The VISIO JOURNAL

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF PUBLIC POLICY ANALYSIS

CONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRACY IN A PREDICAMENT

Editor
Tanja Porčnik

Admir Čavalić,
Athanasios Grammenos,
Constantinos Saravakos,
Giorgos Archontas,
Haris Delić,
Mihaela Iacob, and
Octavian-Dragomir Jora

NUMBER 7 • PUBLISHED BY VISIO INSTITUT • 2022

Copyright © 2022 by Visio institut

All rights reserved. This publication or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the publisher except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

The authors of this publication have worked independently, and opinions expressed by them are, therefore, their own and do not necessarily reflect the views of Visio institut.

Although every precaution has been taken to verify the accuracy of the information contained in the papers, the publisher assumes no responsibility for any errors or omissions. No liability is assumed for damages that may result from the use of information contained within.

Book design by Milutin Pavićević.

Cite this publication as:
Title: *The Visio Journal 7*
Editor: Tanja Porčnik
Publisher: Visio institut
Date of publication: 2022
Digital copy available from <http://www.visio-institut.org/>

Cataloguing Information
The Visio Journal 7 / edited by Tanja Porčnik
Annual.
2022 issue by Admir Čavalić, Athanasios Grammenos, Constantinos Saravakos, Giorgos Archontas, Haris Delić, Mihaela Iacob and Octavian-Dragomir Jora.

ISSN 2536-1481

www.visio-institut.org

The VISIO JOURNAL

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF PUBLIC POLICY ANALYSIS

Vol. 7

Constitutional Democracy in Predicament

Tanja Porčnik *Editor's Note / i*

Octavian-Dragomir Jora and Mihaela Iacob *The Industrial Revolutionizing of the Social Contract: 4.0 Generation Prospects / 1*

Athanasios Grammenos *The Church and Democracy in Times of Crisis / 18*

Admir Čavalić and Haris Delić *State Institutions as a Playground for Populism: Case Study of Western Balkans / 47*

Constantinos Saravakos and Giorgos Archontas *Quality of liberal democracy and COVID-19 pandemic restrictions: Did liberal democratic institutions manage to protect the civil liberties? / 67*

About Visio institut / 83

EDITOR'S NOTE

By Tanja Porčnik*

After the decades-long global momentum toward constitutional democracy, we have seen its reversal in recent years as institutional and constitutional constraints on government have been weakened, and human rights have been afforded less protection. In addition, the coronavirus pandemic exigencies have put constitutional democracy to yet another test.

It is with great pleasure that I present Issue 7 of *The Visio Journal* which explores the grounds of concern with the resilience and robustness of constitutional democracy which has led scholars to speak of "democracy in retreat", "democratic backsliding", "democratic recession", "democratic deconsolidation", "constitutional retrogression", "constitutional failure" and "constitutional rot". The Journal features four papers analyzing the degree institutional and legal frameworks of liberal democracies are resilient to attacks on the rule of law, open society, and human rights.

In the first paper, Dr. Octavian-Dragomir Jora and Dr. Mihaela Iacob analyze the imprint of technological (r)evolutions on the concept of a social contract. With the lens of a political economist, they outline the core conceptions of the social contract theory and its intersection with political systems. They also investigate the impact of different waves of industrial or technological changes on social behavior and political processes. The authors conclude that "Industrial Revolution 4.0 favors the freedom of expression, the necessary yet not sufficient first layer of exercising political rights through political participation, coupled with the economic freedoms and economic means [...] The direct democracy 4.0 virtualization paves the way towards a new reality, with greater possibilities than ever to define, debate and redesign, from scratch, the social contract."

Next, Dr. Athanasios Grammenos examines the engagement of religion with politics in cases where human rights were threatened. The research traces the normative causes for democracy's alleged setback before analyzing the preposition for religion being a sustainable pillar of democratic tradition. The paper explores whether religion could support democracy in avoiding political mistakes and (re)gaining the trust of citizens. The author's analysis determines that the most important conclusion is that "today the Church, as a living body, has displayed the ability to conform to democratic principles and serve the needs of modern society."

Third, Admir Čavalić and Haris Delić study the state of populist policies and practices in practice in Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The authors find that "these policies are basically very similar - they are multi-year populist policies that trace their roots back to the 1990s and the breakup of the former Yugoslavia." While strong institutions are

recognized as a solution for tackling populism, this path has an additional challenge in the Western Balkan countries where further EU integration seems to be perpetually being delayed.

Fourth, Constantinos Saravakos and Dr. Giorgos Archontas explore the relationship between institutions in 111 liberal democracies and the COVID-19 governments' policy responses restricting fundamental individual and civil rights. The authors' results suggest "that countries with a higher quality of liberal and democratic institutions restricted less the rights of their citizens regarding school and universities closures, the requirements to stay at home, and the closure of public transportation. Our results also indicate that countries with better quality of liberal and democratic institutions restricted fewer workplaces, public events, gatherings, internal movement, and international travel; however, the differences recorded in these areas, compared to the ones from the other Liberal Democracy groups, are not statistically significant."

Finally, I recognize the generous contribution of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom for supporting the journal that is before you.

---

* Dr. Tanja Porčnik is President of Visio institut and editor of *The Visio Journal*.

SUPPORTED BY

The Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom is not responsible for the content of this publication, or for any use that may be made of it. The views expressed herein are those of the author(s) alone. These views do not necessarily reflect those of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom.

The Industrial Revolutionizing of the Social Contract: 4.0 Generation Prospects

By Octavian-Dragomir JORA* and Mihaela IACOB**

For a "materialistic" person, the social contract is a bizarre "mental" product, close to alien/UFO mythologies: many people complain that they found themselves speaking of it without ever seeing it; frustrating is that it is supposed to have been signed before being spoken of; on top of that, it was presumably sealed prior of being properly signed. Described (as well as prescribed) by generations of theorists as a (necessary) agreement between the ruled or between the ruled and their rulers, defining the rights/liberties and duties/obligations of each, the social contract is a functional fiction that maintains human society lawful and orderly. In addition to the stress tests (passed and failed, across times and territories) due to the vagaries of the human nature, the imprint of technological (r)evolutions on the social contract is intriguing. Does technology smoothen or rather sharpen the imbalanced positions of the "signatory parties"? What about enforceability? Or about legitimacy? The present paper delves into this techno-political topic with the lenses of the political economist. Firstly, an outline of the core conceptions regarding the social contract theory and its crossroads with the perspectives on direct versus representative democracy is made. At this very junction reside the assessments on both the righteousness and the practicality/efficiency of the social order. Secondly, the inquiry continues with surveying the impact of the waves of industrial/technological shifts upon the general social behaviour and related political processes. The main costs and benefits that economically digested technologies imposed on the democratic life are then noted. Thirdly, the analysis ends up with investigating the capacity of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, with its information processing and communication toolkit, not only to be more inclusive for the citizen, yet in weak democratic routines, but to reset and start anew an empowering social contract.

Key words: political philosophy, political economy, social contract, democracy, industrial revolution, efficiency.

Introduction: On the twin facets: homo techno-oeconomicus and zoon techno-politikon

The "egg-and-chicken" problem when, for instance, reasoning on and ruminating about the history-long and worldwide plethora of technological shifts/rifts/drifts and social/political/economic realities is secondary to a principal obviousness: these two dimensions of the human(e) existence are involved in a co-evolutionary relationship, implying mutual and bi-directional causes and effects. Hence, defining (or decreeing) the "technological" as the independent variable and the "socio-" as the dependent one, or maybe vice versa, solely provides the scholar with insights onto limited segments from what it is, yet, a continuum; but, for the scientist, understanding each and every modest and simple link gets her closer to the underpinnings of the mega-complex chains of events. Studying Industrial Revolutions' (IR) imprint onto the functioning of polities is such a link, a compound of the chain of capturing the practical means which get us closer to our principled ends.

Problem statement. Our species' sociality comprises a mixture (and sometimes a messing-up) of political and economic considerations, among other issues. Themselves results of more or less fertile political and economic societal circumstances, the technological (r)evolutions strike back in political and economic matters. If the second imputation is much more common, as dealing with new productive (technological, organizational) methods prompts industry ahead of agriculture in jobs and fortunes creation, the first one is significant too. The very act of governance changed, with the extent of state involvement in economic policy ranging from the more classical-liberal, capitalistically-entrepreneurial takes in the Anglo-Saxon world to the proto-welfare-states springing in the continental Europe. Notably, each wave of Industrial Revolution got state agencies and public policies in even more direct contact with ordinary people. Yet the trend is far from being exhausted.

Research questions. This essay briefly surveys the accumulations in terms of major impacts coming from technological breakthroughs – embodied in the four (and counting?!) waves of Industrial Revolutions – on the broad soci(et)al fabric, with an explicit focus on the political sphere, as well as with the use of economic lenses. Although it draws upon popular historical retrospectives, and occasionally playing with prospective tools, the exposé is intendedly theoretical. It aims as sketching answers to questions such as: What can be noticed observed at the interplay between technology - politics - economics across epochs?; How much contractual any social contract really is and how technologies may improve this?; Is the representative type of democracy truly superior to the participative one?; Does the society of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 have the means (or the will!) to restore/install social contract's legitimacy via more participative democracy?

Research methods. Short of entering the debates pertaining to the philosophy of science, the authors are aware of (*grosso modo*) methodological disparity of social vs. natural

sciences and adopted, for this exploratory topic, a rather austere, qualitative, deductive route, than a luxurious, data-based, quantitative and empirical one. There has been found as an adequate (*stricto sensu*) methodological toolkit the one containing: a brief (praxeo)logical/deductive investigation of the coherence and consistence of some state-of-the-art arguments within the extant literature; a short scrutiny of both qualitative and quantitative historical records involving processes at the confluence of industrial revolutions with social phenomena, merely related to government issues; a terse attempt to demonstrate that, theoretically and practically, the evolutions in information technology and communications (IT&C) affairs shall contribute to more ethical and efficient social contracting.

Expected conclusions. An in-the-making research route such as this one has as much novelty as enduring common sense. Amid narratives that tend to associate technological arduous progress with the risk of dystopian abyss, this study is not intended to be a *manifesto* for re-reading and re-writing the more often than not unread and… unwritten social contracts, but it may well join one endeavour of such genre. After centuries (if not millennia) of attempting to demonstrate (bloodily a posteriori than peacefully *a priori*) that strong dictatorships and despotisms are worse than the most fragile democracy because of the degenerative/corruptive nature of (absolute!) power, it may be the ripe time for giving back the power to the people, though not in a socialist-revolutionary, but in a liberal-evolutionary way. The incoming "4.0 citizenry" has the wherewithal to be more participative (cutting down political middlemen) and genuinely contractual (cutting down political mythologies).

Generations of revolutions: On "the good" technologies, "the bad" politics and "the ugly" economics

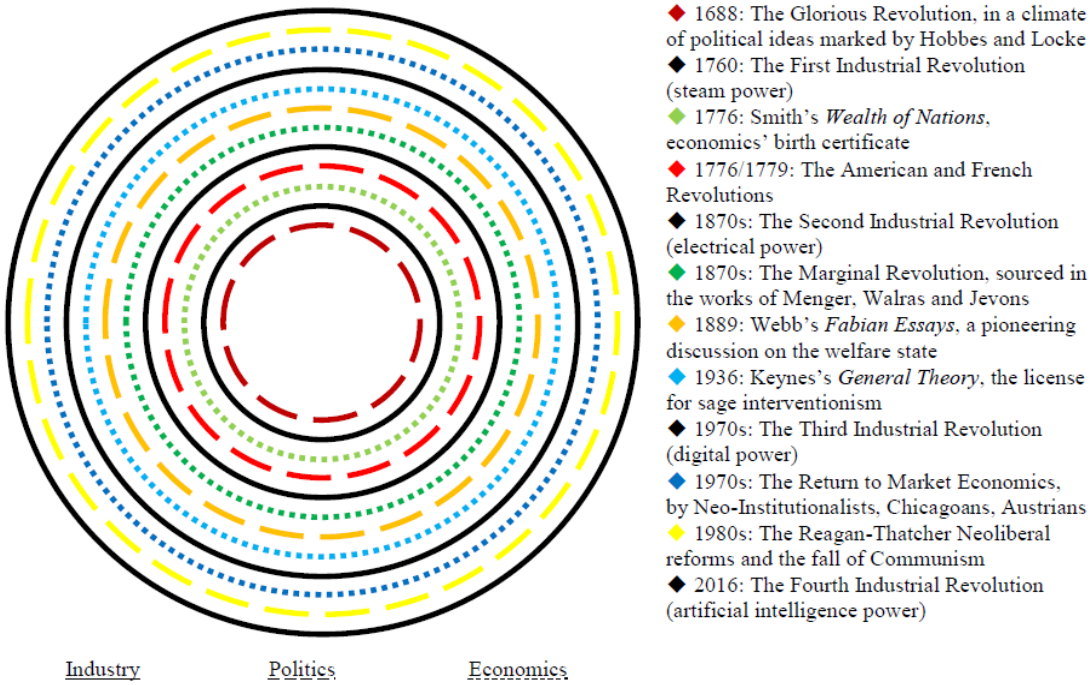
Revolutions, irrespective of how large-scale, out-of-the-blue and severely-altering might look, could be regarded as caught in evolutionary sequences – that is they originate in other pre-existing types and their distinguishable differences come from modifications across successive generations. Or they may be seen as revolutionizing one another. By revolution we understand either an overturning of *de facto* patterns and delving into what lies ahead (this is the "modern" type of revolution) or a return to the original positions (the "traditional" type).

Even if a famed principle states that "*natura non facit saltum*" ("nature makes no leap", dictum shared by Charles Darwin, a biologist, and Alfred Marshall, an economist) – human nature being included! –, the free-willed social character of human existence, based on exchanged and changeable ideas, allows for the idea of revolutions, in either evolutionary or revolutionary waves. Be they in technological ingenuities, political ideologies or economic/epistemological inquiries, such revolutions existed in their own right, whilst resonating mutually.

This is neither the moment nor the place for a thorough analysis of the interbreeding of technologies, politics and economics, yet a concise review of some illustrative and illuminating features of revolutionary episodes in the (r)evolutionary series of technological, political and economic changes may be of good use for the purpose of this essay. This might contribute to grasping, at least *prima facie*, what could not have been possible in an early epoch (practically/physically, or politically, or profitably) in terms of democratic exercise, but it might become in a not so distant future.

The choice of words tagging the three realms (inspired by the 1966 Italian epic spaghetti Western movie – *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*) is not scholarly, but it relies on pop wisdom. Etymologically, technology is a "discourse on the arts, both fine and applied" (Britannica), something inherently good. Politics, dealing with the distribution of power, is the "art of looking for trouble, finding it everywhere, diagnosing it incorrectly, and applying the wrong remedies" (Ernest Benn *apud* Spring, 1944, 31). And economics is the "dismal science" (Carlyle, 1849), disciplining us to live with the scarcity doom.

Figure 1. Waves of Technological, Political and Economic Revolutions



Source: Own representation.

Nota bene: The moments or periods associated with the beginnings of each breakthrough are mainly indicative. The tiers overlap and interplay in so many ways, while their consecution does not suggest causality.

Industrial/Technological revolutions

One common feature of all IRs was a visible change to human condition and social condi-

tions (Stearns, 2021). Even the pre-industrial, agrarian revolution laid the footing for society and, as humanity progressed from a hunting-gathering to a sedentary lifestyle, that gave way to basic urban settlements with centralised administration, bringing with it the visible stratification of human societies into classes. Then, the steam-powered IR 1.0 (1760s-1830s) saw the intense transformation of manufacturing processes that enabled mass production, rapid urbanisation and the prominence of a middle class of entrepreneurs. This tendency was further distinct in the electrically- (but also managerially-) powered IR 2.0 (1870s-1914), allowing for greater productivity, greater connectivity and greater globality in corporate affairs. The Digital Revolution, as the IR 3.0 (approx. 1960s-2000s) is usually recognized, transformed the role of information in society and shaped a new class of white collars, good at data mastery and digital machinery. As for the IR 4.0 (2000s-), it revolutionizes the previous wave of digital technology, with the development of artificial intelligence and machine learning, going forward towards nano-bio-technology and quantum computing, yet with assorted fears of transhumanist Frankenstein-type beasts and useless-class pariahs (Schwab, 2016; Johnson and Markey-Towler, 2020).

Mapping the very roots and reverberations of the Industrial Revolutions is not an easy task. One of the verdicts is quite striking: "the Great Enrichment was built on ideas, not capital" – where the "Great Enrichment" (McCloskey, 2016) is the process set in motion by the "Industrial Enlightenment" (Mokyr, 2013). Thus, if engineering and organizational innovations (i.e., the spinning jenny, the insurance undertaking etc.) plus those within in politics and society (i.e., the US Constitution, the British middle class etc.) are the visible pillars of our modern world, their deep foundations spur ultimately from a change in what Adam Smith (1759) once labelled as the "moral sentiment". It implied an ideational change in economic/political rhetoric. In the great ABC of social systems' flow, the Bourgeois Era (following the Aristocratic one, and interrupted by Communism) was that time in which merchants and entrepreneurs began to enjoy respect and admiration, being able to aspire to (at least in principle) the equally-accessible ranks of elites. They embodied the libertarian-egalitarian values of the new-born, loved and hated, "industrial society".

Politico-Ideological revolutions

In a sense, technological disruptions were the by-product of liberating political idea(l)s and ideologies. They reinforced the former or usurped them, as technical progress spills over equally across the friends and foes of voluntarily cooperative society. Alas, political ideologies have a tumultuous course of their own (Weiss, 2019). The theorizers (and historians) of politico-ideological revolutions are more numerous than those concerned with techno-industrial problems and what unites the cohort is its astonishing heterogeneity, noticeable only by listing some of its "rock-stars": Thomas Paine, Marie-Jean-Antoine-Nicolas de Caritat, marquis de Condorcet, Immanuel Kant, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Mikhail Bakunin, Karl Marx, Hannah Arendt, Michel Foucault. Belonging to democratic/republican, or authoritarian, or anarchist intellectual traditions, they produce an unset-

tled, polemic literature. When we streamline and simplify the approach, we may identify a typological trilogy of archetype revolutions (Patapievici, 2019): a right-wing one (the English Glorious Revolution, 1688), a left-wing one (the French Revolution, 1789) – having in mind the Burkean re-evaluation of the second one (of dissimulated artificial bondage), in the light of the first (of traditional natural bonds) –, and a centre one (1989 Revolution). Specifically, the 1989 moment is about centre/fused values: human rights, rule of law, open society, free trade, democracy, social market economy, *inter alia*.

Focusing on the intellectual representation of the government in the collective mindset, Micklethwait and Wooldridge (2015) proposed a three-and-a-half-staged revolutionary history of the state. The first came in the 17th century, with the nascence of the Leviathan-state (the allegedly lesser-evil response to the nastiness, brutality and brevity of man's life in his imperfect "state of nature", as decried by Hobbes; the offshoot was that nation-states grew up into trading empires, only to mature into entrepreneurial liberal democracies. The second one was brought by the joint forces of the American and French Revolutions, with the ancient regime's "old corruption" giving place to meritocratic, accountable, limited, night-watch government. The third one contested the past competitive liberty in favour of a novel compassionate one, as the welfare state (or its degenerate communist mutant) provides for the education and health (or misery?!) of the nation. And the (uncompleted) fourth piece, labelled by its detractors as a Thatcher-Reagan neoliberal spasm, temporarily delayed the aggrandizement of the state and privatized part of the stifling public monopolies. Fulfilling it implies cutting off individual-rights' erosion (in the name of biased social grounds) and democratically lighten the state's burden. Technology and economic spirit/activity seem ready to assist this task.

Economic-conceptual revolutions

The most political and politicized of all the social sciences, maybe more than even political science, economics (formerly, political economy) is also subject matter of a myriad of (hi)stories about economic theories. These theories and the histories thereupon are biased by the political fashions of the day, the most pronounced polarity being between market-first vs. government-first camps. In the bipartisan club of the titans of the history of economic thought feature names such as those of Joseph Alois Schumpeter, John Kenneth Galbraith, Robert Louis Heilbroner, Murray Newton Rothbard or Mark Skousen. Yet sequencing true revolutions in economics is a too hard of a job. Some indicate celebs such as Adam Smith, David Ricardo, John Stuart Mill, Alfred Marshall and John Maynard Keynes (Dillard, 1978) as perfect candidates for the status of economist-revolutionaries. Others feel the need to introduce in the landscape the Austrian School of Economics – from Carl Menger onwards, as the maintainers of a perpetual counter-revolution to the Keynesian-Neoclassic Samuelsonian synthesis (Dolan, 1976). Or fill Karl Marx in, the iconoclast(ically wrong) depicter of capital and capitalism; or call for Milton Friedman's Chicago School; or say that the Neo-Institutionalist movement, ignited by Douglass North, revealed the many blind-spots in mainstream theorizing, confirmed by the sudden and synchronic fall

of socialist economies.

If still wanting to identify roughly-discernible stages in the (r)evolution of economic thought, there can be possible to find a fair set (and also keep the factor of four from the previous snapshots). The first revolution "started with Adam", as the Smithian work not only created a scientific system, but also inspired (as it had been inspired by) a mood of ideas auspicious to wealth creation and widespread growth. The second movement responded to the Marxian "dark age" twist in economic science and to the forthcoming communist experiments, with Menger-Walras-Jevons "marginal revolutions" (and a rather marginalized "subjective revolution"). The third step was done by J.M. Keynes' sneaking between fading laissez-faire economists and furious socialist economists, professing state interventionism in the monetary and fiscal affairs to stabilize market economies in depression. And a fourth wave was to be the one of a new crop of pro-market economists, gathering Monetarists, Supply-Siders, Neo-Institutionalists and relentless Austrians, who re-forged both logical and empirical rationales in the face of both Western stagflation and Eastern stalemate in the "red" world. These happenings stay proof that the quest for betterment in conducting social/political/economic affairs knows no pause and, despite fluctuations, has embryos for success

Contractare humanum est: On all said social contracts' missing signatures (along with broken seals)

Law and Economics scholars and pundits warn that there is no such thing in the real world as a perfect contract. Yet what do they say of "the most imperfect" contract of all – the social contract?

Property and contract: emerging markets and designing organizations
Summing up, *avant-la-lettre*, contracts (springing from property rights) presuppose at least these basic prerequisites:
• scarcity – relative, means-ends, abundance de-activates economizing behaviour;
• sociality – no need for "*meum et tuum*" kind of norms when there is no "other";
• inter-subjectivity – deontic or utilitarian reasons inform scarcity-pushed social competitors that cooperation commences with the "good fences make good neighbours" edict.

The most common-sense perspective (yet so twisted and turned across ages) on contracts and contracting is that their understanding stands and falls with that of the concept of property rights: essentially, the contract is a non-aggressive relationship between property owners. (Onto)Logically, property rights cannot be secondary to contracting (be it "social" or formal), for any contract presupposes the prior acknowledgement that the contractors establish their relation (of exchange) based upon resources previously and rightfully owned (bodily or extra).

Such viewpoint, expression of the *jus naturalis* theory of property – brilliantly strengthened in the Lockean-Rothbardian-Hoppeian lineage –, grounds the attribution of a right of possession exclusively on the existence of an objective and intersubjective link between the human possessor and the possessed non-human object. Thence, it calls aggressive all property claims that can only invoke in their favour "subjective" evidence. This dry verdict cannot be sweetened by objectifications via positive legislation (re)assignment of ownership – for this is "legal plunder".

Properly set property rights lay the contractual basis for functional markets and hierarchies. Transactions (contract-based acts) are the ultimate units of micro-analysis – with markets comprising independent transacting entities and hierarchies displaying a single administrative entity at the both sides of the deal (Williamson, 1975). Contract theory is *en vogue*: Nobel Prize for O. Hart and B. Holmström in 2016. Choosing marketed vs. managed transactions and assessing organizational performance, in both for- and non-profit setups, entail contract-sensitive appraisals.

Society, state and contractualism: some canonical and criticist visions

The social contract is a defining, yet truly debatable, idea, one of the backbones upon which the social/political/economic body decisively relies. Modern statehood and national economies owe to it the fecundity of the forms they experience(d). Ultimately, the state-creating social contract is one topic where the modern severed from the antic: the latter's political order rests on contributions to the common good, the modern runs away from violence.

Whether the social contract elevates humans from the savage and menacing state of nature, entrusting them to an absolute sovereign ruler (Hobbes, 1651) or to a government of trustees (Locke, 1689), or provides shelter from the deleterious civil society, which estranges them from an idyllically free state of nature just to enslave them (Rousseau, 1762) is a matter of worldview (*Weltanschauung*). The state is preached as that political institution transcending the violent ordeal by converting the outlaws' competition-in-rampage into a monopoly of legitimate violence (Weber, 1965).

Yet, this discernment and enforcement of rights and responsibilities of the governing and the governed is an unstable compound for both Right and Left (Skocpol, 1979). On the one hand, for classical liberals/libertarians, the state, though protective, even providential, hides under its generosity and solidarity rhetoric the embryos of domination over the individual. And on the other, for socialists/Marxists, though emancipated from feudal absolutism, the state is the tool of those in control of the means of production to exploit the have-nots.

Despite ideological clashes, the state-establishing governance and the rule-of-law social contract is vulnerable infrastructurally, in its core legitimacy traits. There can be noted at

least three main fragilities in (all!) theories on social contracts (Evers, 1977):
• people's "tacit consent" – based on benefits accepted or residency preserved – is overrated;
• citizens' "self-enslavement" to sovereigns/majorities/legislators/law-enforcers is unnatural;
• prerequisite for the rule of "just" law is non-aggression (a duty epically failed by the state).

The issue at stake: the social (quasi- / illusive / null and void) contract
A much simpler critique of the social contract – to which a Constitution looks like a formal proxy (Lermack, 2007) – does not need a thorough cognisance of the savvy (or sophisms) on that matter from Socrates, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Ayn Rand or John Rawls. It rather needs going backwards to the most widespread view of the very idea of contract, genre to which the social contract is a species:
• was there a mutual assent among the parties, expressed by a valid offer and acceptance? (though crucially is to first identify the parties, de-homogenizing them from third-parties);
• were the promises made by the parties exchanged for adequate consideration from the rest? (that is, do they unequivocally understand what they are giving up in exchange for what?);
• did the parties have the capacity to contract? (presuming this is true, what happens with those lacking capacity yet related to the parties – are they parties, third parties, "objects"?);
• is the contract legally enforceable? (we have a case of circular reasoning, for the legality expected to govern contractual relations among the parties is hereinafter expected to being established).

Power to/for/by the people

On participative vs. representative democracies' operational conundrums
Remaining silent for now to the above quiz, and before turning towards eventual technology-infused answers, we make a stop at the "0 km" of social contracting: the participative democracy.

<u>Participation and/versus representation</u>
Neither the political system nor the government make sense in democracies without the participation of citizens as voters. Nor, obviously, the social contract that it is said to establish them. For brevity reasons, we will skip over the succulent discussion on political regimes. This is a core term, which survived antics' political philosophy translation into modern political science, dealing with the relationship between the exercise of authority and obedience – that is between those who command and those who obey. Here democracy featured all taxonomies and rankings, but not always in the pole position of people's ra-

tional choice, as it has been summarized in recent times: "[D]emocracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others" (Churchill, 2008). The essential point is not whether democracy is rightfully portrayed as another "God that failed" (Hoppe, 2001), but, being as it may, how it conciliates participation and representation.

People's political participation is defined by its deliberate/voluntary and tentatively-influential features. Preda (2013) summarizes the panoply of participatory actions:
• the classical/conventional participation – running for a political office (candidacy), voting (in an electoral process), militancy (joining a political party, acting within such an organization or involvement in election campaigning) and even the apparently passive concern for political information (by regular and social media);
• the protesting/contesting/non-classical participation – revolutions (violent overthrown of existing orders animated by primal instincts coupled with herd spirits, by class fights coupled with charismatic leaders etc.) or petitions, boycotts, strikes, street protests, civil disobedience (striving to bring change within, not of a regime).

Political representation and, especially, the institutional design for representation are a nuisance for political theory, even if political practice continues to roll over more or less satisfactory arrangements. "How we organize the representation", "how it should be conceived in the first place", "what are its limits", "which aspects we can still manage", "how we do/should choose our representatives" – these are issues associated with any form of democracy, be it well-established or self-proclaimed (for even the dictators or the autocrats are concerned with them being sensed as representative). Modern democracies, relying on representation and representatives, continue to be accused (or they have already been found guilty) for entertaining a quite vicious "illusion of participation". Equating representation with participation, modern democracy creates the fancy that politics is owned by and owed to "ourselves, the people".

<u>Some efficiency- and excellency-based arguments</u>
A consequence of, though distinct from, participatory democracy, representative democracy appears as a limited and an indirect form of democracy. It is limited for popular participation in governance is recurrent (once every some years) and short-lived (concentrated to electoral ballots). It is indirect in that people delegate, in between ballots, their powers (that is rights and resources) to those deciding in their name and on their account.

Representative democracy is deemed "representative" as long as it builds up on an as larger, non-discriminative, inclusive and informed participation as possible, and "democratic" as long as it establishes reliable links between the rulers and the ruled, embodied in a (constitutional) electoral mandate. As well, it is seen as a more appropriate form of governance than mere participatory democracy, for economic and ethical justifications:
• efficiency – it saves time and money at a social scale, by allowing elected officials to devote themselves to legislative or executive tasks, rather than involving every citizen in

every ruling; it is a matter of division of labour superior output; it presupposes predictable timeframes in which political acts to be duly processed, instead of leaving public affairs to vulgate's volatile, private, daily whims, etc.
• ethicality – it is considered superior to both census exclusivism and full participativism, for it includes a filter of socially recognized merits while not prohibiting anybody to take part based on inherited/undeserved statutes; it paves the way for professionalization in politics, rather that abandoning it into dilettantes' hands; it creates "statesmen-heroes vs. villains" educational, nation-building narratives, etc.

And some a priori (and empirical) counterarguments
Such arguments as the above-listed would sound quite seductive unless trained in readings coming from the Public Choice, Neo-Institutional or Austrian-Libertarian scholarship (or even Neo-Marxian, sometimes right, yet for the wrong reasons) pointing to the contrary, both theoretically and historically – with mass-media being a good library of case studies.

For instance, Austrian swipes on "democratic representation"-related issues stand out through Ludwig von Mises' famous economic-calculation rail on bureaucracy, Jörg Guido Hülsmann's reworking of moral hazard as biased-property, not information-asymmetry issue, or Matthew McCaffrey and Joseph Salerno's review of political entrepreneur's production function; on the economics of politics, from the Austrian stance, see Apăvăloaei (2018).

"Politics without romance", as James Buchanan (2003) branded Public Choice, it hosts a much substantial and sophisticated audit, with the likes of Kenneth Arrow, Duncan Black, James Buchanan, Gordon Tullock, Anthony Downs, William Niskanen, Mancur Olson, and William Riker (to name solely some of the coryphaei) at the forefront (Shughart, n.y.).

That said, with human nature stubborn since ever, is there a technological cure for (representative) democracy?

Polis recoded – 4.0 edition: On three scenarios, by the weight of a tech-revolutionized social contract

The scant scientific literature on social contract and IR 4.0 evolves around ideas such as: reviewing citizenship in a cyberspace-mediated or dominated world, given its assortment of concerns regarding digital users' (data suppliers') social rights and welfare provisos (Tomasello, 2022); the moral, ethical and legal dilemmas at the crossroads between the human and the artificial intelligences (Variath and Variath, 2020); privacy, security and trustworthiness (Denton et al., 2018).

Our present essay catches another angle. It is not only about dealing with the new reali-

ties of "social contracting 4.0", but with the old ones, yet using novel technical, participatory instruments. In the "hard" scenario, it is about reshaping the boundaries of polities starting from manifest, not tacit consent; in the "moderate" one, the legislative becomes a more administrative, quasi-executive arm of the sovereign popular will; and in the "weak" one, e-referenda emerge as common practices.

This exercise of imagination starts from the plausible reality that future state of affairs in IT&C 4.0 (artificial intelligence, blockchain, quantum computing) makes possible bolstered-up forms of both cyber-connectivity and security. These represent powerful preconditions for accepting all contractual relations expressed in a digital form, whether private or public, as legally binding, including here the act of democratic participation, such as voting in electoral ballots or in referenda.

Henceforth, a predictable consequence would be the enhanced easiness not only in adding to the social nexus of e-contracts, but in reworking the ones in place, up to reconsidering the whole legal order – desirably so that the new order capitalizes upon and not breaches the existing one. Notwithstanding resistance from statue-quo controllers and benefiters, this contractual chain-reaction may rewrite Constitutions and state power structures, beyond surface-scratching current civic consultations.

The hardcore scenario: State-rebuilding 4.0

What all scenarios share is the reliable prognostic of the universalization of digital literacy and access to IT&C terminals, as well as the reasonable pretence of legalizing the exercise of citizenship rights, and duties alike, by resorting to cyber-facilities. Thus, by invoking the symmetry of treatment, once people are encouraged to pay their taxes online, they should also be able to vote accordingly. "No e-taxation without e-representation!" – here is a good slogan for "democracy 4.0".

Every willing individual could become an active "e-citizen", in the same vein as in classical citizenship. The essential difference will be the far greater scale and scope of democratic participation. And by accepting uniformity of treatment in terms of permitted e-participation (basically, voting – but in all kinds of elections or plebiscites), the spectrum of possibilities for changes (or preservation, depending on the conservative vs. progressive biases) becomes enormous.

Pushing the above reasoning to the logical limit, such technological easements in reaching a critical mass for critical decisions could give birth to unthinkable options in nowadays mindset. For instance, the "fundamental laws" can be amended in crucial aspects such as the indivisibility and inalienability of national territory, with "individual secession" (of a person and his real estate properties) as a constitutional possibility plus as a constant pressure for bettering governance in use.

There can be imagined jurisdictional mosaics, where different citizens from a neighbourhood are "subscribers" to different state-like providers of "public goods" (law and order, education and healthcare), with the problem of fixed infrastructures, such as those for transportation or utilities, being settled by dedicated inter-state clearing-houses. Of course, the option for such fancy arrangements would depend on cost-benefit calculus, but freedom, not coercion, would do the math.

The mere possibility of creating institutional competition and cultural compactness – of course, balanced against diseconomies of scale and strategic vulnerabilities arising from such heterogeneity of political units – will incentivize the (fewer!) political representatives (due to the participatory nature of the move) to perform and deliver according to the expectations of their voters. Such contractarian societies would curb classic ("captive") democracy's perverse arithmetic.

Such against-the-tide intellectual experiments have been made in the Austrian-libertarian, anarcho-capitalist rite, with roots in 19th century era of European or United States nation-building – for instance, see the volume edited by David Gordon (1990) dedicated to the highly inflammable topic of secession. What such exercises lacked was the availability of the technological input for reframing the conqueror-state's "maculate conception" into a participatory, really contractarian one.

The moderate scenario: Law-making 4.0

Realising that it would take long for such a hyper-liberalization of political participation to take place – as it is unlikely to be itself too soon conducive to a political class eager to prepare its own dismissal so abruptly –, there could be envisaged a more gradual move though. That would imply a curtailment of the legislative layer to the limited role of a law educator and formalizer with regard to what, in the end, the people, with the help of reachable and secure technology, will decide.

Transforming the Parliament into a more supple institution (along with the rest of the state apparatus), that only prepares the supply of laws or provides the juridical rigour to citizens' initiatives before returning them to public scrutiny, would have two effects: reducing the frenetic rhythm of contemporary regulatory creation (as popular majorities are much harder to amass than in the vested-interested, elected national assemblies) and even repelling previous dysfunctional norms.

Even if assuming the underlying social contract as unshakable, legislating within its confines will be more legitimate with citizens at a click-distance in subsequent law-making. "Demonstrated" preference (not polls-based "revealed" preference!) would unequivocally indicate that a matter is so important for one to vote for it; or, on the contrary, merely conducive to inaction. Hence, popular majorities (to be procedurally penned) will better signal "the greatest good for the greatest number".

The weakened scenario: Vetoing 4.0

Finally, even if the political Cerberuses in office may find unwise to allow citizens to be the sole creators of legislation, a last redoubt will be to gain the possibility to repel a law (as well as to revoke an elected official) by referendum, in the most operative manner, that is technically obtainable within a digital format. Granting to the people even only the "atomic button" of vetoing undesirable decisions and decision-makers will add to a climate of social quasi-contract legitimacy.

This perspective amounts to a democratic-liberal attitude of the citizen toward elected politicians: "what is not prohibited is implicitly permitted". Yet, as sovereign, the citizen has the principled right to aspire to proactively dictate the rules of the game, more than being a price-taker in relation to policy-makers. And even with this small increment – that is not always deciding what is best for her, but still declining what is worst –, Democracy 4.0 could be seen as a step forward.

Those who might object to the risk of hastiness in popular decision will have to confront the reply that there is more room for hasty decisions under the cupolas of national assemblies than in mobilizing equivalent shares in the large population, with a far cry superior legitimacy. As for the relative efficiency, there are so many valuable economists/financiers who could evaluate the pay-off / the return on investment from a digital infrastructure that would save costs of poor policymaking.

Conclusion

This essay aimed at preparing the terrain for more thorough works on how IR 4.0 could be converted into a democratizing factor for a worldwide society that decries democratic deficits even in the most mature societies (politically and economically). Part of a series of industrial revolutions that made people more and more aware of their political forces and fragilities alike, IR 4.0 has some unique traits, which distinguish it from the rest of the previous episodes: it is highly empowering. This is true to the extent that people would feel the need to claim back such made-available power.

What stands out in front of everything else is that IR 4.0 favours the freedom of expression, the necessary yet not sufficient first layer of exercising political rights through political participation, coupled with the economic freedoms and economic means to make it happen (as compared to other epochs, when having your voice heard in streets or in media was limited physically/materially). The direct democracy 4.0 virtualization paves the way towards a new reality, with greater possibilities than ever to define, debate and redesign, from scratch, the social contract.

---

* Dr. Octavian-Dragomir Jora is Professor at the Bucharest University of Economic Studies, the Faculty of International Business and Economics, founder and editor of *The Market for Ideas* magazine and editor-in-chief of the *Œconomica* journal.

** Dr. Mihaela Iacob is Associate Professor at the Bucharest University of Economic Studies, the Faculty of Finance and Banking.

References

Apăvăloaei, M. A. (2018). *Analiza praxeologică a acțiunii politice și a cooperării internaționale. O abordare interdisciplinară la confluența dintre știința economică și știința politică*. București: Editura ASE.

Britannica (n.y.). Technology. Available at: https://www.britannica.com/technology.

Buchanan, J. M. (2003). Public Choice: Politics without Romance. *Policy*, Spring. Available at: http://www.cis.org.au/policy/spr03/polspr03-2.htm.

Carlyle, T. (1849). Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question. *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country*, 40: 670-679.

Churchill, W. (2008). *Churchill by Himself: The Definitive Collection of Quotations*. New York: PublicAffairs.

Denton, S. W., Pauwels, E., He, Y., and W. G. Johnson. (2018). Nowhere to Hide: Artificial Intelligence and Privacy in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. *Wilson Center Policy Report*. Available at: https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/nowhere-to-hide-artificial-intelligence-and-privacy-the-fourth-industrial-revolution.

Dillard, D. (1978). Revolutions in Economic Theory. *Southern Economic Journal*, 44(4): 705-724.

Dolan, E. G. (1976). Austrian Economics as Extraordinary Science. In *The Foundations of Modern Austrian Economics,* Dolan, E. G. (ed.). New York: New York University Press.

Dumont, C. (2021). *The Fourth Industrial Revolution: Much More than a Paradigm Shift, a New Way of Conceiving the "Human"*. Cooltura.

Evers, W. M. (1977). Social Contract: A Critique. *Journal of Libertarian Studies*, 1(3): 185-194.

Gordon, D. (ed.) (1998). *Secession, State, and Liberty*. New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers.

Hobbes, T. ([1651] 1969). *Leviathan*. Baltimore: Penguin Books.

Hoppe, H. H. (2001). *Democracy – The God That Failed: The Economics and Politics of*

Monarchy, Democracy and Natural Order. New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers.

Johnson, N. and B. Markey-Towler. (2020). *Economics of the Fourth Industrial Revolution: Internet, Artificial Intelligence and Blockchain* (Innovation and Technology Horizons). New York and London: Routlege.

Lermack, P. (2007). The Constitution Is the Social Contract So It Must Be a Contract ... Right? A Critique of Originalism as Interpretive Method. *William Mitchell Law Review*, 33(4). Available at: https://open.mitchellhamline.edu/wmlr/vol33/iss4/1.

Locke, J. ([1689] 1988). *Two Treatises of Government*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.

McCloskey, D. (2016). *Bourgeois Equality. How Ideas, Not Capital or Institutions, Enriched the World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Micklethwait, J. and A. Wooldridge. (2015). *The Fourth Revolution: The Global Race to Reinvent the State*. London: Penguin Books.

Mokyr, J. (2013). *Twenty-Five Centuries of Technological Change: An Historical Survey* (Fundamentals of Pure and Applied Economics). New York and London: Routlege.

Patapievici, H. R. (2019). Revoluția de centru. Reflecții asupra Revoluției Române și a revoluțiilor din 1989, *Newsweek.ro*. Available at: https://newsweek.ro/istorie/patapievici-revolutia-de-centru-reflectii-asupra-revolutiei-romane-si-a-revolutiilor-din-1989.

Preda, C. (2013). *Introducere în știința politică*. Iași: Polirom.

Rousseau, J. J. ([1762] 2001). *Du contrat social ou Principes du droit politique*. Paris: Flammarion.

Schwab, K. (2016). *The Fourth Industrial Revolution*. Geneva: World Economic Forum.

Shughart, W. F. II (n.y.). Public Choice. Available at: https://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/PublicChoice.html.

Skocpol, T. (1979). *States and Social Revolutions. A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Smith, A. ([1759] 2011). *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Erie: Gutenberg Publishers.

Spring, H. P. (1944). *What is Truth?* Winter Park: The Orange Press.

Stearns, P. N. (2021). *The Industrial Revolution in World History*. New York and London: Routlege.

Tomasello, F. (2022). From Industrial to Digital Citizenship: Rethinking Social Rights in Cyberspace. *Theory and Society*, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-022-09480-6.

Variath, A. G., and A. A. Variath. (2020). *A New Social Contract for AI Governance in the Age of Fourth Industrial Revolution*. Nirma University, Institute of Law. Available at: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3952446.

Weber, M. (1965). *Politics as a Vocation*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Weiss, K. (2019). The Liberal Order and Its Backlash: Transition and Realignment in Eastern Europe and the West. *The Visio Journal*, 4: 1-12.

Williamson, O. E. (1975). *Markets and Hierarchies: Analysis and Antitrust Implications*. New York: The Free Press.

The Church and Democracy in Times of Crisis

By Athanasios GRAMMENOS*

Contemporary European political culture entails robust reliance on the Enlightenment assumptions of positivism and logic. On this basis, the ethics of secularism are associated with reason, while religious tradition, although institutionally respected, is mostly linked with some sort of despotic anachronism. After 9/11, positive ethics considered political Islam as incompatible with liberal democracy, but lately, also Christian faiths are treated with caution, if not reservation within western societies and any involvement in public affairs is received with unease. Be that as it may, in recent years, constitutional democracy faces strong challenges, social and natural. Political developments in the periphery, such as the Syrian civil war and the consequent refugee crisis, economic disparities, environmental concerns, and more recently the pandemic, have dropped participation levels, raised concerns about the efficacy and legitimacy of restrictive measures and, failed to prevent conspiracy theories from gaining ground. In this historical context, religion has played an overlooked role, backing government policies based on humanitarian principles and protecting the common good. The present study examines the engagement of religion with politics in critical cases for human rights when democratic institutions face intense skepticism. Focusing on the recent European experiences, the research traces the normative causes for democracy's alleged setback and, avoiding the narrowness of the secular rationale, will analyze whether religion could be a sustainable pillar of democratic tradition by supporting constructive citizenship in modern society. The first part will present the updated academic discussion on contemporary democracy and its relationship with religion, while the second will study the empirical evidence on the practices and principles of religious organizations in case studies with protracted controversies. The analysis will answer whether democracy could use (political) support from religion to correct previous political fallacies and win the trust of citizens.

Key words: church, religion, democracy, refugee crisis, COVID-19 pandemic, Orthodox Christianity, Roman Catholicism, politics.

Introduction

Nobody can take democracy for granted. The end of history (Fukuyama 1992) as a tele-

ological approach to the concept of liberal democracy has proved too ambitious, failing to predict and explain its domestic discontents. The dynamics of social evolution have the ability to transform political conditions and rearrange the liberal order in unpredictable shapes. In the recent past, western democracy has gone through situations that would be unthinkable in the early 2000s. The global sovereign debt crisis in the late 2010s undermined economic and political stability (Mukunda 2018, Macartney 2013). The rise of peripheral powers with authoritarian systems, such as China and Russia, has changed the balance of power, asking for a bigger share in international affairs (Ambrosio et al. 2019, Agnew 2010). Religious fundamentalism and terrorism finally struck on European soil, in France and Belgium. The refugee crisis brought, to the doorstep of Europe, a dramatic humanitarian crisis, calling for immediate action. In its aftermath, new populist and xenophobic movements made their appearance in countries like Germany, France, Poland and Hungary, disputing the very principles of European solidarity. Great Britain exited the EU and Donald Trump was elected President of the US, marking a fulcrum of neoconservative politics. And, the pandemic of COVID-19, accompanied by a wave of conspiracy theories and denial of science, built up new tensions and divisions.

All these years, many enemies of democracy have emerged, aspiring to change the rules in their favor, encouraged by external (contending authoritarian models, global economic recession, climate change) and domestic failures (rising inequalities, unemployment, declining social mobility). Even so, democracy has proved resilient, renewing itself after every occasion. Its potential is reinforced by a pluralistic system of participating citizens and social agencies, run under the premise of the rule of law and a set of institutions balancing and checking each other. However, as it will be discussed below, this time, the main challenge comes not from an illiberal outsider or an extraordinary risk but the inside, due to systems "hovering constantly on the brink of crisis" (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018, 212).

In the social architecture that is now under scrutiny, religion plays a special role. For historical and cultural reasons, Christian Churches are oftentimes constitutionally or organically attached to the state and the people (Sandberg and Doe 2007). Even in religiously neutral countries like France, where prevails the model of *laïcité*, the relationship between Church and state is still complex with administrative and economic linkages (Donadio 2021). That said, the occurring question is what does this bonding mean for our democracy?

The present article is concerned with the role religion has played in two recent challenging cases for European democracies. The first is the refugee crisis and the second is the pandemic. These topics were selected because they have a horizontal, pan-European effect without exceptions, they have aspects of humanitarian interest, and they have provoked an intense debate about the course of political action.

The paper recognizes that religious institutions have their own standpoints stemming from

their philosophical traditions and they reach out to large groups of people with their ethical norms and organizational forms. Thus, the present approach will not focus on the institutional relationship between state and religion, but on the "political" actions of the latter, in the above case studies administered by the former. The Church has a significant power to exert political influence over believers based on spiritual and theological convictions (Stepan 2000). Sandberg and Doe (2007) argue that "religion continues to be a potent [political] force" but not in a confrontational fashion to the Weberian model of statecraft which remains unequivocally secular. What they suggest is closer to Bell (2019, 465), who believes that the Church is political "in the most general and abstract sense" engaging in the social discourse to inform the faithful of its theological perspectives on issues of interest. With that in mind, the thesis wonders whether in times of crisis, religious organizations use their power to support government policies responsibly, or they distance themselves, investing in fear and superstition, posing new challenges to democracy. Put differently, in the aforementioned democratic distress, do Churches comply with the -mostly restrictive- measures and actively advise their constituents to do the same, or do dispute their rationale, calling the faithful to disobedience?

To explore these questions, the article is organized as follows. Chapter 1 discusses the interaction between religion and politics beyond the secularization thesis. Chapter 2 develops the conception of democracy's alleged decline, presenting crucial indicators about the performance of institutions and civil society in times of crisis. The next two chapters are dedicated to the stance of religion in two considerable challenges for European democracy, firstly the migration crisis and secondly the pandemic. Due to space limitations, the research narrows its focus to the heads of the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches. The reason for this focus is that they both had a direct engagement in the case studies, their jurisdiction spreads to a wide geographical area, one in western and the other in eastern Europe, and they both form ecumenical ecclesiastical organizations, compared to other Christian denominations, and they administer their constituents in a large transnational network. When necessary, though, references to other doctrines or faiths we be made.

Interestingly, these two Churches share a political antinomy: the Pope, head of the Roman Catholic Church, is seated in the Vatican City, an independent sacerdotal state, while the Ecumenical Patriarch, head of the Eastern Orthodox Church, is seated in Turkey, a non-European and predominantly Muslim state. While the Pope is the leader of a state, the Ecumenical Patriarch operates in a rather hostile environment (Sisson 2019).

At this point, it is important to make a normative clarification. The Church, unlike state structures, does not function in a strictly hierarchical way but there is space for officials and groups to alienate themselves from decisions and declarations coming from the top. This phenomenon is more frequent in Eastern Orthodoxy because it is governed by a synodical system of autocephalous (independent) and autonomous Churches, but it is not for-

eign to Catholicism, despite its vertical system of hierarchy. Therefore, one should not expect a solid and monolithic response by the Church to every issue of social concern. Voices of opposition or an alternative interpretation of the facts may occur but this under no circumstances undermines the authority of the respective bodies.

The last chapter expands the discussion to the potential of interfaith dialogue, the approach among leaders of different religions to support a cooperation process and strengthen the efforts for peace. Global challenges affect not merely different states but also different peoples, with their respective religions and cultures, and therefore, coordinated efforts among faiths may serve effectively as a humanitarian tool where hard politics face obstacles. The analysis reviews the latest literature on the field and studies empirical data, including official public declarations as well as actual interventions, be symbolic or substantial.

Religion and politics: beyond the Enlightenment assumption

The fields of politics and international relations have displayed a strong reservation when it comes to incorporating the study of religion in their disciplines. The prevalence of neorealist approaches in combination with Enlightenment assumptions of positivism has marginalized non-materialistic, non-countable factors. Political realism, the predominant school of international relations theory, is based on the notion of power (Donnelly 2001). Realists argue that the international system is anarchical, meaning that there is no supreme authority to supervise or impose order. Therefore, states rely merely upon their capabilities in terms of security and, ultimately, survival. Fear and insecurity urge them to constantly pursue to enhance their defensive means and be prepared to respond to potential threats. As a result, the governments are trapped within a vicious cycle of continuous armaments and increase in their relative strength, with the possibility of a preemptive conflict always obscuring international relations. The growth of one state's power alerts its neighbors or competitors causing a security dilemma. In such a perilous environment, unit-level (intra-societal) factors, such as religion, are considered reductionist (Waltz 1979) for having little, if any, impact on the international system.

Schwarz and Lynch (2016) examine the historical evolution of scholarly perceptions over religion, commenting on how the Westphalian presumption shaped the modern secularization thesis. More precisely, the Peace of Westphalia (1648) ended two, decades-long, wars between Protestant and Catholic states, on the battlefields of northern and western Europe. To avoid new conflicts heated up by the religious element and, more essentially, to keep out of their business the transnational role of the papacy, European monarchs agreed that "religious and cultural pluralism cannot be accommodated in international society, but must be privatized, marginalized, or even overcome -by an ethic of cosmopolitanism- if there is to be international order" (Thomas 2003, 23). With this development, religious relations were subjected to the jurisdiction of the ruler. Later, this position

was updated by the Enlightenment narrative, according to which the political milieu was suitable only for the products of reason and science, while religion was thought as incompatible with modernization and a synonym for superstition (Harvey 2014). The national movements of the 19th century affirmed the domination of the political agency over the spiritual and the secularization of the political process, with or without the separation of Church and state. In this context, it has been argued that nowadays "the prevailing orthodoxy among intellectuals in the West is that religion is a waning, irrational, and dysfunctional aberration" (Powers 2010, 317).

Nonetheless, the study of religion in political science is reemerging in the last years, with scholars systematically picking up the question of the relationship between religion and politics (Crockett and Keller 2021; Fitzgerald 2011; Hurd 2008). One part of contemporary research is focused on conflict, interpreting religion as a causal factor of civilizational divisions. The dramatic events of 9/11, the consecutive wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the appearance of the Islamic State, attracted attention which, nevertheless, was confined to the narrow limits of conflict and terrorism studies. The most noticeable work remains The Clash of Civilizations, by Samuel Huntington (1996). In his scheme, Huntington presents a dystopic image for the future of inter-civilizational relations, thinking religious and cultural identities -especially Islam- as the primary sources of conflict. "In the emerging world," he argues "the relations between states and groups from different civilizations will not be close and will often be antagonistic" (Huntington 1996, 183). His position, albeit influential, has received strong criticism (Shahi 2017, Perry 2002, Said 2001) for selective and counterfactual interpretation of events, on top of taking for granted western supremacy over the rest. The Brussels Declaration, signed on December 20, 2001, by eighty Christian, Muslim and Jewish leaders of Europe and Romano Prodi, the then President of the European Commission, responded to Huntington's thesis by rejecting "the assumption that religion contributes to an inevitable clash of civilizations" (Bartholomew 2010, 307) and reaffirming religion's constructive and informative role in inter-civilizational approach.

Another part of scholarly literature, focuses on the religious hermeneutics of peace, highlighting open opportunities for reconciliation. Interreligious (and interfaith) engagement provides reasoning with theological or cultural arguments, emancipated from institutional politics, meaning governments and public administration (Bob 2015, 97). Valuable in this fashion is the concept of soft power, as opposed to hard power: if "[hard] power is the ability to affect others to get the outcomes one prefers […] by coercion, payment, or attraction and persuasion […] soft power is the ability to obtain preferred outcomes by attraction rather than coercion or payment" (Nye 2017). That being so, for religious leaders and organizations, soft power is a natural domain, given that they can facilitate collective action through their normative systems (Steen-Johnsen 2021), autonomous from political interests and without suppressing the faithful. That being said, the reader must be aware that no religion is monolithic and religious factors can contribute to both violence

and peace (Appleby 2000, 282). Some religious groups may give in to superstition, political divisions, nationalism and aggressive radicalism, as recent history has shown, especially in communities where serious societal problems exist (Chiwetalu Ossai 2021). Because of that bitter challenge for peace, the Bosporus Declaration of 1994 that ended the International Peace and Tolerance Conference, stated that "a crime committed in the name of religion is a crime committed against religion" (Bartholomew 2010, 299). Hence, the main concern of this article is to detect patterns of positive action, arguing that religions and cultures do not belong to diametrically opposed camps, as Huntington supposed, but they have the potential to promote democratic policies and constructive peace-building processes (Powers 2010).

This kind of religious soft power was exercised by US President Harry Truman as part of his containment plan (Inboden 2008). The anti-communist strategy of the US was based on the domino theory according to which every country falling to communism would drop one more until they reached global domination. To prevent such a development, beyond his political efforts, Truman supported pro-western hierarchs to elevate in influential positions and forge a joint ideological front (Kirby 2014). An applied example of his doctrine was the election in 1949 of the Greek Orthodox Archbishop of North and South America Athenagoras as the Ecumenical Patriarch, the leader of all Eastern Orthodox Christians, who flew to Istanbul -the See of the Eastern Orthodox Church- with a US government's aircraft (Grammenos 2019).

In the limited space of this paper, it is essential to discuss one more aspect of religious soft power with meaningful sociopolitical impact. Interfaith dialogue is the interaction among senior representatives of different religions, aiming to overcome ignorance and prejudice, promote mutual understanding and foster cooperation in support of the common good (Blakemore 2019). In the last decades, the major religions have made big steps for cooperation and common action on global challenges, rendering interfaith dialogue the diplomacy of faith, involving not only religious leaders but also academics, politicians, international organizations and civil society agents. The road was paved in 1920 with an encyclical sent by the Ecumenical Patriarchate to all Christian Churches, proposing the creation of a "League of Churches" which would promote unity and peace (Ziakas and Ziaka 2016, 502). This ecumenical vision was realized in 1948 with the foundation of the World Council of Churches (WCC). The constitutional purpose of WCC was to provide a forum for dialogue on crucial international issues through Christian unity. A few years later, the 2nd Vatican Council (1962-1965), declared religion as a major cause of fellowship among human beings laying the foundations for structured dialogue and collaboration with non-Christian faiths (O'Collins 2013). Throughout the polarized period of the Cold War, cooperation among different religions intensified, including a partnership with the UN, working to ease the consequences of the East-West split. Later, this dialogue was expanded into areas such as disarmament, racism, social and gender inequalities, public health and migration. The structures of interfaith dialogue allow a

permanent and direct communication channel among religious leaders, through which they exchange views and coordinate their efforts on issues of faith, and international affairs but also crises that call for an immediate response, such as the refugee crisis and the pandemic.

Modern democracy and its discontents

The question of democracy's present and future concerns not only academics but also political leaders. A virtual Summit organized by Joe Biden, President of the United States, in December 2021 (The White House 2021) hosted leaders from 100 countries,[1] who exchanged ideas about how to bolster democratic institutions against authoritarian models, tackle corruption, and promote respect for human rights. Biden's initiative was fueled by what he called the "backward slide of rights and democracy" (Biden 2021) and the increasing public distrust in democratic institutions, as a result of their poor performance in delivering sustainable economic and political progress.

At the time of the Summit, Biden was completing his first year in office after an election race that stigmatized US politics for its polarization and the following incidents of violence, when supporters of the outgoing President Donald Trump refused to accept the result of the election and stormed the Capitol (Gramlich 2022). Internationally, the situation was no less complicated, either. Many EU member-states had been flagged by independent monitors for their poor democratic performance (Balfour 2019) while studies made evident that the pandemic of COVID-19 had worsened the condition of democracy and human rights in numerous countries across the globe (Repuccci and Slipowitz 2020). Furthermore, economic limitations and government interference had a severe impact on the quality of information and freedom of the press (IDEA 2021). Last, as of November 2021, Russia had amassed some 170.000 troops at the border with Ukraine and in occupied Crimea, gathering the clouds of war above Eastern Europe.

Biden's initiative emphasizes that these are hard times for democracy. On the one hand, countries in Europe's periphery, such as Russia and Turkey become more and more authoritarian, threatening the liberal consensus; on the other hand, member-stated of the European Union, the flagship of democratic tradition, like Poland and Hungary, adopt an ultra-conservative political behavior, restraining fundamental liberties. Larry Diamond (2015) argues that this process started already in 2006 due to bad governance and the consequent social cleavages that polarize western societies. Kurlantzick (2011) believes that authoritarian states became more repressive while democracies are weakening because of domestic and international threats. In contrast, Levitsky and Way (2015) reject as pessimistic the view that there is a democratic recession in the world, adding that such

[1] The summit included also representatives from multilateral institutions, international NGOs, the Media, Civil Society and business, but no religious leader was present.

conclusions stem from observers who raised the bar too high about regime transitions and the fall of communism in the 1990s. More precisely, they hold that democracies have proved successful and resilient although they recognize that autocrats have become smarter and politically adaptive, overcoming foreign pressure.

These studies, however, rely primarily on empirical bases that consider structural factors (e.g., political system, elections, civil society, media freedom) as indicators. Although they are valuable resources, from another point of view the author believes that the whole picture is not revealed yet. The concentration of power and passing of controversial laws with a parliamentary majority may be valid and 'democratic' but gradually they lead to what has been called "loss in quality of democracy" (Erdmann 2011) affecting -in the long term- political equality and freedom (Smolka 2021). Put differently, the structural approach overlooks the erosion of the spirit of democracy, which is understood as the level of meaningful participation by the citizens and their capacity to bring actual change with their vote.

Colin Crouch argues that the West witnesses a shift towards post-democracy in which the center of political gravity has moved out of the political system. The concentration of power resources in the hands of only a few economic centers gives them the ability to influence political decision-making, overriding traditional democratic structures (Crouch 2004). In his own words, "[e]lections, while still crucial for protecting citizens' rights, [are] becoming an increasingly empty shell when it [comes] to expressing serious conflicts of interest" (Crouch 2016, 72). Expanding the context of Crouch's theoretical framework, Alikhani (2017) proposes the analytical model of de-democratization that emphasizes the role of structural interdependence within a given society to explain that the scope of (political) decision-making depends on the distribution of power. Using the example of super-PACs in the US, and lobbyists in the EU Parliament, he argues that the economic sector has great resources to influence politics while the capacity of the governed to shape policies decreases over time.

Power relationships are central also for Sandel, who argues that democratic recession is the fruit of civic breakdown caused by market triumphalism. The growth (giantism) of the corporate economy and, consequently, economic internationalization strengthened the business sector so much that it became unaccountable. The drift from a market economy to a market society (Sandel 2012) forced social-welfare liberalism to retreat resulting in citizens' alienation from public affairs. The growing corporate power over politics resulted in populist backlash and loss of democratic control over the economic forces (Sandel 2010).

The sovereign debt crisis of the Eurozone and the austerity measures imposed on the states of the South was one more challenge for democracy, especially when Parliaments were called to vote divisive laws under the threat of economic default. Kotler (2016)

notes that the governments do not satisfy the people, so they respond with lower turnout and engagement. Especially the lower classes detach themselves from the elections causing a widening participation gap over time (Dalton 2017), while the power of the few is in a position to diminish democratic governance by exploiting their unequal influence.

Reduced civil engagement, says Putnam's theory of social capital, triggers a drop in levels of trust, unity and reciprocity, making social identities more fragile (Putnam 2001). At the national level, a significant group of citizens may perceive this as an attack on their (national) identity, feeling neglected by the political establishment and threatened by minorities. In this case, along with popular disappointment or frustration at large, one effect of the democratic recession, is that it can give birth to populist movements (Crouch 2019, 126). This explains how, and more importantly, why the refugee crisis that erupted in 2015 forged a xenophobic, anti-immigration and anti-Islamist political culture, expressing discontent, not against their governments, but, against Muslim immigrants.

The crisis of democracy is above all a crisis of trust in the efficiency of its institutions. A widening gap between the governing and the governed, inflamed by economic inequalities, disappoints a crucial part of the society while populists and anti-systemic voices reject policies and measures taken for the public benefit in exceptional cases, such as the pandemic. The citizens who are affiliated with a Church have a high prospect of asking for advice and support from their community. Therefore, if a democratic recession harms social identities, the question onward is whether the Church has the will to help restore faith in institutions and rebuild trust in democracy. The following Chapters will examine this possibility, analyzing the Church's response in certain cases.

Christian leaders and the pandemic: between faith and science

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the need for a fast response gave the European governments a wide range of emergency powers that in many cases led to temporary restrictions of certain liberties, including freedom of movement and assembly. While social life was paused and the majority of citizens were confined at home to prevent the spreading of the virus, the executives in many countries passed controversial laws and decrees (Michalopoulos 2021) without parliamentary scrutiny. A Freedom House special report found that the pandemic worsened the quality of democracy in 80 countries of the world since the governments engaged in abuse of power, manipulation of institutions, control over the Media and diminution of transparency (Repucci and Slipowitz 2020). A group of researchers investigated the variation of these policies across Europe and concluded that in countries with weaker democratic systems "the pandemic opened up a window of opportunity for power-seeking leaders to further concentrate power" (Ergen et al. 2021).

Some examples are very informative: in March 2020, Hungary passed a controversial

law entitling the Prime Minister to rule by decrees for an indefinite period (Tharoor 2020); Poland, following Hungary's steps, undermined the rule of law by passing authoritarian judicial reforms, challenged the supremacy of the European law and removed the Ombudsperson (Bastasin 2021); Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz resigned under the pressure of multiple scandal allegations, one of which was about some media advertisements he ordered supposedly to promulgate measures against the pandemic, but essentially in exchange for favorable coverage (Föderl-Schmid 2021); similarly, in Greece, the neoconservative government subsidized targeted media outlets with 20 million EUR to carry the COVID-19 measures' campaign, inaugurating a long-term relationship of dependence with them. Press freedom and pluralism were drastically limited so much that Věra Jourová, EU Commission Vice-President, considered the situation in the country "problematic" (Michalopoulos 2022). Overall, financial support for Media across Europe proved too risky because public funds functioned as soft money given for supporting political allies (Bleyer-Simon and Nenadić 2021). These complications resulted in domestic debates and a decrease in the levels of trust in politicians across Central and Eastern Europe, a fact that was reflected in the performance of the hygienic measures and the low vaccination rates (Furlong 2021)

With governments monopolizing power and new strict measures of social distancing applied, civil society actors had their distinctive interventions. For religion, the pandemic was a great challenge on both theological and liturgical grounds. The lockdowns had an inevitable impact on religious services, shutting down places of worship and suspending all physical religious services. It was neither an ordinary nor an easy development, since church attendance and the sacraments are the sine qua non of Christianity, linking spiritual life with worship and membership. Before that, some religious gatherings in the early stage of the pandemic had resulted in new infections, igniting reactions from citizens who thought that some of their fellow citizens are ignoring on purpose their public health responsibilities (Marshall 2021). This development created a state of emergency that needed immediate action, asking for a reconciliation between hygienic protection and religious freedoms.

Physical gatherings

As an extraordinary response to an unusual situation, some churches in the UK shifted to the provision of virtual services, challenging, though, existing theological conventions connected with space and physical contact (Bryson, Andres and Davies 2020); the Evangelical Church in Germany broadcasted Sunday's liturgy via the national ZDF, holding also an online media center for updates regarding worship (Kuropka 2020); and, Pope Francis celebrated the Easter of 2020 in the empty Basilica di San Pietro (De Angelis 2021). The Pope also canceled all his international trips and in May 2020 he called for an interfaith "Day of Prayer" to raise awareness of the pandemic among Christian, Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu religious and lay organizations (Vatican News 2020). Since Italy witnessed first-hand the consequences of the disease, with a high death toll in the north of

the country, Francis canceled all public masses (Merlo 2020), called for prudence and obedience highlighting the threat of false news (Wooden 2020), and used social media platforms in many languages to connect with his flock (Pérez-Martínez 2022).

The Ecumenical Patriarchate was decisive from the very beginning, fully endorsing social distancing measures. On March 18, 2020, the Holy Synod in Istanbul strongly suggested its hierarchs across the globe stay at home for their safety and the protection of the general public, limiting outings and travels to what is absolutely necessary. Concerning the scientific community, it underlined the need to follow the recommendations of the authorities, protect public health, and express gratitude to the medical personnel for working on the front line. Most importantly, it declared an ecclesiastical resolution to cease all divine services, events, and rites, including the Patriarchal Offices in Istanbul (Grdzelidze 2020) stressing that "that which is at stake is not our faith – it is the faithful. It is not Christ – it is our Christians. It is not the divine-man – but human beings." In addition, the Ecumenical Patriarch through the Health Care directory, organized an online Consultation about the Pandemic to explore ways in which the Church can support the isolated and "open line of communication with medical and health care professionals within a spirit of mutual respect and understanding" (Pastoral Health Care 2021). One of the most doctrinal questions, provoking divisions and fear, was that of the Holy Communion (bread and wine), that in the Orthodox world is shared with one common spoon. Although not all local Churches responded fast or were under lockdown, some of them introduced changes that fully complied with hygienic protocols (Calivas 2020).

Science and Vaccination

The relationship between religion and science is obscured by a traditional narrative about an unsettled dispute between the two (Evans and Evans 2008). Following this perception, one could expect that religious actors would be skeptical, if not negative, about the origins of the virus and the very vaccine. Empirical evidence has linked religiosity with beliefs in conspiracy theories (Ladini 2021) but another study has specified that this correlation applies to the most dogmatic and fundamentalistic types of religiousness (Lowicki et al. 2022), among which cults and marginal movements (Mylan and Hardman 2021), but not to the mainstream or institutionalized religion. A bishop of the Church of Greece explained to the author that the Church does not antagonize science but walks side by side since its conception. After all, he continued, some of the most prominent religious figures, like Gregory of Nyssa and Basil of Caesarea, were scientists themselves (Gabriel 2022).

Overall, the coming of the vaccine was not free from suspicion and resistance by certain religious groups such as White Evangelicals (Lovett 2021). Similarly, when it became known that the vaccines were developed with the use of fetal cells derived from terminated pregnancies there here have been requests for religious exemptions or calls for vaccine boycott (Letzing 2021). The official Church, however, adopted an antithetical

approach. The Pope affirmed his support for the hygienic measures and furthermore, he praised the work of medical staff calling them "next door saints" (Ivereigh 2020). On vaccine, the Pope played an active role in supporting the vaccination campaign. In January 2021, the Vatical launched its own program, with Pope Francis and Pope emeritus Benedict XVI getting the jab first (Vatican News 2022). Francis argued that vaccination is a "moral obligation" (Euronews 2022a), he condemned those who oppose the vaccine stating that they are in suicidal denial (Sly 2021) and he appeared critical of members of his Church, such as some Cardinals, who were skeptical about the vaccines (Winfield 2021). Furthermore, he addressed twice the problem of vaccine misinformation and fake news calling it a human rights violation (Euronews 2022b) while he invited governments to build trust among the people for the safety of the entire process (Glatz 2022). Last, given the inequalities between progressed and developing states, he urged rich nations to send vaccines to regions with limited access to health care (Euronews 2021). The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales followed, encouraging the faithful to take the shot in good conscience, for the public good. In addition, it warned those who refuse that they should still protect their fellow citizens from infection by self-isolation (Moth 2020).

As far as it concerns the Ecumenical Patriarchate, already in March 2020, it commented that the Orthodox Church respects medicine and advised the faithful to follow the directions of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the regulation of states (Ecumenical Patriarchate 2020) leaving little, if any, space to deniers. The Ecumenical Patriarch personally urged all the members of the Orthodox Church to become vaccinated, follow the advice of health authorities and take all appropriate measures to counter the virus (Claus 2021). He and his top-ranking bishops received the vaccine when it became available while in an interview he said "the refusal of vaccination and other protective measures is irrational and unjustified by theological or scientific criteria" (Nedelescu 2021). On the occasion of the annual Athenagoras Human Rights Award, which in 2021 was awarded to the founders of BioNTech, Bartholomew congratulated the scientists and executives who were responsible for the development of the vaccines and he proposed the formulation of more efficient and equal health policies stressing out that the Church would be present to help (Orthodox Times 2021). In a similar spirit, Greek Archbishop Hieronymos called the vaccine "a gift from God" to counter hesitation by some of the faithful and even removed priests who defied hygienic regulations (Kitsantonis 2021).

Discussion

If nothing else, the pandemic provided the ground for a renewed research interest in the role of religion. A study carried out in the UK and US, has shown that believers relied even more on religious beliefs to deal with the phycological effects of the pandemic, such as insecurity and stress, and their religious beliefs were bolstered in contrast to non-believers whose religious beliefs weakened (Rigoli 2021). The same conclusion was reached by Johnson et al. (2021) who also noticed a small but significant decline in faith compared to science, as an explanatory system for COVID-19. Loss of faith has been

observed also in Germany, among both Catholics and Protestants possibly because of long-term self-isolation (Büssing et al. 2021).

A study on the interaction between Church and state in Europe during the pandemic (Rudenko and Turenko 2021) reviewed attitudes towards the imposed restrictions and observed some differences between the West and the East. In western Europe, the Churches adapted quicker to the new situation, aligning with the directions for social distancing, however, protest from middle-ranking clergy people, which led to increased infections, was noticed. By contrast, in Eastern Europe, the reactions were more diverse from country to country, and in some cases confrontational. The diversity between the two European regions stemmed either from peculiarities in the political system or from the structure of the Church. For instance, a group of scientists investigating the case of Romania, further concluded that the Orthodox Church made sincere efforts to help the management of the pandemic, however, what was missing was active consultation between state authorities and religious institutions (Dascalu et al.2021).

Taking everything into account, the pandemic opened a new dimension to the role of religion in social affairs. Isolation deprived the Church of physical contact and communal life, nevertheless, it managed to provide spiritual support to people in need. Last, although some reactions were noticed from mainly middle-ranking clerics and cults, the Church leadership endorsed the hygienic protocols and promoted vaccination for all citizens.

The refugee crisis: religion before the populist challenge

If the pandemic with its grave consequences posed a modern challenge to faith from a theological perspective, the refugee crisis that started in the mid-2010s was a matter of practice of Christian values with the coming hundreds of thousands of predominantly non-Christian immigrants. In principle, religious diversity should not be a condition for helping people in need. The already mentioned Greek bishop maintains that

> *"the Christ was a migrant Himself, a xenos, who came on earth not to judge (discriminate) but to save the world. When we see this through the lens of the Greek Orthodox tradition we understand if prejudice or fanaticism against contemporary immigrants could ever be justified" (Gabriel 2022).*

Research though has shown that social approaches to immigrants are not shaped by individual (theological) beliefs but according to the correlation between one's religious identity and the average religiosity of the respective country (Storm 2018). For example, Catholics in majority Catholic countries tend to be more skeptical about migrants compared to religious minorities or societies with mixed religious affiliations.

Migration is not a new phenomenon, but the waves of refugees fleeing into Europe because of the civil war in Syria posed an unprecedented challenge for Europe, both in size

and intensity. Only in 2015, some 850.000 people arrived in Greece, while 3771 lost their lives crossing the Mediterranean (IOM 2016). It has been discussed above the notorious concept of the clash of civilizations and the perception some scholars hold for the West-Islam relationship. Similar attitudes were reflected in xenophobic movements and parties of the far-right that made their appearance in several EU countries as a reaction to migration. One such case was PEGIDA (an acronym for Patriotic European Against the Siamization of the West), which was founded in Germany, in October 2014, declaring that Muslim communities constitute a threat to the cultural, political, and economic idiosyncrasy of [Christian] Europe (Molas and Volk 2021). The core of PEGIDA's ideology is an extension of the motto Abendland in Christian hands, which is endorsed also by the nationalist Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ). Abendland, literally the Occident, is a political vision for a German-led, conservative, and Christian Europe, pure from foreign elements, not only Muslim but also Eastern Orthodox (Forlenza 2018). The refugee crisis of 2015 provided momentum for these ideas to spread to other northern European countries and Scandinavia (Meisner 2016), and more importantly, it allowed the governments of the Visegrád Group, to unite against the common EU policy of quotas (accepting a specific number of refugees), which would relieve the first entrance countries, Greece and Italy (Kalmar 2018). Furthermore, far-right movements and politicians instrumentalized religion to justify their policy of exclusion (Marzouki et al. 2016), and in cases like Austria, where the clergy criticized the government's anti-immigrant policy as inhumane in the first place, the powerful executive posed threats that its tax privileges would be cut (Heinisch and Werner 2021).

Pope Francis, on the other hand, had expressed his sensitivity on the matter early enough, selecting Lampedusa, an Italian Mediterranean island off the shores of which many African immigrants had drowned, as his first trip outside Rome in 2013. The purpose of the Pope was to raise a concern about the humanitarian drama of these people and condemn the "globalization of indifference" that had resulted in a political stalemate regarding immigration (Friedman 2016). In the following years, Francis remained truly active, especially as the tension in the external borders of the EU was escalating. With encyclicals and public interventions, he advocated for the protection of human rights and dignity, he encouraged the EU member states to promote policies of integration, without forcing immigrants to forget their own culture, and he addressed an open call to Europeans to show empathy and solidarity (Tan 2019). Above all, he invited political leaders to take measures that will tackle those economic and political reasons that drive migration in the periphery (Catania 2016). The Pope's stance was anything but comfortable. As it has been pointed out in the Press,

> *"terrorist attacks by militant Islamists in Paris and Brussels, the sexual assaults in Cologne over New Year's Eve by mainly North African migrants, the rise of anti-immigration parties such as Germany's AfD, and unease about the continent's ability to integrate Muslim newcomers have helped to undermine popular support for admitting large numbers of refugees" (Rocca and Walker 2016).*

In Istanbul, the Ecumenical Patriarch could observe the problem more closely. Turkey was hosting more than 2 million refugees while many others were trying to reach the Greek islands of the Aegean, oftentimes exploited with grave consequences by smugglers and traffickers. At the other end of the sea, Greece was under severe pressure due to the European disparity over the refugee issue. The increase of refugee flows had revealed the real size of the problem, which was unbearable for a single country, notwithstanding the economic challenge for Greece's weak and bound by harsh austerity programs economy. In November 2015, Prime Minister Tsipras visited Bartholomew in Istanbul, asking for his support to mobilize the international community (Anadolu 2015). His goal was to empower the values of humanism in Europe and urge his colleagues to abandon the policy of closed borders, showing European solidarity with the Greek society. Tsipras and Bartholomew agreed to organize a visit to Lesbos, organized by the Church of Greece, as the local authority, extending the invitation to Pope Francis (Winfield 2016). Since Pope is head of state, the invitation to him was sent by the President of the Hellenic (Greek) Republic, as the protocol obliges, and it was accepted.

The Greek bishop who helped prepare the visit from the side of the Church of Greece, explains that it was a symbolic gesture of those three hierarchs, to mobilize the UN. "The issue is dealt with at the EU level, although it exceeds European borders – it is international" (Gabriel 2022). Eventually, on April 16, 2016, Francis, Bartholomew and Hieronymos, Archbishop of Athens and All Greece, traveled to Lesbos, demonstrating their profound concern for the situation of the asylum seekers, urging the international community to act responsibly and through cooperative efforts (Parolin 2016).

In their joint declaration from Moria Refugee Camp, they stated that it was an "unsustainable situation" and called for rapid action "to protect minorities, to combat human trafficking and smuggling, to eliminate unsafe routes, such as those through the Aegean and the entire Mediterranean, and to develop safe resettlement procedures" (Francis 2016). A prominent Orthodox theologian added that the trip aimed also to give hope and attention to the detained immigrants (Chryssavgis 2016), and with their declaration the hierarchs sent a strong political message for the protection of fundamental human rights of all people, calling upon all religious communities to provide temporary asylum to refugees (Denysenko 2018).

The visit attracted enormous media attention allowing a large audience to receive information about the size of the problem (Cheshirkov 2016). However, beyond the symbolic importance of the visit, it is critical to evaluate its results in terms of changes in the attitude of the people. Unfortunately, the available knowledge is very limited because of the complex nature of data collection. Even so, recent research examined whether Pope Francis affected public opinion perceptions vis-à-vis the political stance of the European Union by publicly addressing the problem in Moria camp. The study compared survey

responses before and after the Pope's trip and concluded that "following the Pope's visit to Lesbos, Catholics [in Catholic countries] show a relatively more critical judgment of EU action on migration matters than non-Catholics" (Deiana et al. 2022). Although similar data are unavailable for the Ecumenical Patriarch, the evidence reflects that media coverage has the power to reduce negative attitudes, "depending on whether immigrants are depicted as a threat or as victims" (De Poli et al. 2017). The presence of and the message sent by Bartholomew (and his fellow Hieronymos) to the Orthodox believers of Eastern Europe, was a clear conviction against discrimination and in favor of responsible actions by the authorities.

Interfaith dialogue as a model for international cooperation

Having already examined the role of the two Christian Churches, the last section discusses the potential of interfaith dialogue to encourage closer cooperation among all people in the challenges of the future. Interfaith dialogue is the structured communication and cooperation between different faiths, to promote peace and understanding. This type of approach can take an array of forms and target various types of participants, from religious leaders to grassroots activists (USIP 2004). Today, there are several organizations in Europe, and many more in the rest of the world, working to bring together religious leaders and decision-makers with the aim of developing peacemaking initiatives. This process is also endorsed by the European Commission, in the context of its religious dialogue, recognizing the contribution of faith to society (Schinas 2020).

Some people who work in the field, like the director of the Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development, are skeptical about the dynamic of interfaith dialogue, arguing that it does not involve local communities but senior leaders without the power of legitimacy, and beyond the joint declarations, there is an accountability and evaluation deficit (Tadros 2019). Scholars like Orton (2016) find this process crucial for the development of cohesive communities but, he agrees that it must be practiced at multiple levels, not only at the elite. For example, about the refugee crisis, a study on Syrian migrants to Greece has shown openness to intercultural dialogue and the belief that dialogue and communication between Christian and Muslim religious leaders would facilitate good relationships between members of both religions (Bučko et al. 2018).

Indeed, interfaith dialogue is based on goodwill, but it implies no safeguard for the implementation of the agreed positions. Words can remain words if the signatories of declarations abandon the process. Nevertheless, the objective in this dialogue among different religions is to build a long-term relationship fostering a spirit of respect and mutual understanding. Unlike politicians, who design immediate and effective action, interfaith dialogue shapes a new conscience about the 'other,' not as an enemy but as a partner. The significance of the already mentioned Bosporus Declaration is that it employs a global and objective perspective for peace and justice, as "duties of every human being to

one another" (Bartholomew 2010).
The are several important cases of interfaith dialogue's contribution -although only indicatively some of them can be mentioned here- such as the 2014 "Invocation for Peace" process for the Middle East. Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, hosted in the Vatican the then-Israeli President Shimon Peres and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas (Leustean. 2015, 182) sending out the message that the negotiations are on and any acts of provocation are condemned (Francis 2014). The Conference of Religions for Peace is also very active in the Israel-Palestine conflict since 2007, calling for a solution based on international law (Ziakas and Ziaka 2016, 477).

In 2021, a group of religious and political leaders issued a statement in support of equitable vaccine distribution, under the auspices of UNICEF (2021) saying "no-one is safe until everyone is safe." On migration, the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) criticized the European Commission's Pact on Migration and Asylum because of practical and legal gaps that allow EU countries to violate human rights at the borders (CCME 2021).

The interfaith dialogue will not be a panacea for all political ills. However, open channels of communication among people with different cultures, in addition to a vivid process of communication and agenda setting, is a very useful exercise for a pluralistic international society where tolerance gradually replaces prejudice.

Conclusions

The study of religion in politics opens up a new corridor to scholars, that goes beyond conventional political relations. In light of the recent crises, for the first time, we have a mature environment to discuss what needs to be improved. For years, the European process of integration has been approached unconditionally by mainstream literature. Although the European Union provided the means for a more prosperous, peaceful and democratic commonwealth, however, over time, and especially after the 2004 enlargement, it has witnessed turbulence ranging from economic to social issues. For several of its full and candidate members, the EU became more the pool for structural funding than a common area of freedom and democracy with shared cultural features.

Simultaneously, the transition to a "market society" and the shift towards post-democracy moved the gravity of decision-making beyond or out of the political system, distorting the inceptive character of the European vision. Eventually, its cohesion was stretched especially with the economic crisis of the 2010s, and the imposed adjustment policies -of questionable efficiency-, which created a de facto north-south schism. The inability to deal with inequalities led to the occurrence of populist and xenophobic movements threatening democracy, not only in the weak economies, as someone would expect, but also in the wealthiest ones, like Germany, France and the UK. Pope Francis framed the stalemate by

saying that "today […] we are witnessing a retreat from democracy [because the EU is being] torn by nationalist egoism" (France24 2021).

This paper raised the question of the Churches' attitude in front of critical political problems when even trust in democracy is being questioned by groups and individuals. The analysis looked at the facts with a particular focus on embedding political challenges, given that the governments were facing sensitive problems and the responses were not necessarily popular. Institutional aspects were beyond the scope of this research because there has been no such question in Church and state relations, in Europe.

The mother Churches, for their part, focused on the human factor. They did not hesitate to criticize political choices they thought in went the wrong direction, endorse a positivist campaign with a solution-oriented mindset, and, on top of everything, call for more constructive action from the governments. During the pandemic, the Church fought a two-front war: firstly, to protect the faithful from the virus by complying with medical protocols, and secondly, to contain hardliners and conspiracy theorists, emerging from the inside, from cults and other fundamentalist individuals. Similarly, the migration crisis was dual labor, too, one for humanitarian awareness and one against the growing ethnoreligious extremism, in established and radical parties.

Drawing on conclusions from the case studies, it was assessed -at the top level- the Church behaved responsibly. Moreover, in both case studies, the role of religion displays that democracy in Europe is in a constant struggle and players from the civil society, which acts beyond electoral maneuvers and populist premises, can defend its core values, such as human rights and dignity exerting soft power.

That said, the thesis does not recommend a definite positive evaluation of the role of religion. Experience from other historical periods shows that the Church -especially in the West- regulated the lives of the people in absolute terms, abusing power and persecuting reformers. Most of all, Theology, the basis of Christian doctrine, will always be studying the nature of the divine by interpreting the Holy Canons. In one sense, social evolution and minorities within the major faiths will be creating a shifting environment. Nevertheless, the most important conclusion is that today the Church, as a living body, has displayed the ability to conform to democratic principles and serve the needs of modern society.

Last, this research has shown that culture is a bonding rather than a divisive quality, and therefore the assumed clash of civilizations is not inevitable. De Gruchy (2019, 477) argues that "ecumenical Christianity is committed, possibly irrevocably, to the retrieval of democracy as essential to its vision of a just world order." That being so, paraphrasing Appleby (2000, 283), it could be said that religion can be part of the solution to the problems of contemporary democracy, revitalizing the spirit of the individual as the subject of a "sacred" value that must be defended against political and economic totalitari-

anism.

* Dr. Athanasios Grammenos is Research Fellow at the School of Theology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

References

Agnew, John. 2010. Emerging China and Critical Geopolitics: Between World Politics and Chinese Particularity, *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 51:5, 569-582.

Alikhani, Behrouz. 2017. Post-Democracy or Processes of De-Democratization? United States Case Study, *Historical Social Research*, 42:4, 189-206.

Ambrosio, Thomas, Schram, Carson, and Preston Heopfner. 2020. The American securitization of China and Russia: U.S. geopolitical culture and declining unipolarity, *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 61:2, 162-194.

Anadolu Agency. 2015. Tsipras visits Istanbul patriarchate for first time as PM. https://www.aa.com.tr/en/politics/tsipras-visits-istanbul-patriarchate-for-first-time-as-pm/475454.

Appleby, Scott. 2000. *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Balfour, Rosa. 2019. Europe is undergoing a democratic recession. https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/brexit/2019/11/13/the-future-of-european-democracy-the-democratic-recession/.

Bartholomew, Ecumenical Patriarch. 2010. *In the World, Yet Not of the World: Social and Global Initiatives of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Bastasin, Carlo. 2021. *When security in Europe conflicts with democracy in Poland*. https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/11/30/when-security-in-europe-conflicts-with-democracy-in-poland.

Bell Daniel. 2019. State and Civil Society, in T*he Wiley Blackwell Companion to Political Theology* (2nd edition), edited by William T. Cavanaugh and Peter Manley Scott. Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell.

Biden, Joe. 2021. *Remarks By President Biden At The Summit For Democracy Opening Session*. https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/12/09/remarks-by-president-biden-at-the-summit-for-democracy-opening-session.

Blakemore, Scott. 2019. *Faith-based Diplomacy and Interfaith Dialogue*. Leiden: Brill.

Bleyer-Simon, Konrad and Iva Nenadić. 2021. *News Media Subsidies in the First Wave of the COVID-19 Pandemic – A European Perspective*. https://networkofcenters.net/news/news-media-subsidies-first-wave-covid-19-pandemic-–-european-perspective.

Bob, Clifford. 2015. Religious Activists and Foreign Policy in the West, in *Faith, Freedom, and Foreign Policy. Challenges for the Transatlantic Community*, edited by Michael Barnett, Clifford Bob, Nora Fisher, Onar Anne, Jenichen Michael Leigh, and Lucian N. Leustean. Washington DC: Transatlantic Academy.

Bodnar, Adam. 2021. *The State of Democracy in Europe 2021. Overcoming the Impact of the Pandemic.* https://www.idea.int/gsod/sites/default/files/2021-11/state-of-democracy-in-europe-2021.pdf.

Bryson, John, Andres, Lauren, and Andrew Davies. 2020. COVID-19, Virtual Church Services and a New Temporary Geography of Home, *Journal of Economic and Human Geography*, 111:3, 360-372.

Bučko, Ladislav, Hardy, Mária, Páleníková, Milica, Poloňová, Jaroslava, Fero, Martin, and Mária Jackulíková. 2018. Interfaith Dialogue from the Viewpoint of Syrian Migrants in the Alexandria Refugee Camp In Greece, *Acta Missiologica*, 2:12, 18-35.

Büssing, Arndt, Baumann, Klaus, and Janusz Surzykiewicz. 2022. Loss of Faith and Decrease in Trust in a Higher Source During COVID-19 in Germany, *Journal of Religion and Health*, 61, 741–766.

Calivas, Alkiviadis. 2020. A Note on the Common Communion Spoon, *Orthodox Observer News*. https://www.goarch.org/-/a-note-on-the-common-communion-spoon--2020.

Catania, Tina. 2015. Making Immigrants Visible in Lampedusa: Pope Francis, Migration, and the State, *Italian Studies*, 70:4, 465-486.

Cheshirkov, Boris. 2016. *UNHCR chief lauds Pope's solidarity with refugees*. https://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2016/4/571273ff6/unhcr-chief-lauds-popes-solidarity-refugees.html.

Chryssavgis, John. 2016. *The Patriarch, The Pope, And The Refugee Crisis*. https://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/2016/04/the-patriarch-the-pope-and-the-refugee-crisis. CRISIS

Church's Commission for Migrants in Europe. 2021. *Comments on the EU New Pact on Migration and Asylum*. https://ccme.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/2021-04-13_-ChristianGroup_EU_Pact_General-Comments.pdf.

Claus, Patricia. 2021. Patriarch Bartholomew Urges Public to Become Vaccinated, *Greek*

Reporter. https://greekreporter.com/2021/12/21/patriarch-bartholomew-vaccinated.

Crockett, Cayton, and Catherine Keller. 2021. Introduction: Political Theology on Edge, in *Political Theology on Edge: Ruptures of Justice and Belief in the Anthropocene*, edited by Cayton Crockett and Catherine Keller. New York: Fordham.

Crouch, Colin. 2019. Post-Democracy and Populism, *The Political Quarterly*, 90:1, 124-137.

----------. 2016. The March Towards Post-Democracy, Ten Years On, *The Political Quarterly*, 87:1, 71-75.

----------. 2004. *Post-Democracy*. Cambridge: Polity.

Dascalu, Stefan, Flammer, Patrik, Ghafari, Mahan, Henson, Shaun, Nascimento, Roger, and Michael Bonsall. 2021. Engaging Religious Institutions and Faith-Based Communities in Public Health Initiatives: A Case Study of the Romanian Orthodox Church During the COVID-19 Pandemic, *Frontiers in Public Health*, 9:768091.

Dalton, Russell J. 2017. *The Participation Gap. Social Status and Political Inequality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

De Angelis, Andrea. 2021. Un anno fa il Papa affidava a Dio l'umanità in balia della tempesta, *Vatican News*. https://www.vaticannews.va/it/papa/news/2021-03/preghiera-papa-pandemia-san-pietro-doppioclick-coronavirus.html.

De Gruchy, John. 2019. Democracy, in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Political Theology* (2nd edition), edited by William T. Cavanaugh and Peter Manley Scott. Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell.

Deiana, Claudio, Mazzarella, Gianluca, Meroni, Elena Claudia, and Luca Tiozzo Pezzoli. 2022. *The unexpected influencer: Pope Francis and European perceptions of the recent refugee crisis*. https://academic.oup.com/oep/advance-article/doi/10.1093/oep/gpac003/6537517.

De Poli, Silvia, Jakobsson, Niklas, and Simone Schüller. 2017. The drowning-refugee effect: media salience and xenophobic attitudes, *Applied Economics Letters*, 24:16, 1167-1172.

Denysenko, Nicholas. 2018. Steps on the Path to Unity: Courage to Pray Together, *Liturgy*, 33:2, 54-61.

Diamond, Larry. 2015. Facing Up to the Democratic Recession, *Journal of Democracy*, 26:1, 141-55.

Donadio, Rachel. 2021. Why is France so afraid of God? *The Atlantic*.

https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2021/12/france-god-religion-secularism/620528/.

Engler, Sarah, Brunner, Palmo, Loviat, Romane, Abou-Chadi, Tarik, Leemann, Lucas, Glaser, Andreas, and Daniel Kübler. 2021. Democracy in times of the pandemic: explaining the variation of COVID-19 policies across European democracies, *West European Politics*, 44:5-6, 1077-1102.

Erdmann, Gero. 2011. Decline of Democracy: Loss of Quality, Hybridisation and Breakdown of Democracy, in *Regression of Democracy?,* edited by Gero Erdmann and Marianne Kneuer. Heidelberg: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

Ecumenical Patriarchate. 2020. Ανακοίνωση από το Οικουμενικό Πατριαρχείο για τον Covid-19 [Announcement from the Ecumenical Patriarchate on Covid-19]. https://ec-patr.org/anakoinothen-gia-ton-covid-19/.

Euronews. 2022a. *COVID-19 vaccination is a 'moral obligation', Pope Francis insists*. https://www.euronews.com/2022/01/10/covid-19-vaccination-is-a-moral-obligation-pope-francis-insists.

----------. 2022b. *COVID vaccine misinformation violates human rights, says Pope Francis*. https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2022/01/28/covid-vaccine-misinformation-violates-human-rights-says-pope-francis.

----------. 2021. *Pope urges COVID-19 vaccines for poorest nations in Easter message*. https://www.euronews.com/2021/04/04/pope-francis-urges-hope-during-dark-months-of-covid-19-pandemic.

Evans, John, and Michael Evans. 2008. Religion and Science: Beyond the Epistemological Conflict Narrative, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 34, 87-105.

Fitzgerald, Timothy. 2011. *Religion and Politics in International Relations. The Modern Myth*. London: Continuum.

Florenza, Rosario. 2018. Abendland in Christian hands. Religion and populism in contemporary European politics, in *Populism and the Crisis of Democracy,* edited by Gregor Fitzi, Jürgen Mackert, and Bryan S. Turner. London: Routledge.

Föderl-Schmid, Alexandra. 2021. Unregelmäßigkeiten im Finanzministerium Wien entlarvt, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/oesterreich-korruptionsaffaere-sebastian-kurz-untersuchung-1.5490361.

France24. 2021. Pope Francis to visit asylum seekers on Greece's Lesbos island, *France24*. https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20211205-pope-francis-to-visit-asylum-seekers-

on-greece-s-lesbos-island.

Francis, Pope. 2016. Joint Declaration of His Holiness Bartholomew, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, of His Beatitude Ieronymos, Archbishop Of Athens And All Greece and of his Holiness Pope Francis, *The Vatican*. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/april/documents/papa-francesco_20160416_lesvos-dichiarazione-congiunta.html.

----------. 2014. Invocation for Peace, *The Vatican*. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/june/documents/papa-francesco_20140608_invocazione-pace.html.

Friedman, Uri. 2016. Refugees and the 'Globalization of Indifference', *The Atlantic*. https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/04/refugees-pope-francis-lesbos/477870.

Furlong, Ashleigh. 2021. Trust deficit stalls vaccinations in Eastern Europe, driving new COVID surge, *Politico*, https://www.politico.eu/article/covid-vaccination-eastern-europe-trust-fourth-wave-vaccine.

Gabriel, Metropolitan of Nea Ionia and Nea Philadelphia. 2022. Interview with the author.

Glatz, Carol. 2022. Pope calls for urgent 'reality check' against misinformation about vaccines, *Chicago Catholic*. https://www.chicagocatholic.com/vatican/-/article/2022/01/10/pope-calls-for-urgent-reality-check-against-misinformation-about-vaccines.

Gramlich, John. 2022. A look back at Americans' reactions to the Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/01/04/a-look-back-at-americans-reactions-to-the-jan-6-riot-at-the-u-s-capitol/.

Grammenos, Athanasios. 2018. *Political advocacy along ethnic and national lines: the case of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America*. SEESOX Diaspora Working Paper Series, 9. Oxford: University of Oxford.

Grdzelidze, Tamara. 2020. *New communique concerning the COVID-19 (Coronavirus)*. Ecumenical Patriarchate Permanent Delegation to the World Council of Churches. https://www.ecupatria.org/2020/03/18/new-communique-concerning-the-covid-19-coronavirus/.

Harvey, David Allen. 2014. Religion(s) and the Enlightenment, *Historical Reflections*, 40:2, 1-6.

Heinisch, Reinhard, and Annika Werner. 2021. *The Kurz affair has uncovered the Trumpian dimension of Austrian politics*. https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2021/11/08/the-kurz-

affair-has-uncovered-the-trumpian-dimension-of-austrian-politics.

Huntington, Samuel. 1996. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Hurd, Elizabeth Shakman. 2008. *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Inboden, William. 2008. *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960. The Soul of Containment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

International Organization of Migration. 2016. *IOM Counts 3,771 Migrant Fatalities in Mediterranean in 2015*. https://www.iom.int/news/iom-counts-3771-migrant-fatalities-mediterranean-2015.

Ivereigh, Austen. 2020. Pope Francis says pandemic can be a 'place of conversion', *The Tablet*. https://www.thetablet.co.uk/features/2/17845/pope-francis-says-pandemic-can-be-a-place-of-conversion-.

Johnson, Kathrin, Baraldi, Amanda, Moon, Jordan, Okun, Morris, and Adam Cohen. 2021. Faith and science mindsets as predictors of COVID-19 concern: A three-wave longitudinal study, *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 96:104186.

Joshua Kurlantzick. 2011. The Great Democracy Meltdown. Why the world is becoming less free. *The New Republic*. https://newrepublic.com/article/88632/failing-democracy-venezuela-arab-spring.

Kalmar, Ivan. 2018. Islamophobia in the East of the European Union: an introduction, *Patterns of Prejudice*, 52:5, 389-405.

Kirby, Diane. 2014. From Bridge to Divide: East–West Relations and Christianity during the Second World War and Early Cold War, *The International History Review*, 36:4, 721-744.

Kitsantonis, Niki. 2021. 'A gift from God': Greece enlists the church in its vaccine drive, *New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/23/world/greece-covid-vaccine-orthodox-church.html.

Kotler, Philip. 2016. *Democracy in Decline. Rebuilding its Future*. London: SAGE.

Kuropka, Von Alice. 2020. Wir halten aus, Corona ist nicht das Ende, *Frankfurter Allgemeine*. https://www.faz.net/aktuell/gesellschaft/gesundheit/coronavirus/corona-ist-nicht-das-ende-kirchen-senden-im-tv-und-im-internet-16688724.html.

Ladini, Riccardo. 2021. Religious and Conspiracist? An Analysis of the Relationship between

the Dimensions of Individual Religiosity and Belief in a Big Pharma Conspiracy Theory, *Italian Political Science Review/Rivista Italiana Di Scienza Politica,* 52:1, 33–50.

Leustean, Lucian. 2015. Eastern Christianity and the Liberal International Order, in *Faith, Freedom, and Foreign Policy. Challenges for the Transatlantic Community*, edited by Michael Barnett, Clifford Bob, Nora Fisher, Onar Anne, Jenichen Michael Leigh, and Lucian N. Leustean. Washington DC: Transatlantic Academy.

Levitsky, Steven, and Daniel Ziblatt. 2018. *How Democracies Die*. New York: Crown.

Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan Way. 2015. The Myth of Democratic Recession, *Journal of Democracy* 26:1, 45-58.

Letzing, John. 2021. What role should religion play when it comes to COVID-19 vaccines?. https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/12/covid-19-vaccines-what-role-should-religion-play/.

Linklater, Andrew. 2001. Realism, in *Theories of International Relations* (2nd edition), edited by Scott Burchill, Andrew Linklater, and Richard Devetak. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.

Lovett, Ian. 2021. White Evangelicals Resist Covid-19 Vaccine Most Among Religious Groups, *The Wall Street Journal*. https://www.wsj.com/articles/white-evangelicals-resist-covid-19-vaccine-most-among-religious-groups-11627464601.

Łowicki, Paweł, Marchlewska, Marta, Molenda, Zuzanna, Karakula, Adam, and Dagmara Szczepańska. 2022. Does religion predict coronavirus conspiracy beliefs? Centrality of religiosity, religious fundamentalism, and COVID-19 conspiracy beliefs, *Personality and Individual Differences,* 187. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0191886921007923#bb0145.

Macartney, Huw. 2013. *The Debt Crisis and European Democratic Legitimacy*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Marzouki, Nadia, McDonnell, Dunan, and Olivier Roy. 2016. *Saving the People: How Populists Hijack Religion*. London: Hurst & Company.

Meisner, Matthias. 2016. PEGIDA plans anti-Islam demos across Europe, *Euractiv*. https://www.euractiv.com/section/languages-culture/news/pegida-plans-anti-islam-demos-across-europe.

Marshall, Katherine. 2021. *Towards ICCS 2022 – COVID-19's Testing of Religious Roles*. https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/rsis/towards-iccs-2022-covid-19s-testing-of-religious-roles/#.Ytm7IS8Rqt-.

Merlo, Francesca. 2020. Covid-19: Churches around the world fight to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, *Vatican News*. https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2020-03/covid-19-coronavirus-churches-around-the-world-take-measures.html.

Michalopoulos, Sarantis. 2022. Media freedom report shakes Greece's conservative government, *Euractiv*. https://www.euractiv.com/section/media4eu/news/media-freedom-report-shakes-greeces-conservative-government.

Michalopoulos, Spyridon. 2021. Constitutional Mithridatism: Fundamental Rights in Times of a Pandemic, *The Visio Journal* 6, 10-19.

Molas, Barbara, and Sabine Volk. 2021. *Transatlantic Islamophobia: PEGIDA before and during the pandemic*. https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/countering-radical-right/transatlantic-islamophobia-pegida-and-during-pandemic.

Moth, Richard Rev. 2020. *Update on COVID-19 and Vaccination*. https://www.cbcew.org.uk/covid-19-and-vaccination-dec20/.

Mukunda, Gautam. 2018. The Social and Political Costs of the Financial Crisis, 10 Years Later, *Harvard Business Review*. https://hbr.org/2018/09/the-social-and-political-costs-of-the-financial-crisis-10-years-later.

Mylan, Sophie, and Charlotte Hardman. 2022. COVID-19, cults, and the anti-vax movement, *The Lancet*, 397:10280. https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(21)00443-8/fulltext.

Nedelescu, Hermina. 2021. *Anti-Science, Mistrust, and Anxiety in the Orthodox World*. https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/responses/anti-science-mistrust-and-anxiety-in-the-orthodox-world.

Nye, Joseph. 2017. *Soft Power: The Origins and Political Progress of a Concept*. https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms20178#citeas.

O'Collins, Gerald. 2013. *The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Orthodox Times. 2021. *Ecumenical Patriarch: The pandemic that afflicts humanity will not be the last*. https://orthodoxtimes.com/ecumenical-patriarch-the-pandemic-that-afflicts-humanity-will-not-be-the-last.

Orton, Andrew. 2016. Interfaith Dialogue: Seven Key Questions for Theory, Policy and Practice, *Religion, State & Society*, 44:4, 349-65.

Ossai, Emmanuel Chiwetalu. 2021. I Respect My Imam, But I Can't Fight Even if He Tells Me to

Fight. I am Peaceful for Myself and My Family: Are We Overestimating Religion in Peace Dynamics? *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations*, 32:2, 181-202. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09596410.2021.1893998.

Parolin, Pietro Cardinal. 2016. *Responsibility and Solution Sharing: The Role of Religious Organizations in Responding to Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants*. http://icmc.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/cardinal-parolin-un-side-event-new-york-city.pdf.

Pastoral Health care. 2021. *The Pastoring Church in the days of the Pandemic*. https://www.pastoralhealth-ep.com/assets/files/PastoralHealth/pdf/The%20Consult_Conclus_EN.pdf.

Pérez-Martínez, Víctor Manuel. 2022. The message of Pope Francis in time of pandemic: Engagement and sentiment on Twitter, *Church, Communication and Culture*, 7:1, 196-219.

Perry, Glenn. 2002. Huntington and his critics: The West and Islam, *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 24:1, 31–48.

Powers, Gerard F. 2010. Religion and Peacebuilding, in S*trategies of Peace. Transforming Conflict in a Violent World*, edited by Daniel Philpott and Gerard F. Powers. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Putnam, Robert. 2001. Social Capital: Measurement and Consequences, C*anadian Journal of Policy Research* 2, 41-51.

Repucci, Sarah and Amy Slipowitz. 2020. *Democracy under Lockdown. The Impact of COVID-19 on the Global Struggle for Freedom*. https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-report/2020/democracy-under-lockdown.

Rigoli, Francesco. 2021. The Link Between COVID-19, Anxiety, and Religious Beliefs in the United States and the United Kingdom, *Journal of Religion and Health*, 60, 2196–2208.

Rocca, Francis, and Marcus Walker. 2016. Pope's Defense of Migration Is Likely a Tough Sell to European Union, *The Wall Street Journal*. https://www.wsj.com/articles/popes-defense-of-migration-is-likely-a-tough-sell-to-european-union-1460370990.

Rudenko, Sergii, and Vitalli Turenko. 2021. Specifics of State-Religious Relationships During Covid-19: Eastern Europe vs Western Europe, *George Fox University*, 41:1.

Said, Edward. 2001. The Clash of Ignorance. Labels like 'Islam' and 'the West' serve only to confuse us about a disorderly reality, *The Nation*. https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/clash-ignorance.

Sandberg, Russell and Norman Doe. 2007. Church–State Relations in Europe, *Religion Compass*, 1:5, 561-578.

Sandel, Michael. 2012. *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets*. London: Allen Lane.

Sandel Michael J. 2010. *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?*. London: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Shinas, Margaritis. 2020. *Twitter*. https://twitter.com/MargSchinas/status/1332293080473608193.

Schwarz, Tanya, and Cecelia Lynch. 2016. Religion in International Relations, in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. https://oxfordre.com/politics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-122.

Shahi, Deepshikha. 2017. *Understanding Post-9/11 Afghanistan. A Critical Insight into Huntington's Civilizational Approach*. Bristol: E-International Relations Publishing.

Sisson, Franklin. 2019. *The Status and Issues of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople*. https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/9/7/430919_4.pdf.

Sly, Eleanor. 2021. Pope Francis calls opposition to Covid vaccine 'suicidal denial' and says he will get jab, *Independent*. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/pope-francis-vaccine-coronavirus-b1785051.html.

Steen-Johnsen, Tale. 2021. A Social Capital Perspective on the Peace Work of Religious Women, *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 56:1, 55-75.

Stepan, Alfred C. 2000. Religion, Democracy, and the 'Twin Tolerations', *Journal of Democracy*, 11:4, 37-57.

Storm, Ingrid Storm. 2018. When does religiosity matter for attitudes to immigration? The impact of economic insecurity and religious norms in Europe, *European Societies*, 20:4, 595-620.

Tan, Jonathan. 2019. Pope Francis's Preferential Option for Migrants, Refugees, and Asylum Seekers, *International Bulletin of Mission Research*, 43:1, 58–66.

Tedros, Mariz. 2019. *Six reasons why we need to move beyond interfaith dialogue if we are serious about redress for victims of violence based on religion or belief*. https://www.ids.ac.uk/opinions/six-reasons-why-we-need-to-move-beyond-interfaith-dialogue-if-we-are-serious-about-redress-for-victims-of-violence-based-on-religion-or-belief.

Tharoor, Ishaan. 2020. Coronavirus kills its first democracy, *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2020/03/31/coronavirus-kills-its-first-democracy.

The White House. 2021. *Summit for Democracy - Summary of Proceedings*. https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/12/23/summit-for-democracy-summary-of-proceedings.

Thomas, Scott M. 2003. Taking Religious and Cultural Pluralism Seriously: The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Society, in *Religion in International Relations; The Return from Exile*, edited by Pavlos Hatzopoulos and Fabio Petito. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

UNICEF. 2021. *No-one is safe until everyone is safe – why we need a global response to COVID-19*. https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/no-one-safe-until-everyone-safe-why-we-need-global-response-covid-19.

United States Institute of Peace. 2004. *What Works? Evaluating Interfaith Dialogue Programs*. https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/resources/sr123.pdf.

Vatican News. 2021. *Pope Francis and the Pope emeritus receive Covid-19 vaccine*. https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2021-01/pope-francis-benedict-xvi-covid-19-vaccine.html.

Vatican News. 2020. *'Day of Prayer' sees humanity united in the fight against Covid-19*. https://www.vaticannews.va/en/world/news/2020-05/day-of-prayer-for-humanity-covid-19-participants.html.

Waltz, Kenneth. 1979. *Theory of International Politics*. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley.

Winfield, Niccole. 2021. Pope questions vaccine skeptics, including cardinals, *Associated Press*. https://apnews.com/article/health-religion-coronavirus-pandemic-pope-francis-raymond-burke-b2f2b16321f0275e7b57fbadbd5cfaec.

----------. 2016. With migrant mission to Greece, pope pushes Orthodoxy, *Kathimerini*. https://www.ekathimerini.com/society/207906/with-migrant-mission-to-greece-pope-pushes-orthodoxy/.

Wooden, Cindy. 2020. As lockdowns end, pope prays for obedience, prudence in behavior, *Catholic Philly*. https://catholicphilly.com/2020/04/news/world-news/as-lockdowns-end-pope-prays-for-obedience-prudence-in-behavior/.

Ziakas, Grigorios, and Aggeliki Ziaka. 2016. The Orthodox Churches, in *Διαθρησκειακός Διάλογος. Η Συμβολή της Μελέτης των Θρησκειών στην Κατανόηση της Θρησκευτικής*

Ετερότητας [Interreligious Dialogue. The Contribution of the Study of Religion in Understanding Religious Otherness]. Thessaloniki: University of Macedonia Press.

State Institutions as a Playground for Populism: Case Study of Western Balkans

By Admir ČAVALIĆ* and Haris DELIĆ**

The paper focuses on the concept of populism in practice in the countries of the Western Balkans, mostly in Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the use of state institutions and government-controlled media to propagate populist narratives. The basic research question relates to the nature of this populism, in the context of the theoretical framework of the given term, as well as the future challenges of the region. In order to answer the research questions, scientific methods of description, comparison, and classification were used, along with an extensive collection of available data. Through research and a comparative analysis of the nature of populist policies in the Western Balkans, it can be seen that these policies are basically very similar - they are multi-year populist policies that trace their roots back to the 1990s and the breakup of the former Yugoslavia, and that the most important path for these countries is their integration into the European Union, which, although very slow, is still possible, however, a more serious approach to state policies and more significant support from the European Union is needed for a bigger step forward. Paper concludes that there are also other temporary alternatives to institution building and the fight against populism, like Open Balkans initiative or upgrading the CEFTA agreement (Central European Free Trade Agreement). These would be increasing the living standards in Western Balkans countries.

Key words: populism, western Balkans, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, populist leaders.

Introduction

"After Nikola Pašić, I will be someone who has been in power for the longest time," said Aleksandar Vučić on April 3, 2022, at a press conference at which he declared his victory in the presidential elections in the Republic of Serbia. This is his second consecutive term as

President after he spent one term as Prime Minister of the Republic of Serbia. A little further west, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Milorad Dodik was elected a member of the presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina from the ranks of the Serb people. Other countries in the Western Balkans are also characterized by the strengthening of the power and political influence of populist leaders from the 1990s, whose populist rule is increasingly taking the form of autocracy. One of the main reasons for the strengthening of populist movements in Europe, especially in a democratic turmoil such as the Western Balkans, is the creation of a growing gap between democratic ideals, ie democracy in its original form, and the actual events and functioning of democracy and political processes in society. Thus, according to a survey conducted by the Faculty of Political Science at the University of Zagreb in 2012, 49% of respondents said that democracy is the best possible form of organization of the political system, but only 3% expressed satisfaction with the way democracy works in Croatia. Poorer functioning of democracy, together with other causes such as low level of education, financial crisis, and poor infrastructure is fertile ground for strengthening populism, whose basic characteristics are according to Lutovac (2022), appealing to the will of the people, first and foremost, and then challenging or undermining the institutions of representative democracy, as well as antagonistic attitudes towards elites and "dangerous others" who threaten the state and (or) the nation.

The concept of populism

Populism is one of the longest-running features of politics and a political concept (Roberts, 2006) - on the left and on the right - sometimes more, sometimes less, without a clear global synchronization (Brubaker, 2017). The number of populist movements has been growing since 1990, which is why populism has been identified as one of the key political phenomena of the 21st century (Longley, 2022). Charles Postel (2016) calls it a stable current - with its proposals for making a more just and equitable society and under a variety of names — antimonopolist, farmer-labor, populist, democratic socialist, nonpartisan, progressive. From Donald Trump to Brexit, from Hugo Chávez to Podemos, the term has been used to describe leaders, parties, and movements across the globe who disrupt the status quo and speak in the name of "the people" against "the elite" (Moffitt, 2020). It is used so often that it is sometimes unclear what it represents. That is why Serhan states that the term is meaningless, explaining that words like populist and nationalist, once confined to academic circles, have become fixtures in the lexicon. Countless books and articles have been written on the subject. The pope has weighed in on the matter as well, declaring populism an "evil" that "ends badly" (Serhan, 2020).

Therefore, one acceptable definition offered by Moffitt and Tormey (2013) is that populism is a "political style" or a way in which certain politicians behave, striving to achieve performance in the short term. Populism has been present; however, it was difficult to establish a consensus around this notion. In a review of theoretical literature, Deiwiks states that in the more recent literature there is agreement on at least two characteristics that are

central to populism: a strong focus by populist leaders on the "people", and an implicit or explicit reference to an "anti-group", often the political elite, against which the "people" is positioned. The usefulness of such a minimal definition is shown by looking at cases of populism in Russia, the United States, Western Europe, and Latin America (Deiwiks, 2009). This is just one of the key features of the growing populism in the Western Balkans, which will be the subject of this paper. The first focus on "people" means enabling, or more precisely restoring, the power of "people", most clearly stated through the slogan "power to the people" (Roberts, 2015). The second characteristic refers to open hatred and struggle against a certain group - which is identified by populists as the one against the"people".

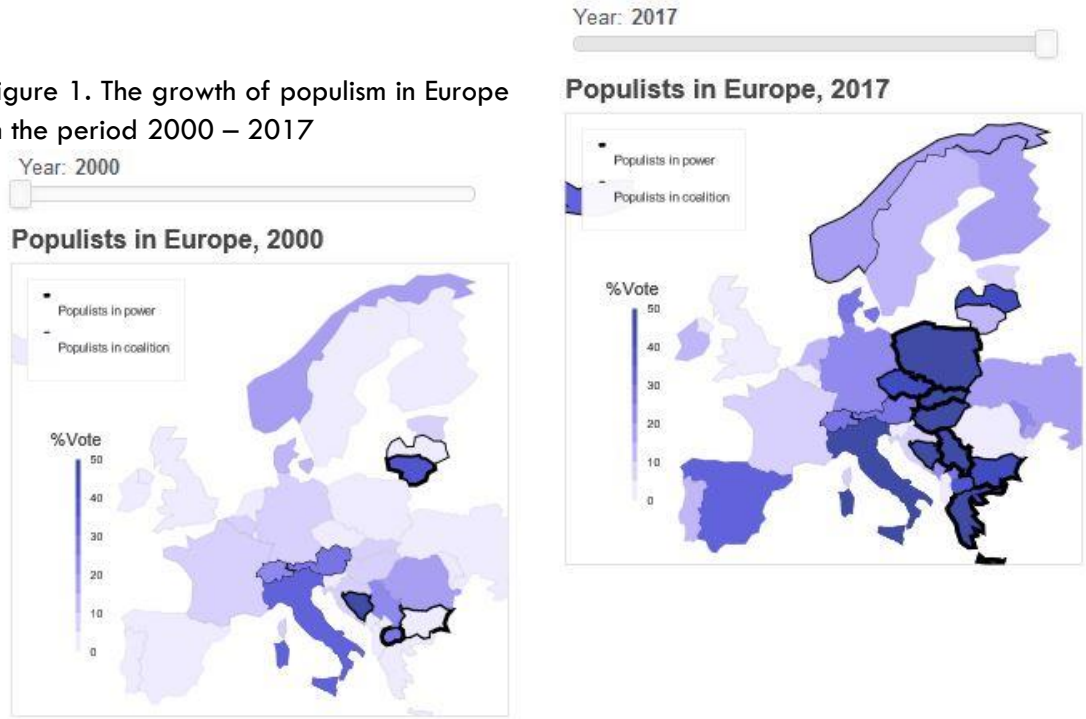
There are various causes of populism, but it mainly comes down to the fact that institutions are not able to meet the expectations of citizens. That is why Kenneth M. Roberts (2015) believes that the story of populism should focus on the story of institutions - the political representativeness of political parties, civil society, and social movements. Urbinati (2019) puts forward an interesting thesis that populism in power is a new form of mixed government, in which one part of the population achieves a preeminent power over the other (s), and that it competes with constitutional democracy in conjoining a specific representation of the people and the sovereignty of the people. It attains this meld by instantiating what he calls a direct representation, a kind of democracy that is based on a direct relationship between the leader and the people. Thus, populism depends on the state of institutions, but also on the state of democracy in a society.

The growth of populism in Europe

Populist movements in Europe are gaining more and more support from voters every year (Boros et al., 2020). One of the reasons for its rise is the Great World Economic Crisis of 2008, and it is especially important to point out 2016 as a year that is important for the further rise of populist and anti-establishment movements in Europe. Namely, Brexit (*The Guardian*, 2016) began that year, there was a migrant crisis (USA for UNHCR, 2016), terrorist attacks (*USA Today*, 2016), the strengthening of right-wing political parties (Kattago, 2019), and all this contributed to the development of populism not only in Europe but also in the world. According to The Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS), more than 80 active populist parties were founded between 2015 and 2019, while according to their end-2018 poll, 30.3% of European voters vote for populists, while in 2017, that number was 26% (Ibid., 2020).

Figure 1 shows the actual strength of populist movements in Europe in 2017 compared to 2000, i.e., it is evident that populist movements in many countries have significantly strengthened compared to the period of 2000.

Figure 1. The growth of populism in Europe in the period 2000 – 2017



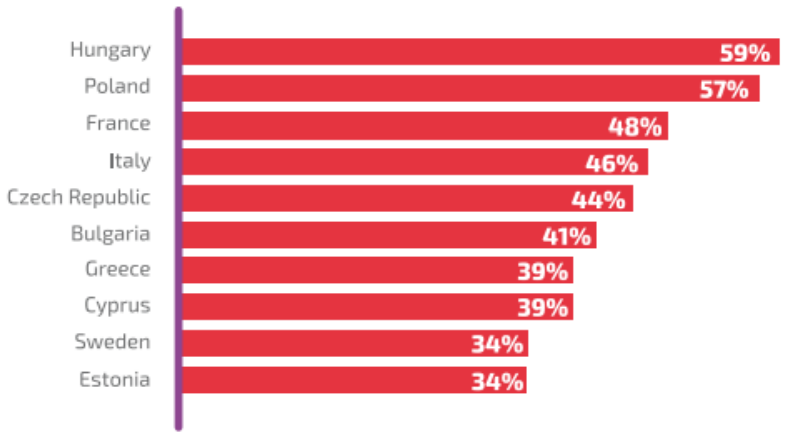
Source: Tony Blair Institute for Global Change (2017).

The future of populist movements also depends on how Russia's attack on Ukraine, which began in February 2022, will affect the change of political forces in the world, ie, can this event, as some authors (*NY Times*, 2022) believe, bring the final victory of liberal forces over populist? However, the situation in practice is currently significantly different. In Hungary and Serbia, a convincing victory was won by populist leaders - Viktor Orbán and Aleksandar Vučić (Starcevic, 2022), while in the elections in France, the candidate of the extreme right, Marine Le Pen, was very close to victory in the elections (*France24*, 2022).

The report of the Foundation for European Progressive Studies entitled "The State of Populism in Europe in 2020" (Boros et al., 2020) shows us that Europe is increasingly leaning towards right-wing populist political parties (See Figure 2), so the results of research presented in this report show that Europe has support for left-wing populist parties is declining, while support for right-wing populist parties has increased.

The situation in which the world finds itself is currently further conducive to the development of right-wing populist parties. The consequences of the Coronavirus pandemic, global inflation, energy and economic crisis caused by the attack on Ukraine, supply disruptions around the world, the migrant crisis bring us a challenging time that populists could use to further strengthen their position.

Figure 2. Countries with the largest increase in support for populist parties in 2019



Source: Boros et al., 2020

Populism in the Western Balkans

Due to its democratic stagnation, political and economic crises, and the exodus of the population, especially the young, the Western Balkans are fertile ground for populist rhetoric. In the following, we will make a brief overview of the state of populism in Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Populism in Serbia

When analyzing populism in Serbia and other countries in the Western Balkans, it is important to conclude that the weakness of democracy is one of the main reasons for the emergence of populist policies, and in order to understand the current political situation in Serbia and the inviolable rule of populist Aleksandar Vučić, the paper gives an overview of events that led to such developments.

After the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the main political character in Serbia was Slobodan Milošević. His rule was marked by the strengthening of nationalist rhetoric in which the idea of a Greater Serbia was propagated (MacDonald, 2018). Milošević profiled himself as the unofficial leader of all Serbs,[1] and in that, he had the support of the public, which was strongly influenced by state propaganda and the media he controlled (Fogg, 2006). In a report entitled "Political Propaganda: All Serbs in a State: The Consequences of the Instrumentalization of the Media for Ultra-Nationalist Purposes", Professor Renaud de la Brosse (2003) cites several reasons why the population of Serbia at the time was easy

prey for nationalists:

• Disoriented population in the context of the general crisis (abandonment of the system of values and ideology of communism, difficult economic, political, and social situation, a lost population whose ideals have disappeared),
• Support for the regime by the main creators of public opinion (such as "Politika", "Radio-Television of Serbia", the Orthodox Church),
• State media is the main source of information for 90% of the population (lack of independent media)
• Impossibility of democratic change of government (under the monopoly of state power in all spheres of social, political, and media life, the opposition had no chance to win the election)
• Absence of critical spirit.

The non-existence of any alternative to the reality created by the government and the control of the media kept Slobodan Milošević and his ideology in power. As one of the soldiers of that ideology, at the end of the 1990s, Aleksandar Vučić appeared. He became the Minister of Information of Serbia in the government formed by Milošević's Socialist Party of Yugoslavia with the Serbian Radical Party of which he was a member. The results were the Public Information Law (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2000), which resulted in heavy fines for the media and the closure of several media outlets. As a prominent member of the Serbian Radical Party, Aleksandar Vučić has already been established as a nationalist and his statement "For every Serb killed, we will kill 100 Muslims"[2] is well known.

One of the key moments in recent Serbian history is October 5, 2000, when the regime of Slobodan Milošević fell and new - pro-European political parties led by Zoran Đinđić, which advocated Serbia's European integration, came to power. However, the assassination of Zoran Đinđić, the Serbian Prime Minister at the time, led to disappointment among voters in Serbia and the loss of hope that democratic changes could be made in Serbia. According to Kovačević (2020), this evident delay of Serbia in the process of democratization is caused by various factors that are fertile ground for populists and their ideas, which in recent years, especially with the coming to power and strengthening of Aleksandar Vučić's policy, has become an integral part of political discourse in Serbia. The author uses Tagart's (2004) model which explains the emergence of populism through clearly defined characteristics that need to be checked, emphasizing that populist movements, parties and individuals are characterized by the following characteristics:

• Hostility towards representative democracy.
• The concept of serving the "fatherland" and the "people".
• Lack of basic values and principles and chameleon character.
• Spreading the atmosphere of extreme crisis.
• The important role of the charismatic leader.

According to Šalaj (2012), the central idea of populism is that society is divided into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups: honest people and a corrupt elite. Populists emphasize the idea of good and honest people who have been deceived and manipulated by corrupt, incompetent, and interconnected elites. The role of the media in spreading populist ideas is important, especially in digital media in recent times. The lack of responsibility of the media for the presented content and their control by the authorities are an ideal combination for spreading populist ideas. Populists hide behind the majority, behind the people. They propagate the idea that they are on the side of the people in the fight against some others, enemies, and groups working against the people.

Table 1. Frequency of populism in the narratives of presidential candidates in Serbia (2017)

Candidate	Percentage
Janković	0.9%
Jeremić	37,1%
Parović	37.0%
Radulović	30.0%
Vučić	**82,1%**
Obradović	46,9%
Šešelj	46,6%
Popović	44,1%
Stamatović	45,5%
Čanak	35.0%

Source: Bešić, 2017.

In Table 1 we can see that all presidential candidates in the 2017 Serbian elections, except Janković, had a significant percentage of populism in their narratives, and convincingly the winning candidate - Aleksandar Vučić had the most.

A characteristic of populism according to Tagart is the spread of the atmosphere of extreme crisis. The media wholeheartedly help in that, and, as Perić and Kajtaz (2013) note, politics and the media are increasingly connected because politics establishes control over the media, primarily by providing them with financial support in various ways. Thus, the research from 2018 established that two Serbian tabloids (Srpski Telegraf and Informer) had the words "war" and "conflict" on the front page as many as 265 times in the period from April 1, 2016, to March 31, 2017 (Janjić and Šovanec, 2018). In this way, the media creates the illusion of a great threat, danger to the people, constant plans of enemies of the state to attack the state, and the people, and then through the same media presents populist ideas about a president who does not allow anyone to attack the people.

Table 2 shows only some of the headlines of Serbian tabloids in the past years, but several conclusions can be drawn from this. First of all, Aleksandar Vučić pays a lot of attention to media control (Istinomer, 2018). By controlling the media, he also controls public opinion. Also, from the headlines of the tabloids in Table 1, we see the classic action of a

populist - he simultaneously creates an atmosphere of imminent danger, and at the same time presents himself as the only savior, as a fighter for the people, for the truth.

Table 2. Covers Serbian tabloids[3]

TITLE	TABLOID / NEWSPAPER	YEAR PUBLISHED
Only in informer! ISIL attacks Dečani	informer.rs	2016
Wahhabis reached the suburbs of Belgrade	novosti.rs	2016
The Hague rapes the Serbs again! Radovan Karadžić was sentenced to 40 years in prison on the 17th anniversary of NATO aggression!	informer.rs	2016
The Albanians are preparing a new "Storm" and a general attack on the Serbs: Vučić gave them a deadline to think three times until september 30!	objektiv.rs	2022
Americans are preparing to bomb Serbia again! Watch out now, as there will be a new war in B&H, and Serbia will stand with Republika Srpska	informer.rs	2021
As long as Vučić is there, the truth about Jasenovac will be known: The Ustaše wanted to change history, so they attack our president!	objektiv.rs	2022
Who and why attacks Aleksandar Vučić now that he has the highest support of the people?	telegraf.rs	2017

Source: Authors.

One of the characteristics of populist movements is the important role of the charismatic leader. Starting from Nikola Pašić through Josip Broz Tito, Slobodan Milošević, Vojislav Koštunica to Aleksandar Vučić, the cult of personality has always been nurtured on the territory of the Republic of Serbia, regardless of the territorial and political organization of the state. Thus, it is important for Serbia to mention, as Kovačević (2020) notes, that power often goes to individuals, and does not remain in accordance with constitutional powers, which shows the lack of institutionalized government. This is best identified in the example of Slobodan Milošević, Aleksandar Vučić and, in part, Boris Tadić, who, regardless of their position, were central figures in political life in Serbia.

According to the analysis from 2017 (Jahić, 2017), in the period from 01.01.2016 - 31.12.2016, Aleksandar Vučić's photograph appeared on the front page of the newspaper as many as 681 times, while his name was mentioned more than 150 times. At the same time, the opposition has almost no space in the daily press, except when it is written negatively about them. All this supports the claim that the media are an extremely power-

ful tool in the hands of the authorities in Serbia. Also, Lutovac (2022) cites an example of a text written by Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić in the daily "Politika" entitled "Elite and Plebs" (Vučić, 2017), which is full of examples of populist communication. In the text, Vučić addresses the people, and the people are only those citizens of Serbia who support him. He attacks the elite, calling it a qualifying elite, which means those who criticize him. As Lutovac (2022) points out, Vučić is rhetorically fighting for the poor and disenfranchised at the same time, and in practice, he is the one who generates poverty and disenfranchisement. He publicly promotes the idea of adhering to the European Union, and in practice, he shows his orientation towards the East and Russia.

Another characteristic of populism according to Tagart is its chameleon character. Thus, as Lutovac (2022) notes, the populist discourse in Serbia can, according to the needs of the leader, incorporate advocacy for the free market and competition at a given moment, and affirm the idea of equality and fair redistribution of economic goods in the next. Often in public, Vučić communicates in a conciliatory tone, with a lot of understanding towards everyone, even those he considers enemies, but at the same time, his closest associates go public with views that Vučić himself supports and initiates but does not want to declare about them in person. Finally, populism in Serbia is closely linked to nationalism, nativism, and xenophobia (Ibid., 2022). In this case, the people are equated with the state, and every enemy of the people is also the enemy of the state. We can conclude that today the citizens of Serbia are hostages of the populist policy of Aleksandar Vučić. Today, the entire political, social, and media order in Serbia is in the function of keeping Aleksandar Vučić and his associates in power. By controlling the media, they create public opinion in Serbia and adapt it to their needs. It is not wrong to conclude that there is less democracy in Serbia today than in the time of Slobodan Milošević.

Populism in Montenegro

Montenegro gained independence in 2006. Until then, this country was in the state union with Serbia called Serbia, and Montenegro. First, Montenegro was ruled by the Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro or DPS, as the successor to the former Communist Party, whose most prominent representatives Momir Bulatović, Svetozar Marović, and Milo Đukanović were very close to Slobodan Milošević's policy at the time. That's why Montenegro didn`t have ambitions for independence in that period, unlike other republics of the former Yugoslavia. However, after October 5th and the fall of Milošević, the DPS has positioned itself as the leader of Montenegro's independence movement. All of this resulted in Montenegro's independence in 2006.

Džankić and Keil (2017) analyze populism in Montenegro on the example of its most important party - the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS), using the aforementioned Taggart framework. They state that, although the DPS per se is not a populist party, in the 25 years of their rule we find numerous elements of populism.

First of all, "othering" political opponents, the emphasis on the heartland, the back of the party's ideological profile, the reproduction of the crisis, charismatic leadership, and chameleonic nature can be recognized in the DPS. These traits are often intertwined. Thus, during the 1990s, during the wars in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia, the DPS was very close to Slobodan Milošević's policy, supporting the activities of the Yugoslav People's Army (Jugoslovenska narodna armija – JNA), and imaginary opponents were all those who were against these ideas. Due to that, the position of national minorities in Montenegro is significantly more difficult. However, as Milošević's power weakens, so does the ideology of the DPS. According to the authors (Džankic and Keil, 2017), from the 1997–2000 year, the perception was created among the supporters of the DPS and Milo Đukanović that the enemies are those who support Milošević. This is where the chameleon nature of the DPS rule manifests itself, as one of the most significant features of populism according to Tagarrt. Over time, this turned into an initiative for the independence of Montenegro, so the "enemies" became those who opposed it.

The authors state that the connection between the people and Montenegro as a homeland was at the center of the DPS's political rhetoric. However, that also changed like a chameleon with political changes, first in Serbia, and then in Montenegro. First, in the 1990s, during its closeness to Slobodan Milošević's policies, the DPS in Serbia supported the JNA's (Yugoslav People`s Army) war activities, especially in Croatia, proudly pointing out that Montenegrin soldiers were engaged in what they called "war for peace". However, with the fall of Milošević, and the strengthening of the idea of Montenegrin independence, the DPS changed its political orientation, emphasizing that Montenegro was a "hostage of Serbian politics". During that period, the DPS actively worked on the promotion of national affiliation, strengthening the bond between the people and the state and the "heartland" through language, state symbols, and the country's path to the European Union. As in Serbia, so is the cult of personality in Montenegro. Thus, Milo Đukanović, like Milošević and Vučić in Serbia, has been the central political figure in Serbia for years and power and authority are always tied to the function he performs.

Populism in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Like many other things, populism in Bosnia and Herzegovina is very specific. Populism is closely connected with national affiliation, with constituent peoples and that is why Fejzić (2021) calls it ethnonational populism and states that it appears "as an implication of political reaction of party elites to important issues of a practical policy such as constitutional and political reforms, arrangements with international financial institutions, economic crisis, the disintegration of state integration into NATO, etc". It can be said that populism in B&H has several identities: national, religious, territorial and all that, as the author states, makes the state government in Bosnia and Herzegovina inefficient.

"Republika Srpska has embarked on a path of exit from Bosnia and Herzegovina from which there is no return" (*ATV BL*, 2020) Milorad Dodik said in February 2020, noting that

"Republika Srpska has two choices - one of which is to allow itself to quietly disappear and collapse through a deadly package made by the international community and the Bosniak side in Sarajevo."

We will observe populism in Bosnia and Herzegovina on the example of Milorad Dodik, currently a member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina from the ranks of the Serbian people. He is the political party Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) president. After serving as Prime Minister and President of the Republika Srpska entity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, he currently serves as a member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina from the ranks of the Serb people. It is characteristic of him, as well as of Aleksandar Vučić, that regardless of their position, he is the central political figure in the entity of Republika Srpska. His policy is characterized by secessionist threats, strong nationalism, and denial of anything to do with Bosnia and Herzegovina, even though he is a member of the presidency. He is another of a plethora of politicians who began their political careers in the 1990s as members of the Republika Srpska National Assembly, an entity whose entire wartime leadership has been convicted by the International Court of Justice of the most serious war crimes, including genocide[4]. However, at the end of the 1990s, Dodik, as a true populist, recognized the change in the political situation, and softened his political views, which is why even the then President of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Alija Izetbegović, as well as the international community consider him a good political interlocutor (RTV BN, 2022; Associated Press, 2022).

Figure 3. Alija Izetbegović (for Milorad Dodik op.a.): "After seven years, finally a normal Serb"[5]

Source: *RTV BN*, 2017.

That is how Milorad Dodik began his political rise in Bosnia and Herzegovina. His policies in the coming years will be marked by a series of contradictions, which corresponds to the chameleon-like character of his populism (Associated Press, 2022).

As a sovereign ruler at all levels of government in the Republika Srpska entity, Milorad Dodik, by controlling the media, also controls public opinion, maintaining a state of constant crisis and danger, constant danger lurking for Republika Srpska, constant plans for some kind of attack. In that, he received wholehearted political and media support from neighboring Serbia, so the media are full of headlines like:
- NEW ATTACK ON THE REPUBLIKA SRPSKA We do not rule out the possibility of reacting (*ALO!,* 2021)
- GENERAL ATTACK ON THE REPUBLIKA SRPSKA AND THE RIGHTS OF THE SERBIAN PEOPLE (*Glas Srpske*, 2022)
- ATTACK ON THE TRUTH AND THE REPUBLIKA SRPSKA: Strong reactions to the ban on university professor Miloš Ković from entering BiH (*Novosti*, 2022)
- WAR SCENARIO FOR ATTACK ON REPUBLIC OF SRPSKA LEAKED: This is how the BiH Army plans to conquer it (*Telegraf*, 2016)
- DANGEROUS! USTAŠE AND NATO ARE PREPARING OPERATION 'PRIJEDOR'! Croats are hitting Republika Srpska with "Kiowa" and "Hellfire" rockets! (Informer, 2016)
- THERE IS AN INTENTION TO DESTROY REPUBLIKA SRPSKA THROUGH WAR (*Vesti*, 2016)

In this way, the population is intimidated, the illusion of endangerment is created and an atmosphere in which only a populist leader - in this case, Milorad Dodik - can protect the population. However, the loss of support and the consequent loss of power is what scares populists like Milorad Dodik the most. In order to strengthen his position before the upcoming elections, Milorad Dodik started at least declaratively the action of withdrawing the Republika Srpska from the institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina (WDR, 2021). This was formalized in December 2021, when the Assembly of the Republika Srpska adopted conclusions (Al Jazeera Balkans, 2021) on the transfer of competencies from the institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the institutions of the Republika Srpska. With the mentioned Conclusions, it is planned to establish the Army of the Republika Srpska, the Agency for Medicines of the Republika Srpska, to withdraw from the Indirect Taxation Authority of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This was condemned by both the international community and the opposition in the Republika Srpska, which is aware that such actions introduce the entity to a very unstable period. Although he subsequently held public appearances in which he stressed that the process of transferring competencies from the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the Republika Srpska entity was underway, Milorad Dodik still showed that it was a populist move and postponed the implementation of the Republika Srpska Army Law (*RTV BN*, 2022).

Another populist element we identify in Milorad Dodik's policy is the issue of Bosnia and Herzegovina's membership in NATO. Although he does not miss the opportunity to say in public that Republika Srpska and he will never agree to Bosnia and Herzegovina's membership in NATO[6], his party member Nebojša Radmanović, as a member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, signed the document Action Plan for BiH's NATO mem-

bership and later stated that this was then the position of the National Assembly of the Republika Srpska[7]. From all the above, we can conclude the nature of Dodik's populist policy. Its essence is that Milorad Dodik is telling the media what his voters want to hear, but that he is essentially doing the exact opposite. His plans and threats have so far remained declarative, with no concrete actions to implement, but as his political career draws to a close, it remains to be seen how far populist Dodik can go to stay in power and what his end game will be.

Present and Future Challeneges

The Western Balkans region has problems with populism. The feature of these populisms is their combination with clientelism and corruption (Sotiropoulos, 2017). Based on the above, the populists in power in the Western Balkans can remain in power, creating a strong resource base that serves them to manage the entire society. In particular, the regime of Aleksandar Vučić in Serbia, Nikola Gruevski in Macedonia, and the politics of Milorad Dodik in Republika Srpska, or Albin Kurti in Kosovo have attracted international attention with scholars classifying their form of leadership culture from illiberal democracy to authoritarianism (Sotiropouloss, 2015).

There are several key challenges in the context of growing populism in the Western Balkans:

- Process of EU integration of the Western Balkans.
- Russian and Chinese special interests.
- The Open Balkans and the economic future.

When it comes to EU integration, the Western Balkans region currently represents a “hole” within the common EU market. Currently, five states are in the status of candidate countries - Albania, the Republic of Northern Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Turkey, while Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo are potential candidates. This creates difficulties in the process of building much-needed institutions that would oppose growing populism, but also safeguarding human rights, which were particularly violated during the Covid-19 pandemic (Jahić, Hasić, and Čavalić, 2021). Currently, the EU integration of the region represents the biggest challenge, but also a chance to fight populism. The good news is that in July 2022, the European Union's 27 members have agreed to open accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia. EU accession negotiations with Nort Macedonia and Albania have been pending sing 2020 because Bulgaria had blocked any progress for European Union accession talks with Nort Macedonia over linguistic and historical issues which also stalled Albania's status, as the European Union treats it as part of a package (DW, 2022).

What is further worrying is the growing Russian and Chinese interest (Al Jazeera, 2021). Often, populist regimes, such as those mentioned above, seek to establish cooperation with

Russian and Chinese companies, or banks, with the aim of realizing larger infrastructure projects or simply securing sources of funding. Russian interests are especially related to populism, there are even media agencies like Sputnik that openly spread Russian propaganda, which skews public opinion in the region (DW, 2021).

Ultimately, the rate of economic prosperity will determine the future of populism in the region. Currently, the Western Balkans region is growing slowly, creating fewer job opportunities, and leading to the departure of the workforce. According to Porčnik (2019), openness and regional economic integration in the Western Balkans must stimulate economic activity, investment, trade, create jobs, and increase participation in global value chains, which will increase productivity, improve economic growth, and reduce poverty. One of the possibilities for better use of the region`s economic potential is the "Open Balkans" initiative formerly knowns as Mini Schengen- better integration of the region with the aim of the easier flow of people, goods, and capital. The problem is that this initiative is mostly propagated by populists, such as Mr. Vučić. It is therefore uncertain whether it can be institutionalized and deliver results in the long run.

Conclusion

Populism is a great challenge for all the countries of the Western Balkans. It does not help that populist movements are growing across Europe and the world. What is clear is that the populists benefit the most from current happening and the citizens of the countries where the populist's rule have the least benefit. The paper presented the actions of some of the populist leaders. Some of these leaders have been active for more than 10 years, which shows the continuity of populism. So far, the only certainty that can help reduce populism relates to building strong institutions. However, the question is whether it is possible to do that, understanding that there is a lack of EU support, i.e., EU integration is on a long stick. Populists are taking advantage of the current situation and continue to strengthen while preventing the development of sound institutions - all this leads to a vicious circle of populism in the Western Balkans. The only long-term solution is to speed up the EU integration process and ultimately integrate these countries into the EU. In the meantime, it is also possible to work on trying to build regional institutions through the Open Balkans initiative or upgrading the CEFTA agreement (Central European Free Trade Agreement). The goal is to reduce the influence of populism in Balkan politics and to emphasize those policies that contribute to concrete changes - primarily through increasing the living standards of the citizens of this region.

---

[1] More about his influence on Serbs during the nineties is available in the United Nations International Criminal for the former Yugoslavia indictment for crimes committed in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Kosovo at the following link: https://www.icty.org/en/case/slobodan_milosevic

[2] Statement of Aleksandar Vučić: "For every killed Serb we will kill 100 Muslims". Available

at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rDmwnfx3Ab4

[3] Some of the titles are: "An incurable disease is coming to Serbia"; "I am leaving if the people want it" (Vučić op.a.), "Everyone against Vučić", "Our children are lurking as many as 60 sects", "WAR" "The West overthrew Vučić", "Vučić is giving up his mandate because of foreigners", "Serbia is recorded and monitored by as many as 3,000 drones, etc.

[4] A list of all those convicted by the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) along with all trial details, including verdicts, is available at: https://www.icty.org/en/cases/judgement-list.

[5] Apart from Alija Izetbegović, the then president of Bosnia and Herzegovina, who had a positive opinion of Milorad Dodik, he was also praised by other world officials during that period, so the then U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said after the meeting with Dodik that "it felt like a breath of fresh air had blown through the room. More about the change in Milorad Dodik's political views over the years is available at: "How Bosnia's Dodik went from a moderate reformist to genocide-denying secessionist", www.npr.org/2022/01/08/1071537135/how-bosnias-dodik-went -from-a-moderate-reformist-to-genocide-denying-secessionist

[6] An example from 2017: "Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik said he will seek to block efforts for the country to one day become a member of NATO, insisting on military neutrality, in line with Serbia." Available at: https://balkaninsight.com/2017/12/15/bosnia-serbs-oppose-nato-acession-bid-12-15-2017

[7] High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina Valentin Inzko stated in 2017 that "regarding the Membership Action Plan, the BiH Presidency has already decided on this issue in 2009. The then Presidency members, including the Serb Presidency member Nebojša Radmanovic from President Dodik's own party, made this decision. In fact, it was Mr. Radmanović who signed BiH's formal BiH application letter addressed to the NATO Secretary General in 2009, asking for BiH to be granted the NATO Membership Action Plan." Available at: http://www.ohr.int/radiosarajevo-ba-interview-with-hr-valentin-inzko/

* Admir Čavalić, PhD student at University of Tuzla, is economic analyst and the founder of Association Multi in B&H.
** Haris Delić, MA in law studies, is a Senior Officer at University of Tuzla and member of Association Multi in B&H.

References

Al Jazeera Balkans. (2021, 10 December). The RS Assembly voted on the transfer of competencies from BiH to the entity. https://balkans.aljazeera.net/news/balkan/2021/12/10/danas-sporna-sjednica-entitetskog-parlamenta-rs-a

Al Jazeera. (2021, 11 October). As EU hopes fade, Russia, China fill voids across Western Balkans. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/11/with-no-eu-strategy-russia-china-fill-void-in-western-balkans

ALO! (2021, 23 December). NOVI NAPAD NA REPUBLIKU SRPSKU. Ne isključujemo mogućnost da reagujemo (Eng. *New attack on the Republika Srpska: We do not rule out the possibility of reacting*). https://www.alo.rs/svet/planeta/578705/republika-srpska-evropska-unija-napad/vest

Associated Press. (2022, 8 January). How Bosnia`s Dodik went from a moderate reformist to genocide-denying secessionist. https://www.npr.org/2022/01/08/1071537135/how-bosnias-dodik-went-from-a-moderate-reformist-to-genocide-denying-secessionist

ATV BL. (2020, 13 February). Republika Srpska je krenula na put izlaska iz BiH, s kojeg nema povratka (Eng. *Republika Srpska has set out on a path out of BiH from which there is no return*). https://www.atvbl.rs/vijesti/republika-srpska/republika-srpska-je-krenula-na-put-izlaska-iz-bih-s-kojeg-nema-povratka-13a

Bešić, M. (2017). *Populizam u narativima predsedničkih kandidata na predsedničkim izborima u Srbiji 2017. godine*. Belgrade: Institut društvenih nauka, Centar za politološka istraživanja i javno mnjenje.

Boros, T., Freitas, M., Gyori G., and G. Laki. (2020). *State of populism in Europe in 2020*. Brussels and Budapest: Foundation for European Progressive Studies, Policy Solutions. https://progressivepost.eu/wp-content/uploads/State-of-Populism-in-Europe-2020.pdf.

Brubaker, R. (2017). Why populism? *Theory and Society* 46: 357–385. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-017-9301-7

Committee to Protect Journalists. (2000). *Serbian Public Information Law: Full Text*. https://cpj.org/reports/2000/08/serb-info-law/

De la Brosse, R. (2003). *Political propaganda and the project "All Serbs in one state": consequences of instrumentalization of the media for ultra nationalist purposes*. The Prosecutor's Office of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. https://www.icty.org/x/cases/slobodan_milosevic/prosexp/bcs/rep-srb-b.htm

Deiwiks, C. (2009). Populism, *Living Reviews in Democracy* 1: 1–9.

DW. (2021, 29 September). *Western Balkans: Russia's Sputnik skews public opinion*. https://www.dw.com/en/western-balkans-russias-sputnik-skews-public-opinion/a-59357427

----------. (2022, 18 July). *EU to open accession talks with Albania, North Macedonia*. https://www.dw.com/en/eu-to-open-accession-talks-with-albania-north-macedonia/a-62516677

Džankić, J., and S. Keil. (2017). State-sponsored Populism and the Rise of Populist Governance: The Case of Montenegro, *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 19(4): 1–16.

Fejzić, E. (2021). Populizam i nacionalizam u postdejtonskoj Bosni i Hercegovini: desnica, ljevica i zloupotrebe volje naroda. In V. Veselinović (ed.), *Populistički duhovi vremena i izazovi demokraciji: studije o populizmima* (250–267). Zagreb: Despot infinitus d. o. o.

Fogg, K. (2006). *The Milošević Regime and the Manipulation of the Serbian Media*. European Studies Conference, March 25, 2006.

https://www.wm.edu/as//globalstudies/european/conference/pre-2009-conference-docs/fogg.pdf

France24. (2022, 25 April). "Victory" in defeat? Le Pen raises the far right's glass ceiling, fails to crack it. https://www.france24.com/en/france/20220425-victory-in-defeat-le-pen-raises-far-right-s-glass-ceiling-fails-to-crack-it

Glas Srpske. (2022, 30 May). Општи напад на Републику Српску и права српског народа (Eng. *The general attack on the Republika Srpska and the rights of the Serbian people*). https://www.glassrpske.com/cir/novosti/vijesti_dana/opsti-napad-na-republiku-srpsku-i-prava-srpskog-naroda/413749

Informer. (2021, December 12). AMERI OPET MERAČE BOMBARDOVANJE SRBIJE! PAZI SAD, KAO BIĆE NOVI RAT U BIH, A SRBIJA ĆE STATI UZ SRPSKU (Eng. *Americans are preparing to bomb Serbia again! Watch out now, as there will be a new war in B&H, and Serbia will stand with Republika Srpska*). https://informer.rs/planeta/balkan/659418/srbija-opasnosti-ameri-slute-novi-rat-bih-novo-bombardovanje-beograda

----------. (2016, 25 March). SAMO U INFORMERU: HAG opet siluje SRBE! Radovanu 40 godina na 17. godišnjicu NATO agresije! (Eng. *The Hague rapes the Serbs again! Radovan Karadžić was sentenced to 40 years in prison on the 17th anniversary of NATO aggression*!). https://informer.rs/srbija/vesti/260552/samo-informeru-hag-opet-siluje-srbe-radovanu-godina-godisnjicu-nato-agresije

----------. (2016, 02 February). SAMO U INFORMERU! ISIS napada Dečane - Ekstremisti spremaju veliko zlo! (Eng. *Only in informer! ISIL attacks Dečani*). https://informer.rs/srbija/vesti/251247/samo-informeru-isis-napada-decane-ekstremisti-spremaju-veliko-zlo

----------. (2016, 2 September). OPASNO! USTAŠE I NATO SPREMAJU OPERACIJU 'PRIJEDOR'! Hrvati udaraju na Republiku Srpsku 'kajovama' i 'helfajer' raketama! (Eng. *Dangerous! Ustaše and NATO are preparing operation "Prijedor"! Croats are hitting Republika Srpska with "Kiowa" and "Hellfire" rockets*!). https://informer.rs/vesti/politika/287215/opasno-ustase-nato-spremaju-operaciju-prijedor-hrvati-udaraju-republiku-srpsku-kajovama-helfajer-raketama

Istinomer. (2018). *Decenija SNS: Godine strogo kontrolisanih medija*. https://www.istinomer.rs/analize/decenija-sns-godine-strogo-kontrolisanih-medija/

Jahić, A., Hasić, M., and A. Čavalić. (2021). Human Rights during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Bosnia and Herzegovina, *The Visio Journal* 6: 21–33. http://visio-institut.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Visio-Journal-6-Aldina-Jahic-Merisa-Hasic-and-Admir-Cavalic.pdf

Jahić, D. (2017, 26 January). *Naslovnice dnevnih novina u Srbiji: Horor, strah, užas, kraj ...* MediaCentar Online. https://www.media.ba/bs/mediametar/naslovnice-dnevnih-novina-u-srbiji-horor-strah-uzas-kraj

Janjić, S., and S. Šovanec. (2018). Najava rata na naslovnim stranama tabloida. *Communication and Media* XIII(43): 49–68. https://scindeks-clanci.ceon.rs/data/pdf/2466-541X/2018/2466-541X1843049J.pdf

Kattago, A. (2019). *The Rise of Right-Wing Populism in Contemporary Europe*. Tallin University.

Kovačević, D. (2020). Populizam u Srbiji nakon 5. Oktobra. In S. Orlović and D. Kovačević (eds.), *Dvadeset godina 5. Oktobra* (113–130). Belgrade: Faculty of Political Science University of Belgrade, Centar za demokratuju, Hanns Seidel Stiftung.

Longley, R. (2022). *What Is Populism? Definition and Examples*. ThoughtCo. https://www.thoughtco.com/populism-definition-and-examples-4121051

Lutovac, Z. (2022). Populizam u Srbiji. In V. Veselinović (ed.), *Populistički duhovi vremena i izazovi demokraciji: studije o populizmima* (209–229). Zagreb: Despot infinitus d.o.o.

MacDonald, B. D. (2018). *"Greater Serbia" and "Greater Croatia": the Moslem question in Bosnia-Hercegovina*. DOI: 10.7765/9781526137258.00013

Moffitt, B. (2020). *Populism*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Moffitt, B., Tormey, S. (2013). Rethinking Populism: Politics, Mediatisation and Political Style, *Political studies* 62(2): 381–397. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1467-9248.12032

Novosti.rs. (2022, 14 March). ATAK NA ISTINU I REPUBLIKU SRPSKU: Oštre reakcije na zabranu ulaska u BiH profesoru univerziteta Milošu Koviću (Eng. *Attack on the truth and the R epublika Srpska: Strong reactions to the ban on university professor Miloš Ković from entering BiH*). https://www.novosti.rs/planeta/region/1095979/atak-istinu-republiku-srpsku-ostre-reakcije-zabranu-ulaska-bih-profesoru-univerziteta-milosu-kovicu

----------. (2016, 26 January). Vehabije stigle do predgrađa Beograda (Eng. *Wahhabis reached the suburbs of Belgrade*). https://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/drustvo/aktuelno.290.html:587951-Vehabije-stigle-do-predgradja-Beograda

*NY Time*s. (2022, 16. March). Will the Ukraine war end the age of Populism? https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/16/opinion/ukraine-russia-populism.html

Objektiv.rs. (2022, 25 July). Dok je Vučića, znaće se ISTINA o Jasenovcu: Ustaše bi da menjaju istoriju, pa napadaju našeg predsednika (Eng. *As long as Vučić is there, the truth about Jasenovac will be known: The Ustaše wanted to change history, so they attack our president*!). https://objektiv.rs/vest/1203046/dok-je-vucica-znace-se-istina-o-jasenovcu-ustase-bi-da-menjaju-istoriju-pa-napadaju-naseg-predsednika/

----------. (2022, 29 June). Albanci spremaju novu OLUJU i opšti NAPAD na Srbe: Vučić im dao rok da TRI puta razmisle do 30. septembra (Eng. *The Albanians are preparing a new "Storm" and a general attack on the Serbs: Vučić gave them a deadline to think three times until september 30*!). https://objektiv.rs/vest/1174186/albanci-spremaju-novu-oluju-i-opsti-napad-na-srbe-vucic-im-dao-rok-da-tri-puta-razmisle-do-30-septembra/

Perić, N., and Kajtez, I. (2013). Ideologija i propaganda kao masmedijska sredstva geopolitike i njihov uticaj na Srbiju, *Nacionalni interes* IX(17): 173–189.

Porčnik, T. (2019). *Mini Schengen - Western Balkans`s Embrace of the Market*. The Institute for

Research in Economic and Fiscal Issues. https://en.irefeurope.org/Publications/Online-Articles/article/Mini-Schengen-Western-Balkans-Embrace-of-the-Market/

Postel, C. (2016). *If Trump and Sanders Are Both Populists, What Does Populist Mean?*. The American Historian. https://www.oah.org/tah/issues/2016/february/if-trump-and-sanders-are-both-populists-what-does-populist-mean/

Roberts, K. M. (2015). Populism, political mobilization, and crises of political representation. In C. de la Torre (ed.), *The promise and perils of populism: Global perspectives* (140–158). Lexington, Kentuky: The University Press of Kentucky.

----------. (2006). Populism, Political Conflict, and Grass-Roots Organization in Latin America. *Comparative Politics* 38(2): 127–148.

RTV BN. (2022, 18 April). Dodik ipak popušta: Odgađa usvajanje zakona o vojsci i porezima Republike Srpske (Eng. *Dodik relented: Postpones adoption of law on army and taxes of Republika Srpska*). https://www.rtvbn.com/4024301/dodik-ipak-popusta-odgadja-usvajanje-zakona-o-vojsci-i-porezima-republike-srpske

----------. (2017, 17 March). Kako je Alija hvalio Dodika (Eng. How *Alija praised Dodik*). https://www.rtvbn.com/3857026/kako-je-alija-hvalio-dodika

Šalaj, B. (2012). Što je populizam? Politološki pojmovnik: populizam. *Političke analize: tromjesečnik za hrvatsku i međunarodnu politiku* 3(11): 55–61. https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/209523

Serhan, Y. (2020, 14 March). Populism Is Meaningless. *The Atlantic*. https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2020/03/what-is-populism/607600/

Sotiropoulos, D. A. (2017). *How the quality of democracy deteriorates: Populism and the back-sliding of democ-racy in three West Balkan countries*. LIEPP Working Paper n° 67. https://hal-sciencespo.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-03458615

----------. (2015). *An Inventory of Misuses of Democracy in the Western Balkans*. ELIAMEP Working Paper No. 70. Athens: Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy.

Starcevic, B. (2022, 8 April). Pro-Russian Strongmen Win Re-Election in Hungary, Serbia. IR INSIDER. https://www.irinsider.org/easterncentral-europe/2022/4/9/pro-russian-strongmen-win-re-election-in-hungary-serbia

Taggart, P. (2004). Populism and representative politics in contemporaray Europe. *Journal of Political Ideologies* 9(3): 273–275.

Telegraf (2017, 6 July). Ko i zašto napada Vučića sada kada ima najveću podršku naroda? (Eng. *Who and why attacks Aleksandar Vučić now that he has the highest support of the people?*). https://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/politika/2866665-ko-i-zasto-napada-vucica-sada-kada-ima-najvecu-podrsku-naroda

----------. (2016, 21 September). PROCUREO RATNI SCENARIO ZA NAPAD NA REPUBLIKU SRPSKU: Ovako armija BiH planira da je osvoji (Eng. *War scenario for attack on Republika Srpska leaked: This is how the Bosnian army plans to conquer it*).

https://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/2368002-procureo-ratni-scenario-za-napad-na-republiku-srpsku-ovako-armija-bih-planira-da-je-osvoji

The Guardian. (2016, 24 June). UK votes to leave EU after dramatic night divides nation. https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/24/britain-votes-for-brexit-eu-referendum-david-cameron

Tony Blair Institute for Change. (2017). *European Populism: Trends, Threats and Future Prospects*. https://institute.global/policy/european-populism-trends-threats-and-future-prospects

Urbinati, N. (2019). Political Theory of Populism. *Annual Review of Political Science* 22: 111–127. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-050317-070753

USA for UNHCR. (2016). *Refugee Crisis in Europe*. https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/refugee-crisis-in-europe/

USA Today. (2016, 14 July). More than 75% of terror attacks in 2016 took place in just 10 countries. https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2017/07/14/terrorist-attacks-2016-isis-10-countries/480336001/

Vesti. (2016, 20 September). "POSTOJI NAMERA DA SE RATOM UNIŠTI REPUBLIKA SRPSKA". https://www.vesti.rs/Ivica-Da%C4%8Di%C4%87/Postoji-namera-da-se-ratom-unisti-Republika-Srpska.html

Vučić, A. (2019, 10 July). Elita i plebs. *Politika*. https://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/433411/Elita-i-plebs

WDR. (2021, 28 October). Povlačenje Republike Srpske iz državnih institucija BiH. https://www1.wdr.de/radio/cosmo/programm/sendungen/radio-forum/region/rs-bih-kriza-100.html

Quality of liberal democracy and COVID-19 pandemic restrictions: Did liberal democratic institutions manage to protect civil liberties?

By Constantinos SARAVAKOS* and Giorgos ARCHONTAS**

This paper seeks to explore the relationship between liberal and democratic institutions, and the COVID-19 governments' policy responses restrictions on the fundamental individual and civil rights. We use a sample of 111 countries during 2020 and we employ eight indicators of the Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker as proxies of the right to assemble, the right to move freely and to work and to attend school/university. Through a Kruskal-Wallis test we examined if there is a significant difference in the degree that the governments' policy responses restricted those rights, depending on the quality of their liberal and democratic institutions (using Varieties of Democracy dataset). Our results suggest that countries with higher quality of liberal and democratic institutions restricted less the rights of their citizens regarding the school and universities closures, the requirements to stay at home, and the closure of public transportation. Our results also indicate that countries with better quality of liberal and democratic institutions restricted less workplaces, public events, gatherings, internal movement, and international travel; however, the differences recorded in these areas, compared to the ones from the other Liberal Democracy groups, are not statistically significant.

Key words: COVID-19 effects, liberalism, liberal democracy, individual rights restriction, COVID-19 policy responses.

Introduction

After 1989 and the collapse of the communist regimes[1], liberal democracy seemed destined to thrive. This prevalence of liberal democracy is associated with a major decline in global extreme poverty, an increased rate of literacy, less global child mortality, better health, and more freedom (Roser 2020). Nevertheless, the social and political developments of the last decade challenged that era of human progress and economic prosperity

and led many countries to a democratic backsliding (Foa and Mounk 2016, 15-16). The beginning of this retreat goes back to 2007-8, when the economic crisis that first emerged in the US became global and impacted economies all over the world. Besides the negative effects of the economic crisis per se and the subsequent Great Recession between 2008 and 2012, the economic crisis revealed another hidden problem of the European economies, the so-called European Sovereign Debt Crisis. Greece, Cyprus, Italy, Portugal, Ireland, and Spain were unable to refinance their (smaller or bigger) government (or private) debt and therefore they faced a severe fiscal crisis (Lane 2012, 51). The significant decline of standards of living compared to the 2008 levels[2] and the beginning of a period of austerity triggered institutional crises which questioned the status quo, the legitimacy, and the efficiency of liberal democracy in Europe.[3]

The economic and sovereign debt crises were followed by the 2015 European migrant crisis, during which over one million people crossed the borders to Europe, the greater number in a single year since World War II (Barlai et al., 2017). Countries that previously experienced the sovereign debt crises, such as Italy and Greece, had to deal now with an increasing number of incoming refugees and undocumented migrants. In that political and social setting, radical political forces mobilized all over Europe, resulting to a re-emergence of populism and outright extremism. In 2019, more than one out of four voters in Europe voted for an authoritarian populist party in the last domestic election (TIMBRO 2019). Populist political parties managed to enter the parliament or even become governments (Aslanidis and Rovira Kaltwasser 2016). In 2021, there was "an intensifying wave of autocratization around the world…dictatorships are on the rise and harbor 70% of the world population" (Boese et al., 2022, 5-6).

On top of the above challenges, the COVID-19 pandemic which emerged on early 2020, enabled political forces across the spectrum that aim to challenge liberal and democratic institutions, to exercise the power they gained through the consecutive crises to restrict individual liberties beyond the scope of the state of emergency. Some notable examples are the weakening of the democratic institutions in Hungary (Kelemen 2020)[4], the recent ruling of the Constitutional Tribunal in Poland, which banned over 95% of the cases of previously legal abortions (Rutynowska et al., 2020) and the European Parliament's non-legislative resolution, by which the European Commission called Romania to adhere to judicial independence, as well as transparent and inclusive processes, along with enacting a judicial reform (European Commission 2019).

Given those developments, there is an increasing concern that the continuous use of the emergency powers the governments gained and yielded during the COVID-19 pandemic is leading to a backsliding on the established civil rights and liberties (Vardanyan 2020, 22; United Nations 2020, 20; Arceneauxa et al., 2020). This concern combined with the notion that freedoms (such as the freedom of association and assembly) can mobilize the people against containment policies, reinforce the view that authoritarian regimes cope

better with the pandemic (McMann and Tisch 2021, 2). This perspective poses another threat to the already declining trend of liberal democracy (Boese et al., 2022, 6).

Theoretically, the deepening of liberal and democratic institutions in a country should restrain the politicians' ability to act discretionally and violate the individuals' civil rights. This is, in brief, the hypothesis we aim to examine in this study, given the documented variation in the response measures that governments implemented to cope with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the next sections, we will examine in brief the literature on the impact that the institutional framework has on the implemented COVID-19 policies and then we will present our research design. In the final sections, we demonstrate and discuss our findings and present a conclusion.

Theoretical background and brief review of the literature

The overall impact of the institutional framework on the implemented policies and policy outcomes has been well documented. For instance, the EU's body of rights and obligations, the so-called "acquis," is based on liberal principles, and the alignment of the potential EU members with this legal framework is a prerequisite to entering the Union. The reforms required to become a member of the European Union lead to stronger political rights (Schizas et al., 2021), as well as greater economic freedom (Tarabar and Young 2017; Schizas et al., 2020). This literature suggests that the more liberal the institutional framework of a country is, the more liberty its citizens enjoy.

Concerning the link between the institutional framework and COVID-19 pandemic policies, Lundgren et al. (2020, 317) found that countries with less strong democratic institutions were more likely to declare a state of emergency during the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, the type of government also plays a pivotal role in the efficiency of the COVID-19 policy measures implemented to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Bayerlein et al. (2021), populist governments implemented less far-reaching policy responses, resulting to higher excess mortality.

Hale et al. (2022, 17-20), documented a significant variation in the response measures implemented by governments dealing with the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly during 2020. Some governments opted for measures to mitigate outbreak spreads, while others increased the intensity of the applied policy measures, depending on the respective growth in new cases. Also, the stringency of policy responses varied across the entire period, which suggests a time effect as well. There is evidence that some countries implement more intense policy responses at a lower-case load, while others implement stricter policies than the (perceived) risk they face (Hale et al., 2022).

In regard to the outcomes of COVID-19 governments' policies in certain jurisdictions, Bećirović et al. (2020, 50) indicatively reported that in Bosnia and Herzegovina there have been concerns about the impact on personal finances and job stability; in Canada, the

pandemic government policies seem to have a negative impact for workers more exposed to disease as well as to younger, not married, and less educated workers (Beland et al., 2020, 18). In Poland, the COVID-19 policies brought economic uncertainty at the peak of the lockdown, while the gradual lifting of the restriction measures along with generous economic support by the government improved the business situation (Łaszek 2020, 16). In addition, containment measures have been found to have a severe impact on economic activity, which is estimated to a loss of about 15% in industrial production over a 30-day period following their implementation (Deb et al., 2020). Overall, in terms of economic impact, IMF estimated that global economy contracted by 3.1% in 2020, a decline steeper than the 2008–09 financial crisis (IMF 2020). Regarding the relationship between the efficiency of COVID-19 governments' policies and the institutional regime, McMann and Tisch (2021, 15) found that where democracy components are stronger, COVID-19 deaths are fewer and vaccination rates are higher.

Although the study of COVID-19 policies impact is still ongoing, an examination of the link between the quality of liberal democratic institutions and the policy measures adopted to restrict certain individual rights has not yet been addressed.

Conceptualizing individual freedom and COVID-19 policy responses indicators

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the University of Oxford has been tracking the respective policy responses from governments around the world. The Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker (OxCGRT) combines a "series of novel indices that aggregate various measures of government responses" (Hale et al., 2022). The set of indicators that the OxCGRT publishes and we use in our study, are the following:

i. School closing, which records closings of schools and universities.
ii. Workplace closing, which records closings of workplaces.
iii. Cancel public events, which records cancelling public events.
iv. Restrictions on gatherings, which records the cut-off size for bans on gatherings.
v. Close public transport, which records closing of public transport.
vi. Stay at home requirements, which records orders to "shelter-in- place" and otherwise confine to home.
vii. Restrictions on internal movement, which records restrictions on internal movement.
viii. International travel controls, which records restrictions on international travel.

The above indicators incorporate various concepts of individual freedoms and rights associated with liberalism and they are constitutionally guaranteed in liberal democracies. Modern liberal democracy is based on the absence of coercion and the prevalence of persuasion (Audi 1997) and its core democratic principle prescribes that decisions are reached in a polity (Boese et al., 2022, 55). The state can use coercion only when justified in a persuasive rationale basis. On the contrary, the same set of freedoms and rights is not

guaranteed in regimes such as illiberal democracies or autocracies that lack strong liberal commitments. In those regimes, governments have a wider discretion to curtail or outright individual rights, especially during emergencies, since they are not constrained by the checks and balances that characterize liberal democracies (McMann and Tisch 2021).

The indicators published by the OxCGRT, incorporate both the concepts of positive and negative liberty, such as the right to education (school closing) and the right to engage in work[5] (workplaces closing), which jointly characterize democracy besides its basic electoral aspect (Dahl 1989; Bobbio 1989; Saward 1998; Becher and Brouard 2020). Nevertheless, the most emblematic liberal concept the above indicators measure is arguably the freedom to move, the extent the citizens of a state "*are able to move freely, in daytime and nighttime, in public thoroughfares, across regions within a country, and to establish permanent residency where they wish*" (Coppedge et al., 2022, 186). These restrictions to the free movement were a crucial part of the COVID-19 measures taken by most governments, and they also affected other rights, such as the right to work, or to attend school or university. Governments around the world had to react to the pandemic and weigh the consequences of lockdowns and restrictions against the protection of individual rights. However, the necessity of each measure and public policy is difficult to be determined.

We consider that *Cancel public events and Restrictions on gatherings* indicators are conceptually associated with the right to assemble; *Stay at home requirements, Restrictions on internal movement,* and *International travel controls are conceptually associated with the right to move freely; Workplace closing, School closing,* and *Close public transport* are conceptually associated with positive rights, as means for an individual to achieve his/her own purposes.[6]

Therefore, our main research question in this study is to examine if there is a difference in the degree that the various governments' policy responses restricted their citizens' civil and individual liberties (as proxied by the above indicators), depending on the quality of their liberal democratic institutions (categorized by V-Dem Liberal Democracy scores).

Data and Methods

To answer that, we use a sample of 111 countries during 2020. We controlled our sample of countries to account for those that did not have a standard health system capable to offer minimum health security during the spread of COVID-19. We only included countries characterized as most[7] or more[8] prepared for epidemics and pandemics, according to the Global Health Security Index (Nuclear Threat Initiative, Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security, and the Economist Intelligence Unit, 2019). We believe that the association between the quality of liberal and democratic institutions and the strictness of COVID policy measures implemented is best examined among those countries that actually had the option to choose among different policy options in line with a sufficient health system.

We employ as dependent variables the eight indicators presented above, published by The Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker (Hale et al., 2021). The indicators overall measure the restriction that COVID-19 policy responses imposed to certain policy areas (social and individual life concepts). All the indicators are given in an ordinal scale of measurement. In terms of their coding method, each indicator is measured as follows:

- School closing:
  - *0 - No measures.*
  - *1 – Recommend closing, or all schools open with alterations resulting in significant differences compared to usual, non-COVID-19 operations.*
  - *2 - Require closing (only some levels or categories, e.g., just high school, or just public schools).*
  - *3 - Require closing all levels No data – blank.*

- Workplace closing:
  - *0 - No measures.*
  - *1 - recommend closing (or work from home).*
  - *2 - require closing (or work from home) for some sectors or categories of worker.*
  - *3 - require closing (or work from home) all-but-essential workplaces (e.g., grocery stores, doctors).*

- Cancel public events:
  - *0- No measures.*
  - *1 - Recommend cancelling 2 - Require cancelling.*

- Restrictions on gatherings:
  - *0 - No restrictions*
  - *1 - Restrictions on very large gatherings (the limit is above 1000 people).*
  - *2 - Restrictions on gatherings between 101-1000 people.*
  - *3 - Restrictions on gatherings between 11-100 people.*
  - *4 - Restrictions on gatherings of 10 people or less.*

- Close public transport:
  - *0 - No measures.*
  - *1 - Recommend closing (or significantly reduce volume/route/means of transport available).*
  - *2 - Require closing (or prohibit most citizens from using it).*

- Stay at home requirements:
  - *0 - No measures.*
  - *1 - recommend not leaving house 2 - require not leaving house with exceptions for daily exercise, grocery shopping, and 'essential' trips.*
  - *3 - Require not leaving house with minimal exceptions (e.g., allowed to leave only*

once a week, or only one person can leave at a time, etc.).

- Restrictions on internal movement:
  - *0 - No measures.*
  - *1 - Recommend not to travel between regions/cities.*

- International travel controls:
  - *0 - No measures.*
  - *1 – Screening.*
  - *2 - Quarantine arrivals from high- risk regions.*
  - *3 - Ban on arrivals from some regions.*
  - *4 – Ban on all regions or total border closure.*

Since the OxCGRT ascribes a score for each country, on daily basis, we use the sum of each day scores for the entire 2020, as the measure of our dependent variables; the higher the sum, the greater the restriction the citizens of a given country experienced in 2020 in the area of the respective indicator.

As an independent variable, we use the Liberal Democracy Index published by Varieties of Democracy project (Coppedge et al., 2021). From the score of each country in the Liberal Democracy Index we create four main groups of democracy top-to-bottom quartiles (25%). The *Top 25%* includes countries scoring from 0.736 to 0.878 out of 1 (N=28), therefore countries assessed to have the best quality of liberal democratic institutions. The *Second 25%* includes countries scoring from 0.471 to 0.735 out of 1 (N=27). The *Lower 25%* includes countries scoring from 0.25 to 0.466 out of 1 (N=28). The *Lowest 25%* includes countries scoring from 0.039 to 0.24 out of 1 (N=28), therefore countries assessed to have the worst quality of liberal democratic institutions (see Table 1).

Table 1. Tests of Normality

	Liberal Democracy Quartile	Kolmogorov-Smirnova			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Cancel public events	Top 25%	0,215	28	0,002	0,877	28	0,003
	Second 25%	0,162	27	0,068	0,922	27	0,045
	Lower 25%	0,253	28	0	0,846	28	0,001
	Lowest 25%	0,269	28	0	0,695	28	0
School closures	Top 25%	0,11	28	,200*	0,969	28	0,543
	Second 25%	0,174	27	0,035	0,877	27	0,004
	Lower 25%	0,125	28	,200*	0,921	28	0,036
	Lowest 25%	0,187	28	0,013	0,798	28	0
Stay home requirements	Top 25%	0,117	28	,200*	0,941	28	0,115
	Second 25%	0,126	27	,200*	0,955	27	0,28
	Lower 25%	0,115	28	,200*	0,95	28	0,195
	Lowest 25%	0,102	28	,200*	0,973	28	0,675
Workplace closures	Top 25%	0,145	28	0,138	0,97	28	0,572
	Second 25%	0,076	27	,200*	0,982	27	0,911
	Lower 25%	0,16	28	0,063	0,899	28	0,011
	Lowest 25%	0,176	28	0,026	0,869	28	0,002
Restriction gatherings	Top 25%	0,204	28	0,004	0,831	28	0
	Second 25%	0,106	27	,200*	0,954	27	0,273
	Lower 25%	0,129	28	,200*	0,939	28	0,103
	Lowest 25%	0,146	28	0,133	0,89	28	0,007
Close public transport	Top 25%	0,168	28	0,043	0,877	28	0,003
	Second 25%	0,106	27	,200*	0,962	27	0,405
	Lower 25%	0,135	28	,200*	0,937	28	0,094
	Lowest 25%	0,107	28	,200*	0,954	28	0,246
Restrictions internal movements	Top 25%	0,156	28	0,08	0,914	28	0,025
	Second 25%	0,095	27	,200*	0,958	27	0,33
	Lower 25%	0,091	28	,200*	0,973	28	0,666
	Lowest 25%	0,161	28	0,061	0,897	28	0,01
International travel controls	Top 25%	0,167	28	0,044	0,909	28	0,018
	Second 25%	0,138	27	,200*	0,971	27	0,631
	Lower 25%	0,152	28	0,095	0,943	28	0,133
	Lowest 25%	0,124	28	,200*	0,957	28	0,293
Liberal Democracy Score 2021	Top 25%	0,079	28	,200*	0,971	28	0,611
	Second 25%	0,146	27	0,147	0,942	27	0,137
	Lower 25%	0,098	28	,200*	0,941	28	0,12
	Lowest 25%	0,157	28	0,075	0,905	28	0,015

* This is a lower bound of the true significance (a Lilliefors Significance Correction).

To identify any relationships between our dependent and explanatory variables, we employed the Kruskal-Wallis H test as a nonparametric alternative to a one-way analysis of variance, since our data do not follow the normal distribution (see Table 1), a condition required for the ANOVA test. We also formulate the two following research hypotheses:

Ho: There is no significant difference in the degree that the governments' policy responses restricted the civil and individual liberties of their citizens, between countries with low and good quality of their liberal democratic institutions.

H1: There is significant difference in the degree that the governments' policy responses restricted the civil and individual liberties of their citizens, between countries with low and good quality of their liberal democratic institutions.

Given that liberal democracies have more checks and balances in the executive branch and accountability mechanisms for the electorate, and that individual rights are guaranteed constitutionally and upheld judicially, we expected countries in the top categories (scoring very high in Liberal Democracy Index) to have implemented fewer restrictions in civil and individual liberties of their citizens (lower mean rank).

It should be noted that this kind of analysis is designed to show empirical evidence on the resilience (or not) of liberal democracy in emergencies and the degree that basic concepts of fundamental individual and civil rights are protected. In the analysis, we do not assess if the implemented policies were effective or not in mitigating the COVID-19 pandemic implications; rather, we focus on the question of whether fundamental rights are more difficult to be restricted in liberal democracies compared to other political regimes.

Findings

Table 2 shows the mean rank of each indicator grouped by the respective Liberal Democracy Quartiles. The Kruskal-Wallis test yielded a significant negative association in *School closures* ($p<0.000$), *Stay home requirements* ($p=0.034$), and *Close public transport* ($p=0.002$). On the other hand, there was no statistically significant difference in the rest five indicators, while we observe that Restrictions internal movements is the only one which is marginally rejected at 5% significance level ($p=0.072$). However, the mean rank of all the dependent variables suggests that countries with better quality of liberal democracy scored lower (mean rank) on the OxCGRT indicators.

Table 2. Mean ranks of each OxCGRT indicator grouped by the Liberal Democracy Quartiles

	Liberal Democracy Quartile	N	Mean Rank	p-value
Cancel public events				0,524
	Top 25%	28	52,84	
	Second 25%	27	54,22	
	Lower 25%	28	53,05	
	Lowest 25%	28	63,82	
School closures				**0,000****
	Top 25%	28	33,57	
	Second 25%	27	62,5	
	Lower 25%	28	64,09	
	Lowest 25%	28	64,07	
Stay home requirements				**0,034***
	Top 25%	28	41,43	
	Second 25%	27	56,39	
	Lower 25%	28	65,09	
	Lowest 25%	28	61,11	
Workplace closures				0,979
	Top 25%	28	57,36	
	Second 25%	27	54,63	
	Lower 25%	28	57,3	
	Lowest 25%	28	54,66	
	Total	111		
Restriction gatherings				0,805
	Top 25%	28	58,54	
	Second 25%	27	56,19	
	Lower 25%	28	51,02	
	Lowest 25%	28	58,27	
Close public transport				**0,002***
	Top 25%	28	36,13	
	Second 25%	27	60	
	Lower 25%	28	60,55	
	Lowest 25%	28	67,46	
Restrictions internal movements				0,072
	Top 25%	28	45,63	
	Second 25%	27	55,11	
	Lower 25%	28	55	
	Lowest 25%	28	68,23	
International travel controls				0,493
	Top 25%	28	54,05	
	Second 25%	27	64,31	
	Lower 25%	28	53,14	
	Lowest 25%	28	52,79	

* Significant at 5% level; ** Significant at 1% level.

Table 3 demonstrates the results of the post hoc test for the indicators where there was a significant difference between Liberal Democracy groups. Among the three indicators for which the Kruskal-Wallis test yielded significant results, the *Top 25%* group in *School Closures* had a statistically significant lower mean rank than the *Second 25%* (p=0.001), *Lower 25%* (p=0.000), and Lowest25% (p=0.000). The *Top 25%* group in Stay home requirements, had a statistically significant lower mean rank than the Lower 25% (p=0.036). The *Top 25%* group in *Close public transport* had a statistically significant lower mean rank than the *Second 25%* (p=0.006), *Lower 25%* (p=0.004), and *Lowest 25%* (p=0.000).

Table 3. Statistically Significant differences between Liberal Democracy groups

Indicator	Liberal Democracy Quartile Groups	Difference	Sig.	Adj. Sig.
School closures	Top 25%-Second 25%	-28,9	0,001	0,005
	Top 25%-Lowest 25%	-30,5	0	0,002
	Top 25%-Lower 25%	-30,51	0	0,002
Stay home requirements	Top 25%-Lower 25%	-23,6	0,006	0,036
Close public transport	Top 25%-Second 25%	-23,87	0,006	0,035
	Top 25%-Lower 25%	-24,42	0,004	0,027
	Top 25%-Lowest 25%	-31,33	0	0,002

Discussion

The results of the Kruskal-Wallis test confirm the alternative hypothesis (H1) that there is indeed a significant difference in the degree that the governments' policy responses restricted the civil and individual liberties of their citizens (as proxied by the eight OxCGRT indicators), between countries with low and good quality of liberal democratic institutions. Our results suggest that countries with a higher quality of liberal and democratic institutions restricted less the rights of their citizens regarding school and university closures, the requirements to stay at home, and the closure of public transportation. Our results also indicate that countries with better quality of liberal and democratic institutions restricted fewer workplaces, public events, gatherings, internal movement, and international travel controls; however, the differences recorded in these areas, compared to the ones from the other Liberal Democracy groups, are not statistically significant.

The findings of this research suggest that, during the first spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, countries with high quality of liberal and democratic institutions managed to better protect certain positive rights of their citizens, such as access to public transportation and the right to attend school or university. In addition, the results showed that countries with high-quality liberal and democratic institutions implemented fewer restrictions on the right to move freely, as assessed by the stay-at-home requirements imposed. It is also

noteworthy that although the rest indicators, associated with the right to assemble and the right to move freely, yielded statistical not significant results, they all showed that countries with high-quality of liberal and democratic institutions restricted fewer gatherings and movements.

It should be noted that the current methodological approach has several limitations and that our results should be interpreted with caution. First of all, the conceptualization of the OxCGRT indicators as individual rights proxies works to the extent that they interpret a broader concept of individual rights. Although the eight OxCGRT indicators are not fully aligned with a strict concept of liberty, they are designed to capture the strictness of governments' policy responses, which in turn measures the restriction of citizens' granted rights. Second, the study only examines the relationship between liberal and democratic institutions and the COVID-19 pandemic policy responses during 2020. However, there was a major time heterogeneity in terms of when the first case appeared in each country and therefore the consequent call to action by the governments. There may be countries that could have a lower restriction sum in the indicators in question, due to the fact that the spread of the pandemic reached them later in 2020 (i.e. April instead of March). Finally, it is acknowledged that several different cofounders have impacted the relationship between liberal and democratic institutions and the COVID-19 pandemic policy responses (such as the type of government discussed earlier); the determinants of the effect of COVID-19 pandemic policy measures on individual and civil rights should be attributed not only to institutional factors, but to other economic and social factors as well, documented in the respective literature.[9]

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between liberal and democratic institutions and the COVID-19 pandemic policy responses restrictions on the fundamental individual and civil rights. The results of the Kruskal-Wallis test suggest that there is a significant difference in the degree that the governments' policy responses restricted the civil and individual liberties of their citizens (as proxied by the eight OxCGRT indicators), depending on the quality of their liberal democratic institutions. More specifically, countries with better liberal and democratic institutions tend to restrict less the rights of their citizens regarding the school and universities closures, the requirements to stay at home and the closure of public transportation. Although the rest indicators associated with free movement and with the right to assemble were not statistically significant, they also point to the same direction of less restriction by the better liberal and democratic regimes.

Despite certain limitations of the study, such as conceptualization, the time frame and cofounders of the analysis, even an initial study of the relationship between liberal and democratic institutions and the COVID-19 pandemic policies could be of significant interest and relevance; given the threats Liberal Democracy is facing the last ten years. Future re-

search could focus on covering a greater sample of countries with a greater time span and looking for other main explanatory factors and cofounders of the relationship between the quality of liberal democracy and COVID-19 pandemic policy responses.

---

[1] Countries such as Estonia, Croatia, Albania, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Latvia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Armenia, Uzbekistan, Lithuania, Slovenia, North Macedonia, Georgia, Turkmenistan, Czech Republic, Kazakhstan, Poland, Russia, Ukraine, Slovakia, Tajikistan and Romania.
[2] About 1/3 of the Greek GDP was lost, and unemployment, in particular among the young, increased to unprecedented rates (Aslanidis and Kaltwasser 2016). Greece's youth unemployment rate reached 58.2% in 2013.
[3] For example, see the Indignados/Aganaktismenoi movements in Greece and Spain and their social demands in Aslanidis and Marantzidis, 2016. The authors argue that, in Greece, it was the Indignados/Aganaktismenoi movement, which led to the dealignment and the delegitimation of the Two-Party System, resulting to the electoral fluidity of 2012 (see also, Teperoglou and Tsatsanis 2014).
[4] Indicatively, Hungary constitutionally banned adoption by LGBT people (Amendment of Article 33, https://www.parlament.hu/irom41/09934/09934.pdf).
[5] "Freedom to choose an occupation and right to engage in work" EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, Article 15.
[6] The OxCGRT Dataset has been used again in the literature as an interpretation of the right to move and to gather, see Heo et al. 2021, 3.
[7] Scores between 67 and 83.5 out 100 in the Global Health Security Index 2019.
[8] Scores between 33.5 and 66 out 100 in the Global Health Security Index 2019.
[9] For potential determinants on the relationship between democracy and Covid-19 policy outcomes see McMann and Tisch 2021.

* Constantinos Saravakos is a PhD candidate in Political Science at the University of Macedonia and Research Coordinator at the Center for Liberal Studies – Markos Dragoumis (KEFiM).
** Dr. Giorgos Archontas is Head of Educational Programs at the Center for Liberal Studies – Markos Dragoumis (KEFiM).

References

Arceneauxa, Kevin, Bert N. Bakkerb, Sara B. Hobolt, and Catherine E. De Vries. 2020. Is COVID-19 a Threat to Liberal Democracy?. *PsyArXiv*. doi:10.31234/osf.io/8e4pa.

Aslanidis, Paris, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. 2016. Dealing with populists in government: the SYRIZA-ANEL coalition in Greece. *Democratization* 23 (6): 1-17. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2016.1154842.

Aslanidis, Paris, and Nikos Marantzidis. 2016. The Impact of the Greek Indignados on Greek Politics. *Southeastern Europe* 40: 125-157.

Audi, Robert. 1997. Liberal Democracy and the Place of Religion in Politics. In *Religion in the Public Square*, edited by Robert Audi and Nicholas Wolterstorff, 1-16. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Barlai, Melani, Birte Fähnrich, and Christina Griessler. 2017. *The migrant crisis: European perspectives and national discourses*. Zürich: Lit Verlag.

Bayerlein, Michael, Vanessa A Boese, Scott Gates, Katrin Kamin, and Syed Mansoob Murshed. 2021. Populism and COVID-19: How Populist Governments (Mis)Handle the Pandemic. *Journal of Political Institutions and Political Economy*. http://doi.org/10.1561/113.00000043.

Becher, Michael, and Sylvain Brouard. 2020. Executive Accountability Beyond Outcomes: Experimental Evidence on Public Evaluations of Powerful Prime Ministers. *American Journal of Political Science* 1-17. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12558.

Bećirović, Damir, Faruk Hadžić, and Admir Čavalić. 2020. The COVID-19 crisis: economic implications for Bosnia and Herzegovina. *The Visio Journal 5*: 40-53.

Beland, Louis-Philippe, Abel Brodeur, Derek Mikola, and Taylor Wright. 2020. *The Short-Term Economic Consequences of COVID-19: Occupation Tasks and Mental Health in Canada*. Discussion paper series, May. https://deliverypdf.ssrn.com/delivery.php?ID=549006098115007000115084126123110064050071056080004037007005057025065044018084116025067115107048010079085098030089127001024097120101102114066073094104064092011016064117115009029002&EXT=pdf&INDEX=TRUE.

Bobbio, Norberto. 1989. *Democracy and Dictatorship*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Boese, Vanessa A., Nazifa Alizada, Lundstedt Martin, Kelly Morrison, Natalia Natsika, Yuko Sato, Hugo Tai, and Staffan I. Lindberg. 2022. *Autocratization Changing Nature? Democracy Report 2022*. Varieties of Democracy Institute (V-Dem). https://v-dem.net/media/publications/dr_2022.pdf.

Coppedge, Michael, John Gerring, Carl Henrik Knutsen, Staffan I Lindberg, Jan Teorell, Nazifa Alizada, David Altman, et al. 2021. *V-Dem [Country–Year/Country–Date] Dataset v11.1*. Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project. https://doi.org/10.23696/vdemds21.

Coppedge, Michael, John Gerring, Carl Henrik Knutsen, Staffan I Lindberg, Jan Teorell, Nazifa Alizada, David Altman, et al. 2022. *V-Dem Codebook v12*. Varietes of Democracy (V-Dem) Project. https://www.v-dem.net/static/website/img/refs/codebookv12.pdf.

Dahl, Robert A. 1989. (1989). *Democracy and Its Critics*. Yale University Press.

Deb, Pragyan, Davide Furceri, Jonathan D Ostry, and Nour Tawk. 2020. *The Economic Effects of COVID-19 Containment Measures*. IMF Working Paper WP/20/158, International Monetary Fund.

European Commission. 2019. *On Progress in Romania under the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism*. REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL, 10 22. https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/progress-report-romania-2019-com-2019-499_en.pdf.

Nuclear Threat Initiative, Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security, and the Economist Intelligence Unit, 2019. *Global Health Security Index. Nuclear threat initiative and Johns Hopkins school of public health*. https://www.ghsindex.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/2019-

Global-Health-Security-Index.pdf.

Foa Roberto Stefan and Yascha Mounk. 2016. The Danger of Deconsolidation. *Journal of Democracy* 27(3). https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/FoaMounk-27-3.pdf.

Hale, Thomas, Anna Petherick, Toby Phillips, and Samuel Webster. 2020. *Variation in Government Responses to COVID-19*. Version 3.0. Blavatnik School of Government Working Paper. March 31. www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/covidtracker

Hale, Thomas, Noam Angrist, Rafael Goldszmidt, Beatriz Kira, Anna Petherick, Toby Phillips, Samuel Webster, et al. 2021. A global panel database of pandemic policies (Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker). *Nature Human*. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-021-01079-8.

Heo, Gyujin, Catherine Apio, Kyulhee Han, Taewan Goo, Hye Won Chung, Taehyun Kim , Hakyong Kim, et al. 2021. Statistical Estimation of Effects of Implemented Government Policies on COVID-19 Situation in South Korea. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* 18, 2144. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18042144.

IMF. 2020. *World Economic Outlook: Recovery During a Pandemic*. International Monetary Fund.

Kelemen, R. Daniel. 2020. The European union's authoritarian equilibrium. *Journal of European Public Policy* 27 (3): 481-499.

Lane, R. Philip. 2012. The European Sovereign Debt Crisis. *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 26 (3): 49-68. https://pubs.aeaweb.org/doi/pdfplus/10.1257/jep.26.3.49.

Łaszek, Aleksander. 2020. Evaluating COVID-19 policy responses in Poland. *The Visio Journal 5*: 1-16.

Lundgren, Magnus, Mark Klamberg, Karin Sundström, and Julia Dahlqvist. 2020. Emergency Powers in Response to COVID-19: Policy Diffusion, Democracy, and Preparedness. *Nordic Journal of Human Rights* 38 (4): 305-318.

McMann, Kelly M, and Daniel Tisch. 2021. *Democratic Institutions and Practices, and COVID-19 Outcomes*. Strömsborg: International IDEA. https://doi.org/10.31752/idea.2021.86.

Roser, Max. 2020. *The short history of global living conditions and why it matters that we know it*. https://ourworldindata.org/a-history-of-global-living-conditions-in-5-charts.

Rutynowska, Eliza, Marek Tatała, and Patryk Wachowiec. 2020. *Rule of law in Poland 2020: The rule of law crisis in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic*. Warsaw: Civil Development Forum (FOR) / Forum Obywatelskiego Rozwoju.

Saward, M. 1998. *The Terms of Democracy*. Cambridge: Polity.

Schizas, Emmanuel, Mara Vidali, Constantinos Saravakos, and Nicos Rompapas. 2021. *EU Accession and Political Freedom An empirical analysis of the effect of EU accession on civil rights and individual liberties*, edited by Constantinos Saravakos. Athens: European Liberal Forum and Center for Liberal Studies (KEFiM)-Markos Dragoumis.

Schizas, Emmanuel, Mara Vidali, and Constantinos Saravakos. 2020. Does accession process to European Union lead to more economic freedom? Empirical evidence on the EU enlargement between 2000 and 2017. In *EU Accession and Economic Freedom: An empirical analysis of the effect of EU membership and its antecedents on economic freedom*, edited by Constantinos Saravakos, 15-39. Athens: European Liberal Forum and Center for Liberal Studies (KEFiM)-Markos Dragoumis.

Tarabar, Danko & Andrew T. Young. 2017. "Liberalizing Reforms and the European Union: Accession, Membership, and Convergence," Southern Economic Journal, John Wiley & Sons, vol. 83(4), pages 932-951, April.

Teperoglou, Eftichia, and Emmanouil Tsatsanis. 2014. Dealignment, De-legitimation and the Implosion of the Two-Party System in Greece: The Earthquake Election of 6 May 2012. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* 24 (2): 222-242.

TIMBRO. 2019. *Timbro Authoritarian Populism Index*. https://populismindex.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/TAP2019C.pdf.

United Nations. 2020. *Human rights are critical –for the response and the recovery*. United Nations. https://www.un.org/victimsofterrorism/sites/www.un.org.victimsofterrorism/files/un_-_human_rights_and_covid_april_2020.pdf.

Vardanyan, Vladimir. 2020. *The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on human rights and the rule of law*. Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, Council of Europe. http://www.assembly.coe.int/LifeRay/JUR/Pdf/TextesProvisoires/2020/20200702-CovidImpact-EN.pdf.

VISIO INSTITUT

Visio institut is an independent, non-partisan research organization based in Slovenia. Its aim is to develop and promote public policy and institutional reform proposals to foster an open, free, developed, and just society in Slovenia. To that end, Visio institut organizes events, produces publications, and appears regularly in the media.