shows how the power relations inside the party have changed over the years. The founder and the first president of the party, Nicuşor Dan, resigned from the party in June 2017, disagreeing with party's decision to stand against the referendum to amend the Constitution in the sense of redefining the family as a union between a man and a woman.

"We promised the people that in the party there will be room for both progressives and conservatives"– said Nicuşor Dan. Romania has more important problems to solve, such as corruption, the issue of the family being an intimate one, related to identity and religious feeling, and as such the party should not take a position on this subject, but address both those who support the referendum and those who are against it.[20]

After an interim of several months of the USR Cluj leader Elek Levente, the party elected Dan Barna as president at a congress held in October 2017. He managed to remain at the head of the party for four years, until October 2021, although he was often criticized for the clientelistic way in which decisions are took within the party's leadership forums and especially for his refusal to assume the failure in the 2019 presidential elections by resigning from the head of the party (Lungu–Goja 2022). After the merger with PLUS (Freedom, Unity and Solidarity Party), started in August 2020 and completed in April 2021, the party was led by two co-presidents, Dan Barna and Dacian Cioloş, and at the congress in October 2021, although it seemed that Barna has the first chance because the share of the members of the old USR in the new party was bigger, yet Dacian Cioloş was elected president with 50.9% of total votes.[21]

The formal merger of the two parties and the election of Dacian Cioloş as president did not diminish the dissensions within the party, whose members remained divided based on their old affiliation. Cioloş had to work with a National Bureau dominated by members of the old USR and in which PLUS was less represented. As such, the refusal of this central body of the party to fully adopt its party reform measures, led to his resignation from the position of president after only a few months, in May 2022. Cioloş announced his decision through a message posted on his Facebook page: "I did not want by all means to be the president of USR–PLUS and I looked for a reasonable, negotiated political solution that would affect the factions within the party as little as possible. I did not find understanding. I won the elections for the party presidency and tried to build a bridge between the artificial groups inside the party....I resigned when I understood that the chances of reforming a party that society needs are non-existent, and I cannot lie or I hide that everything is perfect just to fill a temporary position".[22]

After the resignation of Cioloş, Cătălin Drulă, former Minister of Transport, was elected president of the party following a congress held online in July 2022, in which six candidates competed. The priorities of the new president are to maintain the unity of the party, "the only party with a true liberal agenda in Romania" and to lead it on the path of maturity and stability: "I asked for a clear mandate and the USR gave it to me. It is a mandate to make a real opposition to the current bankrupt power, it is a mandate for internal organization and seriousness, and it is a mandate for the USR to give the prime minister and the president of this country".[23]

The objectives are ambitious, it remains to be seen if they will be achievable. For now, recent surveys[24] put USR in fourth place in terms of voting intentions, with approximately 9%, while the parties from the governing coalition (PSD: 33%, PNL: 21%) and the far-right AUR party (16%) are on the top three places.

Conclusions

Born from civil society and lacking ideological coherence since its foundation, USR achieved a remarkable performance in Romanian politics. In just a few years, it became the third largest political party, challenging the dominant status of traditional parties and attracting the sympathy of citizens dissatisfied with the existing parties. The party built its message around the concepts of integrity, transparency, the fight against corruption and the differences between them and the established parties in the political system. This kind of rhetoric directed against traditional political actors, especially PSD and PNL, accused of maintaining corruption and clientelism for more than three decades, as well as identifying the source of corruption with the image of a representative institution like the Parliament, denigrating the political class, the corrupt elites, brings the USR among the populist parties. Dragoman sees in the USR's messages a kind of "recombinant populism", in which the anti-communism of the first years of the transition and the anti-corruption of the last years are skillfully directed against the Parliament and the established and representative parties. "USR managed to emerge as an important player by reviving old populist themes but in a more radical manner. The party continues to emphasize an anti-elitist orientation combined with a strong anti-corruption campaign, adopting a flamboyant political style based on permanent confrontation, verbal attacks, and extensive accusations" (Dragoman 2021: 303). On the other hand, the anti-establishment rhetoric is common to centrist anti-establishment parties that have been successful in the last decade in most Central and Eastern European countries. They attract the support of discontented voters in the first elections in which they participate, being more a protest vote than one based on ideological considerations: "Their strategy of attacking the whole political establishment, while representing the same positions as the political mainstream, has proven to be an effective way of winning votes as newcomers" (Engler 2020).

The question – valid for USR as well – is to what extent these parties will manage to keep their support over time. The answer depends on several factors, an important one being how these anti-establishment parties will succeed to build an ideological identity. USR took steps in this direction, assuming a liberal identity, "a modern centre-right doctrine defined as a synthesis between European liberalism and the power of communities."[25] Ideological coherence could help both to harmonize the factions inside the party and to improve the communication with citizens, to better explain the party's priorities and public policies in various sectors and to consolidate a stable segment of voters. Secondly, USR's future will depend on the extent to which it manages to attract support in other places than big cities, in small towns and communes across the country, investing in the creation of local branches and of a network of social ties. And last but not least, the party representatives will have to learn better the culture of compromise and negotiation between divergent interests. This could avoid internal frictions and reconcile interest groups within the party, and help collaboration with other democratic parties in the political system.

The break with Dacian Cioloş and PLUS weakened the party and disappointed the voters who saw in the two parties a viable alternative to the traditional ones. Their trust should be regained, but focusing only on the anti-corruption and anti-system message puts USR in the shadow of AUR, which also fully took over these themes and makes even more noise around them.

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Notes

[1] See the Association's website https://www.salvatibucurestiul.ro/echipa/

[2] https://alegeri.roaep.ro/?alegeri=alegeri-locale-2012

[3] Until 2015, the number of members needed to establish a political party was 25.000, consolidating the dominance of existing parties. Only with the adoption of a new law on political parties in May 2015 (Law 114/2015), the number of founding members is reduced to three people, its effects being felt in the rapid increase in the number of newly founded parties.

[4] https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-administratie_locala-20269592-nicusor-dan-lansat-partidul-uniunea-salvati-bucurestiul-suntem-continuarea-acestui-efort-care-dna-face-curata-administratia-publi-ca-din-bucuresti-orasul-asta-nu-are-vizune-venim-propunem.htm

[5] The results of 2016 local elections are available here: http://locale2016.bec.ro/rezuultate-finale-5-iunie-19-iunie/index.html

⁶ See https://usr.ro/intrebari-frecvente/#ideologie, accessed on May 1ˢᵗ 2023.

⁷ See https://usr.ro/usr-la-guvernare/fara-penali/

⁸ See: http://europarlamentare2019.bec.ro/rezultate/

⁹ https://www.g4media.ro/breaking-surse-dan-barna-a-fost-desemnat-candidatul-comun-la-prezidentiale-al-aliantei-2020-USR–PLUS-dacian-ciolos-va-fi-candidatul-la-functia-de-prim-ministru-negocierile-dintre-usr-si-plus-s-au.html

¹⁰ The government led by Viorica Dăncilă came to power on January 29, 2019 and was dismissed by motion of no confidence in October 2019. It was the third PSD government after the legislative elections of 2016, the changes of these governments being mostly the result of political games within the PSD and the interests of its leader Liviu Dragnea to solve his criminal prosecution problems.

¹¹ https://prezidentiale2019.bec.ro/

¹² https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/politica/usr-a-decis-sa-nu-intre-la-guvernare-si-sa-ramana-pe-varianta-de-anticipate-1201209

¹³ https://romania.europalibera.org/a/micile-rocade-de-imagine-ale-partidelor-pentru-reasezarea-procentelor-ajun-alegeri/30982528.html

¹⁴ https://media.hotnews.ro/media_server1/document-2020-11-20-24431815-0-programul-guvernare-usrplus.pdf

¹⁵ https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/politica/conditiile-puse-de-USR–PLUS-pentru-un-guvern-cu-pnl-1413843

¹⁶ See: https://usr.ro/2022/06/19/ce-au-facut-ministrii-usr-la-guvernare/

¹⁷ https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/politica/catalin-drula-citu-e-un-zombie-politic-nu-iesim-din-coalitie-dar-guvernarea-nu-sta-intr-un-singur-om-1497959

¹⁸ https://romania.europalibera.org/a/USR–PLUS-alegeri-interne-pnl/31439663.html

¹⁹ https://romania.europalibera.org/a/USR–PLUS-aur-motiune-cenzura-solutie-imorala-/31442044.html

²⁰ https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-politic-21797310-nicusor-dan-isi-explica-plecarea-din-usr-cel-mai-important-motiv-tine-onoare-promis-oamenilor-usr-loc-pentru-progresisti-pentru-conservatori.htm

²¹ https://romania.europalibera.org/a/dacian-ciolo%C8%99-noul-pre%C8%99edinte-al-USR–PLUS-cu-50-9-barna-%C3%AEnvins-cu-695-de-voturi/31488060.html

²² https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/politica/prima-reactie-a-lui-ciolos-dupa-demisia-din-usr-nu-am-gasit-intelegere-imi-lasa-un-gust-amar-si-o-uriasa-cantitate-de-tristete-1958835

²³ https://www.rador.ro/2022/07/10/catalin-drula-a-fost-ales-presedinte-al-usr-din-primul-tur-de-scrutin/

²⁴ https://curs.ro/sondaj-de-opinie-la-nivel-national-martie-2023/

²⁵ https://usr.ro/centru-dreapta-modern/

Photo/István Péter Németh

FROM CIVIL SOCIETY TO POLITICAL PARTIES
LESSONS LEARNED FROM TWO ORGANIZATIONS IN TRANSYLVANIA-MUREȘ COUNTY

Lucian Săcălean

◼ The democratization of Central-Eastern European countries after the fall of the Berlin Wall was a long process, favored by external factors, such as the adoption of the Community Acquis, economic, political or other pressures from European national players or from pan-European institutions, respectively by the collective memory of these nations, with references to the periods before the establishment of the communist regime or other totalitarian/dictatorial regimes, from the period preceding the Second World War, more precisely, with reference to the liberal regimes.

We can state today, over 30 years after the beginning of the post-communist regimes, that there are different speeds and moments of the democratization of society at national level, respectively of the local/regional type components. Without any of these being less important than the other, we will focus on the experience of democratization of local society. We can distinguish at least three different stages, namely:

− first stage, immediately after the fall of the communist regime, when there is a synchronization between the national and local democratization process;
− a second stage in which the consolidation of the process at the national level (competition and political competitiveness) is reflected at the local level particularly by the establishment of some political-administrative monopolies;
− a third stage, marked by the revival of local political competitiveness and the emergence of contesting political parties at the local level, without the need for a doctrinal or organizational link with the centralized parties.

In the first case, it is a matter of synchronization between the national and local levels from the perspective of political-administrative activity. The construction of new political networks as replacements of the former communist party, the change of legislation, the political competition, the expression of economic-social needs that broadly coincide now between the local and national levels make up the premises of this synchronicity. The needs of the local community are expressed in the national discourse and the other way round, solving some issues related to the local level is rather delegated to the center, by virtue of the central political-administrative tradition until the fall of the communist regime.

In the second case, the consolidation of the political system at the central level, the creation of stable organizational structures, having as a functional model the former governing party until 1989 – the Romanian Communist Party, will be reflected at the local level by the beginning of a period in which the parties with national representation will try to establish real political-administrative monopolies. Winning by popular vote the executive positions – that of the mayor, ensuring the majority in the local legislature – local councils – either as a result of a favorable vote, of pre/post electoral alliances, or of personal arrangements involving a sufficient number of local elected officials becomes the most common scenario. Therefore, veritable political dynasties are established at the local level with all the negative effects that accompany this phenomenon. At the central level, this phenomenon is even encouraged, through discretionary public funding, the support of the local leader (in some cases with his access to the higher party structures) including from a media point of view. The political math is simple, each local area controlled in this way has major potential in the electoral numbers at the level of the national competition.

In the third case, we witness, in the case of some communities, the attempt to coagulate a political structure that is not necessarily dependent on a national arrangement. The main obstacle to the construction of an alternative rooted in civil society, at the local level, was seen in the form of the Law on Political Parties in Romania. The most important steps for its change have been concentrated in the direction of its integration in a broader sense of the concept of entrepreneurship, in this case political entrepreneurship. Further studies can be made on the connection between the performance of local government and the extent to which local citizens are mobilized to participate and demand accountability. As Merilee S. Grindle explains, "according to this perspective, social groups in the local community exert pressure on the public sector to provide better services or more opportunities for participating in policy processes. These groups not only demand good performance, they can also provide models of how improvements can be made, participate in decision making and implementation activities, and take an active role in monitoring the performance of elected and administrative officials – and sanctioning and rewarding them at election time. Through extension of this argument, localities without active civil societies are less likely to take on difficult tasks of providing better services, innovating in their activities, or being responsive to local needs."[1]

For case studies on the relationship between government and different lobbies which can acquire an active role in government, see also the last chapters in Mancur Olson's *Collective Action. Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*.[2]

With the fall of the communist regime in Romania (December 1989), the transition from the centralized system with a single party – the Romanian Communist Party (RCP or PCR, which is its Romanian acronym) – to a multi-party system, a significant number of political formations were offered the chance to enter the political life. Of these, 18 formations and 13 organizations representing minorities were part of the first post-communist legislative assembly (1990–1992),[3] out of the 90 that appeared in the first months of 1990.[4] 11 parties and 14 organizations representing national minorities made up the structure of the Chamber of Deputies between 1992–1996,[5] out of 155 registered.[6] Later, the adopted legislation encouraged the existence of the big parties, which tacitly tried, through the electoral results, to impose a system as close as possible to the systems characterized by the existence of 2 main parties competing against each other for governance. Law 27 of April 26, 1996[7] required 10,000 founding members from at least 15 counties out of the total of 42, while Law 14 of January 9, 2003 required the existence of 25,000 people from 18 counties.[8] As a result, the number of existing political parties in 2012 was reduced to only 28 political formations. The reform initiated in 2015 led to the increase in the number of political parties again, the debates surrounding the legislative changes highlighted the unease of the major parties related to the idea of competition and diversity.[9]

The approach aimed at amending the Law on Political Parties[10] in the sense of drastically reducing the number of signatures required to establish a political party, from 10,000 respectively 25,000 to only 3 founding members and without the need for the administrative-geographic criterion that required participants as founding members from 15 and 18 counties respectively out of the 42 in total. But even in this case, a last legislative element conditions the existence of these local parties on the submission of candidacies in at least 75 localities or a complete list in a county in the parliamentary elections.[11] The effects of this legislative change, in the short term, were immediate: 23 requests to establish new parties.[12] A year later, in 2016, the number of requests to establish new parties, according to the legislative changes, increased considerably.[13] Although the tendency is to increase the number of parties with national representation – 165 formations in 2019,[14] 189 formations in 2021,[15] an even higher number in 2022,[16] this phenomenon did not prevent the emergence of political organizations with local ambitions, even if the text of the law does not explicitly contain this formula. The test of the functionality of the legislative changes, respectively of the viability of some political initiatives with a local/regional focus, will be given by the number of formations that are able to finance participation in the electoral campaign according to the requirements imposed in order not to be written off. Even if the law is, in principle, generous regarding the financing from the state budget of the electoral expenses registered by the political parties in Romania, the reimbursement of these expenses is conditional

on meeting the electoral threshold of 5%, a threshold also necessary to access the local/national legislative structures.[17] Although a significant number of political formations of local/regional interest[18] with a diverse geographical coverage at the national level have succeeded to be legally registered, they are conditioned not to operate in a single locality, even if this was, in some cases, the basis of their establishment, so as not to be deleted from the Register of political parties.

The Free People's Party – Romanian acronym: POL[19] – was registered in 2015.[20] Founding members of this formation are also those who initiated and supported the campaign aimed at amending the legislation regarding the conditions for establishing a political party, together with the NGO AMPER, respectively the access of new parties to political representation. The initial approach addressed several key questions.[21]

1. How difficult is it to register a political party (exercising the right to association for political purposes) in Romania compared to EU member states that are consolidated democracies, former communist EU member states, and former communist states?
2. Is the legislation regarding the right of association and the electoral legislation in Romania more prohibitive than the legislation of other states when considering the access of new parties to parliamentary representation or local government?
3. Which are the most permissive and the least permissive states regarding the establishment of parties and their representation in parliament or in local government among the compared states?
4. To what extent do the provisions regarding the registration of a political party of Law no. 14/2003 of political parties affect political pluralism in Romania?
5. What impact do the legal provisions and their jurisprudential interpretation (especially the decisions of the Constitutional Court) have on political representation in Romania?

Elements such as the following were relevant in the creation of the internal argumentative discourse from a comparative perspective:[22]

1. the minimum number of people required for the official registration of a political party;
2. the ratio between the minimum number required to register a political party and the population of the state;
3. the statute of the person required by law for the registration of a political party;
4. the obligation of territorial representativeness for the registration of a political party.

The POL/AMPER[23] approach directly targeted political activity at the local level, a comparative analysis presenting the way the political system works in a number of European states, who and under what conditions can register and participate in local elections;[24] 6 out of 28 analyzed states recognizied the right of only party

members and independent candidates to run in local elections: Austria, Greece, Poland, Portugal, Romania and Slovakia. The initiators saw here the opportunity to recommend some changes that, in their view, were not only about reducing bureaucracy, but about facilitating the very democratic game of participation in elections. The existence and size of the electoral threshold were also analyzed comparatively; even Romania had a lower threshold until the 2000 elections than the current one – 3% vs 5%. Moreover, the existence of the electoral threshold in European political systems is not an exception: they vary from the natural threshold to 10% or even higher.

The campaign succeeded in what it set out to do, easing the way to establish political parties in Romania, but without including the idea of a local/regional party in the legislation. Even so, the law's requirements regarding the number of signatures when submitting an electoral list remains high (1% of the number of those entitled to vote), actually indicating a possible barrier to free competition. The law also provides that parties that do not run alone or in alliance in two successive campaigns, except for presidential ones, and do not provide at least 75 constituencies in the case of local elections, respectively a complete list of candidates in at least one constituency county election or candidates in at least 3 electoral constituencies in the case of parliamentary elections, can be abolished, at the request of the Public Ministry,[25] the provision not being a purely formal one, POL being in this position at present.

In the local elections of 2016, POL managed to obtain three mandates in the Local Council of Tîrgu-Mureș, in a multi-ethnic community,[26] out of a total of 23 (10 for the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania/ RMDSZ/UDMR – Romanian acronym), 5 for the National Liberal Party/PNL – Romanian acronym, 4 for the Social Democrat Party/PSD – Romanian acronym), the electoral results being somewhat more modest in the local elections of 2020 – 2 mandates (11 UDMR, 4 PNL, 2 PSD, 2 PRO Romania, 2 for the Popular Movement Party/ PMP – Romanian acronym). In this case, however, there are a number of characteristics - the quasi-monopoly of the political representation of the Hungarian community exercised by UDMR[27] both locally and nationally, the organizational and financial capacity of the other parliamentary parties participating in the local elections, the existence of a degree of political conservatism, etc. The three local councilors initiated 52 Council Decisions, of which 31 were approved, registering in the same period (2016–2020) about 1000 amendments and taking of the floor.[28] The main directions of action of POL in the Tîrgu Mureș Local Council targeted areas such as education – supporting the increase of the allocated budget, savings to the local budget, bilingualism, reducing pollution, transparency – including through the online transmission of local council meetings. Cultural identity enjoyed the same attention in POL discourse; however, there were different interpretations regarding this matter on its reception within the community.[29] POL failed to win the position of mayor of Tîrgu Mureș Municipality, participating in both campaigns with its own candidate.

Another case is that of the UIPS[30] in Sighisoara, also in a multi-ethnic community.[31] Although registered as a party in its current form after the change in the law, UIPS has been carrying out its political activity since 2012 as the name of a political alliance between two parties without parliamentary representation and unimportant on the political scene (the Cojocaru Law People's Party and the Green Party). This formula was considered the most effective at that time of transfer from the civic area to the political area of a program aimed at the local administration and local community by the initiators of this movement. It was a successful subterfuge to avoid the restrictive legislation from that time. In 2016, UIPS won 6 mandates of local councilors following the vote (out of 20 mandates in total; PSD - 7, UDMR - 3, PNL - 3), the position of mayor going to the PSD candidate. In 2020, UIPS manages to win 6 local council mandates (out of 20 mandates – PNL, 3 PSD, 2 UDMR, 1 PMP), and the position of mayor of the municipality of Sighisoara. Being in a similar situation to POL at Tîrgu Mureș, that of the opposition party, UIPS will rely on the submission of projects considered to be useful and necessary for the local community, most of them with minimal chances of realization, however, at that time (reduction of taxes, the construction of a new maternity hospital, the establishment of a solidarity fund, the creation and construction of a new bus station,[32] etc.). However, a series of proposals manage to find majority legislative support, such as the allocation of a minimum of 2% for the preservation of the local heritage (the identity of the city is part of the cultural identity between the protection-promotion dilemma[33]), the creation of urban plans, the tabulation of ANL-type blocks (some of them, although having been previously implemented, are completed after 2020 once the position of mayor is won). The transition from the opposition to the position of the main force of the local government also brought maturity to the political discourse, respectively of the initiatives aimed at the local community.

What do these two briefly presented examples have in common? Both are local civic initiatives materialized on the political scene. Both POL and UIPS exemplify the legislative change in the field of organizing political parties in Romania, in the sense that they become political formations with proper documents and enter the local political competition, having grown from more or less official or organized civic platforms. Both focus on clear needs of the local community, discursively, trying to present models of local governance characterized by responsiveness, responsibility, transparency, dialogue. Obviously, the political-administrative discourse of the opposition needs to change once the responsibility of the local government falls to them.

Both formations manage to capacitate an electorate dissatisfied with the rotation and quality of local government, a significant part of it becoming a loyal electorate. However, the difference in the ethnic structure and the size of the localities seem to differentiate the political trajectory and the success in the local elections, the change of political generations in Tîrgu Mureș in the case of some parties that partially targeted the POL electorate reducing the%age of voters for this formation. In Sighisoara, the maturity of the political team after four years of being in

the opposition transforms UIPS into an alternative to the government, thus capitalizing on the communication initiative that belonged to them during this period.

Local activism can take on new valences if a community issue can acquire a formula of political support that mainly involves local forces. Theoretically, it is easier to convince local political leaders of the justice of your cause than to do so with national leaders, as long as the object of concern is marginal to the political center. The number itself of local political initiatives can be, but not necessarily, an indicator of local democratization (it is difficult to establish a minimum limit of these initiatives, respectively an upper threshold of dispersion), however the facilitation of local political participation brings definite benefits to democratization, with all that it implies (competition, transparency, etc.) to local communities.

The fact that, in the first case, a local civic movement achieved an important change in the legislation regarding political competition, and later became active in the local legislature, emphasizing the transparency of the use of public funds, demonstrates the importance of the freedom of initiative and competition, with a major impact in local and/or national democratization. However, success or failure in terms of local political competition cannot be analyzed only through the lens of legislative changes. The adopted agenda, the political messages, the willingness of the public to consider a certain type of message, the ability to promote key messages, the stability of an electorate loyal to older parties/with national representation, ethnic weights are just some of the items to be taken into consideration. In the second case, the local political competitive structure, and possibly the size of the community compared to the first case, allowed a presence that was better valued in terms of political results. But both cases prove the importance and impact of local civic initiatives that can turn into political movements which can impose significant changes in the targeted community.

The future of these types of political movements, however, remains relatively uncertain, as long as the legislation continues to impose scales of representativeness, which are not always the object of the intention or interest of the initiators of such formations. Their maturation, from the perspective of administrative-political activity, is another test; in this case it is interesting to follow the response of the local community and the ability of these movements to remain viable, including to once again appeal to civic formulas and not necessarily mainly political ones.

However, we consider it necessary to facilitate and encourage the local competition, as a test for the national one, but also for the consolidation of the community from the perspective of civic-political activism. The existence of local formations can also be seen as a possible source of inspiration and leadership for parties with national representation, and as outlets for possible themes generating tension at the local level. The potential negative aspects concern the possible extreme polarizations at the local level, the sharpening of the local-national cleavage. The problem of financing, however, will remain, at least in the short term, an essential one for the survival of these local formulas, along with the lack of legislative measures to ensure their sustainability.[34]

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Acknowledgement

Notes

1 Merilee S. Grindle (2009): *Going Local: Decentralization, Democratization, and the Promise of Good Governance.* Princeton: Princeton University Press. p. 2.

[2] Olson M. (1971): *The Logic of Collective Action. Public Goods and the Theory of Groups.* Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, pp. 132–169.

[3] *Political formations and organizations represented in the Assembly of Deputies.* https://www.cdep.ro/pls/parlam/structura.fp?leg=1990

[4] „1990, anul 0". 90 parties were formed in just a few months
https://www.digi24.ro/special/campanii-digi24/1990-anul-0/1990-anul-0-nouazeci-de-partide-au-aparut-in-doar-cateva-luni-351518

[5] Political formations and organizations represented in the Assembly of Deputies
https://www.cdep.ro/pls/parlam/structura.fp?leg=1992

[6] https://tribunalulbucuresti.ro/index.php/partide-si-aliante-politice/partide-politice

7 Law 27 of 26 April 1996 - Legea Partidelor Politice/ Law of Political Parties
https://www.cdep.ro/pls/legis/legis_pck.htp_act_text?idt=16867

[8] Law 14 of 9 January 2003 - Legea Partidelor Politice/ Law of Political Parties
https://www.cdep.ro/pls/legis/legis_pck.htp_act_text?idt=39753

[9] Septimius Parvu, "Democrația locală din România și ce ne facem cu partidele politice noi",
https://www.contributors.ro/democratia-locala-din-romania-si-ce-ne-facem-cu-partidele-politice-noi/

[10] In chronological order – L. 27/26 April 1996 – Art 17 paragraph b – actul de constituire împreună cu lista semnăturilor de susținere a cel puțin 10.000 de membri fondatori, domiciliați în cel puțin 15 dintre județele țării, dar nu mai puțin de 300 în fiecare județ, însoțit de o declarație autentificată a conducătorului organului executiv al partidului privind autenticitatea semnăturilor/ the act of incorporation together with the list of supporting signatures of at least 10,000 founding members, domiciled in at least 15 of the country's counties, but not less than 300 in each county, accompanied by an authenticated declaration of the head of the party's executive body regarding the authenticity of the signatures;

L.14/9 January 2003 – art 19.paragraph 2 Lista trebuie să cuprindă cel puțin 25.000 de membri fondatori, domiciliați în cel puțin 18 din județele tarii şi municipiul Bucureşti, dar nu mai puțin de 700 de persoane pentru fiecare dintre aceste județe şi municipiul Bucureşti/ The list must include at least 25,000 founding members, domiciled in at least 18 of the country's counties and the municipality of Bucharest, but not less than 700 people for each of these counties and the municipality of Bucharest. L. 114/19 May 2015 – 9 article 19 is amended and will have the following content …paragraph 3. Lista trebuie să cuprindă cel puțin 3 membri fondatori/ The list must include at least 3 founding members.

[11] "b) nu a desemnat candidați, singur sau în alianță, în două campanii electorale succesive, cu excepția celei prezidențiale, în minimum 75 de circumscripții electorale în cazul alegerilor locale, respectiv o listă completă de candidați în cel puțin o circumscripție electorală sau candidați în cel puțin 3 circumscripții electorale, în cazul alegerilor parlamentare."/ did not appoint candidates, alone or in alliance, in two successive electoral campaigns, with the exception of the presidential one, in at least 75 electoral constituencies in the case of local elections, respectively a complete list of candidates in at least one electoral constituency or candidates in at least 3 electoral constituencies, in the case of parliamentary elections.

[12] https://www.inovarepublica.ro/noua-lege-a-partidelor-politice-oportunitati-si-bariere/

[13] https://www.inovarepublica.ro/monitorizarea-inregistrarii-noilor-partide-politice/

[14] AEP – Lista partidelor politice înregistrate în Registrul fiscal deținut de Autoritatea Electorală Permanentă conform art. 60 alin. (1) din Legea 334/2006 republicată, cu modificările și completările ulterioare și la Tribunalul Municipiului București până la data de 31 decembrie 2019/ The list of political parties registered in the Fiscal Register owned by the Permanent Electoral Authority according to art. 60 paragraph (1) from Law 334/2006 republished, with subsequent amendments and additions, and at the Bucharest Municipal Court until December 31, 2019.

[15] AEP – Lista partidelor politice înregistrate până la data de 31.12.2021 (actualizat conform Registrului partidelor politice)/ List of political parties registered until 31.12.2021 (updated according to the Register of Political Parties) https://finantarepartide.ro/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Plan-2022-cu%20anexa-actualizat%C4%83-color.pdf

[16] https://tribunalulbucuresti.ro/index.php/partide-si-aliante-politice/partide-politice

[17] The electoral legislation in Romania ensures the representation of national minorities, assigning one parliamentary mandate in the Chamber of Deputies to national minority formations that fail to reach the 5% threshold.

[18] Partidul Câmpina Curată, Partidul Oltenilor, Alianța Moților Uniți, Partidul Hunedoara Unită, Partidul Pentru Odorheiu Secuiesc, Partidul Eforie Rom, Partidul Alianța Albeștii de Argeș, Partidul Independenții Comunei Moșnița, Partidul Constanța Altfel, Partidul Sebeșul Verde, Partidul Inițiativa Otopeniul Nostru, Partidul Inițiativa Pătârlagele, Partidul Băcăoanilor, Partidul Pro Iași, Partidul Împreună Pentru Moldova, Partidul Prahova în Acțiune, Partidul Pact Pentru Galați, Partidul Uniunea Pentru Bucovina, Partidul Arădenilor, Partidul Uniunea Independentă Pentru Tecuci, Partidul Banatul, Partidul Acțiunea Națională Alba, Partidul Gorjenilor, Partidul Brăila Nouă, Partidul Viitorul Țării Făgărașului, Partidul Uniunea Civică Slănic Prahova, Partidul Costineștiul Unit, Partidul Civic Alimpești, Partidul Pentru Iași, Partidul Maramureșenilor, Partidul Alternativa de Vest, Partidul Mândri că Suntem Arădeni, Partidul Vrancea Noastră, Partidul 200 Pentru București, Partidul Ialomițenilor, Partidul Uniunea Independentă Pentru Sighișoara, Partidul Uniunea Pentru Codlea, Partidul Mișcarea Pentru Medgidia, Partidul Societății Ieșene, Partidul Forța Moldova, Partidul Renașterea Săcălazului, Partidul Gălățenilor, Partidul Pentru Argeș și Muscel, Partidul Botoșănenilor, Partidul Oamneilor Liberi, etc. https://tribunalulbucuresti.ro/index.php/partide-si-aliante-politice/partide-politice

[19] POL Partidul Oamenilor Liberi (POL) is is a party that defines itself as local reformist, based in the municipality of Tîrgu-Mureș. https://oameniliberi.com/despre/program-politic/

[20] Registered according to the provisions of civil sentence no. DEC 42 pronounced by the Bucharest Court – Fifth Civil Section, in file no. 28691/3/2015, in the public meeting of 16.09.2015, final https://tribunalulbucuresti.ro/images/documente/Partide/poz-78-dec-2020.pdf

[21] http://partide.amper.org.ro/ro/proiect-pentru-schimbarea-legii-partidelor/analiza-comparativa/

22 idem

23 AMPER – the non-governmental organization that publicly undertook, alongside POL, the campaign to amend the Law on Parties in Romania, the Association for Pertinent Minds AMPER was founded in 2011 in Tîrgu-Mureş,
https://www.amper.org.ro/despre-amper/

24 Local democracy – https://partide.amper.org.ro/ro/democratia-locala/

25 L. 114/19 May 2015 14. Article 47 paragraph (1), point b)

26 https://mures.insse.ro/, https://mures.insse.ro › uploads › 2018/05 › 0

27 Assimilated as a political organization UDMR – Hungarian Democratic Union of Romania came into being on December 25, 1989 http://udmr.ro/page/despre-noi

28 https://oameniliberi.com/ce-am-facut/

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30 PARTIDUL UNIUNEA INDEPENDENTĂ PENTRU SIGHIŞOARA/ INDEPENDENT UNION PARTY FOR SIGIŞOARA–UIPS registered according to Civil Decision no. 51 pronounced by the Bucharest Court – Fifth Civil Section in file no. 257/3/2016, in the public meeting on 28.03.2016, final by non-appeal. https://tribunalulbucuresti.ro/images/documente/Partide/poz-107.pdf

31 https://mures.insse.ro/, https://mures.insse.ro › uploads › 2018/05 › 0

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34 Septimius Pârvu, "Democrația locală din România şi ce ne facem cu partidele politice noi". https://www.contributors.ro/democratia-locala-din-romania-si-ce-ne-facem-cu-partidele-politice-noi/

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FABRICATING TRUTH: FROM A HYBRID WAR TO POLITICAL FAKE NEWS

STUDY CASE ON ROMANIAN ILLIBERAL PARTIES' DISCOURSE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE UKRAINIAN WAR

Mihaela Daciana Natea

From political lies to refurbishing history – a center peace process for understanding Russian propaganda in Eastern Europe.

The utilization of lies in politics is not new endeavor. In ancient Egypt the erase of the name of Pharaohs was meant of removing an undesired figure from history by the succeeding rulers (Nims Charles F. 2016: 97–100). Altering history was also a practice in the case of political events, as the interpretation of the historical sources of the battle of Kadesh had shown (Aljosha Karim Schapals 2018: 976-975). In ancient Rome *"damnatio memoriae"* was considered a punishment worse than death, and was executed by erasing the person form all public records (Eric R. Varner 2004), thus presenting a convenient truth. If we follow the evolution of the political system, it points us towards similar cases in different historical periods, and across the globe (Eric R. Varner 2004). From the spread of rumors from town to town to, later, publishing false information in newspapers, the physiognomy of political lies changed along with the societal and technological evolution. Printers made it easier to spread information, in form of leaflets, brochures, or newspapers. Radio and television made the information even more accessible for a larger audience and social media increased the spread and the velocity with which the information travels. The society moved from Francis Bacon "knowledge is power" (Rodríguez García 2001) to the need to develop the necessary skills to select the correct information from the hole area of sources concentrated in what we call infodemic today (Eysenbach G. 2020). Thus, the binomial science/power is even more relevant today.

Political lies find their legitimization from political decisions through historical records. As pointed out earlier the historical records presented a facet of the events, leaving "the historical truth" open to political interpretation.

There is a rich literature, covering various fields, pointing towards the manner in which historical records were used to describe the way history is instrumented to gather legitimization around certain political and social movements, decisions, or policies or to exclude them form history. Robert Graham points towards the fact that historians have sometimes presented certain political or social movements in a convenient manner: "for much historiography, anarchists have always been losers and necessarily so. Anarchism is described in turn as a dead or doomed ideology, depending on one's chronical scope. The historian task becomes to explain why this could not ne otherwise" (Robert Graham 2009: XV).

Wiping the slate clean of certain historical events to legitimize or glorify certain political movement or figures is also a common practice for certain historians serving the rhetoric of political regimes. In the literature it has been emphasized that "contemporary ideological and political battles can be fought out by highlighting certain features of the past and suppressing others" (John Coakley 2004: 531–56). Looking at the Romanian spectrum, we can highlight the case of Marshal Ion Antonescu, who committed war crimes during the Second World War. In several cases, historians and politicians tried to salvage his image denying the existence of war crimes and his involvement in crimes against Jews (Cosmin Zamfirache 2020). In the case of the war in Ukraine the Russian propaganda is built upon affirmations such as: Ukraine is not a state (Billy Perrigo 2022) using history as a standing argument and ignoring documents. In the latter category one can include the recognition of Ukraine and the Memorandum of Budapest in which Russia, together with The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States, guarantees the "independence and sovereignty and the existing borders of Ukraine" (Memorandum on Security Assurances in Connection with Ukraine's Accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, 5 dec 1994, Budapest).

Rewriting history, wiping the slate clean of certain events or refurbishing history to serve legitimize certain ideas were used by extremist movements in order to gain more visibility, promote their ideas, and justify certain political decisions. The communists have rewritten history in order to serve their narratives by introducing the ideology of "historical materialism" (John Coakley 2003: 531). Thus, the mainstream history and the history manuals had to comply with this new line imposed by the Communist Party. The narrative of the Moldavian language was formed to serve Russia's propaganda and to offer legitimization for not recognizing the unification of Basarabia with Romania after the Paris – Versailles treaties 1919 (Gheorghe E. Cojocaru 2014). An entire literature of scientific studies was developed linking the Moldavian language to Slavic languages and pointing how it differed from the Romanian one (Gheorghe E. Cojocaru 2014: 56). The Communist Party in Romania imposed a new rhetoric regarding major historical events such as

the unification from 1918, which was done "by the unified Romanian proletariat" (Moisuc Viorica 1971: 17–18).

John Coakley acknowledges that ""history" may be used to help consolidate particular types of regime". In the particular case of nationalism, they gaze at the grate common past picking the events which best serve their intentions, generating myths (John Coakley 2003: 531) in order to entertain their audiences and promote specific political discourses.

All these methods were encountered in Russia's propaganda and are disseminated in the Romanian public spere by historians, public figures, and politicians. These examples protrude to the core objective of our research as the main Russia propaganda regarding the war in Ukraine use historical events, makes references to historical findings or gazes upon the glorious history while justifying their invasion in Ukraine. This are then transported in third countries national politics trough political parties and extremist politicians as the research will highlight.

From hybrid war to political fake news

Hybrid war is a concept highly embedded in the military and security studies. In 2005 the concept was used in references to the tactics used by Hezbollah in the Lebanon war (Puyvelde Damien Van 2015). Lt Col Daniel T. Lasica, United States Air Force , concluded in a report in 2009 that hybrid war is an "evolving type of war that the United States may soon face" (Lasica Daniel 2009). References to the concept are identified in Russia, generally pinpointing towards the Gerasimov Doctrine (McDermott Roger N. 2016). All definitions refer to the term as an umbrella concept/ cover all concept for a type of war which: "is a combination of strategy and tactics designed to mix the types of warfare to use tactical success to achieve strategic effects by quickly exploiting the cognitive and moral domains" (Lasica Daniel, 2009). All hybrid war specialists emphasize the role of communication in conducting hybrid war: "consider the power of the cognitive and moral domains and the significance of influencing people to be so great that it is changing the very nature of war" (Lasica Daniel 2009). In this case information warfare plays a major role and disinformation is a threat not only in time of war but also in times of peace.

The *Joint Communication to the European Parliament and The Council, Joint Framework on countering hybrid threats. A European Union Response* acknowledges that "massive disinformation campaigns, using social media to control the political narrative or to radicalize, recruit and direct proxy actors can be vehicles for hybrid threats" (European Commission, Joint Communication to the European Parliament and The Council, Joint Framework on countering hybrid threats a European Union Response, Brussels, 6. 4. 2016). The Communication also pinpoints towards the need to better address radicalization and violent extremism including measures for better evaluation and removing harmful online content (European

Commission, Joint Communication to the European Parliament and The Council, Joint Framework on countering hybrid threats a European Union Response, Brussels 6. 4. 2016).

The exploitation of vulnerability is a key strategy in the hybrid warfare, thus if a system is vulnerable, the aggressor will use state and non-state actors to conduct its operations. Any political, economic, societal weakness can be exploited. Jovana Marović identifies as a tactic of hybrid war "interference in electoral processes" (Jovana Marović 2019). Using propaganda and financing local or regional actors is a common tactic (Jovana Marović 2019) used by Russia, and not only, in several European countries (EuroNews 14. 09. 2022). From our standpoint it is important to understand that a political manifestation in one country can be the result of foreign interventions in a direct or indirect manner.

Considering the connection between hybrid war, disinformation, and electoral processes, we must move consequently emphasize that the use of propaganda as a political tool has become a well-known international practice. Propaganda generates emotional responses within the society and in the context of hybrid war this may be delivered in order to generate social polarization, to destabilize societies, and in a broad spectrum to undermine the targeted state resilience.

It is used against controversial policies in order to "capture the emotions" around a certain response or a leader (Nino Imedashvili 2022). During the pandemic the use of propaganda was intense so states and international institutions took a stand by imposing standards and laws to reduce the impact of propaganda and disinformation. As an example, OSCE adopted the *Joint Declaration on Freedom of Expression and "Fake News"*, Disinformation and Propaganda through which rules were set aiming at the rights balance in combating these harmful actions but also preserving the core values of Western societies: the freedom of speech, of thought and of expression (OSCE, Joint Declaration on Freedom of Expression and "Fake News", Disinformation and Propaganda 2017). UNESCO developed a Handbook for Journalism Education and Training to combat 'Fake News' &Disinformation (Ireton—Posetti 2018).

Even with some international movement to combat disinformation we can easily determine that the practices are on the rise. Fake news appear frequently as most Europeans point in the Eurobarometer regarding Fake News and Disinformation: 37% daily, and 31% at least once a week (European Commission, Eurobarometer Fake News, 2018). The debate around fake news, as Terry Lee point out, is not new but in the era of social media took new dimensions (Terry Lee, 2019). Cambridge Dictionary defines fake news as: "false stories that appear to be news, spread on the internet or using other media, usually created to influence political views or as a joke" (Cambridge dictionary). Fake news become a political tool, through which political parties and politicians can spread fake information, misleading information or discrediting information in order to attract members or to increase one's image but also to "increase political polarization among the general public across nations" (Terry Lee 2019). Anand explained that polarization

is greater in social media as "we watch what we believe but what we don't watch we don't believe" (Terry Lee 2019).

The typical political lies and propaganda generates new nuances in the era of social media platforms as echo chambers and filter bubbles can appear. Even if social media can offer more visibility to the content someone shares, researchers have identified that people create filter bubbles by selecting what they view or can enter into echo chambers which disseminate information they believe is true leading to increase polarization (Terry Lee 2019). To this, social media algorithms (Jay J. Van Bavel–Steve Rathje et al. 2021: 913–916) (Lucian Sacalean 2015) and troll factories (Marius Dumitru Crăciun 2022: 154) can contribute to spreading fake news, confirmation bias, or polarization thus generating social clusters with, as J. Bishop observed, same views and little to non-room for debate (Jay J. Van Bavel–Steve Rathje et al. 2021: 913–916).

Even if some acts of disinformation, propaganda or fake news can be attributed to tools of the hybrid war, we must consider that not all are part of this process. In certain cases, political figures and parties use fake news, or disinformation tactics, even affiliating themselves with actions of another country, just in an attempt to gather attention, mobilize voters or gather notability and to exploit certain national and international controversial decisions. Populism is on the rise in Europe, extremist parties gained considerable popularity among the voters of several European countries (Jarrel De Matas 2017). Even if they use disinformation, misinformation, populism, or fake news this do not necessarily mean they are part of a hybrid war.

Considering this aspect, it is important to highlight that there is considerable information regarding hybrid war, disinformation, and fake news withing the electoral processes with foreign funds (Edward Wong 2022) in many states such as Georgia (Nino Imedashvili 2022), Bulgaria (Denitsa Koseva 2023), Romania (Gabriel Bejan 2022), Ukraine (Arun Iyer–Marc Polymeropoulos et al. 2023) Republic of Moldova (Dora Vulcan 2023) (George Scutaru–Marcu Solomonet et al. 2023) or even Africa (Shannon Bond 2023) and Latin America (José Ospina-Valencia 2022).

Fake news and the Romanian political spectrum

According to the Eurobarometer regarding Fake News and Disinformation 84% of Europeans consider fake news as a threat to democracy. The Eurobarometer also shows some interesting data when it comes to information sources. Responses to the questionnaire put Romania in an interesting position when it comes to trusting different sources of information. Asked about how much they trust information coming from the radio 66% consider it as a trusting source, putting the country in the 22nd and the 7th position below the European average (European Commission, Eurobarometer Fake News 2018). Romania is on the 19th with 66% of respondents saying they trust television, positioning the 1st below the European average.

Romanians thrust less in magazines and newspapers (45%) placing the country in the last five in Europe, with fewer trusting online papers and magazines (37% last three countries). When asked if they trust online social networks and messaging apps, Romania is third in Europe with 39% of the population considering these are trustworthy (European Commission, Eurobarometer Fake News, 2018). The data is correlated with the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) as in 2019 Romania occupied the first place in Europe in the participation in social networks (90% of the interviewed) (Digital Economy and Society Index Report 2019). Also, Romania scores a low index for digital skills, occupying the last place in Europe (2019) (Digital Inclusion and Skills in the EU 2019).

When asked how often they came across fake news, 41% answered every day, and 27% at least once a week, while 79% consider they can easily spot fake news (European Commission, Eurobarometer Fake News 2018).

The data is important as it give a clear image about what is happening: Romanians are heavy users of social media platforms, especially Facebook, considering the information they find online fairly trustworthy. This gives opportunities for political parties but also opens the possibility for online fake news distributed by political parties, politicians, public figures sharing certain views, NGO's or simple users. Also, the trolling effect needs to be mentioned as fake accounts are growing in number and are used to give the impression of a great number of followers or voters sharing the same view.

Moreover, audiences are gathered in groups, especially for Facebook which favor the distribution of online content. Groups such as: "esti din (county/city/village) if" gather audiences and are sometimes controlled by individuals associated or close to certain parties and are disseminating information according to certain rules. Certain groups or media agencies are associated with minorities and disseminate information in their language with specific results in voting patterns (Sacalean–Munteanu–Mircea 2013: 6).

In the political spectrum the last elections results promoted the extremist party AUR (Alianta pentru Unitatea Romanilor/Alliance for Romanian's Unity) in the parliament with 9% of voters. The party promotes a clear nationalist view, with extremist manifestations. In the aftermath of the elections, a part of the elected parliamentary left the party as they shared a more radical view (Diana Sosoaca) or a more moderate one. Former AUR members established Partidul Patrioții Poporului Român (Party of Patriots of the People of Romania) with an anti-Western view, considering NATO and EU "stones around the neck of the Romanian people" (Semeniuc Sorin 2022). Partidul Lege Educație Unitate (LEU) was established by politicians in close connection with AUR and RoExit is another party established by former AUR members (Semeniuc Sorin 2022). It is a clear dynamic in the extremist front but it is to see if, at next year elections, they will amass enough votes to pass the electoral threshold imposed by the law.

AUR and all the new established parties have a clear anti EU anti-NATO propaganda, disseminating of fake news in the online environment, and violent manifestation. Diana Sosoaca, is a clear supporter of Russia, promoting Russia propaganda.

According to a INSCOPE poll (March 2023), the voting intention is as follows: Social Democratic Party (PSD) 30,4%, Liberal National Party (PNL) 21,6%, AUR 19,1%, Union Save Romania (USR) 10,9%, Democratic Union of the Magyars in Romania (UDMR) 4.3% (Sondaj INSCOP, 2023). A CURS poll of January positioned PSD at 36% in voting intention; PNL at 22%; AUR at 14%; USR at 8%; UDMR at 5% (Marius Olaru 2023).

There are interesting aspects concerning news media agencies. Some sources explain that a big part of political parties' money is used to buy media coverage. In the last parliamentary campaign televisions were asked to comply with national rules for media exposure and information during elections (Cristian Andrei, 2020). Also, there are sources showing the staggering amounts political parties play to media agencies (Cristian Andrei 2022).

All political parties have social media pages and use them for dissemination. In some cases, the social media pages are boosted in order to give the impression that they have considerable interactions. This is why some pages have clones or massive interactions and views from these countries such as Vietnam, Pakistan, Mexico, Costa Rica and so on (Codruta Simina 2021). This usage of social media is not limited to Romania, but it can be identified in other countries (Kate Martyr, 2019).

The illiberal parties in Romania and the discourse on the war in Ukraine

For the purpose of this study, we compared some topics identified as disinformation by EU vs DiSiNFO with the information spread by AUR party or AUR party members and Diana Sosoca as a politician who adheres to Russia's propaganda. We tried to establish how much convergence there is between the Moscow narrative concerning the war in Ukraine, and the two selected case studies. We selected several topics which generated reactions in Romania and in the region. We followed if the topic was transposed directly into posts or if it was adapted to the particular case of Romania to support the rhetoric on Ukraine.

Thus, we try to identify if these news are fake, misinformation in singular cases or the actions need to be analyzed from the viewpoint of the hybrid war.

Topic	EU vs DiSiNFO	AUR	Diana Sosoaca
The disintegration of Ukraine	**DISINFO: Poland Wants to Subjugate the Remnants of Ukraine** (EU vs DiSiNFO, 9. 05. 2023) "An alleged plan by Poland to occupy Western parts of Ukraine", published in Hungarian **DISINFO: Poland Demands the Transfer of Lands in Exchange for Helping Ukraine,** (EU vs DiSiNFO, 24. 04. 2023) 24. 04. 2023, published in Georgia **DISINFO: Poland Plans to Swallow Ukraine** 6.04.2023, published in Russian and Arabic languages (EU vs DiSiNFO, 6.04.2023) **DISINFO: Romania is Preparing its Annexation of Ukraine,** 26.03.2023, published in Russian language Most of the articles target an Eastern European audience (EU vs DiSiNFO, 26. 03. 2023)	"When he calls the whole world for help to defend his country from Russia's aggression, is President Zelenski aware that he is the beneficiary and the guarantor of the same kidnappings, aggressions and historical injustices that robbed Romania of entire regions that today are part of Ukraine?" (Alexandru Mihăescu, 7 April 2023)	"Considering the conflict in Ukraine and the fact that the Romanian state finances Ukraine with military equipment and weapons through NATO, as well as the fact that approximately 3 million Ukrainians have passed through Romania, we ask Ukraine to give us the lands inhabited by our Romanian brothers" (Beatrice Ghiciov, 22. 03. 2023), (Romanian Parliament, 2023) On March 20, 2023, the senator submitted to the Senate the legislative proposal to amend Law no. 129/1997 for the ratification of the Treaty on good neighborly relations and cooperation between Romania and Ukraine in troducing 3 articles, one of them asking that: "Romania annex the historical territories that belonged to it, namely Northern Bucovina, Herța, Bugeacul (Cahul, Bolgrad, Ismail), historical Maramureș and Serpent Island" (Juridice.ro, 2023)
Ukrainian grain	**DISINFO: Ukrainian Grain Fills European Granaries and Breaks EU Unity** 25. 04. 2023, Spanish language (EU vs DiSiNFO, 25. 04. 2023) **DISINFO: Ukrainian Grain Destroyed Kyiv's Dream of Becoming an EU Member State,** 02.05.2023. Bulgarian language (EU vs DiSiNFO, 02. 05. 2023)	"AUR demands the prohibition of grain imports from Ukraine and their transit through Romania" (Digi24, 19. 04. 2023) "AUR demands an official investigation: Cereals full of pesticides from Ukraine would have arrived at low prices on the Romanian market" (VIDEO) (Florin Pușcaș, 2023).	Soșoacă: "Pesticides from Ukrainian cereals, ATTACK on the health of the Romanian people!" (Soșoacă, 3. 05. 2023)

Topic	EU vs DiSiNFO	AUR	Diana Sosoaca
EU exit/EU disintegration	**DISINFO: Poland Takes the First Step to Leave European Union,** (EU vs DiSiNFO, 14. 12. 2021), 14. 12. 2021, Russian language **DISINFO: The USA May Inspire New "Brexits" Through the Three Seas Initiative,** 21.09.2021, polish (EU vs DiSiNFO, 21. 09. 2021) (EU vs DiSiNFO, 21. 09. 2021)	George Simion: "Part of the Romanians are for Roexit. Can't they have opinions?" Who wants Romania out of EU and why? (Răzvan Filip, 2022)	Sosoacă demands the exit from the EU and prison for journalists. Sputnik: "Movement of the Moment" (Mircea Marian, 5. 10. 2021) "Do you like it in the European Union? Do you like that they stole everything from us? Do you like to eat bugs? Do you like utility prices? Do you like who rules you? And then, what do we want? Roexit! Roexit! Roexit! Roexit! (Ionel Sclavone, 2022)

The table above is composed only by selected information relevant for the research. It is obvious that the two discourses, which are embedded in a nationalist movement, follow the Russian propaganda. In this case, it is not only fake news but also the manifestation of the hybrid war. Lately in the press several information emerged connecting George Simion, the leader of AUR to Russian secret services (Revista 22 7. 04. 2023). Also, Senator Diana Sosoaca has ties with the Russian officials, celebrating the 9th of May with the Russian consulate in Romania.

Conclusions

There are several aspects that need to be consider and which emerged from the research:
– There is a strong connection between Hybrid War, disinformation, and political fake news. Even if the information distributed through media channels and social media target a larger audience, the impact of disinformation is strongly related to public figures.
– The fact that a politicians or political parties use fake news does not necessarily link them to hybrid war.
– The presence of disinformation about the war in Ukraine is higher in Eastern Europe and relates to the historical background and the way the communist regime refurbished history in the past. In this context, there is a common package of information the population can relate to, certain times entering certain bubbles in social media.
– The research on how Russia finances political parties and politicians needs to be more intense, as it can have a considerable impact if there are vulnerabilities in the society.

– The messages used to create disinformation are sometimes taken directly form the Russia propaganda, other times they are adapted to a specific country to generate the same idea. Therefore, there are considerable articles which describe e EU exit of certain states, the looming end of the EU, and the unhappiness within EU population about the decisions taken in Brussels.

– The rhetoric of division of states in Eastern Europe can have a deeper impact over the region as it addresses core disputes developed throughout the history.

– Political fake news can be a manifestation of a larger international agenda and can have negative impact on a state's security.

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THE ROLE OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS IN EXPLAINING THE RISE OF POPULISM
CASE STUDY: ALLIANCE FOR THE UNION OF ROMANIANS (AUR)

Radu Carp–Vasile Strat–Cristina Matiuța–Marian Oancea

Introduction

In the last decade, populism has risen across Europe with a speed much faster than experts could imagine and predict. The migrant's crisis or the COVID–19 pandemic were the major factors that contributed to the development of such parties that are continuously fighting the establishment and the old parties that ruled the countries before. Thus, we have witnessed parliamentary changes in France, Germany, Italy, or Spain, with more and more populist parties becoming part of the decision-making process.

Romania became one of the countries with a populist party in Parliament. The 2020 local elections were supposed to be held in June, but they were reported to be held in September due to pandemics. The Alliance for the Union of Romanians – *Alianța pentru Unitatea Românilor (AUR)* – participated to these elections but got a very modest result: 21.876 votes, representing 0,29% of the total number of votes. AUR succeeded to elect only 3 mayors and 79 local councilors and no county councilors. The real breakthrough of the AUR was in the parliamentary elections organized in December 2020. AUR got 535.831 votes, representing 9,3% of the total votes and becoming the 4th party at the national level. AUR got 33 seats in the Chamber of Deputies and 14 seats in the Senate.

This article aims to explain some of the major factors that influenced the total score obtained by a nationalist-populist party that succeeded to Parliament in a manner that nobody could predict before. For a comprehensive explanation we

started with a set of hypotheses formulated starting from previous studies and we have tried to provide some quantitative evidence for supporting them. Using correlations and regression analysis (both simple and multiple linear regression models) we have tried to identify the main socio- economic and demographic characteristics of Romanian counties that could be viewed as indicators of the success of the AUR party in the general elections held in 2020.

General assumptions that could explain the final score of AUR in 2020 elections:

a. AUR is part of what is called the "populist radical right", as well as a digital party, collecting votes by sending strong messages through social media channels.
b. AUR collected the votes that historically other nationalist or populist parties used to have, but now they do not exist anymore, leaving an open space on the political arena.
c. AUR's score was influenced by the referendum hold in 6–7 of October 2018 regarding the definition of the family in the Romanian Constitution, as his founders were among the main supporters.
d. AUR is a party voted by a part of the Romanian society that normally does not participate in electoral process.
e. AUR is highly supported by the Romanian diaspora, who strive to be anti-establishment.
f. The AUR was voted for by poorer citizens with fewer education.

Another very important explanation for the unexpected results of AUR in December 2020 is related to *the pandemics.* Romanian authorities, imposed restrictions that were strongly challenged by AUR representatives, especially George Simion and the late senator Diana Șoșoacă. Within the Romanian Orthodox Church, there was a consensus to follow the strict antiCOVID–19 rules, except for the Archbishop of Tomis, Teodosie, who advocated strongly against any restriction. Therefore, the main dividing line in Romania in the autumn of 2020 was between favoring COVID–19 restrictions or being against them. AUR has been the only political party to assume the position of being totally against all restrictions and this is how it gained a voice. In Romania, the cleavage for and against COVID–19 restrictions was almost unnoticed by the media in the autumn of 2020 (one explanation is that the media received a lot of money from the government in order to not promote anti-restrictions messages and fake news about the pandemics). This explains why the growing of AUR in electoral terms from local elections until parliamentary elections was unnoticed either and why the result of AUR in December 2020 has been considered a major surprise.

All the hypotheses presented above are a very good starting point for further research. In this article we focus on the socio-economic determinants that influenced the election of AUR for the Romanian Parliament and we tried to figure

out if there is a statistical explanation that could give a clear overview of how the electorate of this party looks like. Thus, we have selected and downloaded from the Online Tempo Database of the National Institute of Statistics a large array of indicators available at the county level for 2020. Our main approach was based on correlations and regression analysis. Therefore, as a first step, we have tried to identify common patterns between socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of Romanian counties and the%age of votes obtained by AUR party. We have also tried to connect AUR performance with the overall turnout and with the turnout of difference between the 2020 versus 2016.

After having identified several correlations, we have investigated simple and subsequent multiple regression models with the clear objective of providing a good enough estimation of AUR performance based on different combinations of the previously identified variables. Overall, eight simple models and eight multiple models were estimated and the most performant reached an R square of over 0.66.

Theoretical background

Debates on populism have intensified in recent decades, with the rise of populism movements that are a challenge to political stability and democracy across Europe and in the United States. As political scientist Cas Mudde points out (Mudde 2007), in its original form, populism is an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups- "the pure people" and "the corrupt elite"- and argues that politics should be an expression of the "general will" of the people. At least three conditions classify an political actor as populist, according to Jan Werner Müller: the first one is that populists are critical of the elite (although not everyone who criticizes the status quo is populist); the second -that they are anti-pluralists, claiming that only they represents the people (this claim of the exclusive representation of the people is a moral one: the elites are immoral and corrupt, they and the people are morally immaculate), and the third -that populism is a form of identity politics threatening democracy through the idea of a single, homogeneous and authentic people (Müller 2017).

Populism cannot be defined in terms of right, left of center, because "it is not an ideology, but a political logic- a way of thinking about the politics" (Judis 2016: 14). There are rightwing, leftwing, and centrist populist parties. An important feature of the populist parties, say Judis, is that they often function as warning signs of political crisis, arising in circumstances when see the prevailing political norms as being in contradiction with their hopes, fears and concerns. The populists express the neglected concerns and frame them in a politics that puts the people against intransigent elite, becoming thus catalysts for political change. Problems as increased immigration (seen seedbed of crime and terror) or protection of workers against global capitalism are taken by populists who give voice to people's concerns.

They signal that the prevailing political ideology is not working and needs repair, and the standard worldview is breaking down.

Unlike most political ideologies, populism is not based on well-articulated principles, it is rather a simplistic critique of the establishment; that's why it was categorized by scholars as a "thin-centered ideology: a set of relatively coherent but narrow propositions that are used to express more robust ideological perspectives, such as nativism or economic protectionism" (Bonikowski 2016:12). When the "thin" ideology is mixed with stronger ones, such as nationalism, the populist parties strengthen their chances against governing majorities seen as "the establishment," becoming in a few instances full-fledged governmental forces (Martinelli, 2018). The 2019 European Parliament elections, as well as the national elections in the past years all across the Europe have proved that in the cases where populism merged completely with nationalism it won a significant number of votes and it have lost votes where it was not affiliated with nationalism (Carp–Matiuța 2020). The trend towards the national populism began long ago and it was accelerated by the economic and financial crisis that determined many citizens to shift their votes from mainstream to populist parties.

Many studies (Mudde 2007; Eatwell–Goodwin 2018; Norris–Inglehart 2019; Zulianello 2020; Taggart–Pirro 2021) analyze the different roles played by populist parties in contemporary party systems. Adopting a broad pan-European perspective, covering 33 countries (the EU Member States and extra-EU countries), in order to capture the varieties of populist parties, Mattia Zulianello emphasizes that in many cases populist parties are no longer at the margins of party systems, but integrated, as never before, into their national political systems. Other research focus on the electoral base of populist parties (Pauwels 2014; Rooduijn 2018; Guth–Nelsen 2019; Voogd–Dassonneville 2020). If, beyond their ideological diversity or political styles, populist parties share a common set of ideas about the relationship between the people and the elite for example, could we say the same thing about their voters? Do the voter bases of populist parties also have something in common? To answer this question, M. Rooduijn examines the electorates of 15 prototypical populist parties from 11 Western European countries. Based on analysis of individual-level data (coming from the European Social Survey 2002–2012) on socio-demographics, attitudes and voting behavior, the research shows that the voting bases of different kinds of populist parties strongly differ from each other and that, despite a widely held belief, "the electorates of populist parties do not always consist of individuals who are more likely to be 'losers of globalization' with Eurosceptic attitudes, low levels of political trust, and preferen-ces for (more) direct democracy. This suggests that 'the' populist voter does not exist" (Rooduijn 2018: 365).

Populism in post-communist Romania

As far as populism in Romania is concerned, studies emphasize its constant presence in Romanian politics during the country's transition to democracy (Shafir 2008; Gherghina–Miscoiu 2010; Corbu et. al. 2017; Adam 2018). Soare (2010) identifies five species of populism in post-communist Romania, with specific characteristics and commonalities which often combine elements of communist origin with those inspired by the interwar far right. These species are, according to the author, *the national paternalist populism* (embodied in the early 1990s by the National Salvation Front–FSN, the main heir of the Communist Party, taking from national-communism especially the anti-Hungarian discourse and the risk of losing Transylvania); *the anarchic populism* (represented by the miners' riots in Bucharest, in the early of 1990s, characterized by fear and violence, lacking any form of institutionalization and strongly dependent on their leader's charisma); *the radical populism* (embodied by the Greater Romania party–PRM, borrowing, seemingly chaotic, elements from the national-communist discourse and from the rhetoric of the interwar far right; party revolving around its leader, Corneliu Vadim Tudor and characterized by organizational weakness); *a regional episodic populism* (that can be identified with the Romanians' National Unity Party–PUNR, with the electoral base in Transylvania, which in its short parliamentary existence was the promoter of an nationalist message, focused on defending national interest against Hungarian minority); and the messianic populism (in the early of 2000s, represented by the New Generation Party–PNG and its leader George Becali, focusing on the need of moral and spiritual renewal of the Romanian society).

These species are representative for the transformations taking place in Romania in the first two post-communist decades. But, if its species are transient, the populist genus endures over time, like a phoenix, "able to maintain itself, in different ways, in a state of temporal weightlessness: a youth without old age and a life without death" (Soare 2010: 88). Also referring to the Romanian case, Shafir (2008) distinguishes between "historical populism" (during the interwar and communism) and "neo-populism" in the post-communist context. As for neo-populism, it is "useful to distinguish between neo-populism from below and *neo-populism from above*, since they are prone to employ different techniques" (Shafir 2008: 432). The neo-populism from below is the category of politicians aspiring to power (exemplified with the case of George Becali and his New Generation Party), while the neo-populism from above refers to populist policies employed by incumbent politicians seeking to preserve power and broaden support. The example chosen for this second category is of the former president of the country, Traian Băsescu, who appealed to the people and vehemently criticized the corruption of the elites.

At the beginning of the third post-communist decade, another populist party founded in 2011 managed to accede to Romanian politics, gaining 68 seats in the Parliament following the legislative elections of 2012. It is about the People's Party Dan Diaconescu (PP–DD). Its leader, Dan Diaconescu, owner of a tabloid-style TV

station called OTV, accused the corrupt and incompetent elite, obedient to European institutions, for the moral and social decline of the nation, advocating for a redistribution of wealth in Romania, from elites to the nation. The success of the party faded quickly, entering a dissolution process after Diaconescu was sentenced to prison for blackmail and his MPs began migrating to other parties. Following the 2016 legislative elections, it seemed that we were witnessing at a decline of populism in Romania as no extremist party enters parliament. One explanation may be that many features of populist discourse "have been hijacked by mainstream parties in the hope that repeated appeals to the people and denouncements of corrupt governing elites will resonate with voters' mind and hearts and bring the parties more votes." (Corbu et al. 2017).

The local and parliamentary elections of 2020 brought into life in Romania a new political party that belongs to the family of populist parties: *Alianța pentru Unitatea Românilor* (AUR)–The Alliance for the Union of Romanians.

The alliance for the union of romanians (AUR)

When AUR participated for the first time in local and parliamentary elections and succeeded in making an outstanding breakthrough from 0,29% in the local elections to 9,3% in the parliamentary elections, almost everyone in Romania expressed surprise. AUR has been completely absent from TV shows that preceded parliamentary elections; therefore, it was 'under the radar" of the political analysts, but also of other parties before December 2020. Those who followed the electoral campaign on social networks have witnessed the unusual and extraordinary activity of AUR but even them were skeptical about the AUR performances. In Romania it was not understood that mainstream left and center – right parties will be challenged by the same parties as in other European countries – first a party belonging to the digital parties´ family and then by a party belonging to the category of populist parties sharing approval for illiberal democracy and for Europe as a family of so-vereign nations. 2020 could be considered as an end to the illusion of mainstream parties that controlling TV stations (as written press become almost irrelevant in Romania) could have good electoral results and other parties will have bad results because of limited access to TV stations. 2020 marks the first parliamentary elections when social networks were a very important factor in explaining the outcome of the elections, in a way that one party – AUR – focused more on direct interaction with the potential voters, both online and offline.

AUR had all the premises to evolve as an old-style nationalist party, as his leader George Simion has been also the founder of „Acțiunea Platforma Unionistă 2012" (Unionist Platform Action 2012), a network of NGOs, leaders and social movements that pleaded for the unification of the Republic of Moldova with Romania (2012 marked the bicentenary of the first Russian annexation of Bessarabia, currently the Republic of Moldova).

George Simion was a public figure even before 2012, as a very active leader of football galleries that promoted nationalist slogans. He introduced in the arenas the written slogan "Bessarabia is Romania." From football stadiums this phrase expanded in the whole country on different roads, public monuments, train stations, etc. At some point after 2012, Simion considered the Platform obsolete and he started to organise himself marches as a leader in Bucharest, like in 2016, just before the first round of presidential elections in the Republic of Moldova. This was a turning point in his public career, as it opened dialogues with the leaders of the Romanian mainstream parties. In 2018 Simion established a new social movement called "Alianța pentru Centenar" (Alliance for Centenary), as Romania celebrated 100 years of the Great Union of 1918.

In 2019 Simion competed for the first time in elections, as independent in the European Parliament elections, getting only 1,21% of the total votes, using the slogan 'Great Romania in Europe." In the aftermath of these elections, Simion participated in the incidents of the cemetery from Valea Uzului, challenged by Romanians and Hungarians. Simion participated to these events together with a neo-fascist outlet *Partidul Noua Dreaptă* (New Right Party).

The other co-president of AUR was, until March 2022, Claudiu Târziu, a former journalist. He was the founder of a Christian-oriented journal called *Rost* ("The sense"), while continuing his activity as senior reporter for *Formula As*, a weekly magazine that promotes traditional attitudes and values, protection of environment and rural life. The orientation of *Rost* was not only spiritual, but also a lot of attention has been paid to how a Christian – Democrat party could be successful in Romania or on interviews with people who had the experience of Romanian prisons during Communism. Rost has been published between December 2002 and September 2012.

AUR as a political party has been officially created on December 1 2019, the National Day of Romania. Its first congress was organized on January 24 2020 when Târziu and Simion were elected as co-presidents and Sorin Lavric was elected as president of the AUR Senate. According to the AUR Statute, the president of the Senate is defining the party doctrine, and it is responsible to apply the party strategy. Sorin Lavric was a relatively well – known Romanian intellectual, with conservative ideas before joining AUR. He was an editor at Humanitas publishing house and taught courses at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Bucarest. Lavric published a book about the relationship between the philosopher Constantin Noica and the Iron Guard *(Noica și mișcarea legionară)* in 2007 and he also published a book in 2019 (Decoct de femeie) where he develops misogyny-related thoughts. He was also editor at *România literară* (Literary Romania), a weekly magazine, but after being elected in the Parliament in 2020 he was expelled for his extremist attitudes.

Based on these premises (the past of its leaders), AUR could have evolved in the direction of a conservative party, with close links to nationalism and or Christian democracy, a kind of conservative outlet that exists in many countries nowadays.

Nevertheless, AUR evolved in the direction of a populist party, as other new political brands with conservative roots did in the recent years – one good example in this sense with a lot of similarities with AUR is the party Vox from Spain (Rama et al. 2021).

Reading the AUR programme is one of the best arguments to define this party as belonging to the family of radical right. AUR declares that is based on four pillars: family, fatherland, faith and freedom. For AUR, the family is the union of a man and a woman, reiterating the question addressed at the 2018 referendum. The AUR programme describes some measures for harmonizing family life with professional life in order to encourage the birth of more children and therefore fighting the constant decline in demographic terms of Romania. Regarding abandoned children placed in state institutions, AUR proposes moving these children in family-like houses", although it is not very clear what it mean and not considering that nowadays it is not the state that runs most of these institutions, but NGOs or Churches.

Fatherland is defined as the initial 'hearth' (the ancient territory of Romania), but due to migration to Western countries the nation does not correspond to Romanians living in Romania. It means that the Romanian diaspora is also part of the nation, therefore Romania is everywhere Romanians live – a theory that corresponds in a striking way to „*russky mir*" according to which there is a Russian space everywhere russophone people lives, no matter the country or to the attitude of Viktor Orban´s Hungary towards neighboring countries where the Hungarian minority live.

According to the AUR programme, Romanians living in countries neighboring Romania (Ukraine, Serbia, Bulgaria, Hungary) are the victims of the so-called „ethnocide", because these countries practice policies aimed at completely destroying Romanian communities. AUR promise concrete steps in order to promote their national identity. It is interesting that AUR believes that there is also an 'ethnocide' against Romanians from the Balkans (Greece, North Macedonia, Albania), probably referring to the Vlach minority. This minority, while with strong links to the Romanians, does not want to be considered as part of the Romanian nation (although there is a controversy on this specific issue among the Vlachs).

The third pillar is faith, but AUR refers only to Christianity, adding that we are witnessing a "campaign of prosecution" against Christians in the last decades.

Finally, the fourth pillar is freedom, defined in a way as FPÖ describe *Freiheit* in its own party programme.

A common issue of populist parties across Europe is the willingness to promote an „Europe of the nations", as opposed to an ever-closer European Union that increasingly use specific federalist instruments. AUR declares in his programme not only the adherence to the Europe of nations, but also the rejection of „the United States of Europe," which is against "the colonization of Europe with allogeneic populations", meaning its opposition to migration. Nevertheless, AUR declares itself in favor of Europe, considering that it fights for a „Great Romania as part of Europe." This 'Great Romania' means the union with the Republic of Moldova (but

it is not limited to this aspect). According to AUR, Romania could be a 'leader' inside the European Union, by promoting 'the principles of national sovereignty". Regarding the reunification with the Republic of Moldova, this could be done according to the AUR programme by organizing a referendum.

Reading the AUR programme, one can realize that this party is in favor of some issues promoted by other parties, blamed by AUR as part of the 'establishment'. AUR declares that it is in favor of the rule of law and even for the strengthening of DNA – The Anti-Corruption Directorate, adding that the damages caused by corruption must be recovered. AUR declares that it is in favor of a free market economy, a free press, and the promotion of the rights of the Romanians living in the diaspora. AUR wants, as most mainstream Romanian political parties, more money for health and ensuring more transparency of the money used by the hospitals.

The AUR programme is combining issues that are specific for extreme right, radical populist right and populist parties all across Europe, but it seems that the authors of this programme were cautious not to be accused of being against the current pro-European stance of Romania and consequently to promote Russian interests (as AUR has been constantly accused of a supposed 'Russian connection'). This could explain why this programme shares some perspectives with the programme of mainstream parties, especially in the area of the rule of law (Bocancea 2020: 77– 111).

In the summer of 2021, the Romanian government lifted most of the public health restrictions, despite the fact that Romania had at that time one of the lowest COVID– 19 vaccination rates in Europe. The rapid spread of the Delta variant consequently led to a fourth wave of coronavirus, peaking at around 500 deaths a day in October 2021. As a consequence, restrictions were reintroduced. The new restrictions and the government's intention (poorly materialized in the end) that a "vaccine passport" might be necessary to access public places, have been strongly opposed by AUR, who have organized protests. Many of those protesting against vaccination in Romania were supporters of AUR and the party leaders organized many protests against all pandemics related measures (Doiciar–Crețan 2021: 244).

On 24th of January 2022 (chosen as a symbolic date to coincide with the Union of Romanian principalities of Wallachia and Moldova in 1859) George Simion announced that Călin Georgescu will be appointed as the honorary president of AUR. Claudiu Târziu expressed his intention to not endorse Georgescu for this position. According to the AUR statute, the honorary president is appointed by the two co-presidents of the party, but there are no further mentions about his role and powers. It is not clear right now if this position inside the AUR is filled by Georgescu or not. Călin Georgescu has been promoted for long time as the AUR candidate for prime minister and alternatively as the AUR candidate for President of Romania. He is known for nationalist views, for pro-Russian stances and for his admiration for the Iron Guard movement and former fascist autocrat leader of Romania during WW2, Ion Antonescu.

On March 27 2022 (chosen as a symbolic date in order to coincide with the anniversary of the 1918 Union between Bessarabia and Romania) AUR has convened an extraordinary congress in order to change its statute. It was decided that instead of two co-presidents, AUR will have a single president (George Simion). Claudiu Târziu stepped down as co-president and was elected as President of *Consiliul Național de Coordonare* (CNC – National Council of Coordination). Nevertheless, on the AUR website the old form of the party statute may be found.

Methodology

The current research is based on a stepwise quantitative methodology created for identifying the most important socio-economic explanatory factors of the electoral success of the AUR party. The article does not follow a sociological perspective based on personas created using sample data but rather follows a more fact-based approach investigating relationships between the voting results and the socio-economic characteristics of the Romanian counties. For reaching the key objective and for providing a 360-degrees view, 4 assumptions are formulated and tested in this article.

Assumption 1 – In counties with a poorly developed social infrastructure, the Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR) scores higher.

Assumption 2 – In counties where the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) scores higher, the Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR) scores lower, and the other way around.

Assumption 3 – The turnout has a significant impact on the Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR) score.

Assumption 4 – The performance of the Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR) is correlated with migration.

The data used in the paper have three main sources, namely the National Institute of Statistics (Appendix A) and the Permanent Electoral Authority (Appendix A).

To ensure comparability between counties all variables expressed in absolute values were standardized with the help of the POP107A variable (population at the first of January 2020). After this step all variables that were included in the next steps of the analysis were: rates, value per inhabitant, value per 1000 inhabitants or similar comparable variables. Since correlation was under investigation it was decided that standardization was not a necessary step. Using the newly created variables common patterns and correlations have been investigated. All 39 variables were correlated with the %age of votes recorded by AUR at the 2020 general elections, using Pearson correlation coefficient.

$$r = \frac{\sum (x_i - \bar{x})(y_i - \bar{y})}{\sqrt{\sum (x_i - \bar{x})^2 \sum (y_i - \bar{y})^2}} \tag{1}$$

r – Pearson correlation coefficient with values in [-1, 1]

Based on the identified correlations, several regression models were constructed to identify the best model for explaining the results of the party across Romanian counties. For ensuring a complex view of the phenomenon 16 regression models were estimated. The first 8 are simple linear regressions and the last 8 are multiple linear models including three to four independent variables. All correlations with a medium to high intensity, therefore of approximatively 0.5 or higher were included in the different regressions.

The structure of the 16 estimated regression models is as follows:

(simple linear regression model)

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_i + \varepsilon_i \tag{2}$$

(multiple linear regression model)

$$y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x_{i1} + \beta_2 x_{i2} + ... + \beta_p x_{ip} + \epsilon \tag{3}$$

Empirical results

All variables selected and included in the analysis were quantitative variables and the main descriptive statistics are displayed in the following table.

Table 1.

	Average	Std dev	Min	Max	Median	No of obs.
SCL101A/POP107A – Crese	0,325	0,043	0,245	0,456	0,321	42
SCL112C / /POP107A	21,927	11,624	11,672	67,910	18,573	42
SAN102B/POP107A	5,525	1,630	3,009	10,391	5,463	42
LOC103B/POP107A	19,718	2,417	14,126	29,305	19,633	42
SCL101A/POP107A	10,266	1,680	7,174	15,825	10,239	42
PS_UDMR	0,079	0,187	0,001	0,863	0,005	42
PCD_UDMR	0,078	0,185	0,001	0,859	0,004	42
Prezență locale 2020	0,477	0,059	0,369	0,594	0,481	42
Parlamentare 2016	0,395	0,036	0,316	0,472	0,394	42
Parlamentare 2020	0,323	0,038	0,236	0,426	0,318	42
Dif Parl 2016- Parl 2020	0,072	0,021	0,009	0,105	0,071	42
POP320C/POP107A	8,622	0,687	7,278	10,146	8,614	42
POP309E/POP107A	0,849	0,387	0,245	1,893	0,735	42
ASS118F/POP107A	8,628	4,468	0,109	20,778	8,400	42
SCL103B/POP107A	131,522	9,514	111,602	151,436	131,202	42
SCL103B/POP107A	3,964	1,813	0,604	8,788	3,755	42
SCL103B/POP107A	5,114	1,399	1,409	7,457	5,057	42
SCL103B/POP107A	27,307	3,850	15,698	35,558	27,284	42
SCL103B/POP107A	0,692	0,319	0,241	1,310	0,676	42
SCL103B/POP107A	70,877	6,538	55,700	83,723	71,433	42
SCL103B/POP107A	22,886	3,193	17,718	30,786	22,038	42
SCL103B/POP107A	0,985	1,918	0,000	12,567	0,570	42
SCL103G/POP107A	147,364	26,417	113,743	236,736	141,994	42
SCL103G/POP107A	141,619	24,671	110,222	223,170	135,565	42
SCL103G/POP107A	3,218	1,985	0,053	8,640	2,586	42
SCL103G/POP107A	32,421	4,117	17,107	40,630	32,592	42
SCL103G/POP107A	28,371	3,720	12,342	34,869	28,142	42
SCL103G/POP107A	3,041	1,949	0,053	8,640	2,484	42

SAN101A/POP107A	0,601	0,279	0,151	1,484	0,558	42
SAN101A/POP107A	0,348	0,090	0,157	0,603	0,339	42
Romani %	0,819	0,178	0,126	0,942	0,881	42
Maghiari %	0,079	0,180	0,000	0,829	0,001	42
Romi %	0,034	0,018	0,010	0,085	0,029	42
Ucraineni %	0,003	0,010	0,000	0,064	0,000	42
Germani %	0,002	0,004	0,000	0,015	0,000	42
Turci %	0,001	0,005	0,000	0,030	0,000	42
Rusi-Lipoveni %	0,002	0,008	0,000	0,049	0,000	42
PCD_AUR	0,087	0,034	0,014	0,150	0,083	42
Attendance Census FAM	0,207	0,049	0,085	0,307	0,205	42

The main results of the second step are synthetized in the following table presenting the correlations between the variable,%age of votes for AUR and all other 39 variables.

Table 2.

	SCL101A/ POP107A - Crese	SCL112C / /POP107A	SAN102B/ POP107A	LOC103B/ POP107A	SCL101A/ POP107A	PS_ UDMR	PCD_ UDMR	Turnout local elections 2020
%CD _AUR	-0.526	-0.244	-0.379	-0.263	-0.352	-0.501	-0.501	-0.273
	Parlamen- tare 2016	Parlamen- tare 2020	Dif Parl 2016- Parl 2020	POP320C/ POP107A	POP309E/ POP107A	ASS118F/ POP107A	SCL103B/ POP107A	SCL103B/ POP107A
%CD _AUR	-0.485	-0.605	0.281	-0.453	0.378	-0.141	-0.152	-0.195
	SCL103B/ POP107A	SCL103B/ POP107A	SCL103B/ POP107A	SCL103B/ POP107A	SCL103B/ POP107A	SCL103B/ POP107A	SCL103G/ POP107A	SCL103G/ POP107A
%CD_ AUR	0.290	-0.004	0.069	-0.067	-0.283	-0.288	-0.147	-0.134
	SCL103G/ POP107A	SCL103G/ POP107A	SCL103G/ POP107A	SCL103G/ POP107A	SAN101A/ POP107A	SAN101A/ POP107A	Romanians %	Hungarians %
%CD _AUR	-0.208	0.095	0.175	-0.220	-0.102	-0.207	0.491	-0.487
	Roma %	Ukrainians %	Germans %	Turks %	Russians- Lipovans %	Attendance census FAM		
%CD _AUR	-0.307	-0.003	0.009	0.278	0.193	0.259		

Correlations in the intervals (-0.3, -0.2) and (0.2, 0.3) are marked in 80% gray.
Correlations in the intervals (-0.485, -0.3) and (0.3, 0.485) are marked in blue. (20% gray)
Correlations in the intervals (-1, -0.485) and (0.485, 1) are marked in green. (50% gray)

The larger the value of the correlation (positive or negative) the stronger is the common pattern of the variables.

For all correlations in the third group the analysis went one step further and we have investigated their suitability for predicting the%age of votes obtained by AUR. Initially we have investigated 8 simple linear regression models.

The most performant in predicting the dependent variable, based on the value of R square is M3 which includes as independent variable the parliamentary turnout registered at the elections held in 2020. *The correlation is negative and therefore, low turnout is an indicator for higher%ages obtained by AUR.*

The second most performant model is the one including as independent variable, the ratio between the existing number of available places in nurseries and the population.

Going one step further we have investigated 8 complex models where, the initial independent variables were combined to increase the performance of the models.—models with two independent variables were estimated and M11 is the most performant among them. Finally, a 16th model including four independent variables was estimated and the value of R square reached 63.5%.

Table 3. Estimated regression models. 8 simple linear regression models

	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8
Intercept	0.1315**	0.0947**	0.2617**	0.2826**	0.2699**	0.0099	0.0947**	0.2237**
SAN102B/ POP107A	-0.0080**							
PCD_UDMR		-0.0928**						
Parlamentare 2020			-0.5399**					
POP320C/ POP107A				-0.0226**				
Parlamentare 2016					-0.4623**			
Romanians %						0.0947**		
Hunagrians %							-0.0925**	
SCL101A/ POP107A								-0.4195**
R square	0.1435	0.2509	0.3659	0.2054	0.2351	0.2410	0.2372	0.2770
Prob F	0.0134	0.0007	0.0000	0.0026	0.0011	0.0010	0.0011	0.0003

. ** p-value< 0.05, * p-value<0.1

	M9	M10	M11	M12	M13	M14	M15	M16
Intercept	0.2954**	0.3201**	0.2688**	0.3049**	0.2033**	0.2671**	0.3299**	0.3597**
SAN102B/POP107A		-0.0065**						-0.0065**
PCD_UDMR			-0.0702**					-0.0620**
Parlamentare 2020	-04063**	-0.3543**	-04230**	-0.3540	-04305**	-04181**	-0.3580**	-0.3170**
POP320C/POP107A							-0.0067	-0.0150**
Parlamentare 2016				-0.0590				
Romani %					0.0691**			
Maghiari %						-0.0658**		
SCL101A/POP107A	-0.2364**	-0.2534**	-0.1211**	-0.2461**	-0.1033	-0.1218	-0.2131*	
R square	04315	0.5248	0.5562	04324	0.5359	0.5324	04440	0.6354
Prob F	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0001	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000

.** p-value< 0.05, * p-value<0.1

Figure 1. Correlation between the%age of AUR votes and the number of existing hospital beds per capita
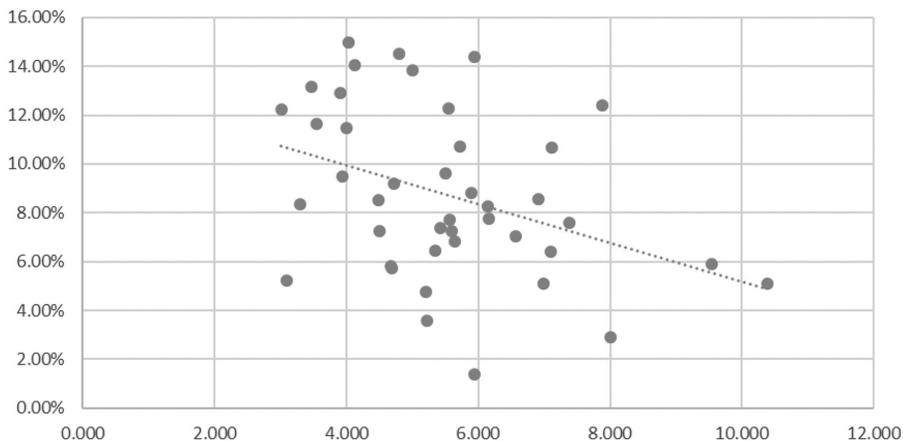
In several parts of the country, local public development has been afflicted by major problems. The key elements that created the precarious situation, according to popular opinion, were the both the corruption and the poor management performance of the politicians holding office in the recent decades. The need for political change to improve the quality of public services was heavily advocated by the new parties. Even though, not very strong, as seen in the figure above, there is a visible negative correlation between AUR's%age of votes in the 2020 Parliamentary Elections and the number of existing hospital beds per capita.

This explains why voters are more likely to vote for a new populist party such as AUR in counties where public infrastructure and services are poor and lagging behind the more developed ones.

Figure 2. Correlation between the%age of AUR votes and turnout at the 2020 general elections
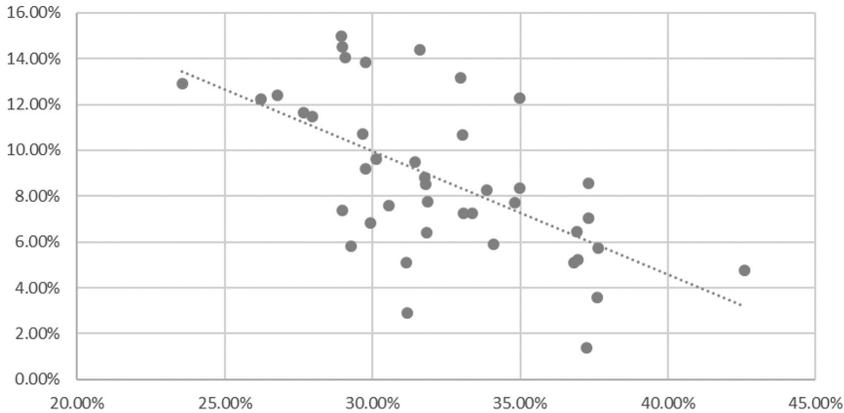
Excepting the presidential elections, Romanian voter turnout has been low or very low in recent years. The population's lack of participation in the political process has resulted in a low degree of trust in the political environment and in the any institutions highly associated to them, such as Parliament or Government.

One of the rhetoric used in the latest campaigns was that all the parties that ruled Romania in the last 30 years should back off and leave the place for new parties and new politicians. This new wave has now two important voices on the political stage: The Save Romania Union and, the newest, The Alliance for the Union of Romanians. Because the old parties have a capped pool of recurring voters represented mostly by party members and their capacity to motivate people in their proximity to vote, their representation in Parliament is closely connected to turnout in most cases (higher the turnout the lower is the importance of the traditional parties). Even though this correlation holds for established traditional parties it proved to also be visible for the AUR party. There is a visible, negative correlation between the%age of votes AUR obtained in the 2020 Parliamentary elections and the turnout, as visible in the next figure. Therefore, one might conclude that AUR will thrive and maybe increase its importance in the future if traditional parties fail to motivate undecided voters and increase simultaneously their importance and the overall turnout.

Figure 3. Correlation between the%age of AUR votes and the ration between the temporary emigration and population
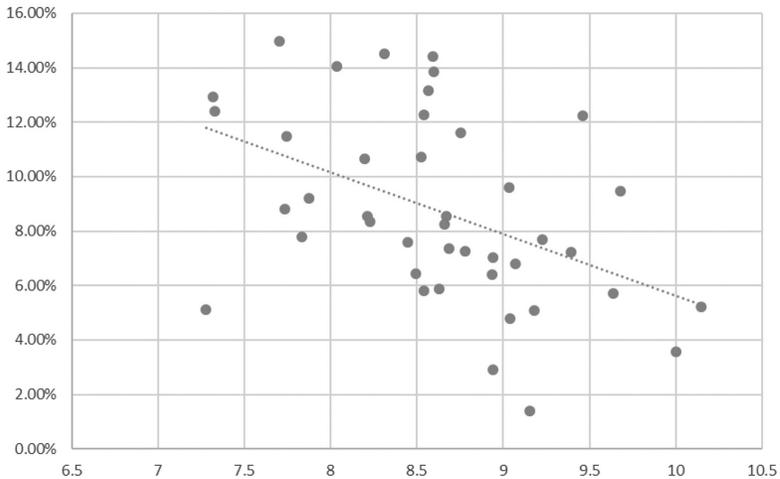
In the last 20 years the Romania's population registered a continuous decline due two important factors: low birth rate and high emigration. When it comes to emigration, there are two types that exist in Romanian society, the first is the permanent emigration, which includes all those who left Romania and settled in another country for an extended period of time, while the second type of emigration is the temporary emigration, which is usually associated with seasonal labor. Lately, in the Romanian society the seasonal work abroad became a very common phenomenon especially in rural areas where the job opportunities are scares, and salaries are very low. In *Figure 3* one easily observes the negative correlation between AUR's%age and the temporary emigration. To put it another way, one can hypothesize that AUR obtained a lower%age in counties with a higher number of people who were temporarily out of the country, and it obtained their votes in diaspora (mostly low skilled Romanian working temporarily in West Europe).

Figure 4. Correlation between the%age of AUR votes and the%age
of UDMR votes, both in logharithm.
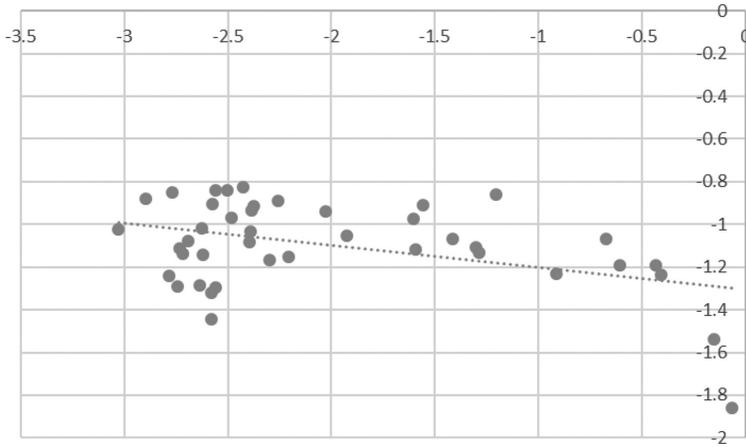
A general representation in the public sphere is that AUR is a populist-nationalist party, and that its success in the 2020 elections was due to a nationalist discourse. In fact, the findings of this study show that this is only partially accurate. As it is visible in *Figure 4* there is a negative correlation between the%age of AUR votes and the%age of Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) votes. Therefore, where UDMR scored higher, AUR scored lower and the other way around. This insight is an indication of the success of the nationalist message of the AUR party.

Conclusion

Populism hit Europe in the past 10 years, new parties being able to enter the national parliaments and influence the decision-making process. In every European country there are some key factors that determine the final score gained by such political actors. We cannot say that there is a formula appliable all around Europe, for example, but we could find some specific determinants that explain why people prefer to vote a new populist party in each country.

As we have seen in the Romanian case, AUR is a party with a nationalist anti-establishment discourse that use mostly unconventional methods to disseminate the message, which succeeded to become a parliamentary party on the background of public disappointment and low turnout. Furthermore, we discovered that some socio-economic determinants have explained the score of this political party and gave us a statistical overview to predict some key aspects of the future elections in Romania. This paper is preliminary research for determining the success factors of the Alliance for the Union of Romanians in the 2020 parliamentary elections.

We tried to give some explanation using quantitative methods by correlating all the socio-economic characteristics that could be found in the Romanian National Institute of Statistics database, on county level, with the score obtained by AUR. We started our study by formulating a set of general assumptions based on some personal experience and sociological results published in the media or other scientific journals, but in the end, we have tested 4 hypotheses that correlated with the score of the party. The empirical results showed that a party with the characteristics similar to the Alliance for the Union of Romanians, in Romania, gains more votes in the areas with a poorly developed social infrastructure, when the turnout is low or very low, in the regions where temporary migration is high and, in the counties, where the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania scores higher than the national average.

Our work has some limitations due to the lack of data. The National Institute of Statistics does not provide full data on county level for all the socio-economic characteristics of the Romanian citizens. We are convinced that there are more factors in the success formula that sent a populist party into the Romanian Parliament. But for now, if we take into account the correlations from this article, in the next elections, we could predict the constituencies where AUR has more chances to gain more votes than the national average. For example, in the regions where the public authorities did not invest, in the last 2 years, in hospitals and public infrastructure in general, AUR, or a party with similar characteristics, has more chances to score higher than in a region where there was built a new school in the next elections. Or, if the turnout is lower than the average, AUR, or a similar party, has more chances to get a higher%age of the seats.

APPENDIX A

Code of the variable	Source	Full title of the variable
POP107A	NIS	LEGALLY RESIDENT POPULATION, by age group and age, sex, urban/ rural area, macroregions, development regions and counties, at January 1st
SCL101A/POP107A	NIS	Education units, by categories of units, ownerships, macro-regions, development regions and counties
SCL112C /POP107A	NIS	PCs/IT equipment, by level of education, macroregions, development regions and counties
SAN102B/POP107A	NIS	Sanitary units, by category of units, ownerships, counties and localities
LOC103B/POP107A	NIS	Living floor at the end of the year by type of ownership, counties and localities
PS_UDMR		% gained by the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania gained in 2020 Parliamentary Elections for Senate
PCD_UDMR		% gained by the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania in 2020 Parliamentary Elections for Chamber of Deputies
Prezență locale 2020		Turnout in Local Elections held in 2020
Parlamentare 2016		Turnout in Parliamentary Elections held in 2016
Parlamentare 2020		Turnout in Parliamentary Elections held in 2020
Dif Parl 2016- Parl 2020		Turnout difference between 2016 Parliamentary Elections and 2020 Parliamentary Elections
POP320C/POP107A	NIS	Temporary emigrants by age group, sex, urban/ rural area, macro regions, development regions and counties
POP309E/POP107A	NIS	Permanent emigrants by counties and localities of departure
ASS118F/POP107A	NIS	Social allowances assuring the minimum guaranteed income macro regions, development regions and counties
SCL103B/POP107A	NIS	Children and pupils enrolment in pre-university education, by level of education, languages, macro regions, development regions and counties
SCL103G/POP107A	NIS	Enrolled population, by level of education, educational frecvence, macro regions, development regions and counties
SAN101A/POP107A	NIS	Sanitary units, by category of units, ownerships, macro regions, development regions and counties
SAN101A/POP107A	NIS	Sanitary units, by category of units, ownerships, macro regions, development regions and counties
Romani %	NIS	% of Romanians from total population according with data collected in 2011 census
Maghiari %	NIS	% of Hungarians from total population according with data collected in 2011 census
Romi %	NIS	% of Roma-people from total population according with data collected in 2011 census

Ucraineni %	NIS	% of Ukrainians from total population according with data collected in 2011 census
Germani %	NIS	% of Germans from total population according with data collected in 2011 census
Turci %	NIS	% of Turks from total population according with data collected in 2011 census
Rusi-Lipoveni %	NIS	% of Lipovans from total population according with data collected in 2011 census
PCD_AUR		% obtained by the Alliance for the Union of Romanians in 2020 Parliamentary Elections for Chamber of Deputies
Attendance Census FAM		Turnout in 2018 Romanian Constitutional Referendum (the Family Census)

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Who do We Trust?

Blurry Perceptions on Authority of the Voters of the Romanian Radical Right-wing PoPuliSt Party Alliance for the Union of Romanians

Sergiu Mișcoiu–Ana Gabriela Pantea–Laurențiu Petrila

Introduction

The focus of the present paper is to explore the perceptions of voters affiliated with The Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR) in relation to social values and their views on authority. More specifically, to address the concerns of this paper, we will capture the perception of how voters view trust in the societal environment and how this manifests itself in their political preferences to assert an agenda over the mainstream political parties. (McCarthy 2005; Nightingale–Ojha 2013; Wolford et al. 2013).

In the past few years, post-communist Central and Eastern European countries have experienced a resurgence of trust in the political and social spheres. Notably, Poland and Hungary have had a rise in political trust, despite accusations that their governments of dismantling the democratic framework (Bakke–Sitter 2020). This phenomenon presents a puzzle, as support for populist parties at an individual level has traditionally been linked to below-average political trust (Norris–Inglehart 2019).

As such, we are interested in finding out the perceptions of the supporters of AUR on authority to understand the background of the puzzle of their political preferences. Opposed to the question "who trusts whom," our paper investigates "in what they trust", what social values and political principles the AUR voters are loyal to.? High levels of trust among supporters of populist parties are likely to reflect support for "our people" governing the country rather than support for

democratic political systems and their institutions. As some populists may say: "only some of the people are really the people" (Noury–Roland 2020: 3), the supporters of far-right populist parties recognize that only some instances of authority are entrusted and only a part of the country has legitimate demands.

Our interviewees – urban and rural voters of AUR, with higher or lower levels of education, employees, or entrepreneurs – equally unite under a common vision to restore social order, follow traditional moral principles, and request freedom and national self-determination. It remains blurry how the new social order should look like; who should be the architects of the model, the state, the church, or other actors; how freedom and the need for "leaders with iron hands" (F.C) can balance without conflict; and how self-determination can work in a more globalized world. As our objective is to explore the perspectives on authority and social values of the voters, our hypothesis is centred around the party's emphasis on anti-elitism and the strong religious foundation, as well as the flamboyant political style characterized by constant verbal attacks. However, it is notable that the party lacks a clear ideological vision regarding the structure of authority at societal level. The study confirms the hypothesis of an inability among the party's voters regarding a clear mapping of the structure of authority and the principles of the new welfare state. The voters positioned themselves as advocates for the re-evaluation of national social policies and emphasized the importance of order and traditional social values but remains blurry in regards with the direction in which these policies should move. As AUR effectively capitalized on and amplified this sentiment, despite their apparently dual vision of authority, the supporters unambiguously indicated what kind of political system they preferred: authoritarian leadership and freedom from governmental control, consumptive social policies, but in a chauvinist manner. As the voters view AUR the main defender of a recalibration of the traditional social democratic state, the discrepancies in the views on authorities seem, in the end, pragmatic ideological decisions with a clear purpose for the "real" people.

Research design

What kind of state do voters of Alliance for the Union of Romanians want? Which types of authority do voters consider to be legitim in their worldview? What stance do they take in regard to the welfare state? Previous research (Ghergina–Mișcoiu 2022; Soare 2023; Stoica 2021) shows that the party is focused on wedge issues (antic-vaccination campaigns, defense of the traditional family, anti-LGBTQ+ protests, etc.) that are instrumentalized to gain political capital against competing mainstream political parties. As such, the party didn't tackle doctrinal issues, as the reactionary position had been sufficient for gaining votes. From 2022, we can notice a shift to conceive a doctrin (AUR 2022) and nuance the position of the party at national and European levels. The present study is an attempt to analyze how voters see authority or how the hierarchy of trust (in institutions, in social

structures, or symbolic entities) works for them. The topic is relevant for the voters of the party, as authoritarian values and their view on statism will be relevant for the further development of the party and the perceptions of the voters towards the party.

The typology (see Serdar et al 2023) of the AUR dictrine can be represented in the following figure to emphasize the exclusionary-religious dimensions:

Figure 1. AUR in four dimensional axes
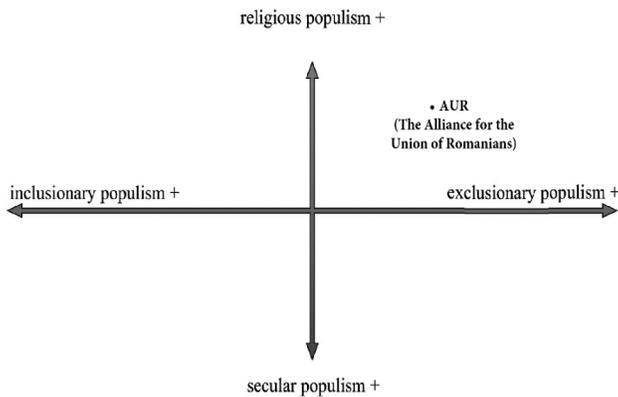
Applying Mudde's commonly acknowledged definition, populism is characterized as a thin centered ideology (Mudde 2004). This definition puts forward a widely employed typology that distinguishes between inclusive and exclusive forms of populism (Mudde–Kaltwasser 2013) in which AUR is positioned as exclusionary and religious.

Our theoretical investigation and qualitative research show the particularities of the voters of AUR in regard to their perceptions of authority. The qualitative research incorporates 16 semi-structured interviews with voters affiliated with the Alliance for the Unity of the Romanians (AUR). Our interviews encompass a range of topics, including questions on the values and principles of the respondents, with a specific emphasis on their interpretations of concepts such as order, freedom, authority, and identity. Additionally, we explore the alignment between their personal beliefs and the ideologies advocated by AUR (for further details, please refer to *Appendix 2*).

To fully comprehend and depict the perspectives of AUR voters when it comes to authority, we have implemented a blended approach of deductive and inductive thematic analysis. This method allows us to obtain a comprehensive understanding and representation of their viewpoints. By utilizing a combination of deductive and inductive thematic analysis, we were able to gain insight into the AUR voters' perceptions of authority. On the one hand, we have extracted key correlations between their specific views on authority and their motivation to vote in favor of

AUR, based on their responses to our inquiries. On the other hand, we have also developed an alternative set of explanations for their electoral choice in favor of AUR, derived from their freely expressed ideas, particularly regarding concepts like freedom and identity. Ultimately, through the integration of both perspectives, we endeavored to construct a credible narrative comprising four key points regarding how the interviewees perceive the connection between the imperative to reinstate order and authority, and the pursuit of freedom and national self-determination. Furthermore, we sought to explore how these notions contribute to the endorsement of the emerging far-right political party in Romania. (1) The concept of family as the ultimate and most valid source of authority; (2) Instead of relying on institutions, it is more effective to have strong leaders; (3) The concept of freedom involves liberating oneself from the encroaching presence of government interference and control. AUR stands as the embodiment of both liberty and regulation, championing the values of both freedom and order.

The Romanian social conservative milieu

Social conservatism advocates traditional social values, religious beliefs, and customs, and establishes social hierarchies and power distance (Jakobs 2008). The framework is a useful tool to analyze the position of the voters of The Alliance for the Union of Romanians who resonate with the importance of maintaining established customs, cultural practices, and moral principles, often rooted in religious or traditional beliefs (AUR 2022: 7).

Key stances of the farmwork are applicable to AUR, as the party prioritizes the nuclear family unit and upholds the values associated with it. They actively endorse heterosexual marriage as the fundamental building block of society, and as a result, they express opposition to same-sex marriage (Miscoiu–Pantea 2023). The relationship between religion and morality is frequently invoked by social conservatives as they construct their ethical foundation. They rely on religious teachings and convictions to guide their moral framework, which in turn influences their stance on various policies. For instance, they may assert opposition to abortion and champion religious freedom in alignment with their religious values. (Ghergina –Miscoiu 2022) Resistance to specific societal transformations: Social conservatives tend to harbor reservations towards swift alterations in society, especially those that question established customs and principles. They may express disapproval towards movements that promote parity between genders, advocate for LGBTQ+ rights, and address other progressive social matters. Social conservatives typically advocate for a reduced and restricted role of the government in society. They tend to favor a model where individuals and private institutions, like religious organizations, assume responsibility for addressing social matters instead of depending on government intervention. National identity and cultural preservation are topics that social conservatives frequently prioritize (Heiskanen 2021) AUR tend to sup-

port policies that safeguard or advance the distinctive cultural heritage of their nation. When it comes to social conservatives, their emphasis is often on maintaining law and order, as they typically prioritize implementing strict criminal justice policies and are strong proponents of bolstering law enforcement measures.

Social conservatism is used to distinguish it from the economic liberalism/conservatism usually associated with party politics. The three main components of social conservatism are (Stankov 2016, 2018, 2021): (1) religious belief; (2) meanness/social domination. This factor includes four subdomains: (2.a) evil (promotion of violence, immoral social attitudes, authoritarianism, unbridled egoism, aggressive tendencies, resentment, and materialism; (Stankov–Lee 2016); (2.b) social dominance (gender and non-egalitarianism); (2.c) social cynicism (negative views of people and social institutions); (2.d) belief in supernatural forces capable of influencing people's lives (more specifically, the social axiom of destiny control); and (3) social awareness/ethics. (Stankov 2021) The social awareness measure considers social complexity (there are different approaches to solving social problems), power distance (society is organized hierarchically), and effort reward (hard work is rewarded). Morale-related metrics are loaded along with the social awareness dimension. A common feature of these moral standards (including moral foundations, ethical social attitudes, group rationalism, conservatism/collectivism) is the promotion and appreciation of values and moral principles that maintain social order and inhibit selfishness.

Norris and Inglehart (2018) articulate an important and relevant position within the concept of authoritarian populism. The authors argue that populism should be understood as a style of discourse about who should rule society and that legitimate power belongs to "the people" rather than "the elite." Authoritarianism is defined as a set of values that prioritize the collective safety of a group at the expense of individual autonomy. Its core components are: a) security; b) conformity; and c) obedience. The social conservatist framework captured in our study on perception on authority of the AUR voters focuses on the aspects of these core components of authority.

Research in Eastern European communist countries has shown (Stankov 2016) that while political movements around the world were generally left-wing at the time, the seeds of today's prospects were already in place. The communist government did not make major changes to traditional culture. A relative lack of education is associated with conservative views and behaviors. Ethnocentrism and nationalist sentiments have been and continue to be a powerful force against attempts of globalization. The promotion of ethnocentrism/nationalism by Eastern European politicians to achieve institutional change had an impact on the collapse of the Soviet Union and the transformation of Eastern Europe, including Romania, in the early 1990s.

The rise of populism in various regions of Eastern and Western Europe is evident through the emergence of the social conservatism dimension. Research in the field (Wolford et al. 2013; Stankov 2021) suggests that today, disparities in education

level play a significant role in societal divisions. Individuals with lower education tend to exhibit more socially conservative beliefs and possess a less open-minded perspective, often displaying apprehension towards change. The perception of society being divided into an educated elite and the less educated masses is growing stronger, with populist politicians exploiting this division for their own gain.

Recognizing authority as a dynamic societal process

The topic of authority has been extensively discussed and analyzed (Hansen–Stepputat 2006; Rose 1999) throughout debates that have resulted in two salient points that are relevant to our topic. First, authority is a dynamic construction that is based on relationships, in which the right to govern change is claimed and recognized (Cashore 2002; Lund 2006; Nuijten 2003; Sikor–Lund 2009). Authority is not a one-way force that is exerted through a traditional "power" dynamic, rather it is a relationship that necessitates acknowledgement and continual renewal. As a result, it can result in uneven power dynamics that have unexpected and surprising outcomes, including the rise of populism. Second, authority is often contested and claimed by both state and non-state actors, resulting in complex and overlapping dynamics that require close observation, as there are actors who are challenging the status quo of traditional political structures (Gupta–Ferguson 1997; Hansen–Stepputat 2001; Raeymaekers et al. 2008).

A definition of authority used by Sikor–Lund (2009: 9) is "[a]uthority characterizes the capacity of politico-legal institutions, such as states and their constituent institutions, village communities, religious groupings and other organizations, to influence other social actors," but importantly, in their formulation, that capacity is relational and not static. More specifically, authority captures how the exercise of power manifests itself in competition for influence and the ability of one person or organization to assert an agenda over another in governance and adaptation processes (Fairhead et al. 2012; McCarthy 2005; Nightingale–Ojha 2013). Conceptualizing authority in this way clearly demonstrates that the capacity to manage societal change (according to traditional values in our case) is not merely dictated by policy, but the result of dynamic and often contested social relationships (Bulkeley 2015).

Therefore, when considering institutions and organizations involved in societal change, "authority" is not limited to traditional political parties and ideologies or formal programs. There is often a conflict over which actors or institutions have the authority to manage visions and values, and because of the importance of hierarchy and value systems in everyday life, societal values are also the context in which actors attempt to gain or strengthen their authority. There is a need to examine the consequences of these power struggles in order to understand which institutions and individuals are empowered (Ribot 2003), how, and what are the priorities for addressing societal change.

When studying the historical dynamics of feudal societies, Barrington Moore observed the intricate power dynamics between landlords and peasants. It became apparent that while the peasantry relied on the services provided by the landed class, they would also rise up against them in cases of non-delivery. However, Moore emphasized that these uprisings were not solely driven by unfulfilled material promises. Rather, they often stemmed from a deep sense of injustice that violated their perceived moral duty to obey traditional rulers. (Moore 1978) Moore's argument can be replicated in the ethos of contemporary Romania, in which AUR gains support. During our interviews, we noticed the frustration of the subjects related the structural social injustice. The interviewees require an authoritarian figure to oppose the injustices they ubiquitously notice.

In his formulation of recognition theory, Axel Honneth Axel Honneth postulates that the right to be recognized by society as a morally responsible person is a central motivator for human behavior (Honneth 1996: 163). Personal experiences of unethical treatment, social exclusion and humiliation hinder this right to recognition. Such feelings of disrespect can form "the moral context of social conflict" (ibid: 162) and "become the motivational basis for collective resistance if subjects are able to articulate them." "They may prove to be typical of the whole group" (ibid: 163). Jürgen Haacke points out that social conflict and legitimacy are thus inseparable since subjects claims recognition. In essence, it becomes "a normative judgment of the legitimacy of social arrangements" (Haacke 2005: 187). When this requirement is met, social order is stabilized. When this is not the case, collective opposition ensues.

The group value model makes a similar argument, stating that the feeling of being considered a valued member of a group associated with higher social status and moral principles leads to a sense of self-esteem and self-worth (Tyler 2001). Recognition is thus likely to overcome frustration for the social group (ibid: 426). As AUR voters express the idea: "we want finally to be hearted and take into consideration" (F.C) In other words, feelings of approval or disregard are related in part to an individual's social identity, which "is that part of an individual's self-concept defined by both his or her knowledge of belonging to a social group and his or her knowledge of belonging to one or more social groups composition". (Tajfel 1978: 5) Value and appreciation lead to "the emotional meaning attached to that membership" (Tajfel 1978: 63).

The arguments of both Honneth and Tyler emphasize the need for recognition of the "silent" groups of populist supporters (including AUR) who articulate their group values to overcome frustrations, as the phenomenon in post-communist Romania is linked, similarly to other parts of the world, to social injustice or social acceleration.

AUR as a response to hegemonic power structures

For more than twenty years, Europe has been facing an overlap of political phenomena that from a broader perspective, can be considered synonymous with populism. The last European elections, namely the elections for the European Parliament in May 2019, did not lead to the rise of populism in Europe that many feared.

However, the phenomenon of Euroscepticism remains a significant force to be reckoned with in national and EU public policymaking. We understand from the studies edited by Pollak and Schmidt (2020) that there are different types of Euroscepticism in Europe. The studies in the work draw our attention to the fact that beyond legitimate concerns, the phenomenon of Euroscepticism can also be a normal facet of a social and especially economic crisis. In understanding the national-populist-Eurosceptic phenomenon, it is important to specify a few things. As for the countries affected by the crises, some, such as Italy and Greece, have become deeply critical of the EU and are inclined to promote closer relations with other Member States and solve pressing national problems, while others, such as Ireland and Portugal, remained largely pro-European. Nations such as Sweden, France and Belgium have a strong tradition of Euroscepticism, while for some Eastern European Member States that joined after 2004, Euroscepticism is a more recent phenomenon linked to rising nationalist and populist tendencies. We are thus dealing with some governmental hostility or revulsion towards parties that are clearly pro-EU, such as in Poland and Hungary. (Pollak–Schimdt 2020)

According to Toma and Damian, Romanians have remained among the most optimistic pro-Europeans over time, but trust in the European Union began to decline in the first half of 2018. Political leaders supported by certain parts of the mass media, are the main ones responsible for deepening the distrust of Romanian citizens in the EU. The European Union is often presented in the public space as the main culprit for the inabilities of the government in Bucharest. (Thomas–Damian 2021). Forecasts for the European and presidential elections in November 2019 as well as the local and parliamentary elections in 2020 show that citizens will still give broad support to pro-European political forces and sanction populist parties, partly due to their anti-EU rhetoric, but mainly due to their failure to fulfill their electoral promises.

One of the reasons for the growth of populism in Europe was represented by the acute phenomenon of migration (Petrila 2022). Populism also gained momentum due to the political and economic failures managed in Brussels. Problems related to social precariousness and little tolerance towards immigrants were the most important issues that built the discourse of populist parties in Europe before the European elections in 2014. Perhaps the most important result in this sense was recorded by the National Front in France, which obtained 24.9% ahead of the Popular Movement Party which obtained 20.7%. In 5 other states, the populists managed to pass 10%, as follows: 19.7% in Austria, 14.6% in Hungary, 13.2% in the

Netherlands, 12.9% in Finland and 11% in Poland. Likewise, the left-wing populists won seats in ten states, a striking example being SYRIZA in Greece, which together with the Communist Party achieved 32.7%. It should also be noted that the success of the contesting parties of the left-wing orientation was higher in Europe – 15%, by condemning the anti-austerity measures Podemos – 17.8%, 6.3% in France, 9.6% in the Netherlands, while the right-wing populist parties succeeded and obtained the majority of votes in the Nordic states – Great Britain, Denmark, Austria, Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden (Popa 2017).

Even before the last European elections in 2019, there was some concern about the possible success of the Eurosceptics. The European populist movements can also represent an alarm signal for the European Union, because, although they are most often incoherent and lack viable or concrete proposals, they nevertheless emphasize the important fracture lines within the European construction, thus preventing the realization of realistic, sustainable strategies and above all long (EURACTIV 2017).

The results of the 2019 European elections show that somewhere over 20% of those elected do not come from pro-European parties or movements (EU Affairs 2019). As a brief summary of the 2019 results, we can say that the surprise of the elections is the significant turnout (by more than 8% compared to the 2014 European elections). Over 51% of the 420 million European citizens with the right to vote were present at the polls. Political scientist Janis Emmanouilidis, from the European Policy Center in Brussels, believes that among the causes or explanations of this important voter turnout score we can include: protests against environmental policy, strikes and the desire to counter Eurosceptic and right-wing populist parties. The result showed that the right-wing populists improved their result, but overall we can say that we were dealing with a trend in which the big parties lost their weight, so the European Parliament became much more diversified and with complications in achieving of majorities (Riegert–DW 2019).

There are certain reservations, and it is difficult to define the term populism without showing its nuances and the evolution of the term over time. We therefore observe that a source of populism is represented by the difficulties that society feels at a given moment in the midst of challenges of modernization, democratization or towards a solid economic development. We will refer to these societal difficulties when we discuss the genesis and meaning of AUR in the Romanian political space.

Figure 2.

Share of votes for populist and nationalist parties in the European Parliamentary Elections of 2019, by country

Country	Share
Hungary	61.91%
Italy	57.86%
Poland	53.62%
United Kingdom	33.95%
France	26.82%
Latvia	24.61%
Slovakia	19.39%
Netherlands	18.4%
Austria	18.24%
Croatia	17.92%
Sweden	15.34%
Denmark	14.46%
Finland	14.1%
Belgium	13.46%
Bulgaria	13.2%
Estonia	12.7%
Germany	11.3%
Greece	10.67%
Luxembourg	10.03%
Czechia	9.14%
Cyprus	8.25%
Lithuania	8.23%
Spain	6.21%
Slovenia	5.71%
Portugal	0%
Romania	0%
Malta	0%
Ireland	0%

Share of the vote

Source
Europäisches Parlament
© Statista 2023

Additional Information:
EU; Europäisches Parlament; May 23-26, 2019

Source: European Parliament (2019).

Immediately after the installation of democracy in Romania, many groups and political parties of different colors and orientations appeared. We will refer very briefly to the populist ones that have and have been successful at a given time. By "success" we mean the fact that they managed to cross the electoral threshold and be part of the Romanian Parliament. Perhaps the longest-lived populist and even extremist party was the Greater Romania Party (PRM) led by Corneliu Vadim Tudor, which reached the second round in the presidential elections of 2000, where it obtained a third of the votes. Their speech was nationalist and extremist. A hate speech against selected enemies of the people: foreigners, Freemasons, minori¬ties, enemies of the Orthodox faith, etc (Dragomir–Hosu 2023). The French thinker Chantal Delsol said that first of all populism is an insult, and this can be confirmed very easily without great efforts of scientific demonstrations, but only by a careful look at the saving and revolutionary speeches of the main political leaders of these groups. Their speeches were always suspended between political attacks and populist slogans that caught on with the public. If the PRM had representatives in the parliament in four rounds of parliamentary elections starting in 1992, the same cannot be said about the next party that entered the parliament

and which also falls into this populist and self-declared anti-system typology: Peol-ple's Party Dan Diaconescu (PPDD). If the PRM reached the second political force in the parliament in 2000 with approximately 20%, the PPDD reached the third force in the parliament in 2012, just one year after its establishment, with 15% and that was all (Boboc 2021).

Upon a finer analysis of the populist phenomenon in Romania, we can identify a messianic political species in all the leaders of these parties (Gherghina–Mișcoiu 2010). However, this is best seen in the Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR) party led by a charismatic and controversial leader: George Simion. The other lead-er of the AUR, Claudiu Târziu, was the leader of the Coalition for the Family and the organizer of the referendum for changing an article in the constitution in 2018. The Referendum that did not pass due to the fact that it did not meet the neces-sary quorum even though it was the first round of elections that took place held over two consecutive days (Popescu–Petrila 2022). On the other hand, it should be noted that there are certain similarities between the attendance at the 2018 refer-endum in the counties where AUR obtained the best results in the 2020 elections. So from a certain angle we are dealing with: a pool of unionists and young people from galleries that George Simion cultivated in over ten years of activism; a pool of ultraconservatives and orthodox practitioners mobilized either by priests or by Christian organizations with which co-president Claudiu Târziu cultivated close ties; a pool of citizens angry at the entire political class, ground by frustrations accumu-lated over time but potentiated by the pandemic and eager to embrace populist messages and providential leaders (Recorder 2020). Such groups or parties appear especially in times of crisis (Stoica 2021). If the PRM of Corneliu Vadim Tudor was the result of a ravansard vote after the hopes of the electorate were dashed by the period in which Emil Constantinescu was president 1996–2000, and in 2000 the crises at the level of society were becoming acute and even the communist nostalgia was beginning to makes its way into public discourse. Thus, also follow-ing a moment of crisis, the PPDD also appeared in the parliament, which received the vote of confidence immediately after the consequences of the economic crisis, the great protests against the government, but also due to a major social crisis due to the reduction of pensions by 15% and the salaries of public and civil serv-ants by 25% as a measure of economic recovery (Ziarul Financiar 2010). In addi-tion to these moments of crisis that give birth to such parties, we could observe in Romania that these parties that have and had some success always also had a platform. The Greater Romania Party communicates with the electorate through the România Mare Newspaper or the Tricolor, which have had significant circula-tions over the years. Dan Diaconescu's People's Party had OTV television, and AUR is apparently first on Facebook and second in polls (Europa Liberă Romania 2022).

If the representatives of the AUR failed to impose themselves on the public stage immediately after the failure of the referendum in 2018, it is also due to the fact that at that time Romanian society was enjoying some peace and stability, but the global pandemic crisis. If in their first participation in the elections: the local

elections in September 2020 they obtained 0.29%, three months later in December 2020 in the parliamentary elections they obtained almost 10%, making the surprise of the elections. It is interesting to note how a radical right-wing populist party is using anti-communism to produce an anti-establishment discourse in an attempt to promote ultra-conservative political values. In the course of the AUR discourse, they gradually replaced communism with neo-Marxism in their speeches (Popescu–Vesalon 2023).

Moreover, throughout Europe, populist parties have latched onto the health crisis, believing that certain global corrupt forces want to destroy the dignity of honest citizens. The speech was always a combination of national and religious values. AUR and built the political discourse on four main pillars: family, nation, faith and freedom – all of which have a serious religious charge (we emphasize the fact that when it comes to faith and religion in AUR, it must necessarily be Orthodox). Among other things in the political program of the AUR we find the fact that they aim to fight against the persecution to which Christianity is supposed to have been subjected in recent years (Stoica 2021). It is very possible that the call for responses regarding Christian persecution is a reaction to the secularization of the Western world, which is also a Eurosceptic construct. Behind them, the leaders of this party campaign against the LGBT movement, against minority groups, whom they consider wanting to reduce Romania's sovereignty, against foreigners of any kind, against the EU, which imposes political standards, for the freedom of Romanians not to vaccinate against Corona virus and not to wear the protection mask, for the involvement of the Church in public affairs (Fati 2021).

Lacking a clear ideology or viable political and economic programs in its speech and actions, AUR manages to produce another surprise in the 2020 elections where it obtains over 23% in the diaspora (Bortun 2020).

Most European states have a radical, nationalist, far-right party in Parliament. Their common denominator is based on conspiracy theories, Euroscepticism, sovereignism, ultranationalism, anti-system policies, equivocal attitudes towards interwar fascism: in Romania, a leader who is part of the leadership of the AUR, apologizes to some famous legionnaires, in Budapest, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán glorified Miklos Horthy, the fascist and anti-Semitic dictator of Hungary in the 1930s, in Madrid there is nostalgia for Franco, and in Paris there is talk of the Vichy government (Fati 2021).

Before the electoral year 2024 when Romania will face European, local, parlia¬mentary and presidential elections, all opinion polls show that AUR is in top positions in terms of voting intention (Hotnews 2023).

Data analysis

Our study uses 16 semi-structured interviews with voters of the Alliance for the Unity of the Romanians, who were selected to increase variation in terms of

gender, age, profession and geographical distribution (balance between the counties of different historical regions). None of the respondents come from the same locality, except for two voters who live in Bucharest, the Capital city of Romania, which counts for about 10% of the total number of registered voters. The profile of the interviewees is presented in *Table 1.* For confidentiality and anonymity purposes, the initials of their names are fictional. The interviews were conducted face-to-face in March, April and May 2023, in the fertile context where AUR was growing in the opinion polls and thus its voters were in a mood that allowed them to focus more on analyzing and explaining their options. Our interview guide includes questions about the respondents' values and principles, with a particular focus on their understanding of order, freedom, authority, and identity, and on the way there is a match between their beliefs and those defended by AUR, as a reason for their vote in the 2020 parliamentary elections (see *Appendix 2*).

We use mixed deductive-inductive thematic analysis to understand and draw a picture of the AUR voters' views on authority. On one hand, based on the respondents' answers to our questions, we isolated the main points of correlation between their specific views on authority and the incentive for voting in favor of AUR. On the other hand, based on their freely expressed ideas, especially about freedom and identity, we built a relatively different set of explanations for their electoral option in favor of AUR. In the end, by crossing the two perspectives we tried to build a plausible four-points narrative about the manner in which the interviewees perceive the relation between the need to restore at the same time order and authority, and freedom and national self-determination, and about the way these ideas feed the support for the new Romanian far-right party.

1. Family as the most legitimate authority.
2. Strong leaders rather than institutions.
3. Freedom as freeing yourself from the intrusive state.
4. AUR as the champion of both freedom and order.

Figure 2. Perceptions of authority of AUR voters

PERCEPTIONS ON AUTHORITY OF AUR VOTERS

CHURCH
SCHOOL
FAMILY
AUR
PARLIAMENT
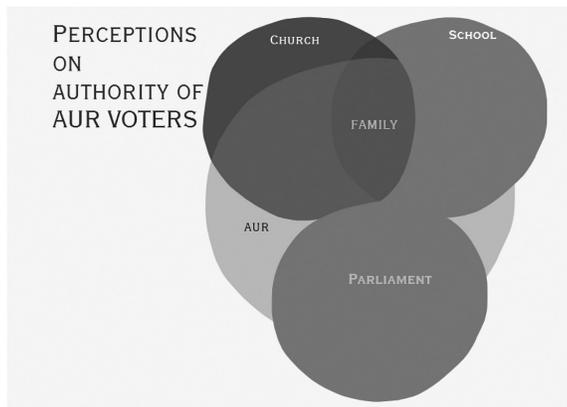
1. Family as the most legitimate authority

Most of our respondents believe that the main – and for some the sole – source of legitimate authority lies in the family. As one of the respondents put it, "within the family we are raised, and we become what we are" (D.E.). Family is the vital environment where the individuals are educated and disciplined and where "we become aware of what is good and what is bad" (C.I.). The educative function of the family is thus essential, precedes and overwhelms all the other institutions or social and cultural environments that the individual might frequent during his or her life.

No other source of authority can provide to the individual the full skills and capabilities needed for what one of the respondents called the "genuine ethical life" (A.L.). For instance, school is considered to be an increasingly distant institution, which "sometimes perverts even the most well-raised kids" (I.I.). Other respondents also agree with the idea that school is "no longer what it was" (D.E.) and became to an increasing extent a "milieu of perdition rather than a stronghold of positive education" (P.N.). Promiscuity, moral deprivation, addictions of all kinds, but also "cynical favouritism and transactionalism" (N.P.) are the new features of the educational system contested and criticised by our respondents. Some of them even underline that there is now an overt opposition between the "indispensable moral and social values" cultivated within the family and the "school's laxism and misery" (C.I.).

While school is portrayed in a such negative frame, the only would-be competitor for the family's legitimacy seemed to be the church. Nevertheless, if the family got the unanimous support of the AUR voters we met, the church convinced only half of them. Indeed, especially for the female supporters of the new far right party, the church's authority is incontestable, while the party's support for the church is seen as a natural gesture. On the other hand, several respondents pointed out the fact that at their turn the churches were gangrened by different negative developments within the post-communist society, such as corruption, immorality or self-sufficiency. As opposed to the family, where the central figure of the Father a remains the undisputed source of legitimate authority, the churches suffer from the degradation of the Priest's image, "a character who is now too far" (I.I.) from his initial crucial role: inspiring their congregations and also the wider communities.

2. Strong leaders rather than institutions

If the family is perceived by our interviewees as being much more than an institution, this is also because the institutions are despised and, at all the levels of the Romanian society, there is a clear preference for strong leadership than collective decision-making bodies. This is due to the fact that, as one of the respondents put it,
"…above the myriad of networks and bureaucratic spider webs, we need to place strong and determined leaders" (D.E.).

The institutions have no personality, they lack a physical marker of their identity and for some of our interviewees, They are used in order to cover the absence of political strength of their holders. As a younger respondent put it, "the state has no soul, how can one trust a soulless entity?" (A.L.).

The parliament seems to be the embodiment of this weak and unconvincing plethora of institutions, to which the AUR sympathizers oppose the figure of the charismatic leader. Two respondents were particularly vocal about the "decrepitude of the Romanian Parliament" and about its incapacity to represent and defend the people's interests. The first argued that "the Parliament showed its 'real value' when the MPs decided to back together their corrupted fellows" (P.N.), while the second pointed out the "uselessness of the parliament, meant just to produce money for its own members" (I.I.). In opposition to this disavowed institution should stand the "People's leader", a "valiant patriot, for instance George Simion" (O.B.) [the AUR's co-president].

Several respondents argued in favour of the re-establishment of authority, "of the genuine authority, meaning the one of the Head of the Nation". For them, all the other political parties accept the dissolution of natural authority and prefer ruling through "various combinations and chains of corruption and nepotism" (O.N.). This "octopus" is afraid of the courage and determination of the Alliance for the Romanians' Unity's leaders, who wish to create a system of governance based on the restoration of "authority, authenticity and unity" (A.L.).

3. Freedom as freeing yourself from the intrusive state

In spite of the widespread preference for strong traditional authority, the AUR voters are anything but insensitive to the party's argument according to which freedom is endangered in the contemporary society. The question is, of course, what kind of freedom are our respondents considering when claiming they are attached to this fundamental value. The interviews allowed us to understand that freedom is perceived in a very different way than in the framework of liberal political philosophy, our respondents being closer to a libertarian reading of it.

To start with: freedom means being totally independent from the state authorities' regulations, control and constraints. As one of the respondents said, "we earned our right to be who we are and the state can't tell us what to do" (C.I.). Freedom is in this sense an act of resistance against the intrusions of the state in the lives of the communities, against their traditional values and behaviours, rather than in the individual's self-determining decisions and paths. An elder respondent insisted on the fact that "being free means that 'they' [the state's authorities] need to let us live the way we know" (F.J.).

But freedom is not at all related to the propensity of the individuals to make their own choices is terms of social and cultural behaviour outside the pre-established normative order of the society he/she lives in:

"If somebody believes that freedom means choosing to be something like being gay, wearing women clothes, drinking tones of alcohol and taking drugs, he is wrong. This is suicide, not freedom!" (D.E.)

Thus, the AUR voters are convinced that there is a "misunderstanding about what freedom means, as it is not anarchy or should not be anarchy!" (O.B.). Instead, it should be "the duty to be responsible but also independent" (F.J.).

At the same time, freedom is deeply connected with the idea of self-reliance and self-help. Associated with an imagined projection of virility and strength, freedom is the appanage of those who are not "afraid of defying the dangers and the enemies" (N.P.) and those who "dare to say 'no' to the state when they force us to vaccinate" (P.N.). Being a master of your destiny and not depending on the others' and especially on the institutions' help are the core attributes of a "genuinely free person" (R.U.). Our respondents were convinced that property ownership, as well "working for yourself, not being hired by the state or by the banks" guarantee a much higher degree of freedom than the one to which could aspire those who are "enslaved by the 'system'" (D.E.).

4. AUR as the champion of both freedom and order

Given the specific significance of order and freedom in the view of our interviewees, there is "only one political party who defends our ideas: AUR" (O.B.). What does make AUR consonant with these citizens' views on freedom and order? First of all, the capacity of its leaders to "read our aspirations, to understand that we need to be again like our Dacian ancestors: free, proud, and secure!" (I.I.). AUR is praised for its ability to understand the particular way in which freedom, perceived as self-reliance oriented against the "abstract" institutions, should be combined with order, as the restauration of ancestral purity and with an "exemplary manner of punishing the criminals" (P.N.).

Then, AUR is entrusted with the necessary legitimacy to fight against the "repeated violations of human rights by the government", as it did in the case of the "introduction of the quasi-mandatory vaccination" (N.P.) during the Covid crisis. Thus, the "freedom-order" function of AUR also consists in the transformation of the party into a people's rampart against the state's abusive interventions. While the "other parties docilely accept the brutal anti-national actions of the state" (A.L.) and even "contribute to them as their Western masters require" (J.N.), AUR fights to "preserve our basic liberties and our way of live" (N.P.).

Finally, our respondents believe that AUR succeeded in "creating a positive emotion" in that it "made us proud to be Romanian, free and audacious" (F.J.). In this sense, the contrast with the other political parties is once again important: while the parties of the establishment are perceived as being "dead inside" (R.U.), "too contaminated by the American and European ideologies" (J.N.), or simply "sissy-like" (C.I.), AUR embodies the rightful balance between authority and freedom:

"It was not only once that we saw where we get if we deny our roots, our nature itself, and trade them for empty so-called modern slogans. I voted AUR because, as opposed to other parties, it defends our identity, our freedom, our tradition". (J.N.).

Conclusion

Our research provides empirical evidence that perceptions of authority of the voters of AUR. We have shown that the high-level of the trust among voters of populist parties are likely to reflect support for "our people" governing the country, rather than support for democratic political institutions. Family is the vital environment in which individuals are educated and disciplined. No other source of authority can provide the individual with the full skills and capabilities needed for what one of the respondents called the "genuine ethical life" (A.L.). School is an increasingly distant institution, that "sometimes perverts even the most well-raised kids" (D.C.). The parliament seems to be the embodiment of this weak and unconvincing plethora of institutions. Two respondents were particularly vocal about the "decrepitude of the Romanian Parliament" (I.I.) and about its incapacity to represent and defend the interests of the people. The parliament seems to be the embodiment of this weak and unconvincing plethora of institutions, to which the AUR sympathizers oppose the figure of the charismatic leader. Freedom is perceived as an act of resistance against the intrusions of the state in the lives of the communities. The AUR voters are anything but insensitive to the party's argument according to which freedom is endangered in the contemporary society. Freedom is in this sense an act of resistance against the intrusions of the state in the lives of the communities, against their traditional values and behaviours. AUR is praised for its ability to understand the way in which freedom, perceived as self-reliance oriented against the "abstract" institutions, should be combined with order. Then, AUR is entrusted with the necessary legitimacy to fight against "the repeated violations of human rights by the government" (F.J.).

Our research provides empirical evidence that perceptions on authority of AUR's voters are not a uniform concept. The influence of nativist views, social conservatism, religious views on populism seems to be influenced by traditional ideological identifications. While populism in Romania does appear to be consistently linked to euroscepticism and statist economic attitudes, it is not consistently associated with xenophobic views, nor with anti-democratic values. The research suggests that existing ideological predispositions can shape how populist attitudes interact with other ideological phenomena.

Annex 1. Respondents' profiles

No.	Initials	Gender	Age	County	Profession
1	N.P.	Woman	45	CJ	Pharmacist
2	O.B.	Man	29	SV	Waiter
3	F.J.	Woman	62	HG	Pensioner
4	D.E.	Man	51	AB	Taximan
5	A.L.	Woman	22	AG	Student
6	P.N.	Man	36	B	Receptionist
7	R.U.	Man	42	BH	Salesman
8	C.I.	Woman	35	B	Cleaner
9	I.I.	Man	30	AR	Farmer
10	J.N.	Man	52	CT	Journalist
11	A.C.	Man	46	CA	IT specialist
12	F.C.	Man	47	HA	Medical doctor
13	L.P.	Man	38	AR	Journalist
14	D.U.	Man	51	DJ	Teacher
15	M.U.	Woman	49	OT	Social worker
16	A.Z.	Woman	66	IS	Retired

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Annex 2. The Questionnaire

1. Please present yourself and give us some details about your education, career and family.
2. What are your general political ideas? Do you feel close to a particular ideology, doctrine or set of principles? Why?
3. When thinking about authority, what are the first things coming to your mind?
4. Who are the rightful holders of authority in a family? And in a community? And in wider society and the state?
5. Do you believe that the real authority lies in institutions or rather in strong leaders? Please explain and give me an example.
6. How should authority manifest itself in a good and correct society? Please give me some examples of what citizens should not be allowed to do.
7. To what extent do you believe that there is need for more authority in Romania? And in Europe?
8. Do you think that the existing penalties for disobeying authority are too soft? What other means should we use in order to reinforce order and authority? Would death penalty be an option?
9. Why did you vote for AUR? Please enumerate your reasons
10. Did AUR convince you that this party seeks the restauration of order and authority in our society?
11. Any other comment…

Arkadiusz Lewandowski–Łukasz Perlikowski

Between Social and Political Sphere – Civil Society Dilemmas in the Third Republic of Poland

One can say that the ideal of civil society is an undisputable commonly recognized principle that animates Polish society. Not to mention rich traditions of civil society of the past centuries, there is a natural drive to civil society ideals after emancipation from communist regime. As the development of civil institutions was the main purpose of political activities at the time of the rebirth of sovereign people of Poland at the beginning of '90, the later events made things more and more complicated. Variety of interest and values that constitute a pluralist society led to multiplication of groups of interest and organizations that have started to have their own purpose of existence as incongruent to the universal ideal of civic society according to the commonly recognized division of civil society into three main sectors: public sector, private sector and a combined one called just the third sector of civil society; there should be some kind of autonomy within each sector of the society. But since the things related to social dynamics are more volatile, the sectors are intertwined and dependent on each other. This fact affects the shape of civil society in practice. It is hard to maintain an equal balance the given sectors and to prevent the domination of one over another. We would like to propose a hypothesis, that in the current situation of Poland we are dealing with the domination of the public sector (represented by political parties as well as the direct governmental activities) over two other sectors. The former manifests itself in the colonization of self-governance policy by political parties which is in vivid contradiction with bottom-up logic of civil society; and the latter is palpable on the example of determining the shape of so-called third sector of civil society by the use of government subsidize which is again a form of dismissal of efforts normally belonged to bottom-up civil society. In the proposed paper we would like to draw a comprehensive picture of issues mentioned above to display the condition of civil society in Poland. For doing so, we need to examine following issues: a) politicization of local elections; b) local elections of middle level as a competition between political parties; c) non-competitive elections on the lower level of self-governance; d) weakness of local civil initiatives; e) differentiation of attendance degree in different level of elections; f) form and instruments of political control over associations and foundations of third sector of civil society. All these elements brought together allow us to obtain a complete perspective of civil society in contemporary Poland and as the conclusion we would like to consider pros and cons of this socio-political situation. The methodological characteristics of the research are associated with theoretical analysis based on empirical evidence accompanied by desk research.
Keywords: Civil society, local elections, the Third Republic of Poland, democracy, voter turnout, NGO.

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Arkadiusz Lewandowski–Łukasz Perlikowski

A társadalmi és politikai szféra között – Civil társadalmi dilemmák a Harmadik Lengyel Köztársaságban

Azt mondhatjuk, hogy a civil társadalom eszménye egy vitathatatlan, általánosan elismert elv, amely élteti a lengyel társadalmat. Nem beszélve az elmúlt évszázadok gazdag civil társadalmi hagyományairól; a kommunista rezsimtől való felszabadulás után természetes késztetés van a civil társadalom eszméi iránt. Mivel a szuverén lengyel nép '90 eleji újjászületésekor a politikai tevékenység fő célja a civil intézmények fejlesztése volt, a későbbi események egyre bonyolultabbá tették a helyzetet. A pluralista társadalmat alkotó érdekek és értékek sokfélesége az érdekcsoportok

és szervezetek megsokszorozódásához vezetett, amelyek saját létcéljukat kezdték el a polgári társadalom egyetemes eszményével összeegyeztethetetlennek tekinteni, a civil társadalom általánosan elismert három fő szektorra való felosztása szerint: állami szektor, magánszektor és egy kombinált szektor, amelyet csak a civil társadalom harmadik szektorának neveznek. Mivel a társadalmi dinamikával kapcsolatos dolgok ingadozóbbak, az ágazatok összefonódnak és függenek egymástól. Ez a tény a gyakorlatban befolyásolja a civil társadalom szerepét. Nehéz fenntartani az egyenlő egyensúlyt az egyes szektorok között, és megakadályozni egymás feletti uralmat. Szeretnénk felvetni azt a hipotézist, hogy Lengyelország jelenlegi helyzetében a közszféra (amelyet politikai pártok és közvetlen kormányzati tevékenységek képviselnek) dominanciájával van dolgunk két másik szektor felett. Az előbbi az önkormányzati politika politikai pártok általi gyarmatosításában nyilvánul meg, ami élénk ellentétben áll a civil társadalom alulról felfelé építkező logikájával; ez utóbbi pedig kézzelfogható a civil társadalom úgynevezett harmadik szektora formájának állami támogatás alkalmazásával történő meghatározásának példáján, amely ismét az alulról felfelé építkező civil társadalomhoz tartozó erőfeszítések elutasításának egy formája.

Kulcsszavak: Civil társadalom, helyhatósági választások, Harmadik Lengyel Köztársaság, demokrácia, részvételi arány, civil szervezetek.

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Igor Bahovec

Civil society, political parties, and the development of democracy in Slovenia

According to Robert Schuman, the central feature of a democratic state is that „it is at the service of the people and acts in agreement with the people". Political parties and civil society associations and organizations seems to be the principal actors of democratic mediation between citizens and government. The main purpose of this paper is to explain the characteristics of the relationship between civil society and political parties in Slovenia. We will focus on three aspects. 1) Analysis of the concrete actions of different civil society organisations in relation to political parties and to government – and vice-versa. 2) Differences in understandings of civil society: there is no unified view on civil society in Slovenia. Some advocate a pluralistic understanding of civil society; others are close to the Gramscian view of civil society. The latter understanding was strongly developed during the last years of communism. 3) Citizens' interests are diverse, and two questions arise: a) to what extent citizens' interests are (or are not) represented in civil associations: b) to what extent different civil associations work towards the common good of society as a whole and to what extent they work to promote their own particular interests.

We will focus on two periods of Slovenian democracy when the political power of civil society was strongest. One is the period of the last few years, in particular the period of the previous government (2020 until the elections in April 2022) and the current government. During this period, civil society associations had a strong influence on political decisions and on the new elections. Before the elections, some civil organisations transformed themselves into political parties, while some others formed close alliances with political parties. The current developments cannot be explained without understanding the role of civil society in the period of political change before and after 1990, which saw the fall of communism, the formation of a democratic government and the independence of the Slovenian state. Civil society was a key factor in social reflection and action at that time. Civil associations were also the founders of new democratic political parties.

Keywords: Civil society, social changes, democratic development, pluralism.

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Igor Bahovec

Civil társadalom, politikai pártok és a demokrácia fejlődése Szlovéniában

Robert Schuman szerint a demokratikus állam központi jellemzője, hogy „a népet szolgálja, és a néppel egyetértésben cselekszik". Úgy tűnik, hogy a politikai pártok, valamint a civil társadalmi szövetségek és szervezetek a polgárok és a kormány közötti demokratikus közvetítés fő szereplői. A tanulmány fő célja, hogy elmagyarázza a szlovén civil társadalom és politikai pártok közötti kapcsolat jellemzőit. Három szempontra fogunk összpontosítani. 1) A különböző civil társadalmi szervezetek politikai pártokkal és kormánnyal kapcsolatos konkrét intézkedéseinek elemzése – és megfordított irányzat. 2) A civil társadalom értelmezésének különbségei: Szlovéniában nincs egységes nézet a civil társadalomról. Egyesek a civil társadalom pluralista értelmezése mellett érvelnek; mások közel állnak a civil társadalom Gramsci szemléletéhez. Ez utóbbi megértése erősen fejlődött a kommunizmus utolsó éveiben. 3) A polgárok érdekei sokfélék, és két kérdés merül fel: a) a polgárok érdekei milyen mértékben képviseltetik (vagy nem képviselik) magukat a civil szervezetekben; b) milyen mértékben munkálkodnak a különböző civil szervezetek a társadalom egészének közjaváért, és milyen mértékben munkálkodnak saját különös érdekeik előmozdításán.
A szlovén demokrácia két olyan időszakára fogunk összpontosítani, amikor a civil társadalom politikai ereje a legerősebb volt. Az egyik az elmúlt évek időszaka, különösen az előző kormány (2020-tól a 2022. áprilisi választásokig) és a jelenlegi kormány időszaka. Ebben az időszakban a civil társadalmi szervezetek jelentős befolyással bírtak a politikai döntésekre és az új választásokra. A választások előtt egyes civil szervezetek politikai pártokká alakultak, míg mások szoros szövetséget kötöttek politikai pártokkal. A jelenlegi fejlemények nem magyarázhatók anélkül, hogy megértenénk a civil társadalom szerepét az 1990 előtti és utáni politikai változások időszakában, amely a kommunizmus bukását, a demokratikus kormány megalakulását és a szlovén állam függetlenségét eredményezte. Abban az időben a civil társadalom kulcsfontosságú tényező volt a társadalmi gondolkodásban és cselekvésben. A civil szervezetek új demokratikus politikai pártok alapítói is voltak.
Kulcsszavak: Civil társadalom, társadalmi változások, demokratikus fejlődés, pluralizmus.

Igor Bahovec, a társadalomtudományok doktora, a vallásszociológia docense a Ljubljanai Egyetem Teológiai Karán, valamint a Ljubljanai Fejlesztési és Stratégiai Elemzési Intézet kutatója. Kutatási témái kapcsolódnak a közösségekhez, a civil szférához és a társadalmi tőkéhez, a vallásszociológiához, a posztmodern kultúrához és a kultúrák korszakváltásaihoz. Különösen érdekli a személyközi, kulturális és valláskzi kapcsolatokban folytatott párbeszéd. Két könyve jelent meg szlovén nyelven, az első a közösségekről, a második a posztmodern kultúráról és a spiritualitásról és számos cikke jelent meg. Újabban az európai identitásról publikált tanulmányokat, különös tekintettel Robert Schumann európai víziójára.
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Dúró József

Civils in Opposition.
CSOs in Party Politics after the 2010 Elections

In Hungary, the civil society did not play a crucial role in party politics until 2010, i.e. the collapse of the support of the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), the then-major left-wing party. It is an interesting phenomenon in the light of the fact that trust in political parties decreased after the democratic transition due to the disillusionment of the people from the whole process. Between 1990 and 2010, however, political parties were more or less the only actors in everyday politics, without significant impacts of civil society organisations on them. Since 2010, the right-wing Fidesz has been able to win four consecutive parliamentary elections with a supermajority, while the oppositional landscape has become more and more fragmented. Right after the formation of the second Orbán government in 2010, some civil organisations were established in order to unite the voters of the opposition, and mainly those

of the left-wing and liberal opposition (e.g., Milla or 4K). Milla joined the Together party of Gordon Bajnai, while 4K transformed itself to a political party and disappeared from the political scene. In 2017, the Momentum Movement emerged during the campaign against hosting the summer Olympic games in Budapest, and a couple of months later it became a political party. After the 2018 electoral defeat of the left, CSOs organised the primaries to select one candidate for the position of mayor of Budapest in 2019, and to select the joint candidate for the premiership and all the candidates in single member districts ahead of the 2022 parliamentary elections. Moreover, as a result of these latter primaries, a non-partisan candidate, Péter Márki-Zay became the leader of the six-party opposition. The paper argues that although CSOs have played an important role in opposition politics in Hungary, they failed to impact the strategies of political parties, and usually transformed themselves to political parties. On the other hand, in the local elections, opposition parties sometimes have formed CSOs as cover organisations to run together under the banner of a local association because of the anti-party sentiment of the Hungarian society.
Keywords: Hungary, civil society organisations, parties, opposition.

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Dúró József

Polgárok ellenzékben. Civil szervezetek a pártpolitikában a 2010-es választások után

Magyarországon a civil társadalom nem igazán játszott komoly szerepet a pártpolitikában 2010-ig, vagyis a Magyar Szocialista Párt, az akkori legnagyobb baloldali párt támogatottságának összeomlásáig. Ez annak fényében érdekes fejlemény, hogy a politikai pártokba vetett bizalom csökkent a demokratikus átmenetet követően, mivel az emberek kiábrándultak az egész folyamatból. 1990 és 2010 között ugyanakkor többé-kevésbé a politikai pártok voltak a kizárólagos szereplői a mindennapi politikának, anélkül, hogy a civil társadalom komoly hatást gyakorolt volna rájuk. 2010 óta a jobboldali Fidesz négy egymást követő választáson szerzett alkotmányozó többséget, míg az ellenzéki térfél egyre fragmentáltabbá vált. Szinte azonnal a második Orbán-kormány 2010-es megalakulását követően létrejöttek civil szervezetek annak érdekében, hogy összefogják az ellenzéki, elsősorban baloldali és liberális szavazókat (pl. a Milla vagy a 4K). A Milla később Bajnai Gordon Együtt pártjához csatlakozott, míg a 4K politikai párttá alakult és eltűnt a politikai életből. 2017-ben a Momentum Mozgalom tűnt fel a budapesti olimpia megrendezését ellenző kampány során, és néhány hónappal később politikai párttá vált. A baloldal 2018-as választási vereségét követően civil szervezetek előválasztásokat szerveztek azért, hogy egy főpolgármester-jelölt legyen a 2019-es választáson, illetve hogy közös miniszterelnök- és egyéni jelölt legyen minden egyéni választókerületben a 2022-es parlamenti választáson. Ráadásul utóbbi előválasztások eredményeként egy pártonkívüli jelölt, Márki-Zay Péter lett a hatpárti ellenzék vezetője. Jelen tanulmány amellett érvel, hogy habár a civil szervezetek fontos szerepet játszottak a magyarországi ellenzéki politikában, nem tudták befolyásolni a pártok stratégiáit, és általában ők maguk is párttá alakultak. Másfelől viszont a helyhatósági választásokon néhol az ellenzéki pártok civil szervezeteket alapítottak a lakosság erős pártellenes érzelmei miatt, amelynek színeiben együtt indultak a választáson.
Kulcsszavak: Magyarország, civil szervezetek, pártok, ellenzék.

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Aleksandar Nacev–Dragana Kostevska

„From civic movements to nation builders: The rise of the Macedonian right"

The process of democratization of the Eastern European countries has been recently in the focus of attention of a number of political scientists. Among the various authors writing on the issue of democratic transition in post-communist Europe very few have concentrated on the processes of democratic transition and consolidation in former Yugoslavia.

The aim of this paper is to explain the distinct democratic transition of Macedonia, and to show the importance of the right wing parties, that were suppressed by the Yugoslav state in a systematic way, in the process of getting the independence and the building of the state in the first tumultuous years if the 90's.

The formation of the right wing parties in Macedonia was a unique and complex process of mixing civil society organizations, transnational Macedonian human rights networks, rock groups and soccer fans associations. As a result, all of these stakeholders played a great part in the formation of the first two Macedonian right wing parties. Among the first to organize into a political association was a fraction of the Macedonian intellectuals concerned with the well being of the Macedonian nation and the state. On 4th of February 1990, the more nationally oriented Macedonian intelligentsia founded the MAAK party (Movement for Pan-Macedonian Action).

In late June 1990, another nationalist party emerged on the Macedonian scene. Supported by the Macedonian emigration and founded by eminent Macedonian dissidents , the new party was named VMRO–DPMNE (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Macedonian Party for Macedonian Unity).

Mobilizing the Macedonian society and appearing on the forefront of the defense of Macedonian national interests, these two parties were looking forward to the upcoming multi-party elections.

Keywords: Pluralization, Macedonian Right, VMRO–DPMNE, Nation Builders.

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Aleksandar Nacev–Dragana Kostevska

A civil mozgalmaktól a nemzetépítőkig: a macedón jobboldal felemelkedése

A kelet-európai országok demokratizálódási folyamata a közelmúltban számos politológus figyelmének középpontjában állt. A posztkommunista Európában végbemenő demokratikus átmenet kérdéséről író szerzők közül csak nagyon kevesen foglalkoztak a volt Jugoszlávia demokratikus átmenetének és konszolidációjának folyamataival.

Ennek a tanulmánynak az a célja, hogy megmagyarázza Macedónia sajátos demokratikus átmenetét, és bemutassa a jugoszláv állam által szisztematikusan elnyomott jobboldali pártok fontosságát a függetlenség megszerzésének és az állam építésének folyamatában az első viharos '90-es években. A jobboldali pártok megalakulása Macedóniában egyedülálló és összetett folyamat volt, amelyben civil társadalmi szervezetek, transznacionális macedón emberi jogi hálózatok, rockcsoportok és futballszurkolói egyesületek keveredtek. Ennek eredményeként mindezek az érdekeltek nagy szerepet játszottak az első két macedón jobboldali párt megalakulásában. Az elsők között, akik politikai szövetséggé szerveződtek, a macedón értelmiségiek egy töredéke foglalkozott a macedón nemzet és az állam jólétével. 1990 február 4-én a nemzeti irányultságú macedón értelmiség megalapította a MAAK pártot (Mozgalom a Pánmacedón Akcióért). 1990 június végén egy újabb nacionalista párt jelent meg a macedón színtéren. A macedón emigráció támogatásával és kiemelkedő macedón disszidensek által alapított új párt neve VMRO–DPMNE (Belső Macedón Forradalmi Szervezet – Macedón Demokratikus Egység Pártja) lett.

A macedón társadalmat mozgósítva és a macedón nemzeti érdekek védelmének élvonalában fellépve ez a két párt várta a közelgő többpárti választásokat.

Kulcsszavak: Pluralizáció, macedón jobboldal, VMRO–DPMNE, nemzetépítők.

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Jaroslav Ušiak—Petra Jankovská

The clash between mainstream and new parties – adapting to the digital world:
A case study of the Slovak political space on social networks

The democratic system by its very nature sets space for the rise of anti-democratic forces in the state. In the context of current European developments, political populism and radicalisation have increased in recent years, with a significantly negative impact on political and social life. In many states (including democratic ones), we are increasingly seeing a clash between traditional and new political parties, which are trying to use new forms of communication to attract potential voters, while traditional political parties are not shying away from using rhetoric with elements of radicalisation and extremism. The aim of this article is to explore the clash between traditional (mainstream) and new political parties in the Slovak digital space within Slovak party/political social media channels in selected periods and to describe how this clash is manifested in their narratives disseminated on these networks. An important role will also be played by the comparison and analysis of the communicative shift that occurred in the defined comparative period. Critical discourse analysis has been used to interpret research on social networks and the communication of political parties and individual politicians in broad socio-political contexts. At the same time, a case study of politicians' and political parties' communication on Facebook in 2020 and 2022, particularly in February 2020 and January 2022, was used to complement the analysis. In the context of the findings, it is important to note the changes/adaptation of the communication strategies of traditional parties and their increased level of radicalisation and populism in the competition for potential voters.
Keywords: Slovakia, political parties, digital world, social media, Facebook.

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Jaroslav Ušiak–Petra Jankovská

A mainstream és az új pártok összecsapása – alkalmazkodás a digitális világhoz. Esettanulmány a szlovák politikai térről a közösségi hálózatokon

A demokratikus rendszer természeténél fogva teret enged az antidemokratikus erők felemelkedésének az államban. A jelenlegi európai fejlemények összefüggésében az elmúlt években erősödött a politikai populizmus és a radikalizálódás, ami jelentős negatív hatást gyakorolt a politikai és társadalmi életre. Sok államban (beleértve a demokratikus államokat is) egyre inkább a hagyományos és az új politikai pártok közötti összecsapásnak lehetünk tanúi, amelyek a kommunikáció új formáit próbálják felhasználni a potenciális szavazók vonzására, miközben a hagyományos politikai pártok nem riadnak vissza attól, hogy a radikalizálódás és a szélsőségesség elemeit tartalmazó retorikát használjanak. Jelen cikk célja, hogy feltárja a hagyományos (mainstream) és az új politikai pártok közötti összecsapást a szlovák digitális térben a szlovák párt/politikai közösségi média csatornákon belül a kiválasztott időszakokban, és leírja, hogy ez az összecsapás hogyan nyilvánul meg az ezeken a hálózatokon terjesztett narratíváikban. Fontos szerepet játszik a meghatározott összehasonlító időszakban bekövetkezett kommunikációs váltás összehasonlítása és elemzése is. A kritikai diskurzuselemzést a közösségi hálózatokon végzett kutatások, valamint a politikai pártok és az egyes politikusok kommunikációjának széles társadalmi-politikai kontextusban történő értelmezésére használták. Ugyanakkor az elemzés kiegészítésére egy esettanulmányt használtak a politikusok és politikai pártok Facebookon folytatott kommunikációjáról 2020-ban és 2022-ben, különösen 2020 februárjában és 2022 januárjában. A megállapításokkal összefüggésben fontos megjegyezni a hagyományos pártok kommunikációs stratégiáinak változásait/kiigazítását, valamint a radikalizálódás és a populizmus fokozódását a potenciális szavazókért folytatott versenyben.

Kulcsszavak: Szlovákia, politikai pártok, digitális világ, közösségi média, Facebook.

Jaroslav Ušiak, PhD, politikatudományi diplomát szerzett a Matej Bel Egyetem Politikatudományi és Nemzetközi Kapcsolatok Karán Besztercebányán, Szlovákiában, majd 2015-ben elnyerte a nemzetközi kapcsolatok docense címet a Matej Bel Egyetemen Besztercebányán, Szlovákiában. A Politické vedy tudományos folyóirat főszerkesztője, amely a Web of Science Core Collection indexében szerepel. Fókuszában a nemzetközi kapcsolatok, a biztonságelméletek, a felmerülő biztonsági fenyegetések állnak, és elsősorban Közép-Európában foglalkozik a regionális biztonsági problémákkal, főként a társadalmi szektorra és az identitások problémájára összpontosítva. Írásait hazai és külföldi folyóiratokban és konferencia-kiadványokban is publikálta. Számos hazai és nemzetközi projektben, kutatási projektben, előadási tartózkodásban és konferencián vett részt itthon és külföldön.
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Ivica Kelam–Darija Rupčić Kelam

Overview of the positions and responsibilities of the leading political parties in Croatia in dealing with the COVID–19 pandemic

The COVID–19 pandemic that began in 2020 shocked the entire planet. The initial reaction of many countries was to introduce strict lockdowns to slow the virus's spread. In Croatia, immediately after the appearance of the first cases of infection, a lockdown was introduced. In addition, headquarters for fighting the pandemic of civil protection was established to coordinate the fight against the spread of the virus. At the beginning of the lockdown, the public had great confidence in the headquarters' decisions and saw them as a guarantor of responsible handling of the pandemic. However, the public's trust in the headquarters' decisions began to decline after a series of politically motivated decisions, and the entrenched public distrust towards political structures further deepened. The ruling party HDZ played a crucial role in this, which has become synonymous with corruption and nepotism over the past thirty years. Furthermore, with the arrival of the first vaccine doses, there were scandals in the media due to the excessive vaccination of citizens who were not in the priority group, including prominent politicians from the ruling party HDZ. In the paper, we will describe the role and responsibility of the leading political parties in the fight against

the COVID–19 pandemic. The traditional mistrust of the public towards political structures, a legacy of communist rule, was further deepened by the HDZ, burdened with corruption and criminal affairs during the pandemic. As a result, Croatia is eighth in the world in terms of the number of deaths per million citizens and has paid a high price in lost human lives, but at the same time, the extensive erosion of public trust in the guidelines of (health) experts, the rise of the anti-vaxxer movement and the complete collapse of trust in government structures represent a hidden price pandemics.

Keywords: Croatia, COVID–19, HDZ, corruption, public distrust, NCHFTCP.

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Ivica Kelam–Darija Rupčić Kelam

A vezető horvátországi politikai pártok Covid–19-világjárvány kezelésével kapcsolatos álláspontjainak és felelősségeinek áttekintése

A 2020-ban kezdődött COVID–19 világjárvány az egész bolygót sokkolta. Sok ország első reakciója az volt, hogy szigorú lezárásokat vezetett be a vírus terjedésének lassítása érdekében. Horvátországban közvetlenül az első fertőzéses esetek megjelenése után lezárást vezettek be. Emellett a vírus terjedése elleni küzdelem koordinálására létrehozták a polgári védelem járvány elleni küzdelem központját. A lezárás kezdetén a lakosság nagyon bízott a központ döntéseiben, és a világjárvány felelősségteljes kezelésének garanciáját látta bennük. A közvélemény bizalma a központ döntéseiben azonban egy politikai indíttatású döntés után csökkenni kezdett, és a politikai struktúrákkal szembeni megszilárdult bizalmatlanság tovább mélyült. Ebben döntő szerepet játszott a kormányzó HDZ párt, amely az elmúlt harminc évben a korrupció és a nepotizmus szinonimájává vált. Továbbá az első vakcinaadagok megérkezésével botrányok voltak a médiában a prioritási csoportba nem tartozó polgárok, köztük a HDZ kormányzó párt prominens politikusainak túlzott oltása miatt. A dokumentumban ismertetjük a vezető politikai pártok szerepét és felelősségét a Covid–19-világjárvány elleni küzdelemben. A közvélemény hagyományos bizalmatlanságát a kommunista uralom öröksége, a politikai struktúrák iránt tovább mélyítette a HDZ, amelyet a világjárvány idején korrupció és bűncselekmények terheltek. Ennek eredményeként Horvátország a nyolcadik a világon az egymillió lakosra jutó halálesetek számát tekintve, és nagy árat fizetett az elvesztett emberéletekért, ugyanakkor az (egészségügyi) szakértők iránymutatásaiba vetett közbizalom széles körű eróziója, az anti-vaxxer mozgalom felemelkedése és a kormányzati struktúrákba vetett bizalom teljes összeomlása rejtett árjárványokat jelent.

Kulcsszavak: Horvátország, COVID–19, HDZ, korrupció, közbizalmatlanság, NCHFTCP.

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Radu Carp

The rise and fall of digital parties – searching for a common model

After Syriza was removed from power in 2019 and after the leader of Podemos retired from the political life in 2021, the first signs of a decline of these parties started to be seen. The continuous decline of M5S and the transformation of Syriza into a mainstream left party confirmed subsequently the trend. All these parties and the so-called "pirate parties" had a fulminant rise after the 2008 financial crisis. There is a theoretical framework for explaining the emergence and the growth of these parties: affirming that we are in the time of a "digital populism" that we have "digital parties" and that there is a new political leader "digital prince" type, as other explanations emphasize the model of "bubble democracy" grounded on the virtual exercise of politics. All these models are considered to see why these "digital parties" have a similar way of rise and fall, in order to get the answer to the question if this is a evolution cycle or not.
Keywords: Democracy, digital parties, filter bubble, populism, left-right cleavage.

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Radu Carp

A digitális pártok felemelkedése és bukása – közös modell keresése

Miután a Szirizát 2019-ben eltávolították a hatalomból, és miután a Podemos vezetője 2021-ben visszavonult a politikai életből, e pártok hanyatlásának első jelei kezdtek látszani. Az M5S folyamatos hanyatlása és a Sziriza mainstream baloldali párttá válása később megerősítette ezt a tendenciát. Mindezek a pártok és az úgynevezett „kalózpártok" a 2008-as pénzügyi válság után erőteljes emelkedést mutattak. Van egy elméleti keret e pártok megjelenésének és növekedésének magyarázatára: annak megerősítése, hogy a „digitális populizmus" idején vagyunk, hogy vannak „digitális pártjaink", és hogy van egy új politikai vezető „digitális herceg" típusa, mivel más magyarázatok hangsúlyozzák a „buborékdemokrácia" modelljét, amely a politika virtuális gyakorlásán alapul. Mindezeket a modelleket figyelembe veszik annak érdekében, hogy választ kapjanak arra a kérdésre, hogy ez egy evolúciós ciklus-e vagy sem.
Kulcsszavak: Demokrácia, digitális pártok, szűrőbuborék, populizmus, bal-jobb hasítás.

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Zoltan Zakota

Pirate Parties in Europe: from Activism to Established Politics

After the fall of communism, things seemed to settle down worldwide. The system collapsed and it seemed, at least in Europe, that no one wanted it back. Francis Fukuyama wrote his famous essay on the end of history (Fukuyama, 1989) and (almost) everyone agreed with him, or at least hoped that he was right. Two ideas seemed to triumph: liberal democracy in world politics and capitalism in the global economy. The preparations for the accession of the Central and Eastern European successor states of the Soviet empire to the European Union have begun. But, despite all reassuring forecasts, we had to face, mainly after the turn of the millennium, that many essential changes took place in political life. There are things like the strengthening of nationalism or the resurrection of imperial ideals, but I will not deal with them in my present writing. My topic is related to one of the main driving forces of these changes, the former unimaginable strengthening and expansion of the information society. Information and communication technologies have permeated every subsystem of the society, including the political one, inducing deep transformations. On the one hand, this meant the appearance of new digital tools in the political life, thanks to which the efficiency of work and communication increased considerably. At the same time, political theory and philosophy also underwent significant changes, one of the signs of which was the emergence of a new party type: the pirate party. My paper aims to briefly present these political formations, with special regard to their origins and in relations with civil society. After outlining the broad framework, I present Europe's two most notorious cases: the rise and fall of the Swedish Pirate Party, the ever first such political formation, and the success story the Czech Pirate Party, as well as the European organizations of pirate parties.

Keywords: Information and Communication Technologies, Information Society, Network Society, Pirate Parties.

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Zoltan Zakota

Kalózpártok Európában: az aktivizmustól az intézményesült politizálásig

A kommunizmus bukása után a dolgok rendeződni látszottak világszerte. A rendszer összeomlott, és úgy tűnt, legalábbis Európában, hogy senki sem akarja vissza. Francis Fukuyama megírta híres esszéjét a történelem végéről (Fukuyama, 1989), és (majdnem) mindenki egyetértett vele, vagy legalábbis abban reménykedett, hogy igaza van. Úgy tűnt, hogy két eszme diadalmaskodott: a liberális demokrácia a világpolitikában és a kapitalizmus a globális gazdaságban. Megkezdődtek az előkészületek a szovjet birodalom közép-kelet-európai utódállamainak az Európai Unióhoz való csatlakozásához. Ám minden biztató előrejelzés ellenére szembesülnünk kellett, főként az ezredforduló után, hogy a politikai életben sok lényeges változás történt. Ezek között olyan folyamatok szerepeltek, mint a nacionalizmus erősödése vagy a birodalmi eszmék feltámasztása, de jelen írásomban ezekkel nem foglalkozom. Témám e változások egyik fő mozgatórugójához, az információs társadalom egykor elképzelhetetlen erősödéséhez és térnyeréséhez kapcsolódik. Az információs és kommunikációs technológiák a társadalom minden alrendszerét áthatják, így a politikait is, mély átalakulásokat idézve elő. Ez egyrészt új digitális eszközök megjelenését jelentette a politikai életben, aminek köszönhetően jelentősen nőtt a munka és a kommunikáció hatékonysága. Ezzel párhuzamosan a politikaelmélet és -filozófia is jelentős változáson ment keresztül, aminek egyik jele egy új párttípus, a kalózpárt megjelenése volt. Írásom célja az ilyen politikai formációk rövid bemutatása, különös tekintettel gyökereikre és a civil társadalommal való kapcsolataikra. A tág keretek felvázolása után bemutatom Európa két leghíresebb esetét: az első ilyen politikai formáció, a Svéd Kalózpárt felemelkedését és hanyatlását és a Cseh Kalózpárt sikertörténetét, valamint a kalózpártok európai szervezeteit.

Kulcsszavak: Információs és kommunikációs technológiák, információs társadalom, hálózati társadalom, kalózpártok.

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Cristina Matiuţa

Political parties rooted in civil society. The case of the Save Romania Union (USR)

Romania's post-communist history has been the scene of several experiments of civic associations' involvement in political life, meant to contribute to country's democratization and institutional reconstruction. This happened shortly after the collapse of the communist regime, when several civic associations were established to rebuild the civil society that was completely annihilated by the communist regime. Some of them turned into political parties and even managed to propel their members into important positions in the state administration. But none of the civil society associations that later became political parties did not succeed by their own forces the performance achieved by the Save Romania Union (USR), in the third post-communist decade. Officially registered as political party in 2016, USR has its roots in the Bucharest civil society, where the Save Bucharest Association activated since 2006 as a voice of the civil society, reporting various abuses of the authorities, blocking various real estate projects, saving heritage buildings from demolition, etc. The party recorded an astonishing performance in the 2016 general elections (following the success in the 2016 local elections in Bucharest), becoming the third parliamentary party, a step later completed by its success in the 2019 European elections. This party with civic seeds positions itself in opposition to the existing political parties and it is ideologically ambiguous. It does not want to be "confiscated by any ideology" and promoted the populist slogan of saving the citizens of Bucharest, later of the entire country, from politicians.

The paper focuses on the genesis of the Save Romania Union, the party's program, messages and election results, its performance as a governing party, the mergers and splits inside the party, its leadership, as well as the perspectives of the party's evolution. It explains how the dissatisfaction with the offer of the parties that governed post-communist Romania maintaining corruption and clientelism determined, in addition to the drastic decrease in voting participation, the orientation of a part of the citizens towards this new political party, that built its message around the concepts of integrity, transparency and fight against corruption and the old party system.

Keywords: civil society, Save Romania Union, elections, anti-corruption, anti-system party, populism.

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Cristina Matiuţa

A civil társadalomban gyökerező politikai pártok. A Mentsük meg Romániát Unió (USR) esete

Románia posztkommunista történelme számos kísérlet színhelye volt a polgári szervezetek politikai életben való részvételére, amelyek célja az ország demokratizálódásához és intézményi újjáépítéséhez való hozzájárulás. Ez röviddel a kommunista rezsim összeomlása után történt, amikor számos civil egyesületet hoztak létre a kommunista rezsim által teljesen megsemmisített civil társadalom újjáépítésére. Némelyikük politikai pártokká alakult, sőt sikerült tagjaikat fontos pozíciókba vinni az államigazgatásban. De a később politikai párttá vált civil szervezetek egyike sem tudta saját erejéből elérni a Save Romania Union – Mentsük meg Romániát Unió (USR), teljesítményét a harmadik posztkommunista évtizedben. A 2016-ban hivatalosan politikai pártként bejegyzett USR gyökerei a bukaresti civil társadalomban vannak, ahol a Mentsük meg Bukarest (USB) 2006 óta működik a civil társadalom hangjaként, jelentve a hatóságok különböző visszaéléseit, blokkolva különböző ingatlanprojekteket, megmentve az örökségi épületeket a bontástól stb. A párt elképesztő teljesítményt nyújtott a 2016-os általános választásokon (a 2016-os bukaresti helyhatósági választások sikerét követően), és a harmadik parlamenti párttá vált, amelyet később a 2019-es európai választásokon elért sikere tett teljessé. Ez a polgári magokkal rendelkező párt a meglévő politikai pártokkal szemben pozícionálja magát, és ideológiailag kétértelmű. Nem akarja, hogy „bármilyen ideológia elkobozza", és azt a populista szlogent népszerűsítse, hogy mentse meg Bukarest, később az egész ország polgárait a politikusoktól.

A tanulmány a Mentsük Romániát Unió keletkezésére, programjára, üzeneteire és választási eredményeire, kormánypárti teljesítményére, a párton belüli egyesülésekre és szakadásokra, vezetésére, valamint a párt fejlődésének

perspektíváira összpontosít. Kifejti, hogy a posztkommunista Romániát kormányzó, korrupciót és klientelizmust fenntartó pártok ajánlatával szembeni elégedetlenség a szavazási részvétel drasztikus csökkenése mellett hogyan határozta meg a polgárok egy részének orientációját az új politikai párt felé, amely üzenetét az integritás, az átláthatóság és a korrupció elleni küzdelem és a régi pártrendszer köré építette.

Kulcsszavak: Civil társadalom, Save Romania Union, választások, korrupcióellenes, rendszerellenes párt, populizmus.

Cristina Matiuța a Nagyváradi Egyetem docense, ahol politikai pártok, demokráciaelméletek és civil társadalom területén tanít. A kolozsvári Babeş-Bolyai Tudományegyetem Politika- és Közigazgatástudományi Karán szerzett PhD-fokozatot, majd ugyanezen az egyetemen PhD-fokozatot szerzett a liberalizmus és a nacionalizmus kapcsolatáról, valamint Románia modernitási problémáiról írt disszertációjával. Doktori ösztöndíjban vett részt a Brüsszeli Szabadegyetemen, valamint posztdoktori kutatói gyakorlaton a Fribourgi Egyetemen (Svájc) és az Európai Egyetemi Intézetben (Firenze, Olaszország). Jean Monnet-professzor az európai integrációs tanulmányok területén, valamint a Journal of Identity and Migration Studies alapítója és szerkesztője.
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Lucian Săcălean

From civil society to political parties. Lessons learned from two organizations in Transylvania-Mures county

The democratization of local political life is sometimes more difficult as a process compared to that at national level. The large parties, with national representation, tend to establish a true monopoly at local level, useful from the perspective of internal political competition in parliamentary elections. The existence of an electoral mechanism that can facilitate the establishment and activity of parties at local level can be an answer that supports civil society in the implementation of local community management projects, ensuring a high transparency of the political and bureaucratic act. Moreover, as Merilee S. Grindle states, "the rhetoric and theory of decentralization promise better governance and deeper democracy as public officials are held more directly accountable for their actions and as citizens become more engaged in local affairs."

Romania is one of the countries where the amendment of the legislation regarding the establishment and activity of political parties was carried out following initiatives from civil society. Although the amendment currently allows the legal establishment of a political party with only three founding members, there has not been an "avalanche" of new parties taking advantage of the legislative change, as some feared before the amendment. We could even say that the parties that took advantage of this opportunity concentrated on the local area, which was their main interest. This analysis focused on two political parties in Mures county which were at the forefront of transforming civil society organizations in political parties. Both formations sent representatives to the local councils, one of them even succeeding in winning the position of mayor. Currently, both formations are politically active, the area of interest remains a local one, with positive effects in the democratization of local political life. Besides the common points, there are also several differences, as we will be able to see from the analysis, differences given by the local ethnic component, the competition with the major parties, respectively the agenda of the local community.

Keywords: Democratization, new parties, multiethnic community, civil society, local community.

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Lucian Săcălean

A civil társadalomtól a politikai pártokig. Két erdélyi-marosi szervezet tanulságai

A helyi politikai élet demokratizálódása, mint folyamat, néha nehezebb, mint országos szinten. Az országos képviselettel rendelkező nagy pártok hajlamosak valódi monopóliumot kialakítani helyi szinten, ami hasznos a parlamenti választások belső politikai versenye szempontjából. Egy olyan választási mechanizmus megléte, amely megkönnyít-

heti a pártok helyi szintű létrehozását és tevékenységét, olyan válasz lehet, amely támogatja a civil társadalmat a helyi közösségirányítási projektek végrehajtásában, biztosítva a politikai és bürokratikus aktusok magas szintű átláthatóságát. Ráadásul, ahogy Merilee S. Grindle megállapítja, „a decentralizáció retorikája és elmélete jobb kormányzást és mélyebb demokráciát ígér, mivel a köztisztviselőket közvetlenebbül felelősségre vonják tetteikért, és ahogy a polgárok jobban részt vesznek a helyi ügyekben.

Románia egyike azon országoknak, ahol a civil társadalom kezdeményezéseit követően módosították a politikai pártok alapítására és tevékenységére vonatkozó jogszabályokat. Bár a módosítás jelenleg lehetővé teszi egy mindössze három alapító taggal rendelkező politikai párt jogi létrehozását, nem indult el a jogszabály-módosítást kihasználó új pártok „lavinája", ahogy attól egyesek tartottak a módosítás előtt. Azt is mondhatnánk, hogy azok a pártok, amelyek éltek ezzel a lehetőséggel, a helyi területre koncentráltak, ami a fő érdekük volt.

Ez az elemzés két Maros megyei politikai pártra összpontosított, amelyek a civil társadalmi szervezetek politikai pártokba történő átalakításának élvonalában találhatók. Mindkét formáció képviselőket küldött a helyi tanácsokba, egyiküknek még a polgármesteri pozíciót is sikerült megnyernie. Jelenleg mindkét formáció politikailag aktív, az érdeklődési terület továbbra is helyi jellegű, pozitív hatással van a helyi politikai élet demokratizálódására. A közös pontok mellett számos különbség is van, amint azt az elemzésből látni fogjuk, a helyi etnikai összetevő, a nagy pártokkal való verseny, illetve a helyi közösség napirendje által adott különbségek.

Kulcsszavak: Demokratizálódás, új pártok, többnemzetiségű közösség, civil társadalom, helyi közösség.

Lucian Săcălean PhD, a Marosvásárhelyi G. E. Palade Orvosi, Gyógyszerészeti, Tudományos és Műszaki Egyetem oktatója. Alapdiplomáját politikatudományokból és PhD-fokozatát történelemből szerezte. A doktori értekezés az erdélyi interetnikus kapcsolatokat vizsgálta. Kutatási területe a politikai pártok, politikai rendszerek, kisebbségek, valamint azok képviselete a politikai, nemzeti és nemzetközi rendszerekben. Tagja a Jean Monnet Center of Excellence on European Security and Disinformation in Multicultural Societies szervezetnek, ahol a multikulturális társadalmakra gyakorolt politikai befolyást és a kisebbségi politikai pártok működésére gyakorolt transznacionális hatásokat tanulmányozza, kiemelve az erdélyi magyar kisebbséget. Számos könyve és cikke jelent meg nemzetközi és hazai kiadóknál (pl. L'Harmattan) és folyóiratok (L'Europe Unie) e témákban.
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Mihaela Daciana Natea

Fabricating truth: from a hybrid war to political fake news.
Study case on Romanian illiberal parties' discourse in the context of the Ukrainian war

Digitalization and the new means of communication represent a game changer in the political arena. As political parties need to address a wider audience the online social platforms become true battlefields between parties, between parties and civil society movements, and within the public in general. All actors developed strategic communication policies in the attempt to captivate the public, amass the voters, and promote their ideas. But with the advantages of the new form of communication the associated problems have not delayed in arriving.

Fake news is considered to be a threat to democracy. In a Flash Eurobarometer on fake news and disinformation more than 80% of the respondents consider this phenomenon to be a problem for their democracies. From Brexit to elections in the US, and lately elections in many states (Germany, Brazil, Italy) political fake news was encountered as a political weapon. The combination of fake news and misinformation can become a lethal weapon against the democratic political establishment, especially with rising populist parties. The article explores how the fake news of the Russian propaganda is spread through different political parties or civil society organizations in Romania. We selected the case of the war in Ukraine following the main ideas of the Russian propaganda and how they were used as an instrument of political communication at national level.

Keywords: Fake news, democracy, strategic communication, political parties, disinformation.

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Mihaela Daciana Natea

Az igazság fabrikálása. A hibrid háborútól a politikai álhírekig.
Tanulmány a román illiberális pártok diskurzusáról az ukrajnai háború kontextusában

A digitalizáció és az új kommunikációs eszközök gyökeres változást hoznak a politikai színtéren. Mivel a politikai pártoknak szélesebb közönséget kell megszólítaniuk, az online közösségi platformok valódi csatatérré válnak a pártok, és a civil társadalmi mozgalmak között, valamint általában a nyilvánosságon belül. Minden szereplő stratégiai kommunikációs politikákat dolgozott ki a nyilvánosság megragadása, a szavazók összegyűjtése és ötleteik népszerűsítése érdekében. De az új kommunikációs forma előnyeivel a kapcsolódó problémák nem késlekedtek megérkezni. Az álhírek fenyegetést jelentenek a demokráciára. Az álhírekről és a dezinformációról szóló Eurobarométer gyorsfelmérésben a válaszadók több mint 80%-a véli úgy, hogy ez a jelenség problémát jelent demokráciája számára. A Brexittől kezdve az amerikai választásokon át az utóbbi időben számos államban (Németország, Brazília, Olaszország) tartott választásokig a politikai álhírekkel politikai fegyverként találkoztak. Az álhírek és a félretájékoztatás kombinációja halálos fegyverré válhat a demokratikus politikai berendezkedés ellen, különösen a felemelkedő populista pártok esetében.

A tanulmány feltárja, hogyan terjednek az orosz propaganda álhírei a különböző politikai pártokon vagy civil szervezeteken keresztül Romániában. Az ukrajnai háború esetét az orosz propaganda fő gondolatai alapján választottuk ki, és azt, hogy ezeket hogyan használták fel nemzeti szintű politikai kommunikációs eszközként.

Kulcsszavak: Álhírek, demokrácia, stratégiai kommunikáció, politikai pártok, dezinformáció.

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Radu Carp—Vasile Strat—Cristina Matiuța—Marian Oancea

The role of socio-economic factors in explaining the rise of populism
Case study: Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR)

Populism is a phenomenon that has hit Europe in the past 10 years, with new parties being able to enter the national parliaments. In every country, there are some key factors that determine the final score gained by such political actors. One of the most difficult challenges for political scientists is explaining why people vote for a particular party. This paper is preliminary research and explains, using quantitative methods, by correlating all the socio-economic characteristics that could be found in the Romanian National Institute of Statistics database, at county level, with the score obtained by AUR, which are the key factors that influenced the general score obtained by the Alliance for the Union of Romanians in the 2020 parliamentary elections. We started our study by formulating a set of general assumptions based on some personal experience and sociological results published in the media or other scientific journals, but in the end, we tested four hypotheses that were correlated with the score of the party.

Keywords: Populism, socio-economic determinants, political parties, correlation, parliament, elections.

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A társadalmi-gazdasági tényezők szerepe a populizmus térnyerésének magyarázatában.
Esettanulmány: Szövetség a Románok Egyesüléséért (AUR)

A populizmus olyan jelenség, amely az elmúlt 10 évben érte Európát, és új pártok juthattak be a nemzeti parlamentekbe. Minden országban van néhány kulcsfontosságú tényező, amely meghatározza az ilyen politikai szereplők által elért végső pontszámot. A politológusok számára az egyik legnehezebb kihívás annak megmagyarázása, hogy az emberek miért szavaznak egy adott pártra. Ez a tanulmány előzetes kutatás, és kvantitatív módszerekkel magyarázza el, korrelálva a Román Nemzeti Statisztikai Intézet adatbázisában megyei szinten megtalálható összes társadalmi-gazdasági jellemzőt az AUR által kapott pontszámmal, amelyek kulcsfontosságú tényezők, amik befolyásolták a Románok Uniójáért Szövetség által a 2020-as parlamenti választásokon elért általános pontszámot. Tanulmányunkat azzal kezdtük, hogy általános feltételezéseket fogalmaztunk meg néhány személyes tapasztalat és a médiában vagy más tudományos folyóiratokban közzétett szociológiai eredmények alapján, de végül négy hipotézist teszteltünk, amelyek korreláltak a párt pontszámával.
Kulcsszavak: Populizmus, társadalmi-gazdasági meghatározók, politikai pártok, korreláció, parlament, választások.

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Sergiu Mişcoiu–Ana Gabriela Pantea–Laurenţiu Petrila

Who do we trust?
Blurry perceptions on authority of the voters of the Romanian radical right-wing populist party. Alliance for the Union of Romanians

The article provides a theoretical and empirical analysis of the perceptions of authority by the voters of The Alliance of the Union of Romanians (AUR). More specifically, we capture the perception of how voters view trust in the societal environment and how this manifests itself in their political preferences to assert an agenda over the mainstream political parties. We will follow four frameworks to understand how perceptions of authority are uttered: (1) the need to respect traditional institutions and family roles; (2) the protection of social cohesion and order; (3) respect for freedom; and (4) the denunciation of the negative effects of non-traditional social models. These dimensions are consistent with the general assumptions associated with authoritarian radical right-wing populism, which emphasise security, conformity, and obedience, as well as the need to oppose the expansion of modern social roles in society as a measure of opposition to traditional societal values that prioritise the collective safety of a group at the expense of individual autonomy. Our study analysed, through 16 interviews, the main perceptions of the AUR voters most of the "ordinary" and "silent" people, who are the main supporters of far-right Romanian populism. Our hypothesis is based on the party's emphasis on an anti-elitist orientation, combined with a strong religious orientation, ethno-nationalism, and reactionism, but a lack of a clear ideological line on how authority is layered at the societal level. For the voters, family is the vital environment where individuals are educated and disciplined. The school is indeed an increasingly distant institution, and the parliament seems to be the embodiment of a weak and unconvincing plethora of establishments. AUR voters are anything but insensitive to the party's argument that freedom is endangered in contemporary society, and the party is praised by the voters for its ability to understand the way in which freedom, perceived as self-reliance oriented against "abstract" institutions, should be combined with order. AUR is entrusted with the necessary legitimacy to fight against violations of human rights. The result of the study confirms the initial hypothesis of a deprived vision among the voters of AUR-related authority, as they position themselves as defenders of the recalibration of national social policies and focus on order and traditional societal values.
Keywords: Social conservatism, authority, Alliance for the Union of Romanians, voters' perceptions.

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Kiben bízunk?
A román radikális jobboldali populista párt, a Románok Egységéért Szövetség választóinak elmosódott érzékelése a tekintéllyel kapcsolatban

E tanulmány empirikus és teoretikus elemzését nyújtja a Románok Egyesüléséért Szövetség (AUR) szavazói körében megnyilvánuló hatalom-felfogásnak. Négy gondolati keretet követve vizsgáljuk azt, hogy miként jutnak kifejezésre a hatalomról alkotott felfogások: (1) a hagyományos intézmények és családon belüli szerepek tiszteletben tartásának szükségessége által; (2) a társadalmi kohézió és rend védelme által; (3) a szabadság tiszteletben tartása; (4) és a nem hagyományos társadalmi modellek negatív hatásainak elítélése által. Ezek a dimenziók összhangban vannak a szélsőséges jobboldali populizmus tekintélyelvűségével kapcsolatos általános elképzelésekkel, amelyek hangsúlyozzák, hogy ellenállást kell tanúsítani a modern társadalmi szerepek kiterjesztésével szemben, mivel azok ellentétesek a román társadalmi értékekkel. Tanulmányunk az AUR-szavazók zömére jellemző főbb felfogásokat elemzi, amely szavazók „hétköznapi," „csendes" emberek, és a romániai jobboldali autoritárius populizmus fő támogatói. Ennek megfelelően, 16 interjú alapján vizsgáljuk meg a párt városi szavazóit és vidéki támogatóit, valamint elemezzük a jóléti államról és a hatalomról alkotott felfogásaikat.
Hipotézisünk alapja, hogy a párt hangsúlyozottan elitellenes orientációjú, ami ugyanakkor erős vallási kampánnyal is párosul; állandó verbális támadásait dagályos politikai beszédstílus jellemzi, de nem rendelkezik világos ideológiai elképzeléssel arról, hogy a hatalom társadalmi szinten miként rétegződik.
A tanulmány eredményei megerősítik kezdeti hipotézisünket, amely szerint a párt szavazói nem rendelkeznek világos elképzeléssel a párt hatalommal és jóléti állammal kapcsolatos felfogásáról. Mivel a választók a nemzeti szociálpolitika újra kalibrálásának védelmezőiként pozícionálják magukat, valamint a rendre és a hagyományos társadalmi értékekre összpontosítanak, a párt ezt az igényt a homályos hatalomfelfogás segítségével ragadja meg és sokszorozza.
Kulcsszavak: Társadalmi konzervativizmus, tekintély, Szövetség a Románok Szövetségéért, választói felfogás.

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folyamatokra alkalmazott konstruktivista elmélet, valamint a kelet-ázsiai társadalmi átalakulás dinamikája. Cikkeket publikált a román posztkommunista társadalmi átalakulásról, és terepkutatást végzett a roma közösségekben a társadalmi egyenlőtlenségre és marginalizációra összpontosítva; terepkutatást végzett Délkelet-Ázsiában és Kínában is.
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■■ "As the development of civil institutions was the main purpose of political activities at the time of the rebirth of sovereign people of Poland at the beginning of '90, the later events made things more and more complicated." *(Arkadiusz Lewandowski–Łukasz Perlikowski)*

■■ "The current developments cannot be explained without understanding the role of civil society in the period of political change before and after 1990, which saw the fall of communism, the formation of a democratic government and the independence of the Slovenian state." *(Igor Bahovec)*

■■ "[A]although CSOs have played an important role in opposition politics in Hungary, they failed to impact the strategies of political parties, and usually transformed themselves to political parties." *(Dúró József)*

■■ "The formation of the right wing parties in Macedonia was a unique and complex process of mixing civil society organizations, transnational Macedonian human rights networks, rock groups and soccer fans associations." *(Aleksandar Nacev–Dragana Kostevska)*

■■ "In the context of current European developments, political populism and radicalisation have increased in recent years, with a significantly negative impact on political and social life." *(Jaroslav Ušiak–Petra Jankovská)*

■■ "The traditional mistrust of the public towards political structures, a legacy of communist rule, was further deepened by the HDZ, burdened with corruption and criminal affairs during the pandemic." *(Ivica Kelam–Darija Rupčić Kelam)*

■■ "There is a theoretical framework for explaining the emergence and the growth of these parties: affirming that we are in the time of a 'digital populism' that we have 'digital parties' and that there is a new political leader 'digital prince' type, as other explanations emphasize the model of 'bubble democracy' grounded on the virtual exercise of politics. *(Radu Carp)*

■■ "A pirate party is a political formation having one foot anchored in the civil society and the other one in the information society that advocate for civil liberties, digital rights, and government transparency." *(Zoltan Zakota)*

■■ "Romania's post-communist history has been the scene of several experiments of civic associations' involvement in political life, meant to contribute to country's democratization and institutional reconstruction." *(Cristina Matiuța)*

■■ "Romania is one of the countries where the amendment of the legislation regarding the establishment and activity of political parties was carried out following initiatives from civil society." *(Lucian Săcălean)*

■■ "The combination of fake news and misinformation can become a lethal weapon against the democratic political establishment, especially with rising populist parties." *(Mihaela Daciana Natea)*

■■ "Populism is a phenomenon that has hit Europe in the past 10 years, with new parties being able to enter the national parliaments." *(Radu Carp–Vasile Strat–Cristina Matiuța–Marian Oancea)*

■■ "AUR voters are anything but insensitive to the party's argument that freedom is endangered in contemporary society, and the party is praised by the voters for its ability to understand the way in which freedom, perceived as self-reliance oriented against 'abstract' institutions, should be combined with order." *(Sergiu Mișcoiu–Ana Gabriela Pantea– Laurențiu Petrila)*