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The Role of Civil Society in the Democratization and European Integration Process of Central and Eastern Europe

Mircea Brie, István József Polgár, István Péter Németh, Laurențiu Petrila, Orsolya Falus, Zoltan Zakota (Eds.)

Communities and civil society

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FROM EXCLUSIVE BORDERS TO INCLUSIVE FRONTIERS IN THE Western Balkans

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Active Citizenship in the New Rural Slovakian Space in Bihor and Sălaj Counties (Romania)

Threats and Opportunities[1]

Sorin Șipoș–Cosmin Patca–Ioana Blajec–Manuela Bârza

Introduction and methodology

According to the 2011 census, there were 13,654 Slovaks living in Romania. The counties with the highest values of ethnic Slovaks were: Bihor (6,091), Arad (4,462), Timiș (1,424) and Sălaj (1,118). The historiography regarding the Slovaks in Romania identified four main regions inhabited by Slovaks over time: Banat, Bihor – Sălaj, Satu-Mare – Maramureş and north-eastern Bucovina. The area that concentrates the largest community of Slovaks is Bihor-Sălaj, spread over the Plopiș Mountains. The Plopiș Mountains are located in the north-western part of the Apuseni Mountains group. They have low altitudes, being mostly covered by deciduous forests. From the administrative point of view, the Plopiș Mountains are divided between Bihor and Sălaj counties.

The purposes of our research were to get to know the Slovak community in the area better; to identify the threats it faces and the opportunities that this community has; to identify and propose solutions to increase the level of civic involvement in the preservation and promotion of the Slovak cultural heritage. The present study presents the conclusions of this active citizenship project conducted within the Slovak community in Bihor and Sălaj counties.

The massive migration of Slovaks from the northern counties of Hungary to the southern parts (the Lower Lands) began after the Peace of Karlowitz (1699) and the Peace of Satu Mare, 1711 (Dumitrescu 2008). There were many fruitful lands that remained after the retreat of the Turks, but these lands were mostly depopulated. Thus, a first wave of migration of Slovaks occurs in the first decades

of the 18th century; the Slovaks flee the northern counties of Hungary (present-day Slovakia) and settle in the counties of Esztergom, Komárom, Nógrád, and Pest (Dumitrescu 2008). Other causes that influenced their migration were the increased obligations during wars, epidemics or the burning of some localities, but there was also a religious cause. The migration of the Slovaks to the current territory of Romania took place in several stages. It began in the second half of the 18th century and continued in the first half of the 19th century, the Slovaks settled especially in four regions of today's Romania: the plain areas of Bánát, the wooded areas of Bihor and Sălaj counties, the plain areas and the mining settlements of Satu-Mare and Maramureş counties and the north-eastern Bucovina (Štefanko 1998a).

The appearance of the Slovaks in the Bihor-Sălaj area is directly related to the great landowners in the area. The area of the Plopiș Mountains was mostly covered by forests at the end of the 18th century. Four large noble families had possessions in this area: Bárányi, Bánffy, Batthyány and Kereszegi. The Bárányi family owned the northern and western parts of the mountains (forests, pastures, arable land), Bánffy and Kereszegi, the eastern part, and the Batthyány family, the central and southern parts (Kukucska 2018). The first Slovak families, originating in the regions of Orava, Kysuce and Gemer, arrived in 1785 at the initiative of the Hungarian magnate Bárányi and founded the settlement of Budoi (Štefanko 2004). R. Urban considers that in this first wave of migration at the end of the 18th century, 50 Slovak families were involved in the founding of the three localities: Budoi, Borumlaca, Vărzari (Urban 1930). Deciduous forests here began to be cut from the middle of the 18th century, in order to produce potash (potassium carbonate), used in the production of glass. Therefore, the Slovaks were brought here as lumberjacks; the Slovaks were promised wood for the construction of the houses and all the land they could clear (Štefanko 2004).

As it had positive consequences, Bárányi's pattern of colonization of the Slovaks was followed by the other local nobles, Bánffy and Batthyány, who began to bring Slovaks from the northern counties of Hungary, that is, from present-day Slovakia. A massive colonization of the plateau of the Plopiș Mountains was mainly conducted by Bánffy. He began to produce potassium and glass in these places and that is why, in addition to woodcutters, he needed specialists in furnaces and glass. The first Slovaks arrived in the plateau area of Plopiș in the first two decades of the 19th century. In addition to the devaluation of the coin in 1811 or the famine in 1817, as a result of poor harvests and drought, the noble agents skilfully spread numerous fake news about the abundant life of the first settlers. After 1820 the migration of the Slovaks to these lands ceased for a while, but gained momentum again after 1830, when Jozsef Batthyány began to colonize (Kukucska 2018).

As a result of the colonization actions of the Plopiș Mountains with Slovaks, new localities of scattered type were founded: Huta Voivozi (hung. *Almaszeghuta*, slov. *Stará Huta)*, Valea Ungurului (hung. *Magyarpatak*, slov. *Gemelčička*), Valea Târnei (hung. *Hármaspatak*, slov. *Židáreň*), Şinteu (hung. *Sólyomkő*, slov. *Nova Huta*) and Socet (hung. *Forduló*, slov. *Huta Sočet*) (Ocelák). Roman Catholic shematisms

and cartographic documents from the first half of the 19th century demonstrate the existence of two huts of glass at Huta Voivozi and Şinteu. Along with deforestation activities, animal farming and plant culture developed. In the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century there was an internal migration of the Slovaks. As a consequence, new settlements inhabited almost exclusively by Slovaks were founded. Occasionally, the Slovaks settled in villages inhabited by Romanians or Hungarians in the valley areas (Štefanko 2004).

From a confessional point of view, most of the Slovaks colonized in the Bihor-Sălaj area were Roman Catholics. In the beginning, they were assigned to the existing Roman Catholic parishes in the area: Aleșd, Mișca, Suplacu de Barcău. New Roman Catholic parishes were established when the number of settlers increased. This is how the parishes of Budoi and Şinteu were founded, in 1829, respectively in 1839. Both parishes were part of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Oradea (Schematismus r. cat. 1869).

Hypotheses:

1. *A better knowledge of the local history, of the material and immaterial cultural heritage contributes to the preservation of the cultural identity of the Slovak minority in the Bihor-Sălaj area.*

Q1. To what extent can the research on local history provide solutions to increase the involvement of civil society in solving community problems?

Q2. In what way could the local cultural heritage be exploited from a touristic point of view?

2. *The massive migration and the decline of the natural growth in the Slovak community in the Bihor-Sălaj area determine the accelerated dissolution of this ethnic group, thus it is necessary to actively involve the citizens into a project that could diminish this phenomenon.*

Q1. What are the most urgent needs of the community that could be solved by involving civil society?

Q2. How can the European slogan "Unity in diversity" be implemented in the studied community?

Historiography regarding the Slovaks in the Bihor-Sălaj area. Literature review

The historiography regarding the Slovaks from Bihor-Sălaj area can be classified into two important categories: works published in Czechoslovakia/Slovak Republic, in Slovak, and works published in Romania, in Romanian and Slovak. A first valuable work for knowing the past of the Slovaks in Romania was published by Rudolf Urban in the interwar period (Urban 1930).

After the signing of the cultural agreement between Romania and Czechoslovakia in 1936, the number of materials about the history and culture of the Slovaks in

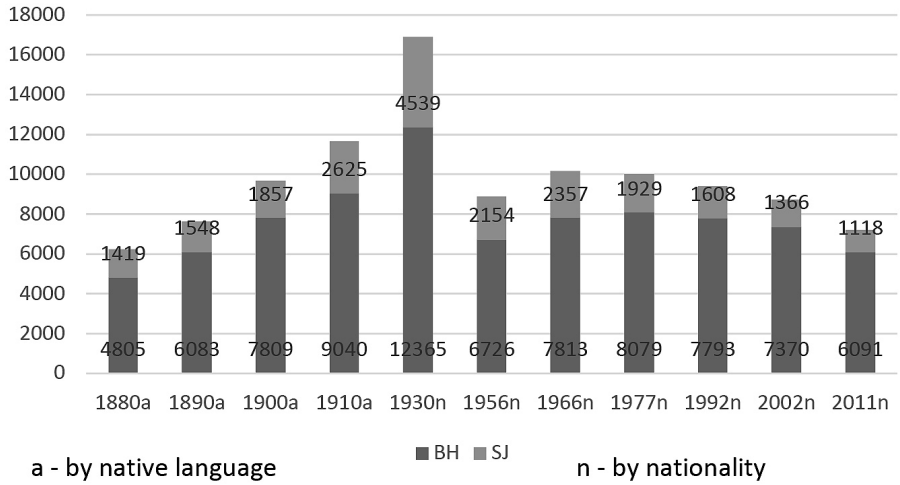
Romania, and implicitly, of those from the Bihor-Sălaj area, increased significantly, being published in both countries (Štefanko-Hlasnik 1995). During the communist period, the number of studies and publications related to Slovaks from Bihor-Sălaj was reduced; in Romania they appeared mostly in the scientific yearbook *Slováci v zahraníčí*. Romania's return to democracy after 1989 led to a remarkable increase in research and publications about Slovaks. An important role in the knowledge of the history and culture of the Slovaks in Romania was played by the „Ivan Krasko" Cultural and Scientific Society established in 1994, which aimed to preserve and defend the cultural identity of the Slovak minority in Romania.

Ondrej Štefanko, poet and writer of Slovak origin, is one of those who were involved in studying and publishing materials related to the history and culture of Slovaks in Romania, being the coordinator of several publications (Patca 2022). A very important work for the history and culture of the Slovaks in the Bihor-Sălaj area is the *Atlas of the popular culture of the Slovaks in Romania*, published in 1998, in Romanian and Slovak. The atlas includes scientific studies on the settlement of Slovaks in Romania (Štefanko 1998a), the popular culture of Slovaks in Romania (Štefanko 1998b), the history and demography of Slovak localities (Pasková-Hlásnik 1998). There are also references to the Slovaks from the Bihor-Sălaj area in other general works about the Slovaks in Romania, mainly published at the *Ivan Krasko* Publishing House in Nădlac.

General information about the causes of the Slovak migration in the 17th–18th centuries, the stages of the migration, was published in Romanian by a group of authors of Slovak origin, by the Institute for the Study of National Minorities Problems (Jakab–Peti 2018). In recent years, researchers from the University of Oradea have focused more and more on researching the history and culture of Slovaks from Bihor and Sălaj counties (Șipoș–Blajec–Patca–Bârza 2022). Among the researchers and authors from Slovakia who wrote and published important materials for the knowledge of the history and culture of the Slovaks in the Bihor–Sălaj area we mention Eva Michalčaková (about the internal migration of the Slovaks from the Plopiș Mountains), Javor Pavol (about the glass factories where the Slovaks worked).

Demographic aspects of the Slovaks in the Bihor-Sălaj area

Figure 1. The dynamics of the Slovak population in the Bihor-Sălaj region during 1880–2011, based on censuses



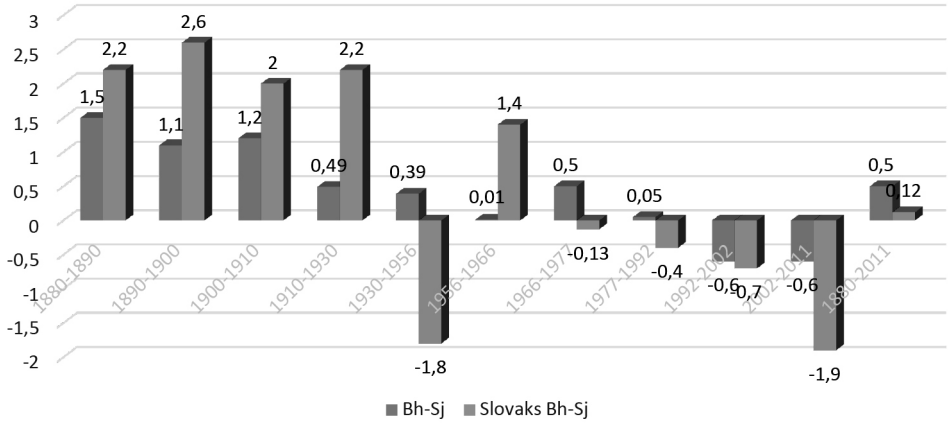
Source: National Institute of Statistics, Varga E. Árpad.

The first official data about the number of Slovaks in the Bihor-Sălaj area are those that come from the census of 1880, a census that structures the population according to the criterion of the native language. According to this data, 6,224 Slovak lived in Bihor and Sălaj counties, representing 1.2% of the total population of the two counties (Rotariu 1997). The percentage is a small one and remains at a low value throughout the entire period studied. However, a slight increase in the percentage of Slovaks can be noted until 1930, when the maximum value is also recorded *(Figure1)*. In addition to the steady growth of the Slovak population in the previous period, the high percentage in 1930 (2.2%) has two other explanations.

The first one concerns the fact that in the 1930 census the Czech ethnics were reviewed together with the Slovaks. Therefore, the 16,904 inhabitants in 1930 are not only Slovaks, but also Czechs. However, the number of Czechs was low in this region. We do not know their exact value in 1930, but we do know that in 1956 there were 108 in Bihor (representing 1.6% of the Slovak population in Bihor in 1930) and 22 in Sălaj (representing 1% of the Slovak population in Sălaj). The second explanation refers to the fact that in 1930, the year of the first census conducted by the Romanian state authorities in these places, Bihor County had a small area compared to the former Bihor County; some of the localities of the former county, less inhabited by Slovaks, remained within the borders of the Hungarian state.

Analysing the data from the censuses *(Figure1)* we can see that in the entire period (1880–2011) the Slovak population in the Bihor-Sălaj region increases from 6,224 in 1880 to 7,209 in 2011 (Patca 2021). The percentage increase is 15.8% and the actual numerical increase is 985, the annual growth rate being only of 0.12%. The values are clearly lower compared to the values related to the entire population in Bihor and Sălaj counties (actual numerical growth 317,546, percentage increase 95.8%, average annual growth rate 0.5%). However, the lower growth values of the Slovak population are not the same over the reviewed period. During 1880–1930, the growth values of the Slovak population are above those of the total population of the two counties. No colonisations took place during this period, so the growth of the Slovak population can be attributed to a positive natural increase. The highest average annual growth rate, at 2.2%, is found both between 1880 and 1890, as well as during 1910–1930. The most consistent effective numerical growth is of 5,239, between 1910 and 1930. After 1930, demographic regression was established among the Slovak community, except the period 1956–1966.

Figure 2. Average annual comparative growth/decrease rates of population for the period 1880–2011



source: National Institute of Statistics, Varga E. Árpad.

The rate of decline of the Slovak population is above that of the total population of Bihor-Sălaj. The average annual rate of decline of the Slovak population *(Figure2)* reaches its maximum during 2002–2011 (-1.9%). The admission of Romania into the European Union opened the way for Slovak workers to the European labour market, most of them migrating to the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic. In terms of the number of localities where Slovaks have lived over time, the average is 150 (about 75% localities in Bihor County, and 25% in Sălaj County). According to the 1880 census, 10 of the 147 localities where ethnic Slovaks lived, comprised 73% of all Slovaks in the Bihor-Sălaj region (Patca 2021).

The localities with the most numerous Slovaks in 1880 were: Făgetu (hung. *Magyarpatak*) – 1,263, Valea Târnei (hung. *Hármaspatak*) – 638, Peştiş (Şinteu) – 554, Budoi – 408. Eight localities had a majority Slovak population, all of them being located on the plateau and on the outskirts of the Plopiș Mountains (Şinteu, Budoi, Vărzari, Borumlaca, Huta Voivozi, Socet, Valea Târnei, Făgetu). In 2011, 12 localities in the Bihor-Sălaj area had a majority Slovak population, most of the localities being established by Slovaks as a result of the internal migration process and having a small population (Șerani, Sacalasău Nou, Valea Cerului, Foglaş, Varasău).

Next, we will analyse the demographic dynamics of the Slovak community in several localities that belonged to the Roman Catholic parishes of Budoi and Şinteu. The two parishes were established in the Plopiș Mountains area as a result of the colonization of Slovaks in this region in the late 18th century and early 19th century. The Parish of Budoi, founded in 1829, was located on the western edge of the Plopiș Mountains. In 1880, the parish had 1,025 parishioners, of which 581 (56.6%) were Slovaks. The Parish of Şinteu has become an independent parish since 1844, but the it keeps a record since 1938, the year in which a chapel was built to serve the confessional needs of the Slovaks. The Parish of Şinteu, with its subsidiaries, was located on the plateau of the Plopiș Mountains, at the border between Bihor and Crasna counties (since 1876, Sălaj County). In 1880, the parish of Șinteu had 4,018 parishioners, of which 2,942 were Slovaks, representing 73%. Together, the two parishes comprised 3,523 Slovaks, representing 56.6% of all Slovaks registered in the 1880 census in the Bihor-Sălaj region (6,224).

Analysing the documentary sources from the first half of the 19th century, we can approximately apprehend the moment of colonization of the Slovaks in the Plopiș Mountains area and the number of Slovak communities in the settlements that were part of the Roman Catholic parishes of Budoi *(Table1)* and Şinteu. The Roman Catholic shematisms *(*Table1)* of the 19th century indicate the size of the settlements and the number of Roman Catholic communities in each settlement. In order to approximate the number of Slovaks, a regressive analysis was needed, taking into account the proportion of Slovaks within these localities.

Table1. The evolution of the Slovak community in the Parish of Budoi during 1824–2011

Year	Numeric value / Percentage of the population of the locality	Budoi	Voivozi	Cuzap+ Pădurea Neagră	Popeşti	Derna	Poiana (Polyana)*	Ciutelec	PARISH OF BUDOI Period: Annual average of the balance between no. of baptisms and no. of deaths	PARISH OF BUDOI Period: Annual average of marriages
1824*	Nr.	420	–	–	–	–	–	–	1832–1835	
	%	100							24.2	10.7
1835*	Nr.	518	–	–	–	–	–	–	1836–1851	
	%	99							10.4	9.5
1851*	Nr.	617	–	–	–	–	132	–	1852–1869	
	%	98					–		10.1	11.5
1869	Nr.	554	10	155	0	0	119	10	1870–1880	
	%	96.2	1.7	17.2	–	–	–	1.6	–15.5	12.3
1880	Nr.	420	10	163	6	0	11	11	1881–1890	
	%	87.7	1.9	18.3	1	–	–	2.3	23.1	14.8
1890	Nr.	505	17	215	2	6		47	1891–1900	
	%	87.2	2.8	20.9	0.3	1.5		8.5	28.9	11.4
1900	Nr.	830	40	327	8	95		50	1901–1910	
	%	74.6	5.8	23.4	1	11.2		6.8	38.5	16.7
1910	Nr.	913	4	444	2	31		60		
	%	81.9	0.5	31.7	0.2	2.4		6.7		
1930	Nr.	1015	35	302	7	10		23	1937–1941	
	%	90.7	3.8	19.9	0.7	1.6		2.6		23
1941	Nr.	1076	58	293	14	11		49	1942–1966	
	%	89.6	5.6	17.8	1.4	1.4		5.5		2.4
1966	Nr.	1060	37	81	2.4	2.4		37	1966–1977	
	%	88.3	2.9	3.8	1.1	1.8		2.9		19.4

1977	Nr.	1156	37	76	40	103		37	**1978–1991**	
	%	93.5	3.3	3.2	1.4	8.8		3.3		2.1
1992	Nr.	820	44	180	92	285		44	**1992–2000**	
	%	72.8	4.4	7.6	3.3	26.9		4.4		15.2
2002	Nr.	800	36	144	76	288		36		
	%	91.1	4	7.1	3	28.2		4		
2011	Nr.	592	127	69	60	249		19		
	%	82.2	7.7	4.1	2.3	27.3		2.7		
1869 – 2011	Nr.	38	117	–86	60	249	–	9		
	%	6.8		–55.4			–	90		

Source: Schematismus 1824, 1835, 1851; Varga E. Árpad; Civil Status Registers fund; Budoi Parish Archive; National Institute of Statistics.

Of really significant use for our analysis was a record from 1838 that presents the confessional and ethnic structure of the localities situated on the plateau of the Plopiș Mountains. According to its data, there were 512 Slavs (Slovaks and Czechs) in Șinteu, representing 94.6% of the settlement's population; in Huta Voivozi there were 229 (89.8%), in Făgetu 360 (99.7%); all the inhabitants of Socet (155), Valea Târnei (411) and Kálimb (36) were Slavs, that is, overwhelmingly Slovaks (SJAN Bh., fund Parohia Romano-Catolică Șinteu, dosar 1, f. 3). Therefore, this is how the settlements inhabited mostly by Slovaks in the first half of the 19th century develop, both on the high plateau area (Şinteu, Huta Voivozi, Socet, Valea Târnei, Făgetu), and in the valley area on the western edge of Plopiș, Budoi (Patca 2021).

The main occupation of the Slovaks during this period was deforestation, while a small part of them were working in the glass huts. On the cleared land, mainly potato and rye were grown, as they were plants that adapted to the less fertile soil; also the Slovaks had animals, especially cattle and pigs. The high natural increase of the population which came as a result of a high birth rate caused a significant increase in the Slovak population. This led to the beginning the process of internal migration of the Slovaks, which founded new scattered settlements in the highland, most of them extinct in the 19th century (*Csornahora or Feketehegy*, *Fehérpatak*, *Kálimb*, *Polyána*). In the valley area, the migration of Slovaks had mainly economic reasons, small communities of Slovaks being formed in Romanian settlements (Voivozi, Ciutelec, Cuzap, Popești) or in mixed settlements (Pădurea Neagră).

During the 1870–1880 period, the Slovak population of Budoi Parish is greatly reduced, as a result of a negative natural birth rate. The balance between the number of births and the number of deaths *(Table1)* registers negative values due to the cholera epidemic that has caused havoc throughout Transylvania. This review, an indicator of positive natural growth, records remarkably high average values in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. By 1910 and 1930, the Slovak population was growing in most of the localities, both in the Şinteu Parish and in the Budoi Parish.

The natural growth of the population is affected by the process of emigration, especially to the American continent. We do not know to what extent this process affected the Slovaks in the area, but it is obvious that it existed. During 1941 and 1966, the number of Slovaks decreased sharply, especially as a result of the process of re-emigration manifested mainly in the period 1945–1948 (Štefanko 2004). The average growth rate of the entire Slovak population in the Bihor-Sălaj area *(Figure2)* registers negative values for the period 1930–1956. After 1966, during the years of communism, there is an increase in the number of Slovaks in the valley areas (Budoi, Derna, Voivozi, Popeşti, Ciutelec, Cuzap, Pădurea Neagră) due to the exploitation of coal in the Bistra and Barcău basins and of the asphalt at Budoi-Derna. However, the number of Slovaks decreases in the settlements located in the Parish of Şinteu, where economic development was incipient. The wood had been largely exploited and the farmland had a low productivity. After 1992, following the regain of freedom of movement, the Slovak communities are declining in numbers in all settlements. Many Slovaks have re-emigrated to Slovakia. Most of them were young, as it is proved by the low number of marriages in Budoi Parish between 1992 and 2000 *(Table1).*

Aspects of traditional Slovak architecture in Bihor and Sălaj counties

The protection of the specific characteristics is undeniably important for the preservation of the local specificity and landscape. By the term *landscape* used here we refer to a group of houses and annexes that form a household, but also to the image of the place where these households are located.

Slovak settlements can be classified into two broad categories: settlements with villages scattered on hills or villages with isolated houses and settlements with compact villages or valley villages (Maier 1979). A characteristic of the first category of settlements is the fact that the households are built at significant distances from each other, being connected to one another by alleys or paths. The household is usually built in the middle of the property, around which the agricultural lands, orchards etc. develop. The following villages can be listed in this category: Huta Voivozi, Şinteu, Valea Târnei, Socet, Făgetu etc. A characteristic of the second category, that of settlements with compact villages or valley villages, is that the households are aligned along a water course. Plots are usually narrow and long. The household is built at the end of the plot, from the riverside, while the agricultural lands, orchards, etc. develop along the plot, towards the back. This category comprises localities such as Budoi, Vărzari, Borumlaca etc.

The first buildings intended for living were *kolibele* (the huts), seasonal homes for shepherds, woodcutters, miners, also used in viticulture. Later, after the Slovaks settled in the new territories, they started to build permanent houses. The houses usually had a simple planimetry, consisting of two or three rooms. The walls of the houses were made of wooden beams or rammed earth, while reed and later straw

were used for covering (as a roof). Houses built of earthen brick and rammed earth appear in the middle of the 19th century, and ceramic tile coverings appear starting from the 20th century.

In the ensemble of traditional architecture, in addition to the house, there are also other household annexes that complete it as an entity: the coop, the stable, the barn, etc. These constructions were intended for agriculture and animal farming. Other component elements of the traditional architecture are the garden, the fountain, the bench in front of the house; all of these play an important role in the lives of the community members. Accumulated and correlated with the life of the peasant, they compose the traditional architecture.

The villages of scattered type have households spread over a large territory, at a significant distance from each other. The main factor in the construction of traditional Slovak households in the areas with villages scattered on the hills was the geographical one. The residents carefully chose the location where they were going to place their house in such a way that the location would offer them as many facilities as possible: the smoothest slope, watercourse or spring, accessibility, etc. (Krivošová 2012). These households usually have a simple conformation and modest dimensions, aiming to create a central space (courtyard) around which the constructions of the household are arranged. The yard is usually spacious, and it represents the centre of the family habitat.

Following the field research, 4 main household typologies could be identified:

A – households with L-shaped constructions;
B – households with parallel or face-to-face constructions;
C – households with randomly arranged constructions, conformed to the irregular terrain;
D – households with buildings arranged around an inner courtyard.

The oldest and most used typology in hilly areas is the L-shaped construction, that is the the house and the household annexes arranged in an L shape. This arrangement offered the easiest possible connection between the constructions in the household and a generous opening to the rest of the components of the household. The parallel or face-to-face display of the constructions is a more compact arrangement that outlines an interior space, the courtyard, where a large part of household activities took place. In some cases, when the family became larger, a later construction (house) was added parallel to the other two. The random arrangement of the constructions aims to create an inner enclosure (the courtyard), without having a defined shape. The arrangement of the constructions is primarily conditioned by the relief on which they are to be built. The type of households with buildings arranged around an inner courtyard represents a newer arrangement. This layout resulted from one of the typologies listed before, as in time and due to the growth of human needs, other constructions were added to the initial ones (Blajec 2021).

The households in the villages of compact type are usually lined up along a river or a stream. They keep a certain order and alignment. Following the field research, 3 main typologies of households could be identified:

A – households with parallel or face-to-face constructions
B – households with L-shaped constructions
C – households with U-shaped constructions.

The predominant and oldest typology is that of households with parallel or face-to-face constructions. At the same time, L-shaped households are present especially in places where the plots had a more generous width. The U-shaped households are more recent and resulted from the expansion of the initial households, by the addition of constructions according to the needs of each household. Considering the character of these settlements, the households in this area had a narrow and separate yard. There was a flower garden positioned in front of the house, while the rest of the space was intended for everyday activities. The backyard was used mainly for farming domestic animals and planting fruit trees. The rest of the plot served as arable land for agricultural crops: corn, potatoes, beans, pumpkin (Blajec 2021).

The Slovak community in Bihor-Sălaj counties – opportunities and threats

Table 2. S.W.O.T. analysis regarding the Slovak community in the Bihor-Sălaj area

STRENGHTS:	WEAKNESSES:
– Multicultural space (wide perspective) – Cultural and historical heritage – Preserved traditions – Preserved natural setting – High tourist potential	– Emigration – Insufficient jobs – Prominent isolation of the localities – Lack of public transportation
OPPORTUNITIES:	**THREATS:**
– Preserving and promoting the culture of the Slovak population in Bihor and Sălaj counties – Promotion of local products and traditions – Development of interethnic cooperation	– Risk of depopulation – Natural and climatic risks – Pollution – Poverty

Active citizenship projects in the Slovak settlements of Bihor and Sălaj

The process of preservation of the local specificity, including the architecture, customs and traditions, identity and cultural heritage of an ethnic community represents one of the greatest challenges in the contemporary globalized world. Even if there were some sporadic efforts over the years, the actual situation shows

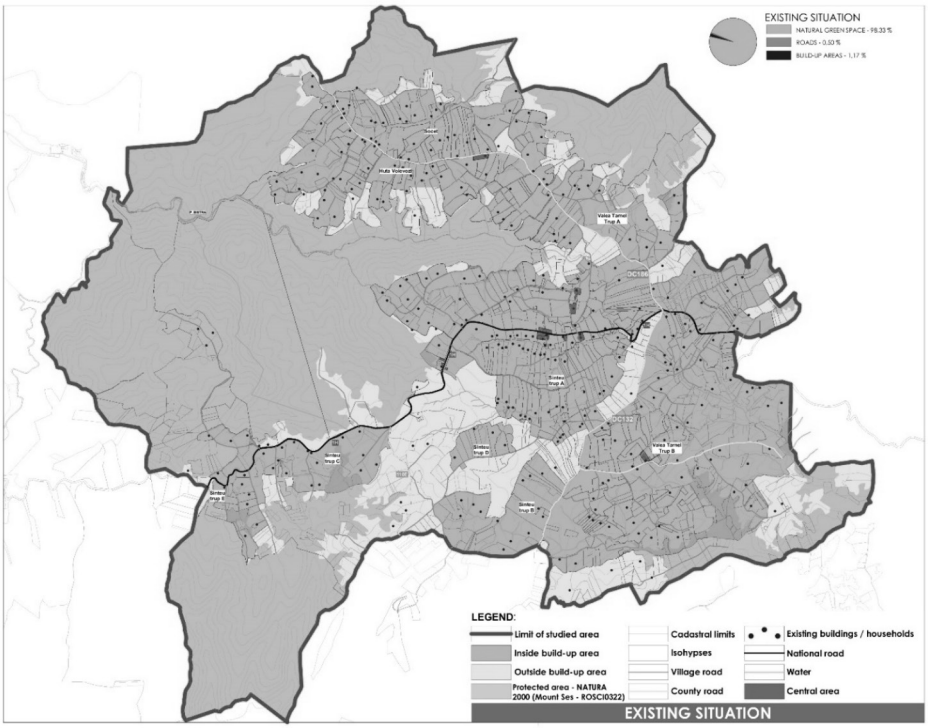
that there is a high demand of active citizenship projects, that could facilitate the achieving of the desired goals.

In 2021, the Şinteu City Hall in collaboration with the Bihor County Council have elaborated a regulation of aesthetics and architectural conformation, specific to the Şinteu commune *(Design Guidelines)*, inhabited by a majority of Slovaks (96.37%). The main role of the regulation was to identify local specifics, traditional architecture, and specific local elements, and at the same time to examine the existing urban situation, in order to indicate future development directions and an optimal territorial organization.

This regulation was based on a series of substantiation studies: historical analysis, analysis of the existing buildings, respectively urban analysis that was considered relevant. In the end, a series of rules regarding the conservation of existing constructions, respectively interventions on existing constructions and guidelines for the design of new constructions have been developed. The application of the regulation is done in accordance with the General Urban Plan and is implemented with the approval of the Bihor County Commission for Urbanism and Spatial Planning.

Current situation:

Figure 3. Current situation



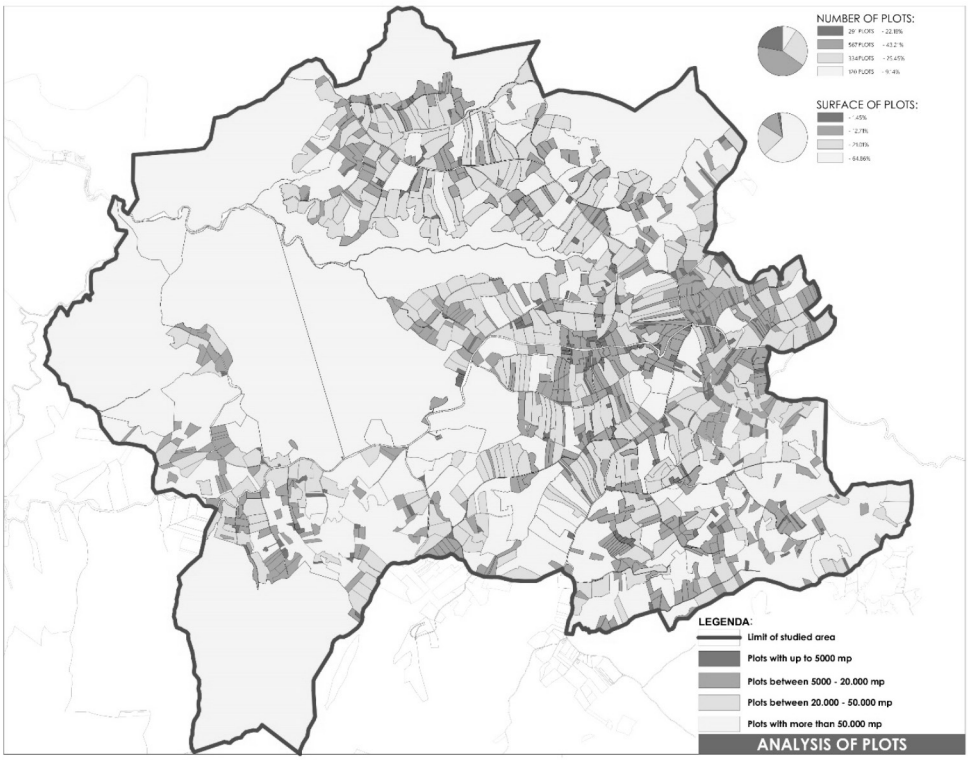
Source: Blajec Ioana.

The analysis of the existing situation led to the following conclusions:

– approximately half of the territory of the Şinteu county is in the Natura 2000 protected area (ROSCI0322), a wooded area. The rest of the territory is composed of the inner and outer areas of the localities (pastures, arable land, buildings etc.);
– the ratio between the existing buildings and the green space is approximately 2%;
– the average distance between the households is approximately 200 m; the households are dispersed over the entire area of the county, both in the build-up area and outside the build-up area;
– it is crossed by the Bistra river, which springs from the Văratec Peak and which crosses the entire Şinteu area from east to west.

Analysis of plots:

Figure 4. Analysis of the plots



Source: Blajec Ioana.

The general characteristics of the plots of Şinteu area:

– they have an irregular shape;
– most plots have surfaces between 5,000 and 20,000 square meters;

Conclusions regarding the number of parcels:

– 43.21% have areas between 5,000–20,000 square meters;
– 25.45% have areas between 20,000–50,000 square meters;
– 22.18% have areas under 5,000 square meters;
– about 9.14% have surfaces over 50,000 square meters.

Conclusions regarding the surface of the plots:

– plots with surfaces under 5,000 square meters occupy 1.45% of the entire area;
– plots with surfaces between 5,000–20,000 square meters occupy 12.71% of the entire area;
– plots with surfaces between 20,000–50,000 square meters occupy 21.01% of the entire area;
– plots with surfaces over 50,000 square meters occupy about 64.86% of the entire territory;

Analysis of road networks:

Figure 5. Analysis of road networks

Source: Blajec Ioana.

The Şinteu County is crossed by the national road DN 1H that connects the towns Aleşd and Şimleu Silvaniei. The county road 110 E connects the villages Şinteu, Codrişoru and Făgetu. The rest of the street networks are made up of village roads. Among these, the DC 186 county road is noteworthy, which is also the administrative boundary between the villages of Huta Voivozi, Socet and Valea Târnei. The county road DC 132 constitutes the administrative limit of the villages of Şinteu and Valea Târnei. Since these communal roads define the villages and converge towards the national road DN 1H, their intersection can be considered the most important intersection of the Şinteu County. A specific local characteristic are the alleys and paths known only by the residents.

Dysfunctions: Except for the main (national, county) roads, most of the village roads have interruptions, „dead ends", which is a result of the dispersed distribution of households in the territory. Some of them are unpaved. Parking spaces are insufficient.

Analysis of accessibility of the plots:

Figure 6. Analysis of accessibility of the plots

Source: Blajec Ioana.

The street network is an important element for a locality. Its condition can positively or negatively influence the development over time. Direct access to a public road is absolutely necessary. Most of the plots in the suburbs of Şinteu commune have direct access to a public road.

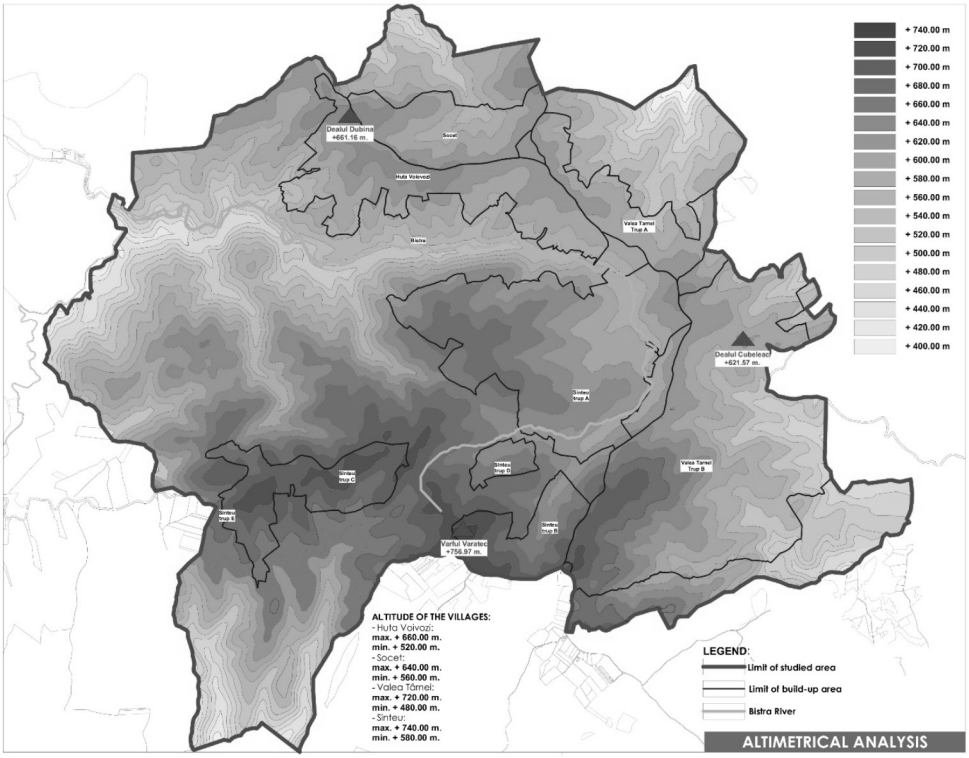
Dysfunctions: Certain plots located in the build-up area do not have direct access to public roads.

Following the analysis of the accessibility of the plots to the public road throughout the territory of the Şinteu county, the following conclusions emerge:

– approx. 67.33% of the total number of plots in Şinteu county have direct access to a public road;
– approx. 32.67% of the total number of plots in Şinteu county do not have direct access to a public road;

Altimetrical analysis:

Figure 7. Altimetrical analysis



Source: I. Blajec.*Source:* Blajec Ioana.

The relief of Şinteu county is mountainous with gentle slopes. It has altitudes between 400 and 740 meters. The heights increase successively from the North-

West to the South. The highest peak, Văratec Peak (756.97m), is located in the village Şinteu, in the southern part.

Altitudes of localities:

– Huta Voivozi has altitudes between 520 and 660m and the highest point, Dubina Hill (661.16m), is located in the western part of the village;
– The village Socet has altitudes between 560 and 640m; Dubina Hill, the point with the maximum height (661.16 m), is located in the western extremity of the village;
– The highest altitudes are found in the village Şinteu. These altitudes vary between 580 and 740m;
– Valea Târnei has altitudes between 480 and 720m. The maximum height is represented by the Cubeleac Hill (621.57m), located in the northern part of the village.

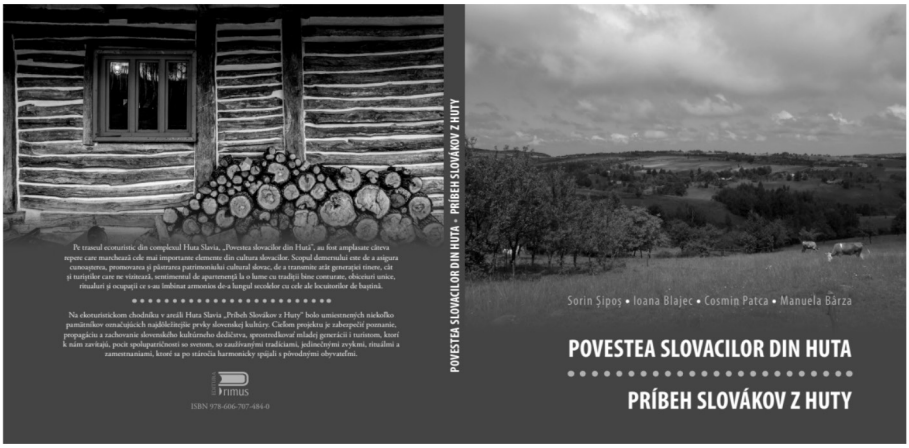
The project "The story of the Slovaks from the Huta"

Staring from all the data we gathered through our surveys and analysis, we felt that some solutions are needed, in order to preserve the Slovak community. The Slovak community represents a community with well-defined traditions, unique customs, rituals and occupations that have harmoniously blended together with those of the natives over the centuries. Thus, the importance of knowing and promoting the traditional values of this community must be underlined. We tried to do this through a vast project, *"The story of the Slovaks from the Huta"* (Șipoș–Blajec–Patca–Bârza 2022), that includes the creation of an ecotourism route in one of the most attractive places in the middle of the Slovak community, i.e., in Șinteu, along with a historical-geographical album that aims to presenting the ecoturistic footpath, the sights on it, and some aspects of the Slovak culture. The main objectives of our endeavour are: getting to know the Slovak community in multiple aspects; studying the history and culture of Slovaks in the region; finding solutions to strengthen the Slovak community; preserving and promoting the culture of the Slovak population in the Bihor-Sălaj area; promotion of local tourism; development of interethnic cooperation.

The ecotourism route has a length of 2 kilometres and it comprises 24 objectives where tourists can observe and appreciate the nature and local Slovak traditions and get to know the history, traditions and customs of the Slovak community in Șinteu. As it is mostly an interactive path, one can take part to the crafting workshops or engage in seasonal specific activities such as harvesting, Easter or Christmas celebrations. Moreover, ecotourism is a sustainable solution, as it meets the following conditions: conservation and protection of nature, use of local human resources and minimal negative impact on the natural, cultural and social environment. It also has an educational character, respect for nature through the awareness of tourists and local communities.

The partners in this active citizenship projects were: University of Oradea, The Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies "Silviu Dragomir", Honorary Consulate of the Slovak Republic, Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Affairs, Slovak Cultural Region Association, National College "Octavian Goga".

Figure 8. The cover of the tourist promotion album of the eco-tourist route from Şinteu, Romanian-Slovak bilingual edition



Conclusions

The largest community of Slovaks in Romania lives in Bihor and Sălaj counties. Slovaks were colonized in the area of the Plopiș Mountains in the period between the end of the 18th century and the first half of the 19th century, mostly for economic reasons. They founded new settlements inhabited mostly by Slovaks, but they also lived in older settlements inhabited mostly by Romanians, Hungarians, or Germans. Through their own way of life, traditions and customs, Slovaks have developed a traditional architecture with specific elements. The demographic changes of the last two centuries indicate a strong reduction of the communities inhabited by Slovaks in relation to the majority population. The main threats facing the settlements inhabited by Slovaks in the Bihor-Sălaj area after 1989 are represented by the accentuation of the emigration process and the risk of depopulation and aging of the population. At the same time, opportunities also arise for these communities, represented mainly by the knowledge and promotion of local cultural specificity, the promotion of inter-ethnic dialogue and the development of tourism. The projects carried out by the members and representatives of the Slovak communities in Bihor and Sălaj counties, in collaboration with regional and local institutions, aim to promote Slovak cultural heritage, interethnic dialogue, local products and activities, which will increase the degree of involvement and participation of community members in cultural and community actions.

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Photo/István Péter Németh

The Role of Civil Society Organisations in Migration Management. Cooperation between Public Authorities and Civil Society Actors at the EU's South Eastern Borders

István József Polgár

Introduction

Migration issues and demographic issues are two of the key elements of modern society, bringing benefits and conflicts both to the receiving places and to the place of origin and raising issues of security, social measurments and multiculturalism in our globalised world. One of the great challenges of contemporary Europe is related to migration and the need for European integration of minority communities, including immigrants. Evaluations conducted have shown that there is a great need for expertise and policies regarding the European integration of minorities in both their countries of origin and in the new host countries which are dealing with migration (Polgár 2016).

In recent years, the discourse on migration has become increasingly negative. It is more and more obvious that the complex, transnational migration challenge cannot be handled or managed anymore only by the state. Especially because the states are no longer the most important actors in the migration process (Newland 2010). As a consequence, there is an increasing tendency to advocate for closing the borders and trying to stop migration. If we are trying to figure out how to manage migration, or how to elaborate comprehensive and sustainable migration policies, the issue of integration of migrants its must to be considered. Usually, the question of integration, or the method of integration is a very sensitive subject. When it is already difficult to discuss whether and how the migratory trajectory should happen, it is even harder to discuss how and whether immigrants should be helped to integrate.

There is a different perception between countries with regard to the definitions of the terms: migrant, national minority and ethnic minority. In some cases, EU Member States are treating migrants and minorities like own citizens, in other cases like non-citizens - their migration or minority background is viewed as irrelevant in statistical terms (Centre for Strategy & Evaluation Services 2011). There are also differences in the way these people are viewed as having an ethnic minority background irrespective of how long they have been in the certain country (Polgár–Popescu 2016).

There are several legal issues and obstacles which are identified especially at the Eastern and South Eastern border of the EU. These obstacles are directly related to the status and the rights of migrants in the Member States. Therefore, one of the main questions of the research is: How have the illiberal tendencies impacted the independence of civil society in its actions regarding migration management? Has civil society acted as a counterbalance in the question of migration management against illiberal tendencies from political systems?

Some believe that the solutions can be fined if the political leadership, civil society and also employers from the labor market will focus on the role and importance to achieve broad representation of different ethnic groups. This can have important implications for the stability and quality of democracy, especially for states in transition to democracy and emerging out of long periods of authoritarian rule. Withal, the way that minority groups are included in the democratic process strongly influences the inter-ethnic relations at the state level and the creation of an inclusive society is an important task for any democratic government.

The issue of migration and the so called „new minorities" are, in the process of European construction, one of the most important aspects that European countries have had to manage. Learning about and researching migration, for them to transmit knowledge and experience to young people through education, have become an essential pillar of European values on the construction of an intercultural society based on direct and indiscriminate cooperation and collaboration between ethno-religious communities. It is known that European legislation and practice promote the idea of living together in the sense of social value consisting in accepting otherness, good understanding of the various ethnic groups within the same local communities and openness to communication and cooperation (Brie 2016: 13–14).

As the economy expands to become increasingly more global, society and workplaces are more diverse than ever before. To succeed in a multi-cultural workplace, it is essential to be able to work with and adapt to the work styles and habits of people of varying ages and cultural identities. To be a successful job candidate it is a must to be able to demonstrate a sensitivity and awareness to other people and cultures.

A theme that appears frequently in public debate, in recent years, concerns the future and destiny of a united Europe, from the cultural approach of the European integration, the relationship between national and European level, the relationship

between the national cultures in the European space and the possibility of the emergence of a European cultural identity with supranational character.

Managing migration in the EU and in the neighbouring countries is a social and economic investment that enables societies to strengthen their cohesion and resilience and become more prosperous. It can be considered also a societal process in which the responsibility does not rest with a specific group, but with several.

One of our research hypotheses is represented by the fact that civil society organizations play an important role in migrant management. They carry out valuable work assisting or even substituting public authorities and governments by providing guidance and support in this process. Civil society and social partners operate at different levels. Some organizations are active at EU level, others at national level, and others at regional or local level. Activities at different levels complement each other.

A second hypothesis that we want to test starts from the idea that civil society organisations working on the ground play a role in monitoring the implementation and impact of new policies and initiatives. However, in addition to impacting political decisions, civil society and its organisations also exists to actually deliver services to the people it represents.

The present research is intended to be an analysis through which we would like to emphasize the lack of interaction between civil society organizations and public authorities at different levels in migration management at the South Eastern borders of the European Union.

Methodology

The emergence of civil society has been a major feature in many areas of everyday life. While a large amount of work has been developed on its significance for the legitimacy of a democratic regime, the question of its relationship with the European values and integration processes on one hand and conservative, or illiberal political systems on the other has been answered in limited ways. However, in a context in which the common understanding of European values is regularly undermined, civil society and its organizations are facing challenges such as the reduction of their advocacy role. At least as it relates to recent major developments that have affected the quality of democracies of the South East European states. While there has been a rapid and extensive spread of civil society institutions and practices in the region, the 'internalisation' of the 'norm' of civil society has emerged as a benchmark in assessing the capacities of civil society to bring or contribute to a change. Thus, the role of civil society in both integration processes and anti-migration tendencies can be further enlightened with the application of the benchmark of internalisation of the norms of civil society.

What constitutes a norm of civil society? As an answer to this question we can use the definition given by Dahl (2006: 15–30) and by Katzenstein (1996: 5) over

international norms as "collective expectations for the proper behaviour of actors with a given identity". While there has been broad agreement among democracies on the necessity of the existence of civil society in a democracy, a feature of the so called illiberal political systems has been the contestation and violation of civil society as a norm. Normative change does not occur immediately. According to the literature, the norm-like cycle includes three phases, namely the emergence, cascade, and internalisation phases (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). The cycle begins with the formulation of a new norm(s), continues with compliance to the new norm by the states and ends with the internalisation of the new norm; for example, increased independence of the civil society.

However, the nature, culture, and dynamics of civil society, provide the government actors with numerous points of co-optation or capture of civil society. Civil society has its own organisational culture and dynamics and has a tendency to accommodate or remain receptive to new demands of the government. In this direction, the illiberal tendencies tend to contest the diffusion of civil society norms, resulting in a halting of internalisation of the norms related to civil society.

The cases of South East European countries, as we argue in this paper, are a case in point. From this discussion emerges the two hypotheses of this article: (H1): "Civil society organizations play an important role in migrant management"; (H2): "Civil society organisations working on the ground play a role in monitoring the implementation and impact of new policies and initiatives". Contributing to the empirical literature on the relationship between civil society and migration management or illiberal tendencies, this article looks to tackle and answer the following research questions: How have the illiberal tendencies impacted the independence of civil society in its actions regarding migration management? Has civil society acted as a counterbalance in the question of migration management against illiberal tendencies from political systems?

We use a qualitative approach to choose data that comprised major developments as regards migration management and its obstacles in South East European countries, mainly after 2015. After collecting the data, we identified events that could be considered important factors in the developments surrounding the role and behaviour of civil society in migration management.

The cases of South East European countries are important in two main aspects. First, countries from the specified region have approximately 30 years of history of the emergence of civil society. Thus, assessing the relationship between civil society and integration process or migration management tendencies can shed an important light on the role that civil society has. The second, most of the initiatives proposed by the civil society organisations in this region, in terms of migration management, are facing political scepticism or refusal.

South East European countries democratised during the post-Cold War era in the early 1990s with civil society mobilisation playing a crucial role in the downfall of their former communist regimes. Nevertheless, only in some countries from the region civil society was able to act as an effective counter to democratic backsliding

and bring an end to it. This article argues that this is largely due to the levels of independence of civil society and of internationalisation of the norm of civil society.

The article continues with the examination of the main aspects of the civil society, specifically civil society organisations dealing with migration or with the integration process. It maps the journeys seen in South East European countries and attempts to detail the argument of the significance of civil society in managing migration, managing integration processes and the possibility of change, considering the features of civil society in a specific region. The final part provides concluding remarks.

Typology and literature review of civil society in the context of migration management

Civil society's involvement in public governance today is evolving against a backdrop of several worldwide developments that are transforming the socioeconomic dynamics of countries with both opportunities and challenges (Cartwright 2018). Indeed, the recent commitments to the sustainable development agenda made by the world leaders at the global level reflect a shared vision of development and an effort by the international community to devise strategies that will simultaneously help minimize challenges and maximize opportunities. The involvement of the civil society in public governance may well be a key strategy for serving these twin goals (UN 2008). According to the thesis developed by other researchers, like Giddens (1998), civil society has the potential to correct the failures of both states and market, and would therefore constitute the way forward for democratic progress.

The use of the new communication tools in accessing information has formidable potential for accelerating citizen connectivity and civic participation, but has so far been used to this end in relatively few places. The rise of civil society and its demand for a greater role in the migration management process have amplified the need for greater civic engagement (UN 2008).

A common meaning of the term civil society leads us to the idea that this represents a society of the citizens. In parallel with the concept of civil society, a series of related concepts were born and were used, such as social pact, civil order or civic culture.

The expression 'civil society' bears the imprint of a particular historical legacy, loaded with imprecision and contradictions. Reasons are several, one of these can be that the term received a double and successive understanding at it was used to name distinct realities (Tămaş 1993). Initially, civil society meant a society organized as a state, meaning the state. Later and in the present days, it represents a sphere of social life, coexisting with the state but autonomous from it, we could say, trying to be in a balance with it.

Defining the concept *'civil society'* itself has proven to be a challenging task in both applied and academic circles, so much so that use of the term has become essentially stipulative and its meaning has to be declared in any particular context. In most of the cases, civil society is perceived as an entity which performs two basic functions, the so-called service delivery and advocacy. In fact, despite their different backgrounds and general differences among the civil society organizations from the EU and civil society organizations from across Europe seem to be becoming more and more alike in the way these react to major societal trends such as demographic changes, migration, economic crisis, populism, shrinking civic space and integration (Divjak–Goran, 2017).

If we want to define civil society in the specific context of migration, we use the term civil society to mean a diverse range of nonstate entities, which can influence formal and informal migration related rules, practices and processes (Banulescu-Bogdan 2011).

Based on the different understanding of civil society, presented above, we can say that the concept is used by different authors with different meanings and remains ambiguous (Amoore–Langley 2004). Accordingly, we will use 'civil society' to refer to voluntary, non-profit, organized activities that is autonomous from the state. It is important to underline, that the above presented definition is not a static concept. Basically, we speak about a concept which meaning is constantly evolving alongside changing migration trends.

In South Eastern Europe, the terms covering civil society, or its bodies, the so-called civil society organizations (CSO), or/and non-governmental organization (NGO) also take on a different meaning. The civil society and civil society organizations step by step created a frame which is divided between NGOs (formal, officially registered bodies) and non-formal organizations (NFOs, which may be short-lived and more or less well organized). Both types are having the same goal, to support efforts in assisting civil society development (USAID 2023).

Civil society through its actions and organizations will promote values. This attitude is usually perceived as opposed to the ones that guide states and markets. In terms of the issue of migration, civil society would privilege openness, solidarity and hospitality. Most of the time all this will be implemented in a bottom-up way. Through this manner of handling migration, social and human ties that emerge at the very basic level will be promoted, for example between migrants and non-migrants (Cuttitta–Pécoud–Phillips 2023).

As it is presented in the table below, civil society organizations are participating in the migration management process in many different ways. These can be active from operational point of view, supporting migrants directly through services. Also, these can be active in the policy making process, contributing or designing policies which are affecting migration (Banulescu-Bogdan 2011).

Table 1. The typology of civil society organizations working in migration

Type	Description	Examples	Trends
Service Provision	Groups that provide operational assistance to migrants, such as basic needs, legal services, or (re)integration aid.	International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC)	Historically, this category comprised the bulk of NGOs working in migration, and most are still perceived in this light.
Advocacy	Groups that advocate for specific migration-related principles. In addition, the creation of nongovernment-led forums to give voice to these causes.	Amnesty International; Human Rights Watch	Most of this work is still very narrowly focused, and a coalition of groups is needed to engage in migration policy writ large.
Policy Formulation	Groups invited to participate in negotiations during official state-led policymaking forums, or as part of working groups tasked with contributing to and/or drafting policy.	Civil Society Days of the Global Forum on Migration and Development; The European Integration Forum	While most governmental bodies now have some mechanism to consult with civil society, it may be discretionary rather than a constituent part of the process.
Implementation and Monitoring	Groups that are subcontracted to implement or evaluate government policies, but are not involved in policy decisions.	Structural Adjustment Participatory Review Initiative (SAPRI)	By necessity, groups that fulfill a watchdog function must operate outside of official structures.
Umbrella Groups	Groups that thread together multiple organizations with common goals, creating a stronger collective voice and broader global reach.	Migrants' Rights Network (MRN); European-wide African Diaspora Platform for Development (EADPD)	Coalitions and networks have developed to give advocates a common platform and governments an interface.

Source: Banulescu-Bogdan, Natalia (2011): The Role of Civil Society in EU Migration Policy: Perspectives on the European Union's Engagement in its Neighborhood, Washington DC, Migration Policy Institute

Through the table above we are trying to illustrate the considerable diversity between civil society organizations which are using all their available resources in order to achieve their function and objectives and to maximize their capacity of interaction with governmental bodies in the process of policy making. In addition, civil society organizations can operate at local, regional, national and international level.

Even if the need of a close partnership between the state actors and civil society organizations from South East Europe is obvious, real and practical instruments and mechanisms which can strengthen these relations are still missing. In order to realize a functional and successful cooperation between states and civil society organizations, consistent and continuous investments are necessary.

In order to maximize the efficiency of civil society organizations in policy making and in order to create and strengthen partnerships with the state actors and civil society organizations a clear and understandable structure is needed. The way how civil society is involved in policy making is very important. Unfortunately, several times governments are involving civil society in policy making only in a very formal way, in order to pose transparent and inclusive. In most of these cases civil society initiatives or recommendations are ignored and are not included

in any policy (Banulescu-Bogdan 2011). Nevertheless, civil society has other tools to influence policy making, through informal consultations or implementation or monitoring. In the table below we try to synthetize in what forms civil society is engaged in policy making.

Table 2. Spectrum of policy engagement of civil society organizations

EXTERNAL ACTOR	OBSERVER	PARTICIPANT	CONSTITUENT
Not involved in government led policy processes: May be leading or involved in parallel processes	**Informal participation in processes:** May participate in discretionary consultations	**Formal participation in processes:** Participation is institutionalized, but may be nonvoting, or otherwise not equal to that of governments	**Involved in core governance structure**: Civil society as one of the forma constituents of governance structure
Civil Society Days of the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) Regional Network of Civil Society Organizations on Migration (RNCOM)	Global Migration Group (GMG) European Commissions on line platforms (like the European Citizen's Initiative)	NGO's accredited to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC)	The International Labor Organization's tripartite decision-making structure

Source: Banulescu-Bogdan, Natalia (2011): The Role of Civil Society in EU Migration Policy: Perspectives on the European Union's Engagement in its Neighborhood, Washington DC, Migration Policy Institute

In the table we can observe that the so-called engagement can be understood as a process. This can materialize in ad-hoc consultations or all the way to true multi-stakeholder governance. Following the above presented structure, a formal role for civil society can be created within an official governance framework. This way involvement in policy making will be more real, more palpable for civil society actors.

Migration and civil society in South Eastern Europe

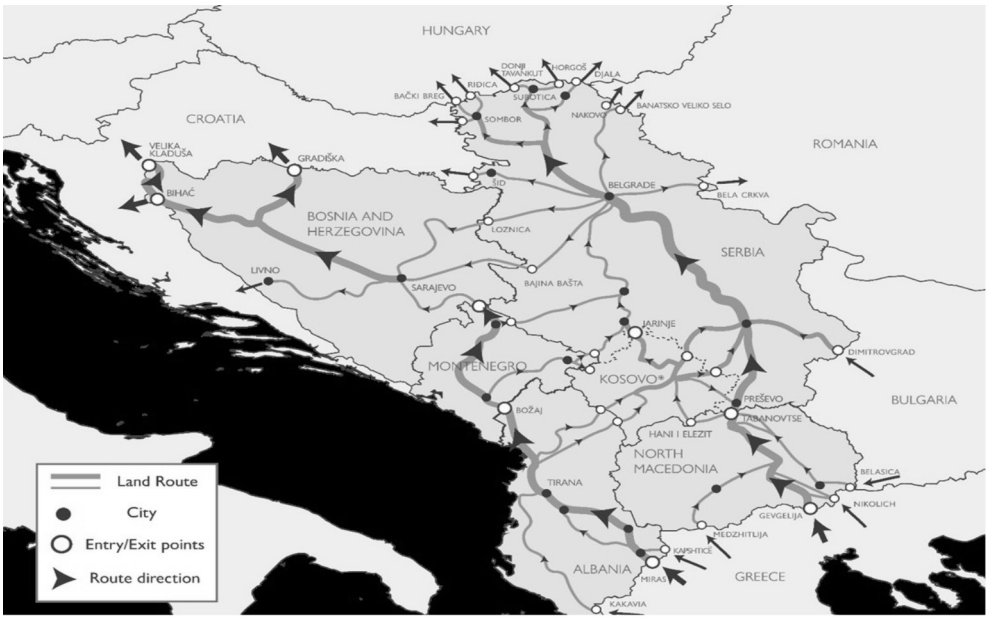
The European Union's South Eastern border region, and bordering countries are representing a so-called epicenter of the migration process. Basically, it is one of the main migration routes, also called the Western Balkan track, used by thousands of migrants and refugees on their way to the EU member states.

This region can be characterized also through its specific features, context and trends in the fields of economy, demography, socio-politic environment and migration. Although there are several differences between the countries of the region, the so-called sub regional migration dynamics connect these countries and create

similar challenges and opportunities. The majority of the common issues and challenges are identified as a side effect of migration. These issues are concerning demographic shifts, skills and labor gaps, human trafficking and stranded migrants, inadequate access to health care, environmental and climate change impacts, irregular migration, and return and reintegration, as well as unaccompanied and separated children (International Organization for Migration 2020).

The history of South Eastern Europe, with a population consisting of different ethnic groups that overlap national borders makes it challenging to define and measure migration. Nowadays the region is experiencing an unprecedented influx of migrants, making the so-called Western Balkan route the most frequented migratory track.

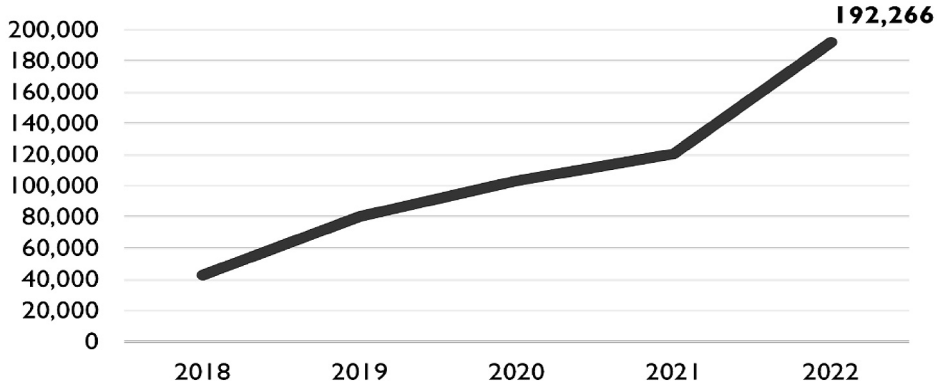
Figure 1. Main migration travel routes in South Eastern Europe



Source: Global Data Institute (2022): IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM): Migration Trends in The Western Balkans

As it is presented in figure 1, as migrants reach the Western Balkan countries, the most active routes are through North Macedonia, Serbia and then directly attempting to cross into the European Union through the Hungarian border. Alternatively, once in Serbia, many others cross the border into eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina and then attempt the crossing into Croatia from the north and northwestern part of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Figure 2. Number of arrivals in South Eastern Europe (Western Balkan countries)



Source: Global Data Institute (2022): IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM): Migration Trends in The Western Balkans

According to the official statistical data, since 2018, authorities in the Western Balkans have consistently been registering more migrant arrivals. As it is presented above in figure 2, in 2022, authorities registered 192,266 migrants in the Western Balkan countries. This is a 59.5 per cent increase in arrivals compared to 2021 and a 348 per cent increase when compared to 2018. These numbers refer to any registration of a migrant in one of the six countries or territories of the Western Balkans (Global Data Institute 2022).

Figure 3. Yearly arrival figures broken down per country or territory

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Albania	1,627	3,067	3,628	18,496	12,216
Bosnia and Herzegovina	24,067	29,196	16,150	15,740	27,429
Montenegro	4,645	8,695	3,007	3,336	8,318
North Macedonia	3,132	19,716	37,937	17,919	22,379
Serbia	8,827	17,611	39,648	63,535	120,883
Kosovo*	594	2,038	3,001	1,487	1041
TOTAL	**42,892**	**80,323**	**103,371**	**120,513**	**192,266**

Source: Global Data Institute (2022): IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM): Migration Trends in The Western Balkans 2022

Based on the data from figure 3, an increase is visible in the number of migrants registered in all countries or territories in the Western Balkans in 2022 compared

to 2021, except for Albania and Kosovo. This reduction is possible because in the past years fewer migrants choose the Albania-Kosovo-Serbia route. Instead of this route, nowadays the Albania-Montenegro track is preferred. Serbia remains the main transit hub in the region, accounting for almost two-thirds of all registrations (Global Data Institute 2022).

The increasing number of arrivals and high turnover rate are representing a significantly bigger challenge to the civil society organizations involved in humanitarian actions. Authorities from the region face the same issue, their institutions are overwhelmed by the scale of the problem. In this case, neither the legal framework which stipulates the process of handling migrants and asylum seekers is enough. Over the logistic problems, there are missing mechanisms which should ensure the implementations of the laws and procedures (Malkki 1995). Even if these mechanisms or methodologies would exist, several times these are inadequate.

All these remarks are underlining the need of cooperation and common work between state and civil society organizations.

But, over the high number o migrants, logistic and social issues, the role of civil society in migration management also represents a sensitive policy concern to. Most of the actions delivered by civil society organizations are taking place in border areas. These borderlands, or border areas represent key sovereign objectives over which states claim full control (Fauser-Di Stefano-Fattorelli 2023). Because of the specific reasons mentioned above, actions delivered by the civil society organizations face specific challenges. These specific challenges can represent a serious obstacle especially if the beneficiaries (migrants) have needs that are unrecognized or even forbidden by the state authorities.

In order to present some specific examples, first we choose the case of undocumented migrants. For these the most important thing is to stay and not to be deported. Another example is the case of migrants in transit, specific to the South East European territories. For them the most important is to continue their journey towards the destination country. All these situations are difficult to be handled and solved by the civil society organizations, since most of these needs are considered illegal by public authorities. Interfering and delivering actions to solve these issues can generate legal problems, both for the migrants and the civil society organization (Cuttitta–Pécoud–Phillips 2023). Since, the given context and status quo is at least awkward, but the need for support in migration management is high, compromises are necessary. This compromise means that civil society organizations are limiting their actions to humanitarian support for migrants, covering their basic needs. This way legal and political issues are avoided. On the other hand, we must emphasize that through these humanitarian actions, civil society organizations directly contribute to the fulfilment of governments agenda (Cuttitta 2018).

All the data and informations presented above underlines the complex and multi-faceted roles of civil society as a distinct category of actors working in contemporary migration and border regimes. It is also visible that there still are unclear situations, lack of unity and motivation in the actions of civil society organizations.

Also, there is no clear antagonism between civil society and public authorities, as both can perform the same tasks. But it is more than obvious that public authorities need to focus and consider the role of civil society in migration management.

Conclusions

Managing migration in the European Union and at its South Eastern borders is a social and economic investment that enables European societies to strengthen their cohesion and resilience and become more prosperous. It can be considered also a societal process in which the responsibility does not rest with a specific group, but with several: migrants, host communities, public authorities and institutions, social and economic partners, civil society organizations, churches, religious and other philosophical communities, and the private sector (European Commission 2020).

Illiberal tendencies impacted negatively the perception of civil society organizations and their actions in the process of migration. The main tool was the creation and the spread of fake ideas about civil society organizations, which were presented as an engine and promoter of illegal migration (Freedom House 2022). But the own organizational culture and dynamics made civil society to re-produce, to answer new tendencies and to accommodate or remain receptive to new challenges and demands of society.

Civil society and its organizations play an important role in migrant and refugee integration in all the target countries. These carry out valuable work assisting or even substituting for governments by providing guidance and support in integration processes. However, their involvement in the design of integration policies and integration activities does not always correspond to the importance of their role. Basically, the results of this study confirm H1, which assumes that civil society organizations play an important role in migrant management. Therefore, South East European states should step up their efforts to achieve more structured cooperation between civil society organizations and government authorities so as to create synergies and make better use of the knowledge and resources available on both sides. The expertise of the civil sector should be much more used and capitalized when designing integration strategies and measures in order to increase their efficiency.

The second hypothesis which assumes that civil society organizations working on the ground play a role in monitoring the implementation and impact of new policies and initiatives is also confirmed. Civil society and social partners operate at different levels. Some organizations are active at EU level, others at national level, and others at regional or local level. Activities at different levels complement each other (EESC 2020). Civil society organizations working on the ground are monitoring the implementation and impact of new policies and initiatives. However, in addition to impacting political decisions, civil society also exists to actually deliver services to the people it represents.

Generally speaking, countries facing migration should apply a multi-stakeholder approach involving local and regional authorities, employers, trade unions and civil society organizations when developing integration policies to ensure that they correspond to actual needs and circumstances and benefit migrants and refugees in an optimal way.

The overall picture that emerges from the article presents that societies from the South East European region are in fact becoming more confrontational, more political, more polarized, and less open to compromise: these characteristics apply both to the government and to civil society itself. Civil society acts as a counter-balance in this so-called social turbulence, with a special focus on the question of migration management and integration, drawing new policy recommendations (Freedom House 2022).

Thus, civil society is experiencing increasing difficulty in engaging with state institutions impacted by political polarization. The cooptation of the civil society in the decision-making process can generate a higher acceptance and legitimacy for the state in implementing reforms or new policies. At the same time, the civil society sector is diversifying, with many of the newcomers themselves less open to constructive dialogue and working within the confines of the system (Gautier 2018).

The civil sector remains at the forefront in the defense and promotion of values across the South East European states, but its constant and tireless endorsement of values is not without challenges in the present volatile and interdependent national, European and global contexts.

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The Role of Civil Society in the Establishment of the Carpathian Euroregion

Zoltan Zakota

Literature review

There is a whole library of literature on the theory and practice of the European regionalization idea, including Western European Euroregions. But when it is about the Carpathian Euroregion, the situation changes radically and, unfortunately, the literature becomes much poorer. Of course, there aren't really any Internet resources available about the initial period, but the issues of the Carpathian Euroregion Newsletter provide some information on it. Mainly the archives of local and regional governments and administrations, as well as contemporary press materials can be considered. As far as the preparations and process of the establishment of this Euroregion are concerned, most of the studies come from the Hungarian side. This is understandable, since the Hungarian side was most interested in the creation of the Euroregion, on the one hand, as a means of reducing ethnic tensions, and on the other, as a means of economic uplifting of the backward Eastern Hungarian region. There are several studies available made under the auspices of the Institute for Regional Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences concerning the broader Carpathian region, as well as the Carpathian Euroregion. Understandably, the staff of the Universities of Debrecen and Oradea also dealt a lot with the subject. Some of the most important researchers in the field are: Béla Baranyi, Klára Czimre, Imre Dobák, Sándor Illyési, Iván Illés, Zsuzsa Ludvig, Csaba Patkós, Károly Teperics, Gyula Tréba, Pál Virágh and certainly the most important among them: István Süli-Zakar. We also have to mention Vasil Hudák from the EastWest Institute, one of the key figures of the establishment process. We can also men-

tion some researchers from the other partner countries, such as: Waclaw Kotlinski, Sławomir Rębisz, Jakub Rok, Maciej Smętkowski (Poland), Cosmin Chiriac, Florentina Chirodea, Cristina Dogot, Alexandru Ilieş, Adrian-Claudiu Popoviciu, Radu Săgeată, Constantin-Vasile Toca, (Romania), Zuzana Hrabovská, Eva Výrostová (Slovakia), Albina Dioba, Halyna Lytvyn, Andriy Tyushka (Ukraine), Tatiana Shaban (Canada) and Hiroshi Tanaka (Japan).

The international context

Integration efforts on our continent have a very long history. However, the truly modern concepts appear after the Second World War and are usually represented by some kind of federalist idea. At first glance, the process of integration appears to be smooth, from the Schuman (Schuman, n.d.) and Monnet plans to the European Union, but, as Philip Windsor, political science professor at the London School of Economics, said, it is only an appearance, and appearances can be deceiving. (Windsor 1994) The initial goal was twofold: European reconciliation and reconstruction. Appeasement primarily concerned Germany and France, but while for the former integration meant the gradual acquisition of sovereignty, for the latter (and also Great Britain) it meant a loss of sovereignty. Therefore, it is not so self-evident that at least Western European integration, if only partially, has been achieved. Paradoxically, the fact that this could happen was due to the division of Europe, primarily to the Cold War, and the commitment of the USA. Unfortunately, this process did not go smoothly either: it was characterized by recoils and a gradual slowdown.

A significant impulse was given to the process by the Maastricht Treaty on financial and political union, but at the same time a new wave of "European pessimism" also raised. According to Harvard University historian Stanley Hoffmann, the reasons for this were the huge costs of the worldwide recession and the German unification, which caused most European governments to focus on their own internal problems. In addition to this came the issue of "too little democracy" and the unclear relationship between the national state and the new United Europe. (Hoffmann 1993)

One of the most important problems of the 1980s was the democracy deficit, i.e. the too great distance between the bureaucratic centres governing the European Community and the European voters. Although at first sight this was counterbalanced by the state, the matter was lame in that it itself often got in conflict with its citizens. One of the reasons for this was that in most European countries there are living minorities, which often questioned the unlimited sovereignty of the state and did not hesitate to address their complaints directly to supranational organizations. Regions could provide a solution to these and similar conflicts, at least partially, by taking over certain roles from the state, which can be implemented more effectively at a lower level. Of course, it was also necessary to make the institutions of the European Community more democratic, transparent and efficient.

There is no doubt that the biggest challenge for the Community was the collapse of the Eastern Bloc in 1989. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe were very frustrated and therefore piled conflict upon conflict. First of all, they turned against their former oppressor, the Soviet Union, and then, after its disintegration, the successor states. They then turned against each other, partly due to economic reasons and partly because of the revival of nationalism. As it was proven very quickly, the West was not at all prepared for the Great Eastern Collapse, and even less for the integration of the states thus liberated. As a result, resentment against it grew.

The solution was only slowly outlined by gradual integration using subsidiarity and decentralization. In the field of politics, a network of supranational, national, regional, subregional and local autonomous institutions had to be developed. Regarding the economy, the debates were mainly about the extent to which social, environmental and other problems should be taken into account. Regarding culture and social self-organization, the "spiritualization of borders" clearly became the main objective. So, it seemed obvious that the role of nation-states should be reduced as much as possible, simultaneously increasing the sovereignty of individuals and local communities.

After the collapse, one of the first actions of the states of the former Soviet bloc, and also their last joint action, was the liquidation of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) in the summer of 1991. This organization was doomed by the duality of the rules: there were different rules for trade between each other and different ones for trade with the rest of the world. The introduction of the system of payments in convertible currency and prices following world economic trends broke the backbone of traditional economic cooperation in the region. After that, each of the states tried immediately to reorient its foreign trade towards the West. However, the transition encountered enormous difficulties.

However, the orientation towards the West started earlier, in the mid-1980s. Almost all Central and Eastern European countries tried to switch to foreign trade at the expense of the COMECON partners. In the case of Hungary, for example, between 1985 and '90, exports to the COMECON decreased by a quarter and imports from there by 13%, while exports to the rest of the world increased by a third and imports by 11%. In the case of Poland, exports to both regions increased, but to the COMECON by only 7%, while to the rest of the world by 65%. Imports from the former fell by 28%, while imports from the latter increased by 32%. Similar trends were noticeable in Czechoslovakia: while COMECON exports decreased by one fifth, exports to the rest of the world increased by 16%. In the case of imports, these numbers increased in both cases, but while those coming from the first region only increased by 6%, those coming from the second region increased by 51%.

Nevertheless, the large-scale decline in the volume of mutual trade was not only caused by the reorientation towards the West. The low technical level, outdated production technologies, and the existence of parallel production structures had

also contributed to the difficulties. And in addition to all these obstacles, the monopoly of state-owned foreign trade companies continued to function for a long time.

There were some Western opinions expressed according to which it was hasty to break up the COMECON. It should have rather been transformed and used as a kind of "European trade school" in the field of international free trade. Whether this idea was good or not, it is hardly believable that any of the countries involved would have taken it to heart, since their only goal at the time was to connect with Western Europe as soon and as closely as possible. As János Martonyi put it, Europe was "the only widely accepted and functional myth". (Martonyi 1993)

Common past and similarities

The Euroregion includes the border areas of Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Romania and Ukraine, which are located in the Carpathian Mountains and in the Tisa River basin and which are interested in the development of future joint interregional relations. As a consequence of the geographical location and the common historical past, the population living in the neighbouring areas of these countries has developed a very colourful palette of common contacts and relationships over time. Let's not forget that the territory of the region was once part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (East Galicia, North Bukovina, North-East Hungary), and although it belonged more to the periphery, it had developed industry, trade and a significant citizenry. In the same way, the fact that this region was one of the most diverse parts of the empire in terms of ethnic and religious composition of the population, and lived a very intense and colourful cultural life, cannot be neglected either.

The unified state administration, transport, education and national defence infrastructure was built up in the region during the time of the Monarchy. To a certain extent, this still integrates the parts and at the same time distinguishes them from areas outside the former empire. The once unified infrastructure can hardly be used in its fragmented state today, such as the Sátoraljaújhely-Lviv or the Debrecen-Chernivtsi railway lines, which cross the current borders four or five times.

This state of affairs was put to an end by the peace treaties following World War I. The subsequent events turned the situation upside down: isolation, population exchanges, resettlements and autarchic economic tendencies characterized the politics of the newly formed nation-states. The genocide of the Second World War and the conscious isolationist policy of the communist regimes contributed to all of this. Despite everything, at the lowest level, the civilian population tried to maintain relations as much as possible, and despite the official historical brainwashing, they did not forget the 'happy times of peace'.

It is therefore understandable that, beyond all economic and political considerations, there was a need in the societies of the region to resume relations, also

at the level of everyday life. These forms of unofficial international relations rose from natural needs of the peoples of the region. There is the possibility that the previously listed factors did appear as important stabilizing factors in this part of Europe, as well as having a decisive role in economic development.

The border areas always faced many problems, mainly regarding the sectoral structure of the economy and the regional characteristics of the workforce. The population of the strongly peripheralized region was aging, the younger generations were exposed to increased risk and the existing inherited structure seemed to be able to be changed very slowly and to a limited extent. The proportion of marginalized groups increased significantly in the backward village districts on the border. The labour market was characterized by significant unemployment, one-way migration towards the interior of the country, forced commuting, and an impoverished occupational structure. A solution to these problems was sought through the regional development of the border areas. In addition to the economic ones, they also tried to take into account such cognitive factors, whose strengthening effect on the future in the development of local and micro-regional relations seemed indisputable, such as the role of self-governments and civil organizations.

At the beginning of the 1990s, in Central and Eastern Europe, the development of a locally owned and managed economy began based on a local network of connections. At the same time, local governments and civil society organizations, local and regional associations became important actors. Despite all these favourable changes, the enforcement of the interests of the border areas was still not satisfactory, and by the nature of things, the role of the government changed relatively little. In the transforming Central and Eastern Europe, the main basis of territorial development remained the territorial redistribution of budgetary resources. (Enyedi–Pálné Kovács 1994)

The establishment

The philosophy of the creation and operation of the Carpathian Euroregion was based on the results of interregional cooperation across Western European borders. The purpose of its creation was to provide members with a better framework for coordinating cross-border cooperation, as well as to contribute to a faster social and economic development, attracting the interest of the West, and to the establishment of good neighbourly relations between the countries concerned and their peoples.

A New York-based NGO, the Institute for East West Studies, the current East-West Institute, played a significant role in the founding and early history of the Alliance. (EastWest Institute 2020) The former Institute for East West Security Studies shifted its focus from security to cooperation after the great turn in Eastern Europe, which was also reflected in the dropping of the 'security' term and the changing of the institute's name. John Edwin Mroz, head of the institute, probably

played a significant role in the undertaking of the Carpathian Euroregion project. The institute assumed a serious role, in addition to advice and financial support, also in concrete work. In all participating countries, it had a representative who took part in the organizational work and its 1991 conference was held in Bardejov (Slovakia) where they came into closer contact with the problems of the region. As Vasil Hudák, former vice-president of the IEWS pointed it out, the organization wanted to provide assistance in coping with the burdensome and divisive legacy of the 20th century and in creating a new order in Europe in which governments, the private sector and civil organizations can work together effectively. (Hudák, Új Európát építünk (We are building a new Europe), 1996) in (Süli-Zakar Közös múltunk – közös jövőnk, együtt Európáért: 20 éves a Kárpátok Eurorégió. Emlékek, sikerek, megújulás /Memories, Successes, Reformation. Our Mutual Past – Our Common Future, Together for Europe: 20 Years of Carpathian Euroregion/, 2014, p. 98)

According to the foreign ministers' statement signed at the time of its establishment the Carpathian Euroregion will make a significant contribution to the strengthening of friendship and prosperity of the people living in the region and will serve well in the Final Document of the European Security and Cooperation Conference signed in Helsinki in 1975, in the Paris Charter for a New Europe signed in 1990 and the implementation of the principles contained in other ECHR documents. It will promote the efforts of the Council of Europe and the European Community to develop regional cooperation.

At the ceremony held in Debrecen for the establishment of the Carpathian Euroregion, Catherine Lalumiere, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe at the time, drew attention to the importance of the Association in healing the borders, "the wounds of history".

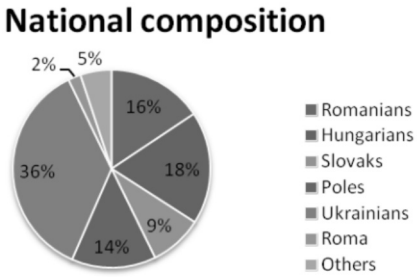
Today, the Carpathian Euroregion comprises 19 administrative units from Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Ukraine and Romania, as shown in the figure below, with a total area about 160000 km^2, having more than 15 million inhabitants. (Wikipedia 2022)

Figure 1: Geographical area of the Carpathian Euroregion.

Source: (Süli-Zakar, Közös múltunk - közös jövőnk, együtt Európáért: 20 éves a Kárpátok Eurorégió. Emlékek, sikerek, megújulás (Memories, Successes, Reformation. Our Mutual Past – Our Common Future, Together for Europe: 20 Years of Carpathian Euroregion), 2014)

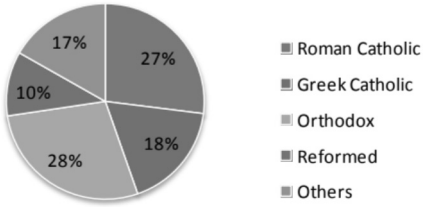
One of the most important legacies of the region is its ethnic and religious diversity, which is still one of its defining features and this was also taken into account when it was founded. As Rudolf Bauer, director of CESCI Carpathia in Košice (Slovakia) pointed it out: "[o]ne of the motives to establish the CER project was that a lot of nationalities and ethnic groups live in the simple natural space of the Carpathian territory and they should be linked to each other." (Bauer 2015: 9) The ethnic and religious composition of the area, based on his figures is presented below.

Figure 2. National composition of the CER territory



Source: Bauer, 2015. p. 9.

Figure 3. Religious composition of the CER territory



Source: Bauer, 2015. p.10.

Organization and operation

According to the basic regulations, the main goal of the Association is to promote cross-border cooperation by supporting local initiatives. As a result, it organizes and coordinates activities supporting economic, cultural, ecological, scientific and educational cooperation. It assists in the development of specific plans in areas of common interest, involving experts if necessary. The Association also plays an important role in regional development. As for integration into the wider framework, the Association considers it its task to connect and facilitate the cooperation of its members with other international organizations, institutes or agencies. Accordingly, the Carpathian Euroregion Interregional Association is a joint advisory and coordinating body operating as defined in the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities. (Council of Europe 1980)

Carpathian Euroregion membership has no impact on the internal laws of the parties, or on their cooperation with other territorial organizations. The bodies of the Association primarily exercise advisory, consultation and coordination functions, which do not impose any legal obligations on the parties, and during this time they may cooperate with other international organizations that are directly interested in interregional cooperation.

The participants must provide the financial means necessary for the operation of the Association. All costs of the Carpathian Euroregion must be covered by local budgets, but other sources can also be used to support specific activities. A major means of funding the region was the International Carpathian Foundation Network, consisting of independent foundations in Poland, Slovakia, Ukraine, Hungary and Romania. The Carpathian Foundations support the development of their diverse and multi-ethnic communities, encourage local partnerships, and assist grassroots not for profit organizations and local governments. (Carpathian Foundation n.d.) A good overview of the main projects implemented in the region and its finances, with special regard to the Romanian–Hungarian border area, can be found in (Țoca, Chiriac–Chirodea 2021)

Since the Association was organized at the subnational level, the governments of the states to which the participants belong had the right to request information about its activities and decisions. In addition, they had the right to inform the Association about their own situation and could request consultation on specific issues.

The organizational structure of the Association was as follows:
– the Council, in which each party had 3 representatives (two elected representatives of the local government, and one representative of the regional administration). Its most important tasks included discussing and approving plans for interregional cooperation, making decisions about membership, budget, and regulatory decisions. Decisions had to be adopted unanimously.
– the Secretary General, who was an executive and administrative representative of the Association elected by the Council and who could be recalled. Its main duties were: representing the Association, coordinating the daily activities, ensuring the necessary administrative and financial operations, leading the work of the permanent Secretariat General.
– the Working Committees, which were established based on the Council's decision and dealt with special issues of interregional cooperation between members. Based on the basic regulations, the following were established: economic cooperation, cultural cooperation and control and revision work committees.

Difficulties and dilemmas

The establishment and operation of the Association was hampered by numerous conflicts of interest and contradictions, which can practically be divided into three groups:
– conflicts between the central governments of individual nation states,
– conflicts between the central government and regional units within individual states,
– conflicts between individual territorial units and regions within each country.

The situation was only complicated by the fact that the regulations regarding local and regional public administration were very different in different countries. The municipalities with the greatest freedom were in Hungary and Poland, the local will prevailed the least in Ukraine and Romania, and Slovakia was somewhere in the middle.

The member states participating in the cooperation had very different political interests. This was also clearly reflected in the fact that the founding documents were signed by representatives of only three countries (Hungary, Poland, Ukraine), while Slovakia only gave its consent to associate membership, and Romania completely abstained.

Hungary, as one of the initiators, had serious interests in the cooperation beyond the economic ones. Cooperation in the Alliance could have helped to resolve the existing tensions with neighbouring Slovakia and Romania, and to a lesser extent with Ukraine, which were rooted in the history following World War I and the political practice of the times that followed. The problem of national minorities arose most acutely for Hungary. The Association could have provided the mother country with a very effective channel in maintaining relations with Hungarians across the border, and this could have been one of the reasons for the Romanian and Slovak reluctance.

This was probably only compounded by the national rhetoric of the Hungarian government led by József Antall, behind which the nationalists of the neighbouring countries immediately saw irredentism and incitement to separatism. The fact that while the Hungarian government concluded the basic agreement with Ukraine, and the other two neighbours were not so easily willing to conclude the agreement, also provoked controversy. Due to the ethnic diversity of the region, it is no coincidence that the nationalist movements of the region have the greatest influence in these regions: the Slovak and Romanian nationalist parties, the RUH movement in Western Ukraine and the Polish nationalism.

Poland's situation was very similar to Hungary's. It also played a leading role in the cooperation: Adam Peziol, the head of the Przemysl region, was chosen as the first general secretary of the Carpathian Euroregion, according to the decision of the Council, the first general secretariat operated there and most of the initiatives started from there. Like Hungary, Poland was more interested in western cooperation, but like Hungary, it did not have an alternative vision for the development of the eastern parts.

For Ukraine, on the other hand, the Alliance could have been a means of getting closer to the West. The representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from Kyiv assessed the signing of the Carpathian Euroregion Agreement as the first step in Ukraine's European integration. This motivational factor could have made Ukraine the country most interested in cooperation. The accession of the Ukrainian territories outside Transcarpathia may have reduced the feeling of the Romanian and Slovak parties that the region is organized along the former Hungarian borders, but at the same time, it considerably increased the weight of the Ukrainian party within the region. Otherwise, the fiercest opponent of their accession was Transcarpathia, for which exclusive membership was an important symbol of separation from Galicia.

Slovakia's reservations could not be justified solely by the tensions existing with Hungary in the field of minorities. Even the resentment caused by the Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros dispute probably contributed to this, at least at the central level. When signing the agreement, the Slovak foreign minister justified his absence by saying that only the representatives of the affected areas were involved in the preparation of the document and not the Slovak government. This sensitivity was understandable in the case of the new Slovak state, but it could hardly be called goal-oriented.

The case of Romania was the most complicated and it exemplified the difficulties of accession. In many cases, the members emphasized that the association is open to Romania (for example, in the Foreign Minister's statement of February 14, 1993). Nevertheless, after the counties of Satu Mare and Maramureș requested and received their admission at the end of 1993, the Romanian government declared the accession invalid. But since no official notification of this was received by the Association, it continued to consider them as members. It is also true that only Satu Mare County participated in the organization's work, but it was also absent from the working committee meetings.

There were several factors behind the Romanian seclusion. One of these was the already mentioned nationality problem. On the other hand, many believed that Hungary intended to use the Carpathian Euroregion to interfere in Romania's internal affairs and to influence them. The third was represented by the advocates of autarchic development, namely that it was a way of economic exploitation of the country. The fourth, and in my opinion, the most compelling reason why the Carpathian Euroregion membership was so vehemently rejected was the fear of increasing independence of the territorial units. The Romanian government did not, under any circumstances, want to renounce its traditions of centralization, which were successfully continued by the new public administration law. In the end, the fact that – at least in the beginning – the region began to develop along the borders of the former Hungary may have caused visceral resentment, although the subsequent accessions – mainly on the part of Ukraine – could alleviate this.

It should not be forgotten that Romania had reservations not only with Hungary, but also with Ukraine. The reason for this was the question of Northern Bukovina, which for a short time was part of Greater Romania. Its seat, Chernivtsi (Cernăuți), played an important role in Romanian culture and many people are still emotionally attached to it. The peak of the conflict was the request of the Romanian parliament to Ukraine in 1991 that they should return the 'illegally usurped' Romanian land. It was already useful to improve bilateral relations that it was possible to involve the counties that once formed South Bukovina, which are an integral part of the region anyway. On the basis of such considerations, the counties of Bihor and Sălaj could of course have been included.

The (intended) involvement of civil society

In the previous sections, I outlined the role that certain civil society organizations played in the creation and operation of the Carpathian Euroregion, namely the IEWS and the Carpathian Foundation. But the idea of rebuilding civil society was part of the concept of the Euroregion from the very beginning. The need to build and strengthen relations between the civil actors of the region accompanied practically the entire existence of the organization.

The founding principles of the new Euroregion were intended to contribute to the creation of an open society based on tolerance and pluralism, sowing the seeds of a new kind of self-organizing civil organizations that support grassroot economic and political cooperation. (Hudák, Analysis of the Development of the Carpathian Euroregion, 1996) in (Süli-Zakar, Közös múltunk – közös jövőnk, együtt Európáért: 20 éves a Kárpátok Eurorégió. Emlékek, sikerek, megújulás /Memories, Successes, Reformation. Our Mutual Past – Our Common Future, Together for Europe: 20 Years of Carpathian Euroregion/ 2014)

Although the emphasis on the importance of civil society organizations did not stop at the level of declarations, in practice it was a problem that the Council consisted almost exclusively of local politicians, mainly representatives of local governments, who were relatively distrustful of civilians. Another problem was the frequent personnel changes, which caused a lack of continuity in the organization's work. It would also have been important to involve representatives of entrepreneurs, research institutes, and other civil organizations in the leading body of the Euregion. (Süli-Zakar–Ludwig, Együttműködés és felzárkózás a Kárpátok Eurorégióban 2000)

The financing of the Euroregion's activities was primarily envisioned within a civil framework in the long term. In February 1994, representatives of the Mott Foundation and the Institute of East-West Studies toured the Carpathian Euroregion. During the trip, the representatives of the two organizations visited Debrecen, Uzhhorod and Košice, where they met representatives of civil organizations and local governments. As a result of the trip, it was decided to establish the Fund for the Development of the Carpathian Euroregion (FDCE). The Foundation was registered in Košice and its establishment progressed rapidly. From the spring of 1995, it began to call for expert advice and tenders for civil organizations.

It became possible to involve local governments, businesses and civil organizations in cross-border cooperation, which facilitated the process of decentralization and the development of good neighbourly relations between the member countries. Decentralization facilitated the activities of local and regional governments, as well as entrepreneurs and civil organizations. Experience has proven that efforts to promote cross-border and inter-ethnic relations have contributed to the resolution of tensions even where relations between states have developed unfavourably.

Unfortunately, since the leaders of the Euroregion did not sufficiently enlighten the people living in the region about the goals of the cooperation and did not prepare them for the time needed to achieve these goals, the participation of representatives of the business and civil spheres in the work of the Council and the Working Committees did not reach the desired level. In fact, some considered the Carpathian Euroregion solely as an 'initiative of the political elite'. In general, we can say that the marketing of the Euroregion has fallen far short of the required level since its establishment.

Conclusions

Unfortunately, it seems that István Süli-Zakar was right that the Carpathian Euroregion was in a sense "ahead of its time". The adoption of Western European examples could not really be successful, as the receiving conditions were undeveloped. The region was characterized by capital poverty, cross-border grey or black economic relations, backwardness due to its peripheral location, and could not meet the expectations necessary for the efficient operation of a successful European cross-border economic relations system. It is also a fact that none of the five countries felt the need to jointly try to improve their border regions with a common territorial development policy. Moreover, since regional politics was considered the internal affairs of each of the neighbouring countries, there was also a fear of "unauthorized" interference by the others. (Süli-Zakar, Közös múltunk –közös jövőnk, együtt Európáért: 20 éves a Kárpátok Eurorégió. Emlékek, sikerek, megújulás /Memories, Successes, Reformation. Our Mutual Past – Our Common Future, Together for Europe: 20 Years of Carpathian Euroregion/ 2014, p. 340)

On the other hand, the Carpathian Euroregion opened a new dimension in the traditional way of thinking and action patterns of the region's leaders. It became clear that there is an alternative to the centralized, territorially bound approach, based on regional identity. Thanks to this decentralized vision, the population of the region and its leaders became more European and less nationalistic. All this, even if only to a small extent, contributed to the alleviation of the above-mentioned ethnic and religious tensions.

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The Cooperation of Social Actors in the Cross-border Area and its Role in Promoting European Values

Luminița Șoproni

Introduction

The importance of the micro-region as economic and social construct has gradually increased in the context of a more and more intense process of economic regionalization and global competition at territorial level. The regionalization of the economy represents a natural consequence of the regionalization of investments, services and production which, unlike the economic competition and financial markets, have not become completely global (Gilpin 2001: 293). The cultural differences between nations, including those from the economic field, also contribute to the regionalization of the global economy and greatly influence the way in which the economic relations between regions are structured.

Micro-regional integration is often achieved as an alternative or in opposition to the formal regionalism of states, without recourse to national capital (Hettne–Söderbaum 2002: 42; Ohmae 1996: 2–5). The traditional resources on which states rely and which give them their comparative advantage according to classical international trade theory, are no longer the main motivation for trade on the global market. Globalisation provides access to resources located anywhere in the world, to international capital markets, so that regions no longer need national capital to develop or increase their competitiveness. Their competitive advantage now stems from their ability to access the "four Is" of the global economy – investment, industry, information technology and individuals (individual consumers), and the efficiency of using these resources (Snowdon–Stonehouse 2006: 166–167; Ohmae 1996: 81).

Regions are structures that compete globally in order to find the best solutions for successful economic development, linked to access to labour, education, innovation, technology, adequate infrastructure, natural resources and quality of life. When these resources are strong and of high quality, the region's industry thrives, and the region grows. Moreover, when two neighbouring regions agree to share these resources, across administrative and political boundaries, a development model is generated. This transforms regional resources and opportunities into an engine for economic growth and sustainable development. In this context, borders no longer have any relevance, being a burden for the countries they border, because the cross-border region is not a political entity, but rather an economic one (Ohmae 2005: 92–93).

In this context, our aim is to demonstrate that the region has the capacity to become a generator of competitiveness in the regional and global economy. We shall also try to show that micro-regional integration mechanisms might represent a viable solution for attracting investment in the cross-border states or regions that can rely on the exploitation of common resources. Finally this would bring to wealth and well-being at the level of communities living in the aforementioned regions.

Literature review

The literature review will focus on the concept of public diplomacy, seen as a tool used by the social actors within a region to boost the local and regional development.

Public diplomacy as instrument of communication and development

Public diplomacy, by means of both the instruments it uses and the actors involved, creates the appropriate context for regional development and cooperation. This modern form of diplomacy, complementary to traditional diplomacy, promotes ideas and actions that are important for the social actors implicated, leading to increased international cooperation, the building of strategic alliances, the attraction of investors and tourists, the improvement of the business situation and the protection of the environment. And its target audience is "the general public in foreign societies and more specific non-official groups, organisations and individuals" (Melissen 2005: 5).

Edmund A. Gullion introduced the current modern sense of the concept in 1965, considering that public diplomacy entails „the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries; the interaction of private groups and interests in one country with those of another; the reporting of foreign affairs and its impact on policy; communication between those whose job is communication, as between diplomats and foreign correspondents; and the processes of

intercultural communications" (The Edward R. Murrow Center of Public Diplomacy 2014). According to Henrikson, „public diplomacy may be defined as the conduct of international relations by governments through public communications media and through dealings with a wide range of non-governmental entities (political parties, corporations, trade associations, labour unions, educational institutions, religious organisations, ethnic groups, and so on including influential individuals) for the purpose of influencing the politics and actions of other governments" (The Edward R. Murrow Center of Public Diplomacy 2014).

Tuch sets out the scope of the concept, considering public diplomacy as "a government's process of communication with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about understanding for its nation's ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture, as well as its national goals and policies" (Tuch 1990: 3), and Frederick makes specifications in relation to content: "activities, directed abroad in the fields of information, education, and culture, whose objective is to influence a foreign government, by influencing its citizens" (Frederick 1993: 229).

Cull has provided a concise and very clear definition of public diplomacy, considering it as "the attempt of an international actor to manage the international environment through actions directed at an external audience" (Cull 2009: 12). By "international actor" Cull defines various entities, such as states, transnational companies, international organisations, non-governmental organisations, paramilitary or terrorist organisations or any other player on the global stage. The actions that public diplomacy entails may include shaping and improving the image of regions or promoting actions that generate economic and social growth.

Cull's definition is in line with the direction of study that emphasises the role of non-state actors, as part of civil society, in the management of international relations: regional organisations, public and private companies, groups or individuals that shape public opinion. Gregory uses the term of "citizen diplomacy" to explain the contribution of the civil society actors in shaping the foreign relation of one country, considering that "they are growing in power relative to the state" (Gregory 2011: 364).

In this context, the new public diplomacy is defined by the following features (Melissen 2005: 12–16; Gregory 2008; Cull 2009: 12–13; Van Ham 2010: 116–117):

– it involves communication strategies aimed at different categories of external actors, who form the target audience, different from the traditional external communication strategies of governments (the so-called socialisation strategies). These strategies are based on trust and credibility, have a broad time horizon (with medium- and long-term objectives) and are primarily aimed at building relationships;
– it involves engagement in dialogue with external audiences and not just one-way information flows. To achieve its goals, the new diplomacy must be comprehensive in its communication efforts, using the latest information and communication technologies, whereby feedback can be generated, and which lead to desirable attitudes and behaviour in the target audience;

– it uses new tools, adopted from the domains of marketing and communication – image, country brand or territorial brand – instead of old propaganda concepts;
– it is a non-uniform method of communication, therefore it is more active and effective in bilateral relations compared to multilateral methods.

Joseph S. Nye introduces three dimensions of public diplomacy: ordinary/normal communication – which refers to explaining the context of domestic and foreign policy decisions and preparing to deal with crises; strategic communication – which develops a set of core themes, similar to those developed in political or advertising campaigns; and developing lasting relationships with key individuals – through joint projects and programmes, fellowships, exchanges, training, seminars, conferences and access to media channels that allow face-to-face communication, implying increased credibility created by reciprocity (Nye 2010).

In formulating the research hypothesis for this paper, we started from the third dimension of public diplomacy, as a generator of sustainable relations among regions in different countries, relations that lead to regional growth and improve the image of areas involved in cooperation.

Research methodology

Research hypothesis and questions

In order to carry out this study, we formulated the following *research hypothesis:* cross-border areas, through the cooperation actions initiated and carried out by regional actors, add value to the European construction and offer new resources for the socio-economic development of European regions.

The research questions to which we aim to provide answers, in order to verify the hypothesis of this study, are as follows:

Q1. *Do regional social actors have the capacity to generate economic growth and promote EU development principles and strategies through actions at local and regional level?*

Q2. *Are urban poles drivers of regional economic growth?*

The answers and results generated by our analysis will allow us to highlight that economic, inter-cultural and inter-ethnic links and interactions are better valued at the micro level through the combined effort of public, private and civil society actors in the communities involved, reflecting the process of horizontal subsidiarity at the EU level.

The present research is based on the analysis of joint projects and actions in the Bihor–Hajdú Bihar cross-border region (on the border between Romania and Hungary), carried out by local actors in the urban poles of Oradea and Debrecen during the period 2014–2022.

Data: The cooperation instruments

In a world shaped by globalization, options and opportunities for growth and development can no longer be limited by administrative or political borders. Economic, social or cultural actions are increasingly interconnected, and the transport, tourism, environmental or cultural sectors work much better when they function as a network, compared to cases when they operate independently. And this interconnection is much more visible and effective at regional level, making a cooperative approach necessary.

The European Union, aware of the benefits generated by cooperation and wishing to "reduce disparities in the levels of development, growth and quality of life in and across Europe's regions" (Interreg Europe), has created a series of territorial cooperation instruments, as part of its Cohesion Policy. The New Cohesion Policy (2021–2027) has five objectives that continues and complement the goals assumed during the previous periods, supported by the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund, and the Interreg: a more competitive and smarter Europe; a greener Europe; a more connected Europe by enhancing mobility; a more social and inclusive Europe; and a Europe closer to citizens (European Commission).

In this context, a significant instrument of the EU cohesion policy is the *European Territorial Cooperation programme (Interreg),* reorganised as a formal "objective" of European Cohesion Policy in 2000 and aimed at encouraging economic growth in border areas, that assumes among its main objectives the acceleration of the regional development (Interreg Europe 2020). Interreg Europe is an interregional cooperation programme co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund with 359 million euros for 2014–2020 and 379 millions euro for 2021–2027.

For our research, the relevant instrument for the analysis of cross-border cooperation actions is *Interreg A (European Cross-Border cooperation)*, which supports cooperation between NUTS 3 regions from at least two different Member States, lying directly on the borders, or being adjacent to them. Its main goal is "to tackle common challenges identified jointly in the border regions and to exploit the untapped growth potential in border areas, while enhancing the cooperation process for the purposes of the overall harmonious development of the Union" (European Commission).

The programmes are managed by joint structures, situated in one of the countries, responsible for the whole programme. This form of organisation is in line with the general model we are pursuing in this paper, whereby social actors in neighbouring regions, through cooperation, lead to the creation and strengthening of the necessary conditions for regional growth and the promotion of European objectives and values.

The joint actions aim to improve the life quality of the population in the territories involved in cooperation, focusing in particular on the following areas: innovation, health care, education, employment and labour mobility.

During the period under review (2014-2020), 56 cooperation programmes were implemented, involving a wide variety of activities with a direct impact on cross-border cooperation, to which 6.6 billion EUR were allocated.

The Interreg V-A – Romania–Hungary programme is the framework within which cooperation programmes have been implemented between the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar regions (and, in particular, between Oradea and Debrecen as urban poles), located on the internal EU border separating Romania and Hungary. Among the priorities of the programme, one should mention: cooperation on common values and resources, accessibility, employment, health-care and prevention, risk prevention and disaster management, and cooperation of institutions and communities (European Commission).

The spatial focus: Oradea and Debrecen, urban poles of the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar border region

The border region is a complex concept that contains, besides the purely competitive dimensions, aspects related to political leadership, internal cohesion, environment, geography, the perception and openness to the outside. The actors of cross-border cooperation have to manage these special conditions. There are few cooperation initiatives at the national level (De Sousa 2012) and that is the reason why the local and regional actors play a key role in the European border regions. Inside these regions, the state authority is largely transferred to regional institutions, cultural bodies and national or transnational companies, overcoming and ignoring the territorial boundaries. In this context, both business environments and regional authorities are engaged in the regional competition to attract the resources needed for development, and their decisions are influenced by the actions of other firms and governments in their proximity.

The Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar cross-border region, with its specific features, offers favourable conditions for cooperation. The region has an important and complementary economic, tourist and cultural potential, based on the existence of natural resources (landscape, hydrographic network, thermal waters, flora and fauna) and man-made resources (architectural and historical monuments, cultural institutions, churches and monasteries, local festivals, traditions, customs, gastronomy). In addition, these resources can be integrated into complex tourist packages, thanks to their spatial proximity, common historical and cultural context, multi-culturalism and multi-confessionalism.

Cooperation actions aim at expanding the possibilities for growth and development of the two neighbouring territories, which have strategic positions on both sides of the Romanian–Hungarian border, by exploiting joint potential, based on the collaboration of actors in a variety of key sectors of the economy and society in general (Common Territorial Strategy 2014): transport infrastructure and cross-border mobility; labour mobility and the creation of new jobs in the cross-border

labour market; the business environment; the joint tourism market, providing an integrated tourist destination and increasing the number of visitors; the health care and emergency sectors, by creating superior facilities and services, developed in a coordinated manner; local communities in the vicinity of the Hungarian-Romanian border, for which cooperation is part of everyday life; sustainable development; environmental quality, creating the conditions for increasing the quality of life in the region.

According to World Bank documents, analytical studies in recent years have shown that the performance of EU regions is closely linked to the performance of urban areas within regions. "The most dynamic EU regions either have one or more metropolitan areas or urban agglomerations within their boundaries, or they are close to one in another region. Without strong urban areas, one cannot have strong regions" (The World Bank 2019). Cities ensure the polarisation of development in the areas surrounding them.

But strong cities, taken separately, are not enough. They need to form networks of connections and partnerships (internal and external) in order to extend the benefits of development to the region they are part of. Thus, cooperation between urban centres in geographically close regions becomes essential in the regional development algorithm to create integrated growth and development strategies needed to achieve the objectives of the EU cohesion policy.

The cities of Oradea and Debrecen, located in the cross-border region formed by the counties of Bihor (Romania) and Hajdú-Bihar (Hungary), are two dynamic urban centres that have all the necessary assets to become poles of urban connectivity and development of the urban hinterland. The cities have similar geographical, demographic, economic, and cultural characteristics *(Table 1)*, which have generated multiple possibilities and directions for cooperation.

Table 1. Common features of Oradea and Debrecen

	Oradea	Debrecen
Role	seat of Bihor County (NUTS 3), Romania	seat of Hajdú-Bihar County (NUTS 3), Hungary
Population	221.015 inhabitants	202.402 inhabitants
	Upward trend in residential establishments Population growth expected in the future	
Surface	115 km²	461.66 km²
Historic cities	The first documentary attestation of Oradea was made in 1113, in a diploma of the Benedictine abbey of Zobor; the toponym Oradea - called Varadinum – is used for the first time.	The first settlement was set up just after the first Hungarians arrived to the Pannonian Basin in the 10th century
Natural resources	Mineral and thermal water resources (Aquapark Nymphaea)	Mineral and thermal water resources (Aquaticum Spa)
Relief	Located at the opening of the Crișul Repede Valley towards the plain, in a hilly area in the extension of the Apuseni Mountains	Situated in North Great Plain of Hungary
GDP per capita	€ 27.003 (2018)	$ 21.747 (2020)
Infrastructure development	Industrial parks, quality offices International airport Central Station – the best-positioned railway junction in north-western Romania Modern public transportation	Industrial parks, quality offices Motorway International airport Central Station Modern public transportation Good regional transportation network to help commuters
Education and research	University of Oradea – 15 faculties 7 doctoral schools, 20 doctoral fields – 20.445 students; over 1.200 foreign students	University of Debrecen – the oldest and largest university of Hungary – 13 faculties, 24 doctoral schools – 31.458 students – over 6.500 foreign students
Industrial parks	Total: 6 – Industrial Park Eurobusiness I – Industrial Park Eurobusiness II – Industrial Park Eurobusiness III – Industrial Park Eurobusiness IV – Industrial Park Săcuieni – Industrial Park Tileagd	Total: 6 – Daniella Industry Park – Debrecen Logistical Centre and Industry Park – Western Industry Park – Debrecen Regional and Innovation Park – Debrecen Science Park – Southern Industry Park

Clusters	Existing clusters within Oradea Metropolitan Area: – Clustherm Transylvania Association (2020) – the first geothermal research cluster in Romania – Innovative Geoterm Cluster (2010)	Clusters organized around the University of Debrecen (accredited clusters, two having international accreditation): – Pharmapolis Innovative Pharmaceutical Cluster – Hungarian Sports and Lifestyle Development Cluster – Norhtern Great Plain Regional Thermal Cluster – Pharmapolis Innovative Food Industry Cluster – Silicon Field Cluster
Other common features	The main urban centres with a polarising character in their counties, from a socio-economic perspective	
	Ethnic and religious diversity	
	Vibrant cultural life	
	Significant tourist resources of a historical, religious and cultural nature, as well as specific health and sports tourism attractions	
	Growing, liveable cities	

Source: Author's elaboration based on the data collected from: Oradea City Hall and Debrecen City Hall websites and documents; University of Oradea and University of Debrecen reports; OECD 2023; ADLO Oradea; EDC Debrecen; Debrecen 2030; UrbanizeHub 2021

Based on this common pool of resources and socio-economic characteristics, the two cities have decided to establish strong links and solid partnerships between them so as they might formulate integrated urban development strategies that will generate significant multiplier effects for the cross-border region they are part of.

Analysis of cooperation actions in the Oradea–Debrecen urban poles

Joint projects. Objectives and results

The joint projects and actions of the two cities were carried out both based on access to European funds allocated for regional development and territorial cooperation, and through the initiatives and collaboration of social actors in the two urban centres:
– the Interreg V-A–Romania-Hungary programme;
– other actions initiated by local public and private actors.

The Interreg V-A–Romania–Hungary programme is the framework for cooperation actions between the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar regions (and, in particular, between the urban centres of Oradea and Debrecen), located on the internal EU border between Romania and Hungary (European Commission). The priorities of the pro-

gramme included cooperating on common values and resources, accessibility, employment, healthcare and prevention, risk prevention and disaster management, and cooperation of institutions and communities.

In the period 2014–2020, social actors from Oradea and Debrecen initiated and implemented 18 *Interreg projects,* plus 8 projects implemented by partners from other localities in the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar cross-border region.

Partnerships were varied *(see Table 2),* including different types of relationships: public-private (55.6%), public-public (33.3%), and private-private (11.1%), which highlights the openness and involvement of actors from all sectors for cooperation in order to identify and exploit common resources and opportunities. As for *public actors*, they were represented by town halls, county councils, universities, hospitals, institutions involved in training and employment, institutions in the field of protection and security (county police, border police), regional development agencies, cultural institutions (theatres, museums), local transport companies, institutions in the field of agriculture, institutions dealing with disaster management. *Private actors* involved in the projects are business promotion associations, environmental protection and sustainable development associations, cultural foundations, career development associations, tourism agencies, religious institutions.

Table 2. Partnerships within Interreg V-A (2014–2020)

Partnership type	Number of partners involved	
	Oradea	Debrecen
Public	21	16
Private	19	5

Source: Author's elaboration based on the data collected from EU project database KEEP and the websites of Interreg projects

The *total budget* of the programmes carried out amounted to EUR 44,292,195, of which EUR 36,066,829 (81.43%) was EU funding (EU project database KEEP 2023). These figures demonstrate the significant support provided by the European Union for regional development and cooperation, which enables regions to achieve the desired and necessary results for economic growth and social cohesion.

The *areas of collaboration,* according to the information obtained, are in line with the general priorities of the programme, including: relations among actors in labour markets, cross-border mobility, entrepreneurial skills, protection of the environment, protected areas and species, higher education research, risk and disaster management, protection of shared cultural values, tourism and hospitality sector, preventive and curative health-care services, migration management. And

the *results* of the projects, through their scope, scale, efficiency of implementation and direct and indirect effects generated, contribute greatly to boosting and strengthening the processes of economic growth, social cohesion and regional development in general *(see Table 3).*

Table 3. Results of Interreg projects (2014–2020)

General objectives	Outcomes
Increasing the economic development in the cross-border region – increasing employment – promoting cross-border labour mobility – improving the business environment	– creation of new entrepreneurial facilities – higher employment rate in the Romanian-Hungarian border area by supporting self-employment – stimulation of the local community and population to perform economic activities that will benefit the whole cross-border area – growth through start-up and growing businesses – facilitating accessibility to local products and services in cross-border region – creation of entrepreneurship training programs – organisation of job fairs – increase in the productivity of the people in volved in agricultural activities – training in IT – elearning courses in farm management – development of modern tools in the finance--related area – increased cross-border cooperation between universities within the area
Strengthening the attractiveness of the border area – increasing cultural mobility – strengthening the joint cultural image – development of the tourism industry	– formulation of a joint and integrated tourism destination – creation of job opportunities in the tourism and creative industries – strengthened cross-border cooperation between cultural institutions – 1020 people trained/ specialized for tourism, cultural tourism, tourism synergy and hospitality – 22 events to promote employment in the tourist, cultural and hospitality sectors – increase in tourist overnight stays in the region
Enhancing joint sustainable development – conservation and protection of the cross border natural heritage of Bihor - Hajdú-Bihar counties – conservation and protection of ecosystems endangered	– enhancement of the furnished surfaces dedi cated to the bio-diversity protection with at least 300 hectares – better conservation status of thermal species in Protected Areas in Romania and Hungary – creation of resources on local heritage in the cross-border area (a local Atlas and a Heritage Album published; a documentary produced) – institutions, events and promotional materials for the environment protection on both sides of the border

Improving the public transport service at the level of Oradea and Debrecen cross-border urban poles	– modernized public transport services at the level of Oradea and Debrecen – elaboration of a Passengers Traffic Flow Study on the public transport network at the level of the City of Oradea – elaboration of a Technical Study for improving the e-ticketing system for Debrecen public transport network – 7 new buses with a reduced level of CO2 emissions used by Oradea Local Public Transport Company – 2 new midi-buses and 2 suburban Euro 6 buses used by Debrecen Local Public Transport Company
Improving the preventive and curative health-care services	– more than 700.000 people from both counties have access to quality medical services – 9 medical centres and departments equipped with modern medical devices – e-health system improved – telemedicine established
Improving the cooperation on risk and disaster management	– development of Cross-Border Strategy for risks prevention and disaster management at the level of Bihor–Hajdu Bihar region
Improving cross-border cooperation of institutions in migration management	– enhanced administrative capacity of each partner institution in managing migration (Border Police, County Police from Bihor and Hajdú-Bihar) – mobile and IT equipment – new pieces of equipment for border police officers – training sessions and modules for police workers on both sides of the border – info-point on migration, fully equipped

Source: Author's elaboration based on the data collected from EU project database KEEP (www.keep.eu) and the websites of Interreg projects

In addition to the actions carried out under the European programmes, social actors in the two urban centres have also carried out other activities in partnership. These initiatives in turn complement and support the development of the cross-border region through the links created by local authorities and other public or private institutions in the two cities, in various fields, in addition to traditional cultural relations. Joint projects have included actions and events organised in partnership in the fields of tourism, sport, academia and culture.

Table 4. Results of other joint projects (2014–2022)

Domain	Project/ Actors involved	Objectives & Results
Tourism (2022)	*Partnership for strengthening inbound tourism* Oradea Municipality Debrecen Municipalty	Mutual promotion of Oradea and Debrecen through: – promoting in parallel the events in the two cities, as they have the same source markets from which tourists come (Austria, Poland, Germany, Israel) – setting up a bus line between the two cities – the creation of city-break packages for Debrecen and Oradea – developing joint offers with tourism professionals, involving service providers – supporting religious tourism
Sports (yearly)	*The Organica FX Running Oradea–Debrecen Super Marathon* Law enforcement agencies Local governments Police authorities of the municipalities concerned Private companies	Drawing attention to the importance of developing traffic in the region, as the Oradea-Debrecen route is one of the most beautiful and busiest routes in the region
Education (2022)	*Joint doctoral training* University of Oradea University of Debrecen	Training valuable specialists for the cross-border labour market who meet the requirements and demands of local and foreign employers – collaboration to coordinate doctoral training – joint seminars, symposia, and scientific lectures
Culture (yearly)	*Debrecen Flower Carnival Festival* Local administrations of Bihor and Hajdú-Bihar	Promoting the cross-border region at European level – promoting the common cultural values of the two cities – attracting tourists to the region

Source: Author's elaboration based on the data collected from: Oradea City Hall and Debrecen City Hall websites and documents; Organica FX Running; The Debrecen Sun; Debrecen Today

The most important and relevant achievements of the joint actions, carried out outside the European programmes, through the will and by the own efforts of public and private entities from Oradea and Debrecen, are summarized below:

– strengthening the links between the two border cities;
– increasing awareness as regards the existence of common resources and drawing attention upon the fact that cooperation creates competitive advantages that are stronger than those created separately;
– developing a regional identity, made up of the shared values of the two neighbouring regions, to be recognised at EU level;
– promoting regional competitive advantages;

– promoting European ideas and values that call for solidarity, tolerance, mutual respect and unity.

All these actions and partnerships, whether carried out through or outside European programmes, are powerful tools whereby social actors contribute to the process of strengthening the links between the two neighbouring regions and creating growth opportunities for the border region.

The results and achievements of the projects carried out by the two urban centres have led to many positive changes in local and regional development policies. The cooperation has thus provided multiple development opportunities for local and regional actors, who have shared solutions and best practices in different areas of regional development policy. Multiplying effects have thus been produced, which have greatly contributed to the success of the development strategies of the cities of Oradea and Debrecen, of the counties and regions to which they belong, as well as of the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar cross-border region.

Strengths of the cities in the region resulting from cooperation

The urban development objectives of the two cities are clearly influenced and supported by the cooperation actions of the social actors in the two neighbouring regions. Attracting European funds, through joint projects or other regional programmes, has led to their becoming *urban development poles of regional importance.* The local administrations of Oradea and Debrecen have understood that the first stage in the internationalization of a locality lies in local development, which involves the creation of an economically strong entity and an attractive image for target audiences in the region or in the country.

The two towns have been among the top performing cities in recent years, both in terms of economic growth and the number of people attracted.

The local actors in Oradea, through the joint actions performed during the last 10 years, managed to position the city successfully as both tourist and business destination of Romania, relying on the following *competitive advantages:*

– the privileged geographical location: a border town situated in an EU (internal) border area;
– the existence of six strong industrial parks that receive foreign investment;
– developing the business environment in the IT field;
– investments in local infrastructure, performed by Oradea City Hall;
– the Art Nouveau Capital of Romania, with a history of more than 900 years – the only city in Romania that is part of the European Network of Art Nouveau Cities;
– good restaurants – five of which are included in the Gault & Millau Romania guide;
– the existence of an elegant and civilized space of aquatic fun and spa.

The city of *Debrecen* is the economic, cultural and knowledge centre of the Eastern part of Hungary, an innovatively developing regional centre, offering a high quality of life (EDC Debrecen 2022). The economy of the city shows a strong development trend, based on several *competitive advantages* (Debrecen 2030; Smart specialisation in Hungary 2017):

– the geographical location: a border town situated in an EU (internal) border area;
– the strongest concentration of research and higher education organisations: Debrecen University, ATOMKI (Institute for Nuclear Research of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences), and the Debrecen Reformed Theological University;
– the existence of six strong industrial parks that receive foreign investment;
– the centre of intelligent transport organization developments related to the automotive industry;
– the existence of a modern space of aquatic medicinal and thermal baths.

All these competitive advantages enable Oradea and Debrecen to achieve their development objectives and turn them into European cities recognised as growth centres, creating value for the cross-border region they are part of. And *the positive effects of economic and social success* are obvious:

– increased volume and value of foreign investment;
– increased numbers of tourists and visitors;
– an increase in the number of students;
– an upward trend in the resident population;
– the increasing number of cultural and sports events organised.

Table 5. Urban values of Oradea and Debrecen

Strengths (Urban values)	Oradea	Debrecen
Image	Cosmopolitan city, known for its rich multicultural history, good restaurants, active nightlife and world-famous spas	Economic, cultural and knowledge centre, offering a high quality of life
Business environment	The turnover of the municipality – 51.79% increase in 2019 compared to 2014 1.248 companies with foreign capital, with origin capital in Hungary (370), Italy (298), Germany (96), Austria (94) and Slovakia (49) (2017–2020) 43.92/1000 enterprise density (active firms per 1000 inhabitants) – above the regional and national average, comparable to the European average Total value of investment attracted in industrial parks (2022) = €160.180.000, reaching a total of 9,800 jobs by 2025 **Main investments** – Press Glass Production SRL (€50,000,000) – Andreas STIHL Power Tools SRL (€125 million) – Nokian Tyres (€650 million)	99.910 registered businesses (2020) 9.730 companies, with a revenue of 5 billion EUR Strong international background (Germany, USA, UK, France, Israel, Netherlands, Italy) 40.000 employees in the region at the major manufacturing employers 18.000 employees in vehicle or machine industry 500 billion HUF of working capital invested, creating 6 thousand new jobs (2015–2018) **Main investments** – National Instruments, British Telecom, IT Services Hungary (the early 2000's) – international corporations – BMW, Thyssenkrupp, Diehl Aviation, Continental, Krones (2015–2018)
Tourism	The city with the highest rate of growth as regards the number of tourists from the ten largest cities in Romania Oradea ranked 7th in top Romanian tourist destinations, with 215.000 visitors (2022) 10.5% of tourists were foreign tourists (mainly from Hungary, Germany and Italy) (2022) 477 companies in the tourism sector, 3.307 employees and 421.83 million RON turnover (2020)	149.000 visitors per year (2016) – 74% of visitors from Hungary – 26% of visitors from abroad The average length of stay: – 2.18 nights/visitor for nationals – 2.75 nights/visitor for foreigners

Education	The second academic centre in the North-West Development Region, considering the number of universities and the volume of school population	Powerful educational centre – healthy co-operation with industry – dual training opportunities both in vocational and university level – university very strong in engineering and other supporting fields (finance, IT)
The quality of life	A vibrant urban setting with growing cultural activity 24.16 m² of green space per capita Considered by art history specialists as a true "architectural reserve" (77 monument buildings officially registered in the lists of the National Commission for Historic Monuments) The objectives of Oradea Heritage offer a range of community programmes, performances, exhibitions, concerts and special events Existence of the necessary infrastructure for sports activities, both at the performance and recreational levels Large variety of annual festivals – Festifall entertainment and culture festival – "Serbările Cetății" (concerts, medieval theatre performances, exhibitions, medieval sports competitions) The city has much to offer, from history and architecture to gastronomy, spa and wellness, a generous cultural agenda	The cultural hub of the region Bike lane developments Green city programme The city has reduced its carbon emissions by more than 50 percent compared to 1990 Classical and contemporary museums, galleries, municipal and alternative theatres, concert halls, and cinemas offer events every day of the week The Great Forest, the first protected nature area in Hungary The bird-residential park promenade, unique in the country More than 40 world competitions organised in nearly 20 sports in the last years Large variety of annual musical, literary, dance and gastronomic festivals (the Flower Carnival – August) Entertainment is available all year around with indoor and outdoor theatres, cinemas, restaurants and bars

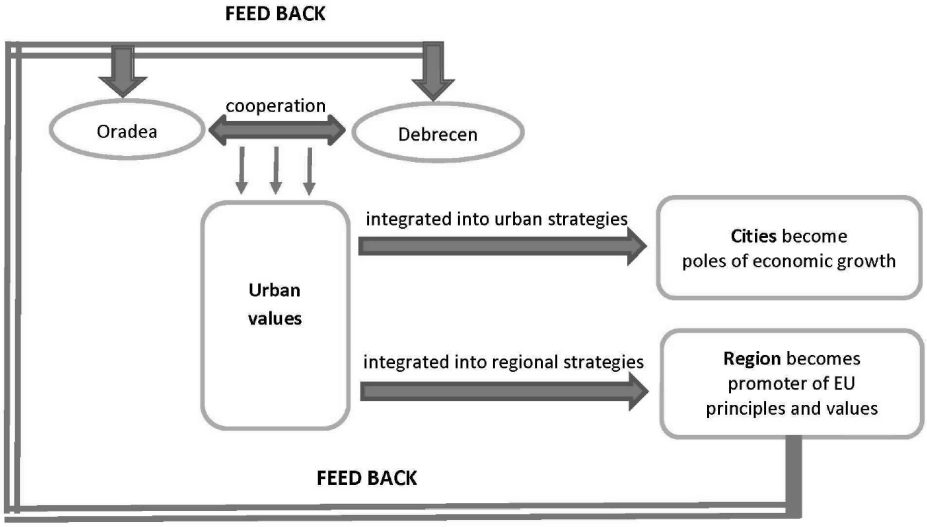
Source: Author's elaboration based on the data collected from: ADLO Oradea; infoOradea.ro; actmedia.ro; EDC Debrecen 2020; Eurocities; Debrecen Smart City Strategy; PROSPERA Regional Report - Debrecen, 2020

All these strengths represent important *urban values* that have led to the transformation of the two localities into centres of economic growth, polarising for the surrounding localities and engines of development for the cross-border region they are part of. This conclusion is also supported by the positive signals conveyed by the perceived images of the two cities, which translate into the recognition and highlighting of several positive attributes needed to form a modern European metropolis identity (attractive, dynamic, good quality of life, tourist and cultural centre):

– *Oradea* – has the second best performing administration in Romania in 2021 (Bihon online 2021); the jury prize in the "Destination of the Year 2021" project (Destinatia anului 2021); second place in the ranking of the cleanest cities in Romania (storia.ro 2020); the city with the best transport services in Romania (storia.ro 2020); included in the presentation brochure of the Year Destination at World Travel Market 2022 (London); the hottest spot on the map of investment attracted to Romania (2022); ranked 6th in Romania in terms of global attractiveness, according to the World Bank's Urban Barometer (World Bank 2020); in the first rating category (low investment risk, investment grade – highest creditworthiness) in the Fitch grid (infoOradea 2023).
– *Debrecen* – won the award of the European Cities and Regions of the Future 2018/ 2019 (Eurocities); winner of CEE Shared Services and Outsourcing Awards, 'Emerging City of the Year' in 2017 (EDC Debrecen 2020); best university - business cooperation of the year; won the "Best FDI Strategy Award" (2018) given by fDi Intelligence, the unit of Financial Times dealing with international capital flows and investments, in the category of small and medium-sized cities; could use the title of European City of Future in 2018-2019 (Debrecen Smart City Strategy); was voted Tourism Municipality of the Year by the professional jury of the event „Hotel and Tourism Excellence of the Year Competition and Awards Gala" in 2022 (Debrecen City Hall).

The two urban centres analysed in this paper are in fact the focal point of our research, suggesting a valuable *development model for European regions (see Figure 1).* The cities, identifying their own development needs and growth and internationalisation objectives, are the initiators of cooperation actions and territorial networking. The results of collaboration are translated into important urban values (attractiveness, connectivity, dynamism, innovation, good quality of life). Once formed, urban values generate direct and indirect effects both for the initiating cities, which become engines of growth and development for the surrounding areas, and for the cross-border region, which, through the cross-border resources and networks created, finds innovative solutions for successful economic development. At the same time, the region becomes stronger and adds value to European cohesion. Meanwhile, the (regional) results generate positive feedback to the initiators of the process (the cities): the economic value of the region in turn translates into positive effects on the areas within it, providing new resources and growth opportunities for urban centres, which thus increase their negotiation power and improve their image and visibility at both European and international level.

Figure 1. Research architecture:
cross-border urban centres – cooperation – development – European cohesion



Conclusions. Answering the research questions

The Cohesion Policy, the main European approach aimed at reducing disparities between European regions, has been the main driver of policies related to urban areas (Rotolo 2019). In recent years, the European Union has realised that Member States cannot be the only actors in planning urbanisation and implementing policies that address urban areas. In this context, the tools created by public diplomacy, which uses communication and cooperation of non-state actors to generate strong relationships and sustained development, are in perfect agreement. The links built in this way are based on trust and credibility and work over long-time horizons.

Based on the context presented above, we set out the answers to the research questions posed in this study.

Q1. *Do regional social actors have the capacity to generate economic growth and promote EU development principles and strategies through actions at local and regional level?*

Creating growth for a region involves joint efforts from all social actors within the territory: local administration, political representatives, the business environment, civil society, in the fields of economy, culture, education, transport, sport, tourism – expressing the process of *horizontal subsidiarity* (the exercise of competences at the same level of power – between the EU and the European social

partners; between the state and the other actors – EurWORK 2020). Considering this process, economic competitiveness at the regional or local level is built on several premises contained in the development policies: government efficiency, local democracy, attracting and using of European funds, and the collaboration capacity of local and regional actors.

There is a strong connection between subsidiarity and regions, as the horizontal subsidiarity process seeks the involvement and cooperation of relevant social actors for the evolution and development of urban communities (local/regional administrations, private companies, NGOs, entrepreneurs, university experts) (Mihăilescu 2022: 10). In the development algorithm, the role of the public administration is enhanced by the cooperative relations it establishes with the other actors: civil society, business, universities and other fields.

The EU objectives relating to the cohesion policy can be achieved much more easily through cooperation and the creation of links with neighbouring areas that are economically, socially and culturally compatible and similar, such as the Bihor and Hajdú-Bihar regions on either side of the Romanian-Hungarian border. In this algorithm, an essential instrument is represented by the cooperation programmes created by the EU, which offer opportunities for funding projects and represent a way to establish a direct link with the European Commission and promote European values (achieving the so-called Europeanisation through cross-border cooperation programmes and actions).

In the case of the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar cross-border region, the results of the cooperation actions (carried out through the Interreg V-A–Romania-Hungary programme and other projects initiated by local public and private actors – see *Table 3 and Table 4)*, through the direct and indirect effects generated, have largely contributed to boosting and strengthening the processes of economic growth and regional development. The competitive advantages created as a result of cooperation allow the achievement of the region's development objectives and transform the polarising urban centres (Oradea and Debrecen) into growth poles that create value for the cross-border region to which they belong.

The economic and social effects of the joint actions *(see Table 5)* show that only through the will and collaboration of all the actors involved, the projects for development, implemented in the interest of the community, can be achieved. In this way, local actors become a driver for promoting European values as part of public diplomacy. Cooperation creates a better image for the whole EU area, making it easier to achieve the objectives of the European cohesion policy.

Q2. *Are urban poles drivers of regional economic growth?*

The results of the joint projects implemented by the social actors in the two cities (Oradea and Debrecen), together with the local development policies of the authorities, have contributed to the achievement of the necessary conditions for turning the aforementioned urban areas into centres of regional interest within the EU: positive image, internal legitimacy, economic power, attractiveness, competitiveness and influence over neighbouring regions. These are the foundations

on which the *territorial development* objectives could be achieved: increased attractiveness of the cities as tourist destinations; significant domestic and foreign investment; capacity to attract new and highly educated people; preservation and promotion of the local culture; improvement in the quality of life in the region.

The results and achievements of the projects carried out by the two urban centres (through the Interreg programme and independent actions) have led to many positive changes in local and regional development policies (presented in detail in the paper). The polarisation areas of the two municipalities, Oradea and Debrecen, transcend the territories of the counties to which they belong, including parts within the territories of other neighbouring counties. The cooperation has provided multiple development opportunities for local and regional actors, who have shared solutions and best practices in different areas of the regional development policy.

The projects and cooperative actions referred to above have had multiplier effects, with important contributions to the success of the development strategies in the counties and regions to which Oradea and Debrecen belong, as well as in the Bihor - Hajdú-Bihar cross-border region. And success means creating the prerequisites for the region to develop a competitive economy, able to enhance its geographical position and exploit internal and international connectivity:

– a diversified and relatively stable economic structure, with an upward trend in the importance of services;
– increasing the labour productivity of employees in the cross-border economy;
– increasing cross-border mobility;
– significant foreign direct investment;
– increases in turnover and profits of active local companies;
– increased export volumes;
– improvement and modernisation of transport infrastructure;
– high and diversified tourism potential;
– diversification of health services (public and private), which are accessible to the community;
– improved air quality;
– increasing life expectancy;
– increased connectivity with Western Europe;
– development of cultural heritage and creative industries;
– creation of smart urban communities, capable of developing a knowledge-based economy and connecting internationally.

The cities of Oradea and Debrecen are "champions" of cross-border cooperation between Romania and Hungary. This means, in addition to development, that they are also leaders in relation to the principles and values of the European Union, and important actors in achieving European cohesion. Although they do not fall into the category of large urban centres, through their performance in metropolitan areas, the two localities have succeeded in ensuring the polarisation of

development in the areas around them, confirming the studies according to which the performance of EU regions is closely linked to the performance of urban areas within regions.

Considering the European context favourable to sustainable urban development, we can identify the foundation of the development model described in this paper: cities in the Member States become partners in the urban policy process at regional, national and European level. Cooperation and networking among cities on the one hand, and among cities and surrounding areas in the same region on the other hand, generates development prospects for all places (expressed by the multiplier effects outlined above). Social actors in cities that look beyond their administrative boundaries towards larger regions and cooperate with those in neighbouring areas can turn their places into engines for regional growth.

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Civil Society Development and Democratization in the Republic of Moldova

Natalia Putină–Mircea Brie

Introduction and methodology

Moldova gained its independence in 1991 following the collapse of the Soviet Union. For the next decade, the country struggled with political instability, economic turmoil, and widespread corruption. Civil society has played a critical role in the democratization process in Moldova. Civil society organizations, including human rights groups, environmental groups, and advocacy groups, have been instrumental in promoting democratic values and holding the government accountable. These organizations have worked to increase transparency and accountability in government, to protect human rights, and to promote the rule of law. One of the most significant examples of civil society's impact on democratization in Moldova was the "Twitter Revolution" of April 2009. Following disputed parliamentary elections, civil society groups used social media to mobilize large-scale protests against the government. The protests eventually led to the formation of a pro-European government, which has since made significant strides towards democratization. In addition to their role in protests and demonstrations, civil society organizations in Moldova have also been involved in other aspects of the democratization process. For example, they have monitored elections, provided legal assistance to victims of human rights abuses, and advocated for government reforms.

The purpose of this research consist in to realising a deep analysis of the development degree of the civil society in the Republic of Moldova at the current stage and the role he plays in assisting the democratization process of the country.

One of our *research hypotheses* is - since the departure of the left-wing parties from the government and the involvement of the Republic of Moldova in the European accession process, the involvement of CSOs in the process of democratization of the country at different levels has greatly dynamized. Another hypothesis that we want to confirm is – civil society in the Republic of Moldova has the necessary capacities to contribute to assisting the process of democratization, modernization and involvement in the decision-making process.

The main research questions raised are: Q1. Does the Republic of Moldova have a favorable legal framework for the development of CSOs? Q2. What are the positive changes that determine the degree of development of civil society and what are the barriers? Q3. What is the degree of trust in CSOs in Moldova? Q4. What are the challenges and conclusions regarding the dynamism of the role of civil society in the democratization of the state?

The *levels of analysis* that we propose from a methodological perspective include: a. analysis of the degree of democratization of the Republic of Moldova and the general framework of civil society evolution; b. mapping the capacities and degree of sustainability of civil society in the Republic of Moldova; c. drawing up conclusions based on the research carried out.

To analyze the development of civil society in the Republic of Moldova, we will use various methodological approaches. Firstly, we will examine relevant scientific publications and analytical reports to establish a framework for our research. The institutional-legal method will be employed to analyze the normative framework for civil society organizations (CSOs) and their relationship with the state, as well as the impact of state policies on the development of a favorable environment for CSOs.

In order to refer to the evolution of the degree of democratization of the Republic of Moldova and its inclusion in certain tipologies, we refer to the data and analisys carried out by Freedom House within the *Nation in Tranzit* annual Reports. Nations in Transit is a report that assesses the state of democracy in a region stretching from Central Europe to Central Asia. It covers 29 countries, and Freedom House provides numerical ratings for each of them in seven categories that reflect the institutional foundations of liberal democracy. These categories include elected state institutions (both local and national governments), unelected state institutions (such as the judiciary and anticorruption authorities), and unelected nonstate institutions (such as the media and civil society). The ratings are given on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 indicating the lowest level of democracy and 7 the highest. The Democracy Score is calculated by taking the average of the seven indicators. In 2020, Freedom House introduced the Democracy Percentage, which translates the Democracy Score to a scale of 0–100, with 0 indicating the lowest level of democracy and 100 indicating the highest.

To evaluate the organizational capacities, sustainability, and public perception of CSOs in Moldova, we will collect data from several sources. These include official statistics from the National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova and

the *CSO Sustainability Index* from 2005–2021. The latter covers seven dimensions of sustainability, including the legal environment, organizational capacity, financial viability, advocacy, service provision, sectoral infrastructure, and public image. Each panel member should rate each of the seven dimensions and each of the indicators within each dimension on a scale from 1 to 7, with a score of 1 indicating a very advanced civil society sector with a high level of sustainability, and a score of 7 indicating a fragile, unsustainable sector with a low level of development. Fractional scores to one decimal place are encouraged.

We will also use data from the *Moldova CSO Meter Reports* from 2019–2021, which measure the environment in which CSOs operate and provide a clear plan for progressive law reforms. The CSO Meter supports regular and consistent monitoring of the environment in which civil society organizations (CSOs) operate in the Eastern Partnership countries. It consists of a set of standards and indicators in 11 different areas to measure both law and practice. It is based on international standards and best practices. he scores range from 1 to 7, where 1 signifies the lowest possible score (extremely unfavourable – authoritarian - environment) and 7 signifies the highest possible score (extremely favourable environment).

Finally, we will analyze public opinion data from the Republic of Moldova between 2009–2021, collected through the *Public Opinion Barometer.*

Determinants of the democratization process of the Republic of Moldova

Moldova has experienced a tumultuous more than 30 years of independence, filled with difficult and complex issues. Some of the most critical problems were: war and Transnistrian secession, an agriculturally-based economy dependent on Eastern markets, a political tradition of strong central power, and a lack of governmental experience and capacity have all shaped Moldova's reality (Black 2005). The Republic of Moldova has become a real hostage to its unresolved problems, the first of which is the "frozen" conflict in Transnistria (Munteanu 2005). The inability to ensure the integrity of the state, determined by the existence of the Transnistrian territorial conflict, has largely influenced the entire course and evolution of the state. Economic problems, security risks, challenges in ensuring human rights for citizens on the left side of the Dniester, the direct impact on the state's internal politics and the major dependence on Moscow's decisions have greatly affected the quality and capacity of the governing act and, in general, the edification and consolidation of the state.

The Republic of Moldova faces significant challenges in its transition to a democratic society, including large gaps in its ability to effectively manage multi-ethnicity and integrate ethnic minorities. These gaps have a profound effect on social cohesion, political stability, and the shared vision of the elites and citizens regarding the geopolitical vector and development of the state. To address the issue, the Moldovan government is working with international organizations to ensure that the

rights of minorities are respected and social and political stability is maintained. This includes initiatives to promote inter-ethnic dialogue, create better access to education, focus on building trust amongst citizens, and develop a shared vision of the future. Through these efforts, the Republic of Moldova can continue its progress towards a more inclusive, democratic society (Putină–Lațco 2014). Beyond developing institutional structures as part of a larger democratic political system, Moldova must also create a state identity that encompasses all of its ethnic and linguistic groups. The leadership of the country has been incapable to prevent ethnic differences from becoming political cleavages, enabling the nation to focus more on its collective energies on the political and economic transition (Munteanu 2015).

Migration has had a significant impact on the Republic of Moldova, a large portion of the working-age population has left and the country is wedged in-between Russia and Europe. The Republic of Moldova has one of the highest levels of labour and youth emigration in the world, as well as a significant problem of human trafficking within its borders (IOM 2021; Polgár 2017; Polgár 2022: 23–34). This is having a profound effect on the country, with an estimated one million Moldovan citizens living abroad. The issue of the diaspora and returning migrants is taken seriously by the political agenda, and the Moldovan government has put in place a number of initiatives to address the problem. This includes increasing the opportunities for returning migrants to contribute to the local economy, offering financial incentives for skilled workers to return, and providing access to education and training for youth. In addition, the government is working to raise public awareness about the issue and to educate the population about the dangers of human trafficking. Through these efforts, the Republic of Moldova can continue to address the issue of migration and help ensure the safety of its citizens.

The lack of a strong rule of law created a setting where judicial proceedings were utilized as tools for resolving disputes among the elite factions. In addition, the widespread corruption within the political class became an integral part of Moldova's political system (Crowther 2023; Putină 2020).

The prolonged governance crisis in the Republic of Moldova has cast a shadow on the unresolved issues of public interest, and has caused confusion amongst the population when it comes to the implementation of national reforms in key areas such as the functioning of democratic institutions, the reform of the justice sector, the protection and promotion of human rights, media freedom and pluralism, local democracy and decentralization. These reforms are critical to ensuring that citizens are able to enjoy a decent standard of living. The government must find a way to resolve the crisis so that these reforms can be implemented and the Moldovan people can benefit from them (Varzari 2019).

According to the Freedom House Report *"Nation in Transit"*, the Republic of Moldova fits into the "Transitional or Hybrid Regime classification[1]", with a score of 35 out of 100 points, where the democracy score is 3.11 out of 7. [2] The highest score at Democracy Score Moldova attept to the dimension of *civil society* (4.75/7.00)

and *electoral process* (4.00/7.00). Numerous post-Soviet hybrid regimes, such as Ukraine and Moldova, have seen periods of democratic progress, though they have yet to achieve full democracy, as well as periods of backsliding. In order for these countries to make further democratic strides, their governments must take action to tackle issues such as corruption, weak rule of law, and lack of accountability, as these are all major impediments to further democratization (Knott 2018).

The process of Moldova's accession to the European Union will have a positive impact on the country's democracy. This accession will bring Moldova closer to the EU's core values, such as rule of law, human rights, and good governance, which will strengthen and reinforce the country's democratic principles and practices. Furthermore, the accession will also bring economic benefits, such as more investment opportunities and greater economic growth, which will in turn provide more resources with which to further strengthen the country's democracy. Finally, the accession will also improve the level of cooperation and integration between Moldova and other European states, allowing them to learn from each other's experiences and further advance their democratic development.

Table 1. Category and democracy score summary in Eurasia

Country	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	
Armenia	2.61	2.64	2.64	2.64	2.64	2.61	2.57	2.93	3.00	2.96	**3.04**	▲
Azerbaijan	1.43	1.36	1.32	1.25	1.14	1.07	1.07	1.07	1.14	1.07	**1.07**	
Belarus	1.32	1.29	1.29	1.29	1.36	1.39	1.39	1.39	1.39	1.29	**1.18**	▼
Georgia	3.18	3.25	3.32	3.36	3.39	3.39	3.32	3.29	3.25	3.18	**3.07**	▼
Kazakhstan	1.46	1.43	1.39	1.39	1.39	1.36	1.29	1.29	1.32	1.32	**1.36**	▲
Kyrgyzstan	2.00	2.04	2.11	2.07	2.11	2.00	1.93	2.00	1.96	1.86	**1.75**	▼
Moldova	3.11	3.18	3.14	3.14	3.11	3.07	3.07	3.04	3.11	3.11	**3.11**	
Russia	1.82	1.79	1.71	1.54	1.50	1.43	1.39	1.43	1.39	1.39	**1.32**	▼
Tajikistan	1.82	1.75	1.68	1.61	1.46	1.36	1.21	1.21	1.18	1.11	**1.11**	
Turkmenistan	1.07	1.07	1.07	1.07	1.07	1.04	1.04	1.04	1.00	1.00	**1.00**	
Ukraine	3.18	3.14	3.07	3.25	3.32	3.39	3.36	3.36	3.39	3.36	**3.36**	
Uzbekistan	1.07	1.07	1.07	1.07	1.07	1.04	1.11	1.11	1.14	1.25	**1.25**	
Average	2.01	2.00	1.99	1.97	1.96	1.93	1.90	1.93	1.94	1.91	**1.88**	
Median	1.82	1.77	1.70	1.57	1.48	1.41	1.39	1.41	1.39	1.36	**1.34**	

Source: Nation in Tranzit Report 2022, avaialable at: https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2022/from-democratic-decline-to-authoritarian-aggression

Literature review – conceptualization of civil society in the Republic of Moldova and as an agent of democratization

The studies note the close connection between the process of transition to a democratic society and the role of the citizen, as a basic element of civil society (Diamond 1997; Howard 2003). Both political democratization and economic liber-

alization require to change radical and fast mentality and behavior of the majority of the population. Researchers mention the rather weak participatory dimension, a good part of society not realizing a direct participation and own efforts are necessary for ensuring the normal functioning of the community and the state (Costachi 2015).

The concept of civil society has evolved over time, and in the current meaning "by civil society we refer to that arena in which self-organized groups, movements and individuals relatively autonomous from the state try to articulate values, create associations and promote the interests" (Linz–Stepan 2004).

From a structural point of view, civil society today has *evolved.* Political parties, trade unions or the church are social institutions with tradition, although all of them adapt to the condition of (post) modern man. NGOs, with the multitude of institutions they assume, represent the "new" with which society encounters this millennium. NGOs are a characteristic space for the expression of civil society, whose requirements for co-decision and co-participation within the traditional centers of power represent a positive development in the consolidation of new forms of governance at the local, national and supranational levels (Cace 2011: 27–28).

In the Republic of Moldova, civil society did not appear organically and did not take shape naturally. This is for several reasons. First, one reason is the legacy in this field, from the communist regime (Varzari–Tăbîrță 2010). The civil society in the Republic of Moldova was born in the annals of the anti-communist resistance and the national liberation movement, which became possible with the relaxation of the communist regime in the second half of the 1980s. From this stage, the articulation of the Moldovan civil society is measured, whose course we divide conventionally in three stages: *romantic stage establishment stage and consolidation stage* (Țugui 2013). *The first stage* started with the disintegration of the Soviet empire and was characterized by an implicit pluralism that determined the emergence of the first popular movements, mostly concerned with national emancipation and the definition of the state. The first NGOs were established at the beginning of the 90s, with all the predominant financial support from public and private donors from the West. Mostly their activity focused on the field of fundamental freedoms and political processes or economic transition. Since the armed conflict of 1992, there is a clear division between the development of civil society in the separatist region of Transnistria and the rest of the Republic of Moldova. Contacts between CSOs on the two banks of the Dniester have been very limited, and the civil society sector in the two environments has remained significantly different until now (Komm 2021). The end of the 1990s witnessed new tendencies in the development of Moldovan NGOs belonging to this group. Firstly, NGOs extended their activities to some new fields (think tanks, regional development, prevention of trafficking in women, public administration etc.). Secondly, Moldovan NGOs were able to form coalitions for the promotion of interests regarding human rights, combating torture, advocacy actions and environment. Thirdly, a network of resource centers for NGOs has been created (Cukrowski 2003).

The establishment period begins with the proclamation of the sovereignty and independence of the Republic of Moldova and lasts until the adoption of the *Law on Public Associations* in 1996. A significant role in the development of Moldovan civil society was played by the creation, in 1995, of the National Assistance and Information Center for Moldovan NGOs CONTACT (Țugui, 2013). While the 90s were characterized by political pluralism and institutional deficiency, the period between 2001 and 2009 was dominated by the Communist Party, which consolidated its political and economic power and controlled all state institutions. During this period, CSOs in the Republic of Moldova enjoyed relative freedom, even if the state's approach to civil society was, on the whole, based on suspicion (Komm 2021). During this period the Republic of Moldova experienced progress that was achieved through the continuous increase in the number of non-commercial organizations, but also through the adoption of the relevant legislation *(Law on Foundations (1999) Civil Code (2002), Trade Union Law (2000))*.

At the end of 2005, the *Concept on cooperation between Parliament and civil society* was adopted, which provided for the creation of opportunities for the direct involvement of the associative sector in the improvement of the legislative framework, the main beneficiary of which would be the public interest (Official Gazette of the Republic of Moldova 2006). Thus, CSOs obtained a consultative role in the development and finalization of draft laws. And the further application of this mechanism had positive contributions for both parties, which is expressed by the intensification of the degree of socialization in the decision-making process. The document included the attributions and obligations of the working bodies of the Parliament that were directly responsible for the process of cooperation with civil society. During this period, a series of events took place that focused on strengthening the cooperation process between public authorities and civil society, with several cooperation mechanisms adopted in this regard according to European principles and practices. This fact was mainly due to the signing in 2005 of the Republic of Moldova – European Union Action Plan. Thus, the document offered support for the development of civil society by taking the following steps: amending the law on assemblies in accordance with the requirements of the ECHR and facilitating support for the development of civil society, strengthening dialogue and cooperation.

After 2009 in the Republic of Moldova, the appearance of new civil society actors is attested, such as various initiatives, social movements and informal groups of activists at the local level. As the "pioneers" matured, in the early 2010s, a new generation of activists appeared on the scene. They have demonstrated that they are more technologically savvy and strategic than just responding to ad hoc information and messages about rights violations, they have initiated systematic monitoring of actions by public authorities (for example, the demolition of listed historic buildings state and commercialization of public lands), developed more professional approaches and began to attract additional people and resources.

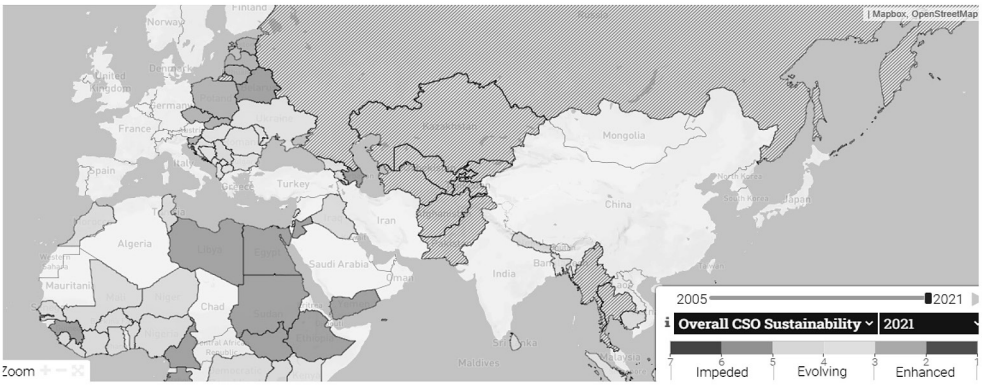
At this stage, many promising initiatives have failed due to lack of practical experience of teamwork as well as lack of resources (Komm 2021).

The specificity of civil society in Moldova consists in what it is the establishment is taking place in the conditions of ongoing political modernization. In this sense, the special role is played by the state, which creates legal and institutional prerequisites of civil society.

Civil society in the Republic of Moldova – the degree of development at the current stage

The evolution of civil society in the Republic of Moldova developed along a different trajectory than in other democratic states. This is because the intention of the political class was to very quickly "create" a civil society, molded and enslaved to their interests. Important segments of civil society – trade unions, churches or charities – have either been left out of public debates or have been used by political forces, especially those in power, as elements of their politics (Varzari–Tăbîrță 2010: 78–79).

Figure 1. CSO Sustainability Index Map, 2021



Source. https://csosi.org/, Accessed 14.01.2023.

Freedom of association in "other social-political organizations" (the term used in the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova) is guaranteed by the *Supreme Law* of the country. The Civil Code further distinguishes 3 types of organizations: *associations, private institutions and foundations.* The change of government in 2009 and the dynamism of the relations between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union within the framework of the Eastern Partnership also brought changes in the state's relationship with civil society. Thus, the Government of the Republic of Moldova, which is implementing a series of reforms coordinated with the European Commission, institutionalized relations with civil society by creating the National Council for Participation (CNP) in February 2010 (Budurina–Goreacii –Cebotari 2018).

The role of state policies and the creation of regulatory instruments regarding CSO activity

The legal framework governing civil society organizations (CSOs) in Moldova is characterized by a complex set of laws and regulations that have undergone significant changes over time. The main legal acts regulating CSOs in Moldova are the *Law on Public Associations and Foundations (2002)* and the *Law on Non-Governmental Organizations (2016)*. The *Law on Non-Governmental Organizations*, adopted in 2016, aims to modernize the legal framework for CSOs in Moldova and to align it with European standards. The law also provides for *the establishment of a register of NGOs*, which is maintained by the Ministry of Justice. In June 2020, Parliament was adopted *Law no. 86 on non-commercial organizations*, simultaneously repealing *Law no. 837/1996 on public associations* and *Law no. 581/1999 on foundations.* The new law simplifies the registration procedure of ONCs, removes many unjustified restrictions to be a member or part of the administrative bodies of ONCs. According to the new regulations (art.5), the financial support granted by the state is achieved through non-reimbursable financing, contracting of works and services or through special purpose financing. An important impact of the new changes concerns the rules regarding the granting of public utility status (awarded by the decision of the Certification Commission, for a period of 5 years) and the application of the percentage designation mechanism, as well as the use of the financial means obtained as a result. According to the new regulations, the non-commercial organization that benefited from percentage designations will present reports on the use of the financial means obtained as a result of the percentage designation, in the manner established by the Government (Law 837/1996; Law 581/1999, Law 86/2020).

In addition to these laws, there are a number of other legal acts that regulate the activities of CSOs in specific areas, such as human rights, charity, and social entrepreneurship. For example, the *Law on Charity (2012)* defines the legal framework for charitable activities, including the establishment of charitable organizations, the conditions for their registration, and the procedures for their financial reporting. Despite the existence of a legal framework governing CSOs in Moldova, there are still challenges related to the implementation of these laws in practice. One of the main challenges is the lack of transparency and accountability of some CSOs, which has led to concerns about the misuse of public funds and the involvement of CSOs in partisan political activities. Additionally, some CSOs have reported difficulties in accessing funding and facing administrative barriers in their work. In order to adjust the regulatory framework in the field of volunteering, according to European recommendations, through *Law no. 128/2020 for the amendment of Article 9 of Law on volunteering no. 121/2010,* primary rules were introduced regarding the creation of the body responsible for implementing state policy in the field volunteering. In April 2021, parliament passed *Law 50/2021 on Local Action Groups* (LAGs). LAGs are partnerships that include nonprofit organizations, local public authorities, and commercial entities as members. Under the new law, LAGs

can register and obtain official legal recognition, allowing them to have their own bank accounts and sign legal documents, which will facilitate their development. In October 2021, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry (MAFI) published a guide for LAGs that explains how to establish and register a LAG (CSO Sustainability Index for Moldova 2021).

The development of civil society has become a national priority reflected in official programming documents of the state. In 2008, the first strategic document for the development of civil society was adopted, namely the *Civil Society Development Strategy for the years 2009–2011*, after which in September 2012 the Parliament adopted the Civil Society Development Strategy for the period 2012–2015 and the Action Plan for the implementation of the Strategy. The strategy, developed in partnership with the National Council of NGOs from Moldova, represents a common framework for all efforts to develop civil society in the Republic of Moldova (Țugui, 2013). *The Civil Society Development Strategy for the period 2018-2020* continued the efforts started within the Civil Society Development Strategy for the years 2012–2015, with the aim of creating an effective normative framework for the development of civil society in the Republic of Moldova, for stimulating social cohesion and for harnessing human potential based on the principles of cooperation between public authorities and civil society - civic activism and involvement, trust, partnership, responsibility, transparency and accountability, political independence of civic initiatives, sustainable and balanced development, equal opportunities. *The Civil Society Development Strategy (2018–2020)*, accompanied by the related, contains 3 areas of intervention, each representing a separate objective with specific objectives and corresponding actions. Objective I: "Consolidation of the normative and institutional framework regarding the participation of civil society in the development and monitoring of the implementation of public policies" Objective II: "Promoting and strengthening the financial sustainability of civil society" Objective III: "Development of active civic spirit and volunteering" (The Civil Society Development Strategy 2018–2020).

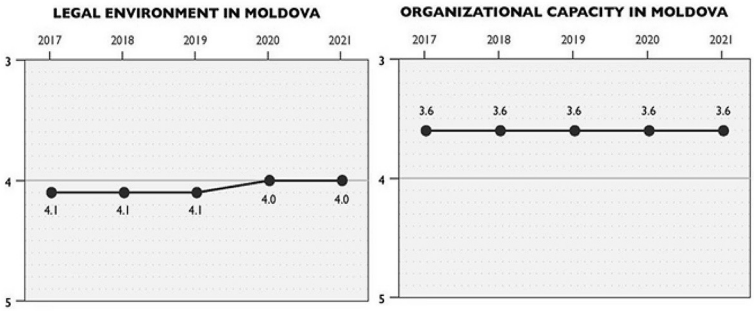
There have been periods when political actors from the Republic of Moldova have tried to limit the influence of CSOs at the action level, both through legal initiatives to limit financial capacities, as well as promoting a negative image in society. In 2017, a draft law was proposed in the Republic of Moldova to limit foreign funding of NGOs. The Minister of Justice proposed additions to the draft law that included special provisions on political activity of non-governmental organizations. These provisions significantly restricted the activity of NGOs and prohibited their direct or indirect foreign financing. The restrictions applied to organizations that contribute to the development and promotion of public policies intended to influence the legislative process or participate in political activities, electoral campaigns, electoral programs, support political parties or candidates, or promote them. These limitations were contrary to international standards that do not allow such restrictions on NGO activities. The Venice Commission analyzed the proposal and found that such limitations only exist in three member states of the Council

of Europe: Russia, Hungary, and Azerbaijan. The proposal was also criticized by a group of CSO representatives (Promo-Lex 2017).

Sustainability and organizational capacity of CSOs in Moldova

As of December 2021, the State Register of Nonprofit Organizations (SRNO) in Moldova recorded 14,939 registered non-profit organizations, in comparison with 10,94220 in 2020. The PSA registered 428 CSOs in 2019, and another 360 CSOs in the first 10 months of 2020 (comparable to the previous years). 36 of these organisations have been registered during the 2 months of the state of emergency. Of these, approximately *13,746* can be classified as *civil society organizations (CSOs)*, while the remaining are public institutions, political parties, and other socio-commercial political groups that do not meet the definition of CSOs used by the CSO Sustainability Index. Among the registered CSOs, around *78% (10,681) are public associations*, which are non-legal entities established by two or more individuals for non-commercial purposes. The remaining *22% comprise religious organizations, foundations, private institutions, trade unions, water users' associations, employers' associations, non-commercial periodicals*, and others (CSO Sustainability Index 2019, 2020, 2021).

Figure 2. Legal environment and organizational capacity of OSCs in the Republic of Moldova



Source: Moldova CSO Meter 2021 Report.

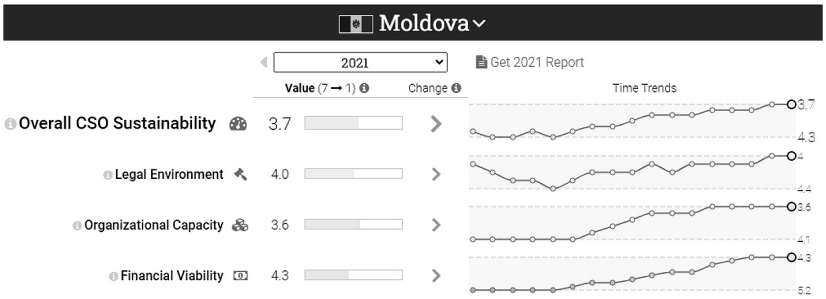
In 2021, CSOs showed limited improvement in their organizational capacity despite some positive strides made in digitalization and mobilization in response to the COVID19 pandemic. The pandemic had a negative impact on the organizational capacity of CSOs, with one-third of organizations severely affected and two-thirds moderately affected, as reported by a survey of 40 CSOs conducted by *People in Need Moldova* in February 2021. Staff layoffs, reduced pay, increased stress levels, and higher workloads were also reported by CSOs due to pandemic conditions. However, some CSOs were able to enhance their capacities through a capacity-building program implemented by the CONTACT Center, as revealed by a

questionnaire. As per the new *Law on Non-Commercial Organizations passed in 2020,* approximately 3,000 already-registered CSOs in Moldova have adjusted their registration documents as required by September 2022. However, the registration authority employees have continued to burden the registration (and re-registration) process of CSOs with non-compliant practices, such as imposing additional fees and conditions for registration (CSO Meter 2021)

CSOs include *public associations, private institutions, foundations and unions of legal entities.* By 01.08.2020, *14,070 non-commercial organizations* were registered; of them: 10,828 CSOs (public associations (10,028), foundations (448), private institutions (184) and unions of legal entities (168). The other 3,242 include religious cults, public institutions, professional associations, periodic publications, trade unions, parties and other organizations (NBS 2021; Moldova CSO Suitability Index 2020, 2021). State's protection was mostly visible during CSO assemblies from 2019. Extraordinary security measures were taken to protect the LGBT rally organized in Chisinau (Ombdusman Report 2019).

According to the *2021 Moldova SCO Meter* there has been a slight improvement in the area of freedom of association, with natural and legal persons, with the exception of public authorities, institutions, state and municipal enterprises, being able to enjoy this right. However, progress in this area has not been significant since the adoption of the *Law on Non-Commercial Organizations in 2020.* During the reporting period, CSOs initiated the process of re-registration in accordance with the new law. Another positive development was the adoption of the *Law on Local Action Groups in 2021,* although no LAGs have been registered under the new law due to administrative and conceptual issues. The registering authority, the *Public Services Agency (PSA),* has not completely eradicated the practices of its employees that are not in compliance with the law during the registration (and re-registration) of CSOs, as previously reported and confirmed in the current reporting period (Moldova SCO Meter 2021).

Figure 3. CSO Sustainability in the Republic of Moldova, 2021



Source: Moldova Country Profile in CSO Sustainability Index 2021.

In a democracy, citizens possess the crucial right to hold public authorities accountable. Social accountability pertains to the ability of citizens to exercise this right, as well as the capacity and willingness of public authorities to uphold it. For this reason, it is important to support both civil society and public authorities in order to promote responsiveness, thereby enabling them to design, implement, and monitor effective public policies that are tailored to meet the needs of communities. According to a recent needs assessment conducted by Moldova's CSO Contact-Center, local public authorities have insufficient capacity to meaningfully involve citizens in their work, leading to a breakdown of trust in institutions and the overall efficacy of public policies that often fail to yield outcomes at the local level (EPD 2022).

The majority of active CSOs in Moldova are concentrated in Chisinau (61.1%), where a significant number of CSOs are registered. CSOs in the Centre (14.2%) have the second-highest concentration, followed by the North (13.4%), South, and Gagauzia (11.1%). Education, culture, and youth are the fields in which 59% of CSOs operate, while social work, human rights, and other fields account for 25%, 19%, and so on. The primary target groups and beneficiaries of Moldovan CSOs are young people, children, and citizens in general, as well as individuals with disabilities, women, local public administrations, and seniors. There is a developing trend in the CSO sector where informal civic groups advocating for various changes through innovative ways are increasingly participating. These groups are often temporary cooperation within communities to solve specific and ad-hoc problems, rather than formal organizations with a structure, statute, staff, and long-term goals. Approximately half (42% or 46%, respectively) of active CSOs are not part of any network, while more than half declared that they belong to at least one CSO network (EU Roadmap 2018).

The particularities of the constitution and functions of civil society in the Gagauz Autonomy and the Transnistrian Region

The development of civil society in the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia is lacking, with only 5.6% of NGOs considered active and functional. The active NGOs are primarily located in urban areas and operate at the community or regional level, with financial sustainability and human resource retention being the main challenges. The limited knowledge of Romanian and English languages among local organizations hinders their ability to apply for donor funding. The legal framework governing CSO activities in the autonomy region and the division of responsibilities between central and regional authorities are unclear. To address this issue, CSOs are advocating for the adoption of a local law on transparency in decision-making. However, citizens in the region have a low level of interest and knowledge about the non-profit sector, leading to a lack of interest or even a negative attitude towards CSOs, including from the autonomous authorities (EU Road-

map 2018). According to an article from IPN, Mihail Sirkeli, director of the "Piligrim-Demo" Center, stated at the *"GROW 2018: Civic Gagauzia - Strengthening civil society in Gagauzia"* international conference held in Avdarma on September 26, that civil society in Gagauzia should be powerful, stable, and have influence on the local authorities' agenda. Sirkeli emphasized that NGOs should be free from political influence and not be used as "diesel engines" for political activity by politicians in the region (IPN 2018).

The situation of civil society is entirely different in the Transnistria region. The legislative framework for CSOs is very different to the one established by central authorities. CSO activities are tolerated in some fields (environment, social rights) and even encouraged in others (social affairs, vulnerable people) (EU Roadmap 2018). The challenges faced by NGOs operating in the Transnistria region, a breakaway territory in Moldova. The region is known for its difficulties in terms of human rights and media freedom, and there are obstacles to registering projects with the de facto Committee for Humanitarian Assistance. In 2018, the so-called Supreme Soviet passed a law restricting the ability of NGOs to engage in political activities and receive external funding. The definition of "political activities" is very broad and includes activities such as "law enforcement activity". In response, many NGOs on the left bank of the Dniester River have united in thematic groups and elected representatives to a Consultative Council established within the de facto government. Most NGOs in the region rely on external funding from donors, and many have registered with the Moldovan Ministry of Justice. Some of the strongest organizations have double registration on both banks of the Dniester River, which increases their access to donor funding. However, there are concerns that partnerships with NGOs from the right bank are not established on an equal basis, and that CSOs from Transnistria do not fully benefit from donor support. To address these challenges, the OSCE organizes an annual donors' forum to facilitate networking and building partnerships between CSOs in Transnistria and development partners.

Although the civil society sector in Transnistria may seem quite dynamic and functional at first glance (despite the restrictive legislation, which is explained in the following subsection), it is essentially worthless because the current NGOs operating in the separatist region lack independence. Most of them actively cooperate with the de facto authorities and perceive the informal sector more as a mechanism for receiving external funding than as a monitoring and oversight function. They are even supported by the de facto authorities, who encourage the flow of external funding to the region as a type of development assistance. At the same time, the work of organizations and activists involved in sensitive political issues, such as freedom of expression and assembly, is extremely limited. As a result of such an environment, public control over the actions of the de facto authorities is very low, and information about ongoing human rights violations is limited, which generates an even higher level of impunity. The situation is even more serious against the background of the absolute lack of independent media sources in the region (Komm 2021).

According to the The *2021 CSO Sustainability Index for Moldova* the situation of CSOs in the Transnistrian region did not change substantially in 2021. They continue to work under difficult conditions and experience frequent harassment and repression from the local authorities. CSOs in the region that receive foreign funding cannot engage in so called "political activities," including protests, criticism of local governments, and advocacy activities aimed at changing or impacting government policy. However, CSOs from the Transnistrian region encounter various challenges in registering and opening bank accounts in Moldova due to restrictive provisions in the *Law on Preventing and Combating Money Laundering* that banks use to refuse to open bank accounts for CSOs that have members or persons in their governing bodies that are from or reside in the Transnistrian region. According to the Register of Public Associations and Political Parties of the Transnistrian region, as of December 2021 there were *617 registered CSOs* (CSO Sustainability Index for Moldova 2021).

Financial viability and sources of income of CSOs in Moldova

Public associations have the right to receive various forms of financial or in-kind support. The legislation explicitly states the following forms of support: *the right to access grants and scholarships from other countries, from national and international foundations and organizations and from individuals, and the right to participate in national and international contests in order to obtain social contracts and state allocations.* CSOs have the right to conduct economic activities, to conclude agreements with individuals and legal entities on technical-scientific, economic and financial cooperation, on manufacturing, on performance of works and provision of services in order to fulfill the statutory goals and duties (CSO Meter 2021).

More than *EUR 3 million* was allocated from the state budget for CSOs in *2019*, which exceeds the amount for 2018 (EUR 2.4 million) and 2017 (EUR 1.8 million). The amount allocated to CSOs through the *2% mechanism* decreased in 2020 after increasing for several years in a row. In 2020, 325 thousand euros were allocated (65 thousand less than in 2019). The decrease in the amount (-17%) was proportional to the decrease in the number of designators (-16%) – probably caused by the Covid–19 pandemic and the tax reform of 2018 which introduced a flat tax of 12%. The highest values so far were recorded in 2019, with 504 CSOs benefiting compared to 393 in 2018.

With *81%* of the amount allocated in 2019, *Chisinau organizations* continue to be the main beneficiaries (65% of all beneficiaries). For the third consecutive year, the Public Association of Veterans and Pensioners from the Ministry of Internal Affairs is the biggest beneficiary (23% of the total amount). A flaw in the mechanism affects the liberal professions, which do not have the legal possibility to make appointments (CSO Meter Moldova 2020).

The European Union is the largest donor to civil society in Moldova. This is done through regional programmes (such as the CSO–LA budget line with an allocation of EUR 1.85 million), thematic programmes (such as EIDHR), and on a bilateral basis. The indicative bilateral allocation for civil society in Moldova for 2017-2020 accounts between *EUR 14.2 million and 17. 4 million* (the previous allocation for 2014–2017 was between EUR 16.75 million and 20.5 million) (EU Roadmap, 2018). According to data received from NBS, Moldovan CSOs received *USD 233 million* in revenue *in 2021,* 7 percent less than in 2020, but 18 percent more than in 2019. This slight decrease, however, did not influence the overall financial viability of the CSO sector in Moldova (NBS 2020).

CSOs outside the capital city continue to encounter significant funding challenges due to a lack of qualified finance staff and limited access to funding sources. CSOs continue to depend heavily on foreign funding. According to various studies and surveys carried out over the last few years, about 70% of CSOs' annual revenues come from foreign grants. This dependence on foreign funding limits civil society's sustainability and resilience. According to the questionnaire, during 2017-2018, most of the CSOs were funded from international grants – 75% and from local non-state sources – 53%. External funding is also the main source of independent investigative media. Other sources of income used by CSOs were traditional donations – 36%, or crowdfunding, SMS or online donation, 41% – benefited from the percentage designation mechanism, 30% – collected membership fees, 20% – received support from the state, 20% – support from business entities, 21% – carried out economic activities (UE Roadmap, 2018). The reliance on donors has an impact on the capabilities of CSOs. As a result of limited interaction with communities, CSOs may lack the ability, or even the incentive, to properly identify and analyze the issues that are being faced by the community, and subsequently propose effective solutions.

In 2021, CSOs that held public benefit status lost their fiscal facilities, free or preferential use of public property, and non-reimbursable financing, as the committee responsible for extending these benefits had not been active since 2020. State institutions did not provide support to CSOs during the pandemic to facilitate their activities, and many CSOs experienced funding shortages due to changes in priorities for financing programs. There were some improvements in financial aspects. Revenues from the percentage designation mechanism increased by 53% to a total of 454,000 EUR, returning to the pre-pandemic trend. Additionally, a new regulation was adopted for the subsidization of taxes for social enterprises that employ people with disabilities. (CSO Meter Moldova 2021).

In 2021, there were *665 CSOs registered* as potential beneficiaries of 2% mechanism, an increase of 131 from 2020. Accredited organizations collected *about USD 551,694 in 2021,* an increase of approximately 68 percent from 2020, when there was a 27% decrease compared to 2019 due to COVID19. Also the number of taxpayers who utilized the 2% assignment mechanism increased from 28,506 people in 2020 to 34,805 people in 2021, suggesting improved CSO capacity to interact

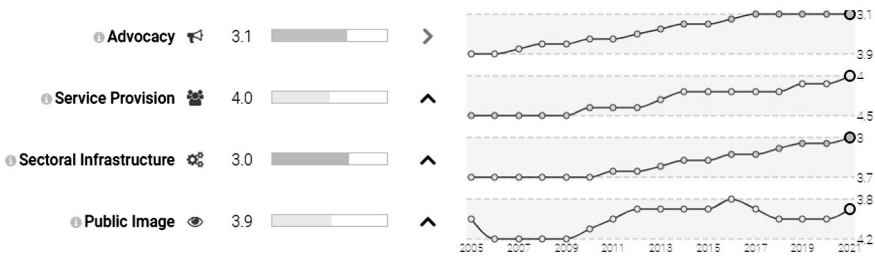
with constituents. At the same time, CSOs used online tools such as Zoom, Google Meet, and Microsoft Teams to interact with a greater number of people from various regions (CSO Sustenability Index 2021).

Public image and degree of citizens' trust in CSOs

The perception of civil society organizations (CSOs) in Moldova is mixed. On the one hand, there is a growing recognition of the role that CSOs can play in promoting civic engagement, advocating for the rights of marginalized groups, and holding the government accountable. This recognition is reflected in the emergence of new CSOs and the increasing participation of citizens in civil society initiatives. On the other hand, there are also mistrust perceptions of CSOs, which are fueled by factors such as the co-optation of some civil society members into politics, the emergence of CSO-satellites, and a lack of trust in the ability of CSOs to effect meaningful change. Furthermore, the perception of CSOs in Moldova can vary depending on factors such as the sector they operate in, their geographic location, and their funding sources. For example, CSOs working in the areas of human rights, democracy, and governance tend to be viewed more positively than those working in areas such as business or the environment.

Overall, while there is a growing recognition of the importance of CSOs in Moldova, there is still work to be done to build trust and confidence in their ability to promote positive change and represent the interests of citizens. CSO Meter Report Evaluation of the activity environment of civil society organizations in the Eastern Partnership states.

Figure 4. Advocacy, service provision, sectorial infrastructure and Public Image of OSCs in the Republic of Moldova

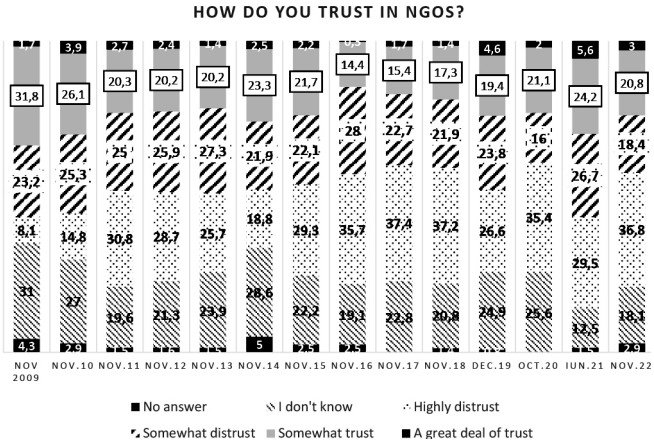


Sourse: Moldova Coutry Profile in CSO Sutenability Index 2021.

According to the *CSO Sustainability Index*, the level of trust in CSOs remains low: 3.9 from 7. In concret terms the trust in CSOs was 23% – in October 2020, up from the beginning of 2019 (18%), but at the same level as in May 2018.

The highest level of trust is held by the church, with 74%, and CSOs are placed at the same level as the Government (23%). *The Public Opinion Barometer of the Republic of Moldova* the representations of the citizens and the perception on the CSO image change over time. If in 2009, 2010 CSOs enjoyed the trust of 33,5 and 30% respectively, then over time it decreased to 23,8% in 2021. At the same time the degree of mistrust has considerably increased from 8.1% high distrust to 36.8 % high distrust. If in 2009 about 31% had a neutral position or did not know much about CSOs, then by 2021 a large part of them changed their neutral opinion and formed a lack of trust image (POB 2009–2021).

Figure 5. The evolution of the public trust in the NGOs in the Republic of Moldova 2009-2021

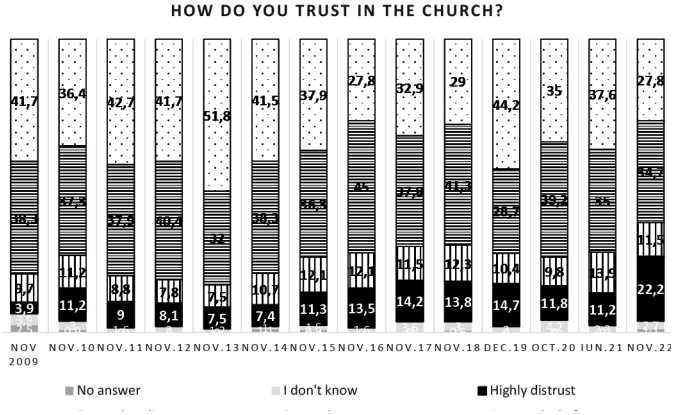


Sources: author's own preparations based on data collected from the The Public Opinion Barometer of the Republic of Moldova, available online https:/ http://bop.ipp.md/, Accessed 24. 02. 2023.

While the population's perception of the church has evolved from 80% trust in 2009 and 62.5%.

This lack of image is largely due to the public discourse launched mostly by the left-wing parties, as well as the mass media enslaved by them, which present the CSOs of the Republic of Moldova as agents of the West, serving foreign political interests and contradicting national interests. In the same way, a bad image was created of NGOs who receive quite high salaries compared to the rest of the population, being financed by external funds.

Figure 6. The evolution of the public trust in the church in the Republic of Moldova 2009–2021



Sources: author's own preparations based on data collected from the *The Public Opinion Barometer of the Republic of Moldova*, available online https:/ http://bop.ipp.md/, Accessed 24. 02. 2023.

In 2021, civil society organizations (CSOs) and media institutions faced attacks and smear campaigns from social media users and politicians. Journalists from the Association of Alternative Media and other media organizations were accused of defamatory actions. The most recent attack was launched by one of the leaders of the Socialist Party of the Republic of Moldova, Bogdan Tîrdea, who published an 800-page book entitled

"Civil Society in the Republic of Moldova: Sponsors, NGOs. Culture Wars" (Țîrdea 2020). The author combines real sources (public financial reports of the most prominent NGOs) with speculation to claim that NGOs are" instruments of control and influence of other states through leaders who actually work for private donors, of very often against national interests…", "it has become an octopus that has infiltrated all branches of power, media and academia." and "all are connected to a certain political party and candidate…" (Komm 2021: 5). Former deputy minister of foreign affairs, Iulian Groza, director of the Institute for European Policies and Reforms in Chisinau, considers the statements of deputy Țîrdea as "characteristic of undemocratic, corrupt and authoritarian political regimes". He considered that" such actions seek nothing more than to discredit civil society which is a component of democratic institutions and when the competent authorities… that things are going wrong in relation to everything that means the state of democracy in the Republic of Moldova" (Radio Free Europe Moldova 2022).

Additionally, the Prosecutor General accused several CSOs, independent media outlets, and development partners of discrediting him, which led to a public condemnation of his statements by 13 CSOs.[3]

In response to this, on October 5, over a dozen CSOs released a statement condemning the attack and arguing that Stoianoglo had violated provisions of the penal code, as his statements had been based on materials from a criminal inves-

tigation. The CSOs also emphasized the importance of civil society in promoting rule of law, transparency and accountability, and noted that the Prosecutor General's accusations were a disservice to the efforts of the PAS-led government. They concluded by urging Stoianoglo to retract his defamatory statements and respect the role of civil society in promoting true democracy. Despite these attacks, data suggests that the population's trust in CSOs slightly increased, with 29.8% of respondents reporting that they trust NGOs in a June 2021 Public Opinion Barometer survey, compared to 23.1% in October 2020 (2021 Moldova Report CSO SI).

Following the PAS's victory in the early elections, several civil society actors were co-opted to join the government. Sergiu Gaibu became the Minister of Economy, Dumitru Budianschi the Minister of Finance, and Iuliana Cantaragiu the Minister of Environment. Two other representatives of the think-tank community, Iulian Rusu and Vadim Gumene, were appointed as secretaries of state in the ministries of Justice and Economy, respectively. This marked an important step in the PAS's commitment to involving civil society in governance, and provided the civil society actors with an opportunity to help shape the direction of the country (2021 Nations in Transit Moldova Report).

The improved image and trust may be attributed to the decrease in attacks by authorities following the elections, the active involvement of CSOs in promoting draft laws, their support during the pandemic, and the appointment of many civil society representatives to key government positions. Media affiliated with the Socialist Party of the Republic of Moldova criticized CSOs focused on the freedom of expression and the rule of law but did not attack affiliated organizations such as Molodaya Gvardiya. Independent media provided objective coverage of CSO initiatives, such as the Stop Fake campaign, Stop Bullying campaign, and PromoLex's campaign against hate speech and discrimination.

Conclusions

The Republic of Moldova's consolidation period, which evolved cyclically, was influenced by its European path, and the establishment of a national framework for OCSs garnered support from external development partners, ultimately aiding the Moldovan civil society's consolidation. Since 2009, pro-European political forces have taken control of Chisinau's political power, significantly shaping the dynamics and character of Moldova's civil society development. However, the post-2009 period has been non-linear. Despite this, various initiatives, social movements, and informal groups of activists have appeared at the local level, and a new generation of activists has emerged, demonstrating a more technologically savvy and strategic approach. However, many promising initiatives have failed due to a lack of practical experience and resources. Civil society's establishment in Moldova occurs amidst ongoing political modernization, with the state playing a critical role in creating legal and institutional prerequisites for its development.

The development of civil society in the Republic of Moldova has been shaped by its post-communist legacy, ongoing political modernization, and external support from development partners. At present, the degree of development of civil society in Moldova is mixed. On the one hand, there have been notable achievements in civil society development in Moldova, such as the protests against the "Kozak Memorandum" in November 2003 and the "events of April 6–7, 2009". These protests, together with opposition political parties, demonstrate that civil society in Moldova is capable of mobilizing and protesting against political decisions that go against public interest.

Additionally, since 2009, new civil society actors such as social movements, initiatives, and informal groups of activists have emerged at the local level. These actors have demonstrated a more technologically savvy and strategic approach, and have initiated systematic monitoring of actions by public authorities. This suggests that civil society in Moldova is evolving and adapting to changing circumstances. However, civil society in Moldova still faces several challenges. Firstly, it remains fragmented and has weak civic participation, which hinders its ability to influence policy decisions. Secondly, the co-optation of some civil society members into politics and the emergence of CSO-satellites pose a threat to civil society's independence and credibility. Finally, many promising civil society initiatives have failed due to a lack of practical experience and resources. Therefore, while civil society in Moldova has made some progress, there is still much work to be done to further its development. This requires addressing the challenges faced by civil society and ensuring that it has the necessary support, both from the state and external development partners, to continue to evolve and play a more active role in Moldovan society. Covid–19 pandemic proved the vulnerability of the tools CSOs traditionally use (requiring physical presence), e.g. public assemblies, different discussion formats or trainings.

The democratization of the Republic of Moldova has been a slow and challenging process, but civil society has played a critical role in promoting democratic values and holding the government accountable. Despite significant challenges, there are opportunities for further progress towards democracy, particularly with the support of the European Union and other international actors. It is clear that civil society will continue to play an important role in the democratization process in Moldova, and its efforts should be supported and encouraged. Despite the progress that has been made in Moldova's democratization process, there are still significant challenges that need to be addressed. One of the biggest challenges is corruption, which remains widespread throughout the country. Civil society groups have been working to combat corruption, but progress has been slow.

Another challenge is the influence of external actors, particularly Russia. Russia has historically had strong ties to Moldova, and it has been accused of meddling in the country's internal affairs. This has made it difficult for Moldova to fully embrace democracy, as it faces pressure from both Russia and the West. However, there are also opportunities for further democratization in Moldova. The country's

recent association agreement with the European Union has provided a framework for further reforms, and civil society groups continue to be active in promoting democratic values and holding the government accountable.

Q1. Moldova has made progress in developing a legal framework that supports the growth of CSOs. At the same time, CSOs have shown their resilience by adapting to the new circumstances, partially moving their activity online and contributing to the defence of freedoms and the promotion of the social agendas they advocate for. Improving transparency in CSO activity, public communication and intensifying collaboration with public authorities, especially local ones, should be priorities in the future activity of CSOs in the Republic of Moldova.The country has laws in place that allow for the establishment and registration of CSOs, which operate under the Civil Code and the Law on Non-Governmental Organizations. However, some issues remain, such as complex registration procedures and limited access to funding.

Q2. The legislative changes made between 2020 and 2021 have created favorable conditions for civil society organizations (CSOs) to be included in the decision-making processes of public authorities. This inclusion can significantly increase their impact on public policies and raise their visibility. However, while the dialogue between the state and CSOs has intensified recently, it still tends to be formal. Moreover, CSOs can improve their financial capacity by increasing the proportion of funding obtained through donations from citizens. However, this is unlikely to happen unless the image of CSOs enjoys a high degree of trust among citizens. Positive changes that have contributed to the development of civil society in Moldova include increased participation and engagement of citizens in civil society activities, the growth of CSOs, and the emergence of new forms of activism, including social media-based campaigns. Barriers to the development of civil society in Moldova include limited access to funding, a lack of collaboration between CSOs and government entities, and insufficient government support for civil society. Additionally, political instability and corruption have also hindered the growth of civil society.

Q3. The level of trust in CSOs in Moldova is relatively high, with many citizens seeing these organizations as an important force for change and social progress. However, some people also have concerns about the transparency and accountability of CSOs, which can impact levels of trust. To increase the image credit CSOs need to be much more active in promoting and disseminating their work. Here you can also see the organization and the weak presence of organizations at the local level, they are quite undeveloped, poorly financed, but also little present in the public space.

Q4. Challenges to the role of civil society in democratizing Moldova include limited access to funding, a lack of collaboration with government entities, and insufficient government support for civil society. Additionally, political instability and corruption can also impact the ability of civil society to promote democracy. Overall, civil society has played an important role in promoting democracy in

Moldova, with CSOs working to increase transparency, accountability, and citizen participation in decision-making processes. However, there is still much work to be done to overcome the challenges and create a more robust and dynamic civil society sector in Moldova.

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Notes

[1] *Transitional or Hybrid Regimes (3.01–4.00):* Countries receiving this score are typically electoral democracies where democratic institutions are fragile, and substantial challenges to the protection of political rights and civil liberties exist.

[2] Countries are rated on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing the lowest and 7 the highest level of democratic progress.The average of these ratings is each country's Democracy Score *(DS)*. The Democracy Percentage *(D%)* is the translation of the Democracy Score to the 0–100 scale.

[3] On October 4, the Prosecutor General of the Republic of Moldova, Alexandr Stoianoglo, published conversations that had been intercepted by Europol between the controversial former Anticorruption Prosecutor Viorel Moral and several representatives of think tanks in the justice field. Stoianoglo used these conversations and statements made by these CSOs to accuse them of participating in a plot to prepare public opinion for his dismissal, claiming that the publications they issued about the activity of the Prosecutor General's Office had been defamatory and unfounded.

Appendix

Appendix no. 1

Moldova Coutry Score acording 2021 CSO Meter

Basic data

Population: 2,597,107[2] | **GDP per capita**: USD 12,325[3] | **Number of CSOs**: 11,569 (out of 14,839 non-commercial organisations)[4] | **CSOs per 10,000 inhabitants**: 44 | **Registration fee for CSOs**: None | **Freedom in the World**: 62 (Partly Free)[5] | **World Press Freedom Index**: 68.39 (89 out of 180 countries)[6] | **Public trust in CSOs**: 29.8 per cent of the surveyed population have either 'a lot of trust' or 'some trust' in CSOs[7]

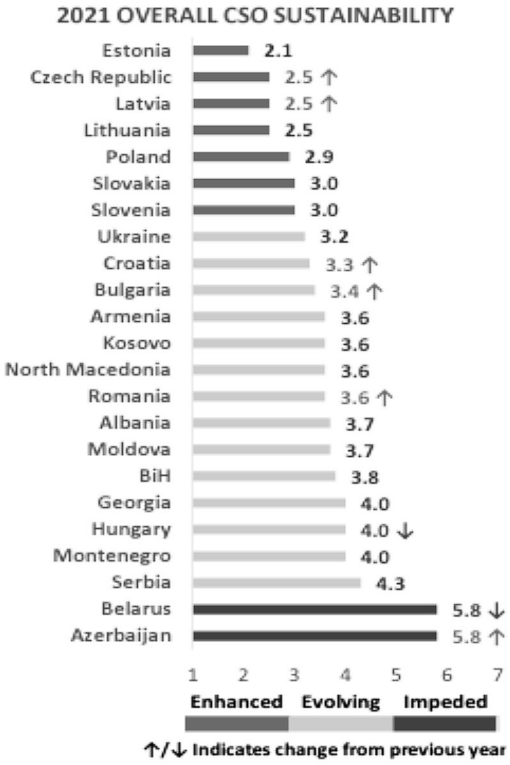
Country score: 4.6
Legislation: 5.0
Practice: 4.3

The scores range from 1 to 7, where 1 signifies the lowest possible score (extremely unfavourable – authoritarian - environment) and 7 signifies the highest possible score (extremely favourable environment).

Areas	Overall	Legislation	Practice
Freedom of association	5.4	5.6	5.3
Equal treatment	4.6	4.8	4.4
Access to funding	5.1	5.6	4.7
Freedom of peaceful assembly	5.2	5.4	5.0
Right to participation in decision making	4.7	5.2	4.3
Freedom of expression	4.9	5.3	4.6
Right to privacy	4.4	5.3	3.4
State duty to protect	4.5	5.0	4.1
State support	4.2	4.6	3.9
State-CSO cooperation	4.0	4.2	3.7
Digital rights	4.1	4.3	3.9

Appendix no 2

Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index – Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia



Source: Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index (fact sheets), available at: https://www.fhi360.org/resource/civil-society-organization-sustainability-index-fact-sheets

Appendix 3.

Overview of score trends in Nation in Tranzit 2022 Report

NATIONS IN TRANSIT 2022: OVERVIEW OF SCORE CHANGES

▼ Decline ▲ Improvement ☐ Unchanged

	Country	Democracy Score	Democracy %	NDG	EP	CS	IM	LDG	JFI	CO
BALKANS	Albania	3.75	46%							
	Bosnia and Herzegovina	3.36 TO 3.29	38%	▼		▼				
	Croatia	4.25	54%					▲		▼
	Kosovo	3.14 TO 3.25	38%	▲					▲	
	Montenegro	3.82	47%	▲					▼	
	North Macedonia	3.82	47%							
	Serbia	3.89 TO 3.79	46%			▼	▼			▼
CENTRAL EUROPE	Bulgaria	4.50	58%							
	Czech Republic	5.57 TO 5.54	76%			▲			▼	▼
	Estonia	6.04 TO 6.00	83%							▼
	Hungary	3.71 TO 3.68	45%				▼			
	Latvia	5.82 TO 5.79	80%						▼	
	Lithuania	5.68 TO 5.64	77%						▼	
	Poland	4.57 TO 4.54	59%	▼						
	Romania	4.39 TO 4.36	56%					▼		
	Slovakia	5.32 TO 5.25	71%			▼				▼
	Slovenia	5.86 TO 5.71	79%	▼	▼				▼	▼
EURASIA	Armenia	2.96 TO 3.04	34%	▲	▲		▼		▲	
	Azerbaijan	1.07	1%							
	Belarus	1.29 TO 1.18	3%			▼	▼			▼
	Georgia	3.18 TO 3.07	35%	▼		▼			▼	
	Kazakhstan	1.32 TO 1.36	6%					▲		
	Kyrgyzstan	1.86 TO 1.75	13%	▼	▼				▼	
	Moldova	3.11	35%							
	Russia	1.39 TO 1.32	5%			▼	▼			
	Tajikistan	1.11	2%							
	Turkmenistan	1.00	0%							
	Ukraine	3.36	39%				▼	▲		
	Uzbekistan	1.25	4%							

CATEGORIES:

NDG – National Democratic Governance
EP – Electoral Process
CS – Civil Society
IM – Independent Media
LDG – Local Democratic Governance
JFI – Judicial Framework and Independence
CO – Corruption

The NIT ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 7 representing the highest level of democratic progress and 1 the lowest. The NIT 2022 ratings reflect the period from January 1 through December 31, 2021.

Source: https://freedomhouse.org/

Appendix 4.

Nation in Transit 2022: Catergory and democracy score summary

Countries are rated on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing the lowest and 7 the highest level of democratic progress. The average of these ratings is each country's Democracy Score (DS). The Democracy Percentage (D%) is the translation of the Democracy Score to the 0–100 scale.

CATEGORIES:

NDG – National Democratic Governance
EP – Electoral Process
CS – Civil Society
IM – Independent Media
LDG – Local Democratic Governance
JFI – Judicial Framework and Independence
CO – Corruption
DS – Democracy Score
D% – Democracy Percentage

Country	NDG	EP	CS	IM	LDG	JFI	CO	DS	D%
Albania	3.25	4.25	4.75	3.50	4.50	3.25	2.75	**3.75**	46
Armenia	2.50	3.50	4.50	2.75	2.25	2.75	3.00	**3.04**	34
Azerbaijan	1.00	1.00	1.25	1.00	1.25	1.00	1.00	**1.07**	1
Belarus	1.00	1.00	1.50	1.00	1.25	1.00	1.50	**1.18**	3
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1.75	4.50	4.25	3.25	3.25	3.00	3.00	**3.29**	38
Bulgaria	4.25	5.50	5.50	3.50	4.75	4.25	3.75	**4.50**	58
Croatia	4.25	5.00	5.25	3.75	4.50	3.50	3.50	**4.25**	54
Czech Republic	4.75	6.75	6.25	5.00	6.00	5.75	4.25	**5.54**	76
Estonia	5.75	6.50	6.25	6.25	5.75	6.50	5.00	**6.00**	83
Georgia	2.25	3.00	4.00	3.50	2.75	2.50	3.50	**3.07**	35
Hungary	3.00	4.25	4.25	3.00	4.25	4.25	2.75	**3.68**	45
Kazakhstan	1.25	1.25	1.50	1.25	1.75	1.25	1.25	**1.36**	6
Kosovo	3.00	3.50	4.50	3.25	3.50	2.75	2.25	**3.25**	38
Kyrgyzstan	1.00	1.75	3.00	2.00	1.75	1.25	1.50	**1.75**	13
Latvia	6.00	6.25	6.00	6.00	5.75	6.00	4.50	**5.79**	80
Lithuania	5.50	6.25	6.00	5.75	5.75	5.75	4.50	**5.64**	77
Moldova	2.50	4.00	4.75	3.00	2.50	2.75	2.25	**3.11**	35
Montenegro	3.50	4.25	5.25	3.25	4.25	3.25	3.00	**3.82**	47
North Macedonia	3.50	4.50	4.75	3.50	4.00	3.25	3.25	**3.82**	47
Poland	3.50	5.75	5.50	4.25	5.50	3.25	4.00	**4.54**	59
Romania	4.25	4.75	5.50	3.50	4.25	4.25	4.00	**4.36**	56
Russia	1.00	1.25	1.75	1.25	1.50	1.25	1.25	**1.32**	5
Serbia	3.25	4.25	5.25	3.00	4.00	3.50	3.25	**3.79**	46
Slovakia	4.75	6.25	6.00	5.00	5.50	5.25	4.00	**5.25**	71
Slovenia	5.50	6.25	5.75	5.25	6.50	5.75	5.00	**5.71**	79
Tajikistan	1.00	1.00	1.25	1.00	1.50	1.00	1.00	**1.11**	2
Turkmenistan	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	**1.00**	0
Ukraine	2.50	4.50	5.00	3.50	3.50	2.25	2.25	**3.36**	39
Uzbekistan	1.00	1.25	1.50	1.25	1.25	1.25	1.25	**1.25**	4
Average	3.03	3.91	4.21	3.22	3.59	3.20	2.88	**3.43**	41
Median	3.00	4.25	4.75	3.25	4.00	3.25	3.00	**3.68**	45

Photo/István Péter Németh

Romania's Rapidly Changing Perceptions of Ukraine: A Civil Society-driven Endeavour with EU Nuances?

Adrian-Gabriel Corpădean–Delia Pop-Flanja

Introduction and methodology. Research premises, objectives and design

Romania's relations with its larger neighbour, Ukraine, were seldom characterised as cordial throughout the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, for a variety of historical reasons, unpleasant territorial changes and undiplomatic rhetoric often expressed at the highest political levels. This did not translate to open conflict or to severe diplomatic incidents, but still prevented the cooperation between the two countries from fully attaining their political or trade potential. While Ukrainian politicians' allegiances have shifted on several occasions in the sinuous and perilous East-West equilibrium, Romania has exhibited two constant priorities throughout the so-called transition period after 1989, pertaining to NATO and EU integration (Ioan-Franc 2000), perhaps in that order, given that the pyramid of needs undoubtedly places security before economic prosperity. After almost half a century when Romania was marred by an impoverishing communist system that its people chiefly perceived as exogeneous, i.e. of Russian descent, and set against the background of a tortuous course of governance at least in the 1990s, one of the few priorities the state was able to remain faithful to was "Euro-Atlantic integration", as the cliché began to spread in the postrevolutionary vernacular.

Indeed, amid the massive changes that Romania underwent – albeit not at warp speed – in the aforementioned decade, its foreign policy goals remained amply linked to the dossier of the Republic of Moldova, a neighbour with which it shares profound historical, cultural and linguistic roots. As Moldova also fluctuated

between the EU and Moscow, in the delicate game all countries stained by a frozen conflict were forced to resort to (in this case, Transnistria), Romania was keen to keep a close eye on the political environment of its neighbour and intervene with economic and diplomatic support whenever the occasion presented itself. The same does not hold true for the relations between Bucharest and Kyiv, even though the presence of a Romanian minority on the territory of Ukraine remained a decisive factor in the dialogue between the two administrations and has yet to yield the desired outcomes for the Romanian side.

This study will briefly delve into the history of Romanian–Ukrainian relations, by resorting to the literature, discourses and viewpoints emanating from the civil society, decision-makers and academics, whilst bearing in mind a recurrent comparative approach put to the test amid the different periods such relations have undergone. Most notably, our focus lies on the changing perceptions that have become noticeable among the Romanian people following the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation, on 24th February 2022, in keeping with a clear-cut reorientation of Romania's foreign policy in this respect. It remains of paramount importance to discern whether this undeniable shift is a genuine feeling expressed by the Romanian people, one that is bound to remain unaltered regardless of the outcome of Russia's war against its neighbour, or whether it is chiefly triggered by the overall pro-Western feeling, in a country that is known to remain undeniably optimistic with respect to the future of EU integration, clearly Europhile and linked to the values the Union promotes. The implications of the new attitude Bucharest has publicly endorsed towards its larger, non-EU neighbour reach far beyond puny political goals, if one is to consider Romania's support for the granting of EU candidate status to Ukraine, with all the long-term pecuniary implications this entails (Romanian Embassy in Ukraine 2022).

Besides the abundance of information we have identified in the recent literature and documents issued by all sides involved in the Ukrainian file, our investigation benefits from the richness of direct observation, owing to our contacts with academics and representatives of the diplomatic corps from Ukraine, as well as to bilateral conferences and to discussions with members of the Ukrainian minority in Romania. While most of the analytical approaches are inherently qualitative, we occasionally turn to some quantitative data in order to underline the breadth of the refugee crisis, the prominence of the Romanian and Ukrainian ethnic groups residing on the other country's territory, or the findings of surveys gauging public perceptions germane to the Russian war against Ukraine.

Literature review

The relations between Romania and Ukraine have been approached in the literature from a variety of standpoints, chiefly with respect to the nature of bilateral ties, but less in the broader context of European affairs. The majority of the

subjects proposed include the communist heritage and the conflicts generated between the two states as a consequence thereof, with an emphasis on border disputes and ethnic communities. More recent titles tackle the joint cooperation programmes, favoured by the EU membership of Romania and the pro-western stance adopted by Kyiv, set against the background shaped by the significance of the Black Sea region for the EU.

Kruglashov (2011) focuses on the long-standing border issues shared by the two neighbouring countries, with an emphasis on the historical facts that amplified the problems, but with less consideration for the EU's role in reconciliation endeavours. Filipenko and Makoukh (2013), instead, outline the need for enhanced cooperation between the two states, amid their common EU aspirations and subsequent reforms. However, this is performed chiefly through the lens of the legal framework and less from the viewpoint of international relations theory. In a more recent article, Brie (2017) proposes views that are largely compatible with ours, stemming from the ample cross-border programmes that Romania and Ukraine are eligible to implement, so as to strengthen bilateral ties, in the context of the Neighbourhood Policy of the EU.

Some of the literature devoted to Romanian–Ukrainian relations also feature the particular case of the Republic of Moldova, with arguments explaining the particular interests that Romania exhibits in the latter, given the historical and cultural-linguistic ties the two countries share. Such an approach is found in Marcu (2009) and Angelescu (2011) and includes the reconfiguration of Romania's foreign policy, as well as the rekindled international interest in the Black Sea region, both of which are of importance to the present article.

Studies that assess the evolution of the civil society sector are limited, and they commonly address general, more than specific, performance. Hence, we will focus next on two such studies, namely the "Freedom House 2022 Nations in Transit report", which offers a broader evaluation of the state of democracy in the region spanning from Central Europe to Central Asia, and the USAID 2021 "Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index for Romania".

"NiT Romania 2022" classified Romania as a Semi-Consolidated Democracy, scoring 5.50/7 on the civil society index; this index evaluates the organizational capacity and financial sustainability, the legal and political environment, the functioning of trade unions, the participation in the policy process, and the threat posed by antidemocratic extremist groups. Romania is rather constant on the civil society measurement scale, with no significant variations between 2005 and 2022 – 5.75 to 5.50 (Freedom House 2022).

The 2021 "CSO Sustainability Index" (USAID 2022), the most recent report available, provides a broader and more complex portrayal of the Romanian civil society. A relevant finding for the purpose of our research is that, in the context of the COVID–19 crisis, the visibility of CSOs increased, as well as their positive public image and online presence. Although the report does not cover the war-generated crisis in Ukraine, since the pandemic demonstrated the importance of NGOs in

emergency situations and based on their involvement in offering support to the refugees, we can safely estimate that their visibility is even higher.

Romanian-Ukrainian relations before the Russian aggression

There are numerous similarities that characterise the recent historical evolution of the two neighbouring countries, despite the rather dissimilar linguistic and cultural heritage that defines their identities. From a strictly geographical standpoint, they share in excess of 600 km of borders, which is of utmost importance for Romania's security protocols, as the country has been striving to gain access to the Schengen area and is, thus, extremely cautious with the manner in which it secures the outer frontiers of the EU.

Historically speaking, the two nations have been confronted with episodes that are sometimes understudied and, consequently, poorly comprehended by the general population. Such an event is the Romanian War of Independence of 1877–1878, where the presence of Ukrainian soldiers in the army led by Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolaevich of Russia is not investigated in the literature. Much more research, however, is dedicated to the situation of Bukovina, a territory that is now divided between Romania and Ukraine, whose fate has often been the spark of political disputes, claims and bitterness, much to the satisfaction of Russian agitators (Fisher–Röger 2019). Returning to the historical deeds that are less debated at present, there arises the Odessa massacre committed mostly by the Romanian troops, under the general command of Marshall Ion Antonescu, one of the darkest stains in the country's warfare record (Grec 2021).

It is under such complicated auspices that the two countries sank into the communist marshland, with Ukraine becoming one of the constituent members of the USSR in 1922 and Romania falling under the control of communists in 1945. This prevented the two nations from settling their territorial disputes, chiefly hovering around several islets in or near the Danube Delta, the most famous of which being Snake Island.

After ridding themselves of totalitarianism and following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the two neighbours exhibited different foreign policy views, with Romania making a much more coherent and long-standing commitment to what became widely known as Euro-Atlantic integration. As such, Romania's NATO membership, which was arguably more ardently present in collective feelings (since it was more easily attainable and given the hierarchy of priorities and the constant aversion Romanians have shown towards the Russian Federation), required a clarification of potential territorial disputes with its non-Alliance neighbours. For this reason, in 1997, a bilateral treaty was finally signed with Kyiv (Monitorul Oficial al României, no. 157, 1997), and, upon its swift ratification, the only remaining bone of contention was the continental shelf around Snake Island, which did not prevent Romania from achieving NATO membership in 2004. The treaty was met with

rather mixed feelings on both sides of the border, with vocal contestation on the part of nationalists, but the pragmatism of the endeavour was incontestable and so was the stringent need to achieve one of the leitmotifs of the often disappointing transition period for Romania, namely NATO membership (Cioculescu 2015).

The signing of a cooperation treaty with Ukraine did not, however, bring an end to the territorial differences invoked by the two governments, with more conflictual episodes following, most notably in and after 2004. The spark that reignited the tensions was the Bystroe Canal, a Ukrainian navigation route on the final stretches of the Danube, which was deemed extremely detrimental to the fragile, protected ecosystem of the river's Delta (Golășilă 2020: 154–171).

The second conflict was centred on the much thornier matter of the continental shelf delineated by Snake Island, which was recognised as falling within Ukraine's sovereignty. This was in no way a novel topic in bilateral relations, as during Soviet times, the two countries had failed to reach agreement on the matter and, thus, it became part of the dossier inherited by the new, post-revolutionary administrations. Given the fossil fuel deposits of the area and amid the concurrent economic interests cultivated by the two countries and their respective investors, the case of Snake Island was brought by Romania before the International Court of Justice in 2004, leading to a five-year struggle to establish the nature of the Island (habitable or not) and the size of the continental shelf attributable to either party. The Court in the Hague delivered ruling no. 2009/9, through which it awarded Romania almost 80% of the surface it had requested, which was largely seen as a major victory for the legal team and the strategic interests promoted by Bucharest (Lazăr–Bostan 2021).

Under the auspices of this verdict and the ardour with which Romania had made its case before the ICJ, tensions were high in the diplomatic and military circles of both countries. One example illustrating this hostile climate are the views stated by Yuriy Yekhanurov, Minister of Defence of Ukraine, in 2009, who considered Romania to be the principal foe of his country at the time (Chifu 2018).

Despite such unfriendly positions, a completely different picture was painted by the Romanian and Ukrainian ethnic communities residing on the territory close to the common border or in other regions of the neighbouring country. According to the 2011 census performed in Romania, Ukrainians made up 0.3% of the country's population, or 50.920 people (National Institute of Statistics of Romania 2013), mostly concentrated in the northern, western and south-eastern parts. With Romania's commitment to and preparations for EU integration becoming a political reality much earlier than in the case of Ukraine, a different approach began to be taken by Bucharest to national minorities than the one marking Kyiv's legislative actions. For instance, the Ukrainian community in Romania was granted one seat in the lower house of Parliament, the Chamber of Deputies, although the size of this community would not have enabled any political party created by it to pass the electoral threshold. This was part of the general strategy pertaining to national minorities, which saw 18 deputies from political parties of national minorities ob-

taining seats in the Chamber at the 2020 parliamentary elections (Central Electoral Bureau of Romania 2020). Moreover, Ukrainian is recognised as a minority language, which has consequences on the rights of the ethnic community to undergo education in its mother tongue, for instance through the existence of a Ukrainian high school in Sighetu Marmației, called "Taras Șevcenko". On the other hand, the Romanian authorities have been quite critical of the absence of comparable measures taken by the Ukrainian side, a phenomenon which does not appear to have improved even at present (2023), amid Kyiv's efforts to comply with the acquis of the EU in terms of national minorities' legislation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania, 22nd December 2022).

A much more numerous Romanian community can be found within the borders of Ukraine, comprising 400.000 people according to the 2001 census, some of whom call themselves Moldovans, i.e. 0.85% of the country's population (Government of Ukraine, Ukrainian census 2011). The Romanian government has constantly requested better political representation for this sizeable minority, which does not receive a right to appoint a delegate in the Ukrainian parliament, the Verkhovna Rada. Since dual citizenship is still not recognised by Ukraine, the Romanian community meets with hurdles in the area of freedom of movement, the right to an education in the mother tongue and others. The lack of reciprocity with regard to how national minorities are treated in Romania and Ukraine is one of the topics that frequently arise in bilateral discussions and can be placed on the to-do list of the current executives as well.

Swift changes after 24th February 2022

As it can be deduced from the rather bleak picture painted above, bilateral relations between Romania and Ukraine have often been marred by historical, territorial and ethnic disputes, whose resolution did not seem to be looming on the horizon, in spite of both countries' pro-European orientation in recent years (and, in the case of Romania), throughout the post-1989 period. Hence, it remains of interest to decrypt the genuine reasons behind what we will attempt to describe as a major change of perception on the Romanian side regarding Ukraine, its people and the country's role inside a united Europe, following the start of Russia's was of aggression against this country (on Russia's hybrid tactics employed since 2014, see Herta 2017: 135–143 and Herta 2016: 52–76). Several constants ought to be brought to the forefront of the analysis prior to delving into the events triggered by the 24th February invasion.

One of these constants is undoubtedly Romanians' suspicion of the Russian Federation, owing to the past interactions between the two countries (Goșu 2016) and the role Russians played in the advent of communism in Romania, back in 1945, as an exogenous system that was imposed illegally and undemocratically, constantly at odds with the country's cultural, linguistic and aspirational fabric.

It is not our intent to perform an analysis of how communism came to power in Romania or of the profound damage and setbacks it caused during its 45-year-long rule, but stressing the inherent ties imprinted on collective thinking between this system which was officially deemed "murderous" before the Romanian parliament by president Traian Băsescu in 2006 and the Russian plots that stood behind its roots is tantamount in order to comprehend Romanians' perceptions thereof (Tismăneanu 2006). Indeed, after 1989, one of the few constantly defended priorities by all the country's governments and the civil society has been the integration with western structures, i.e. NATO and the EU, as an expression of societal will, political tradition and pragmatic orientation.

One more aspect to be borne in mind is the special interest Romania has always shown to the European future of the Republic of Moldova, as this country's most vocal supporter in its EU-related actions. This is due to a myriad of reasons, ranging from historical to cultural and linguistic closeness, and should be treated as a major foreign policy factor when assessing Romania's stance towards the region and the enlargement policy of the EU.

These are some of the considerations that have prompted the Romanian government to enforce the sanctions imposed by the EU against Russia following the aggression against and conquest of Crimea in 2014, in a course of action whose logic would be once again found in the 2022–2023 political measures adopted by Bucharest, as a reaction to the new Russian aggression against Ukraine, and in synergy with western allies. The discipline exhibited by Romania in supporting stark measures against Moscow has prompted characteristically hostile reactions on the Russian part, which are usually received with calm, composed attitudes by a country whose NATO membership is widely supported. At least two episodes could be mentioned to illustrate the outrageousness of Russian high-level rhetoric towards Romania. The former dates back to September 2014, when Vladimir Putin appears to have boasted to then-Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko that Russian troops could reach not only Kyiv, but also Riga, Vilnius, Tallinn, Warsaw and Bucharest in two days (Rettman 2014). Following in Putin's footsteps, Russian deputy prime-minister Dmitry Rogozin stated, in August 2017, after being denied the right to fly over Romanian airspace, in accordance with EU sanctions: "My analysis says that Romania and the Moldovan governance, pro-Romanian and pro-fascist, have decided with impertinence to be in line with the American policy, which involves Russophobia, idiocy, sanctions and wild statements." (Lazăr 2017). Such outbursts clearly prove that the level of bilateral relations between Romania and Russia was already extremely precarious, even before the large-scale invasion of 24th February 2022, and that for Moscow, Romania was in no way regarded as a potential partner for dialogue within the EU.

Even these strained relations with Russia could hardly be regarded as a unique plausible explanation for the exemplary mobilisation of Romania(ns) from the onset of the humanitarian crisis triggered by the events occurring in late-February 2022 (on the definition and development of humanitarian intervention in world

politics, see Herta 2013: 5–48). Whilst the timeline of such events is widely known and, thus, not of particular interest to us in this analysis, our focus will lie mostly on the reactions and concrete measures taken on the Romanian side by a variety of actors, ranging from the government to the civil society (Pantea–Mișcoiu 2022: 147–164). This will bring new evidence that emphasises the change in perception of Romanians towards their war-torn neighbours, as a genuine feeling that transcends any other opportunistic or ephemeral attitude, as well as the traditional mistrust in the actions of the Russian Federation.

Among the most noticeable measures encountered at the level of civil society organisations in Romania, from the first days of the war, one should emphasise the prompt mobilisation for welcoming refugees at the northern border, with supplies donated on site to Ukrainians crossing into Romania. Border guards on the Romanian side ensured smooth transit, which was evidently a measure communicated to them from the central government, while a humanitarian hub was inaugurated in Suceava as of 9th March (G4Media, 9th March 2022). Data from the Romanian Border Police shows that over 3.2 million Ukrainians entered the country in the period 10th February 2022–3rd January 2023. The government announced that, in October 2022, there were more than 83.000 Ukrainian refugees that had chosen to remain under the protection of Romanian authorities, almost half of whom were children (Burnar, 24th October 2022).

Several welcome measures were taken at the level of national and local authorities in order to facilitate the temporary integration of the refugees into community life and to respond to their stringent needs. These included free medical and educational services, with places granted, for instance, in the national university network, as well as free public transport and simplified access to the labour market. According to the Romanian ministry of labour, by November 2022, 4.850 Ukrainian refugees had found employment in the country, mostly in industry and constructions (Euractiv, 11th November 2022). A coherent set of measures meant to enhance the integration of Ukrainian refugees was issued by Bucharest on 26th July 2022, which was aimed at fostering their independence and protection from abuse while residing on Romanian territory (Juridice.ro, 25th October 2022).

Meaningful efforts have also been made at the political level, with three condemnations of Russia's war unequivocally indicating Romania's position in the international community. Firstly, it is worth pinpointing the vehement condemnation of the Russian aggression by the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs before the UN Security Council and General Assembly. Secondly, in furtherance of such expected initiatives, on 29th September 2022, the Romanian minister of foreign affairs, Bogdan Aurescu, also condemned the so-called "referenda" orchestrated by Russia in the occupied regions, in a speech addressed to the Permanent Council of the OSCE, thus guaranteeing that there would be no recognitions of the results thereof on the Romanian part (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania, 29th September 2022). And thirdly, on 12th October, Romania co-signed and voted for a Resolution of the UN General Assembly which condemned the illegal "annexa-

tion" of the four occupied territories (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania, 13th October 2022), essentially adding them to the position on Crimea. Apart from such diplomatic gestures, in synergy with western allies and, notably, with the EU, Romania collaborates with the World Food Programme in order to foster humanitarian aid to Ukraine (Monitorul Oficial al României, no. 405, 28th April 2022), and has taken measures to facilitate the transport of Ukrainian produce through the ports of Constanța and Galați (Păvălașc 2022).

Several other international interventions have put Romania on a par with western responses to the crisis. On 2nd Mars, along with 42 other countries, Romania made an appeal to the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate potential crimes of genocide committed by Russia on Ukraine's territory. An additional declaration of intervention before the ICC was added by Bucharest on 13th September to the procedures initiated by Ukraine against Russia. Three days later, Romania once again intervened in Ukraine's favour before the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in the file it had opened against larger neighbour. And on 15th October, Romania made a voluntary addition to the NATO funds dedicated to enhancing Ukraine's defence capabilities (Aurescu, 24th October 2022).

Unlike many other EU member states, however, Romania has made a point of not placing military assistance in the limelight, which has not met with vocal criticism on the part of NATO, the EU, important internal political / civil society groups, or Ukraine itself. One could speculate as to the reasons for this choice and refer to the rather precarious state of the military technology in use within the country (with several notable exceptions), but also to the risks this would pose to the Republic of Moldova (amid the agitations in Transnistria) and to the wider border region.

Perhaps the most complex action taken by the government in Bucharest amid the crisis is the support given to Ukraine in its EU integration bid, for the granting of candidate status. This is arguably the most straightforward argument in our demonstration that Romania's new perceptions of Ukraine are part of a serious, coherent agenda, given that the EU membership of the latter would entail not only gains, but also - most likely - losses for East-Central EU states, which are still in dire need of the financial tools of the cohesion policy, as well as of the common agricultural policy. Sharing such limited resources with a country of 43 million people, whose GDP is under immense strain and whose reconstruction will require enormous efforts (Martin, 24th October 2022) is indeed proof of a mature and solidary vision.

Meanwhile, the response from Kyiv has been very encouraging, with more bilateral visits occurring during this period of war than in previous, peaceful times. On 22nd April 2022, foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba received a warm welcome in Bucharest (Government of Romania, 22nd April 2022), and shortly after, on 26th April, prime minister Nicolae Ciucă visited war-torn Kyiv. Whilst there is no denying that the political gains, both internal and at EU level, of such audacious deeds are likely to pay off, we do feel that they are also an expression of a genuine

pro-democratic commitment. The same feeling could be associated with the visit to the Ukrainian capital of four EU leaders, Macron, Scholtz, Draghi and, perhaps surprisingly, Iohannis (Aurescu, 24th October 2022). If the presence of the French president, German chancellor and Italian prime minister was an expected show of strength, one could not help but notice that the Romanian president joining the leaders of the three most powerful EU economies conveyed somewhat peculiar flashbacks of president Traian Băsescu speaking of the Washington–London–Bucharest axis (Alexandrescu 2005: 481–502). The regional implications of Iohannis' presence, however, are clear and justify this quadrilateral form of representation of the EU's position.

One of the paramount interests pursued by Romania in the current context revolves around energy security, both for itself and for the Republic of Moldova, with which it has significantly improved ties in this regard. This is the principal reason behind the Odessa reunion between Romania, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine held on 15th September 2022, which officially launched this trilateral format and proved to be a useful occasion for the Romanian and Moldovan foreign affairs ministers to ask their Ukrainian counterpart to withdraw the recognition of the so-called "Moldovan language" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania, 15th September 2022).

In addition to these high-level contacts, perhaps the most memorable has been the presence of president Volodymyr Zelensky before the Romanian Parliament, in a videoconference organised on 4th April 2022. On that occasion, Zelensky put his best foot forward and delivered an address that was, unsurprisingly, adorned with historical and cultural references, much to the satisfaction of the audience. The change in mutual perception was clearly acknowledged, which added a realistic touch to a message that hit many soft spots, not the least of which being the parallels drawn between Ceaușescu's dictatorship and the regime led by Putin, or the threat the war posed on the Republic of Moldova. A speech analysis also reveals genuine appreciation for Romania's enforcement of international sanctions against the aggressor and for the many forms of aid granted to Ukrainians (Europa Liberă România, 5th April 2022).

Actions taken by Romanian CSOs in support of Ukrainian refugees

Although Romanian CSOs, and the civil society in general, have been actively engaged in offering support to Ukrainian refugees, it is difficult to quantify their endeavours or to evaluate their performance and impact.

Initiatives of creating inter-organizational networks, such as the collective child protection intervention programme "Help to Help Ukraine" (Help to Help Ukraine Platform 2023), which encompasses organizations and projects supported by CARE and implemented at national level by the SERA Romania Foundation with the backing of CARE France and FONPC, strengthen their associative capacity and

ability to offer support to Ukrainian refugees in a more centralised and effective way. These endeavours are illustrative of the noteworthy mobilization in this crisis situation and of the transformative power of the Russian aggression, especially since the Romanian CSO environment is generally more competitive than collaborative (Cibian 2022).

Other actions taken to aid civilians suffering as a result of the war in Ukraine have received international recognition, such as the ones of the non-governmental charity "Asociația SUS INIMA Romania", which was awarded the European Economic and Social Committee 2022 first prize in this category, "for pivoting from its usual work and developing many initiatives to help the Ukrainians (ranging from school activities and finding a job to getting therapy and psychological support) and enable them to smoothly integrate into Romanian society" (European Economic and Social Committee, 7th June 2022).

There are also examples of NGOs collaborating closely with governmental institutions, such as "Code for Romania", a civic technology independent Non-Governmental Organization that has created a comprehensive information and support platform (Dopomoha.ro) for refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine, in partnership with the Department of Emergency Situations of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the UN Refugee Agency, the International Organisation for Migration and the Romanian National Council. What is specific to this platform is that "the information is validated by the Government of Romania, DSU, CNRR, and the UN agencies in Romania and is available in Ukrainian, Romanian, English and Russian" (Code for Romania, Dopohoma.ro Platform 2023), which makes is not only highly accessible but also reliable.

Moreover, we consider relevant to acknowledge the importance of civil society organizations that justify their support for Ukraine not only form a reactive perspective, but that place the conflict in a broader context and address aspects related to peace and security throughout Europe and worldwide. A suitable example in this respect is "The Peace Action, Training and Research Institute of Romania" (PATRIR), a non-governmental, non-profit, politically independent organization that activates on the basic principles of "non-violence, conflict transformation, the promotion of human rights through information and awareness raising by solutions oriented, social, political and economic analysis". Based on their focus on conflict resolution and on these declared principles, we have deemed relevant to investigate the actions taken in this context. Through their "Humanitarian Support for Ukraine" programme, the organization has made a point of raising donations for purchasing supplies and their transportation. Apart from these concrete measures, note should be taken of the call to solidarity addressed, where the focus is not solely on supporting the people in need, but also on condemning the Russian incursion into Ukraine, empowering people to take action, calling for an urgent ceasefire, and for a shift in the European approach to ensuring peace and security: "We have also been brought to this situation by the approach to 'security' in Europe since 1991 based upon expansion of military alliances and misuse of national

resources for the maintenance and expansion of armed forces and missile deployments in the region. We call for a comprehensive conference to review Europe's peace and security architecture [...]" (PATRIR 2022).

Notwithstanding the limited depiction of the Romanian CSOs that have contributed to offering support to refugees and to reinforcing the cooperation between Romania and Ukraine, the reason for choosing to present these particular activities was to highlight four specific categories of representation, namely inter-organizational networks, civil society – governmental collaborative actions, peace and security building activism and international recognition.

A change in the attitudes of the Romanian civil society towards Ukraine and its role inside a united Europe can also originate in a deeper perception of proximity and similarity. Since the Russian invasion is right across the border, the presence of the Ukrainian refugees makes the conflict seem more palpable; it is less a nationalistic division between us and the others, and more a sense of unity and solidarity in facing a common enemy, and, presumptively, an acknowledgement of the importance of EU membership and enlargement.

Some conclusions

It is our view that a broad variety of arguments can be brought to the forefront in order to make a case for the ample change of perceptions exhibited by Romania/Romanians towards their war-torn neighbour, some of which have been enunciated in the previous pages. From a diplomatic standpoint, it would have been expected, by virtue of Romania's NATO and EU membership, to comply with some or all the actions taken at such levels to condemn the Russian war of aggression and provide assistance to the country under attack. Nevertheless, Romania seems to have gone the extra mile and voiced support for Ukraine's EU and NATO integration, the former of which would (or, better yet, will) come at a price for the whole of East-Central Europe. Sharing the increasingly scarce resources of the cohesion and agricultural policies of the EU (to name but the most onerous ones) is an unselfish gesture that denotes Bucharest's capacity to see beyond its short-term interests.

Another angle we have attempted to explore is that of citizens, with Romanians exhibiting exemplary mobilisation from day one of the crisis, in part owing to the welcome measures taken by a clearly developed and functional civil society. If Romanians' mistrust of Russia had been a reality long before the war, it becomes apparent that the current feeling in society is more one of support for Ukraine and its citizens than primarily against a common enemy. Expecting to see Ukrainian flags everywhere in Romania would be unrealistic, since this does not reflect customary civil behaviour, but the concrete measures taken first on the common border and then in state bodies and civil society organisations reflect true commitment. Not surprisingly, it seems that sometimes, the further one finds oneself from

a conflict, the more prone one is to exhibit symbolic support, while the realities close to the front encourage people to resort to more pragmatic gestures. This is indeed the case with Romanians' response to Russia's war of aggression.

A survey conducted by INSCOP in June 2022 reveals that 71.2% of Romanians blame Russia for starting the war, while only 3.9% consider NATO to be responsible for this. Additionally, 50.3% of those interviewed believe that Ukraine will emerge victorious, with only over a quarter stating that Russia will win (INSCOP Research, 2nd June 2022). Such figures clearly indicate where Romanians stand when EU or NATO-related issues are being debated, but are also an expression of the favourable perceptions recently developed towards Ukraine and the plight of its people. It is also clear that the proximity of the Republic of Moldova to the conflict is a thorny subject for Romania and this influences the level of support for the war, as well as engendering few to no public messages stating that Romania was paying too high an energy price or contributing too much amid its own inflation crisis to the war effort (unlike the political voices advocating this in some neighbouring countries). The same holds true for the official rhetoric on the war, which strictly follows the guidelines of western allies, to the extent that any contrary viewpoint is met with serious political consequences, for instance, the resignation of defence minister Vasile Dâncu on 24th October 2022, after claiming that negotiations were necessary between Ukraine and Russia while failing to underline that such endeavours should only be conducted solely on Ukraine's terms (Pora, 24th October 2022).

If the subject of the war is still unfolding and is bound to be carefully scrutinised by the academic community as well as the general population, one constant is quite likely to remain, regardless of the evolution and outcome thereof, i.e. the mature views the Romanian civil society has developed on its formerly largely unknown neighbour, and perhaps on the broader role the country can play in the regional context, in keeping with its size, pro-western stance and membership of the two key organisations its foreign policy has unequivocally relied upon – NATO and the EU.

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The Interaction between the Level of Democracy and the Perception of the Civil Society

The Case of Albania and North Macedonia (2010–2022)

Islam Jusufi–István József Polgár

Introduction

The region of the Western Balkans, despite the fact that it is a major sub-region of Europe and is surrounded by EU member states, has remained out of EU borders. The European integration process has moved, but very slowly. The EU membership has been vital goal for the six Western Balkan states. The EU's condition-setting approach made a huge impact on the design of the democratisation reforms in the region. The EU also through its wider political, economic and security presence in the region provided incentive for the development of the democratisation-oriented strategies (Brie–Jusufi–Polgar 2021). The process of European integration seemed to be the solution in the context of widespread aspirations of the populations of these states towards democratisation.

The new socio-political realities, associated with a process of consolidation and strengthening democracy, have led to the redrawing of the social structures in the Balkan space. Competition and mutual distrust marked the first two decades after the fall of communism, but slowly, these societies matured and the injuries of the past began to heal and the idea of liberal democracy started to be more and more implemented.

Civil society was reborn after the fall of communism, but still was affected by the lack of financial support and a proper legislative framework. The idea that democracy, the rule of law and civil society are not similar or connected might seem incorrect or strange to some, especially nowadays, when these concepts are perceived as the foundation of democracy.

Western Balkan region, in general, Albania and North Macedonia, specifically, represent a good testing ground for analysing the impact of civil society over the democratisation process. First, both of the countries have been and still are home for major disputes and efforts to accelerate democratisation. Second, in both of countries, civil society was not built from scratch after 1990. Although these states did not inherit a proper civil society, a solid and comprehensively institutionalized sphere can be discovered, which included trade unions, professional associations, organizations representing different social and interest groups (Pârvulescu–Nimu–Todor 2016). In the communist period these types of organizations had many members, subsidiaries, since the participation in the activities was mandatory. Basically, the associative life was imposed and controlled by the party and in this way became politicized, bureaucratized and used for propaganda. Third, the civil society is much more attentive to the process of democratisation.

Therefore, if a role by civil society is expected in democratisation, this is likely to be detected in the western Balkan neighbourhood, where the societies themselves and international actors have actively sought to contribute to the democratisation process.

Democracy reflects a different content of meaning according to the type of politics. Nowadays it has become clear that in the political discourse, there is a lively debate about the value content of democracies, which also presents the different attitudes in the East and in the West of the European continent.

In the new annual report on the state of democracy in the world, Freedom House ranks the states of the Western Balkans in the category of states with a "hybrid regime" and in the category of states with a semi-consolidated democratic regime. Based on the report, in most of the Western Balkan states there is a decline in democracy (Freedom House 2022). While these regimes combine elements of democracy and authoritarian rule, they are analytically distinct from both. They may be democratic in the minimal sense since they feature regular, competitive elections, but their dysfunctional institutions are unable to deliver the definitive components of a liberal democracy: checks and balances, the rule of law, and robust protections for the rights and liberties of all (Freedom House 2022).

In the past decade, in Albania and North Macedonia we could withness several antidemocratic and illiberal practices. Civil society from these countries are confronting permanent disquieting threats. However, the individuals and groups that compose each country's civil society have remained steadfast in their efforts to hold bad actors accountable and promote the public good. Throughout the 18-year democratic decline documented by Nations in Transit, civil society has remained the highest performing indicator: in the 2022 edition it averaged 4.21, vastly overperforming the year's average overall Democracy Score of 3.43 (Freedom House 2022).

This study draws on analysis of evidence and data on the role of civil society in Albania and North Macedonia to investigate whether and to what extent the civil society can affect the democratisation process, and the manner in which the civil society has in turn been affected by the same process.

Methodology

The emergence of civil society has been a major feature of the democratisation processes. While a large amount of work has been developed on its significance for the legitimacy of a democratic regime, the question of its relationship with the democratisation tendencies on one hand and autocratisation on the other has been answered in limited ways, at least as it relates to recent major developments that have affected the quality of democracies of the Western Balkans. While there has been a rapid and extensive spread of civil society institutions and practices in the region, the 'internalisation' of the 'norm' of civil society has emerged as a benchmark in assessing the capacities of civil society to bring or contribute to a change. Thus, the role of civil society in both democratisation and autocratisation tendencies can be further enlightened with the application of the benchmark of internalisation of the norm of civil society.

What constitutes a norm of civil society? This article builds on Katzenstein's definition of international norms as "collective expectations for the proper behaviour of actors with a given identity" (1996: 5). While there has been broad agreement among democracies on the necessity of the existence of civil society in a democracy, a feature of autocratisation has been the contestation and violation of civil society as a norm. Normative change does not occur immediately. According to the literature, the norm-like cycle includes three phases, namely the emergence, cascade, and internalisation phases (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). The cycle begins with the formulation of a new norm(s), continues with compliance to the new norm by the states and ends with the internalisation of the new norm; for example, increased independence of the civil society.

However, the nature, culture, and dynamics of civil society, provide the government actors with numerous points of co-optation or capture of civil society. Civil society has its own organisational culture and dynamics and has a tendency to accommodate or remain receptive to new demands of the government. In this direction, the autocratisation tendencies tend to contest the diffusion of civil society norms, resulting in a halting of internalisation of the norms related to civil society.

The cases of Albania and North Macedonia, as we argue in this paper, are a case in point. From this discussion emerges the two hypotheses of this article: (H1): "Internalisation of the civil society norms increases the chances for the civil society to play a role against autocratisation"; (H2): "the higher level of independence of the civil society from the government, the less the chances for the autocratising governments to co-opt or capture the civil society". Contributing to the empirical literature on the relationship between civil society and democratisation or autocratisation tendencies, this article looks to tackle and answer the following research questions: How the autocratisation tendencies impacted the chances of independence of civil society and internalisation of the civil society norm in Albania and in North Macedonia? Has civil society acted as a check on democratic backsliding?

We use a qualitative approach to choose data that comprised major develop-

ments as regards the democratic backsliding or democratisation in Albania and in North Macedonia mainly in the second decade of the 21st century, i.e. the 2010s. After collecting the data, we identified events that could be considered important factors in the developments surrounding the role and behaviour of civil society in democratic backsliding settings.

The cases of Albania and North Macedonia are important in two main aspects. First, Albania and North Macedonia are countries which have had increasing democratic backsliding in recent years. While North Macedonia has been able to bring an end to the democratic backsliding, Albania has continued to flow in autocratising waters. Second, the two countries have approximately 30 years of history of the emergence of civil society. Thus, assessing the relationship between civil society and autocratisation or democratisation tendencies can shed an important light on the role that civil society can play in democratic stability.

Albania in particular democratised during the post-Cold War era in the early 1990s with civil society mobilisation playing a crucial role in the downfall of their former communist regimes. Nevertheless, while in North Macedonia the civil society had been able to act as an effective counter to democratic backsliding and bring an end to it, the same has not been happening in Albania. This article argues that this is largely due to the levels of independence of civil society and of internationalisation of the norm of civil society.

The article continues with the examination of the main aspects of the relationship between civil society and illiberal regimes in Albania and in North Macedonia. It maps the journeys seen in both Albania and North Macedonia and attempts to detail the argument of the significance of civil society in checking democratic backsliding and the possibility of change, considering the features of civil society in a specific country. The final part provides concluding remarks.

Theory and literature review of civil society development and democratisation

The success of the concept called civil society and the fast development of the associative phenomenon, not only in post-communist Europe but all over the world, no longer ensured a unitary framework of interpretation. Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkan space represented an ideal territory for the transition to liberal democracy. We can observe the evolution of the civil society, but especially of some organizations that claim ostentatiously from this (Nimu–Pârvulescu–Todor 2016).

A common meaning of the term civil society leads us to the idea that this represents a society of the citizens. Etymologically, the term comes from the Latin language "societas civilis". In the political and public discourse, the term "societas civilis" is first used by Cicero. In his understanding, civil society covers not only the state and its individuals, but also the living conditions of a community which is politically civilized, enough developed to build cities, laws, social relations with all the advantages and freedoms of a civil life (Dobrescu–Ene 2009).

Other theorists consider, that civil society is a new, 20th century term for something very old in democracy, what we call freedom of association. Civil society exists because politicians tend to forget about voters, so civil society is reminding politicians that there are citizens, taxpayers which needs to be represented (Miroiu 2021).

In parallel with the concept of civil society, a series of related concepts were born and were used, such as social pact, civil order or civic culture. Jean Jacques Rousseau, in his work entitled *"Du contrat social; ou, Principes du droit politique"* emphasized that the social pact lies at the origin of society.

The expression *'civil society'* bears the imprint of a particular historical legacy, loaded with imprecision and contradictions. Reasons are several, one of these can be that the term received a double and successive understanding at it was used to name distinct realities (Tămaş 1993). Initially, civil society meant a society organized as a state, meaning the state. Later and in the present days, it represents a sphere of social life, coexisting with the state but autonomous from it, we could say, trying to be in a balance with it.

The term *'civil society'* appeared and gained an own meaning in the space of philosophical culture of the modern Western civilization. Basically, it covered realities and forms of organization specific to development level of these societies. This can be considered the main cause of the different understanding of the concept in non-western societies. So, the perception of civil society is directly related to the level of modernizations and the level of social and political development (Cioaba–Pavalan–Pogoceanu 1997).

Defining the concept *'civil society'* itself has proven to be a challenging task in both applied and academic circles, so much so that use of the term has become essentially stipulative and its meaning has to be declared in any particular context. The concept is used by different authors with different meanings and remains ambiguous (Amoore-Langley 2004). Accordingly, we will use *'civil society'* to refer to voluntary, non-profit, organized activities that is autonomous from the state.

In most of the cases, civil society is perceived as an entity which performs two basic functions, the so-called service delivery and advocacy, but in the case of Albania and North Macedonia, especially at the end of the 90's we can observe the assumption of a third task as well, which could best be called the reconstruction of social capital.

The idea that democracy, the rule of law and civil society are not totally connected and do not have a strong interaction it can be unacceptable for some (Glasius 2010). Especially nowadays, when in the perception of the main stream, terms like 'rule of law' and 'civil society' became the cornerstone of democracy. But if we use these in excess, the two notions, which explain almost any political fact, will not only become trivialized, but these will be heavily instrumentalized.

The term *'civil society'* has proved an exceedingly contentious one in both applied and academic circles since it has come into widespread use over the last 20 years or so within the development community. At one extreme some take it to mean any organized human activity not part of the state or the family, while at the other

end of the spectrum people use it to mean efforts intended to influence public policy but excluding the commercial sector, political parties, religions, etc. (Blair-Blue-Popovski-Trajkovski 2003). A democratic civil society is always open towards finding consensus, and not towards creating manufactured majorities.

In Albania and North Macedonia, the terms covering civil society, or its bodies, the so-called civil society organizations (CSO), or/and non-governmental organization (NGO) also take on a different meaning. The civil society and civil society organizations step by step created a frame which is divided between NGOs (formal, officially registered bodies) and non-formal organizations (NFOs, which may be short-lived and more or less well organized). Both types are having the same goal, to support efforts in assisting civil society development (USAID 2023).

In the Albanian and in the North Macedonian societies, the post-communist transition took place in a specific societal context. Based on this we can admit, that the consequences created by this specific context will produce effects for a long time to come. The transition from communism to a new type of society determined decisive mutations in terms of the relations between the civil sector and politics (Bojicic-Dzelilovic–Ker-Lindsay–Kostovicova 2013; Wunsch 2018; Żornaczuk 2014).

Our point of view can seem severe, but is based on a series of observations of some structural phenomena. This finding is also supported by numerous specialized works which emphasize at a different extent, the obstacles that continue to oppose the efficiency of the democratization process and the strengthening of the civil society in Albania and North Macedonia (Kacarska 2008; Hummel 2020).

If we would like to define briefly what is civil society in this specific social context created in Albania and North Macedonia, we can say that civil society is most generally understood as an initial but well-ordered social arrangement. Current political philosophy explores civil society as a condition of society and seeks to identify the necessary societal infrastructure for a functioning participatory democracy (Buzhar 2004; Heidbreder 2012).

On the other hand, civil society can be defined as a result of a common legislative framework that enables the individual to associate and communicate in the public sphere (Börzel 2010; Cekik 2017).

Based on the history and the experiences of the past decades, we can affirm that the development of the legal framework for the civil society it is connected to the level of the democratisation process in the two post-communist states (Green 2002; Conces 2007).

Any assessment regarding the genesis and the evolution of the civil society in Central and South-Eastern Europe (especially the case, of Albania and North Macedonia) it cannot skip the specific context and the different pace of development (Kroupa, Štogr 2006; Mavrikos-Adamou 2010). The path was given by the existing diversity, starting from the collapse of the communist regimes (and the typology of the transition), to the apparition of the first entities belonging to the civil society (Chaney 2017; Christopoulou, Roumeliotou 2006; Dyrstad, Halvard, Kristen, Simkus, Listhaug 2011; Engstörm 2002a, Engström 2002b).

The collapse of the communist regimes in Albania and North Macedonia did not caused the overnight disappearance of the entire set of mindsets, values and perceptions deeply rooted in the society during the decades of the communist period (Meyer–Neumayr–Traxler–Vandor 2017).

If we would like to establish a chronological hierarchy with the main development phases of the civil society in the two former communist countries, we will need to focus on three main stages.

The first stage in the development process of the civil society is represented by a rudimentary approach, characterized by the lack of resources, fragile democratic system, weak local involvement, legislative vacuum and a very small number of badly coordinated entities. This approach was valid in the first decade after the change of the totalitarian regimes (Bernhagen 2007; Federowicz 2005; Ackerman-Rose 2007).

A period of settlement followed, marked by the emergence of new actors and representatives of the civil society, using external expertise and resources (Péterfi 2009).

The last stage, is represented by a certain institutional expansion and consolidation of the civil society in South Eastern Europe. We can observe a network of entities built on a sustainable structure, covering more and more areas and fields of activity (Kákai 2009).

In the past 20 years Albania implemented major reforms, especially in the area of the democratisation process, the rule of law, but also in other areas closely monitored by the European Union in the context of EU enlargement conditionalities (Transparency International 2021).

The communist heritage of the former governance structures in Albania, as well as the way in which regime change was made during the 1990s are often mentioned as key factors that have influenced the difficulties the country has faced in consolidating democracy (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2022).

North Macedonia's road in the democratisation process is long and problematic, full of obstacles originating from the past. The country's reforms have focused simultaneously on three main issues: state-building, democratic development and establishment of a functioning market economy (Graan 2013). The government aimed to reduce state capture and to strengthen democracy and the rule of law. While it has made some progress since the change of government in 2017, mainly regarding human rights and freedoms many economic and political challenges remain (Jusufi 2022).

During the 1990s, ethnic Albanians contested the nation-state approach of political elites, requesting more collective rights, including the introduction of an official bi-ethnic state system (Crowther 2018). A fast resolution of the conflicts was supported by the European Union and the United States envisioned political and constitutional reforms and introducing some power-sharing features (Jusufi 2018).

Still, the most critical aspect of the civil society in Albania and North Macedonia is represented by lack of power and impact over the politics and political lead-

ership. In these terms the most important need in this case is the creation of a significantly larger group of organizations capable of forming the core of such a critical mass (Todorova 2018; Trajkovski 1999).

Beyond the deficiencies but also the successes and failures of the civil society from Albania and North Macedonia, throughout the three decades of democracy, it can be said that it has evolved meanderingly, following a similar trajectory to the South-East European society as a whole (Klekovski–Nuredinoska–Stojanova 2010; Kondonis 2002).

International and European context of civil society development

Civic society's involvement in public governance today is evolving against a backdrop of several worldwide developments that are transforming the socioeconomic dynamics of countries with both opportunities and challenges. Indeed, the recent commitments to the sustainable development agenda made by the world leaders at the global level reflect a shared vision of development and an effort by the international community to devise strategies that will simultaneously help minimize challenges and maximize opportunities. The involvement of the civil society in public governance may well be a key strategy for serving these twin goals (UN 2008)

Neither globalization nor liberalization is wholly positive or negative. Similarly, while the recent surge of democratization in the Western Balkan countries constitutes an opportunity, it also manifests deficits. The use of the new communication tools in accessing information has formidable potential for accelerating citizen connectivity and civic participation, but has so far been used to this end in relatively few places. The rise of civil society and its demand for a greater role in the process of democratization have amplified the need for greater civic engagement (UN 2008).

The idea according to which the European Union was one of the main normative landmarks and one of the main shaping factors in the democratization of the former communist states is unanimously accepted. Also, it plays a crucial role in the path of democratization and in the integration process of the Balkan states. However, from the perspective of the neorealist theory, it is not so much about the EU, it is about the structure of the international relations system.

In this case, the unipolar nature of international politics after the end of the Cold War created a framework of possibilities, constraints and pressures in which the states of the Balkan region did not have to many options (Brie–Jusufi–Polgar 2021).

The European Union is founded on the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law. Among these fundamental freedoms is the right of citizens to form associations to pursue a common purpose which respects the above-mentioned principles and to participate actively in society an in the democratisation process.

One of the important roles for the civil society and its organisations both within the EU and globally is indeed the facilitation of citizens participation in decision-making processes, whether they be at the local, provincial, national or even international level. However, this is a role that civil society often struggle to fulfill effectively and it is a particular capacity challenge for the civil society in countries in transition (Forester–Sunar 2011).

According to political scientists such as Robert Dahl, democracies must provide equal and adequate opportunities for citizens to participate. These opportunities should see citizens: a) putting issues on the agenda; b) expressing their views on those issues, and c) exercising some form of authority through voting or otherwise (Dahl 2006). All three of these rights are enshrined in the European Union's Lisbon Treaty and, for both the EU as a whole and its individual Member States, present significant challenges to be upheld and stand as useful benchmarks for those seeking EU membership.

Of course, it is not only the EU which looks to support and promote civil society and the process of democratisation as a crucial aspect of good governance. The UN Report People Matter: Civic Engagement in Public Governance argues that the enrolment of the civil society in the democratisation process is regarded as an important governance norm that can strengthen the decision-making arrangements of the state and produce positive outcomes. The report goes on to outline over multiple areas in which UN resolutions and declarations have promoted the importance of the enrolment of the civil society in participatory processes (UN 2008).

European integration mainly concerns the countries that give priority to reforms from the fields like the rule of law, fundamental rights, democratic values and institutions, transparent public administration, economic development ensuring increased competitiveness. Candidate countries from the Western Balkans, as Albania and North Macedonia must ensure in this sense the effective involvement of public institutions as well as the civil society.

The civil society in Albania and North Macedonia has been produced and reproduced. It has undergone series of transformations. New initiatives have been launched and some of the existing structures have been enhanced or transformed reflecting the changes in the socio-political context of the countries. As the countries moved to initial democratisation phase in early 1990s, the concept of the civil society was introduced, a practice of which had limited prior experience (Brie–Jusufi–Polgar 2023).

Democratisation and civil society in Albania

During the investigated timeframe by the present research, Albania realized major reforms, especially in the area of democratization and the rule of law, but also in other areas closely monitored by the European Union in the context of EU enlargement. After the fall of the communist regime Albania started to build up

democracy step by step. This represented a challenging process, since big parts of the population were deeply distrustful with the state institutions and because there was a huge lack of actors committed to democracy.

Still, after the experience of the communist dictatorship, Albanians have consistently shown solid support for democracy as the ultimate goal of transition. Similarly, political and social actors have consensually embraced democracy as the only way and solution.

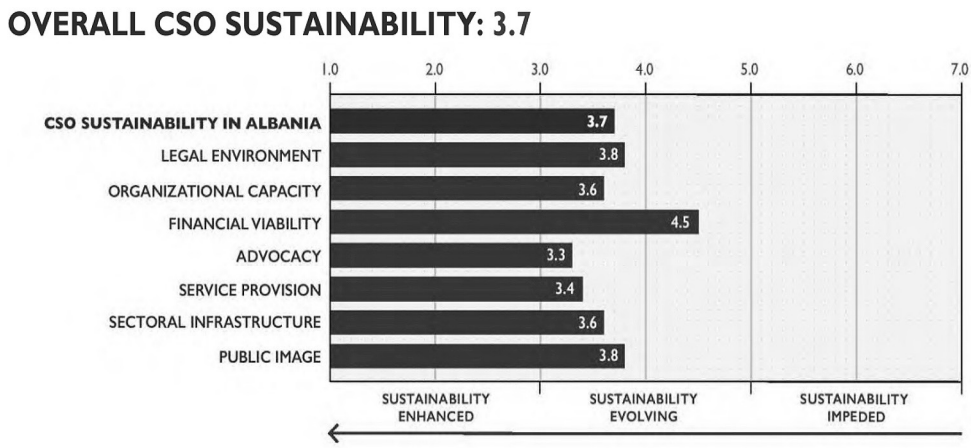
Similar to the process from North Macedonia, the role of the individuals in understanding the importance of the civil society and its potential, in the democratization process it has been crucial. In all these phases, there has been an increase in the number of civil society organizations in Albania.

Slowly, but a new legal framework was created, so individuals were free to form and join independent political or civil society groups, which can assemble and operate free of state intervention. The Albanian constitution ensures a wide range of freedoms of assembly and association (Article 46). Civil society organizations can also register freely, manage their affairs and address all matters of public debate without state interference or restrictions (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2022).

The current stage of the civil society in Albania can be labelled as the new civil society, as the circle has moved from generalist to specialized organizations and where the newly established organizations are led by the new generation of young leaders of the country.

However, in many areas, the Albanian political leadership still fails to consider and accommodate the interest of civil society actors. Over time, some civil society organizations have assumed a stronger public role in the Albanian public sphere and become more engaged in policymaking and in the democratization process.

Figure 1. Civil Society Organization Sustainability in Albania



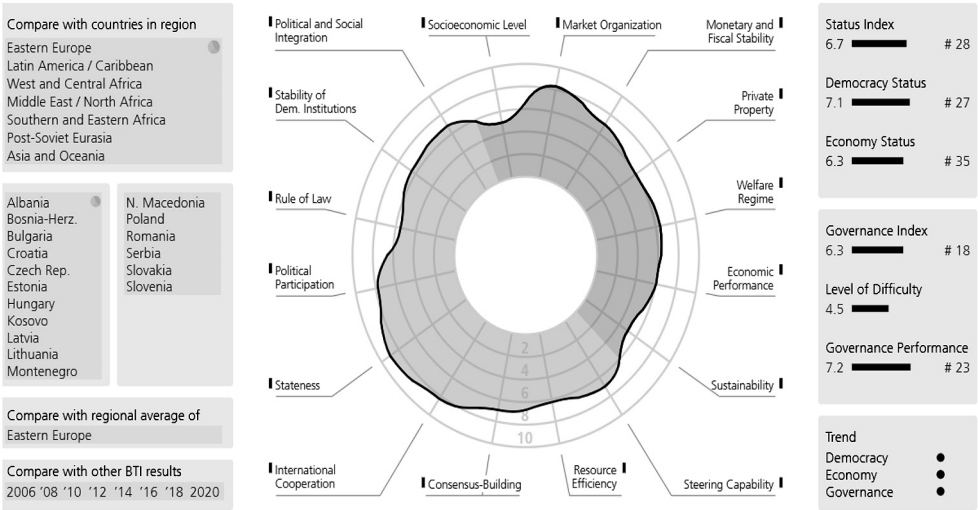
Source: USAID, 2021 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe and Euroasia, 25th Edition, https://www.fhi360.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/csosi-europe-eurasia-2021-report.pdf

International support has contributed to the creation of a relatively active civil sector. The continuous improvement of the legal and institutional framework for the inclusion of the civil society and its organizations ensured the possibility for these to play an important role in the democratization process.

Public opinion polls show citizen's approval of democratic norms and actions of the civil society. Also, Albanian citizens show more interest in voluntary work, an essential ingredient of a successful civil sector. According to the Balkan Barometer 2020, trust in the main institutions (the parliament, the government, and the judiciary) is among the lowest in the Western Balkans. The trust in democracy and the rule of law institutions is particularly low (Balkan Barometer 2020).

Civil society has the possibility to join policymaking, to be part of the democratic monitoring of this process. More and more, the legal and institutional frame offers the possibility to include civil society's feedback in the political decision-making processes (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2022).

Figure 2. Status of democracy, market economy and good governance in Albania



Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung, Transformation Atlas, https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en/our-projects/transformationindex-bti

In the past 10 years, Albania had a dynamically developing civil society, with many civil society organizations active in the democratization process. Mass media still is the main visibility tool for the civil society to promote their mission and work in the democratization process. Even though Albania's civil society has been strongly politicized in the last decade but it's organizations still represents the main private providers of social services in the country (USAID 2021).

Democratization and civil society in North Macedonia

This first phase of emergence of civil society in North Macedonia covered the period of 1991–2001 and corresponded to the period of the start of the inter-ethnic disputes in the country that culminated with the armed conflict in 2001 and that ended with the signing of OFA in August 2001 (Trajkovski 1999; UNDP 1999).

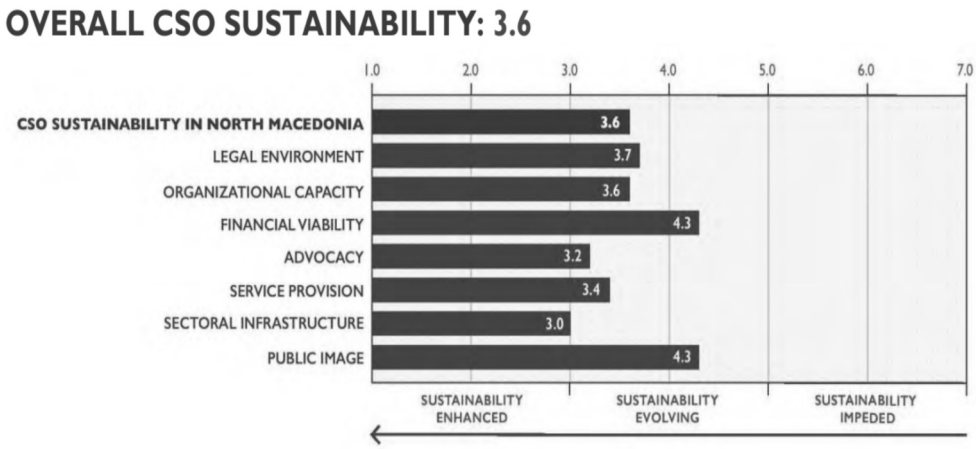
The new civil society of the post-OFA period, which was the second phase of the development of the civil society in the country, was expected to establish safeguards for the protection of the inter-ethnic cohesion in the country in the spirit of OFA (Klekovski–Nuredinoska–Stojanova 2010; Gaber-Damjanovska 2007; Conces 2007; Grødeland 2006; MCIC 2006; Mungiu–Pippidi 2005). The third phase of development of civil society of North Macedonia concerns the period of 2010s and covers the period until present times. It is the phase when the civil society witnessed its opening to regional cooperation and intensive efforts to foster the regional cooperation, as part of the stipulation of the funding requirements of the major donors active in the region of the Western Balkans (Brie–Jusufi–Polgar 2023).

The role of the individuals in understanding the importance of the civil society and its potential, in the democratization process it has been crucial. In all these phases, there has been an increase in the number of civil society organizations in North Macedonia. Earlier, the civil society circle consisted of very few organizations. With the turn of century and with the change in the reform agenda towards democratization and transition to European integration, the number of the civil society organizations tripled. The current stage of the civil society in North Macedonia can be labelled as the new civil society, as the circle has moved from generalist to specialized organizations and where the newly established organizations are led by the new generation of young leaders of the country. This growing interest was also replicated in different spheres of civil society work, including in think tanks, federations of the civil society organizations, etc. All of these circles form the pillars of the civil society community in North Macedonia. This growing civil society community provides an alternative source of information on issues for both policy makers and wider public and it also provides opportunities for popular debate, discussion and criticism of public issues in the process of democratization (Brie–Jusufi–Polgar 2023).

North Macedonia's legal framework and institutional mechanisms are adequate for civil society participation in policymaking. In North Macedonia civil society participates in public discussions at the national and local levels, but this practice is rather sparse. Even though government has declared openness and interest to collaborate with the representatives of the civil sector. For example, the Strategy for Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society 2018–2020 aimed to create a stronger working relationship between the NGO sector and the government (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2022).

However, in many areas, the political leadership still fails to consider and accommodate the interest of civil society actors. Over time, some civil society organizations have assumed a stronger public role and become more engaged in policymaking and in the democratization process.

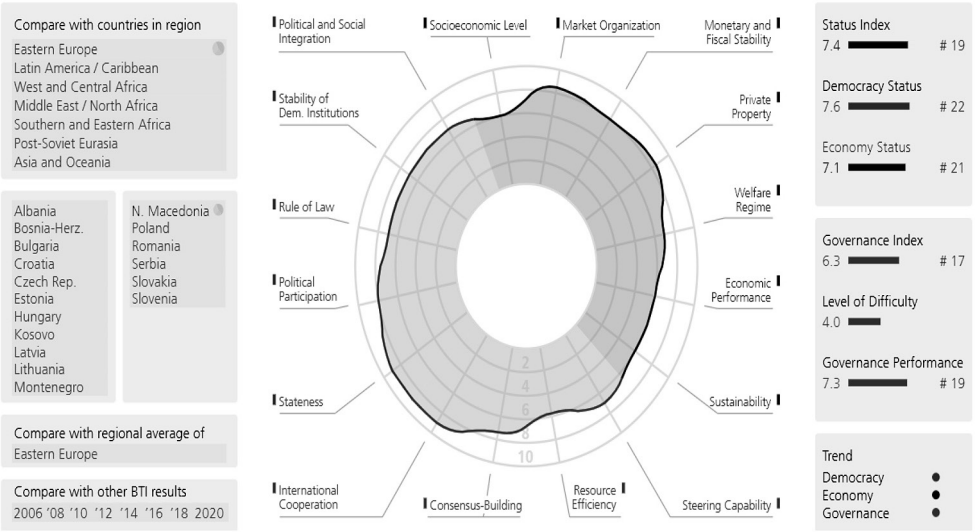
Figure 3. Civil Society Organization Sustainability in North Macedonia



Source: USAID, 2021 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe and Euroasia, 25th Edition, https://www.fhi360.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/csosi-europe-eurasia-2021-report.pdf

Public opinion polls show citizen's approval of democratic norms, even though trust in the institutions and especially in political parties remains low. The opinion polls, however, also show that the primary concerns of most citizens are socio-economic issues and economic stability rather than democratic norms and procedures (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2022). According to the Balkan Barometer 2020, trust in the main institutions (the parliament, the government, and the judiciary) is among the lowest in the Western Balkans. The trust in democracy and the rule of law institutions is particularly low (Balkan Barometer 2020).

Figure 4. Status of democracy, market economy and good governance in North Macedonia



Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung, Transformation Atlas, https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en/our-projects/transformationindex-bti

Since its independence, North Macedonia had a dynamically developing civil society, with many civil society organizations active in the democratization process. North Macedonia's civil society has been strongly politicized in the last decade. Mass media still is the main visibility tool for the civil society to promote their mission and work in the democratization process (USAID 2021).

Discussion: The civil society response to democratic backsliding in Western Balkan democracies

While civil society is analytically distinct from the state, the economy, and political society, in reality, the boundaries are blurred. A lack of autonomy curtails their ability to act as democratic watchdogs by ensuring accountability and controlling the power abuses of political elites. Against this backdrop, what has been the relationship between civil society and democratic backsliding in Western Balkans? Democratic backsliding in the Western Balkans is mainly a feature of weak democratic institutions (Jusufi 2022). Weak horizontal and vertical accountability mechanisms, such as the judiciary and civil society, prompt the political elite to resort to extra-constitutional and extra-legal tactics. Specifically, the absence of a strong civil society able to check on the behaviour of the executive can lead to backsliding.

This is relevant for the Western Balkan democracies of Albania and North Macedonia where there have been recent situations of democratic backsliding and state capture of the democratic state institutions by the executive. The capture of

state institutions indirectly has led to the co-optation of civil society by the executive elite due to the dependence of civil society on government funds and the ability of the executive to direct resources to civil society institutions perceived as suitable for their policies.

Thus, as argued by Lorch, the autonomy of civil society is likely to be circumscribed in weak democracies undergoing backsliding (Lorch 2021). With the contestation and violation of the civil society norm, the backsliding regimes can prevent the internalisation of the civil society norm.

To analyse whether civil society can play a check on and resist democratic backsliding, autonomy or independence of the civil society and chances of internalisation of the civil society norm can play an important role. Thereby, based on whether civil society enjoys autonomy and whether a particular society has been able to internalise the civil society norm, the civil society can either counter democratic backsliding or be co-opted by the illiberal regimes.

Albania

As North Macedonia was exiting from backsliding, Albania was entering into the waters of democratic backsliding. This backsliding in the country started to occur under the rule of the left-wing PS (Partia Socialiste e Shqipërisë – Socialist Party of Albania) party that came to power in 2013 and has maintained power as of writing this article (V-Dem 2023). This backsliding in Albania has been documented accordingly. V-Dem beginning in 2019 has classified Albania as Electoral Autocracy, with the assessment of continuous worsening of the situation. Formerly classified as an 'electoral democracy', including in 2020, in 2019 and 2021 it transitioned to electoral autocracy.

It was a liberal democracy in 2016 but was downgraded to electoral democracy in 2017 and to electoral autocracy in 2019 (V-Dem 2023). The Freedom House's Nations in Transit noted in 2022 that the civil society in Albania faces intimidation, harassment, derogatory media campaigns, and lawsuits, especially when their activities are critical towards political, business and media players (Freedom House 2023), with elements of state capture (Transparency International 2021).

Unlike North Macedonia, the civil society of Albania has so far failed to counter democratic backsliding. While there have been a number of corruption cases that should have galvanised civil society, including the cases of public-private partnerships concerning incinerators, road construction, and last but not least the US prosecutors' charge against former FBI counterintelligence official Charles F. McGonigal for taking money from advisers of Prime Minister Edi Rama for the purposes of silencing Rama's rival opposition in Albania (Bushati 2023), there has been no strong reaction by the civil society. This is in large part due to the fact that, prior to the current backsliding processes, Albania's civil society had all the features of being weak and affiliated with the same political elites that came to

capture key democratic state institutions. This lack of autonomy has prevented civil society in Albania from acting as an effective accountability mechanism against the power abuses committed by political elites.

A significant section of Albania's civil society has gone silent in regard to democratic backsliding, limiting the chances for internalisation of the civil society norm. The alignment between civil society and political elites has compromised independence within Albanian civil society. This finding that civil society in the country has been silent due to pressures by political elites does not imply that civil society has no agency. In the past, there has been civil society resistance to a number of government projects, including the issues that relate to student fees.

However, as time passes, civil society has gone silent. This compromise has hindered democratic pushback by civil society and the forming of civil society-based opposition. Alternative explanations for the inability of civil society to stem democratic backsliding in the country include civil society's relatively low levels of capacities. In spite of his attacks on civil liberties, populist prime minister Rama has been largely successful in portraying his rule as democratically legitimate, owing to his electoral mandate, ongoing popularity, and the general silence of civil society. Accordingly, no broad-based civil society mobilisation against democratic backsliding in Albania has occurred to date.

North Macedonia

North Macedonia was among the most serious cases of democratic backsliding in Southeast Europe. The backsliding occurred in the rule of the right wing VMRO-DPMNE (Vnatrešena Makedonska revolucionerna organizacija-Demokratska partija za Makedonsko nacionalno edinstvo/Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity) party in the period of 2006–2016.

The country's specific trajectory from 2006 onwards until at least 2015, was marked by the capture of the state, including the judiciary, of businesses, and media, but also with attempts to influence civil society and the pursuance of grand national goals such as the ideology around antiquisation of the country as a means for re-inventing Macedonian national identity.

The conservative-national VMRO-DPMNE party, led by Nikola Gruevski, beginning with winning the elections in 2006, proceeded to gradually dismantle liberal checks and balances, extended partisan control over media and civil society and developed a harshly anti-liberal ideology, which sought to de-legitimise liberal competitors as well as minority ethnic communities as foreign to the majority national community (Jusufi 2022). It was a pattern of democratic regression and backsliding, that led to the dismantling of liberal democracy.

This regression in North Macedonia's democratic practice was accordingly documented. The Varieties of Democracy Project (V-Dem) stated that in the case of North Macedonia, all of V-Dems component measures of performance – liberal,

egalitarian, deliberative, and participatory democracy – went into decline during the period 2006 through 2015 (V-Dem 2019).

The Freedom House's Nations in Transit in 2016 noted that North Macedonia suffered the greatest decline among any of the countries covered (Freedom House 2016). It clearly appeared to have gone out of balance and drifted decisively in the direction of illiberal if not authoritarian politics.

The reconstruction of the centre of the capital under the project 'Skopje 2014' was an expression of ethnonationalism and represented the desire to reconstruct the Macedonian nation based on historical myths and narratives. A massive build-up of statues around Skopje's central area was a reference to the attempt at forming a new national identity (Vangeli 2011). 'Skopje 2014' as a symbol of a new ethnically Macedonian nationalist narrative was divisive for the country's civil society. It generated an intense domestic nationalist backlash, setting the stage for intensified polarisation of civil society (Graan 2013).

The civil society organisations critical of the project were portrayed as a potential risk. There was a tendency to limit the democratic space, marginalising and delegitimising civil society voices. Civil society was presented as a potential hindrance to a successful transition to grand national goals. The survival of the nation was presented as the ultimate goal to which even civil society could be sacrificed.

The backsliding regime of VMRO-DPMNE led by Gruevski actively borrowed from the 'authoritarian toolbox' used in authoritarian regimes by imposing control and penalties on civil society and their operations. It attacked civil society organisations and associations by delegitimising them as enemies of the nation, defunding them, and sending tax controls in order to undercut or eliminate them. By controlling the Ministry of Finance, for example, the government controlled the state bodies tasked with inspecting the financial activities of civil society and their compliance with tax laws. Gruevski vilified liberal civil society groups and well-known figures from the liberal intelligentsia.

Thus, vertical mechanisms of accountability such as civil associations or organisations were attacked or explicitly controlled to avoid their acting as checks and balances and the mobilisation of citizens. The regime, lacking its support in civil society, chose to establish its own conservative civil society initiatives and movements. It was in response to this move by the regime that the Macedonian Association of Journalists (MAN) was established as a rival to the long-standing Association of Journalists (ZNM). In this way, the regime sought to organise and draw strength from conservative civil society by developing its own stridently partisan groups. The critical civil society organisations were continuously denigrated as traitors by the ruling élite and government-controlled media.

The regime chose to enter the media as well. Before 2008, the largest print media in Macedonia were controlled by foreign, mainly German, investors. Later, foreign owners were replaced by members of the regime or their friends who used their media outlets to further their own business and political interests and to reduce scrutiny of their activities.

The regime used the affiliated electronic and print media, including the public broadcaster, to pressurise and discredit rival political parties, often targeting individual politicians through selective coverage. It also used its power to silence media outlets that criticised them, leading to the closure of some of the prominent critical media such as A1, which was shut down for financial reasons. It also used government resources to undermine the independence of civil society organisations and the opposition media by directing the funds to the media seen as appropriate by the government. It also used regulatory threats and libel suits against critical media outlets and journalists.

Control over key media and the marginalisation of critics allowed the ruling coalition to shape much of the public discourse, severely limiting competition and accountability (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2014; Crowther 2017). Thus, control of the media constituted a central element of the Macedonian regime. The regime's dominance of the media landscape allowed the outlets to be biased, reporting more often and more in favour of the regime and against the opposition rivals.

Despite the heavy hand of the government to support the nationalistic policies, they were continuously contested by a large number of civil society organisations, which set the stage for civil society to begin acting as a check on democratic backsliding. Beginning in February 2015 the then-opposition leadership released transcripts obtained by the country's secret police through illegal wiretapping. The recordings laid bare the degree of state capture that the VMRO-DPMNE had achieved. The recordings also revealed authoritarian ambitions to control the media and civil society (Senior Experts' Group on systemic Rule of Law issues in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia 2015).

The release of the wiretapping content caught the imagination of thousands of Macedonians, drawing masses to the streets from early 2015 into 2017, to protest the authoritarian leanings of the government (Jusufi 2018). Labelled 'Colourful Revolution' by the participants, with the help of civil society organisations vast crowds of people across the country were mobilised; and they demanded a democratic change. The protests were driven by civil society bringing people of all ages together including young people, students, intellectuals, members of opposition parties, and the jobless. They successfully protested against the curbing of civil and political rights. They were ready to fill the streets and squares in Skopje, with Ilindenska Street in front of the government building as the strategic and symbolic centre. The protesters stayed there in tents until Gruevski was ousted from office.

The 'colourful revolution' led by the civil society united people of all stripes, ages, and colours to air their grievances against the government (Kjuka 2016). The result was the departure of Prime Minister Gruevski in January 2016, and the formation of a new democratic government in April 2017, following the legislative elections in December 2016 (Jusufi 2022).

Civil society became instrumental in the subsequent collapse of the regime with the election of the new government in 2017. As there has been the role of civil society and protest movements in limiting the potential for authoritarian con-

solidation elsewhere (Lorch 2021), the civil society in North Macedonia was able to act as an effective force for ending democratic backsliding.

Conclusions

Accession to the European Union has proved to be, through its own mechanisms for accession negotiations, an important motivating factor with a large impact on the process of implementing structural reforms and democratizing the region of the Western Balkans. Deepening integration through opening up and conducting accession negotiations has most often also meant a process of stabilization and resolution of the political turmoil that is constantly encountered in Albania and North Macedonia.

Before the european integration process started for Albania and North Macedonia, the role and the participation of civil society has not been an area of interest for political decision-makers. This changed with a rising interest in the democratic credentials of the European Union.

The current stage of the civil society in Albania and in North Macedonia can be marked as the raise of the new civil society, as the circle has moved from generalist to specialized organizations and where the newly established organisations are led by the new generation of young leaders of the country. Nevertheless, the main problem of the civil society in Albania and North Macedonia remains the absence of the critical mass, needed to become a serious actor at either national or local level.

Basically, Albanian and North Macedonian political leaderships and societies needs to decide what should civil society be, and what role should play. There are several possibilities. In the context of this research civil society can play the role of an agent, perhaps even a ferment, of change. On the other hand, it can stay as a simple, but passive actor.

According to the well-known role of civil society organizations played in starting the democratization and social development processes in Central and Eastern Europe after the fall of communism seems that the first option should be taken into consideration. But if we analyse these democratization and social development processes more carefully, we will observe the implosion of the system of rights and freedoms and the emergence of so-called 'illiberal democracies".

The case study of Albania and North Macedonia with particular consideration over the role and perception of the civil society in the process of democratisation, help us to test both of the hypothesis. The results of this study partially confirm H1, which assumes that the internalisation of the civil society norms increases the chances for the civil society to play a role against autocratisation in the analysed countries. Research results show that an updated, internationalised civil society can prevent autocratic tendencies. Nevertheless, civil society it is not a major party in the decision-making process or policymaking, even though it could provide its

inputs to the democratisation of the state. Still, civil society becomes an important partner when we consider that it represents the main private provider of social services. This support and role become indispensable in implementing public policies.

The second hypothesis which assumes the importance of independence of the civil society from political actors, in order to avoid the capture of the civil society by autocratic entities is partially confirmed. Independence of the civil society is very important, but civil society is likely to improve its role even when the politics as an alternative source of change is strong. Thus, need for democratisation is likely to stimulate more civil society work and role. Despite the relative power of politics, democratisation can have unintended positive effect on the situation of civil society.

The results presented in this study suggest that almost all the major achievements in the process of democratisation, from Albania and North Macedonia can give a role and can positively affect a civil society community.

Basically, *'civil society'* remains a notion with political valences which, because it does not have an independent meaning, is associated with politics. In this context autocratic tendencies are having a huge impact over the independent character of the civil society and over the perception of this as an independent entity.

The concept of *'civil society'* is used either to clarify the meaning of the movements for the defence of human rights, or to legitimize the protests (economic, social, ethnic, cultural) against the authorities, or to mobilize in favour of charitable actions. But this instrumentalization, positive or negative, civic or uncivil of the civil society, amplifies, through the effect of reaction and multiplication, its influence. Still, we can definitely affirm that civil society from Albania and North Macedonia is acting as a check on democratic backsliding.

The history of the concept reflects this equally semantic and ideological evolution, which created the framework for its continuous rebirth. Even if the apparent retroactivity of the concept is the effect of a linear process of progressive accumulations that shaped a definition which cannot be framed in a single hypostasis.

Nowadays it is still obvious that the extreme polarization that permeate the Albanian and the North Macedonian political systems also restrict the effective participation and contribution of the civil society to the democratisation process.

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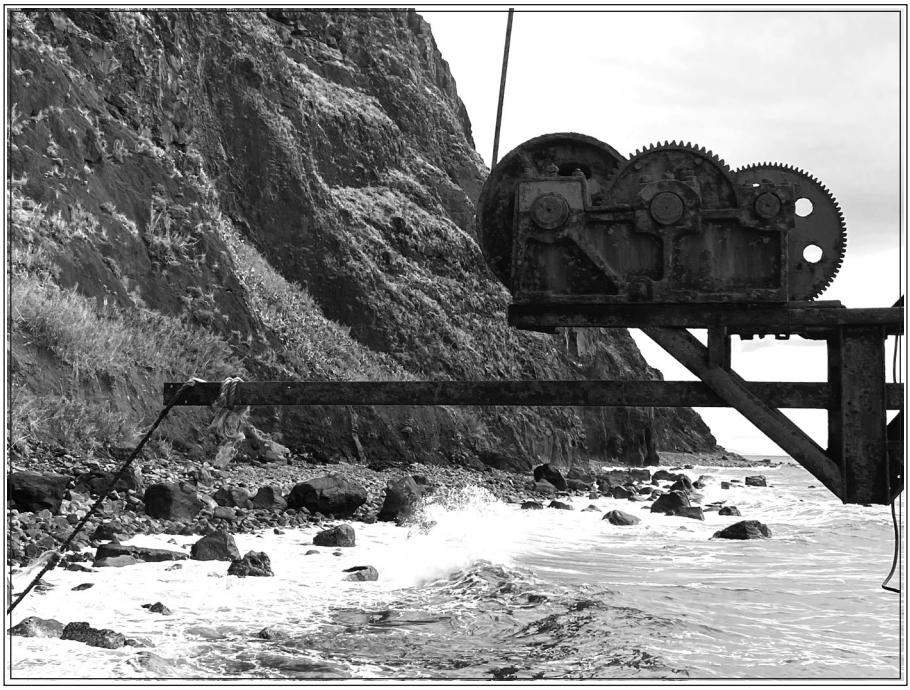

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The Role of Civil Society in Policy Making and Europeanization in Montenegro

Laura-Maria Herța

Introduction and methodology: conceptual claims and research design

This study is organized along the following assumption: the case of Montenegro stands out, in terms of candidate country from the Western Balkan region, because the process of Europeanization, albeit shortcomings, exposes genuine norm incorporation. Moreover, the particular role of civil society organizations (CSOs) is noteworthy in this case study. Our main argument is that the legitimacy of European Union's rules, norms, and values in Montenegrin perception shapes the country's relations with this regional structure (EU), but also models the state identity itself and the state interests. The first part of the chapter will dwell on the theoretical and methodological framework, by selecting the relevant social-constructivist assumptions. The second part will cover the literature review on processes of Europeanization in the Western Balkans. Finally, the last part of this chapter will briefly present EU's relations with Montenegro and will corroborate the main contention by analysing the relations between government and CSOs, and relations between Montenegro and the EU from a co-determinative, agency-structure type of interaction.

According to conventional social-constructivist theorizing, the international reality (international structure) is both ideational and material. It cannot be reduced to the sole role of ideas and practices ("ideas all the way down", Wendt 2009), but it also encompasses more than the mere existing material forces. However, the structure of international politics is ultimately rather social than material.

The main constructivist assumptions point to the following facts. First, the structures of human association are determined by shared ideas, and not so much by material facts. Second, state interests, state identities are constituted and shaped by these shared meanings and shared ideas, and not pre-given. Therefore, there is a strong commitment to the role of ideas, norms, shared values, and shared knowledge in the constructivist epistemology. State interests and state identities are generated by intense interaction, by intersubjective practices, and by agent-structure relations. Within the international realm, processes of interaction create, shape, alter, strengthen not only state behaviour, but, more deeply, the very identity and interests of states (Wendt 2009, Ruggie 1998, Smith 2001).

The effects of states' interactions are both regulative and constitutive. Regarding the constitutive effects of social norms and institutions, James March and Johan Olsen explored the "logic of appropriateness" and emphasized the differences between strategic interaction and the rule-guided behaviour (March, Olsen 2004). Building on March and Olsen, Thomas Risse pinpointed to two different logics: one is based on cost-benefit analysis, which means that the EU constrains states' behaviour (and the role of EU conditionality is paramount here), and state actors try to pursue their interests through strategic behaviour. The second one stresses the fact that the EU is perceived as *social* institution, it is not seen as external to actors, and states "are deeply embedded in and affected by the social institutions in which they act" (2009: 147–148). The latter provides the ontological framework for our analysis. As underlined by Risse, social norms do not merely regulate behaviour, by enabling the actors to do something or by punishing deviating behaviour, "they also constitute the identity of actors in the sense of defining who 'we' are as members of a social community". Moreover, "EU membership implies the voluntary acceptance of a particular political order as legitimate and entails the recognition of a set of rules and obligations as binding" (Risse 2009: 145–146). The ideational structure of international or regional politics does not only determine state agents to act in a certain way, by regulating their behaviours and foreign-policy agenda, it also has constitutive effects. The latter means that during interactions with attributes of the structure, the states constantly define, re-define, nuance their national interests and their identities. At their turn, these agents have the possibility to reproduce or to modify the structure.

Structuration refers to the dynamic process whereby structures are created and then recurrently reproduced through social practices (Loyal 2003). Anthony Giddens argued that "the basic domain of study of the social sciences, according to the theory of structuration, is neither the experience of the individual actor, nor the existence of any form of societal totality, but social practices ordered across space and time. Human social activities, like some self-reproducing items in nature, are recursive. That is to say, they are not brought into being by social actors but continually recreated by them via the very means whereby they express themselves as actors. In and through their activities agents reproduce the conditions that make these activities possible" (1985: 2). Therefore, human actions are, on

the one hand, predetermined, in the sense that they are contingent upon a pre-existing social structure (which is governed by rules, norms, laws), but the structure and the rules are not, on the other hand, permanent and exogenous to actors, but they are rather maintained, modified, recreated, reproduced by human action or by agency. As underlined by Wendt, "just as social structures are ontologically dependent upon and therefore constituted by the practices and self-understandings of agents, the causal powers and interests of those agents, in their own turn, are constituted and therefore explained by structure" (1987: 359). Ian Manners introduced the idea of "normative power Europe" in 2002 and explained how EU norms are diffused.

The European Union's extended normative basis has been developed ever since the 1950s, Manners showed, and five "core" norms within the ensemble of Union laws and policies can be identified: peace, liberty, democracy, rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms. In addition to these, Ian Manner suggests other four "minor" norms, namely the notion of social solidarity, anti-discrimination, sustainable development and the principle of good governance (Manners 2002: 242–243; Stivachtis–Price–Habegger 2013: 12). Normative power rests, according to Zaki Laïdi, on "legitimacy of rules, the predictability of behavior, and especially the enforceability of accepted principles" (Laïdi 2008: 43).

Literature Review. Europeanization in the Western Balkans

There is a rich and insightful scholarship centred on Europeanization. Many theoretical and methodological approaches discuss Europeanization (either as process, or as EU-ization, or as rational calculation for optimizing foreign policy goals, some treat it as a phenomenon, others as part of institutionalism). In this chapter we will delve into a social-constructivist framework and we will concentrate on the following key concepts: social learning, social identity construction, and agent-structure co-determination. Social-constructivist scholars have focused on the ways in which the European Union acts, both regionally and globally, as a norm-setting organization that is able to transfer a body of normative load, which includes principles, values, rules and expected behaviours, to its neighbouring areas (Tocci 2007, Parmentier 2008, Laïdi 2008, Risse 2009, Herța–Pop-Flanja, 2021). At their turn, countries included in the EU neighbourhood or EU candidate countries are able to gradually internalize the normative framework and re-shape their behaviour according to the EU's norms and rules. Such re-shaping would occur both exogenously and endogenously, since countries would pay attention to EU expectations and conditionality, but they would also genuinely and incrementally incorporate values, principles, norms, based on their adherence to and strong belief in the latter's validity and legitimacy (Herța–Corpădean 2021). Initial approaches to Europeanization referred to top-down processes and equated Europeanization to European integration. The majority of commentators concentrated on the implica-

tions of Europeanization on domestic politics. In this sense, Europeanization was viewed as a one-sided, limited process (Herța 2022).

However, scholars have increasingly stressed the need to advocate "bottom-up" methods when analysing the consequences of Europeanization, on the assumption that "pre-existing domestic structures and internal developments are likely to have an important mediating effect on 'external' pressures" (Ladrech 1994; Bache 2002). Europeanization was tackled as a process which refers to adoption of values (Börzel 2002; Featherstone 2003; Ladrech 1994) or as "a process of change that transcends the conventional legal and political transformations that occur through the technical process of integration centred on the *acquis communautaire"* (Radaelli 2003; Economides–Ker-Lindsay 2015), or as a phenomenon (Goetz 2001). Consequently, contrary to initial attempts to describe Europeanization (tackled as set of pressures from above, at political, administrative and legal levels), more recent approaches focus on the combination of attributes embedded in processes of Europeanization: the impact on domestic political, institutional and policy dynamics, but also greater emphasis on beliefs, values, ideas (Bache 2002), shared meanings, norms and perceptions. Olsen argued that "Europeanization as domestic impacts is not limited to structural and policy changes […] European values and policy paradigms are also to some (varying) degree internalized at the domestic level, shaping discourses and identities" (Olsen 2002). Claudio Radaelli emphasized the role of shared belief, rules and norms: "Europeanization consists of processes of a) construction, b) diffusion and c) institutionalisation of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, 'ways of doing things' and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and then incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and subnational) discourse, political structures and public policies" (2004: 5).

From an institutional perspective (and by assessing effects of institutions on state behaviour) two approaches were gradually shaped: 1) a strategic adaptation to European conditionality, in which Europeanization occurs as a result of distribution of resources at domestic level, and 2) one in which "change agents" or "norm entrepreneurs" (Börzel–Risse 2003) are able to produce the redefinition of interests and identities, through a "logic of appropriateness" (March and Olsen 1998). According to Tanja Bőrzel and Thomas Risse, both can (and usually do) occur at different stages or even simultaneously (2003: 59).

From a sociological perspective, Europeanization is an interactive, ongoing process and in this sense, it can be embedded in an agent-structure (Giddens 1985) relation: the European Union as a structure influences the agents' national policies and transfers a framework of normative knowledge and expected behaviour; however, the agents also play a role in changing or revisiting, altering the structure's key attributes or in perpetuating them. According to Radaelli, "the question is not one of assessing whether a country has become Europeanised or not. […] Europeanization demands explanation of what goes on inside the process", since "the EU may provide the context, the cognitive and normative 'frame', the terms of refer-

ence, or the opportunities for socialisation of domestic actors who then produce 'exchanges' (of ideas, power, policies, and so on) between each other" (2004: 7). Therefore, contrary to initial conceptualisations of Europeanization which focused on top-down and unilateral effects on domestic politics, policies, and polities, other theorisations tackle the interactive, horizontal and vertical processes. Olsen underlined that "change is not unilateral. Global, European, national and sub-national processes interact in intricate ways. Typically, there is no single dominant and deterministic causal relation. Causal chains are often indirect, long and complex. Effects are difficult to identify and disentangle. Interactive processes of feedback, mutual influence and adaptation are producing interpenetration between levels of governance and institutions" (Olsen 2002: 942; Bulmer and Burch 2001). Kelly Kolman argues that Europeanization is intertwined with globalization. By focusing on "the embeddedness of EU legislation in wider international policy regimes and international market incentives", she analyses how international and transnational forces had influenced the implementation of EU legislation (Kolman 2007: 2).

Empirical research on consequences of Europeanization (or limits or even lack thereof) also abound. Various case-studies display particularities and specificities of Europeanization effects. For example, Sepos provides a systematic examination of the impact of the EU on the polity, policies and politics of Cyprus. He draws from both rationalist and constructivist mechanisms and assesses the process of Europeanization by showing how the "country's territorial and temporal dimensions have mediated the impact of these mechanisms and processes" (Sepos 2008: 13). Other scholars focused on the Europeanization of Central and Eastern Europe (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeir 2005a; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeir 2005b) and showed how "EU's collective identity towards the CEECs includes the notion of a 'special responsibility' of the EU towards the CEECs (Sedelmeir 2005: 121). Schimmelfennig argued that there is a middle ground between rationalism and constructivism, between egoistic or rationally calculated preferences and a norm-conforming outcomes, and he introduced the term 'rhetorical action', which is meant to capture "the strategic use of norm-based arguments" (Schimmelfennig 2005: 166).

The EU's enlargement towards the Western Balkans has attracted scholarly interest, especially since expectations changed and the European Commission turned Montenegro into the first candidate country subjected to the "new approach" (Wunsch 2018: 69). In previous studies we touched upon the capacity of Europeanization to bring about frameworks for conflict resolution and discussed the EU's role in the Western Balkans, especially its mediating role in Serbian-Kosovar relations (Herța and Corpădean 2020). Vladimir Vučković analyses the level of Europeanization among the Montenegrin parties by studying their manifestos and their relevance in the context of European integration (Vučković 2016). Pollozhani and Hamiti tackle social learning as tool of Europeanization and focus on the case of Macedonia, by explaining the promotion of European values as new paradigms during a process of Europeanization of society (Pollozhani–Hamiti 2017).

Spyros Economides and James Lindsay-Ker analysed the Serbian-Kosovar normalization process and tackled the phrase "pre-accession Europeanization", based on the idea that the EU has shaped a model of relations in which candidate countries have to undergo Europeanization as a pre-condition for membership, and not as a result of integration. The scholars' argument is that "rather than undergoing a process of Europeanization, whereby a fundamental transformation in the underlying rationale and processes of decision-making occurred, as some have argued, the changes in Serbia's policy are in fact based on material concerns"; consequently, this is indicative of "a policy of rationally instrumental 'pre-Accession Europeanization' rather than as a process of adaptive normative Europeanization as more conventionally understood in the literature" (2015: 1). This entails a form of pragmatic adaptation to the model and the lack of genuine norm appropriation. It is the authors' contention that Serbia's relations with Kosovo are based on political opportunism, rather than "convergence or identity change" (Economides–Ker-Lindsay 2015).

A constructivist "reading" of EU enlargement processes claims that Europeanization should/would entail the genuine incorporation and internalisation of rules, vales, norms by states within the Western Balkan region, and identity transformation. EU's rules and norms would gradually be accepted as most legitimate path, and not perceived as expected behaviour which triggers strategic thinking and calculated action (Herța–Pop-Flanja 2021). Therefore, the following research questions will structure the second part of the chapter: what are the unique and particular elements of the process of Europeanization in Montenegro? Do civil society organisations play a major role in socializing and Europeanizing Montenegrin society?

Shaping trust in the European Union. The agent-structure relation between Montenegro and the European Union

In the debate on future EU enlargement in the Western Balkans, the case of Montenegro (Corpădean 2018; Corpădean 2019) is not necessarily indicative of the situation of the entire region, but it may be regarded as the closest file we have at present to eventual membership. According to Corpădean, the size of the country creates a deceptive feeling of simplicity around the subject, but there are various factors that render Montenegro's EU file interesting. The Montenegrin state has recently (2006) achieved independence, and has ever since displayed an unusually strong desire to seek both NATO and EU integration, reminiscent of other countries in East-Central Europe in the mid-1990s, and with economic peculiarities without precedent in the negotiation process (Alger 2016, Morrison 2008).

Montenegro's EU accession process, unlike its successful NATO integration (in 2017), has proved to be a rather difficult endeavour, despite the fact that Montenegro has a small, manageable economy, which should render the negotiations on at least some of the accession chapters less time-consuming. The initial Feira

European Council impetus of 19–20 June 2000, which stamped countries in the Western Balkans as potential candidates, was furthered by the conclusions of the Thessaloniki Council of 19–20 June 2003, which shaped an agenda for the integration of the countries in the region (Cini and Pérez-Solórzano Borragán 2016: 233). Furthermore, on 22 January 2007, the Council of the EU concluded the European partnership with Montenegro, setting the conditions for the reforms and priority areas to be tackled, with the support of pre-accession funds Council Decision 2007. The Stabilisation and Association Agreement was signed on 15 October 2007 and entered into force on 1 May 2010 (Stabilisation and Association Agreement 2007), gathering considerable support from national parties. Furthermore, during the Sarajevo EU-Western Balkans ministerial meeting on 2 June 2010, the Union reaffirmed its commitment to the integration of countries in the area (Commission Opinion on Serbia's application 2011). Montenegro's application for membership was submitted on 15 December 2008 and accepted at the Brussels European Council of 18–19 June 2009 (Brussels European Council 2008). As a consequence, Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn presented Podgorica with the customary questionnaire, in December that year. The visa exemption agreement between Montenegro and the EU came into force on 19 December 2009, as a reward for the progress attained in matters ranging from border protection to justice and security reforms (European Commission 2009).

Back in December 2010, the Commission awarded Montenegro official candidate status, followed by the opening of negotiations, on 29 June 2012. The Juncker doctrine and the relatively slow progress of negotiations during the mandates of Štefan Füle and Johannes Hahn as Commissioners for Enlargement have not prevented Montenegro from opening 30 out of the 35 chapters, prompting Juncker to hint at a potential accession date in 2025 (Euractiv 2017). The annual progress report of the country drafted by the European Commission on 9 November 2016 (Commission Staff Working Document) paints both a positive and a negative picture of compliance with Community requirements. The former includes the positive outcome of the 2016 general elections, defined by transparency and endowing the newly-elected bodies of the state with the necessary legitimacy to further the negotiation process, along with the reduction of bureaucracy and the more uniform approach to salaries in the public sector (Montenegro Country Economy 2017). The report also emphasizes the need to step up the pace of administrative reform and provide more political independence to the somewhat oversized public service apparatus.

Montenegro has managed to undertake an in-depth reform endeavour and has attempted to render it perceptible and transparent, including through the publication of significant policy documents in English, the involvement of its emerging NGO sector in the modernisation process and the adoption of EU-fashioned e-governance and decentralisation administrative patterns, relying on simplification and meritocracy. This is set against the background of a starkly pro-EU feeling of the population – more than 80%, according to a recent survey (Delegation of the European Union to Montenegro 2018).

According to Natasha Wunsch, Montenegro stands out as a unique case whereby the civil society organisations have been formally included in the negotiation structure (Wunsch 2018: 73). On the positive side, the Montenegrin Chief Negotiator declared commitment to the "full membership of CSO representatives in the working groups"; at their turn, CSOs felt encouraged to go "beyond monitoring government actions and to provide direct input into the ongoing accession negotiations" (Wunsch 2018: 73). On the negative side, however, the traditional tensions between state structures/political elites and civil society, typical for most post-communist countries, have been lingering.

For a better understanding of the situation of CSOs in Montenegro, we reviewed the annual national reports of the European Commission, starting from 2013 until 2022. The goal herein is to understand to what extent the situation has improved throughout this timeline, according to the European Commission, and what this institution considers worthy of inclusion in the report concerning CSOs in Montenegro. Apart from the importance of the engagement and consultation of CSOs in the membership and negotiation process, which is recognized in the reports, we consider that the particularities of each report are useful in achieving the objective of our research.

In the progress report presented by the Commission in 2013, representatives of civil society organizations are considered quite involved in state and local administration activities, as well as in the working groups on the negotiation chapters. However, the report emphasizes, "the transparency of government procedures should be further enhanced" (European Commission, 2013). This aspect linked to the transparency of procedures is in fact one of the problems presented in a recurring manner in the reports, including that of 2022. The 2014 report presents the introduction of a new Council for the development of NGOs which was also responsible for monitoring the CSO development strategy. As far as the public funding system is concerned, it had proved to be inefficient and the legal framework conducive to voluntary activities and corporate social responsibility had not been established. Another reported problem is related to the fact that some civil society activists have been targeted by local media (European Commission 2014).

In the 2015 report, the Commission places more emphasis on activities of local media against CSOs and the latter's dissatisfaction with participation in policy-making. Also, according to the report, the amount allocated to CSO projects was smaller (European Commission 2015). The 2016 report reiterates deficiencies related to lack of transparency, smear campaigns and the relatively low level of impact of CSOs on policy-making. On the other hand, it commends the fact that the active role of civil society in the accession process was "officially recognised" and that the adoption of the amendments to the Law on Public Gatherings provides a more favourable framework for freedom of association (European Commission 2016). The 2018 report, which includes the 2017 activities as well, shows that progress has been observed in "improving the legal and institutional framework for cooperation between the government and CSOs" and that amendments adopted to the

CSO law required that a percentage of the annual state budget be allocated to civil society projects (European Commission 2018). According to the 2019 report, despite the growing tendency of public institutions to declare information as classified and the "controversial dismissals" of CSO representatives, certain measures, such as the establishment of an online database on recipients of public funding, have been taken to improve the transparency of the CSO funding process. In addition, the report indicates an increase in the sums allocated from the state budget to civil society projects (European Commission 2019).

The 2020 report shows that the capacity to launch and manage grant programs still needs to be improved, but that public funding rules for CSOs require that a minimum of 0.5% of the grant budget of the state must be allocated to civil society. Also, the CSO Development Council has intensified its work, but it still lacks visibility with local CSOs in more remote areas (European Commission, 2020). The 2021 report shows that the role of civil society in the accession process is recognized and promoted at the political level, although not all ministries carry out public consultations when drafting laws and strategies. The report also mentions that the visibility of local CSOs in remote areas is insufficient (European Commission 2021). In the latest report available, the European Commission underlined that amendments to the law on volunteering still need to be adopted, that the legal (e.g. that related to volunteering) and institutional framework still needs to be improved, and that the cooperation between state bodies and civil society, as well as the capacity of ministries to monitor and evaluate CSO projects, must be strengthened (European Commission 2022).

There are several notable factors which illustrate Montenegrin civil society's strengths. The civil society sector is well developed, there has been successful mobilisation of the sector during the last twenty years, due to EU support and "considerable domestic access"; moreover, the "formal inclusion of civil society representatives in the government's negotiation working groups" enhances cooperation and interplay between government structures and civil society actors (Wunsch 2018:70). However, as noted by the Commission' Reports, there could be more openness of policy-making processes and the institutional architecture could be improved so as to foster CSOs involvement. The Government has committed to the latter already in 2007, by creating the Government Office dedicated to the cooperation with CSOs and by devising Strategies for the Development of CSOs, in the intervals 2009–2011 and 2014–2016. Despite all these, political will for more inclusion of CSOs in political deliberations is expected (Wunsch 2018: 70).

The EU's normative power played an extended role in all these developments. The Montenegrin Government adopted two important decrees which uphold the commitment and importance of cooperating with CSOs and which are built on the Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation developed by the Council of Europe in 2008 (Wunsch 2018: 70). But, way beyond the process of Europeanizing elites, the EU values, norms and rules are diffused and then received and incorporated within the entire Montenegrin society. There is a clear consensus regarding EU

integration and all polls indicate a majority of almost two thirds of the population supporting Montenegro's membership prospects. This could simply show the presence of the "European idea" (Vladeva 2015: 48), but, in reality it is much more than that. The legitimacy of EU norms and expectations is present and internalized, and most political statements and the interviews conducted in Podgorica expose the true attachment to EU rules and the will to undergo Europeanization as if Montenegro is a (future) part of a normative regional structure. According to Aleksandar Andrija Pejović, former Chief Negotiator to EU, "at the beginning of the process, the citizens had great expectations from the EU membership. In time, they became more realistic. The citizens perceive that the membership in the EU, apart from providing the rights and benefits, also brings the commitments and certain expenditures […] European integration is the project of the entire society and as such it requires a high level of understanding and acquirement, as well as the active participation of all actors" (quoted in Vladeva 2015: 49) Negotiations with EU are perceived as a normal, beneficial process for Montenegro, not only as a logical and rational decision-making option for a country from the Western Balkans, but also as a determination to accept and genuinely incorporate a set of rules because they are valid, legitimate and necessary.

The EU's 2011 'new approach', focused on prioritization of the rule of law reforms in candidate countries (Damjanovski–Kmezić 2019: 28–29), also somehow understood as pre-accession Europeanization, rests on the principle that issues relating to the judiciary and fundamental rights and justice, freedom, and security "should be tackled early in the accession process and the corresponding chapters opened accordingly on the basis of action plans, as they require the establishment of convincing track records" (European Commission 2011: 5). Our interviews show that, even though acknowledging that the bar has been set higher (than in previous enlargement phases), the EU requirements are legitimate and authoritative. In the words of Đorđe Radulović, Minister of Foreign Affairs from 2020 until 2022, "corruption should be fought for the well-being of the citizens, not for compliance with the EU requirements. […] "People care for justice" (interview taken in Podgorica 2021).

According to Zorka Kordić, who has been appointed Montenegro's new Chief Negotiator with the European Union back in 2020, the difficulty of engaging the Montenegrin society in EU dialogue and continued negotiations is related to "promoting the EU enlargement as if the crises at the EU level do not exist". However, she underlines, "we have been constant in the decision of joining the EU". Even though, "the rules were changed during the game, the new methodology has been accepted; there is a stricter conditionality mechanism, but we are determined to turn ourselves into an example of revised methodology" (interview taken in Podgorica 2021). Our main conclusion is that Montenegro is undergoing a process of pre-accession Europeanization, albeit setbacks and difficulties, and the analysis of this case is indicative for norm-adherence and the role of shared meanings, shared beliefs and values resulting from this agent-structure,

Montenegro–EU relation. Montenegro is not just setting its foreign policy goals in an EU-regulated manner, it is not only pursuing a strategic path, but, much more than this, it gradually changes its state identity and interests. It wants to be part of an ideational structure, not (only) because it brings benefits, but because it is the only way forward and because this is an essential attribute of its changing identity.

Conclusion

The chapter's main contention is that, out of all Western Balkan countries, Montenegro stands out as the most committed to processes of Europeanization and internalization of EU norms, values, rules. Building on social-constructivism, our research showed the main pillars and approaches of Europeanization and identified the major distinctions between strategic behaviour of states who are responding to EU conditionality as if this is expected of them and necessary to implement and, on the other hand, the reshaping of state identity and state interests, by appropriating a normative structure as if it is undeniably legitimate and part of the state's identity.

The main goal was to show the specificities and dynamic of civil society organizations in Montenegro and their role in processes of Europeanization. The interplay between the government and civil society was explored to this end. Additionally the annual reports issued by the European Commission were presented and analysed in order to illustrate setbacks or positive developments.

Another equally important goal was to "read" the relations between Montenegro and the European Union through the lenses of social constructivism, by identifying the agency-structure type of interaction. In this sense, structures (EU as a regional micro-structure) impacts agents (candidate states, *id est* Montenegro) but also undergo transformations alongside interactions with agents. The latter orient their foreign policy goals and internalize core values and norms of the structure (such as Montenegro and its beliefs that joining the EU is not only the next logical step, but the most legitimate and righteous model which needs to be adhered to). At its turn, the (regional) structure's attributes can be revisited in a co-determinative manner (like the EU insisting on pre-accession Europeanization after the experience with previous enlargement phases).

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The Development and Role of Civil Society in the Republic of Moldova in the Framework of the Eastern Partnership (2009–2021)

Mircea Brie–Natalia Putină

Introduction and methodology

An analytical debate about the development of civil society and its role in the Republic of Moldova in the general context of the approach to the European Union, in particular the Eastern Partnership (EaP), is a complex one. It is necessary to take into account the stage of development of this civil society, its typology, independence and characteristics, as well as the level of ambition expressed by the Republic of Moldova in relation to the European integration process. This level of ambition must also be analyzed in the wider geopolitical context, including the new reality after the Russian invasion launched in Ukraine after February 2022.

Despite the fact that the Eastern Partnership (EaP) project is often viewed as having an integrative role in light of its proximity to the European Union, its evolution has been sinuous, mired by shifting geopolitical contexts and divergent national aspirations consistent with the assumed objectives. In terms of evolution and geopolitical context, the EaP has seen numerous reformatory changes, as well as adaptations that took into account the level of individual aspirations of the states. (Brie 2022a: 316).

In the context of the events of 2022, deeply marked by the war triggered by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, we are even more deeply responsible to analyze the commitments of the Republic of Moldova through the lens of understanding regional geopolitics. The level of deepening and availability in relation to European integration can no longer be judged strictly in relation to national aspirations, but

primarily must be analyzed through the lens of national interests. These national interests have proved to act in the sense of conditionality, often having the effect of putting a brake on the impulse of those who were acting in the integrative direction (this reality is highlighted by the analysis of the evolution of the PaE Index).

Despite of some obvious progress achieved since its launch in 2009, the Eastern Partneship has reached its limits. The current format, despite of the periodic reformation attempts, does not provide a development framework nor clear perspectives regarding the relations of these states with the EU. The multilateral framework was replaced by a bilateral one. From this perspective, the Republic of Moldova deepened the integration process. The pro-European orientation of the Republic of Moldova is also clearly expressed by formulating the request to open accession negotiations with Georgia and Ukraine. However, the process is complicated. Chisinau must also take into account the regional context, the current Russian-Ukrainian conflict, but also the Russian support given to Transnistria and Gagauzia.

The *purpose* of this research is to analyze and conceptualize the development and the role of the civil society in the Republic of Moldova in the context of European integration and the Eastern Partnership. The present research is intended to be an analysis of the civil society in the Republic of Moldova in the broad context of the western option of geopolitical orientation during the period 2009–2021.

One of our *research hypotheses* is represented by the fact that the civil society in the Republic of Moldova developed a lot during this period, and its role in deepening democratization and supporting the European integration process proves to be a consistent one. A second hypothesis that we want to test starts from the idea that the underdeveloped civil society is still strongly connected to the political actors and responds to the political impulses. This fact requires new regulatory mechanisms that ensure the existence of a strong civil society, which can expresse itself independently of political interests.

The main *research questions* raised are: Q1. Is there a developed civil society in the Republic of Moldova? Q2. Is there a developed civil society in the Republic of Moldova to influence the European integration process in the context of the Eastern Partnership? Q3. What is the image of civil society in the Republic of Moldova through the lens of the Eastern Partnership Index? Q4. What is the role of civil society in the Republic of Moldova in the context of the Eastern Partnership?

The *levels of analysis* that we propose from a methodological perspective include: a. contextualizing the participation of the Republic of Moldova in the framework of the Eastern Partnership; b. the conceptualization and development stages of the civil society in the Republic of Moldova in the context of the Eastern Partnership; c. the analysis of the civil society in the Republic of Moldova through the lens of the Eastern Partnership index.

Methodologically, we propose to analyze some of the indicators quantified in the Eastern Partnership Index in the period 2011–2021 that are related to civil society, society in general and the democratization process in the Republic of Moldova. We intend to identify the integrator level in three relevant measurable areas (and

a couple of subareas): Management, Approximation and Linkage (we have chosen only the areas/subareas which are connected with the subject of this paper).

The Index was launched two years after the release of the Partnership and contains aggregate statistics on the level of integration of the six above-mentioned countries. European integration for the EaP states is understood as a sum of the elements that comprise the political, economic, civil and security dimension. It is measured by: the level of convergence with European norms, the level and increase of economic exchanges and the increase of these exchanges, the development and deepening of cross-border networks and people contact (EaP-CSF 2022a). The present analysis includes aggregated data from 2011 to 2021. It should be noted that from 2011 to 2014 the index was officially called the European Integration Index for Eastern Partnership states. The name was changed in 2015 to the Eastern Partnership Index. The change was not accidental, as we will see in the subsequent analysis. If in the case of the former, the emphasis was on integration based on the premise that all six partner states want a deep relationship with the EU, if not accession, in the case of the latter the tone is more nuanced/adapted, taking into account the interests of partner countries (Brie 2022b).

The Index uses a multi-layered methodology[1]. "It involved over 50 experts from all EaP states at each and every stage, namely in the basic research design, data gathering, quantitative and qualitative analysis and verification. As a first step, national experts completed a questionnaire by giving scores for their countries against a detailed set of indicators, which formed the basis of subsequent national reports, drafted by the experts. These reports were then analysed by sectoral experts, also from the EaP region, who synthesised national-level findings into a wider regional perspective. Fourteen focus groups based on the sectoral reports were then held and provided an opportunity for all experts and the Index editorial team to collectively probe, discuss and validate the findings, whilst also identifying salient case studies. Through its methodological approach, the Index strikes an effective balance between richness and rigour and yields evidence, lessons learned and examples of best practice of use for EaP and EU stakeholders. The Index's method also means that progress and change can be gleaned on a comparative cross-regional basis, meaning that instances of progress, backsliding and inertia and where relevant, frontrunners, can be identified" (EaP-CSF 2022a).

For a clear methodological overview of our analysis, we make the following clarifications (see details in EaP-CSF 2022a and Brie 2022b):

– The analysis of the management dimension gives us an image of only four time intervals (2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014), which is then analyzed as part of the other two dimensions of the PAE Index.
– Linkage dimension, was last measured and published for the interval 2018–2019 (in this case we have data available for seven time intervals: 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015–2016, 2017 and 2018–2019).
– Approximation dimension has been quantified for seven time intervals: 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015–2016, 2017 and 2020–2021

EaP's limits context

The European enlargement of 2004 and 2007 created a geopolitical context that required the reform of the ENP, by stimulating the consolidation of the regional component. In this sense, in 2008, the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) appeared in Paris, and in 2009, in Prague, the Eastern Partnership (EaP) was launched. This need for the EU to reform the ENP was due to the fact that this period brought a lot of changes to its external border. Neighboring countries are less stable than in 2004 or 2007. The European Union has been put in a position to protect its partners in the face of Russia's attempt to reposition itself geopolitically (Brie 2017: 58–60; Polgár 2017; Polgár 2021: 392–405). The crisis in Georgia in 2008 or the conflict in Ukraine are eloquent for this reality to which the EU had to adapt (Brie 2022a: 317–318; Brie 2014; Brie 2016).

The ENP and EaP were components of a strategy that the European Union attempted to implement in order to achieve balance and understanding along its eastern borders. Over the last few decades, not only the European Union, but also its neighbors, have worked to establish mutually beneficial cooperation relationships. "These have taken the shape of asymmetrical alliances based on partnerships and cooperative agreements. Later, Eastern countries developed deeper relations, progressing from these agreements to a new level of partnership, eventually leading to their accession to the EU." (Bărbulescu–Brie–Toderaș 2016: 75; Polgár 2022: 23–34; Polgár 2015). The ENP and EaP appeared to be part of a broader, integrative policy. Even the three states that signed the Association agreements and unequivocally declared their support for European integration did not receive clear perspectives on a potential member state status prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. At the beginning of March 2022, amid the precipitous events generated by the Russian aggression, the European institutions started the process for examining the applications for EU membership made by the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia (Brie 2022b).

The European Council granted Moldova and Ukraine the designation of candidate nations on June 23, 2022. The European Council also said on the same day that it was ready to grant Georgia candidate status as soon as the priorities indicated in the European Commission's opinion on Georgia's accession application were addressed (issued on 17 june 2022) (European Council 2022). Despite these prompt actions, which are crucial from a political and image standpoint, the European Union is compelled to quickly modify its policies in the Eastern Neighbourhood. The Russian-Ukrainian conflict's trajectory and, more importantly, how it is resolved (in time and form!) will determine the extent of the expansion to the east. However, the EU cannot afford to forsake its allies, to whom it can only provide a few limited solutions in the geopolitical environment of 2022 (Brie 2022b).

Through an analysis of policies, context and results, we identify the current EaP boundaries in three main directions, without excluding other perspectives (see for more details Brie 2022a and Brie 2022b):

– *The limits of the EU's low commitment to the integration of EaP states* has been visible since the beginning of this partnership project. The EU has always avoided offering a clear prospect of membership to the six EaP countries. Despite numerous political declarations of support from European leaders, neither of the six partners has received any firm guarantees or commitments with specific deadlines. Since 2011, the parameters of EU involvement have been established. Despite the progress made, particularly by the Republic of Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine, the EU gave the impression of having political and geopolitical boundaries during the Warsaw Summit (EaP Summit 2011). In the new post-2014 context, it is clear that the mere reform of states, accompanied by the implementation of EU policies and acquis, is no longer sufficient to achieve European enlargement. The ENP, as it was thought, no longer corresponds to geopolitical realities. This proves to be insufficiently clear and unrelated to the current geopolitical situation, the security thus proving to be a "weak point" (Gogolashvili 2015: 18), on the agenda of the European neighborhood (Bărbulescu–Brie–Toderaş 2016: 110–111; Brie 2016). The beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 served as confirmation of the EaP's shortcomings and bottlenecks as well as the limitations of the guarantees that the EU could have provided to the EaP states. (Brie 2017: 63–66; Brie 2022b).
– *The general geopolitical context and the Russian opposition in particular,* have shaped EaP member states' policies. The brutal Russian interventions in Georgia (2008) and Ukraine (after 2014 with the annexation of Crimea, with the support of the separatists in the east, and primarily with the military invasion started on February 24, 2022) were associated with the total enslavement of Aleksandr Lukashenko's regime to Putin, but also the maintenance of a constantly tense atmosphere in Transnistria and especially in Nagorno–Karabakh. A simple analysis leads to the conclusion that states that did not accept the Russian Federation's political and geopolitical orientation were forced to confront internal and external challenges, often of a military nature, supported by the Russians. The invasion and war in Ukraine exemplify the Russian Federation's reaction to Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic orientation (Brie 2022b; Brie 2016).
– *Specific national interests of the EaP countries,* which frequently diverge from European integration, have also contributed to the failure to achieve the original EaP objectives. The level of ambition for European integration varied across the six countries. Furthermore, some states have never even expressed an interest in this direction, with the EaP seen as a tool for pragmatic facilitation of economic gains without incorporating political implications. The EaP countries' national interests were not only divergent in relation to the goals of European integration, but also in many cases divergent in relation to the partnership's neighboring partners. The analysis of specific interests highlights the EaP countries' limited levels of ambition. Furthermore, by shifting the focus of the EaP from the multilateral to the bilateral dimension and on the more-for-more principle, the reform of the EaP highlights the flexibility of EU policies regarding the EaP in direct

agreement with the constraints imposed by these national interests correlated to the specific geopolitical context. (Brie 2022a; Brie 2022b)

In the years since its launch in 2009, the EaP has faced difficulties due, on the one hand, to the lack of political will of the partners to integrate and, on the other, to the lack of consensus of the EU Member States in their relations with Russia. Even so, the EaP results were positive, especially for countries such as the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine or Georgia. The EaP states acted in accordance with their national interests, but also with the evolution of geopolitical realities. Their agenda has not been a common one throughout this period since the launch of the EaP. Starting from this reality, their aspirations were not uniform either.

Literature review

Civil society becomes relevant in the Republic of Moldova with sovereignty and independence, it develops simultaneously with the public sector and the private sector, it grows in importance according to the modernization and structural reforms that the Moldovan society has undertaken. With the beginning of the process of democratization of the Moldovan society, interest in the problem of the formation of both civil society in general and its structural elements, in particular, has increased. Articles and monographs appear in Moldovan political science, which deal with a wide range of problems related to the development and functioning of civil society. A comprehensive political analysis of the state of civil society in Moldova, its problems and prospects was undertaken by Anikin (Anikin–Solomon 2011). Some methodological principles of the study of civil society and its relationship with the state in the Republic of Moldova were laid down by Chistruga, Țveatcov, Marin, Costachi (Chistruga 1997; Țveatcov 2019; Marin 2002; Costachi 2015). Significant is the vision of the researcher C. Marin, who proposes a hexagonal model of civil society building in the Republic of Moldova, focused on sizing: political, economic, legal, institutional, cultural and communicational of society (Marin 2002). There is disagreement about the political aspect of civil society, which is typically described as the non-governmental and apolitical sector. Some authors argue that the political dimension is crucial, especially given current circumstances where civil society's role in establishing power and promoting participatory democracy is essential. This approach is seen as a means of restraining government power in a state governed by the rule of law (Costachi 2015: 23).

From a structural point of view, civil society today has evolved. Political parties, trade unions or the church are social institutions with tradition, although all of them adapt to the condition of (post) modern man. NGOs, with the multitude of institutions they assume, represent the „new" with which society encounters this millennium. NGOs are a characteristic space for the expression of civil society, whose requirements for co-decision and co-participation within the traditional

centers of power represent a positive development in the consolidation of new forms of governance at the local, national and supranational levels (Cace 2011: 27–28).

On a practical level, however, at that stage, civil society institutions mobilized very slowly and were absent from some important events in the country. The NGO networks were not yet well coagulated in the country, and the connection between the organizations in the countryside and those in the capital was very weak. Also, Moldovan civil society was unable to influence government decisions, their reports being often ignored by officials. Civil society institutions could only signal the abuses committed, but they were too weak to produce changes at the level of the decision-making mechanism, being heard, but not listened to. Public actions (eg: advocacy, lobbying, information campaigns, etc.) were very few in number, so that even the initiatives of some donors to support certain campaigns were ignored by the Moldovan associative sector. This fact demonstrated the lack of maturity of the CSOs, but also the disinterest in supporting a transparent and active democratic process (Budurina-Goreacii–Cebotari 2018: 43–44).

The characteristics of Moldovan civil society are typical for post-communist societies: fragmentation and weak civic participation. „Transnational civil society", through NGOs, tried to revive the civic participation of citizens. Acording to Varzari and Tăbîrță "civil society in the Republic of Moldova has reached a certain level of development, such as the protests against the „Kozak Memorandum" in November 2003 (together with the opposition political parties) or the „events of April 6–7, 2009". But these manifestations of the Moldovan civil society had, rather, a protest character, and, by no means, an active-participatory one, which would stimulate and fully contribute to the constitution of the rule of law" (Varzari–Tăbîrță 2010: 80–81)

The consolidation of the civil society was determined by the European path of the Republic of Moldova, although in a cyclical evolution, and the establishment of a national framework regarding the OCSs, further raised the support of external development partners, implicitly the support for the consolidation of the Moldovan civil society (Țugui 2013). Starting from 2009, the political power from Chisinau passes to the management of pro-European political forces, a fact that influenced the evolution, dynamics and character of the development of civil society in the Republic of Moldova in general and CSOs in particular. The period after 2009 has had a non-linear evolution, largely determined by a number of very important factors: there is the co-optation in politics of some exponents from the environment of civil society; so-called CSO-satellites appear, fronts used by political parties, to evade certain legal constraints of political financing, by establishing foundations or charity organizations.[2] (Promolex 2017; Cebotari 2019).

In Moldova, civil society is largely dominated by NGOs that support both democracy and European integration. From 2014, these NGOs have strengthened their capacity to engage with central and local authorities by creating various joint institutional mechanisms and platforms. These mechanisms are designed to

facilitate policy consultation, coordination, monitoring, and joint implementation. Notable examples include the National Participation Council, ProEurope Platform, and National Platform of the EaP Civil Society Forum, which was established in accordance with the Association Agreement. The pro-European NGOs are primarily focused on ensuring the successful implementation of the Association Agreement with the EU, which has become their top priority. Some of the most active organizations in this regard include IDIS Viitorul, the Foreign Policy Association, the Institute of Public Policies (IPP), Contact Center, the Association of Independent Press (API), Youth of Moldova, PromoLex, and East European Foundation Moldova. These organizations have launched various projects or have partnered with assistance programs aimed at helping Moldova implement the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) with the EU (Gromadzki 2015: 48).

In addition, the Moldovan National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum has taken collective and individual actions to promote the benefits of Moldova's European path, particularly following the government's signing of the Association Agreement with the EU. The platform has also been monitoring the implementation of reform commitments and strengthening the national platform. As part of its efforts to promote „European values," the platform has launched a public awareness campaign aimed at informing the public about the advantages of the Association Agreement and the DCFTA with the European Union (EaPCSF 2011).

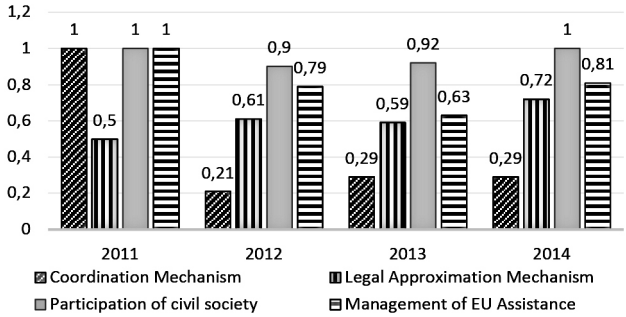
Civil society and democratization through the analysis of the EaP Index. Case study

The conceptual analysis, the particularities and complexity of the civil society in the Republic of Moldova, can be completed at an analytical level through an appropriate use of the EaP Index (see the Introduction & Methodology section for technical details). The involvement and role of civil society in the democratization process, respectively the level of democratization of society are in our attention by referring to the various indicators present in the reports of this index.

In the 2011–2014 period, the Eastern Partnership Index had a special section dedicated to the category Civil society participation in the *Management dimension.* After 2015, this indicator was introduced as an intersectoral category at the level of the other fields, especially in that of Approximation. In this context, we choose to analyze categories such as: *Deep and Sustainable Democracy/Democracy and good governance,* including the main subcategories; and *EU Integration and Convergence/Policy Convergence* (subcategorie Freedom, Security and Justice).

For the period 2011–2014, *Management Dimension* includes variables such as: coordination machanism, legal approximation mechanism, participation of civil society; management of EU assistance[3] (EaP–CSF 2022a).

Figure 1. Management Dimension (Categories) – Republic of Moldova



Sources: author's own preparations based on data collected from the reports European Integration Index for EaP Countries 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, available online https://eap-csf.eu/eastern-partnership-index/, accessed 14. 01. 2023.

The evolution of the variable that quantifies the participation of civil societies, generally positive in the Republic of Moldova (having a score close to the maximum), decreased from 1 (2011) to 0.9 (2012), and later increased to 1 point (2014). This fact must also be seen in the broader context of the analysis of all the EaP states, but without reducing the positive perception in the Republic of Moldova recorded in that period (before the annexation of Crimea by Russia). "Initially in terms of Management, the Republic of Moldova had a good result, but in 2012 the situation suddenly changed to decrease, and in 2013–2014 the score began to increase, but it still did not reach the same indicator as in 2011. If in 2011 Moldova was placed second in this ranking, after Georgia, in 2012–2013, the country improved the score, placing first, but in 2014 Moldova lost to Georgia again" (Goreainov 2020: 104).

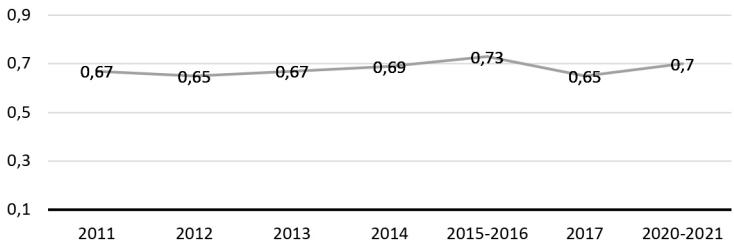
Analyzing the situation in the Republic of Moldova compared to the other states of the Eastern Partnership, it is interesting to note that this dimension initially maintains the same separation of a leading group in terms of the four indicators used (coordination machanism, legal approximation mechanism, participation of civil society; management of EU assistance). This group includes Republic of Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine, but it records a detachment of Georgia and the Republic of Moldova from the rest of the partners for the last two analyzed time periods (EaP–CSF 2022a). The reason for this detachment is mainly related to two of the defining categories for this dimension of the EaP Index: the coordination mechanism and the participation of civil society (Brie 2022b).

In more detail, the 2011 pilot edition describes *Approximation Dimension* using eight categories for which partner countries receive scores: Democracy; Rule of Law; Governance Quality; Market Economy; Freedom, security and justice; Energy and transport; Environment; Education and People to People. Since 2012, these categories have been reduced to 3, such as: Deep and Sustainable Democracy; Market

Economy and DCFTA; Sectoral Approximation. At the same time, since 2015 the names of these categories have changed – Deep and Sustainable Democracy; EU Integration and Convergence; Sustainable Development.

By looking at the chronological chart for this dimension (period 2011–2021), we can see a demarcation point at the level of 2015, until the Republic of Moldova registered an upward trend. This trend came to an end in 2015, when the Republic of Moldova experienced a noticeable decline until 2017. We won't see a return to the upward trend until after the 2020 presidential election.

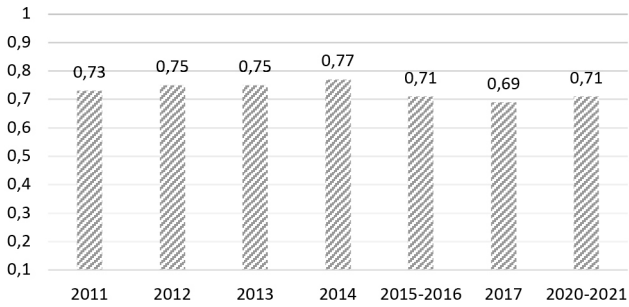
Figure 2. Approximation Dimension– Republic of Moldova



Source: author's own preparations based on data collected from the reports European Integration Index for EaP Countries 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and EaP Index 2015–2016, 2017, 2020–2021, available online https://eap-csf.eu/eastern-partnership-index/, accessed 14.12. 2022.

In the period 2020–2021, the Republic of Moldova achieved an average score of 0.7 points. There are some elements of the specific under analytical relation at the level of the three main categories of subdomains (EaP–CSF 2022c; See more Appendix no. 1): Democracy and Good Governance, with an average score of 0.71 points; Policy Convergence with the European Union, with an average score of 0.80 points; Sustainable Development, with an average score of 0.80 points.

Figure 3. Deep and Sustainable Democracy (2011–2017) / Democracy and Good Governance (2020–2021) – Approximation Dimension

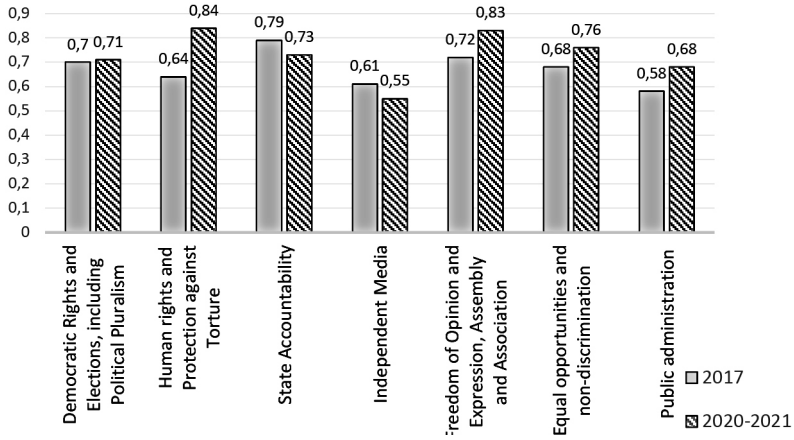


Source: author's own preparations based on data collected from the reports European Integration Index for EaP Countries 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and EaP Index 2015–2016, 2017, 2020–2021, available online https://eap-csf.eu/eastern-partnership-index/, accessed 14. 01. 2023.

The indicators quantified at the level of the first category of subdomains reflect the macrotrend: After 2014 (the year of Crimea's annexation), there has been a trend toward worsening democracy and good governance, as evidenced by the election of Igor Dodon as president in 2016 (Brie 2022a).

Within the *Deep and Sustainable Democracy / Democracy and good governance* category (part of Approximation), we are analyzing the following subcategories: Democratic Rights and Elections, including Political Pluralism; Human rights and Protection against Torture; State Accountability; Independent Media; Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Assembly and Association; Equal opportunities and non-discrimination; and Public Administration. In this analysis, at the subcategory level, we will only use data from two Approximation EaP Index reports (2017 and 2020–2021).

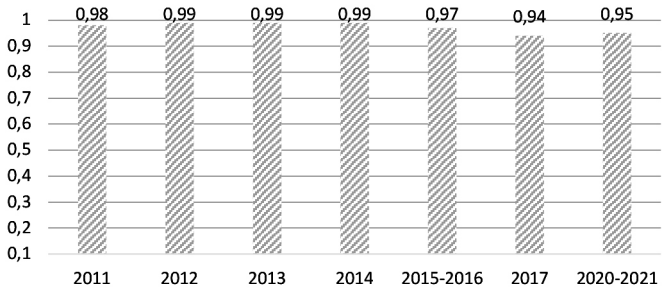
Figure 4. Deep and Sustainable Democracy (2017) / Democracy and Good Governance (2020–2021) – (subcategories)



Source: author's own preparations based on data collected from the reports EaP Index 2017, 2020–2021, available online https://eap-csf.eu/eastern-partnership-index/, accessed 14. 01. 2023.

It was analyzed only one of the five categories of indicators within the subdomain EU Integration and Convergence / Policy Convergence that are related to civil society: *Freedom, Security and Justice.*

Figure 5. Freedom, Security and Justice – subcategorie EU Integration and Convergence/Policy Convergence (Approximation Dimension)



Source: author's own preparations based on data collected from the reports European Integration Index for EaP Countries 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and EaP Index 2015–2016, 2017, 2020–2021, available online https://eap-csf.eu/eastern-partnership-index/, accessed 15.01.2023

The Republic of Moldova has demonstrated a high level of convergence by maintaining a relatively high score throughout the period.

Conclusions

Despite the Republic of Moldova's pendulatory and oscillating political evolution during the this period (2009–2021), as captured by the EaP Index analysis, we see a clear positive trend in the integrative process from the civil society point of view. Without being an irreversible process, development of the civil society in the context of the EaP and the European integration have begun to produce tangible benefits at the societal level (Q1). The political class is also becoming more aware of this reality. The EaP Index encapsulates the mechanisms of change brought on by closer ties to the EU and the strengthening of democracy and the rule of law. The development of a strong civil society and an independent media must still be anticipated. Although it is worn out, the process has started and is already producing some results. Although it proved to be important through the role played in the geopolitical orientation towards the EU, civil society in the Republic of Moldova still cannot be decisive in the European integration process (Q2).

The Republic of Moldova's civil society has become vulnerable as a result of the complicated geopolitical context created by the war in Ukraine. The prospect of military intervention in Transnistria endangers the process of European integration and the consolidation of the civil society (Q2 and Q3). Opportunities have also been created in this context. The European Union demonstrated its solidarity with the Republic of Moldova.

The main variables of the EaP Index related to the civil society in the Republic of Moldova illustrate the progress and the role played by it in the process of managing

the approach to the EU. The civil society score in the Republic of Moldova has always been high compared to the other EaP states. This leads us to conclude that civil society plays an important role in the European integration process, even if this role is not the most decisive in the context of EaP (Q4).

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Notes

[1] Most survey questions ask for a "Yes" or "No" response to induce experts to take a clear position and to minimise misclassification errors. As a rule, all questions to be answered with yes or no by the country experts are coded 1 = yes or positive with regard, for example, to

EU integration and convergence, and 0 = negative with regard to integration and convergence (labelled "1-0"). If the expert comments and consultations with experts suggest intermediate scores, such assessments are coded as 0.5 (EaP-CSF 2022b).

[2] The charity foundation „Din suflet" founded by Galina Dodon, which can be considered affiliated to the Socialist Party of the Republic of Moldova (PSRM); the Vlad Plahotniuc Foundation „EDELWEISS" affiliated to the Democratic Party of Moldova (PDM) ; The „Renato Usatîi" Foundation affiliated to our Party (PN); the Pentru Orhei Association (founder of SRL Social Stores) affiliated to the Political Party „ȘOR" (PPȘ)

[3] An extremely important element in this analysis is that the management dimension has been integrated into the other dimensions since 2015, when the official name of the index was changed (EaP-CSF 2022a).

APPENDIX

Appendix no. I. Approximation dimension. The Eastern Partnership Index 2020–2021

		Armenia	Azerbaijan	Belarus	Georgia	Moldova	Ukraine
	TOTAL APPROXIMATION	**0.63**	**0.44**	**0.49**	**0.65**	**0.70**	**0.70**
1	**DEMOCRACY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE**	**0.73**	**0.35**	**0.31**	**0.70**	**0.71**	**0.69**
1.1	**Democratic Rights and Elections, including Political Pluralism**	**0.84**	**0.20**	**0.16**	**0.77**	**0.71**	**0.78**
1.1.1	Legal framework and its compliance with international standards	0.92	0.00	0.23	0.54	0.62	1.00
1.1.2	Organisation of elections	0.83	0.50	0.22	0.89	0.78	0.78
1.1.3	Electoral campaigning	0.71	0.29	0.18	0.71	0.53	0.41
1.1.4	Electoral competitiveness	0.89	0.00	0.00	0.96	0.92	0.95
1.2	**Human Rights and Protection against Torture**	**0.82**	**0.49**	**0.15**	**0.69**	**0.84**	**0.91**
1.2.1	International protection of human rights	0.83	0.72	0.17	0.75	0.86	0.94
1.2.2	National protection of civil and political rights	0.81	0.25	0.13	0.63	0.81	0.88
1.3	**State Accountability**	**0.75**	**0.41**	**0.47**	**0.88**	**0.73**	**0.86**
1.3.1	Executive accountability to legislature	0.76	0.34	0.29	0.80	0.77	0.70
1.3.1.1	Legislature's influence over executive	0.82	0.53	0.27	0.85	0.78	0.83
1.3.1.2	Legislature's institutional autonomy	0.90	0.50	0.35	0.85	0.75	0.75

1.3.1.3	Legislature's specific powers	0.60	0.40	0.50	0.80	0.70	0.70
1.3.1.4	Legislature's institutional capacity	0.83	0.17	0.33	1.00	0.83	0.83
1.3.1.5	Conditions for opposition	0.63	0.11	0.00	0.48	0.77	0.36
1.3.2	Access to information	0.57	0.14	0.71	0.93	0.57	1.00
1.3.3	Transparent budgeting	1.00	0.75	0.60	0.98	1.00	0.99
1.3.4	Democratic control over security and law enforcement institutions	0.66	0.40	0.26	0.83	0.59	0.76
1.3.4.1	Internal control	0.56	0.36	0.50	0.81	0.47	0.75
1.3.4.2	Parliamentary oversight	0.61	0.39	0.19	1.00	0.82	0.86
1.3.4.3	Transparency	0.74	0.50	0.23	0.85	0.52	0.83
1.3.4.4	Civil society oversight	0.71	0.35	0.14	0.67	0.53	0.61
1.4	**Independent Media**	0.67	0.04	0.20	0.59	0.55	0.54
1.5	**Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Assembly and Association**	**0.84**	**0.29**	**0.09**	**0.64**	**0.83**	**0.66**
1.5.1	Freedom of opinion and expression	0.83	0.25	0.17	0.58	0.75	0.50
1.5.2	The right to freedom of assembly	0.83	0.33	0.06	0.44	0.89	0.67
1.5.3	The right to freedom of association	0.86	0.29	0.05	0.88	0.86	0.81
1.6	**Independent Judiciary**	**0.71**	**0.43**	**0.50**	**0.57**	**0.66**	**0.56**
1.6.1	Appointment, promotion and dismissal of judges	0.50	0.17	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.17
1.6.2	Institutional independence	0.71	0.29	0.43	0.57	0.57	0.57
1.6.3	Judicial powers	0.75	0.50	0.63	0.88	1.00	0.75
1.6.4	Accountability and transparency	0.88	0.75	0.63	0.50	0.75	0.75
I.7	**Equal Opportunities and Non-discrimination**	**0.47**	**0.29**	**0.21**	**0.67**	**0.76**	**0.67**
1.7.1	International and regional HR legal documents	0.54	0.33	0.21	0.58	0.71	0.71
1.7.2	Anti-discrimination legislation and policy	0.39	0.25	0.21	0.77	0.81	0.63
1.8	**Fight against corruption**	**0.88**	**0.52**	**0.49**	**0.79**	**0.65**	**0.51**
1.8.1	Corruption incidence and the capacity to criminalize and prosecute corruption	0.73	0.16	0.38	0.51	0.51	0.38
1.8.2	Internal and external auditing	1.00	0.60	0.40	0.90	0.65	0.40
1.8.3	Public procurement	0.90	0.80	0.70	0.95	0.80	0.75
1.9	**Public Administration**	**0.59**	**0.52**	**0.52**	**0.72**	**0.68**	**0.72**
1.9.1	Policy formulation and co-ordination	0.64	0.31	0.54	0.69	0.62	0.67
1.9.2	Local government	0.75	0.64	0.50	0.75	0.75	0.79

1.9.3	Impartial and professional civil service	0.38	0.61	0.53	0.72	0.67	0.69
1.9.3.1	Legal framework of civil service management	0.82	0.77	0.64	0.86	0.91	0.91
1.9.3.2	Institutional framework	0.33	1.00	0.33	1.00	1.00	1.00
1.9.3.3	Employment and remuneration	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.50	0.50	0.00
1.9.3.4	Recruitment, promotion, and disciplinary procedures	0.56	0.50	0.26	0.82	0.56	0.76
1.9.3.5	Management of public service quality	0.20	0.80	0.40	0.40	0.40	0.80
2	**POLICY CONVERGENCE**	**0.64**	**0.53**	**0.48**	**0.70**	**0.80**	**0.77**
2.1	**Market Economy and DCFTA**	**0.65**	**0.46**	**0.45**	**0.77**	**0.66**	**0.78**
2.1.1	Market economy	0.83	0.60	0.47	0.85	0.71	0.71
2.1.1.1	Market entry and exit	0.87	0.54	0.68	0.81	0.47	0.64
2.1.1.2	Competition policy and state aid	0.86	0.39	0.12	0.82	0.67	0.85
2.1.1.3	Private property	0.68	0.76	0.51	0.92	0.79	0.64
2.1.1.4	Intellectual property rights (IPRs)	0.90	0.71	0.56	0.85	0.90	0.72
2.1.2	Trade policy convergence	0.47	0.32	0.44	0.69	0.62	0.84
2.1.2.1	Technical barriers to trade (TBT)	0.36	0.18	0.41	0.60	0.74	0.88
2.1.2.2	Sanitary and phytosanitary measures	0.42	0.23	0.40	0.65	0.48	0.85
2.1.2.3	Customs and trade facilitation	0.62	0.56	0.50	0.81	0.64	0.79
2.1.3	Sectoral cooperation	0.50	0.41	0.30	0.66	0.79	0.74
2.1.3.1	Financial services and movement of capital	0.55	0.41	0.43	0.62	0.81	0.79
2.1.3.2	Digital services	0.44	0.39	0.17	0.69	0.78	0.69
2.2	**Freedom, Security and Justice**	**0.73**	**0.60**	**0.50**	**0.94**	**0.95**	**0.90**
2.2.1	Visa dialogue	0.75	0.50	0.17	0.92	0.92	0.92
2.2.2	Irregular immigration, including readmission	1.00	0.71	0.57	1.00	0.93	1.00
2.2.3	Border management	0.20	0.40	0.69	0.83	1.00	0.80
2.2.4	Security and combatting organised crime	0.95	0.78	0.58	1.00	0.95	0.90
2.3	**Energy: Legislation Convergence and Energy Policy**	**0.59**	**0.51**	**0.58**	**0.44**	**0.83**	**0.74**
2.3.1	Institutional framework of energy market	0.26	0.36	0.17	0.46	0.65	0.65
2.3.2	Energy efficiency	0.75	0.67	1.00	0.42	1.00	0.83
2.3.3	Renewable energy	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.83	0.83	0.67

2.3.4	Energy security	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
2.4	**Environment and Climate Policy**	**0.60**	**0.61**	**0.40**	**0.71**	**0.94**	**0.74**
2.4.1	Environmental policy	0.54	0.82	0.60	0.69	0.88	0.67
2.4.2	Climate change	0.65	0.40	0.20	0.73	1.00	0.80
2.5	Transport: regulatory policy	0.63	0.46	0.48	0.63	0.61	0.71
3	**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**	**0.51**	**0.45**	**0.67**	**0.54**	**0.59**	**0.64**
3.1	**People**	0.50	0.42	0.80	0.50	0.61	0.63
3.2	**Planet**	0.62	0.58	0.70	0.66	0.64	0.73
3.3	**Prosperity**	0.59	0.46	0.73	0.57	0.60	0.70
3.4	**Peace and Partnership**	0.33	0.33	0.46	0.43	0.51	0.51

Source: EaP Index 2020–2021, available online https://eap-csf.eu/eastern-partnership-index/, accessed 14.12.2022

Appendix no. 2. Approximation dimension. The Eastern Partnership Index 2017

	2017	**UKRAINE**	**MOLDOVA**	**BELARUS**	**GEORGIA**	**ARMENIA**	**AZERBAIJAN**
	APPROXIMATION	**0.73**	**0.65**	**0.52**	**0.64**	**0.66**	**0.56**
1	**DEEP AND SUSTAINABLE DEMOCRACY**	**0.71**	**0.69**	**0.27**	**0.70**	**0.60**	**0.32**
1.1	Democratic rights and elections, including political pluralism	0.61	0.70	0.18	0.70	0.48	0.16
1.2	Human rights and protection against torture	0.65	0.64	0.06	0.68	0.58	0.36
1.3	State accountability	0.85	0.79	0.29	0.86	0.72	0.34
1.4	Independent media	0.57	0.61	0.21	0.62	0.55	0.13
1.5	Freedom of speech & assembly	0.83	0.72	0.10	0.73	0.47	0.00
1.6	Independent judiciary	0.65	0.61	0.42	0.64	0.86	0.39
1.7	Equal opportunities and non-discrimination	0.75	0.68	0.25	0.64	0.48	0.44
1.8	Fight against corruption	0.79	0.88	0.60	0.86	0.79	0.62
1.9	Public administration	0.69	0.58	0.33	0.53	0.49	0.47
2	**EU INTEGRATION AND CONVERGENCE**	**0.72**	**0.70**	**0.51**	**0.65**	**0.65**	**0.57**
2.1	Market economy and DCFTA alignment	0.58	0.62	0.58	0.84	0.70	0.64

2.2	Freedom, security and justice	0.97	0.94	0.36	0.96	0.77	0.70
2.3	Energy: legislation convergence and energy policy	0.55	0.54	0.55	0.30	0.64	0.60
2.4	Environment and climate policy	0.77	0.76	0.70	0.58	0.70	0.52
2.5	Transport: regulatory policy	0.71	0.66	0.36	0.57	0.45	0.38
3	**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**	**0.77**	**0.57**	**0.78**	**0.57**	**0.72**	**0.79**
3.1	Sustainable development policy	0.75	0.50	1.00	0.25	0.75	1.00
3.2	Sustainable development goals	0.58	0.46	0.75	0.58	0.58	0.58
3.3	Education and cultural policy	0.97	0.74	0.59	0.89	0.83	0.78

Source: EaP Index 2017, available online https://eap-csf.eu/eastern-partnership-index/, accessed 14.12. 2022.

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Assessing the Involvement/Development of Civil Society as Part of the European Integration Process of the Eastern Partnership States

Ana Maria Costea–Ioana Roxana Melenciuc-Ioan

Introduction

In 2003 the European Union (EU) declared itself as *"inevitably a global player"* (Council of the European Union 2003) given the number of its member states, population and GDP. This statement was largely contested due to the fact that the EU was not a single political and military entity. Rather than that, the global level referred to the sum of the interests and capabilities of its member states, this difference being a game changer since rather often the EU proved incapable of reaching a united conclusion regarding a pressing international event. At the empirical level, in 2004 the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was developed, but it quickly generated criticism from both the EU member states and the partner countries (from the Eastern and the Southern neighbourhood), since it envisioned a single top-down approach that was not adaptable to the reality from the ground. Although the EU was and still is a normative power, its model cannot be implemented as it is in any country, since we deal with different historical events, cultures, economic developments, political systems, etc. Thus, in order to be efficient, it needed to be adaptable through a horizontal type of strategy. This criticism reminded the international community about the former Belgian Foreign Minister's, Mark Eyskens, famous 1991 quote according to which Europe was *"an economic giant, a political dwarf, and a military worm"* (in Leonard 2018). Given the Central-Eastern European waves of enlargement (European Council, Council of European Union-Enlargement 2023)[1], the globalization process and Putin's claim for an inde-

pendent Russian foreign policy from 2007 during the Munich Security conference[2] the EU needed to ensure the stability and predictability of its neighbourhood. Hence, the EU decision makers created two new programs: the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) for the Southern region launched in 2008[3] and the Eastern Partnership (EaP) for the Eastern one.[4] Even after this differentiation the programs still faced issues regarding the effectiveness. Given the recent events happening in Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Armenia, the present research will focus on analysing the EaP partner countries and their integration process considering the civil society development. We have chosen this topic since many of the current analyses focus on the hard security level, bypassing one of the keystones of democratic principles (Popoveniuc 2022), the civil society.

Research methodology

The present paper aims to assess the civil societies' development and involvement as part of the European integration process, within the six EaP countries, between 2011 and 2022. The assessment is based on the principles of evaluation based on criteria, approach that shall be addressed in the upcoming section.

The data source employed is mainly the assessing mechanism used by the European Commission regarding the EAP states, namely the European Integration Index for the Eastern Partnership (named as such up to 2014) and the Eastern Partnership Index starting with 2015. It is not only relevant considering the content, but also a sustainable and credible data source. However, in order to comprehensively assess the development of the civil society there are also included international independent indexes like Freedom House's Freedom of the World 2021 and 2022 Reports.

The criteria set for the assessment are selected considering the hypothesis of the paper, that the more developed the civil society is, the deeper goes the European integration process. Moreover, the quality of each democratic system lays in the existence and involvement of a sustainable civil society, thus the latter is a condition for the existence of the first, and without the first we cannot discuss about any sort of European integration. Thus, for the period of 2011–2014 the analysis focuses on *Participation of civil society* within the Management dimension, since afterwards, the civil society category became an inter-sectorial one. For the period of 2015–2021 we will analyse the Approximation domain, the *Democracy and good governance* category. Within it the following sub-categories will be selected: *Democratic rights and elections*, *State accountability*, *Independent media*, *Freedom of opinion and expression*, *Freedom of assembly and association*, *Equal opportunities and non-discrimination and Public administration.* The reason behind this selection lays on the fact that the European integration refers to the alignment towards the European norms and values, among which the rule of law and the quality of the democratic process are leitmotivs. Also, these elements are es-

sential in assessing the CSOs involvement in the internal and external affairs of each state, especially during crises situations like: the annexation of Crimea, the Ukrainian crisis, the Nagorno-Karabakh war, the Ukrainian war, etc. Unfortunately, there is no data available regarding the above subcategories for 2018–2019, but in order to tackle this limit, we will analyse for the period of 2011–2021 also the Linkage domain since it represents the links between the governments, CSOs, business sector and citizens in the partner countries and the EU member states. Also, we will take into consideration the Progress reports for 20 deliverables for 2020 (European Council, Council of the European Union 2022) (2018, 2019, 2020) that were launched in 2017 paying a special attention to the first cross-cutting deliverable, namely More engagement with civil society organisations.

From a timeframe point of view, the year of 2011 was chosen since it is the first year when the European Integration Index for the Eastern Partnership states was launched in order to measure the progress achieved by each state and the year of 2022 is the year when the Ukrainian war started and both Moldova and Ukraine became candidate countries to the EU, thus officially entering on the European integration path towards a future membership.

The framework of the assessment – a brief literature review on criteria-based evaluation

Throughout the many definitions of evaluation, the one that best fits our needs is that referred to by many authors, that evaluation is to *"value the merit or worth of an entity in a systematic way"* (Alkin 2011: 9). The discipline of evaluation sets the evaluation paradigms throughout five generations, that are set in a chronological order.

The evaluations performed at the beginning of what we consider today as the discipline of evaluation were focused on the decision-making function. This meant that evaluations were used either to legitimize decisions that were already taken, or that they were providing valuable data about the performance of a program, information that influenced the decision of financing the program or not. At this point in the evolution of evaluation as a discipline it is very important that the data provided are accurate, as the discipline was not yet consolidated as a science, and the public still had to validate its means and use. The evaluations are mainly results-oriented, quantitative driven. It was at that point that the criteria-based evaluations made the difference between pre-evaluation and evaluation, as they brought the systematic approach in the process of assessment.

The second generation of evaluations brings to the fore the importance of evaluation use. It is less relevant the act of measuring and the focus on accuracy that was specific to the authors of the first-generation, while it becomes utterly important to perform evaluations that are useful considering the needs of the client (and the clients tend to be more sophisticated in their expectations).

The third generation of evaluations brings us in the realm of evaluating in order to increase the performance of the program. This implies an exhaustive, systematic approach, that links the causalities to the effects and thus constructs the paradigm of change. It is at this point that evaluations based on the theory of the program get to the fore, and remain there up to present. The approach based on the theory of the program implies comparing an ideal model to the reality, thus constructing the paradigm of change and the means to improve the intervention. Both quantitative and qualitative methods are being used, as long as they get to the aimed thorough understanding (Fitzpatrick 2012).

The forth generation of evaluations is constructed on the premises of the theory of the program, but the focus shifts to constructing the universe of the program (the theory) by considering diverse stakeholders. Thus, the participation of the stakeholders in both constructing the evaluation design and the evaluation process, gets to be of utter importance.

The fifth generations evaluators further develop the models of the theory of the program scholars, by shifting the focus to the transformation process. The process of evaluating gets to be more important that the results of the evaluation as such, as the process of evaluating can (and should) transform organizations or societies. Within this framework one can find the means for a meaningful gender-based evaluation, or for evaluating for democratization.

However, all the five paradigms co-exist, and nowadays there are performed evaluations specific to all paradigms and generations, without being made value-based distinctions among them. Our assessment can be assimilated to a brief criteria-based evaluation. The criteria-based evaluation is a transversal layer that can be applied to various approaches that are characteristic to different generations of evaluation as well. Our assessment can be placed in between the first and the third generation, making use of the criteria at the operational level. While the focus is mainly on the results (specific to the first generation), there is also being paid attention to the context, and to the causalities, linking broadly the results to the structural elements and the specific elements (Mertens–Wilson 2012: 34–41). Even though the criteria that we chose do assess part of the democratization process/transformation of the societies, the evaluation is not transformational and does not aim to generate change by its own, thus the current assessment should not be understood in the framework of a fifth-generation evaluation.

The criteria can be defined as the attribute used to determine the value or merit of the evaluand. Some evaluators consider the criterial thinking as being at the root of any evaluation, requiring the *"formal expression of goals and performance in terms of generic descriptors"* (Stake 2004: 54–57). However, as expected, the choice of some criteria over others is a subjective process and may determine whether the evaluated program is successful or not. In our case, the choice for the criteria has been made considering the hypothesis of research, namely that a good ranking in civil society participation is correlated with a deeper EU integration (which also implies the adjacent understanding that EU integration can only

be developed in a functional democratic society.

The evaluation questions are being interconnected with the criteria, as listed below:

1. Do the EaP countries register a progressive path in civil society participation? Linked with the criteria *Civil Society participation, Democratic rights and elections, State accountability, Independent media, Freedom of opinion and expression, Freedom of assembly and association, Equal opportunities and non-discrimination and Public administration*
2. Is there a link between a high level of participation of the civil society and the status of a candidate country?
3. Is the performance of the civil society participation affected by the regional wars?

The purpose of this assessment is to generate know-how, probably the least common of all the evaluation uses, which is mainly characteristic to the academia (Alkin 2011). Thus, the assessment is not expected to produce an immediate outcome, but to be referred to by other experts in the field.

EaP member states – a divided European path

Launched in the aftermath of the Georgian war from 2008 and during the energy competition between Nabucco and South/ North Stream, the EaP (2009) was believed to be a response to the criticism brought against the ENP for having a top down approach centred on a single policy that all partners should implement. The reason behind such a logic would be that the program was dedicated to only six Eastern countries, thus it encompassed a targeted objective on a very specific region. Unfortunately, the empirical dynamics contradicted this logic. Although there were only six partner countries from the same region, their expectations from the EU and their interests could not have been more diverse. On one hand states like Ukraine, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova wanted the program to offer future membership prospects, fact that was not possible, since it was not the objective of the EU regarding EaP. However, it offered the possibility of economic and political integration *"without prejudice to individual partner countries' aspirations for their future relations with the European Union"* (Council of the European Union 2009). This vague statement put the aforementioned states in a rather difficult position in relation with Russia that considered the initiative as a threat to its area of influence. On the other hand, states like Belarus and Armenia did not have any acknowledged interest in joining the EU in the foreseeable future due to several reasons: Belarus had and still has a close relationship with the Russian Federation, both in political and economic terms, and Armenia did not want to antagonize Moscow since it needed it in order to balance Azerbaijan in the Nagorno–Karabakh conflict as it was confirmed in 2020. This statement was later on proved by the fact that

both became part of the Eurasian Union (Eurasian Economic Union 2023). Last, but not least, Azerbaijan traditionally adopted a balancing strategy between the East and the West using the energy card (IEA 2023) that provided a certain level of independence. From an economic point of view, Moldova was dependent on the Russian market and gas, and so was Ukraine. The difference between the two resided on the fact that Ukraine was an energy hub, fact that provided important leverage at the negotiating table. From a social point of view, Moldova was and still is a rather fragmented society that was not constant regarding its European path (The Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index 2022a). This lack of persistency was somehow dealt with after 2022 when the Ukrainian war started and the EU was seen as a viable option due to the fear that Russia would also invade Moldova. The same situation could have been seen in Ukraine before 2022 (The Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index 2022b).

At the level of incentives, the EaP offered both a bilateral and multilateral approach, the first one concentrating on the possibility of signing Association Agreements (AA) and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTA) that lead to gradual integration of the partner countries into the EU economy, but also on other areas like mobility, security, social development, etc. (Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council COM 823 final 2008). Three out of the six partner countries signed AA with the EU: Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine bringing them to a higher level of economic integration in relation with the European structures (European Union External Action 2022). At the same time, this did not have a spill-over effect over other domains and did not respond to the security needs of those countries. Rather than that, it attracted a higher level of criticism from the Russian side and culminated with the emergence of the Ukrainian war. Coming back to the topic of the paper, faced with hard security issues (annexation of Crimea from 2014, Nagorno–Karabakh war from 2020, Russian economic blockade against the Moldavian imports, and the war from 2022) the EaP states reacted differently in terms of involvement and development of their civil societies as it can be seen in the forthcoming analysis. These fluctuating behaviours affected the governance quality which in turn affected their European integration process as it will furtherly be seen.

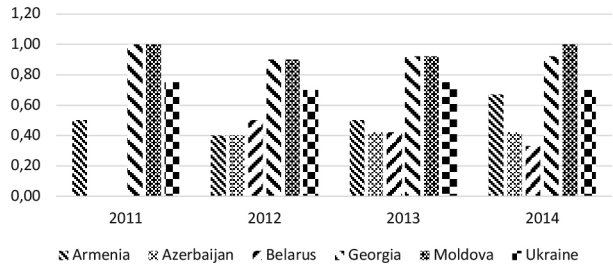
Civil societies in EaP states: 10 years of progressive and regressive behaviours

As already stated, without an active civil society a state cannot reasonably have a functioning democratic system, and without a functioning democratic system a state cannot achieve a high level of European Integration, be it a candidate country or not, since this is one of the fundamental norms of the EU.

In order to be able to have an accurate image over the involvement of CSOs, we firstly analysed the EaP indexes from 2011 until 2021 for each EaP state, by comparing the scores for the chosen categories and subcategories that each partner state

registered on a scale from 0 (being the lowest) and 1 (being the highest). This comparative and longitudinal analysis is fundamental for identifying and characterising the behaviour of each country regarding its civil society in crisis versus non crisis situations. It is equally important to see if a state follows a progressive path, or rather if it follows a regressive one when faced with security issues (be them economic, political, military in their nature).

Figure 1. Participation of civil society in EaP states 2011–2014



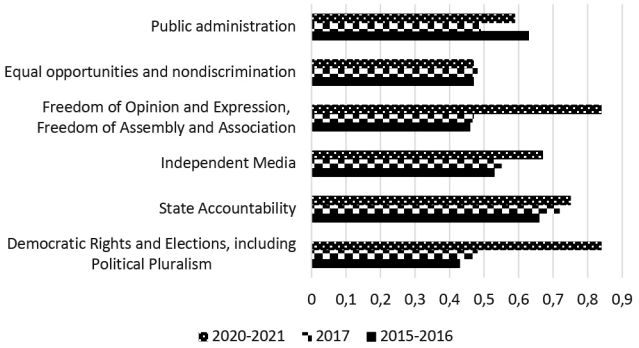
Source: Analysis developed by the authors based on the data collected from Eastern Integration Indexes for Eastern Partnership countries conducted by Open Society and International Renaissance Foundations available online https://eap-csf.eu/, accessed 4 December 2022

As previously mentioned, for the period of 2011–2014, the Index envisioned a special category for CSOs participation in the EaP societies. Analysing the above chart, we can see that the Republic of Moldova and Georgia are scoring in some years 1 out of a maximum of 1, revealing a high participation rate of CSOs in both states, with some fluctuations in 2012 and 2013. Also, although there was a small difference, Georgia was on a slight regressive path from 1 in 2011 to 0.92 in 2014. At the same time, Ukraine was rather constant from 0.75 to 0.70, Armenia on a progressive path from 0.5 in 2011 to 0.67 in 2014. Azerbaijan, although not reaching the median level, still was on a progressive path from 0 (with a practical non-existent active civil society) to 0.42, as it was also the case of Belarus (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum). Since the annexation of Crimea occurred in 2014 and to some degree it affected all six states, but of course mainly Ukraine, we could claim that the Russian threat did not affect in a negative way the quality of the civil society and thus neither the integration process for states like Moldova or Ukraine. But given the events from Ukraine regarding the Euromaidan in the West, the pro-Russian protests in the East, the Crimean annexation, the fraud scandal in Moldova (Reuters 2020), the pressures that Russian put on those states, the social fragmentation of the population, the EU leaders decided that the program needed a structural reform, since the index did not transparently reflected the partners' domestic dynamics. Starting with 2015 the index stopped discussing about the integration (by changing its name), thus, eliminating a direct causal link between the program and a possible pre-acceding strategy, and went into a more in-depth

analysis regarding the indicators that the partner countries need to achieve in order to reach a high level of European integration. It is worth mentioning that reaching this level would not automatically turn a state into a candidate country. Even if this situation is achieved, this does not guarantee a possible membership, but this is a different topic of discussion that does not fall under the topic of this paper. Thus, moving to the period of 2015–2021, when the civil participation was included as an inter-sectorial category, we analysed each state from the selected categories' point of view, as it follows:

Armenia. As it can be seen below, this state registered a huge boost in terms of *Democratic Rights and Elections, including Political Pluralism and Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Freedom of Assembly and Association* sub-categories going from 0.43 in 2015 to 0.84 in 2021 for the first and from 0.46 to 0.84 for the second during the same period of time (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum). It is worth mentioning that this boost happened during the 2020–2021 timeframe, thus during the Nagorno–Karabakh war pinpointing towards a rather robust and active civil society especially during crisis situations. Also, another important aspect is represented by the fact that in 2021 Armenia was the frontrunner from all six states regarding *Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Freedom of Assembly and Association* sub-category (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum). At the same time, we cannot claim that this boost was done with the purpose of reaching a high level of European Integration, since Armenia is part of the Eurasian Union and still depends on the Russian Federation regarding Nagorno–Karabakh, but we cannot exclude the results either. At the same time it is worth mentioning that external funding is allowed for CSOs, thus creating a certain degree of independence from the state. Thus, although dependent from a security point of view to Russia, Armenia proves able to reach a rather positive level of European Integration increasing its freedom scores, as it will be seen further.

Figure 2. Civil society in Armenia-Approximation domain 2015–2021

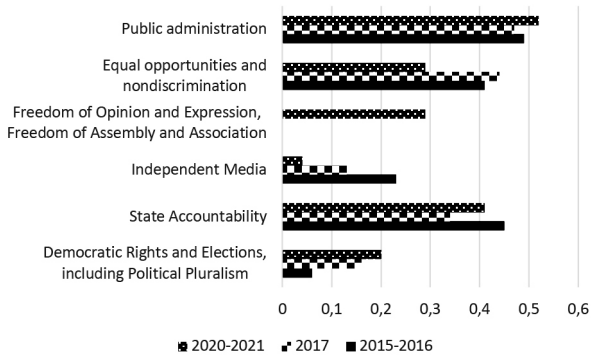


Source: Analysis developed by the authors based on the data collected from Eastern Partnership Indexes conducted by Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum available online https://eap-csf.eu/, accessed 4 January 2023.

Speaking about the efficiency of the CSOs from Armenia especially during the Nagorno-Karabakh war, the general trend was a rather positive one. One of the main reasons for their efficiency was represented by the availability of foreign donors to adapt to the dynamics from the ground, by adjusting their programs to the needs of the society (Komm–Zamejc–Terzi 2021: 11). More than that, the CSOs even cooperated with their peers from Azerbaijan, when the official communication channels were frozen, in specific and sensitive issues like prisons of war exchanges, the situations of civilians that were caught in the war zones, etc. (Komm–Zamejc–Terzi 2021: 17), proving a high level of adaptability and a general positive path into which Armenia embarked.

Azerbaijan. If in the previous case we could acknowledge a rather robust and active civil society, in this case, by looking at the results and comparing the two subcategories, we can claim that in Azerbaijan objectively the civil society has a very limited role. Also with a score of 0.04 regarding the *Independent media* in 2021, we can say that practically there is no free media in this state. The only sub-category where Azerbaijan reached the median line in 2021 is the *Public Administration* one by scoring 0.52 showing a strong public administration sector (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum).

Figure 3. Civil society in Azerbaijan-Approximation domain 2015–2021.



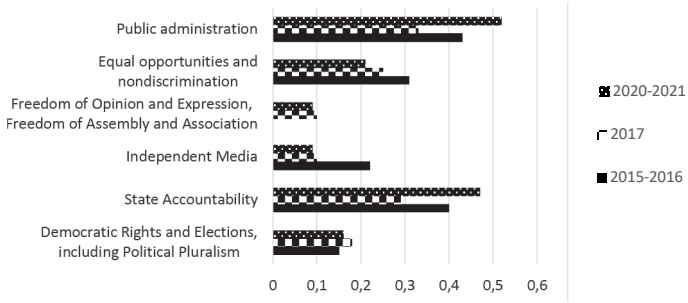
Source: Analysis developed by the authors based on the data collected from Eastern Partnership Indexes conducted by Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum available online https://eap-csf.eu/, accessed 4 January 2023.

Analysing specifically the period of 2020–2021 when the war occurred, we can notice a rather low level of European Integration with no noticeable positive changes (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum) that were generated by the conflict with Armenia. Rather than that, having arrested the activists that criticized the war (Freedom House 2021) and not allowing NGOs' access to foreign funding (Guluzade–Rzayev 2022: 5), we could claim that Azerbaijan is on a rather negative path towards its European integration. Thus, the chart confirms the political strategy that Azerbaijan adopted, by not allying with the West, nor the East.

Unfortunately, the war served as an opportunity for the government to adopt domestic measures that affect the core principles of a democratic country, fact that affects its freedom as will be seen in the following chapter.

Belarus. In the case of this country, we can notice a rather similar situation with that from Azerbaijan, the main difference being that Belarus has a strategic political economic and military partnership with the Russian Federation, also being part of the Eurasian Union. Reaching the score of 0.15 to 0.16 regarding the *Democratic rights and elections* we can pinpoint towards a rather non-democratic state, with practical no *Independent Media* (0.09 in 2021) and no *Freedom of Expression and Assembly* (0.09 in 2021). For a civil society to be able to function properly, it needs the suitable legal framework, which is not the case. The only sub-category where Belarus reaches the median line is represented by *Public Administration* (0.52 in 2021) as it is the case of Azerbaijan. Regarding State accountability it scored only 0.47 (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum) confirming Human Rights Watch report from 2021 according to which *"Belarusian security forces arbitrarily detained thousands of people and subjected hundreds to torture and other ill-treatment in an attempt to stifle the protests"* (Human Rights Watch 2021). At the same time these abuses were met with even more public outrage, as *"tens of thousands continued to demonstrate peacefully for fair elections and justice for abuses"* (Human Rights Watch 2021) highlighting the beginning steps of an active formal and informal civil society. All in all, realistically speaking, we cannot discuss about a European path for this state in the foreseeable future given the development level of its civil society, thus its non-democratic system. This position is reinforced by the sanctions that the EU imposed against it for its contribution in the Ukrainian war. It is worth mentioning that these were a deepening of the already existing sanctions that were in place starting with 2020 due to the governmental actions against civilians that were previously mentioned (European Council, Council of European Union 2023a). Last, but not least, in July 2021 Belarus was suspended from participating to the EaP programme (European Council, Council of European Union 2023b), cutting all the official channels regarding its European integration.

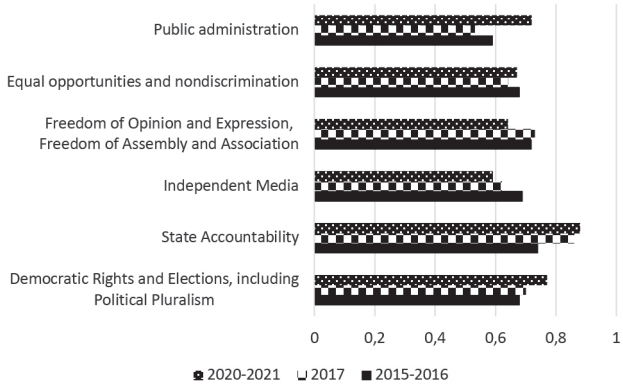
Figure 4. Civil society in Belarus-Approximation domain 2015–2021.



Source: Analysis developed by the authors based on the data collected from Eastern Partnership Indexes conducted by Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum available online https://eap-csf.eu/, accessed 4 January 2023

Georgia. Although it was the frontrunner from all six states regarding the *State Accountability* in 2021 with a score of 0.88, the government from Tbilisi registered a regressive path regarding the *Independence of Media* (from 0.69 in 2015 to 0.59 in 2021) and *Freedom of Expression and Assembly* (from 0.72 in 2015 to 0.64 in 2021), aspects that are quintessential for a functioning civil society in any democratic state. At the same time we can notice a slightly increase regarding the other sub-categories, especially Public Administration (from 0.59 in 2015 to 0.72 in 2021) and State Accountability (from 0.74 in 2015 to 0.88 in 2021) highlighting a stronger and stronger public sector (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum). Comparing 2011–2014 with 2015–2021 periods of time, as it is the case of the Republic of Moldova (analysed below), we can notice a more nuanced and fluctuating conclusion regarding the European integration path of Georgia in what concerns the civil society development. This fact was officially noticed by the EU decision makers in 2022 when they decided to refuse Georgia's proposal to become a candidate country, aspect that will be analysed in the following chapter.

Figure 5. Civil society in Georgia Approximation domain 2015–2021.

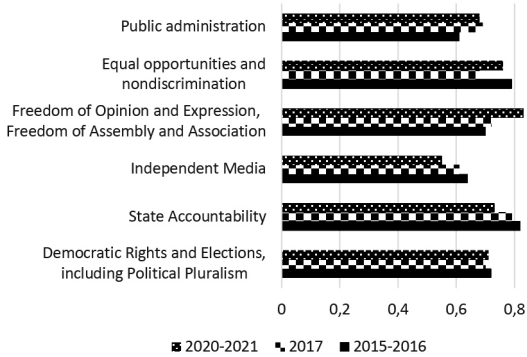


Source: Analysis developed by the authors based on the data collected from Eastern Partnership Indexes conducted by Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum available online https://eap-csf.eu/, accessed 4 January 2023.

The Republic of **Moldova.** Although it started as a frontrunner in terms of civil society participation (2011–2014), over the years, the authorities from Chisinau had a fluctuating behaviour regarding Moldova's integration process. This pattern was possible due to the fragmentation of the Moldavian society that was reflected in the strategies of ruling parties and the presidential platforms. Another argument that can explain the differences between 2011–2014 period of time and 2015–2021 one is the 2014–2015 fraud scandal regarding 1 billion USD which ended up in EU temporarily freezing its aid (Reuters 2020). We could say that the Republic of Moldova is a classic example of why the EaP Index needed to be reformed and to add

these inter-sectorial domains and more specific indicators. If in 2014 it scored 1 out of 1 for the participation of civil society, for the period of 2015–2021 the dynamics are more nuanced. Regarding *State Accountability* (from 0.83 in 2015 to 0.73 in 2021) and *Independent media* (from 0.64 in 2015 to 0.55 in 2021), Moldova faced a slightly regressive path. Regarding the other sub-categories, as it can be seen below, it had a more constant behaviour, especially regarding the *Democratic Rights and Elections* (0.72, 0.71, and 0.7) and *Equal opportunities and Non-discrimination* (0.79, 0.68, and 0.76) levels. The only positive trend that was registered the one referring to *Freedom and Expression* where it went from 0.7 in 2015 till 0.83 in 2021 indicating a more active and vocal civil society (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum).

Figure 6. Civil society in Moldova Approximation domain 2015–2021.

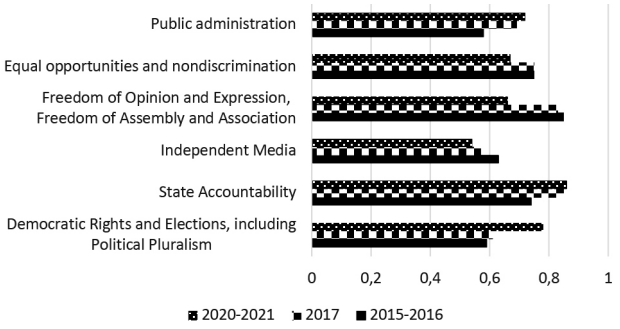


Source: Analysis developed by the authors based on the data collected from Eastern Partnership Indexes conducted by Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum available online https://eap-csf.eu/, accessed 4 January 2023.

Ukraine. As the biggest immediate neighbour of the EU after the Russian Federation, Ukraine has a major geopolitical importance for both Brussels and Moscow. This argument is proven also for the analysed period of time, especially starting with 2014 when the Ukrainian crisis erupted. Analysing the chosen sub-categories, Kiev situates itself in a both progressive and regressive pattern. Firstly it scored positive results regarding the *Democratic rights* (from 0.59 in 2015 to 0.78 in 2021 being the second after Armenia), *State Accountability* (from 0.74 in 2015 to 0.86 in 201 being the second after Georgia) and *Public administration* (from 0.59 in 2015 to 0.72 in 2021 being the first along with Georgia), demonstrating a more robust and resilient, democratic public sector. On the other side, it scored negatively regarding *Independent media* (from 0.63 in 2015 to 0.54 in 2021), *Freedom of opinion* (from 0.85 in 2015 to 0.66 in 2021) *and Equal opportunities and Non-discrimination* (from 0.75 in 2015 to 0.67 in 2021) (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum). Thus, although some generic democratic rights were protected, in terms of measures taken to protect the vulnerable groups or regarding the framework that the state

must create in order to ensure a save and free space for expression, Ukraine was on a regressive path, aspects that will the highlighted latter on by the international community especially regarding the rights of minorities (Denber 2022). At the same time, as it will be seen in the following chapter, in 2022 the Ukrainian civil society became more and more involved in the country's affairs especially in what concerns its European integration.

Figure 7. Civil society in Ukraine – Approximation domain 2015–2021.

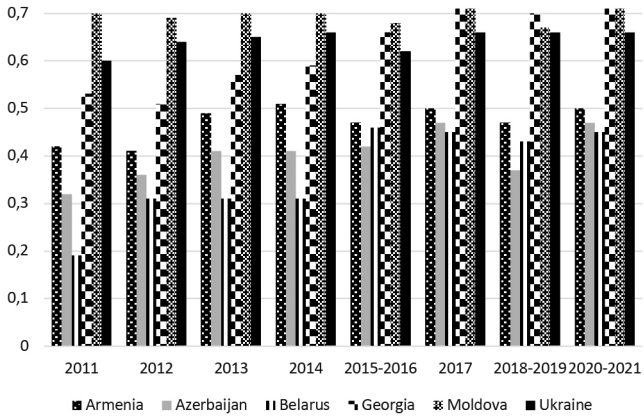


Source: Analysis developed by the authors based on the data collected from Eastern Partnership Indexes conducted by Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum available online https://eap-csf.eu/, accessed 4 January 2023.

Making a cross-analysis over all six states for the 2015–2021 period of time in relative terms (thus without taking into consideration the numbers, but the trends at the macro level) we can notice that, although not reaching very high scores for all, Armenia was the single country that was on a progressive path for all six sub-categories. As previously mentioned, it occupied the first place regarding *Democratic rights and Freedom of Opinion, Expression, Assembly and Association* registering the highest scores, almost doubling them from 0.43/0.46 in 2015, to 0.84/0.84 in 2021, reaching the highest level of increase. Also it was the only partner state that was on a positive pattern regarding the *Independent Media* subcategory although in absolute terms it did not scored a very high value (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum). These aspects are even more important since Armenia was perceived as being on the losing side regarding Nagorno–Karabakh war from the autumn of 2020. Also, faced with a national security problem, the civil society from this state, although criticized, proved to be active and resilient in a wartime situation (Komm–Zamejc–Terzi 2021: 13). At the same time, Moldova and Azerbaijan were the only partner states that were on a positive pattern regarding Public Administration, but scored a regressive behaviour regarding *State accountability*, although the general trend should be vice-versa. On the other hand, Belarus was the only country where the *Democratic rights* were limited and Ukraine and Georgia were the only ones where the *Freedom of opinion* has decreased (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum).

In terms of the interactions between the governments, CSOs, business sector and citizens in the partner countries and the EU member states, we can notice below that Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine passed the median line, proving a good European integration level regarding the Linkage domain. Moldova tended to be the most constant partner fluctuating between 0.68 and 0.71 (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum), fact that proved a rather stable relationship between the actors, with minor setbacks during Igor Dodon's presidency. The partner states that registered the highest increase is Georgia going from a score of 0.51–0.53 in 2011–2012 to 0.71 in 2021. On the other side, Ukraine tended to be more constant fluctuating between 0.6 and 0.66. Starting with 2017 it entered on a stable dynamic scoring the same, 0.66, proving its pro-European view (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum). This behaviour can be seen also as a reaction to the Russian actions starting with 2014, the annexation of Crimea, the Ukrainian reaction taking the form of the Euromaidan, etc. Regarding Armenia and Azerbaijan, the numbers prove that the war did not affect the links between the players, as they even increased from 2018–2019 (pre-war) to 2020–2021 (post-war).

Figure 8. Linkage dimension 2011–2021 behavioural patterns



Source: Analysis developed by the authors based on the data collected from Eastern Partnership Indexes conducted by Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum available online https://eap-csf.eu/, accessed 4 January 2023.

On the other hand, as a result of the criticism brought over time and the conclusions of the meeting of foreign ministers in May 2016, the European Commission together with the European External Action Service launched in 2017 the 20 deliverables that should have been achieved by 2020. These can be grouped into four priority areas and three inter-sectoral priorities that refer to: stronger civil society involvement, gender equality and non-discrimination and strengthening strategic communication, supporting pluralism and media independence (European Council, Council of the European Union 2017).

In 2018 (EUforBusiness 2018), 2019 (European Council, Council of the European Union 2020) and 2020 (EU Neighbours East 2020), the European Commission launched the progress monitoring reports on these 20 deliverables. Regarding the main differences between the Index and the 20 deliverables, we must mention the following aspects: in the case of the Index, the emphasis falls on the expressed achievements of each partner state separately on a scale from 0 to 1, 0 being the minimum and 1 being the maximum. In the case of deliverables, the focus is no longer on the score of each individual state, but on the 20 deliverables, thus tangible results, even using examples. Then, the Commission no longer uses the scale, but rather focuses on the objectives achieved and those that still require effort and time to be achieved. As a conclusion for the three analysed years, in February 2020 the Commission labelled the cross cutting deliverable *More engagement with civil-society organisations* "on track" with progress registered from 2016 (EU Neighbours East 2020: 12) highlighting the following results: all six countries implemented capacity building projects, there were more than 60 fellowship projects that were granted to more than 200 persons, there was implemented a pilot instrument that can be used in order to monitor the civil society in all EaP states and the EU increased its engagement level towards the Civil Society Forum having the aim to improve the policy dialogue level (EU Neighbours East 2020: 2).

Therefore, between 2011 and 2021 the general macro trend was pretty much maintained, the front runners (Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova) generally maintaining their positions. Analysing in a more in-depth way we notice the development of the Armenian civil society in comparison with the three mentioned above that are, either constant, or regressing, although Armenia passed through a wartime situation. At the same time, we should highlight the general relative constant scores of Ukraine (the exception being the subcategories Freedom of Opinion, Expression, Assembly and Association, Independent Media and Equal opportunities and non-discrimination), although starting from 2014 it dealt with huge security problems due to the Russian actions.

2022-a game changer?

2022 brought the European continent in front of yet another war (the largest armed conflict since World War II). Besides the hard security concerns, the civil society from all six states were put under pressure due to the instable situation from Ukraine.

At the same time, the war presented itself with an unprecedented opportunity in terms of European integration. Three of the six EaP states applied to the EU for a candidate status: Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia. As the numbers are showing above, they were the most prepared and willing ones from all six. Although Georgia has a rather similar development regarding the civil society, when it officially applied for obtaining the status of a candidate country to the EU, the

European decision-makers did not grant it with this status as it was in the case of Moldova and Ukraine. The reasons behind the decision were related more to the reforms that the Georgian government still needs to implement regarding the human rights, rule of law and a process of *"de-oligarchisation"* (Liboreiro 2022). This opinion is backed by the Freedom House 2022 results, labelling Georgia as a partly free country with a score of 58 out of 100 (decreasing from a score of 60 in 2021) (Freedom House 2022a). It is worth mentioning that for the same year Moldova obtained a score of 62/100 (increasing from 61 in 2021) (Freedom House 2022b) and Ukraine 61/100 (increasing from 60 in 2021) (Freedom House 2022c). Although we can identify a rather high level of integration regarding the development of CSOs as it was analysed and also an economic integration through the AA and the DCFTA (European Council, Council of European Union 2023b), this was not enough in order to grant it with EU candidate status. At the same time, generally speaking, the quality of being a candidate country does not automatically mean an already high level of integration or that once a candidate a state it will become for sure a member state, nor does it mean that a state does not have to make changes. For example, Ukraine, among others, is highly criticised for breaches regarding human rights, especially minorities ones (European Parliament 2018), as even the Indexes proved. Generally speaking, a candidate country should prove an increased level of European integration, but over the years we witnessed situations in which a candidate state chose for several reasons that are not within the scope of this paper to draw away from the Copenhagen criteria (EU-Lex 2023), thus to embark in a regressive integration process. This is the case of Turkey, a state that has a candidate status since 1999 (European Commission 2023). Even after the accession, the integration process continues since it is an ongoing process as the EU is far from being a static organization. Last, but not least, we should not exclude the fact that granting a state with the candidate status is also a political act that is decided by all EU member states in unanimity.

Analysing specifically the case of Ukraine, since it is a part of the Ukrainian-Russian war, in terms of civil society development, we can notice that the more aggressive Russia has been over the years, the more active the CSOs have become and the 2022 war was no exception. At the same time we have to distinguish between the formal civil society and the informal one. The formal CSOs like think thanks involved themselves in the geopolitical aspects of war, pushing towards a deeper European integration, by supporting the liberal, pro-democratic reforms, women's rights, local governmental accountability, etc., as they see the European path as a viable alternative to the subservice Russian actions against the very core of Ukraine as a state. There are 184 Ukrainian organizations that are registered within the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum proving their interest and involvement. This trend was noticeable also by analysing the charts from above. Even more importantly, starting with 2019, "Ukraine's pro-European society and European integration course have been included in the country's constitution, making it easier for Ukraine's stakeholders to push through reforms when they have a European

label attached" (Zarembo 2022: 56). Concretely, *"Ukrainian CSOs cooperated with the EU to build an anticorruption infrastructure through institutions like the National Anticorruption Bureau, the Specialized Anticorruption Prosecutor's Office, the National Agency on Corruption Prevention, the State Bureau of Investigation, and the High Anticorruption Court"*(Zarembo 2022: 56).

Even in the case of Ukraine's candidacy to the European Union, the civil society played a very important role. In July 2022 approximately 200 organisations from Ukraine signed a petition for the EU in order to grant Ukraine a candidate status. Even more, they advocated at the EU's level, they helped the Ukrainian policy makers in drafting the European Commission questionnaire. Even more importantly, their actions were not singular, but, rather than that, bidirectional, as the government from Kiev asked their help in the application process. At the same time, the CSOs kept being involved in the domestic affairs also. For example they maintained their criticism towards the government relating to the corruption accusations. Taking into consideration the pre-2014 internal division between East and West, we have to mention also the pro-Russian CSOs, but after February 2022 they remained a minority (Zarembo 2022: 56–57).

In what regards the informal Ukrainian civil society, it supports the European path of Ukraine, adding a new pro-European integration level to the already existing ones. In terms of tangible actions, according to the polls approximately 80% of the population was involved in defending their country through: volunteering, financial contribution, and information resistance, work in defending and maintaining the critical infrastructure or being part of the military personnel (Rating Group 2022).

All in all, given the crises it has been going through, Ukraine proved a robust and active civil society that helped the country in its integration process. This does not mean that we should bypass the regress that was visible regarding the media independence, freedom of expression and equal opportunities and non-discrimination. Rather than that, these scores give Ukraine the clear image towards the actions it needs to take in order to increase its European integration level.

Conclusions

The purpose of this paper was to assess the involvement/development of civil society in the European integration process of all six EaP partner countries putting a special emphasis on the crises situations, namely the 2020 Nagorno–Karabakh war and the 2022 Russian-Ukrainian war. In order to reach this objective, we have conducted a longitudinal comparative analysis over 2011–2022 period of time on specific items that we have chosen. The primal source that we have used was represented by the EaP Index and for the 2022 period of time other international Indexes that deal with the involvement and development of civil society. From the EaP Index we have selected a limited number of domains (Management, Approxi-

mation and Linkage) that have a direct connection with the topic of our research. Since from the start we have positioned ourselves in the framework according to which without a strong civil society, we cannot have a democratic state, we have also analysed the Freedom Index scores for all states. In terms of results, we cannot claim that civil society tends to be stronger during wartime situations, although both Armenia and Ukraine proved to be under this category. The reasons that lays behind our conclusion is the case study of Azerbaijan, where the CSOs and activists faced setbacks regarding their rights and liberties in 2020 and 2021. Regarding the European Integration process, it is confirmed that the stronger the civil society is, the deeper the European integration is. We could argue that to a certain degree Armenia could be the exception, since it registered high scores regarding the Approximation domain. A possible explanation in this case could be that due to hard security concerns, it tends to cooperate more with the Russian Federation rather than the EU since it cannot balance Azerbaijan by itself. At the same time, this strategic choice is captured by the Linkage domain scores, where it scored only 0.4-0.5 out of 1 for the examined period of time (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum). Since Yerevan tends to be on a positive trend it remains to be seen which would be its future strategies.

Last, but not least, generally speaking, the formal/ informal civil society proved to have crucial roles especially under wartime situations in both analysed events, especially in Ukraine where they even had a tangible role in the candidacy of Ukraine to the EU. Also, it is confirmed that the higher the involvement of civil society is in a state, the higher is the score regarding its democratic principles.

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Notes

[1] In 2004: Czech Republic, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia and in 2007: Romania and Bulgaria. For more information please check: European Council, Council of European Union (2023c) Enlargement https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/enlargement/ accessed on 9 January 2023.

[2] "Russia is a country with a history that spans more than a thousand years and has practically always used the privilege to carry out an independent foreign policy" Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy, Vladimir Putin, 10 February 2007. For the entire speech please access: http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034 accessed on 9 January 2023.

[3] It encompasses 16 partner countries like: Albania, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, North Macedonia, Palestine, Syria (until 2011), Tunisia and Turkey. For more information please access Union for the Mediterranean https://ufmsecretariat.org/ accessed on 9 January 2023.

[4] It encompasses six Eastern European countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Belarus, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine. For more information, please access European Council, Council of European Union (2023) Eastern Partnership https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eastern-partnership/ accessed on 9 January 2023.

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Democratic Resilience Building in Eastern Europe the EU's Role in Supporting the Ukrainian Civil Society[1]

Oana Ancuța Poiană–Laurențiu Petrila

Introduction and state of the art

For the last decade, the EU has experienced many internal and external crises and has been struggling to identify viable solutions and increase its capacity to act in matters of security, public health, disinformation and democracy promotion. However, the EU did not always manage to correctly identify future trends and anticipate geopolitical changes. Thus, it has been criticized by several national governments and competing global actors for its lack of strategic thinking and accused of formulating its policies according to a perpetual reactive pattern. Furthermore, EU's structural inability to deal with these cumulative crises comes in a global retraction context where hard power is more central than ever.

Growing political instability at its Eastern border and the deepening Russo-Ukrainian war are compelling the EU to adjust its principles of foreign policy action. Moreover, the conditions that determine the expectations of neighboring countries for a united Europe have changed, and the political regimes of many European countries are shaped differently.

In a tensed international order characterized by very low levels of predictability, the EU has limited capabilities to offer in terms of hard power not to mention the complicated decision-making process and the lack of willingness to cooperate, of certain members. The political elites of several EU member states are formally expressing their support for the European values and norms but their actions show a totally different perspective. This mounting pressure on democracy has created

a dangerous internal cleavage within the Union and brought into attention the necessity of identifying effective tools for avoiding further democratic backsliding not only for the older EU democracies but also for younger democracies situated at its borders.

Given their weak economies, poor infrastructure connectivity and energy dependencies, the East European countries are some of the most vulnerable to geopolitical changes and susceptible to democratic erosion. EU's struggle to project its strategic autonomy and democracy within the Eastern European region becomes even more difficult as it has to fight the major influences of powerful geopolitical players such as Russia and China who have invested massively in energy and road infrastructure projects in the area and persistently pressured its democratic order by offering alternative undemocratic models of governance. In this context, it is now more important than ever to identify EU's most appropriate and efficient means for creating and expending the "democratic infrastructure" in this area by addressing the complex and underscored threats posed by illiberalism.

Therefore, the current study aims to assess potential procedures and developments that could protect democracy and avoid further democratic backsliding focusing on the role of the civil society for increasing social mobilization, accountability and participatory democracy while exploring the means in which EU could improve its support and develop its involvement.

The study consists of two parts. The first part analyses Ukrainian democracy and the role of civil society before and after the 2022 war as well as EU's democracy promotion and support throughout its democratization process. The second part explores EU's involvement in supporting democratic resilience[2] for facilitating Ukraine's accession reform and post-war reconstruction processes. A particular focus will be devoted to the decisive role of the Ukrainian civil society in assisting the political transformation of Ukraine.

Literature review

According to the 2022 Democracy Indexes published by *The Economist*, Eastern Europe has been one of the worst-performing regions throughout the existence of the index. Although there are still no *full democracies* in Eastern Europe and the majority of *flawed democracies* are concentrated here, the region recorded in 2022 a slight improvement in its average score for the first time since 2018. The most notable improvements in the region were registered by the *political culture* and *civil liberties* categories, which can be partially explained by the increased citizen's engagement with politics and news in the context of the Russo-Ukrainian war (Democracy Index 2022: 30–55).

Paradoxically, the invasion of Ukraine by Russia has created a pressing need to address the future of the Eastern European countries in relation to Euro-Atlantic matters and determined the unfreezing of the EU enlargement process. While a

former empire is trying to stop EU integration and denies Ukraine's democratic development, Ukraine offers an incredible lesson in democratic resilience. On its part, the EU is working to uphold strict standards for democracy and the rule of law, while also ensuring that the possibility of accession remains a viable option. Despite the European Union's increased efforts in Eastern Europe, it remains indecisive about the extent of its aspirations. While Ukraine and Moldova have been granted EU candidate status, the actual likelihood of their accession to the union remains uncertain.

The regulations and methods established for international aid and donor involvement during peaceful times are inadequate during periods of war. Additionally, any actions taken by the EU in the region this year will be wasted if the bloc does not demonstrate its ability to persevere and plan for a prolonged conflict in Ukraine. (Dempsey 2023). While the emphasis on physical survival and conventional warfare remains the primary focus, EU needs to assume a leading role in fortifying resilience especially in the non-military sector. In this respect, its efforts should concentrate on supporting Ukraine's fight for strengthening its democratic resilience which is crucial not only for the legitimacy of the state and the accomplishment of accession criteria, but also for maintaining the legitimacy of the democratic model in Eastern Europe. For Ukraine, EU integration represents probably the only viable way of gradually exiting the Russian sphere of influence and a chance of pursuing a steady and relatively independent development process. In a nutshell, for Ukraine there is no stronger incentive for creating democratic resilience than EU integration.

For this purpose, the current study aims to analyze the mechanisms already in place and the ones that could be utilize by EU to strengthen Ukraine's democratic resilience and offer a strong political signal regarding its determination to grant full membership. The reason why we have selected this country as the main unit of analysis for our study, refers primarily to the tremendous significance it had in shaping EU's European Neighborhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership initiative and for the extremely important role it plays now for the security of the entire Central and Eastern European region. Acknowledging that a sustainable democratic development it is primarily an inside task and that bottom-up pressure is essential for achieving robust democratic reforms, the study will particularly explore the Ukrainian civil society's power and how can EU harness it for the enhancement of the accession framework.

Although for the last two decades, many studies related to the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian conflict were conducted, the scientific literature is almost devoid of studies analyzing EU's role in supporting Ukrainian civil society and the remarkable fight of Ukrainian civil society for increasing democratic resilience which begun in November 2013 with Euromaidan protests and continues during the current full-scale war.

Similarly, although the scientific literature abounds with themes such as democratization, autocratization and illiberalism, for the last decade, very little attention

has been devoted to democratic resilience. In these studies, the emphasis always falls on the erosion of democracy, the dangers of populism, the decline of social activism, but rarely on the means of combating this trend by creating a model of democratic resilience that can probe democratic integrity, prevent democratic erosion and decrease its vulnerabilities.

Therefore, the current study will analyse (through qualitative methods of analysis and process tracking data) the current state of democracy in Ukraine and EU's available instruments for democracy promotion and consolidation while trying to answer several crucial questions such as: How can EU step up its support for democratisation in Ukraine? Does EU play an active role in supporting the Ukrainian civil society? How effective are EU's already in place mechanisms of democracy promotion in these countries? What will be the EU's involvement in the reconstruction and reform processes in the aftermath of the war?

Ukrainian civil society behind the frontlines of democracy

During the first decade of Ukraine's independence, significant advances were made towards democratization, including the establishment of a nation-state, the implementation of political and economic liberties, and the introduction of a multiparty system through free and fair parliamentary and presidential elections. The 1996 Constitution further solidified the division of power and the protection of political and economic freedoms. Civil society also emerged during this time[3], supported by the appearance of independent mass media. However, despite these successes, the transition to democracy was hindered by the Communist party's dominance in parliament, the division among former dissidents, and the tendency of emerging political parties to prioritize their leaders' economic interests over representing society (Shapovalova and Shumylo 2008). Although it had significant fluctuations in its democratic performance, according to International IDEA's Global State of Democracy Indices, Ukraine has been recognized as a democracy since 1994 and experienced the most intense reforms in its democratic history during the three revolutions: the revolution on the Granite (1990), the Orange revolution (2004) and the Euromaidan (2014) (IDEA 2022).

In spite of their spectacular mobilization, the aftermath of the first two revolutions brought into power corrupt regimes that lead to democratic backsliding. Unlike them, Euromaidan's transformative power was unprecedented and marked the beginning of the Ukrainian democratic consolidation. Moreover, Euromaidan's significant role in state-building and reform, constituted the driving force for Ukrainian's fight to determine its future as a EU member state. As argued by Shapovlova and Burlyuk (2018), Euromaidan protests revolutionized the Ukrainian civil society and created a civic ethos of activism that determined civic awakening and national revival in Ukraine. It was during this time that the Ukrainian civil society matured and became institutionalized. Later on, these processes have gradually translated

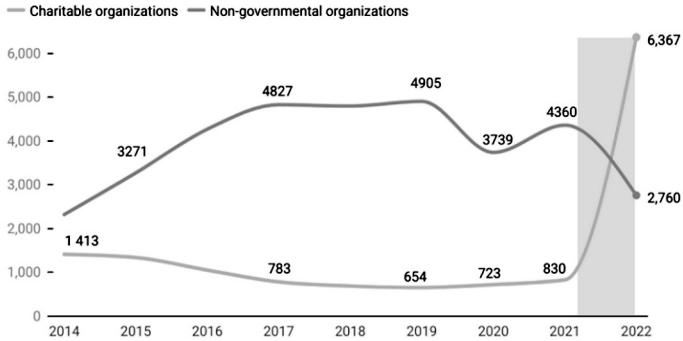
into a remarkable resilience that would help the Ukrainian state to navigate through the difficult times of the 2022 full scale invasion.

From 2014 to date, Ukraine has registered a series of improvements on different democratic performance indicators such as clean elections, judicial independence, personal integrity and security, absence of corruption and predictable enforcement (International IDEA: 2022). However, according to the 2022 Freedom House Report on Ukraine's democracy percentage for nations in transition, the country was very dynamic in its core areas of democratic transit adopting "laws and strategies respecting civil society, ethnic minorities, and human rights'' but these achievements were "accompanied by the imposition of sanctions on a record number of Ukrainian citizens, businesses, and media (Freedom House: 2022).''

While struggling to complete the decentralization process, to de-oligarchize its media landscape and achieve financial viability for its civil society, Ukraine succeeds to maintain a vibrant, loyal and committed civil society that serves the democratic goals of the nation during the current full-scale wartime with as much dedication and determination as the Ukrainian army. The ongoing war in Ukraine triggered a renewed sense of activism transforming civil society into an influential actor. That now takes functions in the realms of defense and foreign policy (Zarembo: 2022). As Applebaum stated (2022), civil society, together with the public have created *the other Ukrainian army*, a force that supports the military and humanitarian needs of Ukraine, a *non-military capability* whose influence was tremendously underestimated.

One of the most recent studies (conducted between December 9, 2022, to January 4, 2023) on Ukrainian civil society shows that "77% of all public and charitable organizations in Ukraine now participate in the assistance of the Armed Forces. The number of mentions of charitable foundations, charitable organizations, public associations, and volunteer organizations in the Ukrainian media landscape increased almost 10 times from February 2022 to November 2022: from 9,398 mentions in February to 97,940 in November.'' (Ukrainian civil society under the war report: 2023). As it was expected (observe figure 1.1), the war in Ukraine determined a significant increase in the number of new charitable organizations and a decrease in the number of new NGOs.

Figure 1. The number of registrations of new non-governmental and charitable organizations by year (2014–2022)



Source: Ukrainian civil society under the war-2022, A report based on the findings of the study conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology within the project "Ukraine Civil Society Sectoral Support Activity", p. 12.

Although this trend does not come as a surprise given the circumstances created by the war in Ukraine, it is important to note that the war has created an unprecedented disruption to the usual activities of civil society, redrew its boundaries and most certainly reduced its capacity of action. It is now more than ever necessary to expend the financial and human capital investments to the civil society sector in Ukraine. At this point, any investment in Ukrainian civil society represents an indirect investment in building democratic resilience and security in Eastern Europe. While the outcome of the war remains uncertain, civil society's role in mobilization during wartime is vital and the urgency of preventing its fatigue in Ukraine should be a priority for EU.

EU as an external agent of democratization in Ukraine. From democracy promotion and support to democracy protection and consolidation.

The transformation of Post-Soviet Eastern Europe was substantially supported by different governmental and nongovernmental donors from outside. The EU has played a vital role in supporting civil society organizations, strengthening democratic institutions, promoting regional cooperation and integration. However, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, EU's external agenda focused more on economy reforms rather than democracy promotion. It was only after the Treaty on European Union (1993) and the subsequent enlargement policy that EU assumed the role of a transformative power seeking to promote and consolidate democracy externally (Solonenko: 2009). As Moreau-Defarges (2002) called it, EU as a ''democratic empire'' has sought to enlarge and deeper integrate the former communist countries in Eastern Europe through the creation of European Neighborhood Policy in 2002 and the Eastern Partnership in 2009 (without the double space between Partnership and in) that came as a reaction to the Russo–Georgian

war in 2008 (Lefebvre: 2023). The relation between the so called *Association trio* (Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia) and EU was firstly formalized by the signing of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements in the mid-90s and moved progressively towards integration with the European Union (EU) after signing their Association Agreements in 2014.

The 2013–2014 invasion of Ukraine and the nation-wide protests that followed represented one of the great geopolitical turning points that changed the EU-Russia relations and EU's relations with the *Association Trio* countries. According to Solonenko (2009), EU's role as a democratic promoter in Ukraine has been limited due to several factors. One of the most important factors was EU's decision to devise different sets of policies for the CEE countries (a policy directed towards integration and accession) and the Newly Independent ones (a policy directed toward partnership and stabilization). Ukraine fell into the second category and the implications of this artificial compartmentalization combined with the lack of clarity regarding its accession plans have significantly shaped its future political transformation. Moreover, the Orange revolution and the 2006 free elections established Ukraine's democratic credentials and offered EU the opportunity to act as a democracy promoter. Unfortunately, at that time EU failed to offer the expected support for democratic reform and a clear strategy for Ukraine's membership aspirations.

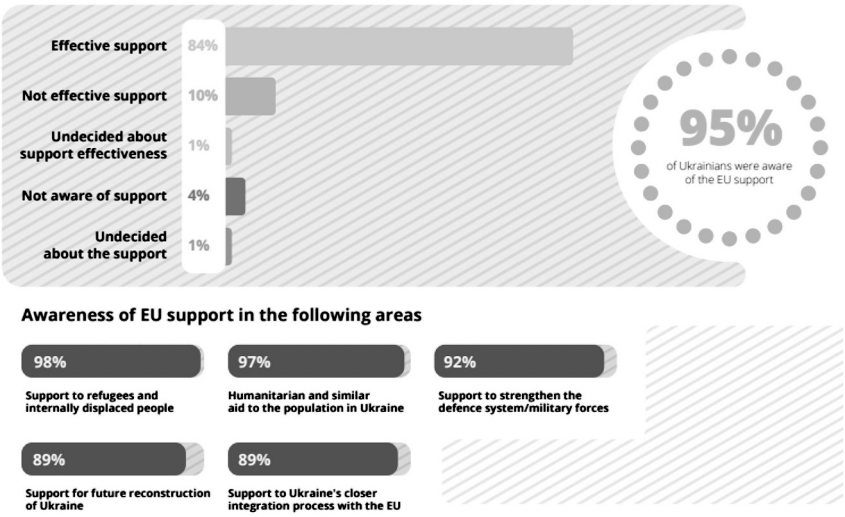
With the beginning of Russia's war in Ukraine in February 2022, a new momentum for democratic consolidation has been created and we have seen a different EU strategy for Eastern Europe, one that is determined to correct its past mistakes and ready to strengthen Ukraine's democratic resilience. Firstly, EU has offered candidate status to Ukraine and despite all the challenges of the war, Ukraine is steadily making progress towards EU integration.

Secondly, to this day, it offered around 50 billion € for macro-financial assistance, budget support, humanitarian and emergency support and it intends to add 1 billion € as a contribution to fast recovery. Furthermore, EU is providing 31 million € under the Civil Society and Human rights and Democracy Thematic programmes in order to support Ukrainian civil society. In addition to this, it announced a 305 million € further support for increasing Ukraine's resilience and support its reforms and 145 million € for humanitarian assistance (The European Union and Ukraine factsheet: 2022–2023). As Lefebvre (2023) pointed out, "the European Union has indeed become a *liberal power* that defends its values by using the tools of hard power (sanctions), even bordering on co-belligerence through the delivery of arms to Ukraine."

Thirdly, besides taking several measures designed to reduce Russia's capacity to finance the war, EU cut its energy dependency on Russia and helped its Eastern candidates to manage their energy crisis by coordinating alternative energy supplies. The President of the European Commission (2023) has stated that this far-reaching support will be provided for as long as it takes and EU will continue to impose a heavy price on Russia until it stops the aggression. President von der

Leyen added that "Ukraine can count on Europe to help rebuild a more resilient country, that progresses on its path to join the EU. " Consequently, according to the 2022 annual survey carried out by EU NEIGHBOURS East, the support for the EU in Ukraine reached unprecedented levels.

Figure 2. Annual Survey 2022–Ukraine. Perception of the European Union



Source: Annual Survey- Ukraine Perception of the European Union (2022): EU regional Communication Programme for the Eastern Neighbourhood, available online at: https://euneighbourseast.eu/news/publications/annual-survey-2022-ukraine/.

As it can be observed in figure 2, 95% of the Ukrainian citizens are aware of the support provided by EU, 94% feel Ukraine has good relations with EU (a 30% increase in comparison with last year's results) and 65% have a positive view on the EU (Annual Survey–Ukraine 2022).

Similarly with the 2006 momentum created by the Orange Revolution, the war in Ukraine has unintentionally created the enabling conditions (social unity and the determination of the Ukrainian citizens as well as EU member state solidarity) for EU to take on the role of democracy promotion actor, guide Ukraine's path towards integration by supporting its reforms and deliver on its commitments. As Lebanidze (2023) argues, "Ukraine's somewhat unexpected resilience against Russia and U.S. leadership in coordinating the Western response to Russia's war of attrition helped the EU find its geopolitical identity."

In this context, it is important for EU to acknowledge that Ukraine's civil society is simultaneously opposing Russia for the benefit of Ukraine, without necessarily equating resistance to Russia with advocating for European integration. Nevertheless, the geopolitical situation has caused an increasing number of CSOs to campaign for EU integration (Youngs 2022). Therefore, it can rely on its democratic so-

cialization and social capital building function but in the same time it should adapt its obsolete policy frameworks for Eastern Europe and provide constant assistance for preserving Ukraine's democratic institutions and maintaining civil society's efficacy. EU should also question how much of Ukraine's activism is a result of the war and how much democratic quality it has. In this sense, EU should make sure it has the necessary political will to assist the post-war democratic development of Ukraine and help its civil society to regain the watch dog function.

EU integration in itself represents a driving force for Ukraine's democratization and the most important means to achieving this end is the engagement with its civil society and the citizens who were able to see the transformative force of democracy in motion during wartime. EU should move from incentive-based (without the double space between wartime and EU) democracy promotion to protecting Ukraine's democracy and supporting its democratic resilience. Engaging citizens and changing the way they think and act, instead of engagement governments, is the most efficient method of strengthening democratic resilience and hopefully, EU has learned this lesson from its previous accession rounds. The democratic transformation of Ukraine was possible due to the strong will of its citizens.

Conclusion and recommendations

A year ago, in a world barely recovering from the Covid–19 pandemic where democracy was subject to regression, another turning point in history has sent shock waves worldwide. Russia's full scale invasion of Ukraine has unequivocally raised awareness regarding the importance of strengthening the democratic resilience in Eastern Europe and worldwide.

If for EU, the 2022 war in Ukraine marked the beginning of a new historical phase that revived its pursuit for enlargement and made it acknowledge the unequivocal need to address the democratic backsliding both internally and externally, for the world, the geostrategic sifts caused by the 2022 war have put democracy back on the priority agenda of the international system as the world has gained a newfound realization of just how acute the threat of autocratization actually is. As stated by Honcharuk (2023), the ongoing war in Ukraine "It's not a war for territories or resources. It's not a regional conflict. It's a war for freedom and democracy."

In this context, the current study has acknowledged the paradigm shift from democracy promotion and support to democracy protection and consolidation and explored EU's role in strengthening Ukraine's democratic resilience. While assessing potential procedures and developments that could revive and protect democracy in this area, we have noticed the vital role played by the Ukrainian civil society in the democratization process and its creative means for resistance during the ongoing war. If until February 2022, the Ukrainian civil society's capacity to expend its mobilization beyond major disruptive events was put into question,

its strong role in conserving and developing Ukrainian democracy during the current war has proved that Ukraine has indeed one of the strongest civil societies in Eastern Europe. The study argues that the Dignity revolution represented a turning point for Ukraine this being the moment when its civic activism was remodeled by great power competitions and that Ukraine stands out as an example that demonstrates that investing in civil society, means investing in solidifying democratic resilience.

Finally, the study argues that at the moment, the war in Ukraine created a historical opportunity for EU to stabilize the Eastern Neighborhood and demonstrate its relevance as a transformative power by utilizing the integration incentive. Democratization by integration constitutes an efficient geopolitical tool for EU and an important geopolitical objective for the Acession Trio countries. As Andguladze (2022) has argued, "the enlargement framework has the potential to provide more empowerment for local actors from civil society and political parties than the Eastern Partnership initiative has ever offered." While Ukraine has the challenging task of implementing its democratic reforms under martial law, EU needs to remain in tune with Ukrainian civil society dynamics and support it with all possible means in order to avoid the corrosive impact of war on democracy.

The current enthusiasm of Ukrainian citizens regarding the perspectives of EU membership, should prevent state capture attempts. However, the union would need to invest many resources to empower Ukrainian civil society and prepare for post-war recovery because creating democracy resilience will necessitate coordinated financial and administrative support.

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Notes

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[2] For the purpose of this study, the democratic resilience concept will be utilized as defined by McCoy and Murat Somer. Namely, as "a system's capacity to withstand a major shock such as the onset of extreme polarization and to continue to perform the basic functions of democratic governance-electoral accountability, representation, effective restraints in excessive or concentrated power, and collective decision-making.

[3] According to Yatsenko, Tkhelashvili and Hurak (2022), the existence of civic society organizations in Ukraine can be traced back prior to the fall of the USSR. From 1985 to 1989, the sociopolitical movement mainly focused on criticizing the Soviet system and reviving Ukrainian history and culture through their activities. Led mostly by former dissidents who organized meetings to address current issues, the movement developed gradually into CSOs throughout other regions of the country.

Romanian Civil Society and the Preparation of Romania's Accession to the EU

Melania-Gabriela Ciot

Introduction

Eastern European enlargement is one of the greatest historical achievements of the last century (Pușcaș 2010) and a challenge for the European leadership of that times, because it involved a doubling of the number of members and the appearance of new characteristics at system level, due to the past and the preoccupations of "newcomers". It was the most complex process that European Union has ever known, providing evidence of the continuos negotiations process within the EU, "the multilayered shape of EU with its clusters of actors" (Landau 2004). At the system level, the pressures were extended on policies and the institutional and procedural reforms that led to blockages and delays in policies' implementations. With all these consequences, the enlargement policy remains one of the most succesful EU's foreign policies, which spread the democratic ideas and ideal across European continent (Pérez-Solórzano 2015).

The fifth enlargement wave from 2004 and 2007 determined an emphasis on negotiations, which increased in the years that followed along with the issues related with the redistribution policy (especially cohesion policy). The new international order that is recalibrating nowadays, underlines the need for a procedural reform at European Union level, due to the complex interdependencies and globalization which demonstrates that integrative processes are increasing and that the interactions between state and non-state actors are intensifying. The integration management has became a lasting necessity, not just of moment or conjucture.

The inclusion of Romania in the fifth wave of enlargement was "our chance, as a country and people, to join the coordinates of an evolution, that could lead to development and modernization. It was the entry on the road to rediscovering the national and European identity, which could be distinctly and with distinction and, at the same time, the Romanians could have built what Lucian Blaga dreamed and predicted – historical plenitude" (Senatul Universității Babeș–Bolyai 2015). It was a complex process, involving different categories of actors: state actors (European institutions, Member States, representatives of national Government and Parliament) and non-state actors (civil society, trade unions, representatives of market structures, media, academia), who were in a constant dialogue in the decision-making process for each negotiating chapters. The media coverage from that times (especially 2001–2004) and minutes of Consultative Council (2004) are transparent proves of it.

The involvement of civil society in the EU accession process of Romania wasn't explored enough. The present research will focus on the identification of civil society involvement in the decision-making of the content of negotiating position paper of specific chapters, being the first steps of participatory democracy of Romanian citizens. For that, the qualitative research strategy will be issued, with content and discourse analysis of important actors involved in accession negotiation process from 2001–2004. The investigation will be conducted on national official documents, minutes of meetings and media coverage. The research questions are: *Was civil society an active partner in the EU accession process of Romania? Which were the policies and areas of activities of contribution and involvement of civil society in the Romania's accession process?*

The work is structured as follows: after the introduction, a literature review section will follow, building the theoretical basis of analysis – enlargement policy, accession negotiation process, the civil society involvement in the process. Then, a methodological research and data analysis section will follow, presenting the research strategy and identifying the data. The discussion of results will be next. A conclusion section will come after that, and the bibliography section will end the present work.

Literature review

The key concepts of Contemporary International System are complex interdependencies, cooperation, partnerships, and negotiations (Ciot 2022). International and European negotiations are expanding fields, such as number, complexity, and aim (Kremenyuk 2002). EU is a "enormous negotiation process" (Meert 2003). The multilateral framework of European negotiations have expanded constantly fields of policies and number of its members. The European enlargements refers to the multiplication of its common European policies and integrated European partners. It is not only about widening its horizons, but also about deepening its coopera-

tion in different fields, consolidating its institutions, and organizing its coalitions (Meerts 2003) and partnerships (Pușcaș 2016). Building coalitions and partnerships is one of the main institutional conduits that future Member States have to internalize from the first interactions with representatives of European institutions.

The European negotiation is the main characteristic of European decision-making process and "central to reaching agreement in the EU" (Arregui–Stockman–Thomson 2004). Understanding the EU as a "negotiating system in action" (Cede 2004) will create a pre-requisite and a rule for all actors in the European arena. EU negotiations are developing in a changing environment and in asymmetric situations. The biggest enlargement in the history of the EU (from 2004) determined qualitative changes at institutional level, asking for radical reforms of procedures, rules, and mechanisms, including negotiations. Significant improvements of enlargement policy appeared in the last decades, but still, a revised methodology is expected nowadays (Council of EU 2023).

The accession to the European Union and its negotiations are complex and meant to build trust and credibility between negotiating parties (Friis–Jarosz -Friis 2002) – European institutions, Member States, and candidate country (to European level), as well as to domestic level of candidate country (Government, Parliament, civil society, representative of market structures, media, academia). A special attention is paid to content and progress of the accession negotiations (Pușcaș 2013) and different activities environment (political, economic, media, civic or academic) which projected their expectations and interests in the analyses of accession negotiation.

The Eastern enlargement (from 2004 and 2007) was characterized by the coherence and deepening of European integration. The assymetry in accession negotiation was a debated topic in Central and Eastern European candidates countries. Professor Inotai (2001) mentioned the factors that characterized these assimetries: EU is one party of accession negotiations, one of the most powerful global actors; the other party is a single state; all the negotiations are taking place in Brussels and the acceding country has to prepare first the position paper, and after all the other Member States expressed their position, the candidate country has to present an improved an harmonized position, agreed by the Council (Friis and Jarosz-Friis 2002). In fact, accession negotiations are a specific type of European negotiation, a double negotiation (Pușcaș 2013): at European level (between the candidate country and European institutions – Council and Commission, and other Member States) and domestic level (between different categories of actors). The harmonization of internal position of a candidate country on a specific chapter of negotiation is difficult and it is realised at different levels between different categories of actors (state and non-state).

The accession process begin with the agreement of all EU Member State on its membership application. The opening of formal accession negotiations requests also the agreement of all Member States. These negotiations follow the adoption of EU laws and implementation of reforms (economic, juridical and administrative),

which prepare the candidate country for the membership (Conclusions of the Council 2022). After the negotiations of all policies/chapters are closed and EU has the absorbtion capacity for enlargement, the accession treaty is elaborated, including all the clauses and arragements for transition. The European Parliament has to give its consent and the Council of EU has to approve unanimously the treaty, and then the Member States and the candidate state could sign it. After the ratification of the Treaty by all parties, the candidate state become member of EU. The current candidates countries for the EU membership at this moment are: Montenegro, Serbia, Türkiye, North Macedonia, Albania, Ukraine, Moldova, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Georgia applied for EU membership, but the status of candidate country has not been granted yet (Conclusions of the Council 2022).

At internal level, the accession to the EU is a process of modernization and development of entire society, to which different categories of actors are participating: Government, working groups coordinated by line ministries, Parliament, civil society and interest groups. For the civil society, the enlargement is seen through the lenses of political and economic factors, from a social and cultural approach (Pușcaș 2013; Pușcaș 2006). The harmonization of interests involves taking into account and coordinate the interests of citizens, maintaining the public support for the necesarry reforms and changes. The public support is an important barometer, mirroring the effects of the stepts taken into accession process by the state actors. The polls will indicate the aspects that have to be improved in the accesion process, and the support groups (from civil society) will address the negative attitudes, aiming to increase the public participation and facilitate communication.

To domestic level, the main interest groups that participate to accession process are: nongovernmental organizations, opinion leaders (political analysts, cultural and scientific personalities, journalists), professional associations and trade unions (Pușcaș 2013). In the domestic coordination of European affairs, the representatives of civil society are involved (van Keulen: 2004), in the elaboration of position paper of a chapter that will be negotiated, in public debates and in the dissemination of information regrding European integration and its benefits for citizens. Van Keulen considers this participation "rather ad-hoc and spontaneous" and that the dialogue depends on the openness that the Government has, by initiating consultations with NGOs. The author suggests that it is better to prepare from an early stage the position that a government will present to Brussels, so it could be presented proactively, with coherence and consistency, involving the social partners. For a consistent contribution to a state's accession to the EU, the CSOs should actively take their role within communities. For that to happen, it needs organizational capacities such as legitimacy and credibility, so their activities will have sustainability. One of the highlighted trends is to organize on a transnational level the participation of civil society representatives (van Keulen 2004; Pușcaș 2013).

Enlargement will be succesful only with the democratic support and a transparent process. The Eastern enlargement showed that there is a greater need for the candidate states and Member States to inform media, CSOs, professional associations and labor unions, because a wide dialogue will soften the difficulties and will present clear the benefits and challenges of the process (Pérez-Solórzano 2015). In this way, the citizens will find the necesarry answers to their concerns and will straighten up the misperceptions. As for other European policies, the public expects to see concrete results of enlargement (Pușcaș 2013).

The Eastern enlargement represented the moment when the democracy promotion and support of civil society became key-elements of enlargement policy (Pérez-Solórzano 2015). One of the political requirements for joinining the EU is a working democracy, with a active civil society, as evidence of a good governance. It could be also considered as an instrument to engage citizens and to promote public debates about enlargement process, soften the possible contestation of EU in candidate country and other Member States (Pérez-Solórzano 2015). One of the weak points regarding the involvement of civil society in accession process is the fight for financing, which makes civil society organizations competitors rather than partners. Collaboration, cooperation and partnerships between state authorities and civil society will strengthen. The role of civil society in EU accession and integration is not regulated, so there is not a model that EU is proposing to be applied by candidate country during accession negotiations. (Newsletter 24/2012)

The presence of the civil society in the pre-accession and accession period will assure the deepening of the understanding of the citizens toward institutional reforms needed by the candidate country to become EU Member State (Dimovska 2022). The CSO is the facilitator and catalyst of civil engagement environment (Pérez-Solórzano 2015), representing the sources of information for the EU, assuring the monitorization and harmonization with EU standards (Drakić–Kajganoć 2012). The cooperation between state and CSOs representatives will improve policymaking process and will assure well-established institutions (Madhi and Sopoti 2020).

Also, in the Europeanization process of accession, CSO will allow a sustainable participation of citizens in political process and will favor an open and transparent performance of government (Dombrovska 2022). The permanent dialogue between government authorities and civil society organizations is a part of a conditions for EU membership. The role of civil society in EU accession and integration is not regulated, so there is not a model that EU is not proposing a model to be applied by candidate country during accession negotiations. The constructive and open communication, as well as active partnerships between state and non-state actors are encouraged by the EU. The involvement of civil society representatives in the elaboration of negotiating position and access to information regarding the evolution of the accession process are concrete actions needed for an efficient accession. An important element for CSOs efficient action is the coalition-building, so, their initiatives will be significant and influential (Marović–Stefanovschi–Ivanovik 2019).

From the last wave of enlargement's experience with Croatia, it could be assumed that not only simple participation of the civil socity is important for accession process, but a meaningful participation, through direct engagement and advocay actions, concentrated on following themes: transparency, democratization, environmental issues, social inclusion, human rights, peace building, as parts of accession obligations (Newsletter 24/2012).

For current accession negotiations processes (especially in Western Balkans), it is important to consolidate the expertize of CSOs and support the networking and public appearances, to increase the efficiency of EU reforms (European Movement in Albania 2021; Ekim 2019; Khaze 2018; Newsletter 24/2012). The EU and its Member States are committed to support the building of capacities of CSOs, in order to consolidate their voices in the regions where the accession process is developing, in order to advance the political, social, and economic dialogue (European Commission 2022; Jahier 2020; Nikolovski 2020, Marović–Stefanovschi–Ivanovik 2019). The local actors have to be involved also in the process (Vurmo 2013).

The road to the EU for Romania was not easy. The civil society was a credible partner, which offered a real support for the accession (Pușcaș 2003).

The dissemination of the information regarding EU integration was crucial and the CSOs played an important role. Also, its role in local and regional development and in initiatives an actions which promoted public participation was significant. The framework for the dialogue and cooperation for policymaking between CSOs and Romanian Government was established in 2001, with Law 544/2001 of free access to public information, in order to align national legislation with EU laws and regulations of Council of Europe and the Law 52/2003 regarding decisional transparency in public adminsitration (Chabanet–Trechsel 2011).

The empowerment of CSOs in Romania during accession period was determined by three factors: the desire of national Government to accede to the EU, a transnational advocacy network, which included domestic CSOs and the Government's identification with elements of advocacy network (Parau 2008).

The former Chief Negotiator of Romania's accession to the EU described the situation of the CSOs during accession period: the most well represented CSOs were in the cultural field (34%), as a reflection of the traditions and of links with traditional societies. Another field of representation is education, CSOs were legitimate partners in debates about the future of educational services.

For the transparency of accession process in Romania, all negotiating positions were debated with representatives of civil societies, trade unions, professional associations, political actors (Pușcaș 2003).

Methodology of research and data analysis

Methodology

The research strategy is qualitative, favoring the study of a process in its environment (Denzin–Lincoln 1994), by offering the possibility of an interdisciplinary and holistic approach to a specific topic. This research is empirical and the study unit is Romania's accesion to the EU. The study period investigated is 2000–2004, when Romania's accesion negotiations to EU were developed. The investigation material consists in media representations and articles, public information and reports, interviews, public speeches of Government's representatives (especially former Chief Negotiator of Romania's accession to the EU) with references on CSOs involvement in the accesion process. The research methods are discourse analysis, content analysis, document analysis and study case. The key-elements that will be investigated are the policies and areas of activities in which CSOs were involved. The questions of research are: *Was civil society an active partner in the EU accession process of Romania? Which were the policies and areas of activities of contribution and involvement of civil society in the Romania's accession process?*

This research will fill a gap in the literature, being the first of this topic, contributing to the deepening the knowledge regarding the accession of Romania to the EU and the Eastern enlargement characteristics. The limitation of this research consists in its subjective interpretation of results, which meets the objectivity of qualitative research.

Data analysis

The data were organized taking into consideration the specific field of negotiation chapter where the CSO representative brought their contributions and the specific type of activities where the CSO representatives were involved in the process of preparation of the accession to the EU or future integration to the EU.

For more convenience, the data will be presented in two separate tables. The data were collected from the public speeches, media interviews and interventions of public authorities, especially former Chief Negotiator of Romania's accession to the EU. The process of data collection was difficult, due to the complexity of materials and lack of records from CSOs representatives for the period 2001–2004.

The specific negotiating chapters were CSO representatives were involved, were the following:

Table 1. Negotiating chapters for the Romania's accession to the EU with contributions of CSOs' representatives

Negotiating chapter	Event	Example
The four freedoms of movement	Reunion of Working Group 3 – Free movement of services of Advisory Board April 22, 2004	The questions were conceived to offer to the state's institutions competence for the implementation the Community's provisions from this field, an image on the implications of their adoption on the services market from Romania, aiming to prevent unpleasant situations for economic agents. Those present manifested a particular interest for the Consolidated law of the securities market, whose draft was developed in consultation with relevant the domestic and international bodies.
	Reunion of Working Group 3 – Free movement of services of Advisory Board July 29, 2004	[…] reunion […] was dedicated to the problematic of Romanian *legislation harmonization from the fields of assurances to the requests of acquis communautaire.*
	Reunion of Working Group 3 – Free movement of services of Advisory Board August 31, 2004	The debated topics were: the establishment of a distinct authority whose object of activity is the *protection of personal data;* the degree of knowledge of the legislation in the field of personal protection regarding the processing of personal data, in particular the obligations of personal data operators and the rights of the persons concerned by the processing of this data; the r*ole of civil society in applying and complying with the law on the protection of persons with regard to the processing of personal data.*
Competition policy	First Reunion of Advisory Board February 17, 2004	[…] it was suggested that it would be necessary to request a transition period for the granting of state aid to allow the increase in the *competitiveness of the Romanian economy* during this period.
	Reunion of Working Group 6 – Competition policy of Advisory Board March 17, 2004	The subject of the meeting was the *compatibility of state aid for free and disadvantaged areas* […]. These have been transposed in the new State Aid Law and related regulations [...]. The participants in the meeting also proposed that the projects *amending Law 84/21.07.1992 regarding the regime of free zones and GD 24/1998 regarding disadvantaged areas should contain provisions* [...] that state aid incompatible with community *acquis.*
	Reunion of Working Group 6 – Competition policy of Advisory Board August 17, 2004	The discussion focused on the *compatibility of state aid granted in Romania with the rules of the European Union,* the reduction of tax authorities and areas, but also the best possible communication with Romanian companies so that they know the new rules for granting state aid and to *create a culture of competition.*

Agriculture	First Reunion of Advisory Board February 17, 2004	[…] they stated that the working groups must focus on identifying the measures that are being contested to solve the problems in the Country Report, to eliminate the financial blockage and find solutions in terms of agriculture. In this sense, on behalf of the National Delegation for the Negotiation of Romania's Accession to the European Union, the request was made for the participants to present proposals regarding the issue of *subsistence farms in Romania.*
	Reunion of Working Group 7 – Agriculture of Advisory Board May 5, 2004	The debates were held around the issue of *subsistence and semi-subsistence farms in Romania,* to identify the most appropriate measures for the optimal negotiation of the chapter in question.
	Reunion of Working Group 7 – Agriculture of Advisory Board May 25, 2004	The debates were held around the issue of *rural development policy* in Romania.
Transport policy	The 8th edition of the National NGO Forum, organized by CENTRAS and DAIS January 18, 2002 Bucharest	Regarding the drafting of the position papers on *transport* and energy, consultations were held with the German Democratic Forum.
Taxation	The Conference of the Trade Union and European Integration November 19, 2001 Bucharest	In this sense, I would like to emphasize the fact that at the last Romania-EU Intergovernmental Accession Conference, negotiations were opened on two chapters to which the union partners had important contributions: *Taxation* and Social Policies.
Social policy and labor force employment	The 8th edition of the National NGO Forum, organized by CENTRAS and DAIS January 18, 2002 Bucharest	After the adoption of the Government Strategy for the Roma, administrative and institutional measures were taken to improve the situation of this ethnic group [...] civil society made an essential contribution.
		The presence of NGOs in the field of social services is extremely well noted, as well as in local services […]. Employers and trade unions have an extremely important role in defining and implementing the policies assumed in the Social Policies chapter.
	Piața Financiară/Financial Market May 2002	The representatives of employers and unions believe that the *current legislation is not rigorous enough to prevent illegal work and tax evasion*, and they hope that, by closing this chapter, the application of European standards will ensure *more order on the labor market in Romania.*

Energy	The 8th edition of the National NGO Forum, organized by CENTRAS and DAIS January 18, 2002 Bucharest	Regarding the drafting of the position papers on *transport* and *energy*, consultations were held with the German Democratic Forum.
	Meeting with the representatives of the organization Terra Mileniul III Radio Romania Actualităţi/ Radio Romania News September 17, 2003	So here, *energy policies* are clearly targeted by the concerns of this organization. For example, in this guide, which is extremely useful and I hope that the local authorities will study it as soon as possible, I propose, on the one hand, the knowledge of *European energy policies* and, on the other hand, relate the *energy policy in Romania to the energy policies from the EU.*
Education, professional training, and youth	The 8th edition of the National NGO Forum, organized by CENTRAS and DAIS January 18, 2002 Bucharest	NGOs have become legitimate partners in the debate on the future of *educational services.*
Regional policy	Reunion of Working Group 21 – Regional Policy of Advisory Board regarding the establishment of the institutional framework for the management of structural instruments. April 1, 2004	We discussed the types of institutions that can constitute these intermediate organizations and what would be the next stage, what types of institutions we could have in such a way that, in practice, they get as close as possible to the beneficiary […].
		The most substantial part of the discussions focused on the future institutional construction and the conditions that will have to be respected in the use of structural funds.
Environment protection	The 8th edition of the National NGO Forum, organized by CENTRAS and DAIS January 18, 2002 Bucharest	During the past year, I had several meetings with *environmental NGOs.* This event […] followed the analysis of the *position paper for chapter 22, Environmental Protection.*
	Meeting with representatives of environmental protection NGOs Radio Romania Actualităţi/ Radio Romania News February 19, 2002	As far as today is concerned, there was *an assessment by the NGOs* of the following aspects related to the application of environmental policies consistent with the acquis, as they are provided in *the position document, in chapter 22, negotiated with the EU, regarding environmental protection policies.*
	Meeting with the representatives of the organization Terra Mileniul III September 17, 2003	There are two components to consider. One, energy efficiency, two, *environmental protection.* […]I am absolutely convinced that the guide will be useful to the local administration and for the implementation of strategies and action plans in the field of energy efficiency, but also in the field of *environmental protection.*

	The meeting of the Advisory Council on environmental issues August 11, 2004	The subjects discussed were: – public-private partnership, as a source of development of projects to promote the *environmental protection policy.* – the impact of including *environmental expenses* in the production cost and how it will affect the population and economic agents. – the types of financial instruments to be used for the establishment of a collective system for the *collection of packaging and packaging waste,* their impact on the Romanian economy. – what would be the relationship between the implementation monitoring structures *(Environmental Guard)* and those for policy development/decision-making (ministries), as a way of using feedback in establishing priorities in this field. – the way in which the recovery and *recycling system of electrical and electronic equipment* waste must be organized.
Justice and home affairs	The 8th edition of the National NGO Forum, organized by CENTRAS and DAIS January 18, 2002 Bucharest	Regarding the *alignment of the Romanian Police with the standards of the European Union,* the policies and programs of the Ministry of the Interior have focused on the *orientation of institutions* for the benefit of individuals and local communities [...] I would like to emphasize the *consultations with the Pro Democracy Association.*
	The meeting of the Consultative Council on the topic of border security, the regime of foreigners and the separation of passenger flows August 25, 2004	Topics debated: – the relationship between the structures involved in the *management of border security strategies* (Inter-institutional cooperation and ways to improve/make it more efficient). – the *legislative framework regarding foreigners* and its implementation. – the process of *separating passenger flows in Romanian ports and airports.*
	Reunion of Working Group 24 – Justice Reform of Advisory Board October 20, 2004	During this meeting, the recent progress in the field of *judicial reform* was discussed, in particular the status of the implementation of the measures proposed in the Action Plans regarding the implementation of the provisions of the laws regarding the judicial organization, the *status of magistrates and the one regarding the organization and functioning of the Superior Council of the Magistracy,* such as and the new role conferred on the Superior Council of Magistracy.

Another important element of research was to identify other fields of activities where the CSO representatives were involved. The data collected were divided into several categories, for the convenient of interpretation: dialogue/consultations, events (debates, roundtables, conferences), partnerships, dissemination of information regarding the process of accession and integration to the EU, finalizing the position paper (general activity), active participation of the decision-making process and impact studies/researches. Below, *Table 2* consists of all these data.

Table 2. Fields of activities for CSOs representatives' involvement during the Romania's accession to the EU

Field of activity	Event	Example
Meetings/ Dialogue/ Exchanges of opinions	The Conference of the Trade Union for European Integration November 19, 2001 Bucharest	Thus, in the process of finalizing the position documents for the negotiation chapters, before by their adoption by the Government, the *dialogue* established with the trade unions on chapters of significant social and economic impact (the four freedoms, Social Policies and employment, Taxation, the Union Economic and Monetary, etc.) have fully proven their usefulness.
	International Volunteer Day Conference December 3, 2001 Cuj-Napoca	These organizations have an extremely important role in mobilizing public opinion in favor of democracy and development, establishing *bridges* between the authorities and civil society. Through voluntary organizations, solidarity, and the notion of citizenship, vital for the existence of a true democracy, are strengthened.
	Meeting with representatives of environmental protection NGOs Radio România Actualități/Radio România News February 19, 2002	[…] I would like to tell you that it is not the first, but it is a *series of meetings* that we have had with environmental organizations, and we, the Ministry of Integration, have also had with NGOs from other regions. As far as today is concerned, it was an assessment by NGOs of the aspects related to the application of environmental policies consistent with the acquis […].
	Seminar organized by the Black Sea University NGO August 15, 2003 Radio România Actualități/Radio România News	I am one of those who very much want *opinions* on the effects of the application of the acquis and how it is negotiated and the results that people feel in their everyday lives
	European opinion multipliers and their participation in the preparation for accession August 20, 2003 Sibiu	There were very, very many *questions* […] we had a one-and-a-half-hour session, of which *I answered the questions* over an hour later. Mainly there were questions about our conduct, what we should do especially in areas that we consider, and public opinion has already been codified as quite difficult. It's about agriculture, it's about the environment, it's about structural funds and, finally, there was also a *lot of discussion* about the mentality component, which given this is and must be, in our opinion, one of the drivers of this process of accession.

	Meeting with the members of the Social Dialogue Commission NGO November 13, 2003 RADOR	I argued why, according to the method of the analysis procedures of the EU, of the European Commission, through this document Romania is considered a functional market economy and I presented the content of the structure, market mechanisms and the characteristics that support this reality. I *informed both the representatives of employers and unions* that we are in the process of preparing a program of measures for 2004 which will be presented to the Government very soon and to the social partners, of course, and to the European integration forum.
	Dialogue on the Internet of the Chief Negotiator of Romania with European Information Multipliers January 26, 2004 Radio România Actualităţi/Radio România News	It is one of the initiatives of the European data and information multipliers to also *refresh their data,* information and to have the direct perceptions of those involved in the process of preparation for accession and negotiation. I was happy to *answer all the questions* that they have today, which were particularly related to the stage of our preparation, aspects related to chapters, to certain chapters, and finally, I would like to tell you that it was of particular interest to the discussion the context of 2004 […].
	Consultative meeting with civil society representatives April 1, 2004 Radio România Actualităţi/Radio România News	We *discussed* the types of institutions that can constitute these intermediate organizations and what would be the next stage, what types of institutions we could have in such a way that, in practice, they get as close as possible to the beneficiary […].
Debates/ Roundtables/ Conferences	International Volunteer Day Conference December 3, 2001 Cuj-Napoca	*Citizen's participation* is an extremely important element for effective governance and effective development. Volunteers manage to bring trust and reciprocity among citizens, thus contributing to a more cohesive, stable, and prosperous society.
	National NGO Forum, 8th edition, organized by CENTRAS and DAIS January 18, 2002 Bucharest	The National Forum of Romanian Non-Governmental Organizations is the *most important event of the Romanian associative environment.* The debate on the issue of Romania's accession to the European Union, the role that the non-governmental sector can assume in this process comes at a time when the active involvement of the entire Romanian society is necessary to achieve the objective of Romania's integration into the European Union.
	Europe Day celebrations May 11, 2003 Zalău	It is worth noting the *attention that civil society paid* to the debate on the future of Europe, and especially the emphasis placed on Romania's role in a future Europe.
	Summer University Izvoru Mureșului August 17, 2001	The Romanian government has shown a *wide openness to civil society,* which is why the social partners, union leaders, representatives of employers and NGOs, political parties and relevant parliamentary committees are also consulted in the discussions for each chapter.

	The Conference of the Trade Union for European Integration November 19, 2001 Bucharest	On participating in the European Integration Caravan conference, organized by the National Union of European Integration and Solidarity Center, I want to express my satisfaction for the *interest shown by trade unions and civil society representatives* regarding the issue of European integration. I think that participating in this conference is a very good opportunity to discuss the chances that Romania has within the future united Europe, but also about what the road to get there means, namely the negotiations for Romania's accession to the European Union.
	Show 24 Hours Radio România Actualități/Radio-România News Novermber 22, 2001,	One of the very powerful and *very professional non-governmental organizations* organized an international meeting in Berlin regarding the process of broadening and the *contribution of civil society,* of citizens to this process, and I was called to be a speaker for one of the panels related to the Community *acquis.*
	Diversity Day December 18, 2001 Cluj–Napoca Radio România Actualități/Radio România News	[...] we are talking about the Romanian specificity, including through this *permanent coexistence* [...] *on cultural grounds, confluences* that existed between the Romanian community and the communities, the ethnic groups.
	European opinion multipliers and their participation in the preparation for accession August 20, 2003 Sibiu	It is the initiative of a group of journalists and *representatives of non-governmental organizations,* such as the *House of Europe Hermannstadt*, who said that they needed to know more about the process of preparation for accession and about negotiations, and while they can be vectors of communication and want to be vectors of communication in this area of membership.
		[...] I told the colleagues I met here in Sibiu, I noticed in the second half of 2002 and the first half of 2003 that the press is also becoming a vector of information, but, at the same time, it brings - plan a lot of aspects related to the subject of the application of European legislation, the acquis [...] and the commitments and obligations and responsibilities that we have at the moment in the status of a candidate country and preparing for the status of a member state. And here I would like to tell you that *we are preparing from a citizen's point of view for the status of a European citizen.*
	Meeting with the representatives of the organization Terra Mileniul III NGO September 17, 2003 Radio România Actualități/Radio România News	I am absolutely convinced that *the guide will be useful to the local administration and for the implementation of strategies and action plans* in the field of energy efficiency, but also in the field of environmental protection.

	The European Integration Show Journal Forum România 1 TV November 25, 2003	[...] such a debate aims at a wider consultation, an *opening of the issue to the whole society,* trying to have the *direct participation* of the political class, of civil society in such a way that, practically, we find the best solutions for negotiations and for the preparation for accession.
Partnerships	Principles of organization and communication within political parties September 21, 2001 Snagov	Strategies for relating the activity of political parties with NGOs and international organizations. Involvement in decision-making. Actions to demonstrate the effectiveness of *partnerships.* Implementation strategy. Support systems before the allocation of funds. Impact campaigns.
	The Conference of the Trade Union for European Integration November 19, 2001 Bucharest	*Partnerships* with EU trade unions, merger of interests, support of the whole civil society.
	National NGO Forum, 8th edition, organized by CENTRAS and DAIS January 18, 2002 Bucharest	I want to launch a call to non-governmental organizations active in Romania for the establishment of mixed committees of youth, consultation, discussions, round tables, or seminars on the issue of accession negotiations. These *partnership programs* can be useful if they are developed with civil society in member states. It will be a real contribution to the fusion of all interests and will bring Romania's accession to the European Union the support of the entire society.
		NGOs have become *legitimate partners* in the debate on the future of education services.
	Show Cronica sonoră Radio România Actualități/Radio România News November 18, 2001	Vasile Pușcaș: The *partnership* is broader (n. with the trade unions) we also have both institutionalized consultations, regarding the accession process, and punctual ones, regarding the content of the position documents and at the third level of consultation, regarding certain specifically related aspects by Romania's social policies, direct or indirect, resulting from industrial and economic policies. Mircea Steinberg: Unions must have a united reaction, focus their efforts coherently, in order to minimize the social costs of the process, the union representative. Bogdan Hossu: From our point of view, I think the translation process of the EU directives should have been much more accelerated, with free access for the Romanian citizen, for all the institutions in Romania, because there are substantive consequences. [...] They are the benefit of Romanian civil society, but, obviously, they also require certain sacrifices on its part.

	Support group for the integration of Romania into the EU 38 companies and some private persons, representative of the Romanian business environment April 16, 2003 Radio România Actualităţi/Radio România News	The business community must be a *partner* in the negotiation team, both in terms of preparation and finding the actual solutions in the negotiation [...] is a win for the whole process of preparation for accession.
	The role of NGOs in integration July 10, 2003 Radio România Actualităţi/Radio România News	[...] it is necessary for the administration, it is necessary for NGOs to be able to build *real partnerships* with employers, with unions, with professional associations, with interest groups and influence groups, so that we can build together this project which is called the preparation for accession with a view to 2007.
Dissemination of information	EU-Romania Joint Consultative Committee May 23, 2002 Bucharest	The objective of our communication with all social and political actors, with NGOs is to *disseminate information* regarding Romania's EU accession negotiations, to familiarize the citizen with EU issues and with the responsibilities deriving from membership status, to increase the level of their participation in the decision-making process regarding European issues, to understand the benefits and costs of accession [...]. In short, this permanent dialogue is meant to *keep the pulse of civil society.*
	National NGO Forum, 8th edition, organized by CENTRAS and DAIS January 18, 2022 Bucharest	A caravan of European integration, in which the central trade unions and the Ministry of European Integration also participated, precisely followed the *explanation* of the procedural details of the negotiation, the costs and benefits of this process.
	The Conference of the Trade Union for European Integration November 19, 2001 Bucharest	Trade unions have a crucial role in disseminating *information* and projects regarding European integration.
Active participation to the decision-making process	National NGO Forum, 8th edition, organized by CENTRAS and DAIS January 18, 2022 Bucharest	NGOs have increased importance in supporting *participation,* in involving a growing number *of citizens in the decision-making process,* through various associations that can represent their points of view in policies that affect the average citizen.
Impact studies and research	The Conference of the Trade Union for European Integration November 19, 2001 Bucharest	The information, expertise and *impact studies* provided by trade unions are extremely useful in the negotiations for accession to the European Union.

	National NGO Forum, 8th edition, organized by CENTRAS and DAIS January 18, 2022 Bucharest	NGOs can produce *long-term research,* focusing on consequences, by analyzing trends, evaluating options and costs, making the results usable by a large number of actors and decision-makers.
	Academy of Economic Sciences of Romania Scientific Conference Economic Convergences in the EU Journal Economist May 27, 2002	I have the claim to *impact studies* when I talk about arguments and the commitments that Romania takes. And from this preoccupation of mine is born the interest in what you produce, under this dome, today and tomorrow, but also in what you write and what you give for circulation to the academic and scientific environment

Discussion

Identifying the data was the most difficult part of this research, due to the lack of archives of website of authorities involved in accession process, or from the CSOs representatives involved. The qualitative analysis offered the framework and objectivity of researcher to selected materials of investigation.

As *Table1 and 2* presented, there were a clear evidence of the CSOs representatives participation and active involvement through different types of activities in the preparation of accession and integration processes. The involvement was accentuated at the end of accession process – 2004, when the majority of negotiating chapters were finalizing.

A notable initiative for consolidating the permanent dialogue, participation and involvement of social parteners in accession process was the establishment of the Advisory Board *(Consiliul Consultativ)* for the Negotiation of Romania's Accession to the European Union on January 2004 (Decision no. 37/2004). This Advisory Board was functioning besides the Ministry of European Integration, being composed from the representatives of central public authorities, of employer and trade union organizations, of the academic and scientific environment, as well as of civil society. It was a natural consequence of the good collaboration and cooperation that existed between the authorities and the CSO representatives. For better efficiency, 31 working groups were organized, according to the specificity of each negotiating chapter. During 2004, there were 12 meetings of this Council in the general format, and many others in group format, proved by the discussion on final form of a negotiating chapter in the general meetings of the Council.

As *Table1* shows, there were 11 negotiating chapters were civil society brought a consistent contribution, namely: the four freedoms of movement (especially the services movement); competition policy; agriculture; transport policy; taxation; social policy and labor force employment; energy; education, professional training, and youth; regional policy; environment protection; and justice and home affairs. The mentioning of these participations appeared in the period 2002–2004, more accentuated in 2004, when most of the chapters of negotiation were closed.

In the minutes of the meetings of Working groups on different chapters or with the occasion of conferences of CSOs representatives, this involvement was underlined constantly. Besides the implication in the finalization of negotiating chapters, the CSO was involved in the elaboration of guides for the implementation of different policies, like energy and transport (as the Organization *Terra Milenium III*), which demonstrated the preoccupation of integration process, not only accession (with the preparation of accession position papers).

Another active organization in the position paper preparation were *German Democratic Forum* (for energy and transport policies) and *Association Pro Democracy* (for justice and home affairs chapter), as Table 1 indicated.

But the contribution of CSO was not only for the preparation of the position paper. *Table 2* presented other types of supportive activities from the accession and integration process, as: events (conferences, roundtables, debates), dissemination of information regarding the integration to the EU, exchanges of opinions, impact studies and partnerships. These activities began in 2001 and continued during the period of investigation (till 2004).

It is worth mentioning the significant events that were organized annually by CSO representatives, were the authorities were invited, as: *European Integration Forum* (November 25, 2003; Bucharest), *National NGO Forum*, 8th edition, organized by CENTRAS and DAIS (January 18, 2002; Bucharest), *Conference of the Trade Union for European Integration* (November 19, 2001; Bucharest), *International Volunteer Day Conference* (December 3, 2001; Cluj–Napoca), *Diversity Day* (December 18, 2001; Cluj–Napoca) and *EU-Romania Joint Consultative Committee* (May 23, 2002; Bucharest). These events were organized at the national level, with a large participation from civil society.

At regional level, were important the *European opinion multipliers and their participation in the preparation for accession* (august 20, 2003), organized in Sibiu, or Europe Day celebrations (May 11, 2003), organized in Zalău, with the role of disseminating the information regarding accession and facilitating the dialogue between citizens and authorities.

The accession was a national process, so the whole country was participating in it, not only the capital, Bucharest.

Another significant element was the initiative groups established by the professional association (market structure), the *support groups.* One example was *Support group for the integration of Romania into the EU 38 companies and some private persons,* representative of the Romanian business environment, which became a natural partner of Romanian authorities for the preparation of accession and integration to the EU.

Concrete involvement was manifested in the forms of impact studies and research that was provided by NGOs, trade unions or universities, as *Table 2* indicates.

Another important field presented in Table 2 was the active involvement of NGOs in decision-making process, emphasizing the effective cooperation between CSO representative and public authorities.

It is worth mentioning also the introduction of electronic collaboration, ahead of the time when the accession process was developing, and the *Dialogue on the Internet* of the Chief Negotiator of Romania with European Information Multipliers, held in January 2004 is evidence in this regard.

Conclusions

As demonstrated throughout this work, the involvement of the Romanian civil society in the preparation of accession and integration was constant and consistent. In the forms of organizations of events for disseminating information regarding EU or progresses in the elaboration of position papers to the supportive groups that facilitate the future integration, Romanian CSO prooved to be a solid partner in the national modernization and development.

To answer to the first question of research – *Was civil society an active partner in the EU accession process of Romania?* –, the answer is yes. Romanian civil society was actively involved in the preparation, implementation and decision-making process regarding accession and integration for the period 2001–2004.

As for the second question of research – *Which were the policies and areas of activities of contribution and involvement of civil society in the Romania's accession process?* –, the answer will indicate the following areas: elaboration of position papers on different areas or research, impact studies, organization of events, disseminating information regarding European accession and integration. From the total of 31 negotiating chapters, the civil society had a direct contribution to 11: the four freedoms of movement (especially the services movement); competition policy; agriculture; transport policy; taxation; social policy and labor force employment; energy; education, professional training, and youth; regional policy; environment protection; and justice and home affairs.

There were several contribution to different negotiating chapter, from which were mentioned: justice and internal affairs *(Asociația Pro Democrația/Association Pro Democracy),* rule of law (Popescu Zamfir: 2022), transport and energy *(Forumul Democrat German/German Democratic Forum),* social services, environment, decentralization of administrative processes, economic field. Partnership programs were established between government and CSOs at national and European level, for permanent counsultations, discussions, debates, roundtables and seminars on the topic of accession negotiations. Several events were organized, especially conferences, that borught toghether the civil society representatives. The National Forum of CSOs was the most important event of civil society representatives, organized annualy during the accesion period. With these mechanisms and procedures, the accession of Romania had the public support, the participation of citizens in the decision-making process and a better understanding of European integration (Pușcaș 2003).

The CSOs had the crucial role of disseminating the information and projects aiming European integration. Their expertize brought into authorities' attention the citizens expectations and transposed it in solutions for daily problems. The impact studies and analyses provided by CSOs were useful in the accession negotiation process. The involvement of civil society in the elaboration and implementation of Governmental Strategy for Rroma people and the Declaration of ethnic minority for supporting Romania's accession to the EU were an important contributions. The CSOs contribution for the antidiscrimatory civil and political rights are worth mentioning (Pușcaș 2003).

Understanding its role in the accession and integration process, the responsibility and active participation, the Romanian civil society had a valuable contribution, which paved the way for future social dialogue, collaboration, and cooperation, specific for a European democracy. Its activity aimed to familiarize the citizens with European institutions, with *acquis*, and with European policies, but also to explain the sense of enlargement of EU for the citizens of Member States, including a presentation of the costs-benefits for the candidates and Member States. The built partnerships between CSO and public authorities in the accession period facilitated the mutual sharing of information, opinions, and perceptions, which supported the creation of a new political culture, fit for the XXI century.

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"Likes" for Populists. Perceptions of the Voters of the Alliance for the Union of Romanians Party on the Political use of Social Media Platforms

Ana Gabriela Pantea

Introduction

In the past two decades, populist parties around the world had become "mainstream in the politics of Western democracies" (Mudde 2004: 542). In this regard, the research on the relationship between populist movements and voters' communication preferences and practices has extended, accordingly. The present article analyses the perceptions of the voters of the Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR) party in relation to use of social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter) in defining and consolidating their political view. The party had become, since 2020, the fourth political force in the country, with a traditionalist and ultra-Orthodox agenda, often embracing an anti-digitalization discourse. Even more, in the last year, the opinion pools estimate the rise of the party in the next election on the second position in terms of preference of the electorate. As such, the impact of the party in the Romanian political milieu is rising exponentially. Focusing on the specificity of the Romanian populist movement, the article will explore the typology of voter's perceptions on the use of social media through qualitative research method. The paradox of the Romanian far-right populist movement resides in the fact, that on one hand creates a romanticize, non-digital, anti-globalist reality, but on the other hand the party uses digital communication tools for reaching out to its electorate. As the AUR party had been voted predominantly by a public with a post-secondary level of education, members of religious communities (Pora 2020), but being present in the social media platforms, the research tries to understand how the electorate absorbs the dual discourse on traditionalism and digitalization.

The background argument hinges on the belief that populism is a narrow ideology that divides society into two factions – "us" versus "them". The proponents of this argument contend that politics should focus on fulfilling the will of the people rather than promoting structural societal changes. (Feldman–Jackson 2013: 3) Despite its purported aim to bridge the representation gap and empower the people, populism is often exclusive, politically unsophisticated, and distrustful of democratic institutions. This ideology strives to establish a homogenous nation-state, based on conservative values, rejecting pluralistic perspectives; additionally, it emphasizes the construction of a distinct self, often at the expense of denying the legitimacy of other standpoints. For instance, in Romania and in Europe in general, this could manifest as the portrayal of traditional pure countryside image versus the urban environment crowded with gadgets, with apparent lack of overlap between these two words. Nevertheless, in social virtual world, the same opposition is constructed with opposed groups.

The Alliance for the Union of Romanians party's voters, as revealed by the qualitative research through semi-structured interviews, strongly identify with the party's mission to reinstate traditional, nationalistic values. One respondent highlighted the importance of a persuasive power of social media platform, which plays a crucial role in the larger project of mediatizing the interests of the party. Within an atmosphere of media-driven populism, the online platform serves as the primary battleground for mobilizing "the people" and communication channel within the group. Through the impact of such platforms (primarily Facebook), the Romanian far-right populism becomes evident in the manifestation of the implications on a media-centric version of nationalism that reinforces the concept of "the nationalist us" as a guise for creating a malefic "them".

Research design

Although the literature on populism and media has been highly examined in the European context (Aalberg 2017), the role of social media has been overlooked. The focus has centred on the presence of populist discourse in traditional media, primarily in the press. This approach distinguishes between media populism in a narrow sense (populism portrayed by the media themselves, Krämer 2014) and in a broader sense (coverage of populist actors and their messages). Thus, the few existing studies on the online dissemination of right-wing populism (Engesser, et al. 2016; Groshek–Engelbert 2013) emphasize that populists use the Internet to bypass mainstream media. These interpretations focus on how populists and their supporters spread core elements of their ideology online, primarily through posting brief, emotive, and often mobilizing messages. Following this line of interpretation, the premise of the present paper emphasizes the fact that exactly this bypass is captured by the voters who identify themselves with the message of a non-mainstream, direct and personal channel of communication.

As the communication within right-wing populist movement tend to be highly personal, it is common to use online tools, such as to messages tailored to individual recipients (Krämer 2017). For example, a content analysis of social media posts by right-wing populist parties in five European countries from 2014 showed that messages focused on leaders rather than issues (Grill 2016). It shows that the overall communication strategy follows a top-down approach: parties post links and photos instead of engaging users and sharing or replying to the messages of others.

The first hypothesis of the paper is that, in the Romanian context, there is a similar top-down approach in communication strategy (from party leaders to voters), as the dominant figures (like George Simion, Călin Georgescu or Sorin Lavric) address their messages in a technically well-designed and apparently direct manner. In addition, the second hypothesis is to prove whether such approach helps with the formation of the groups with no formal affiliation with populist organizations to spread the message forward in order to enlarge the political supporters of the party. The third hypothesis for the present analysis is linked to the perceptions of the voters regarding covered intentions or strategies of the party beyond the messages received through social media platforms from the leaders or in support groups, in a broader sense if there is any critical approach of the voters related political content transmitted through social media.

As a premise of the research, AUR and the populist movement which overcomes the borders of a strict party membership is perceived as an authoritarian and centralized anti-elite party. But contrary to the principles of its leadership, AUR invites the entire population to express their identification with the movement by simple, formal means, regardless of further divisions and different interests within the population. Defining a sense of community and common sense of belonging, this approach equally excludes "others" who easily become enemies.

This qualitative study was conducted during the second half of December 2022 and the first two weeks of January 2023. It included 17 interviews with AUR voters (10 men and 7 women). Respondents were selected using a random procedure, and even though they were not statistically representative, they were arguably diverse in terms of age, geographic distribution, living environment, religion, and education level. Ten of the 17 interviews were conducted face-to-face and the remaining seven were conducted online. The average length of interviews is 40 minutes. A table listing those respondents who specifically requested anonymity (their initials were changed accordingly) is provided in *Appendix 1.*

Literature review and theoretical context

From what we have learned from history, societal crises bring about casualties in tandem with restructuring efforts. Right-wing populism gains momentum under certain circumstances, often involving scapegoating of certain groups. Historically, xenophobic, or nationalistic tendencies reinforce the perception of a shared

crisis. However, these apparent commonalities mask the fact that not all segments of society are equally affected by crises. This idea aligns with a particular interpretation of Marxist theory regarding ideology. Coined as "masking," this manoeuvre might benefit from a contemporary setup in the Romanian context. Mainstream politicians, intellectuals and those derided today as "elites" are portrayed as enemies (rather than class enemies) by AUR and blamed for the downfall of the country and people.

Considering the history of fascism, populism, and Holocaust in Europe, the return of contemporary far-right populism poses a particular challenge. BREXIT, the post pandemic challenges, the war in Ukraine, a growing financial crisis and the unequal burden of neoliberal policies are the basis for the prevalence of Xenophobic and populist responses. For many, the EU lacks social integration and an ineffective supranational governance project reflects the role on the unrepresentative transnational elites.

As Slavoj Žižek comments (Zizek 2002: 236) on the then rise of right-wing extremist parties and their leaders and the outcry against democratic values, it is necessary to recall the insidious but reassuring spectacle of democratic politics when right-wing populist parties were formed in Europe and created public enemies.

The initial step of the present article entails examining various viewpoints and stances concerning the occurrence of new form of populism (Taggart 2000; Jansen 2015) in the Romanian context and to link it with the perception and use of social media.

AUR – between the social message and the political agenda

The wide theoretical repertoire about populism (Donnelly 1856; Canovan, 2018; Manow 2020) contains the thesis that populism, as an ideology, is a set of ideas characterized by the Manichean distinction between "the people" and "the elite", having the central principle that politics should consist of acting in accordance with popular sovereignty. Viewed in this light, populism has a democratic impulse, as it tends to be at odds with any kind of independent, unelected institution that places limits on the will of the people. (Kaltwasser–Taggart 2015: 2)

According to AUR's ideology (Stoica et al. 2021), reactionary populism is usually a conflict between the reactionary (sometimes xenophobic or racist) ideas of the majority and the liberal and tolerant ideas of the progressive elite. Because progress has an elitist component, a liberating mission to others, populist movements are staunchly opposed to it. However, since there is no single elite, much less a monolithic people, conflicts rarely take an acute form. Romania, for example, embodies populist nationalism at the level of identity discourse, but is open to change and eager for "progress" (Soare–Tufiş 2021). According to discourse theory, the collapse of the overall discourse supported by the repressive apparatus leads to hegemonic tendencies.

AUR addresses the "people", depending on the context and objectives, the discursive method used by the AUR targets the entire population (separating the reactionaries from unnecessary divisions), but divides the society into two antagonistic groups, the "pure people" (victims of the elite interested in maintaining privileges) and the "corrupt elites", foreign interests and their national supporters. Populist attacks on institutions end up creating political instability and confusion, and the apparent cohesion between classes and specific interests means a weakening of the social fabric.

Romania's political spectrum is rife with populist discourse, but as clothes don't make people, just the words don't make populists. Only addressing the analysis of the discourse can distract from understanding Romanian populism and the specificity of AUR (Mişcoiu–Gherghina 2010, 136). Key elements of AUR discourse are anti-domination positions and opposing views of the relationship between the "elite" and the "people". Both groups have distinct characteristics: the "people" appear as superior entities over different classes and social groups, while the "elite" are corrupt and morally inferior to the people. In other words, populism is characterized by "a positive assessment of the people and a denigration of the elite". Moreover, anti-ruling rhetoric combined with a special relationship with "the people" tends to reduce populist language to just one language.

Since 1989, Romania's political system has been dominated by two triads – PSD, PNL and UDMR – as well as smaller political (populist) organisations. Corruption scandals have sapped popular support for mainstream politicians in Romania and elsewhere in Europe.

"Essentially, Romanians had to choose between three scenarios in December 2020. They could vote for the existing political class, vote for an anti-system party or ignore the polls entirely. Exactly 535,828 (9.08 per cent) Romanians chose to back anti-system groups, giving the AUR enough votes to get into the parliament. Although the group's success is not necessarily linked to the poor performance of the other parties in the electoral campaign, it can be attributed to the fact that many voters just wanted to show their contempt for the old political class." (Demianenco 2021: 76)

The ethics dimension of AUR use geographically grounded approaches such as "the union of Bessarabia with Romania" (AUR Status 2021) with potential impact of nationalism and symbolistic resentment. This approach pretends of having the power to restore Romania's identity for its economic future and recognition of urban diversity (Lizotte 2018). Due to the theoretically comprehensive taxonomy of the spread of right-wing populism via the Internet, we hypothesise that AUR ideology is based on the restoration of sovereignty. Their means of political communication are taxpayers, people with civic duties such as voters, consumers, etc.

With its ability to reach a vast and diverse audience, social media has become an indispensable tool for political movements and parties to communicate with their supporters and garner public attention. The AUR has leveraged this potential by actively engaging on popular social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and

Instagram. Through these platforms, they keep their followers up to date with their activities and disseminate their political views. Similar to other political parties, the AUR utilizes social media to connect with younger demographics who are more likely to consume news and information via social media channels.

The connection between social media and politics is multi-faceted and can produce various outcomes, both advantageous and detrimental. Political groups can use social media to build relationships with voters and propagate their agenda, but equqlly they can contribute to spreading disinformation and dividing communities. Consequently, the influence of social media on politics remains a topic which is continuously explored and analyzed.

Social media and populism

In a world of digital communication, social media has become an influential tool in the dynamics of populist movements (Hendrickson–Galston 2017). The relationship between social media and populism is symbiotic in nature, as populists have utilized it to gain support and grow, while social media has been inextricably linked to the rise of populism (Khosravinik 2022). Populist messages have been spread at greater speeds and within a short time span on social media, giving populist actors a great opportunity to have their political messages or agendas heard (Olaniran 2020). This has forced leaders across the political spectrum to concede to anti-immigrant stances and cultural protectionism, and also led to calls for centrist politicians to engage on social media (Hendrickson–Galston 2017). The characteristics, penetration, and technological logic of new communication systems impact society by remaking the terms by which a mass of people have a conversation about society (Khosravinik 2022). Social media has facilitated online mobilization of populist movements through strong-tie networks existing offline and online (Olaniran 2020), and has also enabled the spread of populist ideology in a fragmented form (Fortunato 2022). Research has shown that populist parties and candidates have a higher social media following compared to their centrist opponents,and populists were also early adopters of social media for political communication. (Hendrickson–Galston 2017) Populists are currently dominating political cyberspace and social media spaces,and the features of social media also lend themselves well to the promulgation of populist messages and figures. (Hendrickson–Galston 2017). However, the exact impact of social media on the dynamics of populist movements is still unclear (Hendrickson–Galston 2017), and popularly on social media is not necessarily a function of truth, but of capital, promoting political extremism and populism. (Khosravinik 2022) In order to fully understand the impact of social media on the dynamics of populist movements, it is important to consider the interaction between social context and technological design. (Khosravinik 2022)

Social media has drastically changed the way populist movements spread and grow, giving them a platform to reach wider audiences and bypass traditional media

channels. (Bobba, 2019) The classical European case study, Italy's Lega Nord, led by Matteo Salvini, has been able to utilize social media to increase their visibility and appeal to a larger audience. The case of Romanian AUR party presents similarities in this regard, in terms of nationalist approach and social media usage. The populist communication on social media, of both Lega and AUR, is characterized by references to "the people", "politicians" and "others". Populist leaders like Salvini or George Simion play an important role in online communication, and social media allows them to bypass traditional media and deliver messages directly to supporters. Furthermore, the interactive nature of social media has made it possible to mobilize supporters and organize protests. It also facilitates the creation of echo chambers, enabling like-minded people to amplify each other's populist beliefs. Additionally, social media algorithms and features, such as the "like" button, help populist movements gauge their popularity and tailor their messages accordingly, while providing them with a platform to disseminate their messages directly to the public. Few studies have focused on the characteristics of online populist dissemination and how to measure its success, but social media has been a powerful tool for disseminating populist discourse and style. (Bobba 2019)

As suggested by Bimber (1998, 2014, 2021), the Internet has the potential to transform the political landscape into a populist arena, as allows politicians and citizens to communicate directly without intermediary.

"the Net is accelerating the process of issue group formation and action, leaving the structure of political power […] altered, but not revolutionized or qualitatively transformed into a new epoch or era of democracy. The most significant and interesting changes may be that processes of group-oriented politics will show less coherence and less correspondence with established private and public institutional structures. The main theoretical foundations for my claim concerns political cognition and the costs of collective action" (Bimber 1998: 137)

The view according to which that the "medium is the message" has the undesirable effect of distracting attention, more specifically the content. As the research on the social media focused on its novel technological capabilities, suggesting that it helps maintain and expand interpersonal networks, especially weak ties (Ellison et al. 2007), interaction with different people is therefore encouraged. Since people mainly use social media in their daily life to fulfil their social needs, they also pay more attention to social cues (such as the number of "likes") when dealing with within the networks.

Equally, social media platforms offer powerful ways to filter out unwanted content and allow people to be muted and unfriended. While the most existing research has focused on the logic of "connectivity" and how platform offerings help connect content, users, and advertisers (McFarland–Ploy 2015), the present study will apply Bimeber's view in the Romanian context on the connexion between social media and populism. As the communication practices of the users enable or restrict social media platforms, including hiding content and disrupting the flow of information from specific platforms, we can expect that in an environment where

confrontation make politics heated to personal attacks, the users of the social platforms can easily shift to exclusionist tactics like unfriending, unfollowing, and hiding content (Shorik et al. 2021: 5)

Confirming *Storik et al.* in the transnational quantitative analysis, the interviews which had been conducted in Romania confirm that supporters proactively purify their online social circles according to their political views. Those who from the "other side" may indicate a regression in terms of connections, as it might be seen as a common human tendency. Such natural inclination manifests itself as restoring significant social connections through different forms of disengagement techniques (unfriending and unfollowing opposed viewpoints).

Social media and voter's profile

According to recent studies on young people following populist actors on Facebook (Heiss–Matthes 2017), that populist parties received support from youth when they vote, especially in offline context. They also found that young people disagree with negative messages and political socialisation. There is little evidence of positive effects of negative messages and adolescents' preference for populist messages. Other evidence shows a tenuous link between teens' political knowledge and populist campaigning when populist feeds simple messages on SNS (Arzheimer–Carter 2006). These messages tend to undercut social reality, and young people remain the most vulnerable audience. In the context of media consumption, researchers reveal positive relationship between personality traits and political behaviour (see Bakker–De Vreese 2011). Another dimension of the political motivation of adolescents for SNS Engagement Activities (Valentino et al. 2011) discuss the emotional states young people exhibit when channelling. That adolescents' cognition is based on emotional information rather than information.

As it was previously argued, the notion of populism has shifted, especially as political actors create a respite between evil elites and the broad population. As hypothesised by Arzheimer–Carter (2006), the more the EU embraces immigrants, the more right-wing populism expresses political trust and scores in the SNC offline vote. There is also strong evidence for language supported by populists on the SNC network, and there is a positive correlation between intentional action and conversational discussions (Engesser et al. 2016). In addition, the content expressed by populists on Facebook relies on political attacks and negative language posts about politicians. (Bene 2016).

Increased levels of online participation and young peoples' participation in political voting becomes a trigger, especially when they appear vulnerable and uninformed (Pew Research Centre 2016; Vissers–Stolle 2014). Studies have shown that populists target young people by sharing illicit information, such as conspiracy theories about politicians relying on racial groups (Rooduijn et al. 2016).

Psychological studies have shown that there are positive correlations between dominant personality traits such as extroversion and introversion when teenagers use the Internet. It is impossible for teenagers to have a nuanced political understanding, hence, according to the Five Model factor, the predictors that shape the political beliefs of adolescents are relating to personality traits such as neuroticism, conscientiousness, openness to new things and extroversion (Quintelier 2014; Roberts, Walton,–Viechtbauer 2006).

Related the SNS users, there is a research consensus and most of them militate around the hypothesis that youth predictors of political decisions are related to youth's disposition to be extroverted. (Correa et al. 2010; Marder–Slade–Houghton–Archer-Brown 2016). The younger people follow an extroverted politician who comes in front of them with populist messages about the corrupt elite, the more interested they become in targeting their various opinions on Twitter (Engessera–Fawzib–Larsson 2017).

At the same time, it was shown that the speech of populists differed from their attempts to be strong influencers on social media platforms. For example, the Sweeden Democrats speech managed to be seen on the Twitter platform by sharing some messages that promote a correct policy and influential users retweeted their messages because it had the highest number of mobilizations in replies and shared quotes (Akerlund 2020). This maximised the visibility of the messages shared through the hashtag, which enjoyed success, especially since Twitter has a setting based on a constellation of accounts (Bruns–Burgess 2011).

According to the subjects' answers to the research about political motivations and the use of SNS, there are moderate correlations between independent variables, such political motivations and participants' use of SNS for differences in politics. ($r = .91$, $p < .001$) (Heiss–Matthes, 2017). The investigation conducted by Heiss and Matthes has strong evidence for personality traits involvement in political decision by extraverted young people. The more extroverted teenagers are, the more they make impulsive political decisions. The quality of interactions on SNS are closely related to personality traits. According to experimental findings, the link between negative messages promoted by populists by political actors and the number of users on Facebook. The more controversial the messages, the higher the agreeableness level of the voters.

As similar research haven't been conducted yet in the Romanian context, the European psychological profile can only guide us as a framework according to the general profile of the Romanian SMS users, but not as a strongly grounded methodological premise.

Populist style communication strategy

The interest of political scientist on populism is in constant growth, especially during the elections, for example during the campaign of Donald Trump from the US or during the general elections of Romania when George Simeon launched the AUR. George Simion gained interest on SNC network AUR with *"anti-system, anti-covid, pro-Orthodox and anti-Western speech"* (Miscoiu 2021: 22), campaigning for the union of Bessarabia with Romania and promoting Orthodox values and traditional family roles. According to Giovanni Carbone (2021) there are five main indicators that are typical of a populist leader: a highly personalized leadership style; marginal style, the new leader does not originate in the political class or claim to exist; anti-institutions and anti-organizations rhetoric, often aiming at political corruption and political parties; a highly personalized leadership style; marginal style, the new leader does not originate in the political class or claim to exist; a call to restore the "power of the people" by refunding democracy (where the term "the people" as an organic whole does not allow the representation of particular interests); a dual strategy for mobilizing the masses, intended to legitimize and implement the mentioned political project, basing on: (a) a leader who appeals directly to the group for legitimization. This idea in turn implies: (i) a certain type of leadership that supports or is easily adaptable to an electoral environment; (ii) a possible key role for mass media; and (iii) an imminent appearance of demagogic policies, especially xenophobic appeals or economically irresponsible policies; (b) mechanisms for democracy.

The communication style within the populist movement is strongly impregnated with acclaims about the interests pursued by the party in favour of the people and the interests of the elites against the people. In other words, the reverse side of the medal comes from the expressions used by the correct people from the AUR party who pursue the good of the Romanians and their goals which should be focused on identifying the accomplices who excluded the interests of the Romanian people. The heuristic model proposed by Engesser et al. (2017) illustrates the contrast between the concept of "the others" and "us," two diametrically opposed categories intended to restore sovereignty.

The speeches of AUR politicians on mass media it is loaded with the ideology of the people, man is the centre of the AUR party. The discourse has strong roots in traditionalism and is based on the belief that society is divided by a deep fracture between the "pure and simple people" and " corrupt rulers" (Gherghina–Mișcoiu –Soare 2012: 377), whether we consider the phenomenon rather as a mentality, a forma mentis dependent on a Discourse, Vision of social order based on the belief in the innate virtues of the Romanian people basedwith which they claim their primacy and legitimize their political and governmental action.

As in his studies have shown by Engesser et al. (2017), in particular, populist leaders can inspire an organized and lasting collective mobilization dependent on a structured political message and a coherent program, or it can translate the message

into an improvised style that is suspicious of setting in motion different symbolic materials and placing themselves in various ideological positions, taking on the political colour of the place and which appears as an ensemble of rhetorical operations activated by the symbolic exploitation of some social representations. Regarding this issue, in the Chamber of Deputies, the AUR leader said "the gratest stake was the budget they shared and negotiated to the last second, each of your money. Your money is divided, and so is Romania. Romania as a prey" (AUR Status 2020).

Social media and the psychological message

Political parties post, connect and engage on internet platforms differently than other politicians. Dutch politicians, for example, prefer Twitter hashtags, while Romanian politicians use Facebook to express political distrust, xenophobic attitudes. The research on the content and effects of AUR communication, but studies that look at this topic using observational data are few and far between. Meanwhile, studies that focus on the effects of right-wing populist (RWP) communication are more common (Heiss–Matthes 2019).

According to Krämer (2017), RWP is a political movement that is focused on protecting the interests of the middle and working classes. In AUR context of the young democracies of Eastern Europe, therefore, especially the post-communist terrain that is sufficiently fertile when it comes to populism. The myth of the "true people" is a direct legacy of communism and reflects the lost solidarity. All these parties lament the loss of equality at the social level justified not so much in direct connection with the past, but as an effect of the corruption of the democratic system with various consequences: from unemployment to moral or ethical-religious approaches. In addition, in a internet platforms context such as Facebook, AUR communication style is characterized by a late birth of the nation-state, the nation is perceived as a natural extension of the demos and is found at the center of populist identities. Thus, populism in Eastern Europe displays a collection of attributes that put the exaltation of the people on the same level ultranationalism, with extremist drifts. Populism is not disadvantaged, it must necessarily be able to remove the class division; a populist discourse referring both to "the people" and to "the class", the class being the agent of the people's interests." According to the first and the second perspective, the appeal "to the people" can be considered more of an electoral strategy than theoretical. Used in this sense, the term "people" the notion of the *cordon sanitaire.* And from this it is similar to the perspective, the people represent a homogeneous entity, but not in a political sense like the common people or the right-wing populist parties.

"The people" acquire qualities and meanings in the light their ethnic and/or cultural characteristics. People who do not give attention to the populist radical right or cultural traditions are excluded from this category, the result being a demarcation and static image of the features of "outcasts" (Jonge–Gaufman 2022).

This and from this it is similar to the perspective, the people represent a homogeneous entity, but not in a political sense like the common people or the united people. And from this it is similar to the perspective, the people represent a homogeneous entity, but not in a political sense like the common people or the united people. Here the people acquire qualities meanings in the light of their ethnic and/or cultural characteristics. Second, researchers have concerns about who work in the media might choose to talk to right-wing populist parties in a way that is confrontational.

Political parties post, connect and engage on internet platforms differently than other politicians. Dutch politicians, for example, prefer Twitter hashtags, while Romanian politicians use Facebook to express political distrust, xenophobic attitudes and right-wing populist. There is a lot of research on the content and effects of AUR communication, but studies that look at this topic using observational data are few and far between. Meanwhile, studies that focus on the effects of right-wing populist communication are more common (Heiss–Matthes 2019).

Right-wing populist content on social media (Heiss–Matthes 2019) can look at the links between how many people have been exposed to right-wing populist content and their attitudes and emotions towards different groups of people. The founding is that those who had been exposed to more right-wing populist content tended to have more anti-elitist attitudes, anti-immigrant attitudes, and feelings of political anger and fear. However, younger and smaller groups in particular can continue to engage actively with users, stimulating them to initial support from voters. despite the limited will of more popular politicians. Interestingly, emotion and humor can positively affect different types of user interactions.

Interview results

"We don't use social media anymore"

Some of the interviewees (A. T.; C. F.; H. N.) explained the reasons why they have decreased social media usage, as a volunteer decision. "At the beginning, I was following them [AUR] on Facebook" (A. T., 52), but changes on the workplace, in the family life dynamic, or time management issues determined some voters to allocate less time for online communication or following social media with political content. "It is very time consuming, and I don't have as much time as I used to have during the pandemic" (B. D., 35). During the time they were social-media consumer, they had spent an average of two-three hours per day following political groups (especially on Facebook), heavily commenting the statements of the party leaders and engaging in group discussions.

In two cases, the subjects of the interviews (C. F. and H. N.) embraced a strong religious path (becoming daily religious practitioners) and they follow the recommendation of their priests to reduce contact with social media. Even though, they

maintain they accounts active, even though, they don't check of follow the party or other political content on social media.

In the specific cases mentioned above, social media contributed to the articulation of their political view and support for AUR between 2019–2020. The voters encountered the message of the party online and radicalized their views during the COVID pandemic (either due to the social restrictions, or due to religious incentives). The interviewees fully appropriated the messages of the party, constantly using xenophobic syntagma in their discourses. „Romania had become a gypsy land" (H. N., 36) or "only AUR and the church are able to save us" (B. D., 35). They legitimized their vote for a strong ethno-nationalistic leadership and a conservative party as a direct consequence for the dissolution of social and moral values in Romania.

The group of the voters who reduced social media consumption invalidated the third hypothesis to discover any critical approach of the voters regarding the political intentions of the party beyond the messages received through social media platforms. The messages received directly from party leaders, either first or second level politicians, related the party, anti-vaccine campaigns or social mobilizations had not been filtered critically. The voters appreciated the messages without doubts and noticed the importance of social media for shaping their political views.

On contrary, the first and second hypothesis were confirmed as the voters appreciated the short and eloquent video contents and written messages from party leaders. Voters had been convinced through social media and face to face communication on voting and supporting the party, even transmitting the message in their offline and online social network. Interestingly, supporting the party itself or extending its network in an abstract sense were not primarily goals of the voters. More precisely, the interviewees presented their social media engagement as an identifying process, finally being able to connect with those whose share similar values. They were sceptical related the future as "all who enter politics and get money at the end will betray" (C. F., 51).

"Social media, the only source of leisure during the COVID pandemic"

The general view of the interviewees (in 12 out of the 17 cases) was that the pandemic has created not only an economic and justice crises, however, they were focused on a marginally explored aspect of the COVID pandemic: the denial of small everyday pleasures that came with it. "I haven't seen my cousins or friends for a year. How can you leave without birthday parties and weekend gatherings? We have seen each other only on Messenger" (T. T., 41) On social media, the communication channels formed by social movements, political parties, and regular citizens is more fluid and dynamic. This interactive communication environment is quite distinct from traditional mass media, which had been even more restricted during the COVID pandemic.

As lockdowns restricted physical and virtual consumption, the crisis of pleasure deepened. However, as bars, restaurants, and malls began to reopen, pleasure-seeking behavior was scrutinized and challenged by the public. The pandemic's lateral surveillance on social media also contributed to the contestation surrounding post-lockdown phase. The discourse of freedom and choice, so critical to the political identity, became obstacles to the mainstream Romanian parties to hold their electorate, leading to misinformation, protests and strong support for AUR. "Politicians kept us blocked at home, without money and any source of pleasure" (O.M., 44), "they stopped us to enjoy our lives" (D.S., 44), "how can the dirty politicians stop us to go shopping or go to the church?" (A. T., 52)

One of the key benefits of social media marketing is its ability to offer entertainment value, which can be harnessed to create powerful relational marketing strategies that foster loyalty for group. AUR can be considered as a product of the lockdown, gaining support due to strong marketing campaign. Facebook remain the primary medium for transmitting political messages.

Figure 1. Number of followers of AUR party leaders, January 2023.

National Leaders	Facebook followers	Instagram followers	Tweeter followers
AUR – official party account	164000	550	181
George Simion	1300000	28300	3903
Claudiu Târziu	25000	523	1053
Sorin Lavric	35000	205	/
Marius Lulea	1100	218	/
Titus Paunescu	3200	313	10
Gianina Serban	24000	549	/
Ariadna Elena Cirligeanu	4500	314	/

Throughout the pandemic, rigid public communication has been a hot-button issue. The Romanian Prime Minister at that time, Nicolae Ciuca, a former military high official, together with the President, Klaus Iohannis, transmitted their messages in an unappealing manner to most of the population. The reaction of the public followed by the inability to express oneself through communal experiences has been a defining feature of the pandemic's early lockdowns, with family gathering and party enthusiasts being labelled as selfish. The crisis of pleasure is further amplified by social media surveillance, where going out can be considered contested acts. Interestingly, individuals who have downplayed the pandemic, spread misinformation, and advocated for a return to normalcy have also been the most

vocal about fully reopening, highlighting the close link between these perspectives. (Soto-Vásquez et al: 2023)

As social media "was our main source of leisure" (A. F., 28), as it was mentioned during an interview, the Romanian society faced a partisan identity, of those who supported versus those who opposed the draconic lockdown measures. Political parties and NGOs that aligns with progressive social values can prompt voters to demonstrate their political beliefs via their choices, leaving them with a sense of satisfaction. However, AUR and the main religious organizations (The Romanian Orthodox Church) genuinely countered and denounced an oppressive system against which social groups had been mobilized.

The assumptions of the paper were validated as voters favoured dynamic video content and written messages from AUR, compared to main political leaders. The interviewees were convinced through online communication to vote and advocate for the party, and spread the message through their personal social networks. It's noteworthy that interviewees viewed their social media engagement as a statement for freedom and joy, a process of opposition to lockdown, allowing them to connect with like-minded individuals who share similar values.

"Finally, I found my brothers"

Communicating directly with the electorate, right-wing populist party AUR caters to personalized ideals that are best suited for an interactive user experience. Such communication is designed to establish the idea of a "true citizen" as someone who identifies as "people like me" - commonly described as a hard-working, native-born citizen from the majority ethnic and religious groups. Minorities who are perceived as living off the hard-earned tax money of such "true citizens" are often excluded from this definition. (Stier et al. 2017) Like in other parts of Europe, the "true Romanian electorate" (H. N., 36) discovered itself online during the COVID lockdown and keeps in contact using the same channels today. The interviewees confirmed the convenience of online communication in different groups which works like safe bubbles. "Finally, I found my brothers and I don't have to pretend that I like Romas or Hungarians" (D. P., 33) Nevertheless, the ideology of the party, in the sense of a brotherhood for a specific goal, is not cleared understood by the voters. The interviewees customized their groups, which allows them to go undetected by political adversaries or critical observers, as they are less conspicuous than a complete political ideology. With social media, there are no gatekeepers or filters from the mass media to contend with, making it easier to melt in the group.

Conclusions

The present study was focused on voters' perceptions on the presence on social media of The Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR) party. A qualitative research was conducted during the second half of December 2022 and the first two weeks of January 2023 in order to analyse the perception of the voters of the AUR party on the usage of social media towards and the political message of the party, as AUR had become, since 2020, the fourth-largest political force of the country, having a traditionalist, ethno-nationalist, and ultraorthodox agenda, as well as a clear retrograde discourse regarding new social trends and "western import products". The results show that there is a variation in how AUR uses social media, working with the emotional repertoire of the voters to move the party forward. The paradox of the Romanian far-right populist movement is that it creates a romanticize, non-digital, anti-globalist reality, but on the other hand uses digital communication tools for reaching out to its electorate. The research aims to understand how the electorate absorbs the dual discourse on traditionalism and digitalization. The interviews confirmed that the communication strategy of AUR follows a top-down approach: instead of targeting users and sharing or replying to messages, the supporters post links and photos and often don't reply to negative comments. The first hypothesis was focused on the top-down approach in communication strategies (from party leaders to voters) as dominant figures are straightforward in their messages. Furthermore, a second hypothesis confirmed this method of forming groups without formal affiliation with populist organizations helps spread information to increase the party's political following. The third hypothesis had been partially confirmed that voters' perceptions of covert party intentions is obvious in some circumstances, but many interviewees did not confirm the initial premise.

The present article had some limitations. First, the interviewees were captured a specific context and moment in time, feeling neglected by the Romanian society due to the Ukrainian war, having the same perception on their own social status as they have had during the COVID pandemic. And second, the sample might not be fully representative for the AUR voters. Future studies could provide a more comprehensive outlook of the voters' perception on social media with a more diverse research design.

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Annex 1. Respondents' profiles

No.	Initials	Gender	Age	Social media user	County	Profession
1	B.D	Woman	35	Yes	B	Journalist
2	C.S.	Woman	54	Yes	IS	Technician
3	T.T.	Woman	41	Yes	SV	Salesperson
4	I.A.	Woman	48	Yes	CT	Electrician
5	F.F.	Woman	55	Yes	AG	Farmer
6	A.D.	Woman	22	Yes	AR	Student
7	N.I	Woman	45	Yes	MH	Retired
8	O.S.	Woman	75	Yes	AB	Nurse
9	G.A.	Woman	22	Yes	CJ	Teacher
10	O.M.	Man	44	Yes	CT	Hairdresser
11	A.T.	Man	52	Yes	BV	Accountant
12	D.Ș.	Man	41	Yes	IF	Businessman
13	D.P.	Man	33	Yes	AR	Unemployed
14	C.F.	Man	51	Yes	IS	Policeman
15	A.T.	Man	67	Yes	AB	Retired
16	T.P.	Man	44	Yes	AG	Engineer
17	H.N.	Man	36	Yes	BH	Driver

Assessing TikTok's Potential for Civil Society in Europe

A Literature Review

Mirela Mărcuț–Cosmin Chiriac

Introduction

The expansion of the digital space has allowed for more forms of expression and promotion of various causes than ever before. With this democratization, more users can connect to political, social, economic causes and their voice can be better heard, especially on social media. From a political standpoint, the golden age of social media as a democratizing force started with the early Twitter revolutions from Moldova (2007) and the protests in the UK and Spain (2010), but culminated with the Arab Spring (2011). In these cases, regular citizens disenfranchised by their governments started an online protest that trickled down to the streets and culminated, in the case of the Arab Spring, with regime change. So far, there is no consensus in the literature regarding the purely democratizing force of social media. Empirically, this is even contradicted by the contentious issue of fake news and its effects on elections in the United States. Furthermore, some authors argue that social media has not been the main force in the influence of elections (Benkler–Faris–Roberts 2018; Allcott–Gentzkow 2017).

Nevertheless, the golden age of social media seems to be over, as social media platforms have increasingly come under regulatory scrutiny across the world. They have been compared to states (Gramer 2017) and even to medieval empires (Lehdonvirta 2022) because of the way in which they control this digital space that they curate. Changing algorithms and different standards of publishing messages affect the manner of communication.

However, one cannot argue against the openness and the democratizing quality of social media, which citizens and civil society organizations (CSOs) use to promote their causes and make their voices heard. The research focuses on the way in which the latter make use of social media platforms, from the more traditional to the newer ones, such as TikTok. Civil society organizations are essential for a democratic society, as one of the main social partners of the state. As the conversation has shifted from traditional to digital and social media, their activity and communication have moved online. In this article, we aim to investigate how social media platforms affect the activity of CSOs and then to adapt the lessons learnt there to CSO activity on TikTok, the most downloaded app of 2022 (Koetsier 2023).

The literature on civil society and social media is rich and developed, but mostly investigates the ways in which civic engagement can be boosted at an individual level (Warren–Sulaiman–Jaafar 2014; Shao et al. 2022). Additionally, a significant part of the literature focuses on integrating social media in educational settings to develop civic attitudes and engagement for the youth (Sanford and Bonsor Kurki 2014; Lenzi et al. 2015). In the context of growing and ever-changing social media platforms and online practices, the literature has indeed emphasized the organizational and institutional usage of social media by civil society organizations. However, as these ecosystems and their algorithms constantly change, new research is mandatory. Additionally, considering the growing presence of TikTok, our main research question is aimed at exploring the potential of TikTok for CSOs, based on the lessons learnt from other major social media platforms, such as Facebook or Twitter. This article proceeds as follows: after a brief methodological note, we move to the conceptual framework to refine the discussion on civil society and CSOs. The second section deals with the qualitative literature review aimed at identifying key topics on the use of social media by CSOs, while the last two sections of the article assess the potential for CSOs to take advantage of the growing usage of TikTok based on the lessons learnt from other social media platforms and the interaction possibilities that the features of this short-form video content social media platform offers.

Methodology

Our main research question surrounds the potential of TikTok for civil society organizations. To answer this question, we have developed a quantitative and qualitative research framework focused on analysing the existing literature on social media and its connection to civil society organizations.

Firstly, the quantitative analysis starts with a search on three major research databases – ScienceDirect, Web of Science, Scopus – organized around the following keyword pairs: *social media platforms and civil society, social media and civil society, social networks and civil society,* and, finally, *social media and civic engagement* that could be found in the title, abstract, and keywords. The search is refined

to include theoretical, as well as empirical research concentrated on Europe, as well as limited to research articles, conference papers, proceedings, and books. Additionally, we limit the search to articles written between 2012 and 2022, based on the idea that social media became well-known as a vehicle for democratization because of the Arab Spring events of 2011. The purpose of the quantitative analysis is to have an overview of the research on the use of social media by CSOs and to identify the main topics of interest for research in the field.

The keyword search produced more than 1500 results that went through an initial clean-up process. The different keyword pairs used produced some overlap both within (Web of Science: 13%, Scopus: 17%, Science Direct: 9%) as well as across (55%) databases. The duplicates were eliminated, along with any kind of reviews, notes, or errata, any non-English studies and any studies published before 2012, which reduced the remaining literature to 788 papers. A second, more intensive clean-up was performed. Firstly, any papers that clearly addressed non-European case studies were identified and eliminated, leaving 392 papers to analyse further. Secondly, a thorough, individual analysis of the titles and abstracts of the remaining studies was performed. This time, the focus fell on eliminating studies that were clearly not addressing our research topic. For example, some were pure sociological studies, having no insights on social media use, while others were addressing social media use for governmental or public institutions.

The entire data clean-up process produced 142 papers that required a more in-depth, qualitative analysis. Most of them are the result of the *social media – civil society* (60) and *social media – civic engagement* (72) keywords pairs. *The social media platforms – civil society* keyword pair produced no results, most probably because, though it may be more accurate, it is uncommon to use the term *social media platform,* especially in this field of study. The *social networks – civil society* keyword pair produced 10 results. In this case, the reason for such a small number of results may be that social network analysis is also an important process in the field of sociology and most of those papers were eliminated in the second clean-up phase. Of the three databases, Science Direct contains the smaller number of relevant results (4). On the Web of Science 70 were identified, while on Scopus there were 68.

Secondly, the qualitative analysis aims to discern lessons of social media usage that can form the basis of the analysis on the potential of TikTok for CSOs. Out of the quantitative analysis, 22 articles were identified as having a clear focus on the use of social media for civil society organizations. Finally, the framework is applied to the usage of TikTok by CSOs, having in consideration the particularities of this application.

Thirdly, the specific features and functionalities of the TikTok social media platform are analysed, while also considering the ways in which CSOs can make use of them.

Some limitations are inherent, especially considering language and content identified. Firstly, we limit our research to English literature for ease of use.

Secondly, even though examples of social media usage from other territories would be significant, we also limit the research to Europe, attempting to bring clarity and specificity to the literature. Even though comparative perspectives can also be analysed, they are outside the scope of this research.

Civil society and civil society organizations (CSOs)

From amorphous to ambiguous to contentious, there has been no shortage of descriptions of the term civil society in the literature. As with many fluid concepts, civil society is hard to define. With this conceptual haze, clarity is hard to accomplish. However, the purpose of this section is to organize a conceptual framework regarding civil society to provide insights into their presence on social media, especially the emerging platforms.

Civil society is defined in different directions, but most of them begin from the realization that the concept is a part of a significant triad of institutions - along with the state and the market (Edwards 2014; Kopecký–Mudde 2003). The dissensus starts when discussing the boundaries between the state and civil society, or the civil society and economic institutions. Edwards (2014) argues that the boundaries between them are quite fluid, considering that civil society organizations require a legal framework that comes from the state or that CSOs may engage in the market in initiatives, such as social entrepreneurship or their functioning might become corporatized.

The manner in which civil society settles its boundaries influences its role. Researchers discuss about the assumed normative function of civil society, whose role is to push for more democratization (Kopecký–Mudde 2003). Starting from the characterization made by Edwards that there is also focus on the civil qualities of civil society, other researchers delve into the issue of civil versus uncivil society (Bob 2011). Kopecky and Mudde insert nationalist movements from Eastern Europe in this category, while other researchers emphasize the uncivil character of anti-globalist and anti-liberal demonstrations (Edwards 2014).

The discussion around the civil society as an inherently good force is just one part of the conceptualization of this concept, stemming from the vision of civil society as inherently good and a positive force. Edwards (2014) discerns two other conceptualizations, which are also useful for the purposes of this research. The first concerns the traditional conceptualization stemming from Tocqueville's admiration of the voluntary associations in the United States, while the second focuses on the public sphere defined by Habermas. The first one stresses the power of organization and coagulation, while the second is more fluid and is the place of social movements, where action is more politicised (Hendriks 2006).

Regardless of the three conceptualizations, the concept has philosophical roots and describes the involvement of citizens in different causes, loosely outside the framework of state or market activities. Hendriks (2006) details two possible

sources of emergence of this term, one from anti-communist movements in Eastern Europe, stressing the potential for democratization. The second stems from the American tradition, as a counterreaction to individualism. In both sources illustrated by Hendriks (2006), the source of development of civil society is voluntary association, not mandated by either the state or the market. In the case of Eastern European civil society movements, their emergence was grassroots and worked against the existing state institutions, while, in the second source, the emergence of civil society functioned in parallel with the state and other institutions. Again, the discussion relates back to the 'civil-uncivil' dichotomy and to the relationship that civil society has with the state or market. However, both have in common the idea that participation and association are completely voluntary, which is one of the cornerstones of civil society.

In this research, we view civil society not as completely separate from the state or economic institutions, considering that the focus of the research is to observe how such organizations make use of the social media platforms controlled by corporations. In this sense, they compete with other actors for the attention and participation of citizens and are dependent on the algorithms of these companies. Secondly, we view it as part of society, because of the organizational perspective that we bring in the paper, given that we aim to follow the practices of established CSOs on social media. Thirdly, having in mind the idea that civil society organizations compete for attention in the avalanche of content and information available online, they are prone to become professionalized institutions that have to mirror business practices. Even though a part of the literature criticizes this conflation between business and civil society (Walzer 1998), we argue that this is necessary for the organizations to fulfill their social, economic, or political purposes.

Social media use by CSOs. Literature review

Since the wide extension of social media in our societies, it has provided a public space for engagement with regular citizens, companies, and CSOs alike. Currently, the unwavering support for the democratizing potential of social media has faded away, as the platforms have been accused of disseminating disinformation and allowing election interference after the initial boom resulting from the Arab Spring. Nevertheless, they have become a significant part of public communication. On this ambivalent backdrop, the literature has examined the actual usage of social media by CSOs based on the acknowledgement that they are a significant component of our reality – along with the state and markets.

This section explores this literature identified based on the abovementioned methodology – focusing on theoretical discussions and empirical examples from Europe since 2012. As a general impression regarding the literature, research is focused more on theoretical explorations rather than empirical studies and the focus on Europe is quite limited. Empirical case studies limit themselves to countries,

such as Germany, Sweden, Italy, Macedonia (Jovevsk et al. 2017; Comunello–Mulargia–Parisi 2016; Selivanova 2022). In this case, we do not find any significant concentration of analyses of social media usage by CSOs. Central and Eastern Europe is largely missing from the sample collected, while more focus is placed on examples from the former Soviet space, with some articles focused on the Russian Federation or Ukraine especially around the Euromaidan protests. Nevertheless, these examples are also limited.

As previously mentioned, the literature focuses more on user behaviour and engagement, especially about the youth. When looking at the domains and competencies of CSOs, the main are environmental, democratic, and civic activism. Apart from these observations, the literature mainly analyses the generalized impact of social media on NGOs and CSOs (Steen-Johnsen–Enjolras 2015; Castelló–Lopez-Berzosa 2023; Chapman et al. 2015), the platform affordances that influence message distribution (Monaci 2019; Alb–Etter 2020; Comunello, Mulargia, and Parisi 2016), and, most practically, different types of usage and engagement (Selivanova 2022; Akboğa 2020).

Regardless of the perspective approached in the literature, there is one common starting point, namely that social media has the potential to extend the audience of civil society and to boost engagement with their causes. Research shows that, regardless of the territory analysed, CSOs pay attention to the social media channels precisely for this reason (Jovevsk et al. 2017; Selivanova 2022; Foos et al. 2021). Larger organizations may have dedicated teams and budget and report larger success in leveraging social media channels (Maxwell–Carboni 2019). This finding is in congruence with the various articles that look specifically at how larger organizations, such as Greenpeace or Amnesty International, integrate social media usage (Steen-Johnsen–Enjolras 2015; Pillay–Maharaj 2017). Some researchers argue that the integration of social media actually changes the structure from within, as it moves to a more developed networked structure prompted by the functioning of social media platforms that thrive on network effects (Özkula 2021).

At the same time, there is yet another dichotomy in the approach of social media by CSOs, namely private versus public organizations. Private organizations are not as well-researched as public ones, but their experience is relevant since it relates to the challenges of the sector. Private foundations are more likely to use social media and engage in more stakeholder engagement than public and community foundations, which focus more on calls to action, since the former have more access to funding, and they are less dependent on donations (Maxwell –Carboni 2019). However, the stakeholder engagement sought after by private foundations may just as well signal the formation of the so-called "expert bubble", as information remains trapped by the filter bubble (Selivanova 2022).

Similar literature focuses on social media adoption by such organizations, starting from the acknowledgment that this process can mirror the one made by the public authorities. Chapman et al. (2015) expand on the model developed by Preece–Shneiderman (2009).

The latter describe a three-step model for adoption of social media: experimentation, creative chaos and, finally, institutionalization. The model developed by Chapman et al (2015) focuses precisely on CSOs and is rooted in the organizational mission. Social media presence should be built on this foundation and developed in congruence with the purpose of the organization on social media. Similar to the model that emphasizes creative chaos, the authors advocate also for several iterations and experimentation in order to identify the best way to reach and engage audience. The main usage of social media for CSOs relates to civic engagement and advocacy, rather than mere reach and one-way communication.

A significant proportion of the literature concentrates on platform affordances and how they influence the activities related to activism and civil society. CSOs are aware of the differences between platforms and try to use them accordingly, while acknowledging the content filtering deployed by platform algorithms. Although it focuses on violent organizations that could be a part of the so-called 'uncivil society', Monaci (2019) describes platform affordances that are also valuable for CSOs, namely pervasiveness, scalability, searchability. Due to the network effects, platforms gather vast amounts of users that can search for content that is of interest for them. At the same time, they allow the organization to be present 24/7 in user feeds, which could also be considered a drawback, as it requires constant supervision of the activity. However, there is a caveat and it refers to platform side-effects, such as the algorithmic governance employed by platforms tuned towards data extraction and attention. Because of this, the reach and engagement sought after by CSOs is highly dependent on the algorithm. A second and related side effect is the phenomenon of information overload, which can sometimes be used against the organization by nefarious users with strategies, such as obscuring and trolling (Gümüsay et al. 2022) or off-track discussions (Albu–Etter 2020).

These two side-effects require CSOs to constantly adapt and to deploy a series of strategies and tactics both in terms of content and in the way it is delivered. For instance, Castelló–Lopez-Berzosa (2023) find that constructive and affective messages receive more engagement than destructive ones. Other research stresses the fact that two-way communication is more significant rather than mere communication and showcasing of organizational activity (Asencio–Sun 1AD). In this sense, two-way communication is significant for the identification of what researchers call "free agents", supporters of the same causes that can contribute to the spread of the messages.

The literature helps describe the types of messages and communication that CSOs use online. These may include:

- Information sharing, calls to action, and community building (Akboğa 2020)
- Mobilization of supporters by calling out opponents, such as corporations, combined with a subsequent inclusive strategy towards the company, rewarding efforts (Castelló–Lopez-Berzosa 2023)

– Posts dedicated to the expert bubble, but which might elude regular citizens' attention (Selivanova 2022)
– Slideshow activism – the use of the slideshow function from Instagram to explain the message in multiple images, which contributes to better reach as user spend more time on a post (Dumitrica–Hockin-Boyers 2022)
– Creation and dissemination of hashtags, which exploit the searchability affordance of social media (Gümüsay et al. 2022; Amit–Narayanan 2019)
– Mashups – linking content from one social media platform to another to build connectivity between different audiences (Albu–Etter 2020)
– Simple retweets and shares, which are found to not have a particularly large added value (Tsai et al. 2020)

Specific platform characteristics influence the success of these strategies and tactics, along with the algorithm design. Researchers also emphasize the complementary characteristics of social media sharing, as different platforms enjoy their own audiences. Twitter might be a social media platform for wider audiences, the place of instantaneous reactions and much more public engagement, while Facebook is considered the standard platform for communication (Comunello–Mulargia–Parisi 2016). However, considering that the literature dedicates significant attention to techniques meant to help engage the youth into civic issues, it is worth exploring the potential of TikTok for civic engagement. TikTok is one of the most used social networking platforms by the youth, and news reports have highlighted that it has also become a de-facto search engine (Huang 2022).

What TikTok brings to the table

TikTok is one of the more recent entries in the realm of social media platforms, currently holding an important part of the social media market share, evolving steadily in terms of active users over the years (TikTok Revenue and Usage Statistics 2023). The defining element of this platform is that all its functionalities and features revolve around short-form video content.

TikTok, called Douyon in China where it was founded, evolved from the short lip-sync video social media platform Musical.ly, after it was acquired by ByteDance (Kaye et al.2021). In this niche, it was preceded by Vine, a 6 second short-video content social media platform acquired by Twitter in 2012, before its launch, only to be discontinued in 2016 (Vandersmissen et al. 2014; Kaye et al. 2021). Other social media platforms included the possibility of sharing short-form video content, following the success of TikTok, but they do not have it as their main media type, and this is one of the key elements that differentiates TikTok from the other social media platforms. For instance, Meta has developed Reels as a response to the growing sharing of short-form videos from Tik-Tok on their platforms and now, short videos uploaded on Facebook and Instagram are transformed into Reels (Alexander 2020).

Regardless of the media type in question, a social media platform user has the possibility to play the role of *content provider*, *content viewer* or both, as statistics show that 83% of TikTok users have posted at least a video (TikTok Statistics – Everything You Need to Know 2023). Whether the platform is used on behalf of a company, an NGO, a public person, or an individual, a user may interact with a social media platform from both points of view. We preferred *content provider* over *content creator* to describe users that deliver content to other users as it is a more inclusive term. Content providers may very well create content however, they can also rely on other content creators that they can hire directly through a dedicated marketplace that TikTok built for this very purpose.

Whether TikTok has the potential to help civil society organizations in achieving their goals depends on both perspectives and this is the reason for which, in this section of the paper, we are analysing it from both points of view.

On a brief overview, for the content provider, the following aspects are fundamental:

– What functionalities are available to create and deliver content (C1),
– What interaction possibilities the platform offers (C2),
– The logic used to distribute the content (C3),
– What the costs or monetization possibilities are, where relevant (C4),
– What tools are available to evaluate the success of their content (C5).

From the perspective of the content viewer the following aspects are relevant:

– The logic used to distribute the content (V1),
– What interaction possibilities the platform offers (V2).

It was made intentionally evident that there is some overlap between the aspects relevant to the content providers and the content viewers. Namely, the way in which the platform delivers the created content to the viewer, usually called "the algorithm" (C3, V1), and the interaction possibilities the platform offers (C2, V2). Regardless of the overlap, the reason why they matter to both roles is different.

TikTok displays content to viewers, currently, through the *For you* and *Following* sections of the platform. Before a user starts following certain content providers they prefer, the algorithm decides what videos are displayed to them in the *For you* section. The queue of videos that are displayed to a user is built based on different criteria which are usually not explicitly disclosed. This is "the algorithm" and, just as in the case of search engines or other social media platforms, it evolves through time.

According to a recent study, TikTok's "algorithm" is the element that sets it apart from other social media platforms emphasizing that, by design, TikTok discourages users from exploring or using other platform functionalities feeding their egos with "various aspects of their own personas" (Bhandari–Bimo 2022, 2, 5, 9). TikTok's algorithm takes into consideration a combination of factors such as user activity, data extracted from videos a user has shown interest in, including its

audio, user's location and language, and "not interested" feedback, according to Worb (2023). Consequently, the algorithm constantly improves based on the continuous input that it receives from the user's activity. However, according to Klug et al. (2021), users assume that video engagement through comments, posting times and flooding a video with hashtags would guarantee a video's success, only to confirm the first two. Nonetheless, it should be noted that rich video engagement through comments is more a consequence of a video's success than its driver.

For content providers, the algorithm is relevant as it can lead their efforts to success or failure depending on the elements that make up their video. However, as already mentioned, the algorithm is not constant and one of the factors it may be affected by is the "shifting moral space" in which social media platforms operate (Simpson et al. 2022). The discussions regarding the moral aspects of these changes are beyond the scope of this paper, however, there's an inherent connection between the algorithm, the performance of content on social media platforms and, in consequence, content creation.

The success of TikTok may be attributed to a lot of factors, however, one of the aspects that can make or break any software application is the ease of use, which applies to content creation as well, which come in the form of short-video content, stories, and slideshows (C1). Without the appropriate tools, creating and editing videos is not easy. TikTok makes this process a breeze, eliminating the need for sophisticated video editing software.

However, social is the defining term in social media and user interaction is what gives this characteristic to software applications. There are a few ways for users to interact through TikTok. Posting does not necessarily lead to social interaction, it is more of an interaction, or conversation starter. Some of the functionalities through which TikTok facilitates user interaction are the comments, video sharing, creating duets, using the stitch and Q&A functionalities, and live streaming.

Comments and sharing are the most common interaction possibilities and are a defining feature of social media. Live streaming is also supported by other social media platforms, however, on TikTok, this functionality comes with several interaction possibilities like *Live Q&A or Live together.* The *Duet* and *Stitch* functionalities facilitate video mixing, which also keeps the new video linked to the original one. At face value, all these functionalities offer a rich social interaction environment with the targeted audience, improving on the possibility of a more involved youth, which is the main segment of its user base.

Without going into more detail, it is quite clear that TikTok offers a multitude of social interaction possibilities, especially through its main media type: short-form video.

Regarding costs, monetization (C4), and the possibility of evaluating the success of their initiatives (C5), civil society organizations may benefit from the *TikTok for Good* initiative, which, in addition to the aspects mentioned so far, also provides support in content creation (TikTok for Good 2023). There is no explicit mention of whether there are any costs attached to this initiative, though one can assume

there are not. However, to qualify for it, civil society organizations must go through a selection process, which gives TikTok the power of choosing the initiatives worth helping. Still, without being part of this initiative, civil society organizations may use TikTok to promote their message and even obtain donations.

In the previous section, through literature review, we've identified several ways in which social media platforms are used by CSOs to benefit their causes while, in this section, by analysing the features and functionalities of TikTok, we have found they cover all of them.

To understand whether TikTok really makes a difference for civil society organizations, further research is needed. Still, the potential is there.

Conclusions

This empirical analysis has focused on the use of emergent social media platforms by CSOs, starting from the premise that their online presence must align with where the users are. As one of the most popular platforms in the world, TikTok is not without peril. Just recently, the European Commission has requested all Commission employees to delete the app off their work phones for security purposes (Anderlini–Goujard 2023). Nevertheless, as the literature argues, CSOs need to be present on social media platforms to get people involved in their causes.

The research has pursued the answer to the research question from three angles. First, the quantitative analysis of the literature aimed to identify interest in the literature and main topics regarding social media platforms and civil society. We found great interest in the literature, but rather more focused on getting citizens, and especially the youth, to become civically engaged, hinting that there is more supply of content than demand.

Secondly, we moved towards a qualitative analysis of the articles that dealt with the use of social media by CSOs. The research illustrates that there is a learning curve for CSOs in the integration of this technology into their communication activity, that several iterations are necessary and that the most successful strategies start from the integration of the organizational mission in the social media communication. Moreover, the literature review showcases a series of examples of usage that have proven to be useful, such as more focus on two-way communication, identification of free agents that support this cause, or the rallying up of supporters by providing dissent against rivals, such as corporations. Platform affordances, such as searchability or pervasiveness, are useful for the missions of CSOs.

Finally, based on the conceptual framework and literature review, we aimed to apply the knowledge from the literature to the affordances of TikTok, as a short-form video content platform. What we found is that TikTok offers a rich set of functions to cover the needs of any organization, including the case of our research, of CSOs. The platform also offers support to certain initiatives in terms of content creation, analysis of results and hashtag promotion, that may include

CSOs. However, the decision regarding the supported initiatives is in the hands of TikTok, which gives it a certain amount of influence on what civil society topics get promoted and how.

This research is useful for civil society organizations aiming to refine their message and adapt to the new information context that TikTok has created, especially considering that other platforms have copied its features. Hence, these insights can be multiplied on other platforms, such as Facebook. The research also contributes to the literature by filling the gap in analyses related to TikTok, considering its perils and potential. CSOs must adapt their communication activity to various types of content, but also always having in mind the organizational mission and the audience they aim to reach. In this respect, a presence on TikTok helps with engagement towards the youth, which the literature signals out as lacking civic engagement.

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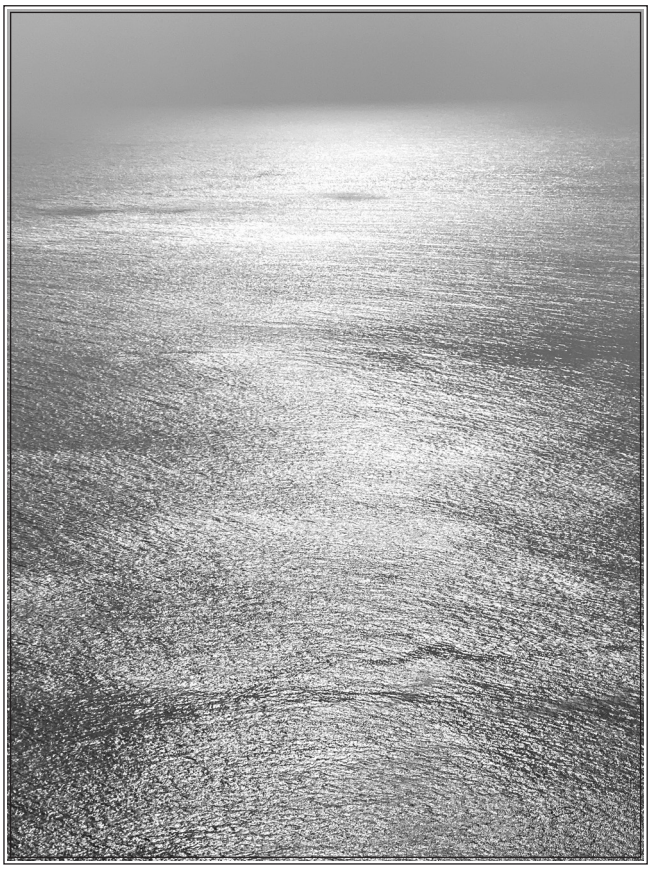

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The 2017–2018 Protests, a Factor of Pressure on Europeanisation of Romania's Political System?

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Introduction

Among the many changes brought about by the fall of the communist regime in Romania was the possibility of a new development of the political system in terms both of pluripartidism and democratization of representative institutions (Ionescu 2013: 114–124), as that of political and civic participation of citizens (Radu –Buti 2016), experiences that most members of Romanian society had not known but were associated with the democratic models of Western European states. The 1990s became so the ground on which Romanian citizens and the new political parties started the process of democratisation, experimenting with free elections, opposition and political dialogue, and rotation of power as specific practices to democratic regimes that led to a strengthening of the new institutional system, but also to a process of learning the practices of democracy by citizens, including that of *civic and political participation*, a process that will continue and will have its moments of glory in the years to come. (Radu–Buti 2016; Mărgărit 2016a,b; Momoc et al. 2019; Pavel 1995: 23–26).

Considered to have an apathetic civil society (Pojoranu 2017: 43; Gubernat–Rammelt 2021: 259; Răuțu 2021–2022: 172), the protests that erupted in February 2017 seemed to take by surprise. However, survey-based research conducted in November–December 2011 in three major university cities revealed some positive trends regarding the civic involvement of young people between 18 and 29 y.o. with secondary education, students or employees of multinationals, namely: prosocial

behaviour, an awareness of the role of public institutions and their professionalism and effectiveness, distrust of political institutions but trust in civil society and NGOs, *corruption* being one of the causes that would lead them to protest in the street. (IMAS 2011). A few years later, Burean and Bădescu (2014) showed that, amid the growing access to new technologies, students' interest in civic and political activism had increased (compared to the general national interest) and raised the question of the consequences in terms of the availability of physical participation in protest actions. After new reviews, Răuțu (2021–2022: 171–175, 180–182) and Abăseacă and Pleyers (2019: 160, 163) show that after 2012 there was an increased interest in socio-political realities, the participants in the 2017 protests being politically active citizens (interested in the decision-making system and participation in voting), representing the "democratic right" and "young (neo)liberal entrepreneurs" for whom the EU represented the guarantee of maintaining Romania's democratic direction. Different authors (Gubernat–Rammelt 2021: 254–256; Adi 2017a: 55–56; Borțun and Cheregi 2017: 19–20) highlight the high level of education and economic comfort, their rather young age and tech-savvy, their urban residence and hired mainly in the private sector, their civic and unconventional political engagements and global vision of modern society, their responsibility-based contractualist approach to the relationship between citizens and political decision-makers as official actors of modernisation and Europeanisation[2] of Romania. For the 2018 protest, although organised by the diaspora, the majority of participants were from the country/Bucharest and had also participated in the 2017 protests, indicating that a critical mass of active members of society had formed, having empirical and theoretical knowledge of what democracy means and recognising the deviations from democratic and EU practices, values and principles. In 2017, 10 years had passed since the accession to the EU and the implementation of the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism, the issue of corruption was widely discussed including at the official/institutional level and citizens had much easier access to both technology and information and normative interpretations of EU or international reports and a critical mass of people sufficiently trained and exposed to an organisational culture based on procedures and respect emerged, which has changed both the expectations and attitudes of employees toward public institutions too (Bratu et al. 2017; Răuțu 2021–2022: 167–168, 178–180), and this changed the purpose of the protests: freedom had been achieved in 1989, now people's desire was "to build a fair and functional system, to create a new social and political order" (Ioan–Boța-Moisin 2017: 112) and to maintain its new values and principles (Adi 2017a: 55; Pojoranu 2017: 47). The easy access and use of technology also made it possible to coagulate this social segment into groups capable of joint action and made for an excellent organization (i.e., choreographed performances, huge karaoke sessions, street shows, petitions, etc.) and communication (including live broadcasts on Facebook or on their own TV channel) with a significant mobilising impact (Ionescu–Ciudin 2017: 91–92; Boicu 2017; Păun 2017; Trif 2017).

Literature review

Although the analysed events are recent, an important analytical literature has already been published, some as recently as 2017 (the volume coordinated by Adi and Lilleker especially). For the proposed analysis were necessary diverse but complementary researches. So, in order to retrace the course of the protests, the studies from the volume coordinated by Adi and Lilleker were very useful, as well as the chronology made by Moceanu, for 2017, and the comparative analysis 2017–2018 made by Răuțu. Some of the cited authors (Abăseacă–Pleyers; Gubernat–Rammelt; Răuțu; Mărgărit) published several analytical researches, individual or in a team, on the same subject, but it was not possible to refer to all these, although they were extremely useful scientific tools to understand the phenomenon of protests and the way of reporting of civil society to the political system in Romania. Very important for understanding the spirit of the protests, in addition to the multitude of press articles consulted, were also the collection of slogans photographed and filmed and the videos watched on YouTube.

The correlations between the messages of the protesters and the values they received was possible due to several articles on the issue of individual and social values signed by Bogdan Voicu, while the works on the Europeanization of Romania signed by Constantin Schifirneț, a profound connoisseur and a fine analyst of Romania's social problems since the nineteenth century, while the correlation of the demands of protesters and the decisions of political system was possible given to the volume published by the Foundation Konrad Adenauer and some analyses realised by some civic organisations (Funky Citizens, Vice, Declic). Many of the works and articles consulted or the videos viewed could not be included in the references, in order to avoid redundant approaches, but I am grateful to the authors for their work in collecting and ordering the information.

Theoretical and methodological framework

The fall of the communist regime in Romania in December 1989 was closely associated with citizens' protests against the Ceaușescu regime. Protest against some decisions of the political system, though not based on some well-organised civilian structures, became, in the post-communist society, an important tool to obtain the changes that civil society expected from the representatives of the political system. Thus, the establishment of new governments, as well as new political alliances at times, took place in the aftermath of the 1991 mineriad, after the protests against certain decisions of President Traian Băsescu and the Emil Boc government in the winter of 2012, and in the aftermath of the Colectiv fire in the autumn of 2015, while the rejection by Parliament in 2014 of the law regulating the mining exploitation of Roșia Montană, occurred as a result of the protests of September 2013-February 2014 (protests that led to the emergence of a new political party,

the Union Save Romania/Uniunea Salvați România). (Burean–Bădescu 2014; Radu –Buti 2016: 66–74, 87–126, 152–168; Mărgărit 2016a: 258–260; Lilleker, Adi 2017: 7; Momoc 2017: 13; Pojoranu 2017: 43–48; Munteanu 2017: 138; Rogalski 2017; Macdonald 2017) Even though the participants in the 2017 and 2018 protests did not participate in those of the early 2010s, Abăseacă and Pleyers (2019: 154–159, 163), Barbaros (2017: 75) and Băltărețu (2017) show that there is a relationship of continuity between them, being a period of learning (from one's own experience or that of protesters in other countries) and increasing awareness, of creation and consolidation/maturation of civic activist networks (Trif 2017), all in a rather effervescent international and regional protest context. For all the protesters, political parties were seen as the main ones responsible for certain decisions taken (or not) in the political system or for the direction they took, but also as the main vectors of a change in the perspective of the decision-making system on the issues that were the subject of the protests. The difficulties of transition, the deviations of the new political elites from the project of democratization and liberalization, in addition to the development of widespread corruption, determined massive migration (Răuțu 2021–2022: 176–177) created, progressively, a "negative feedback towards the entire political class, the establishment and the way in which the relationship of representation between rulers and governed works" (Radu–Buti 2016: 159) but also "the determination of citizens to stop ignoring the irresponsible and illegitimate decisions of the political class" (Mărgărit 2016a: 256). Thus, the fall of communism made possible the emergence and development of civil society in Romania, and the problems that arose in the post-communist political-administrative system led to the institutional organization of civil society, citizens understanding that by their association is easiest "to promote their own interests before the state" and influence the final decision of authorities (Miroiu 2017: 524), the adversities of transition were a good basis for the development of civil society in terms of pursued values and principles, a development which will be seen particularly in the pre-accession period and after Romania's accession to the European Union (Nimu 2016: 44–54; Pfiszter 2017: 132–133). Even if they often started from an event with a strong emotional nexus, the protests turned into rational instruments to pursue certain objectives of civil society, determining decisions involving the rationality of political actors, aspects that I will emphasize in the following analysis. The article will use the principles of rational choice theory to show that Romanian citizens chose "conscious protest" (Trif 2017) even if emotions, positive or negative, were constantly at the centre of their actions, and effectively used the technical means at their disposal to make policymakers review their decisions. Protest actions will be analysed from the perspective of instrumental and value rationality models, both of which are used for analysing individual actions but have also been shown to be acceptable for analysing collective actions. (Miroiu 2017: 77)

Civic actions of 2017–2019

Protests, revendications, and tools.

The political action behind the outbreak of the anti-government protests in February 2017 was the adoption on 31 January, by the social-democratic government sworn in on 4 January, of an emergency ordinance (OUG13) to amend the Criminal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure and a law on pardons. Given the number of protesters and the strong support of the diaspora (Adi 2017a,b; Ioan–Boța-Moisin 2017), these protests were considered the largest ones in the last 27 years (Moceanu 2017) and another step to "full democracy" (Lilleker–Adi 2017: 6), some important features for a country with a slight culture of protest and suing rights (Gubernat–Rammelt 2021: 253). Reactions emerged both at the national, European and international levels, as the newly adopted legal rules are seen as undoing the last decade of progress in strengthening the rule of law and the fight against corruption in Romania. (Pojoranu 2017: 43, 48; Adi 2017a; DoR 2017: 60; Barbaros 2017; Pfiszter 2017; Gross 2017: 147; Gubernat–Rammelt 2021: 258; Abăseacă–Pleyers 2019: 155–156; Dumitrica 2021: 240)

The main message of the 2017 protests will be an anti-corruption one but also stressed bad public administration, rule of law, democracy, freedom, rights, and limiting the influence of the political system on justice (Rogalski 2017: 35; Ursu 2017: 39; Pojoranu 2017: 47; Ionescu–Ciudin 2017: 90–91; Boicu 2017: 95–96; Pfiszter 2017: 132sql; Momoc 2017; Adi 2017a: 55; Gross 2017: 146) and in 2018 the reasons for the protest organized by the diaspora remained the same, the catalyst of the protest being the negative perception of the evolution and performance of the political system (Răuțu 2021–2022: 165–166, 174, 177; Abăseacă–Pleyers 2019: 154).

The Europeanist dimension of the 2017–2018 protests was given by:

- the *anti-corruption* message and in favour of strengthening democracy and the rule of law "as an expression of citizens' longing for EU standards and Western European lifestyles" (Gubernat–Rammelt 2021: 248), a message easily associated with the requirements that the EU put forward to mark Romania's democratic stability and ability to join the Schengen area;
- the protest planners' appeal to European officials to express "their disappointment with the incumbent Romanian government's stance on anti-corruption efforts" and thus to support the protesters' aspirations to enjoy their rights and freedoms in an EU member state, where the rule of law is truth, uncorrupted officials serve the good of the citizen, justice is free, and the economy is running (Gubernat–Rammelt 2021: 257–258);
- at a symbolic level, the impressive EU flag made of lights by the protesters was perceived as a visual expression of the European orientation of the Romanian citizens and transformed into one of the "emblems of the protests"; (Adi 2017b: 84; Armanca 2017: 107)
- by organising protests in the diaspora (Adi 2017a,b; Pfiszter 2017);

– the organisation of the protest by civic groups from the diaspora, which "came home" bringing, by patriotism and wish for modernisation, the European values and principles experienced beyond Romania's borders, where it was forced to live because the bad national governance (Gubernat and Rammelt 2021: 259–260; Răuțu 2021–2022: 165, 179-180).

The adoption of a new ordinance, increasing the level of political influence over judicial bodies, provoked the protests of magistrates in February 2019 (Rădulescu and Popescu 2019; Popovici–Driu 2019), legitimizing the former even more, because, coming from justice professionals and referring to some political influences that citizens' representatives had also accused, they had the role of post-factum reinforcing the message of civil society. Citizens reorganised on August 10, though at a smaller scale, the demands also target the problem of corruption and inefficiency/incompetence of some state institutions. (Uniți schimbăm 2019)

Protesting – a rational choice.

By analysing the major demands and objectives of the protesters in 2017–2019, their organizing, and the participating human resource, we can discuss both instrumental and value-based rationality.

Aspects of instrumental rationality:

– the use of the previous protest experiences (Roșia Montana, Colectiv) for new purposes;
– use of technology and adapting universalised cultural symbols to the local reality and loading them with creativity, refined humour, and emotional largely recognizable meanings at a social level, to draw attention to the problems faced by Romania and the causes of the protests and to increase their followers (Dumitrica 2021: 243–245; Pătruț 2022: 291–292, 295–296; Macdonald 2017);
– use of some emotional triggers (diaspora's support in 2017 and "return home" in 2018–2019, children's march, choreographies) to mobilise crowds (Pătruț 2022: 291–292; Ionescu–Ciudin 2017: 90; Armanca 2017: 104; Lerner et al. 2014);
– involving in protests children and pets, as symbols of future and innocence (DoR 2017: 59; Barbaros 2017: 74; Ionescu and Ciudin 2017: 90; Armanca 2017: 104)
– the elaboration and assumption of the Proclamația România 2017+ and reflecting in a very concise manner the current demands of the protesters and their vision of the qualities necessary for a functioning political system;
– different organising civic groups assumed the limited influence of protests and assumed other directions of action and their own projects to contribute to a deeper and sustainable change (Ioan–Boța-Moisin 2017: 113; Macdonald 2017).

Aspects of *value rationality:*

– the focus on the issues of "thievery" and "thieves," to suggest a value divide between society and the political system; (Trif 2017)
– the use of the *promise principle* (Miroiu 2017: 37–38) to accuse the unrespect of the ideals assumed at the failure of communism and those adopted by the EU accession; (Pojoranu 2017: 44; Adi 2017a: 54; Gross 2017: 147)
– assuming a *moral duty*[3] to participate in the protests, following the examples of some prominent personalities, opinion leaders or professionals; (Neagu 2017; Voiculescu 2018)

All the above would not have been possible without some existing needs within the Romanian society, reflected, more or less directly, in some of the slogans, both as psychological values (Voicu 2010: 252) as truth, honesty, courage, fairness, respect, care, responsibility[4] and as sociological values (Voicu 2010: 253), namely justice, solidarity, responsibility, commitment, hope, sacrifice, dedication.[5] (Trif 2017; Borțun–Cheregi 2017: 20)

Though not bringing new leaders to Romanian society at the national level, did not give rise to new ideologies (Lilleker and Adi 2017: 7; Pojoranu 2017: 47; Armanca 2017: 103, 107; Boicu 2017: 97) and only temporarily strengthened some political groups in the opposition, protests should have exerted and have exerted quite a lot of pressure on the political system, which decided to repeal the ordinance in order to calm the spirits and, above all, not to lose power and continue the actions in the same direction, but at a slower pace.

Political system choices following the civic action of 2017–2019

Maintaining the steady path of democratisation and strengthening democratic institutions and rules will prove sometimes to be major challenges for the Romanian political system. The 2017–2019 protests were aimed at hijacking the political system by abandoning the objectives assumed in 1989 and 2007, and one of the tools was the eight-point proclamation officially addressed to the authorities at the beginning of the protests. Whether politicians have taken citizens' demands into account we can find out by analysing what exactly from the eight requests and objectives of this proclamation was reflected in the debates and decisions of the political system after the 2017–2019 protests.

Requests positively solved:

Transparency in administration through e-government

The main legal norm regulating the issue of public administration transparency is Law 52/2003, supplemented and republished in 2013 (Ministerul Dezvoltării 2023; Legea 52/2003 2013). In 2018 Romania was at the bottom of the rankings on e-government, digital performance and digital competitiveness. (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2018) In 2020 an Authority for the Digitization of Romania was however established, having as its role the management of the National Electronic System and the Single Point of Contact, which ensures citizens' access to integrated e-government information and services. (Hotărâre 2020)

De-politicisation of civil service positions and filling them by competition only

In the government programme 2021–2024 the issue of depoliticisation was mentioned for a few areas: the general system of transfers from the state budget, public functions, regulators and state companies, school and school management, the Council and Congress of Romanians Abroad (Program de Guvernare 2021), after the 2019 programme mentioned the National Tax Administration Agency, entities of the Ministry of Interior, public administration and the transfer system (Program de guvernare 2019) and the 2017–2020 programme made only two general references to the depoliticisation of public management (Program de Guvernare 2017). In 2021, the first competition for school principals was organised (Ionescu 2021), for many other areas the process is still far from being advanced, as an argument by the Declic association shows (Declic 2020) or even a resumption of politicisation is in question (Parlamentul European 2021).

No convicted criminals in public office

Point 8 of the 2017+ Proclamation became the "No Criminals in Public Office" bill and, together with a similar initiative in Parliament (Law 294, 04 Nov. 2022; Law 295, 04 Nov. 2022), will end up amending three of the local government laws and the parliamentary election law, which was one of the major achievements of the protests and civic actions to collect signatures to table the bill.

Unsolved or unconsidered requests:

No government, regardless of political colour, should ever repeat "Ordinance 13"

Even though OUG 13 was repealed in the first days of the protests, what followed cannot be considered as respecting this first requirement. Since August 2017, political decision-makers have resumed the process of reforming the justice laws, with amendments concerning the legislation on the status of certain officials and legal bodies, the Tax Code, and the Code of Criminal Procedure, some of the amendments being questioned by experts at the national level, within the European institutions and the CVM or some international organisations, calling for their repeal or amendment. (Fundația Konrad Adenauer 2020; Forumul Judecătorilor 2017) And to close the circle, on 29 March 2023 the new government tried to pass a law modelled on OUG 13, but failed (yet) to get it through both houses of Parliament. (Hera 2023)

Ombudsman to be directly elected by citizens

Since the Ombudsman did not refer the matter to the Constitutional Court when Ordinance 13 was adopted (and in the case of other ordinances raising questions about respect for the principles of democracy and the rule of law), it was proposed that he be elected by the citizens. Although since 2014 several NGOs (and even some small political parties) have proposed petitions and organised debates on this issue, citizens are not involved in the procedure for appointing the Ombudsman.

Citizens are to be able to refer cases directly to the Constitutional Court

According to information on the Constitutional Court's website, citizens did not receive this right.

Government members should not be parliamentarians

This right continues to be exercised, according to the Romanian Constitution, there has been no move to change legislation in this area.

Abolition of parliamentary approval for criminal investigations into government officials

No information has been found on a possible change in the legislation as requested by the protesters. Like the protesters, policy-makers have used various

rational or value-based instruments to counteract the effects or nullify the actions and demands of the protesters.

Instrumental rationality:

– the repeal of OUG 13, the trigger for the protests; (Momoc 2017: 13; Ursu 2017: 40–41)
– the call for the European Commission to solve prison overcrowding (value rationality can be also considered in this case); (Coadă 2020: 47–48; Ursu 2017: 39)
– use of intimidation and coercion (even unjust) on members of public institutions who had critical approaches to changes in justice laws or political influence on justice; (Călin 2020a: 37; Călin 2020b; Pîrlog, Lia 2020)
– using the Parliament to make anticipated changes to justice laws (Călin 2020a: 7–35)
– using the strategy of fake news and accusations of coup d'état, and destabilisation to stir up the wave of emotions needed to discredit the protesters; (Barbaros 2017: 73–74; Feher 2017; Pfiszter 2017)
– use of agitator groups to provoke violence among the protesters and justify the violence of the security forces; (Barbaros 2017: 73)
– use of violence against protesters; (Răuțu 2021–2022: 181–182)

Value rationality:

– attacks on parents who participated with their children in the protests, trying so to induce the idea of their lack of responsibility for the safety of their children; (DoR 2017: 59; Ionescu–Ciudin 2017: 90)
– invoking the European Commission's demands to solve the problem of prison overcrowding (Coadă 2020: 47–48; Ursu 2017: 39)

The political system has managed to keep its own interests on the agenda, even if it has had to take steps backwards or even sacrifice certain leaders by resigning. (Moceanu 2017) After the energies of the protests had been spent, the government carefully chose its tools to pursue its objectives. The result of the protests was not exactly what was desired, apathy and despair have once again taken hold in Romanian society. The hopes of 2017 to achieve "a systemic change… the redefinition of the ideological spectrum of Romanian political parties… the emergence of new parties… the redefinition of the roles of the politician and the citizen in a representative democracy… the birth of a new ideology… the emergence of a new political actor, capable of fundamentally changing the parameters of public discourse and possibly reshaping the social norms that structure a society… the emergence of a new collective social actor… the emergence of a true ideological alternative to right-wing populism" (Trif 2017) were not really materialised and enthusiasm was lost without succeeding in breaking the political system out of its inertia in terms of its relationship with its own citizens and their objectives. (Brett 2018; Gross 2017: 146–147)

Conclusions

Whereas at the beginning of the transition, the focus was on reform and democratisation, with the start of the pre-accession period the focus shifted to concepts such as integration and Europeanisation, which became key elements of the public discourse, initially at the level of some political parties and an intellectual elite, then also at the level of public debate and civil society. The pre-accession period and the preparations for accession to the Schengen area have kept on the public agenda issues such as corruption and transparency in decision-making and the independence of the judiciary, and this has made at least part of the citizens aware of the problems Romania was facing and what its objectives should have been in order to meet the EU membership status. However, it cannot be said that there is a synchronization between the political system and the social groups that have benefited from the EU accession process. This lack of synchronization was the origin of the protests of civil society, which assumed Europeanization as an element of *modernity and a propensity* (Schifirneț 2011: 17) to be followed and had the same expectations from the decision-making institutions and political parties as the main actors of the decision-making process and, implicitly, of the Europeanization process. Individuals realised in the pre-accession period and immediately after accession the impact that the EU could have on the modernisation of the state and turned their attention and hopes to the EU to support them in their demands.

Europeanisation - summed up, as Gubernat and Rammelt (2021) point out, in the phrase "We want a country like abroad!" which became the leitmotif of the post-2013 protests, remains a desideratum, "the aspirational identity of the protests and their participants, as it provides both a strong identity frame – the lack of post-transition and post-accession achievements by domestic political elites – and a compelling prognostic frame, Western democratic 'normalities'" (Gubernat –Rammelt 2021: 249) that seems elusive due to the behaviour of politicians. The phrase can also be considered as proof of the existence of knowledge and, above all, of a rational acceptance of the European regulatory system as a desirable one, capable of providing Romanian citizens with a predictable and functional framework in which to carry out their activities, an attempt to identify qualitatively with a certain type of political and social practices, with a certain type of relationship between authority and citizen, and an attempt to take the political system out of the "turn" from the path it had started on with accession and to push it to a qualitative leap in line with the aspirations of a more formally educated social segment, with aspirations of modernity, stability, welfare, respect for rights, autonomy. Schifirneț (2011: 22–24) considers that the effects of Europeanization at the societal level are slower, but in Romania in the second half of the 2010s, it seems that the "abstract rationalism" of the EU regulatory system was preferred to the national conjunctural one, being considered, by a certain social segment, more beneficial for its own development. But, it is hard to believe that the 2017–2019

protests are proof that European society has developed in Romania. It may be a sign that the "background" has started to be created, because after the predominantly top-down Europeanisation of Romania since the pre-accession period, the 2017–2019 protests are proof that the bottom-up Europeanisation process has a certain basis, but probably needs some time to take effect.

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Notes

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[2] The slogan "We want a country like the ones abroad!" sums up very well both the demand and the protestors' reproach to the government.

[3] Well reflected in some interviews with protesters (Tacu 2017: 59) or specialists (Ursu 2017: 41), in some famous quotations used as slogans (Th. Jefferson: "When injustice becomes law, resistance becomes duty"; E. Burke: "All it takes for evil to win is for good people to do nothing!") or in some slogans with a direct or a hidden mobilising message ("What my parents did not succeed for me, I will succeed for my children" "At home, it's warm and cosy, but I'm also crying out for you!" "If not us, then who?" "Wake up Romanian! Don't be an accomplice by not getting involved and don't kill Romania's future!" "Romania wake up!," "1989 Reloaded" (Proteste antigrațiere 2017)), and, not in the end, in the Moto of Proclamația România 2017+, "When the rule of law is in danger, we have a duty to defend it!"

[4] "Mommy taught me it's not nice to steal, didn't you?", "Down with the dictatorship of thieves!", "Justice, not corruption!", "Don't legalize theft!", "Thieves, we see you!" "Cuffs for criminals!", "Don't free the thieves, they are stealing our future!" (Proteste antigrațiere 2017)

[5] "Nation awaken", "If we want democracy, we must put thieves in jail!" "Error 2017!!! Democracy not found, Stop-Undo Delete or Ctrl+Z", "We want transparency, principles & moral values, performance!" "We want a government program, not convicted criminals!", "Important laws are not passed in secret!" "Enough has been stolen from our country, let's build something!" (Proteste antigrațiere 2017)

Sorin Șipoș–Cosmin Patca–Ioana Blajec–Manuela Bârza

Active citizenship in the new rural Slovakian space in Bihor and Sălaj counties (Romania). Threats and opportunities

Situated in North-Western Romania, Bihor and Sălaj counties are home to the largest Slovak population in the country. The main characteristic of this region is represented by the existence of an ethnic and confessional mosaic. Political changes influenced the ethnic and confessional structure of the population. In the Contemporary Era, the economic development determined a higher standard of living for the inhabitants in the area. Therefore, large groups of Slovak colonists settled here, mainly for economic reasons. But after 1989, the Slovak community deals with problems related to demographic decline, economic restructuring, aging population, migration of young people and of labour force, loss of cultural identity. We need to find out what are the most urgent needs of the Slovak community in Bihor-Sălaj area that could be solved through the engagement of the civil society. In an interdisciplinary approach, the present study aims to identify how active citizenship can be a solution to reduce the impact of this process.
Keywords: Bihor County, Sălaj County, interdisciplinary approach, active citizenship, history, economy, eco-tourism.

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Aktív állampolgárság az új, vidéki, szlovák térségben, Bihar és Szilágy megyékben (Románia). Fenyegetések és lehetőségek

Románia legnagyobb szlovák közössége az ország északnyugati részén, Bihar és Szilágy megye területén él. A régió legfőbb jellemzője az etnikai és vallási sokszínűség. A népcsoport etnikai és vallási összetételét a politikai változások is befolyásolták. A jelenkori gazdasági fejlődés a környékbeli településekhez viszonyítva egy magasabb életszínvonalat biztosított a Bisztra völgye lakosságának. Ennélfogva jelentős szlovák csoportok telepedtek le itt, elsősorban gazdasági megfontolásból. 1989 után a közösség demográfiai hanyatlással, a gazdaság átszerveződésével, a lakosság elöregedésével, a fiatalság és a munkaerő elvándorlásával, valamint a kulturális önazonosság elvesztésével szembesült. Tudnunk kell, hogy a Bihar–Szilágy-régió szlovák közösségének melyek a legsürgetőbb szükségletei, amelyeket a civil társadalom bevonásával lehetne megoldani. Jelen tanulmány interdiszciplináris megközelítésben próbálja megválaszolni, hogy az aktív népesség milyen mértékben járulhat hozzá a fenti tényezők negatív hatásának csökkentéséhez.
Kulcsszavak: Bihar megye, Szilágy megye, interdiszciplináris megközelítés, aktív állampolgárság, történelem, gazdaság, ökoturizmus.

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The Role of Civil Society Organisations in Migration Management. Cooperation between Public Authorities and Civil Society Actors at the Eu's South Eastern Borders

Managing migration in the EU and in the neighbouring countries is a social and economic investment that enables societies to strengthen their cohesion and resilience and become more prosperous. It can be considered also a societal process in which the responsibility does not rest with a specific group, but with several. One of our research hypotheses is represented by the fact that civil society organizations play an important role in migrant management. They carry out valuable work assisting or even substituting public authorities and governments by providing guidance and support in this process. Civil society and social partners operate at different levels. Some organizations are active at EU level, others at national level, and others at regional or local level. Activities at different levels complement each other. A second hypothesis that we want to test starts from the idea that civil society organisations working on the ground play a role in monitoring the implementation and impact of new policies and initiatives. However, in addition to impacting political decisions, civil society and its organisations also exists to actually deliver services to the people it represents. The present research is intended to be an analysis through which we would like to emphasize the lack of interaction between civil society organizations and public authorities at different levels in migration management at the South Eastern borders of the European Union.
Keywords: Civil society, migration, Europe, neighborhood, cooperation.

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István József Polgár

A civil szervezetek szerepe a migrációkezelésben. A hatóságok és a civil társadalom szereplői közötti együttműködés az EU délkeleti határainál.

A migráció kezelése az EU-ban és a szomszédos országokban olyan társadalmi és gazdasági befektetés, amely lehetővé teszi a társadalmak számára, hogy erősítsék kohéziójukat és ellenálló képességüket, és virágzóbbá váljanak. A migráció társadalmi folyamatnak is tekinthető, amelyben a felelősség nem egy meghatározott csoporté, hanem többfelé oszlik. Az egyik kutatási hipotézisünket az a tény képviseli, hogy a civil szervezetek fontos szerepet játszanak a migráció kezelésben. Értékes munkát végeznek, segítve vagy akár helyettesítve a hatóságokat és a kormányokat számos területen. A civil társadalom és a szociális partnerek különböző szinteken működnek. Egyes szervezetek uniós szinten, mások nemzeti szinten, mások pedig regionális vagy helyi szinten tevékenykednek. A különböző szintű tevékenységek kiegészítik egymást. Egy másik hipotézis, amelyet tesztelni szeretnénk, abból az elképzelésből indul ki, hogy a helyszínen működő civil társadalmi szervezetek szerepet játszanak az új politikák és kezdeményezések végrehajtásának és hatásának nyomon követésében. Amellett, hogy befolyásolja a politikai döntéseket, a civil társadalom és szervezetei azért is léteznek, hogy ténylegesen szolgáltatásokat nyújtsanak az általa képviselt embereknek. Jelen kutatás célja egy olyan elemzés, amelyen keresztül szeretnénk hangsúlyozni, a civil társadalmi szervezetek és a hatóságok közötti interakció hiányát, a migráció kezelésének folyamatában, különböző szinteken, az Európai Unió délkeleti határainál.
Kulcsszavak: Civil társadalom, migráció, Európa; szomszédság, együttműködés.

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Zoltan Zakota

The Role of Civil Society in the Establishment of the Carpathian Euroregion

The initiative of the Euroregions arose in Western Europe after the 2nd World War in order to make strong efforts to prevent conflicts like this, so that the confrontation between nations is replaced by cooperation. At the same time, it became clear to the politicians of Europe, especially Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman, that the spirit of cooperation, good neighbourly relations and mutual respect should be brought as close to citizens and localities as possible. Efforts made by national governments to build interstate relations must take into account initiatives coming from below, which also play an important role in the development of mutual trust and cooperation. Beyond political goals, the Euroregion also served as a tool for economic development and cooperation in Western Europe. One of the first attempts of establishing this paradigm in Central and Eastern Europe was the Carpathian Euroregion. Its founders pursued goals such as economic cooperation, strengthening of civil society relations and, last but not least, alleviating ethnic tensions. My paper intends to outline the main ideas of its establishment and the difficulties faced while doing it. The process could not have been fulfilled without the strong involvement of several civil society organizations in its founding and their participation in its later development. Maybe the greatest loss that Central and Eastern European societies suffered under communism was the total eradication of civil society by their dictatorial powers. One of the first things to do after the fall of the system, a must the West has recognized from the beginning, was the reconstruction of the civil society. A main task of my article is to present the role played by the concept of civil society in the creation of the Carpathian Euroregion.
Keywords: European Union, Regionalism, Euroregion, Carpathian Euroregion, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Ukraine.

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A civil társadalom szerepe a Kárpátok Eurorégió létrehozásában

Az Eurorégiók kezdeményezése Nyugat-Európában a 2. világháború után jelent meg, hogy az ehhez hasonló konfliktusok megelőzése érdekében erőteljes erőfeszítéseket tegyenek a nemzetek közötti konfrontációk kölcsönös együttműködéssel való felváltására. Ugyanakkor Európa politikusai, különösen Jean Monnet és Robert Schuman számára világossá vált, hogy az együttműködés, a jószomszédi kapcsolatok és a kölcsönös tisztelet szellemét a lehető legközelebb kell hozni az állampolgárokhoz és a településekhez. A nemzeti kormányok államközi kapcsolatok kiépítésére tett erőfeszítései során figyelembe kell venni az alulról jövő kezdeményezéseket, amelyek szintén fontos szerepet játszanak a kölcsönös bizalom és együttműködés kialakításában. Az eurorégió a politikai célokon túl a nyugat-európai gazdaságfejlesztés és együttműködés eszközeként is szolgál. E paradigma megvalósításának egyik első kísérlete Közép- és Kelet-Európában a Kárpátok Eurorégió volt. Alapítói olyan célokat követtek, mint a gazdasági együttműködés, a civil társadalmi kapcsolatok erősítése és nem utolsó sorban, az etnikai feszültségek enyhítése. Írásom célja, hogy felvázolja a létrehozásának fő gondolatait és a megvalósítás során felmerült nehézségeket. A folyamat nem valósulhatott volna meg több civil szervezetnek az alapításban és a későbbi fejlesztésében való részvétele nélkül. Talán a legnagyobb veszteség, amit a kelet-közép-európai társadalmak elszenvedtek a kommunizmus

alatt, az volt, hogy diktatórikus hatalmaik teljesen felszámolták a civil társadalmat. A rendszer bukása után az egyik első tennivaló, amelyet a Nyugat már a kezdetektől felismert, a civil társadalom újjáépítése volt. Írásom elsődleges célja bemutatni a civil társadalomnak a Kárpátok Eurorégió létrehozásában betöltött szerepét.
Kulcsszavak: Európai Unió, Regionalizmus, Eurorégiók, Kárpátok Eurorégió, Lengyelország, Magyarország, Románia, Szlovákia, Ukrajna.

Zoltan Zakota Zakota Zoltán a nagyváradi Partiumi Keresztény Egyetem oktatója, ahol jelenleg számítástechnika és közgazdasági tárgyakat tanít. Emellett a Debreceni Egyetem Műszaki Karán informatika és villamos mérnöki tárgyakat oktat. Az évek során az oktatás mellett a magán- és a civil szférában is tevékenykedett. Számos hazai és nemzetközi projektben vett részt, elsősorban az oktatás és a kutatás területén. Fő érdeklődési területe az információs és tudásalapú társadalom, valamint az IKT hatása a társadalomra, a gazdaságra és az oktatásra. Jelenleg két nagyobb projektben érdekelt: az egyik az európai felsőoktatással, a másik a román–magyar határon átnyúló együttműködés regionális hatásaival foglalkozik.
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Luminița Șoproni

The Cooperation of social actors in the cross-border area – its role in promoting European values

Local and regional development is a driver of European economic and social integration, due to the role played by the territorial entities (the city and the region) as poles of formation and dissemination of European values. Regional initiatives replace and advance cooperation initiatives at the state level, providing the framework for strengthening the negotiation power of regional actors at the European or international level. In this context, cross-border areas, through cooperation actions initiated and carried out by regional actors, add value to the European identity and offer new resources for the socio-economic development of European regions. Economic, inter-cultural and inter-ethnic links and interactions are valued much better at the micro level, through the joint efforts of public, private and civil society actors from the communities involved, reflecting the process of horizontal subsidiarity at the EU level. The paper aims to verify the research hypothesis formulated above, demonstrating the capacity of regional social actors to generate economic growth and promote EU development principles and strategies through the actions carried out at the local and regional level. The research is based on the analysis of joint projects and actions in the cross-border region of Bihor–Hajdu Bihar (located on the border between Romania and Hungary), carried out by local actors from the urban poles of Oradea and Debrecen.
Keywords: Cross-border cooperation, socio-economic growth, social actors.

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Társadalmi szereplők együttműködése a határ menti térségben – szerepe az európai értékek népszerűsítésében

A helyi és regionális fejlesztés az európai gazdasági és társadalmi integráció mozgatórugója, a területi egységek (város és régió) által az európai értékek kialakításának és terjesztésének pólusaiként betöltött szerepe miatt. A regionális kezdeményezések felváltják és előmozdítják az állami szintű együttműködési kezdeményezéseket, keretet adva a regionális szereplők tárgyalási erejének európai vagy nemzetközi szintű erősítése végett. Ebben az összefüggésben a határokon átnyúló területek a regionális szereplők által kezdeményezett és végrehajtott együttműködési fellépések révén hozzáadott értéket adnak az európai identitáshoz, és új forrásokat kínálnak az európai régiók társadalmi-gazdasági fejlődéséhez. A gazdasági, kulturális és etnikumok közötti kapcsolatok és interakciók mikroszinten felértékelődnek. Az érintett közösségek állami, magán- és civil társadalmi szereplői közös erőfeszítései révén jönnek létre, ami tükrözi a horizontális szubszidiaritás uniós szintű folyamatát. A tanulmány célja a fent megfogalmazott kutatási hipotézis igazolása, bemutatva a regionális társadalmi szereplők képességét a gazdasági növekedés elősegítésében és az EU fejlesztési elveinek és stratégiáinak előmozdításában, helyi és regionális szinten végrehajtott akciókon keresztül.

A kutatás a határmenti Bihar–Hajdú Bihar régióban végrehajtott közös projektek és akciók elemzésén alapul, amelyeket a nagyváradi és debreceni városi pólusok helyi szereplői hajtottak végre.
Kulcsszavak: Határon átnyúló együttműködés, társadalmi-gazdasági növekedés, társadalmi szereplők.

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Natalia Putină–Mircea Brie

Civil society development and democratization in the Republic of Moldova

The Republic of Moldova has undergone significant political and social changes since its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. One of the most important developments has been the democratization of the country's political system, which has been aided by the active involvement of civil society organizations. This scientific article will examine the democratization process in the Republic of Moldova, with a particular focus on the role played by civil society. The study will review existing literature on the topic, analyze the impact of civil society on democratization in Moldova, and identify challenges and opportunities for further progress. Through this analysis, the article aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between civil society and democratization in Moldova, and to contribute to ongoing discussions about the role of civil society in promoting democratic values and institutions around the world.The present research will also make an overall radiography of the current state of civil society in the Republic of Moldova. There will be analyzed the main trends and developments in terms of adjusting the normative framework and policies that are inclusive and conducive to the development of a healthy civil society. We focus on the analysis of the organizational and financial capacities of CSOs, some very important elements in ensuring their sustainability, as well as the contribution of CSOs to the consolidation of democratic principles in the Republic of Moldova, but also the way in which they are perceived by the society as a whole.
Keywords: Republic of Moldova, Democratization, Development of Civil Society, Civil Society Organizations.

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Natalia Putină–Mircea Brie

Civil társadalom fejlődése és demokratizálódása a Moldovai Köztársaságban

A Moldvai Köztársaság a Szovjetuniótól való 1991-es függetlenné válása óta jelentős politikai és társadalmi változásokon ment keresztül. Az egyik legfontosabb fejlemény az ország politikai rendszerének demokratizálódása volt, amelyet a civil társadalmi szervezetek aktív részvétele is segített. Ez az írás a Moldovai Köztársaság demokratizálódási folyamatát vizsgálja, különös tekintettel a civil társadalom szerepére. A tanulmány áttekinti a témával kapcsolatos meglévő szakirodalmat, elemzi a civil társadalom hatását a moldvai demokratizálódásra, és azonosítja a kihívásokat és a további előrelépés lehetőségeit. Ezen elemzés révén a cikk célja, hogy átfogó képet adjon a civil társadalom és a demokratizálódás kapcsolatáról Moldovában, és hozzájáruljon a civil társadalomnak a demokratikus értékek és intéz-

mények világszintű előmozdításában játszott szerepéről folyó vitákhoz. valamint egy átfogó röntgenfelvételt készíteni az ország civil társadalmának jelenlegi helyzetéről. Elemezzük az olyan tendenciákat és fejleményeket a normatív keretek és politikák kiigazításának tükrében, amelyek befogadóak és elősegítik egy egészséges civil társadalom fejlődését. Kiemelten foglalkozunk a civil szervezetek szervezeti és pénzügyi kapacitásainak elemzésével, a fenntarthatóságukat biztosító néhány nagyon fontos elemmel, a civil szervezetek hozzájárulásával a demokratikus alapelvek megszilárdításához a Moldovai Köztársaságban, valamint azzal is hogyan érzékeli működésüket a társadalom egésze.
Kulcsszavak: Moldovai Köztársaság, demokratizálódás, civil társadalom fejlődése, civil társadalmi szervezetek.

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Adrian-Gabriel Corpădean–Delia Pop-Flanja

Romania's Rapidly Changing Perceptions of Ukraine: A Civil Society-driven Endeavour with EU Nuances?

It is well-known that, in the (recent) past, Romania did not cultivate the most constructive political relations with its neighbour, Ukraine, or the most lucrative civil society collaboration projects, for a series of deeply-rooted historical reasons, combined with precarious diplomatic dialogue and a lack of understanding – or interest – at the level of CSOs. The transformative power of the Russian aggression against Ukraine has spread to the level of perceptions Romanians now exhibit towards the neighbouring nation, as it emerges from the actions taken at the level of the civil society, as well as public administration, amid the inflow of Ukrainian refugees and the involvement of NATO and the EU in the war triggered by Moscow. This article aims to study the genuineness of this radical change in approach, while taking into account the rich heritage the two countries share, the general views exhibited by Romania on matters germane to EU enlargement, and the concrete steps that have been taken lately in the light of the mobilisation of the civil society as a response to the Russian aggression. From contentious topics in the not-too-distant past, to common projects and concrete actions meant to provide tangible support to the defending nation, Romania's feelings and commitment to the European future of Ukraine have undergone spectacular change, which we attempt to explain through the lens of its broader foreign policy commitments, but also amid the pressure exerted by an already mature civil society, one that now stands as capable of engendering ample change with regard to more than just internal issues.
Keywords: Ukraine, EU candidate countries, perceptions, Russian war, Civil Society Organisations.

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Románia gyorsan változó felfogása Ukrajnáról: civil társadalom által vezérelt törekvés uniós árnyalatokkal?

Köztudott, hogy a közelmúltban Románia nem ápolta a legkonstruktívabb módon politikai kapcsolatait szomszédjával, Ukrajnával. Ugyanez a helyzet a civil társadalmi együttműködési projektek terén is, számos mélyen gyökerező történelmi ok miatt úgynevezett bizonytalan diplomáciai párbeszéd és megértés vagy érdeklődés hiánya figyelhető meg a civil szervezetek szintjén. A Moszkva által indított Ukrajna elleni orosz agresszió átalakító ereje átterjedt a társadalmi szintre. Ez változást hozott a románok szomszédos nemzetekkel szemben tanúsított felfogásában. Ehhez nagyban hozzájárultak a civil társadalom, valamint a közigazgatás szintjén tett lépések, amik az ukrán menekültek beáramlása közepette, a NATO és az EU részvételével születtek. A tanulmány célja ennek a radikális szemléletváltás valódiságának tanulmányozása, miközben figyelembe veszi a két ország gazdag örökségét, a Románia által az EU-bővítéssel kapcsolatos kérdésekről kifejtett általános nézeteket, valamint az utóbbi időben megtett konkrét lépéseket, mint például a civil társadalom mozgósítása az orosz agressziót adott válaszként. A közelmúlt vitatott témáitól Románia Ukrajna irányába tanúsított álláspontja és Ukrajna európai jövője iránti elkötelezettsége látványos változáson ment keresztül. Ezek a változások közös projekteket és a védekező nemzet kézzelfogható támogatását célzó konkrét akciókat eredményezett, ami a tágabb külpolitikai kötelezettségvállalás szemszögén keresztül magyarázható. Ugyanakkor mindez egy már érett civil társadalom nyomásának eredménye is, amely ma már képes bőséges változást előidézni nem csupán belső kérdésekben.
Kulcsszavak: Ukrajna, EU tagjelölt országok, percepciók, orosz háború, civil társadalmi szervezetek.

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Islam Jusufi–István József Polgár

The Interaction between the Level of Democracy and the Perception of the Civil Society. The Case of Albania and North Macedonia (2010–2022)

Nowadays, civil society represents one of the most actively discussed concepts in the field of social sciences. Several researchers underline the importance of the civil society in the democratisation process. The present research is intended to be an analysis through which we would like to emphasize the interaction between the level of democracy and the perception of the civil society in Albania and in North Macedonia in the past twelve years. The new socio-political realities, associated with a process of consolidation and strengthening of democracy, have led to the redrawing of social structures in the Balkan space. Competition and mutual distrust marked the first two decades after the fall of communism, but slowly, these societies matured and the injuries of the past began to heal and the idea of liberal democracy started to be more and more implemented. Civil society was reborn after the fall of communism, but was still affected by the lack of financial support and a proper legislative framework. The idea that democracy, the rule of law and civil society are not similar or connected might seem incorrect or strange to some, especially nowadays, when these concepts are perceived as the foundation of democracy. We propose to test two different hypotheses in terms of meaning and expression. First, that internalisation of civil society norms increases the chances for the civil society to play a role against autocratisation and second, that the greater the independence of civil society from the government, the less the chances for the autocratising governments to co-opt or capture

the civil society. Contributing to the empirical literature on the relationship between civil society and democratisation or autocratisation tendencies, this article looks to tackle and answer the following research questions: how have the autocratisation tendencies impacted the chances of independence of civil society and the internalisation of its norms in Albania and North Macedonia, and has civil society acted as a check for democratic backsliding?
Keywords: Albania, North Macedonia, Civil Society, Democracy, Rule of Law.

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A demokrácia szintje és a civil társadalomról alkotott kép közötti kölcsönhatás. Észak-Macedónia és Albánia esete (2010–2022)

Napjainkban a civil társadalom az egyik legtöbbet vitatott fogalom a társadalomtudományok terén, ám számos kutató hangsúlyozza a civil társadalom fontosságát a demokratizálódási folyamatban. Jelen kutatás célja egy olyan elemzés, amelyen keresztül szeretnénk kihangsúlyozni a demokrácia-szint és a civil társadalom megítélése közötti kölcsönhatás alakulását Albániában és Észak-Macedóniában az elmúlt tizenkét évben. Az új társadalmi-politikai realitások, amelyek a konszolidáció és a demokrácia megerősítésének folyamatához kapcsolódnak, a balkáni térség társadalmi struktúráinak újrarajzolásához vezettek. A kommunizmus bukása utáni első két évtizedet a versengés és a kölcsönös bizalmatlanság jellemezte, de lassan ezek a társadalmak kiforrtak, a múlt sérülései gyógyulni kezdtek, és egyre inkább megvalósult a liberális demokrácia eszméje. A civil társadalom a kommunizmus bukása után újjászületett, de továbbra is érintette a pénzügyi támogatás és a megfelelő jogszabályi keret hiánya. Az az elképzelés, hogy a demokrácia, a jogállamiság és a civil társadalom nem hasonlít egymáshoz vagy nem kapcsolódnak egymáshoz, egyesek számára helytelennek vagy furcsának tűnhet, különösen manapság, amikor ezeket a fogalmakat a demokrácia alapjának tekintik. Ennek alapján javasoljuk elemzésünkben 3 perspektíva felvázolását, valamint a civil társadalom interakciójának és a demokratizálódási folyamatban betöltött szerepének bemutatását állami, civil és nemzetközi szervezetek oldaláról. Kutatásunk gyakorlatilag végigkíséri a civil társadalomról alkotott kép alakulását Albániában és Észak-Macedóniában, de arra is fókuszálunk, hogy ez a kép hogyan befolyásolta a civil társadalom szerepét és hatását a demokratizálódási folyamatban. Két különböző hipotézis vizsgálatát javasoljuk jelentésük és kifejezésük alapján. Egyik, hogy a civil társadalom normáinak internalizálása növeli annak esélyeit, hogy szerepet játsszon az autokratizálódás ellen. Másik, hogy minél nagyobb a civil társadalom függetlensége a kormánytól, annál kisebb az esélye az autokratizálódó kormányoknak annak befolyásolására vagy korlátozására. Hozzájárulva a civil társadalom és a demokratizálódási vagy autokratizálódási tendenciák kapcsolatának empirikus szakirodalmához, ez a cikk a következő kutatási kérdéseket kívánja megválaszolni: hogyan befolyásolták az autokratizálódási tendenciák a civil társadalom függetlenségének esélyeit és a civil társadalom normáinak internalizálását Albániában és Észak-Macedóniában, illetve, hogy tud-e a civil társadalom korlátozóan fellépni a demokratikus visszaesés ellen?
Kulcsszavak: Albánia, Észak-Macedónia, civil társadalom, demokrácia, jogállamiság.

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Laura-Maria Herța

In the EU we Trust! The Role of Civil Society in Policy Making and Europeanization in Montenegro

The paper's main goal is to explore the dynamic and the transformations of civil society in Montenegro in congruence with democracy-related processes and prospects of EU integration. The theoretical underlining assumptions pertain to ideational factors which shape communities, societies, state-identity and state-interests. The social-constructivist theorizing will be employed in order to illustrate the ways in which civil society in Montenegro has evolved, from the post-socialist logic to a regional post-war environment, and then to the meanings and expectations attached to the EU candidate status. Based on interviews conducted in Podgorica, this research aims to emphasize the factors which contribute to Europeanization processes in Montenegro and the ways in which the European Union's normative power (Ian Manners, 2002) is perceived, received and incorporated into policy making. The interplay between civil society organizations and government decision making will be explored so as to reveal trust in and legitimacy of EU norms and values in Montenegro.
Keywords: Civil Society, Montenegro, European Union, Normative Power, Europeanization.

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Laura-Maria Herța

Bízunk az EU-ban! A civil társadalom szerepe a politikai döntéshozatalban és az európaizáció folyamatában Montenegróban

A tanulmány fő célja a montenegrói civil társadalom dinamikájának és átalakulásának feltárása, összhangban a demokráciával kapcsolatos folyamatokkal és az EU-integráció kilátásaival. Az elméleti részben hangsúlyozott feltevések a közösségeket, társadalmakat, államidentitást és állami érdekeket formáló eszmei tényezőkre vonatkoznak. A szociálkonstruktivista elmélet alkalmazása annak szemléltetésére szolgál, hogy a montenegrói civil társadalom milyen módon fejlődött, a posztszocialista logikától a háború utáni regionális környezetig, majd az EU tagjelölt státuszához kapcsolódó jelentésekhez és elvárásokhoz. A Podgoricában készült interjúk alapján a kutatás célja, hogy hangsúlyozza azokat a tényezőket, amelyek hozzájárulnak a montenegrói európaizációs folyamatokhoz, valamint az Európai Unió normatív hatalmának (Ian Manners, 2002) észlelésének, fogadásának és beépítésének módjait a politikai döntéshozatalba. Feltárják a civil társadalmi szervezetek és a kormányzati döntéshozatal közötti kölcsönhatást annak érdekében, hogy feltárják az uniós normák és értékek montenegrói bizalmát és legitimitását.
Kulcsszavak: Civil társadalom, Montenegró, Európai Unió, normatív hatalom, európaizáció.

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Natalia Putină–Mircea Brie

The Development and Role of Civil Society in the Republic of Moldova in the Framework of the Eastern Partnership (2009–2021)

The present research is intended to be an analysis of the civil society in the Republic of Moldova in the broad context of the western option of geopolitical orientation during the 2009–2021 period. Its purpose is to analyze and conceptualize the development and the role of the civil society in the Republic of Moldova in the context of the European integration and the Eastern Partnership. Despite of some obvious progress achieved since its launch in 2009, the Eastern Partneship has reached its limits. The current format, despite of the periodic reformation attempts, does not provide a development framework nor clear perspectives regarding the relations of these states with the EU. The multilateral framework was replaced by a bilateral one. From this perspective, the Republic of Moldova deepened the integration process. Its pro-European orientation is also clearly expressed by formulating the request to open accession negotiations with Georgia and Ukraine. However, the process is complicated. Chișinău must also take into account the regional context, the current Russian-Ukrainian conflict, but also the Russian support given to Transnistria and Găgăuzia. One of our research hypotheses is that the civil society in the Republic of Moldova has developed a lot during this period, and its role in deepening democratization and supporting the European integration process proves to be a consistent one. A second hypothesis that we want to test starts from the idea that the underdeveloped civil society is still strongly connected to the political actors and responds to the political impulses. This fact requires new regulatory mechanisms that ensure the existence of a strong civil society, which can express itself independently of political interests. The levels of analysis that we propose from a methodological perspective include: a. contextualizing the participation of the Republic of Moldova in the framework of the Eastern Partnership; b. the conceptualization and development stages of the civil society in the Republic of Moldova in the context of the Eastern Partnership; c. the analysis of the civil society in the Republic of Moldova through the lens of the Eastern Partnership index.
Keywords: Republic of Moldova, European Union, Civil Society, Eastern Partnership, Democratization.

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Natalia Putină–Mircea Brie

A civil társadalom fejlődése és szerepe a Moldovai Köztársaságban, a keleti partnerség keretében (2009–2021)

Jelen kutatás célja a Moldovai Köztársaság civil társadalmának elemzése a geopolitikai orientáció nyugati opciójának széles összefüggésében a 2009–2021 közötti időszakban. A kutatás célja, hogy elemezze és konceptualizálja a civil társadalom fejlődését és szerepét a Moldovai Köztársaságban az európai integráció és a keleti partnerség összefüggésében. A 2009-ben történő bevezetése óta elért nyilvánvaló előrelépés ellenére a Keleti Partnerség elérte határait. A jelenlegi formátum az időszakos reformkísérletek ellenére sem ad fejlődési keretet, sem egyértelmű távlatokat ezen államok EU-val való kapcsolataira vonatkozóan. A többoldalú keretet egy kétoldalú váltotta fel és ebből a szempontból a Moldovai Köztársaság elmélyítette az integrációs folyamatot. Európa-párti irányultsága egyértelműen kifejeződik a Grúziával és Ukrajnával való csatlakozási tárgyalások megkezdésére irányuló kérés megfogalmazásában is, ám a folyamat bonyolult. Chișinăunak figyelembe kell vennie a regionális kontextust, a jelenlegi orosz-ukrán konfliktust, de Transzisztria és Găgăuzia orosz támogatását is. Kutatási hipotéziseink egyike, hogy a Moldovai

Köztársaságban a civil társadalom sokat fejlődött az elmúlt időszakban a demokratizálódás elmélyítésében, és az európai integrációs folyamat támogatásában betöltött szerepe következetesnek bizonyult. Egy másik, tesztelni kívánt hipotézis abból indul ki, hogy a fejletlen civil társadalom még mindig erősen kötődik a politikai szereplőkhöz és reagál a politikai impulzusokra. Ez a tény olyan új szabályozási mechanizmusokat igényel, amelyek biztosítják egy erős civil társadalom létét és amely a politikai érdekektől függetlenül nyilvánul meg. Az általunk módszertani szempontból javasolt elemzési szintek a következők: a) a Moldovai Köztársaság részvételének kontextusba helyezése a Keleti Partnerség keretrendszerében; b) a civil társadalom fogalmának kialakítása és fejlesztése a Moldovai Köztársaságban es a keleti partnerség összefüggésében; c) a Moldovai Köztársaság civil társadalmának elemzése a Keleti Partnerség-index szemszögéből.
Kulcsszavak: Moldovai Köztársaság, Európai Unió, civil társadalom, Keleti Partnerség, demokratizálódás.

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Assessing the Involvement/Development of Civil Society as Part of the European Integration Process of the Eastern Partnership States

2023 marks 14 years since the European Union (EU) launched the Eastern Partnership (EaP) Program, an instrument that was designed to respond to the vulnerabilities and threats specific to the six Eastern European countries that were not part of the EU (the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, Belarus, Azerbaijan, and Armenia). After several series of critics, the EaP was revised in 2017 in order to break the one size fits all policy and, thus, to be more adaptable to each specific case. Although the Program was not designed and still is not a platform for future accession, two out of six states are currently candidate countries to the EU (Moldova and Ukraine), fact that emphasizes even more the importance of the EaP as a platform used to start the integration process. On the other side, one critic that still stands is represented by the fact that it does not offer any security guaranties against external threats, fact that was seen in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea and in 2022 when the war in Ukraine started. In terms of tangible evaluation of its results, the EaP indexes were launched in 2011 and the European Commission's reports regarding the 2020 deliverables represent ones of the most important tools for measuring the integration level of each country. Since the war threatens the stability and the security of the entire region, if not of the entire continent, one aspect that tends to be overlooked is represented by the importance of civil society and active citizenship. The present research aims to assess the level of development and involvement of the civil society between 2011–2022 throughout all six EaP countries. It is also emphasized the role of the civil society and its development during the periods of crisis, as well as the link between external funding and the sustainability of the activities performed by the civil society.
Keywords: Civil Society, Crisis, EaP, EU Integration.

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A civil társadalom bevonásának/fejlesztésének értékelése a Keleti Partnerség államainak európai integrációs folyamatában

2023-ban lesz 14 éve annak, hogy az Európai Unió (EU) elindította a Keleti Partnerségi Programot, egy olyan eszközt, amely az EU-n kívüli hat kelet-európai ország sajátos sebezhetőségeire és fenyegetéseire hivatott reagálni. Ezek az országok Moldova, Ukrajna, Grúzia, Fehéroroszország, Azerbajdzsán és Örményország. Számos kritika után, a keleti partnerséget 2017-ben felülvizsgálták annak érdekében, hogy megváltoztassák az általános, mindenkire egyformán érvényes politikát, és így egy alkalmasabb, az egyéni esetekhez jobban illeszkedő struktúra váljon használhatóvá. Habár a Programot nem arra tervezték, hogy a jövőbeli csatlakozás platformja legyen, és még mindig nem az, hat államból kettő jelenleg az EU tagjelölt országa (Moldova és Ukrajna), ami még inkább hangsúlyozza a keleti partnerség fontosságát. Másrészről, a progrmammal szemben továbbra is fennál egy lényeges kritika, mégpedig hogy semmilyen biztonsági garanciát nem jelent a külső fenyegetések ellen, ami 2014-ben a Krím annektálásakor és 2022-ben, az ukrajnai háború kitörésekor is látható volt. Az eredmények kézzelfogható értékelése szempontjából a keleti partnerségi indexek 2011-ben lettek bevezetbe, és az Európai Bizottság 2020-as eredményekről szóló jelentései képezik az egyik legfontosabb eszközt az egyes országok integrációs szintjének mérésére. Mivel a háború az egész régió, ha nem az egész kontinens stabilitását és biztonságát veszélyezteti, az egyik időnként figyelmen kívül hagyott szempont a civil társadalom és az aktív állampolgárság fontossága. A jelen kutatás célja, hogy felmérje a civil társadalom fejlettségi szintjét és részvételét 2011 és 2022 között mind a hat keleti partnerországban. Hangsúlyozza továbbá a civil társadalom szerepét és fejlődését a válságos időszakokban, valamint a külső finanszírozás és a civil társadalom tevékenységeinek fenntarthatósága közötti kapcsolatot.
Kulcsszavak: Civil társadalom, válság, keleti partnerség, EU-integráció.

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Democratic Resilience Building in Eastern Europe. The EU's Role in Supporting the Ukrainian Civil Society

The global democratic crisis exacerbated by the Covid–19 pandemic and the Russo-Ukrainian war emphasized the importance of identifying a more strategic and autonomous approach to increasing democratic resilience around the world. For the last decade, the EU has experienced many internal and external crises and has been struggling to identify viable solutions and increase its capacity to act in matters of security, public health and disinformation. EU's structural inability to deal with these cumulative crises comes in a global retraction context where hard power is more central than ever. EU's struggle to project its strategic autonomy within East Central Europe becomes even more difficult since it has to fight the major influences of powerful geopolitical players such as Russia and China who have lately invested massively in energy and road infrastructure projects in the area and persistently pressured its democratic order by offering alternative undemocratic models of governance. In this context, it is now more important than ever to identify EU's most appropriate and efficient means for creating and expending the "democratic infrastructure" in this area by addressing the complex and underscored threats posed by illiberalism. Building on the assumption that EU's democratic resilience emanates equally from within and beyond its borders and that it can only be strengthen by simultaneously supporting EU member states and aspirant nations, the current study aims to explore EU's means and methods for consolidating democratic resilience in Ukraine. The reason why we have selected this country as the main unit of analysis for our study, refers primarily to the tremendous significance this had in shaping EU's European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership initiative and for the extremely important role this play now for the security of the entire Central and Eastern European region. Although for the last decade Ukraine achieved major milestones in their democratization processes (the political association and economic integration with the Union brought by the signing of the Association Agreements, the increased parliamentary capacity of Ukraine, the 2005 and 2014 Ukrainian revolutions, the pro-Western orientations of the elected presidents in Ukraine gaining EU candidate states statuses, etc.) they are still struggling with a series of common challenges, such as: the Russian-backed separatist regions which are creating an unstable domestic environment, the spread of Russian propaganda, disinformation, the political subordination of state institutions, a weak political culture, infringements of civil liberties and problematic electoral processes. Although the scientific literature abounds with themes such as democratization, autocratization and illiberalism, for the last decade, very little attention has been devoted to democratic resilience. In these studies, the emphasis always falls on the erosion of democracy, the dangers of populism, the decline of social activism, but rarely on the means of combating this trend by creating a model of democratic resilience that can probe democratic integrity, prevent democratic erosion and decrease its vulnerabilities. Therefore, the current study will analyse (through qualitative methods of analysis and process tracking data) the current state of democracy in Ukraine and EU's available instruments for democracy promotion and consolidation in this country. The study will assess potential procedures and developments that could protect democracy and avoid further democratic backsliding focusing on the role of the civil society for increasing social mobilization, accountability and participatory democracy while exploring the means in which EU could improve its support and develop its involvement.
Keywords: Democratic Resilience, Eastern Europe, Civil Society, Ukraine.

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Demokratikus reziliencia építése Kelet-Európában. Az EU szerepe az ukrán civil társadalom támogatásában

A Covid–19 világjárvány és az orosz-ukrán háború által súlyosbított globális demokratikus válság hangsúlyozta annak fontosságát, hogy stratégiaiabb és autonómabb megközelítést találjunk a demokratikus ellenálló képesség növelésére szerte a világon. Az elmúlt évtizedben az EU számos belső és külső válságot élt át, és küszködött, hogy életképes megoldásokat találjon, és növelje cselekvési kapacitását a biztonság, a közegészségügy és a félretájékoztatás terén. Az EU strukturálisan képtelen kezelni a felhalmozódott válságokat, amelyek egy globális visszahúzódási kontextusban jelentkeztek, ahol a kemény hatalom központibb, mint valaha. Az EU küzdelme, hogy stratégiai autonómiáját kivetítse Kelet-Közép-Európában nehezebbé válik, mivel olyan erős geopolitikai szereplők jelentős befolyásaival vetélkedik mint Oroszország és Kína, amelyek az utóbbi időben jelentős összegeket fektettek be a térség energetikai és közúti infrastrukturális projektjeibe. Emellett kitartóan nyomást gyakoroltak a térségre és a demokratikus rendre azáltal, hogy alternatív antidemokratikus kormányzási modelleket kínáltak. Ebben az összefüggésben most minden eddiginél fontosabb az EU legmegfelelőbb és leghatékonyabb eszközeinek meghatározása a „demokratikus infrastruktúra" létrehozására és felhasználására ezen a területen, az illiberalizmus által jelentett összetett és hangsúlyos fenyegetések kezelésével. Abból a feltételezésből kiindulva, hogy az EU demokratikus ellenálló képessége egyformán ered határain belülről és túlról, és csak az EU-tagállamok és az aspiráns nemzetek egyidejű támogatásával erősíthető meg, a jelen tanulmány célja, hogy feltárja az EU eszközeit és módszereit a demokratikus reziliencia megszilárdítására Ukrajnában. Az ok, amiért ezt az országot választottuk tanulmányunk fő elemzési egységeként, elsősorban az, hogy az EU európai Szomszédsági politikának és a Keleti Partnerségi kezdeményezésnek az alakításában óriási szerepet tölt be. Emellett arra a rendkívül fontos szerepre utal, amelyet jelenleg a biztonság szempontjából játszik az egész közép-kelet-európai régióban. Bár az elmúlt évtizedben Ukrajna jelentős mérföldköveket ért el demokratizálódási folyamataiban (a társulási megállapodások aláírásával hozott politikai társulás és gazdasági integráció az Unióval, Ukrajna megnövekedett parlamenti kapacitása, a 2005-ös és 2014-es ukrán forradalom, a megválasztott elnökök nyugati orientációja, EU-tagjelölti státusz megszerzése stb.) továbbra is számos közös kihívással küzd, mint például: az oroszok által támogatott, instabil belső környezetet teremtő szeparatista régiók, az orosz propaganda és dezinformáció, az állami intézmények politikai alárendeltsége, a gyenge politikai kultúra, a polgári szabadságjogok megsértése és problémás választási folyamatok. Bár a tudományos irodalom bővelkedik olyan témákban, mint a demokratizálódás, az autokratizálódás és az illiberalizmus, az elmúlt évtizedben nagyon kevés figyelmet szenteltek a demokratikus rezilienciának. Ezekben a tanulmányokban mindig a demokrácia eróziójára, a populizmus veszélyeire, a társadalmi aktivizmus hanyatlására helyezik a hangsúlyt. Ritkán látunk olyan tendenciát, ami ebben a küzdelemben eszközként mutat a demokratikus ellenálló képesség olyan modelljének létrehozására, amely képes a demokratikus integritás vizsgálatára, a demokratikus erózió megelőzésére és csökkenti a sebezhetőségét. Ezért, a jelenlegi tanulmány elemzi (kvalitatív elemzési módszerekkel és folyamatkövetési adatokkal) a demokrácia jelenlegi helyzetét Ukrajnában, valamint azokat az eszközöket, amelyek az EU rendelkezésére állnak a demokrácia elősegítésére és megerősítésére ebben az országban. A tanulmány felméri azokat a lehetséges eljárásokat és eszközöket, amelyek megvédhetik a demokráciát és elkerülhetik a további demokratikus visszaesést. Valamint a civil társadalomnak a társadalmi mobilizáció, az elszámoltathatóság és a részvételi demokrácia fokozásában betöltött szerepére összpontosít, miközben megvizsgálja, milyen eszközökkel javíthatná az EU támogatását és fejleszthetné részvételét.
Kulcsszavak: Demokratikus reziliencia, Kelet-Európa, civil társadalom, Ukrajna.

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Melania-Gabriela Ciot

Romanian Civil Society and the Preparation of Romania's Accession to the EU

Romania's accession negotiations to the EU represent a complex process that united representatives of all important actors, as political parties, market structures, non-governamental organizations and academia. All these actors tried to explain and project their interests toward these negotiations, so that the attitudes and communication paradigms evolved in the last decades, providing the perception that the enlargement process was the most prominent activity of EU, even though the cohesion of enlargement and deepening was aimed. The preparation of accession offered arguments for the negotiation process, the link being direct between preparation and negotiation. The present paper aims to identify the contribution of the Romanian civil society in the preparation of the accession. Qualitative analysis is used, with the discourse and content analysis as methods of research. The results of the study will reveal important contributions of the Romanian civil society in the preparation of certain chapters that were negotiated and will offer useful examples for future accession negotiations to the EU.
Keywords: Accession to the EU, Preparation of Accession, Negotiations, Civil Society, Romania.

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Melania-Gabriela Ciot

A román civil társadalom és Románia EU-csatlakozásának előkészítése

Románia uniós csatlakozási tárgyalásai egy összetett folyamatot alkotottak, amely egyesítette az összes fontos társadalmi szereplő képviselőit, úgy mint a politikai pártok, a piaci struktúrák, a civil szervezetek és a tudományos élet. Mindezek a szereplők igyekeztek megmagyarázni és kivetíteni érdekeiket ezekre a tárgyalásokra. Ezek fügvényében a különböző attitűdök és kommunikációs paradigmák az elmúlt évtizedekben alakultak ki, azt a felfogást keltve, hogy a bővítési folyamat az EU legkiemelkedőbb tevékenysége, annak ellenére, hogy a bővítés és a mélyülés kohéziója volt a cél. A csatlakozás előkészítése érveket kínált a tárgyalási folyamat mellett. Közvetlen kapcsolat volt a csatlakozás

előkészítése és a csatlakozási tárgyalások között. Jelen tanulmány a román civil társadalom hozzájárulását kívánja azonosítani a csatlakozási felkészülésben. Kutatási módszerként kvalitatív elemzést, diskurzus- és tartalomelemzést alkalmaztunk. A tanulmány eredményei feltárják a román civil társadalom fontos hozzájárulását egyes tárgyalt fejezetek előkészítéséhez, és hasznos példákat kínálnak a jövőbeli EU-csatlakozási tárgyalásokhoz.
Kulcsszavak: EU-csatlakozás, csatlakozás előkészítése, tárgyalások, szereplők, civil társadalom, Románia.

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Ana Gabriela Pantea

"Likes" for Populists. Perceptions of the Voters of the Alliance for the Union of Romanians Party on the Political Use of Social Media Platforms

Social media is seen as a convenient communication tool that parties use to reach their supporters; as the party itself can directly reach the voters, and ideological rivals transmit counteroffensive messages. Such social media platforms are versatile and unexpensive tools to spread fake news and divide society for electoral purposes, through their narratives that often lack fact-checking found in the traditional media. Populist parties, for instance The Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR), rally and unite people to advance a common cause against the dominant political spectrum using social media as one of its most effective tools. As social media had become a global force for ideological dissemination, and it is inextricably connected with the way people shape their identity, after the Covid–19 pandemic and the Ukrainian war, this tool provide a much wider choice and awareness for the self-identification process of the voters. And as such, it creates new space for conspiratorial and ethno-nationalist discourses that can facilitate a radicalization by a populist party in terms of religious, heterosexual, and ethnic identity. The goal of the article is to analyse through qualitative methods the main characteristics of the engagement in social media channels for political self-identification of the voters in terms of their affinity with AUR. In addition, the article highlights the perceptions of the voters on this issue to emphasize the impact of the political discourse on the voting preferences for the party, as AUR will be defined in the following as a populist movement. The qualitative research is based on 17 viewpoint interviews conducted between December 2022 and January 2023 with AUR voters. The results of the research confirm the hypothesis that voters are more politically engaged using social media and radicalize their perceptions on politics through media tools, rather than assuming a rational decision-making process. The study had been focused on the consequences for voter's preferences on communication strategy adopted by AUR, as a top-down approach, rather than engaging with the audience and responding to their messages. The study confirmed that in the Romanian context, dominant figures express their views in a technically sophisticated and seemingly direct manner. This strategy determines unaffiliated groups to connect and promote the party's message and attract more supporters.
Keywords: Eastern Europe; Social Media; Populism; The Alliance for the Union of Romanians; Political Self-perception; Political Engagement.

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Ana Gabriela Pantea

„Like" a populizmusnak. A Szövetség a Románok Uniójáért párt szavazóinak véleménye a közösségi média platformok politikai használatáról

A közösségi média megfelelő és kényelemes kommunikációs eszköznek tekinthető, amelyet a felek arra használnak, hogy elérjék támogatóikat; hiszen maga a politikai párt közvetlenül elérheti a választókat, az ideológiai riválisok pedig ellentámadást és álhíreket is közvetítenek. Az ilyen közösségi médiaplatformok sokoldalú, olcsó és kényelmes eszközök az álhírek terjesztésére és a társadalom megosztására, választások idején. Ezt legfőképpen narratíváik révén érik el, amelyekből gyakran hiányzik a hagyományos médiában megtalálható tények ellenőrizhetősége. A populista pártok, például a Szövetség a Románok Uniójáért (AUR) gyülekeznek és egyesítik az embereket, hogy egy úgynevezett közös ügyet kreáljanak a domináns politikai spektrummal szemben. Ez a közösségi média egyik leghatékonyabb eszköze. A közösségi média az ideológiai terjesztés globális erejévé vált és elválaszthatatlanul összefügg az emberek identitásalakításával. A Covid–19 világjárvány és az ukrán háború után ez az eszköz sokkal szélesebb választási lehetőséget és tudatosságot biztosít a választóknak. És mint ilyen, új teret teremt a konspiratív és etnonacionalista diskurzusoknak, amelyek elősegíthetik egy populista párt radikalizálódását a vallási, heteroszexuális és etnikai identitás tekintetében. A cikk célja, hogy kvalitatív módszerekkel elemezze a szavazók AUR-hoz való affinitását. A közösségi média csatornáiban való részvétel főbb jellemzőit és az ebből jelentkező politikai önazonosítást figyelembe véve. Ezen túlmenően a cikk kiemeli a választók véleményét a hangsúlyozott politikai diskurzusról, ami a párt szavazási preferenciáira gyakorol hatást. Ezt tesszük annak függvényében, hogy az AUR-t a továbbiakban populista mozgalomként fogjuk meghatározni. A kvalitatív kutatás 17 nézőpont-interjún alapul, amelyeket 2022 decembere és 2023 januárja között készítettek AUR-szavazókkal. A kutatás eredményei megerősítik azt a hipotézist, hogy a választók politikailag elkötelezettebbek a közösségi médiában, és a média eszközeivel radikalizálják a politikáról alkotott elképzeléseiket, nem pedig racionális döntéshozatali folyamatot feltételeznek. A tanulmány arra összpontosított, hogy kiemelje milyen következményekkel jár az AUR által felülről lefelé irányuló kommunikációs stratégia a választók preferenciáiban, ahelyett, hogy a nagy nyilvánossággal foglalkoznának és válaszolnának ezek kéréseire. A tanulmány megerősítette, hogy a román kontextusban a meghatározó személyiségek technikailag kifinomultan és látszólag közvetlen módon fejezik ki nézeteiket. Ez a stratégia meghatározza a független csoportokat, hogy összekapcsolják és népszerűsítsék a párt üzenetét, és több támogatót vonzanak.
Kulcsszavak: Kelet-Európa; közösségi média; populizmus; Szövetség a Románok Szövetségéért; politikai önfelfogás; politikai elkötelezettség.

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Mirela Mărcuț–Cosmin Chiriac

Assessing TikTok's Potential for Civil Society in Europe. A Literature Review

Civil society organizations make use of different tools to get the message out to their public, ranging from raising awareness on social causes to educating the public on political issues of the day. With social media, their potential for outreach has expanded, considering the democratization of communication that these platforms bring forward. However, each social media platform is different, and the message and the cause must adapt to its specificities. Additionally, their activities fall prey under the perils of algorithmic governance, which decides how far and long their message travels. Considering that civil society organizations play a significant role in democratic processes, the use of social media can either short-circuit or expand their access to the public. This is the main starting point of this analysis, in which we aim to understand the manner in which social media platforms affect the activity of civil society organizations. The second main point of the analysis aims to look at how new social media platforms can fit into this narrative. How do civil society organizations have to adapt to TikTok, one of the world's most famous social media platforms? Methodologically, this paper focuses on an extensive quantitative and qualitative literature review to dissect the way social media platforms affect civil society organizations.

Then, we use this theoretical framework to discuss TikTok and assess its potential for success or peril of civil society organizations.
Keywords: Civil Society, Civil Society Organizations, Social Media, TikTok.

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A TIKTOK európai civil társadalmakban rejlő potenciáljának felmérése. Irodalmi áttekintés

A civil társadalmi szervezetek különféle eszközöket használnak, hogy eljuttassák az üzenetüket a nyilvánossághoz, kezdve a társadalmi okokra való figyelemfelhívással, egészen a közvélemény napi politikai kérdésekkel kapcsolatos oktatásáig. A közösségi médiával kibővült az elérhetőségük lehetősége, figyelembe véve a kommunikáció demokratizálódását, amit ezek a platformok előmozdítanak. Azonban minden közösségi médiaplatform különbözik, így hát az üzeneteknek és az okoknak alkalmazkodnia kell e sajátosságokhoz. Ezen túlmenően tevékenységeiket az algoritmikus irányítás veszélyei fenyegetik, amely meghatározza, milyen messzire és mennyi ideig jut el üzenetük. Tekintettel arra, hogy a civil szervezetek jelentős szerepet játszanak a demokratikus folyamatokban, a közösségi média használata rövidre zárhatja vagy kiterjesztheti a nyilvánossághoz való hozzáférésüket. Ez a fő kiindulópontja ennek az elemzésnek, amelynek célja annak megértése, hogy a közösségi médiaplatformok milyen hatással vannak a civil szervezetek tevékenységére. Az elemzés második fő pontja azt kívánja megvizsgálni, hogy az új, közösségi médiaplatformok hogyan illeszkedhetnek ebbe a narratívába. Hogyan kell a civil társadalmi szervezeteknek alkalmazkodniuk a TikTokhoz, a világ egyik leghíresebb közösségi médiaplatformjához? Módszertanilag a tanulmány egy kiterjedt mennyiségi és kvalitatív szakirodalmi áttekintésre összpontosít, hogy feltárja, hogyan hatnak a közösségi média platformjai a civil társadalmi szervezetekre. Ezt az elméleti keretet használjuk a TikTok megvizsgálására, és felmérjük ennek hatását a civil társadalmi szervezetek sikerére vagy kudarcára.
Kulcsszavak: Civil társadalom, civil társadalmi szervezetek, közösségi média, TikTok.

Mirela Mărcuț PhD, a Nagyváradi Egyetem oktatója. Kutatási területei a digitális politikák és kormányzás, valamint az intelligens városok, különös tekintettel az Európai Unióra. 2017-ben elnyerte a Jean Monnet Foundation for Europe Henri Rieben ösztöndíját, hogy tanulmányozza az európai információs társadalom kezdeteit. 2020-ban posztdoktori kutatási ösztöndíjat nyert Darmstadtban (Németország), ahol az okos városok kormányzását tanulmányozta. Főbb publikációi közé tartozik a The Social- Economic Evolution of the European Union: Exploring the Electronic Frontier (2016) és a Crystalizing the EU Digital Policy. A digitális egységes piac feltárása (2017) és a Digitális politikák irányítása (2020).
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Cosmin Chiriac, PhD, oktató a Nagyváradi Egyetem Nemzetközi Kapcsolatok és Európa Tanulmányok Tanszékén. Iskolai végzettsége informatikai alapképzésből, valamint földrajz szakon szerzett mester- és doktori képzésből áll. Fő kutatási területei a földrajzi információs rendszerek és a területi elemzés a területi kohézió és a policentrikus fejlődés, az Európai Unió célkitűzéseinek témakörében. A kutatási tevékenysége számos cikket foglal magában ezekben a témákban, mint például: Monocentrikus közigazgatási egységek, policentrikus határterületek? Egy pillantás a Bihar–Hajdu-Bihar Eurorégióra, avagy a romániai policentrikus fejlesztési kezdeményezésekre a NUTS-rendszer első helyi szintjén. Kutatási projektekben is részt vett, de számos térkép és atlasz elkészítésében is közremű-

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Cristina-Maria Dogot

The 2017–2018 Protests, a Factor of Pressure on Europeanisation of Romania's Political System?

A series of events in Romania between autumn 2015 and spring 2019 provoked protests in Bucharest and many other cities in Romania, some of which received quite significant support from the diaspora and from personalities and opinion leaders in Romania and around the world. Besides being considered, at the time, as the most important or largest since the anti-communist protests, they were also associated with a revival of the Europeanist commitment of Romanian society, arousing interest and appreciation at European and international levels and inspiring similar movements in other European countries. The culmination was the 2017 protests, but the next almost two years after were also marked by numerous other protests, which, even if smaller in size, were seen as ensuring the continuity of the Europeanist engagement of Romanian civil society, whose revival produced awe and confidence that a landmark civic transformation had become possible. The article traces the Europeanist dimensions of the protests of 2017–2019 and provides, on the basis of the cause-effect relationship, an analysis of the capacity of these protests to bring about changes in the political system towards its Europeanisation.
Keywords: Civil Society, European Integration, Europeanisation.

Cristina-Maria Dogot, PhD, is PhD, Lecturer, at the University of Oradea. Her researches concern the European Union, from the perspective of its strategies at the international relations level and political leadership and the process of integration and Europeanisation of Romania. Amongst her most recent publications: "Waterside Border Cities in Romania and their Participation in Cross-border Cooperation Programmes and Projects" (2021); "Elita politică europeană și ideea federației europene: Schuman, Adenauer, De Gasperi" (2021).
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Cristina-Maria Dogot

A 2017–2018-as tiltakozások, nyomástényezők Románia politikai rendszerének európaiasítására?

A 2015 ősze és 2019 tavasza közötti romániai események sorozata tiltakozásokat váltott ki Bukarestben és Románia számos más városában, amelyek egy része igen jelentős támogatást kapott a diaszpóra, valamint a romániai és a világi személyiségek és véleményvezérek részéről. Amellett, hogy abban az időben az antikommunista tiltakozások óta a legfontosabbnak vagy legnagyobbnak tartották őket, a román társadalom európai elkötelezettségének felélénkülésével is összefüggésbe hozhatóak voltak, felkeltették az érdeklődést és megbecsülést európai és nemzetközi szinten, és hasonló mozgalmakat inspiráltak más európai országokban. A csúcspontot a 2017-es tiltakozások jelentették, de a következő közel két évet számos más tiltakozás is jellemezte, amelyek, ha kisebb méretűek is voltak, de a román civil társadalom európai szerepvállalásának folytonosságát biztosították, amelynek újjáéledése félelmet keltett azzal a bizalommal, hogy egy mérföldkőnek számító polgári átalakulás lehetségessé vált. A cikk nyomon követi a 2017–2019-es tiltakozások európai dimenzióit, és az ok-okozati összefüggések alapján elemzi e tiltakozások azon képességét, hogy változást idézzenek elő a politikai rendszerben az európaivá válás felé.
Kulcsszavak: Civil társadalom, európai integráció, európaizáció.

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■ "[A]fter 1989, the Slovak community deals with […] demographic decline, economic restructuring, aging population, […] loss of cultural identity."
(Sorin Șipoș-Cosmin Patca-Ioana Blajec-Manuela Bârza)

■ "Managing migration in the EU […] is a social and economic investment that enables societies to strengthen their cohesion and resilience and become more prosperous."
(István József Polgár)

■ "One of the first things to do after the fall of the system[…] was the reconstruction of the civil society." *(Zoltan Zakota)*

■ "Local and regional development is a driver of European economic and social integration, due to the role played by the territorial entities […]." *(Luminița Șoproni)*

■ "The Republic of Moldova has undergone significant political and social changes since its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991." *(Natalia Putină-Mircea Brie)*

■ "Romania's feelings and commitment to the European future of Ukraine have undergone spectacular change […]" *(Adrian-Gabriel Corpădean-Delia Pop-Flanja)*

■ "The new socio-political realities […] have led to the redrawing of social structures in the Balkan space." *(Islam Jusufi-Polgár István József)*

■ "The interplay between civil society organizations and government decision making will be explored so as to reveal trust in and legitimacy of EU norms and values in Montenegro."
(Laura-Maria Herța)

■ "Despite of some obvious progress achieved since its launch in 2009, the Eastern Partnership has reached its limits […]." *(Natalia Putină-Mircea Brie)*

■ "[The Eastern Partnership Program] does not offer any security guaranties against external threats, fact that was seen in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea and in 2022 when the war in Ukraine started." *(Ana Maria Costea-Ioana Roxana Melenciuc-Ioan)*

■ "The global democratic crisis […] emphasized the importance of identifying a more strategic and autonomous approach to increasing democratic resilience […]."
(Oana Ancuța Poiană-Laurențiu Petrila)

■ "Romania's accession negotiations to the EU represent a complex process that united representatives of all important actors[…]." *(Melania-Gabriela Ciot)*

■ "Populist parties […] rally and unite people to advance a common cause against the dominant political spectrum using social media as one of its most effective tools."
(Ana Gabriela Pantea)

■ "Civil society organizations make use of different tools to get the message out to their public, ranging from raising awareness on social causes to educating the public on political issues of the day." *(Mirela Mărcuț-Cosmin Chiriac)*

■ "A series of events in Romania between autumn 2015 and spring 2019 provoked protests, […] some of which received quite significant support from the diaspora and from personalities and opinion leaders in Romania and around the world." *(Cristina-Maria Dogot)*

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