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TRENDS AND CHALLENGES IN E-GOVERNANCE DEVELOPMENT IN POST-SOVIET COUNTRIES: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GEORGIA AND ESTONIA

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Abstract

E-Governance has become a key research focus on public administration. Since 2015, Georgia's civil service reform has aimed at creating effective, transparent, and citizen-oriented services. This article analyzes its trends and challenges, comparing them to Estonia's best practices. Using desk research, document analysis, and in-depth interviews with Georgian (5) and Estonian (3) public agency representatives, as well as local and international experts (9), the study identifies key preconditions for Estonia's success and Georgia's digital transformation challenges. The findings contribute to understanding the factors essential for effective e-governance development in post-Soviet contexts.

Key words: e-governance, digital transformation, digital literacy, electronic public service, digitalization.

INTRODUCTION

Amid ongoing global technological transformation, e-governance has emerged as a central concept in public administration and political science, emphasizing the integration of information and communication technologies (ICTs) into governance structures. While often used interchangeably with e-government, e-governance extends beyond the digitalization of services to include policy-making, regulatory

frameworks, and multi-stakeholder engagement [Palvia et al. 2007; Riley 2003]. Finger & Pécoud (2003) differentiate e-governance from e-government by highlighting its broader institutional and participatory dimensions, where digital tools facilitate not only service delivery but also decision-making, transparency, and civic engagement.

The contrasting political strategies of Georgia and Estonia after the collapse of the Soviet Union reveal critical insights into how political stability and institutional reform can shape a country's approach to digital transformation and e-governance. After declaring independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Estonia's leadership announces a clear pro-Western orientation, focusing on integrating into the European Union (EU) and NATO. The country's political stability during this period allowed implementing ambitious reforms, particularly in areas such as governance and technology [Espinosa et al. 2024]. One of the pivotal elements of Estonia's success in digital transformation was the consistent commitment of its leadership to institutional modernization and efficiency.

In contrast, the political situation in Georgia after gaining independence from the Soviet Union was more turbulent and unstable. The political system was defined by civil war and territorial conflicts, which did not allowed the country to have a long-term transformational strategy [Center for Social Justice 2023]. This lead the country to weak institutional framework, state corruption and huge economic and social problems. Since the Rose Revolution in 2003, Georgia began to experiment with certain e-government initiatives, such as online tax filing and e-justice systems, but these efforts were often fragmented and challenged by problems in the directions of justice and human rights protection [Burtchuladze 2021].

So, public service reform was key for Georgia as an initiative, trying to unify and coordinate the fragmented institutional system of the country. Following international trends in public policy, Georgia's public sector reform since 2015 has focused on enhancing accountability, transparency, and citizen participation through digital transformation. This trajectory aligns with the broader concept of e-democracy, which refers to the use of digital platforms to foster democratic engagement. While early definitions, such as Macintosh (2004), emphasized online civic participation, more recent scholar perspectives recognize e-democracy as a multidimensional framework encompassing e-participation, e-voting, digital deliberation, and open government [Kneuer 2016; Huffman 2021; Musiał-Karg et al., 2022]. Lindner & Aichholzer (2023) further argue that the interplay between

digital governance and democratic processes is reshaping public policy, requiring adaptive regulatory models and citizen-centered digital services.

Thus, modern e-governance does not merely facilitate service efficiency but also serves as a critical enabler of digital democracy, ensuring that technological advancements contribute to more inclusive and participatory policymaking.

Public Administration Reform in Georgia encompassed all aspects of public administration. The core initiatives of the reform align with democratic principles and serve as a crucial foundation for Georgia's integration into the European Union. A cornerstone of the reform is the establishment of an open, transparent, and citizen-oriented public service that adheres to the principles of open governance. It emphasizes citizen participation in the political decision-making process and the strengthening of their engagement in public policy, which, in turn, enhances the quality of democracy [Villaplana et al. 2023]. As Hacker and van Dijk (2000) argue, digital democracy emphasizes not only the facilitation of citizen participation in political decision-making but also the deepening of public engagement in policymaking processes, ultimately contributing to the overall quality of democracy. This perspective aligns with the broader understanding of e-democracy as an extension of e-governance, where digital tools serve to enhance deliberation, transparency, and inclusive decision-making.

Such a governance model (open governance, leading to e-governance) is characterized by an increased emphasis on participatory elements, which not only ensure proactive information sharing by the government but also empower citizens to assume the role of co-designers of public policy. This transformation facilitates the shift away from a Weberian-style hierarchical bureaucracy¹, replacing it with a system of diverse policy actors and networks [Villaplana et al. 2023].

This article focuses on e-governance development in two post-soviet countries as a phenomenon crucial for democratic transition in the 21st century. E-Governance constitutes a crucial mechanism for improving the quality of democracy while simultaneously fostering democratic development in countries where democratic values remain in the process of consolidation [Gascó-Hernández 2014].

Georgia has strengthened e-governance in the public sector by introducing comprehensive public service reforms. According to the World Bank GovTech case study report, "Georgia achieved key results in the development of center-of-

¹ Weberian-style hierarchical bureaucracy – Max Weber's (1864–1920) ideal type of rational bureaucracy consists of a set of organizational rules and administrative processes. Its key characteristics include a hierarchical structure, professionalism, meritocracy, impersonality, and the discipline of public officials [Sager et al. 2021].

government digital platforms and solutions as part of its Public Administration Reform Strategy” [World Bank 2021]. Georgia’s digital transformation demonstrates both service delivery advancements and institutional e-governance development: some crucial digital platforms have been created that enable citizens and businesses to get electronic public services (e-PFMS – electronic financial management system; e-Budget management system; e-HRMS – human resource management system etc. [United Nations Development Program (UNDP) 2021];

- more than 3 million citizens of Georgia hold electronic Identity (ID) cards and they can use digital services, including, digital signature of the documents;
- Correspondingly, the appropriate legal framework for digital transformation have been created;
- united portal of electronic public services – www.my.gov.ge – now can provide more than 700 public services to the citizens, residents, businesses as well as enable e-correspondence with the public agencies [World Bank 2021].

Despite significant progress and successful cases, the development of e-governance in Georgia continues to encounter several challenges. Based on the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI) comprehensive research on digitalization of Georgian public services, these challenges include limited digital public awareness; Equal accessibility of Electronic Services (Disparities in digital infrastructure and internet connectivity) and Trust in Electronic Services [IDFI 2020].

Among post-Soviet countries, Estonia has achieved the highest level of e-governance development. According to the 2024 United Nations E-Government Development Index (EGDI), Estonia ranks second in Europe, trailing only Denmark [United Nations 2024]². The Estonian government has made a political declaration that e-governance is a strategic choice for Estonia, aiming to "enhance the country's competitiveness and improve the quality of citizens' well-being" [E-Estonia 2021]. The digitalization of Estonia has gone through more comprehensive and longer road, as since only 2001, all Estonian public schools were already equipped with computers and internet within the “Tiger Leap” project [Education Estonia 2022]. It is interesting that the Estonian government’s approach was to develop electronic awareness not only within a specific segment of society but holistically. Hence, 99 % of public services in Estonia are accessible online, “1407 years of working time is saved every year thanks to Estonia’s digital services” [E-Estonia 2024].

² Georgia's e-governance score for 2024 is 0.78, placing it 69th out of 193 countries [United Nations 2024].

Through the analysis of Estonia's model-one of the leading countries in digital development within the European Union-international best practices were identified. Based on comparative analysis, these findings provide valuable insights for evaluating digitalization of Georgia's public sector. Precisely, the aim of this article is to identify key prerequisites that lead Estonia to successful development of e-governance mechanisms; and on the other hand, the research focuses on understanding key factors that play crucial role in fostering or/and challenging digital transformation of Georgian public services.

The conducted desk research enabled the identification of key factors contributing to successful digital transformation in the target countries. Additionally, in-depth interviews with public servants and field experts allowed for the validation of these preconditions and an assessment of their relevance within the framework of political science. The study highlights the following critical determinants of digital transformation:

1. Digital literacy among all stakeholders in the policymaking process, including citizens, businesses, government institutions, and public sector employees.
2. Trust in electronic public services as a fundamental factor influencing adoption and engagement.
3. General trust in public services, which underpins the effectiveness of digital governance.
4. Equal accessibility to electronic services, including the availability of digital infrastructure and internet connectivity.
5. A legal framework aligned with the requirements of effective e-governance, ensuring regulatory support for digital transformation.

1. THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES FOR STUDYING DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

1.1. Theoretical Framework

The concept of e-governance and digital transformation of public services is primarily linked to the definition – “Transformational Government”. Transformational government differs from the traditional bureaucratic model, and from the 1970s to the 1990s, such transformative governance models began reshaping public policy processes, particularly through the utilization of information and communication technologies (ICT) [Bekkers et al. 2007]. One of the earliest attempts to explain transformational public governance can be found in the work of Nolan and Gibson (1970). According to these authors, the electronic

transformation of public policy can be conceptualized as a “learning curve”³, through which public organizations progress by adopting computer technologies. The final stage of technological learning in this curve is the maturity stage, where a public sector fully understands how to leverage information and communication technologies (ICT) for the effective delivery of public services [King et al. 1984].

Since the 2000s, the concept of e-Governance has expanded beyond its initial focus on the technical and operational aspects of digital government. Currently, emphasizes the transformation of governance styles, citizen participation, and the overall enhancement of public administration processes through electronic mechanisms. Consequently, rather than being limited to a narrow technical or operational perspective, the concept of e-Governance adopts a more holistic approach, examining the integration of technology within governance processes to improve efficiency, transparency, and public engagement [Sharma et al. 2021].

The paper focuses on the strategic, regulatory (legal) and participatory (citizen engagement) dimensions of digital state management. Although these terms: “e-governance” and “e-government” are often used as synonyms, there is a clear difference between them in terms of encompassing digital management framework. On the one hand, e-government emphasizes the digitalization of public services, while e-governance is a broader concept and stands for transformation of overall governance processes, including legal changes and citizen engagement through digital tools [Grigalashvili 2021]. Hence, the paper focuses on the concept of e-governance in a broader perspective as successful state digitalization is being seen as not only development of digital public services but as interconnecting processes of digital policymaking, appropriate legal framework, cybersecurity policies, institutional cooperation and tense citizen engagement [Abdulnabi 2024].

The case of Estonia, examined in this article, clearly illustrates that successful digital transformation was not limited to electronic public services but it evolved from a Soviet bureaucracy into fully digital state, including robust legal frameworks, institutional reforms, public-private partnership or citizen engagement, reflecting the essence of e-governance [Hardy 2023].

In this context, the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) for information exchange and communication between the government and four key stakeholders becomes particularly relevant [Sharma et al. 2021]. Accordingly, this

³ Learning curve describes how system improves its performance over time as experience and knowledge increase, showing relationship between time (effort) and performance (efficiency) [Rogers 2003].

study focuses on four theoretical models of e-governance; key components/stakeholders of these models are utilized in the discussion on indicators for assessing e-governance effectiveness in targeted countries:

- Citizens (Government to Citizen – G2C)
- Businesses (Government to Business – G2B)
- Government entities (Government to Government – G2G)
- Employees (Government to Employees – G2E)

These theoretical models lead to identifying preconditions for effective digital transformation. First of all, Government to Citizen (G2C) model emphasizes the digital public service delivery to citizens, which aims the improvement of the quality of service delivery, transparency and strengthens citizen engagement. Tehcnology trust theory discusses the notion that “the trust in information technology (IT) plays a role in shaping IT-related beliefs and behaviours [McKnight 2011]. For empowering citizens to engage in digital public service delivery process, trust can be divided into sub-categories: (1) perceived competence, whether the system can work and deliver the necessary service effectively; (2) benevolence, whether the public sector focuses on citizens’ best interests while delivering digital public services; (3) integrity, whether the systems seems transparent, secure and safe from the citizens’ perspective [McKnight 2011].

The scientific literature on trust in public e-services emphasizes that trust in e-government involves citizens' attitudes towards the government's ability to deliver services effectively, maintain the confidentiality of personal information and ensure the cybersecurity [Belanger et al 2008]. Trust can be a key driver for e-governance effectiveness. E.g., based on evidence from China, trust together with the perceived usefulness of the digital services effect the overall usage of electronic platforms: “perceived usefulness and expectation confirmation significantly and positively affect public satisfaction and trust in e-government, which in turn drive the public’s intention to continue using these platforms” [Luo et al. 2024].

The theoretical models of e-governance discuss various preconditions for efective digital transformation. Besides trust, high accessibility to digital infrastructure become key characteristic for effective e-governance; in addition, high accessibility includes electronic public services that are equally accessible for citizens (G2C), businesses (G2B) and government employees (G2Y), regardless users’ education level, geography or social affiliation [United Nations 2011]. In this regard, successful e-governance plays significant role in bridging digital divide in terms of various social, economic and ethnic groups in a society.

Presented theoretical models, especially, Government to Citizens (G2C) approach emphasizes on the public sector responsibility to ensure proper level of digital literacy in a society. In the process of digital transformation, citizens with high level of digital literacy are more likely to use and benefit from using digital public services [Lubis 2024]. Digital literacy appears to play pivotal role in effective e-governance development. Particularly, theories of e-participation and democratic engagement focus on the quantity and quality, how digitally literate citizens engage in e-governance and on the other hand, the theory highlights the possibility of excluding citizens from policy-making process, if they lack digital competence [Coleman et al. 2009].

While the article focuses on theoretical models of e-governance and the factors, that effect their success in practice, the literature of digital transformation emphasizes on one more key precondition of effective e-governance: accesibility, which works together with already mentioned fundamental conditions (trust and digital literacy). Digital Divide theory best describes how negatively can affect on digital transformatuon the gap between citizens with and without access to ICT resources [Van Dijk 2020]. While identifying key success drivers for e-governance, accesibility can't be excluded as it ensures equal distribution of public resources. Precisely, in case of inequal access to digital services, the political system lacks sufficient infrastructure (access divide), overall digital competence in various stakeholders (usage divide) as well as citizens, business or the government get inequal benefits from electronic public services [Norris 2001].

Finally, the theoretical perspective on succesful e-governance prerequisites concludes on the discussion on legal framework for smooth digital transformation. Based on the principles of rule of law and digital governance, appropriate legal framework can ensure legal accountability of public institutions, data security, transparency and citizen trust in digital policy-making process [Gil-Garcia 2012]. Additionally, institutional theory add more credibility to the vital role of the legal framework for e-governance as it focuses on the formal legal structures, clear digital governance laws that shape overall e-government effectiveness [Scott 2001].

So, theoretical bases ensures the article to examine e-governance through four theoretical models to assess digital transformation. Together with key prerequisites (trust in e-services, digital literacy, accesibility and strong legal framework), the theoretical framework collectively determines the effectiveness of e-governance in enhancing public service delivery, citizen engagement, and successful digital policy implementation.

1.2. Methodology

The four theoretical models of e-governance and the theoretical prerequisites for successful e-governance form the foundation for practical public policy analysis. Specifically, the article examines how these prerequisites function within each theoretical model and contribute to the success of e-governance in Estonia and Georgia. The stated research goal can be achieved through following research objectives:

- To analyze the institutional and legal frameworks of e-governance in Estonia and Georgia, identifying the role of formal and informal institutions in shaping digital governance. This includes assessing key strategic documents and legislative acts that support or hinder e-governance implementation, using an institutional analysis framework [North 1990; Peters 1999] and legal governance theory [Metcalf 2014].
- To examine the coordination mechanisms among public institutions (G2G, G2Y), private sector stakeholders (G2B), and citizens (G2C) in the execution of national e-governance policies. This analysis is grounded in the UN E-Government Development Index; The index highlights the scope and quality of online services, development of infrastructure and inherent human capital [UNDESA 2022].
- To assess the significance of theoretical e-governance prerequisites by collecting empirical data through in-depth interviews and Likert-scale evaluations with civil servants and field experts. The assessment is based on four key e-governance models [Finger et al. 2003] and the five-stage digital governance model [Baum et al. 2000], which outline how public administration transforms through digitalization.

First of all, through the analysis of secondary sources (state strategies, action plans, reports on e-governance), local (Georgian) and international best trends in e-governance were examined, including types, levels, approaches, and key development factors. Precisely, the secondary data was collected using institutional and legal analysis. By incorporating institutional analysis, the study examined the role of institutions (formal and informal) in shaping e-governance. In this regard, according to state strategic documents and following reports, the article focuses on the evaluation of the design and execution of national e-governance policies which includes the coordination between or inside the public institutions (G2G, G2Y), private sector stakeholders (G2B) and citizens (G2C) [Pandey 2024]. On the other hand, the paper uses legal analysis to emphasize the significance of legal

frameworks which define the boundaries and operational mechanisms of e-governance as “legal system must be able to include e-governance but does not need to change totally because technologies change” [Metcalf 2014: 33]. Legal analysis includes comparing key legislative acts that support e-governance in Estonia and Georgia. That enables to identify success factors as well as gaps in the legal frameworks that may hinder e-governance process.

Additionally, the development levels and future perspectives of e-governance theoretical models in Estonia and Georgia were assessed based on public policy documents analysis. In this regard, by requesting public information from public organizations in Georgia, the study investigated the coordination mechanisms among public institutions (G2G, G2Y), private sector stakeholders (G2B), and citizens (G2C) in the execution of national e-governance policies and the extent to which they focus on the theoretical digital governance prerequisites identified in the research.

For a comprehensive and complex analysis, in addition to the information obtained from secondary sources, empirical data was collected using a qualitative research method. Specifically, through in-depth interviews, the study analyzed the extent to which state policy in each target country prioritizes each theoretical prerequisite of e-governance. Specifically, given the complexity and context-specific nature of e-governance, qualitative research method, particularly in-depth interviews, are essential to gain deep insights that can't be captured through quantitative approaches alone. Especially, in-depth interviews allow the research to offer more adaptive and comprehensive exploration of e-governance by going deeper into pre-defined as well as unexpected findings.

The in-depth interviews followed the theoretical background of the research. The questions listed in the interview guide covered following themes with appropriate respondents, so the interview guide was specific to each respondent:

Table 1

Key themes and types of respondents during the in-depth interviews

Covered themes	Type of respondent
1	2
Understanding institutional and legal dynamics	Field experts, Georgian and Estonian civil servants
Cross-national comparison, highlighting the best practices, gaps and institutional challenges in Georgia and Estonia	Field experts

The End of the Table 1

1	2
Assessing practical implementation of theoretical models from institutional and legal perspective (country specific exploration)	Georgian and Estonian civil servants
Comparison of practical implementation of theoretical models in each country	Field experts
Exploration of emerging trends and unforeseen issues (unexpected findings)	Field Experts, Georgian and Estonian civil servants

Non-probability, targeted sampling technique was used during planning in-depth interviews. The respondents were selected based on their role, professionalism/ expertise and involvement in e-governance processes in Georgia, Estonia and the broader European Context.

Precisely, in Georgia there was conducted two types of in-depth interviews: (1) representatives of public organizations in Georgia were interviewed. The public agencies and the respondents were selected based on their role in coordinating, leading, or being responsible for specific aspects of the e-governance implementation process in Georgia. Hence, public information was requested and totally 4 interviews were conducted in following institutions: Civil Service Bureau, Data Exchange Agency, Digital Governance Agency and LEPL Public Service Hall (The Ministry of Justice). Moreover, for assessing the significance of predefined prerequisites of e-governance, 3 in-depth interviews were conducted with field experts working on digital and public policy issues.

In partnership with Tallin Technology University, several in-depth interviews were planned and conducted with civil servants in Estonia (totally 4 interviews – Ministry of Internal affairs, Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communication, The Information System Authority), as well as field experts (3 interviews) from Tallin Technology University, Tartu University and e-Governance academy.

Additionally, in partnership with Lille Catholic University, in-depth interviews were conducted for analyzing globally European perspective on e-governance. This part of the research was crucial as Georgian digital transformation is part of civil service reform, which, in turn, is based on the association agreement with European Union

(EU). For connecting EU perspective to Georgian reality and Estonian best practice, 4 in-depth interviews were conducted with e-governance researchers at Lille Catholic University and 1 in-depth interview was conducted at European Commission.

During the data collection process, in-depth interviews were audio-recorded. Prior to data collection, all respondents were provided with information regarding informed consent, and their consent was documented in the corresponding audio recordings. The interviews were conducted in accordance with ethical standards outlined in the Law of Georgia on Personal Data Protection and the Code of Ethics of the American Sociological Association. Each interview lasted approximately 1 to 1.5 hours. Following the completion of the interviews, data analysis was carried out in several stages: first, interview transcripts were prepared. The transcripts were then analyzed using the thematic analysis method, with a coding framework developed based on the research goal and objectives. The main categories and corresponding codes (e.g., “Challenges to e-governance in Georgia”, “Key success factors of e-governance in Estonia” etc.) were identified using MAXQDA [Woolf et al., 2017].

Additionally, for the assessment of the pre-defined e-governance prerequisites, respondents were presented with a Likert scale. The Likert scale was embedded in interviews and each respondent was asked to share their attitude on a scale. Using a 5-point scale, respondents evaluated each theoretical prerequisite, ranging from the most influential for successful e-governance (5 points) to the least influential (1 point).

The prerequisites for successful e-governance were defined through analyzing theoretical models of e-governance, institutional and legal analysis of best international practice of e-governance (Estonia) and they were tested through empirical research. This enabled to build strong research tool for analyzing e-governance success factors and key challenges in each target countries. The pre-defined successful e-governance prerequisites include:

- Digital literacy – the ability for all e-governance stakeholders to use effectively digital tools in any governance process. Van Dijk’s Digital Divide Theory (2005, 2020) emphasizes the importance of digital skills and competences for developing e-governance policies; Additionally, United Nations E-Government Survey uses digital literacy as one of the key data to assess e-participation and public sector efficiency. Practically, countries with high digital literacy (Estonia, Denmark etc.) have high rating in overall e-governance development [United Nations 2023].

- Trust in e-public services – the extent to which citizens and business perceive electronic public services as reliable and secure to use. Dunleavy et al.'s Digital Era Governance Model (2006) defined trust to digital services as a core factor influencing successful digital transformation. Also, countries with high level of trust in digital services (e.g., Estonia) seem to be more successful in digitalization [Bannister et al. 2015]. This is confirmed in World Bank GovTech Report where trust in digital public services and sustainable digital development are mentioned as interconnected factors [World Bank 2021].
- Equal accessibility to electronic services – the digital reality when all stakeholders (citizens, business etc.) have equal access to digital infrastructure and internet so they can equally use digital public services. Once again, Van Dijk's Digital Divide Theory (2005, 2020) defines barriers to digital access and argues, that digital divide (unequal access to digital resources) can challenge digital transformation. United Nations Digital Accessibility Report (2021) is based on the principle of equal access to digital services as a prerequisite for sustainable digital governance. In this regard, Estonia's success in e-governance can be seen in digital inclusivity as well – “digital inclusion as a fundamental block in building a digital society” [e-Estonia 2023].
- Legal framework for e-governance – legislative basis that supports various directions of e-governance, including: data protection, cybersecurity, interoperability etc. World Bank Digital Governance Study (2022) identifies legal gaps as challenges for digital transformation while EU E-Government Action Plan (2021-2027) sets objective of harmonizing legislation with digital necessities for cross-border digital service delivery. Estonia's e-governance development was going in parallel with legislative changes to provide adequate foundation for digital transformation [Metcalf 2014].

2. E-GOVERNANCE DEVELOPMENT AND CHALLENGES IN GEORGIA

In Georgia, Public Administration Reform (PAR) was initiated in 2015. The Georgia-EU Association Agreement outlined the necessity of implementing civil service reform as part of Georgia's integration into the European Union and its democratic development [Delegation of the European Union to Georgia 2016]. Among its six key directions, the EU's civil service reform prioritizes improving the delivery of public services.

As part of the Public Administration Reform, preparations for integrating e-governance began even before the reform was officially launched. A significant

focus was placed on training public servants (G2Y model), especially, on raising their awareness about various directions of e-governance. It can be evidenced by state-led initiatives to promote electronic services. Since 2013, public officials have undergone training courses covering topics such as personal data protection, ethics in e-governance, strategic planning and project management in digital governance, freedom of information, and proactive publication of public data [Civil Service Bureau of Georgia 2013].

The high significance of electronic mechanisms within the Public Administration Reform is evident from its 2020 policy outcomes. As part of the reform, the number of state services available on the electronic platform www.my.gov.ge increased to 700; Additionally, the “Open Governance Partnership – Georgia” website (www.opengovpartnership.org) was developed, and the number of proactively published, automatically readable, and accessible databases on Georgia’s Open Data Portal (www.data.gov.ge) significantly expanded [The Administration of the Government of Georgia 2021].

To comprehensively assess the citizen (G2C), business (G2B) and public servant-oriented (G2Y, G2G) approach in Georgia’s e-governance development, it is crucial to analyze the digitalized services implemented under the PAR. Since 2015, key public administration processes have been digitalized, including public documentation system (eDocument – an automated document management system), high-performance data systems (eCloud – cloud computing systems), financial management (PFMS – public financial management electronic system), and visitor management in public institutions (Evms – electronic visitor management system) [Financial Analytical Department 2022].

The models of G2G and G2Y has been developed in a very effective and systematic way. This means that e-governance development in Georgia was characterized with creating coordinating bodies for digital transformation or adding structural units in already existing public agencies, which focused on digital development. In 2010, the Ministry of Finance of Georgia established and later strengthened the Financial-Analytical department. This unit supports the ministry’s central apparatus and its subordinate agencies, fully managing their information and communication infrastructure [Financial Analytical Department 2022].

Additionally, the existence of the Digital Governance Agency (LEPL) and its founding principles–“promoting and developing digital governance principles in public administration”–highlight the importance of institutional strengthening within the public administration reform process [Digital Governance Agency 2020]. Such an

institutional focus on raising organizational digital capacity emphasizes the significance of strengthening the public sector and its workforce in the field of e-governance.

A significant milestone from the institutional point of view of e-governance in Georgia was in 2012 when the country joined the Open Government Partnership initiative. Georgia developed the “2012-2013 Open Government Partnership Action Plan” and launched a unified electronic portal for public services – www.my.gov.ge. In the context of G2G model, 2013 year was crucial as the Ministry of Justice established the national coordination mechanism—the Open Government Forum—which brought together all state institutions. To enhance efficiency and effectiveness, it was replaced in 2019 by the Open Government Georgia Interagency Coordination Council, responsible for developing, implementing, and monitoring the Open Government Action Plan [Open Governance Georgia 2022].

If we observe the international perspective on Georgia’s e-governance development approach, it’s evident that besides institutional success stories on organizational level, accessibility of public services remain a challenge. According to the UN 2024 E-Government Index, Georgia performs in a satisfactory manner in infrastructure and human capital indicators; However, the report recommends greater focus on ensuring the universal delivery of public services [United Nations 2024]. The study revealed that Georgia ranks higher in the E-Government Index (69th place out of 193) than in the E-Participation Index (77th place out of 193) [United Nations 2024]. This suggests that while the country has developed strong e-government infrastructure (G2G, G2Y), there is still room for improvement in citizen engagement and participation in digital governance (G2C, G2B). In this regard, it’s crucial how open and transparent are public agencies in communication with citizens. According to the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (2022), Georgia had its best performance in terms of public information transparency in 2013. Despite slight improvements in 2020, this indicator remains one of the lowest globally today.

Based on the chronological comparison of the given indices, it can be concluded that in Georgia, the e-governance index has been on the rise until 2024, while electronic participation – which refers to citizens' direct interaction and serves as the cornerstone of the G2C model – has been in a regressive process, especially over the last four years.

During collecting the empirical data, the respondents were asked to evaluate on a Likert scale the role of each predefined prerequisite for successful e-governance.

The requested public information and in-depth interviews confirmed the challenge of digital accessibility which was revealed during the desk research. “In terms of accessibility, it is noteworthy that www.my.gov.ge is available not only in Georgian but also in English, Abkhaz, Armenian, and Azerbaijani. This highlights the accessibility of state and private sector services for both Georgian citizens within the country and abroad, as well as for ethnic minorities living in Georgia” [Respondent 2 2023]. Meanwhile, respondents highlight that many public services are being delivered online, but their usage is very low. On the one hand, this is connected to the accessibility problem due to digital divide in accessibility level (e.g., based on the National Statistics Bureau of Georgia (2023), 94 % of Tbilisi is covered with internet while this data goes to 74 % in Racha-Lechkhumi Kvemo Svaneti region. Also, the accessibility is challenged by age: more than 90 % from 6–14, 15–29 and 30–59 age groups have access to internet while only 52 % of 60 years and older population use internet [Geostat 2024].

The accessibility criterion in Georgia is primarily connected to the digital infrastructure. The in-depth interview with civil service bureau representative highlighted Government’s initiatives to raise digital capacity in citizens by trainings, information meetings. But, on the other hand, if the population can’t access the digital infrastructure, so the awareness raising activities can be ineffective. Based on the latest data, only 66 % of households are equipped with computers in cities, while only 46 % of households have access to computers in rural areas [Geostat 2024].

Among the predefined preconditions of successful e-governance, the collected empirical data in Georgia gives the highest importance to the legal framework for digital transformation. Once again, this confirms the results of the desk research regarding strong concentration on institutional readiness for e-governance. Precisely, in-depth interviews and requested public information highlight the importance of laws that enable digital public processes, including, digital signature, transactions and overall policy making process. Moreover, in Georgia, the legislative framework for e-governance is discussed not only as the refinement of existing laws but also as the creation of new laws for implementing e-governance mechanisms. The Law of Georgia on “Electronic documents and electronic trust services” creates legal grounds for using e-documents, e-signatures and electronic trust services since 2017 and has been elaborated as a separate law signed by the president of Georgia. Furthermore, separate order creates legal framework for electronic procurement (“Procedure of Electronic Tender”) instead of being described in general law on state procurement in Georgia.

This, once again, emphasizes the strong concentration on institutional readiness while implementing electronic services. In-depth interviews revealed the moderate importance of trust towards digital services and digital literacy, compared to the importance of legal framework. The study suggests that because of the challenges in various public services, citizens didn't have trust to the political system before the introduction on e-governance mechanisms. E.g., the procurement system was one of the corrupted and problematic direction in Georgian public service; once the electronic procurement system was launched in 2010, the trust towards the electronic procurement system started to raise, which can be seen in increased number of the users of the procurement portal (approx. 2 million a year) [Economic Policy Research Center 2015]. The usage of the procurement portal from citizens and business is also increasing: only in 2023, 3 508 new business provider was registered on www.procurement.gov.ge and total number of registered business service providers increased to 56 232 [State Procurement Service 2024].

Interestingly, the Georgian case study reveals that electronic public services played positive role in increasing the trust towards public services, so trust in digital processes itself, isn't perceived as a strong precondition for successful e-governance. Based on Economic Policy Research Center, there were launched some electronic portals, that increased overall trust in public services: "The electronic service was introduced to enhance public trust in the notary system by increasing transparency. The study showed that the service has indeed improved access to notary services for Georgian citizens living abroad and has significantly reduced their costs" [Economic Policy Research Center 2015: 35].

The digital literacy was not identified as a key prerequisite for digital transformation. Moreover, the existing digital services lack usage because of law awareness regarding the electronic services. Electronic notary system works well in citizens living in various countries, but locally, this service needs popularization. The challenge in digital literacy reveals divide in society: the public agencies perceive digital literacy as a challenge especially in rural areas.

During the in-depth interviews, it was clear that digital literacy is reckoned as a process of strategic communication on already existing digital services. On the other hand, information campaigns on various public portals can't be enough as digital literacy in Georgia is closely connected to infrastructural capacity of each household – how each citizen can be involved in electronic policy making process from his/her geographical location. Only 60 % of the Georgian population have some digital device (computer, laptop) and most of these citizens don't live in rural areas [Vanishvili 2023].

While collecting empirical data, the digital literacy was discussed as a process which can occur prior to the implementation of various digital initiatives. The respondents from public agencies evaluate awareness raising process as a part of digital transformation, implementation of e-governance mechanisms; on the other hand, based on collected expert opinion, digital literacy can be a ground bases for e-governance as it defines how successful the digital initiatives can be in any society.

The factual analysis of the existing reality in Georgia, combined with the examination of attitudes expressed during interviews, indicates that the country is primarily focused on institutional strengthening. This entails ensuring the maximum readiness of public organizations, including civil servants (G2G, G2Y), for the implementation of electronic mechanisms. Additionally, it underscores the critical importance of establishing appropriate legislation for digital initiatives. On the other hand, in the Georgian context, factors such as public trust, accessibility to electronic resources, and digital awareness are considered secondary priorities, gaining significance only after institutional robustness is achieved.

3. DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN ESTONIA – KEY TRENDS AND LESSONS LEARNED FOR POST-SOVIET COUNTRIES

3.1. E-governance framework for Estonia – digital transformation policy in European Union (EU) and Estonian legal basis

Following the independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Estonia had to rebuild its political, economic system and the whole society. Emphasizing the potential of ICT in state governance processes defined the ambitious digitalization path for the whole country. It is clear that Estonia is a leader country in digitalization within the EU. Tiger leap project, starting from the 1996, allowed the country to integrate ICT tools into Estonian education system and created groundwork for digital inclusion [Aru-Chabilan 2020]. The strategic projects like “Tiger Leap” were followed with digital legal basis: personal data protection act (1996), digital signatures act (2000), public information act (2001), preceding Estonia’s accession to the European Union in 2004.

Estonia developed several digital reforms that enabled the country to join EU with step forward in e-governance. Starting from 2001, Estonia developed X-Road system – data exchange mechanism that enables information systems to transfer data in a secure and standardized way [Trendall 2023]. This system made not only inter-agency cooperation easier and faster but also it developed public-private

partnership on a higher level. Additionally, Estonia became the first country not only in the EU but also in world widely to launch e-Residency program (2014) that attracted business, investors, and entrepreneurs to invest in Estonia.

The historical background shows that Estonia joined EU as a digital pioneer and continued to develop e-governance initiatives according to EU digital frameworks. Interest in digital communications within the European Union has been growing since the 1970s, as it became evident that digital transformation would become the cornerstone of the EU's economic development [Germany's Presidency of the Council of the European Union 2020]. Consequently, by the 1980s, the EU, with the support of allocated financial resources, modernized the necessary infrastructure for electronic communication (including networks and cellular equipment), while communication policies became more liberal. As a result, consumers were no longer restricted to purchasing digital devices (such as fax machines and telephones) exclusively from communication service providers but could acquire them from any manufacturer [Germany's Presidency of the Council of the European Union 2020].

The European Union's digital communication policy of the 1980s and 1990s transformed in the 2000s into a more comprehensive digital transformation strategy. This shift is clear in the legislative reform package adopted in 2002, which harmonized Europe's digital market and competition regulations, paving the way for digital development in both the private and public sectors. Analyzing the EU's latest priorities reveals a growing emphasis on digital transformation. The European Commission explicitly highlights this trend, stating: "How to make Europe greener and more digital—these are the two challenges of our generation, and our success in overcoming them will determine our future" [European Commission, 2020].

Before 2010-2015 years, digital transformation initiatives in EU member states, including Estonia's ongoing efforts since the 1990s, remained primarily a national prerogative. On a national level, Estonia's strategic decisions on e-governance were based on strong national legal foundation. Apart from the laws that were mentioned in the beginning of this subchapter, Estonia passed the laws that strengthened cybersecurity measures and empowered infrastructural development. Precisely, Databases Act (1997, revision in 2007) created legal framework for managing public sector databases, highlighting the cybersecurity in data exchange system [Metcalf 2014]. The digital infrastructural development was empowered by passing Electronic Communications Act (2004), enabling e-communication service regulation and development of digital infrastructure [Metcalf 2014].

It's important to highlight that legal changes were followed by strategic e-governance projects and vice versa. In the first years of 2000s, Estonia launched not only X-road project, but introduced online tax filing system (by 2009, about 94 % of tax declarations were filed online), launched mandatory e-ID cards for citizens (enabling digital authentication, digital signatures etc.) and e-Voting system (2005, first country in the world to have nationwide e-voting) using e-ID cards [Kattel et al. 2019].

However, from 2010 onward, such activities became part of a coordinated public policy framework. At the EU level, the European Commission assumed responsibility for ensuring the coordinated implementation of digital transformation among member states and within Euro-institutions.

The years between 2016–2018 were crucial for establishing the foundation for a comprehensive digital transformation in the EU, particularly with the regulation of data protection through the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) [Official Journal of the European Union 2016]. The GDPR standardized rules for data sharing, processing, and storage of EU citizens' information, replacing the 1995 Data Protection Directive and unifying all EU member states under a single data protection framework [GDPR 2018]. The European Union's digital transformation gained a solid foundation in 2018 with the launch of the Digital EU Program, designed for the 2021–2027 period, with a total investment of €9.2 billion [European Commission 2018].

Among the key public policy decisions facilitating Estonia's digital synchronization with the European Union are EU directives that established a strong foundation for digital innovation. In 2020, the European Commission initiated two major legislative acts: the Digital Services Act (DSA) and the Digital Markets Act (DMA) [European Commission 2023]. These acts form a unified legal framework aimed at creating a secure digital space that safeguards fundamental user rights while setting common "rules of the game" for digital innovation, development, and competition. These legislative advancements are particularly significant for Estonia, as its digital transformation relies on a public-private partnership model, emphasizing the integration of the private sector into the public domain.

In 2021, the European Union launched a human-centered digital services development program—Europe's Digital Decade 2030—focusing on fostering a digitally empowered society by facilitating the digital transformation of citizens and businesses [European Commission, 2021]. Estonia, in this regard, serves as the best experience for including the whole society in its digital transformation process. The same processes are planned to occur in other EU member countries so, to

support both existing initiatives and future innovative programs, the EU has committed to investing €43 billion by 2030 under this initiative.

It is essential to highlight that this initiative ensures the sustainable development of digital transformation across EU member countries through three key pillars:

1. Synergy with research centers and support for small startups and businesses;
2. Supply chain security, guaranteed by domestic microchip production;
3. Enhanced monitoring and crisis response capabilities through the implementation of strong coordination mechanisms [Ribeiro, 2023].

While analyzing the key strategic priorities of EU for digital transformation, it becomes clear that raising digital awareness and accessibility of electronic services plays a crucial role. The European Union aims to enhance digital skills among its population by 2030, targeting 20 million employed ICT specialists and ensuring that 80 % of adults use digital technologies in their daily lives [European Commission, 2021]. To achieve this, the EU's vision includes: Developing digital infrastructure (high-coverage internet and fast access to data); Digitizing businesses, with 75 % of enterprises adopting advanced digital technologies (AI, cloud computing, big data) by 2030; Fully digitizing public services, ensuring 100 % accessibility, including universal digital medical records and digital ID cards. This strategic vision is reflected in Estonia's local strategic policies, which ensures all stakeholders (citizens, businesses, government organizations) to be fully aware and included in digital policy-making process; 99 % of Estonian public services are provided online and almost 100 % of businesses are adapted to digital technologies, ready for developing on advanced level [E-Estonia 2023].

Accessibility to electronic mechanisms is a cornerstone of EU policy. The European Union envisions that any policy program planned and implemented within the framework of digital transformation must emphasize inclusivity, ensuring that everyone can participate in and benefit from digital services. A key focus is placed on social inclusion, as a fundamental aspect of digital inclusion. Digital projects should actively support persons with disabilities (PWDs) by enhancing their engagement in social, economic, and public activities.

Estonian example shows the state development in digital transformation and establishment of the digital state. On the other hand, the EU's digital transformation roadmap until 2030 includes multinational projects where multiple member states are designated as joint implementers. This approach is particularly relevant for projects in which collaborative resource allocation enhances digital transformation efficiency compared to individual national efforts. By pooling

resources and expertise, these states can achieve more sustainable and impactful digital advancements [Ribeiro, 2023].

3.2. Legal Foundations and Expert Perspectives on Digital Transformation in Post-Soviet Countries: The Case of Estonia

As for any country emerging from Soviet occupation, the effective development of the public sector has been as crucial for Estonia since 1991. The Estonian government states that electronic governance is a strategic choice for the country, aiming to increase national competitiveness and improve the quality of citizens' well-being [E-Estonia, 2021].

In the context of the study, respondents indicate that the development of the country and the development of electronic governance are completely interdependent. During the interviews, it was highlighted that Estonia had no other choice; in order to catch up with the development level of European countries, it had to choose an efficient and rapid (intensive) development path, which would have been impossible without the integration of electronic mechanisms. In this regard, the "Tiger Leap" project, which began in 1996, is significant as it illustrates how Estonia placed great importance on two prerequisites in the early stages of electronic governance: digital awareness within society and accessibility to electronic mechanisms. The project was based on three main principles: equipping the population with computers and internet access (infrastructure development), basic training for teachers in skills needed to use electronic mechanisms, and offering electronic courses in the national language to general educational institutions [Education Estonia 2022].

While discussing the important indicators for the digital transformation process during the in-depth interviews, a new indicator emerged—the significance of the cultural factor. In response to the question, “What indicators do you think influenced Estonia's successful digital transformation?”, The respondents from public sector and field experts directly linked the digital development to the cultural characteristics of the Estonian people: “The Estonian nation, in general, is very open to change, and they want to be the best at everything. Even when they enter a store, they may buy unnecessary things if it makes them stand out. Electronic governance was also an opportunity for them to be different and exceptional” [Respondent 3 2023]. Accordingly, during the collection of empirical data, the openness of the population to change and innovation emerges as a key new indicator determining the effectiveness of e-government. “Estonians are not

"thinkers," but rather a very practical ("doers") nation, always ready to test and implement new things [Respondent 1 2023].

Respondents discussed the indicators defined in the study and assessed how much they agree with the impact of these factors on the effectiveness of e-government. It was revealed that bringing legislation into alignment with e-government is important but not a decisive factor for its effectiveness as it seems from Georgian perspective. While the refinement of legislation and alignment with e-government requirements is crucial, the technological field is so dynamic that legislation is not considered a strong indicator; In some cases, legislation is perceived as a hindering factor because regulation can impede technical progress and create constraints [Respondent 4 2023].

Compared to institutional readiness, digital literacy seems to play more crucial role for Estonian public sectors and field experts. The importance of digital awareness is clearly evident in the public policies implemented by Estonia, which have been aimed at raising awareness of the use of electronic mechanisms across all segments of society since 1991. Under the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications, there is a substructure—the Digital State Academy—which focuses on raising digital awareness both among citizens (G2C) and employees (G2Y) in public organizations. If we consider the example of the Digital State Academy through the lens of the G2Y (Government to Employees) theoretical framework, it becomes clear that the public sector is focused on raising the digital awareness of public servants. This is reflected in the creation of specialized training courses and online programs specifically for public employees, which provide free access to information [Education Estonia 2022]. On the other hand, the prioritization of raising digital awareness is further indicated by the fact that awareness-raising courses are always accessible and free to any citizen. Precisely, when planning these awareness-raising activities, no specific target groups are typically selected. The approach is unified, and the program aims to reach the entire Estonian population. This includes not creating separate educational programs for older segments of the population, as the e-government reform, which began in the 1990s, has been experienced by the majority of the population. In fact, it is difficult to find a segment of society that does not have basic digital awareness or the necessary skills to use digital mechanisms.

In depth interviews identified the "digital literacy" as a key prerequisite for successful e-governance. Even in case of Estonia, where the majority of the population has the highest digital awareness, building digital capacity is a continuous process. For raising digital awareness, both formal and informal

education methods are employed. Digital awareness is directly promoted within public organizations as well. If an Estonian citizen does not know how to access public services electronically (with 99 % of public services being available electronically), when they visit a public organization, the public servant is obligated to provide information on how to access the same service in electronic form [Respondent 4, 2022]. From the perspective of the G2C (Government to Citizens) approach, this form of communication between the public sector and citizens is a clear indicator of the effectiveness of e-government.

Compared to revealed Georgian reality, where institutional readiness was mentioned as a key factor for successful digital transformation, Estonia's approach focuses more on citizens and their readiness to use electronic public services independently. Precisely, Estonia's approach does not focus on public servants directly providing public services and legislative bases to strengthen institutional bases for digital development; instead, it involves public servants creating services that allow citizens to provide for themselves through public goods. Estonia's "small government" concept suggests a minimal number of public servants and instead, empowering citizens equipped with digital skills. E.g., this idea is reflected in the number of employees at the Estonian Ministry of the Interior, which does not exceed a few hundred public servants (excluding police officers), even though this department is responsible for providing Estonia with the electronic ID cards [Respondent 1 2023].

Trust to digital services was modified as a precondition based on the attitudes and expert opinions in Estonia. First of all, it is important to highlight the level of trust towards public institutions, which directly correlates with the level of trust in electronic public services. During the discussion, respondents mentioned that talking about the trust in electronic public services, in reality, is a discussion about trust in public agencies generally. "If people did not trust the Ministry of the Interior as an institution, it would be unimaginable for them to trust the electronic ID cards offered by the ministry" [Respondent 2 2023].

During the analysis of empirical data, it was found out that the successful development of electronic governance in Estonia was also influenced by the public's trust in the political leadership. It seems that the Estonian people believed that after regaining independence, the government was capable of implementing something innovative that would lead the country to success and be completely different from the Soviet Union. E.g., the electronic voting system in Estonia, which was implemented in 2005, is a case of trust in public process with or without electronic support. Today, up to 60 % of the population casts their votes via the

internet [E-Estonia 2023]. The respondents conclude that it does not matter whether the election is held on paper or electronically – if the population does not trust public institutions enough to believe the elections will not be tampered with, they will be skeptical of both electronic and non-electronic elections [Respondent 2 2023]. Trust in public institutions, therefore, emerges as a significant determinant in increasing trust in electronic services and then, impacting positively on digital transformation process in the country.

Government to citizen approach is so strong in Estonia that electronic services become not only accessible or close to the citizens, but beneficial as well. The ability to expedite tax refund processes through the use of an electronic ID card and the electronic payment system significantly enhances the efficiency and convenience for the public. Citizens can receive their refunds within a 3–5 month period, as opposed to a much longer wait when processed in a traditional manner [Work in Estonia 2022]. This demonstrates the effectiveness of e-governance in improving the delivery of public services and provides a clear incentive for citizens to adopt digital tools, further promoting the success of Estonia's digital transformation.

Hence, when comparing the pre-defined indicators for successful e-governance, it is clear from the respondents' attitudes that trust, as an indicator, plays a stronger role in the effectiveness of e-governance than legislation/institutional readiness, but it is slightly weaker than digital literacy and accesibility to electronic mechanisms. Moreover, this suggests that while legal frameworks and trust are essential, the foundation of trust in public institutions remains a significant factor in ensuring the success and acceptance of electronic services within a society.

CONCLUSION

The digital transformation paths of Georgia and Estonia provide valuable lessons on the prerequisites for successful e-governance. While both countries share the goal of leveraging technology to enhance public service delivery and improve governance, the emphasis on specific success indicators diverges, shaped by their unique contexts, historical trajectories, and institutional frameworks.

In Georgia, institutional readiness, including the creation of supportive legal frameworks and the development of public administration structures such as the Digital Governance Agency, has been paramount. Georgia's focus on G2G and G2Y models underscores the importance of preparing public servants for digital transformation through training and capacity building. The legal foundation for digital services, such as the “Electronic Documents and Electronic Trust Services”

law, has enabled the formal adoption of e-documents and e-signatures, facilitating the digitalization of public services. However, the challenge of ensuring broad citizen participation (G2C and G2B) persists, as digital literacy and accessibility issues remain challenging, particularly in rural areas. A significant portion of the population, especially older adults, lacks access to digital tools and internet services. This divide hinders the universal adoption of e-governance, demonstrating that technological infrastructure alone is not sufficient to guarantee full citizen engagement. Furthermore, trust in digital services, though improved by initiatives like electronic procurement, is still a direction that needs some attention to increase the adoption of digital services across all sectors of society.

In contrast, Estonia's success in digital governance is largely attributed to its focus on digital literacy and public trust, with a stronger emphasis on the G2C model. Estonia's "Tiger Leap" initiative in the late 1990s laid the groundwork for its digital transformation by equipping the population with necessary digital competences and skills, thus fostering a society capable of utilizing e-services effectively. The establishment of the Digital State Academy to train both citizens and public servants underscores Estonia's commitment to continuous digital awareness. Digital literacy, in Estonia's case, is not just about the availability of digital tools but the readiness of the entire population to use them independently. This cultural readiness, driven by a national characteristic of openness to change and innovation, has been a key enabler of successful digital governance. The Estonian experience suggests that building trust in public institutions is foundational for the trust in digital services. So, trust in digital services is not discussed separately in Estonian case. On the other hand, trust in public institutions generally, including the electoral system, has facilitated the acceptance of digital services like e-voting and electronic tax refunds, demonstrating that effective e-governance needs trust in public policy processes.

While both Georgia and Estonia acknowledge the importance of legal frameworks and institutional readiness, Estonia's focus on digital literacy and public trust highlights a different prioritization of indicators. For Georgia, institutional preparedness remains the strongest pillar of its e-governance strategy, though it is clear that for broader public participation, greater efforts are required to bridge digital divides. In Estonia, the success of e-governance is underpinned by its citizens' readiness to embrace technology, coupled with strong public trust in public institutions, not only in digital public services.

From the perspective of Baum et al. five-stage model of e-governance, Estonia has achieved full integration of e-democracy. The country's digital systems enable

citizens to vote online in national elections, participate in public consultations, and engage with government officials digitally. The “e-Residency” program allows non-citizens to establish and manage businesses in Estonia, creating an inclusive form of digital democracy. On the other hand, Georgia is still progressing in this final stage. The country’s e-democracy efforts are still in early stages, with a focus on fostering greater transparency and public engagement through digital platforms.

Hence, the lessons from Georgia and Estonia suggest that successful e-governance requires a multifaceted approach: a strong legal and institutional framework is essential, but so too are efforts to foster digital literacy, ensure equitable access to digital tools, and build trust between the citizens and the public institutions that serve them. The challenge for Georgia will be to further engage its citizens in the digital governance process, overcoming barriers of accessibility and trust. For Estonia, the focus will remain on maintaining its high levels of digital literacy and public trust while continuing to innovate in the delivery of public services.

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STRENGTHENING INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY IN SLOVAKIA VIA PARENTAL PENSION

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Abstract

The currently measure in the pension system of Slovakia in the form of a parental pension will significantly affect intergenerational solidarity. The aim of the paper is to define the characteristics of the parental pension, to point out the advantages and possible risks of the parental pension and to present the results of research

aimed to find out the opinion of pensioners on parental pension. We used the chi-square test to assess the statistical significance of responses to our research question across distinct groups. The results point to the negative attitude of seniors towards the tool. Only 28.5 % of respondents answered positively to the question of whether they agree with the parental pension.

Key words: intergenerational solidarity, parental pension, social policy.

INTRODUCTION

Article 25 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union recognizes and respects the right of the elderly to a dignified and independent life [Official Journal of the European Union, 2016]. In order to fight against social exclusion, which is a part of the life of some older persons, the Union recognizes and respects the right to social assistance so as to ensure a dignified existence of people. The population ageing is challenging for society and at the same time it is a matter of intergenerational solidarity and family. In the life cycle, an individual enters a period of old age where his or her way of life changes significantly and where the family becomes an important source of support and mutual assistance. The increasing life expectancy of the Slovak population raises the need for intergenerational solidarity, i.e. mutual support and cooperation between different age groups, which is particularly important in achieving peace of mind for the elderly. As life expectancy and healthy years increase, older family members are participating more and longer in family life. [MaloneBeach, Hakoyama, Arnold, 2018]. The population ageing is considered a natural physiological process that cannot be stopped but people can prepare for it. It represents one of the biggest challenges of the 21st century, as the population ageing causes significant societal changes as well as changes in family relationships. In the Green Paper on Ageing from 2021, the European Commission calls for a discussion on the challenges and opportunities of the ageing European society [European Commission, 2021a]. The demographic change taking place in European countries, including the Slovak Republic, is mainly caused by the decrease in the birth rate and the constant extension of life expectancy. The age structure of the Slovak population changed from progressive to regressive as a result of demographic changes, which creates pressure for changes in the labour market, housing, and health care and will represent a significant factor in the increase in public spending on pension benefits as well as social care for the Slovak population. There are concerns that this could lead to intergenerational conflict between younger and older cohorts due to generational differences in spending preferences of the welfare state [Hess et al.,

2017]. The younger generation prefers public spending on education, while the older generation prefers spending on pension benefits and healthcare. The budgetary asymmetry will not be recovered because the balance of power is shifting towards the elderly [Thijssen, 2016]. In order to avoid conflicts between generations, all European states, based on the resolution of the European Union of Seniors from Prague from 2020, have a special responsibility to strengthen platforms for intergenerational dialogue so as to ensure the best possible models of cooperation between the younger and older population [European Senior's Union, 2020]. The National Active Ageing Program for the years 2021-2030 also declares support for intergenerational solidarity and good intergenerational family relations as the basis for the functioning of the family [MPSVaR SR, 2021].

Currently, based on the ratio of the population aged over 64 to the population aged 20–64, Slovakia is one of the youngest economies in the European Union, but in the future (between 2040 and 2060) it will belong to the fastest ageing countries. While in 2019 there were almost 4 people of productive age (20 to 64 years) per person over 64 years of age, in 2070 there will be only 1.6 of them [IFP, 2021]. Slovak population ageing is expected to slow down after 2060, when the strong population years born in the 1980s will not influence the age composition of the population. At the same time, there will be fewer members of the younger generation, which interferes with the nature of intergenerational solidarity and forms of assistance [Hasmanová Marhánková, Štípková, 2014]. Age asymmetry is particularly pronounced in transfers in pension schemes and health care expenditure.

Intergenerational solidarity refers to different types of transfers and/or gifts that are given to people of different age groups and thus create “social cohesion between generations” [Bengtson et al., 1976; Katz et al., 2005]. These transfers/gifts are made in two directions: from the older generation to the younger and from the younger to the older generation. A characteristic feature of these transfers is that they do not involve any explicit equivalent for the exchange of money, goods, services and time. Transfers can be public or private, with private transfers being intra-family and/or inter-household. Parental pension, which is publicly provided but considers the personal labour market contributions of children, also contributes to strengthening transfers from children to parents. The aim of the paper is to define the main characteristics of the parental pension as a tool of intergenerational solidarity, to point out the advantages and possible risks of the introduction of the parental pension from 2023, and to present the results of a survey aimed at finding out the opinions of seniors on the introduction of the parental pension and intergenerational solidarity.

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Solidarity is generally understood as the unification of interests, goals, sympathies among members of a group, which is, for example, a family. It represents a social bond [Durkheim, 1977, Wagner, 2001] that contributes to the integration of society in general and prevents individualization and autonomy. Solidarity moves along different dimensions that are related to different spheres of life. Silverstein and Bengtson [1997] pointed to its emotional dimension. According to them, earlier strong emotional bonds in the parent-child relationship predict intergenerational solidarity and the support that adult children provide to their parents. The family is an association of direct reciprocity between generations, and even if the child-parent relationship is not close early in life, parental support increases with time and age [Silverstein, Conroy, Wang, Giarrusso, & Bengtson, 2002]. Bengtson and colleagues [2002] described solidarity as an open-ended and fluid concept that can include negative forms of solidarity. According to Čipkár [2013], solidarity appears as a value that can ensure decent living conditions for all citizens, can contribute preventively to the elimination of social tension or conflicts and support the social cohesion of society. Solidarity in families is understood as help based on free will, yet very often accompanied by a strong sense of duty [Ter Meulen, Wright, 2012].

The term intergenerational relationships [Roberts, Richards & Bengtson, 1991; Bengtson et al., 2002] has also been used in the discussion of solidarity to refer to solidarity between generations [Hammarström, 2005], between parents and their children across the lifespan [Silverstein, Burholt, Wenger and Bengtson, 1998].

The concept of intergenerational solidarity essentially refers to social cohesion between generations [Bengtson et al., 1976; Roberts et al., 1991; Katz et al., 2005]. The literature on intergenerational solidarity has largely developed around the six dimensions that Bengtson and Roberts [1991] originally proposed for intrafamily settings. These include: normative (commitment to roles and responsibilities), functional (assistance and exchange of resources), consensual (agreement in values), associational (frequency and patterns of interactions), structural (opportunity for interaction based on a structural element of the family such as size and proximity of members), and affective (type and degree of positive feelings and reciprocity) solidarity. These dimensions of solidarity provide a valid and reliable instrument for assessing the strength of intergenerational ties [Mangen et al., 1988].

According to Szydlik [2000, 2001], intergenerational solidarity involves, on the one hand, specific behaviours and, on the other hand, a sense of belonging and a close connection between generations in the family. It encompasses a number of aspects

that can be classified into three dimensions, namely the functional, affective and associative dimensions of solidarity. Functional solidarity involves support – giving and receiving money, time and space. This support is provided by the generation that has the necessary resources and means to the generation that needs them [Hortová, Souralová, 2019]. The associative dimension refers to joint activities. The affective dimension involves emotional attitudes.

Based on theoretical approaches, we can perceive social and economic support between parents and children. This intergenerational support is one of the main pillars of family life as well as the functioning of the welfare state [Hashimoto, 1996; Künemund and Rein, 1999]. Within the family, parents generally support their children not only during their adolescence but also when they become independent, while adult children support their parents when they become independent and need help [Finch and Mason, 2003; Lee et al., 1994, 1998; Saraceno et al., 2005; Silverstein et al., 2006]. Supporting children of elderly parents is also essential to bridge the time necessary to ensure individuals have access to both public and private caregiving services. Therefore, even when informal social support is not directly provided, child support is essential for older parents (especially when there are limitations with activities of daily living) and the parent receives appropriate support and care [Choi 1994; Litwin 1997]. The quality and quantity of informal support that individuals receive from their family over the course of generations living together is a significant factor that determines their own economic, physical, psychological, and social well-being [Furstenberg, 2005; Bönke, 2008; Spilerman and Wolff, 2012]. In addition, individuals' position in the social stratification system is significantly affected by the amount of informal supports they can count on [Lee et al. 1994, 1998; Lin 1999; Szydlik, 2004; Olagnero et al., 2005; Fragoso, Valadas, Paulos, 2023]. Within the welfare state, working-age individuals provide economic resources to young people in terms of family support and education, as well as to the elderly in terms of financing pensions and health care. This can be seen not only as a redistribution between age groups, but also affects the succession of generations. With worsening demographics, pension funds are running into deficits and solidarity is potentially weakening, which could lead to intergenerational conflict. In reality, however, there is limited empirical evidence of intergenerational conflicts and theoretical explanations of this paradox are scarce [Thijssen, 2016]. Wisensale [2005] presents evidence against the intergenerational conflict hypothesis, describing in a comparative study how intergenerational equity in economic support and care for the elderly is becoming a global issue and how

intergenerational conflict (or lack thereof) varies across countries due to socio-historical context and existing social policies.

The concept of intergenerational solidarity between parents and children is part of the study of several scientific disciplines. Psychologists, political scientists, and social workers have been researching intergenerational solidarity for a long time. With the growing number of seniors, research on the economic aspects of intergenerational solidarity has been emerging in recent decades. Vidovičová and Rabušic [2003], Vohralíková and Rabušic [2004], Sýkorová [2007], Haškovcová [2010] demonstrated the high intensity of intergenerational assistance in their works.

In addition to the economic context, intergenerational solidarity represents a significant ethical challenge both for an individual and for the entire society. Within a family, economic intergenerational solidarity occurs in the direction from the older generation to the younger one, while practical assistance usually goes in the opposite direction from the younger to the older generation. However, it is influenced by many factors, among which we can include: socio-economic status, education and age of family members, religion, standard of living of the family, form of housing, etc. Within intergenerational families, the needs of multiple family members meet at the same time, requiring strategic decision-making about the reallocation of resources within the family [Carr and Utz, 2020].

From an economic point of view, intergenerational solidarity is often understood as the economically active contributing to social insurance funds, from which pension benefits are subsequently paid. With the worsening demographic development, there is a deficit of pension insurance funds and a rejection of solidarity, which deepens the intergenerational conflict. Just like Hortová, S., Suralová, A. [2019] we decided to study intergenerational solidarity from different view as quantitative approach which we can see in contemporary studies.

2. SOLIDARITY IN THE PENSION SYSTEM OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Intergenerational solidarity is an important principle applied in the financing of pension systems in most developed countries. The Slovak Republic commenced the fundamental reform of the pension system in 2004, when a three-pillar model of pension security was introduced with the intention of improving its financial sustainability and diversifying sources of income in old age. Solidarity is the dominant element of the first, public pillar, which is continuously financed (the so-called PAYG) and which exerts the greatest pressure on public finances.

The financial tension is caused by the increase in life expectancy, which has increased by 3.46 years for men and 2.4 years for women from 2005 to 2022. Thus, pensioners receive pension benefits longer than in the past, which creates an additional need for financial resources.

Table 1

Trend in life expectancy at birth (in years)

Year	Males	Females
2005	70.11	77.90
2010	71.62	78.84
2015	73.03	79.73
2022	73.57	80.30

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic.

According to the Ageing Report 2021, the average duration of pension for men in 2070 will be almost 24 years and for women more than 28 years, which is above the EU average [European Commission, 2021]. In the coming years, the age structure of the population will change in favour of inhabitants aged 65+ and 80+, which is caused by a higher quality of life of inhabitants, better health care as well as greater emphasis on prevention.

Table 2

Prognosis of selected demographic indicators

Demographic indicators	Change 2022–2070	2022	2030	2040	2050	2060	2070
Life expectancy at birth							
males	10.7	73.4	75.8	78.1	80.3	82.3	84.1
females	8.7	80.4	82.4	84.3	86.0	87.7	89.1
Life expectancy at age 65+							
males	7.1	15.1	16.7	18.2	19.6	21.0	22.2
females	6.8	19.0	20.6	22.0	23.4	24.6	25.8
Share of the population (65+) in the total population (%)	12.7	17.5	20.6	23.9	28.6	31.3	30.2
Share of the population (80+) in the total population (%)	10.5	3.4	4.7	7.3	8.5	11.6	13.9
Share of the population (80+) on the population (65+) in %	26.6	19.5	22.6	30.4	29.7	36.9	46.6

Source: Eurostat [2023]. Population projections in the EU (EUROPOP23).

All the mentioned facts will have an impact on the public pension system and the need to finance its deficit through payments from the State budget, which will apply the principle of intergenerational solidarity and, due to the growing public debt, this obligation will be transferred to several generations.

Currently, there are less than 1.4 million pension benefit recipients living in Slovakia, of which 78 % are old-age pension recipients. The average amount of the old-age pension exceeded 518.80 euros in 2022 (39.79 % of average national monthly wage), and since the introduction of the pension reform, we have observed an annual increase in the amount of the old-age pension in Slovakia, caused by the growth of wages, from which the amount of newly granted pensions depends, as well as the valorisation mechanism. During the monitored period, the average amount of the old-age pension for females was below the national average of the amount of the old-age pension. In the case of males, we can see the opposite trend, when from 2008 until the end of 2022, their average old-age pension was above the level of the average old-age pension for all recipients.

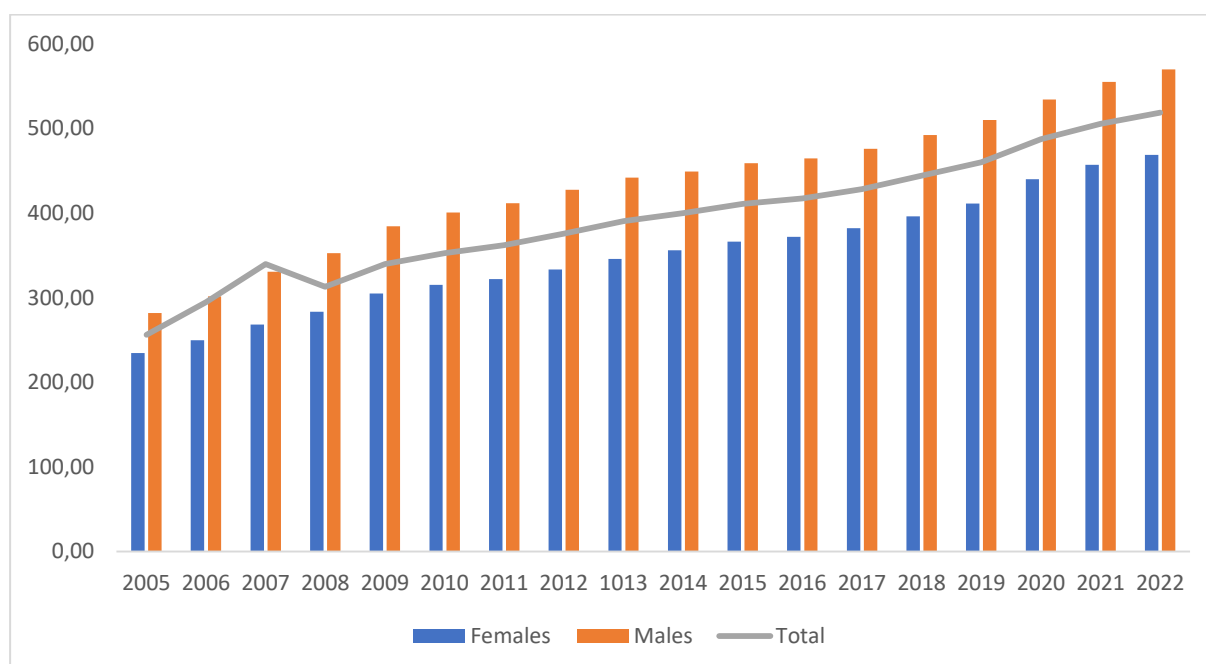


Figure 1. Average amount of old-age pension (solo) by gender (in euro)

Source: Authors' own processing based on data from the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic.

Lower old-age pensions for females are a reflection of their lower wages during their working life as well as childcare periods and thus inequalities between men and women persist even in the post-productive age. As we can see from Figure 2, the

gender gap in the average old-age pension has been developing positively in recent years, when it has been gradually decreasing since the start of the reform after the initial growth phase since 2012. While in 2005 the gender gap in the average old-age pension was 16.81 %, in 2022 it was 17.7 %. The biggest difference in the amount of old-age pension between males and females was in 2012, when male pensioners had higher old-age pension than female pensioners by 22.07 % on average.

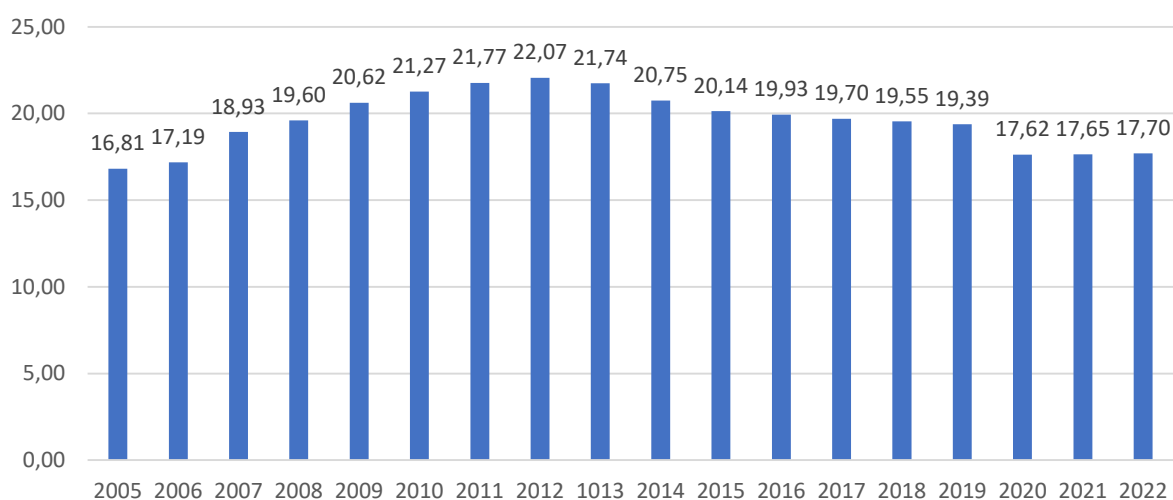


Figure 2. Gender gap in the average old-age pension (%)

Source: Authors' own processing based on data from the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic.

The period of childcare affects the amount of pensions of persons who have raised children compared to persons who have not become parents. Bonnet and Rapoport [2020] confirmed that gender inequality in retirement increases with the number of children raised. The stated information results from the fact that for the purposes of determining the amount of the pension, the assessment bases from which the state paid contributions for pension insurance are taken into account (the assessment basis of the state for this purpose is 60 % of the average national monthly wage of two years before).

Despite the positive development, the pension of females is still by 17.6 % lower than males' pension. Although the length of retirement for women is longer than for men, this raises the question of the quality of life lived at a lower level of pension benefit. This is also reflected in the higher risk of poverty of females than of males in the retirement age. In 2022, the poverty risk rate for female pensioners was 10.7 % and 7.7 % for male pensioners.

Table 3

The influence of parenthood on the amount of the pension benefit

Newly retired female in 2023	Monthly pension
No children	712 eur
1 child	665 eur
2 children	632 eur
3 children	528 eur
4 children	466 eur

Source: www.rodicovskybonus.sk.

Although the average old-age pension is increasing every year, there is pension inequality among the recipients of pension benefits. In 2022, more than 57.11 % of old-age pension recipients, including those with the concurrent inheritance pension, had a pension of no more than 530 euros (40.64 % of average national monthly wage), which causes their lower quality of life. Less than 17.9 % of the recipients of the solo old-age pension + old-age pension together with inheritance pension found themselves in the income range above 665 euros (50.99 % of average national monthly wage).

Figure 3 also shows the income distribution of pension recipients. Over the last years, we can see a positive change in the representation of pension benefit recipients in individual income bands. From 2011 until 2022, the share of pension benefit recipients in lower income bands was decreasing in favour of an increase in the share of pensioners in higher income ranges. While in 2011 there were most pensioners in the income range from 325.10 to 425 euros, today the highest share is in the income range from 425.10 to 530 euros. The shift was mainly caused by the valorisation of pension benefits as well as higher newly recognized pension benefits.

However, a significant shift occurred in the last two highest income ranges, when in 2022 pensioners in these ranges made up almost 37 %, while in 2011 it was just under 6 %. The increase in the share of pensioners in higher income ranges is caused by the retirement of people who had above-average incomes during their working career and for whom the reform of the pension calculation methodology had a positive effect. Thus, in the pension system, we can observe not only intergenerational solidarity but also solidarity between individual income groups of the population.

Table 4

**Distribution of recipients according to the amount of pension benefits
as of 31st December 2022**

Pension amount (€)	OAP solo + OAP paid together with WP and WrP		EOAP solo + EOAP together with WP and WrP		DP solo + DP together with WP and WrP		Total of OAP, EOAP, DP solo + WP and WrP	
	abs.	%	abs.	%	abs.	%	abs.	%
Up to 130	4 295	0.39	9	0.07	10 267	4.20	14 571	1.07
130.1-200	11 087	1.00	26	0.21	55 328	22.62	66 441	4.88
200.1-265	17 453	1.58	113	0.92	48 080	19.66	65 646	4.82
265.1-325	22 660	2.05	1 488	12.09	35 472	14.50	59 622	4.38
325.1-425	249 259	22.57	3 147	25.56	57 029	23.31	309 435	22.73
425.1-530	325 938	29.52	2 736	22.22	22 942	9.38	351 616	25.83
530.1-665	276 539	25.05	2 296	15.97	9 317	3.81	288 192	21.17
Above 665.1	197 034	17.84	2 496	18.65	6 142	2.51	205 672	15.11
Total	1 104 305	100	12 203	100	251 471	100	1 361 195	100

Abbreviations: OAP – old-age pension, WP – widow’s pension, WrP – widower’s pension, EOAP – early old-age pension, DP – disability pension.

Source: Authors' own calculations based on data of Report on the Social Situation of the Slovak population for 2022 from the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic. [MPSVaR SR, 2022a].

One of the solutions for increasing pension benefits and strengthening intergenerational solidarity is the introduction of a parental pension into Slovak legislation and practice with effect from 2023. On November 5, 2022, the National Council of the Slovak Republic approved Resolution No. 1697 amending Act No. 461/2003 Coll. on social insurance as amended. The purpose of the legislation is mainly to introduce the so-called “parental pension” into law, which improves the financial situation of pensioners by increasing their pension via the work activity of their children through the assignment of a part of the insurance premium to the child's pension insurance. The right to decide that part of the pension insurance payment will be provided to the person who raised the insured person and who is provided material security in old age is introduced. At the same time, the amendment to the Social Insurance Act aims to improve the long-term financial sustainability of the continuously financed pension pillar by eliminating the so-called “pension ceiling” from the Constitution of the Slovak Republic, which means the redetermination of the

retirement age for people born after 1967 depending on the increase in life expectancy. Such a method of raising the retirement age should be fully manifested after 2030. The measure improving long-term sustainability lies in adjusting the slowdown in the growth of the current pension value to 95 % of the growth rate of the average wage, thereby creating a reserve to compensate for increased expenditure on the parental pension. The correction mechanism lies in the fact that from January 1, 2023, only 95 % of the year-on-year change in the average wage applied for the purposes of determining the adjustment index of the current pension value to all applicants for pension benefits, however, not everyone is be entitled to a parental pension.

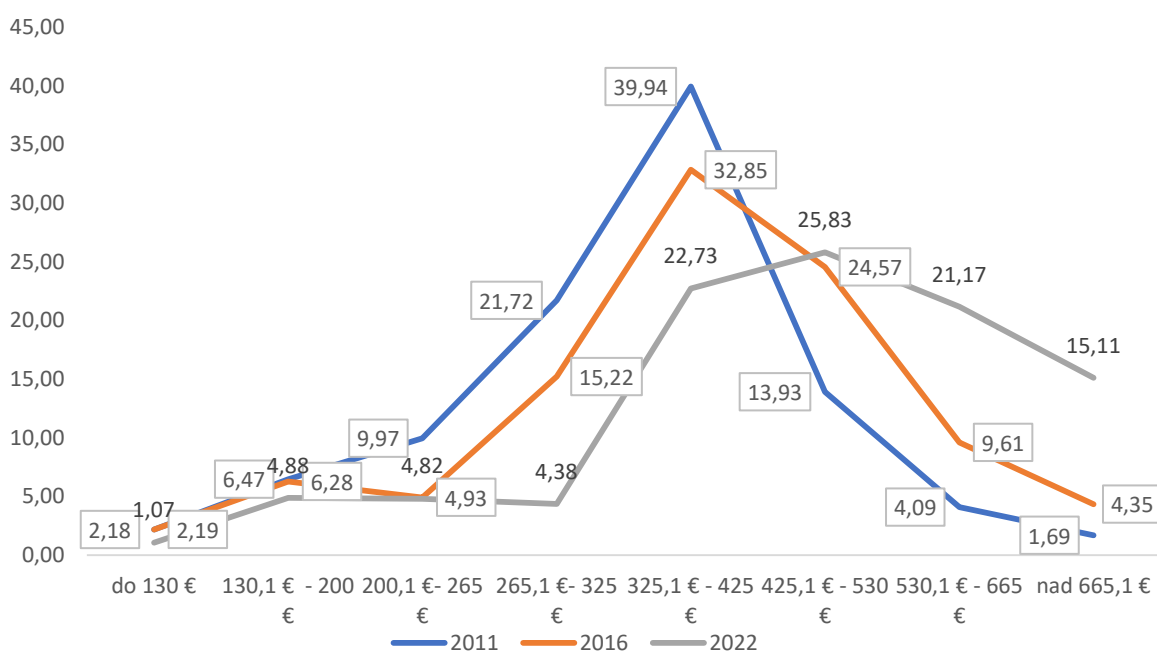


Figure 3. Distribution of pension benefit recipients (OAP, EOAP, DP solo + with WP and WrP) according to income ranges (%)

Source: Authors' own processing based on data calculations of Report on the Social Situation of the Slovak population for 2011, 2016 and 2022 from the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic. [MPSVaR SR, 2011, 2016, 2022a]

Formula for determining the pension value:

$$ADH_r = ADH_{r-1} \times \left[1 + \left(\frac{PM_{r-1}}{PM_{r-2}} - 1 \right) \times 0,95 \right]$$

where,

CPV – is the current pension value,

AW – is the average monthly wage in the Slovak economy determined by the Statistical Office for the third quarter of the calendar year,

y – is the calendar year from which the CPV is adjusted.

The right to a parental pension and its payment arised automatically from January 1, 2023 to the own parent and adopter of the child, with the possibility of declaring that the parental pension is not to be granted. The claim also arises for the insured person to whom the child was entrusted to replace parental care on the basis of the child's consent statement. The recipient of the parental pension must be the recipient of old-age, disability or civil service pension paid after reaching the retirement age. At the same time, the child must be pension insured for two years before the relevant calendar year. The condition of pension insurance is considered fulfilled even if the child was insured for only one day. The number of affected recipients of old-age pensions was 828.000 in 2023. Table 5. shows the number of recipients for other years.

Table 5

Number of affected recipients of old-age pensions (thousands of persons)

Year	2023	2024	2025
Estimated number of recipients	828.0	836.0	842.5

Source: MPSVaR SR [2022].

The amount of the parental pension has been determined as 1.5 % of one-twelfth of the total assessment bases of the child, from which contributions for old-age insurance were paid, at most in the amount of 1.5 % of one twelfth of 1.2 times the general assessment base. The total amount of parental pensions cannot be higher than 3 % of one twelfth of 1.2 times the general assessment base from which the old-age contributions were paid. The parental pension is excluded from valuation, as its amount changes depending on the amount of the child's assessment base, which preceded the relevant year of receiving the parental pension by two years. At the same time, the parental pension is not considered income, e.g. for the purposes of determining the amount of assistance in material need.

The adopted legislation assumes a negative impact on the public administration budget in the years 2022 to 2025 in the total amount of 822,624,117 euros. According to the data of the Social Insurance Company, the assignation of the contributions will apply to approximately 1,004,000 insured people in 2023, approximately 1,014,000 insured people in 2024 and approximately 1,022,000 insured people in 2025 in case it will be used at 100 %.

The Slovak pension system is built on the principle of solidarity and merit. The newly adopted parental pension violates both of these principles. It is only partially

solidarity-based because low-income children will allocate a lower amount of benefit to their parents than high-income children, thereby maintaining the status of income inequality. Trexima's long-term cost of labour reports [2022] show that more than 60 % of employees earn less than the average wage. It is not meritorious because it does not take into account the expenses spent on raising the children of eligible persons. At the same time, the parental pension shows a high level of involvement of the state in family relations through the granting/non-granting of consent, and at the same time it shows signs of discrimination, as parents whose child has died, works abroad or whose health condition does not allow them to be pension insured are not entitled to it, thus denying intergenerational solidarity. Holub, Šlapák [2011, p. 67] draws attention to the fact that the assimilation of part of the insurance premiums clashes with the concept of free movement of labour and the autonomy of individual member states in regulating the diversity of pension schemes. The parental pension is also discriminatory against pension recipients who do not have children not only by their own decision, but also for health reasons or because they have not found a life partner. In addition to several negative signs, the introduction of the parental pension also deepens the deficit of the pension system in the long term, making it more difficult to consolidate a sustainable pension system as called for by the European Parliament in its report on the Agenda for adequate, safe and sustainable pensions [2013].

Table 6

**The impact of contribution assignment on the balance sheet
of the Social Insurance Company (€)**

Year	2022	2023	2024	2025
Contribution assignment	-300 000	-252 600 300	-273 960 749	-295 763 068

Note: the negative sign (-) represents a worsening of the balance.

Source: MPSVaR SR [2022].

Table 7

**The impact of the introduction of the parental pension on the balance
of the pension system (%)**

Year	2023	2024	2025	2030	2040	2050	2060	2070
Impact on the GDP balance	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3

Source: MPSVaR SR [2022].

3. METHODOLOGY

When introducing new social policy measures, it is advisable to know the opinion of the citizens themselves, who are affected by the measure in question. Their attitude is a subjective reflection of the measure and can give feedback to the makers of the measure, which can affect re-evaluation of the adopted measure and thus contribute to improving the quality of life of recipients of state social policy benefits.

The purpose of the conducted research was to find out the opinion of pensioners (seniors) based on selected socio-economic characteristics on parental pension as a new tool of social policy. To achieve our goal, we formed several hypotheses:

Hypothesis No. 1: We assume the existence of significant gender differences in agreement with the introduction of the parental pension.

Hypothesis No. 2: Especially low-income seniors agree with the introduction of parental pension.

Hypothesis No. 3: Seniors who have children are in favour of the introduction of a parental pension.

Our ambition is to answer the formulated hypotheses and at the same time confirm or refute them. To verify and falsify our hypotheses, we used mixed research in the form of a questionnaire survey. We decided to conduct a questionnaire survey because no one has conducted a survey on the attitudes of seniors towards the instrument and we think it is a suitable method to identify their views. The ethical dimension of the research was taken into account. All respondents were informed about the purpose and intention of the survey at the beginning of the questionnaire. They were further assured that their anonymity would be maintained and the results of the research would be used for scientific research purpose. The target group of the survey were pensioners aged 60+ living in all regions of the Slovak Republic.

The anonymous questionnaire survey in the form of a paper questionnaire was carried out between July and September 2022. Representatives of individual regional centres of the Pensioners' Union in Slovakia assisted us in distributing the questionnaires to the target groups. A total of 2,400 questionnaires were sent by mail, of which 1,235 questionnaires were returned to us, which represents a 51.46 percent return rate. From the returned questionnaires, we had to discard 7 questionnaires due to their incorrect filling, which reduced the number of evaluated questionnaires to 1,228. Open, closed and semi-closed questions were used in the questionnaire. The respondent answered the questions in the form of a selection from predetermined alternative answers, one question was answered freely. For five questions, the respondent had the option of multiple answers.

The 23 questions were targeted at three areas. The first group of questions was focused on the basic characteristics of the studied sample, the next group was aimed at finding out the attitudes towards the introduction of the parental pension, and the last group of questions was related to intergenerational solidarity.

We used the chi-square test to assess the statistical significance of responses to our research question across distinct groups. The chi-square test is a non-parametric statistical method utilized to determine whether there is a significant association between two categorical variables. The chi-square statistic is computed using the observed and expected frequencies, and degrees of freedom determined based on the dimensions of the contingency table. By comparing the calculated chi-square statistic with the critical value, the decision is made regarding the null hypothesis. A rejection of the null hypothesis indicates a significant difference in responses among the groups, while failure to reject the null hypothesis suggests no such difference. IBM SPSS Statistics statistical package was used to create pivot tables from collected data and calculate the share of positive responses to a research question, together with a chi-square statistic calculation in selected categories. Significance level $\alpha = 0.05$ was chosen to assess the critical value of the chi-square statistic from the chi-square distribution table. The results were afterwards interpreted, and implications were discussed in the context of the research question, providing valuable insights into the subject of our research.

4. RESULTS

The questionnaire survey was conducted nationwide, with all regions of Slovakia represented. The representative sample consisted of 1,228 individuals, of which 69.87 % were women and 30.13 % were men. In terms of age structure, respondents aged 66–70 and 71–75 predominated, making up 64.58 % of the total number of respondents. The remainder consisted of seniors over the age of 76 (24.76 %) and in the age group of 60–65 years (10.67 %). Regarding parenthood, 92.02 % of respondents had children and 6.76 % were childless, with the remaining respondents not answering the question. Thus, the introduction of the parental pension will personally affect the majority of respondents. The average number of children per senior was 2 children. Only six respondents stated that they have 6 or more children, which represents less than 0.5 % of respondents. In terms of health, 75.08 % of respondents stated that they are in very good or good health, while 24.92 % of respondents rated their health as poor or very poor. By gender, more than 77 % of men rated their health as good to very good compared to 74 % of

women. More than half of the respondents lived in a shared household with their spouse/partner, 36.56 % lived alone, 8.47 % lived with children, and 3.09 % lived with family. A minimal number of respondents (0.33 %) were placed in a senior care facility, and 0.98 % of respondents did not specify their living arrangement.

When examining the economic situation of households measured by the household's monthly income, several income bands were chosen. The first band ranged from 0 to 350 euros, with 8.14 % of respondent households falling into this category. The second band, with incomes ranging from 351 to 500 euros, constituted 33.71 % of respondent households. The third band, with incomes ranging from 501 to 800 euros, included 29.07 % of households, and the final income bracket, with incomes above 800 euros, comprised 26.55 % of households. 2.52 % of respondents did not answer the question regarding their household income situation. The highest number of seniors were found in the income band above 800 euros, while the highest number of senior women were found in the income band from 351 to 500 euros. The representative sample corresponds to the income distribution of retirees in Slovakia, where men's pensions are higher than women's pensions. The fewest seniors, both men and women, were in the lowest income band.

Table 8

Structure of research sample (n=1228)

Gender	Absolute number	Relative number
1	2	3
male	370	30.13 %
female	858	69.87 %
Age	Absolute number	Relative number
60–65	131	10.67 %
66–70	366	29.80 %
71–75	427	34.77 %
76–80	177	14.41 %
80+	126	10.28 %
n.d.	1	0.08 %
Health	Absolute number	Relative number
very good	42	3.42 %
good	880	71.66 %
poor	291	23.70 %
very poor	15	1.22 %

The End of the Table 8

1	2	3
Residence	Absolute number	Relative number
Village	490	39.9 %
Town	726	59.12 %
n.d.	12	0.98 %
Living arrangement	Absolute number	Relative number
Husband/spouse	586	47.72 %
Partner/partner	35	2.85 %
Alone	449	36.56 %
Child/children	104	8.47 %
Family	38	3.09 %
Senior care facility	4	0.33 %
n.d.	12	0.98 %
Income	Absolute number	Relative number
up to 350 eur	100	8.14 %
from 351 to 500 eur	414	33.71 %
from 501 to 800 eur	357	29.07 %
above 800 eur	326	26.55 %
n.d.	31	2.52 %
Parenthood	Absolute number	Relative number
Yes	1130	92.02 %
No	83	6.76 %
n.d.	15	1.22 %

Source: Authors' own processing.

Only 28.5 % of respondents answered positively to the question of whether they agree with the introduction of the parental pension.

From the tables provided above, a significant difference in the proportion of agreement with the introduction of the parental pension between men and women can be observed. Men are more likely to agree with the introduction of the parental pension compared to women. The difference in the proportion of positive responses to the research question between these two groups is more than 10 percentage points. Hypothesis no. 1 has been verified.

Table 9

Opinion of seniors on the introduction of parental pension by gender

gender * pension_agreement Crosstabulation

		pension_agreement		Total	
		0	1		
gender	male	Count	233	130	363
		% within gender	64.2%	35.8%	100.0%
	female	Count	628	213	841
		% within gender	74.7%	25.3%	100.0%
Total		Count	861	343	1204
		% within gender	71.5%	28.5%	100.0%

Source: Authors' own processing according to statistical programme SPSS.

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2- sided)	Exact Sig. (1- sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	13.684 ^a	1	.000		
Continuity Correction ^b	13.175	1	.000		
Likelihood Ratio	13.361	1	.000		
Fisher's Exact Test				.000	.000
N of Valid Cases	1204				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 103.41.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Source: Authors' own processing according to statistical programme SPSS.

When looking at the responses of men and women in terms of income groups, it can be observed that as income increases, the responses between these two groups begin to differ more. In the income groups up to 350 € and 351–500 €, the difference in the proportion of positive responses between men and women is statistically insignificant. Significant differences were observed only in the income groups of 501–800 € and above 800 €, with a higher income associated with a higher difference in the proportion of positive responses.

From the perspective of respondents' income situation, it emerged that across all income bands, the highest number of respondents are against the introduction of the parental pension. However, respondents' income significantly influences the proportion of positive responses to our research question. The relative frequency of positive responses (36 %) is higher in the highest income group with a significant increase compared to the proportion of positive responses in other income groups, while the lowest proportion of responses is observed in the lowest income group (23.5 %).

Respondents from the lowest income band did not show a higher level of agreement with the introduction of the parental pension compared to other income bands. If we extend the low-income group of respondents to include the second income band, we arrive at a similar result. Hypothesis no. 2 has been refuted. Given these findings,

it is possible to consider the attitude of particularly low-income retirees as irrational and potentially influenced by public opinion about this policy. To uncover further correlations, it is necessary to examine the acquired data in more detailed income bands.

Table 10

**Attitude of seniors towards the introduction of parental pension
according to household income (%)**

gender * pension_agreement * monthly_income Crosstabulation

monthly_income			pension_agreement		Total	
			0	1		
up to 350	gender	male	Count	17	5	22
			% within gender	77.3%	22.7%	100.0%
		female	Count	58	18	76
			% within gender	76.3%	23.7%	100.0%
	Total	Count	75	23	98	
		% within gender	76.5%	23.5%	100.0%	
up to 500	gender	male	Count	56	22	78
			% within gender	71.8%	28.2%	100.0%
		female	Count	236	87	323
			% within gender	73.1%	26.9%	100.0%
	Total	Count	292	109	401	
		% within gender	72.8%	27.2%	100.0%	
up to 800	gender	male	Count	82	39	121
			% within gender	67.8%	32.2%	100.0%
		female	Count	181	52	233
			% within gender	77.7%	22.3%	100.0%
	Total	Count	263	91	354	
		% within gender	74.3%	25.7%	100.0%	
over 800	gender	male	Count	74	61	135
			% within gender	54.8%	45.2%	100.0%
		female	Count	132	55	187
			% within gender	70.6%	29.4%	100.0%
	Total	Count	206	116	322	
		% within gender	64.0%	36.0%	100.0%	
Total	gender	male	Count	229	127	356
			% within gender	64.3%	35.7%	100.0%
		female	Count	607	212	819
			% within gender	74.1%	25.9%	100.0%
	Total	Count	836	339	1175	
		% within gender	71.1%	28.9%	100.0%	

Source: Authors' own processing according to statistical programme SPSS.

Based on the responses of seniors with and without children regarding the introduction of the parental pension, it emerged that respondents from both categories do not lean towards the introduction of the parental pension. Hypothesis no. 3 was not confirmed. However, retirees with children are more inclined (29.6 %) to agree with the introduction of the parental pension.

From the survey results, it is evident that whether a pensioner has children has a statistically significant impact on a positive response to the question of whether they agree with the introduction of the parental pension. The higher the number of children, the greater the number of respondents with a favorable stance. Just under 34 % of respondents with more than 3 children are in favor of the parental pension, compared to 31.2 % of respondents with 1 child.

Table 11

**Attitude of seniors towards the introduction of parental pension
according to gender and household income (%)**

monthly_income * pension_agreement Crosstabulation

		pension_agreement		Total	
		0	1		
monthly_income	up to 350	Count	75	23	98
		% within monthly_income	76.5%	23.5%	100.0%
	up to 500	Count	293	109	402
		% within monthly_income	72.9%	27.1%	100.0%
	up to 800	Count	263	91	354
		% within monthly_income	74.3%	25.7%	100.0%
	over 800	Count	206	116	322
		% within monthly_income	64.0%	36.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	837	339	1176
		% within monthly_income	71.2%	28.8%	100.0%

Source: Authors' own processing according to statistical programme SPSS.

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	11.757 ^a	3	.008
Likelihood Ratio	11.514	3	.009
N of Valid Cases	1176		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 28.25.

Source: Authors' own processing according to statistical programme SPSS.

Further exploration of the relationships in this area is limited by the low number of childless respondents, as well as the fact that when this group is excluded and responses are examined based on the number of children, the differences in positive responses to the research question regarding the number of children (within the entire dataset and subgroups based on income levels) become statistically insignificant.

The negative attitude towards this tool also influences the perception of the reasons for its introduction by the respondents themselves. From the responses of the respondents, it emerges that the majority (27.6 %) consider the parental pension as a populist measure rather than a systemic solution to the living standards of retirees. Furthermore, 14.4 % of respondents perceive this financial benefit as discriminatory.

**Attitude of seniors towards the introduction of parental pension depending
on parenthood (%)**

children * pension_agreement Crosstabulation

		pension_agreement		Total	
		0	1		
children	yes	Count	781	329	1110
		% within children	70.4%	29.6%	100.0%
	no	Count	71	10	81
		% within children	87.7%	12.3%	100.0%
Total		Count	852	339	1191
		% within children	71.5%	28.5%	100.0%

Source: Authors' own processing according to statistical programme SPSS.

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2- sided)	Exact Sig. (1- sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	11.088 ^a	1	.001		
Continuity Correction ^b	10.255	1	.001		
Likelihood Ratio	12.895	1	.000		
Fisher's Exact Test				.001	.000
N of Valid Cases	1191				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 23.06.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Source: Authors' own processing according to statistical programme SPSS.

In the survey, we also explored the opinions of seniors regarding the amount of the parental pension. At the time of data collection, the public was informed about the average amount of the parental pension being 25.40 euros for the year 2023 (5.21 % of the average amount of the old-age pension for the year 2020), which was considered appropriate by less than 10 % of respondents. The majority of respondents (44.63 %) were undecided or unable to express their opinion on this matter. However, 41.21 % of respondents consider this amount to be low. While the largest proportion of men (47 %) deem the amount of the parental pension to be low, 48 % of female respondents were undecided. Conversely, 39 % of female respondents expressed that the average amount of the parental pension is low. For both genders, the smallest proportion of respondents consider the amount of the parental pension to be appropriate.

Given the fact that the parental pension can also be considered as a way of implementing the principle of intergenerational solidarity, we were interested in how seniors perceive intergenerational solidarity.

Table 13

Attitude of seniors towards the introduction of parental pension depending on number of children (%)

children_number * pension_agreement Crosstabulation

		pension_agreement		Total	
		0	1		
children_number	0	Count	71	10	81
		% within children_number	87.7%	12.3%	100.0%
	1	Count	86	39	125
		% within children_number	68.8%	31.2%	100.0%
	2	Count	440	161	601
		% within children_number	73.2%	26.8%	100.0%
	3+	Count	252	129	381
		% within children_number	66.1%	33.9%	100.0%
Total		Count	849	339	1188
		% within children_number	71.5%	28.5%	100.0%

Source: Authors' own processing according to statistical programme SPSS.

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	17.039 ^a	3	.001
Likelihood Ratio	18.695	3	.000
N of Valid Cases	1188		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 23.11.

Source: Authors' own processing according to statistical programme SPSS.

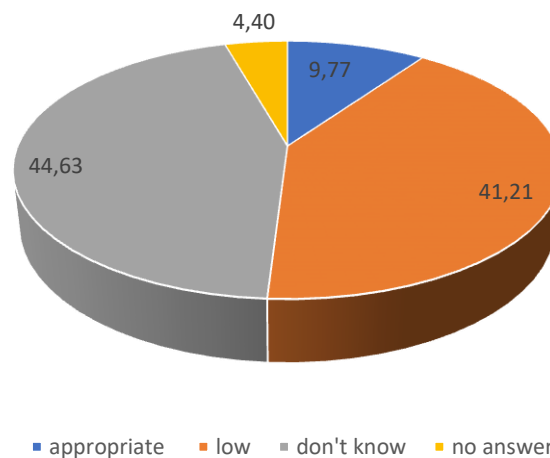


Figure 4. Opinion of seniors on the amount of parental pension (%)

Source: Authors' own processing.

Table 14 presents their responses. Respondents had the option to choose from the provided options as well as the opportunity to express their own perception of intergenerational solidarity. We included in the table only those responses that were selected or mentioned by at least 1 % of respondents.

Table 14

Perception of intergenerational solidarity by seniors (%)

Answer	%
Personal care	30.29
Leaving the property to the next of kin	21.01
No answer	11.89
Other	6.76
Material assistance	6.51
Financial assistance	6.35
Personal care, leaving real estate	4.72
Personal care, material assistance	4.32
Personal care, financial assistance	2.28
Personal care, financial assistance, material assistance	1.22

Source: Authors' own processing.

From the respondents' answers, it emerged that the majority perceive intergenerational solidarity as personal care (more than 30 % of respondents). Another 20 % of respondents indicated the option of leaving property to their descendants, which is approximately 10 percentage points less than personal care. Intergenerational solidarity is associated with material assistance by 6.51 % of respondents. Nearly 7 % of respondents utilized the option "other", where they mentioned responses such as love, mutual cohesion, or mutual respect. Every tenth respondent did not answer the question.

5. DISCUSSION

The parental pension, as a new benefit provided from the old-age insurance, represents another element of intergenerational solidarity in the pension system of the Slovak Republic. The Slovak Republic is not the only country strengthening pension entitlements for individuals who have raised children. For example, Spain has introduced a 5 % increase in pensions for women who have raised two children, a 10 % increase for women who have raised three children, and a 15 % increase for

women who have raised four or more children. In France, any parent who receives the basic old-age pension and has raised at least 3 children for a minimum of 9 years before their 16th birthday is entitled to a 10 % increase in their pension. Additionally, for women working in manual labor professions, there is the possibility of receiving 50 % of the old-age pension's amount at the age of 60 if they have raised at least 3 children and have accrued a minimum of 30 years of pension insurance. In Hungary, a special contribution to the pension is granted to individuals who cared for their severely disabled child for at least 20 years before becoming eligible for the old-age pension. In Estonia, individuals who have raised children for a minimum of 8 years receive an additional contribution to their pension from the public pillar for 1 to 3 years (depending on the child's birth) of additional insurance coverage. [www.zakonyprolidi.cz]. Since 2020, Slovenia has introduced the possibility of a percentage increase in pensions if an individual does not use the option to retire early due to raising a child. For each child raised, the pension is increased by 1.36 %. The maximum increase in pension amounts to 4.08 % for three or more children. Spain introduced a fixed bonus for increasing pensions for up to 4 children starting in 2022. In 2022, the annual increase for each child raised amounted to €378. Both parents are entitled to the pension increase.

The Czech Republic introduced, starting from 2023, an increase in old-age pensions for each raised child (known as “parenting allowance”) by the amount of 500 Czech crowns per month. “The aim is to acknowledge the contributions of caregivers, their efforts in fostering and raising new contributors to the pension system, while simultaneously providing a flat-rate compensation for the decrease in pension resulting from career fluctuations associated with parenting”. [MPSV ČR, 2022] The amount of the parenting allowance is subject to the same indexation as pension benefits. The entitlement to the so-called parenting allowance is granted to only one of the parents who has taken care of the child to a greater extent for a minimum period of ten years. If a person started caring for the child after the child reached the age of eight, it is sufficient for them to care for the child for at least five years and not cease caring for the child before the child reaches adulthood. In the event that a child dies after reaching the age of five, the condition of caregiving is considered fulfilled if the person personally cared for the child from birth until the time of the child's death. If an individual is granted only a partial old-age pension (for example, a foreigner who worked only a portion of their career in the Czech Republic), the amount of the parenting allowance is reduced by the same proportion as other components of the old-age pension. According to long-term estimates by

the National Budget Council Office [2022], the introduction of the so-called parenting allowance increases the share of additional costs to GDP by 0.2 % of GDP.

In Slovakia, the benefit is differentiated based on the earnings of children, with a legally defined maximum limit, which contributes to improving the living situation of pensioners in Slovakia. Additional income can have a positive impact on the household economy of seniors, which will also be reflected in the country's economic growth. Linking the benefit to the earnings of children working in Slovakia can stimulate the motivation of young people to enter the Slovak job market. The determination of the parental pension itself represents another significant administrative and personnel burden for the Social Insurance Agency. The parental pension amount is not considered as income, thus it does not affect the eligibility of pensioners for other benefits from the social system. An advantage is that the allocation of contributions to the parental pension does not reduce the future pension entitlements of children. On the other hand, the introduction of this benefit imposes an economic burden on the budget of the Social Insurance Agency and its financial coverage through transfers from the state budget, leading to adjustments in pension calculations from January 1, 2023, to the detriment of future retirees.

In the future, the new measure poses a high risk to long-term sustainability as well as frequent political interventions in its operation. This measure is perceived as discriminatory (infertility, child mortality, work abroad, severe health disability of the child, unemployment...), as confirmed by the results of our research. The question also arises regarding the infringement of children's rights through emotional pressure to refrain from taking active measures against parents or disrupting parental relationships and the potential suspension of the parental pension. At the same time, parents obtain personal data of the child resulting from their contribution base, which raises doubts regarding the infringement of rights to the protection of personal data. The benefit also brings income instability in the event of the child's job loss, retirement, or emigration for work abroad.

CONCLUSION

Intergenerational solidarity plays a significant role in the pension systems of the European Union, including Slovakia. The currently introduced measure into the Slovak pension system in the form of parental pension will significantly impact intergenerational solidarity. Retirees who are entitled to parental pension will increase their standard of living due to the reduction in pension entitlements of the

next generation of retirees. At the same time, viewing a child as an investment through which the standard of living of seniors will increase appears ethically problematic.

However, it is necessary to implement changes in pension systems that do not conflict with other legislative norms, such as Law No. 493/2011 on Budgetary Responsibility. Today's expenditures to finance parental pensions will be covered by savings resulting from other legislative amendments to the Social Insurance Act, which will automatically lead to lower future pension entitlements for citizens of the Slovak Republic. At the same time, parental pension undermines the goal of achieving long-term sustainability of the pension system, as it deepens the deficit of the pension system in the long term. The reinforcement of intergenerational solidarity for the current selected generation of seniors will be achieved at the expense of the quality of life of all future seniors through the correction of the current pension value and the allocation of a portion of contributions, which may bear signs of emotional pressure from the parent. In the event that a child decides to suspend the allocation of a portion of contributions for their parent, this step may be considered an encroachment on the parent's rights, further deepening intra-family conflicts. The discriminatory element of the parental pension is also evident among the group of childless seniors or seniors whose children do not work or work abroad, as they are not subject to the allocation of contributions due to childlessness or non-participation in the Slovak labor market. The productive population is deprived of the right to allocate a portion of the insurance premium because their parents are no longer alive. The group of seniors who raised a disabled child, who for objective reasons does not work and had higher expenses in raising the child, will also not participate in the allocation of contributions. The parental pension is oriented towards the time of receiving the pension benefit rather than the period of actual expenses related to raising a child. A systemic change that would compensate parents for raising children should involve adjusting the calculation base from which the state pays pension insurance for individuals caring for children. The inconsistency of this measure motivated us to conduct research aimed at determining the opinions of seniors according to selected characteristics on the introduction of the parental pension. The results of our research on a sample of 1,228 respondents indicate a negative attitude of Slovak seniors towards the implemented tool, as only 28 % of respondents agree with it. Based on sorting the attitudes of seniors considering their differentiated conditions (gender, number of children, income), we proceeded to confirm or refute our hypotheses. Hypothesis

no. 1 was confirmed, as significant gender differences were confirmed in the agreement with the introduction of the parental pension. Hypothesis no. 2 was not confirmed, as low-income senior households are not more supportive of the introduction of the parental pension compared to higher-income senior households. The survey revealed that the number of children does not influence a senior's attitude towards the introduction of the parental pension, as only just under 30 % of seniors with children agree with this tool. Hypothesis no. 3 also was not confirmed. Furthermore, from the results of our research, it emerged that seniors, as recipients of the parental pension, consider the actual amount of the parental pension to be low and perceive its introduction as a populist and discriminatory measure. Our research highlights the negative perception of the introduction of the parental pension by the recipients themselves. Time will tell whether the introduction of this new tool into the Slovak pension system is justified and whether the perception of it will change among both experts and the general public. Slovak society inevitably needs to take measures to mitigate the risks posed by aging while ensuring that these measures do not significantly undermine the role and position of older individuals in society. Inevitable population aging can be alleviated by increasing birth rates, which must be supported by effective family policies, measures to balance work and parenthood, as well as the affordability of housing for young families. The parental pension will be replaced from 1 January 2025 by a tax rebate. Children will be able to remit to each parent who is in receipt of a pension (old-age pension, disability pension payable after retirement age, retirement pension payable after retirement age and disability retirement pension payable after retirement age) a share of the tax paid of 2 % for each parent. According to the new legislation, the Social Insurance Institution will, for the first time in 2026, remit a share of the tax paid for 2025 to pension recipients on the basis of a notification from the Financial Directorate of the Slovak Republic. Under the original system, 876,000 persons of pensionable age would be entitled to a parental pension in 2026, but under the new system the number of beneficiaries will fall to 591,000. The reduction of the parental pension under the consolidation package will result in an improvement in the economy of 0.25 % of GDP [Council for Budget Responsibility, 2024, p. 5].

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FEATURES AND CONSEQUENCES OF THE USAGE OF CLONING TECHNOLOGY DURING THE 2019 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN UKRAINE

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Abstract

The article analyses the features of the usage of cloning technology in the electoral practice of modern Ukraine. The authors have considered clone candidates during the elections as a subspecies of technical candidates. The author's typology of clone candidates that can be used in election campaigns has been proposed. Based on the analysis of the 2019 parliamentary election campaign in Ukraine, the peculiarities of the participation of clone candidates in the election race have been demonstrated. The authors have concluded that the cloning technology during elections is not illegal phenomenon, but violates moral and ethical principles, as it involves manipulation and may ultimately lead to significant distortion of the results of the will of voters. Researchers emphasize that the main condition for neutralizing the impact of cloning technology on the course and results of elections is the presence of a high level of electoral culture of voters.

Key words: cloning technology, elections, clone candidates, manipulations, election campaign.

INTRODUCTION

It is well known that one of the key features of democracy is competitive, free and fair elections. However, analysing the current trends of elections in the conditions of the development of the information society, we see more and more use of manipulations in the electoral process, which calls into question the fairness of the elections and, consequently, their democracy.

At the same time, the problem of the democracy of the electoral process, holding elections in conditions where all candidates have the opportunity to compete honestly for power, has always been relevant to political science. This is due to the fact that the level of democracy of the election race and the fairness of the rules of the election campaign affect not only the outcome of elections and the formation of political elites, but also the effectiveness of public administration and democracy of social and political system in state in general.

Therefore, it is necessary to analyse the features of such manipulation as the use of cloning technology in elections, which is becoming more common practice in the modern electoral process. This technology is often used in the electoral practice of post-Soviet countries, in particular, the development of this phenomenon is brightly evident during the elections in Ukraine. In this context, the widespread use of cloning technology in the 2019 parliamentary election campaign in Ukraine underlines the importance of research and adequate understanding of this concept in the 21st century.

In this study, we will understand the cloning technology as a type of electoral technology, which consists in the deliberate and purposeful use of candidates with the same surname or political parties with a similar name to drag votes and reduce the chances of victory for the candidate or party against whom this technology is used.

SCIENTIFIC APPROACHES AND RESEARCH METHODS

The methodological basis of the study is the application of the following scientific approaches to the analysis of the problem of the cloning technology usage during elections: functional, which made it possible to assess the dependence of the democratic nature of the electoral process on the use of such electoral manipulation as the participation of clone candidates; regulatory and value-based, thanks to which we found out the significance of the phenomenon of clone candidates as a factor of violation of moral and ethical standards of the election process, decrease in democracy, integrity of elections and focused attention on those legal norms that it violates.

In general, during the research, the following methods have been used: general scientific methods (comparative, structural-functional and systemic), empirical (method of statistical data, method of document analysis) and logical methods (analysis, synthesis, deduction and induction). Applying the comparative method, the features of the use of clone candidates in various electoral districts during the 2019 parliamentary elections in Ukraine have been compared. A structural-functional method has been also used, according to which the characteristics, functions and types of clone candidates and their influence on the election results have been collectively considered. The systemic method helped to analyse cloning technology as a system phenomenon.

The main methodology used in the study is quantitative methodology. The use of quantitative research methods made it possible to process large amounts of data on candidates in electoral districts. Applying a statistical method, information on the scope and features of the use of cloning technology during the 2019 parliamentary elections in Ukraine has been provided. Method of document analysis has been used during the study of Ukrainian electoral legislation, in particular, the Election Code of Ukraine. In addition, to better understand the specifics of the use of clone candidates, the method of specific situations has been applied.

Besides, the author's own methodology for determining the effectiveness of cloning technology has been used in the study. It has been applied to find out how effective the use of clone candidates was during the 2019 parliamentary elections in Ukraine.

Research question: how large-scale and effective is cloning technology during elections in Ukraine? In our study, we will understand the effectiveness of cloning technology as the ability of the clone candidate to "take away" enough votes from the victim candidate so that he/she is not elected.

Research hypothesis: cloning technology is actively used in Ukraine during the election process and contributes to the results distortion of the will of citizens; it is a type of dirty electoral technology used in Ukraine to take away votes from leading candidates and is, to some extent, effective, allowing for a partial change in the election outcome.

SOURCE BASE AND STATE OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH OF THE PROBLEM

The issue of cloning technology during the elections is actual due to the fact that in Ukrainian and foreign political science studies of clone candidates and their role in

the electoral process are not fully covered. Mentions of this modern phenomenon are found more at the level of journalism and political analytics, which necessitates a comprehensive scientific study of cloning technology during election campaigns, finding out the place and appointment of clone candidates, the theoretical justification of this phenomenon.

Our research is based on such a fundamental international regulatory act as the “Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters” of the Venice Commission, which states that elections can be considered an attribute of democracy and contribute to the democratic development of the country only when they are held on the basis of five basic principles: free, equal, general, direct and secret elections. In addition, the Venice Commission emphasizes that elections must be protected from any party-political manipulation (one of which, in our opinion, is the use of cloning technology during elections) [Code 2002].

In addition, we used the approach of the well-known Ukrainian election researcher Yurii Kliuchkovskiy, who, in his thorough work “Principles of electoral law: doctrinal understanding, state and prospects of legislative implementation in Ukraine” (published in 2018 with the assistance of the OSCE Project Coordinator in Ukraine), defending the thesis about the importance of observing the democratic principles of elections, singles out a number of abuses of the right to vote. Among these, he includes, in particular, the technology of using technical candidates (as well as their variety, such as clone candidates) during elections [Kliuchkovskiy 2018].

The issue of using cloning technology during elections is closely related to the issue of the integrity of the electoral process. In this context, the source base for our research was the works of a number of foreign scientists, who analyzed the problem of election integrity. In this context, it is possible to mention, in particular, Carolien van Ham, who published a chapter entitled “Electoral integrity” in the book “The Oxford Handbook of Political Representation in Liberal Democracies” [The Oxford 2020].

In addition, it is worth mentioning Sarah Birch's book entitled “Electoral Malpractice”. In her work, the researcher compares the concepts of electoral honesty and electoral dishonesty, analyzes various types of manipulations used during elections [Birch 2011]. Also valuable in the context of our research was the work of the American researcher Pippa Norris entitled “Strengthening Electoral Integrity”, which, noting the general global trend towards increasing risks for democracy and elections, emphasizes the importance and necessity of strengthening the integrity of elections [Norris, 2017].

Given the fact that cloning technology during elections is one of the types of dirty (grey) election technologies, we used a number of scientific sources that covered the topic of election technologies in general and such a subspecies of them as dirty technologies. In particular, this is about such Ukrainian scientists as Yurii Shveda and Iryna Lesechko, who reveal the role of destructive election technologies in Ukrainian electoral practice [Shveda, Lesechko 2020]. In this context, it is also worth mentioning the Russian researcher Mykola Hryshyn, who analyses the technologies that underlie the election campaign [Hryshyn 2003]. The role of technical candidates during election campaigns is revealed by the domestic researcher Anatolii Bondarenko. According to the scientist, such pre-election technology is called the “third force” [Bondarenko 2012].

It is also worth mentioning the work of foreign researchers Michael Alvarez, Thad Hall and Susan Hyde entitled “Election Fraud: Detecting and Deterring Electoral Manipulation”, in which the authors raise important and relevant issues of election fraud and manipulation during the election campaign [Alvarez 2008].

However, the works of Ukrainian and foreign scientists, experts and analysts, devoted to the study of cloning technology during elections, which is a type of technology for the use of technical candidates, became the most important source base for our research. Among foreign researchers of cloning technology during election, first of all, it is worth mentioning Edith Elkind, Piotr Faliszewski and Arkadii Slinko, who have developed a mathematical model of technology, in which each candidate can be replaced by several clones – new candidates, who are so similar to an existing candidate that each voter simply replaces the real candidate in his/her vote with a block of these new clone candidates [Elkind, Faliszewski, Slinko 2010; Elkind, Faliszewski, Slinko 2011].

Other researchers, who have directly or indirectly considered the cloning technology in elections, include Mukhtar Mukhtarov, who analyzes falsifications in election campaigns [Mukhtarov 2018], and Oleh Zakharov, who explores the peculiarities of the use of clone candidates during elections [Zakharov 2003].

However, cloning technology is analysed largely not by Ukrainian scholars, but by Ukrainian experts, journalists and analysts. They reveal the features and role of technical candidates in elections, analyse clone candidates as a type of technical candidates, discuss the goals and consequences of using cloning technology in election campaigns [Dzhulai, Naboka 2019; Mykolaichuk 2019; Ovdiienko 2019; Pushchenko 2015; Rohovyk 2018].

Statistical documents and materials related to the 2019 parliamentary election campaign, as well as the election results, have become an important source for

studying the features of the usage of cloning technology during elections [Protocol 2019 № 37; Protocol 2019 № 64; Protocol 2019 № 78; Protocol 2019 № 119; Protocol 2019 № 146; Protocol 2019 № 198; Protocol 2019 № 210; The list 2019 etc.].

However, it should be noted that the issue of cloning during elections is not sufficiently disclosed at the scientific level. This applies primarily to the theoretical study of the features and types of clone candidates, the possible consequences of the use of cloning technology during elections. Moreover, the problem of using cloning technology in election campaigns in Ukraine in general, and during the parliamentary election campaign in 2019 in particular, was left out of the scholars' attention. This makes the scientific research of the peculiarities of the usage of cloning technology during the early elections to the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine in 2019 actual.

DIRTY ELECTION TECHNOLOGIES

Nowadays, the ability of candidate's team to use a wide variety of election technologies plays a very important role for a candidate's election victory. The more electoral technologies are in the candidate's arsenal, the more realistic are his/her chances of winning the elections. As the Russian researcher Mykola Hryshyn rightly points out, electoral technologies combine all available resources into a single mechanism, give it flexibility and sophistication, appearance and the ability to create miracles [Hryshyn 2003].

Election technologies are understood as a set of methods, shares, and actions that contribute to increasing the effectiveness of the election campaign of the subject of the election process or, on the contrary, are aimed at discrediting the opponents of a certain candidate. Electoral technologies are part of political technologies in general.

There are different approaches to the classification of election technologies. However, in our opinion, the most justified is the division of election technologies into three groups: "dirty", "grey" and "clean". This classification allows to cover all election technologies, give their qualitative characteristics and see the results of their use.

"Dirty" election technologies are understood as the use of methods of campaigning or influencing voters, which contradict the law and do not correspond to established ideas about the ethics of political struggle in a civilized society. "Clean" electoral technologies are methods that are used, as a rule, without violating the law and within the framework of the established rules of pre-election campaign and norms of generally accepted ethics [Buchyn 2009].

Often, along with “dirty” and “clean” election technologies, there are also “grey” election technologies that are in the middle between them. “Grey” electoral technologies are methods that, as a rule, are on the verge of violating the law, or violate it to a small extent. In fact, “grey” electoral technologies are legal actions, which, however, violate generally accepted ethical norms. At the same time, “dirty” election technologies are often characterized by a violation of both legislation and moral principles. But it is rather difficult to draw a clear line between “dirty” and “grey” electoral technologies [Buchyn 2009].

“Dirty” election technologies include signature collection fraud, voter bribery, voter intimidation techniques, compromising materials, disrupting the candidate's meetings with voters, discrediting the opponents on their behalf, etc. “Clean” election technologies include organizational methods that increase the effectiveness of collecting signatures, campaigning and the popularity of the candidate, bring him/her closer to voters, etc.

Regarding technologies of using technical candidates during elections in general, and their variety, such as clone candidates, in particular, then, in our opinion, they should be classified as “grey” election technologies. This can be explained by the fact that the use of technical candidates and clone candidates does not directly violate the election legislation, but lowers moral and ethical norms, distorts the will of voters and indirectly reduces the level of democracy of elections. Therefore, we consider it expedient in the future to pay attention to the disclosure of the essence and role of technical candidates and clone candidates in the election campaign.

The issue of dirty election technology and cloning technology is closely related to such a concept as the integrity of elections. In this context, it is worth mentioning first of all the foreign researcher Carolien van Ham, who claims that the integrity of elections is of crucial importance for political representation. Otherwise, an uneven playing field is created for candidates and political parties participating in the elections, and the preferences of the voters will not be truthfully reflected in the election results. Moreover, election dishonesty, according to the researcher, directly creates advantages for certain subjects of the electoral process and nullifies the accountability function normally performed by fair elections [The Oxford 2020].

Another foreign researcher, Sarah Birch, in her study of election abuse, singles out its three main forms: 1) manipulation of the rules on the basis of which elections are regulated; 2) manipulation of voter preferences; 3) manipulation of the voting process [Birch 2011].

It is also worth noting that, as the use of clone candidates is mostly not a direct violation of electoral law, the use of cloning technology is an element of electoral

practice in many countries. However, the level and extent of the use of clone candidates largely depends on the type of political regime. Therefore, it can be assumed that in democratic countries, cloning technology is, on the one hand, less widespread and, on the other hand, less effective. This, in our opinion, can be explained by the high level of democratic consciousness and culture of all participants in the electoral process in democratic countries, who are more inclined to adhere to moral and ethical rules during election campaigns. And in case of their violation, they are able to recognise the intentions of those who use dirty technologies and reduce the effectiveness of such technologies. In contrast, in non-democratic political regimes, cloning technology is used more widely during elections.

Speaking about Ukraine, it should be noted that according to the Democracy Index, the country has a hybrid political regime [Democracy 2023]. It is characterised by the lack of stable democratic institutions and practices of democratic governance [Kononenko 2018]. Therefore, we can assume that the hybrid nature of the political regime in Ukraine has a negative impact on the level of democratic elections. Thus, the electoral process in Ukraine is characterised by use of dirty electoral technologies, including the use of technical candidates and clone candidates.

TECHNICAL CANDIDATES AND THEIR ROLE IN THE ELECTION PROCESS

Analysing the features of cloning technology in the electoral process, it is necessary, first of all, to consider such a concept as “technical candidates”. This is due to the fact that clone candidates can be considered as one of the types of technical candidates. Therefore, clarifying the place and role of technical candidates during election campaigns will provide a significant understanding of the specifics and objectives of the use of cloning technology in the election process.

Revealing the essence of the concept of “technical candidate”, the most problematic is the issue of identifying those characteristics that will allow to refer a particular candidate to the cohort of technical ones. In this context, it is important to emphasize that there is no consensus among researchers as to which candidate can be considered technical and which features may be inherent in him/her.

Summarizing the approaches of various scholars and analysts regarding the understanding of technical candidates, we can identify the following characteristics that, according to researchers, describe such subject of the election process:

- the main goal of the technical candidate is not related to winning the election [Dzhulai, Naboka 2019; Ovdienko 2019; Rohovyk 2018];
- the technical candidate is an instrument of struggle against other candidates in elections [Dzhulai, Naboka 2019; Mykolaichuk 2019; Ovdienko 2019; Rohovyk 2018];
- the technical candidate is a non-independent subject of the election process and acts on behalf of another main candidate to increase his/her chances of winning [Pushchenko 2019];
- the technical candidate is used to provide an advantage to another candidate (by using his/her quota to increase representation on election commissions, increase airtime on television, election observation, etc.) [Rohovyk 2018];
- the technical candidate seeks to drag the part of the votes of candidates who are opponents of the subject of the election process in whose interests he/she acts [Rohovyk 2018];
- the technical candidate is quite passive during the election campaign, etc.

In our opinion, not all of the above characteristics make it possible to clearly classify a particular candidate as technical one. For example, this applies to the participation of candidates in the election race for reasons other than the desire to win. This can be explained by the fact that winning the election is the most common, however, not the only reason why candidates run for elections and participate in the election race. Also, the passivity of certain candidates during the election campaign may indicate that their resources are limited, not their technicality.

In addition, different election campaigns have their own specific features, tools, subjects and opportunities to win. Therefore, in our opinion, certain goals that these candidates pursue during the elections should not be considered as characteristics of technical candidates. After all, goals should always be applied relevant to the specific situation, so the aim of any candidate can be used more as a criterion for the typology of technical candidates than as an inherent feature of the technical candidate.

Thus, the main reason for classifying a candidate as technical is his/her lack of independence, acting on behalf of another candidate or political party. So, in our opinion, technical candidates should be understood as fictitious persons who participate in the election campaign, having a specific goal, not related to victory, but aimed at realizing the interests of other subjects of the election process by manipulating voters.

CLONE CANDIDATES AS A KIND OF TECHNICAL CANDIDATES

One of the most common and effective types of technical candidates is a clone candidate. This is due to the fact that the use of a clone candidate, who is similar to another candidate (as a rule, it is the biggest opponent of the main candidate), allows to most effectively achieve planned goals by manipulating the interests and awareness of voters.

In the political context, cloning is an electoral technology that involves the use of candidates in the elections, who are namesakes of other candidates and/or who are representatives of newly established organizations, parties or private enterprises, that have similar names to another candidate's party or organization. It should be noted that the term "clone candidate" has the same meaning as the term "twin candidate", so we accept the use of any of these terms to denote a technical candidate who has similarities to the real candidate.

In this context, we consider it necessary to provide arguments why the use of clone candidates during elections should be considered as a separate electoral technology, and not a just procedural aspect of the electoral process. Of course, clone candidates are associated with such a stage of the election process as the nomination and registration of candidates. However, the use of clone candidates has a clear purpose: to prevent a namesake of clone candidate (the so-called "victim candidate") from winning the election. Therefore, this gives us reason to talk about a separate technology of cloning as a kind of dirty election technology, which has its own purpose, specifics of application depending on election procedures, the list of candidates and voters' preferences, and specific consequences for the election results.

Foreign researchers Edith Elkind, Piotr Faliszewski and Arkadii Slinko note that mandatory condition for the effective use of cloning technology during elections is the similarity of new candidates, used in the election process, with existing candidates [Elkind, Faliszewski, Slinko 2011: 539].

The increasing use of clone candidates in the electoral practice of the world emphasizes the importance of careful analysis of this phenomenon. In this context, it is worth analysing the work of Russian analyst Oleh Zakharov, who conducted one of the most thorough studies of the features of the usage of clone candidates. First of all, the scholar identifies the following types of twin candidates:

- 1) "understudy", who participates in the election in order to prevent the election without alternatives, as the election may be declared invalid if only one

candidate is running. Such a candidate receives an average of 1–4 % of the votes;

- 2) “assistant”, whose participation contributes to the success of the main candidate, which can be manifested in campaigning for him/her using the airtime of the assistant candidate;
- 3) “twin of competitor”, who aims to drag some votes from another candidate [Zakharov 2003].

Besides, Oleh Zakharov identifies the following stages of the scenario of using clone candidates:

1. Search for the namesake of the competitor candidate, which should have the maximum match in the surname, name and patronymic.
2. Receiving of the power of attorney with the maximum volume of transactions from the fictitious candidate by the representative of the main candidate. After that, all actions on behalf of the clone candidate are carried out by a special team of professional lawyers, who have experience in the use of such manipulations.
3. Creation a specific position or job for a clone candidate to simulate the activities of a real candidate against whom cloning technology is used.
4. Nomination, paying the electoral deposit and registration of a clone candidate.
5. Isolation of the clone candidate from certain contacts with the external environment, to prevent the leakage of any information, that could interfere with the implementation of the plans of the organizers of the technology.
6. Registration, if available, of the pseudonym of the clone candidate in the election commission (if such a possibility is provided by law).
7. Control over the leakage of certain photographs and videos of a clone candidate in the media (usually such candidates do not conduct pre-election campaigning).
8. Tracking of media materials that testify to the falsity of the candidate, and the implementation of an appropriate response.
9. Ensuring the mandatory participation of a clone candidate in the election and the presence of his/her name on the ballot [Zakharov 2003].

However, Oleh Zakharov points out that the above scenario is standard and mentioned stages are the main ones, but can be adjusted according to the situation. In this context, the researcher also singles out additional opportunities for the use of twin candidates, in particular the discrediting of a real candidate by substituting surnames in certain campaign materials; using a clone candidate in

such a way that its negative traits can be accidentally attributed to a real candidate, or to demonstrate a twin candidate where voters do not know the appearance of the real candidate [Zakharov 2003].

Scholar Madiar Mukhtarov argues that a clone candidate should be something similar to his/her opponent and be aimed at dragging his/her votes. In his opinion, there are two subspecies of clone candidates:

1. Person with the same surname or full namesake of another candidate, for whom supporters of a real candidate may accidentally vote. It is possible to use a candidate, who not only has the same surname as a competitor, but also works in an organization that has a similar name to the organization of the real candidate and is usually created only for this election campaign.
2. “One-fielder candidate”, who is focused on the same part of the electorate as the real candidate. Such a fictitious person can be a colleague of the opponent by profession, have a similar image or be his/her countryman. This type of clone candidates is very difficult to identify [Mukhtarov 2018].

According to analyst Pavlo Romaniuk, clone candidates are used for the following purposes: distraction of electoral votes from the main competitors, who are supported by a significant part of voters; receiving from the real candidate an illegal benefit in exchange for withdrawing the candidacy by clone candidate; raising the recognizability of the main candidate’s name [Shcho take 2019].

In return, the coordinator of the Civil Movement “CHESNO”, Vita Dumanska, emphasizes that the technology of using clone candidates, which was previously intended only to “steal” votes from a particular candidate, has now become a business. Therefore, according to the expert, a certain candidate may be offered to receive money for the fact that his/her namesake clone did not participate in the elections [TsVK vpershe 2019].

However, given the above approaches to the characterization of clone candidates, it should be understood that they are generalized, as such candidates may often have specific goals, including intimidation of a real candidate or the sale of seats on election commissions.

It is important to understand that the clone candidates are focused on the common features which they have with the real candidate. So, we believe that a complete match in the full name of the victim candidate and the clone candidate is more effective than having only the same surname. Of course, the simultaneous usage of similarities both in the full name and in the name of the organization on whose behalf the victim candidate carries out activities can be even more effective. In order to better identify these aspects of cloning, we propose our own classification of clone

candidates. However, we believe it appropriate to consider clone candidates who withdrew their candidacies from the election separately, calling them pseudo-clones. All other clone candidates, whose names appeared on the ballot on election day, can be divided as follows:

1. **Direct clones** – candidates, who use matches in the full name to achieve their goal. The following subspecies of direct clones can be distinguished:
 - *absolutely direct clones* – full namesakes of the real candidate (persons with the same surname, name and patronymic);
 - *relatively direct clones* – namesakes of a real candidate who do not have a complete match in name or patronymic.
2. **Indirect clones** – candidates who, when participating in elections, are representatives of organizations, private enterprises or political parties that have the same or similar names with a known political party or with the relevant structure, the activities of which are associated with the victim candidate.
3. **Double clones** – individuals who are both namesakes of a real candidate and use the same name of organization or party as the victim candidate.

As for pseudo-clones, we assume that the purpose of their nomination on election is to intimidate a real candidate, to demand illegal benefit. Thus, pseudo-clones see their refusal to run as a way to make money or possibly get a specific position.

In addition to the problem of classifying clone candidates, there is also the problem of the impossibility of unambiguous definition whether a candidate is technical or not. However, taking into account the data on the candidates, it is possible to identify clear characteristics that help determine the technicality of the candidate. It can be belonging to or not belonging to a political party, a subject of nomination, and sometimes even a position or place of work.

In our opinion, among the namesake candidates, one of whom holds a position related to, for example, politics, economics or business, and the other is temporarily out of work, it is more likely that the clone candidate is unemployed. But this feature is not exclusive, as the mere fact that a candidate is temporarily out of work does not provide sufficient grounds to claim that person is a technical candidate, and at the same time, having an influential position does not guarantee that person is not a technical candidate. Also, a more influential and well-known candidate with political experience more likely is a victim candidate, and a less influential and well-known candidate is a clone candidate. This is due to the fact that the use of a clone candidate is mostly aimed at dragging votes from the victim candidate, which is

much more appropriate and effective to do regarding a well-known and popular candidate than vice versa.

In this context, it is important to reveal some additional aspects related to the specifics of using cloning technology. It is primarily about the connection between cloning technology and the type of electoral system. Cloning technology is more widely used within majoritarian and mixed (in its majoritarian component) electoral systems. This is due to the fact that under the conditions of a majoritarian electoral system, voting takes place for a specific candidate, who can be opposed relatively easily by a clone candidate. Within the framework of the proportional election system, cloning technology can also be used, but it will already apply not to the nomination of a namesake candidate, but to a political party that will have a similar name. But in the context of a proportional electoral system, it is more difficult to apply cloning technology than in the case of a majoritarian system, which, in particular, is connected with certain requirements for political parties participating in elections. For example, legislation may establish the existence of a certain period of party existence as a condition for participation in elections (which may make it difficult to quickly create a clone party).

Also, the use of cloning technology is related to the electoral ratings of candidates and the preferences of voters. It is about the fact that cloning technology is advisable to be used against leading candidates who have significant voter support and a real chance of being elected. In this case, cloning technology will pose a real threat to the victim candidate and may prevent him/her from winning the election. Otherwise (nomination of clone candidates against outsiders in electoral races), cloning technology will be both illogical and ineffective.

THE USE OF CLONE CANDIDATES IN ELECTION PRACTICE (ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE 2019 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION CAMPAIGN IN UKRAINE)

The use of technical candidates in elections is a manipulative technology inherent in Ukraine's electoral practice. It is known, that during the elections in Ukraine, clone candidates who are usually aimed at dragging votes from the rating namesake candidate or a representative of an organization or party with a similar name are the most often used. Therefore, in our opinion, it is worth focusing on the peculiarities of the use of cloning technology during the early parliamentary elections held on July 21, 2019.

The 2019 parliamentary elections in Ukraine were held on the basis of a mixed electoral system, according to which 225 deputies were elected in single-mandate majoritarian electoral districts, and 225 were elected in a single nationwide multi-mandate electoral district [Zakon 2019]. Such an electoral system led to the fact that cloning technology was used primarily in the majority component in single-mandate constituencies.

In addition, the parliamentary elections were extraordinary and were held only 3 months after the victory of Volodymyr Zelensky in the presidential elections in Ukraine. This also determined certain features of the application of cloning technology during the 2019 parliamentary elections in Ukraine. It is about the fact that Volodymyr Zelensky, being at the peak of his popularity (which, by the way, was the main reason for the early dissolution of the parliament), extended it to the Servant of the People political party, which he represented. Therefore, candidates for people's deputies from the presidential political party, due to the popularity of their political power, most often became the object against which cloning technology was used.

Norms of electoral legislation also contributed to the use of cloning technology. According to the law in force at the time, on the basis of which parliamentary elections were held in Ukraine, no restrictions were established regarding the running of namesake candidates in one electoral district [Zakon 2019]. In addition, in our opinion, the widespread opinion that the majority of Ukrainian voters are not interested in politics, elections and candidates was contributed to the use of cloning technology. Therefore, according to the plan of the political technologists who used the technology of cloning, it was supposed to be effective, because many voters could mistakenly vote for the clone candidate due to lack of knowledge and information.

So, analysing the data on candidates for the elections to the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine in 2019 [Perelik 2019], we concluded that cloning technology was actively used. In total, in 2019, 164 namesake candidates ran for the People's Deputies of Ukraine, based on information about whom we identified 57 potential direct clones. It should be noted that in assessing who, among namesake candidates, is a victim candidate and who is a clone candidate, we were guided by the voting results, believing that the real candidate (victim candidate) usually receives a higher percentage of votes than the clone candidate [Perelik 2019]. Among the total number of candidates running in single-mandate constituencies in the 2019 parliamentary elections, direct clone candidates accounted for 1.8 %.

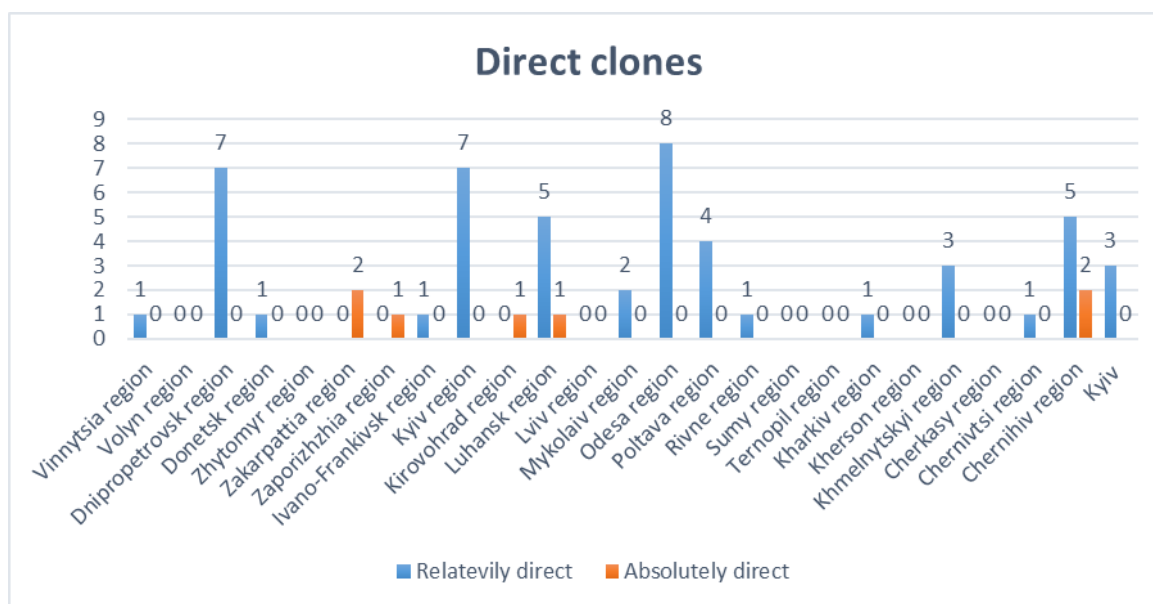


Figure 1. Frequency of using direct clones in the regions of Ukraine (parliamentary elections 2019)

Source: authors.

Thus, the largest number of direct clones was in Odessa region – 8 candidates (see Figure 1). Instead, direct cloning was not used in the following regions: Volyn, Zhytomyr, Lviv, Sumy, Ternopil, Kherson and Cherkasy regions. The largest number of direct clones was in constituencies № 34 and № 137 – 4 candidates in each one. In total, 7 absolutely direct clones took part in the elections. It is interesting to study the running of candidates in constituencies № 94, 92, 107, 113, 127, 133, 137, 207, 208, 209, where there were several direct clones against the real candidate (see Table 1).

Table 1

The phenomenon of using several direct clones against one victim candidate within a particular constituency in the elections to the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine in 2019

Sequence number of constituency	Number of direct clones	Surnames of victim candidates and clone candidates
1	2	3
92	2	Hudzenko
	3	Ferenets
94	3	Dubynskyi
	2	Kononenko
	1	Kononko

The End of the Table 1

1	2	3
107	3	Rybalka
113	2	Struk
127	2	Diatlov
133	3	Baranskyi
137	2	Honcharenko
	1	Klymov
	1	Klimov
207	2	Yevlakhov
208	2	Davydenko
209	2	Zub

Source: authors.

As for indirect cloning, it was most often used in Dnipropetrovsk region – 18 people; not used at all – in Volyn, Zakarpattia, Ivano-Frankivsk, Rivne, Ternopil and Khmelnytskyi regions (see Figure 2). In total, there were 77 indirect clones in the 2019 parliamentary elections in Ukraine. The largest number of such candidates within one constituency was in the constituency № 25 – 6 candidates [Perelik 2019]. Among the total number of candidates running in single-mandate constituencies in the 2019 parliamentary elections, indirect clone candidates accounted for 2.5 %.

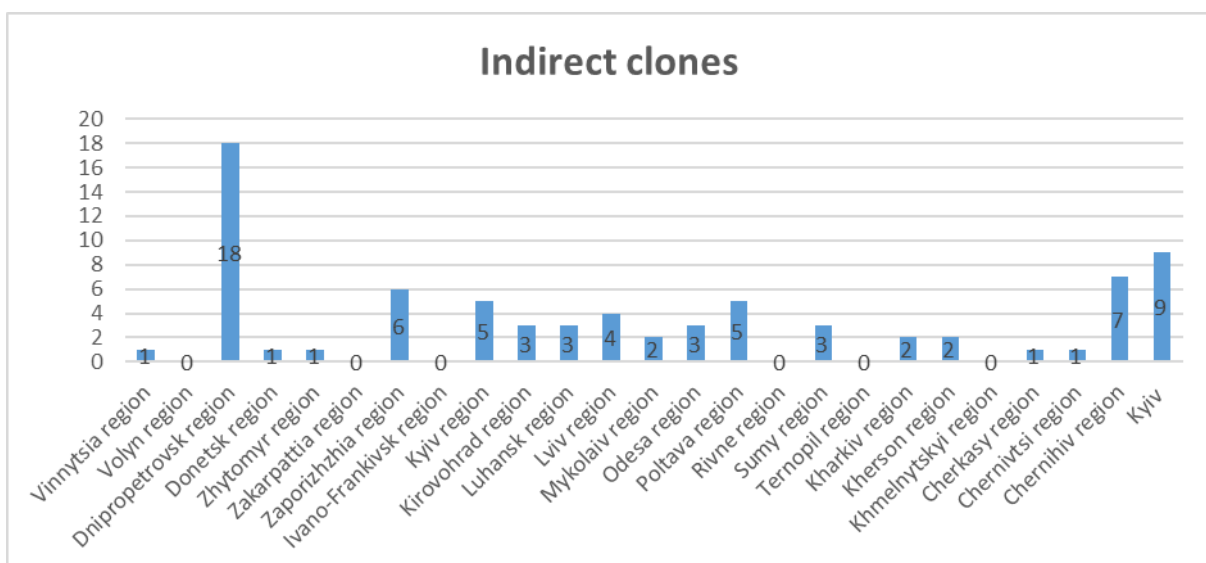


Figure 2. Frequency of use of indirect clones in the regions of Ukraine

Source: authors.

According to our research, 3 organizations (Holos! LLC, Golos PE, Holos PE) used the brand of the Holos political party for cloning; brand of UDAR party was used by private enterprise UDAR. Instead, the brand of the Servant of the People political party was used the most – in 26 different interpretations, including the names of 2 charitable foundations, 1 charitable organization, 10 public organizations, 1 public movement, 4 private enterprises, 8 LLCs [Perelik 2019].

Such cloning, in our opinion, is quite understandable, given the high popularity in 2019 of Volodymyr Zelensky and the Servant of the People party. For a better understanding of the situation, we visualized cloning in the names of NGOs and LLCs (see Figures 3, 4).

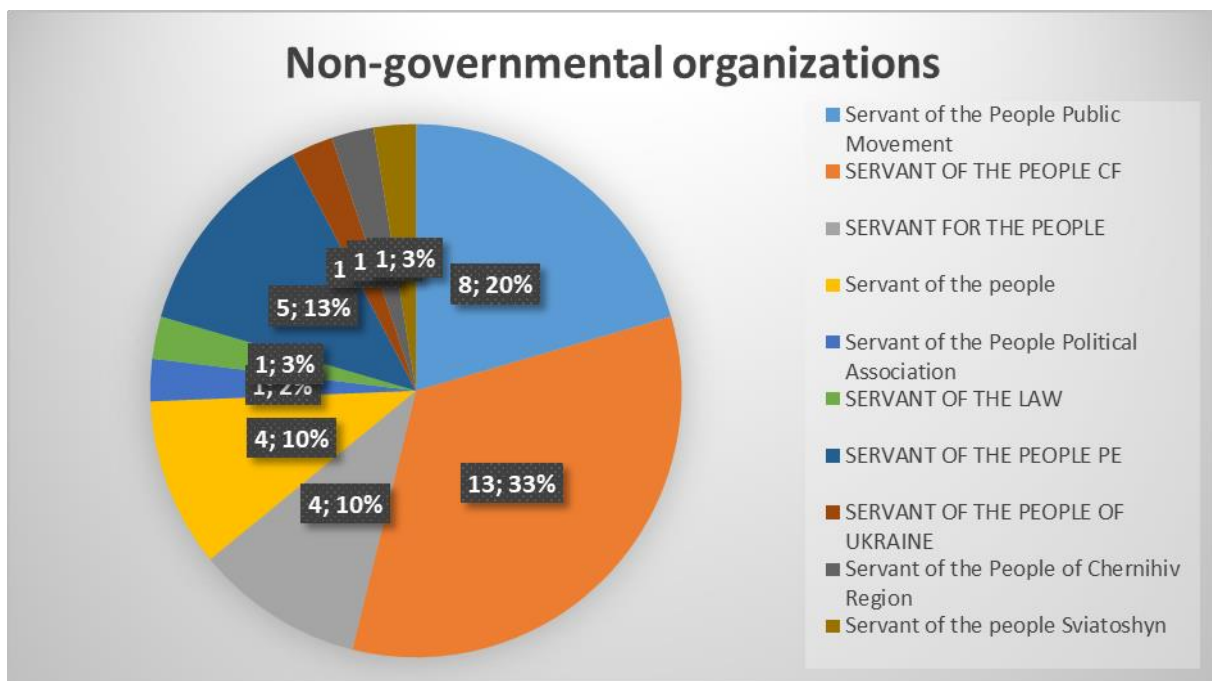


Figure 3. NGOs that used the brand of the Servant of the People party (2019 parliamentary elections)

Source: authors.

We also determined that 8 double clones, who had similar full name to the real candidate and the name of the organization (in all eight cases, the second parameter of double cloning was affiliation to a certain organization with a name close to or identical to the Servant of the People party), took part in the election campaign: in Odesa and Kyiv regions – 3 candidates in each one; in Zaporizhzhia and Sumy regions – 1 candidate in each one (see Table 2).

The 2019 parliamentary elections were also characterized by the participation of clone candidates who withdrew their candidacies (so-called “pseudo-clones”). There

were 23 such candidates; the most – in the constituency № 25 – 4 candidates (see Figure 5) [Perelik 2019].

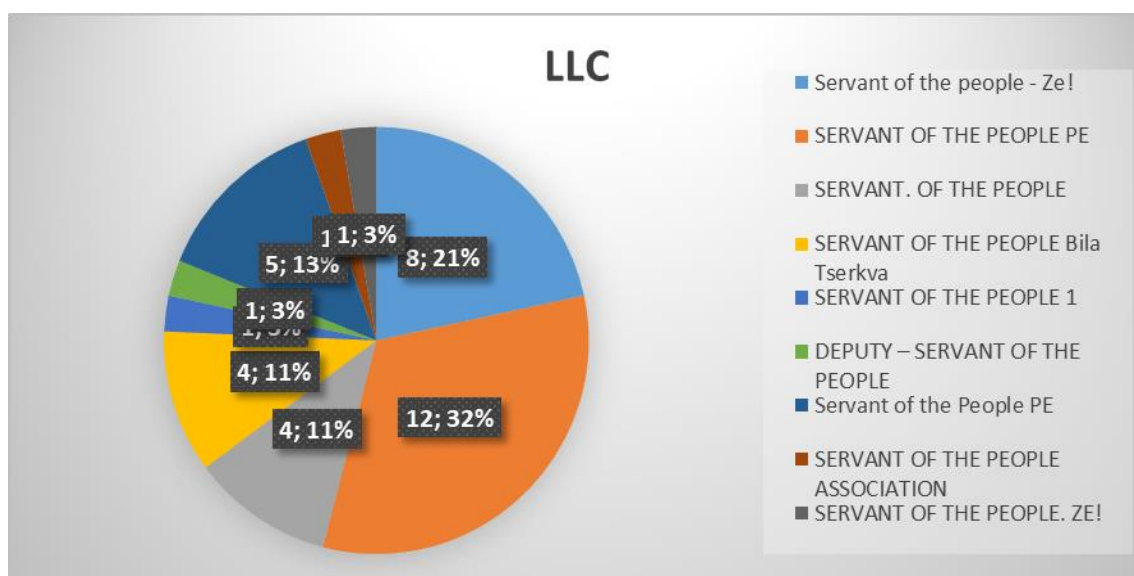


Figure 4. LLCs that used the brand of the Servant of the People party (2019 parliamentary elections)

Source: authors.

Table 2

Use of double clones during the 2019 parliamentary elections in Ukraine

Sequence number of constituency	Region	Full name of double clones	Full name of victim candidate
1	2	3	4
78	Zaporizhzhia	Vasyl Ivanovych Bohovin	Vitalii Viktorovych Bohovin
94	Kyiv	Vadym Volodymyrovych Dubynskiy	Oleksandr Anatoliiovych Dubynskiy
		Maksym Mykolaiovych Dubynskiy	
95		Dmytro Ivanovych Horobets	Oleksandr Serhiiiovych Horobets
133	Odesa	Artem Yaroslavovych Dmytruk	Artem Hennadiiovych Dmytruk
135		Yevhen Mykhailovych Leonov	Oleksii Oleksandrovych Leonov

The End of the Table 2

1	2	3	4
139		Vasyl Mykolaiovych Vasylkovskyi	Ihor Ihorovych Vasylkovskyi
159	Sumy	Dmytro Stanislavovych Shevchenko	Dmytro Stanislavovych Shevchenko

Source: authors.

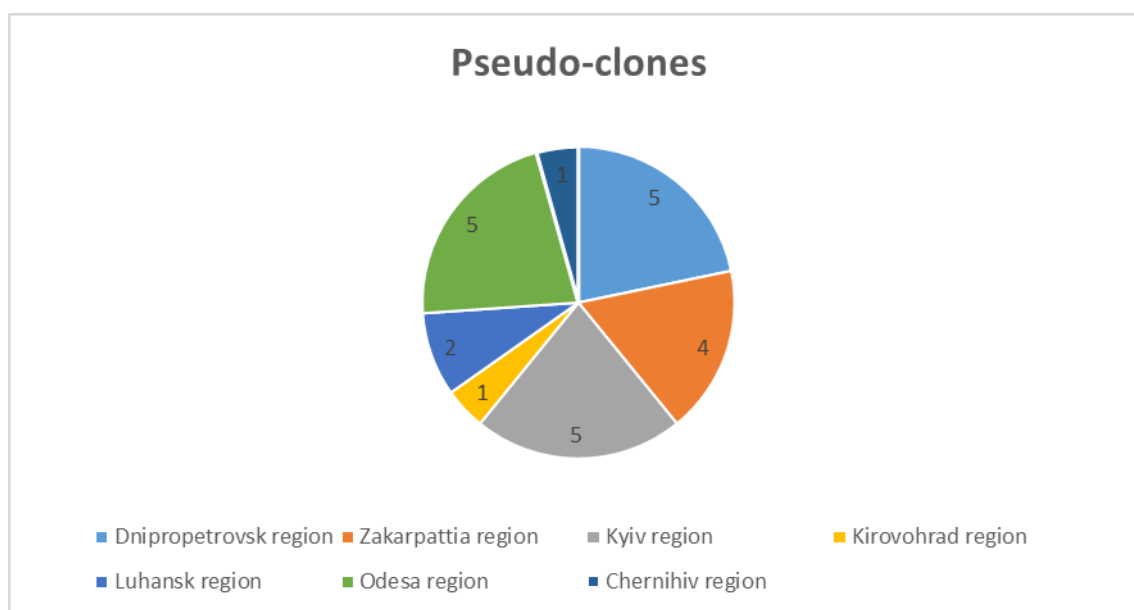


Figure 5. The number of pseudo-clones in the 2019 parliamentary elections in the regional context

Source: authors.

THE LEVEL OF EFFICIENCY OF CLONING TECHNOLOGY IN THE 2019 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN UKRAINE

According to our estimates, there were 161 clones among the candidates for People’s Deputies of Ukraine. The leader in the use of twin candidates was Dnipropetrovsk region (30 candidates) and constituency № 94 (8 candidates). Cloning technology was not used in Volyn and Ternopil regions.

Despite the quantitative characteristics of the use of clone candidates, the outcome of the election is crucial. It is important to understand that it is the result of the vote that determines whether a clone candidate has achieved its goal, thus demonstrating the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of cloning technology. This does not apply to pseudo-clones whose candidacies are not on the ballot on election day,

or to those technical candidates who have a specific goal that they achieve by participating in the election itself, regardless of the results (PR, preparation for the next election, etc.).

In our opinion, the effectiveness of cloning technology is determined by the ratio of results between the clone candidate, the victim candidate and the winning candidate. We can speak more or less clearly about the effectiveness of cloning technology only if the victim candidate lost the election and the number of votes received by the clone candidate (the number of votes taken by the clone candidate from the victim candidate) would be sufficient for the victim candidate to become the winner.

Therefore, the condition for the effectiveness of cloning technology can be represented by the following formula:

$E = R_v + R_c > R_1$, where:

E – efficiency of cloning technology;

R_v – the number of votes received by the victim candidate;

R_c – the number of votes received by the clone candidate;

R_1 – the number of votes received by the winner of the election.

However, the absence of the above-mentioned conditions does not mean that cloning technology is clearly inefficient. It can hypothetically be effective in any case where the victim candidate loses the election. This means that our proposed formula shows only the direct impact of voting technology (direct withdrawal of votes by a clone candidate from a victim candidate). However, cloning technology can also have an indirect effect, as the presence and actions of a clone candidate may result in some voters planning to vote for the victim candidate eventually voting for a third candidate.

However, such indirect impact of cloning technology is very difficult to calculate. In addition, cloning technology can help the victim candidate win, provided candidate can inform voters that dirty election technologies are used against him/her and gain the support of the electorate who is often inclined to vote for those against whom they act immorally. Finally, if the victim candidate wins the election, we can speak unequivocally about the ineffectiveness of cloning technology.

Analysing the information on the election results, which is posted on the official website of the Central Election Commission of Ukraine, we concluded that the cloning technology was successfully implemented in 8 constituencies № 37, 64, 78, 106, 119, 146, 198, 210 [Protocol 2019 № 37; Protocol 2019 № 64; Protocol 2019 № 78; Protocol 2019 № 106; Protocol 2019 № 119; Protocol 2019 № 146; Protocol 2019

№ 198; Protocol 2019 № 210; Perelik 2019 and others]. The success of the cloning was that the rating candidate did not win due to the dragging of votes by the clone candidates.

For example, in constituency № 37 candidate Ihor Fartushnyi lacked 1,209 votes to win. Given the fact that the twin candidates in this constituency received a total of 12,454 votes, it can be assumed that without their participation in the election, Ihor Fartushnyi could have won [Protocol 2019 № 37; Perelik 2019: 9–10].

A similar situation was in the constituency №64. Viacheslav Sihachov lacked 641 votes to win. And his indirect clone candidate in this constituency Anatolii Areshkov received 5,872 votes [Protocol 2019 № 64; Perelik 2019: 13]. Instead, in the constituency №78, Vitalii Viktorovych Bohovin did not win due to a lack of 3,290 votes, and his clone candidate, Vasyl Ivanovych Bohovin, received 3,860 votes [Protocol 2019 № 78; Perelik 2019: 16].

Besides, without the use of cloning technology, Yurii Furman could have won in election district No. 106, but the twin candidate “took away” 1,622 votes from him. Yurii Furman lacked 1,002 votes to win [Protocol 2019 No. 106; Perelik 2019: 22].

In addition, without the use of cloning technology, Orest Kavetskyi could have won in constituency №119, but the twin candidate “withdrew” 2,409 votes from him. In fact, Orest Kavetskyi lacked only 140 votes to win [Protocol 2019 № 119; Perelik 2019: 24]. Cloning was also successful in constituency №146, where Feliks Urin lacked 2,707 votes to victory, and clones in this constituency received a total of 3,641 votes [Protocol 2019 № 146; Perelik 2019: 29–30].

In constituency № 198, clone candidate Oleksandr Pyliukhno withdrew 1,419 votes from the victim candidate. As a result, Nataliia Diachenko was defeated by another candidate with a difference of 1,016 votes [Protocol 2019 № 198; Perelik 2019: 39].

Also, without the use of cloning technology, Dmytro Pakhomov could have won in electoral district No. 210, but the twin candidates “took away” 5,672 votes from him. D. Pakhomov lacked 3,105 votes to win [Protocol 2019 No. 210; Perelik 2019: 41].

By the way, this influence of clone candidates on the results of the 2019 parliamentary elections in Ukraine is also confirmed by the OSCE/ODIHR. In its report based on the results of monitoring the elections to the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, the International Mission of OSCE/ODIHR states that in 7 electoral districts clone candidates were able to deprive the candidates from the Servant of the People party of victory, and in 1 electoral district the opposite happened: clone candidate took votes from the main rival of the representative of the Servant of the People party, thanks to which the latter managed to win [Early 2019].

For more details on the effectiveness of cloning technology, see Table 3.

Table 3

**Effectiveness of cloning technology during the 2019
parliamentary elections in Ukraine**

Winning candidate	Victim candidate	Clone candidate	Type of cloning	Efficiency of cloning
1	2	3	4	5
Constituency № 37				
Dmytro Yuriiovych Shpenov (24 739)	Ihor Ivanovych Fartushnyi (23 531)	Valentyn Vasylovych Hryzhuk (2 019)	Indirect clone	E=23 531 + (2 019 + 1 811 + 3 665 + 1 511 + 2 336 + 1 112) = 23 531 + 12 454 = 35 985 >24 739
		Anton Volodymyrovych Kravchenko (1 811)	Indirect clone	
		Pavlo Oleksandrovych Prykhodko (3 665)	Indirect clone	
		Oleksandr Oleksandrovych Riabovol (1 511)	Indirect clone	
		Alyona Viktorivna Tovkun (2 336)	Indirect clone	
		Mykola Mykolaiovych Fartushnyi (1 112)	Relatively direct clone	
		Constituency № 64		
Volodymyr Yuriiovych Areshonkov (22 056)	Viacheslav Valeriiovych Sihachov (21 416)	Anatolii Mykhailovych Areshkov (5 872)	Indirect clone	E=21 416 + 5 872 = 27 288 >22 056
Constituency № 78				
Oleksandr Serhiiiovych Ponomaryov (27 488)	Vitalii Viktorovych Bohovin (24 199)	Vasyl Ivanovych Bohovin (3 860)	Relatively direct clone	E=24 199 + 3 860 = 28 059 >27 488

The End of the Table 3

1	2	3	4	5
Constituency № 106				
Oleksii Oleksandrovych Kuznietsov (10 125)	Yurii Anatoliiovych Furman (9 123)	Andrii Leonidovych Furman (1 622)	Relatively direct clone	E=9 123 + 1 622= 10 745 >10 125
Constituency № 119				
Mykhailo Leontiovych Bondar (12 789)	Orest Yuriovych Kavetskyi (12 650)	Vitalii Volodymyrovych Kravchuk (2 409)	Indirect clone	E=12 650 + 2 409 = 15 059 >12 789
Constituency № 146				
Yurii Anatoliiovych Shapovalov (19 206)	Feliks Oleksandrovych Urin (16 500)	Tetiana Valentynivna Aleksienko (864)	Indirect clone	E=16 500 + (864 + 1 006 + 1 193 + 578) = 16 500 + 3 641 = 20 141 >19 206
		Vitalii Mykolaiovych Dediurin (1 006)	Indirect clone	
		Iryna Viktorivna Drozdova (1 193)	Indirect clone	
		Kyrylo Volodymyrovych Kuzmin (578)	Indirect clone	
Constituency № 198				
Serhii Yaroslavovych Rudyk (18 921)	Nataliia Oleksandrivna Diachenko (17 906)	Oleksandr Ivanovych Pyliukhno (1 419)	Indirect clone	E=17 906 + 1 419 = 19 325 >18 921
Constituency № 210				
Borys Viktorovych Prykhodko (16 436)	Dmytro Anatoliiovych Pakhomov (13 331)	Roman Petrovych Borsuk (4 476)	Indirect clone	E=13 331 + (4476 + 1196) = 13 331 + 5672 = 19 003 >16 436
		Mykhailo Yuriovych Lukianchuk (1 196)	Indirect clone	

Source: authors.

PECULIARITIES AND PROBLEMS OF COUNTERING THE USE OF CLONING TECHNOLOGY IN UKRAINE

The difficulty in opposing a dirty election technology like cloning is that the technology is not well regulated. Therefore, it is very complicated, even dangerous, to prohibit its use by the norms of election legislation. The point is that it is practically impossible to clearly prove in any specific case that the appearance of several namesake candidates in the same electoral district is an unequivocal indication that cloning technology is being used. Since the fact that there are candidates with the same surname can be a coincidence. Therefore, we can recognise the use of cloning technology by indirect features, such as the status and chances of candidates with the same surname, their actions during elections, etc. However, even if all the signs are present, it is very difficult to officially prove the use of this dirty technology.

Therefore, the legislative ban on the use of namesake candidates may, on the contrary, unreasonably limit the electoral rights of candidates with the same surname who happened to be in the same electoral district by coincidence. Moreover, in such a case, the use of cloning technology would acquire additional possibilities: in this way, a real candidate could be deprived of the opportunity to run, by nominating a clone candidate on the first day of the election and positioning the real candidate as a clone.

Thus, the fight against cloning technology should take place primarily in the technological direction, by using counter-technologies. In this case, it is considered most effective to systematically inform voters that a clone candidate is running in their district, citing convincing facts and arguments for this. After all, a conscious and informed electorate is always one of the best mechanisms against dirty election technology.

In addition, according to the Electoral Code adopted after the 2019 parliamentary elections in Ukraine, the next elections to the Parliament of Ukraine should already be held on the basis of a proportional electoral system [Election 2019]. It is less favorable for the use of cloning technology. Therefore, we can assume that the scale and efficiency of cloning technology in Ukraine will decrease in the future.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

World and Ukrainian election practice is characterized by a fairly large use of technical candidates – fictitious persons who participate in the election campaign, with a specific goal, not related to victory, but aimed at realizing the interests of other subjects of the election process by manipulating voters.

One of the most common and effective types of technical candidates is a clone candidate. We consider it expedient to divide them into 3 groups: 1) direct clones (candidates who have the same surnames, and often – even names and patronymics with the victim candidate); 2) indirect clones (candidates who have jobs or are related to public organizations or private enterprises that are similar or consonant with the parties, enterprises or organizations to which the victim candidates are related); 3) double clones (candidates who combine elements of direct and indirect cloning).

During the 2019 parliamentary elections, cloning technology was used quite actively, and the victims of the technology were primarily candidates from the Servant of the People party, which is understandable, given the high popularity in 2019 of the recently elected President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky and the Servant of the People party, with which he was associated by voters. As a result, other candidates often sought to manipulate voters by creating or renaming own enterprises, organizations, or movements so that their names were similar or consonant with the Servant of the People party. In the west of the country, where the Holos party was popular at the time, there were also frequent cases of using indirect cloning technology against this party.

In total, during the 2019 parliamentary elections in Ukraine, we identified 57 direct clone candidates, 77 indirect clone candidates and 8 double clone candidates. According to the results of the elections, cloning technology proved to be effective in 6 constituencies, potentially depriving victim candidates of the opportunity to be elected, as the number of votes received by potential clone candidates in these constituencies was greater than the number of votes that the victim candidates did not have enough to win the election. Candidates nominated by the Servant of the People party, have become victims of cloning technology in all these constituencies. However, when claiming the effectiveness of cloning technology, we do so with some caution, because we understand that the outcome of the election is influenced by a whole range of factors, so we can never be 100 % sure that without the use of cloning technology, these victim candidates would be guaranteed to win.

The difficulty of combating cloning technology is that, on the one hand, it is a “dirty” election technology that dishonestly and undemocratically affects the course of elections. However, on the other hand, the cloning technology, as a rule, does not violate the election law, while ignoring the moral and ethical principles of elections. Therefore, given the technological nature of the phenomenon, it is necessary to combat this phenomenon, first of all, technologically, using counter-technologies.

As not all voters actively monitor the election process, do not analyse the information about the candidates, so, eventually, they can vote for such candidates for whom election slogans, programs and promises mean nothing, and even victory in the election is not significant for them. Thus, the most effective mechanism for counteracting the impact of cloning technology is to widely and timely inform voters about the use of this technology, clarify that certain candidates are clones and pursue other goals, and vote in support of them will be the result of effective manipulation. It is important that the presence of a high level of political and electoral culture of voters can neutralize the impact of cloning technology.

Besides, effective fight against cloning technology will have a snowball effect and reduce the scale of its use in geometric progression. This is due to the fact that cloning technology is often quite resource-intensive, so seeing its inefficiency, candidates and political parties will consider it more appropriate to use resources for their own popularization, rather than cloning technology, the effectiveness of which in their eyes will be questionable.

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FROM BYTES TO JOBS: DECODING BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA'S EMPLOYMENT PUZZLE THROUGH FDI AND ICT

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Abstract

Bosnia and Herzegovina's transition from socialism to capitalism has led to fundamental changes in the country's economic structure, with unemployment, FDI, economic growth, and information technologies becoming critical factors in this process. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) can promote economic growth and generate employment, helping to tackle unemployment through various channels. Bosnia and Herzegovina has been facing long-term unemployment for years. Thus, this study uses an Autoregressive Distributed Lag (ARDL) bounds testing approach and structural break technique to explore the impact of FDI, ICT, and growth on unemployment in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the period 1997–2022. The research findings indicate that FDI has a negative impact on unemployment in the long run. On the other hand, ICT has a positive impact on unemployment in the long run. Moreover, empirical findings demonstrated that there is a negative and significant relationship

between growth and unemployment in the long run. This implies the validity of Okun's Law for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Furthermore, the study brings forth a crucial insight that the impacts of FDI on unemployment are not uniform and differ significantly based on the type of FDI inflows.

Keywords: unemployment, FDI, ICT, economic growth, Bosnia & Herzegovina.

JEL Classification: C22, J64, O11

1. INTRODUCTION

Bosnia and Herzegovina, as a Balkan country, witnessed the most significant devastation, corruption, and ethnic conflict in post-World War II Europe, resulting in severe consequences for the nation. The war, which led to the deaths of millions, left the country with deep wounds [Yazıcı, 2018: 96]. In the 1980s, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) was one of the most dynamic republics within the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. However, following the declaration of independence in April 1992, the country plunged into a devastating war that lasted until November 1995. This conflict caused the displacement of approximately 1.2 million people and resulted in widespread physical and economic destruction. The current political structure of Bosnia and Herzegovina was established through the General Framework Agreement for Peace, which ended the war [Bartlett et al., 2012: 202].

During its time as part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Bosnia and Herzegovina operated under a socialist economic model characterized by central planning, state control over the economy, and worker cooperatives, which were the primary determinants of production processes. However, by the late 1980s, the economic crisis that plagued Yugoslavia rendered the socialist structure unsustainable. Political turmoil and the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s led to Bosnia and Herzegovina's descent into the Bosnian War from 1992 to 1995. The war decimated the country's economic infrastructure and plunged the economy into a severe collapse. With the end of the war and the signing of the Dayton Agreement in 1995, Bosnia and Herzegovina's political and economic framework was fundamentally reshaped. Following the Dayton Agreement, the country made efforts to rapidly adapt to a capitalist economy. Economic recovery and transformation were recognized as essential to the success of the Dayton process and the survival of the Bosnian state. However, the original privatization timeline in Bosnia implied that privatization was to be completed before the broader economic reforms and institutional rebuilding had even fully commenced [Donais, 2002: 3–5].

While peace was established in 1995 following the Dayton Agreement, Bosnia and Herzegovina faced significant challenges in transitioning from a socialist system to a capitalist market economy. During this period, privatization, the promotion of foreign direct investment (FDI), and free market reforms were implemented. However, the complexity of the transition, combined with the economic and social issues resulting from the post-war destruction, limited the effectiveness of these reforms. Bosnia and Herzegovina encountered high unemployment rates during its transition from socialism to capitalism. In 1996, unemployment in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina was estimated at 50 %. The Bosnian population continues to suffer from severe economic problems, with an unemployment rate of 20.5 % and 17.2 % of the population living below the poverty line [Sancaktar, 2018: 216].

The closure of many state-controlled enterprises during privatization and the limited availability of new job opportunities were among the primary causes of unemployment. When examining the unemployment rates in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1991 to the present, the highest rate was recorded in 2006, at 31.1 %. In the past five years, the unemployment rate has gradually decreased, reaching 15.7 % in 2019, 15.9 % in 2020, 14.9 % in 2021, 12.7 % in 2022, and 11.8 % in 2023 [World Bank, 2024].

Foreign direct investment (FDI) has been pivotal in Bosnia and Herzegovina's post-war rebuilding and economic recovery. Particularly in sectors such as energy, construction, and banking, foreign investments have accelerated economic growth and increased job creation potential in some regions. Although FDI began arriving in the early 2000s, its volume has not been particularly high. Between May 1994 and 2018, the total FDI inflow to the country amounted to approximately 7.31 billion EUR [Ministry of Commerce, 2022]. In 2020, FDI inflows amounted to 421 million EUR. Revised data from the Central Bank of Bosnia and Herzegovina indicate that in 2021, FDI reached 578 million EUR, representing a 37.2 % increase compared to the previous year. By 2022, FDI amounted to 736.4 million EUR, marking a 27.5 % increase from the previous year and reaching the highest levels since 2007 [FIBA, 2024].

Economic growth in Bosnia and Herzegovina has followed a volatile trajectory during the post-war reconstruction period. While growth rates surged at times during the recovery, political and institutional weaknesses, alongside a lack of investment and challenges in the labor market, hindered sustainable development. The heavy blow dealt to the industrial and agricultural sectors during the war contributed to uncertainty in growth rates. Economic growth in Bosnia and

Herzegovina was relatively high between 1998 and 2007, though it was frequently obstructed by increasing institutional and political barriers [Zupcevic and Causevic, 2010: 39]. After maintaining similar growth rates in 2009 and 2010, the economy contracted by 0.7 % in 2012. Despite the Bosnian economy reaching a value of approximately 20 billion USD by 2019, growth between 2013 and 2019 remained modest, with an average annual rate of 2.8 %. In 2020, the economy contracted by 3.1 % due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic [DEIK, 2022]. However, the economy rebounded strongly, growing by 7.4 % in 2021 and by 4.12 % in 2022 [World Bank, 2024].

Since the early 2000s, Bosnia and Herzegovina has invested in information and communication technologies (ICT), with developments in these sectors having a positive impact on economic growth. According to reports from several institutions and organizations, the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2003 did not differ significantly from that of 2002 (Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2004: 165). Investments in information technologies created job opportunities for the young population and accelerated the country's integration into global markets through digitalization. However, the growth of this sector remained limited, and its impact on broader economic expansion was relatively weak. The dynamics of unemployment, foreign direct investment (FDI), economic growth rates, and the development of the ICT sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina are critical in understanding the country's transition from socialism to capitalism and the resulting economic transformation. To analyze the transformations during this period and examine the relationship between various economic indicators, one of the time series analysis methods, the ARDL (Autoregressive Distributed Lag) model, is employed, to research the impact of foreign direct investment, information and communication technology, and economic growth on unemployment in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the period 1997–2022. The study is crucial in terms of being conducted specifically in Bosnia and Herzegovina and its empirical results. The paper is organized as follows. In this paper, in the introduction part of the study, information is enlightened about the development of direct foreign investment, developments in information and technology, economic growth rates, and unemployment rates of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and then a literature review is offered in Section 2. Subsequently, Section 3 describes the data and methodology used in the study. 4 section, evaluations and recommendations are emphasized in the light of the findings.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Theoretical Literature Review

Unemployment has significant economic effects, particularly leading to a reduction in overall production. In the economic literature, Okun's Law emerged from a proposition put forward by Arthur Okun in 1962. Based on data from the post-World War II period in the United States (1948–1960), Okun's Law describes the inverse relationship between changes in the unemployment rate and the gap between actual and potential Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Named after the economist, this concept gained prominence through Okun's analysis of U.S. economic growth and unemployment figures. Okun observed that during years of high real growth, the unemployment rate declined, whereas, during periods of low or even negative real growth, unemployment increased. By expressing the relationship between real growth and unemployment in a formula, Okun's findings eventually referred to as “Okun's Law” [Okun, 1962: 93]. According to Okun's law, it is stated that every 1 % economic growth rate above 2.25 %, which is the average growth rate of the USA in that period, reduces the unemployment rate by 0.5 points. This law is expressed mathematically as follows:

$$\Delta u = -0,5(y - 2,25) \quad (1)$$

Where Δu denotes the change in the unemployment rate and y denotes the current period economic growth rate. In general, the relationship proposed by Okun;

$$\Delta u = \beta(y - y^*) \quad (2)$$

can be expressed as follows. In this equation, y^* represents the average growth rate [Okun, 1962).

Studies in the literature examining the relationship between unemployment and economic growth: Evans [1989] in this study of the United States economy from 1950 to 1985, revealed a negative relationship between the growth of output and the rate of unemployment. Weber [1995] analyzed the relationship between cyclical unemployment rates and cyclical GDP in the U.S. economy during World War II using a dynamic model, and his results supported the Okun coefficient. Moosa [1999] sought to estimate the Okun coefficient for the United States over the period from Q1 1947 to Q2 1992 using the dynamic ARDL (Autoregressive Distributed Lag) method. These findings indicated that increased economic growth had a mitigating effect on the unemployment rate. Lee [2000] carries out an analysis covering 16 OECD countries. The results indicated that there is a cointegrating relationship between unemployment and growth variables. Silverstone and Harris [2001] analyzed the relationship between unemployment and output levels for seven OECD

member countries for the period 1978–1999 using the Asymmetric Error-Correction Model. The empirical results of the study revealed that there is no long-run relationship between unemployment and output levels of countries., Viren [2001] in this study using data from 1960 to 1997 for OECD countries, found that the curve derived from Okun's Law is non-linear. It was concluded that when the economic growth rate exceeds the long-term average growth rate, it has a negative effect on unemployment, thereby reducing it. Sogner and Stiassny [2002] in their study of 15 OECD countries, found that the response of unemployment to economic growth varies across countries. In nations with highly protected labor markets, the reaction of unemployment to growth is relatively muted, and unemployment tends to be more persistent in these countries.

The neo-liberal school, recognized as the pro-foreign investment school, disputes that foreign direct investments can have a very significant impact on the economic development of host countries. Contrary to this presentation of the pro-foreign investment school, advocates of dependency theory realize foreign direct investment as the advance guard of the new diplomacy of economic imperialism. According to them, the penetration of foreign investors into the host economy will result in 'disarticulated development' [Karimov et al., 2020: 455–456].

Economists have focused more on their effects and roles in economic theories rather than the definition of information and technology. There is an augmenting number of studies on Information and Communication Technologies in GDP and economic growth, and several articles analyzing the impact of Information and Communication Technologies investments on GDP growth [Madden and Savage, 1998; Pohjola, 2001, Jorgenson, 2001; Colecchia and Schreyer, 2001; 2002].

2.2. Literature Review of Bosnia and Herzegovina

In the literature review, studies specific to Bosnia and Herzegovina are very limited. The studies were generally conducted within the scope of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Eastern European countries, and Western Balkan countries.

Göçer and Erdal [2015] analyzed the relationship between youth unemployment and economic growth through new generation panel data analysis and cointegration tests using the Okun Law. The geographies of 18 Central and Eastern European countries were analyzed for the period 2006–2012. According to research results, it has been found that economic growth rates will diminish youth unemployment.

Kurtovic et al., [2015] examined the long-run relationship between foreign direct investment (FDI) and unemployment in the Western Balkan countries between 1998 and 2012. Panel data models, cointegration, vector error correction model

(VECM), and Granger causality test were applied in the study. According to the results of the study, it is emphasized that there is a long-term relationship between FDI and unemployment that the variables are cointegrated, and that FDI positively affects the reduction of unemployment in the Western Balkan countries.

Grahovac and Softić [2017] researched the correlation between global unemployment rates and foreign direct investment flows in the Western Balkan countries and highlighted the comparative analysis with selected countries in the period between 2000 and 2014. Only Foreign Direct Investment in Croatia has a positive effect on unemployment. In other countries, FDI inflows are insufficient to affect unemployment.

Kukaj [2018] examined the relationship between unemployment and GDP growth in 7 countries in the Western Balkans (Croatia, Bosnia, and Herzegovina, Albania, Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro, and Macedonia,) within the period 2001–2015. According to the research findings, it is emphasized that there is a statistically important relationship between unemployment and economic growth in the Western Balkans. It has been revealed that unemployment has a negative effect on economic growth.

Mamuti and Gania [2019], in this study, the relationship between foreign direct investment and economic growth and unemployment in selected countries of the Western Balkan region (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Albania) was examined within the framework of the 2005–2015 periods. Multiple regression was used in the study. According to the study results, it has been demonstrated that foreign direct investment has an important effect on economic growth considering the three countries in the Western Balkans. However, the hypothesis was rejected for the country of Bosnia and Herzegovina. That is, foreign direct investment does not have an important effect on economic growth in this country. When control variables vary according to both time and cross-sectional units, it demonstrates that the effect of FDI on unemployment is not statistically significant.

Eric et al., [2020] investigated whether the Okun Law was valid for the period 2000–2019 in the economy of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Regression analysis was utilized in the study. It has been concluded that Bosnia and Herzegovina have inversely proportional trends between unemployment and GDP.

Tumanoska [2020], in this study, economic growth and youth unemployment rates for the periods 1991–2017 were examined in two ways: 7 South Eastern European countries and 14 EU countries. ARDL model and panel data analysis were utilized in the study. According to the study results, it was indicated that there was a significant relationship between economic growth and unemployment rates.

2.3. Empirical Literature Review

Table 1 demonstrates the studies in the literature in the context of unemployment and economic growth variables. The relationship between economic growth and unemployment was revealed in the study conducted for the US economy in 1962 and took its place in the literature as Okun's Law. Several studies have confirmed the validity of Okun's Law in different countries. These studies demonstrate the inverse relationship between economic growth and unemployment. The works that have proven the applicability of Okun's Law include Doğan et al. [2015], Dritsakis and Stamatio [2016], Soylyu et al. [2017], Karikari-Apau, and Abeti, [2019], Khalid et al. [2021], and Amor [2023].

Table 1

**The Studies in the Literature in the Context of Unemployment
and Economic Growth Variables**

Authors	Country	Data Period	Method	Main Results
1	2	3	4	5
Doğan et al., [2015]	Türkiye	1988–2012	Vector Autoregression Model, Johansen Cointegration Analysis, Impulse-Response Analysis	According to the research's results, it has been indicated that Okun's Law is valid between unemployment and economic growth in Turkey and the direction of the relationship changes periodically.
Dritsakis and Stamatio [2016]	Greece	1995–2015	ARDL Bound Testing and VECM Granger Causality	It has been emphasized that there is a unilateral causality relationship between unemployment and economic growth in both the short and long term and that

The Continuation of the Table 1

1	2	3	4	5
				there is a direction towards unemployment and economic growth.
Soylu et al., [2017]	Eastern European Countries	1992–2014	Panel Data Analysis	It has been shown that unemployment in Eastern European countries is positively influenced by economic growth.
Seth et al., [2018]	Nigeria	1986–2015	ARDL Bound Testing	The study's findings indicate that there is no long-term connection between the unemployment rate and economic growth in Nigeria.
Karikari-Abau and Abeti [2019]	China	1991–2018	ARDL Bound Testing	It has been emphasized that both short-term and long-term relationships exist between the unemployment rate and economic growth in the Chinese economy.
Khalid et al., [2021]	South Africa	1980–2018	VAR Analysis	The research findings indicate that there is a bidirectional causality between economic growth and unemployment in South Africa, with

The Continuation of the Table 1

1	2	3	4	5
				both influencing each other. The results of the impulse response analysis display that the response of economic growth to the unemployment rate is positively significant in the long run.
Thapa et al., [2022]	Nepal	1991–2020	The Dynamic Version Approach, Granger Causality Test	In the study, it was emphasized that Okun's law is not valid for the Nepalese economy. To the causality results, it was demonstrated that there is no causal relationship between economic growth and unemployment.
Niyangabo and Zhong [2023]	Burundi	1990–2021	ARDL Bound Testing	According to the results, it has been determined that unemployment has both short- and long-term causal effects on economic growth.
Abid et al., [2023]	Algeria	1970–2018	NARDL Model	It has been displayed that positive and negative changes in the GDP gap of the Algerian economy

The End of the Table 1

1	2	3	4	5
				have a significant negative impact on the unemployment gap in the long term.
Amor [2023]	Tunisia	1980–2020	ARDL Bound Testing	It has been shown that there is a strong cointegration between the growth rate and the unemployment rate, confirming the validity of Okun's Law.

Source: Authors' Compilation.

Table 2 displays the studies in the literature in the context of unemployment and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) variables. Table 2 presents various studies that examine the positive and negative effects of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and unemployment in different countries. Some studies (Irpan et al., [2016], Alalewneh and Nessa [2020], Johnny et al., [2018], Alkopani [2020] highlight the potential of FDI to stimulate job creation, enhance productivity, and boost economic growth, ultimately reducing unemployment.

Table 2

Studies in the Literature in the Context of Unemployment and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Variables

Authors	Country	Data Period	Method	Main Results
1	2	3	4	5
Mucuk and Demirsel [2013]	Chile, Argentina, Colombia, Thailand, Philippines, Uruguay, Turkey,	1981–2019	Panel Data Analysis	In the 7 countries examined in the study, foreign direct investment and unemployment move along in the long term. However, while direct foreign investments increase unemployment in Türkiye

The Continuation of the Table 2

1	2	3	4	5
				and Argentina, FDI decreases it in Thailand.
Strat et al., [2015]	Latest 13 Member States of the EU	1991–2012	VAR Model, Granger Causality Test	It was determined that there was no causality relationship between the variables for six countries, but it was revealed that there was a unidirectional causal relationship in the remaining countries.
Irpan et al., [2016]	Malaysia	1980–2012	ARDL Bound Testing	It has been emphasized that FDI considerably affects the unemployment rate in Malaysia.
Garang et al., [2018]	Uganda	1993–2015	ARDL Bound Testing	The study displayed that foreign direct investment did not reduce unemployment in Uganda. It was revealed that there is no statistically important relationship in the short- and long-term dynamics of the model.
Johnny et al., [2018]	Nigeria	1980–2015	Ordinary Least Square Model (OLS)	It has been displayed that the relationship between foreign direct investment and the unemployment rate in Nigeria is negative and insignificant.
Karimov et al., [2020]	Türkiye	1980–2017	Johansen Co-Integration and Granger Causality Test	According to test result, it was revealed that there is a one-way causality from Foreign Direct Investment to unemployment. According to the Johansen Co-Integration test results, it was

The End of the Table 2

1	2	3	4	5
				determined that there was at most a cointegration between foreign direct investment and unemployment.
Alalawneh and Nessa [2020]	Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, Türkiye	1990–2018	Panel Data Analysis	By the results of the study, it has been demonstrated that foreign direct investment reduces the unemployment rate of men and women in the long run.
Alopani [2020]	Saudi Arabia	2005–2018	Ordinary Least Square Model (OLS)	It has been revealed that foreign direct investment significantly reduces the unemployment rate in Saudi Arabia country.
Ari [2021]	BRICS Countries	1992–2018	Johansen Co-Integration and Granger Causality Test	It has been indicated that there is no relationship between unemployment and foreign direct investment inflows for Brazil, China, and Russia. According to the research's results, it has been emphasized that there is a unidirectional causality relationship between unemployment and foreign direct investment inflows for India.
Warsame and Mohamed [2023]	Somalia	1991–2021	VAR model, Johansen Co-Integration, and Granger Causality Test	According to the results of the study, it is emphasized that foreign direct investments do not reduce the unemployment rate in Somalia

Source: Authors' compilation.

Table 3 indicates the studies in the literature in the context of unemployment and Information & Communication Technologies (ICT) variables. Table 3 includes findings from studies conducted in various countries, which indicate that Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have a positive impact on reducing unemployment rates. These studies demonstrate that ICT contributes to economic growth and increases employment, thereby lowering unemployment.

Table 3

**The Studies in the Literature in the Context of Unemployment
and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Variables**

Authors	Country	Data Period	Method	Main Results
1	2	3	4	5
Ebaidalla [2014]	30 Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries	1995–2010	Dynamic Panel Data Analysis	The coefficients of Information and Communication Technology variables are negative, and it is revealed that progress in information and communication technology in Africa reduces the youth unemployment rate.
Orji et al., [2016]	Nigeria	1985–2015	Classical Linear Regression Model	Information and Communication Technology has been indicated to have a statistically important positive impact on the unemployment rate in Nigeria.
Karabulut and Shahinpour [2017]	Iran	1980–2015	ARDL	It has been determined that developments in information and communication technologies in the Iran economy have a

The Continuation of the Table 3

1	2	3	4	5
				negative effect on unemployment in both the short and long run.
Alper [2018]	23 European Union countries and Türkiye	1996–2016	FGLS Panel data analysis	Results have determined that information technology and technologies reduce unemployment both in selected European Union countries and in Turkey.
Rai and Chaturvedi [2018]	BRICS countries	1998–2016	Panel Cointegration Test, VECM, Wald Coefficient Restrictions Test	The usage of Information and Communication Technology reduced the unemployment rate in BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China South Africa) countries.
Karabulut et al., [2019]	A total of 42 countries, 21 developed countries, and 21 developing countries, were analyzed.	2003–2017	Panel Data Analysis	It has been indicated that expenditures on Information and Communication Technologies in developed countries do not have a significant impact on unemployment. It has been revealed that expenditures on information and communication technology have a positive impact on unemployment in developing countries.

The End of the Table 3

1	2	3	4	5
Nipo et al., [2019]	136 countries (Africa, America, Middle East, Asia, Europe)	2006–2018	Panel Data Analysis	According to results, information and communication technologies reduce the unemployment rate in all country groups except the Middle East.
Abbasabadi and Soleimani [2021]	163 countries	2016	OLS and GLS estimation methods	It has been concluded that as digital technology progresses, unemployment reaches its maximum and begins to decrease as technological development exceeds a certain value.
Postula et al., [2021]	European Union Countries	2009–2019	Panel Data Analysis	According to the results, the usage of Information and Communication Technologies had a restricted effect on unemployment in the EU.
Ogbonna et al., [2022]	41 African Countries	2003–2018	Dynamic Generalized Method of Moment (GMM)	The findings display that youth unemployment in Africa can be decreased with higher information and communication technologies deployment and usage.

Source: Authors' compilation.

There is no empirical study in the literature that examines the impact of economic growth, foreign direct investment (FDI), Information, and Communication

Technologies (ICT) on unemployment for Bosnia and Herzegovina using an Autoregressive Distributed Lag (ARDL) bounds testing approach and structural break techniques. Thus, this study aims to fill this gap in the literature, which reveals the unique value of this study.

3. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The data is composed of Unemployment (% of the total labor force), Economic Growth (as a change of GDP), Foreign Direct Investment (net inflows, % of GDP), and Information and Communication Technology (Individuals Using the Internet, % Of Population) covering the period of 1998–2022. All data are obtained from the World Bank and presented in percentages due to comparability reasons. FDI is included in the model due to its significant role in economic development, particularly in developing countries like Bosnia and Herzegovina. ICT is a crucial driver of modernization and productivity improvements, making it an essential variable in the model. Economic growth is traditionally associated with job creation and reduced unemployment, as articulated by Okun's Law, which posits a negative relationship between unemployment and GDP growth. The inclusion of GDP as an independent variable is therefore crucial to capture the overall economic conditions that influence employment levels. These theoretical underpinnings justify the inclusion of FDI, ICT, and GDP in the model, aligning with the broader literature on economic growth and employment dynamics.

The logarithm of all series is taken to purify the series from small fluctuations and make them linear. Taking logarithms of the data helps to linearize relationships that may otherwise be non-linear, particularly when dealing with growth rates or multiplicative processes. This transformation not only simplifies the analysis but also reduces the impact of heteroscedasticity (i.e., non-constant variance) and small fluctuations in the data, leading to more stable and consistent results. Accordingly, LUNEMP denotes unemployment rate, LGDP denotes the economic growth rate, LICT denotes internet usage as a proxy of information and communication technology, and finally, LFDI stands for the foreign direct investment inflows.

If the variables employed in the econometric analysis are not stationary, a regression fallacy will occur, hence it is critical to check the stationarity of the data before beginning the study. Several unit root tests are performed to investigate stationarity. In the literature, the ADF [Dickey and Fuller, 1979] and PP [Phillips and Perron, 1988] tests have been extensively utilized to determine the series' stationarity status. Because of their limited size and power, both tests may be

inaccurate for small sample data sets [De Jong et al., 1992]. In this work, the NG Perron Test [2001] is used in addition to the ADF test.

We will fit the data to an Autoregressive distributed lag ARDL model [Pesaran et al., 2001]. This strategy is thought to be preferable to a comparable one in the event of a limited sample size. Because it does not impose limits on the variables of interest, the ARDL model can be used regardless of the order in which the series is integrated [Pesaran & Pesaran, 1997]. The formal ARDL model structure used in this study is as below:

$$\begin{aligned} \Delta Unemployment_t = & const + \delta_{unemployment} Unemployment_{t-1} + \delta_{ICT} ICT_t + \delta_{GDP} GDP_t + \\ & \delta_{FDI} FDI_t + \sum_{i=1}^p \alpha_{unemployment,i} \Delta Unemployment_{t-i} + \sum_{i=1}^p \alpha_{ICT,i} \Delta ICT_{t-i} + \\ & \sum_{i=1}^p \alpha_{GDP,i} \Delta GDP_{t-i} + \sum_{i=1}^p \alpha_{FDI,i} \Delta FDI + \theta ECT_{t-i} + \epsilon_t, \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

where, $\delta_{unemployment}, \delta_{ICT}, \delta_{GDP}, \delta_{FDI}$ are the long-run coefficients; $\alpha_{unemployment}, \alpha_{ICT}, \alpha_{GDP}, \alpha_{FDI}$ are the short-run coefficients, ECT is the error correction term, ϵ_t is the error term.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 4 summarizes the first descriptive statistics of our series. It can be observed that average unemployment (LUNEMP) is 3.17 % with a standard deviation of 0.23 % and a maximum of 3.43 %. LICT, LGDP, and LFDI have a mean value of 2.84 %, 1.27 % and 1.09 % respectively.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics

	LUNEMP	LICT	LGDP	LFDI
Mean	3.178156	2.843727	1.273533	1.093080
Median	3.278653	3.756538	1.319086	0.955511
Maximum	3.437529	4.367547	2.747271	2.459589
Minimum	2.642622	-2.302585	-0.198451	-0.223144
Std. Dev.	0.239673	1.917166	0.765400	0.577902
Skewness	-1.185904	-1.491253	-0.260810	0.407969
Kurtosis	2.996665	3.929575	2.811385	3.477711
Jarque-Bera	5.859882	10.37017	0.320483	0.931210
Probability	0.053400	0.055599	0.851938	0.627755
Sum	79.45389	71.09318	31.83832	27.32701
Sum Sq. Dev.	1.378638	88.21259	14.06010	8.015295
Observations	25	25	25	25

Source: Authors' representation.

In Table 4, the 'probability' values refer to the p-values obtained from the Jarque-Bera test, a statistical test used to determine whether the sample data has skewness and kurtosis matching a normal distribution. The Jarque-Bera test checks whether the sample data follows a normal distribution based on its skewness and kurtosis, and the null hypothesis of the test is that the data is normally distributed.

The p-value, or probability value, represents the likelihood of observing the sample data if the null hypothesis is true. A p-value greater than 0.05 suggests that there is insufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis at the 5 % significance level, implying that the data may be normally distributed. This is why in the analysis, it was stated that the variables are normally distributed, as all p-values in Table 4 exceed 0.05.

The context of using the Jarque-Bera test in time series analysis is crucial, as normality of the residuals is often an assumption in econometric modeling, particularly in the context of Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression. Ensuring normality helps in validating the model's results, as it implies that the residuals are symmetrically distributed around the mean with a constant variance, which are essential assumptions for reliable statistical inference. Besides, the Kurtosis values of LUNEMP and LGDP are a little less than three. That suggests the distribution is platykurtic. The kurtosis of LICT and LFDI is more than three. That suggests the distribution is leptokurtic. In summary, all of the kurtosis values are near three, indicating that the variables are distributed normally.

Table 5

ADF Unit Root Test

Augmented Dickey-Fuller Unit Root Test			
Country	Variables	Level	1 st Difference
Bosnia&Herzegovina	LUNEMP	-0.960353	-2.702495*
	LICT	-5.773700*	
	LGDP	-2.829381	-7.094590*
	LFDI	-1.113441	-5.428483*

Note: * denotes that the series becomes stationary at a 1 % level of significance.

Source: Authors' computation.

To check for the stationarity of the series, many unit root tests are used in the literature. The unit root tests in Tables 5 and 6 indicate that all series (except LICT in the ADF test) are non-stationary at level, hence the first difference [I(1)] must be taken to keep them stationary.

Table 6

NG Perron Test

Level	MZa	MZt	MSB	MPT
LUNEMP	-4.18583	-1.13246	0.27055	6.18878
LICT	0.24088	0.23686	0.98331	57.2284
LGDP	-5.61570	-1.66981	0.29735	4.37922
LFDI	-8.98404	-2.11931	0.23590	2.72753
First Difference				
LUNEMP	-9.01403	-2.10625	0.23366	2.78059
LICT	-10.1758	-2.22702	0.21885	2.51610
LGDP	-10.1339	-2.23013	0.22007	2.49678
LFDI	-10.8853	-2.32470	0.21356	2.28221

Source: Authors' computation.

Testing for structural change is crucial in econometrics, as political, social, and economic influences can alter the connections between economic variables over time. Table 7 reveals the Bai and Perron multiple break tests. This study's testing revealed a maximum of five breaks.

Table 7

Bai-Perron break test

Sequential	F-statistic	determined	breaks
5			
Significant	F-statistic	largest	breaks
5			
Break test	F-statistic	Scaled F-statistic	Critical value**
1 *	130.4660	130.4660	8.58
2 *	94.98318	94.98318	7.22
3 *	69.74860	69.74860	5.96
4 *	71.50400	71.50400	4.99
5 *	67.78395	67.78395	3.91
Number of selected breaks and the years 2002, 2008, 2011, 2017, 2020			

Notes: *Significant at the 0.05 level ** Bai-Perron (Econometric Journal, 2003) critical values.

Source: Authors' representation.

The breakpoint in 2002 can be explained by the effects of the European Commission's third-party support program. Economically, this funding consisted of the improvement of the country's transport infrastructure, contribution to increased economic activity and private sector development, and improvement of the quality of university education and vocational educational training. In addition, aggressive banking reform underway since 2001 has seen some tangible improvements. Like the rest of the world, Bosnia and Herzegovina's economy was harshly affected by the global financial crisis in 2008. By 2011, the economic growth of Bosnia and Herzegovina was at the European average. Total government spending and the government's priority for health spending remained above the European average after 2008. Unemployment started rising after the onset of the crisis reaching 11.2 % in 2011 [World Bank, 2015]. Bosnia and Herzegovina officially applied to join the EU in 2016. In 2017, there were hopes of economic recovery with an increase in foreign direct investment in Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, political and legislative uncertainties led to these investments not reaching the desired level. Unemployment rates in Bosnia and Herzegovina remained high. Youth unemployment was of particular concern and was a consequence of the economic recession in the country. Despite the GDP growth of 2.7 % in 2019, Bosnia and Herzegovina experienced severe contraction in 2020 (-4.3 %), driven by reduced consumption and investment. The services sector was hit hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic, contracting by about -3.1 percentage points.

Critical values such as Akaike, Schwarz, and Hannan-Quinn are used to determine the optimal lag length. This is done by selecting the lag length with the lowest critical value. If the model experiences autocorrelation, the next lowest lag length is chosen. This process is repeated until the autocorrelation issue is resolved [Karagol et al., 2007]. In this study, the Akaike criterion suggested a lag length of 4. However, the LM test indicated the presence of autocorrelation. To address this, the appropriate lag length was adjusted to 3.

The initial method used to assess the long-term relationships between the series is the cointegration Bounds test [Pesaran, Shin, & Smith, 2001]. The F-statistic indicates whether long-term correlations exist between the series. Once cointegration is confirmed, the ARDL model can analyze both long- and short-term relationships. The results of the bounds test are shown in Table 8.

Table 9 demonstrates the long-term coefficients obtained using the estimated results of the ARDL (1, 3, 2, 3) model. The results illustrate that the GDP coefficient

(LGDP) has a negative and significant influence on unemployment at the 1% level of significance. The coefficient of foreign direct investment (LFDI) depicts a positive and significant relationship with unemployment at 1 percent. Lastly, the coefficient of information and communication technology (LICT) shows a negative and insignificant relationship with unemployment in the long run.

Table 8

Bounds Test Results

Statistics	Critical Values**		Conclusion
	Lower Bound I(0)	Upper Bound I (1)	
F-Statistics			
3.886955	2.676	3.586	Cointegration

Note: ** at 10 % significance.

The coefficient of the lagged error correction term (ECT) is found to be negative and statistically significant. The coefficient of the ECT indicates that the error correction model of the model is working and the model is significant and shows how much of the imbalance in the short run will be corrected in the long run. Specifically, approximately 31 percent of the deviation from the equilibrium is adjusted each period, meaning that the model gradually returns to its long-run relationship after short-term shocks. It indicates that the speed of adjustment is low.

Table 9

ARDL (1,3,2,3) Model Results

Long-Run Coefficients				
1	2	3	4	5
Variables	Coefficient	Standard Dev.	t-Statistics	Prob.
LICT	-0.095800	0.085879	-1.115527	0.2793
LGDP	-0.703436*	0.180036	-3.907201	0.0010
LFDI	0.448380*	0.154654	2.899243	0.0096
Short-Run Coefficients				
LUNEMP(-1)	-0.310302**	0.132948	-2.334010	0.0445
LICT	0.084145	0.052525	1.602011	0.1332
LICT(-1)	0.129709**	0.043345	2.992469	0.0104
LICT(-2)	0.096274***	0.053278	1.807021	0.0939
LGDP	-0.047584	0.029827	-1.595347	0.1346
LGDP(-1)	0.094943**	0.042300	2.244488	0.0428

The End of the Table 9

1	2	3	4	5
LFDI	-0.06177	0.026644	-0.231824	0.8203
LFDI(-1)	-0.149579*	0.034765	-4.302601	0.0009
LFDI(-2)	-0.094667**	0.034819	-2.718811	0.0176
ECT(-1)	-0.310302	0.058566	-5.298344	0.0001
	Number of Obs.	R-Squared	Adjusted R- Squared	Log Likelihood
	25	0.729829	0.563571	37.99342

Source: Authors' Computation.

Note: *, **, *** 1 percent, 5 percent, and 10 percent denote significance at one percent, five percent, and ten percent levels.

The results of the diagnostic tests provide strong evidence that the model's estimation is accurate. To check for autocorrelation in the residuals, a Breusch-Godfrey serial correlation LM test was conducted. Since the p-value is greater than 1 %, we cannot reject the null hypothesis of no autocorrelation, meaning our model does not exhibit autocorrelation. The Breusch-Pagan-Godfrey test was applied to assess heteroskedasticity, and the model was found to be free from it. The Jarque-Bera test was used to examine the normality of the residuals, with normality tested at the 1 % and 5 % significance levels. Additionally, the Ramsey RESET test for model misspecification confirmed that the model is correctly specified. All test results are summarized in Table 10.

Table 10

Diagnostic Test Results

Diagnostic Test Techniques	Statistics	Probabilities
Serial Correlation (LM Test)	7.323151	0.0257
Heteroskedasticity (Bresuch-Pagan-Godfrey Test)	11.38639	0.4961
Normality Test (Jarque Bera)	0.081955	0.959851
Ramsey Reset Test	0.368215	0.5608

Source: Authors' Representation.

In addition, the results of CUSUM and CUSUM 2 test statistics are shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2, respectively. The results show that these test statistics are within

the 5 % critical thresholds and therefore the long-run parameters are stable. This allows for a policy that is more robust implications for the Bosnian economy in the long run.

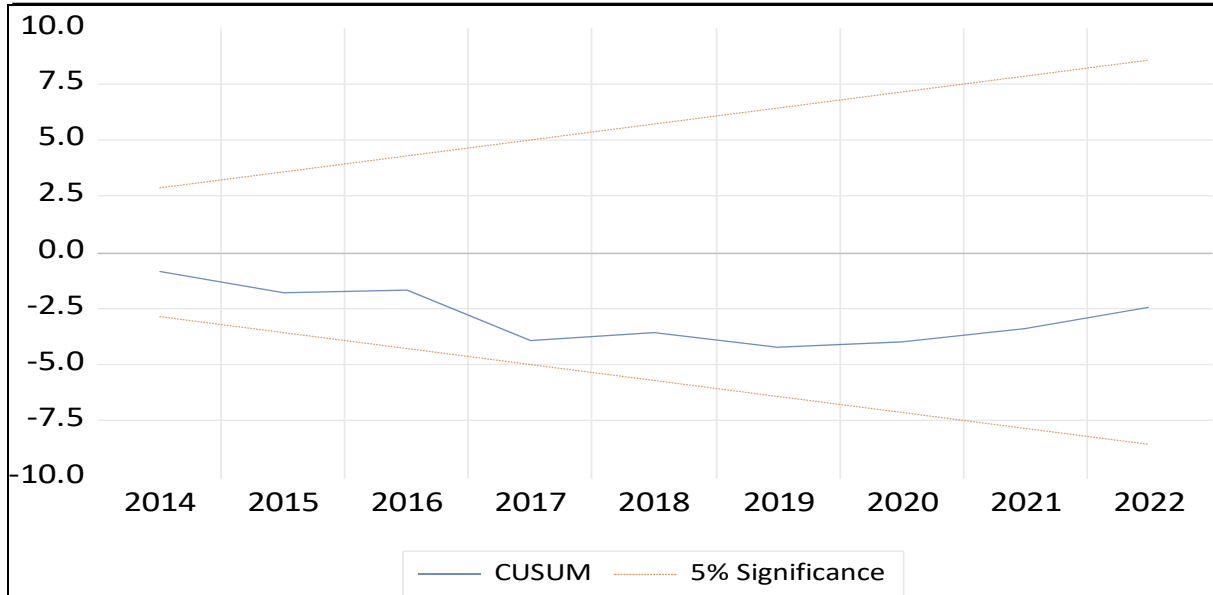


Figure 1. CUSUM Test Results

Source: Author's Computation.

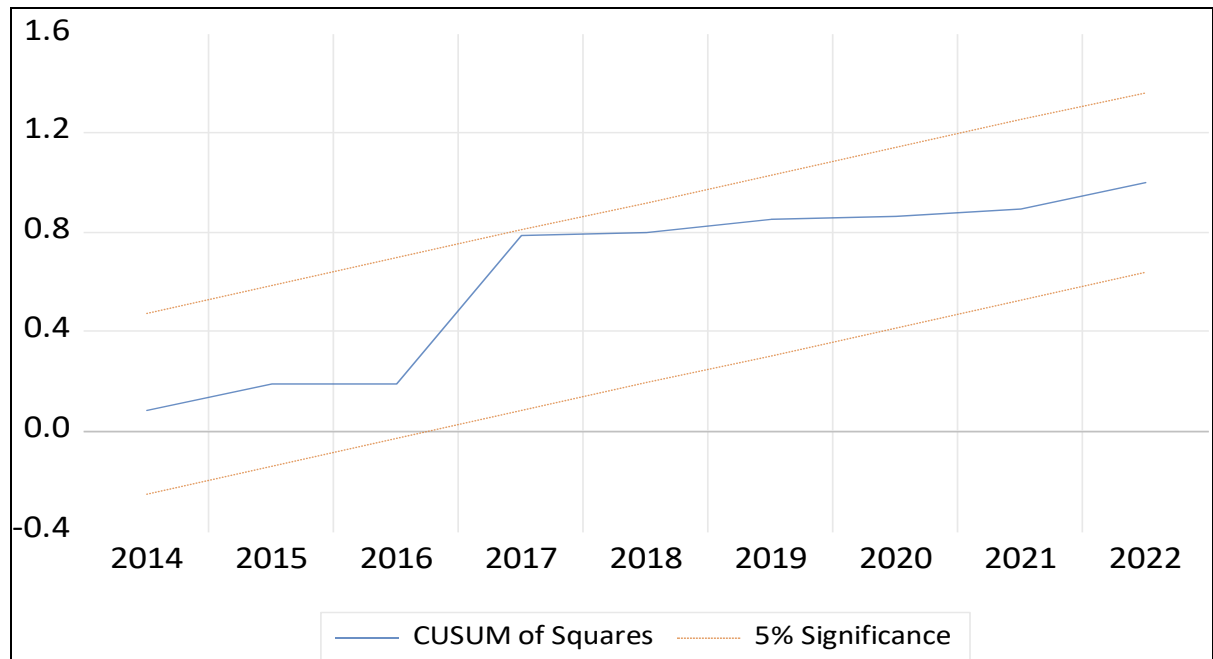


Figure 2. CUSUM of squares test results

Source: Author's Computation.

5. CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Economic growth, FDI, and ICT are significant factors that often have the potential to create employment. Especially in developing countries, investments in these areas play a critical role in stimulating the labor market and reducing unemployment rates. In this context, this study empirically investigates the effects of economic growth, FDI, and ICT on unemployment in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The findings provide insights into how these factors influence the labor market. While the results can inform the development of effective strategies to combat unemployment, the primary aim of this paper is to contribute to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence specific to Bosnia and Herzegovina. These strategies are aimed to contribute to the sustainable development of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In the econometric section of the study, the relevant variables were investigated using the ARDL Bound Test and the structural break technique, using data spanning 1997–2022. The results indicate that GDP negatively influences the unemployment rate in the long run in Bosnia and Herzegovina. A one-point increase in GDP leads to a 0.70 percent point decrease in unemployment rate. This means that *Okun's law* is valid for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Furthermore, the attained Okun coefficient is more than that of the actual Okun coefficient, which was documented by Arthur Okun [Okun, 1962]. This result is in line with the findings from Erić et al [2020].

Although the results indicate a negative relationship between ICT and unemployment in Bosnia and Herzegovina, this effect is statistically insignificant. Therefore, while there is a suggestion that technological innovations could potentially reduce unemployment by fueling economic growth; the evidence from this study is not strong enough to confirm this relationship. Further research with more robust data and methods would be needed to draw definitive conclusions.

There is also a positive and significant connection between FDI and unemployment. A one percent increase in the amount of FDI inflow to Bosnia and Herzegovina leads to a 0.44 increase in unemployment. This result confirms the *dependency theory*, which advocates the influx of foreign investors into the host country may damage the economic structure and increase unemployment. FDI may increase unemployment for several reasons:

- Technological Progress and Automation: Foreign investments often bring technology and increase the productivity of enterprises. This may reduce the need for some labor and increase unemployment. In particular, automation and robots may replace routine and low-skill jobs [Karimov et al. 2020].

- Competition and Business Closures: As foreign investments compete with local businesses, some local businesses may not survive this competition and may close down. This may increase unemployment rates [Grahovac and Softić, 2017].
- Utilisation of Local Resources: Foreign investors usually bring their resources and prefer their suppliers. This may reduce the access of local enterprises to resources and thus increase the risk of unemployment [Johnny et al., 2018].
- Labour Conditions and Trade Union Rights: In some cases, labor conditions and trade union rights in countries where foreign investments come from may be lower than local standards. This may increase the unemployment risk of the local labor force [Brookings Institution, 2020].
- Type of FDI: The type of investment can affect employment. Greenfield and brownfield investments can each have different impacts on the labor force. Greenfield investments usually refer to the creation of completely new businesses, such as the construction of new factories or plants. This type of investment usually has the potential to create more jobs because new job positions are created for the establishment of new businesses. In addition, there is often a need for advanced skills such as technology and management skills, which can create opportunities for training and development of the local labor force. [EBRD, 2021]

In light of these reasons, structural problems in Bosnia and Herzegovina's economy, such as the fact that a large portion of FDI inflows are reinvested earnings, foreign greenfield investments remain intact, the informal economy is large, political uncertainty, skills shortages in the labor market, brain drain, and business disincentives [EC, 2023] all contribute to FDI's negative impact on unemployment. Furthermore, Bosnia and Herzegovina is still in the early stages of planning for digital transformation and media. Bosnia and Herzegovina has yet to adopt legislation relating to electronic communications and electronic media in accordance with the 2018 EU regulatory framework 98, nor has it made any progress in aligning with the EU Broadband Cost Reduction Directive.

In conclusion, our study reveals the complex interactions between economic growth, FDI, and ICT in influencing unemployment in Bosnia and Herzegovina. While FDI and ICT have varying impacts on unemployment, the evidence suggests that economic growth plays a critical role in reducing unemployment, consistent with Okun's Law. The findings underscore the need for targeted economic policies that enhance the benefits of FDI and ICT while mitigating potential adverse effects on the labor market.

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MILITARY USE OF UNMANNED AERIAL VEHICLES (UAV) BY UKRAINE – RISK ASSESSMENT OF POTENTIAL IMPACT ON THE TERRITORY OF THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS

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Abstract

The article presents an analysis of the Ukrainian experience in using unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) in military operations in the context of potential impact on the territory of the Republic of Belarus and its critical infrastructure. It examines the possibility of using unmanned aerial vehicles to strike strategically important targets on Belarusian territory, including airfields, oil refineries, gas pipelines, warehouses, and other key elements of critical infrastructure. The starting point is a study of similar impacts on the Russian Federation in the context of attacks on airfields, oil refineries, gas pipelines, and warehouses. Hypothesis of this work is the statement that Ukraine may have a significant impact on the Republic of Belarus through the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). These capabilities are largely limited by the potential risks of such impact. The article presents the results of computer modeling of military operations using unmanned aerial vehicles, which provide insights into the likelihood of such operations, allowing for the assumption and determination of both the operation's effectiveness and the potential response.

Key words: unmanned aerial vehicles, Ukraine, Republic of Belarus, Russian Federation, critical infrastructure, war.

INTRODUCTION

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 demonstrates the increasing critical importance of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) as one of the leading tools of

warfare. For example, Ukraine actively uses UAVs to strike not only along the front lines but also across a significant portion of the territory of the Russian Federation. In January 2024, Ukrainian strike drones attacked the St. Petersburg oil terminal, which is located about 900 kilometers from the borders of Ukraine [BBC 2024]. Cities such as Yelabuga (1100 kilometers from the border), Yaroslavl (700 kilometers from the border), and others were also attacked.

The possibility of using this type of weaponry against the Republic of Belarus remains less studied. It is important to note that the Republic of Belarus is one of the key and leading partners in the defense sector and allies of the Russian Federation. Specifically, the Republic of Belarus provided its territory for the deployment of Russian troops after joint exercises and allowed tactical and operational actions from its territory, including conducting offensive operations, launching missile strikes on Ukraine, and carrying out reconnaissance activities, which also makes the Republic of Belarus a potential target for retaliatory attacks. This article examines the probable effectiveness of using Ukrainian unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) against Belarus, as well as analyzes the limitations and potential consequences of such actions, which constitutes the scientific issue of this article.

The leading hypothesis of this work is the statement that Ukraine may have a significant impact on the Republic of Belarus through the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs); however, these capabilities are largely limited by the potential risks of such impact. This hypothesis allows for the formulation of the necessary scientific questions for its verification.

- Which targets (using the example of the Russian Federation) are of the greatest interest when planning drone strikes on the territory?
- Which targets on the territory of the Republic of Belarus may represent potential interest when planning an attack?
- What geopolitical and diplomatic consequences, as well as escalation risks, could arise for Ukraine as a result of attacks on the territory of Belarus?

It should be noted that for writing this work and assessing the potential effectiveness of drone strikes on the infrastructure of the Republic of Belarus, the author conducted a computer simulation, which allowed for the evaluation of the theoretical potential impact and effectiveness of such actions, which will be presented in more detail later.

Ukrainian use of unmanned aerial vehicles in the context of attacks on the territory of the Russian Federation

The use of unmanned aerial vehicles in military operations has a history dating back to the early 2000s; however, one of the most powerful developments in UAVs

occurred in 2022 after the start of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Initially used exclusively for surveillance, reconnaissance, and preparatory operations, UAVs have now become a fundamental aspect of planning operations, delivering direct fire strikes, as well as coordinating artillery fire and coordinating tactical groups [Bendett & Nersisyan 2024]. The Russian invasion led to a sharp increase in the use of both specialized military drones and modified civilian devices, as well as independent developments in this field, which are widely used in various combat scenarios, including urban and positional warfare, as well as the delivery of food and ammunition [AeronautMedia 2024].

Thus, the main types of unmanned aerial vehicles used by Ukraine for military operations can be identified. In particular, these are:

- Reconnaissance drones – for example, “Leleka-100” and “Furia”, which are used exclusively for gathering information about enemy positions.
- Kamikaze drones, which strike targets by detonating their warhead, such as “RAM II”, “Punisher”, “Warmate”, and other types of contact detonation drones.
- Modified versions of commercial DJI Mavic drones are specifically used for targeted dropping of grenades and explosives on enemy positions, as well as on equipment.
- Long-range drones such as “UJ-22 Airborne”, “Bobr”, “Tu-141 Strizh”, and “Tu-143 Reis”. The author of this work suggests naming such types of drones “strategic” due to their use in operations and their impact on objects of strategic significance, both in achieving the intended goals and in their importance for the enemy. These drones are used to attack targets deep within the Russian rear, including military airfields, oil refineries, and other strategic objects [Blakcori, Stathakis, Koutsoukos, & Kirilov 2024].

Such popularity and active use can be explained by several factors, such as versatility, ease of training for maintenance personnel and operators, economic efficiency in terms of low cost and cost-effectiveness ratio, and the parallel ability to collect important reconnaissance information. Reports from specialists show that Ukrainian forces incorporated over 140 new UAV models in the first nine months of 2023 alone, highlighting the growing significance and popularity of these systems on the battlefield [Kyivpost 2024].

Unmanned aerial vehicles are also actively used by the Armed Forces of Ukraine not only in the eastern regions of the country along the entire front line but also in the context of conducting attacks and operations on the critical infrastructure of the

Russian Federation [Molloy 2024]. Most likely, such active actions aimed at impacting the critical infrastructure of the Russian Federation stem from the worsening overall situation of ammunition shortages and growing concerns about future military support, both from the European Union and the United States (particularly due to concerns over potential limitations in military aid in the event of a new term for Donald Trump).

In this context, it can be argued that the Ukrainian command has developed a strategy aimed at shifting military actions to the territory of the Russian Federation to weaken Russia and its potential from within. This shift occurred both through direct traditional military operations by the Ukrainian forces and other engaged groups (such as the Russian Volunteer Corps) in the territory of the Kursk region, particularly the Sudzha operation. Additionally, it has involved attacks on airfields, factories, oil refineries, and gas centers of strategic importance within the Russian Federation. Furthermore, Ukraine's intelligence network has also attempted to physically eliminate military personnel involved in the full-scale invasion of Ukraine on Russian territory.

Such impact, according to the author of this work, is aimed at achieving the following goals:

- Creating a series of dilemmas for the Russian Federation's establishment.
- Creating economic losses and economic chaos.
- Disrupting logistical chains.
- Disrupting the propaganda narrative and influence within the Russian Federation.

Disruption of logistical chains occurs as a result of mass attacks on the critical infrastructure of the Russian Federation within the country, such as the Armavir radar station, which serves as the outer ring of Russia's air defense system [Mickiewicz, Kasprzycki 2021], as well as attacks on military airfields, which slow down the transfer of weapons closer to the front, and attacks on weapons storage bases, which lead to irreversible losses of weapons.

Massive attacks, which also target cities (along with conducting ground operations), lead to the disruption of the image of a strong and resilient Russia, and undermine the sense of security among the region's inhabitants. This also affects the residents' perception of the rationale behind military actions against Ukraine.

Direct impact on the energy infrastructure of the Russian Federation is also one of the objectives of these attacks. In 2024, according to the author of this work, Ukraine has attacked oil refineries and fuel storage bases in the Russian Federation

more than 83 times. Most of these attacks targeted regions bordering Ukraine. For example, such attacks led to an increase in gasoline prices not only in the region but also across the entire country. Initially (before March 2024), the attacks caused retail gasoline prices to rise by 0.08 % on the St. Petersburg commodity exchange. In turn, Reuters reports that as of the end of March 2024, about 14 % of Russia's primary oil refining capacity was knocked out due to these attacks [Reuters 2024a]. For example, Helima Croft, the managing director of the investment bank RBC Capital Markets, suggested that drone attacks on oil refineries could have a greater impact on the Russian economy than the current sanctions, which have largely bypassed the energy sector [CNN 2024].

A certain method of mitigating the losses associated with the Ukrainian attack on the energy infrastructure of the Russian Federation was the reorientation towards increasing the import of gasoline and petroleum products from the Republic of Belarus, which helped reduce the risk of shortages in the domestic market [Reuters 2024b]. Also, since March 2024, a ban has been imposed on the export of gasoline from the Russian Federation to all countries, including those in the Eurasian Economic Union, in order to avoid fuel shortages in the domestic market. Additionally, it is likely that a 21 % reduction in diesel fuel exports from the Russian Federation is expected [Kpler 2024]. Such decisions affect not only fuel prices but also the overall cost of goods in the country, as well as their logistics. As a result, in 2024, logistics costs increased by 16-30%, which in turn led to a rise in prices for other goods [Kommersant 2024]. Furthermore, fuel is one of the fundamental resources necessary for the continuation of military operations.

It is important to note that the actual impact and correlation of the attack and its effectiveness are extremely difficult to assess. From a practical perspective, there is an attempt to affect the energy infrastructure. For example, the economic effect of a drone attack on a production center is significantly higher than the cost of the unmanned aerial vehicle and the operation itself. On the other hand, the influence of this attack on the economic sector in terms of price changes can be qualitatively assessed (based on generalized symptoms) according to the estimates of experts and analysts, but also due to the actual increase in the cost of products.

Most likely, such attacks significantly affect the energy and economic sectors of the Russian Federation, as evidenced by the new measures in the field of security and air defense for such objects, as well as the export ban on products and the appeal to Belarusian production capacities. On the other hand, the actual collapse of the system has not been observed, which indicates the limited success of the decisions made by the Russian side.

The combination of these aspects of influence aims to “increase the cost” of the Kremlin's decisions in the context of military operations against Ukraine. The rise in public dissatisfaction in the border regions with Ukraine, the decline in the sense of security, and the impact on the economic and energy sectors directly force the Russian Federation to feel the consequences of its actions.

The infrastructure of the Republic of Belarus as potential targets for drone attacks by Ukraine

The full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation into Ukrainian territory in February 2022 also began with an active offensive from the territory of the Republic of Belarus. This choice was largely determined by the geostrategic position of the Republic of Belarus and its high political and economic dependence on Moscow. In particular, the capital of Ukraine is located about 100 kilometers from the border with the Republic of Belarus. The offensive from this direction, through the cities of Korosten and Sarny, would allow Russian forces to cut off potential retreat lines for the Armed Forces of Ukraine to the west of Kyiv, as well as cut off potential supply lines for humanitarian and military aid from Western countries to Ukraine.

The attack and the opening of the Ukrainian northern front in practice allowed Russian forces to advance towards the borders of Kyiv and secure the strategically important point—the Hostomel airfield—and also allowed them to initially engage in combat within the Kyiv area, specifically in the Obolon district. Additionally, this offensive deprived the Armed Forces of Ukraine of the ability to establish a critical defensive line along the Dnipro River.

The presence of Russian armed forces on the territory of the Republic of Belarus in early 2022 was due to joint exercises, as well as (according to official information) subsequent logistical complications, which led to an extension of their stay in the country. In this context, the author of this work would like to refer to Resolution 3314 (XXIX) of the United Nations General Assembly from December 14, 1974 [UN 1974], According to Article, the actions of a state allowing its territory, which it has made available to another state, to be used by that state for the commission of an act of aggression against a third state are considered an act of aggression. In this context, it is clear that the Republic of Belarus, along with the Russian Federation, is regarded by Ukraine as an aggressor state.

Therefore, it can be argued that the infrastructure of the Republic of Belarus is also a legitimate target for an attack by Ukraine. However, it is important to remember that, in the context of the Russian invasion in 2022, the Republic of Belarus initially attempted to act as a mediator in the Russia-Ukraine negotiations.

Specifically, four days after the full-scale invasion, the first round of negotiations regarding the suspension of hostilities was held in the Gomel region (Republic of Belarus). Subsequent meetings on March 3 and March 7, 2022, were held in the Belovezhskaya Pushcha (Republic of Belarus). These negotiations did not lead to significant success, and later talks were held in other countries. However, this fact can likely be interpreted as an attempt to continue the “tradition” of negotiations and agreements under the Minsk-1 and Minsk-2 formats.

It is important to note that, in fact, Ukraine has not conducted any actions similar to attacks on the infrastructure of the Russian Federation in relation to the Republic of Belarus. However, it is necessary to recall the explosion at the Belarusian Machulishchi airfield on February 26, 2023, which resulted in the damage to a long-range radar detection aircraft of the Russian Aerospace Forces, the A-50U. Notably, the responsibility for the operation to damage the A-50 aircraft was claimed by the Belarusian opposition organization BYPOL. According to the video provided by the organization, the stages of preparation for the operation, as well as footage from the unmanned aerial vehicle itself, showing the process, were visible.

The A-50U aircraft was an important component enabling the launch of “Kinzhal” missiles from the territory of the Republic of Belarus against Ukraine. Additionally, missile strikes were directly launched from Belarusian territory at Ukraine. For example, during the first 10 days of the full-scale invasion, more than 70 missile strikes were carried out from Belarus [U.S. DoD 2022]. Along the northern borders of Ukraine. However, after the damage to the aircraft, missile launches from Belarusian territory were suspended.

Over time, it was announced that one of the perpetrators of the attack was a citizen with dual citizenship of Belarus and Ukraine. According to statements made by Alexander Lukashenko, it was the Ukrainian intelligence services that were the organizers of the attack on the A-50U [VOA 2023], however, no direct evidence followed this claim. Most likely, according to Alexander Lukashenko's position, it was easier to blame the Ukrainian side rather than admit the effectiveness of opposition groups. In this context, it is also important to recall the “railway war of 2022”. Towards the end of February 2022, information began to emerge about sabotage on Belarusian railway lines. These diversions directly impacted the pace and efficiency of transporting Russian personnel and weaponry across the territory of the Republic of Belarus. However, just like in the case of the A-50U aircraft sabotage, the BYPOL organization took responsibility for the coordination of these

acts. The state authorities accused Ukrainian saboteurs, but no direct evidence was provided to support this claim.

It is important to note that throughout the entire period of the full-scale aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine since 2022, Ukraine did not attempt to attack the infrastructure of the Republic of Belarus, unlike the infrastructure of the Russian Federation. Information about drones flying over Belarusian territory was largely provoked by the actions of Ukrainian electronic warfare systems, namely spoofing – the substitution of GPS coordinates, which changed the flight paths of the drones, including towards the Republic of Belarus, which has been frequently mentioned in media sources in 2024.

It should also be noted that a large part of the economically significant enterprises of the Republic of Belarus are located in the southern part of the country. Thus, the “Belaruskali” plant is located in the city of Soligorsk, the Mozyr Oil Refinery in the city of Mozyr, Gomel – the production of potassium fertilizers, and so on. Also, in the southern part of the country runs the “Druzhba” oil pipeline, an object that is of interest when planning an attack.

To assess the potential impact of drones on the territory of the Republic of Belarus, the author created a computer simulation. Thus, two simulations were created with unmanned aerial vehicles of the UJ-22 type, as well as Shaheed-136, as the closest analogue of Ukrainian strike drones.

The well-known expression among specialists “All models are wrong, but some are useful” remains relevant in this work as well. Due to the abstraction of some elements, the results will never be as precise as they could be. This is due to the system's performance. For example, the effective radar cross-section is not calculated to the exact degree, as this would require too many computational resources. However, in this context, it is necessary to conduct a basic simulation, as well as several similar ones, to obtain a broader picture of the developments. In the commercial version, the database is based on publicly available information, which, while confirmed in reality, may not always be sufficient for newer equipment.

According to the simulation, it was assumed that the Belarusian side would send a duty pair to the area (where activity had been detected) after detecting the unmanned aerial vehicle. Although this may be plausible in the case of detection near the state border, the question should be asked whether the air defense or duty pair would expect visual identification of the target if detected deep inside the country.

Since cooperation and information exchange are assumed to be absent, the Belarusian side did not receive prior warning. Therefore, the time for sending the duty pair was increased by the time for takeoff and flight to the last contact location. Also, the possibility of visual identification by patrols, civilians, or observers on the ground was not considered. Radar placement was largely based on data from 2020.

During many test simulations, the radar coverage was very good. It can be said that the coverage was somewhat weaker in the south and east of the country (as of 2020). However, given the ongoing conflict, it can be assumed that the southern part of the country was reinforced with additional radar stations and air defense systems. Reinforcement likely occurred through the increased presence of air defense units and short-range radio reconnaissance means. Also, it is worth considering the potential dilemma of the Belarusian leadership between ensuring dense coverage and distributing resources for scenarios such as drone or missile penetration from the Russian Federation. This scenario is likely quite realistic for the Belarusian side, which explains the placement of air defense units and systems near the Russian Federation border.

In most test simulations, the UJ-22 drone was detected at a depth of 90–110 km inside Belarus. Due to its large size and low speed, its chances of disappearing from the radar and going unnoticed were close to zero. It is also important to remember that the version used in the simulation was reconnaissance. The version carrying weapons would have had a greater mass and effective radar cross-section, which could have worsened the results. Most test simulations ended with rapid detection, the launching of interceptors, and the destruction of the target.

Test simulations using the Shahed-136 ended in a similar manner. Usually, the drone penetrated more than 150 km before being detected. Its higher speed and smaller radar cross-section sometimes allowed it to evade detection, but in the end, it was still shot down.

The most interesting result was obtained from the final simulation. The new flight route allowed the Shahed-136 to completely pass through the radar stations installed on the territory of the Republic of Belarus.

The start of the UJ-22 simulation occurred at 17:08:20 ZULU. The UJ-22 UAV (only the reconnaissance version without bombs is presented in the database, so this version was used; the author assumes that adding combat payload would have reduced its effectiveness).

- 17:41:38 – The drone was detected by the Bar Lock P-37 radar near the city of Mozyr and remained under surveillance for a long time. It should be noted

that these units were redeployed closer to the oil refinery to protect it from possible attacks from Ukraine.

- 17:45:00 – The standby pair of Su-30SM in Baranovichi received a Scramble signal (an emergency take-off order). This is one of the two main types of alerts used by NATO.
- 18:05:17 – The standby pair of Su-30SM identified the Shahed as an enemy target. A P-27R missile was launched a second later. Distance: 6.1 nautical miles.
- 18:05:34 – Impact (hit probability was assessed at 66 %). It is noteworthy that the standby pair required about 20 minutes to take off, search, and destroy the UAV.

The start of the Shahed-136 simulation occurred at 17:41:44 ZULU

- 19:47:12 – The drone was detected by the Antey-4000 radar system of the S-300, located near Minsk-2 airport.
- 19:50:35 – The standby pair of Su-30SM took off from the Baranovichi airfield.
- 19:53:04 – The Shahed-136 lost tracking for 29 seconds.

Four minutes later, the drone was detected again over Minsk-2 airport, and 13 seconds later (19:57:26), it crossed the city border.

Most likely, theoretically, the drone crashed into a residential building as its AGL (Above Ground Level) height was 42 m.

- 20:00:40 – Launch of the P-73M missile (hit probability 60%).
- 20:00:47 – Launch of the P-27R missile (hit probability 69%).
- Both missiles were fired by two Su-30SMs. Both missed.
- 20:00:52 – Second launch of the P-73M.
- 20:00:53 – Second launch of the P-27R.

The P-27R missile hit the Shahed-136, destroying it over the city (see the map below).

The probability of hitting was 64 % (calculated as 80 % base probability, minus the refraction of Shahed-136 and minus the evasion angle).

It is worth noting that the P-73M missile was supposed to self-destruct, but the simulation did not account for this factor. The author assumes that the self-destruction system failed, and the missile fell within the city.

At the end of the simulation, the Shahed made its final approach towards Minsk. Before the standby pair could shoot it down, it was already over the city. In this case, air-to-air missiles failed to hit the UAV three times while it was flying at low altitude. In one of these cases, the missile flew several kilometers before detonating

at a low altitude, likely hitting a residential building. This highlights the risks associated with attempts to destroy aerial targets. In reality, falling debris can also cause significant damage. A missile that hits its target may lose its engine, but its warhead can still travel a considerable distance before hitting something. A similar incident occurred on October 1, 2024, when a piece of a downed missile fell and killed a Palestinian during an Iranian attack on Israel.

Thus, the following conclusions can be made. The results of the simulation highlight key challenges related to modern air defense and actions in the airspace in the face of increasingly advanced UAV technologies. Both the UJ-22 and the Shahed-136 demonstrate that even minor changes in procedures can lead to positive and effective results, as happened when the Shahed penetrated Minsk. The simulations also remind us of the risks of destroying drones over cities, where debris can cause significant damage.

The author also wishes to note that the theoretical effectiveness of such an impact can be considered low. Compared to the Russian Federation, the size of the Republic of Belarus is much smaller, which allows for more efficient space control. Also, the weaponry of the Republic of Belarus (compared to the Russian Federation) is not engaged in direct contact, allowing for the reallocation of resources to guard key facilities. Furthermore, according to open-source information, a successful attack is one in which about 30–35 % of the missiles reach their target [Bild 2024]. In this simulation, only 2 unmanned aerial vehicles were tested. Most likely, with an increase in the flow, there will also be a rise in efficiency, especially due to the overload of the enemy's air defense forces.

Thus, as a result of the analysis of this simulation, it can be stated that, due to the compact size of the country, as well as the significant strengthening of air defense (AD) systems, it has sufficient capabilities for effectively detecting and destroying unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) or, at the very least, for tracking and escorting them in airspace. However, the results of individual simulations conducted show that, under conditions of altitude changes, terrain calculations, the use of stealth technologies, and route modifications, UAVs have the potential to reach their designated targets by evading radar detection, which is also due to the reduced effectiveness of radar systems. These aspects, despite the level of airspace protection, create the possibility of UAVs breaking through the defense system.

Possible consequences and escalation risks

It is also important to recall the potential consequences and escalation risks associated with such an impact. The Republic of Belarus, due to its geographical

location and historically established diplomatic ties, represents one of the most accessible and convenient platforms for the exchange of prisoners of war between Ukraine and Russia. This is also due to the mediating role that Belarus has periodically played in the context of Russian-Ukrainian relations. Over the past few years, there have been occasional reports that prisoner exchanges between the conflicting parties have been taking place on the territory of Belarus. It is important to note that this process requires not only diplomatic preparation but also a high level of coordination between all interested parties, including representatives of Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus itself [PAP 2024].

Alexander Lukashenko himself also regularly addresses the media with proposals to potentially use Belarus as a neutral territory for the exchange of prisoners of war, as well as for potential negotiations. A potential attack on the territory of the Republic of Belarus could disrupt the established situation and deprive Ukraine and Russia of a possible platform for prisoner exchanges.

One of the results of an attack on the territory of the Republic of Belarus could be the involvement of Belarus in active combat operations. Currently, the Republic of Belarus provides significant support to the Russian Federation not only in the military sphere, including providing its territory for the stationing of Russian troops, conducting military exercises, and providing logistical and medical assistance, but also in production. However, despite this, the Belarusian army does not directly participate in combat operations on the territory of Ukraine. Such an operation could lead to an increase in Russian military presence in the Republic of Belarus, as well as a resumption of shelling from Belarus. In the worst-case scenario, it could result in an extension of the potential front line by more than a thousand kilometers.

Additionally, escalation risks may include possible retaliatory actions against Ukrainian critical infrastructure, which has also been under massive attack for the past three years. Undoubtedly, Belarus' military potential must be considered in the context of its deep cooperation with the Russian Federation and within the framework of the defense of the Union State of Belarus and Russia. A precedent for such an attack would allow the Russian Federation to escalate to a higher qualitative and quantitative level of attacks on Ukrainian territory, which would significantly negatively impact Ukraine's military and energy potential.

The political situation as of the second half of 2024 also necessitates attention to the potential reaction from the European Union and the United States to such an attack. For example, Western countries may find themselves in a more complicated

political and diplomatic situation than they are today. Such actions go against the trend of attempting to end the conflict. Therefore, the result of such actions could lead to increased pressure on Ukraine from Western partners due to fears of escalation. It is quite evident that Western countries are trying to avoid and limit actions and decisions that could expand the combat zone or increase the intensity of the conflict. This could also lead to a distancing from Ukraine's actions and, as a consequence, a reduction in direct support, such as by limiting arms supplies.

Thus, it can be definitively stated that a potential attack carries large-scale cumulative risks and consequences not only for the Republic of Belarus itself but also for the countries engaged in the military conflict, as well as for the overall situation in the region.

It is important to note that in recent years, the Republic of Belarus has not actively participated in military actions against Ukraine. At the same time, Belarus has firmly maintained a partnership-oriented position toward the Russian Federation. The Belarusian armed forces have not been directly involved in military operations, which has allowed the country to maintain an initial façade of non-participation in the war, relative stability within its borders, and the avoidance of direct military engagement.

Evidently, this combination of factors has played a significant role in Ukraine's strategic planning. The absence of a serious threat from Belarus has enabled the redistribution of Ukrainian armed forces to more critical and relevant front-line sectors. Conversely, the potential direct involvement of Belarus (at a kinetic level) could not only significantly escalate the situation on the international stage but also force the Ukrainian command to redeploy troops for the defense of the capital, which, in turn, could result in a shortage of forces in other equally important strategic areas.

Thus, the lack of active military involvement by Belarus in recent years has played a crucial role in shaping the current operational situation for Ukraine. At the same time, a potential attack poses significant consequences in the military, political, energy, and economic spheres.

CONCLUSION

In the context of the development of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), as well as the experience of conducting warfare and attempts to shift hostilities onto the enemy's territory, it can be argued that the use of Ukrainian UAVs against the Republic of Belarus is technically and tactically possible, but it carries significant

risks. It is important to note that since the start of the full-scale invasion, Ukraine has not conducted attacks on the infrastructure of the Republic of Belarus. This is most likely due to the expected reaction and the increase in the front line, meaning that achieving the objective of disrupting production and energy centers could result in consequences that would completely outweigh any gains.

In this regard, it can be argued that potential strikes could cause significant damage to Belarus's military infrastructure, but at the same time provoke escalation of the conflict and diplomatic consequences. The need to balance military effectiveness and geopolitical risks makes this issue extremely complex and requires further study. Future research could focus on detailed modeling of probable attack scenarios, analyzing the effectiveness of Belarus's air defense, and studying the international consequences of such actions.

Ukraine's future strategy in employing UAVs will depend on the shifting balance of power in the region and the response of the international community. However, the tendency towards attempts to halt the conflict reduces the likelihood of such an operation being carried out on the territory of the Republic of Belarus to a minimum. It can also be assumed that the risks from both Ukraine and Belarus have led to an unspoken agreement not to engage in such attacks. Furthermore, it is worth recalling that, according to the results of the simulation, the effectiveness of such an operation with the launch of a single UAV can also be assessed as low.

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IMPACT OF EXPECTED RISKS OF WAGE-PRICE SPIRAL ON SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE STATE

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Abstract

Aim of the article. The examination of spiral development hazards is crucial for inflation analysis and forecasting. The growth of the wage-price spiral danger is seen by international organizations as one of the major concerns. Because of this, the paper's goal is to examine the dynamics of changes in prices and wages in order to identify warning signals of impending danger and provide suitable remedies.

Methods. Quantitative analysis of primary, secondary and tertiary sources is used in this paper. It was possible to find and confirm common findings in the research process by comparing data obtained from different types of sources through the triangulation technique.

Results and Conclusions. Recent labor market changes and potential pay pressure on prices have gained prominence in terms of local inflation, raising the possibility of a wage-price spiral. The dangers associated with inflation are still very considerable, even with the recent improvements. It is anticipated that the industrialized nations' central banks would tighten financial conditions even further in the context of a high rate of inflation worldwide. For nations with emerging and expanding economies, the global financial conditions have tightened dramatically, increasing the sovereign risk premium and raising the possibility of further inflationary pressure. Georgia is susceptible to world events since it is a tiny nation with an open economy. Furthermore, recent pay growth in the local labor market has outpaced productivity growth, which highlights labor market inflationary pressures. Thus, maintaining low inflation expectations continues to be a significant task.

Key words: Inflation, wages, sustainable development, wage-price spiral, labor productivity, economic shocks.

1. INTRODUCTION

Global supply chain disruptions brought on by the epidemic, the Russia-Ukraine war, and consecutive economic shocks have generated pressure for hyperinflation. Although it has peaked and is now declining in several nations, inflation is still a major problem on a worldwide scale [Gumata et al. 2017]. Thus, it is important to conduct a thorough analysis of the variables influencing inflation and its causes.

For this reason, we may track the contributions of corporate earnings and labor costs to the dynamics of inflation by observing them alongside other measures. Policymakers are focusing more and more on the dynamics of business earnings and salaries when debating the causes of inflation. The aforementioned breakdown is directly derived from the definition of the GDP deflator, which is a gauge of the costs of goods made in the country. Conversely, there is a substantial correlation between the inflation of the GDP deflator and the inflation of the consumer price index (CPI).

In general, when the level of prices rises in response to an increase in aggregate demand, so do the profits of businesses involved in the market. However, workers also have an incentive to seek greater salaries due to inflationary pressures, which causes wages to rise. The scenario might now go in any of the two following directions:

1. Companies that want to keep their larger profit margins also boost prices as a result of increasing salaries, which raises their nominal cost per unit of labor. It is the spiral of wages and prices. In the event of such a situation, we have the following picture: in the end, both the quickly increasing nominal salaries and the rapidly expanding nominal profits of corporations are the drivers of high inflation.
2. Businesses slow down their profit growth in order to satisfy the need for wage growth. In this scenario, we see that even while salaries would rise significantly during the transition phase, inflation—which was initially driven by rising corporate profits—will decline once more.

Based on the data from the most recent era, the research in our paper paints a specific picture of which scenario is most likely in the instance of Georgia. The GDP deflator decomposition study demonstrates that there was a considerable correlation between the rise in corporate profits and the general price level in Georgia during the Covid-19. Manufacturers have had to boost prices as a result of shortages of some items on the market caused by restrictions put in place at the beginning of the Covid-19 and supply chain disruptions [Zoidze and Tkhilashvili 2021].

Later, accumulated demand was released together with the lifting of the limitations. This demand has provided producers further motivation to raise prices (and consequently profits) even more, given the continued strain on supply systems. The demand was also impacted by the source of migratory movements following the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. When combined, these variables provide an explanation for why suppliers have raised their pricing, increasing their own profits. It should be mentioned that the workers sought greater pay following the corporations' increases in profits, against a backdrop of rising prices and increased inflationary pressure. Another significant factor was the labor market's density. As a result, businesses had to raise employee compensation in order to draw in and keep talented workers. The primary inquiry, though, is which of the two strategies mentioned above will businesses use to combat the pressure on wages to rise.

In 2022, the international economy faced significant problems against the backdrop of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Specifically, the sanctions that the international community has placed on Russia in an effort to prevent aggression also cause problems for the economies of many other nations. As a result, growth rates declined in 2022, particularly in developed economies. Severe supply disruptions around the world were added to this, and as a result, monetary policy tightened in reaction to the decline in inflation expectations that resulted in record-high inflation rates in some nations [Alvarez et al. 2022].

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY

Quantitative analysis of primary, secondary and tertiary sources is used in the present study. In addition, the issue discussed in the paper is multi-layered and located at the intersection of several disciplines. Therefore, many factors need to be taken into account, although depending on the format of the paper, attention is focused on the main aspects.

Cross-referencing of information from different sources was used to confirm the accuracy and reliability of the findings. It was possible to find and confirm common findings in the research process by comparing data obtained from different types of sources through the triangulation technique. The mentioned method of data collection provides a multidimensional approach of collecting information from different sources, which contributes to a deep and multifaceted study of the research topic.

Therefore, we formalized the following Research Questions (RQ):

- Research Question № 1: How tight is the labor market?

- Research Question № 2: Given the tightness of the labor market, what pressures are there on wage growth?
- Research Question № 3: To what extent is the growth rate of nominal wages expected to significantly exceed the growth rate of labor force productivity and, therefore, exacerbate the wage-price spiral?

For this purpose, an in-depth analysis of the dynamics of unemployment and wages has been identified within our research.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. The relationship between average nominal wages and inflation

The globe is now experiencing hyperinflation as a result of recent events, including Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the extension of the state of war as well as supply chain problems brought on by the Covid-19 outbreak. Global inflationary pressures also increase the likelihood that growing salaries will lead to price increases. In the labor market, salaries have a propensity to rise, especially because of the lengthening of the inflationary phase [Edge 2002]. In the case where the rate of wage growth exceeds the rate of inflation, inflationary pressure is generated by an increase in aggregate demand [Bijnens et al. 2023].

Furthermore, manufacturing costs increase when pay growth outpaces productivity growth, prompting price increases from businesses. A wage-price spiral is the dynamics of wages and prices where a rise in pay can set off a chain reaction of price increases, which in turn drives demand for even greater compensation from the labor force, and so on [Alintissar et al. 2018].



Figure 1. Effects of Inflation on Business Operations

Source: [Fastercapital 2024].

The trend of salary increase in the country is particularly noticeable since the time of high inflation during the pandemic period. For example, in 2020 the average salary was 1,191 GEL, in 2021 it increased to 1,304 GEL, in 2022 to 1,543 GEL, and by the end of 2023 the average salary increased to 1,858 GEL. According to the Monetary Policy Report, wage growth was influenced by high inflation and a shortage of skilled labor. In addition, according to the National Bank of Georgia, in the first years of the pandemic, the increase in inflation in the country was related to the increase in the profits of companies [Zoidze and Abuselidze 2021].

According to data from National Statistics Office of Georgia, annual inflation for May 2024 has decreased to 2 %, which is lower than the annual inflation target. Inflation has passed its peak, however, high socio-economic and political risks are still expected. Consequently, uncertainty remains at a high level and inflationary risks are still high [National Bank of Georgia 2023].

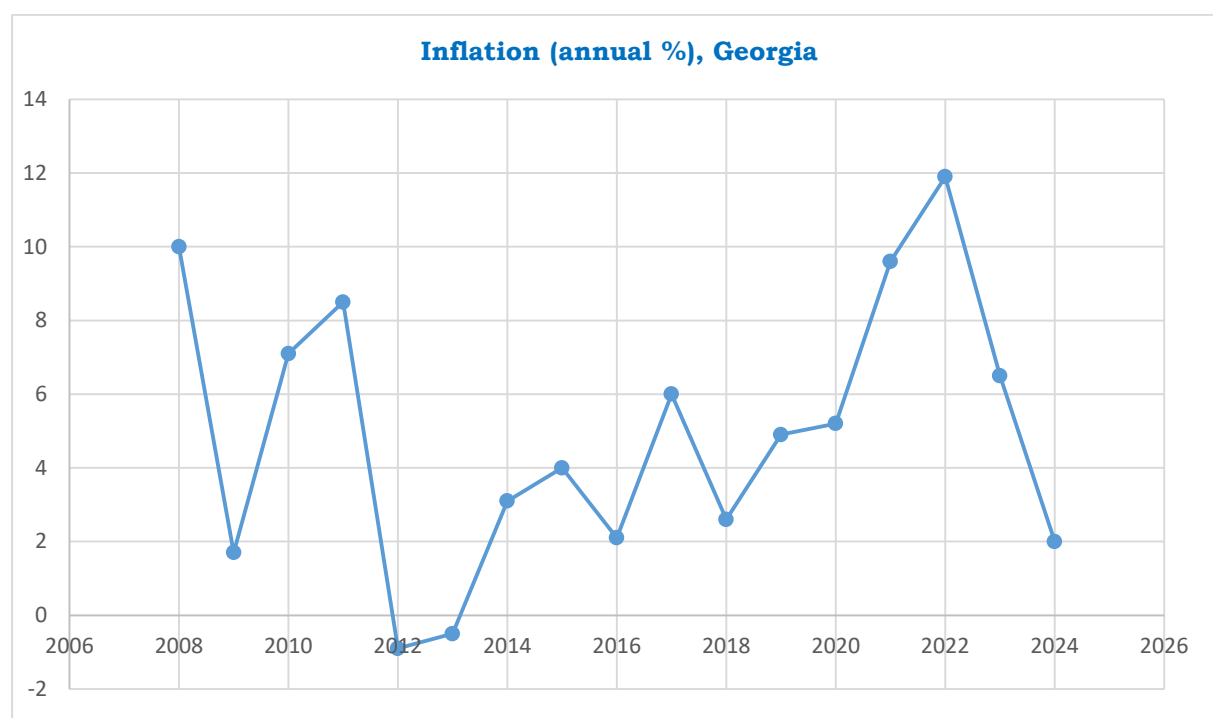


Figure 2. Inflation, consumer prices (annual %) – Georgia

Source: [National Statistics Office of Georgia 2024a].

The recent decline in factors that contributed to high inflation–price increases for food items and energy resources on global markets, as well as higher transportation costs–has also resulted in a decrease in imported inflation. Inflation is also lowered by tighter monetary policy, fiscal restraint, and a stronger currency rate [National Bank of Georgia 2023].

Despite the favorable trends, inflationary risks and uncertainties are still significant, necessitating tighter monetary policy. True, the good trends in foreign markets offer us cause to be cautiously optimistic, but future dynamics remain unpredictable. Furthermore, salary growth in the local labor market has recently outpaced productivity growth. As a result, the cost of staff per unit of production has increased significantly, highlighting the labor market's inflationary pressures [Darsavelidze 2019]. Other else being equal, inflation fell within the target range due to a tight monetary policy and the progressive removal of supply shocks. As a result, monetary policy has been loosened, and the monetary policy rate has fallen to 8 %.

In terms of inflationary pressures, an uncertain geopolitical environment is one of the external causes, while the National Bank highlights the possibility of a wage-price spiral, which indicates that salaries rise faster than productivity. This highlights inflationary pressures from the labor market.

Wages in the job sector are likely to rise as the inflationary environment continues. When pay growth exceeds inflation, aggregate demand rises, creating inflationary pressure. In addition, when pay growth outpaces productivity growth, manufacturing costs rise, prompting corporations to raise prices. Wage and price dynamics, in which an increase in wages can trigger a wave of price increases, which in turn leads to a demand for even higher wages from the labour force, and so on. It is known as a wage-price spiral (Figure 3). In this sense, the labor market's inflationary pressures become apparent, necessitating the implementation of a rigorous policy.

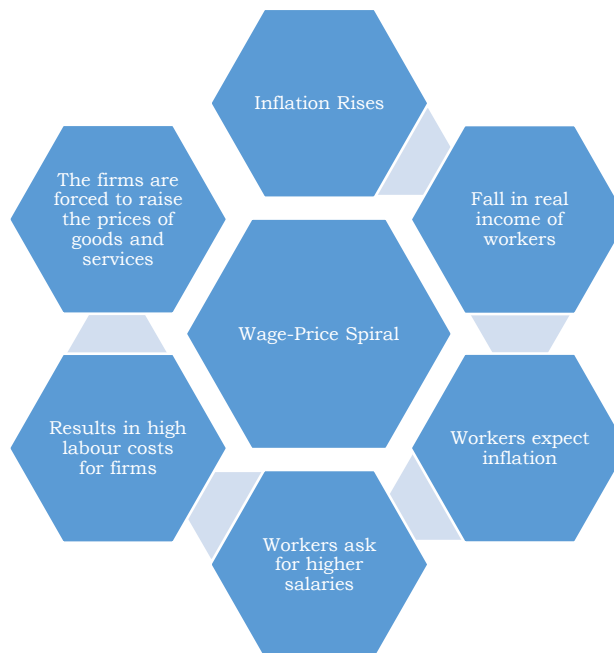


Figure 3. Wage-Price Spiral Model

Source: [Ahmed 2024].

Employees and/or job seekers will have an incentive to demand higher salaries if, following an inflationary shock (such as events like a pandemic or a significant inflow of migrants), expectations are established that the total price level will continue to grow once the shock wears off [Zoidze and Veshapidze 2022]. Georgia's actual inflation rate has been significantly below the target rate for an extended period of time due to a string of shocks, which raises the possibility that medium-term inflationary expectations may rise.

Recognizing the risk motivates job seekers to ask for more pay (Figure 4).

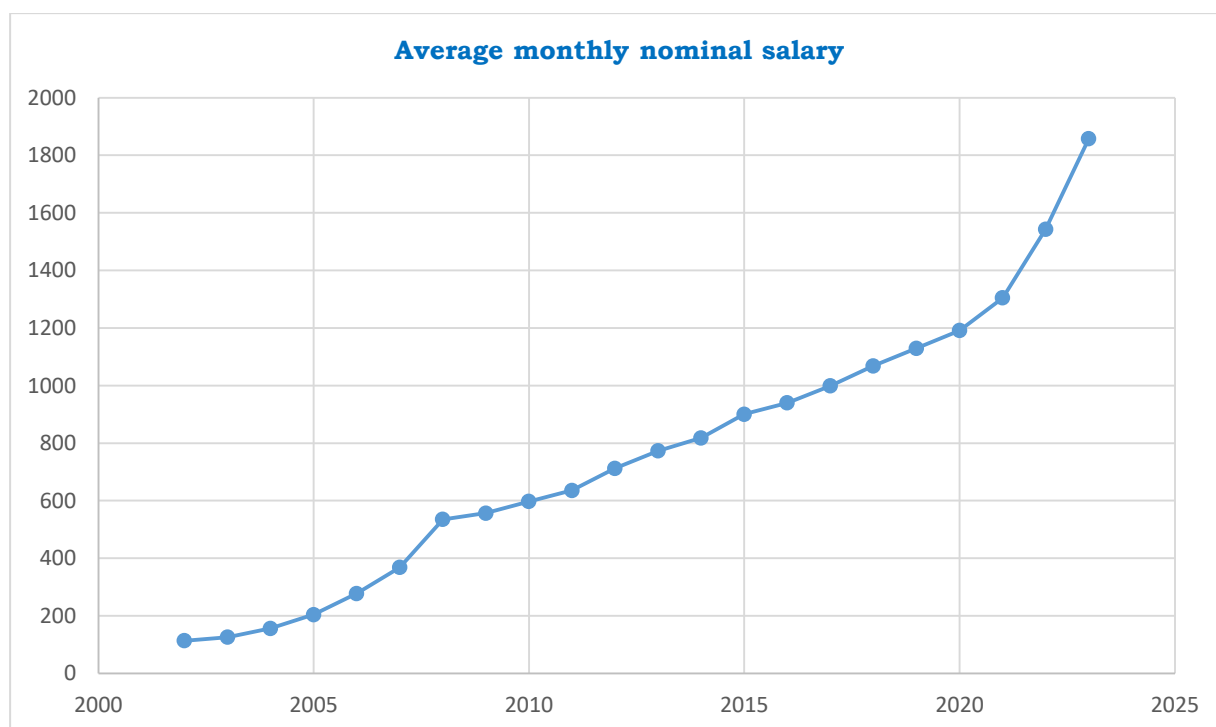


Figure 4. Average monthly nominal salary, Georgia

Source: [National Statistics Office of Georgia 2024b].

Note: Nominal salary is given in GEL – current exchange rate: 1 USD = 2.80 GEL (25.06.2024).

On the other side, high wages boost the cost of manufacturing (Figure 5), raising the general level of prices and exacerbating the inflationary environment.

Given the correlation between inflationary expectations and wage growth, it is important to keep a careful eye on the dynamics between both of these factors in order to respond appropriately when the spiral clearly begins to emerge [Gelantia 2023]. A stringent monetary policy is mostly maintained to lessen this danger, even if Georgia's general inflation rate is already trending downward and global markets are beginning to stabilize as well [Pertaia 2023].

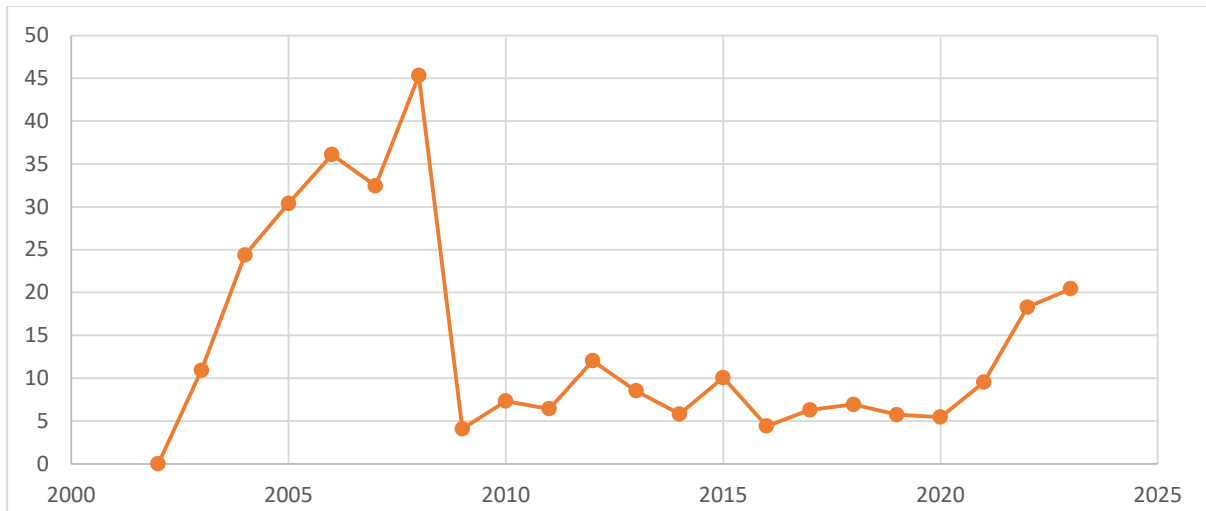


Figure 5. Average annual salary growth rate, 2002–2023

Source: [National Statistics Office of Georgia 2024c].

It should be mentioned that one of the supply variables influencing inflation is the recent strong strengthening of the currency rate. While this influence will continue to have a short-term impact on inflation, it is anticipated to progressively diminish. Furthermore, as indicated by consensus estimates from around the world, the prices of commodities on global markets should continue to stabilize [Kolsrud and Nymoen 2014]. This, along with the trend of declining transportation costs, will reinforce the downward pressure on imported inflation [Suthaharan and Bleakley 2022].

Recent labor market changes and potential pay pressure on prices have gained prominence in terms of local inflation, raising the possibility of a wage-price spiral [Franta and Vlcek 2024]. The convergence of inflation to the target rate has been noticeably delayed in light of the most severe shocks of recent years [Gali 2023]. As a result, it is more important than ever to make sure that inflation is gradually brought down to avoid endangering the National Bank's credibility and depressing inflationary expectations in future years.

3.2. Economic growth and labor productivity

The World Bank assesses Georgia's economic growth positively, but feels that increasing productivity and creating high-paying employment remain challenging concerns in the country.

The World Bank's economic memorandum for Georgia states that many types of changes will be required in order to keep GDP growth within the range of 4–4.5 %. Increased capacity, connectivity, and competitiveness will help a nation better

navigate global trends such as declining economies, mounting debt, threats to global value chains, modern technology, and climate change, all of which can either threaten or create opportunities for economic growth [Galt and Taggart 2023].

The fact that agriculture accounts for about 5 % of employment is also mentioned in this paper. Furthermore, there is a notable distinction in the productivity of those working in agriculture compared to other economic sectors, suggesting that there is still places for structural change.

Future business productivity gains and the capacity to seize possibilities in foreign markets will increasingly determine Georgia's economic growth (Figure 6).

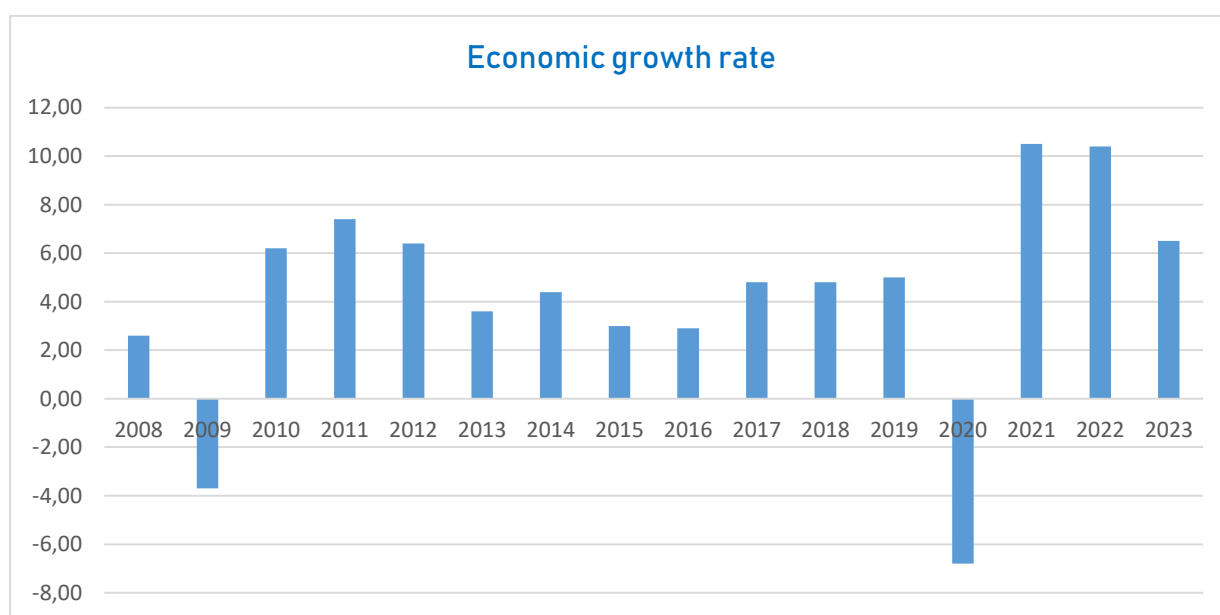


Figure 6. Economic growth rate, Georgia, 2008–2023

Source: [National Statistics Office of Georgia 2024d].

A more engaged and competent labor force can also counteract current demographic trends and boost output. Georgian businesses should concentrate on building stronger connections and turn a greater eye toward exporting [Zoidze and Abuselidze 2023].

In order to maintain the nation's sustainable socioeconomic growth, high rates of investment must be restored while limiting debt [Otinashvili et al. 2023]. This can be done by maintaining a sound macroeconomic policy, enhancing corporate governance, improving the effectiveness of state-run businesses, and improving household financial literacy [Businessformula 2022].

Compared to wage growth, due to the low rate of productivity growth, the cost of personnel per unit of production has increased by about 8 % per year, which raises

the risks of the development of a wage-price spiral. In this regard, the inflationary pressure from the labor market becomes noticeable, which requires maintaining a strict policy.

According to the data of the National Statistics Office of Georgia, in the first quarter of 2024 the unemployment rate in Georgia decreased to 14 %, while the average rate for 2023 was 16.4 %.

A substantial rise in economic activity, along with fundamental labor market issues, has the potential to cause labor shortage [Armendariz and Myrvoda 2023]. In such cases, organizations have numerous levers at their disposal to encourage employee retention and/or recruit fresh talent, one of which is a reasonably high pay offer [Demary and Hüther 2022; Malikane 2012].

Based on the analysis of the relationship between the level of unemployment and the announcement of vacancies, we can note that as of the first quarter of 2024, the efficiency of the labor market has decreased compared to the pre-pandemic period [Zoidze 2020]. From the second half of 2021, the efficiency of the labor market has decreased significantly. The reduced efficiency of the labor market, on the other hand, meant that it was difficult for the employer to find a worker. Since the first quarter of 2022, the unemployment rate has decreased (Figure 7), while the vacancy announcement rate has increased, which is the result of the rapid recovery of the economy.

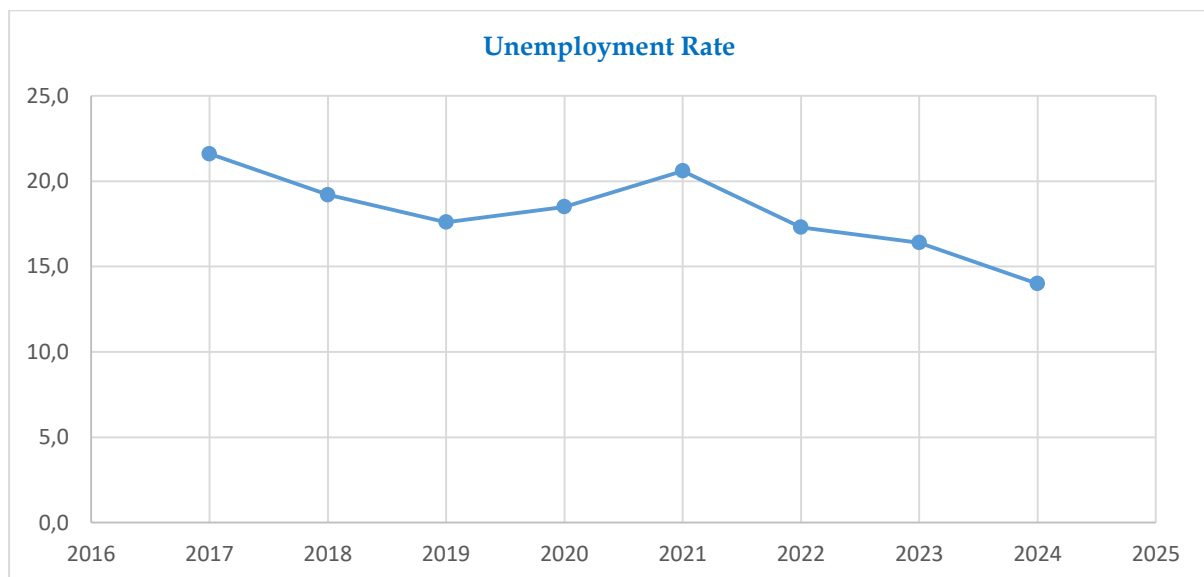


Figure 7. Unemployment Rate, Georgia, 2017–2024

Source: [National Statistics Office of Georgia 2024e].

All things considered, this shift suggests that the labor market is becoming increasingly crowded as businesses search for employees and the proportion of job searchers is decreasing. With decreased efficiency and tighter markets, there is a greater chance of inflationary pressures developing. Simultaneously, throughout the last period, there has been an increase in employment and a decrease in unemployment in the labor market. The patterns of these variables also show how crowded the job market is and how few workers there are [National Bank of Georgia 2023].

Recent data indicates that nominal and real salaries are rising in both the industrial and service sectors. Nominal earnings have been on the rise, especially during the post-pandemic period. But in the post-pandemic era, nominal salaries increased in tandem with strong productivity development, which prevented production costs from rising and, as a result, avoided inflationary pressure. But recently, as productivity growth has slowed, the rise in production costs per unit of product has come to light, raising the possibility of inflation brought on by the labor market.

However, the rise in real wages since the first quarter of 2022 might indicate that workers are basing their salary expectations on anticipated inflation. There may be a risk of a spiral with this labor market signal. Expectations of future price adjustments have a major role in how the spiral develops. The employee and/or job seeker will have an incentive to demand higher pay if, following an inflationary shock, there is an expectation that the general level of prices will continue to rise after the shock ends.

Georgia's actual inflation rate has been significantly below the target rate for an extended period of time due to a string of shocks, which raises the possibility that medium-term inflationary expectations may rise. When job applicants realize they are taking this risk, they want more money. Conversely, high wages exacerbate the inflationary backdrop by driving up production costs and raising the general level of prices (Table 1).

Given the correlation between inflationary expectations and wage growth, it is important to keep a careful eye on the dynamics between these two variables in order to respond appropriately when the spiral clearly begins to emerge [Hofmann et al. 2012]. A stringent monetary policy is mostly maintained to lessen this danger, even if Georgia's general inflation rate is already trending downward and global markets are beginning to stabilize as well [Lorenzoni and Werning 2023].

Table 1

Macroeconomic forecast risks of Georgia and impact on inflation

	Macroeconomic forecast risks	Impact on inflation
1.	Higher-than-expected interest rate hikes and recessions in developed countries	Inflation rise – risk of above-average impact
2.	Deterioration of the geopolitical situation	Rising inflation – high impact risk
3.	A decrease in the credibility of central banks amid increased global inflation	Rising inflation – high impact risk
4.	Decrease in foreign demand and deterioration of the current account balance	Inflation rise – risk of above-average impact
5.	Exacerbation of the wage-price spiral	Inflation rise – risk of above-average impact
6.	Lower than expected prices of commodity products on international markets	Inflation reduction – medium impact risk

Source: [National Bank of Georgia 2023].

Georgia has a tiny open economy thus the economic status of its trading partners has a substantial influence. Thus, the above-mentioned estimates for Georgia's economic indicators are heavily reliant on assumptions about the predicted patterns of economic development, inflation, and exchange rates in the key trading partner nations.

In the alternative scenario, the fundamental macroeconomic forecast's risks—which have a significant influence on inflation—come to pass. The concept primarily presupposes a worldwide recession [Saunders and Denniss 2022]. Conversely, the quick reaction of developed country central banks to the global inflationary environment is what triggers recessions [Sławiński and Hausner 2018].

This risk scenario also predicts that the situation locally would worsen due to an immediate decrease in financial flows from Russia and an extension or intensification of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The external demand for goods and services will decline in such a situation as compared to the base case, which will eventually have a negative effect on the current account deficit. The country's and the region's risk premium will rise, raising the possibility of capital

flight and impeding foreign investment intake [Storm 2024]. In turn, this will exert pressure on inflation and the currency rate [Lucas 2021].

The aforementioned dangers will materialize, and as a result, the real economy's size won't grow considerably in 2024. A situation like this would result in a decline in foreign demand, a worsening of economic agents' expectations, and increased pressure on the currency rate to devalue [Stanford 2023]. The latter will put more pressure on inflation through intermediate costs and expectations since it takes dollarization into account [Mokoka 2017].

The likelihood of a shock to the credibility of monetary policy would rise dramatically and long-term inflation expectations will be jeopardized if inflation deviates from its target rate. As a result, pay pressures will rise, and the forecast for an inflationary environment will get worse as nominal wage growth continues to outpace labor productivity growth [Oxford Analytica 2021].

The inflationary effect will be largely mitigated by decreased energy carrier costs (because to poor global demand). Maintaining the desired inflation rate will be challenging if the aforementioned acute situation occurs.

Conversely, the National Bank exhibits the least amount of leniency for this kind of circumstance, as seen by the quick tightening of monetary policy, the use of additional instruments when necessary, and the sustained maintenance of the tighter stance.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In Georgia, for the second quarter of 2024, inflation continued to decrease, from the second half of the year, other things being equal, it will remain within the target index in the medium term. The gradual reduction of inflation will be supported by the stabilization of commodity prices on the international markets and the exchange rate supported by strong foreign inflows in recent periods, along with the normalization of economic activity. The annual growth rate of the exchange rate will decrease, which is due to the normalization of foreign inflows and the base effect of the high real GDP growth of the previous year, on the one hand, and the tight monetary policy and fiscal consolidation on the other hand.

There are still substantial impact risks associated with the base scenario as things stand. The most severe of these is taken into account in the alternate prediction scenario. Specifically, in industrialized nations in reaction to a climate of inflation, a recession brought on by interest rates that were higher than anticipated, an instantaneous reduction in Russian cash inflows, and an extension or further

escalation of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Simultaneously, in light of inflation that departed from the goal rate for an extended duration,

The scenario takes into account the likelihood of increasing inflationary expectations and confidence shocks, as well as the fact that nominal pay growth is substantially faster than labor force productivity growth, which exacerbates the wage-price spiral. The National Bank has the lowest tolerance for this scenario, which calls for a prolonged maintenance of the tighter posture, a significant tightening of monetary policy, and the possible employment of additional tools.

A decline in external demand and a worsening of the current account balance relative to the base case are anticipated in the event of a worldwide recession. This will result in a weaker currency rate, which will push up inflation and only partially offset the effects of limiting aggregate demand and falling energy and food costs due to a decline in global demand.

The predicted course of inflation is also influenced by measures of Russian financial inflows, the likelihood that the conflict between Russia and Ukraine will continue or worsen, and the methods used to end it. Due to the ongoing high dollarization, a significant decline in Russian capital inflows will put downward pressure on the foreign currency market and raise inflationary pressure through expectations and intermediate costs.

Furthermore, if the full-scale conflict ends or intensifies later than anticipated, it will, on the one hand, weaken the trade and financial channels that have been disrupted by the war and expose those channels whose negative effects have not yet been felt by the Georgian economy due to Russian inflows. On the other side, the likelihood of enacting more sanctions and supply restrictions on Russia will rise along with the region's risk level.

Furthermore, it should be mentioned that the likelihood of a shock to the credibility of monetary policy and a rise in long-term inflation expectations grows dramatically in the context of successive shocks, since this delays the convergence of inflation to the target rate. Overall, this increases the likelihood of a wage-price spiral, where nominal pay growth continues to outpace the development in labor productivity, hence exacerbating the likelihood of an inflationary environment.

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**PREVENTING POLITICAL CORRUPTION IN UKRAINE:
CURRENT STATE AND CHALLENGES
DURING THE WAR**

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Abstract

Russia's military aggression has intensified the issue of political corruption in Ukraine as new threats emerge. Ignoring this issue in the short term could significantly destabilize the system of state governance and, in turn, jeopardize Ukraine's existence as an independent and democratic state. This study examines changes in the mechanisms for detecting and preventing political corruption in Ukraine under the full-scale Russian invasion, particularly in areas such as state funding of political parties, transparency of party finances, and officials' asset declarations. Despite security concerns, public attention to political corruption in Ukraine is growing. The absence of a systematic approach characterizes Ukraine's current political corruption prevention stage. Despite the war, an anti-corruption infrastructure has been established and is operational, with ongoing optimization of the relevant legal framework. On the other hand, informal practices that exhibit evident characteristics of political corruption continue to influence governance.

Keywords: political corruption, informal institutions, party financing and reporting, e-declaration, civil society.

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE TOPIC

Corruption is a global, complex, and destructive phenomenon, and efforts to combat it are nearly as old as its existence. It distorts the moral state of any society, undermines democracy, erodes the rule of law, and violates the socio-economic rights of the poor and vulnerable groups [Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 1997]. Fighting corruption is the responsibility of every society, and leading international actors emphasize the necessity of consolidating efforts at global, national, regional, and local levels. Key factors in an effective anti-corruption policy include democratic institutions and social cohesion, which shape the policy framework and ensure its sustainability. It is essential to address the consequences of corruption and eliminate its root causes [Ades et al. 1999].

Systemic corruption is particularly prevalent in countries experiencing crises in economic, institutional, and broader socio-political sectors. This issue primarily affects underdeveloped countries, autocracies, and states with weak government effectiveness and rule of law [Gründler et al. 2019]. Although formal anti-corruption legal frameworks and institutions may exist, their practical implementation is often undermined by informal rules that take precedence over formal ones [Gwartney et al. 2010].

Developing an effective policy to prevent and combat corruption has been and remains a crucial issue for Ukraine. Every president of independent Ukraine has focused on this issue in their political programs. One of the first anti-corruption legal acts was the Law of Ukraine, "On Combating Corruption", from October 5, 1995. Ukrainian anti-corruption legislation has undergone three stages of

development: the initial stage (1991–2011), the transitional stage (2011–2014), and the reform stage (2014–present). The first stage was marked by flaws in legislation concerning the types of corrupt acts, the individuals involved, and liability for corruption-related offenses [Viktorchuk et al. 2023]. The second stage involved many policy documents containing goals that were not achieved. The lack of a systematic approach to anti-corruption legislation marked the third stage. Corruption levels in the country, including political corruption, remained high, leading to mass public protests—the Orange Revolution in 2004 and the Revolution of Dignity in 2014—which resulted in a change of government. The fall of the Yanukovich regime marked the beginning of a new stage in political reforms, where the issues of preventing and combating corruption, particularly at the highest political levels, became more pressing.

Great expectations were placed on the presidency of Volodymyr Zelenskyy, whose election campaign was built mainly on criticizing the actions of his predecessor, Petro Poroshenko, particularly in the sphere of anti-corruption policy. However, the current government has also made mistakes, and public trust in Zelenskyy has significantly declined, primarily due to unmet expectations regarding eradicating corruption. A key moment in this decline was the constitutional crisis of 2020 when the Constitutional Court of Ukraine (CCU) ruled that mandatory electronic asset declarations for officials and provisions of the Criminal Code regarding inaccurate declarations and illicit enrichment were unconstitutional [Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine 2020b]. Although the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine (VRU) later partially rectified these decisions by amending the Law on the Prevention of Corruption in December 2020, the initial rulings had already weakened anti-corruption institutions, undermined international trust, and enabled corrupt officials to evade responsibility. In recent years, several high-profile corruption scandals have been linked to informal institutions, including nepotism, cronyism, favoritism, and clientelism. Zelenskyy has appointed many high-ranking officials without parliamentary approval, including childhood friends and former colleagues from the entertainment industry. Judicial reform has slowed, and political interference in anti-corruption agencies has increased to maintain control over them. Even Zelenskyy acknowledged in a January 2025 interview that although Ukraine has developed one of Europe's most complex anti-corruption systems, the fight against corruption remains unresolved.

The new threats posed by Russia's military aggression have further increased the urgency of developing an effective anti-corruption policy. The full-scale invasion of

Ukraine has shifted government priorities toward security, resilience, and maintaining the combat readiness of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. While Ukrainian society recognizes the ongoing issue of political corruption, there is a growing perception that this issue is not a priority and can be addressed after the war. However, this approach is fundamentally flawed. Ignoring political corruption today will only further weaken the state governance system in the short term and jeopardize Ukraine's existence as an independent and democratic state in the long run. Therefore, this study is aimed at the examination of changes in approaches to detecting and preventing political corruption in Ukraine under the conditions of Russia's full-scale invasion. The working hypothesis suggests that during the war, Ukrainian society is less concerned with the issue of corruption due to the prioritization of security and personal survival; the political elite has a greater awareness of the threats posed by political corruption and is taking appropriate measures; and the war does not affect the pace of implementation of policies aimed at preventing and combating political corruption in Ukraine. To achieve this goal, the authors used a number of scientific research methods, such as: comparative method (to reveal the content of political corruption, taking into account the peculiarities of various approaches); method of analysis of legal acts (to clarify changes in anti-corruption policy in Ukraine in the field of political relations); method of periodisation (to identify the main periods of development of anti-corruption policy in Ukraine); method of processing sociological data (to diagnose public opinion on political corruption) and others.

2. DETERMINANTS OF POLITICAL CORRUPTION

Despite its widespread use, there is no universally accepted definition of "corruption" due to its complex nature. A more traditional definition is provided by the World Bank and the non-governmental organization Transparency International, which defines corruption as "the misuse of public office for private gain". A broader understanding of corruption is outlined in the UN Global Programme against Corruption, which describes it as "the abuse of power for private benefit", encompassing both the public and private sectors [European Union law 2003].

Ukrainian researcher D. Koretska-Shukevich identifies seven academic approaches to interpreting this phenomenon. The traditional approach considers corruption not strictly as a legal norm but as a set of behavioral, moral, and ethical rules. In this case, corruption does not necessarily involve financial or material gain in exchange

for an action. The classical approach defines corruption as acquiring material benefits in monetary form. The economic approach views corruption as a type of financial behavior in which individuals with administrative and managerial authority serve the economy and become part of it while deriving certain benefits. The functional approach is typical of developing societies, where corruption is seen as a tool for influencing political processes in states with weak or ineffective democratic institutions and authoritarian political regimes. The behavioral approach considers corruption a socio-psychological phenomenon rooted in human vices such as greed and envy. It represents a distorted form of controlling one's social status, leading to societal demoralization and the erosion of moral values. Finally, the institutional approach defines corruption as state-power relations characterized by the exchange of official powers [Koretska-Shukievich 2020].

Corruption is classified into household, business, and political bribery based on social spheres [Anishchenko 2020]. Research on political corruption began only in the 20th century, as cases of political decisions being made in exchange for benefits to high-ranking officials became more frequent. Significant contributions to the development of political corruption theory were made by I. Amundsen, A. Heidenheimer, M. Johnston, V. Le Vine, R. C. Brooks, C. Friederic, K. Balachandrudu, P. Mark, J. Scott, M. Kitsing, S. Kotkin, S. Levitsky, D. A. Miller, J. L. Newell, J. Nye, S. Rose-Ackerman, G. Helmke, M. Philp, P. M. Heywood, and others. Ukrainian researchers have also studied this issue, including O. Bazaluk, V. Beglytsia, L. Berezinsky, B. Bondarenko, A. Borovyk, K. Davydenko, H. Kokhan, I. Kushnaryov, M. Melnyk, Y. Nevmerzhytsky, O. Nesterenko, V. Nonik, R. Radetsky, A. Tytko, V. Trepak, T. Fesenko, and others. From a political science perspective, research on political corruption focuses not on its scale but its causes and consequences. A key challenge in such research is distinguishing political corruption from other types.

Political corruption manifests through the actions of high-ranking officials when these actions are not related to their legally defined duties but are carried out for personal gain [Somin et al. 2015]. Many political scientists argue that political corruption encompasses any transaction between private and public sector actors through which collective goods are unlawfully converted into private benefits. In a more specific interpretation, political corruption occurs at the highest levels of the political system and involves individuals who directly make political decisions [Amundsen 1999]. Thus, political corruption is defined as the abuse of power for political purposes that precede others: (1) obtaining power and (2) maintaining,

strengthening, or expanding authority [Melnyk 2009]. In a broader sense, political corruption refers to the behavior and actions of decision-making actors—voters, politicians, bureaucrats, and interest or pressure groups—who violate contemporary laws and ethical, religious, and cultural societal norms [Aktan 2015: 49].

According to I. Amundsen, this type of corruption differs from bureaucratic or household corruption, and its characteristics include its prevalence at the highest levels of government and its significant political consequences. Political corruption not only leads to the misallocation of resources but also affects decision-making processes. It manipulates political institutions and procedural rules, thereby influencing governance structures and the political system, often resulting in institutional decline. Amundsen concludes that political corruption is more than a deviation from formal written legal norms, professional ethical codes, and judicial decisions. It occurs when government officials systematically abuse, circumvent, ignore, or even tailor laws and regulations to serve their interests. It also represents a deviation from the rational-legal values and principles of a modern state, with weak accountability of officials to the broader public being a central issue. In authoritarian countries, the legal foundations for assessing and condemning corrupt practices are weak and often subject to direct interference from the ruling political elite [Aktan 2015: 49]. Political corruption is typically clandestine, and its presence leads to the gradual erosion of democratic institutions, ultimately rendering them non-functional.

Political corruption becomes apparent in various forms and methods within the political system. According to I. Kushnaryov includes illegal party financing and actions that distort the role of political parties as key actors in a democratic system. Moreover, breaches of parliamentary and high-ranking official ethics, the sale of positions on a party's electoral list, voter bribery, and the misuse of administrative resources. Other forms include the adoption of key party decisions without broad discussion among party members, conflicts of interest among officials, patronage policies, political nepotism, cronyism, favoritism, opaque lobbying, and judicial corruption in political cases [Kushnarov 2018: 51].

For post-communist countries, R. Karklins classifies corruption based on political losses into three types. The first type is corruption at lower government levels, including bribery, deliberate manipulation of regulatory norms, and using administrative inspections for extortion. The second type is asset misappropriation for personal gain, involving abuse of power in public procurement, nepotism, clientelism, and the “sale” of government positions. The third type is the capture of

the state by corrupt networks, which includes deliberate efforts to reduce political competition, manipulation of electoral processes, judicial corruption, abuse of oversight or investigative authority, the use of kompromat as a tool of political struggle, and media corruption [Karklins 2002: 24].

It is important to note that political corruption is a complex and challenging social phenomenon to study. Analyzing only a given state's formal legal framework is insufficient; moral, normative, and ethical criteria must also be considered.

3. PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF POLITICAL CORRUPTION IN UKRAINE: KEY TRENDS AMID RUSSIA'S FULL-SCALE INVASION

Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the primary concerns of Ukrainian society became the preservation of sovereignty, the restoration of territorial integrity, enhanced security, and the protection of citizens' lives. Ukraine faced unprecedented challenges that affected all aspects of socio-political life. However, the corruption issue did not disappear from the public agenda; on the contrary, it remains one of the most pressing concerns for most Ukrainians. This assertion is supported by numerous sociological surveys conducted after the onset of full-scale hostilities, encompassing respondents who remained in Ukraine and those who were forced to leave the country.

In December 2023, the National Public Broadcasting Company of Ukraine commissioned the fifth national survey by Info Sapiens to comprehensively assess the corruption situation in Ukraine. The overall findings of the study can be characterized as disappointment after hopes for improvement, with corruption ranking as the second most serious issue in Ukraine, following Russia's military aggression. Both business representatives (73 %) and ordinary citizens (72 %) highlighted corruption as a significant concern. According to the survey, 63 % of respondents indicated that corruption levels had increased since the full-scale invasion. In comparison, 24 % believed they had remained unchanged, 5 % observed a decrease, and 9 % could not assess the situation. The responses allowed for the identification of key reasons for the increase in corruption levels: the impunity of corrupt officials (77 %), the inefficiency of anti-corruption agencies (53 %), the ineffectiveness of law enforcement agencies (50 %), the dysfunctionality of the judiciary (49 %), the inaction of citizens (26 %) and civil society organizations (22 %), and household-level corruption (35 %). The survey also identified the institutions perceived as most responsible for corruption: the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine (53 %), law enforcement agencies (51 %), the judiciary (50 %), and anti-

corruption agencies and organizations (49 %). Additionally, 44 % of respondents blamed local authorities, 40 % blamed Ukrainian citizens, 38 % the government, 37 % the President's Office, and 36 % the President himself. Respondents considered political corruption at the highest levels—within the government or parliament—to be the most serious issue (93.2 %), followed by corruption in business and household-level corruption. Political and business corruption were identified as the main drivers of the overall increase in corruption levels. Notably, concerns about political corruption among entrepreneurs increased even compared to 2021. When asked about the most effective measures to combat corruption, respondents most frequently supported punitive measures, including strengthening criminal liability up to life imprisonment (60 %), confiscating the property of corrupt officials' close relatives (57 %), and restricting business activities for government officials after leaving public service (45 %). Additionally, respondents prioritized reform and educational initiatives in the following order: reforming anti-corruption agencies (45 %), promoting intolerance of corruption in society (38 %), and inviting foreign judges to work in Ukraine (33 %). However, 67 % of respondents expressed pessimism regarding the possibility of improving the corruption situation in Ukraine in 2025 [Karklins 2002: 24].

In July and August 2023, the Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation studied Ukrainian citizens' perceptions of corruption threats during the war, excluding territories occupied by Russia. According to the findings, 47 % of respondents stated that corruption remains Ukraine's most significant obstacle to business development, even during the war. In comparison, 37 % identified war-related destruction as the main hindrance. More than half (52.5 %) of respondents expressed the view that the government should be criticized for corruption and disagreed with the notion that such criticism destabilizes the country or undermines trust from foreign partners. Additionally, over 78 % of respondents believed that the President of Ukraine bears direct responsibility for corruption within the government and military administrations [Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation (DIF) 2023]. For comparison, a nationwide study of Ukrainians living in Europe who had left due to Russia's full-scale invasion was also conducted in 2023. According to the results, 84 % of respondents considered corruption levels in Ukraine higher than in Europe [Tkalych 2023]. Among the positive developments, respondents highlighted the improvement in administrative services. However, the primary source of frustration for Ukrainians remained elite corruption or abuse of power at the highest levels of government, which is inherently a political issue.

The findings of authoritative international institutions are also crucial for assessing the situation. According to the V-Dem Institute, based at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden, Ukraine's political corruption index 2023 was 0.61 (on a scale from 0 to 1, where 1 represents high corruption). In comparison, the index was 0.60 in 2022, 0.67 in 2021, and 0.81 in 2014. For reference, in neighboring Poland, this index in 2023 was 0.13, nearly four times lower than in Ukraine [Our World in Data 2023]. Transparency International Ukraine reported that Ukraine scored 36 out of 100 on the Corruption Perceptions Index for 2023, ranking 104th out of 180 countries. This reflects a slight improvement compared to 2022, with an increase of three points [Transparency International Ukraine 2023]. Thus, the data from sociological surveys and international rankings demonstrate the presence of political corruption in Ukraine and its prioritization as a key issue for the public and businesses, second only to the full-scale Russian invasion. While some progress has been made, the current pace of anti-corruption efforts remains insufficient despite the government's consistent declarations that combating systemic corruption is a top priority.

4. RESULTS AND CHALLENGES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ANTI-CORRUPTION POLICY IN POLITICAL SPHERE OF UKRAINE DURING THE WAR

Ukrainian researchers identify multiple reasons for the persistence of corruption in the country. S. Radetsky highlights several key factors: political, manifested through the lack of a clear state-building vision and low moral standards; economic, resulting from the absence of transparent economic processes; legal, due to the incomplete definition of subjects involved in corrupt practices; organizational, allowing individuals with business or criminal backgrounds to secure government positions; and socio-political, including tolerance toward corruption, self-interest, and poverty [Radetskyi 2018: 151]. To some extent, Y. Matsiievskyi argues that Ukraine has developed an inefficient combination of political and economic institutions, with key political actors lacking motivation to change the status quo [Matsiievskyi 2016: 36]. Similarly, H. Zelenko notes that informal institutions play a significant role in Ukraine, acting as veto groups that obstruct positive changes. These include the shadow economy, corruption, nepotism, and other factors that distort the essence of a formal democratic system [Zelenko 2025: 33].

Corruption has hazardous consequences in the context of full-scale war, directly affecting national defense capabilities. It results in the procurement of lower-quality equipment, reducing the operational efficiency of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. It

contributes to the loss of scarce resources, creates opportunities for financing the aggressor state, undermines trust in the defense sector and the rule of law, fosters a culture of impunity, and facilitates the infiltration of Russian influence agents into government structures.

As previously noted, the current stage of Ukraine's anti-corruption policy development began with the political shifts following the Revolution of Dignity in 2014, which led to the adoption of numerous documents to combat corruption. A foundational step in this process was the adoption of the Law of Ukraine "On Preventing Corruption" on October 14, 2014, which initiated the construction of a new anti-corruption infrastructure. Further progress was made in June 2022 when the Anti-Corruption Strategy for 2021–2025 was approved to achieve substantial improvements in preventing and countering corruption [National Agency on Corruption Prevention 2022].

Additionally, new mechanisms for preventing and combating political corruption were introduced. Among the most significant measures were state financing of political parties, transparency of party finances, and mandatory asset declarations for officials. However, implementing these measures proved challenging and faced significant resistance from political elites. These mechanisms were also subject to modifications following Russia's full-scale invasion, with changes justified on the grounds of national security and wartime conditions.

In 2015, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted the Law "On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of Ukraine on Preventing and Combating Political Corruption", [Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine 2015] which, in Section IV, established the procedure for state financing of political parties. According to Article 173, parties that received at least 2 % of the vote in the most recent parliamentary elections were granted the right to budget financing. However, in 2019, the Verkhovna Rada restricted state funding to only parliamentary parties, which secured more than 5 % of the vote [Zabolotna 2023]. The final decision on granting such financial support was entrusted to the National Agency for the Prevention of Corruption (NAPC). Oversight of the lawful and targeted use of state funds allocated to political parties was assigned to the Accounting Chamber and NAPC. Simultaneously, a requirement for quarterly financial reporting by political parties (Article 17) was introduced as one of the conditions for obtaining a visa-free regime with the European Union.

Subsequently, on March 30, 2020, the Verkhovna Rada adopted Law No. 540, "On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of Ukraine Aimed at Ensuring Additional

Social and Economic Guarantees in Connection with the Spread of Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)", [Zabolotna 2023] which also affected political party reporting procedures. The law stipulated that political parties must submit their reports no later than forty days after the quarantine. In practice, the pandemic effectively legalized the possibility for political parties to refrain from submitting financial reports to the NAPC. Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Verkhovna Rada, citing security concerns, imposed a moratorium on the review of financial reports, even those submitted voluntarily by political parties. As a result, several billion hryvnias remained outside public and NAPC oversight, leaving unanswered questions about how state funds allocated to political parties since 2020 were spent. Moreover, state funding for parliamentary parties in Ukraine has been steadily increasing. Between 2020 and 2022, parliamentary parties received nearly 2 billion UAH from the state budget. For 2023, over 753 million UAH was allocated for political party financing, 811 million UAH was planned for 2024, and more than 890 million UAH for 2025 [Slovo i Dilo 2025].

The refusal of political parties to submit financial reports created new challenges, including increased opacity in political financing due to the absence of reports in the POLITDATA registry, the complete lack of state and public oversight of political party activities, and the inability of voters to access information on the sources of funding for parliamentary political parties or how state funds were allocated. It also became impossible to determine the financing and expenditures of the "Opposition Platform – For Life" party from 2020 to 2022 in the context of the ban on pro-Russian political parties. These developments naturally provoked an adverse reaction from anti-corruption bodies. The head of the Department for the Prevention of Political Corruption at the NAPC, H. Chornutska, emphasized the need for legislative amendments to restore the submission and verification of political party reports. In December 2023, the NAPC submitted a draft law for government consideration, securing support from civil society organizations and international partners, particularly the ambassadors of G7 countries and the EU, who had repeatedly insisted on such reforms [National Agency on Corruption Prevention 2023d].

As a result, on December 26, 2023, the Law of Ukraine, "On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of Ukraine Regarding the Improvement of State Financing and Control over Political Party Activities", [Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine 2023] came into force. This law required political parties to submit financial reports covering the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and the imposition of martial law in Ukraine

in February 2022 in cases where they had not been voluntarily submitted. Political parties must now report their assets, income, expenditures, and financial obligations to the NAPC quarterly or annually. Failure to submit reports carries penalties, including fines ranging from 300 to 400 non-taxable minimum incomes, equivalent to 5,100 to 6,800 UAH. However, according to the NAPC, nearly 170 political parties failed to submit reports for the second quarter of 2024, while 150 parties failed for the third quarter of 2024, indicating weak enforcement mechanisms in Ukraine [National Agency on Corruption Prevention 2023b].

Another significant step in preventing political corruption was the introduction of electronic asset declarations for officials. In 2014, the Verkhovna Rada adopted the Law of Ukraine, “On Preventing Corruption”, [Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine 2014] which required individuals authorized to perform state or local government functions to submit annual income declarations to the Unified State Register of Declarations by April 1 (Article 45). This register became operational in August 2016 on the official NAPC website with open, round-the-clock public access. However, due to security concerns, the declaration requirement for officials was suspended in February 2022. On February 24 of the same year, the NAPC restricted public access to the declarations registry to prevent the aggressor from obtaining information on Ukrainian civil servants and politicians. At that time, these measures were justified, as Russian forces occupying Ukrainian territories actively sought out state officials and law enforcement personnel [Pashynskiy 2022]. Later, in early March 2022, Law No. 2115-IX, “On Protecting the Interests of Reporting Entities and Other Document Filers During Martial Law or the State of War”, came into effect, postponing all reporting deadlines to three months after the end of martial law [Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine 2022]. However, officials could technically submit electronic declarations voluntarily. In 2021, for example, only a third of those required to declare their assets did so voluntarily. Nonetheless, the declarations registry was not accessible for public scrutiny.

The restoration of electronic asset declarations for officials, which had been suspended at the onset of the full-scale invasion, became one of the seven key requirements for Ukraine’s accession to the European Union and a crucial condition set by the International Monetary Fund for further financial support. Under pressure from international creditors, Ukrainian lawmakers considered several legislative proposals. One such proposal suggested reinstating declarations while keeping the register closed to the public (Bill No. 9534). However, civil society representatives opposed this measure, particularly in light of high-profile corruption

scandals, and launched a petition urging the president to veto the bill. Within hours, the petition gathered the required 25,000 signatures, and by the end of the first day, more than 50,000 people had signed it [Klitina 2023]. The National Agency for the Prevention of Corruption (NAPC) also appealed to President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, raising concerns about a provision that would allow individuals who submitted false information in their declarations—up to a discrepancy of 1.3 million UAH—to avoid inclusion in the Unified State Register of Corrupt Officials if they paid a fine. This effectively weakened the register at a time when false declarations were among the most socially harmful corruption-related offenses. International partners, including the International Monetary Fund, the EU Council, the European Commission, and the ambassadors of G7 and EU countries, also insisted on restoring mandatory electronic declarations for officials. As a result, the president vetoed the bill and proposed making declarations publicly accessible, aligning with public sentiment, as approximately 90 % of Ukrainians supported the reinstatement of mandatory asset declarations for officials even during wartime [Zabolotna 2023].

On October 12, 2023, Law No. 3384-IX on amendments to specific laws of Ukraine regarding the procedure for submitting declarations by individuals authorized to perform state or local government functions under martial law came into effect [National Agency on Corruption Prevention 2023c]. The law reinstated the obligation for officials to declare their assets and restored the NAPC's verification functions. It also required state and local government officials to submit electronic declarations for 2021, 2022, and 2023. On December 10, 2023, the NAPC reopened public access to the register while implementing security measures to protect sensitive information [National Agency on Corruption Prevention 2023c]. This marked a significant step forward in the fight against political corruption, as public access to officials' asset declarations is a key tool for holding them accountable. Simultaneously, the NAPC introduced a fundamentally new approach to selecting declarations for verification. This innovation allowed for processing a record number of submitted declarations and increased the effectiveness of inspections. In 2023, only up to 30 % of all submitted declarations were planned for automated verification through registry software, but by 2025, this figure was expected to reach nearly 100 %. As a result, by early 2025, numerous public officials had already been formally charged with illicit enrichment based on the findings of electronic asset declarations.

5. CONCLUSIONS

An effective policy for combating political corruption is crucial not only for preserving Ukraine's sovereignty, democracy, and European integration aspirations but also for ensuring the country's post-war reconstruction. Since 2014, significant progress has been made in anti-corruption efforts, mainly due to international pressure and civil society activism. However, since 2020, these efforts have faced setbacks due to legislative changes prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the full-scale Russian invasion, and increased attempts by Ukrainian politicians to control independent anti-corruption institutions, including NABU, SAP, and the NAPC.

The current stage of political corruption prevention in Ukraine lacks a systematic approach. On the one hand, despite the war, an anti-corruption infrastructure has been established and continues to function while the corresponding legal framework is being optimized. On the other hand, informal practices indicative of political corruption persist, including interference in the work of anti-corruption bodies, obstruction of new anti-corruption legislative initiatives, and attempts to restrict previous anti-corruption measures under the justification of security concerns [Mysyshyn 2023]. Despite the war, political corruption remains a significant concern for Ukrainian society, with public attention to the issue increasing in 2023 compared to 2022. Although it was initially assumed that the war would reduce corruption due to the country's existential threat, this has not materialized. While the war has not triggered zero tolerance for corruption, there has been some progress in implementing and improving policies for preventing and combating political corruption. However, these efforts have been primarily driven by pressure from international partners and civil society rather than by political will within Ukraine's leadership.

To strengthen Ukraine's fight against political corruption, it is essential to reinforce the independence of newly established anti-corruption institutions while reducing the influence of informal structures perpetuating corruption. It is also necessary to expand the role of international experts in refining Ukraine's legal framework and monitoring the activities of anti-corruption bodies, including in the selection of personnel. A comprehensive strategy for combating political corruption should be developed, incorporating a clear legal definition of political corruption, which is currently absent from Ukraine's legislative framework. Overcoming systemic political corruption in Ukraine requires more than new laws, an anti-corruption infrastructure, or judicial reforms. Establishing a legal culture and a culture of corruption prevention is crucial, ensuring that anti-corruption values become

embedded within society. Civil society must be strengthened by safeguarding freedom of speech and action, which, to some extent, remains restricted under martial law. Additionally, mechanisms for genuine interaction between civil society institutions and state and local government authorities must be implemented. Achieving these goals in the fight against political corruption is a long-term process, significantly complicated by the war and security risks facing Ukraine. Therefore, political will is paramount—genuine, rather than declarative, intentions from the country’s leadership to effectively combat corruption in all its forms and at all levels of government. Only through sustained efforts, international cooperation, and the active involvement of civil society can Ukraine build a political system that is resistant to corruption and aligned with democratic values.

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EXTERNAL FACTORS AFFECTING TÜRKİYE-RUSSIA RIVALRY IN THE SECOND KARABAKH WAR¹

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to analyse the Türkiye-Russia rivalry in the Second Karabakh War in line with the policies of state and non-state actors with interests in the region. In this context, the study examines the policies of international organisations such as the UN, EU, OSCE and OIC, as well as actors such as the US, France, Iran and Israel. The study uses case analysis, a qualitative research method. In this context, official information, documents and comments from these actors, as well as periodicals on the subject, were used in the study.

Key words: Karabakh, Türkiye, Russia, Rivalry, International Actors.

1. INTRODUCTION

In order to comprehensively analyse the Turkish-Russian rivalry during the Second Karabakh War, the role of systemic factors should also be taken into account. Based on the neoclassical assumption, addressing the actors related to the region will increase the validity of the findings. In this respect, in addition to the policies of international actors, a very important factor to be taken into account in the period

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of the Battle of Homeland is the Covid-19 pandemic that affected the whole world. This case, which resulted in the international community's self-isolation, including the disruption of the global supply chain, is one of the possible factors that encouraged Armenia to launch the attack that started the war on 27 September 2020. However, this situation did not only benefit Yerevan, but also provided a relative advantage for Azerbaijan. In addition, Armenia may have taken into account that the dose of Türkiye's response would be low in the current pandemic situation. However, Ankara's decisive and deterrent attitude from the first minutes of the war surprised both Armenia and the actors supporting it. On the other hand, the period during which the Battle of the Homeland took place was also the beginning of the economic crisis caused by the global pandemic. In this period, the priorities of states, including Armenia's supporters, were their national interests. The failure to fulfil Yerevan's expectations after the attacks pushed it to attempt to extend the war beyond Karabakh in order to enforce CSTO engagements.

It can be said that there are many actors with interests in the region in the Second Karabakh War. However, it is more important to analyse the actors that have any direct or indirect connection with the Türkiye-Russia rivalry. In this context, these actors are classified as international organisations and states. Within the scope of the aforementioned classification, the UN, EU, OSCE and OIC are included as organisations, while the USA, France, Iran and Israel are included as states. In this context, it will be useful to first examine the contribution of the policies carried out by the actors of the international community during the Second Karabakh War to the Türkiye-Russia rivalry.

1.1. Literature Review

Although there are sufficient sources in the literature on the role of external actors in the Second Karabakh War, few of them can be associated with the Türkiye-Russia rivalry. In this direction, the United States is one of the leading external actors affecting the Türkiye-Russia rivalry. Ibrahimov and Oztarsu (2022) state that the United States focused all its resources on its domestic agenda due to the elections in 2020 and therefore did not have the expected level of influence during the Second Karabakh War (Ibrahimov & Oztarsu, 2022). Nevertheless, it is possible to say that the United States, through various statements, displayed an attitude that was not in Ankara's favor.

Another actor that could be influential in the Türkiye-Russia rivalry during the Second Karabakh War is the European Union. On the other hand, Almond (2020), in his commentary, emphasizes that it is incorrect to reduce the issue solely to the U.S. elections, noting that the deeper reason for the inability of Western actors to respond to states using military force lies elsewhere.

It is well-known that the EU's primary motivation for its initiatives in the Caucasus is energy policy. Chitadze (2024) argues that the EU's role in the Second Karabakh War was limited to post-war rehabilitation and development programs. However, he also asserts that soft power-based policies in the Caucasus are insufficient. Additionally, Iran emerges as an important external actor in the Second Karabakh War, particularly in relation to the Türkiye-Russia rivalry. Some analysts contend that Iran's policies during the war supported Russia (Goble, 2020).

Another extra-regional actor that played an influential role in the war was France. Some experts have argued that France was behind the Armenian attacks that led to the outbreak of the Second Karabakh War (Koçak, 2020). Given that France's stance in the conflict was directly opposed to Türkiye's, these allegations seem even more plausible. On the other hand, according to Shikhaliyev (2020), the nullification and invalidation of the Minsk Group's mediation efforts excluded France from the post-war peace process.

The current research discovers strong evidence that external factors like international organisations' policies, behaviors of major states, and systemic factors like the global effects of the novel Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic played a crucial role in Türkiye's and Russia's rivalry during the Second Karabakh War. These considerations not only influenced the dynamics of the conflict, but also drew attention to the limits of international mediation and the intricacies of regional power relations. It is maintained that the interplay between these outside factors and the domestic political issues in Türkiye and Russia ought to be an object of future research, and that it should also address the long-term consequences of such an interplay for regional stability in the Caucasus.

1.2. Research Question

The present article aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the Turkish-Russian rivalry during the Second Karabakh War, with a particular focus on the external factors that influenced this rivalry. The research will examine how international actors, including global organisations and states, shaped or impacted

the dynamics of this rivalry. A key part of the analysis will involve considering how the global context influenced the actions of the involved parties, including Armenia, Azerbaijan, and their international allies.

The purpose of the research is to understand the role of external factors in the Second Karabakh War and how these factors affected the rivalry between Türkiye and Russia. The research will explore the impact of international organisations (such as the UN, EU, OSCE, and OIC) and key states (like the USA, France, Israel, and Iran) on the Türkiye-Russia competition during the war. This includes the analysis of how these actors' policies may have either aligned with or opposed Türkiye and Russia's strategic interests.

The research question the article is attempting to answer can be summarised as follows: How did the policies and actions of international organisations and key states influence the rivalry between Türkiye and Russia during the Second Karabakh War? This question addresses the broader context of systemic factors (global and political) in shaping the interactions and rivalries in the Caucasus region during the Second Karabakh War.

1.3. Methodology

To analyze the external factors affecting the Turkish-Russian rivalry during the Second Karabakh War, a qualitative research methodology is appropriate, given the complex and multifaceted nature of international relations in the region. The study will adopt a neoclassical realist framework, focusing on both systemic (global geopolitical shifts) and domestic factors (such as economic crises and national interests) to understand how international actors influenced the rivalry between Türkiye and Russia. The central research question is: How did the policies and actions of international organizations and key states shape the dynamics of the Türkiye-Russia rivalry during the Second Karabakh War?

The primary data collection will involve document analysis of statements, resolutions, and official reports from major international organizations such as the UN, EU, OSCE, and OIC, as well as from states such as the USA, France, Iran, and Israel. This will include reviewing UN Security Council resolutions, EU Council communications, and diplomatic statements issued during the conflict, which reflect the political stances and interventions of these actors. In addition, media reports, particularly from both regional and international outlets, will be examined to understand the public and political discourse surrounding the war and how these international actors positioned themselves in relation to Türkiye and Russia.

To ensure a comprehensive understanding, comparative analysis will be employed to assess how different international actors influenced the rivalry. This includes examining the EU's tacit support for Armenia, the UN's neutral yet problematic stance, and how the COVID-19 pandemic altered the global political environment. The analysis will also consider how these external policies interacted with the domestic policies and strategies of Türkiye, Russia, and Armenia. For example, Armenia's calculation of a "low-cost" response from Türkiye due to the pandemic will be juxtaposed with Türkiye's surprising deterrent actions at the onset of the war. Similarly, the role of Russia's support for Armenia will be analyzed in light of its rivalry with Türkiye in the broader Caucasus region.

Finally, the research will synthesize the findings using discourse analysis to interpret the language used in diplomatic exchanges, policy statements, and media reports. This will help reveal how the global context, including the pandemic and systemic geopolitical factors, shaped the foreign policies of key international actors, and how these policies, in turn, influenced the dynamics of the Turkish-Russian rivalry during the war. The methodology will allow for a nuanced understanding of how external actors either aligned with or opposed the strategic interests of Türkiye and Russia in the context of the Second Karabakh War.

1.4. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this analysis is based on neoclassical realism, a theory in international relations that integrates both systemic factors and internal state dynamics to explain foreign policy decisions. Neoclassical realism builds on the foundational assumptions of classical realism by incorporating the influence of domestic variables, such as leadership, national identity, and domestic political processes, alongside external structural constraints. According to scholars like Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell (2016), neoclassical realism recognizes that while states' behaviors are shaped by the international system's distribution of power, their ability to respond is also conditioned by internal factors, such as the political and economic environment. In the context of the Second Karabakh War, this framework helps explain how the global power balance between Türkiye and Russia interacted with internal pressures—particularly those stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic crises that ensued. The pandemic, which disrupted global supply chains and shifted international priorities, notably influenced Armenia's calculations in initiating the conflict and shaped Türkiye's and Russia's responses. Armenia, for example, may have calculated that Türkiye's reaction would

be subdued due to the global health crisis, while Azerbaijan's geopolitical interests and external support from Türkiye offered a significant advantage. Neoclassical realism, thus, underscores the importance of understanding both the external systemic factors and the internal factors, such as national leadership and domestic imperatives, that shaped the actions of all parties involved in the conflict.

Furthermore, this study incorporates theory of international organizations (IOs) to explain the role of multilateral institutions, such as the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU), and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), in influencing the Türkiye-Russia rivalry during the Second Karabakh War. International organizations are not merely neutral bodies but often reflect the strategic interests of their most influential members, as articulated by Mearsheimer (2019) in his critique of liberal institutionalism. In the case of the Second Karabakh War, the UN's position, which vacillated between calls for a ceasefire and ambiguous stances that could be interpreted as tacit support for Armenia, highlights the way international organizations serve as arenas for broader geopolitical competition, influencing the rivalry between Türkiye and Russia. Similarly, the EU's calls for peace, while framed in neutral terms, have often been interpreted as favoring Armenia, thus complicating Türkiye's regional objectives and fueling the rivalry with Russia, which has maintained strong ties with Armenia. Keohane (1984) argued that IOs are important platforms for reinforcing power dynamics, and in this case, the EU's stance furthered the narrative that Western powers, through their support for Armenia, were counteracting Türkiye's influence in the South Caucasus. This framework allows for an understanding of how IOs contribute to shaping the actions of states like Türkiye and Russia, especially when these states seek to align international norms with their strategic interests.

By combining neoclassical realism with the theory of international organizations, this research will explore how both global and regional actors—shaped by systemic forces and domestic conditions—interacted to influence the competition between Türkiye and Russia during the Second Karabakh War. This approach provides a comprehensive analysis of how international dynamics and institutional politics, alongside domestic pressures and the global context, shaped the behavior of the key players involved in the conflict.

2. POLICIES OF INTERNATIONAL ACTORS

The UN is one of the most prominent international actors in terms of its policies in the Second Karabakh War. As seen in the first war, the UN, albeit a little late, took

a stance in favour of Azerbaijan's rightfulness and territorial integrity. However, the organisation's lack of sanctioning power led to the Security Council resolutions on the Karabakh issue being ignored by Armenia. Nevertheless, it is certain that the aforementioned resolutions of the UN have created a legitimacy in the global public opinion about the fact that Karabakh is Azerbaijani territory. In this context, the activities of the UN in the Battle of Homeland are also important.

2.1. United Nations (UN)

The UN showed its first reaction in the Second Karabakh War within the scope of the Tovuz attacks, which were the footsteps of the war. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' statement on 13 July 2020, which has become a UN tradition, expressed "deep concern" about the tension and called for 'refraining from provocative rhetoric' [United Nations, 2020]. Although it is clearly seen and known that Armenia is both the party that launched the Tovuz attack and the party that officially voiced the discourse of 'new territories in exchange for a new war' through the Minister of Defence, the emphasis on the UN's call to 'the parties' is also the product of a strange UN tradition. The UN displayed a similar 'concerned' attitude on 27 September, and the UN Secretary-General Spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric stated that Secretary-General Guterres would meet with the Presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia [United Nations, 2020b].

On 28 September 2020, UN Secretary-General Guterres held a meeting with President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev via video conference. During the meeting, Aliyev, who informed the UN Secretary-General about the Armenian attacks, stated that 'Armenia, in his speech at the general debate of the 75th session of the UN General Assembly, spoke of its preparation for a new war' [Press Service of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2020]. However, it is noteworthy that Guterres did not make any statement about the occupation of Azerbaijani territories by Armenia, against which there are four UN Security Council resolutions.

Based on the statements of the UN, it is seen that it is trying to follow a delicate balance policy between Azerbaijan and Armenia in the Second Karabakh War. As a matter of fact, the statement made the day after Armenia's attacks on Ganja on 4 October 2020 stated that it was 'seriously concerned about reports of the spread of hostilities, including the targeting of densely populated areas', while avoiding direct reference to Ganja [United Nations, 2020c]. On 18 October, when Armenia renewed its attacks on the same region, the UN mentioned the attacks on Ganja in

its statement condemning the attack. However, the aforementioned statement included Armenian propaganda that Azerbaijan had also attacked Khankendi [United Nations, 2020d]. Although the UN tried to prove its so-called 'neutral' approach to the issue by including the Armenian name of the city in its statement, it can be said that this attitude benefited Armenia and Russia. In this context, it is observed that the UN's policy in the "War of Homeland" did not manifest itself in favour of Ankara in terms of Türkiye-Russia rivalry.

2.2. European Union (EU)

In the Second Karabakh War, the EU's approach to the war did not go beyond ritualised calls for peace. Similar to the UN's stance, the EU, despite trying to create the perception that it was 'neutral' in the war, could not hide its supportive attitude towards Armenia. On 1 October 2020, the EU Council issued a statement calling on the parties to a peaceful settlement, 'expressing its support to the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs and asking the High Representative to review further EU support for the settlement process' [Council of the European Union, 2020]. The Council's stance, which did not mention either Armenia's occupation of Azerbaijani territories or the Armenian aggression that led to the war, was considered as support for Yerevan rather than neutrality. On the other hand, in the statement issued by the EU High Representative the day after the ceasefire agreement was reached after a 10-hour meeting in Moscow on 10 October 2020, it was emphasised that the organisation welcomed the agreement reached. In addition, the statement underlined that 'the EU calls on the parties to strictly abide by this agreement and calls on all actors, including external parties, to refrain from any action that could lead to further loss of life' [Council of the European Union, 2020b]. In fact, it should be emphasised that the hidden subject of the aforementioned call is Türkiye.

One of the indicators of the EU's tacit support for Armenia in the Second Karabakh War has been the anti-Türkiye and especially anti-President Erdoğan attitude of some deputies in the EU Parliament. This situation has become more evident when combined with the propaganda content of some media outlets and the support of the Armenian lobby. As a matter of fact, DW, one of the aforementioned agencies, claimed that during the Karabakh War, 'the European Parliament wanted the EU to take action on Nagorno-Karabakh, but the organisation failed to do so' [Deutsch Welle, 2020]. The German propaganda apparatus DW backed up its unsubstantiated claims that 'in general, most MEPs seem to be in favour of

sanctions against Türkiye' with the following statements made by EU High Representative Josep Borrell in the parliament: 'I think your message was clear, it was repeated 65 times with different voices, but it expressed the same concerns and the same demand for action' [Deutsch Welle, 2020]. Firstly, in the 720-seat EU Parliament, the 65 MPs who want the EU to take action account for about 9 %, which represents a small minority, not a 'majority of MPs'. Secondly, it is important to note that Borrell reminded these parliamentarians that 'the Council of Europe has made it clear that it considers that the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs are the framework for mediation and action in this conflict' [Deutsch Welle, 2020]. This shows that the EU takes Ankara into consideration even though it does not agree with Türkiye's interests. The perception of Russia as a threat to European security plays a major role in the organisation's approach.

Despite all the above-mentioned developments, it should be emphasised that the EU's policy in the Battle for the Homeland is based on preventing Türkiye from getting stronger in the region. Even if this situation is not entirely in Russia's favour in terms of Türkiye-Russia rivalry in the Caucasus, it certainly does not benefit Ankara. However, considering Türkiye's policy of full independence, which Türkiye has been trying to implement at great cost and has been relatively successful in recent years, it can be said that the EU's aforementioned approach does not go beyond a declaration of will. The situation in Russia's favour here is that the EU, like the UN, still hopes to benefit from the OSCE's efforts.

2.3. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)

The OSCE, which emerged in the First Karabakh War with the hope of a solution to the Karabakh Issue, later evolved into a different mechanism with the creation of the co-chairmanship office as a result of the competition with Russia on the solution of the problem. After the co-chairs were allocated to three countries supporting Armenia's position, the organisation lost its will for a possible solution. In the process that started with Armenia's ceasefire violations in the following period, the organisation turned into a structure known for its statements in which the words 'concern', 'restraint' and 'peace' were used extensively.

On 29 September 2020, following the Armenian aggression that started the Second Karabakh War, the OSCE Permanent Council held a special meeting on developments in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. At the meeting, which took place in Vienna under the Albanian presidency with the participation of representatives of 57 countries, 'representatives of the Minsk Group Co-Chairs

(France, the Russian Federation and the United States of America) reiterated the Co-Chairs' call on all parties to immediately cease hostilities and resume negotiations to find a sustainable solution to the conflict' [OSCE, 2020]. The fact that the OSCE made 8 identical statements within 44 days of the war gives an idea about the OSCE's nearly thirty-year working adventure. Azerbaijani President Aliyev evaluates the biased approach of the organisation in favour of Armenia as follows:

“The activity of the Minsk Group is obvious. After a certain period of time, the countries co-chairing the Minsk Group almost concentrated all the powers in their own hands, they almost monopolised this issue, the Minsk Group was paralysed as a group and three countries started to deal with this issue. But did this result in anything? No. Not for us, but for Armenia. Armenia wanted this result, it wanted the negotiations to continue, it wanted them to deceive us all the time, it wanted this issue to be frozen, it wanted our territories to remain under captivity forever, it wanted our territories to remain under occupation forever. And what is the activity of the Minsk group? Was it able to put pressure on the occupier? No! Did it want to put pressure? No! I have repeatedly raised this issue with them: ‘If you want the conflict to be solved, impose sanctions on Armenia. This is in your hands. You are a permanent member of the UN Security Council, you can solve any problem’ [Press Service of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2020b].

As the President of Azerbaijan stated, there was no excuse that the ‘Minsk Group’ could produce. Instead of solving the Karabakh conflict, Russia used the Minsk Group as a tool in its competition with Türkiye. The biggest proof of this was the lack of any progress on the resolution of the issue, which was constantly pointed to the table. Despite Vice President Fuat Oktay’s assessment of the establishment of a Minsk Group without Türkiye as a ‘historical negligence’ [News.ru, 2020], the events throughout the process reveal that this was a highly conscious move beyond negligence. The aforementioned ‘omission’ can be explained in the context of Russia’s rivalry with Türkiye.

2.4. Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)

It is known that the OIC had an attitude supporting Azerbaijan’s just position both in the First Karabakh War and in the period leading up to the “War of Homeland”. It is observed that the organisation maintained the aforementioned approach in the Second Karabakh War. Already during the Armenian aggression in July, the OIC

General Secretariat condemned Armenia's ceasefire violation and referred to the OIC and relevant UN Security Council resolutions demanding the complete and unconditional withdrawal of the occupying power from Azerbaijani territory and supporting the peaceful settlement of the conflict [OIC, 2020]. The organisation demonstrated the aforementioned decisive and clear stance in the Battle for the Homeland, reiterating its condemnation of Armenia's aggression against Azerbaijan and violation of the ceasefire in its statement on the second day of the war, and called for 'the complete and unconditional withdrawal of Armenian forces from the occupied Azerbaijani territories and the settlement of the conflict between the two countries on the basis of respect for Azerbaijan's sovereignty, territorial integrity and inviolability' [OIC, 2020b].

The organisation, which expressed its solidarity with Azerbaijan on 14 October 2020 following Armenia's missile attacks on civilian settlements in the Azerbaijani city of Ganja [Azerbaijan.az, 2024], clearly showed its support for Azerbaijan in the Second Karabakh War. Although the OIC's stance in the war supported Ankara and Baku's position, it can be argued that Türkiye-Russia 'competitive cooperation' also served the cooperative dimension. One indication of this is Russia's participation in the OIC as an observer since 2005. It can be said that the relationship of the Russian Federation with the OIC, where approximately 15 % of the population consists of Muslims, is also a supportive factor for Russia-Türkiye relations. In this context, the fact that Russia did not make any official comments on the statements of the OIC during the Second Karabakh War supports the aforementioned perception. Another branch of the systemic factors that have a direct or indirect impact on Türkiye's rivalry with Russia in the Second Karabakh War is the policies of the states that are closely interested in the issue. In this respect, four states come to the fore.

3. POLICIES OF STATES

Although the number of countries with interests in the Caucasus is gradually increasing, the number of states directly related to the Second Karabakh War is small. In this context, the most prominent non-regional states are the US and France, which are the non-Russian member states of the 'Minsk Trio'. On the other hand, the role of Iran, which is neighbouring the region and to some extent has a rivalry with Türkiye, in the Second Karabakh War is also important. Israel is another country that has interests and influence in the region in connection with

Iran to a certain extent in the Homeland War. In this respect, it is useful to analyse the role of these countries in the Second Karabakh War.

3.1. United States (US)

Washington, which is the only country that still meets the criteria of a superpower in the international relations literature, is present in the Karabakh Issue both as the co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council with veto power, and as the locomotive country of NATO. However, despite all these labels, it cannot be said that the US influence on the issue is directly proportional to its power. While this can be explained by the US governments' interest in the region and Russia's reservations, the Pentagon's prioritisation is another factor to be taken into account.

The United States was one of the first countries to react verbally to the Second Karabakh War, which started with Azerbaijan's response to Armenia's attacks in self-defence. On 27 September 2020, the US State Department condemned the escalation of violence and stated that Washington held a telephone conversation with the Foreign Ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia and urged the parties to refrain from rhetoric and actions that increase tensions on the ground [U.S. Department of State 2020]. The US, as Co-Chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, remains committed to helping the parties find a peaceful and sustainable solution to the conflict, the statement said, adding that it is believed that the involvement of external parties in the escalating violence would be extremely unhelpful and would only exacerbate regional tensions [U.S. Department of State 2020]. In fact, although Washington diplomatically refrains from directly emphasising Türkiye, it is quite obvious that the term 'external parties' refers to Ankara. It is known that such references of the US, which are incompatible with the law of alliance with Türkiye, were also made during the First Karabakh War. As a matter of fact, as it has been emphasised before, when Türkiye's possible intervention within the scope of guarantorship was on the agenda in May 1993 when Armenia intensified its attacks on Nakhchivan, the US opposed it. Unlike the Demirel government, which took into account the US opposition to intervention in the First Karabakh War, Ankara's 'despite the US' stance in the Battle of Homeland can be considered as a step towards a fully independent Türkiye. Moreover, the pro-Armenian stance of the US should not be overlooked in light of the above-mentioned statements of the US State Department condemning the attack without describing the attacker. While one

reason for this may be the effectiveness of the Armenian diaspora harboured by the US, another reason is the competition with Russia.

The US-Russia rivalry in the Caucasus both during the First Karabakh War and in the period between the two Karabakh wars has been mentioned in the previous sections on various occasions. It can be said that a similar situation recurred in the Second Karabakh War. As a matter of fact, after Russia brought the Azerbaijani and Armenian sides together for a ceasefire in Moscow on 9 October 2020, a similar step was taken by the United States approximately two weeks later. The aforementioned ceasefire was violated by Armenia on the day the decision was taken, and it was tried again about ten days later, and Yerevan again did not stick to its commitments. Thus, on 25 October 2020, Washington announced that the ceasefire between Azerbaijan and Armenia was established on the initiative of the United States. Emphasising that the parties 'reaffirmed their commitment to implement and abide by the humanitarian ceasefire agreed and reaffirmed in Moscow on 10 October', the statement said that 'the United States facilitated intensive negotiations between the Foreign Ministers and the Minsk Group Co-Chairs to bring Armenia and Azerbaijan closer to a peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict' [U.S. Department of State 2020b].

Nevertheless, when the pro-Armenian stance of the US and the winking approach of the Pashinyan administration towards the US come together, it can be said that the relationship between Türkiye and Russia, which is characterised as 'competitive cooperation', relatively serves the 'cooperation' dimension. On the other hand, another important point is that after the Karabakh victory, it is observed that there has been a change in the uniform attitude of some federal states of the US towards the Karabakh Issue. The most prominent example of this is the decision of the Governor of the US State of Minnesota on 23 February 2021 to declare 25 February, the eve of the anniversary of the Khojaly Genocide, as 'Azerbaijan Day', indirectly recognising the genocide committed by Armenians in Karabakh [Office of Governor Tim Walz, 2021].

In recent years, one of the policies of the United States contrary to the law of alliance with Türkiye in various foreign policy areas has been its stance in the Second Karabakh War. By opposing its 'ally' Ankara's strong presence in the Caucasus, Washington displayed an attitude that is extremely difficult to explain rationally. In this respect, the aforementioned attitude of the United States can be explained by the presence of the Trump government, a head of state who is not widely believed to have given rational responses in the aforementioned period.

Indeed, in a joint statement on 1 October 2020, the United States, Russia and France called for an immediate cessation of hostilities between the ‘relevant’ military powers [U.S. Embassy in Türkiye 2020]. ABD’nin It should be noted that the ‘relevant’ actor in the aforementioned statement, which was also published on the Turkish Embassy’s website, again refers to Türkiye. Ankara must have realised this, as President Erdoğan responded to the call in absentia by saying ‘Considering that the US, Russia and France have neglected this problem for nearly 30 years, it is unacceptable for them to seek a ceasefire’ [Reuters, 2020].

Nevertheless, it should be emphasised that the presence of the US under the Trump presidency, which did not go beyond verbal statements during the Second Karabakh War, did not restrict Türkiye’s room for manoeuvre. This issue, on the other hand, has brought to the fore a group of people on both the US and the Armenian side who are of the view that Washington was ineffective in the Second Karabakh War. For example, when the presidents of Russia and France issued a joint statement on the issue in the early days of the war, this was interpreted as the US being ‘uncoordinated’ with the Minsk Group co-chairs. As a matter of fact, Carey Cavanaugh, the former US representative to the Minsk Group, described his country’s role in the Second Karabakh War as ‘heartbreaking’, while Thomas de Waal, one of the most important experts on the Karabakh Issue in the US, stated that ‘Americans have withdrawn from the Karabakh Issue’ [The Guardian, 2020]. From all the above, it can be concluded that the US role in the Second Karabakh War, despite its practices incompatible with the alliance law, has partially produced results in Ankara’s favour in terms of Türkiye-Russia ‘competitive cooperation’. Another state that should be taken into account in this respect is France, Washington’s working partner in the Minsk Group.

3.2. France

It is not only their joint co-chairmanship of the Minsk Group that ‘encourages’ France to be active in the region together with the USA. The other common aspect of both powers is that they host the largest Armenian diaspora. In this case, it should not be surprising that both countries are on the side of Armenia in the Karabakh Issue. However, what is interesting is that both countries insist on mediation within the OSCE even though it is obvious that they are not neutral. As for the Second Karabakh War, it can be said that France did not ‘deviate’ from its traditional pro-Armenian line. In a statement dated 3 October 2020, Matthew Bryza, former co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group and former US Ambassador to

Azerbaijan, stated that France took Armenia's side in the Second Karabakh War and therefore lost its mediation potential. Bryza explained the reason for the aforementioned attitude of French President Emmanuel Macron as follows:

'...Because Türkiye is not following France's lead on issues as diverse as Syria, Libya and the Eastern Mediterranean. That is why Macron is directing his personal anger at President Erdoğan. And now he is doing it in the Caucasus, thus making it impossible for France to be a neutral mediator, especially in the Minsk Group' [Haber Global, 2020].

First of all, Bryza's statements are correct but incomplete. When we consider the statements that France has lost its neutrality, it is very difficult to find evidence that Paris has had a neutral stance at least throughout the last three decades of the Karabakh conflict. On the other hand, as Bryza says, behind France's support for Armenia is Macron's personal anger towards Türkiye and President Erdoğan. Indeed, in a speech he gave in Latvia on 30 September 2020, the fourth day of the Second Karabakh War, Macron stated that 'Türkiye's "belligerent" rhetoric encourages Azerbaijan to recapture Nagorno-Karabakh and this is unacceptable', revealing both his open support for Armenia and his anger towards Türkiye [Reuters, 2020b]. Ankara's response to Macron's pro-Armenian comment was not delayed, and on the same day, then Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu stated that France's solidarity with Armenia meant supporting the Armenian occupation in Azerbaijan [Reuters, 2020c]. On the other hand, Macron's embrace of Armenian propaganda accusations such as "Türkiye is sending jihadists to Karabakh" can also be evaluated in this context. Macron, voicing the aforementioned baseless allegations, "Calling on all NATO partners to confront the behavior of a NATO member" He also stated that he would call President Erdoğan [France 24, 2020]. Aside from the paradox that the same person who stated a year ago that "NATO is brain dead" [The Economist, 2019] is the same person who calls for "NATO member behavior" a year later, the fact that Türkiye is the subject of both comments reveals France's rivalry with Ankara.

It should be emphasized that Nagorno-Karabakh is not the only region where France's interests clash with Türkiye; Paris is also engaged in a struggle for influence with Türkiye in Syria, Libya and the Eastern Mediterranean. In addition, it can be said that France came to the forefront as an instigator during the escalation of Armenia's aggression that led to the war. In this context, Paris' role in the Second Karabakh War has both advantages and disadvantages for Ankara in the Turkish-Russian rivalry. France's pro-Armenia, anti-Türkiye policy during the

Battle for the Homeland did not only end with baseless accusations against Ankara, but Paris was also in close contact with Moscow, its counterpart in the Minsk Group. It has been mentioned above that the two even issued a joint statement excluding the US. This is not a development in Türkiye's favor. On the other hand, Paris is also uncomfortable with the policy of "competitive cooperation", which includes partial cooperation between Russia and Türkiye in the Second Karabakh War. As a matter of fact, in a statement issued by the French Presidency on November 20, 2020, it was stated that "France seeks international supervision for the implementation of a ceasefire in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict out of concern that Russia and Türkiye may reach an agreement to exclude Western powers from future peace talks" [Reuters, 2020d]. However, France's attempt to overpower Russia while acting as the protector of Armenia had unexpected consequences that indirectly favored Türkiye. In this respect, it is concluded that France's contradictory stance in the Battle of the Homeland, even though it was foreseen to take place to Türkiye's detriment, also brought unexpected complex results.

The developments that took place after the Karabakh victory also show Paris' hostile attitude towards Azerbaijan's victory, which was won with the intense support of Türkiye. Another step of France in this context was the adoption of a resolution by the French Senate on November 26, 2020 supporting the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh. Upon this development, the Milli Mejlis of Azerbaijan called for France to be stripped of its mediation role in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict [Al Jazeera, 2020]. At the same time, Türkiye reacted strongly to the decision as follows:

"...The French Senate's call for Azerbaijan to withdraw from its territories liberated from occupation is a manifestation of a ridiculous, partisan and unrealistic understanding that cannot be taken seriously. This decision, which is devoid of common sense and cannot be explained by any reasonable justification, also limits France's ability to contribute to the solution of the issue in a real sense. It is thought-provoking, if not surprising, that the resolution, which is seen to contain elements that the French Government would also find unacceptable, reflects the obsession with Türkiye, which is frequently seen in France in recent times. It is a fundamental necessity for the sake of our relations that Türkiye's principled positions on the side of right, law and legitimacy in its neighboring geography are perceived in France in an unprejudiced and objective manner and that extremely erroneous references to history or unrelated issues are avoided" [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, 2020].

In the aforementioned statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it was emphasized that France is now hoped to draw the right conclusions and adopt a constructive stance for the stabilization of the region [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, 2020]. Apparently, Ankara is also aware of France's "obsession with Türkiye". In this context, it is observed that France's Second Karabakh War policy, which is full of paradoxes, is partially effective in terms of Türkiye-Russia rivalry in the Caucasus.

3.3. Iran

Iran has been an important regional country that has made a name for itself due to its policy during the Karabakh conflict. Seeking influence in the Caucasus, Tehran is also known to compete with Türkiye in the region. When it comes to the Second Karabakh War, two different Iranian positions can be mentioned. These are the "delicate balance" that calls the parties to restraint and the supportive policies that adopt Azerbaijan's approach. The development that determined the difference between the two elements was Azerbaijan's position during the war. In this context, on the first day of the Second Karabakh War, Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Said Khatibzadeh emphasized that "Iran calls on both sides to show restraint and demands an immediate end to hostilities and the start of dialogue between the two states." [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2020]. A similar call was echoed by Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif in his telephone conversations with his Azerbaijani and Armenian counterparts on the same day [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2020b]. On the other hand, Spokesperson Hatibzade, who made a similar "restraint" statement on October 12, 2020, during the period of Armenia's attacks on Ganja, expresses Iran's "neutral" stance in his statement without distinguishing between the aggressor and the attacked side as follows:

"The Islamic Republic of Iran deplors the violation of the ceasefire declared during the recent clashes between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia, calls on both sides to show more restraint, condemns the missile attacks on vital infrastructure, residential areas in cities and the killing of civilians and expresses condolences to the bereaved families." [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2020c].

The aforementioned attitude of Tehran, which was perceived as passive support to Armenia, not only lacked a sound assessment of the issue, but was also misleading

about the content of the events. Iran's stance in the war continued in this vein until near the end of October. In the early days of the war, some images of weapons and military equipment being transferred from Iranian territory to Armenia appeared on various media platforms. In response, Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Saeed Khatibzadeh made a statement on September 29, 2020, stating that the transit of non-military conventional goods to neighboring countries through Iran has always continued and emphasized that the trucks in question also passed within the same framework. "The Islamic Republic of Iran carefully monitors and controls the transportation and transit of goods (through its territory) to other countries and does not allow our territory to be used for the transportation of weapons and ammunition in any way", he said [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2020d]. Khatibzadeh reiterated a similar emphasis at a press conference on the Karabakh war held at the Foreign Ministry building on October 5, 2020, stating that the route between Iran and Armenia will continue to be used only for humanitarian supplies, but that "the route between Iran and Armenia will never be allowed to be exploited and used for military means" (Kurşun, 2010). It is certain that the above-mentioned allegations are in need of confirmation. Nevertheless, spokesperson Khatibzadeh's insistence on the continued use of the aforementioned route gave the impression that Iran was siding with Armenia and triggered distrust of Tehran on the part of Azerbaijan and Türkiye.

It can be said that the perception of Iran on the Azerbaijani and Turkish sides was shaped by the aforementioned trucks throughout October. Although the Iranian Foreign Ministry has repeatedly denied this, the fact that the aforementioned route will continue to be used could not remove the question marks of Baku and Ankara. However, by the end of October, after it became apparent that Azerbaijan was the winning side of the war, a partial change of attitude was observed in Iran. One of the most obvious reflections of this is the following statements made by Iran's religious leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in his speech broadcast on Iranian state television on November 3, 2020: "The lands captured by Armenia must be returned and liberated. This is an important condition. These lands belong to Azerbaijan and it has every right over them" [France 24, 2020b].

It is observed that Iran has resorted to actions opposing Türkiye and Azerbaijan after the Karabakh victory. In particular, Tehran initially supported Armenia's position on the Zangezur Corridor issue, which was one of Ankara's important achievements in the Karabakh victory and was included in Article 9 of the

November 10 Agreement. However, Ankara has regularly emphasized cooperation with Iran to overcome this situation. One of the main reasons for Iran's appearance to the detriment of Türkiye in the Türkiye-Russia rivalry in the Caucasus is both the radical elements within Iran and the provocative policies of Iran's opponents who have interests in the region [İnat, 2021]. In this context, Israel is undoubtedly one of the most prominent actors, and perhaps the first. In this context, it is useful to examine Israel's approach in the Second Karabakh War.

3.4. Israel

In the Second Karabakh War, Israel's name started to be mentioned more frequently with the Karabakh Issue. It is known that Israel supported Azerbaijan with military technologies from the Tovuz attacks throughout the Battle of Homeland. The role of Israeli UAVs in the war is also noteworthy, even if it is not at a level to determine the fate of the war, such as Bayraktar TB2. It has been stated before that this detail has been recognized even by Israeli military analysts. In this context, it should be recalled from the previous chapters that Eado Hecht attributed the success of Azerbaijan's UAV army in the war entirely to Bayraktar TB2, despite Armenian General Balayan's claim that they shot down a dozen Israeli UAVs in the Tovuz clashes. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that Israeli drones also took part in the war. This was also stated in a statement by the Azerbaijani Foreign Minister [Republic of Azerbaijan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021]. On the other hand, when Armenia twice struck Baku in November 2020 with Russian-made Iskander-M ballistic missiles, the sale of which is prohibited by international treaties, with the intention of extending the war beyond the region, Azerbaijan used the Israeli air defense system Barak-8 to neutralize these attacks [Mehdiyev, 2021]. In addition, while the Armenian side admitted the use of these missiles, Russia said that these missiles were not used in the war [TACC, 2021].

Israel's other support to Azerbaijan in the Second Karabakh War was social support, in which Azerbaijani Jewish communities played a leading role [Republic of Azerbaijan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021]. Idan and Shaffer note that the successful integration of Turkish and Israeli UAVs on the battlefield during the Battle of Homeland made direct communication between Turkish and Israeli experts a possibility [Idan & Shaffer, 2021]. In this context, it can be said that Israel's role in the Second Karabakh War was a facilitator for Ankara in terms of Türkiye-Russia rivalry.

Israel's support for Azerbaijan should be read in the context of creating an image of cooperation with a Muslim country, as well as commercial gain. However, the most important point here should not be forgotten that Israel is in a struggle for influence against Iran. In this context, it would be a mistake to read Tel-Aviv's support for Baku as a mere support for the Jewish communities in Azerbaijan, independent of Israel's national interests. For this reason, the public opinion in Azerbaijan and Türkiye in particular should avoid the approach that categorizes Iran as completely pro-Armenian while emphasizing Tel-Aviv's support for Azerbaijan in the Second Karabakh War. Indeed, the aforementioned lack of restraint may unwittingly turn the parties into actors in a situation that serves Israel's purpose.

4. CONCLUSION

When the Ankara-Moscow rivalry in the Second Karabakh War is analyzed in terms of system-level variables, it is difficult to identify a radical shift in the attitudes of international actors compared to the First Karabakh War. The primary factors that have evolved are Türkiye's enhanced material power capacity, the transformation of the Turkish state's strategic mindset, and the emergence of a political will that prioritizes its interests in the Caucasus. Despite these changes, Western or Western-dominated organizations such as the UN, the EU, and the OSCE maintained a familiar posture during the Second Karabakh War, expressing "concern" and issuing calls for restraint directed equally at both the aggressor and the attacked parties. For instance, Washington's statements, which emphasized that "the involvement of outside parties in the escalating violence would be extremely unhelpful" and implicitly targeted Ankara, failed to deter Türkiye from its assertive policy. This demonstrates Türkiye's growing ability to act independently, even "in spite of the United States", reflecting its broader efforts in recent years to achieve full strategic autonomy.

The role of Iran, a regional state sharing a direct border with Karabakh, further complicated the Türkiye-Russia rivalry during the Second Karabakh War. Tehran's policies did not favor Ankara; instead, they revealed a competitive tendency, particularly evident in its opposition to the Zangezur Corridor following Azerbaijan's victory. Iran's actions underscored its unease with Türkiye's growing influence in the Caucasus and its desire to maintain its own strategic foothold in the region. On the other hand, Israel, a non-regional state, gained prominence for its support of Azerbaijan during the war. While Israel's backing of Baku was significant, it is

important to recognize that its approach was driven by its own strategic calculations, particularly its rivalry with Iran. This multifaceted support for Azerbaijan, despite the complex regional dynamics, highlights the intricate web of alliances and rivalries that shaped the conflict. Türkiye's steadfast support for Azerbaijan, even in an environment where system-level variables were not entirely favorable, underscores the value of Ankara's commitment and its determination to assert its influence in the Caucasus.

Ankara's role in the Second Karabakh War has undeniably strengthened its position in the region, marking a significant shift from its relatively passive stance during the First Karabakh War. However, much like after the first conflict, Armenia and its supporting forces have not fully accepted the new status quo, leaving the region in a state of fragile stability. In this context, the Ankara-Baku alliance must remain vigilant and proactive to ensure that the strategic cooperation epitomized by the Shusha Declaration remains robust and adaptable to evolving challenges. Recent developments, such as deepening military and economic ties between Türkiye and Azerbaijan, as well as joint infrastructure projects, are promising indicators of a sustained partnership. Nevertheless, the potential for renewed tensions and external interference necessitates continuous efforts to reinforce this alliance and safeguard the gains achieved in the aftermath of the Second Karabakh War. By doing so, Türkiye can consolidate its influence in the Caucasus while contributing to long-term regional stability.

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ORTHODOX POWER AND POLITICS: HOW CHURCH-STATE TIES UNDERMINE GEORGIA'S EU PATH

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Abstract

The paper explores the role of the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC) in Georgia's Europeanization path by answering the question of how the alignment between the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC) and the Georgian Dream government in supporting the "Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence" – the so-called "Foreign Agents' Law" affected Georgia's EU integration prospects. The paper is based on the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Process Tracing methods of analyzing all statements made in 2023-2024 of the church and state in tandem to explore the resisting actions of civil society, opposition, and the international community. The study reveals that the alignment of the ruling party with the GOC around the "Foreign Agents' Law" by framing the civil society and media as threats to national sovereignty, identity, and religious values, was one of the key triggers of Georgia's decision to suspend the accession talks with the EU.

Keywords: Church-state alignment, Foreign Agents' Law, Georgia's EU Integration, Civil Society.

INTRODUCTION

Georgia's more than three-decade-long effort toward Europeanization has experienced significant regress over the past three years. The rapid reforms implemented in the direction of European integration, including the active involvement of civil society, may quickly lose their value, putting the people's historic struggle to become an inseparable part of Western democracy at risk. All of this became especially evident in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine when the government gradually shifted its foreign policy rhetoric and chose a course of alignment with Russia. In Georgia, attempts to suppress democratic development and free speech began with the introduction of the "Foreign Agents' Law".

The adoption of the "Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence" has dramatically altered Georgia's foreign policy architecture and consequently jeopardized its EU integration perspective. It is noteworthy that one of the most trusted institutions in Georgia with 69 % of the public declaring trust in it [CRRC, 2020], the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC), indirectly supported the adoption of the law.

The main targets of this law are non-governmental organizations and the media, which represent key democratic institutions whose strengthening is one of the conditions of the EU integration process. These two actors make a special contribution to the Europeanization of Georgia and to the process of supporting the country's transformation from a hybrid regime to a consolidated democracy. Their vital role was many times emphasized by the EU officials [EESC, 2024]. Moreover, strengthening the civil society and engaging them in democratic processes was also one of the priorities of 9 conditionalities¹ set by the EU on Georgia's EU integration path as a prerequisite to start Accession Negotiations [European Commission, 2023], as well as, the priorities of the European Neighbourhood Policy [ENP, 2003] and Eastern Partnership [EaP, 2009] to which the Georgian state is a signatory.

Despite European officials' criticism of this initiative, the bill was reintroduced by the parliamentary political group People's Power, which was affiliated with the ruling party, Georgian Dream. With this move, the Georgian Government finally achieved the goals it had set out in 2023. Moreover, the adoption of the previously withdrawn bill was preceded by the official return of oligarch Ivanishvili to political life.

¹ EU Conditionalities for Georgia on its EU Integration Path. Conditionality number 9: "Improve the protection of human rights including by implementing an ambitious human rights strategy and ensuring freedom of assembly and expression. Launch impartial, effective and timely investigations in cases of threats against safety of vulnerable groups, media professionals and civil society activists, and bring organizers and perpetrators of violence to justice. Consult and engage with civil society, allowing for their meaningful involvement in legislative and policymaking processes and ensure they can operate freely".

The government's extensive propaganda campaign against the Georgian civil society and media, endorsed by the GOC, was largely driven by a narrative that framed the law as necessary to protect the state's sovereignty, religious and traditional values from NGOs and media outlets funded by Western donors [Eurasianet, 2024]. In particular, the GOC Synod in its official statement framed activities of the non-governmental sector and media as targeted actions to discredit the GOC, which was done in parallel with labelling NGOs' activities as the "growing trend of propaganda of the LGBT lifestyle and sin" [Public Relations Service of the Patriarchate of Georgia, 2024a]. Notably, the Synod of the Orthodox Church of Georgia contributed to the growing hostility towards organizations financed from abroad by legitimizing the law's adoption among parishioners by stating that "the government has clearly taken the path of protecting traditional values" [Ibid., para. 5].

Despite large-scale street protests, harsh statements from Georgia's strategic Western partners, and an appeal to the Constitutional Court, the bill was adopted. As a result, Georgia's EU integration process was suspended. The Georgian government framed this action as evidence that the West opposed Georgian values, religion, and traditions [Social Justice Center, 2024]. Such framing of the Western reaction towards the Georgian governmental actions has to be seen as a pre-election speculation from the Georgian Dream to bolster public support in the conservative segments. This is so, because it was obvious that adopting the law like "Foreign Agents' Law" would create more barriers for the European integration, in particular, by increasing the danger of removing civil society from policy-making and decision-making processes. This speculative strategy was indirectly supported by powerful non-state actors such as the Georgian Orthodox Church².

The paper explores the role of the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC) in delaying Georgia's EU membership negotiations (supported by approximately 80 % of the Georgian population [NDI, 2023]), by undermining democratic institutions and supporting the adoption of the "Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence" that has triggered a regress in the EU integration path of Georgia. The adoption of this law has been followed by other undemocratic laws and actions inconsistent with the EU policies. The analysis in the paper is based on the timeframe 2023–2024, especially on two critical juncture cases when the "Foreign Agents' Law" was introduced and then withdrawn in 2023 and subsequently when the same law with a different name was reintroduced in 2024 and adopted; this process eventually ended with

² "Indirect support" is means that the GOC did not issue the statements explicitly advocating the "Foreign Agents' Law" adoption, or its enforcement but endorsed governmental decisions.

the Georgian Dream's statement about suspending EU accession talks until 2028 which triggered large scale street protests, workers' strikes, and critical dissent of a part of Georgia's civil service, and sparked off a serious political crisis.

The study aims to answer the following **question** about how the alignment between the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC) and the Georgian Dream government in supporting the "Foreign Agents' Law" affected Georgia's EU integration prospects. The **hypothesis** is that the government brought the church as close as possible by pleasing them with the adoption of the homophobic law and by framing the adoption of the "Foreign Agents' Law" in the context of protecting the national identity and sovereignty of the state. These laws, in essence, stand in contradiction to the fundamental European values and serve as the trigger for the suspension of the Europeanization process of Georgia.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This paper draws on the theoretical perspectives of '**religious nationalism**' and '**post-secularism**' that both help to elucidate the case of contemporary Georgia, including the years 2023-2024 under examination in this paper.

1.1. Framing religious nationalism in Georgia

In essence, religious nationalism emphasizes the fusion of religious and national identities in a way that casts religion as the most important source of political legitimacy and national identity. In the context of religious nationalism, religious and political articulations of national identity are strongly intertwined. The Georgian dynamics of the relationship between church and state, and between religion and politics, have been very similar to the historical experiences observed in the Orthodox states of Southeastern Europe [Triandafyllidou, 2024]. Eastern Orthodox political spaces have traditionally been inclined to caesaropapism, a *de facto* combination of religious and secular power. Therefore, a certain historic link between religion and statehood has always existed historically in Orthodox states, including Georgia.

Already in the Soviet period, the Georgian nationalist movement fused nationalism and religion in their rhetoric and the 'sacred trinity of language, faith, and homeland' was an inseparable part of nationalist demonstrations in Georgia [Jones 2012, p.46]. In 1989, as the Soviet Union collapsed, a moment of new national awakening emerged in many states of Eastern Europe, including Georgia, which was accompanied by the revival of both religion and national identity. Given the

prehistory of a cultural and political tendency towards *caesaropapism*, the religious and nationalist categories soon found common ground. For instance, the first president of Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, referred to his course as ‘the Way of Christ’, while the enemy camp was characterized as ‘the way of Barabbas’ [Jones 2012]. Indeed, Georgia’s traditional Orthodox Christian heritage was at the time generally viewed ‘as an essential factor for the formation of national self-awareness’ [Zedania 2011, p.124]. As in many former Soviet republics, in Georgia too, decades of religious repressions led to a new kind of nostalgic reawakening that further fueled the religious and nationalist fervor of the day [Metreveli, 2021].

This sort of (re)turn to religion exemplifies the main contention of post-secular theory, which challenges the broad assumption that modernization presupposes secularization and thus irreversibly leads to a process of gradual decline of religion in public life [Habermas, 2003]. On the contrary, the post-secular theoretical model holds that religion maintains its defining role in the cultural, political, and social realms and represents a powerful force that often revolts against the secular tendencies of modernity, globalization, and other emerging threats to the established order [Casanova, 2006]. In the context of southeastern and central eastern states, it has been shown that church-state relations develop ‘not only in a specific national context ... but in response to broader transformations stemming from European integration and social change characterizing liquid modernity’ [Baumann, 2000]. In the case of Montenegro, too, ‘revitalization of religion and the desecularization of society’, as well as a ‘mass return to religion’ have been shown to have taken place in the early 1990s [Bakrac, Blagojevic, 2020]. Triandafyllidou has argued that ‘in late modernity’, and in particular in the post-1989 period, religion re-asserts itself to become ‘emblematic of the political transition and gets mobilized by different political forces’ as these nations respond to broader external transformations, such as European integration [Triandafyllidou, 2024, p. 24].

1.2. Post-secular interpretation for the case of Georgia

The post-secular interpretation explains the case of Georgia well. The wave of modernization undergone by Georgia during the three decades of independence – and especially the rapid modernization during the years of the Saakashvili administration – has not at all resulted in the decline of religion in public life. On the contrary, the Georgian Orthodox Church has prospered, while the GOC has retained the highest level of popularity. Moreover, precisely in the post-secular manner, recent years of Georgian history, including the last two years, have

witnessed countless concerted efforts by the GOC to reassert itself in the realm of public and political affairs to “defend” itself from the perceived threats of secular modernity and globalization. The GOC’s “reactionary nature” as exemplified in its opposition to aspects of EU integration, particularly draft laws initiated in the parliament, as well as the church’s positioning on the matter of the “Russian Law” on foreign agents in 2023 and 2024 exemplify the church’s resistance to globalization and secularization, which is a post-secular phenomenon [Kakachia, 2014]. Finally, the way in which successive Georgian governments, and especially the Georgian Dream party, have sought to align themselves *rhetorically* with the Church attests to the broader acceptance of the continuous political influence of the GOC as a post-secular, traditionalist, conservative force that is an instrument of resisting the EU and the globalized international order. During the electoral campaign in 2024, the government, in fact, proposed that it would declare Orthodox Christianity as the state religion in Georgia upon winning the next term [Chedia, 2014].

With these two theories – religious nationalism and post-secularism – this paper seeks to explore how the rhetoric of the GOC intertwines religion and nationalism and how this link affects attitudes towards Georgia’s European Union, and also to examine how the GOC frames its narratives in order to strengthen its endurance in the post-secular phase of existence.

1.3. Role of civil society in democracy and Europeanization process of Georgia

Civil society plays a critical role in the creation of an inclusive, stable system based on participatory democracy. Both Anderson and Stephan emphasize the role of civil society in the creation of consolidated participatory democracies based on inclusion and the rule of law. Anderson argues that a robust civil society could have a decisive role during periods of political transformation. Civil society could assume a range of roles that are conducive to such moments, including mediation between actors, promotion of pluralism and deliberation, advocacy for the rule of law and human rights [Anderson, 2004]. Stephan, too, emphasizes that democracy might only be properly considered as consolidated where ‘there is the opportunity for the development of a robust and critical civil society that helps check the state and constantly generates alternatives’ [Stephan 2000, p. 39].

As is well known, the Copenhagen Criteria, established by the EU in 1993 for states aspiring to join the union, sets out democracy, rule of law, and human rights as the key political criteria for EU membership [Copenhagen Criteria, 1993]. Having a

robust civil society is in turn vital to attaining these political objectives in the framework of a consolidated democracy. In the same spirit, in 2023, the EU set out a nine-point plan for Georgia's prospective EU membership that called upon the government to "consult and engage with civil society, allowing for their meaningful involvement in legislative and policymaking processes and ensure they can operate freely", while also calling for "more positive engagement ... a transparent and inclusive process involving opposition parties and civil society" [European Commission, 2023]. Therefore, both in theory and practice, fostering a strong civil society is a strong EU conditionality that Georgia ought to accomplish in order to fulfill its EU membership aspirations.

2. METHODOLOGY

To analyze how the discursive alignment between the church and the state has influenced Georgia's European integration process, especially through the support of the so-called "Foreign Agents' Law" and similar laws limiting the powers of civil society and contradicting fundamental human rights, qualitative research approach – in particular, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) – has been used as a methodology. Considering the context of Georgia in 2023–2024, Teun A. van Dijk's approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), focusing on elite discourse and manipulation, is most relevant since it makes it possible to distinguish how language and discourses are used to frame power relationships in the society and manipulate public perceptions [van Dijk, 2008]. It is useful to analyze why specific social norms are enacted, legitimated, and resisted in textual and verbal communication in the social and political context [van Dijk, 2015]. CDA is relevant because it focuses primarily on social problems and political issues, which are mostly multidisciplinary; it explains social interaction in social structures and enables researchers to explain how discourse structures "enact, confirm, legitimate, reproduce, or challenge relations of power abuse (dominance) in society" [van Dijk 2015]. In the context of this particular research, the emphasis is on the discursive manipulations of elites targeting the Georgian Orthodox Church, especially by politicians representing the ruling party, the Georgian Dream, with an interest in how they frame selective information, and how they make emotional appeals to shape public opinion (ibid). On the other hand, the analysis also focuses on how stigmatized groups like civil society, particularly NGOs and media, challenge their power by opposing counter-narratives. In this study, the *independent variable* could be the church-state alignment in support of the so-called Russian style law adoption which frames this

action as protecting the country from foreign interference and defending the anti-national, traditional, and religious values and sovereignty that could be explained from the religious nationalism perspective. On the other hand, the *dependent variable* could be the developments in the Europeanization process of Georgia and their regress. Resistance from the political opposition, civil society, and critical reactions from the Western actors could be considered as *external variables*.

The timeframe of the research analysis is 2023–2024. Case study analysis is done by picking *critical juncture* cases like the (1) introduction of the “Foreign Agents’ Law” in 2023 and the (2) reintroduction of the same law in 2024. Critical Discourse Analysis of narratives and behavior-alignment of all statements of the Georgian Orthodox Church is pursued by focusing on both rhetoric and actions of the ruling party. In particular, all official statements of the GOC Synod made in 2023 regarding the introduction and withdrawal of the “Foreign Agents’ Law” and the Synod’s statements made in 2024 after the reintroduction of the same law with the different name “Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence” shall be analyzed. Critical analysis is also integrated into the publications and public statements of the civil society organizations regarding the church-state tandem against the “Foreign Agents’ Law”. Discourses spread by pro-governmental and opposition media are not analyzed separately because they directly mirror either the ruling party’s rhetoric or the pathos of the opposition and civil society, so an analysis revealing such media discourses separately would be superfluous.

In order for the analysis to be consistent and to reflect the dynamics of how the rhetoric and actions of the church and state against European integration intersected, the analysis is based on the so-called *Process Tracing* method that chronologically follows all significant events during the specified study period and ultimately clearly reflects what led to the suspension of negotiations on accession to the European Union (Beach, 2020). In other words, through the Process Tracing method, causal effects of the outcome are revealed within case analysis [Collier, 2011]. Using the *Process Tracing* method, in the context of this research, according to minimalist understanding of the causal mechanisms when mechanisms are not unpacked in detail [Beach 2020], “*cause*” could be the “introduction and adoption of the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence”, “*causal mechanism*” could be the church-government joint discursive influence in support of the adoption of the law contradicting EU policies and already set conditionalities for Georgia, while the “*outcome*” could be the suspension of EU accession talks. In order for the analysis to be structurally sound, data was collected as follows: during 2023–2024, all direct

and indirect statements made by the Church regarding the “Foreign Agents’ Law” that were consistent with the ruling party's rhetoric towards civil society and the media potentially contradicting the European integration process were collected. All statements were analyzed one by one using the vivo-coding method through the MAQXDA software program, and the main message boxes were classified into thematic categories that could potentially harm the functioning of civil society, fundamental human rights, and, accordingly, European integration. During data collection, it was noted what statements or actions preceded or followed the statements of the ruling party, the Georgian Dream, to analyze church-state discursive coincidences in the dynamics. In addition, opposing arguments surrounding the “Foreign Agents’ Law” and other subsequent similar laws and actions were also collected during the research. Analyzed were the statements of civil society, media, and opposition, as well as the European Union and the United States referring that the government’s specific actions, changed rhetoric towards the West, and the adoption of specific laws, contradicted the country’s stated constitutional goals. For the analytical framework, (1) the keyframes of religious nationalistic and anti-Western discourses were identified; (2) in terms of power and ideology discourse interaction, the mutual legitimization between the Church and the state was examined; (3) the domestic implication of linking discourse to the political outcome was assessed by measuring the impact of the church on public opinion shaping.

3. WHAT IS THE “LAW ON TRANSPARENCY OF FOREIGN INFLUENCE” ABOUT AND HOW DO DIFFERENT ACTORS FRAME IT?

According to the Legislative Herald of Georgia, the aim of the “Law of Georgia on Transparency of Foreign Influence” can be formulated as ensuring transparency of foreign influence over the non-commercial legal entities, broadcasters, print media owners, and digital media platforms operating in Georgia. According to the law, the listed types of organizations funded by foreign donors with more than 20 % annually are required to register as "organizations pursuing the interests of a foreign power" [Legislative Herald of Georgia, 2024a]. Foreign power is defined as a foreign government non-citizen of Georgia, a foreign-established legal entity (ibid).

3.1. Law defenders

The Georgian Dream (GD), Peoples Power, and indirectly the Georgian Orthodox Church are among the law's direct and indirect defenders. The way these actors

framed the law and how their narratives coincide with each other by categorizing each argument is analyzed through the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) method, which focuses on identifying the patterns of how the language is being framed and how church-state power relations are articulated.

The bill on “Foreign Agents’ Influence” (“Foreign Agents’ Law”) was first introduced in 2023 by the parliamentary fraction “People’s Power”, which separated from the ruling party Georgian Dream a few months before this initiative. When announcing its initiation, they claimed that the law aimed to “register foreign agents” [Formula TV, 2022]. However, after a harsh reaction of the Georgian society, the bill was withdrawn a few months after its introduction [Kirby, 2023].

On the 3rd of April 2024, GD brought back Russian style “Foreign Agents’ Law” claiming that it is similar to Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) and some European laws. The word “agent” was removed from the name without changing much of the content in the law itself and named “Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence” in reality labeling civil society actors, critical media, and opposition as ruled by foreign powers [Gavin, 2024]. In 2024, GD’s main discourse in support of the adoption of the law was framed with three main claimed aims: firstly, to ensure the “protection and strengthening state sovereignty”; secondly, to fight against black money that could have been used to “devalue Georgian traditions in the country” [Georgian Public Broadcaster, 2024a]; and thirdly, to not allow foreign power (“Global War Party”) to appoint a new government consisting of the so-called “Agentura” (Agents/Spies) [Georgian Public Broadcaster, 2024b].

Among the law's indirect defenders, it is possible to name the Georgian Orthodox Church. The GOC repeated the same messages as the ruling party in slightly different words, framing them as the main necessary aim of a state in difficult times. In this way, concepts such as the “protection of national and religious values” indirectly connect with GD’s second aim mentioned above which is “safeguarding sovereignty” thus echoing GD’s key motto [Public Relations Service of the Patriarchate of Georgia, 2024b].

3.2. Opponents of the law

Civil society organizations, especially the ones working on human rights, since 2023 have argued that the “Foreign Agents’ Law” was incompatible with the European Union legal system and values [IDFI, 2023]. More precisely, lawyers frame it as harmful to the process of Georgia’s integration into the European Union (ibid). In 2024, when the law was adopted and the Constitutional Court refused to

suspend its enactment, the 16 media organizations, 120 CSOs, and 4 individuals addressed the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) with the appeal arguing that the law was not compatible with fundamental human rights, especially freedom of expression and association [Art 10–11], the right to respect for private and family life (Article 8), and protections against discrimination [Article 14] [CSOMETER, 2024]. In addition, before the third reading, the ruling party quietly added a clause to the law that concerns special categories of personal data including information about a person's health, sex life, genetic data, and more [Kunchulia, 2024a]. Civil society representatives also claim that the law is imbued with a distinctly Russian spirit, aimed at restricting and stigmatizing civil society [Shubashvili, 2024]. Experts explain that it is similar to the Russian law on foreign agents adopted in 2012, as a result of which a third of all NGOs were closed after its enactment in Russia and argue that the same repressions are intended to take place in the Georgian case too [Goedemans, 2024].

Representatives of the Georgian political opposition parties develop the same line as the civil society and add that the so-called “Russian law” (same as “Foreign Agents’ Law”) was introduced in the first place to tie Georgia to Russia. They argued that the ruling party, which was on the path to defeat, was trying to drag the country into its own defeat [Radio Liberty, 2024a]. As an alternative to this law, representatives of the parliamentary opposition initiated a bill “On Protection From the Influence of the Occupant State – the Russian Federation”, which was finally rejected by the parliament, while the “Foreign Agents’ Law” was adopted [Interpressnews, 2024]. Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili vetoed the controversial “Foreign Agents’ Law” claiming that it is Russian law in its essence, but parliament overrode the veto [Light, 2024].

The EU, NATO, UN, OSCE ODHIR, COE, Amnesty International, and other international organizations alongside the politicians from the USA and individual European states unanimously condemned the adoption of this Russian-style “Foreign Agents’ Law”, stressing that neither the US nor the EU and its member states have such laws in place and that the only country that adopted such law was Hungary and ECHR annulled it since it aimed at “silencing the media and oppressing NGOs” [BBC, 2020]. The key messages from the international actors were that this law stigmatizes the civil society and media (US Embassy in Georgia, 2023), that it is incompatible with Georgia’s EU path (European Economic and Social Committee, 2024), hindering the ability of people to safeguard human rights [Amnesty International, 2024]. ODHIR issued a report on the “Foreign Agents’ Law”,

assessed it as non-compatible with international standards, and called the Georgian Government to revoke the law [OSCE ODHIR, 2024].

The Venice Commission “strongly recommended” the Georgian Dream to repeal the law, stating that “fundamental flaws in the law will have significant negative consequences for the freedom of association and expression, the right to respect for private life, the right to participate in public life and the prohibition of discrimination” [Venice Commission, 2024]. Individual international experts, already in 2023, predicted that law would “effectively stop the European integration process of Georgia [GIP, 2023].

There were several statements made by the individual representatives of the Synod of the Georgian Orthodox Church perceiving the reintroduction of the “Foreign Agents’ Law” as a threat to Georgia’s European integration and stating that everybody should respect people’s historic choice to become part of a European family [Intskirveli, 2024]. On 24th April, Archbishop Zenon Iarajuli of Dmanisi and Agarak-Tashiri criticized the reintroduction of the law as stigmatizing the civil society and emphasized that if the bill were to pass the non-commercial organizations of the Georgian Church would also have been considered foreign agents [Iarajuli 2024]. One more Synod representative, who expressed concern over the law was Metropolitan Grigory [Berbichashvili] of Poti and Khobi who expressed the fear of further escalation and that the enemy might take advantage of this situation where Georgia’s partners would not be able to save the long-suffering country [Kunchulia, 2024b].

4. HOW DID THE CHURCH-STATE POWER INTERACTION SHIFT IN FAVOR OF GD’S POLITICAL GOALS?

In 2023, the government failed to pass the “Foreign Agents’ Law” because they encountered strong public opposition, and the Orthodox Church, which has a profound influence on shaping public opinion, was not involved in supporting the bill. GD claimed that in 2023 “large part of society was misled” [Georgian Public Broadcaster, 2024b]. The rhetoric where the church and government largely coincided throughout two years was in the name of maintaining peace [Erstulovneba TV, 2023].

In the manner characteristic of the post-secular condition, in order to engage the church in the political sphere in a more explicit manner, in 2024, the government developed a new tactic of being in closer harmony with the church both to score points in the pre-election period and to pass the “Foreign Agents’ Law”. This

occurred despite the fact that constitutionally Georgia is a secular state, with a more or less clear division between national and religious spheres even though there is a “Concordat”, a constitutional level agreement between the State and the Orthodox Church [Legislative Herald of Georgia, 2002]. However, the ruling party Georgian Dream went even further, namely, among the 4 main pre-election promises of the Georgian Dream was the proposition of declaring Orthodox Christianity as the state religion [Caucasus Watch, 2024]. There have been skeptical comments from the church representatives in response to this initiative. For example, Giorgi Zviadadze, the official representative of the Patriarchate, stated that the “declaration of Orthodoxy as the state religion is connected with a process of mutual subordination, which is unacceptable for the church” [Palitra TV, 2024]. Some of the experts connect this initiative intending to gain more electoral support for the parliamentary election 2024 [Chedia, 2024]. However, the ruling party and the church held a meeting and agreed that in case GD gains a constitutional majority, which did not happen, they would have added an amendment to the constitution naming “Orthodoxy as the pillar of the identity of the Georgian state” [Georgian Public Broadcaster, 2024c].

The second step for aligning with the GOC, was GD adopting homophobic legislation, as well as, initiating tightening legislation to protect religious feelings and insulting religious buildings [Radio Liberty, 2024b], in response to the incident when one of the civil activists Nata Peradze threw blue paint on the icon of St. Matrona icon of Moscow seated beside Georgian-born Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin 2024 which was accidentally spotted by the people at the Trinity Church on Christmas Eve. Some civil society representatives called on the Georgian Orthodox Church to remove the icon from the cathedral. However, church spokesperson Andria Jagmaidze assessed this as an anti-church campaign, saying “this is not an icon of Stalin” but rather an icon featuring Stalin [Parulava, 2024]. However, later the GOC issued an official statement explaining that the Patriarchate of Georgia is planning to “make changes” to the icon depicting Stalin in the Trinity Cathedral because as they stated there is insufficient evidence confirming Stalin’s meeting with St. Matrona [Tskipurishvili, 2024].

The third step for aligning with the church was increasing the state’s funding for the Georgian Orthodox Church. In March 2024, the state funding of the GOC increased by 35 million, overall amounting to 60 million annually which was assessed by some of the experts, researching church-state related issues, as a clear political aim for the pre-election period [Social Justinec Center, 2024].

5. CHURCH-STATE ANTI-WESTERN NARRATIVES FRAMED AS A DEFENSE OF RELIGIOUS AND NATIONAL IDENTITY AND SOVEREIGNTY

This chapter elaborates on the distinction between the statements and actions of the church and government in tandem against Europe, and the West, in particular by framing “traditional values” from the prism of religious nationalism to build resistance to Western liberal ideals and creating an “us vs. them” dichotomy.

5.1. Church against minorities and media

In summer 2023, in response to Pride events, the church issued a statement condemning the activities of the people supporting LGBTQ+ rights arguing that it negatively impacts the society and values of the majority of Georgians. Moreover, while Europe was not mentioned explicitly in the statement, it implied the resistance of the GOC towards the Western liberal influence. Church is presented as a defender of conservative and nationalist narratives and sees European liberal democracy and cultural trends as a threat to Georgia’s identity. The Church explains the increase of polarization as a result of LGBTQ+ supportive events and the church suggested regulating such events by legislative actions [Orthodox Christianity, 2023]. It frames itself as a protector of national values and claims that opposing views attempt to slander or undermine the Church. In this statement, it is also stated that “the Georgian Orthodox Church has been the object of constant attacks, slander, and offensive campaigns in recent years”. Although it does not name any actors explicitly, it implies the civil society groups protecting fundamental rights and equality (ibid). In the later statement made in October 2023, the GOC criticized the media, referring to the opposition channel TV Pirveli for anti-church tactics, for shifting its focus from the spiritual content to scandals, and for its journalists’ misconduct during church services when reporting [ibid].

5.2. Building an election campaign on conservative and homophobic stances

Among the 4 main pre-election promises of the Georgian Dream was the proposition to adopt homophobic legislation [“Law on Protection of Family Values and Minors”]. This initiative was welcomed and supported by the GOC and it was finally adopted [Legislative Herald of Georgia, 2024b]. In the Press Release of the Public Relations Service of the Patriarchate of Georgia it was mentioned that the “Church of Georgia has consistently defended and continues to defend our youth from ideologies that undermine traditional family structures” [Orthodox Times 2024] and therefore the decision of the government was perceived as a positive step forward [ibid]. Apart

from this, the GOC criticized the European Parliament resolution that according to the GOC's statement calls for not adopting a law on "prohibiting LGBT propaganda among adolescents" that by the church is perceived as pressure against the values of the vast majority of the Georgian population and that that they do not recognize the sovereignty of Georgia as a state [Public Relations Service of the Patriarchate of Georgia, 2024a, para.4].

Non-governmental organizations working on human rights claim that "the package in its essence refers not only to one group, the LGBTQ community but also creates a precedent that in the future the government can deprive any citizen of the rights guaranteed by the constitution" [Kandelaki, 2024]. Similar pathos was coming from the statement made by the European Union External Action (EEAS) arguing that this fast adoption of the law "undermines the fundamental rights of Georgian people and risks further stigmatization and discrimination of part of the population" [EEAS, 2024] that is not in line with the EU enlargement process, especially after making such decisions without broad public consultations (ibid).

5.3. Speculations around the conceptualization of "unity" and attempt to frame the youth as against religion

During the protests, a group of young people in Heroes' Square in Tbilisi swore an oath in front of the fallen heroes to protect the state from the "Russian laws", and Russian narratives, and to protect Georgia's statehood and unity. They recited the following: "We will protect our language, our homeland, and our unity" [Batumelebi, 2024]. The Georgian Dream presented this slogan as a distortion of the words – "homeland, language, and faith" of Saint Ilia the Righteous, a famous Georgian writer, publicist, and public figure. According to GD, Georgian liberals are fighting against religion by removing word "faith" and replacing it with "unity" [Georgian Public Broadcaster, 2024d]. One of the activists, Zviad Tsetskhladze explained that when there was a threat of losing the language emphasize was on language, when facing threat of losing the religion, the focus was on faith, however in the understanding of the youth, "unity" is one of the most acute problems in contemporary Georgia and that is why the emphasis was on unity specifically [Formula TV, 2024]. After that, to avoid speculation on the issue, the following rallies featured signs reading "Language, homeland, faith = unity" [Maisuradze, 2024]. One of the most critical statements regarding civil society and external funding, and one that is in line with the Georgian Dream narrative, was made by the Patriarchate of the Georgian Orthodox Church on April 26, 2024. They did not

miss the opportunity to indirectly echo the slogan described in the previous paragraph, specifically emphasizing that Georgia's progress in recent history should be based on the words of Saint Ilia the Righteous: “Homeland, Language, Faith” [Public Relations Service of the Patriarchate of Georgia, 2024a, para.2]. The statement also calls for the patriotic spirit of new generations not to be used for political interests and harmful ideology. Moreover, stress is placed on the fact that the Georgian government's political vector was EU integration and that the government at the same time has clearly embarked on the path of protecting traditional values. Contrary to the previous GOC statement made in April, the Easter Epistle was less critical towards the civil society and the main motto of the Epistle was calling for the nation to show “love for the homeland” and “live together peacefully” despite political processes and people’s differences [Patriarchate.ge 2024], that was pretty in line what the young protestants were claiming to be the most important in today’s Georgia.

A few days after this statement, GD organized a counterdemonstration under the name of “United Public Gathering” on 29th April where the Honorable Chairman of GD addressed its electorate mobilized throughout Georgia specifically for that day. In his speech, he mentioned the fear of losing sovereignty, that the former government was elected in a revolutionary fashion by the foreign agent NGOs, and that the United National Movement (UNM) had a green light from the foreigners for their assertive actions against the society, and who nowadays want to return to that inhuman behavior that was previously also supported by NGOs in Georgia [Georgian Public Broadcaster, 2024b]. The Chairman said that there is no worse enemy than the pseudo-elite brought up by foreigners [ibid]. He mentioned the so-called mysterious “Global War Party” influencing both NATO and the EU. And that the reason for the Global War Party's aggression towards Georgia is that it could not turn Georgia into a second front, which it could easily achieve if the “Agentura” returned to power [ibid].

5.4. The clash between European politicians and GOC-GD

A few days before the celebration of the “Family Purity Day”, Michael Roth – a German politician of the Social Democratic Party of Germany visited Georgia on an official visit and expressed support for the protesters opposing the “Foreign Agents' Law”. In his speech, he mentioned that the young generation is the future of Georgia and that they need to be heard, and in case they lose confidence in their country, they will leave it, and the resulting brain drain would be a disaster for the

country. He posed the following question while addressing the gathering: “how will you build a bright future for Georgia without the younger generation?! Only with the Orthodox Church, which is one of the closest allies of the ruling party?! Well, try it!” [Radio Liberty, 2024c]. The Georgian Dream assessed this statement as an attack on the church and the best illustration of foreign influence [Georgian Public Broadcaster, 2024d]. “We saw foreign actors at the rally organized by the NGOs financed by them and addressing the protesters” – said Parliamentary Speaker Papuashvili [ibid, para.3]. While the GOC issued another statement in response naming Mr. Roth’s statement as completely incomprehensible, inappropriate, and unacceptable and added that the GOC does not divide society based on who stands on what platforms and represents which political force. His statement was described as an attempt to stigmatize the GOC by linking it with the ruling party [Public Relations Service of the Patriarchate of Georgia, 2024c]. Despite Roth's condemnation of the Church's statement on its affiliation with the ruling party, it became clear on 17th May that the ruling party and the government, in general, were given a significant role, demonstrated by Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze's addressing the parishioners from the entrance of the Trinity Church where he stated that “Family Purity Day” is the day of defending families, identity as well as protecting “Nation, Language and Faith” and the Georgian Orthodox Church [Imedi TV, 2024]. He mentioned that Georgia is a Christian state and the main value of Christianity is love and some powers try to divide our society and replace love with hatred and that they need to do everything to unite the entire society around love [ibid]. This was a clear sign of alignment with the Church and a display of clever rhetorics a few months before the elections to gain the sympathy of the conservative electorate.

It is noteworthy that one month later, on the 17th of June, the Patriarchate hosted the EU Ambassador to Georgia, and the dialogue was focused on the importance of the family and the traditional and Christian values in the EU integration process of Georgia [Patriarchate of Georgia, 2024]. This was a clear sign of an attempt from the EU side to conduct constructive dialogue and explain to the GOC that the EU values does not contradict the above-mentioned conservative values.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

While critically analyzing the discourses around the “Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence” this paper makes a distinction between two narratives. On the

one hand, the initiators and supporters of the law frame it as being similar to the US version of the FARA law with the aim of justifying its appropriateness and to argue that the law was not in any meaningful contradiction to Western standards. On the other hand, the opponents of the law refer to the draft law as “the Russian law” to stress that the introduction of the law will isolate Georgia from the international community and yield nothing but negative results for the country. Regardless of the type and origin of the law, one thing is certain: the adoption of this law plays a negative role in Georgia's European integration process. In addition, even though the Georgian Dream claims that the introduction of the law simply ensures transparency in the activities of the foreign-funded civil sector, it is clear that this law does not in any way benefit NGOs and the media, it does not aim to promote the advancement of their activities, but rather presents this group as a threat to the rest of the society and serves to limit the scope of their freedom and action. The law has a clearly negative connotation and is perceived as a major step that distances Georgia further from its European aspirations. Therefore, the civil sector has had to go into a defensive mode and resist, since civil society, including the media, believes they make a significant positive contribution to the country's development and European integration, which has been repeatedly acknowledged by the West.

The analysis reveals how supporters of the law frame their case for adopting the law: (1) Protecting and strengthening state sovereignty; (2) protecting Georgian traditions and identity; (3) avoiding foreign agents coming into power; (4) protecting religious and national values. All of this framing aims to sow fear among Georgian society, at the same time, it deliberately affects the feelings of the religious and conservative electorate to convince them of the necessity of adopting the law. On the other hand, following categories might be distinguished for how the opponents of the law frame their case: (1) the law is restricting and stigmatizing civil society; (2) the law shows a clear intent to subject any opposition to repressions; (3) the law hinders the ability of people to defend human rights; (4) the law restricts freedom of association and expression; (5) the law creates grounds for discrimination. Accordingly, they are well-founded in their fear that this jeopardizes Georgia's European integration process.

Moreover, the statements of some Synod representatives against the law clearly show that opinions are divided within the Church, although ultimately the Church's position is still being disseminated through official statements

from the Patriarchate, which stands in stark contrast to the aforementioned concerns.

The Georgian Dream's further rapprochement with the Church has two goals. The first goal is to attract the conservative electorate through the Church's support, to which end it adopted an anti-LGBT law, initiated the tightening of legislation penalizing for insulting religious feelings and the Church buildings, and increased state funding of the Orthodox Church. The second goal is to subordinate the Church, which is revealed by the fact that it aims to declare Orthodox Christianity as the state religion, although GD failed to anticipate that it would encounter resistance from the Church itself. However, it should also be noted that in line with the post-secularistic approach, the Church's power in the public sphere has increased considerably in 2024, and therefore, the Georgian Dream is not the only party that benefits from this harmonious relationship.

Given that the majority of Georgian Dream supporters were also in favor of European integration, whatever the actual intentions of this political force in terms of conducting foreign policy are, it still had to emphasize European integration in the run-up to the elections. At the same time, the aim of GD, choosing a religious-nationalist discourse in tandem with the Georgian Orthodox Church, is to balance the criticism coming from the EU due to the adoption of the “Foreign Agents' Law” so as not to lose the pro-European electorate while attracting more conservative votes. Therefore, GD promotes the narrative that some unseen mysterious forces like the so-called “Global War Party” influence NATO, and the EU, without naming these institutions directly as the source. Accordingly, GD together with the Church's indirect support, frames the civil society and media as local agents funded by external powers posing a threat to traditional and religious values. Moreover, by using the “us vs them” dichotomy, GD labels practically everybody including the youth opposing the “Foreign Agents' Law” and some other laws and the actions that ensued from the adoption of these, as “collective enemies of the national identity”. Although the Church has never directly accused the EU of insulting national identity and religious values, and even held a meeting with the EU delegation and expressed its desire for Georgia to become a member of the EU while preserving Georgian traditions and values, the Church willingly or unwillingly contributes to jeopardizing Georgia's European aspiration. In this case, the government effectively exploits the Church's main criticism of liberal democratic values to its advantage. It can also be said that the ruling party deliberately strays from the path of European integration and embarks on the path of authoritarianism. At the same time, it

should be noted that in this process, the Church's attempt to distance itself from the government is noticeable and twofold, the first time when it opposed the attempt to declare the Orthodox religion as the state religion, and the second time when the Church criticized the German politician Roth for attempting to affiliate the Church with the government.

It is important to highlight the limitations of the research here. Given that no face-to-face interviews were conducted with each actor, especially the government and the Church whose arguments regarding heading the state towards EU integration were not convincing, we cannot unequivocally prove what each actor's real intention is to support the "Foreign Agents' Law". Although all those statements and actions are quite sufficient to conclude, especially given the fact that the European integration process was stalled, the European Union itself warned the government about this. However, the government, without any justification, continues to claim that the country is on the path of European integration, although with its actions it is leading the country in an opposite direction. The second limitation of this research is that no in-depth media analysis was done throughout the research. However, it is balanced by the fact that it managed to gather all statements within 2023–2024 of the Church and state and analyzed these independently without interpretations of pro-governmental and opposition media agencies.

The results of the study allows to draw several conclusions, the first of which is that any statement made by any actor regarding the "Foreign Agents' Law" contains a hidden connotation, and what the actors say in support of or against this law is purposefully framed to carry out their discourse. The suspension of negotiations with the European Union demonstrates the accuracy of the arguments against the adoption of the law – that the law is not in line with fundamental European values and policies is a correct observation. In addition, it must be said that if it were not for the ruling party's further rapprochement with the Church and the adoption of the Church's discourse as its discourse to implement the party's goals, the ruling party would have had difficulty convincing its own and other conservative voters of the necessity of adopting the "Foreign Agents' Law" and also convincing them that this law does not contradict European values in general and that it is based on American legislation. Although there were many other obstacles on the path to European integration, the adoption of the "Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence", so-called "Foreign Agents' Law", is the main

trigger for the destruction of European aspirations, to which the Church, consciously or unconsciously, contributes due to its fear of losing national and religious identity and also fear of declining its influence in the public sphere in case of expansion of liberal political values in Georgia.

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