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Editors

WIDENING KNOWLEDGE FOR A MORE RESILIENT EUROPEAN UNION

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CONTENT

FOREWORD

This volume integrates a part of the papers presented at the closing conference of the Project no. 621262-EPP-1-2020-1-RO-EPPJMO-MODULE 'Jean Monnet Module on EU Interdisciplinary Studies: Widening Knowledge for a more Resilient Union (EURES)' (https://cse.uaic.ro/eures/), co-financed by the European Commission in the framework of Jean Monnet Action. The conference took place in May, on the 19th-20th, 2023, within the Centre for European Studies – Faculty of Law of the Alexandru Ioan Cuza University in Iasi.

The conference was dedicated to the topic of resilience and the reasons to concentrate on it are related to a wider range of aspects. Over the last decades, the European Union (EU) has been confronted with a series of major shocks, such as the Great Recession, Brexit, pandemic, migration and political crises, some of them even overlapping (e.g., the COVID-19 and the war from the EU's eastern neighbourhood), deeply worsening the situation. The internal and external turmoil challenged the role of policymakers to possibly better prepare economies and societies for upcoming impasses. This includes addressing the existing vulnerabilities in a pre-shock stage or designing swift interventions to buffer shocks and foster recovery in their aftermath. Such concerns led to an exponential increase in the popularity of the "resilience" concept, which explicitly focuses on making systems withstand various types of provocations and minimize losses. This notion has gained ground also in economics. As a consequence of the financial crisis of 2007/2008, followed by the public debt crisis of the Eurozone states, the Ukraine crisis in 2014 or the subsequent waves of migration, the economic literature devoted a lot of attention to the study of resilience. In the path to recovery, human capital endowments and labour composition were shown to be essential features for displaying timely and proper reactions to different sorts of perturbations. This emphasizes the need for policy initiatives aimed at widening participation in tertiary education, reducing early leavers from schools and the share of the population not in education, employment, or training. Besides, encouraging academic and public debates regarding what the universities can do for the provision of appropriate skills in order to deal with a faster integration of young people in the labour market could have an impact on the efficiency of youth policies. Simultaneously, as robotization and artificial intelligence expansion seem to be outpacing workers' ability to acquire new competencies, the directives centred on adult learning need to be placed at the forefront of European policies in the upcoming period.

In the context of globalization, the interconnectivity between states has increased economically, socially, and politically. The rise of trade, migration, or tourism flows, as well as the spread of digitalization, have considerably amplified the diffusion effects. The events that take place in one part of the world can have significant wider repercussions on societies in other places. Such spillovers have sparked particular interest in finding characteristics that can make systems more resilient. Therefore, within the conference sections were addressed multidisciplinary themes, from resilience, human capital, labour market, entrepreneurship, innovation,

sustainable development to geopolitical issues, the main purpose being to identify ways in which the EU can become more powerful against the backdrop of multiple crises. In fact, this was the motivation behind submitting the EURES Jean Monnet project, that of organizing various courses or events and carrying out research aimed at highlighting the relevance of the EU in supporting its economies and regions after shocks. By disseminating information to different target groups (BA students, MA students, PhD candidates, professors, researchers, representatives of companies, NGOs, local authorities, civil society), the impact of such actions is stronger. We enjoyed the participation of an impressive number of people in the conference, these coming from countries such as: Albania, Austria, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Spain, Slovakia, Ukraine, United Kingdom and so on.

The EURES project was implemented during the period October 1, 2020 – September 30, 2023. This focused on the transfer of knowledge concerning resilience and connected topics (institutions, human capital, labour market, health, sustainable growth, research and development), contributing to the strengthening of teaching and research skills of the team members, but also to the dissemination of the project's results to the target groups mentioned above.

Onward, the Centre for European Studies will promote the European dimension in education and research, and through its mission, it will be continuously committed to ensuring the sustainability of actions converging with European values.

We thank the European Commission and the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) for the opportunity offered to conduct such a project within the Centre for European Studies of the Alexandru Ioan Cuza University in Iasi and we also thank the participants in the Jean Monnet actions and all those involved in the implementation of the project's activities.

The editors

PART I:
CURRENT CHALLENGES AT THE EUROPEAN LEVEL

COMMON DYNAMICS IN THE EU INTEGRATION PATH OF THE WESTERN BALKANS

Jubjana VILA*

Abstract

The European Union's role in the region and in the world is changing rapidly due to several internal dynamics and external crises and challenges. EU's project of integration remains a role model for peace and stability in the region and beyond. The EU Integration has emerged as a shared key priority for the EU institutions and Western Balkan countries that are in different trajectories of the accession process due to several dynamics and developments within the Western Balkan countries, regional dynamics, and enlargement skepticism among EU member states. While a comprehensive academic thinking exists about the EU's enlargement policy at its approach to this region, this study aims to understand the internal/regional dynamics in the EU integration path of Western Balkan countries through an overview of their history of integration as well as the EC Progress Reports (2022) for each country. It combines theoretical and empirical knowledge to offer a descriptive analysis of internal and regional dynamics in the Western Balkans affecting their EU integration paths.

Keywords: EU integration, Western Balkans, member states

Introduction

The role of the European Union in the Western Balkans (WB) region and in the world is rapidly changing with the emergence of new security crises, and a range of supranational climate, health and technological challenges inside and outside the Union's borders. This new context in which the EU must operate has been a test to its decision-making structures and institutions. Despite the debates among Eurosceptics and Europhiles, the EU's project of integration remains a role model for peace and stability in the region and beyond. The integration processes, as a key pillar of the EU studies, is characterized by two parallel processes of "deepening" and "widening". The widening or enlargement perspective is prioritizing the Western Balkan countries such as Serbia, Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo.

The Western Balkans integration in the European Union has emerged as a shared key priority of EU institutions and the Western Balkan states. It is the most important

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platform put in place by the EU to tackle the issues affecting the region through a range of initiatives dominated by the regional approach. Regional cooperation among the Western Balkan countries has been added to the membership conditionality. The European Union has offered political, technical, and financial support to all six Western Balkan partners to help advancing their key political, institutional, social and economic reforms needed for the accession. The Russian aggression against Ukraine re-emphasized the need to speed up the EU accession process for the region. The EU approach, in words of President Ursula von der Leyen in the EU-WB Summit, is that "Western Balkan countries belong in the EU". Also, in Summit's Joint Brdo Declaration, 6 October 2021 (para. 1) and Tirana Declaration (2022) the EU reconfirmed its commitment to the enlargement process.

The Western Balkan countries have signed different agreements with the EU showing their willingness and commitment to the EU integration (Leuffen et al., 2013, p. 2-6). The pace of integration of the Western Balkans countries toward the EU has proceeded through different cycles of acceleration and slow down, impacted not only by the EU's internal crisis, enlargement fatigue and skepticism debates but also by the country-based and regional dynamics and developments. Through a comparative approach, this article focuses on exploring what are some common dynamics and challenges that dominate the EU integration paths of the Western Balkan countries? The qualitative analysis of the 2022 EU Progress Report for each country of the region, will shed lights on the common dynamics and challenges in their EU integration process.

1. EU enlargement policy and the EU accession

The EU enlargement policy is the Union's most important soft power tool (Rehn, 2008). It is a successful foreign policy that according to the EU Commission applies to countries with EU membership aspirations, categorized as candidate or potential candidate countries, and is comprised of the "principles, goals, and instruments defined by the EU to incorporate new member states" (Juncos and Borragan, 2019, p. 267). The integration of the new EU members is facilitated through the enlargement process. Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (2002, p. 500) define the enlargement of the EU as "a key political process both for the organization itself and the international relations of Europe in general". The enlargement process has a strategic importance for EU in terms of its role in the promotion of peace, security, stability and prosperity in Europe as well as in strengthening the EU role in world affairs. Also, the EU membership prospective might be an essential incentive for reforming the political and economic landscape in the EU candidate and potential candidate countries. Enlargement is also a political process considering that since its establishment the policy maintains intergovernmental nature requiring unanimity among the EU member states to reach an agreement (Juncos and Borragan, 2019). In case of conflict or bilateral problems between EU member and applicant states, the EU membership prospective for applicant countries can be affected and

prolonged due to asymmetric power relations fostered by unanimity principle in the decision-making process on enlargement.

As envisioned in the Treaty on European Union (1992, Art.49) any European state respecting and committed to the promotion of European Values mentioned in Article 2 (TEU, 1992) "human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities" is eligible to apply for the EU membership. The states must fulfill a set of political and economic criteria, defined as the 'Copenhagen Criteria', focusing on institutional stability, functioning market economy, and the ability to take on the membership obligations (EC Conclusions, 1993, p. 13). The above-mentioned criteria are clustered in political criteria, economic criteria and alignment with the Acquis Communautaire. The EU Commission lists the rule of law, economic governance, freedom of expression and media, civil society, regional cooperation, common regional market, and SME performance as the main policy areas under concerns for the EU potential members. The Enlargement policy is unique because not only it sets criteria for accessions, but it is also a process through which candidate countries push for development by targeting the above-mentioned concerns in the pre-accession period through a range of strategies and initiatives. The case of Eastern Enlargement has demonstrated the important role of conditionality in enhancing democratic reforms, rule of law and development of market economy (Zuokui, 2010). Even though conditionality has been considered as the main driver of the enlargement, acccession depends on the combination of applicant country preparedness, the EU's absorbtion capacity and the EU member states approach to the EU enlargement. Throughout time and especially after the Eastern enlargement in 2004 the accession process has become even more complex.

The enlargement prospective is an important and successful EU foreign policy tool but it is facing a range of challenges. Debates and discussions within the anti-enlargement camp, based on the enlargement fatigue, focus on institutional overload that comes with the enlargement process and their support for deeper rather than wider integration. Also, they emphasize that widening the union will risk its political stability and absorption capacity. As mentioned by Juncos and Borragan, (2019, p. 277-278), enlargement fatigue is fueled by an increased "support for populist Eurosceptic parties in member states that consider enlargement as a source of insecurity", and by the concerns "over the financial burden and migratory flows that will come with enlargement" especially after the economic crisis that increased gap between more and less developed countries in Europe. Hillion (2010) adds 'creeping nationalization', meaning tightening member states control over EU's enlargement policy and expanding conditionalities that according to Geddes and Taylor (2016) can push candidate countries to make concessions to satisfy the needs of member states especially in case of bilateral issues. The competitive geopolitical context with Russia factor and the Brexit dynamics have also impact the EU enlargement policy. However, what remains a crucial challenge is the slow progress of candidate countries due to factors such as "democratic backsliding, legacies of conflicts and standing bilateral issues" (Juncos and Borragan, 2019. p. 277). This study aims to

explore the common challenges and dynamics in the EU integration process of the Western Balkan countries.

2. EU enlargement towards the Western Balkans

During 1990s the Western Balkans region had the image of Europe's 'trouble-making periphery' due to ongoing conflicts and delayed post-communist transitions and they were left out of the Central and Eastern enlargement wave. In the beginning of 2000s, the EU expanded the enlargement concept and affirmed its "unequivocal support for the European perspective of the Western Balkans" (EC Declaration, 2003, para.3). As argued by Elbasani (2013), by that time, EU enlargement was considered as a success story due to its contribution to stability, development, and democracy consolidation in Central and Eastern European countries. Another reason for this change in approach to the Western Balkans region was a more stable post-conflict environment considered as more suitable for prioritizing EU integration issues (Pond, 2006). The combination of EU's support for integration with high "domestic demand for integration have generated high expectations that enlargement strategy will work to discipline democratic institution-building and foster post-communist reforms in the same way that it did in the previous candidates in CEE" (Elbasani, 2013, p. 4).

The EU integration has emerged as a shared key priority of EU institutions and Western Balkans states. It is defined most important platform put in place by the EU to tackle the issues affecting the region. The EU has a broad range of planned or ongoing initiatives for Western Balkans with the regional approach as most important EU initiative for the Western Balkans to enhance regional cooperation as a condition to move forward with the integration process. In line with the integration process and progress, EU has offered political, technical, and financial support to all six Western Balkan countries with the aim of helping them to advance the key needed political, institutional, social and economic reforms. Even though the basis of the EU demands for the Western Balkan countries are set in Copenhagen criteria, they are enriched with additional conditions such as regional cooperation, good neighborly relations as well as the return of refugees and cooperation with The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Financial assistance, including advancing relations with the region and offering assistance packages, and the membership prospective are important incentives and rewards for progress in terms of meeting the EU demands.

The Pre-Accession Strategy for the Western Balkans aims to assist countries in implementing the reforms necessary for EU membership. Each Western Balkan country has signed the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) that is the main framework for the EU-WB relations. The Stabilization and Association Process (SAP) launched in June 1999 showed the EU readiness for a closer relation with the Western Balkans. It is the EU policy towards the Western Balkans aiming political stabilization, encouraging transition to market economy, promoting regional cooperation, and progressive partnership to be finalized with membership once the

conditionality is fulfilled. Even though the Stabilization and Association Process outlines the common economic and political criteria, counties are individually assessed on their progress in meeting the criteria. The Stabilization and Association Process, when launched, draw heavily on tools and mechanisms EU had developed in relations to Central and Eastern European countries. The pre-accession includes significant pre-accession financial assistance for EU candidate and potential candidates to comply with the conditionality as envisioned in the Copenhagen criteria. It consists of three Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA) packages: IPA I (2007-2013), IPA II (2014-2020) and IPA III (2021-2027) targeting Albania, Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Turkey.

The EU has reaffirmed its position to the Western Balkans in several occasions. In the Thessaloniki Summit in 2003, the EU's statement that "the future of the Balkans is within the European Union" underlines the EU membership perspective of the region. They claim that "the prospect of membership of the EU is real" but "it must be earned" (Ip/03/860). The Thessaloniki Agenda (2003) consists of 5 key elements including: (1) measures to consolidate peace, promote stability and democratic development; (2) further integration with EU through enriched Stabilization and Association Process (SAP); (3) increased cooperation in fighting organized crime on Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) matters; (4) promotion of economic development; and (5) increased support for reconciliation and enhanced regional cooperation. Almost one decade later in 2014 the Berlin Process was initiated as a platform for high-level cooperation between the Western Balkans and some EU member states. It has four main objectives: (1) the solution of open bilateral and internal problems of the Western Balkans states; (2) reconciliation within and between societies in the region; (3) the improvement of regional economic cooperation; (4) the creation of a basis for sustainable growth. The 2018 enlargement strategy defined enlargement into the Western Balkans as "a geostrategic investment in a stable, strong, and united Europe" (EC Press release, 6 February 2018, para. 2). It introduced "six flagship initiatives to support transformation in the Western Balkans", with a focus on fundamental reforms and good neighborly relations." (EC Press release, 6 February 2018, para.3). Hence, throughout the last two decades, beside the Copenhagen criteria, 'regional cooperation' and 'good neighbourly relations' are added to the conditionality for the Western Balkan countries.

The current status shows that the Western Balkan countries are in different stages of the EU integration process. While Montenegro and Serbia are negotiating their accessions for a longer period, Albania and North Macedonia are the new arrivals in this cluster. Bosnia and Herzegovina is a candidate country since the end of 2022, and Kosovo has signed the EU's Stabilization and Association Agreement and is considered as potential candidate country. The Western Balkan states are in different trajectories of the accession process not only due to the Unions' internal dynamics and approach to the region, but also because of the region's common dynamics and each country's own progress and challenges.

3. EU integration prospective of the Western Balkans

The EU integration process of the Western Balkan countries is dominated by ambiguity and there is not an explicit membership premise for the countries of the region. While on one hand the EU is aware that the EU membership perspective is crucial to regional stability, security and prospective, on the other hand it is challenged by enlargement fatigue and resistance (Renner and Trauner 2009). Several EU members explain their opposition to enlargement towards unstable Western Balkan countries with the lack of reforms in the countries of the region. Despite this ambiguity, the Western Balkans countries have continued their integration processes characterized by mixture of progressive and regressive steps. O'Brennan (2014) points out the existence of a symbiotic relationship between the EU 'enlargement fatigue' and Western Balkans' 'accession fatigue'.

He argues that this symbiosis has had a negative impact on EU transformational power in the Western Balkans by becoming an obstacle to the EU *Acquis* transposition and implementation (O'Brennan, 2014). Blockmans (2012) argues that that the political elites engage in misleading policymaking that gives the image of EU membership motivated reforms but they lack proper implementation. Hence, the gap between transposition rhetoric and implementation motivated by political interest remains a substantive obstacle to the EU integration process of the Western Balkan countries. Economides (2020) discusses three main factors for the slow EU integration process of the Western Balkan countries. First the "hangovers from the wars of Yugoslavia's dissolution which still play a central role in contemporary regional politics and act as a serious constraint to accession" (Economides, 2020, p.7). Second, the presence of other external actors challenging the EU influence in the Western Balkans region and lastly, uncertainty regarding the future of the EU and membership prospective might be discouraging Western Balkan countries to move forward with reforming (Economides, 2020). Hence, political/economic elites personal interest and fear of constrains on their political power and authority rest behind resistance to comply with the EU membership conditions in the Western Balkan countries (Economides, 2020).

As mentioned by Elbasani (2013), the EU enlargement process toward the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries has been credited for its positive impact on post-communist reforms. Vachudova (2019) adds that the Western Balkan countries waiting for the EU membership, compared to their post-communist Central and Eastern European predecessors, have more security challenges and less economic potentials. Also, the uneven reforms across the Central and Eastern European region provoked discussions on the role of top-down conditionality vs. contextualized domestic influence. Vachudova (2019, p. 64) claims that "the Western Balkan states in the membership queue are hobbled by the capture of the state by elites who favor rent-seeking and ethno-nationalist appeals over economic reform, media freedom, and the rule of law". Among the domestic challenging factors to Europeanization, Elbasani (2013) highlights the strength of reformist (pro-EU) elites, hindering historical legacies, heterogenic ethnic composition, state-ness

problems and informal networks. According to Noutcheva (2012), EU membership conditionality in the Westen Balkan countries is contested when identity and sovereignty related issues dominate the agenda. Previous Eastern enlargement waves have also left their footprints in the accession process due to the raising concerns over pre-mature politically motivated memberships (Ker-Lindsay et al., 2018). As such, there is more emphasis on the conditionality in the EU enlargement process of the Western Balkan countries. According to Economides (2020, p.12) non-compliance to conditionality "is largely determined both by lack of capacity and lack of will, and especially lack of political will among the ruling political and economic elites". The Western Balkans' EU membership prospectives are also threatened by security, organized crime and trafficking issues dominating the discourse on the region (Ker-Lindsay et al., 2018). Grabbe (2014) adds migration from the Western Balkans region towards the EU states as another rising concern. The prolonged integration process combined with enlargement experiences and slow progress of the Western Balkan countries in meeting conditionality have elevated the demands on candidates and accession negotiations. The EU is not monitoring only the legislative alignment with the *Acquis* but also the progress in terms of implementation. The analysis of drivers of enlargement from EU perspective highlights challenges to EU enlargement policy and EU's internal problems and dilemmas. However, this study takes the approach that the integration process and conditionality on their own does not ensure the EU accession; the EU accession of the Western Balkans is primarily based on addressing a range of domestic and regional issues. The analysis of the 2022 European Commission Progress Reports for the Western Balkan countries reveals several common dynamics and issues in each country's domestic environment and some regional challenges affecting the Western Balkan countries' progress in meeting the EU conditionality.

Even though the Western Balkan countries have largely in place the legal and institutional framework for upholding fundamental rights, their full implementation requires further efforts especially in terms of minority rights and freedom of expression. Compared to other countries of the region, Bosnia and Herzegovina has shown the lowest progress in fundamental rights and it "needs to ensure that all citizens are able to exercise their political rights and also non-discriminating, inclusive and quality education for all" (EC Report for Bosnia, 2022 p. 6). Freedom of expression is another challenging issue for the Western Balkan countries. Most of the countries of the region have some level of preparation in this aspect but no progress has been recorded in 2022 except for Norther Macedonia and Kosovo that enjoy more pluralist media environments. Polarization of media landscape, political pressure and media independence, disinformation, and journalists' intimidation are some problematic issues.

Political polarization emerges as common drawback in terms of political criteria for all six Western Balkan countries, according to their 2022 European Commission progress reports. The polarized political landscape is mainly observed in inter-party relations, except for the case of Albania that has been experiencing polarization due to intra-party conflict too. Polarization has affected the

parliamentary life in Albania and Serbia; created institutional deadlock in Montenegro; blocked state-level legislative and executive institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina; and hindered law adoption in North Macedonia and Kosovo. As mentioned in the 2022 European Commission's progress reports, civil society is operating in a more enabling environment in North Macedonia, Kosovo and Montenegro, while Albania, Serbia and BiH need to put more efforts to ensure that environment. The need for further strengthen cooperation and consultation between the state and civil society is emphasized for all the countries of the region. Despite slow progress in terms of implementation, the Public Administration Reform (PAR) has been in the EU integration agenda for Serbia, Albania, North Macedonia and Montenegro for a longer period compared to Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina. While Kosovo has recently initiated the reform, Bosnia and Herzegovina is far behind due to the lack of political decision-making body for it. The main themes that emerge from the analysis of countries' progress in Public Administration Reform include meritocracy or merit-based recruitment, as well as competence and independence of civil servants as common challenges for the countries of the region in their EU integration paths.

The European Commission progress reports reveal problems with the functioning of governance, institutions and rule of law in Western Balkan countries. In this perspective accountability, independence, impartiality and professionalism of judicial system remains a permanent common goal and challenge for the Western Balkan countries. Albania, Serbia and North Macedonia have shown some level of progress in judicial reform, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo are dealing with the challenges of the early stages of the reform. Despite some progress, the justice system in Kosovo "is slow, inefficient and vulnerable to influence" (EC Report - Kosovo, 2022, p. 5), and the lack of progress in Bosnia and Herzegovina is attributed to "the lack of political commitment to judicial reform and poor functioning of the system" as well as the dynamics created by the "non harmonized legislations" across entities of the federation (EC Report - Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2022, p. 5). Problems with justice system and rule of law have been reflected also in the fight against corruption and organized crime that is mentioned as another common challenge on which the Western Balkan countries need to focus and make progress.

The countries of the region have recorded at least some level of progress in terms of meeting the economic criteria mainly in terms of developing a functioning economy, but the consequences of Covid'19 and Ukrainian war have left their footprints in the region. A crucial challenge remains the ability to cope with competitive pressure and market forces in the EU. There are rising concerns regarding the quality of education and skills that should not be treated separate from the consequence of migration and brain drain phenomena ongoing in the region. In case of Bosnia and Herzegovina the political stalemate and fragmentation is also reflected in the progress of the country in terms of economic criteria.

The legacies of conflictual relations among the countries of the region have contributed in adding regional cooperation and good neighborly relations to the EU agenda and membership conditionality for the Western Balkans. The European

Commission reports analyze the progress of the country in their bilateral relations with countries of the region highlighting the need for improving relations and fostering regional cooperation. Serbia is the country with more reference in terms of addressing bilateral issues. The European Commission Report on Serbia (2022, p. 7) and European Commission Report on Montenegro (2022, p. 7) mention that their relations "remain challenging but both sides are signaling more willingness to reset relations and work toward addressing open issues". Similarly, the European Commission Report on Serbia (2022) highlights strained relations with Croatia with ups and downs in different periods. However, what dominates in Serbia's and Kosovo's EU integration agenda is the normalization of relations between two the two countries. As stated in the report "Kosovo and Serbia are now urged to engage constructively and advance the negotiations on the comprehensive, legally-binding normalization agreement with no further delay. Reaching such an agreement is urgent and crucial so that Kosovo and Serbia can advance on their respective European paths." (EC Report Serbia, 2022, p. 7). Kosovo is also called to "make further substantial efforts on the implementation of all past agreements" (EC Report Kosovo, 2022, p. 6). In addition, strained bilateral relations are also observed in case of Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina, since Bosnia and Herzegovina does not recognize the independence of Kosovo and they "maintain a strict visa regime" (EC Report Kosovo, 2022, p. 7). All the Western Balkan countries are appreciated for being actively involved in regional cooperation. The issue of fundamental rights related to conflict dynamics is particularly emphasized in Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina European Commission reports.

Even through some improvements are valued and countries show variations in terms of their preparedness, the analysis of the progress reports reveals a critical attitude to the developments within and among the Western Balkan countries. Overcoming political polarization, corruption, and organized crime; judiciary reform, administrative reform; sustainable economic model; human rights; and dynamics created by conflictual past relations comprise the main common priorities for the Western Balkan countries in order to progress in their EU integration path. Overall, the results of this study align with the literature that identifies democracy backsliding, unresolved bilateral issues and conflict related legacies of the past as the important obstacles to the Western Balkan countries progress in meeting the EU membership conditionality.

Concluding remarks

The EU integration agenda of the Western Balkans blended with dynamics of regime transition and conflictual bilateral relations is characterized by achievements, failures and challenges. Relations between structural obstacles and effective Europeanization are neither deterministic not linear. This study through an overview of the EU enlargement policy and process, EU integration process of the Western Balkan countries, and their progress in meeting the accession criteria based on the 2022 European Commission progress reports data for each country has identified

some common issues at the domestic context and some regional issues to be addressed for the Western Balkan countries move forward in their integration processes. Political polarization, fight against corruption and organized crime, reformation of judiciary system and public administration, developing a sustainable economic model, protection of human rights, and improvement of bilateral relations among the countries with conflictual pasts are the dominating themes in the European Commission progress reports for the Western Balkans. It shows that membership conditionality is not enough even though it provides an important guide and framework for political and economic progress in countries aspiring the EU membership. Despite the EU perspective on enlargement, developments and dynamics within the countries of the region show the technical readiness of the countries to join the union and they should not be overshadowed by the discourses on the EU integration as a political process. Even though this study is focused on common dynamics, being aware of the differences among the Western Balkan countries would contribute in understanding why they are in different steps of integration and progress.

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THE LOGIC OF EU NORMATIVE POWER IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

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Abstract

This research focuses on comprehending the political logic behind how the EU's normative power is manifested in its engagements within the region. It's evident that numerous studies emphasize the dual role of EU conditionality in the membership criteria for Western Balkan countries, illustrating both normative unity in foreign policy and a complex interaction between interests and norm adaptation. This highlights the intricate nature of the EU's approach in the Western Balkans. The study is grounded in the semi - realist perspective, which argues that democracy norm promotion and peace building constitutes a relevant, but secondary foreign policy aim. It aligns with scholars from various viewpoints who suggest that EU democracy promotion is more strategically motivated for enhancing national security rather than strict ideational diffusion. Instead of a Kantian cosmopolitan approach, the EU's normative power is seen resembling Hobbesian normative homogenization. We argue that striving for a normatively homogenous Europe through ideational diffusion yields varied outcomes in different regions due to distinct structural conditions and institutional practices qualitative methodology, we delve into the achievements and limits of EU normative power in the Western Balkans. The study concludes that normative ideational diffusion rarely results in uniform outcomes even within the region. Thus, during times of crisis and ongoing multidimensional challenges, resilience as norm diversity rather than normative homogenization offers more effective political power implications.

Keywords: European Union, normative power, regionalism, Western Balkan

Introduction

Despite the complexities that associate the historical and ongoing process of EU Common Foreign and Security Policy, there is an apparent consensus on the distinct and most consequential power that norms play in it. A very recent official

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statement by Josep Borrel, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, reaffirms the EU's strong and original normative influence and the vital need to respect core rules and norms of the international system (Borrel, 2023) even in critical times of Russia's war against Ukraine and rising influence of China[1]. The debate over the EU's normative power is marked by contrasting perspectives. On one hand, some argue that the EU projects a cosmopolitan normative power, emphasizing diverse definitions of human freedom, lasting peace, and mutual transformation. On the other hand, there's the view that the EU's actual behavior aligns more with a Hobbesian approach to normative unity In this stance, normative disagreements are seen as jeopardizing the viability of a community built on shared values.

The diffusion theory explains how the EU diffuses its norms, institutions and practices to aspiring countries by immaterial means. According to the theory, the EU's approach to promoting regionalism happens through socialization and emulation. The first involves offering economic incentives, technical assistance and support for institutional development in order to help regions strengthen integration processes. The second type of diffusion happens when the EU often employs its own experiences of regional integration as a model for other regions to emulate. The diffusion of ideas and the normative discourse of the EU have been thoroughly explored in various contexts such as the southern neighborhood (Dandashly & Kourtelis, 2020), Africa (Storey, 2006), and even China (Kavalski, 2013). However, limited attention has been given to its impact on the Western Balkan countries, which currently hold a crucial position in the integration agenda. In this context, our study concentrates on the process of regional integration in the Western Balkans, aiming to highlight both shared and distinct dynamics that characterize the EU's normative power within the region. We particularly focus on two key aspects: The EU's ability to encourage integration and transformation through socialization and its capacity to effectively assume the role of a strategic and critical peacemaker by fostering emulation. By examining these aspects, we aim to shed light on the lesser-explored dimensions of the EU's influence in the Western Balkans' integration process.

The integration of the Western Balkans serves the EU's main objective of having peace and stability in the union. Despite the EU having initiated stages of integration on a regional basis, the progress of member states has been different. Currently, Montenegro and Serbia are ahead on accession talks and several chapters have been opened. Behind them are Albania and North Macedonia, where negotiations commenced in July 2022. Bosnia and Herzegovina lags behind on the list, currently holding the status of a candidate country. Kosovo, on the other hand, submitted its application for integration in December 2022. The first gradual rapprochement of the Western Balkan countries with the EU was launched in 1999

[1] European Commission, retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_23_3358, on 17 May 2023.

named as the Stabilization and association process (SAP). The candidate status would be granted dependent upon merit and progress based on the Copenhagen criteria. Visa free travel to the Schengen area has been lastly granted to Kosovars, effective as of January 2024, the only country in the Western Balkans that did not enjoy it until present (Elbasani, 2013).

A recent public survey conducted in 2022, showed a consistency among all citizens in western Balkans on what EU membership meant to them. Results show that EU membership is tightly related to economic prosperity and freedom to study and/ or work in the EU and very less connected with improved democratic standards or national security guarantee. Thus, public perception connects the EU' power with its capability to produce economic efficiency (Balkan Barometer, 2022)[2]. This discrepancy between EU's conditionality for democratization and regional cooperation and Western Balkans public demand for economic prosperity is creating an impasse in the union's power to exert influence. Furthermore, progress in terms of democratic conditionality has often been subject to interests and positions of member states rather than a norm assessment. To summarize, the EU's influence on regionalism and integration has followed different logics, resulting in varied impacts across regions and even within the same region. In the case of the Western Balkans, studies highlight the dual nature of EU conditionality in the membership criteria, demonstrating both normative unity in foreign policy and a complex interaction between interests and norm adaptation. Given the current deadlock, the article will next delve into a theoretical examination of EU normative power and its methods of diffusion. Following this, it will further explore the extent of EU norm diffusion in the Western Balkans through institutional reform and its role as an effective peacemaker.

1. Normative Power Europe: conceptual and theoretical discussion

Normative Power Europe (NPE) has since the 2000s been an integral part of mainstream international relations scholarship in Europe and is cited almost universally. Normative Power in itself is defined as the ability to shape conceptions of what is normal in international relations (Manners, 2002). In the EU context, normative power is a reflection of a *Good Europe* that aims to promote values of peace, liberty, human rights, rule of law, democracy and regional integration. Furthermore, it is a self-representation of a distinct kind of actor that transcends the anarchic nature of the system and self- interested behavior of states (Hyde-Price, 2008, p. 30). The EU's treaties and legal bodies predisposes that EU acts normatively

[2] Balkan Barometer is an annual survey of public opinion and business sentiments in six Western Balkans economies, commissioned by the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC). Retrieved from https://www.rcc.int/balkanbarometer/home on 20 June 2023.

in world politics and that it enacts a foreign policy aimed at promoting its nine core ethical norms (Aggestam, 2008, p. 1).

Two issues have arisen as a result of this interpretation. First, its normative identity, as fundamentally based on a set common values and the aspiration to act collectively through them, has been often brought to the literature as an attempt to homogenize the normative political space (Kobayashi, 2021). Normative homogenization goes contrary to the Kantian approach of cosmopolitanism and treats normative disagreement as a threat to the viability of a value- based community. In fact, it might act in favor of Hobbesian logic of transforming the society by eliminating discords and building a common wealth through norm diffusion and public education.

Kant and Hobbes offer two different political visions, but they both agree on the impact that norms have on power consolidation. For Hobbes, the key problem in politics is the existence of multiple, competing visions of moralities and normalcies (Lloyd, 1992, Malcolm, 2002). As noticed, in security strategic documents, EU members strive to emphasize the need to defend common values, agree on joint threat assessments and promote common interest and common action (A Global Strategy for the EU's Foreign and Security Policy, 2016). In practice, EU actors' rising diverse interests has made the EU peace bringer narrative less convincing (Mcmahon & Kaiser, 2022).

Second, NPE in reality has reflected itself beyond the strict definition of employing normative means toward normative ends. Often, the EU's normative instruments are more central to the EU than its normative ends (Manners, 2006). For instance, the EU as an external actor employs heavily the instruments of EU membership prospects for aspiring countries and/or trade agreements for neighboring relations. In addition, the EU has been often seen to use its normative means for geopolitical ends. Finally, tightly related to the first issue as well, the EU is criticized to be Eurocentric and promote a so-called normative empire that lacks sensitivity to local context (Bicchi, 2006). This particularly refers to the tendency of the EU to 'reproduce itself' (Bretherton & Vogler, 1999) to non-members through otherwise called "external projection of internal issues" (Lavenex, 2004).

The discussions of norms and means that surround NPE influence EU's capability to promote regionalism, which as a matter of fact is its most distinct and potentially most consequential product in international politics. The EU is the only actor that actively and regularly promotes the norm and practice of regional integration around the world and as EU Trade Commissioner Pacal Lamy (2001) states *"EU- type of regionalism is freely available for all. Use it"*[3].

[3] Speech/01/341, Pascal Lamy, European Trade Commissioner, Regionalism and multilateralism in Latin America, FIESP (Federation of Industries of the State of São Paulo), São Paulo, 10 July 2001.

Regionalization as a notion but also as a tool is heavily significant in all norm diffusion mechanisms EU puts into use for democracy promotion. As a notion, Bloor (2023, p.1) defines it as a shared identity and purpose. He further emphasizes on establishing institutions which uphold a certain regional identity, and then shape the activity of a region (ibid). Through this process, which aims to put states of a region under the same political or economic umbrella, international organizations are formed. States, especially because of the need of economic interdependence, strive for cooperation with one another, and often, this cooperation is supervised by integrated international institutions.

However, regionalism is not promoted only through normative power. The literature lists coercion as a diffusion mechanism that the EU uses to reach its ends by employing military imposition (Björkdahl, 2011), threats as means or channels of diffusion. Coercion acts to exploit the asymmetrical material powers and to impose self- interest on the weaker party. As an example, the EU employed threats or negative conditionality during negotiations for Economic Partnership Agreements with African countries. Economic advantage is also used as a civilian power through the promise of rewards, in other words by seducing others into desired behavior. Common market projects and trade agreements are often subject to the condition of achieving a certain level of economic integration (Mansfield et al., 2008).

Yet, even when the EU acts as a role model and pursues its regional policies through normative power, normative means such as socialization and emulation (Lenz, 2013), do not serve as reason for diffusion but simply as channels to obtain some material benefits. Pace's viewpoint (2007) underscores that challenges stemming from diverse interpretations and implementations of Normative Power Europe weaken the EU's role as a significant global actor in the political arena. More importantly, it significantly influences the EU's ability to positively leverage its potential influence for achieving constructive conflict transformation.

The theoretical exploration presented above sheds light on a critical aspect. It identifies a notable divergence within the EU's normative power, which emerges from the diverse conceptions of "normal" within its member countries, and the impact it intends to exert through the dissemination of its ideas. This impact is expected to be most pronounced in countries aspiring for EU membership. The paper posits that the manifestation of Normative Power Europe in action can be characterized by three main attributes in its exertion of influence in the region. Firstly, EU power revolves around normative tools, significantly relying on prospects for EU membership and/or trade agreements. Secondly, the EU acts pragmatically and can potentially negotiate or compromise normative objectives to accommodate geopolitical interests. Lastly, its normative objectives may display a Eurocentric perspective and may not always consider local contexts sensitively. In the subsequent section, these characteristics will be thoroughly analyzed within the context of the Western Balkans.

2. Integration through democratization as a civilian power

The EU enlargement policy serves as an example of further trying to enhance regionalism, economically, but especially politically. The EU Commission states that through the enlargement policy, the membership status will impact and inspire candidate countries to improve economically and politically, then also leading to democratization. This enlargement "contributes to mutual benefits of peace, security and prosperity in Europe" (Börzel et al., 2017), therefore, it leads to higher levels of democratization and Europeanization, which often go hand in hand. The acceptance and diffusion of European values and norms can powerfully transform the conditions of said candidate states. Three main pillars are the focus of this enlargement strategy: public administration reform, rule of law and economic governance (Sedelmeier, 2006). As this policy is mainly targeted towards Western Balkans countries, regional cooperation within the six states remains a crucial benchmark, added to the aforementioned three pillars.

Both the enlargement policy and regionalism in and out of the EU can be achieved through two main tools: institutional reforms that EU puts as conditionality for candidate states to fulfill, and effective peacekeeping, where it aims to reconcile post-conflict societies. Conditionality is strict, but fair, as it strengthens and ensures not only the aim but also the final result of the enlargement policy, where candidate states obtain membership only through deserved merit (EC, 2014).

When a candidate country starts the accession negotiations, the opening of the 35 chapters requires a fundamental process of harmonizing the legislation of the candidate country with the EU. The said state's legislation needs to be compatible with the EU legislation, rules and regulations. Surely, such harmonization is also done on the basis of the Copenhagen criteria, which imply that the state must have democratic institutions, a functioning market economy, and to oblige fully to the norms of the EU. Therefore, the opening of the chapters and not only, but also the whole process of accessing membership within the EU requires institutional reforms which further help in the Europeanization and democratization of the state politically, economically and socially. The screening process, which examines the country's institutional, political and other capabilities for ensuring the opening of the chapters paves the way for the action plans, policy project and legislation harmonization which occurs in the fields of several clusters: fundamentals, growth and internal market, regional cooperation, internal market, green agenda, resources, agriculture and cohesion. The ongoing of the reforms and action plans is continuously under the reporting of the EU and OSCE-ODIHR bodies.

Serbia's progress towards the EU has been marked in the last years by stagnation due to the non-improvement of relations with its neighbor Kosovo, rising levels of Euroscepticism and a shift towards authoritarian tendencies. As a post-transitioning country, Serbia began an accession negotiation process with the EU in positive light, nevertheless findings from the last reports show a lack of democratic

principles followed in the state. The EU has worked through institutional reforms in order to revitalize the once socialist republic, but in several fields, the Serbian government has been in front of criticism. There is an absence of institutional checks and balances, leading to a monopolization of power in the executive branch (Jovanovic, 2021). Even though there has been progress in the freedom of expression, on the contrary, the media have been fundamentally linked with the government because of lack of financial independence, serving only for government reporting (Spasojević, 2022). The judicial system has adopted several reforms in order to reduce the level of corruption and maintain the rule of law; however it still has to face many obstacles, such as the training of judges and financial independence[4]. Despite a public administration reform being carried out, clientelism survives as an important catapult for more party members and affiliates. In Freedom House, Serbia scores at 60 out of a 100, continuing to be partly free, with main issues in freedom of speech, elections, but also organized crime.[5]

Albania reached the candidate status in 2014, and in July 2022, through the first Intergovernmental Conference, officially started the accession negotiations, alongside North Macedonia. As a prior communist country, the transitioning process has been slow, accompanied with stagnation in a gray zone and a hybrid regime. The Union has consistently worked with reforms, funds and has put benchmarks for the improvement of democratic conditions in Albania several times. However, the EU still demands a high number of changes institutionally (Stojarová, 2021). Parliamentary life is characterized by polarization or monopolization at times. The EU therefore demands an improvement of both the incumbents and the opposition. Decentralization is seen as lacking in the public administration. The reform of public administration, which remains one of the main reforms regarding the norm diffusion, has gone through a slow pace in strengthening line ministries' capacity to implement regulatory impact assessments and hold public consultations (Gafuri & Muftuler-Bac, 2021). A participatory civil society is also lacking, as a result of a lack of government financial assistance. The issues of corruption, rule of law and organized crime continue to be obstacles which the EU has persistently criticized[6]. Albania's democracy has the score of 67 out of a 100 in Freedom House. The frequent changes to the electoral code, vote buying, and the lack of media freedom are listed as main reasons for the absence of democracy, which lead Albania to be a hybrid regime[7]

After seeking membership in 2010, Montenegro started accession talks in 2012. Since then, the government has worked to meet the prerequisites for EU membership, including implementing democratic reforms. Montenegro's adoption

[4] Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, Serbia Report 2022, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/serbia-report-2022_en
[5] Freedom House Report, https://freedomhouse.org/country/serbia/freedom-world/2022
[6] Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, Albania Report 2022, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/albania-report-2022_en
[7] Freedom House Report, https://freedomhouse.org/country/albania/freedom-world/2022

of EU normative diffusion of democracy has been influenced by the need for democratic changes to solve practical problems. Corruption, the rule of law, and human rights are among the many issues confronting the country (Soyaltin-Colella, 2022). Significant progress is visible in Montenegro's case, through closing 33 out of the 35 chapters. Progress has been achieved in several areas, such as the enactment of new legislation and the development of anti-corruption agencies, but admits that implementation and enforcement remain difficult. There have been insufficient efforts to tackle political interference in state institutions and ensure their professionalism and impartiality. Limited progress has been made in the area of media freedom, with concerns over political influence, lack of transparency, and threats against journalists (Paleviq, 2020).

Comprehensive reforms are still needed in its judicial system; this includes enhancing the professionalism and accountability of judges and prosecutors, improving court management, and ensuring the timely resolution of cases. Lastly, there exists an inadequate implementation of anti-discrimination policies, particularly regarding the rights of vulnerable groups such as the LGBT+ community. The report specifically recommends for more measures to strengthen the judiciary's independence and impartiality, to prevent corruption and organized crime, and to ensure public officials responsibility.

According to reports made from Freedom House, Montenegro faces a number of problems in its democratic growth. Montenegro was categorized as a partly free country by Freedom House in 2022, with a score of 67 out of 100. The research identifies many threats to democracy, including political polarization, the entrenchment of interests associated with organized crime, media ownership concentration, and political interference.

North Macedonia started accession negotiations the same year as Albania, marking an important milestone in the region of Western Balkans. Yet, it has been granted candidate statues since 2005, while Albania got it in 2014. In terms of democratization, both countries are grouped as partly free regimes with not much variation in their democratic performance (Isufi, 2021). Democratic conditionality was emphasized in 2015 and 2016 as subject to the implementation of the 'Urgent Reform Priorities' and Pržino agreement, a political agreement in which the main parties in North Macedonia made a commitment to respect democratic principles and agreed to establish a transitional period that would end in free and fair elections (Kolozova, 2021). However, in practice, the name dispute with Greece, the impact of European Parliaments' elections on Germany, France's new negotiation methodology and Bulgaria's identity politics have been the forefront reasons cited for blocking membership processes.

In Bosnia, the EU has been active in peacekeeping operations, notably the deployment of the EUFOR Althea mission, which was established in 2004 to support the Dayton Peace Agreement's implementation. In addition, the EU has offered financial and technical help to promote institutional changes aimed at advancing

democracy and the rule of law. Support for security sector reform is one of the key ways in which EUFOR Althea has helped to the advancement of democracy in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bargués & Morillas, 2021).

The mission has aided in the development of the ability of BiH's security institutions, particularly the police and armed forces, to promote the rule of law and human rights. This has included security personnel training and mentoring, as well as assistance in the building of legal frameworks and institutions for civilian oversight of the military. The mission has offered assistance in the execution of critical democratic reforms, including strengthening the judiciary and combating corruption and organized crime. Furthermore, EUFOR Althea has advocated for the implementation of election processes and the safeguarding of human rights, especially minorities' rights. Furthermore, EUFOR Althea has aided in the promotion of reconciliation and inter-ethnic dialogue in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The mission has aided in the facilitation of communication and collaboration among various ethnic populations, as well as the implementation of confidence-building measures such as joint military drills and exchanges (Poopuu, 2020).

However, like any complex peacekeeping mission, there are challenges and limitations that may impact the perception of success. The political situation in BiH is characterized by a complex power-sharing arrangement among different ethnic groups, which can lead to political tensions and difficulties in decision-making processes. These complexities can affect the implementation of reforms and the overall stability of the country. Secondly, Bosnia and Herzegovina still face challenges related to ethnic divisions and nationalist sentiments. These factors can hinder progress in achieving lasting reconciliation, trust-building, and cooperation among different ethnic groups (Keil & Stah, 2023).

Despite the efforts of EUFOR Althea and other international actors, the pace of reforms in BiH has been relatively slow in some areas. The European Commission and Freedom House assessments on Bosnia and Herzegovina both note considerable issues the country faces in terms of democratic administration, the rule of law, and socioeconomic development. The European Commission report emphasizes that progress on essential reforms, including those relating to democratic governance and the rule of law, has been slow. Political insecurity and a lack of consensus among political elites have stymied progress on constitutional reform, while corruption and organized crime continue to be major concerns.

Similarly, according to the Freedom House study, Bosnia and Herzegovina confronts issues in the areas of corruption, judicial independence, media freedom, and minority rights. The report also emphasizes the nation's unstable political climate and the country's lack of progress on crucial reforms.

Both analyses underline the importance of increased political will to make changes and solve the country's difficulties. In order to achieve sustainable growth, Bosnia and Herzegovina will need to demonstrate stronger commitment to EU integration, according to the European Commission study, while the Freedom House

assessment highlights the necessity of international support for the country's democratic development.

Whilst the debate around EU enlargement to the Western Balkans has received new impetus, the particular path of Kosovo towards EU membership remains stony. The high investments in Kosovo from the EU, motivated mostly by geopolitical reasons, and the country's leadership narrative of a future embedded in and depending on Europe, have created hopes and expectations among its people. After only 15 years of experience as an independent state, the young country has had little time to build its identity as a sovereign state. The Republic of Kosovo was the only state in the Western Balkans whose citizens cannot benefit from visa-free travel until 2023. Kosovo's EU membership perspective has been highly dependent on its capability to normalize relations with Serbia rather than a process of its own democratization (Kulinxha, 2022).

The European path of Kosovo should not remain an aim itself but the result of the efforts of the country which after a bloody past is tackling its main challenge, creating a functioning state that sustains peace for its people. Kosovo's political situation as an independent but internationally not fully recognized state and aiming to become part of the European Union pushes Kosovo in a limbo. EU relationships with Kosovo have been identified as the neither-nor situation and the attempt by the EU to design an ideal European State that it resists to make part of it (Pedersen Trenter, 2022).

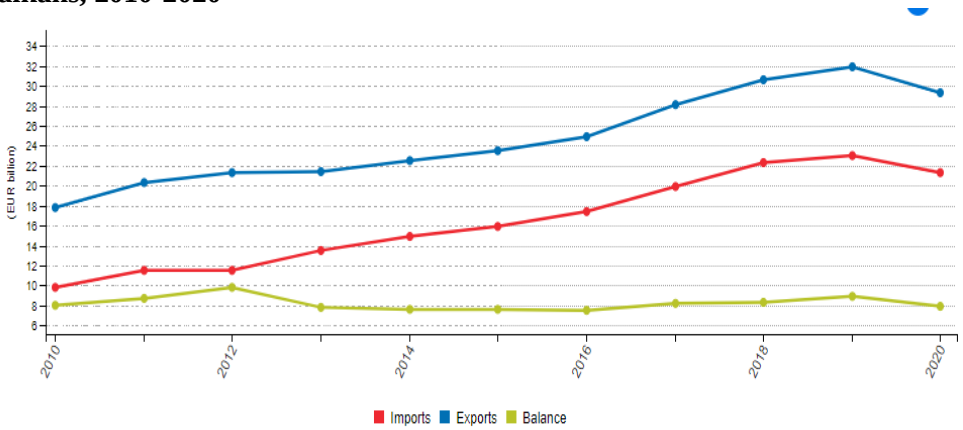
3. Regionalism as a normative power: socialization vs. emulation

Economic success is the most undisputed factor when it comes to the power that the EU exerts in the Western Balkans region. The EU is the main trading partner for WB - in both exports and imports, accounting for over two-thirds (67.6%) of the region's total trade; while the region's share of overall EU trade is only 1.5%. Since 2000, the EU has been granting autonomous trade preferences to all the Western Balkan countries (Montanari, 2005).

The Union has worked continuously to enhance regional cooperation among the Western Balkans, simultaneously holding it as a precondition for entering into the EU. With the development of the Stabilization and Association Agreement, which aims for the Western Balkans to stabilize relations, movement and trade, the Berlin Process and the CEFTA Agreement, countries of Western Balkans have also initiated several cooperation mechanisms, some of which have turned to have positive results.

Europe's ideational influence on regionalism can be understood as the process by which the EU experience travels to other regions through socialization and emulation (Zwartjes et al., 2012). This impact is seen in the Western Balkans in a number of newly established institutions.

Figure 1. Imports, exports and trade balance between the EU and the Western Balkans, 2010-2020



Source: authors' representation based on Eurostat data, 2021[8]

RYCO is an independent institution founded by Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. Its goal is to encourage reconciliation and cooperation among youth in the region through exchange programs. The program promotes peacebuilding and intercultural learning among schools in the Western Balkans. It aims to create long-term partnerships and strong bonds between secondary schools in the region. Schools can apply to participate in exchanges and other activities that build capacity, encourage networking, and foster cooperation.

The Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) promotes regional cooperation, European integration, and development in Southeast Europe. It engages participants from Southeast Europe, the international community, and donors to address important issues and promote European and Euro-Atlantic integration in the region. RCC works to develop and maintain a political climate of dialogue, reconciliation, tolerance and openness towards cooperation, with the view of enabling the implementation of regional programs aimed at economic and social development to the benefit of the people in the region.

The RCC aims to improve mobility, connectivity, and competitiveness, while promoting good governance, rule of law, and security. It also works to create a prosperous region through innovation, women's empowerment, and a competitive youth base. The RCC has 46 participants and is financed by the EU and SEE.

The Common Regional Market initiative was launched at the Sofia Summit on November 10, 2020, as an acknowledged need for greater economic integration

[8] Western Balkans-EU - international trade in goods statistics, retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Western_Balkans-EU_-_international_trade_in_goods_statistics&oldid=526493 in March 2023.

within the region and with the EU. It focuses on the four freedoms (goods, services, capital, and people) as well as digital, investment, innovation, and industry policies. This is the most ambitious regional integration effort in the Western Balkans to date.

The Western Balkans Fund is an international organization based in Tirana, Albania, founded by the governments of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia. The agreement for its creation was signed by the ministers of foreign affairs of WB6 in November 2015, and it became operational on October 1, 2017. The WBF is financed equally by the six contracting parties and led by Executive Director Gjergj Murra from Albania. Its secretariat is in Tirana and aims to promote cooperation and common values through funding small and medium projects in key areas.

Open Balkans, also known as the Mini-Schengen Area, was a regional initiative aimed at improving economic and political relations between all Western Balkan countries. It was first mentioned in 2018 and dissolved as an initiative in 2023. The leaders of Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia agreed to create an economic zone in November 2019 to improve political and economic relations and strengthen cultural ties between states. The idea for Open Balkans came from the Berlin Process, with leaders of Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia referring to it as a child of the Berlin Process.

The initiative aimed to provide opportunities for trade, student exchanges, and encourage EU integration among member states. Citizens would only need an ID card to visit other Balkan states, and goods and capital would flow faster, saving over 30 million hours crossing borders each year. The initiative aimed to provide over $3.2 billion to member countries to improve and stabilize the economic spectrum in the Balkans, according to the World Bank in 2021. In July 2021, leaders of member states signed agreements on access to the labor market, movement of goods, and protection against disasters at the Forum for Regional Economic Cooperation in Skopje, North Macedonia.

Nevertheless, this initiative saw a failure on its implementation, mainly due to Kosovo's refusal to be part of it, even in the summits organized, whereas the other two countries Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro refused to join the OB initiative. Joseph (2022) gives reasons for the failure of the Open Balkans initiative. Firstly, historical conflicts made it difficult for countries to cooperate without recognizing each other. Secondly, trade deficits and lack of trust made it challenging to achieve the initiative's goals. The war in Ukraine deepened issues in the region, creating a lack of peace and increasing tensions. Joseph argues that only Serbia would benefit, with the rest being under its influence without creating strong opposition or possible cooperation. He concludes that Open Balkans would deepen the political imbalance and worsen related issues instead of creating cooperation in the region

4. The EU as a peacemaker: blurred line between interests and norms

The Common Security and Defense Policy, which was initially set in the Treaty of Maastricht and then rebuilt in the Treaty of Lisbon, brought forward a dimension of security and peace within the EU's goals and missions. This dimension would bring to the EU strategic command as well political control. Previous to the 1990s; attempts to set up a defense union did not remain successful. However, the ending of the Cold War and the change of the geopolitical setting in Europe brought to the table new differences that the EU had to address in terms of security. While this pillar falls under the category of intergovernmentalism and it's the member states who decide based on their national agenda, the supranational institutions can heavily influence their decision making process and shape their final answer into one common EU approach towards crisis management (Langenhove & Maes, 2012).

With a lack of adequate military capabilities and without a common operational structure, the Union has instrumentalized mainly diplomacy as a tool in achieving peace in conflicts and crisis. Other instruments include humanitarian aid, economic cooperation, trade policies and human rights, all shaped depending on the context, crisis and region (The Diplomatic Service of the European Union, 2021). The EU aims at delivering stabilization and peace through combining conflict prevention, mediation and peacebuilding. Therefore, its goal is to be at the disposal of peace in all stages of a conflict, from prevention to crisis management. It is of crucial importance for these instruments to be used in an adequate timely manner. Through dialogue, the EU aims to restore and reserve peace in the aftermath of conflicts. Critique for this approach mainly lies on the argument that the EU uses a "one-size-fits-all strategy" (Langenhove & Maes, 2012). The lack of flexibility in adopting adequate responses depending on the dynamics of the conflict has been pointed out.

In the case of Bosnia, the union was the primary determinant for the democratic world's policy in BiH. Christian Schmidt, the current OHR, wrote in his report that the prospects for further division and conflict in Bosnia "are very real" and said threats by Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik to withdraw Serb troops from the Bosnian Army and create a separate Serb force and other moves would "ultimately undermine the state's ability to function and carry out its constitutional responsibilities." Eu's response has been to offer reward for threats that Dodik uses to prevent elections if not satisfied with them. This particular position, which might also be linked to some member countries' different enlargement approaches, keeps the EU closer to leaders than to people (Bassuener, 2021).

The unilateral declaration of independence in Kosovo created a political impasse where Kosovo's and Serbia's respective actions aimed to produce zero- sum political outcomes. The EU used the two states' common aspiration to become EU members as an incentive to convince parties to engage in a dialogue process that would contribute to normalization of relations. Starting from 2011, the dialogue

process has often produced ambiguities in which parties relativize the objectives and outcomes of the negotiations.

The role of the EU as the key mediator has been often a subject of public debate and academic research. For the EU itself, involvement has been seen as strategically important for its foreign policy, yet the debate on its success and efficiency focuses exactly on the ambiguity in the substance of what it has achieved or in the process as a whole (Gashi et al., 2017). Furthermore, it has enabled a status of "silent" consensus among its own members on the status of Kosovo and in attempts to agree on promoting a shared narrative (Semenov, 2020) As a matter of fact, there is a substantive difference in the impact EU has in Kosovo and Serbia separately. Kosovo has still the most pro - European society in the Western Balkans, while Serbia's domestic political identity, power of veto players and competing elite strategies has often resulted in occasions where Serbian political elites used the EU to pursue strategies far from EU norms and standards (Subotić, 2010).

The normalization or appeasement of relations in cases of Kosovo and Bosnia respectively has substituted the democratization conditionality. For instance, on one hand, Serbia's accession talks have advanced despite its criticism toward authoritarianism and governments attempts to concentrate power in the executive. On the other hand, the EU appraised its military mission (EUFOR) more than OHR, by agreeing with the UNSC Resolution text that radically denuded standard references to the international Office of the High Representative (OHR) against the fear of vetoing EUFOR.

As stabilitocracy cannot be claimed as the new value of a Good *Europe*, then the EU's role of peacemaker serves prior to the union's stability interests rather to normative power Europe.

Conclusions

Europe must now assume its responsibilities in all areas in order to assert its sovereignty by increasing its defense capabilities, reducing its dependencies and designing a new model of growth and investment by 2030.[9]

The objective of this paper was to examine the process of regional integration in the Western Balkans and highlight both the shared and distinct dynamics that coincide with the EU's normative power within the region. This analysis focused on the EU's ability to foster integration and transformation through the process of socialization and its capacity to effectively play a successful role as a strategic and pivotal peacekeeper through the mechanisms of emulation. Concretely, EU normative power in the Western Balkans has been projected mainly through political

[9] Informal Summit of Versailles, March 2022, retrieved from https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/european-council/2022/03/10-11/ on 1 May, 2023.

conditionality (Richter, 2012), by pushing institutional reforms and through its direct involvement as a so-called "effective peacemaker" (Skara, 2014). Yet, the noticed discrepancy between EU's conditionality for democratization and regional cooperation and Western Balkans public demand for economic prosperity has created an impasse in the union's power to exert influence. Furthermore, progress in terms of democratic conditionality has often been subject to interests and positions of member states rather than a norm assessment. This is clearly noticed in concrete actions such as the cases of Albania and North Macedonia when France, Denmark and Netherlands rejected in 2019, to move forward with their membership bid.

The EU's ideational influence on regionalism and enlargement via integration has naturally followed different logics and as such its impact does not vary only across regions but has rarely led to similar or comparative results even within the region. As Macron has lastly declared: "This is a dispute about vision. The enlargement rules need reform. We mustn't open accession talks with North Macedonia before Albania - there must be a majority for talks with both, together countries develop, not just make pledges." This brings about the realization that integration is not solely determined by merit but is also influenced by the interests of the Union.

Despite the often norm based rhetoric of European leaders, the belief in "normative power is held neither widely nor deeply enough to consistently shape member behavior". The diverse narrative and action in integration do not only lead to a blurred vision for aspiring countries but also, it would diminish the EU's attempts at its global reach based on normative power projections. The ongoing war in Ukraine has pushed the so-called Group of Friends including Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Slovenia and Spain to issue an appeal to overhaul voting on the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). From the Austrian Chancellor perspective, this calls for homogenization while " The diversity of European countries is not a burden[10]". The new voting system might be considered a relief for some Western Balkan countries but can also be interpreted as a shift from norms to interest, given also that norms are less present in the new vision of CFSP. Should a novel voting system be introduced, researchers will delve into its potential implications with regards to the trajectories of integration and the norms involved.

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[10] Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer speech in the Austrian Parliament, May 2023.

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BEYOND THE BALLOT BOX: THE MEANING AND SUBSTANCE OF DEMOCRACY

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Abstract

This paper seeks to make a theoretical contribution to the concept of democracy. The conceptualization of democracy is a widely linked with periodic elections that allow citizens to choose their leaders. However, this paper argues that democracy is more than just a matter of holding elections every few years. This narrow definition overlooks the substance and meaning of democracy, which encompasses a broad range of values and principles beyond the mere act of voting. In particular, the paper highlights three key dimensions of democracy that are critical for its meaningfulness: (1) participation and empowerment, (2) transparency and accountability, and (3) deliberation and collaboration. Through a review of existing literature, the paper demonstrates that these dimensions are interrelated and mutually reinforcing, and contribute to a more robust and sustainable democracy. The paper concludes by arguing that while elections are an important component of democracy, they are not an end in themselves, but rather one of the many tools that can help facilitate and reinforce a meaningful democracy.

Keywords: substantive democracy, procedural democracy, elections, participation, deliberation

Introduction

Recent years have witnessed a disconcerting trend in various corners of the world—the rise of democracy backsliding, coupled with the ascent of authoritarianism and populism. While, democracy is seen as a beacon of freedom, equality, and collective governance, democratic institutions are facing mounting challenges and societies are grappling with shifting political landscapes. Countries that for long have been considered democratic, are challenged by authoritarian and democratic leaders and the success stories of the post-communist countries such as Hungary and Poland, are no longer considered successful and have experienced democratic backsliding. According to the Bertelsmannn Stifung's Transformation Index (BTI), in 2023 there are more autocratically governed states than democracies. Among the 137 countries surveyed, only 67 are still classified as democracies.

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Therefore, it has become imperative to delve deeper into the very essence of democracy. This academic paper embarks on an exploration of democracy's multifaceted dimensions, aiming to shed light on its intricate meanings and implications, particularly in the wake of the contemporary surge in authoritarian and populist tendencies.

One of the main debates around the meaning of democracy is that between 'procedural democracy' and 'substantive' democracy, which has been part of the history of the modern democracy since its establishment. The debate is mainly focused on the meaning of democracy and its main characteristics. Such debate is considered as imperative in the consolidated democracies, and it is even more so in the post-communist countries. Back in 1997, Kaldor and Vejdova claimed that the Central and Eastern European countries were experiencing a new variant of democracy, which was influenced by the communist legacies of these countries (1997, p.61). Almost a decade later, while exploring the dynamic relationship between democratization and the process of EU integration in the context of the post-communist countries, Vachudova (2005) argued that post-communist countries moved with different pace towards democratization. She highlighted domestic factors, initial conditions after the collapse of communism, historical legacies and regional differences as factors that influenced the democratization process and the EU integration of these countries. Countries with stronger institutions, less corruption, and a more educated populace at the onset of their transition had an advantage in democratizing. The legacy of the communist era varied from one country to another, impacting their trajectories. In terms of regional influences, countries in CEE, especially those with interaction with Western Europe, tended to have smoother transition compared to some nations in the Balkans or the former Soviet Union. Furthermore, in countries where civil society was active, robust, and engaged, democratic reforms were more likely to take hold.

In mid 1990s, Gatti claimed that '20 of these states [were] facing the prospect of neither democracy nor totalitarianism' and that democracy [was] facing 'a partial retrenchment' (1996, p. 169). For him, the transition [was] producing a group of semi-authoritarian (and therefore semi-democratic), nationalist, populist regimes that may permit free enterprise, […] allow free parliamentary debates […], and even tolerate something resembling a free press' (pp. 169-170). The fear of Gatti was that the greatest part of the 27 post-communist countries would become semi-authoritarian or semi-democratic regimes with limited freedom to elect new leaders, curtailed rights to criticize the state's highest authorities, self-censored "free" press, and circumscribed right to strike for trade unions. In these regimes, people are left alone to practice their religion, pursue the education they wand and travel abroad, and thus there is no interference of the state in the private sphere (p. 194-196). Obviously, Gatti depicts a system where there is no public life in the sense that people don't participate in the public sphere, and they don't have real power on the elected officials. After thirty years of communism collapse the fear of Gatti remains

real and true. The deterioration of democracy in Poland, Hungary, Serbia and many other countries of Southeast and Central Europe is an indication that democracy is in perils and as such it is important to have a good understanding of it.

As mentioned earlier, democracy is backsliding in the consolidated democracies as well. In his book "Ruling the Void: The Hollowing of Western Democracy", Mair (2014) argues that representative democracy in the Western democracies is experiencing changes due to many factors. First there is a marked decline in popular engagement with mainstream parties which is evident in lower voter turn outs, reduced party memberships and a general feeling of disconnect between citizens and their representatives. Second, political parties have moved to the center, leading thus to a narrowing of policy choices offered to the electorate. Third, there's been an increasing reliance on technocrats, and independent bodies to make crucial policy decisions which have contributed to the wakening of the link between citizens and their representatives. European Union (EU) as a supranational entity has altered the dynamics of national politics because as more powers are shifted to the EU level, the national parliaments have lost some of their influence, which strengthen the feeling that national democratic institutions are less relevant. With the decline in popular engagement and the convergence of mainstream parties, a void emerges in the political space, a void which can be filled by populist parties, technocrats or other non-traditional political actors which can lead to more volatile landscapes, as seen in various Western democracies. In this context it is of paramount importance to discuss on democracy, what it is and how should it be understood.

This paper is an attempt to delve into the debate on the meaning of democracy, discuss on the scholars' points of view and propose how democracy should be understood. The paper is divided in four parts. The first part gives a presentation of the problem of defining democracy and an introduction to the main debates. The second part present what is understood with meaningful democracy and the third part present the main arguments of the scholars that argue that democracy is procedural. The final part concludes that in order to be functional, democracy should be meaningful.

1. The debate: what is democracy?

There is a plethora of authors who have been and still are engaged in providing a theoretical framework for democracy. The term itself means rule by the people and 'a more precise definition is difficult to formulate, because democracy is a dynamic entity that has acquired many different meanings over the course of time' (Sörensen, 1998, p. 23). Although difficult to agree on a definition on democracy (Mair, 2014, p. 105-6), the scholars have, at least, delimited 'the territory within which the debate ... has taken place' (p. 9). The territory of this debate extends from a minimalist conception of democracy (first conceptualized by Schumpeter and dubbed as 'minimalist' by Przeworski) which relies simply on the elections as a mechanism to

choose political leadership to a more comprehensive, substantial one, which considers as democratic only a society where the citizens have a final control on the political agenda and on distribution of resources (Sörensen, 1998, p. 9-10). These models delimit the territory of the analysis conducted in this paper as well.

Conceptualizing democracy poses a difficult task to accomplish. The vas literature which praises it or highlight its shortcomings is an indication of this. There are scholars, who criticize democracy for poor judgment being based on voters who are ignorant, ideologically biased, uniformed and prejudices (Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Ahlstrom - Vij, 2012). For Brennan, reducing the number of democratic processes, such as restricting the electorate to more knowledgeable citizens, could be the solution (Brennan and Landemore, 2021). On the other hand, Landemore, argues that more inclusive democratic processes, such as referenda and direct democracy, could help improve democracy (Brennan and Landemore, 2021). Another proposed solution is to educate the electorate about democratic facts and procedures by appealing to their agential interests or introducing monetary incentives for learning (Somin, 2023). There are scholars who praises democracy for addressing complex problems of contemporaneity with the help of an electorate which by being very diverse is the only which could provide solutions to these complex problems (in Samrazija and Cassam, 2023, p. 2). These perspectives attempt to address the challenges facing democratic systems and to enhance the participation and engagement of citizens in democratic processes. However, the effectiveness of these proposed solutions is still a matter of ongoing debate among scholars.

The paper will be focused on exploring what is meant with ‘meaningful’ and ‘minimalist democracy’. The ‘meaningful democracy’ is rather a normative approach of explaining the democracy, while the ‘minimalist model’ claims to be ‘realistic’ and based on empirical evidence. Although one of the competing paradigms is normative and the other is descriptive, the demarcation is not that sharp and both models embark on normative and descriptive reasoning at the same time. It is because of this similarity in methodology that the comparison among the two conceptualizations of democracy becomes possible.

The debate is focused on the contemporary society, in the countries considered as consolidated democracy, where democracy has become ‘the only game in town’ (Linz and Stepan, 1996, p. 5). It is important to establish such frontiers of discussion, otherwise the quasi-democratic countries, one-party systems, dictatorships which hold elections far from being fair, would bring implications in our discussion, which are nor the aim of this paper, neither possible to be dealt within.

The paper explores the models of democracy, mainly focused on the meaningful and electoral aspects of it. Furthermore, it compares the two models by embarking on normative and descriptive analysis, in order to reach to a conclusion. It concludes that democracy ought to be meaningful and as such it cannot be reduced to simply holding elections once every few years.

2. Meaningful democracy

Scholars tent to use the word substantive, rather than meaningful. Therefore, in this analysis the two terms will be interchanged with each-other, but convening the same meaning. There are cases when scholars don't use neither of the terms, but all the same we will consider them as substantive or meaningful conceptualizations, since, in addition to the 'electing of leaders' dimension, they offer other dimensions to the concept of democracy. For example, according to Barry (1974) "The normal way of understanding the term "democracy" is to suppose that it refers to the internal distribution of power within a political unit … [A] state is democratic if the government acts in accordance with the wishes of the citizens—and it is not less democratic if there are some things of concern to the citizens that the state has limited control over, like sea pollution, nuclear war or worldwide inflation (pp. 494-5).

Following in the same vein, Cohen considers as intrinsic to democracy the dimension of participation of the members of a community in their own government. According to him '[d]emocracy is that system of community government in which, by and large, the members of a community participate, or may participate, directly or indirectly, in making of decisions which affect them all (1971, p. 7). For him this participation is continuous since policy is not established once and for all but is in continuous change due to changes in the socio-economic environment. For him participation in decision-making doesn't mean that right decisions are consequently taken. Even when a decision is not the best, if it is the result of a participatory process, then the community which made possible this, is a democratic community. For him, democracy is not confined within the boundaries of procedures, such as voting. On the contrary, democracy is constituted by 'the living process of citizen participation [and] not the forms through which it may be realized' (1970, p. 1).

Schmitter and Karl, consider as dimensions of democracy: accountability, cooperation, freedom, and deliberation (1991, pp. 76-79). Rulers are held accountable for their actions by citizens. Cooperation is essential even when during elections we have competing political leaders and parties. But in order to compete they should cooperate with each other: 'They must be capable of acting collectively through parties, associations, and movements in order to select candidates, articulate preferences, petition authorities, and influence policies' (p. 79). One may notice that in order for democracy to function are needed not only parties to participate in elections, but a web of organizations, associations and movements that mobilize people and make possible for them to make known their views and interests as well as ensure the accountability of the political leaders. Furthermore, this web of organizations, as well as all freedoms (of thought and expression), makes possible the deliberation among citizens. Deliberation is needed to 'discover their common needs, and to resolve their differences without relying on some supreme central authority' (p. 79).

Liberalism gives a small contribution toward the model of meaningful democracy. There are different liberal-democrat theories but only in one of them, the development democracy, we find a concern for democracy itself and thus for it to be meaningful. Since central to liberalism is the notion of 'freedom', it is understandable that everything, democracy included, will be a dependant variable of 'freedom' and will be judged and evaluated based on criterions that derive from such notion. With regard to development democracy, it considers as imperative the participation of the individual in political life, because this ensures protection of their interests and 'an informed, committed and developing citizenry. Political involvement is essential to the highest and harmonious expansion of individual capacities' (Held, 2006, p. 92). Followers of deliberative democracy consider deliberation as very essential to democracy because "the terms and conditions of political association proceed through the free and reasoned assent of its citizens. The 'mutual justifiability' of political decisions is the legitimate basis for seeking solutions to collective problems" (p. 253).

For Held, democracy would be meaningful or 'worth its name' if citizens had the actual power to actively participate in state' decision-making process. This participation should be guaranteed by a bill of rights and should be considered as an entitlement for all citizens (2006, p. 261, 277). Furthermore, the political decisions should be accountable and deliberation should organize the political life which should be central all people's lives. For him people are not divided by conflicting interests and values, but rather they belong to 'a plurality of identities, cultural forms and interests, each perhaps articulating different prescriptive regimes' and in such a context 'democracy is seen ... to offer a basis for tolerating, discussing and negotiating difference (2006, p. 261). Democracy is the only system in which disputes can be negotiated in a fair and just way. Held introduces the 'principle of autonomy' according which 'persons ... should be free and equal in the process of deliberation about the conditions of their own lives and in the determination of these conditions, so long as they do not deploy [the political] framework to negate the rights of others' (p. 264). Citizens should enjoy the conditions for 'effective participation' and 'enlightened understanding', otherwise they will be marginalized and not in the position to pursue collective decision-making effectively. Held, develops fully the idea of 'principle of autonomy' and explain how it should function, but this is not the purpose of this paper and thus we will not explore further this model.

Anderson (2006) proposes a new way to approach democracy. She praises the diversity and deliberation of the wide array of people who constitute 'The Sovereign People', who only by being so diverse and having the possibility to deliberate can provide solutions to the pressing social problems. She comments that the diversity of the people is intrinsic to democracy, because 'citizens from different walks of life have different experiences of problems and policies of public interest', and their deliberation becomes valuable because it is a 'means of pooling this asymmetrically

distributed information' (p. 14). The conditions surrounding a deliberative process can either facilitate or hinder the production of the knowledge and insights that are necessary for democratic inquiry to work effectively in solving collective problems. Scholars of deliberative democracy have recognized that the informal public spheres where opinion-forming processes occur on a daily basis are a crucial aspect of a democratic society's broader deliberative system (Habermas, 1996, pp. 21-30; Mansbridge et al., 2012).

In addition to deliberation, Dewey emphasizes the importance of other democratic institutions that help sustain its dynamism and capacity for change. Dewey argues that periodic elections, a free press that questions state power, petitions to the government, public opinion polling, protests, and public comment on proposed administrative regulations all play a vital role in institutionalizing fallibilism and an experimental attitude with respect to state policies. These mechanisms provide feedback and accountability, which help governments revise their policies based on evidence obtained from the public. In Dewey's view, votes and talk reinforce one another, with votes helping to ensure that government officials take citizens' verbal feedback seriously, and talk helping to define and articulate the message conveyed by votes. Dewey believed that legal arrangements such as representation and periodic elections alone were not enough for democracy to work effectively. He believed that culture had to change too, so that citizens at large would welcome diversity and discussion and adopt an experimental attitude toward social arrangements. (Dewey, 1981, p. 167)

The conceptualizations of meaningful democracy mentioned above are congruent in that participation and accountability are essential to democracy. Freedom, cooperation, solidarity, development, equality are other dimensions which have been seen as intrinsic to democracy from certain scholars. Therefore, we will consider as meaningful a system which presents if not all, at least some of these characteristics. However, the minimalist conceptualization of democracy, considers that none of these is essential and democracy is but just a method to ensure political leadership. In the following section we will explore in more details these school of thought.

3. Minimalist conception of democracy: Schumpeter and Przeworski

Schumpeter is one of the representatives of the minimalist conception of democracy. He is against of what he considered as the classical conceptualization of democracy, that is the political system "which realizes the common good by making the people itself decide issues through the election of individuals who are to assemble in order to carry out its will." Schumpeter offered a less philosophical and normative conceptualization of democracy. For him '[t]he democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote'

(1992 [1942], p. 269). The competitive elections provide a criterion which helps distinguish democratic government form others. According to his "theory of competitive leadership" competition is among political leaders who provide a competitive offering to the people. This means that the interests of people, or groups of population, are addressed only when the political leaders make them part of the political agenda, because 'even if strong and definite they remain latent, often for decades, until they are called to life by some political leader who turns them into political factors' (p. 270).

The competition among political offerings functions similarly with that in the economic sphere. The political offer is like the economical one: it's looking for voters who, likewise in the market, will choose among various offerings. Voting or the electoral method, as he calls it, is 'the only one available for communities of any size' (p. 271). Since elections are conducted periodically, it means that by voting people not only choose those who will govern in the coming period, but they choose as well whether those who are currently holding the office will remain or leave. Elections have the functions of producing and evicting a government. The first means the acceptance of a leader or a group of leaders, while the second means the withdrawal of this acceptance. The 'withdrawal function' is the only mean by which electorates can control the political leaders; '[...]electorates normally do not control their political leaders in any way except by refusing to re-elect them or the parliamentary majorities that support them' (p. 272). Finally, Schumpeter concludes that it is not the rule of the people but the rule of majority: "people is a mosaic that [majority] fails to 'represent'" (p. 273).

Przeworksi follows Schumpeter in his logic. He comments that democracy is just but elections. It does not 'assure either rationality, or representation, or equality' (1999, p. 43). It does not assure rationality because individual interests are not harmonious and there is no 'one collective interests that everyone wants to be coercively enforced' (p. 31). On the contrary interests are often in conflict and as such none could claim the ultimate rationality. It does not assure representation, because the rulers are selected based on the 'majority' rule, which means that they - theoretically - represents the interests of the majority which is not equal to the common interest. Lastly, it does not assure equality because it is 'obvious'. This last one is a claim made on empirical evidence, while 'why it is so remains perplexing' (p. 43). According to him, elections make possible that democracy 'survives'. Elections mediate conflicts of values and interests, and since these last ones are always present even 'in the end all coalitions have been formed, the practical consensus has been elaborated, and all arguments have been exhausted' (p. 45). This mediation avoids any bloodshed and assuring their 'peaceful regulation' (p. 45). Przeworski's paradigm is procedural. He considers as imperative the voting process and not the discussions and ideas which guided the people in such process. What counts the most in the end is 'the counting heads, the sheer force of numbers, not...the validity of reasons' (p. 48). The state functions because the 'winner' - voting

generates 'winners' and 'losers' - is vested with authority, and power to exercise coercions and ensure obedience of all people, whether they have voted pro or con the said winner. When all have accepted the rules of game, which means participate in voting and accept its results, and act accordingly, then democracy is legitimate. (p. 48). However, voting is not just a process which enables to find out who the winners are, and thus who will govern; simultaneously it presents an 'information about passions, values, and interests' (p. 48).

Both Schumpeter and Przeworski claim that they are giving a realist description of democracy. Nonetheless, those who defend the meaningful model of democracy have another account on that. In the following section we will see the arguments that defenders of meaningful democracy use to tell that democracy is not just election but much more than that.

Conclusions

The minimalist conception of democracy has been highly criticized by the defenders of meaningful democracy. Held comments that the minimalist conception claims to represent empirical evidence, which does not help to refute the normative ideals of democracy. Therefore, if the reality shows that there are no political equality and equal participation, it does not mean that people should not try to pursue their achievement (1991, p. 153). Moreover, Held argues against the claim that the bulk of population is not interested and not involved in politics and that it lacks capacity and will for agency. He observes that politics is about health, education, employment and unemployment, inequality and social conflict, environment, war, peace, which are not at all remote from people's lives; on the contrary they are, and consequently politics is, essential to their lives (1991, p. 153).

Indeed, the history of democracy is the history of the marginalised groups who have claimed their rights. It is the history of slaves, women, blacks, workers, homosexuals, environmentalists and the list could go longer with new groups which identify themselves as marginalised. The change didn't come from the political leaders, but from those who were directly affected by government's political agenda. Finally, Held argues against the Schumpeter's claim that peoples' participation in election is simply a mean to elect political leadership. Held comments that even in the case when people are manipulated and have not participated in agenda setting, they believe that they have done so. When they elect the leaders, they do so because they consider them right, correct, worthy and their representatives (1991, p. 156).

Another critique to the minimalist model is that it does not analyse the periods between elections. Schmitter and Karl, note that 'during intervals between elections, citizens can seek to influence public policy through a wide variety of other intermediaries: interest associations, social movements, locality groupings, clientelist arrangements, and so forth' (1991, p. 78). Indeed, the existence of a civil society is considered imperative to democracy even to scholars such as Dahl who

has designed a procedural model of democracy. Przworski claims to have followed the line of Dahl (1996, p. 39) when defending the minimalist conceptualization of democracy. Even though Dahl considers elections to be important for democracy, he considers important too, other features such as the freedom to form and join organizations, freedom of expression and alternative sources of information (1982, p. 10). In such context, it is rather difficult for the political leaders to manipulate the people, because they will be challenged by other organizations, which simultaneously provide information that could comply and/or contradict with what these political leaders state. Consequently, these organizations can mobilize people against a political agenda in which they [the people] didn't participate. Thus, democracy even when performs bad is not simply elections.

We may also add that the minimalist model lack in analysing the periods between elections. Schmitter and Karl, notes that 'during intervals between elections, citizens can seek to influence public policy through a wide variety of other intermediaries: interest associations, social movements, locality groupings, clientelist arrangements, and so forth' (1991, p. 78). Indeed, the existence of a civil society is considered imperative to democracy even to scholars such as Dahl who has designed a procedural model of democracy. Przworski claims to have followed the line of Dahl (1996, p. 39) when defending the minimalist conceptualization of democracy. While being procedural and considering elections as important, Dahl, considers as essential to democracy - among others - the freedom to form and join organizations, freedom of expression and alternative sources of information (1982, p. 10). Freedom to form and join organizations, means that such organization exist or should exist and with 'organizations' is not meant only political parties. Furthermore, freedom of expression is not limited only to the expression of votes, but of expression in a wider sense. It is an expression that could be materialized in various organizations. This freedom of expression is linked with 'alternative source of information'. This last one is very important because it means that the political leaders are not the only ones who possess the information. Therefore, their attempts to manipulate the people will be challenged by other organizations, associations which simultaneously provide information that could comply and/or contradict with what these political leaders state. Hence, when rights are institutionalized, democracy even when performs bad is not simply elections.

So far, we have been pointing out the weakness of minimalist democracy theory. Nonetheless, we still need to prove that democracy should be meaningful, not because the minimalist theory is not convincing, but because there are valid reasons to defend an approach which opts for meaningfulness. An understanding of the system of governance will help to do this. A system of governance, determines how to have access and who can have access to the principal public offices. Thus, it establishes the characteristics that actors should have and should have not in order to have access in the public offices and at the same time it establishes the strategies that actors should

use in order to have such access. Finally, all these rules and strategies should be institutionalized in a constitution (Schmitter and Karl, 1991, p.76).

Furthermore, although democracy is commonly viewed as a form of government, its implications go beyond that. The experience of living in a democratic society or not can have a significant influence on one's personal and collective identities. Additionally, democracy can be regarded as a set of activities that individuals engage in, including but not limited to casting votes, collaborating to make decisions, identifying resources to tackle problems, and working together to achieve shared goals (Mathews, 2014, pp. 118-120).

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HOW CAN THE DEVELOPMENT OF E-GOVERNMENT IN THE EUROPEAN UNION INCREASE? BUILDING AN EXPLANATORY STATISTICAL MODEL

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Abstract

The main premise from which we start in the construction of this article is that, in the contemporary era, the need for digitalization and facilitating access to public services has become an imperative in the vast majority of liberal-democratic states. Digitalization is an inevitable process in the natural course of the contemporary age, considering that its benefits have been more than tangible in the vast majority of cases, and e-Government is precisely a concretization of the benefits of digitalization. However, the development of e-Government is not a simple process, as it requires the presence of several factors, which this article will present, analysing their relevance. Moreover, in this article we will also note the main structural differences at European level in the implementation of e-Government: which countries have reached an advanced level of e-Government development, which countries have serious problems in developing e-Government and, above all, why these differences exist.

Keywords: e-Government, digitalization, European Union, corruption, education

Introduction

The phenomenon of digitalization is one that, especially in recent years, has become increasingly relevant, particularly in the liberal democracies of the European Union, on the premise that a digital revolution is transforming the world as we know it at unprecedented speed. The digital revolution, however, is not without its problems, especially structural ones, considering that EU officials are more than aware of the existence of several limits to digitalization, in particular those concerning the digital divide and the lack of investment dedicated to it (Negreiro and Madiega, 2019). In particular, the main focus of European officials has been on the

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digital divide, considering that there is a notable difference between internet access in urban areas and internet access in rural areas, even though there have been various attempts to reduce these differences in recent years. The digital divide, therefore, plays a particularly important role in terms of digitalization and, moreover, if we move from the rural-urban dichotomy to the European Union as a whole, we will see how the digital divide is a supra-national phenomenon, which also marks the degree of development of e-Government in the different European states.

Therefore, in order to be able to deepen the analysis in this article, it is necessary to look at the digital divide rather as a divide between the different European countries, where some countries have managed to provide the necessary infrastructure for their own citizens to enjoy digitalization (and e-Government), while others, for economic or political reasons, have remained at an early stage in this regard. Inevitably, this leads to varying degrees of e-Government implementation among EU countries, which can be seen in the E-Government Development Index (EGDI), an indicator calculated every two years by the United Nations. This indicator, however, will be discussed in detail in the next sections, when the multivariate regression equations is presented. As a prerequisite for better understanding what factors can contribute to a country's development, we must investigate what causes can increase the level of e-Government development in each European country. The need for this research stems from the fact that the contemporary era is inevitably moving towards digitalization in every area of life. Rather, today we are living through the Fourth Industrial Revolution. In this sense, the dependent variable that will be used, will be the E-Government Development Index (EGDI), stipulated by the United Nations, about which we will try to understand which are the main predictors that determine it. Subsequently, after transposing the methodology, the main focus of the present article will be directed towards an in-depth understanding of the relationship between predictors and e-Government development, in an attempt to translate the results obtained from the regression equation into everyday reality.

The need for digitalization, in this respect, is the starting point for the analysis that follows, and we should consider the following research question: what factors determine the evolution of e-Government in EU countries?

Alongside this question, we also have sub-questions such as:

Q1: What is e-Government and what does it entail?

Q2: What are the differences between government and governance?

Q3: But between e-Government and e-Governance?

Q4: What is the role of citizens in the implementation and process of e-Government?

The purpose of our article is to understand how the e-Government process works: top-down (political class to people) or bottom-up (people to political class). By pursuing this goal, we want to highlight the factors because of which e-

Government and e-Government exist. Also, we must consider the objectives of this analysis, which are:

Ob1: Analyze the score of e-Government in the countries of the European Union.

Ob2: Explore the digital divide between the European Union countries.

Ob3: Understand why e-Government differences between European Union countries exists.

As a methodology, we will undertake two linear regression equations: the first using the most recent e-Government data and its predictors (we will rely on data from 2021 and 2022), and the second will be a panel regression, where we will try to analyze the development of e-Government in the decade 2010-2020. We decided to undertake both a cross section and a panel regression because we are interested in the factors that determine e-Government in the short term (through the cross section regression) and also over a longer period, of about a decade in our case (through the panel regression). We have decided to use the data provided by the United Nations on e-Government because, even though it is provided every two years, it comes from a legitimate and globally recognized source. The paper will be structured in this way:

The first section scrutinizes the literature on governance, government, e-Governance and e-Government. In this section we observe the differences between governance and government, but also between e-Governance and e-Government.

The second section resumes the empirical approach and the data used, illustrating both the cross section regression and the panel data regression, the period of time subject of our analysis and the number of cases observed.

The third section concerns data interpretation and the descriptive side of the analysis, demonstrating how the data obtained from the regressions is strongly bond to the social reality of the European Union countries.

Considering all that has been said so far, we will start the whole analysis by introducing the field of e-Government (and, then, e-Governance).

1. Understanding the differences between (e-)Governance and (e-)Government

To begin with, we consider this definition: “E-governance involves new channels for accessing government, new styles of leadership, new methods of transacting business, and new systems for organizing and delivering information and services. Its potential for enhancing the governing process is immeasurable” (Finger and Pécoud 2003). But before providing further definitions, as there is no general consensus on what e-Governance and e-Government mean, we will further define what governance and government stand for, two concepts that may pass as synonyms, but differ in that they are a process carried out by government to manage, distribute and redistribute resources, as well as to oversee relations between individuals, communities and societies with the aim of achieving an ideal of economic, social and human development.

As definitions offered by international organizations, we can put the one given by the United Nations, for which "Governance refers to the exercise of political and administrative authority at all levels to manage a country's affairs. It comprises the mechanisms, processes and institutions, through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences. Specific reference is made to democratic governance as a process of creating and sustaining an environment for inclusive and responsive political processes and settlements. The institutional and human capacities for governance determine the way in which the effectiveness of public policies and strategies is attained, especially in service delivery" (United Nations 2012); or the one issued by the International Institute of Administrative Sciences for which "Governance refers to the process whereby elements in society wield power and authority, and influence and enact policies and decisions concerning public life, and economic and social development. Governance is a broader notion than government, whose principal elements include the constitution, legislature, executive and judiciary. Governance involves interaction between these formal institutions and those of civil society. Governance has no automatic normative connotation. However, typical criteria for assessing governance in a particular context might include the degree of legitimacy, representativeness, popular accountability and efficiency with which public affairs are conducted." (International Institute of Administrative Sciences - IIAS 1996, as cited in: Bannister and Connoly 2012); The two terms government and governance are not differentiated by much, so some authors use the two terms synonymously or frame governance as the process of government: "Governments are specialized institutions that contribute to governance" (Saxena 2005). But some authors argue that governance encompasses not only government but also other stakeholders, working with both informal and formal institutions in the running of society and that there are different forms of governance, from market form to hierarchy (Bannister and Connoly 2012).

These definitions can be divided into 2 categories:

- Structural governance refers to its content and includes "processes, structures, lines of authority, laws, regulations, stakeholders, forms of communication and responsibilities", those "mechanisms by which power is exercised, decisions made, policy is created or changed and its implementation achieved" (Bannister and Connoly 2012)
- Normative governance: shows what structural governance should look like and includes features such as "transparency, accountability, integrity, honesty, impartiality, efficiency and so on that governance is desired to enable, to possess or to deliver. Structural governance may be designed to support or achieve normative aims, but in itself it is about how something is done, not about whether or not the way it is done is efficient (or honest or fair). In summary, normative governance qualifies structural governance and structural governance may be,

but does not have to be, designed to deliver or support norms" (Bannister and Connoly 2012).

Thus, we can say that government is intrinsic to governance, but governance, as idealized in definitions, can lack government. Indeed, structural governance (namely the political framework within government activity takes place) is government itself.

1.1. E-Governance and E-Government

With the development of technology and the advent of the internet, many applications have been developed to connect individuals and enhance human interaction, so national governments have expanded into the electronic area, digitalizing services and interacting more with society. So, countries started to digitalize their bureaucratic services, using technology and the internet to automate ("replacing current human-executed processes which involve accepting, storing, processing, outputting or transmitting information"), informatize ("supporting current human-executed information processes") and transform ("creating new ICT-executed information processes or supporting new human-executed information processes") (Heeks 2001). However, quite recently, in the early 2000s, the term e-Government was predominantly used in India and is now expressed by concepts such as digitization and transformative government, and can be defined as the process by which information and telecommunication technology is embedded in public services, public administration, the democratic process and the relationship between citizens, civil society, the private sector and the State (Bannister and Connoly 2012).

There are many definitions of e-Governance, but they all revolve around information and communication technologies, among which we recall the definition proposed by UNESCO, where "The public sector's use of Information and Communication Technologies with the aim of improving information and service delivery, encouraging citizen participation in the decision-making process and making government more accountable, transparent and effective" (UNESCO, as cited in Bannister and Connoly 2012 apud) and the one offered by UNPAN where: "e-Governance can be defined as the application of ICT tools in (1) the interaction between government and citizens and businesses, and (2) in internal government operations to simplify and improve democratic governance" (Bannister and Connoly 2012 apud UNPAN). A comprehensive definition defines e-Government as „the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and the Internet to enhance the access to and delivery of all facets of government services and operations for the benefit of citizens, businesses, employees, and other stakeholders" (Thompson, Srivastava and Jiang 2008).

Authors in the field propose the following definitions for e-Governance: "should be seen to encompass all ICTs, but the key innovation is computer networks - from intranets to the Internet - creating a wealth of new digital connections:

Connections within government - permitting 'joined-up thinking'. Connections between government and NGOs/citizens - strengthening accountability. Connections between government and business/citizens - transforming service delivery. Connections within and between NGOs - supporting learning and concerted action. Connections within and between communities - building social and economic development" (Heeks 2001).

E-governance is composed of "information technology, people, and governments" (Ramadoss și Palanisamy 2004) and means "the use of information media to increase the degree of interaction between government and society, increase the effectiveness and efficiency of administrations and aims to support and simplify governance for e-governance community comprised of citizens, civil society organizations, private companies, government lawmakers, and regulators on networks" (Ramadoss și Palanisamy 2004). We see that e-Government is thus defined to "that a process is taking place, whereas e-Government encompasses all use of digital information technology (primarily computers and networks) in the public sector" (Heeks 2006). For us, e-Government means the use of information and communication technologies to solve citizens' problems, to eliminate time and resource costs for citizens as well as for the state, to eliminate transaction costs between economic agents in the country, and to increase public participation in the process of elaborating and deciding on public policies.

Like any process, e-Government (and e-Governance) needs to set itself goals to be achieved. The first objective of e-Government is to digitalize the services offered by the state and to inform the population, and for e-Governance "the strategic objective of e-Governance is to support and simplify governance for all parties; government, citizens and businesses" and „"to enhance access to and delivery of government services to benefit citizens" (Basu 2004).

Other objectives of e-Governance are: improved government decisions; increased citizen trust in government; increased government accountability and transparency; ability to accommodate the public will in the information-age; to effectively involve stakeholders, including NGOs, business, and interested citizen in new ways of meeting public challenges (Clift 2003).

For the purpose of this paper, e-Government implies a status quo for which an e-State is necessary, which includes 3 categories:

Table 1. Representation of the E-State

E-government definition	E-administration definition	E-governance definition
Interorganizational relationships including policy coordination and policy implementation and by the delivery of services online or through other electronic means to citizens	Intraorganizational relationships or the internal and public sector management component	Facilitates the interactions between citizens, government organizations and elected officials and how the internet can improve the governing and policy making process
Developing citizen-centric programs	Strategic planning in transitioning to electronic delivery of services	How technology (particularly the web) is transforming governing process
Promotion and enhancing citizen participation	Quantifying cost-effectiveness of electronic service delivery	E-federalism: the changing relationship among the levels of government
Perfecting Online service delivery through analysis and evaluation; measuring efficiency and benchmarking against other forms of service delivery	Benchmarking and performance measurement	Social implications - the digital divides
Country Indexing (performance measurement benchmarking): portal analysis; website analysis	Human resource management issues like training and recruitment, deployment of staff and maximizing existing resources.	Administrative professionalism: e-ethics; increased transparency
		E-democracy: Enhancing citizen participation; online voting; Issues of Ethics, security and privacy; Fundraising for the e-campaign; increased transparency

Sources: United Nations, 2022

1.2. Effects of e-Government

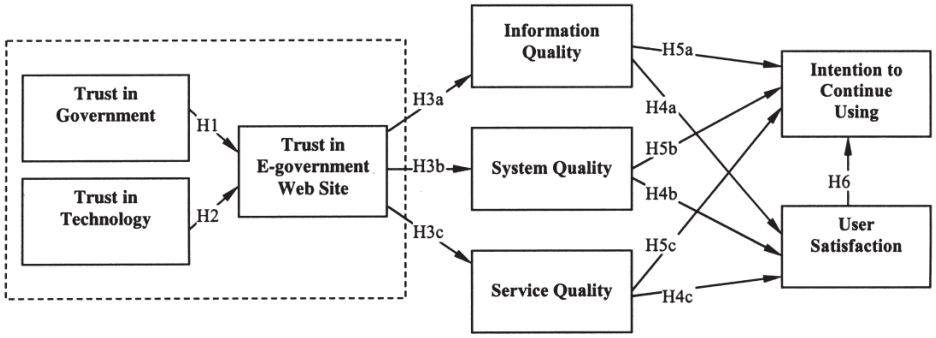
One can ask what are the consequences of e-Government for a state. According to Basu (2004), the e-Government "will generate new styles of leadership, new ways of debating and deciding strategies, new ways of transacting business, new ways of listening to citizens and communities, and new ways of organizing and delivering information" (Basu 2004). Also, e-Government is perceived as a tool by

which "citizens of a country can choose the method by which they will interact with government so that to advance democratic expression, human dignity and autonomy, support economic development and encourage the fair and efficient delivery of services" (Finger and Pécoud 2003).

Other effects of this process are trends such as e-democracy and e-citizens, or Public Net-Work which it represents "the strategic use of ICTs to better implement established public policy goals and programs through direct and diverse stakeholder involvement online" (Clift 2003). Among the consequences of e-Government we found the process of decentralization of political power because the implementation of an electronic system of government requires some decentralization of responsibilities and processes, so that governments have to comply if they want to digitize state services and develop a more friendly and easy collaboration with citizens (Basu 2004), as well as e-voting, but this is still a closed chapter for most countries with a fairly high degree of e-Government. However, we should not forget that e-Government also means other effects on the state, such as trust, which we will talk about soon, reduced state spending, quality services and time saved by citizens.

While this aspect underlies all governance, e-Governance has brought into question the concept of good Governance which is an exercise of economic, political, and administrative authority to better manage affairs of a country at all levels. It is not difficult for people in developed countries to imagine a situation in which all interaction with "government can be done through one counter 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, without waiting in lines" (Basu 2004), which clearly shows what e-Government would mean.

Figure 1. Explanatory model of trust in the process of digitalization



Sources: Teo et al., 2008

Despite the enthusiasm created around this concept, its application is delayed either by the ability of governments to implement these projects and achieve certain objectives, or by citizens for whom the use of public administration websites is either not easy or the interaction is unsatisfactory, and according to theories that there are two cases of users, "initial usage and continued usage", which states that in most

cases after initial usage of e-Government Web sites, many users revert to traditional ways for acquiring information and services, such as telephone inquiry, personal visits, and so forth" (Thompson, Srivastava and Jiang 2008). According to these users, the reasons for not continuing with online services are due to the lack of quality of the system in providing information and services. Another reason for avoiding the use of digital government websites is the lack of trust citizens have in government and technology to ensure the security of data and transactions.

The need for e-Government has many reasons, ranging from those for better, innovative government, increased democracy, participation, accountability and political transparency (government effectiveness reasons) to those for government efficiency (faster government, faster access to more public services, greater public access to public documents and budget, as well as the availability of continuous interaction with the public administration) and reduction of costs of the bureaucratic apparatus (economic reasons). In addition to these reasons, the pursuit for e-Government has emerged with the development of technology, with the increase in the number of internet users and the digitalization of many human activities. Also, with the increasing mobility of people, even within the European Union, the states had to implement e-Government, so that citizens can get their necessary documents in digital format and also work with other institutions online, having considerable time and mobility advantages.

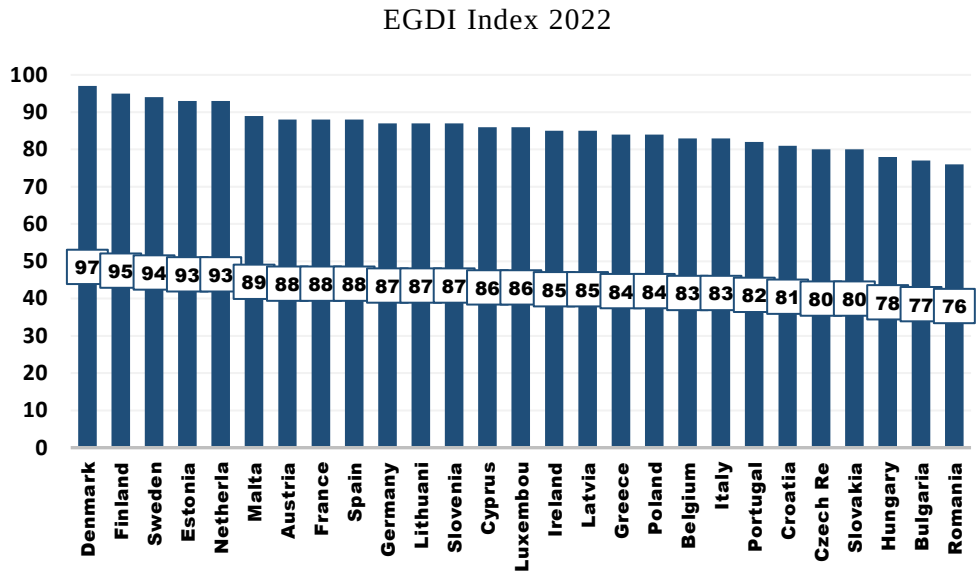
2. Data and methodology

As mentioned above, the dependent variable that we will use in the first regression equation (as in the second one) is the score obtained by each European Union country in terms of the degree of development of e-Government, in the EGDI (E-Government Development Index). This indicator, which is composed of three other indicators (Online Service Index, Telecommunication Infrastructure Index and Human Capital Index) (United Nations 2023) gives a score from 0 to 100 for each country of the world, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 shows that Romania ranks at the "bottom" of the EGDI ranking (with a score of 76 out of 100), while Denmark is the country at the top, with a score of 97/100. Based on this ranking, we set out to stipulate a multivariate regression equation, from which we retain the importance of corruption's levels in defining the degree of development of e-Government. This characteristic shows us that in countries where corruption plays an important role in defining public policies, the development of e-Government will be poor. This is possible because in a country where we have a higher score in the corruption index elaborated by the Global Talent Competitiveness Index, de facto, corruption is mitigated (for example, Denmark has a score of 100.00 and ranks 1st, while Greece has a score of 47.95 and ranks 49th). So, we note that a first explanatory variable is corruption, obtained in our case from the Global Talent Competitiveness Index for the year 2021 (INSEAD, Accenture and

Portulans Institute 2021). The scores range from 39.73 (Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary) to 100.00 (Denmark). The higher the score, the less corruption problems the country has (the countries analyzed were all the 27 European Union countries).

Figure 2. The E-Government Development Index for each European Union country - 2022 data



Source: authors' representation based on United Nations, E-Government Development Index (EGDI): 2022 Annual Report

The second variable we retain, according to its influence on the dependent variable, is "Individuals with basic or above basic overall digital skills", indicating that e-Government development is also correlated with the skills individuals have in the digital field. This variable was obtained from the Eurostat indicator for the 27 countries of the European Union (year 2021), being calculated in percentages ranging from 27.87% of the population (Romania) to 79.18% of the population (Finland) (Eurostat 2022). We, then, find two other fundamental variables: Expenditure in education (as GDP total) and Open Data Policy Framework. The first one tells us about the relationship between education and e-Government, while the second one tells us that in order to have a certain degree of e-Government development, it is necessary to have a well-established legal framework by "opening up public data". Expenditure in education (as GDP total), as "Individuals with basic or above basic overall digital skills", was obtained from the Eurostat indicator, for the year 2021, regarding all the 27 European Union countries. The range was from 3.00% (Ireland) to 6.70% (Sweden) (Eurostat, Eurostat 2022). Open Data Policy Framework, on the other hand, is a variable obtained from the composite indicator

Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI), calculated by the European Commission. As in the previous cases, the year observed was 2021, for all the 27 European Union countries, and the range was from 150.00 (Luxemburg) to 275.00 (Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Ireland, Italy, Poland and Spain) (European Commission 2022). Considering all the characteristics mentioned above, we can retain the following cross section regression:

Table 2. OLS regression estimation of the e-Government drivers

		Unstandardized Coefficients		**Standardized Coefficients**		
Model 1		B	Std. Error	**Beta**	t	**Sig.**
	(Constant)	53.899	4.748		11.352	**0.000**
	Open Data Policy Framework	0.034	0.015	**0.214**	2.274	**0.033**
	Corruption score (GTCI)	0.160	0.037	**0.570**	4.275	**0.000**
	Expenditure in education (% GDP)	1.465	0.670	**0.229**	2.185	**0.040**
	Individuals with basic or above basic overall digital skills	0.104	0.058	**0.230**	1.803	**0.085**

Sources: own elaboration

Table 3. Summary statistics of the observed variables

		EGDI Index 2022	**Individuals with basic or above basic overall digital skills**	**Open Data Policy Framework**	**Corruption score (GTCI)**	**Expenditure in education (as GDP total)**
N	Valid	27	27	27	27	27
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		85.7778	56.2941	240.9259	66.6656	4.9815
Median		86.0000	55.3100	250.0000	61.6400	5.0000
Std. Deviation		5.45142	12.10434	34.64204	19.46113	0.85216
Minimum		76.00	27.82	150.00	39.73	3.00
Maximum		97.00	79.18	275.00	100.00	6.70

Sources: own elaboration

Next, we investigate the value of R^2, which is particularly important to explain the capacity of the explanatory variable to explain the dependent variable variation. De facto, it is the value of R^2 that shows us the proportions in which the variance of the dependent variable can be explained by the variance of the independent variables.

Table 4. Post estimation statistics

Model	R	**R Square**	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	**Durbin-Watson**
1	0.899[a]	**,808**	,773	2,59846	**2,050**

Sources: own elaboration

The value of R^2 indicates that 80.8% of the variance of e-Government development, in the different EU countries, can be predicted from the variance of the variables Corruption score (GTCI), Individuals with basic or above basic overall digital skills, Expenditure in education (as GDP total) and Open Data Policy Framework. The rest of the variance of the dependent variable will be predicted by other variables. Considering this, we will note the following equation:

E-government development = 53.899 + 0.570**Corruption score* + 0.230* *Individuals with basic or above basic overall digital skills* + 0.229* *Expenditure in education (as GDP total)* + 0.214* *Open Data Policy Framework.*

Regarding the correlations between e-Government development and each variable, we note that the variable with the strongest correlation is the Corruption score, followed by Individuals with basic or above overall digital skills, Expenditure in education (as GDP total) and Open Data Policy Framework. Corruption has a strong positive correlation, Individuals with basic or above overall digital skills a medium positive correlation, education (as GDP total) a weak positive correlation and Open Data Policy Framework a very weak positive correlation. These correlations show us that the greatest impact, in the development of e-Government, is given by a very careful control of the corruption phenomenon, by the authorities. We retain the following:

Table 5. Correlations between e-Government development and predictors

	e-Government development
Corruption score	**0.675**
Individuals with basic or above overall digital skills	**0.493**
Expenditure in education (as GDP total)	**0.330**
Open Data Policy Framework	**0.047**

Sources: own elaboration

If we want to apply the regression model obtained from the previous analysis, we obtain the results displayed in Appendix I. In this Appendix we see how, after applying the linear regression equation, the top three positions remained the same, with Denmark, Finland and Sweden consolidating their own hegemony in terms of e-Government development. Bulgaria and Romania also remained "stuck" at the bottom of the ranking, with the gap between these two becoming even wider, to Romania's disadvantage. A major surprise was the spectacular performance of Ireland, which gained 11 places. We believe that such a development is a more

realistic reflection of the contemporary situation, given that Ireland is one of the favourite countries of technology giants such as Google and Facebook. On the other hand, we also find the failure of Malta after applying the regression, which managed to lose 17 positions. The predictor that played the biggest role in this failure concerns corruption, where the small Mediterranean island did not score very well (52.05 out of 100). The major focus of this comparison, however, will be on the variation of positions between the two rankings, as we will see in Table 6.

Table 6. Descriptive statistics for the scores predicted and for the position variations on Table 5

		Position variations	Score predicted by the model
N	Valid	27	27
	Missing	0	0
Mean		3.1852	157.5448
Median		2.0000	155.0300
Std. Deviation		3.90303	15.05361
Range		17.00	67.92
Minimum		0.00	118.99
Maximum		17.00	186.91

Sources: own elaboration

2.1. Panel data regression regarding the development of e-Government

As mentioned in the introduction of the article, we will also perform a panel regression analysis based on data from 2010-2020 (the EGDI is calculated every two years, so we will consider: 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018 and 2020), testing different independent variables. In this respect, the corruption score (calculated under GTCI standards) and the percentage of GDP allocated to education will be kept, but we will introduce other variables such as Internet Usage (obtained from Eurostat)[1] and Government Spending (one of the variables of the Economic Freedom Index).

In the following, we will deal with the descriptive side of these relationships (regarding the first regression) to better understand the set of correlations. Considering this, the first relationship we will discuss is that between e-Government development and corruption. In this regard, The Institut Européen d'Administration des Affaires (INSEAD), the institution that produces The Global Competitiveness Index report, defines the indicator that measures corruption as the "Corruption Perceptions Index" and understands it as "aggregating data from a number of different sources that provide the perceptions of business people and country experts on the level of corruption in the public sector" (INSEAD; Accenture; Portulans

[1] We have to mention that no data were available for France in 2020, an average between 2019 and 2021 data being required

Institute 2021), but this data is made up of experts' and business people's perceptions of how the public sector is viewed in the country. Scores range from 0 (very corrupt) to 100 (no corruption). We believe that the issue of corruption influences the level of e-Government because transparency, public accountability and political participation do not exist where e-Government is not implemented.

When we talk about "individuals with basic or above overall digital skills", we can consider as a theoretical premise the definition Eurostat gives about this variable, quoting: "The indicator is useful to describe general digital literacy and skills in using the internet over time. Aspects of accuracy, reliability, timeliness and comparability for the general population are covered satisfactory" (Eurostat 2021). We can see, from what European officials say, that this statistical variable represents the percentage of citizens in the European Union who are familiar with new technologies. Regarding the percentage of Gross Domestic Product allocated to the education system, we believe that the causal link between this predictor and the development of e-Government lies both in the training of well-prepared generations in line with market requirements and in equipping educational establishments with computer systems and funding higher education whose specializations are computer science and technology. Moreover, even universities could benefit substantially if the percentage of Gross Domestic Product allocated to education was higher, directing academic research also towards the study of new forms of e-Government, to be subsequently implemented by governments.

Another defining element in increasing the development of e-Government is the existence of a well-established legal framework for Open Data. The independent variable was provided by the European Commission, through the famous Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI), which analyses the digital performance of European countries. Among the variables of this indicator, the "Open Data Legal Framework" is also a predictor for the development of e-Government. What does Open Data mean, however, and especially this variable "Open Data Legal Framework"? First of all, we will state that Open Data is more than just an abstract concept, but even an international endeavor, considering that The Open Government Partnership/OGP is an initiative launched by eight founding countries (South Africa, Brazil, Indonesia, the Philippines, the United Kingdom, Mexico, Norway and the United States) at the United Nations General Assembly on 20 September 2011, with the aim of promoting open, transparent and participatory government. In the introductory session of this initiative, the US President of those years, Barack Obama, himself spoke, saying: "We are committed to being more transparent at every level, because more information about government work should be open, timely and free to the people. We need to engage more citizens in decision making, because that makes government more efficient and responsive. We are committed to implementing the highest standards of integrity, because those in power must serve the people, not themselves. And we are committed to expanding access to technology, because in this digital age, access to information is a universal right"

(U.S. Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy and Human Rights 2011). In analyzing this, it is easy to see how having a legal framework that facilitates access to public data, can play a fundamental role in expanding e-Government.

Table 7. The correlation matrix for all the variables

Variable/ Probability	EGDI	CORRUPTION	GOV SPEND	GDP/EDU	INTERNET USAGE
EGDI	1.000				
CORRUPTION	0.637	1.000			
GOV SPEND	-0.381	-0.420	1.000		
GDP/EDU	0.296	0.543	-0.440	1.000	
INTERNET USAGE	0.795	0.727	-0.257	0.374	1.000

Source: authors' representation

Then, performing both a random and a fixed analysis, we note the following:

Table 8. Panel data regression estimation of e-Government (2010-2020)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
Variables	Fixed effects	Random effects	Fixed effects	Random effects	Fixed effects	Random effects	Fixed effects	Random effects
Observations	162	162	162	162	162	162	162	162
Countries	27	27	27	27	27	27	27	27
GDP/EDU	-0.329 (1.076)	-0.833 (0.717)	-	-	-0.447 (1.076)	-0.952 (0.707)	-0.430 (1.081)	-0.466 (0.739)
INTERNET USAGE	0.717*** (0.046)	0.660*** (0.042)	0.721*** (0.043)	0.667*** (0.041)	0.695*** (0.044)	0.655*** (0.036)	0.705*** (0.046)	0.656*** (0.043)
CORRUPTION	-0.159 (0.115)	-0.033 (0.059)	-0.162 (0.114)	-0.060 (0.054)	-	-	-0.154 (0.116)	-0.003 (0.061)
GOV SPEND	-0.071 (0.043)	- 0.096*** (0.032)	-0.072* (0.043)	- 0.090*** (0.032)	-0.069 (0.043)	-0.087** (0.034)	-	-
CONSTANT	35.184***	34.976***	33.351***	31.610***	27.219***	33.483***	33.547***	27.875***
ADJ R^2	0.8168	0.6640	0.8181	0.6633	0.8156	0.6668	0.8145	0.6516

Notes: Standard errors are mentioned in parenthesis., Significance levels are *** for 1%, ** for 5% and * for 10%.
Sources: own elaboration

We can see that the most statistically relevant model is model number 1, which includes Internet Usage and Government Spending with considerable significance levels. In this sense, subjecting the model to the Hausman test we have:

Table 9. Results for the Hausman Test

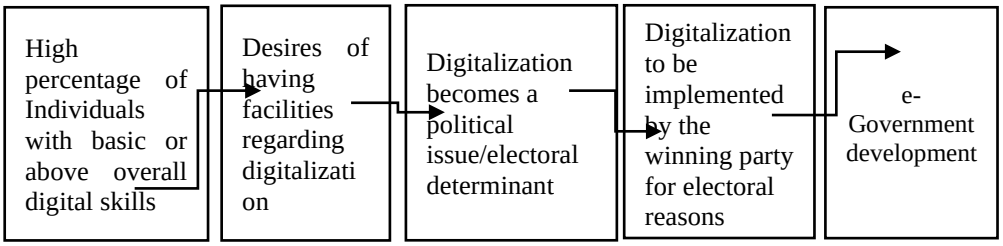
Correlated Random Effects - Hausman Test			
Equation: Model			
Test cross-section random effects			
Test summary	Chi-Sq. Statistic	Chi-Sq. d.f.	Prob.
Cross-section random	17.916053	4	0.0013

Notes: The probability being 0.0013, fixed effects specification is preferred the random effects
Source: authors' representation

3. A qualitative approach regarding the relation between e-Government development and its predictors

Observing the probability level obtained in the Hausman test, we consider the equation with the fixed effects as rather appropriate for our analysis. In this respect, it is more than fundamental to understand that in the model number 1, with fixed effects, we have only one statistically significant variable ("Individuals - internet use"). The exact definition of such variable is, de facto, indicating the percentage of the population using the internet (Eurostat, ICT usage in households and by individuals 2023). The years analysed, as previously mentioned, were 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018 and 2020, for all 27 EU countries. Both the correlation and the significance of this variable are statistically relevant, suggesting that, a perpetual and very common use of the Internet among society, may prompt authorities to implement e-Government policies, considering the need for digitization in societies where the percentage of people using the Internet daily is very high. Corruption and education do not show significant results, while, even if to a very small extent, government spending could have some influence on e-Government implementation.

Figure 3. Causal-descriptive representation of the correlation between Individuals with basic or above overall digital skills and e-Government development



Sources: own elaboration

It is easy to understand, in this respect, that in countries where we have a high number of citizens who know how to use technological tools, we will inevitably have a higher demand for digitalization. In this sense, by becoming a political issue,

digitalization goes beyond the social desideratum and translates into concrete policies, raising the EGDI score. A correlation between these two variables, however, was to be expected, given that it is hard to conceive a digitalized country where citizens are 'digitally illiterate'. Moreover, this correlation also underlines the concept of the "digital divide between European countries", presented at the beginning of this article. To better understand this link between the digital skills of European citizens and the development of e-Government, we propose this causal chain.

Conclusions

The whole process of this work has helped us to reach some important conclusions. First, we have noticed that the famous concept of the "digital divide" is not only a national concept, highlighting the differences between rural and urban areas in terms of technological expansion, but also one with an important international nuance, including European Union countries. The digital divide, especially in terms of e-Government, can be caused by different factors and circumstances and, as we have seen in this analysis, these factors include corruption, the digital skills of European citizens, the percentage of Gross Domestic Product allocated to education or even the efforts of authorities to extend the liberalization of public data.

Beyond these, to answer our research question, we used regression analysis for which we obtained that our chosen predictors influence the EGDI score, in two sets of analysis, simple and panel, but we saw that it is not only the decisions of political elites that determine the change in e-Government scores, but also citizens, who use the internet, have skills in using information and telecommunication technologies and thus can participate in the decision making and public policy making process. However, the involvement of citizens in the process of creating an 'E-state' depends on their trust in either technology or the political class. On the other hand, the decisions of the elites influence both e-Government and e-Governance, with the political class being the architect of both processes, where government denotes an organization, the structure of the state and its institutional framework, and governance denotes an active process involving several stakeholders as well as society as a whole, respecting governance.

E-government suggests the digitalization as part of its work to facilitate access to services and information for citizens and other stakeholders, and e-Government means the use of the internet to increase public participation in decision-making and public policy-making, which brings us to the role of citizens in e-Government. They need to be an active part in decisions, as well as becoming e-citizens to participate in what is called E-democracy, a concept that we find among authors in the field, and that emerged with e-Government, as well as with the development of digital social networks where political elites propagate messages. As a conclusion, an e-

citizen uses the internet, is skilled in the use of information and telecommunications technologies and is involved in the process of government.

The aim of the article was achieved by carrying out the two regression analyses, the one with classical data and the one with panel data, representing the data of the 27 Member States of the European Union. In terms of indicators, we used: EGDI, Perceived Corruption, Individuals with Basic or Advanced Digital Skills, Public Expenditure on Education (%GDP) and Open Data Framework, and for the panel data the indicators: Perceived Corruption, Public Expenditure on Education (%GDP), Individuals - Internet use and Government Spending.

For objective 1 of our paper, i.e., the analysis of the e-Government score among EU member countries, we used data from the United Nations E-Government Development Index which incorporates access to the internet and to public services through tele-infrastructure and education.

In order to achieve objective 2, i.e., to explore the digital divide between the European Union countries, we used different databases such as Eurostat or the Corruption Perception Index to understand what are the main causes of this digital divide: education, abilities to utilize the internet and government corruption.

Objective number 3 was achieved by creating two regression models, the first with simple data and the other with panel data. The first regression showed that around 80% of the variation in the EGDI can be determined by our chosen predictor variables. The regression with panel data has shown how the massive use of the Internet by citizens can increase governments' willingness to implement e-Government (being a human necessity), while government spending, aligned with market demands, can also play a fundamental role.

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APPENDIX I

E-Government in the EGDI Index compared with E-Government predicted by the regression model

Country	EGDI score	Score predicted by the model	Variations between the original EGDI score and the score predicted by the model
Denmark	97 (1st)	186,91 (1st)	0
Finland	95 (2nd)	178,36 (2nd)	0
Sweden	94 (3rd)	177,82 (3rd)	0
Ireland	85 (15th)	174,15 (4th)	+11
Estonia	93 (5th)	173,91 (5th)	0
Germany	87 (10th)	171,50 (6th)	+4
France	88 (7th)	169,28 (7th)	0
Austria	88 (8th)	167,51 (8th)	0
Netherlands	93 (4th)	167,27 (9th)	-5
Spain	88 (9th)	165,26 (10th)	-1
Cyprus	86 (13th)	158,35 (11th)	+2
Slovenia	87 (12th)	157,40 (12th)	0
Poland	84 (17th)	155,76 (13th)	+4
Belgium	83 (19th)	155,03 (14th)	+5
Czech Republic	80 (23rd)	154,89 (15th)	+8
Lithuania	87 (11th)	154,87 (16th)	-5
Portugal	82 (21st)	153,88 (17th)	+4
Italy	83 (20th)	153,84 (18th)	+2
Luxembourg	86 (14th)	152,50 (19th)	-5
Latvia	85 (16th)	151,02 (20th)	-4
Greece	84 (18th)	147,74 (21st)	-3
Slovakia	80 (24th)	145,49 (22nd)	+2
Malta	89 (6th)	143,85 (23rd)	-17
Hungary	78 (25th)	142,48 (24th)	+1
Croatia	81 (22nd)	140,66 (25th)	-3
Bulgaria	77 (26th)	134,99 (26th)	0
Romania	76 (27th)	118,99 (27th)	0

Sources: own elaboration

ACCELERATING GREEN TRANSITION IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE - OVERVIEW OF SOME EU-11 GREEN SPECIFIC STRATEGIES

Boglárka VAJDA[*], Gabriela DRĂGAN[**]

Abstract

This study examines the state of research on green transition, with a focus on circular economy, and bioeconomy, across eight Central and Eastern European countries (EU-11): the four Visegrád countries plus Slovenia (who joined EU in 2004), and the later entrants Romania, Bulgaria (2007), and Croatia (2013). A systematic review of peer-reviewed articles (2015-2023), along with official documents, forms the basis of analysis. The paper identifies the status of green and circular transition research in EU-11, highlighting key policy interests, including the need for coordinated strategies, cooperation, stakeholder engagement. The study also evaluates the influence of EU accession timing on green transition dynamics and underscores the importance of national efforts in shaping these strategic visions. While circular economy strategies are in place for most countries, dedicated bioeconomy strategies are still lacking, with Visegrad countries and Croatia currently under development.

Keywords: circular economy, bioeconomy, green economy, Central and Eastern Europe

Introduction

In its Communication on the European Growth Model (2022), the European Commission recognizes that the European economy is undergoing unprecedented transformations in the context of major uncertainties linked to the global and security landscape. These multiple crises necessitate coordinated responses (Trusina and Jermolajeva, 2021). It highlights that the pursuit of a green transition offers a unique opportunity to steer Europe towards a new path characterized by sustainable and inclusive growth. The blueprint for this transformative shift is encapsulated within

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the European Green Deal (EGD), published in December 2019. This growth strategy outlines a roadmap to achieve climate-neutrality, resource-efficiency, innovation, and socially inclusivity, thereby shaping a forward-looking and holistic vision for Europe's future. To achieve these aims, the EGD covers a range of policy areas such as biodiversity, sustainable agriculture, climate action, sustainable industry, etc. The advancement of a sustainable and circular bioeconomy presents viable remedies to align with the objectives set out by the EGD. Included in these goals are the achievement of a climate-neutral economy by 2050, promotion of clean mobility, the ambition for zero-pollution, a shift towards greener industries, and efforts to preserve and enhance natural ecosystems and their services (EC, 2020).

The Circular Economy Action Plan (European Commission 2015; 2020a), stands as a cornerstone of the EGD. This action plan aims to achieve numerous outcomes, ranging from the reduction of waste generation to the normalization of sustainable products, and the optimization of circular practices for the benefit of individuals, regions, and cities throughout the European Union (EU).

Furthermore, the bioeconomy serves as an additional catalyst for driving sustainable systemic change and addressing key economic, societal, and environmental challenges faced by the EU member states. The European Bioeconomy Strategy (2013, 2018) plays a crucial role in promoting the transition towards a more sustainable future. However, complying with the EGD requirements and transitioning to a green, circular economy presents distinct challenges for all EU member states, particularly for Central and Eastern Europe countries (EU-11).

A number of researchers are meticulously assessing the countries' performances in transitioning towards a Circular Economy (Marino and Pariso, 2020), measuring the degree of transformation achieved by the member states in the implementation of circular economy and/or bioeconomy initiatives. Several studies find that, in comparison to Western European countries, Central and Eastern European countries lag behind in the pace of green transition (Mazur-Wierzbicka, 2021), (Fura, Stec and Miś, 2020), (Škrinjarić, 2020). As highlighted by Vaceková et al. (2019), the lack of relevant research on circularity in the Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) underscores a considerable gap that strongly indicates the need for a deeper insight.

Regarding bioeconomy, there is an uneven distribution of activity associated with the development of sustainable, circular bioeconomy across the EU member states. Notably, a majority of the Central and Eastern European (the so-called EU-11) countries lag in the development of specialized national Bioeconomy Strategies and/or Action Plans (EC, 2021). Such a shortfall could have implications for the ability to effectively achieve the objectives set forth in the EGD as well as the national goals.

The aim of this paper is to assess the existing body of scientific literature concerning the advancement towards green, circular, and bio-based economies within EU-11 countries. Its main objective is to identify the complex governance

dimensions associated with the EU circular transition and to examine whether the timing of EU accession for the most recent enlargement waves has influenced progresses towards the green economy.

The study addresses the following research questions:

- What is the current state of research on the transition to the green and circular economy in the EU-11 countries?
- Has the timing of accession for the newer EU member states influenced their level of progress during the ecological transition process?

Therefore, the paper is divided into three parts. Section 1 briefly describes the concepts and the EU perspective on the topic of green economy, circular economy, and bioeconomy. Afterward, Section 2 presents the study's methodology followed by Section 3 which gives an overview of the current state-of-art in some of the EU-11 countries regarding green economy, circular economy, and bioeconomy.

1. The EU's perspective on the Green Transition

Three major narratives - the green economy (GE), circular economy (CE) and bioeconomy (BE), are attracting increasing attention worldwide and are increasingly being embraced as prominent pathways for development and sustainability (D'Amato et al., 2017). Loiseau et al. (2016) highlighted GE, BE and CE as key concepts in sustainability research and provided a generic framework of different theories, concepts, and approaches, while also identifying the interlinkages among these concepts. Indeed, notable synergies between the bioeconomy and circular economy concepts are significant (Kardung et al., 2021).

Figure 1 shows the interrelation and overlap among these three concepts.

While the green economy is often considered an umbrella concept (D'Amato et al., 2017), the circular economy and bioeconomy are generally considered to be covered by this broad notion.

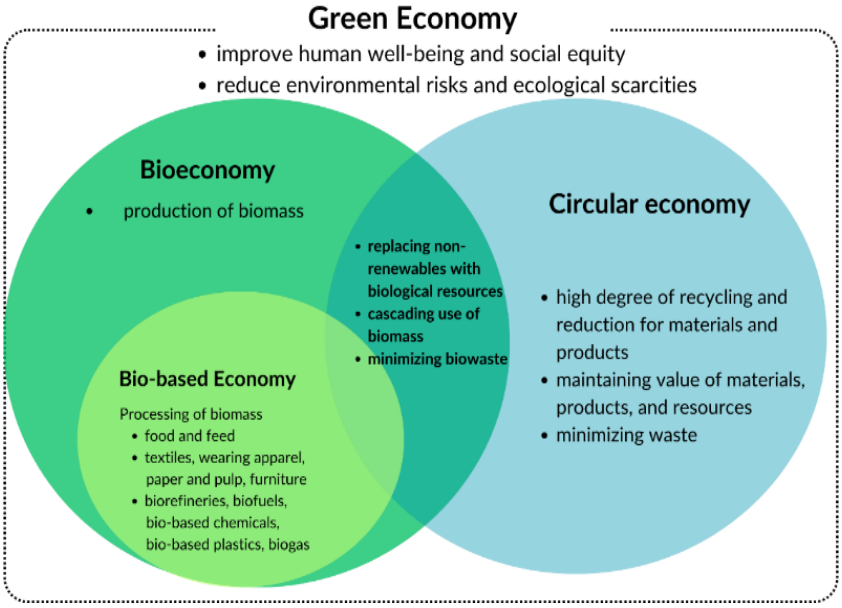
1.1. Green economy from the EU perspective

According to the European Environment Agency, the green economy is "one in which policies and innovations enable society to use resources efficiently, enhancing human well-being in an inclusive manner, while maintaining the natural systems that sustain us" (EEA, 2012).

The foundation of the green economy within the EU's strategic direction can be found in a combination of high-level strategic documents and sectoral policies, each characterized by different focal points and clear, firm commitments. One pivotal cornerstone in shaping the EU's green economy was the strategy "Europe 2020" renowned as the "Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth". Its impact on the European green economy trajectory has been particularly profound. The implementation of the strategy was conditioned on the efficient use of resources

(especially primary resources), transition to a low-carbon economy, greater use of renewable energy sources, increasing energy efficiency, and implementation of new technologies and innovations (especially of ecological nature) (Adamowicz, 2022).

Figure 1. Relations among bioeconomy, green economy, and circular economy



Source: Kardung et al., 2021

More recently, the most significant action taken by the EU is the European Green Deal (2019). This concept gains particular attention since the signing of the Paris Climate Agreement signed in 2018 (Adamowicz, 2022). This new European plan aims at making the European economy sustainable and completely green by the year 2050. Protecting the EU's natural capital, transitioning to a resource-efficient economy and protecting people from environment-related pressures are key priorities of the European Green Deal (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. The European Green Deal

Source: European Commission, 2019

The European Green Deal encompasses a comprehensive set of actions, including the restoration of biodiversity and reduction of pollution, advancement of resource efficiency through a shift towards a clean and circular economy, establishment of an equitable, health-conscious, and environmentally friendly food system, development of agriculture with a focus on environmental protection, reduction of gas emissions and positive externalities of rural farming, provision of support for regional energy transformation programs and innovative solutions, facilitation of the transition through financial mechanisms for green innovation and public investment, enhancement of energy systems to produce clean, secure, and affordable energy, as well as climate improvement and adaptation of strategies for sustainable and intelligent mobility, including improvements in alternative fuel production and infrastructure (EC, 2019).

The successful implementation of the Green Deal requires collective efforts from all EU member states on an equal footing, calling for substantial changes across various aspects of both Community and national policies (Adamowicz, 2022). EU member states are supported by the EC to design and implement reforms that accelerate the green transition and contribute to achieving the goals of the European Green Deal. Member states are engaging in reforms to address these challenges by

further developing their environmental policies and strategies (European Union, 2020). Moreover, in 2018, the EU Commission established a comprehensive and unified EU-wide classification system, commonly referred to as "the EU Taxonomy". This system has been designed to guide green investments towards economic activities that are essential in achieving the EGD'objectives. The EU taxonomy creates an operational list of economic activities accompanied by specific technical screening criteria. These criteria serve to identify instances in which each economic activity substantially contributes to achieving environmental objectives (European Commission, 2020). Subsequently, a new package of the EU-Taxonomy was adopted in 2023, signifying an evolving and adaptive approach to addressing sustainability (European Commission, 2023).

1.2. The circular economy from the EU perspective

The circular economy stands as a central focus within the EU's economic strategy. Crucial to this perspective are fundamental documents like "Closing the loop—an EU Action Plan for the Circular Economy" (European Commission, 2015), and the more recent the "New Circular Economy Action Plan (CEAP) for a cleaner and more competitive Europe" (European Commission, 2020). Centered of fostering sustainable practices, the CEAP focuses on the product design, advancing circular economy processes, encouraging sustainable consumption patterns, and aiming to reduce waste generation. Its objectives are to prevent waste and retain within the EU economy for as long as possible. Introducing a mix of legislative and non-legislative measures, the CEAP specifically targets areas where the EU level brings real added value.

In accordance with the EC's definition (EC, 2023), the circular economy represents a departure from "the linear take-make-waste economy", advocating for a regenerative model. This approach involves processes that restore, renew, or revitalize their own sources of energy and material sources, with a strong emphasis on minimizing waste generation.

Regarding the CE policies and strategies, member states are actively engaged in either formulating or have already adopted such measures (Geerken et al., 2022), as evidenced by Table 1. The European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform (ECESP) serves as a comprehensive repository, systematically accumulating and documenting all circular economy-related strategies, spanning across local, regional, and national contexts (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Circular economy-related strategies in the EU

Source: ECESP Platform

Table 1. EU27 Member States that adopted National Circular Economy Strategies, by year and cumulative total

2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Belgium	Italy	Denmark	Poland	Latvia	Cyprus	Romania	Hungary
Finland	Portugal	France		Malta	Czechia	Austria	
Netherlands		Greece		Spain	Luxembourg	Bulgaria	
		Slovenia		Sweden	Ireland	Estonia	
					Lithuania	Slovakia	
					Germany		
3	*5*	*9*	*10*	*14*	*20*	*25*	*26*

Source: authors' representation

National circular economy strategies appear to have accelerated between 2016-2021 in most of the Western European countries: Belgium (Belgium Federal Government, 2016), Finland (Sitra, 2016; Finnish Government, 2021), Netherlands (Government of the Netherlands, 2016), Italy (Ministry for the Environment, 2017; Ministry for Ecological Transition, 2022), Portugal (Council of Ministers of Portugal, 2017), Denmark (Ministry of Environment, 2018, 2021), France (Ministry for Ecological and Solidary Transition, 2018), Spain (Government of Spain, 2020), Sweden (Government Offices of Sweden, 2020), Luxembourg (Schosseler et al.,

2021), Ireland (Government of Ireland, 2021), Germany (Circular Economy Initiative, 2021) and Southern European countries: Greece (Hellenic Republic Ministry of Environment & Energy, 2018, 2022), Malta (Government of Malta, 2020), Cyprus (Cyprus circular economy network, 2021). The majority of the Central and Eastern European countries and Baltic States elaborated their strategies starting from 2021: Czechia (Ministry of Environment of the Czech Republic, 2021), Lithuania (MITA, 2021), Austria (Federal Ministry Republic of Austria, 2022), Romania (Government of Romania, 2022, 2023), Bulgaria (Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2022), Slovakia (OECD, 2022), Estonia (Ministry of the Environment of Estonia, 2022) and Hungary (OECD, 2023). Three countries, though, Slovenia (Godina Košir, L. et al., 2018), Poland (Council of Ministers of Poland, 2019) and Latvia (Cabinet of Ministers of Latvia, 2020) have developed their CE strategies earlier. See Appendix A1 for circular economy strategic documents of the EU-27 Member States.

From the EU-27, Croatia remains the only member state without a dedicated national circular economy policy, though this stance could evolve as it integrates CE elements into other policy frameworks (Geerken et al., 2022).

To better track progress in the transition to a circular economy, the EU employs a CE Monitoring Framework. This framework aims to provide a comprehensive overview by measuring direct and indirect benefits of increasing circularity. It comprises 11 indicators grouped into 5 dimensions: (1) production and consumption; (2) waste management; (3) secondary raw materials; (4) competitiveness and innovation; and (5) global sustainability and resilience (Eurostat, 2023). Another key framework that refers to the transition to a Circular Economy is included in the EU Taxonomy, developed by the European Commission's Platform on Sustainable Finance (European Commission, 2023).

1.3. The Bioeconomy from the EU perspective

One of the most used definitions of the bioeconomy is that of the European Commission (2018):

> The bioeconomy covers all sectors and systems that rely on biological resources (animals, plants, micro-organisms and derived biomass, including organic waste), their functions and principles. It includes and interlinks: land and marine ecosystems and the services they provide; all primary production sectors that use and produce biological resources (agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and aquaculture); and all economic and industrial sectors that use biological resources and processes to produce food, feed, bio-based products, energy, and services.

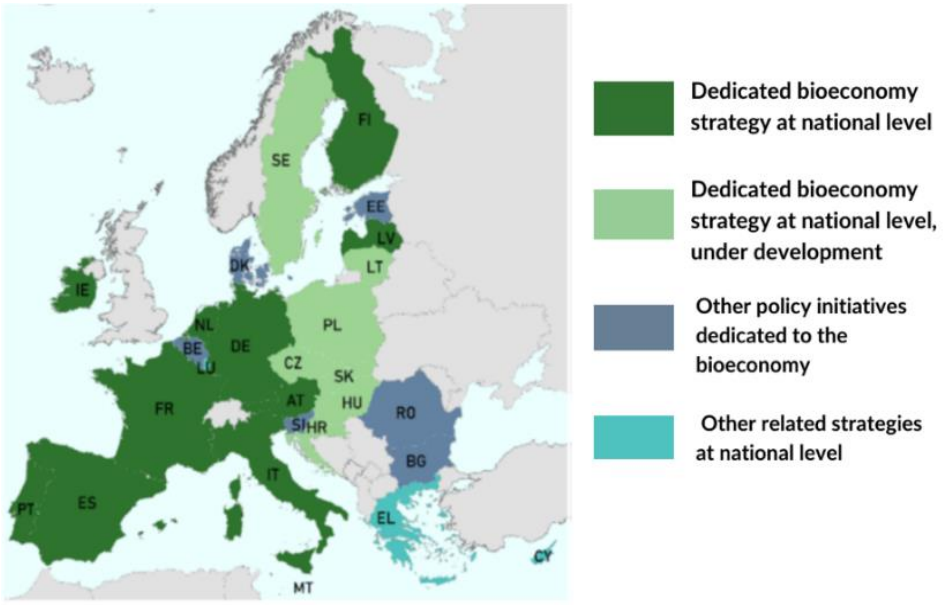
The EU emphasizes that the bioeconomy can significantly contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the European Green Deal, acting as a catalyst for sustainable systemic change and transition. Through its Bioeconomy Strategy - initially published in 2012 and updated in 2018, the EU is committed to ensuring that the bioeconomy's economic and social benefits go hand in hand with environmental benefits. This strategy follows five key goals: ensuring food and nutrition security; sustainable management of natural resources; reducing dependency on non-renewable, and unsustainable resources; addressing climate change through mitigation and adaptation; and strengthening European competitiveness and generating employment opportunities.

Therefore, the Bioeconomy Strategy is key in reaching climate neutrality. It contributes to the three dimensions of sustainability: environmental (management of land and biological resources within ecological boundaries), economic (sustainable value chains and consumption), and social (social fairness and just transitions) (Swisscore, 2022). To advance its objectives, the European Commission launched the Bioeconomy Monitoring System (2021, 2022), that offers a comprehensive overview of European trends in EU Bioeconomy indicators. Selected indicators cover different parts of the system, although there are gaps in the knowledge or data, which are progressively addressed. Furthermore, a first Progress Report entitled "*European Bioeconomy Policy: Stocktaking and future developments*" was released in 2022. The report offers an assessment of the state of play of the European Bioeconomy, evaluating the progress made in the implementation of the 2018 EU Bioeconomy Strategy and its Action Plan (European Commission, 2022c).

No specific EU bioeconomy legislation exists. However, sectorial legislation, in many cases considerably older than the bioeconomy concept, has major impact in the field. Currently, some EU members have already developed multiple strategies, while others have these strategies under development. The status of the current national bioeconomy strategies (2022) is depicted in Figure 4.

According to the Bioeconomy Strategy Progress Report (EC, 2022c), Austria (Federal Ministry Republic of Austria, 2019), the Netherlands (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy, 2018) and Portugal (2021) have developed a (new) national strategy. Germany (Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Germany, 2020), Ireland (Government of Ireland, 2018, 2023), Italy (Gvernment of Italy, 2019, 2020), Finland (Finnish Government, 2022), France (Ministere de l'Agriculture et de la Souveraineté Alimentaire, 2017, 2018) and Spain (Government of Spain, 2015) have updated their existing strategies or action plans. Furthermore, according to the data evidenced by the European Knowledge Centre for Bioeconomy (Haarich et al., 2022) Sweden started to develop its national bioeconomy strategy, while Belgium, and Denmark have other policy initiatives dedicated to the bioeconomy. See Appendix A2 for bioeconomy related strategic documents of the EU Member States.

Figure 4. National bioeconomy strategies in the EU in February 2022



Source: European Commission's Knowledge Centre for Bioeconomy Administrative Boundaries: ©EuroGeographics ©UN-FAO ©Turkstat

Of particular significance is the situation of the Baltic States and the Central and Eastern European countries, namely: Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia - all part of the BIOEAST initiative, in the frame of which National Bioeconomy Strategies Concept Papers have been developed (Rozakis et al., 2023). Moreover, national-level roadmaps for the Bioeconomy Strategies are to be further developed within the CEE2ACT Horizon Europe project in the period 2023-2025. However, there are a few member states that have yet to develop their national bioeconomy strategies (Cyprus, Luxemburg, and Malta).

Regarding regional level strategies Finland, France, Italy, Poland, Spain, and Sweden have developed intense, regional strategic actions to deploy bioeconomy. Additionally, there are 15 countries having at least one region with bioeconomy relevant strategy in regional level (Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, and Slovakia).

2. Methodology

This paper employs a qualitative research method through a literature review, following the established systematic review principles outlined by Tranfield et al.

(2003) and Prieto-Sandoval et al. (2018). Consequently, the review process comprises three distinct stages, planning, execution, and reporting. Within these stages, the approach has involved defining the research question, formulating an appropriate search strategy, and establishing clear criteria for study inclusion.

During the first step, a comprehensive search was conducted in the SCOPUS database using a two-level keyword structure. The purpose of the first level, known as the context keywords, is to identify papers that discuss topics related to circular economy (CE), bioeconomy (BE), or green economy (GE). The second level of keywords was aimed to include papers specifically relevant to the geographical region of the Central and Eastern Europe (the so-called EU-11 countries). By utilizing a two-level keyword approach, the intention was to capture papers that address the intersection of circular, bio-based, and green transition concepts within the context of the EU-11 countries. Other sources that were included in the review process represented EU-level and national-level policy documents as well as studies, reports tackling the topic of the circular economy and bioeconomy in the EU-11 countries.

The research primarily targeted eight specific countries located in the Central and Eastern European region: Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Among these, Slovenia and four nations belonging to the Visegrad group—Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic—having become EU member states in 2004. The remaining three countries, Romania, Bulgaria (joining in 2007), and Croatia (joining in 2013), constitute the latter accession to the EU. This split of the two groups of countries aims to understand whether the timing of accession had any impact on the progress towards green transition.

During the second step, the search results for individual countries were grouped into the specified topics of GE, CE, and BE to have a general overview of research in the EU-11 countries. In the final third step, a thorough analysis was conducted, the results being evidenced in the following section of the paper.

3. Green Transition in the EU-11 - focus on the eight selected countries

To successfully converge on the path to climate neutrality in the EU-11 countries, understanding and addressing the major challenges hindering the expansion of green solutions is an important pre-requisite (Riepl and Zavarská, 2023). The convergence to green targets represents a particular challenge for economies of newer member states (the Central and Eastern European countries), given their fossil fuel-intensive industrial orientation and the presence of highly carbon - intensive regions across Europe.

The green economy is a highly complex construct that requires the involvement of a diverse range of stakeholders and appropriate governance mechanisms to regulate economic recovery processes (Bogovic et al., 2020). This

complexity represents a challenge for both scientists and experts, underscoring the necessity for additional theoretical and empirical advancement to effectively address this complexity.

Ciot (2022) has investigated the main factors that influence the EGD capacity building implementation in five EU member states from Central and Eastern Europe, the four Visegrád countries (Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary) and Romania. The study reveals the existence of four distinct categories of influencing factors, cultural, political, economic, and social but also highlights significant disparities in the implementation of the EGD across various stages within the EU.

In the case of Visegrád countries, the EU path towards climate neutrality has encountered some reluctance, observed Riepl and Zavarská (2023). These nations face a distinct challenge in aligning with green targets due to their strong industrial orientation and high fossil fuel dependence and progress in the region's green transition has been uneven. Thus, while Slovakia and partially Poland have scaled up renewables, Czechia and Hungary have experienced stagnation and respectively, decline. At the same time, a better understanding of the unique obstacles faced by the Visegrád countries is useful for EU policymakers to be able to lead a conducive climate dialogue despite the prevailing cross-country differences in the progress made thus far (Riepl & Zavarská, 2023, pp. 17-22).

Regarding the green economy in Romania, Mihai et al. (2021) stresses out that for a sustainable development, organizations need to develop coordination and management skills, participation, involvement, and commitment.

Furthermore, Licastro and Sergi (2021) analyzed the drivers and barriers to a green economy, based on the latest scholarly articles on the green economy indexed in the Scopus database. Opinions and policy recommendations of experts about green policies and relative challenges in policy changes have been evidenced with emphasis on some of the EU-11 countries: Slovenia and Croatia.

3.1. The advancements and challenges regarding the circular economy in the EU-11

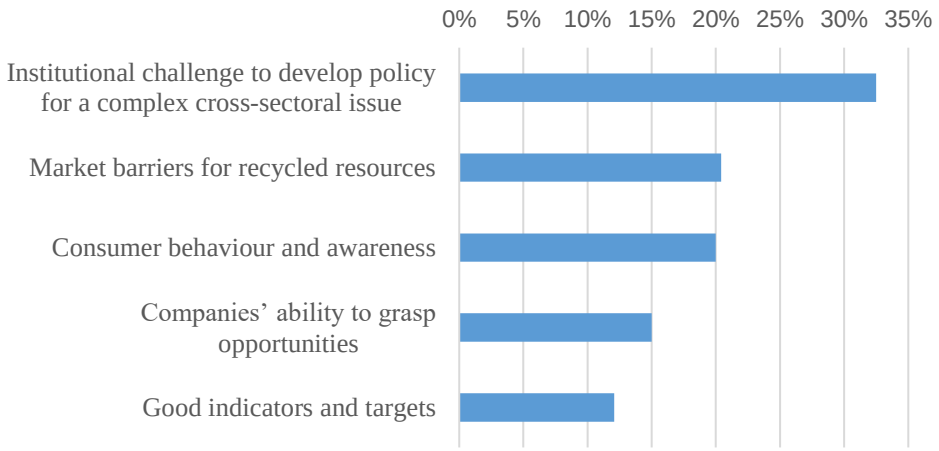
Member States are encouraged to advance circularity at a national level by adopting policies and initiatives that go beyond EU regulations, while preserving the Single Market. Nevertheless, given the complexity and interdisciplinary nature of transitioning to circular economy, this process is a challenging endeavor.

Several authors (Pomázi and Szabó, 2020; Lacko et al., 2021; Mazur-Wierzbicka, 2021a; Mazur-Wierzbicka, 2021b) have analyzed the efficiency of circular economies, by comparing countries' performances and evaluating the impact of selected variables on the performance of the circular economy of countries. Some articles refer to the perspectives of the transition to CE and the need of changing the perspective of society, improving the regulatory framework and the application of legislation (Dobre-Baron et al., 2022), others to the long-term vision, political determination and consistency, and funding (Topliceanu et al., 2023).

Vaceková et al. (2019) review the theoretical, and methodological approaches to the circular economy originating in the Western countries with a view to assessing their applicability in the (post-) transitional context of Central and Eastern Europe. In order to accelerate the green transition process, practical improvements of public policies and business development are needed (Švarc, Dabić and Lažnjak, 2022).

From the point of view of implementing the circular transition in EU, the main challenges and barriers that have been marked by the EU-11 countries are evidenced in the Figure 5.

Figure 5. Key challenges in transitioning to a circular economy in the EU



Source: authors' representation based on Geerken et al. (2022)

The challenges related to the institutional framework and the quality of governance refer to the lack of collaboration and coordination in the development of coherent policies between the responsible authorities and institutions, difficulties in implementing different policies, strategies, roadmaps, related to such a broad concept as " circular economy", etc. In terms of market reactions and economic and financial challenges, several countries highlighted the lack of incentives or positive tax environments for circular strategies.

A key obstacle is consumer behavior, i.e. their difficulty in changing their behavior, or even lack or low levels of awareness about EC. Regarding indicators and targets, EU countries highlighted the lack of harmonized indicators and targets for monitoring and evaluating circular practices, which could discourage countries with fewer resources and less capacity to implement circular solutions (Geerken et al., 2022).

Dynamics of the development of circular economy's strategic visions in the EU-11 countries. Focus on the eight selected countries

In terms of planning and drafting specific strategic documents on Circular Economy, at the request of the European Commission, a comprehensive evaluation has been done by the EEA (2022). The EEA Report (EEA, 2022) provides an updated view of circular economy policies being implemented at a national level in the EU, with a particular focus on elements that go beyond EU mandatory reglementations, while preserving the Single Market.

Bulgaria: The "*Circular economy country profile - Bulgaria*" published by the European Environment Agency (2022) stated that addressing the transition to a circular economy in Bulgaria necessitates significant management changes. The collaborative management approach across the entire value chain mandates that each ministry and institution revamp their organizational framework, allocate sufficient administrative capacity, and secure resources to effectively address the emerging challenges (EEA, 2022). These findings are echoed in the "2022 Environmental Country Report - Bulgaria" that highlights that Bulgaria is among the EU member states falling significantly behind in the implementation of circular economy policies. The report underscores that the Bulgarian economy remains highly resource-intensive within the EU and is lagging in adopting circular economy principles and eco-innovation. Notably, Bulgaria lacks an overarching circular economy program and faces waste management challenges (European Commission, 2022b).

Croatia: Although at the time of joining the EU (2013), Croatia had adopted the main European strategic documents, the circular economy became a strategic priority for the EU only in 2015 (with the adoption of the first EC Action Plan). As such, because current Croatian strategic documents do not tackle CE topics adequately, the Croatian government has the obligation to adequately implement the main CE policies at a national strategic level. According to the "*Circular economy country profile - Croatia*" a new cycle of drafting strategic documents on circular economy is under development. (EEA, 2022). This is what various Croatian authors have pointed out. Švarc (2022) in his research paper highlights the fact that in the case of Croatia the systemic paradigm shifts towards CE are still not the focus of public policies and national strategies. In accordance with the observation made by Govindan and Hasanagic (2018), there are instances of favorable developments within both the public and private sectors, indicating the presence of the necessary capacity and intent for transitioning to a circular economy. However, it remains noteworthy the absence of effective policy leadership, which is identified as a pivotal factor in facilitating circular economy transitions (Govindan and Hasanagic, 2018).

Czech Republic: According to the information presented in the country report elaborated by the EEA European Topic Centre, the Czech Republic has taken a significant step by introducing a dedicated national Circular Economy Strategy

known as the "Strategic Framework of the Circular Economy of the Czech Republic 2040" (Circular Czechia 2040), officially adopted at the end of 2021. The main goal of this strategic framework is "*less waste and more value for the Czech Republic*". This endeavor is set to be realized through the execution of three different Action Plans. The first Action Plan, for the period 2022-2027, had to be released by the end of October 2022 (EEA, 2022).

Hungary: Hungary is cooperating with the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2022) to develop a national CE strategy with a vision statement for 2040. The country aims to develop "a holistic approach to the CE transition, focusing not only on waste management, but also on the industrial, agricultural and service sectors" by mutual cooperation and involving stakeholders, market participants (EEA, 2022).

Poland: The Polish Circular Economy Roadmap has been in effect since 2019, with a defined action timeline extending until 2023. The assessment of the overall transition progress toward a circular economy in Poland, according to the Polish Academy of Sciences 2020 report, indicates a gradual and slow advancement. The Academy views this deliberate pace as desirable, steering clear of radical transformations and excessive limitations (EEA, 2022).

Romania: The approval of the National Strategy for the Circular Economy in Romania was made in September 2022. To enforce the Strategy, an Action Plan should be implemented by the end of the third quarter of 2023. The Head of the Chancellery of the Prime Minister will lead a collaborative inter-ministerial coordination process. This process aims to adapt to national specificities and EU/international trends related to the circular economy, ensuring effective means of implementation and involving key stakeholders in the process (EEA, 2022). Public policy recommendations in the process of green transition to a circular economy are also evidenced by Vermeşan et al. (2020).

Slovakia: Slovakia cooperated with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2021) as well as the European Commission, in developing the Roadmap for Circular Economy. The current policy landscape related to the circular economy is fairly well advanced in the area of waste management, but there are still important implementation gaps that need to be addressed (OECD, 2022).

Slovenia: The country started a strategic and systemic circular transformation in 2016, after the Circular Economy Package was released. CE also gained special emphasis in Slovenian Development Strategy 2030 (Lavtizar, V. et al., 2021). An important document for the circular transition is the "Roadmap towards the circular economy" (Godina Kosir et al. 2018) already adopted in 2018. It is the result of strong collaboration of 3.000 stakeholders, representing a bottom-up driven initiative. The foundation of the systemic circular transition is the so-called "circular triangle" (Godina Košir and Giacomelli 2018). The roadmap aims to guide the country towards a circular transition, to become an inspiration and a leader of the

transition in EU-11; to involve stakeholders in identifying and connecting circular practices and to create recommendations to the government for facilitating a more efficient transition.

3.2. Advancements and challenges in the bioeconomy field in EU-11

The EU-11 countries are frequently perceived as falling behind in the advancement of their bioeconomy, since they have yet to fully tap into the significant potential that this sector offers (Lovec and Juvančič, 2021). Considering the recent crisis resulting from the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the bioeconomy is regarded as pivotal for enhancing policy coherence and attaining the objectives outlined in the Green Deal. To accelerate the integration of the bioeconomy within the EU-11 macro-region, targeted governmental support, amplified stakeholder engagement, and research and technology advancement are imperative (Hájek et al., 2021).

Some authors argue that for the EU-11 region, a model based on tacit transfer of knowledge and practices and vertical and horizontal interaction within the value chains and trade, model of the "*do-use-interact*" (DUI) type, would be more relevant. Another model is based on research and innovation-oriented policies, being a "*science-technology-innovation*" (STI) model. The latter, however, is more suitable for developed countries that have advanced knowledge and capital-intensive bioeconomy sectors.

Progress in the bioeconomy requires multifaceted actions at different levels, nationally and regionally, accompanied by a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of specific mechanisms (Vanhamaki et al., 2019) and basic concepts (Woźniak and Twardowski, 2018). Woźniak et al. (2021) underline the importance of formulating transformative policies for sustainable development, emphasizing the need to involve diverse stakeholder groups through collaborative efforts, while encouraging open dialogue, and mutual learning. This perspective aligns with Kirs et al. (2021), who stress that effective systemic and policy-supported transitions toward the bioeconomy rely on stable and extended policy timeframes tailored to specific systems, participatory processes in policy co-design for vision co-development, and the societal legitimacy and commitment to the bioeconomy. It is evidenced that the requirements of systemic and policy-supported transitions towards bioeconomy are threefold: stable and long timeframes in policy-making and dynamic change agents; participatory processes in policy co-design to co-develop visions; and the societal legitimacy of and commitment to bioeconomy (Kirs et al. 2022).

Dynamics of the development of bioeconomy's strategic visions in the EU-11. Focus on the eight selected countries

A recent progress report elaborated by the European Commission (EC, 2022c) evaluates progress in implementing the 2018 EU Bioeconomy Strategy and its action plan. This Progress Report indicates that the national initiatives are making significant progress in attaining the core goals of the EU Bioeconomy Strategy. In addition, notable progress has been made in the implementation of the bioeconomy in Central and Eastern European countries, supported by substantial EU funding contributions and the creation of new platforms and networks. It should also be noted that one of the 3 macro-regional initiatives in the field of bioeconomy is dedicated to the CEE (EU-11), respectively BIOEAST - *The Central-Eastern European Initiative for Knowledge-based Agriculture, Aquaculture and Forestry in the Bioeconomy*[1]. Since 2018 (when the EU Bioeconomy Strategy Action Plan was adopted), Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Poland, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia (supported by the BIOEAST initiative) started the process of developing a bioeconomy national strategy. Furthermore, CEE2ACT project - *Empowering the Central and Eastern European Countries to Develop Circular Bioeconomy Strategies and Action Plans* - aims to enhance development of circular bioeconomy strategies and action plans until 2025, through knowledge transfer and innovative governance models, to achieve better informed decision-making processes, societal engagement, and innovation.

Below, some specific information regarding the progress of the realization of national / regional strategies in the field of bioeconomy in the eight selected countries:

Bulgaria: A draft Strategy for the Development of the Bioeconomy in Bulgaria 2023-2030 was developed by the Agricultural Academy, in the framework of the BIOEASTsUP project. Also, Bulgaria is developing a Strategy for "Strengthening the Role of the Agricultural Sector in the Bioeconomy". In 2022, the Council of Ministers adopted a Strategy and Action Plan for the transition to a circular economy for the period 2022-2027, which partly includes the circular bioeconomy.

Croatia: To develop the strategic framework for the development of the bioeconomy sector, the Government has appointed a working group to develop the bioeconomy strategy and push for more organized activities. The leading role has been given to the Ministry of Agriculture, supported by the Ministry of Regional

[1] BIOEAST initiative offers a common political commitment and shared strategic research and innovation framework for working towards sustainable bioeconomy in the Central and Eastern European (EU-11) countries: Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Croatia, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia. Concept papers have been published in April 2023.

Development and EU Funds, the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, and the Ministry of Education.

Czech Republic: The Bioeconomy Concept paper has been elaborated by the Ministry of Agriculture. The sustainable management of natural resources, sustainable agriculture, forestry, water management and aquaculture, and the sustainable production of food were defined as key sectors for the development of the bioeconomy. Strengthening the role of primary producers and their integration into the bioeconomy value chain, as well as on the forestry side the involvement of the entire value chain of downstream sectors.

Hungary: The Ministry of Agriculture as a core member of BIOEAST Initiative has published in 2023 the elaboration of a strategical bioeconomy concept paper in the framework of BIOEASTsUP project (2019-2023).

Poland: Poland has developed a '*concept paper*' as part of the BIOEASTsUP project that may contribute to the development of a bioeconomy strategy. Moreover, several regions have a bioeconomy related strategies or its elements are included in Regional Innovation Strategies.

Romania: A concept paper has been developed in the frame of the BIOEASTsUP project. Additionally, seven regions (NUTS 2) have already published strategies related to the bioeconomy: one region with a fully dedicated bioeconomy strategy, two regions have a strategy with a strong bioeconomy focus and four regions have strategies with minimum bioeconomy content. Moreover, one region at the NUTS 3 has published a bioeconomy roadmap within the framework of the BE-Rural project.

Slovakia: Currently, there is not a dedicated National Bioeconomy Strategy. However, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic is currently working on the Roadmap for Circular Bioeconomy under the CEE2ACT project.

Slovenia: There is no independent bioeconomy strategy on the national level. A concept paper has been released in 2023 as part of the BIOEAST initiative. Slovenia has many policies addressing the bioeconomy which are developed and structured by different actors. As bioeconomy covers a variety of sectors, there is more than one ministry that is involved in the development of the strategy plan.

Conclusions

This article has examined the state of research on the green transition, with a specific focus on green transition, circular economy, and bioeconomy, in eight countries from the Central and Eastern Europe (EU-11): Slovenia and the four Visegrad countries, which joined the EU in 2004, and the latest entries, Romania and Bulgaria (2007) plus Croatia (2013). The analysis was based on a systematic review of peer-reviewed articles published between 2015-2023 in the Scopus database,

complemented by other sources, including official documents (reports, strategies, government acts, etc.).

The paper has contributed to identifying the status of research in the field of green and circular transition in the EU-11 countries, highlighting the major topics of interest in policy development in the field of circular economy, bioeconomy, and green economy. The review identified the existence of several common key themes and challenges for the entire Union (including the EU-11 countries) that surface within the literature. These encompass the need for a coordinated and integrated strategic approach, the importance of cooperation in policy shaping, as well as stakeholder engagement and collaboration endeavors. On the other hand, the study found that although there is a growing interest in green transition, the scholar exploration on this topic in the EU-11 region is still limited in comparison to Western Europe.

Several articles have also evidenced the need for accelerating the green transition within (post) transitional economies, notably within countries comprising the EU-11 macro-region. This necessitates a more comprehensive understanding of the concepts and mechanisms, as well as a nuanced strategy tailored to the distinctive traits of the EU-11 (Vaceková et al., 2019; Lovec and Juvančič, 2021). For instance, the convergence towards green targets represents a particular challenge for some newly member states from Central and Eastern Europe, due to the presence of highly carbon - intensive regions and their fossil fuel-intensive industrial orientation.

The paper also analyzed whether the timing of EU accession for the newer EU member states (2004 versus 2007/2013) has influenced the dynamics of the ecological transition process. Consequently, it assessed how the selected countries managed to formulate their strategic visions towards a low-carbon, resource-efficient, inclusive green transition, encompassing both circular economy and bioeconomy strategies. The analysis indicates that the advancements achieved in the development of strategic visions and action plans were not impacted by the timing of accession, but rather by the individual efforts undertaken at the national level by each respective state. Regarding circular economy strategies, Slovenia and Poland adopted them earlier, followed by the other five analyzed countries with a delay of one- or two-years. Presently, all analyzed countries, except Croatia, have developed their circular economy strategies. On the other hand, dedicated bioeconomy strategies are currently missing in all the eight analyzed countries. However, the Visegrád countries (PL, CZ, SK, HU), along with Croatia, are currently developing their dedicated strategies, while in the remaining three countries (SI, RO, BG), only related strategies and policies have been observed so far. However, the EU initiatives like BIOEAST and CEE2ACT aim to support the CEE macro-region countries in developing their strategic visions for the bioeconomy.

In conclusion, the European Green Deal and the associated policy documents (such as CEAP and BE) have set forth ambitious objectives for every EU Member State on the path to achieving a green economy transition. Presently, it holds

paramount significance for all EU member states, regardless of their status as newer or older members, to acknowledge the crucial importance of formulating unified strategic visions and effectively implementing them, either regarding the circular economy or the bioeconomy.

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Appendix A1 - **National circular economy strategies in EU-27**

EU Member state	National circular economy strategy	Year
Austria	The Austrian Circular Economy Strategy	2022
Belgium	Ensemble faisons tourner l'économie en développant l'économie circulaire en Belgique	2016
Bulgaria	Strategy and Action Plan for the transition to a circular economy for the period 2022-2027	2022
Croatia		
Cyprus	National Action Plan for the Circular Economy 2021-2027	2021
Czechia	Strategic Framework of the circular economy of the Czech Republic 2040 (or Circular Czechia 2040)	2021
Denmark	Strategy for Circular Economy Action Plan for Circular Economy	2018 2021
Estonia	Circular Economy Strategic Document and Action Plan	2022
Finland	The Critical Move - Finland's Roadmap to the Circular Economy 2.0	2016
	Strategic Programme to Promote a Circular Economy	2021
France	Roadmap for the Circular Economy	2018
Germany	Circular Economy Roadmap for Germany	2021
Greece	National Circular Economy Strategy National Circular Economy Action Plan (National CEAP) for the implementation period 2021-2025	2018 2022
Hungary	Towards a National Circular Economy Strategy for Hungary	2023
Ireland	Whole of Government Circular Economy Strategy 2022-2023	2021
Italy	Towards a Model of Circular Economy for Italy - Overview and Strategic Framework National Strategy for the Circular Economy	2017 2022
Latvia	Action plan for the transition to a circular economy 2020-2027	2020
Lithuania	Roadmap for Lithuania's industrial transition to a Circular Economy	2021
Luxembourg	National circular economy (CE) strategy	2021
Malta	Towards a Circular Economy 2020-2030	2020
Netherlands	A Circular Economy in the Netherlands by 2050	2016
Poland	Roadmap for the Transition to Circular Economy	2019
Portugal	National Action Plan for the Circular Economy 2018-2020	2017
Romania	National Strategy for the Circular Economy Action Plan for the Implementation of the National Strategy for the Circular Economy	2022 in progress
Slovakia	Roadmap for Circular Economy of the Slovak Republic	2022
Slovenia	Roadmap towards the circular economy	2018

Spain	Spanish Circular Economy Strategy (España Circular 2030)	2020
Sweden	National Strategy for the transition to a CE	2020

Appendix A2 - National bioeconomy strategies and concept papers in EU-27

EU Member state	National bioeconomy strategy	Year
Austria	Dedicated Bioeconomy Strategy at national level Progress Report on the Implementation of Bioeconomy Strategy	2019 2022
Belgium	Other policy initiatives dedicated to the bioeconomy	
Bulgaria	Concept paper BIOEAST initiative	2023
Croatia	Concept paper BIOEAST initiative	2023
Cyprus	-	-
Czechia	The Concept of Bioeconomy in the Czech Republic from the Perspective of the Ministry of Agriculture for 2019-2024	2019
Denmark	Other policy initiatives dedicated to the bioeconomy	
Estonia	Concept paper BIOEAST initiative	2023
Finland	The Finnish Bioeconomy Strategy. Sustainably towards higher value added	2022
France	Dedicated Bioeconomy Strategy at national level Dedicated Bioeconomy Action Plan	2017 2018
Germany	New national bioeconomy strategyBioeconomy Action Plan	2020
Greece	Other related strategies at national level	
Hungary	Concept paper BIOEAST initiative	2023
Ireland	National Policy Statement on the Bioeconomy Action Plan for 2019-2020	2018 2019
Italy	Bioeconomy Strategy (updated) National Bioeconomy Action Plan 2023-2025	2019 2023
Latvia	Latvian Bioeconomy Strategy 2030	2017
	Concept paper BIOEAST initiative	2023
Lithuania	Lithuanian Bioeconomy Development Feasibility Study	in progress
	Concept paper BIOEAST initiative	2023
Luxembourg	Other related strategies at national level	
Malta	Other related strategies at national level	
Netherlands	The position of the bioeconomy in the Netherlands	2018
Poland	Concept paper BIOEAST initiative	2023
Portugal	Plano de Ação para a Bioeconomia Sustentável (PABS)	2021
Romania	Concept paper BIOEAST initiative	2023
Slovakia	Concept paper BIOEAST initiative	2023
Slovenia	Concept paper BIOEAST initiative	2023
Spain	Spanish Bioeconomy Strategy: Horizon 2030	2016
Sweden	Dedicated Bioeconomy Strategy at national level	in progress

PART II:
EDUCATION AND THE EUROPEAN LABOUR MARKETS

THE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT: FACTORS THAT CAN LEAD TO THE EMERGENCE OF IMBALANCES

Cristina Ionela BULAT[*], Mihaela MIRON[**]

Abstract

Education is an important tool for the transfer of knowledge, relationships, social experiences, and technology from generation to generation that determines the perspective in which nations will exist in the near future. This article aims to identify the factors that can lead to the emergence of imbalances in the educational environment in Romania. In the past 12 years, the educational environment went through changes that had an impact on the entire system. The highest impact of changes had a direct effect on the educational institutions that had to keep up and identify new appropriate ways to ensure the institutions success, through the fulfillment of objectives and compliance with the assumed mission. The change process is determined by numerous factors such as: the evolution of science and technologies, adaptability to professional requirements, constantly changing social, economic, informational requirements, changes in the demographic structure, the multiplication of professions, the democratization of life, and fierce competition. Analysing the literature and the reality of the educational system we have identified the following factors: changes in the leadership of the educational ministry, legislative changes, lack of funding, the curriculum is not adapted to current needs, human resources, and COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: educational environment, Ministry of education, legislation, educational funding, curriculum, human resources, COVID-19

1. Brief introduction about the educational environment in Romania

Ecaterina Andronescu, one of the previous education ministries that Romania had describes education as being "the most important chapter in the life of every person, a true social bond, and in general, for the future education it's mandatory to contain and imply values. Education brings together parents, communities, and from

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this perspective is essential to build trust in our schools. Trust is the foundation of a school that will last and it's built for a modern society." (Educational Ministry, Ministerul Educației Naționale, 2019). From reasonings, ideas, pleas, opinions, experiences, conceptions, suggestions, and expectations, education becomes a dynamic, cumulative, extensive, and complex process that continues throughout life. In recent decades, education is involved and contributed to global transformation, social life, and maintaining continuity between generations. This allows for the formation of balanced, flexible, and receptive individuals to any change. A change is seen through the lens of the ability to easily adapt to unforeseen situations, but also a creative reconfiguration of human intelligence for adaptation, readjustment, and development, capitalizing on current educational paradigms.

Thus, the educational environment, in all its forms of manifestation and the contexts that generate it, becomes effective through the means and methods of transmitting its specificity, at the level of each individual of the respective community and has a big impact on the culture, institutions, economy, technology, politics, and social life (Gurr, 2023). The educational environment has a strategic role in the process of creating a balance in society and in the personal life of professors and students (Arpentieva, et al., 2019). It's important to take into consideration the main factors that will help the students to maximize the results. In the article "ABC of learning and teaching educational environment" the author Linda Hutchinson identified the factors that contribute to the maximizing of the educational environment. The first factor is the classroom, tutorials, seminars, and lectures; through this factor, we have to ensure that the students feel comfortable, are encouraged to involve in activities and that their needs are satisfied. The second factor is the clinical settings and it's related to the dual role that the professors and the clinician have. They have to be careful since the students are watching and will observe the hidden messages. In order to build the clinical setting the professor needs to take into consideration that they have the consent of families for students to be present, that everyone understands why they are there and what they should do, everyone has space to carry on their activity, the time is enough for teaching and the students are made to feel useful. The last factor is related to the course and the curriculum design that needs to offer a support system for the students with informal activities to build a collective identity (Hutchinson, 2003).

As a fundamental component of education, the education system is defined as the set of institutions/organizations (economic, political, cultural) and human communities (family, people, nation; professional groups, ethnic groups; village, city, neighborhood, community, etc.) from society that, directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly, performs certain pedagogical functions and roles, which ensure the activation and influence of the formation-development process of the human personality (Cristea, 1998).

In Romania, Article 2 of the Education Law - Law 1/ 2011, defines the educational ideal school that "consists in the free, integral and harmonious

development of human individuality, in the formation of the autonomous personality and in assuming a system of values that are necessary for personal fulfillment and development, for the development of the entrepreneurial spirit, for active citizen participation in society, for social inclusion and employment on the labor market" (Romanian Parliament, 2011).

A safe and sustainable future for the whole society depends to a large extent on how the current education system is developed, which is why it must provide knowledge, science, and innovation permanently (Erdoğan, 2022). As a social institution, education is under the influence of trends, reasonings, ideas, pleas, opinions, and expectations generated by society in permanent change, being intensely influenced by political, economic, and social factors (Wolhuter, Nel, Želvys, & Alisauskiene, 2019). Adaptability to professional requirements it's mandatory for people in general regardless of the domain where they activate. During an interview, the ex-ministry of education, Ecaterina Andronescu, said that the educational environment prepares tomorrow's employees that will be capable of working in domains that have to be discovered in the future. For that to happen we can say that the educational environment has to be "upgraded" and the human resource need new skills required by labor markets.

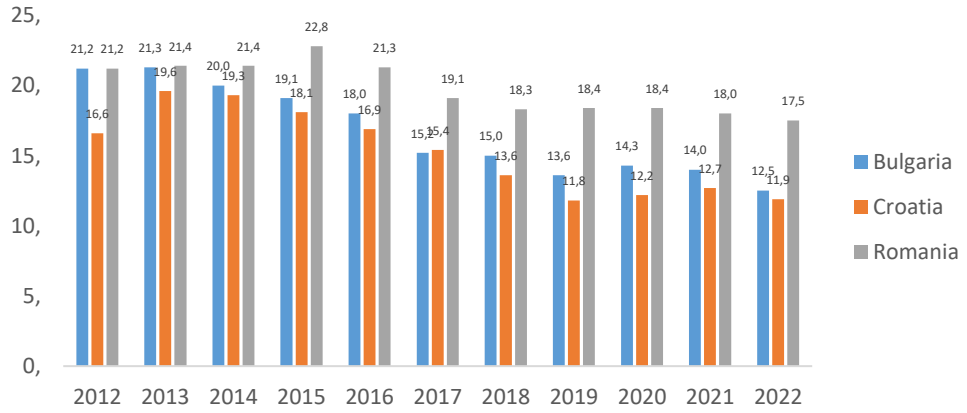
The evolution of science and technology has had a great impact on every aspect of our life and education needs to keep up with evolution. In the article entitled "Science and Technology in Education - Current Challenges and Possible Solutions" the author Svein Sjøberg affirmed that everybody will benefit from a "base knowledge about key ideas in science and basic principles in technology" (Sjøberg, 2002). Since 2001 science and technology have advanced considerably and now we rely on them in all areas of our life. In the 2023 *Global Education Monitoring Report, Technology and Education*, Mary Burns has concluded that "technology has expanded access to information and education, reallocated educational inputs, automated educational processes, delivered learning to refugee students, out-of-school youth, and teachers". Technology became an integrated part of education but the benefits are not distributed evenly generating different points of view on how effective it is (Burns, 2023).

Everyone would agree that education is important and that it needs to be connected with the evolution that happens around us and that challenges us daily to experience new technologies, subjects, and situations. We believe it's important to be aware of the good parts of our educational environment but to not forget about the bad parts to be able to fix them.

2. Main factors that can lead to the emergence of educational imbalances

As a post-communist country, education in Romania has developed differently and still works to change some of the pedagogical methods and approaches of that period. In the book "25 Years of Transition Post-Communist Europe and the IMF" the authors present the European post-communist countries for each region of Europe. Romania is part of Southeast Europe together with Bulgaria and Croatia (International Monetary Fund, 2014). In order to understand Romania's position in the European context we will compare a few relevant indicators available on the Eurostat site with the other 2 post-communist countries from the same European region.

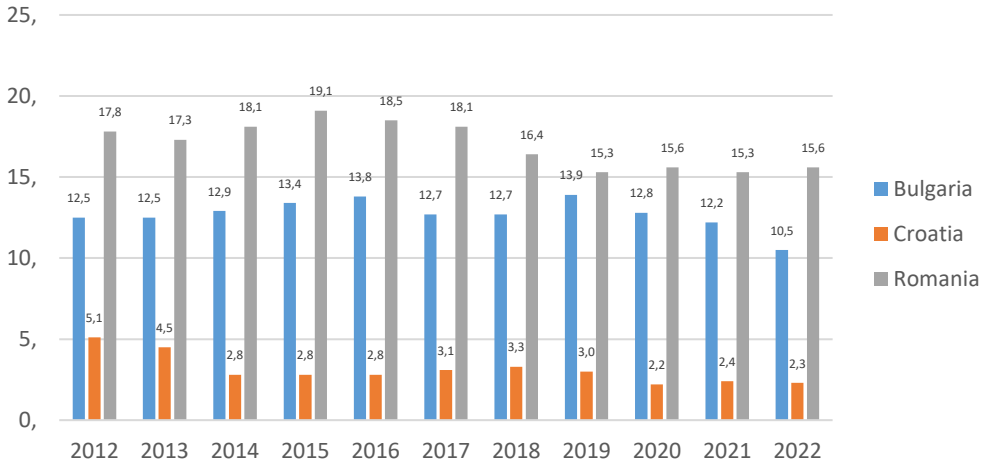
Figure 1. Young people neither in employment nor in education and training (15-24 years) - % of the total population in the same age group



Source: authors' representation based on Eurostat data (LFSI_NEET_A LFSI)

According to Eurostat the indicator "Young people neither in employment nor in education and training (15-24 years) - % of the total population in the same age group" provides information on young people ages between 15 and 24 years that are not employed and have not received any education or training (four weeks preceding the survey) (Eurostat, 2023). Of the 3 post-communist countries Romania had the highest percentage of people that were unemployed in the past 10 years. We can see that the indicator has a downward trend for all 3 countries and that Bulgaria has the biggest drop in the 10 years period that is presented in the figure.

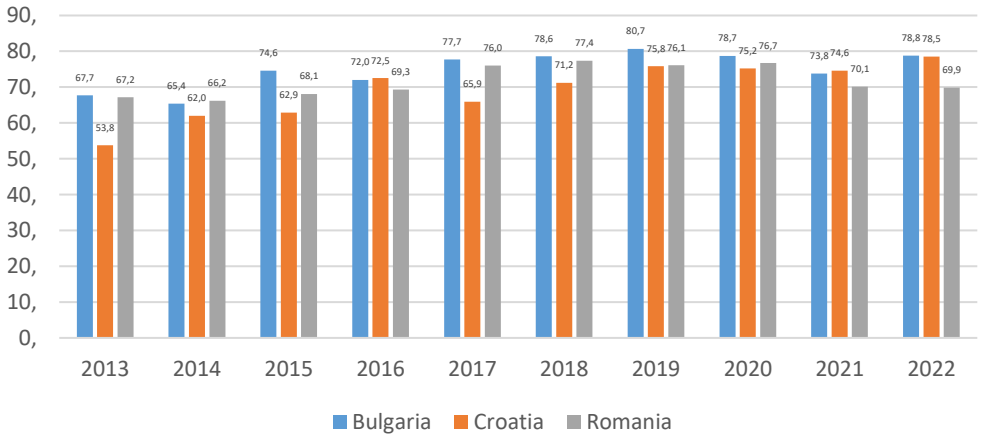
Figure 2. Early leavers from education and training



Source: authors' representation based on Eurostat data (EDAT_LFSE_16)

The Eurostat indicator "Early leavers from education and training" measures the share of the population with age between 18 and 24 with most lower secondary education who were not involved in any education or training (during the four weeks preceding the survey) (Eurostat, 2023). Romania has the higher percentage of early leavers from education and training but has the same drop of around 2% in this indicator in the last 10 years. So the measures took by all the 3 post-communist countries have almost the same results.

Figure 3. Employment rates of recent graduates



Source: authors' representation based on Eurostat data (EDAT_LFSE_24)

According to Eurostat the indicator 'employment rates of recent graduates' presents the employment rates of persons aged between 20 and 34 that are being employed according to the, have attained at least upper secondary education and haven't received any education or training (four weeks preceding the survey and four, having successfully completed their highest educational attainment 1, 2 or 3 years before the survey) (Eurostat, 2023). The evolution of this indicator registers increases and decreases during the past 9 years. The highest percentage of the employment rate was owned by Bulgaria in 2019 (80.7%). Between 2019 and 2021 all 3 countries had a drop in this indicator until 2022 when Bulgaria and Croatia succeed to increase to 78.8% and 78,5%.

The 3 main indicators presented above show a close evolution of the educational situation in all 3 post-communist countries with differences in the values but with almost the same fluctuation. The factors that affect the evolution of these indicators could be the same in all countries (especially the Covid-19 pandemic) but in this paper we will focus on the factors that can lead to the emergence of imbalances in Romania.

To be able to identify the factors we used the autoethnography method accompanied by a literature review. Autoethnography is a qualitative social research method that allows the researcher to use personal experience and connects it to a wider cultural, political, and social meaning and understanding (Chang, 2016). It was important to use the autoethnography method to present the factors that can lead to the emergence of educational imbalances in our country (Romania). All countries are unique and face different problems, even if some of the factors identified by us can apply to other countries as well the way they affect the educational environment can take other forms. Both authors of this paper are interested in the improvement of the educational environment, one of them having a career of 20+ years in education. It was important for us to select the factors that have a major impact on the educational environment. After reading the literature that is relevant to this article such as reports on the state of education, articles related to education available on open sources (Google Scholar, Research Gate, press news, and information available on the Ministry of Education site) we found many factors that can lead to the emergence of educational imbalances but we concluded that the main factors that can lead to the emergence of imbalances are the one presented underneath since they affect the entire educational environment. Another reason that lead to the shortening of the list was that some factors are connected to the ones selected by us. For example, if we discuss about the equipment that an educational institution has, this is connected directly to the funds allocated, and in the end, the problem is related to money.

2.1. Changes in the leadership of the Educational Ministry

From 2011 until today the Romanian Educational Ministry had 18 different ministries[1] that dedicated their knowledge, skills, and time to improve the education for all the actors involved in the educational environment.

In the article "Does frequent leadership changes influence firm performance?" the authors mentioned that frequent leadership changes "*can considerably affect the strategic direction and the smooth function of an enterprise*". In the research, they analyzed the performance of the enterprises over one year and they identified that it dropped, they concluded that the stability of the leadership is essential to have good financial results (Akbar, Jiang, Fareed, & Akbar, 2021).

Even if educational institutions are not created to function as an enterprise and they don't "run after profit" they are meant to guide and teach future generations to be responsible future citizens and to discover the domain they would like to work. Unfortunately, from the list of ministries presented, no one was able to have a complete mandate of 4 years and to fully implement all the projects that they proposed and approved. It was up to the next minister if they would continue the work started by the previous minister. Leadership fluctuation can lead to inefficiency and waste of time by starting from zero projects that were in different stages when the new minister took over.

2.2. Legislative changes

The educational approach in schools in Romania is correlated, as everywhere in the world, with the technique, the level of involvement and the approach of the teacher and the managers of the school institutions. Also, the same aspects influence the various challenges that may arise, such as the complex issue of school dropout or social inequity. It is desired that every school environment offers safety and support to both learners and teachers, and for this to happen happens, it is necessary for the leaders of today's institutions to have a progressive vision, centered on needs, to observe in order to provide feedback folded on needs and significantly useful, to emphasize practice (correlated with theory), but also on encouraging communication in the teacher-manager, teacher-students and teacher-parent triad. In this sense, on February 15, 2016, at the national level, the Educated Romania project was launched, under the coordination of the country's president, which proposed a set of policies that converge towards the main objective - Romania to offer a quality education. This is the largest educational reform project administered and supported by the Presidential Administration. For the project under discussion, the period 2010-2020 was, therefore, of strategic planning. The 2021-2030 period is one for which bold targets have been set, but which could remove Romania from the list of countries

[1] Please see the list in the Appendix.

with a semi-functional educational system. These include (Educated Romania project, Presidential Administration):

a) The proportion of 15-year-olds with low proficiency in reading, maths and science should be below 15%.
b) The proportion of eighth graders with low IT skills should be below 15%.
c) At least 96% of children between the age of 3 and compulsory primary school enrollment should participate in early childhood education and care.
d) The proportion of early leavers from education and training systems should be below 9%.
e) The proportion of people aged between 25 and 34 who have completed tertiary education should be at least 45%.

In terms of management, this project had two major priorities (1. Developing standards for school leaders; 2. Consolidating the selection and initial training of school leaders.) focused on the professionalization of the role of school leaders and their rigorous initial training in order to meet and solving in an appropriate manner the challenges inherent in the job of a school leader.

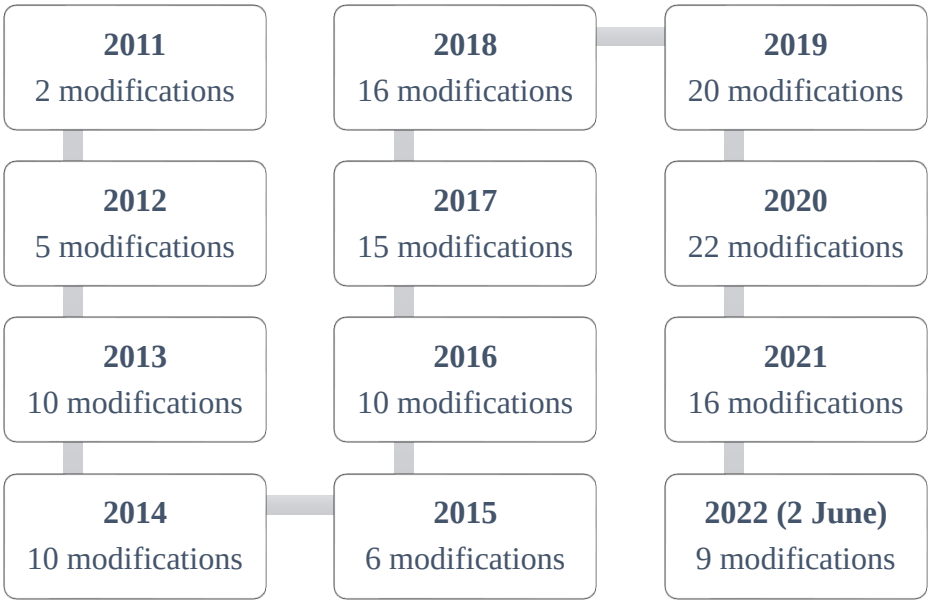
The Educated Romania project does not only address issues related to educational leaders but proposes a broader vision that articulates education in general and aims to revolutionize the educational system in order to increase the quality of life of future graduates (higher incomes, increased quality of life, accessible jobs, etc.), the element that brings a series of benefits for society (competitiveness on the labor market, economic development, civic and societal involvement, etc.) (Educated Romania team project, 2021; Education Ministery, 2021).

All these needs were established on the basis of studies and statistics from which the pressing needs of the Romanian education system resulted. Thus, it was found that Romania faces several problems of a structural and organizational nature with a negative impact at the societal level, which is why it was set up and approved on May 22, 2023, in the plenary session of the Romanian Senate - decision-making chamber of Education Laws (Pre-University Education Law no. 198/2023 and the Higher Education Law no. 199/2023), to be implemented in practice, starting from September 2nd, 2013.

The future Law of Education, national programs, projects and all the efforts that have the educational system at the center, have as their point of departure the identification of the vulnerabilities and deficiencies faced by this system. Problems are substantial, and the approach to remedy them must be multidisciplinary and involve authorities, institutions and associations whose efforts converge towards the expected common goal (Education Ministery, 2021).

The educational law that was published in 2011 and will be used until 2nd September 2023 when the new educational law will take effect suffered from the year when it appeared and until 2022, 141 modifications (change, elimination, or the addition of some articles) (Educational Ministry, Legislație de organizare și funcționare (Organization and operation legislation), 2016).

Figure 4. The number of legislation modifications from 2011 until 2022



Source: Educational Ministry, Legislație de organizare și funcționare (Organization and operation legislation, 2016

From the figure above we can see how the legislative framework has suffered many modifications even before the year 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic started and the entire educational system was forced to move activities online. During the COVID-19 period, the changes had a major impact on the activity of the administrative employees and forced everyone to introduce new activities (that in some cases would turn a simple procedure into a more complicated one with more steps to follow) or to change the way they were working. All this changes have lead to an unpredictable legal framework that didn't offered stability for the employees part of the educational environment.

2.3. Lack of fundings

In the article "Internal Quality Assurance System of Education in Financing Standards and Assessment Standards" (Hidayah & Syahrani, 2022) concluded that

> "*Learning financing standards are minimum criteria regarding the components and amounts of investment costs and operational costs that are arranged to fulfill the learning outcomes of graduates. Education investment costs to provide facilities and infrastructure, development, and education*

personnel, while operational costs are part of the education costs needed to carry out activities education. Financing standards include: 1. Financing planning standards, and 2. Financing allocation standards. Learning assessment standards are minimum criteria regarding the assessment of learning processes and outcomes in the context of fulfilling graduate learning outcomes. assessment standards include: Assessment principles, assessment techniques and instruments, assessment mechanisms and procedures, assessment implementation, assessment reporting and graduation" (Hidayah & Syahrani, 2022).

This conclusion highlights the importance of funds in the educational system. Romania had the smallest total general government expenditure on education in GDP (Peticilă, 2019). It has been more than 12 years since it was established through the legislative framework (Law 1 / 2011), article 8, that 6% of the GDP will be allocated to education. However, this percentage has never been allocated to the Romanian educational system. On the site of Education Ministry there is presented the amount of "*the budget for education foreseen for 2023 is 49,509 million lei, respectively 3.2% of GDP. Under these conditions, the education budget for 2023, on all funding sources, is higher by 6,032 million lei compared to the preliminary execution for 2022. Thus, in 2023, education expenses will weight 8.14% in the Consolidated General Budget (increasing compared to 2022), the weight relative to GDP also increasing: 3.2%, compared to the execution preliminary 3.12%."* The educational budget is financed from four main sources: the state budget, the state budget - sums broken down from VAT, through local budgets, own revenues of higher education institutions and local budgets from own revenues (Education Ministry, 2022).

On the Eurostat site, there is presented the total general government expenditure on education for 2021 GDP and will be presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Total general government expenditure on education for 2021 of GDP (Eurostat, 2023)

Total general government expenditure on education, 2021, % of GDP

	Education	Pre-primary and primary education	Secondary education	Post-secondary non-tertiary education	Tertiary education	Education not definable by level	Subsidiary services to education	R&D education	Education n.e.c
EU*	**4.8**	**1.7**	**1.8**	**0.0**	**0.8**	**0.1**	**0.3**	**0.0**	**0.1**
euro area 19*	**4.7**	**1.5**	**1.9**	**0.0**	**0.7**	**0.1**	**0.3**	**0.0**	**0.1**
euro area 20*	**4.7**	**1.5**	**1.9**	**0.0**	**0.7**	**0.1**	**0.3**	**0.0**	**0.1**
Belgium	**6.3**	**2.0**	**2.4**	**0.0**	**0.9**	**0.6**	**0.2**	**0.0**	**0.1**
Bulgaria	**4.3**	**0.8**	**2.3**	**-**	**0.7**	**0.0**	**0.2**	**0.0**	**0.3**
Czechia	**5.1**	**1.3**	**2.3**	**0.0**	**0.7**	**0.1**	**0.2**	**0.3**	**0.1**
Denmark	**6.0**	**2.8**	**1.5**	**0.0**	**1.5**	**0.1**	**0.1**	**0.0**	**0.1**
Germany*	**4.5**	**1.5**	**1.6**	**0.1**	**0.8**	**0.1**	**0.4**	**0.0**	**0.1**
Estonia	**5.9**	**2.4**	**1.6**	**0.1**	**1.0**	**0.3**	**0.3**	**0.1**	**0.2**
Ireland	**3.0**	**1.2**	**1.1**	**0.0**	**0.6**	**0.0**	**0.1**	**0.0**	**0.0**
Greece	**4.1**	**1.3**	**1.2**	**0.0**	**1.0**	**0.0**	**0.1**	**0.4**	**0.1**
Spain*	**4.6**	**1.8**	**1.8**	**0.0**	**0.6**	**0.1**	**0.1**	**0.1**	**0.1**
France	**5.2**	**1.4**	**2.2**	**0.0**	**0.6**	**0.2**	**0.7**	**0.0**	**0.0**
Croatia	**5.2**	**2.5**	**1.0**	**0.0**	**1.0**	**0.0**	**0.3**	**0.2**	**0.1**
Italy	**4.1**	**1.6**	**1.9**	**0.0**	**0.3**	**0.0**	**0.2**	**0.0**	**0.1**
Cyprus	**5.5**	**1.8**	**1.9**	**0.0**	**1.0**	**0.3**	**0.4**	**0.0**	**0.0**
Latvia	**5.6**	**2.2**	**1.3**	**0.0**	**1.0**	**0.5**	**0.1**	**0.1**	**0.4**
Lithuania	**4.8**	**1.0**	**1.9**	**0.2**	**0.6**	**0.4**	**0.0**	**0.2**	**0.4**
Luxembourg	**4.7**	**1.7**	**1.7**	**0.1**	**0.4**	**0.3**	**0.4**	**0.0**	**0.0**
Hungary	**5.0**	**1.2**	**1.5**	**0.0**	**1.6**	**0.1**	**0.4**	**0.0**	**0.2**
Malta	**5.5**	**1.4**	**1.9**	**0.0**	**0.9**	**0.0**	**0.4**	**0.4**	**0.5**
Netherlands	**5.1**	**1.6**	**2.0**	**0.0**	**1.3**	**0.0**	**0.2**	**0.0**	**0.0**
Austria	**4.9**	**1.5**	**2.0**	**0.0**	**0.8**	**0.3**	**0.2**	**0.0**	**0.1**
Poland	**4.9**	**2.3**	**0.9**	**0.0**	**1.2**	**0.1**	**0.3**	**0.1**	**0.1**
Portugal*	**4.6**	**1.7**	**1.8**	**0.0**	**0.7**	**0.1**	**0.1**	**0.0**	**0.2**
Romania	**3.2**	**0.8**	**1.3**	**0.0**	**0.7**	**0.1**	**0.1**	**0.0**	**0.2**
Slovenia	**5.7**	**2.3**	**1.8**	**0.0**	**1.1**	**0.1**	**0.2**	**0.0**	**0.1**
Slovakia	**4.3**	**1.2**	**1.5**	**0.0**	**0.6**	**0.3**	**0.5**	**0.0**	**0.1**
Finland	**5.7**	**1.3**	**2.4**	**0.0**	**1.7**	**0.2**	**0.0**	**0.0**	**0.1**
Sweden	**6.7**	**4.2**	**1.0**	**0.0**	**1.2**	**0.2**	**0.0**	**0.0**	**0.1**
Iceland	**7.7**	**3.4**	**2.3**	**0.0**	**1.5**	**0.1**	**0.2**	**0.0**	**0.1**
Norway	**5.5**	**2.2**	**1.0**	**0.0**	**1.1**	**0.4**	**0.2**	**0.0**	**0.1**
Switzerland	**5.7**	**1.3**	**1.6**	**0.0**	**1.3**	**1.2**	**0.1**	**0.0**	**0.1**

Source: Eurostat (gov_10a_exp)

***provisional**

2.4. Curriculum is not adapted to current needs

The report presented by the Organization for Economic Development Cooperation (OECD) highlights that recently the existing differences between learners have deepened, leading directly to inequity (OECD, 2023), because there is no coherence in the application of the interdisciplinary digital curriculum in a unitary way at the level of countries. In this sense, ensuring equal opportunities for all has become a fundamental objective at the global level. It is necessary to immediately implement a curriculum centered on skills (including personal, social and learning to learn), interdisciplinary because it targets generic skills starting from the premise that learners need to develop their critical thinking, creative thinking, empathy, persistence/ resilience to truly become active engaged citizens for a globalized world (Howells, 2018).

In the book "Digital Technology and Didactic Creativity" the authors mentioned the skills required by the professions of the future according to the World Economic Forum Report, from 2020: creative thinking, originality and initiative, along with analytical thinking, solving complex problems and critical thinking that have become priorities for any educational institution (Alexandru, Aramă, Gheorghe, & Velea, 2020).

2.5. Human resource

In the article "Knowledge Management, Human Resource Management, and Higher Education: A Theoretical Model" is emphasized: "*organizations—business and educational—must focus on creating and developing knowledge workers that can succeed and excel in a competitive, global environment. Therefore, human resources management activities and curricula development activities must focus on instilling, improving, and evaluating knowledge, skills, and abilities of human assets*" (Brewer & Brewer, 2010).

The human resources of any educational institution should constantly seek and aim to develop/improve their professional knowledge, skills, and abilities, to live learning, to eliminate self-sufficiency, to make the most of their creativity, innovation and transformation, as professionals, to support the educational needs and to adapt to the scientific novelties arising from research in various fields, moving to a higher status of them.

Another cause that can lead to the emergence of imbalances in education is that there is no stability on the job because of fixed-term contracts. Many times young professors come up with new initiatives that push the educational organization to improve the status quo. Because of the type of contract, they can't continue the implementation of the projects or can't be involved at all in them. The professors that are close to retirement have rich professional expertise that will be lost when

they finish their academic careers. The young generation needs to be attracted to didactic careers with salaries and opportunities for professional development.

2.6. COVID-19 pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted all systems, but especially the education system all over the world. The most affected were people from vulnerable groups. In the context of the pandemic, the existing educational crisis has increased social inequalities (World Bank, Unesco, & United Nations Children's Fund, 2022). The pandemic period increased the economic and social risks for the entire population of the globe, but especially for people who were already at risk and had difficulties integrating into the labor market (single-parent families, people with disabilities, migrants, lack of digital devices, remote rural regions) (European Commission & Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs, 2019).

The Deputy General Director for Education, UNESCO, Ms. Stefania Giannini, warned that "the COVID-19 pandemic was the worst shock to education systems in a century", this being also highlighted in the report Mission: Recovering Education (Giannini, Jenkins, & Saavedra, 2021); moreover, there may be negative influences on educational environments for years to come (Biddle, 2021). According to a UNICEF estimate, around 150 million children live in multidimensional poverty without access to essential services - due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of children living in multidimensional poverty has risen to 1.2 billion - a 15% increase since the pandemic hit in early 2020 (UNICEF, 2020). Thus, children could be among the biggest victims of the crisis in the long term, as education, nutrition, safety, and health will be significantly undermined by the socio-economic impact and unintended consequences of the pandemic response.

At the same time, the pandemic highlighted for the entire population the significant role of educational institutions and the relationships they generate in the economic, social and political prosperity and stability of nations, which can directly contribute to the short- and long-term recovery of society due to the opportunities generated of times of crisis for collaborative creativity, innovation and change (Santhosam & Pulla, 2022).

Conclusions

The educational environment is the engine of a developed society that can encourage the young generation to dream, follow their vocation and become professionals in their chosen fields. The educational environment reveals the importance of encouraging people to adapt to current times, which is why throughout schooling the learners are supported, guided, and involved to be part of the changes that happen around them.

In the article, we present and highlighted the factors that we identified after studying the literature review and based on the experience in the educational environment as follows: changes in the leadership of the educational ministry, legislative changes, lack of funding, curriculum not adapted to current needs, human resources, and COVID-19 pandemic. We are aware that the educational environment has other factors that contribute to the emergence of imbalances, but from our perspective, the ones we presented contribute the most. Eliminating the factors that can lead to the emergence of imbalances is not a simple task. It is built over a longer period taking into consideration that society in general demands flexibility, adaptability, and innovation from the organization.

The changes in the leadership of the Educational Ministry is the factor that will conduct to an unstable educational environment that will determine the system to work slowly and be inefficient. Not being able to know how different projects will go or if they will be finished it's only a disadvantage for the teachers, students, and administrative employees that won't be able to enjoy possible good results (that can change the activity into being more interesting and pleasant).

The legislative changes that are made too often will lead to unhappy employees that will have to change their way of doing things. Usually, the most affected are the administrative employees but in some cases, the professor's activity can be affected as well and this can affect the classes.

Fundings are the fuel of activities that allow extraordinary things to happen and without proper funding, no activity will have good results. Education, in special, needs funds to be able to offer each student all the key elements to thrive. Professors need to be paid accordingly and to have funds to organize different activities that will allow students to explore and learn more interestingly and pleasantly.

Curriculum is not adapted to current needs and this creates gaps in the results obtained after the process of learning is over. Students need to accustom the essential skills and knowledge that will allow them to be ready for future jobs. If the curriculum doesn't provide a base of relevant knowledge the educational environment doesn't fulfill the basic reason that was created for. A key element is to have great professors that activate the curiosity in students and inspire them to learn more.

Human resources are the center of all activities. Regardless of the type of organization (public or private), employees need to feel that they are connected to the job and that it gives them a feeling of stability. Unpredictable changes and eliminating some categories of employees from some activities are at the disadvantage of the organization. A team mixed with experienced employees and young people can surprise with a new approach that will be accepted by everyone reducing the resistance to accepting new ways of working.

Covid 19 pandemic was a factor that changed everything we were used to and the educational environment is not an exception. From our perspective, it was bad because of its obvious negative effects but it pushed education to make many steps

forward and to improve a part of the activities. The experience gained by all the actors involved in the educational environment should be used for future projects that focus on ways to allow everyone to have access to education, especially for the students that are part of the vulnerable groups.

Capitalizing within the educational institutions at the optimal level the verbs: to know, to do, to be, to innovate (dynamics through their construction) with evolutionary meaning in any type of action that it entails, the analysis of the factors that can lead to the emergence of imbalances become an essential action.

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Appendix

Educational Ministries from 2011 until 2023:

1. Daniel Funeriu - his mandate started on 23rd December 2009 and ended on 9th February 2012. He was a minister for 2 years and 2 months.
2. Cătălin Baba - his mandate started on 9th February 2012 and ended on 7th May 2012. He was a minister for almost 3 months.
3. Ioan Mang - his mandate started on 7th May 2012 and ended after 8 days.
4. Liviu Pop - his mandate started on 15th May and ended on 2nd July 2012 (1 month and a bit).
5. Ecaterina Andronescu - her mandate started on 2nd July and ended on 21st December 2012. She was a minister for 5 months and 19 days.
6. Remus Pricopie - his mandate started on 21st December 2012 and ended on 14th December 2014. He was a minister for almost 2 years.
7. Sorin Cimpeanu - his mandate started on 14th December 2014 and ended on 17th November 2015. He was a minister for 11 months.
8. Adrian Curaj - his mandate started on 17h November 2015 and ended on 7th July 2016. He was a minister for almost 8 months.
9. Mircea Dumitru - his mandate started on 7th July 2016 and ended on 4th January 2017. He was a minister for almost 6 months.
10. Pavel Nastase - his mandate started on 4th January 2017 and ended on 29th June 2017. He was a minister for almost 6 months.
11. Liviu- Marian Pop - his mandate started on 29th June 2017 and ended on 29th January 2018. He was a minister for 11 months.
12. Valentin Popa - his mandate started on 29th January 2018 and ended on 27th September 2018. He was a minister for 8 months.
13. Rovana Plumb -her mandate started on 2nd October 2018 and ended on 16th November 2018. She was a minister for almost 2 months.
14. Ecaterina Andronescu - her mandate started on 16th October 2018 and ended on 5th August 2019. She was a minister for almost 1 year and a month.
15. Valer-Daniel Breaz -- his mandate started on 5th August 2019 and ended on 4th November 2019. He was a minister for almost 4 months.
16. Monica Anisie - her mandate started on 4th November 2019 and ended on 23rd December 2020. She was a minister for 1 year and a month.
17. Sorin Cimpeanu - his mandate started on 23rd December 2020 and ended on 29th September 2022. He was a minister for almost 2 years.
18. Ligia Deca - her mandate started on 29th September 2022 and she is still the minister.

TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE YOUNG HUMAN FACTOR IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION OF THE WORKFORCE

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Abstract

International migration of the workforce has become a global challenge and is constantly in the spotlight of the world community. Since ancient times, humanity has been on the move. Some people move in search of jobs or economic opportunities, others to join family or to study. Others migrate in response to the negative effects of climate change, natural disasters or environmental factors. Among migration phenomena, an essential role is held by the migration of the young human factor. Today, it is estimated that the number of young people, i.e. people aged between 15 and 24, is around 1.3 billion and account for 15.5 per cent of the global population. (UN, 2020). Migration in general, and that of young people in particular, is one of the current challenges for the developing countries, including the Republic of Moldova. The increasing migration of young people concerns the authorities and civil society, given its effects on the country's human potential and socio-economic development. In this article we aim to study the current trends of the migration process, in particular to address the motivation of young people in Moldova to migrate in order to study abroad.

Keywords: migration patterns, youth mobility, migratory corridors, young people and artificial intelligence

Introduction

The analysis of long-term data on international migration shows the increasing degree of non-uniformity of this phenomenon worldwide, with the causes being shaped by economic, geographical, demographic factors, resulting in *distinct migration patterns*, or the amplification of the heterogeneity of global *migratory "corridors"*. The largest corridors tend to be from developing countries to larger

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economies, such as the United States, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Germany. For 20 years now, the biggest corridor has been between the US and Mexico. The same trends persist in Europe, although regional events such as BREXIT and the special operation in Ukraine have led to some changes in European migratory corridors. For example, the *Poland-UK* corridor has changed to *Poland-Germany*. Taking specific countries as examples, the same trends have continued over the years for immigrant and emigrant states. In these corridors, in addition to people migrating for the reasons mentioned above, there are also young people migrating for various purposes, the main one being to achieve higher education. At the present stage the experience of learning abroad has become a trend and is promoted by the policies of developed countries. Students' mobility is stimulated through various national and regional programmes, and several countries have bilateral and multilateral agreements in this field. Overall, the number of young people who have migrated over the years has increased significantly, from 37.7 million in 1990 to around 60 million in 2021 (ILO), (2021). *The 2030 Agenda and Youth Migration* (UN, 2020) extensively address the opportunities and challenges of the migration process through its impact on young people and sustainable economic development. Population growth trends worldwide, aging migrant populations, and youth growth in most developing countries reflect the relevance of youth migration in supporting and promoting inclusion and sustainable economic development in the upcoming years. The positive contribution of young migrants to sustainable development is recognized by the UN in its *2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals* (UN, 2020). Several actions are proposed:

- Optimizing the overall business environment for youth, creating jobs and youth developement;
- Entrepreneurial education and training for young people to obtaine education, skills and competencies they need to thrive in this modern era and contribute to the development of their communities and society;
- Ensuring access to financial services and products;
- Tailoring support networks to the needs of young social entrepreneurs.
- Through this strategy, member states have agreed to "ensure safe, orderly, and regular migration that fully respects the human rights and humane treatment of migrants regardless of their migration status." (UN, 2016, p. 2)

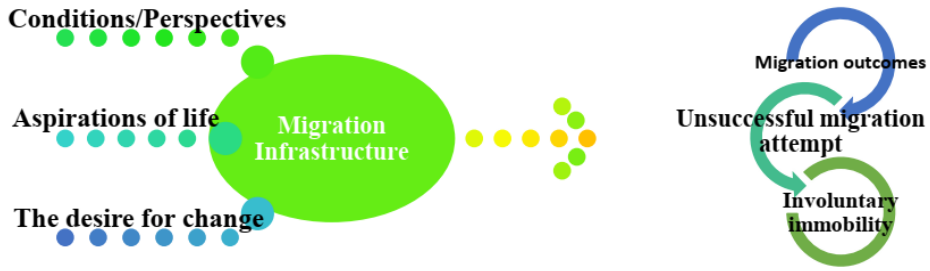
1. General trends of the international migration process contemporary stage

Once the phenomenon of migration appeared, several models were outlined in the specialized literature that determined the factors stimulating this process. The main theories encountered are: *Ravenstein's Laws of Migration*, that was proposed in 1885; *Gravity Model* based on the relationship between distance and migration; *Stouffer's Theory of Mobility*, who is considering that the number of migrants from an origin to a destination is directly proportional to the number of opportunities at

that destination, and inversely proportional to the number of intervening opportunities between the origin and the destination; *Lee's Theory:* based on ideea which lead to spatial mobility of population in any area (ENC, 2023).

If we refer to migration patterns, which have emerged over the years under the influence of several factors, the most general but also acrelevant is the model developed by the Norwegian researcher in the field, Jorgen Carling (2021).

Figure 1. The migration model, according to Carling



Source*:* Carling, 2021.

Importantly, this model recognizes that the desire to change does not necessarily result in the desire to migrate, and vice-versa, where there is a desire to migrate, it does not necessarily result in desire to change. The migration process is, therefore, broad, complex, and determined by several objective and subjective factors that change from one period to another.

Talking about general trends in the movement of people, today, more people than ever live in a country other than the one they were born in. According to the IOM World Migration Report 2022 (IOM, 2022) in December 2020, the number of international migrants was estimated at almost 281 million globally, 60 million more than in 2010 (Table 1.). International migrants represented 3.6% of the global population in 2020, compared to 2.8% in 2000 and 2.3% in 1980 (IOM, 2022).

While many individuals migrate out of choice, out of the desire to change something in their lives, a majority migrate out of necessity. According to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2021), the number of forcibly displaced people globally was 79.5 million at the end of 2019. Of these, 26 million were refugees, 45.7 million were internally displaced, 4.2 million were asylum seekers, and 3.6 million were Venezuelans displaced abroad. It is worth mentioning here the sudden increase in the number of Afghan and Ukrainian migrants, as a consequence of the military conflicts between 2021 and 2022, over 6.3 million Ukrainians and 2.3 million Afghans (IOM, 2022).

Table 1. Evolution of the number of migrants by category during 2019-2020

Indicators	2020	2019
Total number of migrants	281 million - 3.6% of the population (10% young migrants)	272 million - 3.5% of the population
Women	135 million - 3.5% of the global female population	130 million - 3.4% of the global female population
Men	146 million - 3.7% of the global male population	141 million - 3.6% of the global male population
Workforce	169 million	164 million
Missing migrants	3900 missing	5400 missing
Remittances	702 billion dollars	719 billion dollars

Source: authors' representation based on IOM data, 2022

We are now in an unprecedented era of mobility, and the need to facilitate orderly, safe, regulated, and responsible migration and mobility is becoming increasingly relevant and mandatory. The need to address the challenges and maximize the opportunities that this mobility brings has been recognized by the inclusion of migration in the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, which highlights the positive contribution of migrants to inclusive growth and development. Migration is integrated into a number of *Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)* targets, such as ending modern slavery and addressing the vulnerability of migrant workers. However, the central reference to *migration in the SDGs is target 10.7 on facilitating "orderly, safe, regulated, and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of well-planned and managed migration policies."* As it is a vast process among young people, current trends in international migration are determined by: Policy drafting on migration, partnerships between countries and governments, the welfare of migrants and respecting their rights, safe and orderly mobility during crises, regulated migration. (IOM, 2018)

Looking at everything that is happening in the world at the present stage, international migration trends are shaped by several global changes:

1. Young people's desire to study abroad. There are several reasons: lack of opportunities in the home country or the desire to experience something new in the host country;
2. Russian - Ukrainian military conflict and tensions in the region (lack of access to education and jobs for the young human factor);
3. The impact of COVID-19 on the global economy and the evolution of virus mutations;
4. The economic integration process in South America allows easier access for migrants from Venezuela;

5. The New Global Economic Crisis generated by the pandemic and the Russian - Ukrainian war is changing the migratory corridors and the conditions of asylum policy;
6. Changing the migration order in the U.S. with Biden's attempt to modify Trump's imposed migration policies;
7. The fall of the government in Afghanistan and its invasion by the Taliban generates massive movements of the local population out of the country, especially young people;
8. Geopolitical movements in South-East Europe.

Hence, we can say that the workforce migration process will never be static or tedious. Any global change generates strategic changes in the movement of individuals. In each period, everything is different, depending on the local, regional, or global conjuncture.

The unprecedented rate of change in recent years in the geopolitical, environmental and technological fields has led some analysts and commentators to create or use expressions such as "*The Age of Acceleration", "The Fourth Industrial Revolution" and "The Age of Change"*, as a consequence of the hyperglobalisation phenomenon, which has taken on an exorbitant acceleration in all fields.

Recently, another global phenomenon, COVID-19 has been forcing its way into all global and regional processes, amplifying the feeling of uncertainty in all fields, while also providing an opportunity to reflect on future changes and mutations. For exemple, OECD policy brief published after the biggest waves of COVID-19, provides new evidence on the impact of the pandemic on immigrant integration in terms of health, labour market outcomes and training. Immigrants are disproportionately affected by COVID-19, because they were much more likely than their native-born peers to catch the disease, to develop severe symptoms, and to face higher mortality risks. This is due to a range of factors such as poorer housing conditions with higher incidences of overcrowding; a higher dependency on public transport; overconcentration in areas with higher population density; fewer possibilities for teleworking and a higher incidence of frontline jobs; as well as language barriers and other structural obstacles to access health services and communications regarding prevention measures (OECD, 2022).

Similar to other international phenomena, migration has also been historically affected by resounding geopolitical events, such as the two world wars, the Cold War, major terrorist attacks (such as the September 2001 attack), the expansion of globalisation through the emergence of transnational corporations and territorial integration through the creation or enlargement of regional integrationist groups. Each time, these processes have had a direct impact on the movement of the workforce.

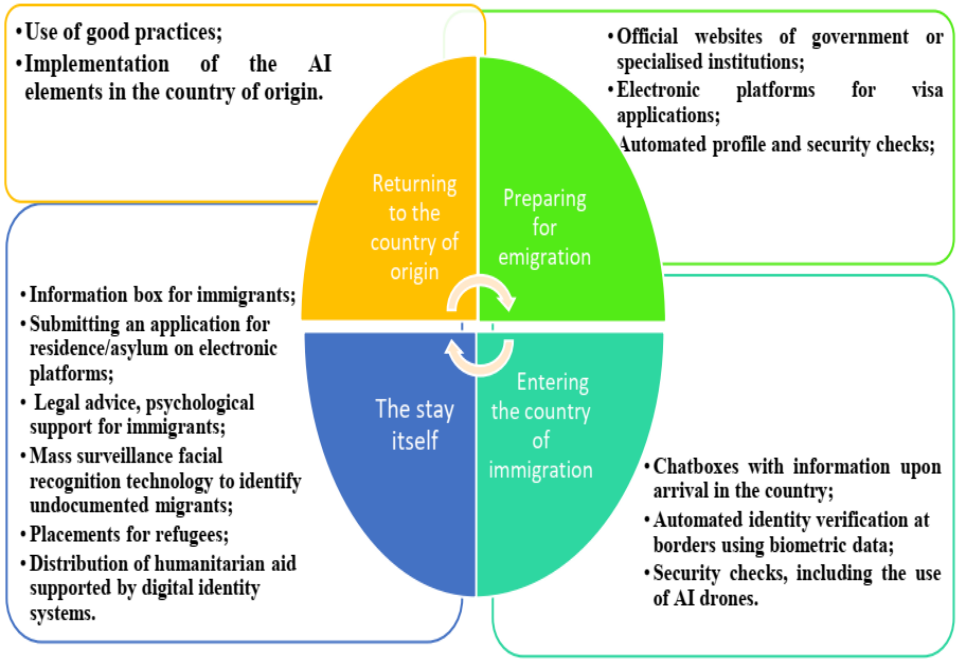
Under the influence of the phenomena mentioned above, other systemic change processes are taking shape that directly influence the migration process, namely the policies of the governments of national economies, civil society, industry

and citizens. In a society dominated by internationalisation, globalisation and economic integration, several factors set the tone for a new era in the movement of the workforce (especially young people, as they are the promoters of change and have greater capacity for movement than other categories of migrants), mobility in general:

- ***Technological transformations and Artificial Intelligence (AI)*** - Technological innovations since 2005 led to the so-called "Fourth Industrial Revolution", Big Data and Big Tech dramatically changing how social, political, and economic systems operate globally**.** Also, the sudden launch of the AI concept has brought tremendous changes in the business and government branches, along with the population/workforce migration process, because there is no lifestyle without Google, Youtube, mobile apps, or social networks. Digital technology is becoming increasingly crucial in the migration journey. People are able to get real-time information about all the details regarding the emigration process, accommodation, employment, obtaining residence papers, financial support, and connection with the diaspora. This also allows them to avoid risky situations such as human trafficking, illegal migration, and exploitation at work. At the same time, all mobile applications make it easier for them to access an informative, movable, adaptable infrastructure, in other words, a better insight into how to function and integrate into a host country. On the other hand, all the latest technological innovations can be successfully adopted and implemented in the countries of origin, especially since there are various online communication platforms that allow people to be in touch wherever they are. Technology also plays a pivotal role in remittance transfers, thus adding value to national economies (figure 2). Technological changes were occurring before COVID-19 but have intensified significantly during the pandemic, meaning that the deep digitization of an already digitized world will be one of the most significant long-term effects. Shaping migration and mobility systems to reduce the impact of inequality in a world suffering from multiple 'digital gaps' will be particularly important in ensuring the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). (McAuliffe, 2021)
- ***Geopolitical transformations*** **-** Increased competition between states results in increased geopolitical tension and risks eroding multilateral cooperation. Economic, political, and military power has shifted radically over the past two decades as a result of increased geopolitical competition and the heated rivalry between major centers of power. These movements have a direct impact on the migration process. On the one hand, we see how the values of fairness, accountability, impartiality, equity, and justice are being actively undermined as some political leaders ignore the common interest in favour of the personal, defying laws, the system of law, and international institutions. This leads to an exodus of refugees to certain countries, as people migrate to a safe place where their rights are respected. In contrast, other countries are making constant efforts

to provide support and assistance to those in need, actively promoting a series of key initiatives to ensure improved conditions for communities globally, especially those most in need. For example, some progress has been made towards achieving the SDGs and on specific migration like: *Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages - For migrants:* Specific public health measures on epidemics and communicable diseases to reach, provide preventative services and treatment for migrants and refugees; Ensure inclusion of attention to migrants and refugees in national sexual, reproductive and family planning health care strategies and programmes. *Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all - For migrants:* Ensure access to and enrollment of all migrant/immigrant/refugee girls and boys in primary and secondary schooling in destination and transit countries, regardless of migration status; Ensure equitable access by migrants/immigrants/refugees to all such training (to improve employability and integration of migrants both in destination countries and if/when return to origin countries). *Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls - For migrants:* to combat human trafficking (while protecting victims) (Taran, 2016, pp. 3-4).

Figure 2. The impact of Artificial Intelligence on the migration process.



Source: adapted after McAuliffe et al., 2021

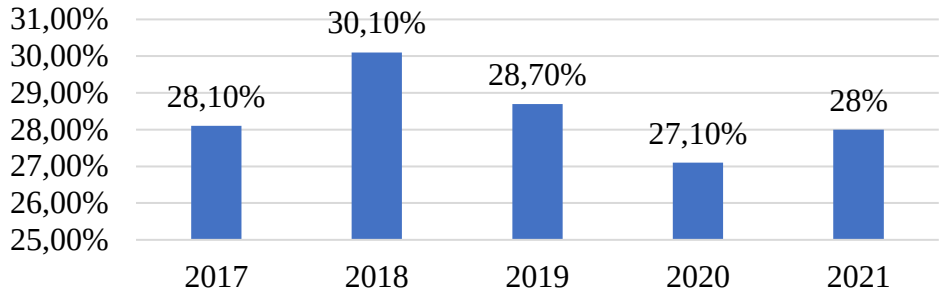
- ***Environmental transformations*** **-** The intensification of environmentally negative human activity results in overconsumption and overproduction linked to unsustainable economic development, the depletion of resources, the collapse of biodiversity, and ongoing climate change. The implications for migration and displacement are significant, as people increasingly choose internal and international migration as a form of adaptation to environmental impacts. The constant displacement from their homes and communities due to the slow rate of climate change or acute natural disasters is critical, for example people from Kiribati, United States (Hurricaine Katrina).

2. Case study: migration of young people from the Republic of Moldova aiming to study abroad

The migration process of young people is very active in the Republic of Moldova. Young people represent over a quarter of the country's population, and this represents a serious problem for the country's economy, if they decide to migrate. The number of the population with usual residence on January 1, 2021 constituted 2597.1 thousand people, of which 680.3 thousand or 26.2% were young people aged 14-34. The distribution of young people by gender is as follows: 49.4% - women and 50.6% - men. The generation of young people is continuously decreasing in the Republic of Moldova. In the period 2017-2021, the population aged 14-19 decreased by 18.5 thousand people (or by 10.1%), and the share of this category in the total number of young people aged 14-34 increased from 22.0% on 01.01.2017, up to 24.1% on 01.01.2021. The number of people aged 20-24 decreased by 61.5 thousand people (or by 31.6%), their share decreasing in the analyzed period by 3.9 %, and that of those aged 25-29 with 53.3 thousand (respectively by 23.6% and by 1.9%). The number of young people aged 30-34 decreased by 15.0 thousand (or by 6.7%), their share increasing during the analyzed period by 3.7%.

For Eastern European countries, including the Republic of Moldova, migration for education becomes a problem of "brain drain" as a result of the dominance of expensive studies, low correlation of education policies with employment policies, limited employment opportunities for graduates, and low wages. At the same time, migration for studies is becoming a way for young people to leave their home country and an opportunity to settle down and live in countries with higher living standards (IOM, 2018). Young people in the Republic of Moldova have started to migrate abroad for studies since the late 1990s (Grigoras, 2014). Since then, their numbers have been steadily increasing, but with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic they have not decreased significantly (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Young people's intention to migrate (18-29 years)



Source: Ionita, 2021

Analyzing Figure 3, it appears that in 2018 the intention of young people to migrate had the highest percentage - 30.10%, but since 2019 it is declining (28.70% - 2019, 27.10% - 2020, and 28% - 2021), due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected the education system and the migration of young students, being an important catalyst for the economy and development of a state (Ionita, 2021).

Of course, national academic exchange programs offer real, unique opportunities for study, undergraduate and postgraduate research in Western countries, supporting the intellectual potential of the country, but along with it, leave a significant number of students with outstanding results who could contribute to the socio-economic development of the country. It appears that the main reasons for the migration of young people are the following:

- Low degree of satisfaction with studies in the country;
- Opportunities for international students (grants, merit scholarships);
- Involvement in different projects, where students would find jobs, a decent salary, and career growth opportunities for young professionals;
- Achieving a successful professional career after graduation with greater financial possibilities;
- The desire to change the lifestyle. It is, therefore, necessary to implement national policies to stimulate the return of young people who have left.

The state needs public policies that encourage young people with a degree to pursue their profession at home in exchange for real social and economic benefits. In this context, the state must be oriented toward the preferences of young people. It must invest in them and create favorable working conditions and decent wages so that when they obtain a degree abroad, it will motivate them to return home and put into practice the experience acquired outside the country. Therefore, to limit the exodus of young people abroad, the following solutions have been proposed:

- Combating corruption in various fields that directly affect young people; Expanding political and economic reforms;

- Providing opportunities for qualified workers;
- Attracting foreign investment and capital to create jobs for young people;
- Supporting small and medium businesses;
- Improving the mechanism of the law;
- Attracting those already outside the country with higher wage incentives and an efficient business environment.

For a more detailed understanding of the migration process among young people in the Republic of Moldova, the case study *Migration of Students and Children Abroad* was conducted by the authors, in may 2022. The research methodology was based on a questionnaire that interviewed 157 students from Mihail Sadoveanu High School/Chisinau, Stefan ce Mare High School/Chisinau and 125 students from the Academy of Economic Studies from Moldova, between 17-20 years old about their attitudes toward leaving the country.

The study includes the analysis of youth migration in general, youth migration for studies, but also the impact of parents' migration on the well-being of children left without parental care.

The objectives of this Case Study were: compiling a list of the main reasons why young people go to study abroad; determining the probability of their return after at the end of their studies; analysis of the psychological picture of pupils who have parents abroad; monitoring psychological and behavioral changes in pupils left without the supervision of one or both parents.

The questions from the interviews were the following:

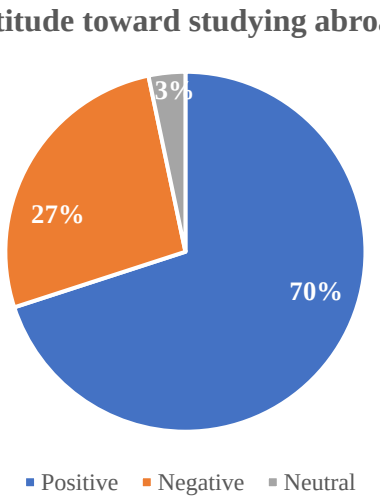
- Why would you choose to study abroad instead of your home country;
- What motivates you in choosing a study abroad experience; in which country do you want to study;
- Can you mention some benefits of migration;
- What disadvantages can you associate with studies abroad?

To the question *what motivates you in choosing a study abroad experience*, the answers were different, for example some said about the international experience, the quality of studies, by the way teachers teach, opportunities to work and learn, achieving a successful professional career after graduation, discover new places, new culture, meet new people, diversified curriculum, others said that there are relatives, parents or their friends.

To the question *what disadvantages can you associate with studies abroad*, the answers were: the high cost of living, language barriers, maybe cultural shock, the risk of not finding a well-paid job after graduation.

According to the data presented in Figure 4, collected from the questioning 125 students of first and second-year from the Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova, regarding the Migration of Young People from the country, it was established that 70% of the young people who gave a response have a positive opinion on the migration in favor of studying in a university abroad, 27% are against this idea and 3% refrained from answering.

Figure 4. Attitude toward studying abroad (17-20 years)



Source: authors' representation

The majority of young people who want to leave the country in preference to study outside the country believe that they will return to Moldova after graduation.

The return of young people from abroad after finishing their studies is an important step in development of the country. This is characterized not only by employing them but by refreshing the country's development policies with newly formed and globalized visions.

Simultaneously, the list of the most preferred countries for emigration was determined, namely:

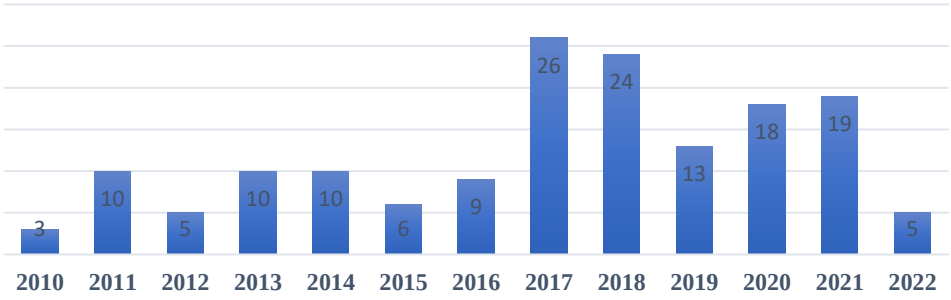
- EU countries: Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Finland, Netherlands, Ireland, Belgium, Greece - the reasons: there are their parents, who have already emigrated; Scholarships easy to access; Accessible transport being on the same continent;
- Non-EU European countries: Switzerland, Norway, United Kingdom;
- Other countries: USA, Japan - the scholarships offered by these states through the programs proposed by the Japanese and American embassies in the Republic of Moldova.

In general, the most common causes that catalyze the decision to emigrate are: studies, exchange of experience; more opportunities; a brighter future; motivating salary; family reunification; discovering new tourist spots.

According to the data in Figure 5, based on the statistic information provided by the principals of the 2 aforementioned high schools in Chisinau, from 2000 to 2022, 167 students emigrated. In the period from 2010 to 2022, the emigration flows of Moldovan students were more frequent in the period after the signing of the Visa

Free Regime in 2014. In the years 2017-2018, these flows reached the highest levels, after which they rapidly decreased due to restrictions during the COVID-19 crisis. Beginning with 2020 their trend starts to recover being in permanent increase up to the present time.

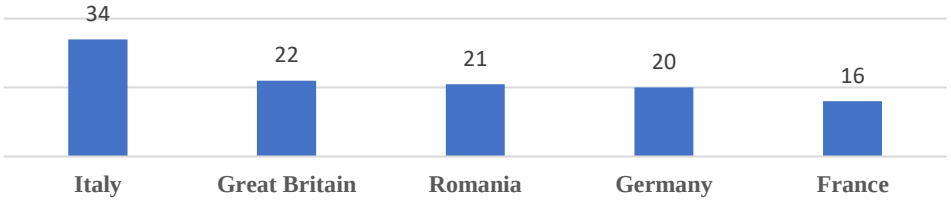
Figure 5. The number of children from "Ştefan cel Mare"and "Mihai Viteazu" high school migrated in the 2010-2022 period



Source*:* authors' representation

In the figure 6, we mentioned top 5 destination countries of the children from "Ştefan cel Mare" and "Mihai Viteazu" high school migrated in the 2010-2022 period: Italy, Great Britain, Romania, Germany, and France, all on the European continent.

Figure 6. Top 5 destination countries of the children from "Ştefan cel Mare" and "Mihai Viteazu" high school migrated in the 2010-2022 period



Source: authors' representation based

The specific reason for going to these countries was to reunite the family and less to go for studies.

Another topic analyzed in our research was on the emigration of parents abroad of students from the same two high schools in Chisinau. The children's relations with their parents are, in most cases, very close, although there are still cases of strained relations, which are more characteristic of young people whose parents have already been abroad for 12 to 15 years. It has also been established that around 68% of emigrant parents have higher education, and 32% have a high school

education, which is unfavorable for Moldova's economy. The majority of parents have left for EU countries due to the privileges for foreign workers granted by the EU. Thus the most common advantages for students whose parents are abroad are: financial support and more possibilities for young people such as studying or receiving citizenship of their parents' host country.

The major disadvantage of the departure of parents was chsen the insufficiency of communication, based on the lack of a mature model for training, increasing affection, and estrangement from parents. About 21% of the students interviewed said that they do not find any disadvantage in their parents' leave, most frequently they belong to the category of young people whose parents have been gone for about 12-15 years.

Following a dialogue with teachers of pupils (the authors of the article had several meetings with the teachers of these 2 high schools regarding the subject of students with parents who have migrated) whose parents are emigrants, were drawn some conclusions:

- In general, no differences were observed in the behavior of students who live with their parents and those whose parents are away. To a large extent, these children mature more quickly, putting financial benefits above family relationships;
- A disadvantage mentioned by the teachers was the students' lateness or absence from class, as they feel freer without parental supervision;
- If necessary, pupils can receive psychological assistance at school to help them adapt to the new conditions following the emigration of their parents;
- These young people are more emotionally sensitive.

Conclusions

Over the last years, the number of international migrants has increased significantly, and following the current trends under the impact of pandemics, economic inequality, or escalating military conflicts, population movement will continue to intensify. The nature of international migration is determined by the global environment, and the determinants are changing rapidly and sometimes suddenly and unexpectedly. Today, artificial intelligence, globalization, digitization, geopolitical and environmental changes represent great challenges and opportunities in the international migration process. In today's society, we are facing a growing imbalance in the generation gap, as younger generations are more adaptable and free because of the environment in which they have grown up, and because of this they have higher and more demanding expectations and needs than adult generations. Young people are eager to emigrate because they have seen the advantages they can find elsewhere that their country does not offer, whether it is money, better education, curiosity, or a higher chance of getting a job. Young people want to emigrate because they want to do more with their lives.

The migration of educated youth, which is the most important catalyst for a country's economy and development, affects the education system and economic growth by reducing the number of skilled workers. The migration of a very high number of young people brings a significant loss of human capital and causes long-term consequences for society's age structure. Therefore, the state must be oriented towards the preferences of young people. It must invest in them and create favorable working conditions and decent wages for them here so that when they obtain a qualification abroad, they will be motivated to return home and put into practice the experience gained abroad.

The main tendency of young people to emigrate for their studies points out the need to revise national strategies in the field of education, attracting more specialists and investments for its development. What remains encouraging is that most young people are willing to return after graduation. This happens because in the Republic of Moldova there are different programs that motivate the return of young people who studied abroad to work in their country of origin like the *Program for the temporary / permanent return of young graduates of universities abroad and migrants* (NEA, 2015), or *The national program to stimulate returns and facilitating the (re)integration of citizens of the Republic of Moldova involved in the migration process for the years 2022-2026* (GOV, 2022).

Anoter problem that has arisen is the emigration of adults, which is reflected not only in the lack of a workforce in the country but also in the emotional state of children left without parental supervision. This impacts not only their psychological state but influences the departure abroad to be reunited with their families, or the need to create investment funds for organizations providing psychological assistance to children left without parents.

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MODERN SLAVERY AND THE EUROPEAN LABOUR MARKET DYNAMICS

Oana-Maria COZMA*

Abstract

Many people think of slavery as a matter of the past with little relevance to today's world. But nonetheless, this institution continues to constitute a thriving research field for sociologists, historians, and economists. The present paper examines the issue of modern slavery as related to forced labour and labour exploitation, analyses the labour legislation of the European Union, and gathers several cases of forced labour/ labour exploitation involving Romanian workers. The purpose of the present paper is achieved using content analysis, a qualitative research method. The results suggested that, despite the European Union's extensive labour regulations, it still encounters situations of forced labour/ labour exploitation where basic worker rights and protection are not upheld; the findings highlight the need for greater consideration, further research, and solutions for this issue, together with special concern towards the clear distinctions between forced labour and labour exploitation.

Keywords: modern slavery, forced labour, labour exploitation, European Union labour market, European Union labour legislation

Introduction

Slavery has long been a polarising subject in economics since it provided an ample research topic. The main disagreement among economists is on whether the institution of slavery was economically successful and hence played a significant role in the social and economic development of today's most developed countries, which once exploited slave labour in a wide range of work areas. Slavery's economics and profitability have been a subject of discussion starting with references to Ancient Greece and Rome. For instance, as presented by Xenophon in his collection of Socratic dialogues, *Memorabilia (3.11)*, the Greek philosopher Socrates comes to the conclusion that in order for an Athenian citizen to become wealthy, he or she may possess (1) a substantial farm, where slave labour is most likely involved; (2) a renting property that serves as both a temporary residence, and a brothel with

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slave girls and women as prostitutes; and (3) experienced slave craftspeople (Cartledge, 2002). Although the use of slave labour is not clearly acknowledged in the context of large farms, it can be seen that in Ancient Greece, the primary means of obtaining income included the exploitation of slaves, enabling slavery as profitable (Cartledge, 2002). Considering the example of Ancient Rome, slaves were used in the agriculture sector since, in contrast to a free labourer, masters only needed to provide for their shelter and food; slaves received no further payment, making their "employment" profitable (Hopkins, 1978). Another way that slave owners might earn significant profits was by allowing some of their slaves to start their own businesses. These slaves would either pay their owners a fixed sum of money each year or simply keep a part of their earnings (Burks, 2008; Johnston, 1903).

In the context of slavery and economics, it is relevant to mention the complex historical event known as the Transatlantic Slave Trade, which involved the trafficking of slaves from Africa to the Americas over the Atlantic Ocean. African slaves were less expensive and more profitable; hence Europeans favoured them for economic reasons (Walsh, 2011). After establishing international trade and having access to the African continent, Europeans learned that black people were more resilient, more submissive, and had superior labour capabilities than white people (Basset, 1896). There are important studies that argue that slavery was advantageous because it supported the economic and social advancement of the various states that participated in the slave trade (Darity, 1990; Inikori, 1992; Williams, 1944), even though perspectives on the profitability of the Transatlantic Slave Trade may differ as some other researchers do not agree on the profitability of Transatlantic slavery (Eltis, et al., 2016; Postma, 1990; Richardson, 1978;).

Slavery in Ancient Greece and Rome, but also the experience of the Transatlantic Slave Trade are only a few examples that paved the way for what is known today as modern-day slavery. The issue of defining modern slavery has proven challenging due to its complexity, therefore the international community has not yet come to a consensus in this regard. However, the International Labour Organization (ILO) defines modern slavery as a situation of exploitation that a person cannot refuse or leave because of threats, violence, coercion, deception, or abuse of power (ILO, 2022). Modern slavery generates $150 billion in annual profits through anything from forced labour and sexual exploitation to debt bondage and forced marriage, with $51 billion being generated by forced labour such as domestic labour or agriculture (ILO, 2014). The economics of modern slavery in general, and forced labour in particular, encourage and benefit the perpetrators who engage in these activities, Moreover, as this phenomenon is genuinely connected with poverty and economic underdevelopment, it has a damaging impact on the global economy (Bales et al., 2009). The extensive labour legislation reflects the European Union's interest and efforts in protecting and providing labourers with a suitable working environment. However, as further explored in this study, there are cases of forced labour and labour exploitation inside the borders of the European Union that address

this problem within the dynamics of the European labour market.

The purpose of the paper is to investigate the issue of forced labour and labour exploitation in the context of the European Union's labour market dynamics, as worker exploitation is profitable for perpetrators and it becomes "increasingly frequent in the context of a developing shadow economy" (FRA, 2015, p. 2; Europol, 2013, p. 12). Considering this context, the aim of this paper also examines the EU's labour legislation to bring attention to the EU's commitment to decent work. The geographical focus of analysing various cases of forced labour and labour exploitation involving Romanian workers is determined by Romania's migration status. A United Nations Migration Report (IOM, 2015) revealed that between 2000 and 2015, Romania was the second country in the world (after Syria, a civil war-torn country) that experienced a major increase in the number of its diaspora population. Furthermore, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2019), the Romanian diaspora is the world's fifth biggest. Because employment is the most prevalent reason for Romanians to migrate to other countries in the EU (OECD, 2019), the possibility of Romanian workers to be subjected to forced labour or labour exploitation is significant.

The present paper's purpose was accomplished using a qualitative research method called content analysis. Through the content analysis there was undertaken a literature review on how forced labour is a challenging part of the European labour market's dynamics. The content analysis focused on modern slavery and the economics of forced labour, European Union's labour legislation, and several cases of forced labour where Romanian workers were involved. In all, 41 sources were examined, including 2 books, 6 online newspaper articles, 12 national and international organisations reports, 17 European Union related documents, and 4 academic articles. Jstor, ScienceDirect and Francis and Taylor, Eur-Lex, International Labour Research, The Guardian, Aljazeera, Official Journal of the European Union. were the main databases used. The primary keywords employed were *modern slavery; forced labour; forced labour economics; labour exploitation; EU labour legislation; EU decent work; garment industry and forced labour; agricultural sector and forced labour; construction sector and forced labour, exploitation of Romanian workers*.

The remainder of this paper is organised in the following manner: Section 1 explores the phenomenon of modern slavery together with the economics of forced labour; Section 2 outlines European Union's labour legislation with its commitment to decent work; Section 3 presents several cases involving Romanian workers who were subjected to forced labour within the European Union's borders; Section 4 emphasises the results and discussions related to forced labour and labour exploitation as problematic parts of the European labour market's dynamics. Some final remarks conclude the paper.

1. Modern slavery and the economics of forced labour

It is quite challenging to define modern slavery since it encompasses a truly complex reality. Modern slavery is widely condemned since it occurs all over the world, yet even though more than 300 international treaties addressing slavery, including modern slavery, have been ratified since 1815, the term has not always been defined similarly in these agreements (Skinner, 2009). For instance, having a look at the ILO's definition of slavery, which states that it is a situation of exploitation that a person cannot refuse or leave due to threats, violence, coercion, deception, or abuse of power (ILO, 2022) and also search the definition of the non-governmental organisation Anti-Slavery International, which states that it is a situation in which a person is exploited by others for personal or commercial gain; whether tricked, coerced, or forced (Anti-Slavery International, 2023), it is noted that both definitions mention the way modern slavery is restrictive and done without the victims' agreement, but only the non-governmental organisation mentions features of an economic-financial nature.

Considering that modern slavery encompasses a wide range of profitable illicit activities, as well as because of its effects on the global economy, it is important from an economic perspective. The influence of modern slavery on the economic underdevelopment of certain countries and the global economy is first linked to the phenomenon of globalisation. Although a multitude of positive consequences have resulted from the acceleration of globalisation (Fischer, 2003; Mukherjee & Krieckhaus, 2012; Tsai et al., 2012), this acceleration has also determined a series of negative effects at the international level (Cardoso, 1996; Bardhan, 2004; Honey, 2004). As ILO has mentioned, modern slavery and human trafficking are harmful aspects of globalisation (ILO, 2005). More specifically, Bales, Trodd and Williamson (2009) point out that one of the aspects of globalisation is that the goods we commonly consume are made in different parts of the world. In all this context favoured by globalisation, forms of modern slavery appear at some point in the manufacturing process (Bales et al., 2009). Therefore, the current problem is that although the percentage of goods produced through modern-day slavery is modest, it actually blends in with the greater percentage of goods produced under free and legal conditions. Due to this reality, it is extremely difficult to identify, alert about, and resolve situations where different types of modern slavery are being exploited in the production process (Bales et al., 2009). Despite the fact that the relationship between modern slavery and its harmful impact on the world economy is exceedingly complicated, one of the main negative effects are the fact slave labourers can bring down the wages of free employees in the same industry in which they work, and that modern slavery is argued to distort local economies by displacing slaves and their families from the position as consumers in local economies (Bales et al., 2009; Cockayne, 2021).

As previously stated, even though modern slavery damages the global economy and has a detrimental impact on the social and economic development of certain countries, it should be highlighted that those who engage in such activities obtain greatly from this matter. In the report *Profits and Poverty: The Economics of Forced Labou*r, the ILO shows that $51 billion is obtained from forced labour such as domestic work or agriculture (ILO, 2014). When discussing the economics of forced labour, it may not come as a surprise that one of the most common forms of modern slavery, forced labour, is very profitable. However, because forced labour is so widely practised around the world, the researchers were able to highlight specific business features that are used for employing forced labour. An important aspect in the context of the profitability of businesses involving forced labour underlines the fact that the actors who tend to use forced labour are producers and middlemen (Allain et al., 2013). Forced labour is most frequently used by producers who manage labour-intensive, poorly mechanised businesses that require unskilled labour; however, intermediaries represent entities that are not directly involved in the production process, but mediate victims of forced labour and companies that need labour, making decisions regarding the distribution of tasks and the resolution of potential conflicts (Allain et al., 2013; Bonet et al., 2013). The enormous profits that this reality produces are noted to represent the economic effects of forced labour. Forced labour is one of the most lucrative manifestations of this phenomena in the context of modern slavery. The negative effects of forced labour on the economy have also brought to light several business practises that those who engage in this activity use to maximise their earnings.

2. European Union's legislation and commitment to decent work

The European Union (EU) has prioritised advancing social development and enhancing the working and living conditions of Europeans ever since the *Treaty on the Functioning of the EU* came into force in 1957. Therefore, the EU's labour legislation has contributed to enhance living and working conditions, protect social cohesion, and promote high employment and solid social protection. Since EU labour law is extensive, the European Union's 2009 *Charter of Fundamental Rights* and other various Directives had the most beneficial impact on the working environment (Scott, 2017). Several the articles in the *Charter of Fundamental Rights* are significant to individuals' rights and working conditions, and they are relevant since they address issues such as forced labour as well as labour exploitation: *The Working Time Directive (2003), Agency Worker Directive (2008), Transfer of Undertakings Directive (2001), Employment Equality Directive (2000), Racial Equality Directive (2000), and Equal Treatment Directive (2006)* are significant pillars that support the EU's efforts to protect worker's rights and combat exploitative practises in the workplace, in addition to the aforementioned articles of the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Table 2. Articles from the *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union* (2009) relevant for workers' protection

Article's Number	Article's Content
Article 1	Human dignity
Article 5	Prohibition of slavery and forced labour
Article 15	Freedom to choose an occupation and right to engage in work (Article
Article 21	Non-discrimination
Article 27	Workers' right to information and consultation within the undertaking
Article 29	Right of access to placement services
Article 30	Protection in the event of unjustified dismissal
Article 31	Fair and just working conditions
Article 32	Prohibition of child labour and protection of young people at work
Article 34	Social security and social assistance
Article 38	Consumer protection
Article 47	Right to an effective remedy and to a fair trial

Source: Scott, 2017

The universal concept of decent work has been taken into consideration by and is a driving force behind EU's labour rules and regulations. The decent work concept, as developed by the International Labour Organisation (1999) and reflected in the *United Nations Development Goals* (UNDP, 2015), encompasses four basic elements, such as, employment; standards and rights at work; social protection and social dialog and tripartism (COM (2022) 66 final). By establishing a stable institutional and economic environment, the element of *employment* aims to encourage employment; the *standard and rights at work* element seeks to respect, promote and realise the fundamental rights at work, namely freedom of associations, eliminations of forced labour and anti-discrimination; the objective of the *social protection* component is to provide access to healthcare and a steady income in the event of job loss, illness, or injury at work; in order to gain higher salaries and strengthened working conditions, the *social dialogue and tripartism* dimension aims to build strong industrial connections and engage in successful social dialogue (COM(2022) 66 final). Furthermore, the EU's effort to promote decent work aims to be all-encompassing, paying particular attention to the situation of workers who are particularly at risk, including minorities, older workers, people with disabilities, migrant workers, and those who work in the informal economy (COM (2022) 66 final). More specifically, the EU actively promotes the idea and practise of decent work on a European level as well as globally through a variety of projects and regulations, such as the ones outlined below (Table 3).

Table 3. How is EU promoting decent work?

EU policies and initiatives with outreach beyond the EU	- Promoting decent work in global supply chains through setting frameworks for sustainable finance, ensuring sustainable production and consumption, etc. via: - Initiatives covering Decent Work (Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive, Circular Economy Action Plan). - Promoting decent work in specific sectors (Farm to Fork Strategy, Raw Materials Initiative). - Increased efforts to combat forced labour and child labour (EU Anti-Trafficking Directive, Conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO) on forced labour and child labour).
EU bilateral and regional relations	- requiring its trade partners to adhere to international labour standards, including those requiring them to promote decent work through national laws and practises, effective labour inspection, and to comply with international labour standards (European Neighbourhood Policy, Eastern Partnership).
EU in international and multilateral fora	- Supporting the United States in the application of decent work-related instruments, especially in the context of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (engagement with organisations such as International Labour Organisation, World Trade Organisation, International Monetary Fund, etc.)
Engagement with stakeholders and in global partnerships	- Promoting bipartite and tripartite European social dialogue at cross-industry and sectoral level (interaction with the civil society organisations, global partnerships and multistakeholder initiatives).

Source: COM (2022) 66 final

The EU's continuous effort on ensuring decent work and fighting against forced labour and labour exploitation is highly illustrated in its complex and comprehensive labour legislation, together with its international and regional collaborations, commitment and involvement with different actors who promote proper working conditions and protection against exploitative practices. The following section of the present paper is presenting different cases of forced labour within the EU's borders which put under the question mark some parts of the EU's activity of preventing such practices.

3. Forced labour and the European labour market

It's generally accepted that the European labour market is concerned particularly with the free movement of workers but also with other types of regulation which impact Europe's labour market (Eurofound, 2022). The European

Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound), which provides knowledge to assist in the development of better social, employment, and work-related policies in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2019/127 (Eurofound, 2023), is one of the most significant EU agencies in the context of the labour market. The European labour market has been a continuing objective ever since the European Economic Community was established in 1957. Recent occurrences have influenced and challenged the characteristics of the European labour market, including migration, the entry of new Member States, as well as a general ageing of the labour force (Eurofound, 2023).

One of the most difficult issues that the EU as a whole and the European labour market are dealing with is the phenomena of forced labour, where the problem of labour exploitation is further prevalent. This section is going to cover cases of forced labour that have occurred in the manufacturing, construction, and agricultural sectors because these are the work areas that are most prone to use forced labour (ILO, 2022).

According to Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC) Romania is the biggest garment production country in Europe, top export destinations of garments being Italy, the United Kingdom, France, Spain, and Belgium (CCC, 2019). The forced labour cases involving Romanians in the garment sector emphasises how frequently workers are not paid the legal minimum wage for their regular working hours, how often factories in this industry don't pay overtime, and how little of a living wage the salaries of employees cover (Ajder et al., 2018). Without receiving any remuneration in the preceding months, employees must put in extra time to meet their production target. Moreover, because the payslip only shows the regular working hours, overtime information is not included. Workers are frequently required to meet high targets that are hard to meet during normal working hours, yet refusing to work extra leads to conflict between staff members and supervisors (Ajder et al., 2018). In accordance with the ILO, employees who must put in additional hours to finish the tasks allocated to them while earning a minimum wage are considered forced labourers (ILO, 2007). Romanian garment workers are frequently subjected to bullying, harassment, yelling, and dismissing threats. In order to fulfil production targets, employees aren't allowed to speak with one another or take breaks, and they have to find someone to replace themselves if they need to use the bathroom (Ajder et al., 2018). A specific example occurred in 2019, when a garment factory in Covasna, Romania, was shut down without giving its employees any advance notice or compensation. After long hours, little and delayed wages, insults from the factory owner, limited toilet breaks throughout the workday and other unfavourable working conditions, 30 textile employees were overnight unemployed (Oddone, 2019).

Cases of Romanian employees being subjected to forced labour may be also observed in the agricultural sector. Since Romania joined the EU in 2007, Italy has taken in more Romanian workers compared to those from other countries (UNAR, 2014). As an outcome, cases of Romanian workers whose labour is exploited in Italy's agricultural sector have been observed. Starting around 2013, cases of

Romanian women being exploited, including sexually, while working in greenhouses and farms in Sicily were reported (Palumbo & Sciurba, 2015). The Romanian women were routinely abused sexually, their wages were little or not paid, and they were forced to live in isolated sheds in abhorrent conditions (Tondo & Kelly, 2017). More specifically, they were working between 10 and 12 hours a day, inhaling dangerous chemicals, not having toilets, and enduring the heat and cold of the summer and winter without receiving payment, or receiving roughly 15 euros per day (Palumbo & Sciurba, 2015). Cases of modern slavery and labour exploitation of Romanian workers in Germany can also be identified in the agriculture sector. Here, supervisors shout at them, treat them rudely, and urge them to work faster than normal. In addition, there are no or few breaks throughout the workday, inappropriate housing conditions, and a persistent worry of being forcibly dismissed when their employer no longer needs them (Teleleu.eu, 2020). Additionally, Romanian workers typically do not get formal pay slips and are paid less than the minimum wage required by law (Teleleu.eu, 2020).

Another sector where Romanian workers are subjected to forced labour and labour exploitation is the construction field. In 2013 the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) signalled a case where about 50 Romanian workers were being subjected to forced labour and labour exploitation. When the workers arrived in Germany, they were hardly paid and received no pension contribution, holiday pay, or sick pay, despite a recruiting firm in Bucharest promising regular employment and a pay check (ITUC, 2013). Moreover, the Romanian workers reportedly have slept in empty apartments with no furniture (ITUC, 2013). In recent times, 2022 more exactly, the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner of the United Kingdom's Home office has called attention to the case of about 500 Romanian workers who were victims of modern slavery as they were working for a gang on construction sites in London Between since 2009 (Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, 2022; McLoughlin, 2022; Robinson, 2019).

Conclusions, discussions, and recommendations

Modern slavery is a reality that continues to represent a problem that has to be resolved immediately on a global and European level. Due to its complexity, modern slavery does not yet have a widely agreed definition, although it is undoubtedly that forced labour is one of this phenomenon's most profitable forms. Considering that forced labour is such a profitable and widespread form of modern-day slavery, specialists have succeeded in emphasising business aspects that entail this sort of labour. One of the most prevalent traits is that producers and intermediates are the ones who employ forced labour, and that this kind of modern slavery includes labour-intensive, poorly mechanised firms that rely on unskilled labour. It's interesting to note that, even though forced labour is extremely lucrative for those who engage in it and for those who profit from the exploitation of the labour force

of those who have fallen victims to this type of modern slavery, it really has a variety of negative impacts on the global economy. In further detail, it is related to the underdevelopment of certain low-income countries as well as the distortion of local economies caused by the removal of victims and their families from the role of consumers in local economies.

As previously stated, the EU has done and continues to make enormous efforts to eradicate modern slavery generally and forced labour specifically. It encompasses extensive legislation concerning the topic of forced labour and offers several regulations and directives that promote high labour standards, the protection of employees worldwide, and their freedom of movement. The EU has consistently aligned itself with international fora regarding the concept and reality of decent work, in addition to the European and local initiatives towards the protection of workers from illicit practices, including forced labour. Due to its involvement in bilateral and regional relations, international and multilateral fora, and politics and initiatives with a reach beyond the EU, the EU has proven itself as a trustworthy partner in the battle against forced labour and the pursuit of decent work. Within the boundaries of the European labour market, however, cases of forced work and labour exploitation have long been reported.

The EU is not avoided by the emergence of situations of forced labour and labour exploitation in the most common economic sectors that are prone to these types of workers', and often human, rights violation. The focus of the present paper has been on a number of examples of Romanian workers being subjected to forced labour and other forms of labour exploitation within the European labour market's framework. In the garment, agricultural, and construction industries, it was observed that, in addition to social and economic problems including poverty or the lack of education, the prevalence of forced labour had started increasing after Romania gained EU membership and people had easier access towards the Western, wealthier countries. Whether we're addressing the garment industry, agriculture, or the construction sectors, Romanian workers who have been the victims of forced labour and labour exploitation have encountered similar experiences: low or no salaries, long workdays, few or no breaks during the workdays, rude and aggressive behaviour from the supervisors, terminations without notice or compensation of any kind, the involvement of deception to determine them to accept the job, unfavourable working and living conditions, even sexual abuse (if we refer to the case of Romanian women exploited in the agricultural sector in Italy). Most of these cases have been addressed by local and European authorities; nevertheless, in certain situations, perpetrators go unpunished, and the problem is that new circumstances of forced labour and labour exploitation continue to occur along the lines of the European labour market.

A further discussion that arises is which is exactly the difference between forced labour and labour exploitation, and who should make some clear distinctions in this regard. This is in addition to the enormous issue represented by the cases of

forced labour and labour exploitation, which needs to be addressed by an integrated social, political, criminal, and legislative effort of the EU and its member states. The literature (Davies, 2019; Davies & Ollus, 2019; Skrivankova, 2010; Andrees, 2008) discusses the perception of labour exploitation as a "continuum". Within the spectrum of working conditions, at one extreme are slavery, servitude, forced labour and other severe forms of criminal exploitation, and at the other extreme we find decent work and various indicators of work (France, 2016). In the middle of these two extremes are numerous practices categorised as labour abuse or "routine" labour exploitation, which may be considered irrelevant or trivial if treated in comparison to extreme forms of exploitation (France, 2016; Davis 2018; Davis & Ollus, 2019). The main point of debate that this paper may determine is whether we discuss forced labour or labour exploitation. Some might argue that the cases presented here qualify as instances of forced labour due to the lack of wages, sexual abuse, or inhumane living and working conditions, while others might counter that the cases are more appropriately categorised as situations of labour exploitation due to the low pay or consent to perform the job in question.

Forced labour and modern slavery continue to be problems that demand attention on an international level. The EU has consistently worked to combat the issue of forced labour, not only domestically but also regionally and internationally. In addition to considering and committing to the international goal of decent work, the EU legislation protecting workers provides so. Nonetheless, there continue to be cases of forced work and labour exploitation in the European labour market, and it seems as though there is no long-term solution for eliminating them now. Considering the present paper, some policy recommendations regarding the issue of forced labour and labour exploitation are as it follows:

- With the support of the EU, each Member State should promote public awareness campaigns and information sessions about the risks of forced labour and labour exploitation.
- Given the EU's approach to promote the concept of decent work, it should be more individual-focused, as it appears to be centred on a macro level of action.
- To prevent and combat forced labour and labour exploitation, labour inspectors should be adequately trained; especially, these entities should be concerned with the rights of workers and work conditions, not just work safety and health standards.

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Appendix A
Literature Review sources by topic

Topic	Sources	Main Academic/ Grey publications	Used key words	Total no.
Modern slavery and the Economics of forced labour	Bales et al., 2009; Cockayne, 2021; ILO, 2014; Allain et al., 2013; Bonet et al., 2013; Skinner, 2009; ILO, 2022; Anti-Slavery International, 2023; ILO, 2005.	Oneworld Oxford; UN Center for Policy Research; ILO Research; Francis and Taylor; Jstor	*modern slavery; forced labour; forced labour economics; labour exploitation.*	9
EU's labour legislation and decent work commitment	Treaty on the Functioning of the EU, 1957; Charter of Fundamental Rights, 2010; COM(2022) 66 final; UNDP, 2015; ILO, 1999; The Working Time Directive, 2003; Agency Worker Directive, 2008; Transfer of Undertakings Directive, 2001; Employment Equality Directive, 2000; Racial Equality Directive, 2000; and Equal Treatment Directive, 2006; Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive, 2022; Circular Economy Action Plan, 2020; European Neighbourhood Policy, 2004; Eastern Partnership, 2008; Farm to Fork Strategy, 2020; Raw Materials Initiative, 2008; EU Anti-Trafficking Directive, 2011.	Eur-lex; ILO Research; Official Journal of the European Union.	*EU labour legislation; EU workers' rights, EU decent work.*	19
Forced labour and the European labour market	Eurofound, 2022; CCC, 2019; Ajder et al., 2018; ILO, 2017; Oddone, 2019; UNAR, 2014; Palumbo & Sciurba, 2015; Teleleu.eu, 2020; ITUC, 2013; Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, 2022; McLoughlin, 2022; Robinson, 2019.	European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions; Clean Clothes Campaign; ILO Research; Aljazeera; Daily mail; The Guardian; Red Lion Chamber.	*EU labour market, garment industry and forced labour; agricultural sector and forced labour; construction sector and forced labour, exploitation of Romanian workers.*	13

PART III:
RESILIENCE FROM MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES

RISK FACTORS FOR A RESILIENT ECONOMIC GROWTH POST COVID-19

Gabriela PRELIPCEAN[*], Diana Georgiana PÎŢU[**]

Abstract

Economic growth, as many other economic phenomenon, has been deeply affected by COVID-19, several effects being still unknown or poor scientifically researched due to the complexity of the epidemiological situation. Resilience, defined as the ability to deal with adversity, withstand shocks and continuously adapt and accelerate as disruptions and crises arise, has become a new fundamental dimension of the current world economy, implicitly for economic growth, and it is threatened by a series of risk factors. Our analytical study projects these factors from the scientific researcher perspective and establishes five directions of investigation. Our purpose is to bring to the forefront the main risks that affect a resilient economic growth and to identify how resilience impacts annual GDP growth. To reach the goals of this research, we opted for a qualitative method using a general-to-private approach. Among the main risk factors identified are inflation, labour market, energy price, investment decisions, external demand.

Keywords: resilience, risk, economic growth, inflation, GDP

Introduction

Recent global shocks evidence the multidimensional impact of risks, underlining the need to prepare and strengthen the economic growth capacity to be resilient by a faster response and recovery. New theoretical developments have revealed that the accelerated rate of spread and the large number of infected patients and people who have died as a result of the establishment of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 has practically placed workers in economies and markets around the world in a crisis situation. Unexpected effect of this unpredictable health crisis manifested itself through a disruption of global supply chains, a dramatic reduction in commercial activities, a discouragement of demand, reduction of working time,

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blocking of some sectors of activity in national economies leading to the emergence of a strong recessions. Recession caused by health crises/pandemics is not, in itself, new to economic history, examples of such shutdowns of economic activity being recorded from the Middle Ages to modern times (Skidelsky, 2009). The novelty is the manifestation of the respective type of impact recession in the context of a service economy, with a high degree of globalization and penetration of informational - communication technologies in the development of economic and social activities.

The paper proposes a preliminary diagnosis of the risk factors and the changes imposed by their manifestations on the resilience of economic growth under the impact of the crisis caused by the new coronavirus, with the presentation of possible scenarios from an analytical perspective.

We therefore started our research considering that specialized studies carried out by various prestigious institutes with the theme of the evolution of economic growth and the resilience capacity of national economies have failed to present a complete situation since 2020. As far as we know, although they identify and treat in a segmented manner various risk factors that threaten the resilience of economic growth, a broader perspective of the theme is not yet been delivered to those interested. Consequently, in the context in which the severe recession expected by analysts was counterbalanced by the resilience of national economies protecting their economic growth, we considered it appropriate to analyse the risk factors that threaten resilience, as an alternative approach of the topic.

Over time, theorists and practitioners alike sustained an idea highly disputed today, according to which "the well-being of a nation has been given by the level of the gross domestic product (GDP), which represents the gross value of the final production of goods and services produced during a period of time by economic agents operating inside national borders" (Chau et al., 2018). Economic growth, understood as a complex process, it manifests itself as the increase of results of the national economy, calculated based on the combination and use of direct production factors: *labour force*, *fixed capital* and the *consumption of material circulating means*. General acknowledgement reveals that national economies aim to acquire economic growth due to the fact that it determines population to consume a bigger quantity of goods and social services, thereby leading to actual improvement of living standards. Specialized literature in the economic field contains various theories regarding the classification and ordering of economic growth factors, designed based on the possibilities of quantifying the direct and indirect contribution, taking into consideration the action priorities within economic policy and their role in the economic dynamics (Rostow, 13).

The modern conception of economic growth began once with the criticism of Mercantilism, especially by the Physiocrats and by the Scottish Enlightenment David Hume (*Essays*, 1741) and Adam Smith (*An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations*, 1776), one of their key arguments was that economic development encourages creativity and ideas, thereby increasing productivity.

Based on his research, Thomas Malthus (*An essay on the principle of population*, 1798) counters several opinions popular in that period supporting that human society would continue to improve and tilt toward a utopian ideal, arguing that segments of the general population have invariably been poor and miserable, effectively slowing population growth.

Joseph Schumpeter (*The theory of economic development*, 1934), best known for his theories on business cycles and the development of capitalist economies, became a game changer by introducing the concept of entrepreneurship. For Schumpeter, the entrepreneur was the cornerstone of capitalism, source of innovation, which is the vital force driving a capitalist economy. The Schumpeterian growth model is based on three main ideas: long-run growth results from innovations; innovations result from entrepreneurial investments that are themselves motivated by the prospects of monopoly rents; and new innovations replace old technologies.

Important for the theoretical base of our research is also the Solow Growth Model, an exogenous model of economic growth that analyses changes in the level of output in an economy over time as a result of changes in the population growth rate, the savings rate, and the rate of technological progress, developed by Robert Solow (*A contribution to the theory of economic growth*, 1956), being the first neoclassical growth model.

On the other hand, Simon Kuznets dismantles some of Thomas Malthus ideas and demonstrates that high rates of population growth did not undermine the growth of per capita income, launching the following definition: "A country's economic growth may be defined as a long-term rise in capacity to supply increasingly diverse economic goods to its population, this growing capacity based on advancing technology and the institutional and ideological adjustments that it demands." (Kuznets, 1973).

The theory of economic growth advanced again through the theories of economist Paul Romer (*Increasing returns and long-run growth*, 1986, *The origins of endogenous growth*, 1994) in the 80s and early 90s. Even if, Adam Smith's assertion that wealth is produced most rapidly when the economic role of government is limited is probably "the most influential and durable argument ever made by an economist" (Lotterman, 1995), we are attempting to show that many other contemporary economists, including some with Nobel prizes, have further explored the roots of economic growth, and another turning point is made by Francis Fukuyama (*Trust: the social virtues and the creation of prosperity*, 1995) who argues that while the efforts of these economists have been fruitful, most since Smith have ignored a crucial growth variable: culture. Other important theorists on our topic are Robert E. Lucas and Robert J. Barro (Yueh, 2018).

Daron Acemoglu (*Introduction to modern economic growth*, 2008) gives a modern perspectives on the fundamental causes of economic growth and the wealth of nations, his work presenting the complex are of growth theory, including models

of human capital, endogenous technological change, technology transfer, international trade, economic development, and political economy.

In consequence, traditional research shows that the theory of economic growth is nothing but a vision of economic life in a dynamic conception that takes into account the modification of parameters, of variables that compete in the development of economic and social life. However, a whole range of different approaches to the problem are available and, today, economic growth is no longer analysed only as extensive, intermediate or intensive, all attention focusing on its capacity for resilience.

The resilience of economies, defined as "the ability to deal with adversity, withstand shocks and continuously adapt and accelerate as disruptions and crises arise" (Brende et al., 2022), is a very topical element, a fundamental element in predicting the evolution of the economic aspects of society. The ability of economic growth, classically measured by GDP values, to withstand shocks and to recover shortly after their assimilation has led to the avoidance of a severe, large-scale recession. Economists are talking about a mild and short-lived global recession thanks to a set of economic measures that have seen a swing between a tight monetary policy that reduces both inflation and the economy, and an expansionary fiscal policy aimed at supporting the economy and mitigating the effects of current crises, especially of the energy crisis.

In the last three years, present-day analysis, conducted for research purpose, question definitions and attempt to give empirical proof to sustain the necessity to rethink economic models that connect economic growth to present crisis. Traditional theories like "economic growth as measured solely in terms of annual increases in per-capita income or gross national product, regardless of its distribution and the degree of people's participation in effective growth" are argued since "classification of countries themselves, based on gross national income per capita, for the World Bank or on the status of markets, for the International Monetary Fund, is dividing the world" and no longer re-legitimate past views (Alenda-Demoutiez, 2021).

On the other hand, the dynamics of economic phenomena in the current geopolitical context determine that the analyses are partial, the conclusions are indicative and with a high degree of estimation. At the same time, the available statistical data are partial, and the published studies and analyses highlight partial aspects, the impact of the COVID-19 crisis in the economic and social sphere, not having the scientific rigor of representativeness and one consistent database. In addition, in the drafting of this analysis, the perspective of economists was taken into account, stating that the economic impact of the pandemic is probably much more complex and varied than what has been observed so far, with amplified effects in the medium and long term in the business environment, the segment of small companies, faced with layoffs since the first months of the crisis.

After examining several previous work, we propose to illuminate this partially charted area, through an analytical study that projects a set of risk factors from the

perspective of the scientific researcher and establishes five lines of investigation: *inflation and measures to protect financial stability; the price of energy in the context of increased demand for natural gas post-COVID 19; China's reopening to foreign trade and investment dynamics; transformations in the labour market; the climate crisis*.

Methodology

The present analysis aims to become a more extensive study on the economic growth resilience post-COVID 19 being at this point a descriptive scientific research segment that can become a useful theoretical base for tackling economic resilience. The chosen topic came from the need to bring together multiple partial analysis of risks that influence the resilience of economic growth and also to validate it as a new concept.

Our investigation creates a literature review which offers an overview of the research area over time. In a qualitative approach, using the technique of analysing and interpreting different known sets of data or opinions, within our study, five research topics are formulated:

1. Inflation and measures to protect financial stability;
2. The price of energy in the context of increased demand for natural gas post-COVID-19;
3. China's reopening to foreign trade and investment dynamics;
4. Transformations in the labour market;
5. The climate crisis.

We chose an inductive research strategy based on: studies and statistical interpretations conducted by bodies recognized for this activity as International Monetary Fund, European Commission, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, opinions of economists with concerns in the sphere of macroeconomics from important and prestigious think-thanks, taking into account that this kind of research offers partial conclusions with a relative character, due to the fact that it operates with various premises investigated.

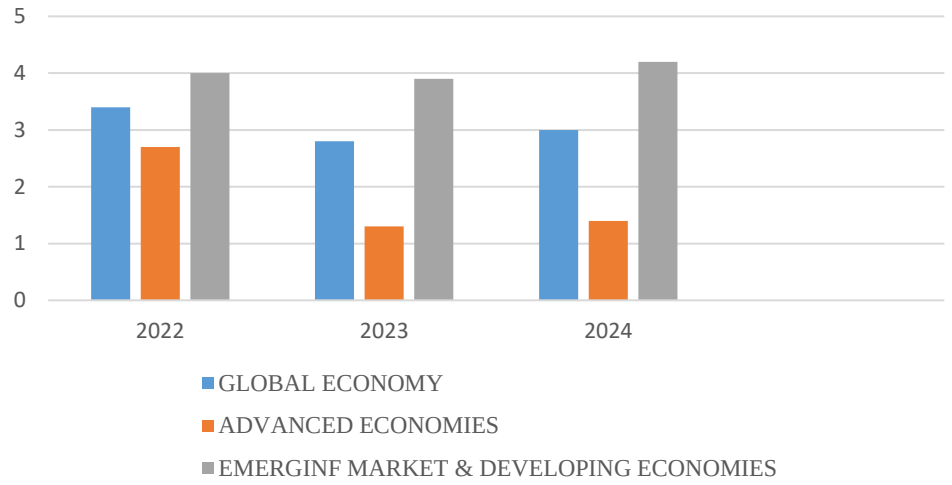
The methodology used for this investigation included several stages of research: documentation and information (consultation of representative and specialized works in the field), synthesis and systematization, and finally, a personal approach on the complexity of the tackled subject.

1. Inflation and measures to protect financial stability

In the post-COVID 19 era, heavily affected by the impact of the armed conflict on the territory of Ukraine, the main impact, from a financial perspective, is the change in the monetary regime from one that supports global markets to one that focuses on measures to contain inflation.

"Europe avoided a full-blown recession this winter and showed resilience - but it faces a triple challenge: fighting inflation, supporting the recovery and protecting financial stability"[1], according to Alfred Kammer (2023), director of the European Department of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). IMF studies explain that the inflation rate remains at a high level and exceeds 10% in most countries in emerging Europe and in some advanced economies. But it is precisely the resilience of economies that combats the effects of inflation and counteracts an easing of inflation by decreasing energy prices and improving the situation in supply chains.

Figure 1. Growth projections (real GDP growth, percent)



Source: authors' representation based on data collected from the International Monetary Fund

Any macroeconomic problem has both a positive, balancing side and a negative, unbalancing side. Regarding inflation as a negative side of the monetary economy, it interferes with all the negative sides of the contemporary economy: recessionary crises, unemployment, budget deficits, external deficits (trade and payments) (Abiad et al., 2015).

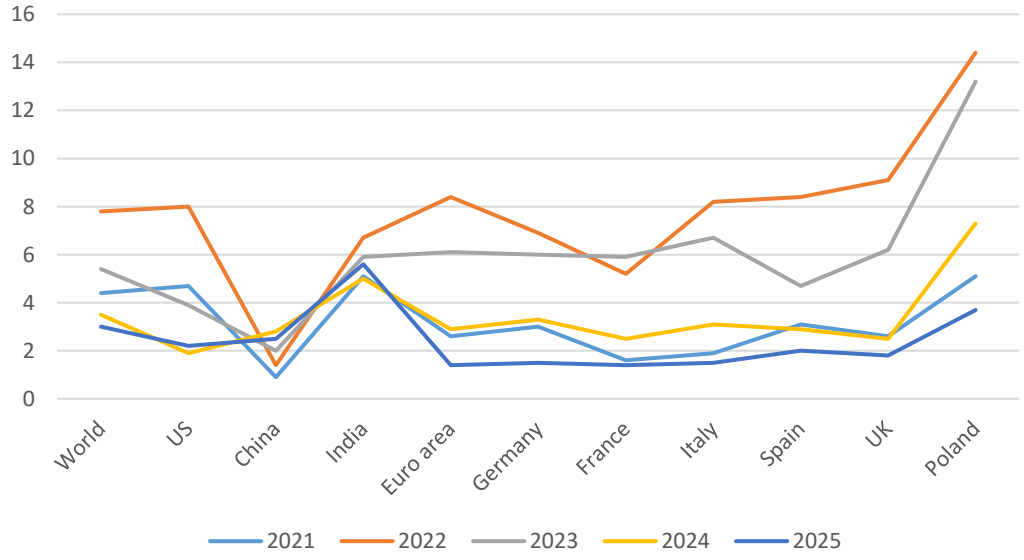
The correlation between inflation and economic growth proves, empirically, to be inversely proportional. Namely, high inflation rates are usually accompanied by negative economic growth rates and vice versa. Unhealthy growth causes, due to its structural deficiencies, inflationary pressures have violent effects in the economy and the fight against inflation was accompanied, over time, by an important decrease in the gross domestic product.

[1] IMF-World Bank Spring Meetings, April 2023.

For this study, it was of interest to investigate that currently we are dealing with a certain increase in the gross domestic product, the economic growth accompanied by high inflation rates being an unhealthy growth, which goes to non-performing sectors, with wage distortions and low efficiency. Such economic growth, in which inflation affects the increased capacity for resilience, can constitute a serious danger for the economy.

The economic growth of the euro zone which surprised with positive values, against the background of GDP stagnation in the fourth quarter (Q4) of 2022 and a modest increase in the first quarter (Q1) of 2023, refuted forecasts for an imminent recession. Inflation passed its peak (10.6% in October 2022) and started to slow down, driven by lower energy prices and its effects. In the coming quarters, the decrease in inflation will reduce the pressure on consumers. Real wage growth, which hit a low of -4.9% in Q3 2022, is accelerating and is expected to turn positive in Q4 2023. Despite the banking tensions that affected financial markets in March 2023, recent data suggests that financial tensions have so far had little influence on consumers and companies, according to a study by EY European Economic Outlook[2].

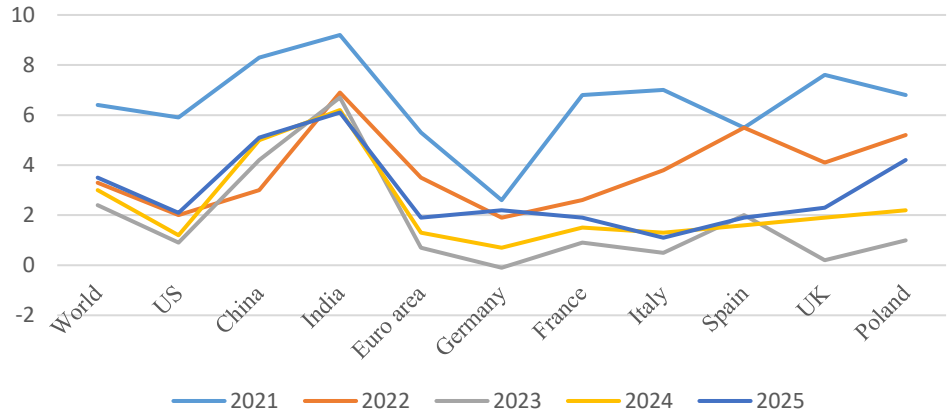
Figure 2. Inflation in 2021 - 2025 (%)



Source: authors' representation based on data collected from Oxford Economics, EY EAT forecast

[2] Ernst & Young Global Limited is a multinational professional services network which provides assurance, financial audit, tax, consulting and advisory services to its clients.

Figure 3. GDP growth in 2021 - 2025 (%)



Source: authors' representation based on data collected from Oxford Economics, EY EAT forecast

Although inflation in Europe is forecast to decrease relatively quickly during 2023, in annual average terms, it remains high. In the euro area, inflation will reach 6.1%, and some countries in Central and Eastern Europe, especially Hungary, the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia will continue to register double-digit inflation in 2023. All projections show a decrease of inflation for all countries for the next two years. Consequently, in theory, the economies in our chart will register economic growth.

According to the European Central Bank's (ECB) target, within the euro area, inflation should reach 2% in the second half of 2024, but core inflation could remain higher until the second half of 2025. For several countries from the European community, price growth will remain above the ECB targets until 2025, or even longer for some. The ECB will maintain a data-driven approach and, due to increased uncertainty as a result of financial sector turmoil over credit conditions, is reluctant to provide interest rate guidance, which we believe it could have been helpful to economic resilience.

All in all, data within our chart interpretation advocates the correlation between inflation and economic growth, supporting our direction of investigation regarding inflation being a significant risk factor that threatens a resilient economic growth.

Several new approaches to inflation analyses and its correlation to a resilient economic growth bring to the foreground new analytical models. Girdzijauskas, S. et al. (2022) present the new analytical model of aggregate inflation. In this theoretical analysis "the formation of an economic bubble is provided based on saturation phenomena and its micro and macroeconomic implications are discussed."(Girdzijauskas, S. et al., 2022) The main findings in this recent research

is the creation of an extended inflation model representing the main drivers of inflation and therefore contributes to the concept of controlled economic growth, which is necessary to ensure resilience of economic growth for national economies.

2. The price of energy in the context of increased demand for natural gas post-COVID 19

Energy is considered an indispensable resource for performing current activities, both for the population and for economic operators. Therefore, the significant increase in its prices observed over the past several years at the European level is expected to have an impact on the dynamics of consumer pricing sooner or later. The broad rise in inflation rates at the community level may also be an indication that such adjustments are about to take place. Also, questions about the potential medium- and long-term repercussions of these shocks, with the possibility of lowering economic agents' expectations for inflation and, accordingly, of a slower-than-expected recovery of economic activity, started to rise. In this context, the present research aims to identify the factors (structural or temporary) that led to such increases in the natural gas and electricity markets as well as to quantify the effects that these increases will have on future economic growth dynamics and resilience.

Our research revealed that there has been a dramatic rise in the demand for natural gas, both for the production of power and for industrial uses, since the global economy has fully recovered and constraints imposed by the epidemic have been eased. This situation was made worse during the summer season by the high demand for electricity production against the backdrop of heat waves, along with the reduction of output from rival sources (hydro and wind), and the manifestation of some supply constraints brought on by extreme weather events or protracted maintenance work (given that some of the latter were delayed during the acute phases of the pandemic). On the European market, an important factor of the rapid rise of natural gas quotations (to historical maximum values, unlike developments in other regions) was one of a cyclical nature, represented by the reduced level of stocks (around 77% in October 2021, compared to almost 95% in the corresponding month of the previous year), caused by a prolonged cold season with temperatures below expectations taking into account past average values. The effect was amplified by the difficulty of restocking supplies during the summer, against a backdrop of limited natural gas deliveries by the major players, either due to structural factors - the natural decline in production, the tendency to abandon coal-fired power plants, the restriction of investments in fossil fuels in the context of the decarbonisation process, or the beginning of closure procedures of the largest gas field in the Netherlands, the main producer in the EU, increased competition for liquefied natural gas from Asian economies as a result of the plan to reduce carbon emissions -, or due to geopolitical reasons: dependence on Russian gas imports and associated supply problems. The

structure of the European market, which gives contracts with prices set according to the ratio between natural gas supply and demand (to the detriment of contracts indexed to the price of oil) the dominant share (80% in 2020), also contributed to the rise in quotations. This characteristic favours the quicker transmission of specific market pressures.

Because the authors know closely the economic situation of Romania and there is a concern for the analysis of the phenomenon that constitutes the subject of the article in this country, we examine also the situation in Romania, where the general framework was relatively similar: the amount of natural gas in deposits being much lower than the level recorded in the previous year (around 74% in October 2021, compared to 95% in 2020); in addition, the domestic market is also characterized by a natural decline in production, a fact that has led to an increase in imports in recent years, thus increasing exposure to external shocks. With regard to the advance of electricity quotations from the second half of 2021 on the European markets and, implicitly, on the Romanian one, the decisive factor was the large increase in production costs for fossil fuel-based plants - in this case, the significant jump of the price of natural gas (up to five times compared to the same period last year) and of coal quotations (about three times). Additional effects include a rise in CO2 emission certificate prices as a result of European-level decisions to speed up the transition to a green economy, such as a wider reduction in the carbon emission ceiling or a quicker removal of certificates from the market that are no longer in use. Added to these influences was the decrease in the electricity production of hydroelectric plants and wind plants (caused by low precipitation and lack of wind), which had to be compensated by the generation of electricity in thermal plants, already faced with problems on the side of production costs. Finally, the exacerbated increase in electricity quotes also reflects the specific pricing mechanism in this market, in the context of aligning the prices of all electricity production units to the marginal production cost of the last unit entering the system to cover energy demand electric. In anticipation of a reduction in the severe supply and demand mismatch, there was a certain price correction at the European level in 2022 after the cold season. On a longer time horizon, the primary structural element that is accelerating the EU's transition to a green economy as a sign of activating its capacity for resilience may cause European energy prices to stabilize at lower levels. According to the European Commission, the process involves the rapid increase in electricity production from renewable sources (simultaneous with the electrification of the heating system of households) which implies a reduction in the influence of higher production costs from electricity based on fossil fuels.

The dynamics of real GDP are being affected in a contractionary way by the rise in the cost of energy products as well as other raw materials and materials, and it is expected that these impacts will last for at least some time to come. In this matter, it is important to mention important research work conducted by Li R. et al. (2021) that provide an econometric analysis that aims to present the connection among

energy consumption, capital or labour to real GDP. Given that energy inputs are difficult to replace with other factors of production, at least in the long term, short and medium, it is important to highlight those regarding the real disposable income of households and the resources available for investment by companies. This presents a challenge to resilience.

3. China's reopening to foreign trade and investment dynamics

For China, the economic, social and fiscal costs of the zero-Covid policy have led to enormous uncertainty over the economy, with major impacts on consumption and investment. At the same time, the infection rate linked to the lifting of restrictions has put immense pressure on economic activity. In this context, Coface[3] forecasts a gradual normalization of economic activity in March 2023, with a firm recovery starting in Q2 2023, with the reopening of China's economy to foreign trade after three years of restrictions. Economists at banking group Goldman Sachs [4]forecast GDP in the world's second-largest economy to grow 6.5% by the end of the year, boosting global trade.

We believe that the reopening of China will give a welcome boost to global economic growth, offsetting weakness in Europe and a possible future recession in the US. We should also take into consideration that in 2023, the revival of activity in the world's second largest economy could give a boost to inflation just as the major central banks of the world is struggling to bring it back under control. Moreover, representatives of the IMF appreciate that China's abandonment of the zero-Covid policy is probably the single most important factor for the growth of the world economy in 2023, warning about the effect on inflation.

Our direction of investigation is sustained also by specialists from Bloomberg Economics[5] who expect the Chinese GDP to accelerate from 3% in 2022 to 5.8% in 2023. Given the relationship between China's growth, energy prices and global inflation, consumer prices could rise by almost a percentage point in the last quarter of this year. If China's growth is higher, the boost would be closer to 2%. In the context of the central banks' efforts to bring inflation back to the 2% target, this advance matters a lot.

[3] Coface (Compagnie Française d'Assurance pour le Commerce Extérieur) is a company that operates globally, providing companies advisory in domestic and export markets, credit insurance, debt collection, factoring, business intelligence and collateral insurance services.
[4] The Goldman Sachs Group, Inc., is a global bank holding company, engaged in investment banking, securities, investment management and financial consulting activities.
[5] Bloomberg L.P. is a financial, software, data, and media company that provides financial software tools and enterprise applications such as analytics and equity trading platform, data services, and news to financial companies and organizations.

China's reopening to foreign trade will also boost the investment market. A recent perception survey conducted by the IFO Institute[6], by consulting around 1000 experts from 110 countries, mentions the reduction of investments as the main problem with a strong impact on national economies. Beyond the situation in China, investment will continue to influence the resilience of economic growth especially through movements in real estate. While the real estate sector is expected to stabilize gradually given increasing political support, growth in infrastructure investment could be weaker. Given the weakened global outlook, export-oriented firms are unlikely to invest in facilities.

Investment was an important driver of growth last year, particularly in the second half of the year, as consumption slowed amid deteriorating purchasing power due to headwinds in inflation.

Gross fixed capital formation contributed 2.2 percentage points to the GDP advance in 2022, compared to just 0.4 percentage points in 2021, for example. It is the best result since 2019, when the investment contribution to economic growth was 2.7 percentage points from 4.2%.

The declining investment trajectory, which despite the pandemic showed remarkable resilience, results in less capital accumulation and less effective utilization of production inputs, which has an effect on the dynamics of potential GDP. The latter would additionally be affected by the economy's reduced ability to create new jobs. A decline in activity in a number of important economic sectors, such as industrial output, may follow the impact on investment, especially as a result of rising production costs brought on by rising energy commodity prices. In turn, it is anticipated that the exports of goods and services, already impacted by the persistence of syncope in the supply chains, will reflect the challenges faced by exporting companies due to the rise in production costs (which will have an effect on the competitiveness of their prices in the external market) and the decline in investment resources (which will have a negative impact on productivity). The dynamics of imports of goods and services are also designed to respond to shocks to the domestic demand for goods and services and to shocks to exports of goods and services, respectively.

However, in some product categories where domestic producers would be more impacted by rising energy prices than foreign rivals (who had access to more energy-efficient technologies), imports might win market share.

[6] The Ifo Institute for Economic Research is a Munich is one of Germany's largest economic think-tanks, that analyses economic policy and is known for its monthly Ifo Business Climate Index for Germany.

4. Transformations in the labour market

The paradigmatic transformation undergone by the economy and society in the last half of the 20th century and at the beginning of the 21st century, began to raise more and more questions, as technological progress, the appearance of more and more digitized, robotic systems that advanced to the exploitation of artificial intelligence have turned into real challenges and pressures for the labour force under increasing pressures and frictions.

The COVID-19 pandemic crisis, which was triggered on by a sudden, almost universal worsening of the macroeconomic environment and the business climate, had a significant impact on the labour market's delicate equilibrium because it occurred at the intersection of demand and supply factors that determine employment opportunities. The post-COVID economic recovery in developed countries, from a labour market perspective, means measures to reduce unemployment, decrease income inequality and in-work poverty, increase the purchasing power of income and manage the postponement of household consumption Measures adopted by developed countries to combat the effects of the pandemic recession included increasing the duration and level of social assistance, as well as active labour market policy measures such as short-term employment, easy and quick vocational retraining, the opportunity to work in extraordinary conditions. The labour market has undergone the most transformations, and political decision-makers, the academic environment and the business environment are faced with new questions, hypotheses and challenges regarding its issues.

Disruption of global value chains, complete or partial closure of international trade flow lanes, as well as border closures, temporary prohibitions on economic activity in the majority of sectors, hygienic and social segregation laws, restrictions on the right to leave the house, with the exception of well-defined situations, bans on leaving towns and, in some cases, their quarantine, the timely opening of some air and land transport routes for seasonal, etc. are only some of the factors with significant influences.

From a macroeconomic perspective, underemployment contributes to both frictional and structural unemployment and affects labour productivity. A nation's capacity for economic growth and its gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (as measured by aggregate demand and GDP) are consequently impacted by this.

Consumer spending is the factor that has the most influence on the GDP and economic expansion. Businesses do not invest in labour or capital, nor do they try to expand to satisfy customer demand, if consumers do not spend money on goods and services (Potters et al., 2021). This results in a slowdown in the economy and an increase in unemployment, which pave the way for an economic recession that, as we previously stated, was restrained by the resilience of economies.

For a country's workforce and societal well-being, employability is essential. The COVID-19 crisis has shown us how important it is to safeguard not only the

most important economic sectors but also our resources, technology, and infrastructure. Above all, we must safeguard our workforce and jobs.

5. The climate crisis

Increased energy use and resource consumption often go hand in hand with higher levels of economic activity. "Energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions, and thus climate forcing, continue to be strongly correlated because fossil fuels still make up 80% of the world's energy mix".(Ritchie et al., 2022) This study investigates the relationship between decarbonisation and economic growth resilience, as well as whether the suite of climate change mitigation policies enhances resiliency. The literature provides radically different explanations for this subject, with academics making arguments along a spectrum that runs from the most idealistic "green growth" ideas to pessimistic "decline" views.

While globally, CO2 emissions per unit of GDP are falling, the rate of decoupling from 1995 to 2018 was only -1.8% annually. To reach net zero by 2050, the rate would have to accelerate to -8.7%, assuming population and GDP growth projections are given, or by a factor of nearly five. In order to keep GDP and population growth at their projections, and thus reject the tapering proposal, decoupling would have to accelerate massively. Two ways are crucial: reducing the energy intensity of production and/or the intensity of energy emissions (Lenaerts et al., 2021).

"The biggest impact of climate change is that it could wipe out up to 18% of the world economy's GDP by 2050 if global temperatures rise by 3.2°C", warns the Swiss Re Institute[7]. Therefore, this major risk factor that could disrupt economic growth is combated by a series of measures that demonstrate its resilience:

- allocating incentives from the state budget to make green technologies cheaper (for example, photovoltaic panels or electric vehicles);
- providing incentives for investment in "green" financial products and services;
- allowing more space for pedestrians and cyclists, at the expense of motor vehicles;
- banning petrol and diesel vehicles from central city areas to create vehicle-free zones;
- requiring all food retailers to offer vegan alternatives or increasing taxes on red meat and diary.
- increasing taxes on means of transport that are more harmful to the environment (eg airplanes, diesel vehicles);

[7] Swiss Reinsurance Company Ltd, known as Swiss Re, is a reinsurance company based in Zürich, Switzerland, being one of the world's largest reinsurers, operating through offices in more than 25 countries.

If fossil fuels are severely outpriced by low-carbon energy, GDP emissions intensity may drop to the point that emissions and economic production are completely unrelated. The availability of negative emission strategies may also be important in this case, especially in industries where emissions are hard to reduce, like agriculture and aviation, provided that these methods support rather than supplant overall efforts at attenuation. Absolute decoupling of emissions from economic activity would be difficult and require significant investments in low-carbon energy, but it is not impossible given the substantial price drops in renewable energy technologies already observed.

Conclusion

Taking into account that this paper proposes a preliminary diagnosis of the risk factors and the changes imposed by their manifestations on the resilience of economic growth under the impact of the crisis caused by the new coronavirus, with the presentation of possible scenarios from an analytical perspective, we feel the need to embrace also an empirical approach using data collected for a more accurate analysis.

Our analysis leads to a number of useful conclusions for further research:

- The extension of the period of high oil costs, inflation, and tightening monetary policy will continue to have an impact on consumer spending and economic expansion. In a simplified scenario, which takes into account the calming of the recent turbulences in the financial sector, GDP growth in the euro area would decrease from 3.5% in 2022, to 0.7% this year and then reach 1.3% in 2024 and to 1.9% in 2025. Therefore, slower growth than the 1.9% average recorded in the period 2014-2019, before the pandemic, is expected. The evolution of the European economies will remain far below the pre-Covid19 trends, influenced both by the long-term negative effects of the pandemic and those of the war in Ukraine.
- Despite the drop in energy prices, high inflation may prove persistent.
- The downward trend in inflation could be counterbalanced by a strong and sustained increase in wages, which accelerated in the euro area. The economic slowdown has caused some easing of labour demand, but labour markets remain much tighter than before the pandemic.
- Geopolitical uncertainty, the gradual decoupling of large economies from globalized supply networks and the risk of an economic downturn have in turn a direct shock on consumer spending, especially on population consumption, and it is households that prove to be the least resilient in the event a hard landing of the economy.
- Overall, strong arguments exist to sustain that promoting economic growth and halting climate change are not mutually exclusive desired results. The recession following the global economic crisis caused emissions to fall, which was

accompanied with a decline in economic activity. It is questionable, though, if the encouraging indicators shown this far in some nations will continue to be a pattern.

All in all, the subject proposed in this paper creates, in our opinion, a broader perspective regarding the economic growth capacity of resilience and makes an analysis of the risk factors that influence it, being a useful tool for economists or students in the field, when trying to clarify current macroeconomic events.

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ENHANCING EU'S RESILIENCE AGAINST TERRORISM: A LEGAL APPROACH

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Abstract

The growth in amplitude and frequency of the terrorist phenomenon at both the European and international levels, in the past years, makes terrorism one of the most significant challenges for European Union's security. Given EU's international ambitions of a significant actor in the field of security (European External Action Service, 2016), this paper approaches EU's responses to terrorism, from a legal point of view. Arguing in favour of the legal instruments as the most appropriate tools to counter the terrorist phenomenon, the aim of this research is to analyse if and how Europe can become more resilient against the terrorist threat, by resorting to legal means. Specifically, the paper seeks to explore how the regulation of the crime of terrorism in international law might foster the resilience of the EU in an increasingly challenging international context. Addressing the issue of terrorism is of high importance taking into consideration the current international context, when Europe is facing again a war and the terrorist offences have significantly increased along with the conflict in Ukraine that started in February 2022 (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2022).

Keywords: international criminal law, crime of terrorism, legal means, EU's security, counter-terrorism

Introduction

The European Union is nowadays facing numerous diverse and decentralized threats which makes the need to identify, adapt, react, and understand these threats an imperative for the EU and its Member States. In order to become an international significant actor in the field of security, the EU should first and foremost ensure the safety within its borders and in its vicinity.

One of the main challenges for EU's security is the terrorist phenomenon, which has grown both in amplitude and frequency in the last years at the European, but also at the international level, irrespective of the international context. Even in

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times of the COVID-19 pandemic, when all states have focused on overcoming the pandemic, terrorist acts did not stop to occur, but the terrorist perpetrators have taken advantage of the focus of the governments on the limitation of spreading the virus and committed even more terrorist offences, adapting their actions to the new international context of the Covid-19 Pandemic (Mullins, 2020). Furthermore, terrorist offences have significantly increased along with the conflict in Ukraine that started in February 2022 (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2022).

To counter the terrorist threat, the EU and the international community shall resort to legal means, which we consider the most appropriate instruments in the tough fight against terrorism. We believe that in this increasingly challenging international context, the regulation of the crime of terrorism in international law might foster the resilience of the EU. Therefore, the aim of this research is to explore on how Europe can become more resilient against the terrorist threat by resorting to legal means.

Thus, the paper analyses the legal tools that the EU currently has to combat terrorism, such as the Directive on combating terrorism, adopted in 2017 by the European Parliament and the Council (European Union, 2017), and argues on the reasons why they are not sufficient to combat the phenomenon. Moreover, the research brings forward how the international criminal law can fill the existing gaps in EU's terrorism law to help the EU and its Member States counter terrorism more efficiently and, consequently, foster the resilience of the EU. To that end, the paper exposes the existing international legal tools to combat terrorism, focusing on the most relevant ones for the further development of the international criminal law: the ones that include a definition of the crime of terrorism. Furthermore, we aim to explore new international legal instruments that could be developed by the international community to better counter the terrorist phenomenon, such as an International Court against Terrorism.

Additionally, this research sheds a light on the steps the EU and its Member States can undertake in the international efforts of combating terrorism through legal means, bringing forward the main obstacle in front of the regulation of the crime of terrorism in international law: the lack of consensus on a common notion of the crime of terrorism. In this hard fight against terrorism and the long-lasting process of regulating the crime of terrorism in international law, the EU and its Member States have an important role to play and they shall join their forces to help the international community end the impasse regarding consensus on the definition of the international crime of terrorism. Regulating the crime of terrorism in international law might increase EU's resilience in front of the multidimensional current and potential future crisis. Therefore, a robust regulation of the crime of terrorism in EU's law might in the first place deter the terrorist offenders from committing this crime on EU's soil.

1. EU's legal tools to combat terrorism and their drawbacks

In the tough fight against the terrorist phenomenon, the EU has also an important role to play. This part of the paper focuses on EU's legal initiatives to counter terrorism.

Throughout the years, the EU has developed a range of legal tools against terrorism to combat the phenomenon. The most significant one is the EU Framework Decision on Combating Terrorism (European Union, 2002), which has been replaced by the Directive on combating terrorism, adopted in 2017 by the European Parliament and the Council (European Union, 2017). Later on, this paper will explain why it is the most relevant counter-terrorism instrument at the EU level.

In addition to this Directive, the European Parliament and the Council have also adopted the Directive on the control of the acquisition and possession of weapons or the EU Passenger Name Record (PNR) Directive (Official Journal of the European Union, 2016) that allows Member States to collect from each other data of flight passengers to detect suspicious travellers that could be foreign fighters. The reasoning behind the adoption of this Directive is the fact that the EU feels itself threatened by the Europeans who leave conflict zones like the one in Syria and return to EU's soil to coordinate terrorist attacks. In this sense, there are precedents such as the terrorist attacks from Paris in 2015 and from Brussels in 2016: "*sadly, this fear materialised in November 2015 in Paris and in March 2016 in Brussels*" (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2021, p. 2).

As it has been mentioned above in this part of the research, the most important instrument of the EU to counter the terrorist phenomenon is the Directive on combating terrorism adopted by the European Parliament and the Council (European Union, 2017) that replaced the EU Framework Decision on Combating Terrorism (European Union, 2002). Its relevance consists in the fact that it contains a definition of the crime of terrorism:

> Terrorist offences
> 1. Member States shall take the necessary measures to ensure that the following intentional acts, as defined as offences under national law, which, given their nature or context, may seriously damage a country or an international organisation, are defined as terrorist offences were committed with one of the aims listed in paragraph 2:
> (a) attacks upon a person's life which may cause death;
> (b) attacks upon the physical integrity of a person;
> (c) kidnapping or hostage-taking;
> (d) causing extensive destruction to a government or public facility, a transport system, an infrastructure facility, including an information system, a fixed platform located on the continental shelf, a public place or private property likely to endanger human life or result in major economic loss;

(e) seizure of aircraft, ships or other means of public or goods transport;
(f) manufacture, possession, acquisition, transport, supply or use of explosives or weapons, including chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear weapons, as well as research into, and development of, chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear weapons;
(g) release of dangerous substances, or causing fires, floods or explosions, the effect of which is to endanger human life;
(h) interfering with or disrupting the supply of water, power or any other fundamental natural resource, the effect of which is to endanger human life;
(i) illegal system interference, as referred to in Article 4 of Directive 2013/40/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council (1) in cases where Article 9(3) or point (b) or (c) of Article 9(4) of that Directive applies, and illegal data interference, as referred to in Article 5 of that Directive in cases where point (c) of Article 9(4) of that Directive applies;
(j) threatening to commit any of the acts listed in points (a) to (i).
2. The aims referred to in paragraph 1 are:
(a) seriously intimidating a population;
(b) unduly compelling a government or an international organisation to perform or abstain from performing any act;
(c) seriously destabilising or destroying the fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures of a country or an international organisation (European Union, 2017, p. 13).

The Directive (European Union, 2017) incorporates numerous terrorist offences like attacks upon the physical integrity of a person, kidnapping or hostage-taking, seizure of aircraft, travelling for terrorist purposes. According to the Directive (European Union, 2017), not only the attacks upon a person that might cause death and attacks upon his/her physical integrity must be criminalized, but also the participation in a terrorist offence, the leading or funding of a terrorist group:

Article 4
Offences relating to a terrorist group
Member States shall take the necessary measures to ensure that the following acts, when committed intentionally, are punishable as a criminal offence:
(a) directing a terrorist group;
(b) participating in the activities of a terrorist group, including by supplying information or material resources, or by funding its activities in any way, with knowledge of the fact that such participation will contribute to the criminal activities of the terrorist group (European Union, 2017, p. 13).

The Directive (European Union, 2017) incriminates the funding and leading of a terrorist group, the participation in terrorist acts, supplying information or

material resources, with the condition of the knowledge of the terrorist perpetrators regarding the contribution of such an act to the criminal activities of the respective terrorist group.

This comprehensive definition of the crime of terrorism given by the EU sheds a light on its vision on the crime of terrorism. Taking into consideration the fact that the Directive (European Union, 2017) contains the notion of the crime of terrorism, it might be a source of inspiration for the international community in the further development of the anti-terrorism legislation.

Even if EU's counter-terrorism legal instruments discussed earlier bring forward its active involvement in the struggle against terrorism and one of them (European Union, 2017) also contains an extensive concept of the crime of terrorism, the issue concerning EU's counter-terrorism legal framework is the fact that the most instruments are directives that need to be transposed by the Member States into their national legislation to become effective. This is a long-lasting process and a challenging task for them that not rarely registered delays. There have even been cases in which the measures regarding countering terrorism were not transposed into the national legislation of the Member States, as evidenced within the Twentieth Progress Report towards Security Union from October 2019 (European Commission, 2019). Accordingly, the EU needs a central instrument to counter the terrorist phenomenon.

Acknowledging that terrorism represents one of the most serious threats not only to the European, but also to the international peace and security, as it has been previously recognized by the international community (United Nations, 2000), the EU shall increase its effort in the development of the anti-terrorism law to enhance its resilience against the terrorist threat. Moreover, in this current international context marked by a war at EU's borders, the need to combat the terrorist phenomenon more effectively is even more imperative for the EU and its resilience against crises and threats.

2. Resorting to international legal means to enhance EU's resilience

EU's legal framework against terrorism is not enough to combat the phenomenon and foster its resilience in front of the terrorist threat. Considering that terrorism represents a serious global threat to the international peace and security, it has to be combated globally, by resorting to the international law and, more specifically, to the international criminal law.

2.1. An overview of the most relevant existing international legal tools to combat terrorism

In the last 100 years, the international community has done sustained efforts to regulate the international crime of terrorism in international law. Thus, it has

developed a myriad of legal tools in the attempt to combat the phenomenon. This paper does not bring forward an exhaustive list of the legal instruments developed so far by the international community, but it gives insights into the most relevant ones.

When choosing the most significant counter-terrorism tools, the reference point is the definition of the crime of terrorism. Considering its importance for the regulation of terrorism in the international law, a part of the legal counter-terrorism instruments that include a definition of the crime of terrorism are exposed within this paper.

The response of the international community to the terrorist threat has begun in the twentieth century with the efforts of the League of Nations that developed two Conventions (League of Nations, 1937a, 1937b). One of them would have obliged states to prosecute the acts stipulated in the text of the Convention (League of Nations, 1937a) into their national laws, while the other (League of Nations, 1937b) would have created a permanent international jurisdiction to prosecute the perpetrators guilty of the terrorist acts encompassed in the first Convention (League of Nations, 1937a). Unfortunately, none of the two Conventions (League of Nations, 1937a, 1937b) entered into force because of the outbreak of the World War II and the end of the League of Nations.

Given the fact that they are into force and represent the opinion and will of many countries, the anti-terrorism sectoral universal legal instruments (United Nations, 1963, 1970, 1971, 1973, 1979, 1980, 1988a, 1988b, 1988c, 1991, 1997, 1999, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2005d, 2010a, 2010b, 2014) are cornerstone tools in the global fight against terrorism. Moreover, a significant aspect concerning these universal legal tools against terrorism is the fact that they also encompass a definition of the crime of terrorism. Nevertheless, since they regulate specific types of terrorist acts and only apply to a specific context, like the aerial, nuclear or maritime context, the anti-terrorism sectoral universal legal instruments (United Nations, 1963, 1970, 1971, 1973, 1979, 1980, 1988a, 1988b, 1988c, 1991, 1997, 1999, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2005d, 2010a, 2010b, 2014) are not sufficient to fight the terrorist phenomenon. Many crimes of terrorism remain unregulated by the international law and, as a consequence, the terrorist perpetrators cannot be punished for their grave criminal acts. What the international community needs is a robust regulation of the crime of terrorism in international law, to incriminate all the acts of terrorism, irrespective of the context in which they have been perpetrated.

Besides the universal sectoral instruments mentioned previously, there are also numerous regional treaties that incriminate the crime of terrorism, some of them including the notion of the crime of terrorism (League of Arab States, 1998; African Unity, 1999; Shanghai Cooperation Organization, 2001). Even if they incorporate the definition of the crime of terrorism, they also present some limitations consisting in the area of application - they only apply to specific geographic regions.

As a consequence of the 9/11 events (Pentagon Memorial, 2021) that have shocked the whole humanity with their gravity, the United Nations adopted a series of resolutions (United Nations, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c, 2002d, 2002e, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2004d, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2005d, 2006), some of which oblige states to criminalize terrorist acts in their national laws. Moreover, they urge states to ratify the existing international treaties against terrorism, to prevent and punish violations of national terrorism laws, to cooperate with each other on preventing and countering terrorism, to ensure that all the measures taken to combat terrorism are in compliance with their obligations under the international law.

Nevertheless, even if some of them are binding on states, they are unharmoniously implemented at the national level. To effectively combat the terrorist phenomenon and enhance its resilience against terrorism, the international community needs to develop a common concept of the crime of terrorism to be uniformly applied in all countries.

2.2. The main obstacle in front of the regulation of the crime of terrorism in international law

Despite of its gravity and almost 100 years of international efforts to incriminate the crime of terrorism in the international law, this international crime remained unregulated by the international law because the international community could not agree on a common notion of the crime of terrorism. The Draft Comprehensive Convention of the United Nations (United Nations, 2000), drafted by an Ad Hoc Committee established by the General Assembly, emphasizes the issues that have hindered the agreement on a common concept of the crime of terrorism. One of the main obstacles to the attempt of the international community to reach consensus on the definition of the crime of terrorism is the divergence of opinion on the acts of armed forces and liberation movements. While some members of the Committee consider freedom fights the worst form of terrorism, the others regard them as a legitimate exercise of the right of self-determination (United Nations General Assembly, 1997). Furthermore, some states believe that, when regulating the crime of terrorism in international law, the focus should fall on the incrimination of non-state violence, while other countries argue that the accent should be put on the incrimination of state violence. Hence, the challenges regarding the incrimination of the crime of terrorism in international law are of a political character. For this reason, the cooperation between states is essential to reach consensus on this controversial issue and overcome the long-lasting impasse in reaching agreement on a common concept of the crime of terrorism and regulating the crime of terrorism in international law - by enhancing international cooperation on the terrorism issue, the states will enhance their resilience towards the terrorist threat.

The EU works together with other states to combat foreign terrorist fighters (FTF) within the framework of the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) - an informal platform designed to address and counter the terrorist phenomenon (Global Counterterrorism Forum, 2023). Some of the actions carried out within the GCTF include preventing radicalization that might lead to terrorism or building capacity of other states, like France is currently doing through trainings for its partners to enhance their resilience in front of the terrorist phenomenon (France Diplomacy, 2023). In addition to these acts, the EU and the other states shall also resort to legal means to better combat terrorism.

2.3. New international legal instruments to be developed to better counter the terrorist phenomenon

At the international level, there are currently two important initiatives for prosecuting the crime of terrorism in international law: the development of an International Court against Terrorism and a Tribunal for Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) Fighters. The paper gives insights into both initiatives that are currently in discussion and brings forward the involvement of the EU and its Member States in both initiatives.

The establishment of an ISIS Tribunal - an ad-hoc tribunal for ISIS fighters - is a significant initiative of fighting terrorism through international legal means in international law. The mission of such a Tribunal would be to analyse and prosecute the terrorist offences perpetrated by the armed group of the Islamic State of Iraq and alSham / the Levant (ISIS or ISIL). Accordingly, the *ratione personae* jurisdiction of such a Tribunal would be restricted to the members of a specific armed group - ISIS.

The proposal to create such a Tribunal has come from Sweden, but it did not gain significant support from other countries since it has been perceived as an attempt of the states to avoid their responsibilities regarding the repatriation of their own nationals (Lu Phillips, 2021). A detailed analysis of such a Tribunal, encompassing the legitimacy of its creation, the feasibility, the set-up options, the issues that come into discussion when creating such a Tribunal has been previously made by the author of this paper (Șolea, 2023).

After analysing all the legal aspects of the creation of the Tribunal, it has been concluded that the international community should continue the discussions on the development of an ISIS Tribunal and start working on its creation since it might bring many advantages. First of all, the prosecution of the ISIS perpetrators will prevent impunity in international law. Furthermore, it might also prevent further grave crimes from taking place by deterring the perpetrators from committing such acts. Accordingly, besides preventing impunity in international law, the creation of an ISIS Tribunal might also have a deterrence role. Moreover, the findings of the Tribunal might lead to the development of the international criminal law since the

establishment of a Tribunal to judge the terrorism-related offences of the ISIS fighters offers to the international community another chance to agree on a common notion of the crime of terrorism (Șolea, 2023).

The idea of the development of an ISIS Tribunal belongs to an EU Member State, to Sweden, and it has also been supported by the Netherlands and Denmark (International Review of the Red Cross, 2022). Furthermore, 11 European countries have met in Stockholm in 2019 to discuss the development of such a Tribunal (Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, 2019). Unfortunately, the meeting in Stockholm did not bring important outcomes and the initiative has been left aside to this date. Despite the fact that this initiative did not become reality, the idea of the creation of an ISIS Tribunal coming up from Sweden and supported by other EU Member States and the meeting that took place in Stockholm in 2019 bring forward the involvement of the EU Member States in countering the terrorist phenomenon worldwide.

Moreover, the initiator of one of the most significant initiatives to combat terrorism through international legal means - the development of an International Court against Terrorism - is also an EU Member State, Romania. Romania's initiative of setting up such a court has been also supported by another EU country, by Spain.

It is important mentioning that the initiative is not new, but by coming up with this project, Romania has recalled an idea which lays back in the twentieth century, when the creation of an International Court against Terrorism has been discussed within the League of Nations and a Convention has been drafted to this purpose - the Convention for the Creation of an International Criminal Court (League of Nations, 1937b). It is admirable that two EU Member States have called back this initiative after many years, which was actually from the very beginning a Romanian initiative of the diplomat Vespasian Pella - the so called "Pela's idea" (Aurescu and Gâlea 2015, p. 113). Besides Romania and Spain, the Netherlands has also got involved in the initiative.

For the development of an International Court against Terrorism in the twentieth first century, a working group of legal experts from Romania, Spain and the Netherlands has been set up. The legal experts from the three countries have conducted research on the legal elements of the initiative and drafted a document including the future design of the Court (Aurescu and Gâlea, 2015). This document encompassed proposals concerning the organisation of the Court. As for the jurisdiction of an International Court against Terrorism, it has been established that it would prosecute those guilty of committing the crime of terrorism. Given the transnational character of the terrorist phenomenon and the diversity of countries and regions where terrorist acts occur, the legal experts have agreed that the Court should be established "with aspirations of a worldwide jurisdiction" (Aurescu and Gâlea 2015, p. 113).

Three EU Member States have worked on an ambitious initiative to combat the terrorist phenomenon, but since 2015, when the concept paper about the Court

has been drafted, no more steps have been taken to bring this idea into reality. To fulfil the goal of the establishment of such a Court and prosecute the crime of terrorism in international law, more countries must support the initiative. Considering that the states that come up with the idea and worked on the Court's development process are EU Member States, they should be supported in the first place by other EU countries. Furthermore, the EU Member States should not only work at a diplomatic level for the development of this initiative, but they should also promote it "in relation with the civil society and the academia" (Aurescu and Gâlea 2015, p. 108). To bring the idea of the establishment of an International Court against Terrorism into reality, joint efforts at all levels (diplomatic, societal and academic) are needed.

3. The role of the EU and its Member States in the international efforts of combating terrorism through legal means and why should the EU act as soon as possible

The EU Member States should cooperate more and more with each other and with third countries to combat the terrorist phenomenon and increase their resilience against the terrorist threat.

As it has been mentioned in this paper, Romania, Spain and the Netherlands have worked on a very interesting proposal for countering the terrorist phenomenon globally: the development of an International Court against Terrorism. Their involvement in such an ambitious initiative endows the EU Member States with a central role in the international fight against terrorism.

The involvement of the other EU Member States in the project might increase its chances to become reality. Accordingly, we consider that they should make joint efforts in the further development of the initiative, but each of them should also act individually with third parties. Terrorism is a global threat posed to all the countries: one can never know when another country will face the terrorist phenomenon on its territory. Since terrorist attacks or terrorist attempts occur on a daily basis, terrorism should be always on the table at EU's different internal and external meetings.

The EU Member States acting collectively, but also individually with the third parties can play a central role in the development of the counter-terrorism law. Romania and Spain have already made an important step by coming up with such an ambitious initiative. Even if Romania does not confront itself on its territory with numerous terrorist offences like other EU countries such as France, Germany or Spain, but it is more indirectly exposed to the terrorist threat, by association with some other countries in Europe involved in countering terrorism (Romania Presidential Administration, 2020), its efforts to combat terrorism at the international level and create an International Court against Terrorism are notable. Romania's actions in the development of the anti-terrorism legislation demonstrate that not only states that face terrorist attacks on their territories should engage in the tough struggle

against terrorism, but all states should get involved in the international fight against terrorism and join their forces to combat the terrorist threat globally. The involvement of more and more states in the development process of an International Court against Terrorism and in its worldwide promotion is essential for ending the long-lasting international impasse regarding an international common notion of the crime of terrorism and the incrimination of the crime of terrorism in international law.

The COVID-19 pandemic has evidenced that the cooperation between states is essential to overcome global threats. In the global fight against Coronavirus, the EU has played an important role at a regional, but also at an international level, by developing a vaccine and exporting it to many countries on the globe (European Commission, 2021).

The EU might also have a central role in the global fight against the terrorist phenomenon. Given EU's international ambitions of a significant actor in the field of security (European External Action Service, 2016), being the starting point towards the solution for the regulation of the crime of terrorism in international law, but also the leader in the development of the international counter-terrorism law might help the EU reach this ambitious goal. Furthermore, acknowledging countering terrorism as a top priority for the EU (European Council, Council of the European Union, 2022), it might lead the process of regulating the international crime of terrorism in international law.

Since the internal security of the EU, its Member States and citizens is also depending on what happens outside its borders, the EU should also cooperate with non-EU countries from all geographic regions in the world, like Western Balkans, the Middle East, North Afrika or the Sahel region. In this sense, the Council of the EU has taken in 2015 the decision to step up external action to counter the terrorist phenomenon, with a focus on the Middle East, Mediterranean, the Gulf, North Africa and the Sahel (European Council, Council of the European Union, 2023). Its actions include projects to support capacity building for the states from these different regions to counter terrorism, fighting radicalisation and violent extremism, and intensifying cooperation with key partners.

Furthermore, in 2020 the Council has called for EU's engagement beyond its borders and for strengthening action in the field of counter-terrorism, giving priority to certain geographical (Western Balkans, North Africa, the Middle East, the Sahel region and the Horn of Africa) and thematic areas (human rights, the rule of law, the prevention of radicalisation leading to violent extremism, terrorism financing) (European Council, Council of the European Union, 2023).

Moreover, the EU is currently supporting the countries from the earlier mentioned regions to enhance their national judicial systems and domestic law enforcement capacities. Also, the Europol - European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation and the Eurojust - the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation offer support to the national judicial authorities that

work together on investigations and prosecutions to counter terrorism and other grave international crimes (European Council, Council of the European Union, 2022).

The fact that fighting terrorism is a top priority for the EU can be observed in its numerous internal and external actions noticed in this paper. Despite sustained efforts and a myriad of anti-terrorism actions taken by the EU, terrorist acts still occur on EU's soil. Even if one can remark a decrease in the number of terrorist attacks in EU countries from 2020 to 2021 (in 2021 only 15 terrorist attacks took place on EU's territory, compared to 57 in 2020) (European Council, Council of the European Union, 2022), the EU needs to increase its actions in the counter-terrorism field to enhance its resilience against the terrorist phenomenon, especially in these times when the war in Ukraine has brought many terrorist acts at its borders. Having to deal with so many threats - war, terrorism, pandemic, energy crisis, enhancing resilience is more needed than ever. Therefore, we consider that the EU and its Member States should reiterate and strengthen their involvement in the development process of an International Court prosecuting the terrorist perpetrators worldwide, regardless of their ideology, religion or country of origin.

The EU Member States should be united in their actions to overcome the terrorist threat internally, but they should also help other states from EU's immediate neighbourhood and from other geographic regions, to project security and stability worldwide. Overcoming the terrorist threat globally along with the development of an International Court against Terrorism at the initiative of the EU and its Member States might not only enhance its resilience, but it might also increase the role of the EU as a significant actor in the field of security globally and the trust of other countries from different regions in partnering with the EU.

Because some of the EU Member States have already put forward such a remarkable initiative and worked on a proposal for the establishment of an International Court against Terrorism, the EU should take advantage of the chance of becoming a security provider not only in its region, but also at an international level. Thus, the EU as a whole and all its Member States should join the initiative, and each of them should also cooperate with third parties to bring them at the working table for the creation of an International Court against Terrorism.

Conclusions

In the current international setting, states have to act collectively to overcome the crises they are facing and increase their resilience in front of future possible crises. Considering its ambition of becoming an important global actor in the field of security (European External Action Service, 2016), the EU should increase its efforts in the international fight against terrorism by resorting to legal means, as they might be the most efficient instruments in front of such a threat, considering the deterrence role of the incrimination of the crime of terrorism in international law.

The establishment of a permanent international jurisdiction to prosecute the individuals guilty of terrorist offences might deter the terrorist perpetrators from perpetrating terrorist acts since they might fear the consequences of their offences and give up on committing such terrifying crimes.

As discussed in the paper, the EU has a series of mechanisms to counter the terrorist threat and is taking lots of actions to counter the phenomenon, such as projects to support capacity building for the states from diverse regions to counter terrorism, fighting radicalisation and violent extremism and intensifying cooperation with key partners. Moreover, for its actions in the anti-terrorism fight, the EU has set prior geographic regions which include the Western Balkans, the Middle East, North Africa and the Sahel, and has established thematic areas such as the rule of law, human rights or terrorism financing (European Council, Council of the European Union, 2023). Nevertheless, the terrorist acts did not stop to occur on EU's territory (as mentioned earlier, we can speak about a decrease in number from 2020 to 2021, but there are still terror attacks happening on EU's soil). If we consider other regions, like the Sahel, there is a huge increase in terrorist attacks, making this region the new epicentre of terrorism with deaths "rising by over 2,000 percent in the last 15 years" (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2023, p. 2). Moreover, if we look at the immediate neighbourhood of the EU, the war in Ukraine has also brought terrorist attacks (European Council, Council of the European Union, 2023).

The numerous terrorist offences that occur in different global regions, including on EU's soil and in its vicinity, prove that the initiatives and the actions that have been conducted so far by the EU and its Member States are not sufficient to combat such a major threat to the European and international security. Ultimately, the EU and the international community need to take further action in the fight against terrorism to enhance their resilience in front of the terrorist threat. Given its ambition of becoming a significant global actor in the field of security, the EU might take a leading role in countering one of the main threats to the global peace and security - the terrorist phenomenon.

Considering that the legal instruments are the most appropriate tools to counter terrorism given first and foremost their deterrence role, the EU should resort to the international legal means to counter terrorism and increase its resilience against the terrorist threat.

Some of the EU Member States have already taken action in the counter-terrorism area and proposed, as it has been exposed in this paper, an ambitious initiative to overcome the terrorist threat: the establishment of an International Court against Terrorism. Therefore, the project of the development of such a Court might represent a significant starting point in EU's involvement in countering terrorism through legal means. To turn an ambitious initiative into a significant counter-terrorism legal instrument, the EU and its Member States should work together on the development process of the court and on its promotion at a global level.

The paper has also brought forward the reason that made impossible the regulation of the crime of terrorism in international law: the lack of consensus at the international level on a common concept of the crime of terrorism. To end this international impasse regarding the common notion of the crime of terrorism, the EU and its Member States should act together, but they should also cooperate with third parties to reach the international goal of incriminating the crime of terrorism in international law.

Acknowledging the current complicated international context, marked by a series of crises and the return of the war to the European continent, enhancing resilience against the multitude of threats is an imperative for the EU. To overcome crises and increase their resilience by resorting to international legal means, all states need to work together, in close cooperation. As the President of the European Parliament Roberta Metsola has stated within a Joint Session of the Romanian Parliament in December last year, "together we will emerge stronger from the crises we face today" (European Parliament, The President, 2022).

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EUROPEAN'S YOUTH RESILIENCE: FROM UNIVERSITY TO THE LABOR MARKET

Miruna PATRICHE*

Abstract

2022 was declared the European year of Youth and in this context, the role of universities as disseminators of knowledge and creators of the future workforce is very important. This paper seeks to address several questions regarding the correlation between R&D, the existence of qualified work force, the innovation degree, and the adaptability of universities to labour market requirements. While underlying the role of human capital in ensuring regional development, the significance of research and innovation in stimulating the resilience of universities is also emphasized, giving an overview on the Romanian case. In the article, some comparisons between Romania and the rest of the EU member states, related to young generation, are described.

Keywords: European youth, universities, innovation, development, resilience

Introduction

Before presenting some European's youth statistics, we should first look into the endogenous growth models that emerged in the 1980s and were further discussed by Uzawa (1965), Romer (1994), Arrow (1971) and Barro (1990), all emphasizing the importance of investments in research and development (R&D), human capital, infrastructure and thus, creating innovation. While the theory of regional growth has its origin in the neoclassical model of exogenous growth, being based on the Solow model (1956), the process of regional endogenous growth has been attracting more and more attention from different fields of academia (economic, geographical, social), starting from Romer's (1990) attempts to endogenize technologies and human capital (Lucas, 1988). Therefore, there is an "umbrella" of endogenous growth theories at regional level (Stimson et al., 2011): competitive advantages (Porter, 1990), new economic geography (Krugman, 1991), innovative regions (Saxenian, 1994), regions of knowledge (Simmie, 2011) and more.

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One of the central pieces in this paper is represented by the younger generation and universities, the latter seen as a "true economic development engine" (O'Mara, 2005), which contribute to regional innovation and scale effects in economy (Sanchez-Barrioluengo, 2014), with academia having the capacity to create and improve the set of skills required for a well-prepared workforce, often encouraging the appearance of new industries (Marques, 2017), significantly contributing to the innovation network within their region. However, there are often shortcomings, especially in the peripheral regions when it comes to absorption of graduates on the labor market, leading to a rise in unemployment (Evers, 2019; Germain-Alamartine, 2019). Even more, the academic peer's contribution to the innovation chain will be strictly linked to a rather intrinsic set of motivations, opportunities offered for research and the degree of willingness of researchers to stay in a particular region. While some authors talk about the reasons for why an increase in education would affect growth more positively in countries closer to the technological frontier, citing the reallocation, the migration, and the market size effect (Aghion et al., 2009), others focus on the relationship between universities and innovation (Andersson et al., 2004; Bartik and Erickcek, 2008; Feng and Valero, 2020). Therefore, direct and indirect channels for pushing the frontier of knowledge (Carlino and Kerr, 2015) and making the economy more resilient (Hartt et al., 2019) will be generated. Martin and Sunley (2017) have repeatedly emphasized the importance of resilience as an ability to absorb shocks; thus, the universities could face the shocks by molding future generations through appropriate skills. Even OECD recommended universities to be incorporated into regional innovation strategies to help drive growth (OECD, 2007), whereas a smart specialization strategy has been imposed at EU level since 2011, making mandatory the strategic involvement of universities in regional development. But it should be recognized that the accumulation of knowledge has its roots in the economic and institutional characteristics, making infrastructure and accessibility pre-conditions for the innovative process (Nijkamp et al., 2022). Several authors pay special attention to the importance of strategic planning of the innovative development in higher education, talking about the universities' chance to thrive in a highly competitive global scientific area under the everchanging conditions of digitalization and internationalization (Kassymova et al., 2019; Zhavoronok et al., 2020). Even more, a well-grounded digital adaptability for universities, especially in emerging markets, contributes to a more sustainable system, capable of returning to the desired path after shock perturbations while enhancing the attractiveness level of education. In the so-called quintuple helix, developed and modeled by several authors (Carayannis et al., 2012; Campbell et al., 2015; Tonkovic et al., 2015; Halibas et al., 2017) we find five main stakeholders as follow: the knowledge sector (academia), government, business/private, civil society and creative industries, with adjustments in each model, all promoting a knowledge economy that pursues innovation. After all, each country's main goal is to improve its welfare levels for its citizens and to increase its competitiveness levels globally.

Currently, one of the most effective ways in order to achieve these goals are shaped by innovation and indirectly, by human capital (Dineri, 2020). It's impossible to deny the strong correlation between a nation's educational system and its economic development, the expenditure on education and human capital being vital aspects in a country's socioeconomic development status (Jellenz et al., 2020), while emphasizing how highly influential is tertiary education in particular to a country's economic performance.

1. The situation of the European youth labor market

To understand the current situation of the European youth labor market and its main strengths and weaknesses – while taking a particular interest on the Romanian case - we briefly discussed a few relevant indicators in that notice by analyzing the results presented in the EU Youth Strategy, the European Innovation scoreboard 2022 and European Skills Index[1], while also taking a look into the younger generation's involvement in today's society across EU member states. Specifically, we took a particular interest in checking on one hand unemployment rates, the standard of living, requirements and opportunities in the labor market for recent graduates and on the other hand the education levels, participation rate in voluntary activities and the interest towards performance.

1.1. In need for government support and a better infrastructure

Here, we ask ourselves how can the model thrive in a country where one of the actors neglects part of its duties? While numerous countries choose to invest in innovation by encouraging and allocating funds for academic research, Romania lags behind, allocating just 0.47% of GDP for R&D in 2021, far below the European target of 3% (Europe Strategy 2020, 2020). Under-investment remains a massive problem for the Romanian academic field as funding mechanisms to support researchers and innovation remain weak. Obviously, such a low level of spending on core public services like education creates a certain socio-economic background that determines an essential impact on human capital.

According to Regional Innovation Scoreboard 2022[2], the Romanian innovative sector stands poorly, the country falling into the least innovative category classified as the "Emerging Innovators" - bottom low performers. One of the main reasons that led to this reality is the low percentage of young people (below 30) that had completed tertiary education (10%), compared to 20.6% at European level (Eurostat, 2022).

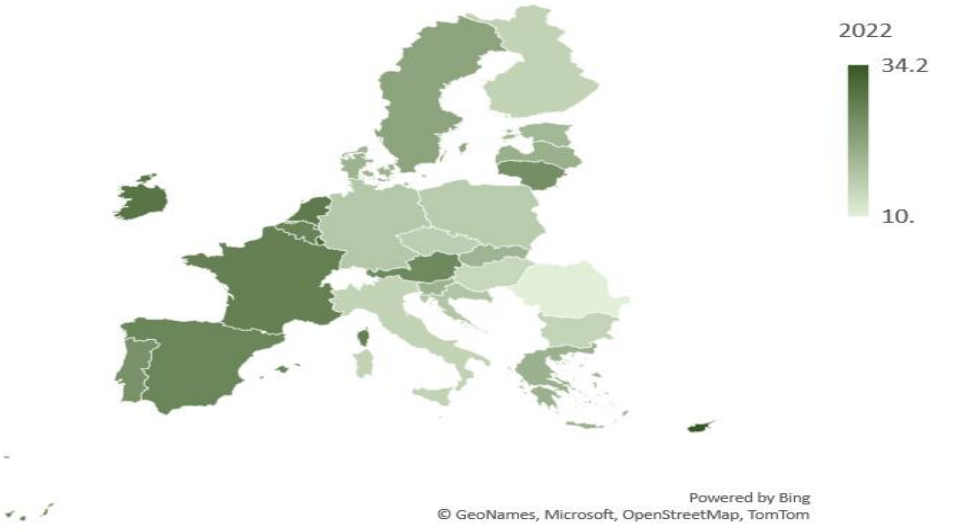
[1] European Skills Index. (2021), retrieved from https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/european-skills-index

[2] European Innovation Scoreboard 2021. (2021), retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/docsroom/documents/46013

Obviously, this has strong implications for the labor market as employment rates will be higher for better educated people.

Figure. 1. Youth with tertiary education in EU (a) and unemployment for citizens below 30 with tertiary education (b)

(a)



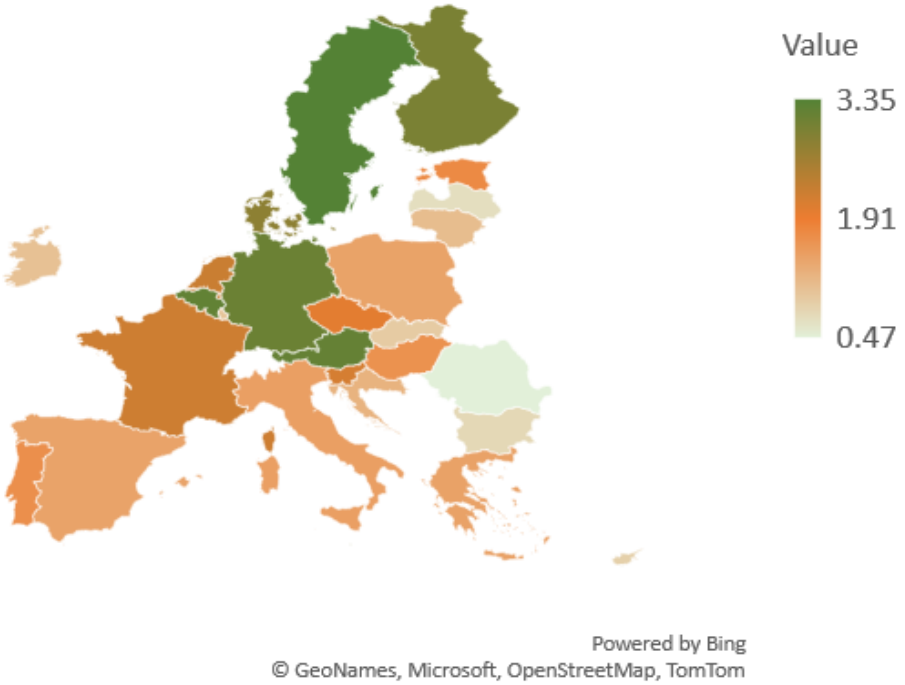
(b)

Source: authors' representation based on Eurostat data

When talking about specialists it is worth bringing to the fore the need for a better funding of academia research and R&D in general. Romania stands poorly in this chapter as well, having spent only 0,47% on R&D compared to the EU average of

2,29% in 2021. In agreement with the target imposed in Europe 2020[3], only Belgium (3,22%), Germany (3,13%), Austria (3,19%) and Sweden (3,35%) managed to meet the 3% criteria investment in R&D up until now. At the opposite end of the scale with an R&D intensity below 1% we found Bulgaria (0,77%), Cyprus (0,87%), Latvia (0,69%), Malta (0,64%) and Slovakia (0,93%) only Romania having a threshold below 0,5% for three consecutive years (Eurostat, 2021). While over the last 10 years, R&D intensity rose in no less than 19 member states, the situation in Romania remained at best the same, having insignificant fluctuations of 0,01.

Figure 2. R&D intensity across EU in 2021



Source: authors' representation based on Eurostat data

As a direct consequence, the personnel hired in this sector remained at low levels throughout the years and the lowest within the EU, at just 0,3805% in 2020. The EU average shows that 20,6% of people aged below 30 obtained a Phd degree, a value that kept constant over the last two years. However, performance in this sector has slowly decreased in Romania - going from 13,4% in 2014 to just 10% in 2022. At the opposite end, best increase in performance has been registered in

[3] Europe 2020. (2020), retrieved from EUR-Lex - 52010DC2020 - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu).

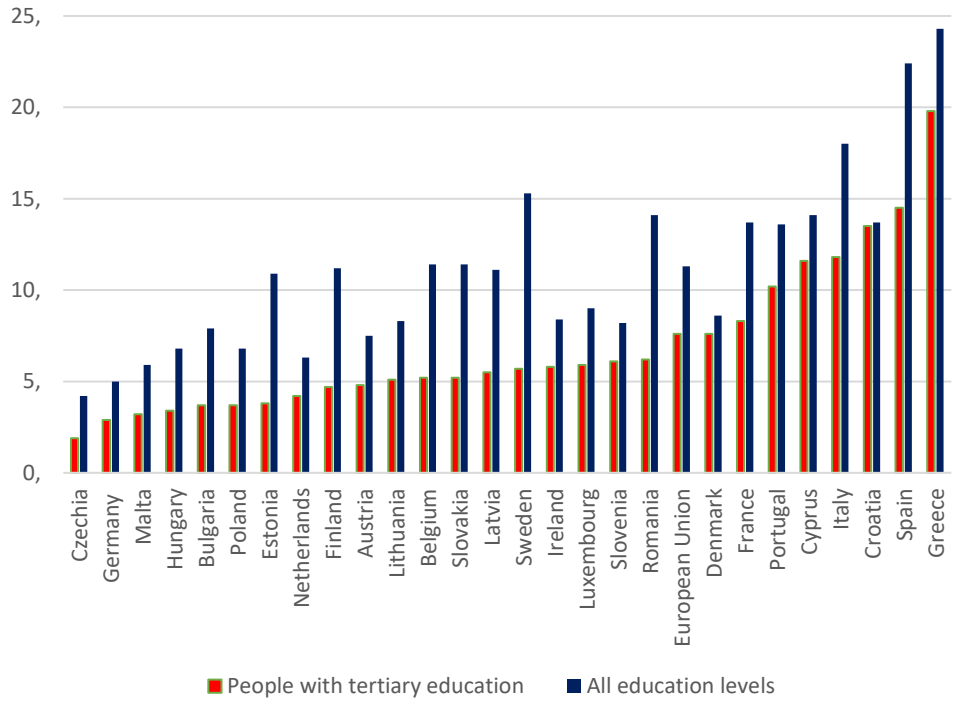
Luxembourg and Portugal, countries that managed to increase their numbers of Phd graduates with more than 9%.

In Romania, the unemployment rate among young tertiary education graduates dropped over the years, from 14.6% in 2013 to just 6.2% in 2022, below the European average of 7.6% (Eurostat, 2022). However, if we shift our focus towards the European Skills Index, we can observe that Romanian graduates often get a job that doesn't match their competences. When it comes to the overqualification rate, Romania scores only 55.6 points, proving how often highly educated people are working in lower skilled jobs that don't require tertiary studies, once again pointing out the major problem within the Romanian labor market: the mismatch between the demand and supply of skills, while the indicator for low waged workers rose up to 92, the biggest in the entire Union. Adding to that the fact that employment among recent graduates scores only 39, one of the lowest in the EU, correlated with Romania being at the bottom in high digital skills and third to last in math, reading and science scores, there's no surprise in having the biggest drop out rate (early leavers) among EU member states – 15,6%, more than triple compared to countries such as Poland (4,8%), Greece and Slovenia (4,1%). Therefore, the fact that Romania's tertiary education graduates' percentage – the lowest in the European Union - has improved over the years, rising to 17,1% in 2022 compared to 12,9% in 2011 does not cover the shortages in the labor market; even more, it discourages the young generation to pursue an academic career giving that in most cases underemployment is a standard rule.

Unlike Romania, that falls on the 25th place out of 31 countries when it comes to an ideal output in performance, Czech Republic, also a former communist country until 1990, ranks at the top of the list since 2020, making first place, with an activity rate in the labor market participation of 41, while also registering the lowest youth unemployment rate in the EU (4,2%) compared to Romania, who only scored 26 and had an unemployment rate among youngsters of 14,1% in 2022. The differences are also high if we take a look at the level of recent graduates in employment (39 for Romania compared to 74 for Czechia) and most importantly skills matching (67 compared to 93). Such results place our country second to least when it comes to skills development, registering a poor performance in skills activation, placing Romania in the low-achieving countries.

The European Union is taking measures against such numbers by launching initiatives and programs such as the European Year of Youth in 2022 and currently, the European Year of Skills as the Digital Economy and Society Index shows that 4 out of 10 people lacks basic digital skills. In an attempt to encourage its citizens to embrace the lifelong learning process, the EU has endorsed the social targets for 2030, stating that 60% of adults should be in training yearly. This is imperative keeping in mind that a well aligned workforce with the market requirements contributes to sustainable development, raising the stake for companies and supporting the innovation process.

Figure 3. Unemployment rates by education level for youth in 2022



Source: authors' representation based on Eurostat data

In this scenario we find it necessary to improve the relationship between the academic and the private sector aiming to reduce the distance between companies and the educational field, following the Czech model. They have high educational programs within the public universities, offering graduates multiple opportunities to find a job - even to those who studied in English and have no knowledge of the Czech language. Besides, a stronger cohesion between universities and labor market allows students to take part in local and international projects, developing soft and hard skills alike, which facilitates an easy entrance into the professional field. Another aspect worth mentioning is the flexibility of the labor market (also present in Poland) when it comes to working hours and the effectiveness of the public employment services which adds to the high average salaries. All are missing aspects from the Romanian labor market, where one the main issues young graduates encounter is the lack of experience in the work field, a requirement needed to get a job with a decent salary. However, just like a domino effect it's almost impossible for the majority of students to have a job before graduating and still frequenting courses, most dropping out of school after a semester or two or choosing not to present their final thesis and thus never graduating. Here lies the profound need to reconfigure and transform the

educational system and to adapt it to the market needs, curriculum and program wise, but also the necessity to get closer to the work field. For the infrastructure to fundamentally change, the initiative must belong to both parties, as the responsibility for well-educated generations must not lie only in the hands of universities but also the government and the private sector, as it is in the country's interest to shape better specialists.

1.2. A post-pandemic view over the European education system and labor market

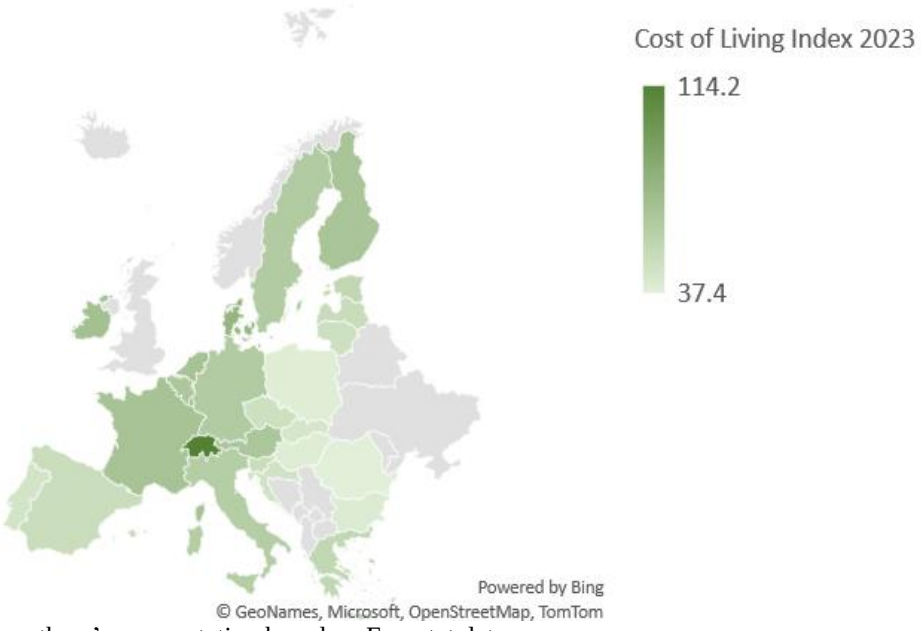
It is imperative to also briefly mention the acceleration process of sketching a digital agenda for universities due to COVID-19 that should have started years before. The movement of universities to the online environment has stirred mixed reactions in the academic world, among students and professors alike, each having mixed feelings about the decision. We admit there are several advantages to moving online, the most noticeable being the removal of the financial barriers, giving access to a wide range of specialized events for free, and bringing researchers closer together, indirectly supporting and encouraging the innovative process in the meantime. Another positive aspect impossible to neglect is the improvement of time management since the system now allows a bigger flexibility in schedules and events. However, it is a system that has dramatically reduced the interaction process between professors and students, the latter struggling with the lack of motivation, most of them being characterized by high levels of disinterest while missing the social aspects of university life. Distance learning and the digitalization agenda of universities definitely has its benefits, but ultimately, a hybrid system turns out to be the optimal solution for everyone.

But the shift did not happen only in the educational field, but also in the private labor market as a divergent workforce emerged from the universities benches asking for better compensation, more vacation days and bigger salaries as Europe is facing an ongoing cost of living crisis, while the corporate sector is raising concerns about the skills gap and the inability to attract talent. The biggest labor shortages in Europe appear to be in the building and machinery sector, while health and ICT are close behind, followed by the food industry and the teaching jobs for early childhood and primary educators (Future of Jobs, 2023). Indeed, the EU tackled some issues signaled by students and recent graduates, regulating the unpaid internships, allocating every year more money to the Erasmus+ budget and attempting to involve and engage the younger generation more in European affairs, but the core problem remains.

Currently, the rising cost of living is a worrying matter for 93% of the Europeans, not just for the younger generation, followed shortly by the threat of being at risk of poverty – a danger the youth is much more exposed post pandemic than before 2020. While for some countries the cost of living remained steady (Czech

Republic) and for most even dropped a few points compared to last year (Luxembourg, France, Germany, Belgium), others (Romania, Bulgaria and Lithuania) stand at opposite ends, marking a substantial increase in the living costs by roughly 2 points. Even though the blame falls mostly on the lack of government's actions for the wellbeing of the people, the situation is generally widespread throughout Europe.

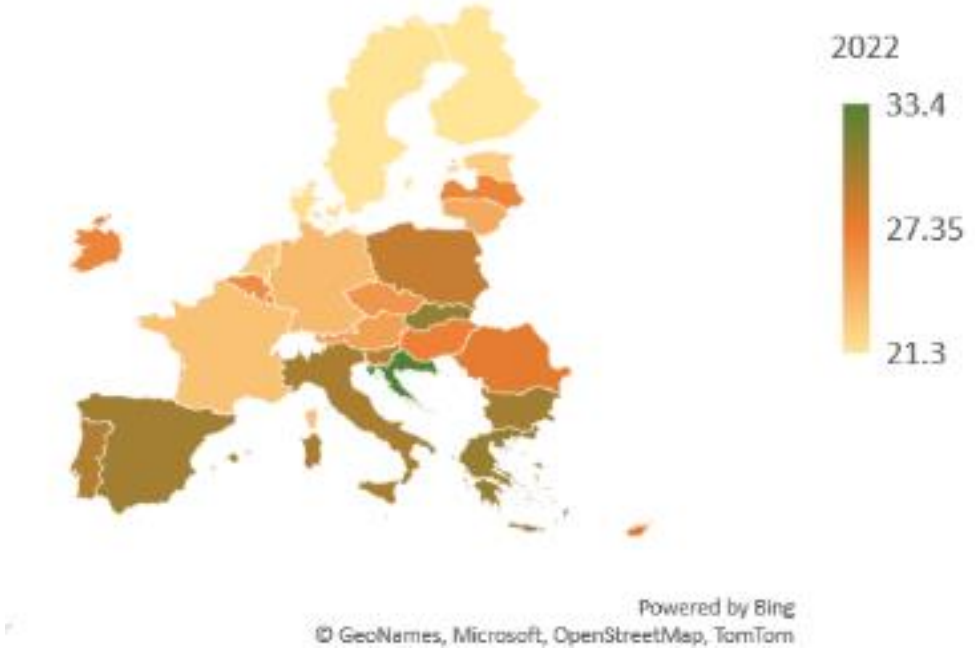
Figure 4. Cost of living Index 2023



Source: authors' representation based on Eurostat data

After an economic crisis from a decade ago, a pandemic that kept us on lockdown for 2 years and it still has repercussions and a current inflation spiking monthly, the future doesn't seem to withhold bright solutions. Despite internships being offered, non-binding guidelines provided for member states to help the youth find jobs, the wages still remain far below the standard living wage, endangering their integration in the labor market and also forcing them to find other ways to make ends meet, opting for living with their parents several years without the prospect of buying a place of their own.

Figure 5. Estimated average age of young people leaving the parental household in 2022



Source: authors' representation based on Eurostat data

With inflation rising through the roof, interest rates tagging along, and wages being left behind, Millenials and generation Z is struggling to pay rent or even save a deposit for buying a house. While only 32% of young people live independently across Europe, some states find themselves in the situation to take extreme measures. Spain, for instance, is aiming to support its younger generation by offering special renting allowances and abandoned houses as the regulations put into place after the economic crisis in 2008 were meant to preserve the financial stability of the member states also made it almost impossible for the young adults to borrow. France maintained their energy prices caped to just 4% for the younger generation up until January 2023. Other countries, such as Lithuania, struggle to withhold their future working class as 47% of the immigrants are people aged between 15 to 25 years old, while the ones that obtain a degree try to find a job for a foreign company hoping it will up their earning potential. In Italy, most students find in the position to ask for the financial support of their parents as there is no minimum wage and internships are roughly paid with approximately 800 euros a month, rent being more than 50% of the income. OECD expressed their warning regarding the younger generation in the context of the pandemic, stating that there was a log term scarring risk on their economic situation and careers. (OECD, 2021)

To sum up and reinforce everything that has been previously presented we checked to see the correlation's intensity between human resources and research systems, two of the main drivers of innovation taken from the European Innovation Scoreboard. Human resources includes three indicators, two of them being briefly analyzed above: new doctorate graduates in STEM, population aged between 25-34 with completed tertiary education and population aged 25-64 involved in lifelong learning activities; while research systems is made up of three indicators that measure the international competitiveness of science by focusing on: most cited publications, international scientific co-publications, foreign doctorate students.

Figure 6. Correlation and scatterplot for human resources and research systems

	Human resources 2021	*Research systems 2021*
Human resources 2021	1	
Research systems 2021	0.840454869	1

Source: authors' representation

According to Pearson correlation, a value of 0.840 between human resources and research systems suggests a strong positive relation, at a Sig=0.01. To have a better visualization over the results, the scatterplot illustrates the same results, showing there is a positive relationship between the two variables and that with each increase in human resources the system research values will tend to increase. Thus, a growth in human capital output can generate more international citations, as the quality of the papers will improve, and the attractiveness levels will follow an upward trend as foreigners' interest for the domestic market will surge.

Conclusions

This paper emphasized the role of research, innovation and better infrastructure for a nation's growth and for the improvement of its welfare levels as well as its competitiveness one. The indicators taken into account and the small analysis that has been conducted proved once again that education lies at the foundation of a nation's development, while human capital holds the key that can unlock a society's potential to achieve greatness. The need for an improvement of the current infrastructure in the Romanian tertiary education system is imperative, as academics and researchers need more incentives, support (financial, technical) and acknowledgments for their efforts, as working hours are often supplemented and extended during their alleged free time, giving the massive amount of work that is due, the overload in bureaucratic matters and the crowded daily teaching schedules and multiple administrative meetings. Romania's educational system is no stranger from the deprivation of government support, and while other East-European countries make efforts, despite their geopolitical and corruption issues, the former does not seem like it could be bothered, a stand that got us at the bottom of the EU for several years consecutively. Romania will not be able to ever prevail its condition characterized by high corruption levels, a political instability on the rise, poor governance, illiteracy and underdevelopment if it will not choose to invest in its citizens, following the example of other countries in the bloc that dealt with their condition.

All in one, to be resilient, educational institutions must consider the prospects of the labor markets and develop their curricula accordingly.

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ALEXANDRU IOAN CUZA
UNIVERSITY of IAŞI

Centrul de Documentare Europeană
Jean Monnet

The conference was dedicated to the topic of resilience and the reasons to concentrate on it are related to a wider range of aspects. Over the last decades, the European Union (EU) has been confronted with a series of major shocks, such as the Great Recession, Brexit, pandemic, migration and political crises, some of them even overlapping (e.g., the COVID-19 and the war from the EU's eastern neighbourhood), deeply worsening the situation. The internal and external turmoil challenged the role of policymakers to possibly better prepare economies and societies for upcoming impasses. This includes addressing the existing vulnerabilities in a pre-shock stage or designing swift interventions to buffer shocks and foster recovery in their aftermath.
Besides, encouraging academic and public debates regarding what the universities can do for the provision of appropriate skills in order to deal with a faster integration of young people in the labour market could have an impact on the efficiency of youth policies. Simultaneously, as robotization and artificial intelligence expansion seem to be outpacing workers' ability to acquire new competencies, the directives centred on adult learning need to be placed at the forefront of European policies in the furthcoming period.

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