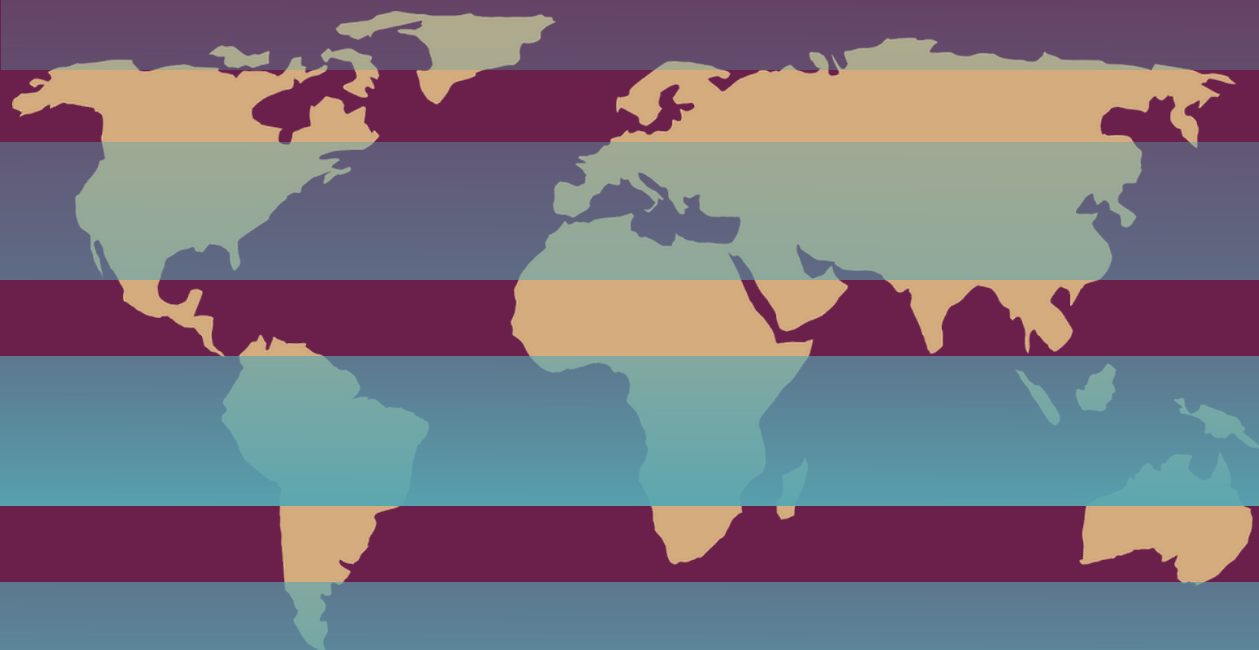


NEW APPROACHES TO CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND CRISIS COMMUNICATION

Dealing with Uncertainties in the New Global Political Era

EDITORS:

Laura-Maria Herța | Delia Pop-Flanța | Adrian-Gabriel Corpădean



Presa Universitară Clujeană

NEW APPROACHES TO CONFLICT RESOLUTION
AND CRISIS COMMUNICATION

Dealing with Uncertainties in the New Global Political Era

EDITORS:

Laura-Maria Herța | Delia Pop-Flanța | Adrian-Gabriel Corpădean

ACEST VOLUM A FOST FINANȚAT
PRIN FONDUL PENTRU SITUAȚII SPECIALE
AL MINISTERULUI EDUCAȚIEI ÎN 2025

**NEW APPROACHES
TO CONFLICT RESOLUTION
AND CRISIS COMMUNICATION**

**Dealing with Uncertainties
in the New Global Political Era**

EDITORS:

Laura-Maria Herța

Delia Pop-Flanța

Adrian-Gabriel Corpădean

PRESA UNIVERSITARĂ CLUJEANĂ

2025

Referenți științifici:

Conf. univ. dr. Elena Grad-Rusu

Lect. univ. dr. Monica Meruțiu

ISBN 978-606-37-2824-2

© 2025 Editorii volumului. Toate drepturile rezervate.
Reproducerea integrală sau parțială a textului, prin orice
mijloace, fără acordul editorilor, este interzisă și se pedep-
sește conform legii.

Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai
Presa Universitară Clujeană
Director: Codruța Săcelean
Str. B.P. Hasdeu nr. 51
400371 Cluj-Napoca, România
Tel.: (+40) 744 687 884
E-mail: editura@ubbcluj.ro
editura.ubbcluj.ro | libraria.ubbcluj.ro

CONTENTS

Laura M. Herța, Delia Pop-Flanja, and Adrian-Gabriel Corpădean	7
<i>Crises, World Order, and Hybrid warfare. Dealing with Uncertainties in the New Global Political Era</i>	
Lyubov Naydonova, Mykhaylo Naydonov, Liubov Hryhorovska	19
<i>Uncertainty in Crisis Communication: Psychological Aspects of Supporting Totalitarianism as a Social Disorder</i>	
Anna Oksiutycz, Elizabeth Lubinga	31
<i>Valorizing Image Repair in Fractured South Africa-USA Diplomatic Relations March 2025</i>	
Yusuf Avar.....	49
<i>A Historical Overview of Turkey-EU Relations Considering Current Developments</i>	
Abraham Ename Minko	73
<i>UN Peacekeeping and Conflict Resolution in Africa: A Mandate-Outcome Analysis</i>	
Ioana-Andreea Mureșan, Raluca Pop	97
<i>Norwegian Royal Discourse on Defending Democratic Values in Times of Crisis</i>	

Réka Horváth.....	113
<i>Using Crisis and Conflicts to GOTV. Case Study: the UDMR</i>	
Ramona Neagoș	133
<i>Populism in the Western Balkans</i>	
Tudor Vidrean-Căpușan.....	145
<i>The Role of the Court of Justice of the European Union in shaping the European Union's Foreign Policy</i>	
Claudiu-Bogdan Aldea	157
<i>Japan's (In)Action on the Uyghur Question: Norms or Interests?</i>	
Ioana-Mădălina Miron	185
<i>The 2023 Belgorod Oblast Incursions: an Analysis of Putin's Response to an Ongoing Crisis</i>	
Ramona Goga	197
<i>The Challenges of Transitional Governance in Post-Assad Syria</i>	
Irina-Maria Cosma.....	215
<i>Ottoman Inheritance in the Republic of Türkiye. Impact on the Interactions with the West</i>	
Andreea-Elena Cioată	227
<i>Mobilization and Media Framing of the Youth-led Protests during the 2024 Presidential Elections Crisis in Romania</i>	
<i>Index</i>	<i>261</i>
<i>List of contributing authors.....</i>	<i>263</i>

Crises, World Order, and Hybrid warfare. Dealing with Uncertainties in the New Global Political Era

This volume is embedded in discussions regarding the new global threats posed by Russia's unprovoked military attack against Ukraine and the reactions of Donald Trump's presidency regarding the potential conflict resolution of this war. Moreover, as the title suggests, American attempts to solve or end ongoing armed conflicts, among which Russia's war against Ukraine, trigger uncertainties in global politics and several unknowns and worrisome variables pertaining to future international security, European security, and Ukraine's post-war security.

In recent times, a great deal of authors linked hybrid warfare with Russia's actions in eastern Ukraine and the subsequent annexation of Crimea.¹ A consistent literature linked hybrid warfare with Russia's actions in eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea, back in 2014. Most articles focus on Russia's combined strategies and tactics, ranging from subversion, cyber-attacks, media manipulation, the presence of "little green men", staged military exercises, criminal disorder, agitation and fifth columns. Several authors describe the entire set of tools employed by Russia in eastern

¹ As emphasized in Laura M. Herța, "Russia's Hybrid Warfare. Why Narratives and Ideational Factors Play a Role in International Politics", *On-line Journal Modelling the New Europe*, Issue no. 21, December 2016, pp. 52-76 and Laura M. Herța, "Hybrid Warfare – A Form of Asymmetric Conflict", in *International Conference Knowledge-Based Organization*, Vol. XXIII, No 1 2017, "Nicolae Balcescu" Land Forces Academy Publishing House, Sibiu, ISSN 2451-3113, pp. 135-143.

Ukraine.² Some scholars focus on cyber warfare or information warfare as major shifts in Russia's strategies³ while others are rather preoccupied with the asymmetric nature of Russia's operations.⁴ Other approaches focus on the difficulty of conceptually coining Russia's strategy as hybrid war, terming them "grey-zone wars"⁵ or a form of "compound 'indirect' approach."⁶ Bachmann and Gunneriusson focused on the somehow "undefined nature of the conflict" stressing the difficulties over defining Russia's actions in Crimea as "war or civil unrest, interstate aggression or intrastate conflict."⁷

Russia's recourse to information warfare and cyber-attacks is considered crucial in transforming the modes of waging war against Ukraine. Keir Giles focused on the way in which information technologies and social media were employed as both tools for disinformation, amounting to "hacking of the news" according to some⁸, and for the media construction of Russia's version of events.⁹ What Keir Giles dubs the "next

² Alexander Lanoszka, "Russian hybrid warfare and extended deterrence in eastern Europe", *International Affairs*, 2016, 92: 1, pp. 175-195, <http://www.alexlanoszka.com/LanoszkaIAHybrid.pdf>, accessed November 2016; Peter Pomerantsev; Michael Weiss, *The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes Information, Culture and Money*, New York: The Institute of Modern Russia, 2014, http://www.interpretermag.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/The_Menace_of_Unreality_Final.pdf, accessed December 2016

³ Bachmann; Gunneriusson, *op. cit.*, 2015; Keir Giles, "The Next Phase of Russian Information Warfare", in Bettina Renz; Hanna Smith, *Russia and Hybrid Warfare – Going beyond the Label*, Report 1/2016, Aleksanteri Institute, University of Helsinki, Finland, 2016, pp. 40-46.

⁴ Rod Thornton, "Turning strengths into vulnerabilities: the art of asymmetric warfare as applied by the Russian military in its hybrid warfare concept", in Bettina Renz; Hanna Smith, *Russia and Hybrid Warfare – Going beyond the Label*, Report 1/2016, Aleksanteri Institute, University of Helsinki, Finland, pp. 52-60.

⁵ Antulio J. Echevarria II, "How Should We Think about 'Gray-Zone' Wars?", in Bettina Renz; Hanna Smith, *Russia and Hybrid Warfare – Going beyond the Label*, Report 1/2016, Aleksanteri Institute, University of Helsinki, Finland, pp. 33-39.

⁶ Sibylle Scheipers, "Winning Wars without Battles: Hybrid Warfare and Other 'Indirect' Approaches in the History of Strategic Thought", in Bettina Renz; Hanna Smith, *Russia and Hybrid Warfare – Going beyond the Label*, Report 1/2016, Aleksanteri Institute, University of Helsinki, Finland, pp. 47-51.

⁷ Bachmann; Gunneriusson, *op. cit.*, 2015, pp. 88-89.

⁸ Polina Tikhonova, "Russia Hacking Your News", *ValueWalk*, 14 March 2015, <http://www.valuwalk.com/2015/03/russia-hacking-your-news/>

⁹ Keir Giles, "The Next Phase of Russian Information Warfare", in Bettina Renz; Hanna Smith, *Russia and Hybrid Warfare – Going beyond the Label*, Report 1/2016, Aleksanteri Institute, University of Helsinki, Finland, p. 40.

phase of Russian information warfare” basically centres on employment of “Pro-Russian trolls – online profiles controlled by humans - and bots, those controlled by automated processes.”¹⁰ A complex and systematic process has been developed, which tends to supplant the conventional deployment of troops, with “Russia amassing abilities on social media, ready to be deployed when needed.”¹¹ This led other scholars to assess Russia’s actions in terms of capacity “to hybridize not only its actual warfare, but also its informational warfare.”¹² Russia’s strategies in eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea have been considered hybrid challenges for the 21st century, since they heavily rely on what Peter Pomerantsev and Michael Weiss have called “‘the weaponization of information, culture and money’, vital parts of the Kremlin’s concept of ‘non-linear’ war.”¹³

The core interplay of cyber, kinetic, information, malware operations in eastern Ukraine represent “a case-study in the potential for cyber-electromagnetic activities”, according to the head of the U.S. Army’s Cyber Centre of Excellence: “It’s not just cyber, it’s not just electronic warfare, it’s not just intelligence, but it’s really effective integration of all these capabilities with kinetic measures to actually create the effect that their commanders [want] to achieve.”¹⁴

Alongside with covert and small military operations, Russia concentrated on the news channel Russia Today (later rebranded RT) which is a wire service that includes “multilingual rolling news, a wire service and radio channels” and “has an estimated budget of over \$300 million”. The latter is a key item in what Pomerantsev and Weiss called “the Kremlin tool kit”, meant to achieve the following goals: to shatter communications by conveying mixed messages, constructing a Russian-made version of reality, and “paralyzing journalism with threat of libel”, and to “demoralize the enemy” via “disinformation campaigns”.¹⁵ Russia’s strategy of exploiting

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 43.

¹² Peter Pomerantsev; Michael Weiss, *The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes Information, Culture and Money*, New York: The Institute of Modern Russia, 2014, p. 5.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

¹⁴ Keir Giles, “The Next Phase of Russian Information Warfare”, in Bettina Renz; Hanna Smith, *Russia and Hybrid Warfare – Going beyond the Label*, Report 1/2016, Aleksanteri Institute, University of Helsinki, Finland, pp. 44-45.

¹⁵ Peter Pomerantsev; Michael Weiss, *The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes Information, Culture and Money*, New York: The Institute of Modern Russia, 2014, p. 6 and

some of the core elements of Western liberal democracies, such as free speech and legal concepts such as *jus ad bellum*, is considered a pivotal attribute of the new information war.¹⁶

Other approaches focusing on the “hybrid” aspects of Russia’s strategies in eastern Ukraine, from 2014 until 2022, reject the intertwining elements of hybrid warfare and the beginning of a new form of Russian belligerence. Some cautiously argue that hybrid warfare is not synonymous to a “quasi-theory of Russian foreign policy”¹⁷ while others analyse hybrid tactics as “neither new, nor Russian”.¹⁸ Bettina Renz and Hanna Smith argued that there is “a dangerous misuse of the term ‘war’” in Western recent literature stemming from overemphasis on combined use of information and psychological operations, which “were important factors leading to Russian military victory and were more important than the use of actual military force [...]” The authors remind us that Russia accomplished its goals only because “these efforts were backed up by special forces, auxiliary fighters and the implicit threat of more military force to come.”¹⁹ Consequently, treating Russia’s annexation of Crimea and “hybrid warfare” as twin developments creates a Western-made “model of Russian ‘hybrid warfare’ reverse-engineered from the approach pursued in Crimea.”²⁰ Andrew Monaghan also showed that analyses on Russia’s hybrid warfare should entail “understanding the implications of the much deeper and wider Russian state mobilization”, since the risk is to obscure or overlook the role of conventional force in Russian military thinking.²¹

pp. 14-16, http://www.interpretermag.com/wpcontent/uploads/2014/11/The_Menace_of_Unreality_Final.pdf, accessed December 2016.

¹⁶ Sascha Bachmann, Hakan Gunneriusson, “Hybrid Wars: The 21st-Century’s New Threats to Global Peace and Security”, in *Scientia Militaria, South African Journal of Military Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 1, 2015, pp. 77 – 98, <http://scientiamilitaria.journals.ac.za/pub/article/view/1110/1107>, accessed November 2016; Pomerantsev; Weiss, *op. cit.*, 2014.

¹⁷ Bettina Renz; Hanna Smith, *Russia and Hybrid Warfare – Going beyond the Label*, Report 1/2016, Aleksanteri Institute, University of Helsinki, Finland.

¹⁸ Nicu Popescu, *Hybrid tactics: neither new nor only Russian*, European Union Institute for Security Studies, http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/Alert_4_hybrid_warfare.pdf, accessed December 2016.

¹⁹ Renz, Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

²¹ Andrew Monaghan, “Putin’s Way of War. The ‘War’ in Russia’s ‘Hybrid Warfare’”, in *Parameters*, 45(4), Winter 2015-2016, p. 72.

In a different argument-built approach, Alexander Lanoszka discusses “hybrid warfare as a strategy rather than a new form of war.”²² The author shows that hybrid warfare is not necessarily a model for the future of warfare and does not indicate Russia’s mixed strategies “born out of weakness” or determined by global asymmetries. Instead, Russia’s hybrid strategies were used to “advance political goals on the battlefield by applying military force subversively.”²³ But such strategies are effective only when directed against a weaker neighbour (such as Ukraine or the post-Soviet space in general) and only when some endogenous elements or situational factors facilitate their success. Lanoszka argues that certain key attributes of the former Soviet region foment the use of hybrid strategies: ethnic heterogeneity, latent historic grievances, and weakness in civil society, and regional complexity. Such regional peculiarities are relevant, rendering the former Soviet republics vulnerable (even though it is not “equally effective across all parts of the former Soviet space”), since “hybrid warfare exploits nationalist identities, thereby blurring responsibility and even gaining political support among foreign audiences.”²⁴

Referring to Russia’s actions in 2014, “hybrid threats” and “hybrid challenges” are often emphasized in a post-conventional international security framework. Some analysts believe this development poses a real threat to Europe, but most importantly to the Baltic states.²⁵ Others have been keen to formulate US policies or contemplate NATO’s strategic planning in order to counteract or avert such future threats, whether posed by state or non-state actors.²⁶ And yet, others warn that inadequate attention leads to “a

²² Alexander Lanoszka, “Russian hybrid warfare and extended deterrence in eastern Europe”, in *International Affairs*, 92: 1, p. 178, http://www.alexlanoszka.com/LanoszkaIA_Hybrid.pdf, accessed November 2016.

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 176 and pp. 181-189.

²⁵ Eve Hunter; Piret Pernik, *The Challenges of Hybrid Warfare*, Tallinn: International Centre for Defence and Security, http://www.icds.ee/fileadmin/media/icds.ee/failid/Eve_Hunter_Piret_Pernik_-_Challenges_of_Hybrid_Warfare.pdf, accessed December 2016; Andis Kudors, *Background notes. Hybrid War – A New Security Challenge for Europe*, 2015.

²⁶ Katie Abbott, *Understanding and Countering Hybrid Warfare: Next Steps for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, Major Research Paper, University of Ottawa, 2016, <https://www.ruor.uottawa.ca/bitstream/10393/34813/1/ABBOTT,%20Kathleen%2020161.pdf>; accessed December 2016; Brian Fleming, *The Hybrid Threat Concept: Contemporary War, Military Planning and the Advent of Unrestricted Operational Art*, Monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, United States Army Command and General Staff College,

misguided attempt to group everything Moscow does under one rubric.”²⁷ As such, Kofman and Rojansky argued, hybrid warfare becomes a “catchall phrase” which poorly describes Russian foreign policy and hastily foresees the duplication of similar scenarios.²⁸

The pattern of Russian aggression changed dramatically in February 2022, when Russian troops invaded Ukraine and tried to mask the aggression under the vague phrase “military operation”. However, what did not change, in my view, is the way in which an analysis built on both material and ideational facts contribute to understanding this event in world politics.

The war waged by Russia against Ukraine is not only an illustration of the distribution of capabilities in world politics, but also a discursive construction, a result of the distribution of ideas in global politics. The Russian “reality” and “truth” about the role of Russia on the international arena, the need to “de-nazify Ukraine”, the recollection of Soviet bravery and victory during the Second World War, the greatness of Russia in history and world politics, the weakness of Ukrainian identity, these are all tools of Russian propaganda, but they are also one interpretation, one social construction, one discourse (not only army and military power) which tries to rival with *and* defeat an opponent.

The present volume brings together studies centred on salient issues in global politics and intertwined with armed conflicts and threats to international order and security.

The first chapter, titled *Uncertainty in Crisis Communication: Psychological Aspects of Supporting Totalitarianism as a Social Disorder*, starts from the following premise: that totalitarianism is considered as form of societal pathology, when normal social connections and subjects are disrupted and oppression under total super-subject. The authors, Lyubov Naydonova, Mykhaylo Naydonov, and Liubov Hryhorovska, propose the model of social disorder with three ontological components of

2011, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, <http://indianstrategicknowledgeonline.com/web/2753.pdf>, accessed in November 2016.

²⁷ Michael Kofman; Matthew Rojansky, *A Closer look at Russia's "Hybrid war"*, Kennan Cable No.7, April, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2015, p. 6, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/7-KENNAN%20CABLEROJANSKY%20KOFMAN.pdf>, accessed in November 20162015.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

totalitarianism (terror, lie, and pseudo ethics) and subjects' imbalance and subjectivity deprivations as mechanisms of the social disorder, by operationalizing cognitive, social and personal moral components of psychological supporting of totalitarianism in form of Russian political regime.

The next study, written by Anna Oksiutycz and Elizabeth Lubinga, *Valorizing Image Repair in Fractured South Africa-USA Diplomatic Relations March 2025*, examines the value of image repair for fractured diplomatic relations underpinned by Benoit's Image Repair Theory. The authors argue that fractured diplomatic relations hinder mutual collaborations between countries, creating far-reaching and adverse tensions that erode longstanding goodwill. Therefore, the two authors resort to a content analysis of 100 posts on X was conducted, focusing on conversational valence, public sentiment analysis and engagement metrics. Their findings reveal several tensions emerging from international and national online discourses, emphasising the importance of image repair for the restoration of healthy diplomatic relations.

Yusuf Avar analyzes the historical perspective of Türkiye-EU relations in the context of current developments. In this context, his chapter is organized around two main objectives: first, to offer a historical account of Türkiye-EU relations, and second, to analyze the trajectory and specific developments characterizing the recent phase of these bilateral ties. In order to realize this objective, Yusuf Avar explores Türkiye-EU relations during periods of crisis, alongside thematic discussions and cooperation held between the respective parties concerning migration crisis of 2015, the modernization of the Customs Union, and the 2023 Kahramanmaraş Earthquakes.

Abraham Ename Minko focuses on *UN Peacekeeping and Conflict Resolution in Africa: A Mandate-Outcome Analysis*. In his paper, the relationship between United Nations (UN) peacekeeping mandates and conflict resolution outcomes in Africa is examined. The authors concentrates on three major missions, namely UNMISS in South Sudan, MONUSCO in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and UNAMID in Darfur. It is the author's contention that missions with clear, context-specific, and well-resourced mandates are more successful in achieving sustainable peace, while those with vague or overly ambitious goals often face operational

challenges and questions of legitimacy. The study underscores the importance of local ownership, regional partnerships, and political will in turning mandates into meaningful results.

The fifth chapter, entitled, *Norwegian Royal Discourse on Defending Democratic Values in Times of Crisis* and written by Ioana-Andreea Mureșan and Raluca Pop provides a comparative analysis of King Harald V's New Year's speeches between 2022 and 2024 in order to identify democratic values promoted in the royal discourse. By employing a mixed-method approach, the two authors have analysed the selected corpus qualitatively with content analysis structured on thematic organization. The main findings of this study indicate that all the three speeches articulate democratic values and frame democracy as an integral part of Norway's identity.

The next chapter, submitted by Réka Horváth, sets the following main argument: the UDMR is the most successful of the various Central and Eastern European nations with Hungarian minority parties because, since its founding, it has not only won seats in the Senate and Chamber of Deputies in every election, but it has also participated in multiple coalition governments since 1996. However, scholarly evaluations of the UDMR's election campaigns are scarce. In this study, the author looks at how the UDMR mobilized its voters by using conflicts and crises.

The study written by Ramona Neagoș explore populism in the Western Balkan countries and emphasizes that, while the majority of researches on populism have primarily concentrated on Western Europe, many of the most relevant hypotheses about the sources of populism actually do not apply in the Western Balkans, a region in which the nature of populism is unique.

Tudor Vidrean-Căpușan tackles the *Role of the Court of Justice of the European Union in shaping European Union's Foreign Policy* in his chapter. The starting point of this analysis is the fact that the role of the European Union Court of Justice in the framework of the European Union is of utmost importance because it has the role to keep a balance between political interests of the member states and the legal order created by the EU law. Therefore, the author contends, a proper EU foreign policy cannot be achieved without proper guidance from the European Union Court of Justice. The main goal of this paper is to explore the case law of the European Union Court of Justice to extract the most relevant decisions and to analyse how these decisions have the capacity to shape the EU foreign policy.

The next chapter represents an astute analysis of *Japan's (In)Action on the Uyghur Question: Norms or Interests?*, which looks at conflicts between strategic interests and norm adherence. The research focuses on the case the Uyghur abuses in Xinjiang, China. The aim of the research is to explore how Japan's cautious stance on the Uyghur question has evolved between 2014 and 2024, across the administrations of Shinzō Abe, Yoshihide Suga and Fumio Kishida. Guided by Social-Constructivism and Role Theory, the author, Claudiu Aldea, tries to answer two research questions: How did Japan's discourse and policy responses to the Uyghur question evolve between 2014 and 2024? What factors influenced Japan's slow reaction to the topic despite increasing international pressure?

In her study, Ioana-Mădălina Miron provides an analysis of the events in the Belgorod region of Russia, which commenced in 2023 and have had lasting consequences. Based on these occurrences, the author tries to analyse Russian President Vladimir Putin's speech strategy in response to the crisis. According to the author, this was a belated reaction, suggesting a deficiency in crisis management strategy.

The next chapter, titled *The Challenges of Transitional Governance in Post-Assad Syria* and written by Ramona Goga, explores, as the title suggests, the hurdles associated with transitional governance and places a particular emphasis on the roles of external actors and the unstable internal dynamics. Using comparative case studies and analysing existing frameworks of conflict resolution and applying them to the Syrian context, the study aims to provide insights into the prospects for sustainable peace and stability.

Irina-Maria Cosma concentrates on *Ottoman Inheritance in the Republic of Türkiye and the Impact on the Interactions with the West*. The author investigates the defining characteristics of the Ottoman Empire in order to reveal how they are inherited by the current Republic of Türkiye. The main objective of this paper is to present and analyse these attributes and also to explain their impact on Türkiye's relations and interactions with the West. The methodological approach is qualitative, more precisely historical-interpretative and analytical.

The last chapter of the volume focuses on a salient issue in contemporary politics, namely *Mobilization and Media Framing of the Youth-led Protests During the 2024 Presidential Elections Crisis in Romania*. The author, Andreea-Elena Cioată, builds on Robert Entman's conceptualization of

framing, then examines how Romanian online media represented the youth protests between November 25 and December 6, 2024, and considers the implications of these portrayals for the public perception of unconventional political participation. Methodologically, the study combines content and discourse analysis of 24 online news articles published by six outlets, namely Hotnews.ro, G4Media.ro, Digi24.ro, R3Media.ro, ActiveNews.ro, and Capital.ro, in order to identify recurring frames, dominant narratives, and patterns of representation.

Bibliography

- Abbott, Katie, *Understanding and Countering Hybrid Warfare: Next Steps for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, Major Research Paper, University of Ottawa, 2016, <https://www.ruor.uottawa.ca/bitstream/10393/34813/1/ABBOTT%20Kathleen%2020161.pdf>; accessed December 2016
- Bachmann, Sascha; Gunneriusson, Hakan, "Hybrid Wars: The 21st-Century's New Threats to Global Peace and Security", in *Scientia Militaria, South African Journal of Military Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 1, 2015, <http://scientiamilitaria.journals.ac.za/pub/article/view/1110/1107>, accessed November 2016
- Echevarria II, Antulio J., "How Should We Think about 'Grey-Zone' Wars?", in Bettina Renz; Hanna Smith, *Russia and Hybrid Warfare – Going beyond the Label*, Report 1/2016, Aleksanteri Institute, University of Helsinki, Finland
- Fleming, Brian, *The Hybrid Threat Concept: Contemporary War, Military Planning and the Advent of Unrestricted Operational Art*, Monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, United States Army Command and General Staff College, 2011, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, <http://indianstrategicknowledgeonline.com/web/2753.pdf>, accessed in November 2016
- Giles, Keir "The Next Phase of Russian Information Warfare", in Bettina Renz; Hanna Smith, *Russia and Hybrid Warfare – Going beyond the Label*, Report 1/2016, Aleksanteri Institute, University of Helsinki, Finland, 2016
- Herța, Laura M., "Hybrid Warfare – A Form of Asymmetric Conflict", in *International Conference Knowledge-Based Organization*, Vol. XXIII, No 1 2017, "Nicolae Balcescu" Land Forces Academy Publishing House, Sibiu
- Herța, Laura M., "Russia's Hybrid Warfare. Why Narratives and Ideational Factors Play a Role in International Politics", *On-line Journal Modelling the New Europe*, Issue no. 21, December 2016

- Hunter, Eve; Pernik, Piret, *The Challenges of Hybrid Warfare*, Tallinn: International Centre for Defence and Security, http://www.icds.ee/fileadmin/media/icds.ee/failid/Eve_Hunter__Piret_Pernik_Challenges_of_Hybrid_Warfare.pdf, accessed December 20162015
- Kofman, Michael; Rojansky, Matthew, *A Closer look at Russia's "Hybrid war "*, Kennan Cable No.7, April, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2015, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/7KENNAN%20CABLEROJANSKY%20KOFMAN.pdf>, accessed in November 20162015
- Kudors, Andis, *Background notes. Hybrid War – A New Security Challenge for Europe*, 2015
- Lanoszka, Alexander, "Russian hybrid warfare and extended deterrence in eastern Europe", *International Affairs*, 2016, 92: 1, <http://www.alexlanoszka.com/LanoszkaIAHybrid.pdf>, accessed November 2016
- Monaghan, Andrew, "Putin's Way of War. The 'War' in Russia's 'Hybrid Warfare'", in *Parameters*, 45(4), Winter 2015-2016,
- Pomerantsev, Peter; Weiss, Michael, *The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes Information, Culture and Money*, New York: The Institute of Modern Russia, 2014, http://www.interpretermag.com/wpcontent/uploads/2014/11/The_Menace_of_Unreality_Final.pdf, accessed December 2016
- Popescu, Nicu, *Hybrid tactics: neither new nor only Russian*, European Union Institute for Security Studies, http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/Alert_4_hybrid_warfare.pdf, accessed December 2016
- Scheipers, Sibylle, "Winning Wars without Battles: Hybrid Warfare and Other 'Indirect' Approaches in the History of Strategic Thought", in Bettina Renz; Hanna Smith, *Russia and Hybrid Warfare – Going beyond the Label*, Report 1/2016, Aleksanteri Institute, University of Helsinki, Finland
- Thornton, Rod, "Turning strengths into vulnerabilities: the art of asymmetric warfare as applied by the Russian military in its hybrid warfare concept", in Bettina Renz; Hanna Smith, *Russia and Hybrid Warfare – Going beyond the Label*, Report 1/2016, Aleksanteri Institute, University of Helsinki, Finland
- Tikhonova, Polina, "Russia Hacking Your News", *ValueWalk*, 14 March 2015, <http://www.valuwalk.com/2015/03/russia-hacking-your-news/>

Uncertainty in Crisis Communication: Psychological Aspects of Supporting Totalitarianism as a Social Disorder

Introduction

The topic of totalitarianism has been widely reflected and deeply understood in scientific research since the Second World War.¹ Today, the topic of totalitarianism is more acute than ever since the end of World War II.² This is due to reasons of various geopolitical scales. In the context of the current global political situation, in recent years we have observed the strengthening of autocratic totalitarian regimes in various parts of the world, their more aggressive attack on the democratic world, especially evident with the beginning of Russia's aggressive war against Ukraine,³ their

¹ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, San Diego New York London: A Harvest/HBJ Book, 1973; Paul Corner (ed.), *Popular Opinion in Totalitarian Regimes: Fascism, Nazism, Communism*, Oxford University press, 2009; Peter Baehr, *Hannah Arendt, Totalitarianism, and the Social Sciences*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press. 2010; Ryszard Legutko, *The demon in democracy: totalitarian temptations in free societies*, New York: Encounter Books, 2016.

² Jack Fong, *Employing Nietzsche's Sociological Imagination: How to Understand Totalitarian Democracy*. Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2020; James Symonds, Pavel Vařeka, *Archaeologies of Totalitarianism, Authoritarianism, and Repression: Dark Modernities*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020; Larry Diamond, Marc F. Plattner, Christopher Walker (eds.), *Authoritarianism Goes Global: The Challenge to Democracy*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016.

³ András Rác, *Russia's Hybrid War in Ukraine: Breaking the Enemy's Ability to Resist*. The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, Fiia report 43; Kate C. Langdon, Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Putin's Totalitarian Democracy: Ideology, Myth, and Violence in the Twenty-First*

unification in opposition to the democratic political system, albeit not always open, sometimes disguised as neutrality, but obvious from the point of view of actions that from time to time become obvious not only to analysts, but also to the general public. In Europe, the political regimes of individual countries (we mean Hungary, Slovakia and Serbia) demonstrate a departure from democratic principles and a tendency towards authoritarianism, weakening the unity of the European Union and the democratic world in general in the face of the threat of impending totalitarianism. The basis of this certain degeneration of democratic countries is both the imperial past of some of them and the unlived legacy of being in the bubble of Soviet ideology in the period 1945-1991.

In the Ukrainian context, despite the country's long-standing expressed desire to join the democratic world, its readiness to defend freedom and democratic values even at the cost of huge sacrifices in a bloody war with authoritarian Russia, attention to the topic of totalitarianism has its reasons. It is dictated by the risks of its manifestations given the reduction in the functioning of democratic institutions due to martial law, although completely justified, as well as the presence of a part of the population that are carriers of the totalitarian mentality of the past historical period as a part of the Soviet Union. The latter actually sets the psychological aspect of studying the reasons for a certain success and stability of the existence of totalitarian regimes.

The peculiarity of the confrontation between totalitarian regimes and democracy at the present stage is determined by the totality that has acquired the established terminological designation of "hybrid war." The extremely important aspect of hybrid war today is war in the information space. The development of information technologies has created enormous opportunities for progressive humanity in information exchange, but at the same time has led to the creation of tools that are extremely effective in terms of influencing mass consciousness, which authoritarian governments use widely and not without success.

In the digital era, totalitarianism, in pursuit of its goals, is changing, becoming multifaceted, including in its information manifestations.⁴ Taking

Century, Springer International Publishing, 2019; Robert F. Baumann. "Review Essay of Stephen F. Cohen's War with Russia? From Putin & Ukraine to Trump & Russiagate", in *Military Review*, September-October 2019. pp. 152-163.

⁴ Andrew Jones, Gerald L. Kovacich, *Global Information Warfare. The New Digital Battlefield*, Second Edition, CBC Press, 2020; Arkady Ostrovsky, *The Invention of Russia: The Rise of*

advantage of the new opportunities, totalitarian regimes with their technologies of creating an alternative (false) reality in mass consciousness primarily for their own citizens, make transformation of the state into a terrorist machine using intimidation, arrests, falsification, and information blockades, investing huge amounts of money in the information sector.

The situation in the modern information space is complicated by other circumstances. Artificial intelligence, social media algorithms and their exclusively commercial nature, the multitude of actors who have different interests and pursue their own goals, etc. create uncertainty about the possibility of making an information message or exerting information influence with the probability of the result expected by the communicator. That is, participants in the information space cannot guarantee that their action is one of fulfilling their mission of providing information. And the author of the message is dependent on the algorithms for his or her income.

All of this determines the complexity of the consumer's orientation in today's information space, makes him vulnerable to information influences, and weakens the ability to resist informational control of his consciousness. Being in the open information space, uncritical consumers of distorted information can thereby reproduce and fuel totalitarianism without intending to do so. In such a situation, participants in the information space, while not being apologists for totalitarianism, sometimes become its weapons against their will, using algorithms that they do not actually control or do not fully control. In return, these algorithms can be controlled by a party that intends to devalue and eliminate information that is disadvantageous to it.

An important factor influencing the information space today is also the war, which exacerbates polarization and distorts the information space. This situation of ambiguity and uncertainty strengthened during the war is used by totalitarian regimes.⁵

Without resorting to a thorough analysis of the characteristics of totalitarianism and the methods of influencing the population that it uses to maintain power, in our report we will focus mainly on such a tool as informational influence on consciousness, which forces a person not only to

Putin and the Age of Fake News, Penguin Books, 2017; Jabbar Moradi, Jasmin Dall'Agnola (eds.), *PC on Earth: The Beginnings of the Totalitarian Mindset*, Ibidem Press, 2020; Michael Filimowicz (ed.), *Digital Totalitarianism: Algorithms and Society*, London and New York: Routledge, 2022.

⁵ Arkady Ostrovsky, *The Invention of Russia: The Rise of Putin and the Age of Fake News*, Penguin Books, 2017.

submit to force under the threat of even physical destruction, but also to accept and reproduce a totalitarian way of governing.

We consider totalitarianism as a psychosocial pathology, a social disorder that requires “treatment.” Not medical, but socio-cultural, sociopsychological. How do we see totalitarianism as a social disease from a psychological perspective? First of all, we rely on the definitions of these concepts in sciences close to psychology. In *psychiatry*, for example, a social disorder is considered as a type of psychiatric condition that includes social deficits and affects social functioning,⁶ and social communication disorder (SCD) as a condition that makes it hard to talk with other people and which is not a problem with speech. Social (pragmatic) communication disorder (SPCD)⁷ is a new diagnosis introduced by DSM-5.⁸

In *philosophy and anthropology*, the issue of “diseases” or social pathologies is part of the established forms of modern societies’ self-understanding. To refer to the social side of pathologies implies, however, an approach that goes beyond the addition of individual diseases only. Social pathologies are a false realization of basic normative standards that society has given to itself in its fundamental ethical convictions.⁹

So, from a psychological point of view, totalitarianism as a social disorder is a state of society that supports totalitarianism as a social system and political order, accepting the pressure of the totalitarian machine as the justified and only correct way of the state’s existence. We assume that there are certain psychological characteristics of society that reproduce totalitarianism upon the removal/death of a dictatorial leader (person, group) from the social system.

New hybrid and digitally-driven forms of totalitarianism and post-totalitarian phenomena are researched in communication study and in political psychology. Turning to the psychology of totalitarianism, we will refer first of all to the research on the role of collective narcissism as a factor

⁶ Michal Hrdlicka, Iva Dudova. “Controversies in autism: is a broader model of social disorders needed?”, in *Child Adolesc Psychiatry Ment Health*, 7 (1): 9, 2013.

⁷ William Mandy, Adele Wang, Irene Lee, David Skuse, “Evaluating social (pragmatic) communication disorder”, in *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, Volume 58, Issue 10, Special Issue: Developmental Language Disorders, 2017, pp. 1166-1175.

⁸ *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders: DSM-5*, American Psychiatric Publishing, 2013.

⁹ Axel Honneth, “Diseases of Society. Approaching a Nearly Impossible Concept?”, *Reseaux*, 2015, pp. 21-42.

contributing to totalitarian tendencies.¹⁰ However, the connections between cognitive activity and thinking specific to auditoria and totalitarian support social disorder are unclear.

The *main goal* of this research is to study such a cognitive aberration as double-thinking (double-mindedness as a disruption of logical thinking) and conspiracy consciousness as mechanisms of social disorder in communication which support totalitarian tendency on the basis of collective narcissism.

Method

We modelled the structure of totalitarian psychological disorder in mass communication.¹¹ (Fig.1)

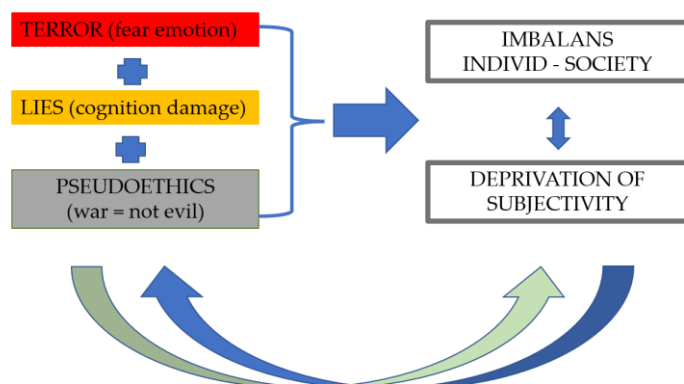


Figure 1. Synthetic model of psychological acceptance of totalitarian regimes

¹⁰ Agnieszka Golec de Zavala, Aleksandra Cichocka, Roy Eidelson, Nuwan Jayawickreme, "Collective narcissism and its social consequences", in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 97(6), 2009, pp. 1074–1096; Agnieszka Golec de Zavala, Aleksandra Cichocka, Irena Iskra-Golec, "Collective narcissism moderates the effect of in-group image threat on intergroup hostility", in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 104, 2013, pp. 1019–1039; Marta Marchlewska, Kevin A. Castellanos, Karol Lewczuk, Mirosław Kofta, Aleksandra Cichocka, "My way or the highway: High narcissism and low self-esteem predict decreased support for democracy", in *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 58 (3), 2019, pp. 591–608.

¹¹ Mykhaylo Naydonov, Lyubov Naydonova, Liubov Hryhorovska, "Psychological problems of measurement of regeneration of fascism, authoritarianism, and totalitarianism in society: toward synthetic scale construction", in *Problems of Political Psychology*, 11, 2022, pp. 99–125 (in Ukrainian).

The proposed synthetic model includes 5 components: 1) terror acceptance, 2) lie as cognitive deformation of the world picture, 3) pseudo-ethics and moral deformation, 4) individual-society imbalance with 5) agency suppression at all levels (personal, groups, local communities).

Also, we created a new questionnaire on totalitarian psychological support and carried out a pilot empirical study (N=176) in Spring 2022 during the Russian invasion in Ukraine. The sample consisted of students and teachers of three universities in the Center and West of Ukraine (volunteers), 91% of whom were female participants aged 17 to 63.

We presented the participants with the battery of scales which includes Magalhães's democracy support (as opposed to totalitarianism tendency)¹² and different aspects of totalitarianism-connected phenomena, as follows:

- *cognitive* - Petrovich's double-mindedness (disrupted logic)¹³
- Bruder's conspiratorial mentality¹⁴
- Cacioppo's cognitive needs (complexity preference and cognitive activity)¹⁵
- Media literacy index (critical thinking)¹⁶
- *social* - collective narcissism (We are higher than others)¹⁷
- *ethics and personality* - Envy-hate and envy-sadness¹⁸

Results

Correlational analysis shows the connectedness of the Triade: collective narcissism with both conspiracy and double thinking ($r=.23^{**}$ and

¹² Pedro C. Magalhães, "Government effectiveness and support for democracy", in *European Journal of Political Research*, 53, 2014, pp. 77–97.

¹³ Marija B. Petrović, Iris Žeželj. (2021), "Thinking Inconsistently: Development and Validation of an Instrument for Assessing Proneness to Doublethink", in *European Journal of Psychological Assessment*, 38(6), 2021, pp. 463–475.

¹⁴ Martin Bruder, Peter Haffke, Nick Neave, Nina Nouripanah, Roland Imhoff, "Measuring Individual Differences in Generic Beliefs in Conspiracy Theories Across Cultures: Conspiracy Mentality Questionnaire", in *Frontiers in Psychology*, 4, 225, 2013.

¹⁵ John T. Cacioppo, Richard E. Petty, "The need for cognition", in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 42(1), 1982, pp. 116–131.

¹⁶ Lyubov Naydonova, *op. cit.*, 2008.

¹⁷ Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, Eidelson, Jayawickreme, *op. cit.*, pp. 1074–1096; Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, Iskra-Golec, *op. cit.*, pp. 1019–1039.

¹⁸ Tatiana V. Beskova, "Metodika issledovaniya zavistlivosti lichnosti" [Methodology for the study of personality envy], in *Voprosy psikhologii*, 2, 2012, pp. 127–141 (in Russian).

$r=.24^{**}$ accordingly) and between the latter ($r=.27^{**}$). BeMas' envy is correlated with cognitive activity and democracy support is negatively correlated with double-thinking ($r= -.18^{**}$ and $r= -.17^{**}$) and collective narcissism ($r= -.17^{**}$ both) (Figure 2).

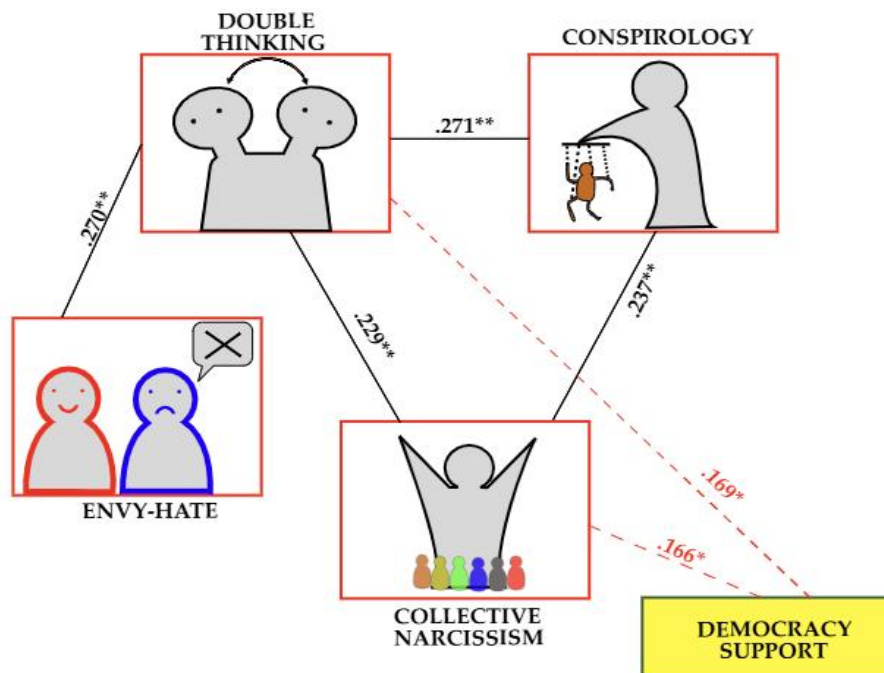


Figure 2. Correlations in Triade: collective narcissism - conspiracy - double thinking

Therefore, weak positive significant intercorrelations are noticeable between collective narcissism, double thinking and conspiriologial consciousness. Positive correlation occurs between double thinking and envy-hate. Two weak but significant negative correlations are between propensity to democracy support and collective narcissism and double thinking

Also, negative correlations are present between double-thinking and 1) cognitive activity, 2) media literacy, and 3) on-task personal orientation.

Cognitive activity negatively correlates with collective narcissism (Figure 3).

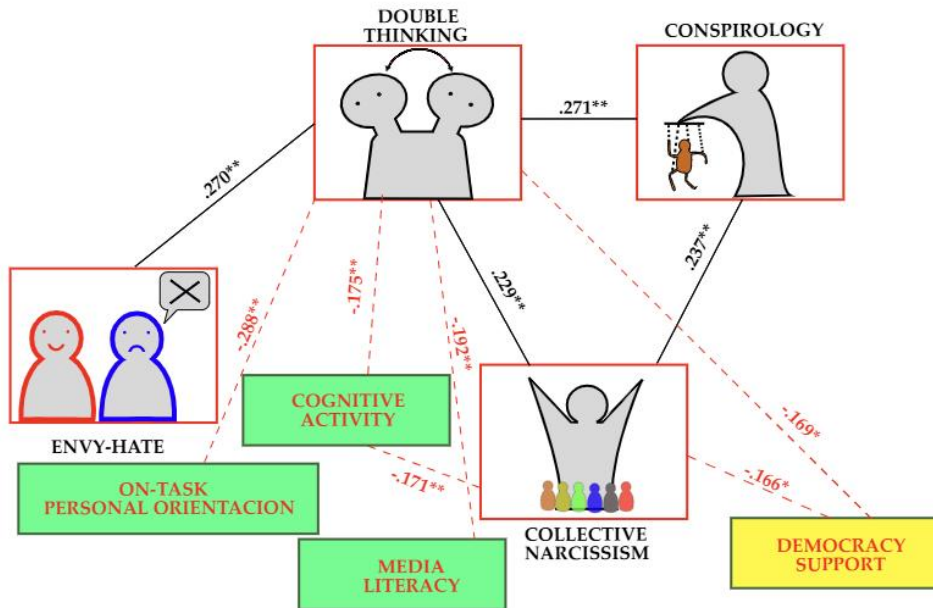


Figure 3. Negative correlations

Discussion

The results are discussed in the context of the following ideas. Providing the consumers with information about the situation, about themselves, and about objective circumstances should occur from the standpoint of measuring their opinions in relation to other groups - competitors, opponents, etc. as a tool to clear the synergy of uncontrollability and uncertainty through involvement in the strategy of obtaining information according to certain algorithms.

The best way to overcome uncertainty is to rethink the situation, to depart from the established view, to transform the situation and restructure it, defining new priorities and resources for oneself.

Traditional approaches to acquiring media literacy are insufficient. In essence, both media and consumers need to master the idea that the necessary critical transformation of information is not only about understanding contexts and identifying radicals as potential information traps to use fact-checking resources. It is precisely because resources can also be poisonous and distort the picture of reality, so it is necessary to master the tools of creating one's own picture.

Conclusion

Disruption of cognition is the factor which plays an important role in the communicative mechanism of the population's support for totalitarianism. So, the way to fight against totalitarian tendencies is to support cognitive activity and defence and develop the logical science self-reflective thinking (opposite double thinking deviation). The media in a democratic society should accept it as their mission to assist the user in overcoming the confusion and uncertainty that prevails in the information space. Media must support the cognitive activity of auditoria and pay more attention to this mission during the fight for truth in political communication. It is necessary to create the tools to clear the information space of uncertainty, as today's tools are likely to be not neutral but used to distort reality. The conception of such a tool is the mission of those involved in the creation and dissemination of information - mass communication media of various types. This tool should be meant to support the cognitive activity of media users as a "tool" for working with complexity. Cognition is aimed at solving problems, as it deals with the complex. Therefore, the sought-after tool should be designed not to simplify the content for the user, but rather to find accessible forms and procedures for communicating (discussing) the complex. This is a task for the future.

Bibliography

- Arendt, Hannah, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, San Diego New York London: A Harvest/HBJ Book, 1973.
- Baehr, Peter, *Hannah Arendt, Totalitarianism, and the Social Sciences*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2010.
- Baumann, Robert F., "Review Essay of Stephen F. Cohen's War with Russia? From Putin & Ukraine to Trump & Russiagate", in *Military Review*, September-October 2019, pp. 152-163.
- Beskova, Tatiana V., "Metodika issledovaniya zavistlivosti lichnosti" [Methodology for the study of personality envy], in *Voprosy psikhologii*, 2, 2012, pp. 127-141 (in Russian).
- Bruder, Martin; Haffke, Peter; Neave, Nick; Nouripanah, Nina; Imhoff, Roland, "Measuring Individual Differences in Generic Beliefs in Conspiracy Theories

- across Cultures: Conspiracy Mentality Questionnaire", in *Frontiers in Psychology*, 4, 225, 2013.
- Cacioppo, John T.; Petty, Richard E., "The Need for Cognition", in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 42(1), 1982, pp. 116–131.
- Corner, Paul (ed.), *Popular Opinion in Totalitarian Regimes: Fascism, Nazism, Communism*, Oxford University press, 2009.
- Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders: DSM-5*, American Psychiatric Publishing, 2013.
- Diamond, Larry; Plattner, Marc F.; Walker, Christopher (eds.), *Authoritarianism Goes Global: The Challenge to Democracy*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016.
- Filimowicz, Michael (ed.), *Digital Totalitarianism: Algorithms and Society*, London and New York: Routledge, 2022.
- Fong, Jack, *Employing Nietzsche's Sociological Imagination: How to Understand Totalitarian Democracy*, Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2020.
- Golec de Zavala, Agnieszka; Cichocka, Aleksandra; Eidelson, Roy; Jayawickreme, Nuwan, "Collective narcissism and its social consequences", in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 97(6), 2009, pp. 1074–1096.
- Golec de Zavala, Agnieszka; Cichocka, Aleksandra; Iskra-Golec, Irena, "Collective narcissism moderates the effect of in-group image threat on intergroup hostility", in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 104, 2013, pp. 1019–1039.
- Honneth, Axel, "Diseases of Society. Approaching a Nearly Impossible Concept?", *Reseaux*, 2015, pp. 21–42.
- Hrdlicka, Michal; Dudova, Iva, "Controversies in autism: is a broader model of social disorders needed? ", in *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health*, 7 (1): 9, 2013.
- Huizinga, Todd, *The New Totalitarian Temptation: Global Governance and the Crisis of Democracy in Europe*, Encounter Books, 2016.
- Jones, Andrew; Kovacich, Gerald L., *Global Information Warfare. The New Digital Battlefield*, Second Edition, CBC Press, 2020.
- Langdon, Kate C.; Tismaneanu, Vladimir, *Putin's Totalitarian Democracy: Ideology, Myth, and Violence in the Twenty-First Century*, Springer International Publishing, 2019.
- Legutko, Ryszard, *The demon in democracy: totalitarian temptations in free societies*, New York: Encounter Books, 2016.

- Magalhães, Pedro C., "Government effectiveness and support for democracy", in *European Journal of Political Research*, 53, 2014, pp. 77–97.
- Mandy, William; Wang, Adele; Lee, Irene; Skuse, David, "Evaluating social (pragmatic) communication disorder", in *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, Volume 58, Issue 10. Special Issue: Developmental Language Disorders, 2017, pp. 1166-1175.
- Marchlewska, Marta; Castellanos, Kevin A.; Lewczuk, Karo; Kofta, Mirosław; Cichocka, Aleksandra, "My way or the highway: High narcissism and low self-esteem predict decreased support for democracy", in *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 58 (3), 2019, pp. 591-608.
- Moradi, Jabbar; Dall'Agnola, Jasmin (eds.), *PC on Earth: The Beginnings of the Totalitarian Mindset*, Ibidem Press, 2020.
- Naydonov, Mykhaylo; Naydonova, Lyubov; Hryhorovska, Liubov, "Psychological problems of measurement of regeneration of fascism, authoritarianism, and totalitarianism in society: toward synthetic scale construction", in *Problems of Political Psychology*, 11, 2022, pp. 99-125 (in Ukrainian).
- Ostrovsky, Arkady, *The Invention of Russia: The Rise of Putin and the Age of Fake News*, Penguin Books, 2017.
- Petrović, Marija B.; Žeželj, Iris, "Thinking Inconsistently: Development and Validation of an Instrument for Assessing Proneness to Doublethink", in *European Journal of Psychological Assessment*, 38(6), 2021, pp. 463-475.
- Rácz, András, *Russia's Hybrid War in Ukraine: Breaking the Enemy's Ability to Resist*, The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, Fiia report 43.
- Symonds, James; Vařeka, Pavel, *Archaeologies of Totalitarianism, Authoritarianism, and Repression: Dark Modernities*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

Valorizing Image Repair in Fractured South Africa-USA Diplomatic Relations March 2025

Introduction and Background

Globally, strong and healthy diplomatic relations between countries remain pivotal to maintaining international stability, enhancing socio-economic ties, and serving as the oil that facilitates international cooperation. As the United Nations (2024) notes, diplomacy is crucial to preventing conflicts, facilitating the adoption of international resolutions, promoting dialogue, and expediting agreements through negotiation. All these elements are necessitated by a dynamic world requiring emergent approaches to multilateral diplomacy. When diplomatic relations become fractured, several tensions arise, some with enduring consequences for the countries and their citizens, which may take a long time to repair. In an increasingly digital world, when diplomatic fallouts occur, social media plays an important role in amplifying public opinions through public sentiments as part of public diplomacy. Inversely, social media are vehicles that increasingly facilitate public dialogues among digital publics, who respond to, interpret, and reconstruct political events through emotion-laden, real-time commentary (Rapadu, 2025).

As Duncombe (2019) argues, the dynamics of diplomatic engagement have changed, with government leaders and diplomats increasingly using social media for public diplomacy. The sentiments that publics express on social media no longer merely follow political developments, but rather public sentiment on social media is a reflection of active participation in the

construction and contestation of political activities, including those of a diplomatic nature (Papacharissi, 2015). In this era of social media and consequent cancel culture during crises, stakeholders' perceptions of organisations play an influential role in shaping how crises evolve (Klok, 2024).

Likewise, in 2025, the fallout in diplomatic relations between South Africa (SA) and the United States of America (USA) generated a flurry of social media public discourses with expressions of a variety of sentiments. On the other hand, it highlighted the social media engagement of several USA and SA politicians as well as the public involved in the saga following the expulsion of the ambassador. This social media engagement was prominent specifically given the fact that the expulsion was publicly announced on X by the US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, which appears to have been an "undiplomatic act" that bypassed the use of conventional diplomatic channels.

In March 2025, diplomatic relations between South Africa and the United States of America deteriorated, resulting in the expulsion of the then South African Ambassador, Mr Ebrahim Rasool. Chronologically, Mr Rasool had successfully served as South Africa's ambassador to the United States from July 2010 to February 2015. He was appointed for the second time as South Africa's Ambassador to the USA in November 2024, towards a time of leadership transition in that country that witnessed the assumption of power by the Republican Party under the leadership of President Donald Trump in his second term. On 14 March 2025, Mr Rasool delivered a speech at a webinar hosted by the Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection (MISTRA) in which he referred to President Trump in derogatory terms.¹ On 15 March 2025, US Secretary of State Rubio tweeted on X: "South Africa's Ambassador to the United States is no longer welcome in our great country. Ebrahim Rasool is a race-baiting politician who hates America and hates @POTUS. We have nothing to discuss with him and so he is considered PERSONA NON GRATA." Consequently, by October 2025, South Africa

¹ "Donald Trump is launching an assault on incumbency, those who are in power, by mobilising a supremacism against the incumbency at home [...]. So in terms of that supremacist assault on incumbency we see it in the domestic politics of the USA, the MAGA movement, as a response not simply to a supremacist instinct but to very clear data that shows great demographic shifts in the USA, in which the voting electorate is projected to become 48% white and that the possibility of a majority of minorities is looming on the horizon."

had not had a resident ambassador to the US; instead, a special envoy was appointed to temporarily liaise between the two countries. Given the public nature of the diplomatic fallout that played out on social media, and the gravity of the expulsion of SA's ambassador from the US a week after he had made the apparently disparaging comments about US politics and the President of the USA, public dialogue on social media about the matter was intensive. While image repair has been widely studied in public relations, political communication specifically by politicians and other disciplines, more research is needed within digital diplomatic contexts to explore the image repair strategies that South Africa employed following the expulsion of its ambassador in March 2025 and public perceptions about the expulsion expressed by users of platform X.

The study objectives were as follows:

1. To determine the image repair strategies that the SA government applied to restore diplomatic relations in March 2025.
2. To analyse the expelled ambassador's response following his expulsion from the USA.
3. To examine public perceptions through conversational valence on X about the expulsion of the SA ambassador from the USA in March 2025.

The nature of diplomatic crises

A crisis is a sudden, unpredictable, and non-routine event or set of events that causes considerable uncertainty and brings both potential advantages and challenges to an entity's most important goals (Ulmer, Sellnow, & Seeger, 2019, p. 7). Coombs (2015) stresses that a crisis occurs when the event challenges the expectations of stakeholders. A crisis is socially constructed through collective perception and interpretation, meaning that a situation becomes a crisis when it is perceived as such (Zhao, 2020). Furthermore, a diplomatic crisis is collectively constructed by the participation of a diverse array of actors in the social exchange, including the media, the public, politicians, diplomats and government officials.

Coombs (2007) outlines in the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) three categories of crises: the victim category, where responsibility is weakly attributed and the reputational threat is mild; the accidental category, where responsibility is minimally attributed and the

reputational threat is moderate; and the preventable category, where responsibility is strongly attributed and the reputational threat is severe. Depending on how the public attributes the responsibility to the actor, they perceive the crisis as accidental, unintentional or deliberate (Ferguson et al, 2018)

Liu et al. (2016) point out that many crisis situations are characterised by uncertainty, especially when information is missing or contradictory. In diplomatic crises, the cause or responsible party is typically clear; however, the short- and long-term consequences of the crisis often remain uncertain. This uncertainty calls for strategies such as image repair to mitigate the consequences.

The Value of Image Repair for Digital Diplomacy

In diplomatic contexts, image repair is particularly important because diplomats are representatives of their countries of origin and additionally personify their countries' values. When a diplomat faces expulsion from a country, as was the case for the then ambassador, Mr Rasool, the effects have multilevel consequences and operate at personal, national and international levels. The diplomatic fallout was sudden and played itself out in real-time diplomatic and public digital discourses. However, social media are not merely an ecosystem of connected media, facilitating human connectedness (van Dijck, 2015); they have evolved into spheres of influence with multiple implications for those who participate (Klok & McClellan, 2023).

Social media can be the source of crisis which may stem either from the platform itself—for instance, when a negative post goes viral or when a campaign is deliberately undermined by unfavourable public comments (Ulmer et al, 2019) or rumours (Nekmat & Kong, 2019). Studies indicate that people are more likely to share contentious and outrageous content on social media (Crockett, 2017). Social media and other digital technologies influence the norms, values, and routines of diplomats engaged in public diplomacy (Manor & Zhao, 2022). Platform X accounts are used by governments, political leaders, and diplomats to engage directly with audiences at home and abroad, serving as a central component of public diplomacy or “#DigitalDiplomacy”. There are numerous examples of digital diplomacy (Duncombe, 2019), with the method arguably most famously adopted by US President Donald Trump.

With decentralised influence accessible to broader audiences, given the virtual reach of social media, image repair when crises occur becomes even more important. This is because social media platforms present additional complications of online cultures and norms that enable a space in which it is socially acceptable to post hate, negative comments, and bottomless critique (Klok, 2024), and that contributes to the proliferation of online crises. In the context of digital diplomacy, public diplomacy can become difficult to navigate, and therefore, the selected types of image repair strategies that are deployed become even more important.

At the same time, research has shown that social media have become essential tools for organisations, people and countries in managing crises, primarily because of users' growing preference for these platforms. In many cases, social media serve as a tool to manage and mitigate negative publicity, thereby protecting an organisation's reputation. Developing comprehensive image repair strategies becomes crucial in digital diplomacy to navigate the evolving digital ecosystem and its related implications. Yet, researchers such as Clementson et al. (2024) argue that selecting the best image repair strategies is complex but necessary to manage crises. Moreover, Coombs (2023) warns that if a crisis is not well managed, it has the potential to turn into a double crisis, especially if a communicative crisis overlaps with the original crisis. In online settings, which could arise in contexts like digital diplomacy, the possibility of dealing with double crises can easily emerge.

Effective social media crisis communication relies on prioritising stakeholder support and fostering relationships both during and after a crisis arises. In particular, the post-crisis communication response, referred to as discourse of renewal, approaches crisis not as a risk, but rather as a potential opportunity (Ulmer et al, 2019).

Public Sentiment in Digital Spaces

The heavy scholarly attention paid to public sentiment in digital environments accentuates its multifaceted nature as more than an emotional and communicative occurrence. Online sentiments are not just individual reactions, but they are socially mediated expressions of feelings, perceptions and emotions that are framed and shaped by collective discourse, cultural context, and technological structures (Waisbord, 2018). Critics point out that social media platforms such as X are not neutral conduits for sentiment;

rather, they are dynamic arenas driving an intersection of emotions, ideology, and communication practices. Sentiments in digital spaces have a range of dimensions, including relational, temporal, and algorithmically mediated dimensions, alongside the social hierarchies and identity politics that influence both expression and reception (Couldry & Mejias, 2019). Digital sentiment is inherently performative, shaped by the expectations of an audience, social norms, and the affordances of the platform itself (Mohamed et al., 2020). It is within the broader environment of public sentiment in digital spaces that digital diplomacy translates into more than diplomats conducting one-sided communication with international publics. Users often engage in meaning-making through acts of framing, amplification, and reinterpretation, situating individual affect within broader political and cultural narratives.

Image Repair Theory

The Image Restoration Theory by Benoit (1995), later renamed the Image Repair Theory, argued that image is vital to individuals, corporations, government bodies and other organisations from a public relations perspective. Benoit (2024) clarifies 'Image' as the public persona of an individual, group, or organization that is, "constructed by each audience member based on their attitudes toward the target" (Benoit 2024, 2). This means that people who have a common interest, for instance, an audience, can develop overlapping attitudes toward an individual, group or organisation. Benoit's theory proposes five categories of image repair strategies based on two components of an attack, namely that the accused is held responsible for an action and that the act is considered to be offensive. The theory emphasises that audience perceptions are considered to be more important than reality. In other words, the emphasis lies on whether the public thinks the individual or organisation is responsible and whether the public believes the act to be offensive. The perceptions of any given audience about the organisation's responsibility when a crisis occurs and the perceived offensiveness of the crisis are crucial, even though the organisation was responsible in reality (Kurnal, 2021).

The value of image is irrefutable, as Benoit (1997) observed that image is central to credibility and legitimacy, and that when an actor's reputation is damaged, communicative strategies become necessary to restore it. The

theory suggests a continuum of five broad categories, namely denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action and mortification (see Figure 1). The categories range from the basic failure to admit responsibility for acts that damage individuals, organisations and, of relevance to this study, the state's image, to taking full responsibility and attempting to restore an image by asking for forgiveness.



Figure 1: Benoit's Image Restoration Theory (1997)

Various researchers have debated what the most effective strategy for image repair is. The theory has been widely applied to the political arena, among others, and as Kitagawa and Chu (2021) point out, political apologies in international contexts can enhance approval and legitimacy among foreign audiences. Ferguson et al.'s (2018) study revealed that corrective action, compensation, mortification, and bolstering were rated by communication practitioners as the most effective crisis response strategies. In contrast, denial was viewed as the least effective and least recommended approach, followed by silence, shifting blame, and provocation. Benoit (1997) cautions that taking full responsibility for the crisis through what Burke (1970) labelled as mortification in his rhetoric of motives, through confessing and asking for forgiveness, could potentially lead to lawsuits from the victims of the crisis. At the same time, Fuoli et al. (2017) found that denial outperformed apology in repairing organisational trust even though there was strong evidence of guilt. Yet Clementson et al. (2024) argue that in politics, public expectations are violated by voluntary self-disclosure of negative information, as would be the case in mortification. This is because the public expects wrongdoers to deny and offer excuses for their wrong

behaviour and asking for forgiveness positively violates expectations (Benoit, 2015). However, Klok (2024) is of the view that mortification is almost always a good idea because the audience expects an apology, but that the apology should be sincere. Fuoli et al. (2017) emphasise that openness and transparency play a crucial role in rebuilding trust, cautioning that responding defensively to accusations of misconduct can be detrimental.

Crisis communication research primarily examines the interconnection between crisis events, communication strategies, and public perceptions of crises. Clementson et al. (2024) suggest a multidisciplinary conceptualisation of crisis communication interventions that apply to political crises. They specify strategies in political crisis communication, such as denial, apology, stealing thunder, which is when wrongdoers break the news of their own crisis before it is discovered by others, and stonewalling, which is when uncooperative communication obstructs and delays information flow. Additionally, some politicians use silence, changing the subject by employing off-topic responses, and using sequential strategies such as sequentially apologising and then deflecting. However, Haugevik and Neumann (2021) argue that containment is the most common communication strategy used in diplomacy. Klok (2024) proposes an image repair selection model (MIRS) that scrutinises and questions the context of the crises before selecting a strategy. This is due to the complexities that social media brings to crisis communication, with the notion of cancel culture meant to hold wrongdoers accountable (Klok, 2024). Clementson et al.'s (2024) political crisis communication interventions are relevant to this study that examines social communication by the South African government and public perceptions as expressed on social media during the diplomatic row in March 2025.

Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative content analysis measuring online discourses on X, specifically public sentiments, SA Government discourses and the expelled former Ambassador's sentiments. Data was collected based on post popularity enabling a selection of the top 100 posts based on the number of likes, retweets, and replies. In terms of the exclusion criteria, news posts from mainstream media outlets such as BBC and CNN were excluded, because the intention of the study was to capture organic public opinion

rather than professionally curated content. To measure public sentiments, the key words and hashtags considered relevant to the SA Ambassador's expulsion were: #SouthAfricanAmbassador, #USandSouthAfrica, #AmbassadorExpulsion, #DiplomaticRelations, #SouthAfricaPolitics, and #USDiplomacy.

To analyse the content, the following analyses were conducted:

- Tone Analysis to determine positive (SA), negative (US), and neutral valences.
- Sentiment Analysis to assess public sentiments: supportive, critical, or ambivalent.
- Engagement Metrics: likes, retweets, and comments to gauge influential or widely shared opinions.

Findings

The first objective was to determine the image repair strategies that the SA government applied to mitigate diplomatic relations in March 2025. The government of South Africa attempted to contain the crisis by limiting its response to the crisis. These actions can be linked to Benoit's reducing offensiveness strategy. There were only a few official responses to the event: a statement by the president's office on 15th March, a statement on X on @presidencyZA on 17th March, and a media statement by the president's spokesperson on 20th March. In all of these statements the fact of the ambassador's recall was acknowledged but not elaborated on. The statements reflected a concern for the relationship between SA and the USA. In the words of the president's spokesperson: "The president is concerned about the current state of the relationship with the United States", and he acknowledged that the relationship was not at its best. "It is the focus of the president to work towards the improvement [sic]", while outlining the hopes for future improvement by presenting the situation as the "Opportunity to reset the trade relationships". Such an approach, where the crisis can be viewed favourably in a broader context, can be classified as "transcending" (Ferguson et al. 2018).

President Ramaphosa, in his media interview on 15 March, applied similar reducing offensiveness strategies. In particular, Ramaphosa tried to reduce the importance of the event by calling it "just a hiccup" [in the relationship between the two countries], reiterating, "We have a great

respect for the United States". Furthermore, the SA president applied a transcendence approach, i.e. situating the event as a minor issue within a broader context of intergovernmental relationships: "We seek good relationships with all countries in the world". It should be noted that at no point did the president or other official sources comment directly on the actions or statements of Ebrahim Rasool.

The second objective was to analyse the expelled ambassador's responses to and following his expulsion from the USA. The expelled ambassador, who returned to South Africa on 23 March 2025, was welcomed by a crowd of supporters at Cape Town International Airport. He adopted a tone of defiance and the strategy of denial of wrongdoing, as evidenced by his statements on arrival: "It was our choice" and "We come home with no regrets". He justified his actions by taking a high moral ground, "we will never stop speaking the truth". At the same time, he defended his actions by attacking the USA's stance on the issue of the treatment of white farmers in South Africa. Donald Trump has expressed a view apparently unsupported by the evidence, perpetuated among USA politicians and some publics, that white Afrikaner farmers face discrimination in South Africa, with some going as far as calling it a "white genocide". Rasool stated: "We hoped to turn away the lies of the white genocide in South Africa, but we did not succeed", presumably referring indirectly to the USA government's offer to give white South Africans refugee status in the USA.

The former ambassador also defended his statements on another topic where the policies of the South African and the US government diverge. "While the US government poured billions in military aid to support the Netanyahu regime's war in Gaza, South Africa openly opposed the Israeli actions". The SA government accused Israel of committing genocide against the Palestinian people in Gaza. In December 2023, the South African government brought before the International Court of Justice a case, *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip* against Israel. Referring to South Africa's support for Palestine, reiterated in his contentious statement at MISTRA, Rasool stated: "The Palestinians are lost in this world without someone they can depend on". In that way, indirectly, Rasool linked the content of his contentious speech to the official policy of the South African government.

The third objective was to examine public perceptions through conversational valence on X about the expulsion of the SA ambassador from the USA in March 2025.

In this section, we analysed the comments on X from journalists, politicians and the public. The public opinion on X was divided along several main themes.

Appeals to fairness and reciprocity

This cluster of posts was generally in support of the ambassador and critical of the USA. The main argument in support was based on the imbalance of power and lack of fairness in the way the United States treated South Africa and other African countries. The fact is that while the perceived truth-telling by the host nation is acceptable, the same does not extend to South African officials when commenting on US policies and actions.

A prominent South African politician posted on X: “The US can opine about our country, but we can’t on theirs. US Embassy staff can opine on our politics but we can’t opine on theirs”. A member of the public echoed that sentiment by highlighting that the perceived lies by the host nation are acceptable while the “truth-telling” ambassador faces expulsion: “So wait... The USA can spout lies about white prosecution in SA without fear of retribution, but our ambassador can’t comment on the way that DT is talking about SA?”

Support for South African foreign policy

A significant number of comments perceived the expulsion as a retaliation for South Africa’s foreign policy and the posts on X expressed unequivocal support for the country’s policy, while labelling the tendencies of the USA administration as “imperialistic”.

A member of the public commenting on Rasool’s return to SA said this on X: “It’s a fitting welcome for an ambassador who told a maniac imperialist what he is. There is no diplomacy with imperialism”

A South African journalist said the following on X: “South African ambassador to the US, Ebrahim Rasool has just been kicked out by Twitter edict thanks to the US secretary of State Marco Rubio, the same guy who twitted he won’t be coming to the G20 in SA later this year because we are doing very bad things like standing up for equality and sustainability”.

Another commentator said: “your declaration of ambassador Ebrahim Rasool as *persona non grata* is a racist, xenophobic, Islamophobic, transparent act of retaliation for South Africa ‘s opposition of Israeli genocide in Gaza”.

While it is impossible with certainty to ascribe the posts on X to any nationality and ethnicity, the indicators on the X profiles such as profile photographs, usernames, flags, using pronouns such as “we” “ours” etc., indicate that the ambassador was largely supported by South Africans of different ethnicities and Africans from other countries; as for the support of wider international publics, it is difficult to ascertain.

The negative assessment of the event and support for the USA

The support for the USA came from the USA, South Africa and international commentators, some of whom staunchly defended the US administration’s decision. One key argument behind the criticism was the host country’s right to choose who can be a foreign representative on their soil. X user Patriot Lady (presumably an American) stated: “Kick anyone and everyone who does not align with our country and values”. Another X User said: “Bye, bye Rasool, we’re a country of laws”.

Many of the users referred to the South African government policies as a justification for the ambassador’s dismissal, in particular those related to the perceived racial discrimination in South Africa against Whites: “Your government is guilty of and complicit in Human Rights Violations against the Afrikaner minority”. “Great Job Sec. Rubio [...]. I’ve watched the white people in South Africa treated like dogs. I’m so glad president Trump and you are taking their feet to the fire”.

Unprofessional behaviour

Another line of criticism relates to the perceived lack of professionalism and reckless behaviour of the ambassador, as exemplified by the following statements:

“Your personal attacks against President Trump is not only unprofessional as a {sic} ambassador but your support/opinions and views with the current ANC leadership and government is against our policies”, stated one user.

X user from Johannesburg said this: "Taking cheap shots at the President of your host country when SA ambassador and required to engage with US leadership SA's representative is so amateurish it borders on rank stupidity".

Another South African user commented: "Ambassador Ebrahim Rasool's recent behaviour is reckless and not becoming of a diplomat [...] Diplomats are meant to be calm, measured and always put their country's image above personal opinions and popularity".

The fallout

Some commentators on X expressed more reconciliatory or neutral tone. These posts reflected a concern about the long-term impact of the diplomatic crisis on South Africa-US relations, thus confirming the uncertainty that surrounds the outcome of the crisis, as pointed out by Klok & McClellan (2023) and Liu et al. (2016).

"S[outh] A[frica] should realise that their relationships with the US is beyond repair. They should now focus on they will try run the country without America involved and facing potential future sanctions from across the globe", stated a South African X user, while another said: "The United States of America and South Africa relationship is becoming sour now. And this is not looking good, especially for South Africa. Both just need to meet each other halfway, diplomatically to rebuild trust".

Discussion

Social media acts as a digital space for expressing and amplifying public opinion, in particular in crisis situations, which presents both opportunities and challenges for crisis communication.

It is worth noting that public opinion on X is characterised by emotional intensity, which, according to Crockett (2017), can be attributed to the nature of the medium itself. Anonymity, brevity of expression and physical distance from the events create a fragmented public sphere which culminates in heated political debates, particularly under circumstances where the moral norms and values are violated.

The analysis of public sentiment on X regarding the expelling of the South African ambassador to the United States on America in March 2025 clearly indicates that the assessment of the events in cases of an international diplomatic crisis is driven by the values of those involved, in other words that it is clear that the attribution of “guilt” and wrongdoing is not straightforward - which supports Zhao’s (2020) view that crises are socially constructed. Participants’ positioning of their personal emotions within larger political and cultural contexts shaped how they framed their responses and reinterpreted the events (Chen, 2025). This was clearly visible in the public sentiment, whereby the public staunchly supported the South African ambassador’s actions on moral grounds or criticised him on very similar principles. The defenders praised him for standing up for principles, justice and truth, in particular regarding his support for the people of Gaza and criticism of the insinuation of “white genocide” views widely expressed among American politicians. Conversely, those who criticised the ambassador interpreted Secretary of State Rubio’s actions as principled and defending American values.

Because a diplomatic crisis can have multiple consequences, it is important that the crisis is contained and an appropriate response to the crisis is implemented in order to restore the image of the entity. In this case, there are two dimensions of image restoration - one pertains to Ebrahim Rasool’s image as a politician, and the other is the image of the South African government that the former ambassador represented.

The former ambassador used a strategy akin to Benoit’s (2015) *denial of wrongdoing*. As pointed out by Benoit (2015), the public typically expects wrongdoers to deny or justify their misconduct, whereas requesting forgiveness positively defies those expectations. While Rasool did not deny the content of his contentious speech, he denied that the speech was offensive by presenting it as “truth”. Instead, he presented the USA side as wrongdoers of a dubious moral fabric who engaged in evil actions by supporting Israel and spreading untruths about South Africa, thus using the *attack the accuser* strategy.

On the other hand, the South African government, by not commenting directly on the ambassadors’ actions, used *stonewalling* tactics, described as uncooperative communication that obstructs or delays the flow of information (Smithson & Venette, 2013). However, Clementson et al., (2024) argue that stonewalling is an ineffective crisis message which hurts the credibility of the people it intends to protect. The SA government made four

“conciliatory” traditional and social media comments in the public sphere. These were too few in relation to a matter of diplomatic gravity. It is rare for a high-calibre event that diplomats are expelled from a country. It is assumed that by not answering questions or making controversial statements, the government attempted to contain the damage. The Image Repair theory posits that silence is not a viable option (Benoit & Drew, 1997) because staying silent may be perceived as admitting guilt (Benoit, 2024). The second strategy used by the South African government can be classified under the reducing offensiveness category. Specifically, attempts to minimise the impact of the event on the bilateral relationship were evident in the government response.

Conclusion

The study aimed to examine the image repair strategies employed by South Africa following the ambassador’s expulsion, as well as public perceptions of the event expressed by users on Platform X. The findings revealed that South Africa’s crisis communication response was limited. The government primarily adopted a containment strategy, seeking to minimise the significance of the incident while avoiding specific statements about the ambassador’s conduct. This study highlights the important role of social media in shaping and reflecting public opinion in the aftermath of a diplomatic crisis. The event in question, the expulsion of South Africa’s ambassador to the United States in March 2025, serves as an example of digital diplomacy, where diplomatic actions and discourse take place on social media platforms.

The analysis of public reactions on Platform X indicated a wide range of opinions: some users expressed support for the ambassador, while others criticised him and sided with the US government. This diversity of views suggests that, unlike many organisational crises, public evaluations of diplomatic crises tend to be ambivalent and polarised. Such divergence is often shaped by the audience’s values and beliefs, making the development of an effective strategic response to a diplomatic crisis particularly challenging.

Bibliography

- Behnke, Nathalie and Eckhard, Steffen, "A Systemic Perspective on Crisis Management and Resilience in Germany", in *Dms – Der Moderne Staat – Zeitschrift Für Public Policy, Recht Und Management*, 15, no. 1/2022, pp. 3-19.
- Benoit, William L. and Drew, Shirley, "Appropriateness and Effectiveness of Image Repair Strategies", in *Communication Reports*, 10, no. 2/1997, pp. 153-63.
- Benoit, William L., "Image Repair Discourse and Crisis Communication", in *Public Relations Review*, 23 no. 2/1997, pp. 177-186.
- Benoit, William L., *Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2024.
- Benoit, William L., *Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies: A Theory of Image Restoration Discourse*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995.
- Brashers, Dale E., "Communication and Uncertainty management", in *Journal of Communication*, 51, no. 3/2001, pp. 477-97.
- Burke, Kenneth, *Rhetoric of Religion*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970.
- Chen, Qiang; Hussain Pamirzad, Qurban; Saber Adina, Mohammad and Evans, Richard, "Social media diplomacy for social visibility and social approval: strategic communication of the Taliban de facto government on Twitter", in *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 2025, pp. 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2025.2548462>
- Clementson, David E.; Zhao, Wenqing and J. Beatty, Michael, "Atoning vs. evading when caught transgressing: Two multi-theory-based experiments investigating strategies for politicians responding to scandal", in *Human Communication Research*, 50, no. 4/2024, pp. 545-560.
- Coombs, Timothy W., "Protecting Organization Reputations during a Crisis: The Development and Application of Situational Crisis Communication Theory", in *Corporate Reputation Review*, 10 no. 3/2007, pp. 163–176.
- Coombs, Timothy W., *Ongoing Crisis Communication*, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2023.
- Couldry, Nick and Mejias, Ulises A., *The costs of connection: How data is colonizing human life and appropriating it for capitalism*, California: Stanford University Press, 2019.
- Crockett, Molly J., "Moral Outrage in the Digital Age", in *Nature Human Behaviour*, 1, no. 11/2017, pp. 769-71.

- Duncombe, Constance, "Digital Diplomacy: Emotion and Identity in the Public Realm", in *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 14, no. 1-2/2019, pp. 102-116.
- Elmie Nekmat and Dewei Kong, "Effects of Online Rumors on Attribution of Crisis Responsibility and Attitude Toward Organization During Crisis Uncertainty", in *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 31, no. 5-6/2019, pp. 133-151.
- Ferguson, Denise P.; Wallace, James D. and Chandler, Robert C., "Hierarchical consistency of strategies in image repair theory: PR practitioners' perceptions of effective and preferred crisis communication strategies", in *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 30, no. 5-6/2018, pp. 251-272.
- Fisher Liu, Brooke; Bartz, Logen and Duke, Noreen, "Communicating Crisis Uncertainty: A Review of the Knowledge Gaps", in *Public Relations Review*, 42, no. 3/2016, pp. 479-487.
- Fuchs, Christian, "The Digital Commons and the Digital Public Sphere: How to Advance Digital Democracy Today", in *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture*, 16, no. 1/2021. <https://doi.org/10.16997/wpcc.917>, 12 October 2025.
- Fuoli, Matteo; van der Weijer, Joost; Paradis, Carita, "Denial Outperforms Apology in Repairing Organizational Trust Despite Strong Evidence of Guilt", in *Public Relations Review*, 43, no. 4/2017, pp. 645-60.
- Haugevik, Kristin and Basberg Neumann, Cecilie, "Reputation Crisis Management and the State: Theorising Containment as Diplomatic Mode", in *European Journal of International Relations*, 27, no. 3/2021, pp. 708-729.
- Kim, Young, "Enhancing Employee Communication Behaviors for Sensemaking and Sensegiving in Crisis Situations", in *Journal of Communication Management*, 22, no. 4/2018, pp. 451-75.
- Kurnal, Joanna, "Image Restoration Theory: Analysis of Polish Deputy Prime Minister's Tweets in Response to Postponed Polish Presidential Election in 2020", in *International Journal of Communication and Media Science*, 8, no. 1/2021, pp. 15-27.
- Manor, Ilan and Alexandre Huang Zhao, "Digitalization of Public Diplomacy: Concepts, Trends, and Challenges", in *Communication and the Public*, 7, no. 4/2022, pp. 167-75.
- Mohamed, Shakir; Png, Marie-Therese and Isaac, William, "Decolonial AI: Decolonial Theory as Sociotechnical Foresight in Artificial Intelligence", in *Philosophy & Technology*, 33, no. 4/2020, pp. 659-684.

- Mygind Klok, Anna-Katrine and McClellan, John G., "Why Post That? Re-Thinking the Problem of Absent Presence within social media", in *Communication & Language at Work*, 9, no. 1/2023. <https://doi.org/10.7146/claw.v8i1.142409>.
- Mygind Klok, Anna-Katrine, "Selection of Image Repair Strategies in Online Crises", in *Communication & Language at Work*, 10, no. 2/2024, pp. 84-105.
- Ozanne, Lucie K.; Ballantine, Paul W. and Mitchell, Thomas, "Investigating the Methods and Effectiveness of Crisis Communication", in *Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing*, 32, no. 4/2020, pp. 379-405.
- Papacharissi, Zizi, "Affective Publics and Structures of Storytelling: Sentiment, Events and Mediality", in *Information, Communication & Society*, 19, no. 3-2-15, pp. 307-324.
- Rapadu, Rabelani, *International Public Sentiment on X: A Netnographic Case Study of Ambassador Ebrahim Rasool's Expulsion*, Honours Research Essay, Johannesburg: University of Johannesburg, 2025
- Smithson, Joy and Venette, Steven, "Stonewalling as an Image-Defense Strategy: A Critical Examination of BP's Response to the Deepwater Horizon Explosion", in *Communication Studies*, 64, no. 4/2013, pp. 395-410.
- Ulmer, Robert R.; Sellnow, Timothy L. and Seeger, Matthew W., *Effective crisis communication: Moving from crisis to opportunity*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2019.
- Van Dijck, José, "After Connectivity", in *Social Media + Society*, 1 no. 1/2019: 205630511557887. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305115578873>. 12 October 2025.
- Waisbord, Silvio, "Truth Is What Happens to News", in *Journalism*, 19, no. 13/2018, pp. 1866-1878.
- Wolbers, Jeroen and Boersma, Kees, "Key challenges in crisis management", in Robert P. Gephart, Jr., Chet C. Miller and Karin Svedberg Helgesson (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Risk, Crisis and Emergency Management*, New York and London: Routledge, 2019, pp. 17-34.

A Historical Overview of Turkey-EU Relations Considering Current Developments

Introduction

Türkiye officially applied for membership in the European Economic Community (EEC) on July 31, 1959. This initial diplomatic effort was shortly followed by a disruption in bilateral relations caused by the 1960 military coup in Türkiye. Subsequently, upon the return to civilian governance, the relationship was formally resumed and codified with the signing of the Ankara Agreement between Türkiye and the EEC on September 12, 1963. Its full name is the “Agreement Establishing an Association between the European Economic Community and Türkiye.” Ankara Agreement outlines a three-stage process for Türkiye’s accession. The first stage, known as the “preparatory stage,” progressed relatively smoothly, during which the EEC provided unilateral economic assistance to Türkiye. However, once again, Türkiye faced political turmoil with the military memorandum of March 12, 1971. The second stage, known as the “transitional stage,” began after the 1970s and lasted until the establishment of the Customs Union in 1995. During this period, relations did not progress as expected, largely because Türkiye experienced another military coup in 1980. Consequently, relations between Türkiye and the EEC remained frozen until 1983-1984. The “final stage” of relations was entered with the Customs Union, which was signed in 1995 and started to be implemented in 1996. Even at the start of the final stage, Türkiye faced additional political challenges, such as the military memorandum of February 28, 1997. Thus, when or whether the final stage

will conclude remains unpredictable, as Türkiye's full EU membership is still a subject of ongoing debate.

The impetus for Türkiye's EU accession process experienced significant acceleration during the initial years of the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) administration, a period extending up to 2007. This momentum built upon the foundation laid at the 1999 Helsinki European Council, where Türkiye was formally recognized as a candidate country, ultimately leading to the official launch of accession negotiations in 2005. However, the country subsequently encountered a period of political turmoil, specifically triggered by the e-memorandum of April 27, 2007. Beyond the mentioned challenges, the relationship is further complicated by outstanding bilateral disputes, notably the "Cyprus issue", which has severely impeded accession progress. Critically, these crises have resulted in the stagnation of chapter negotiations. (*acquis*), primarily due to the veto of new chapters by both Cyprus and France. In addition, certain EU member states, notably France under the Sarkozy term, initially advanced alternatives to full membership for Türkiye, primarily advocating for a "privileged partnership"¹. Subsequently, proposals for a "gradual integration" model for Türkiye emerged as an alternative to outright accession. As a result, Türkiye-EU relations subsequently lost some of the momentum observed between 1999 and 2005. Relations between Türkiye and the EU continued to develop until 2011. Subsequent to 2011, however, the relationship has entered a phase marked by sustained stagnation or, conversely, observable deterioration. Especially, internal crises afflicting Türkiye, such as the Gezi Park demonstrations (2013) and the attempted coup of July 15 (2016), have substantially exacerbated the deterioration of Türkiye-EU relations.

Against this backdrop, both Türkiye and the EU have demonstrably shifted their focus toward pragmatic, thematic cooperation -specifically on issues like migration, the modernization of the Customs Union and natural crisis- instead of prioritizing the long-term objective of full membership. The EU engaged in a formal "Statement" with Türkiye, particularly focusing on regulating the flow and mobility of Syrian migrants. Furthermore, the

¹ Katinka Barysch, "Turkey and the EU: Can Stalemate Be Avoided?," *Center for European Reform*, 2010, p. 2,

https://www.cer.eu/sites/default/files/publications/attachments/pdf/2011/pb_turkey_eu_barysch_dec10-182.pdf.

modernization of the Customs Union has been a foremost issue discussed between the parties; however, no progress has been achieved in this regard, primarily due to the Cyprus issue. Beyond the aforementioned political crises, the EU endeavored to extend maximal assistance to Türkiye within the scope of its operational capabilities during periods of severe seismic activity, as demonstrably evidenced by the catastrophic Kahramanmaraş earthquakes in 2023. It is acknowledged that the EU provided support to Türkiye and offered the utmost assistance possible during earthquake. Thus, it can be stated that in contrast to the political realm, relations between Türkiye and the EU demonstrably improve during natural crises, a phenomenon attributed to the EU's unconditional support and its committed efforts to assist Türkiye during periods of hardship. Nevertheless, the cooperation and assistance in this area do not seem to have affected the Accession negotiation process.

Notwithstanding the current focus on pragmatic, thematic cooperation, the sustained failure to achieve full membership since the initial 1959 application underscores a fundamental mismanagement of the process or persistent mutual uncertainty regarding the prospect. Despite recent divergences, this study maintains the intrinsic imperative of achieving the goal of full membership for both sides, as enshrined by the foundational tenets of the Ankara Agreement. Türkiye, given its sustained candidacy, is unequivocally positioned to realize transformative progress across the institutional and normative spectrum - specifically concerning democratization, human rights, and the rule of law - concurrently fostering robust economic evolution upon accession. Conversely, the EU stands to reinforce its efficacy by expanding its norm-based power through the mechanism of "Europeanisation", while strategically harnessing Türkiye's substantial demographic, commercial, security, and geopolitical capital. Within this framework, the study is designed to offer a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of these historical relations, with a particular emphasis on recent developments, integrating the respective perspectives of Türkiye and the EU on their bilateral engagement. The core research inquiry is twofold: to determine the current trajectory of the bilateral relationship and to analytically examine the most recent developments, specifically focusing on the Migration Deal, the modernization of the Customs Union, and cooperation during the Kahramanmaraş Earthquakes in 2023. To effectively address this central question and the stated research objectives, the methodology employs a focused examination of official documentation

disseminated by both the EU and Türkiye, supplemented by a review of pertinent academic literature, articles, journalistic reporting, and other relevant secondary sources.

Türkiye-EU Relations in Historical Perspective

Türkiye's foreign policy has historically maintained a pronounced Western orientation, specifically focusing on Europe. This enduring and profound historical trajectory can be traced back to the Ottoman Empire's "Tanzimat Edict" (1839), an imperial decree that initiated wide-ranging reforms. Crucially, however, the process of "Europeanization" attained its most significant and structured momentum with the establishment of the modern Republic of Türkiye in 1923. Since the establishment of the Republic, Türkiye has regarded reaching the "level of contemporary civilizations" (modernization) as a strategic goal - referring specifically to the standards of Western and European countries. Even though the ruling governments have changed over time, this goal has remained consistently present, and during some governments, it has been pursued with more active rhetoric and action. In this context, the aim of "Westernization" and "Europeanization" is frequently emphasized by policymakers in Türkiye. For these reasons, it should be stated that "Westernization", and "Europeanization" are political objectives for Türkiye.

Within this context, Türkiye has made efforts to become a member of Western and European international organizations. For instance, she became a founding member of the Council of Europe, joined NATO, and initiated its application process for EU membership. Türkiye's quest for EU membership is a long and complex trajectory marked by periodic advances and setbacks. Türkiye submitted its application for association with the EEC - the precursor to today's EU - on 31 July 1959². However, only a year after submitting its official application, the Republic of Türkiye underwent its first military coup, marking an early and significant setback in its pursuit of EU membership. The military government, which assumed control after the coup, postponed partnership negotiations with the EEC due to its focus on domestic political concerns. As understood, the first military coup disrupted

² Avrupa Birliği Başkanlığı, "Türkiye-AB İlişkilerinin Tarihçesi," 2024, https://www.ab.gov.tr/turkiye-ab-iliskilerinin-tarihcesi_111.html.

Türkiye's efforts to establish a partnership with the EEC. Likewise, several EEC member states - particularly France - advocated for freezing relations until democracy was restored in Türkiye, citing the military regime as justification. The execution of the ousted Prime Minister Adnan Menderes and his colleagues in 1961 led to a *de facto* suspension of relations³. In contrast, Germany advocated for the immediate start of negotiations to enhance relations. However, under the influence of France, a policy of delaying progress in the relationship was adopted. This stance became even more apparent when, although not formally, relations were effectively frozen in response to France's strong reaction to the death sentences issued after the Yassıada trials in Türkiye in 1961⁴.

After the military coup, the EEC proposed a preferential trade agreement. When Türkiye declined this proposal⁵, negotiations ensued, culminating in the "Agreement creating an association between the European Economic Community and Türkiye" (the Ankara Agreement) signed on 12 September 1963 between Türkiye and the EEC. The Ankara Agreement is (one) the most important official document between Türkiye and the EU because it established an association agreement, outlined how the relations would proceed, and emphasized full membership for Türkiye. Concerning Türkiye's accession to the EU, Article 28 of the Agreement states that

"As soon as the operation of this Agreement has advanced far enough to justify envisaging full acceptance by Türkiye of the obligations arising out of the Treaty establishing the Community, the Contracting Parties shall examine the possibility of the accession of Türkiye to the Community." ⁶

Drawing from this specific article, Türkiye contends that the fulfillment of its obligations will ultimately result in its accession to the EU. Conversely, the EU maintains the position that the parties may deliberate the

³ Cemal Kakışım and Seven Erdoğan, "Türkiye-Avrupa Birliği İlişkileri ve 15 Temmuz Darbe Girişiminin Ardından Yaşanan Gelişmeler", *Karadeniz Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 10, no. 18 (2018), p. 404.

⁴ Gökhan Erdem, "12 Eylül Darbesi'nin Türkiye'nin Avrupa İle İlişkilerine Etkileri: Avrupa Topluluğu ve Avrupa Konseyi'yle İlişkiler", *Ankara Avrupa Çalışmaları Dergisi*, 14, no. 1 (n.d.), p. 33, accessed September 30, 2025.

⁵ Doğa Mircioğlu, "Türkiye'nin Avrupa Birliği'ne Yönelik Başlatmış Olduğu Üyelik Reformları İle 15 Temmuz Başarısız Darbe Girişimi Arasındaki Korelasyon İlişkisi", *Uluslararası İlişkiler ve Diplomasi* 6, no. 1 (2023), p. 18.

⁶ Avrupa Birliği Başkanlığı, "Ankara Anlaşması," 2011, https://www.ab.gov.tr/_117.html.

prospect of membership only after Türkiye has demonstrably satisfied all the stipulated commitments.

The Ankara Agreement envisaged Türkiye's EU membership as a three-stage process; "preparatory, transitional, and final"⁷. The "preparatory stage" proceeded relatively smoothly, during which the EEC extended economic assistance to Türkiye. The "transitional stage" of the Türkiye-EEC Association was formally inaugurated by the Additional Protocol, signed on November 23, 1970, and effective from 1973. Concurrently, Türkiye's domestic political stability was challenged by the March 12, 1971, military memorandum, a non-coup intervention that forced the resignation of the existing government and facilitated the installation of a military-backed technocratic administration amidst an environment of intense political polarization⁸. The March 12, 1971, memorandum issued by the Chief of General Staff and the commanders of the armed forces against the civilian government, led to a problematic beginning of the transitional phase in Türkiye-European Community relations⁹. Nevertheless, because of the unique features of the March 12 period - including the continued operation of parliament and the government's ongoing accountability to it despite military supervision - official relations were not formally severed¹⁰.

However, this fragile continuity was shattered when in 1980, Türkiye experienced yet another military coup, which constituted a severe disruption in the country's political trajectory and marked a particularly troubling chapter in its modern history. The military government soon undertook undemocratic measures, including suspending political parties, arresting party leaders, and prosecuting civil society figures with death sentences. Consequently, in March 1982, the EEC suspended the Ankara Agreement provisions and froze relations with Türkiye. Concerns over human rights violations in Türkiye were voiced in the European Parliament, which called on the Community to take action. Facing pressure from the Parliament, eager to assert its influence within the EU framework, planned aid to Türkiye was conditioned on the restoration of democracy. This marked the first time human rights became a central agenda issue in Türkiye-EEC relations¹¹.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Nisan and Şeker, "Demokrasiyi Sekteye Uğratan Darbe Haberlerinin Çerçelenmesi", 71.

⁹ Kakişım and Erdoğan, "Türkiye-Avrupa Birliği İlişkileri ve 15 Temmuz Darbe Girişimin Ardından Yaşanan Gelişmeler", p. 404.

¹⁰ Erdem, "12 Eylül Darbesi'nin Türkiye'nin Avrupa İle İlişkilerine Etkileri", p. 37.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 404-5.

Nevertheless, relations between Türkiye and the EU did not come to a complete halt following the suspension. Through mutual compromises and sustained diplomatic engagement, the accession process continued, culminating in 1995 with the realization of the “final stage” envisioned in the 1963 Ankara Agreement - the establishment of the Customs Union. However, in 1997, citing threats to secularism, military commanders pressured the government to step down under the threat of repercussions, leading to the collapse of the coalition government and a Constitutional Court decision to ban the Welfare Party along with its leaders, including the late Necmettin Erbakan¹². The 1997 postmodern coup went beyond a simple military move against the Islamist-led government party; it represented a broader push by the secular establishment, with Turkish military officers at the forefront of what has been described as a collective revolt against the ruling RP-led coalition¹³.

Following these challenging events and periods, relations between Türkiye and the EU began to follow a more positive trajectory. In this context, the recognition of candidate status at the 1999 Helsinki Summit¹⁴, the pledge made at the 2002 Copenhagen Summit to begin negotiations upon the fulfillment of political criteria¹⁵, and the eventual launch of accession negotiations in 2005¹⁶, were key turning points in the process.

Consequently, the status of EU candidate country was officially conferred upon Türkiye at the 1999 Helsinki European Council, providing the core impetus for an intensified domestic reform agenda. This reform process accelerated substantially after the AK Party achieved electoral success in November 2002¹⁷, leading to a concerted effort to align Turkish

¹² Ibrahim Kalin, “After the Coup Attempt, Turkey’s Success Story Continues”, *Insight Turkey* 18, no. 3, 2016, p. 13.

¹³ Francesco F Milan, “Turkey: What Hides behind a Failed Coup Attempt”, *The RUSI Journal* 161, no. 4, July 3, 2016, p. 29, doi:10.1080/03071847.2016.1228291.

¹⁴ European Parliament, “Helsinki European Council 10-11.12.1999: Conclusions of the Presidency - European Council Helsinki 10-11.12.1999: Conclusions of the Presidency”, 1999, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/hel1_en.htm.

¹⁵ Council of the EU, “Copenhagen European Council 12 and 13 December 2002 Presidency Conclusions” (Council of the European Union, 2003), <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/20906/73842.pdf>.

¹⁶ Gergana Noutcheva and Senem Aydın-Düzgit, “Lost in Europeanisation: The Western Balkans and Turkey”, in *From Europeanisation to Diffusion*, Routledge, 2020, p. 68.

¹⁷ Çigdem Nas and Yonca Özer, *Turkey and EU Integration: Achievements and Obstacles*, Taylor & Francis, 2017.

legislation with the *acquis communautaire* and meet the political criteria for accession. During this period, the EU's conditionality principle provided a relatively reliable framework for Türkiye¹⁸, and Türkiye took significant steps toward internalizing EU norms based on "appropriateness". The period between 1999 and 2005 injected significant vitality into Türkiye-EU relations, impacting both the political and social spheres. This renewed engagement was driven by substantial reform implementation within Türkiye, particularly focusing on crucial areas such as the rule of law, the strengthening of democratic institutions, and the advancement of human and minority rights¹⁹. These reforms included the abolition of the death penalty, combating torture, expanding individual and cultural rights, fighting corruption, promoting transparency in public spending, and restructuring the judiciary, government, and civil-military relations²⁰. The constitutional and legislative changes implemented during this period significantly advanced the principle of civilian supremacy in Türkiye. A key step was the October 2001 constitutional amendment, which restructured the National Security Council (NSC) by both increasing civilian representation and explicitly reducing its function from a decision-influencing body to a purely advisory role. Further limiting military influence, the executive powers of the NSC's secretary-general were largely rescinded in July 2003, effectively transforming the position into a mere administrative post and opening it up for appointment by a civilian. Concurrently, military representation was systematically removed from key civilian oversight bodies, specifically the Supreme Board of Radio and Television (RTÜK) in 2003 and the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) in 2004, marking a concrete retraction of military presence from critical areas of governance and public life²¹.

In formal acknowledgement of the significant internal reforms undertaken by Türkiye, the Brussels European Council on December 17,

¹⁸ Noutcheva and Aydın-Düzgüt, "Lost in Europeanisation", p. 68.

¹⁹ İdris Turan, Ekrem Yaşar Akçay, and Selim Kanat, "An Overview to Turkey-EU Relations during the Justice and Development Party Period", *Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi Vizyoner Dergisi* 10, no. 25, October 28, 2019, p. 660.

²⁰ E. Fuat Keyman and Senem Aydın Düzgüt, "Europeanization, Democratization and Human Rights in Turkey", in Esra LaGro and Knud Erik Jørgensen (eds.), *Turkey and the European Union*, London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2007, 71, doi: 10.1057/9780230223035_5.

²¹ Ayşegül Kars Kaynar, "Post-2016 Military Restructuring in Turkey from the Perspective of Coup-Proofing", *Turkish Studies* 23, no. 3, May 27, 2022, p. 385, doi:10.1080/14683849.2021.1977631.

2004, officially declared that Türkiye had sufficiently fulfilled the Copenhagen political criteria. This landmark political decision paved the way for the subsequent and definitive step: the formal commencement of accession negotiations with the European Union on October 3, 2005²². However, during this period, sensitive issues such as the Cyprus problem, Kurdish and other minority rights, Northern Iraq, and the Armenian genocide led to increased nationalist reactions and anti-EU sentiments among the public²³. Crucially, despite Türkiye's signing of the Additional Protocol on July 30, 2005, extending the Ankara Agreement to include the countries that joined the EU in 2004, its declaration stating that it did not recognize the Southern Cyprus²⁴, marked a new breaking point in relations with the EU. Following the Brussels European Council on December 15, 2006, the accession process faced a significant impediment due to Türkiye's refusal to extend the Ankara Agreement provisions -specifically opening its ports and airports- to vessels and aircraft flagged by the Republic of Cyprus. Consequently, the Council decided to suspend the opening of eight negotiation chapters and block the provisional closure of any chapter until this obligation was met. Concurrently, external dynamics within the EU - including internal constitutional crises, a growing sentiment of enlargement fatigue, and a primary focus on integrating the newest member states- along with proposals advocating for a diminished relationship such as a "privileged partnership" instead of full membership, collectively contributed to the deceleration of the domestic reform process within Türkiye²⁵.

Turning once again to the dynamics between civilian and military spheres, the influence of military ideology could not be fully separated from civilian political structures instead of the implementation of the mentioned reforms. In early 2007, growing concerns over proposed constitutional amendments and the ruling party's increasing control of the executive led

²² Avrupa Birliği Başkanlığı, "16-17 Aralık 2004 Avrupa Birliği Konseyi Brüksel Zirvesi Sonuç Bildirgesi," 2011, https://www.ab.gov.tr/_300.html.

²³ Gülnur Aybet, "Turkey and the EU after the First Year of Negotiations: Reconciling Internal and External Policy Challenges", *Security Dialogue* 37, no. 4, December 2006, p. 536, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0967010606072947>.

²⁴ T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı, "Ek Protokol ve Deklarasyon Metni / T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı," accessed October 1, 2025, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/ek-protokol-ve-deklarasyon-metni.tr.mfa>.

²⁵ Yonca Özer, "Modernising the EU-Turkey Customs Union as an Interest-Driven Initiative," *Ankara Avrupa Çalışmaları Dergisi* 19, no. 1, 2020, p. 179.

Büyükanıt to publish a statement on the General Staff's website - famously known as the "e-memorandum." The statement reaffirmed the military's determination to "protect the unchangeable characteristics of the Republic of Türkiye" and warned that it would "openly and clearly express its stance and take action whenever necessary."²⁶ As seen, in April 2007, the military threatened to stage another coup in an attempt to force the AK Party leadership to withdraw their nomination of then-Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül for the presidency²⁷. The AK Party responded by winning a decisive general election victory and later securing 339 out of 448 votes in the presidential election²⁸. The AK Party - buoyed by a decisive electoral victory in 2007 - initially seemed poised to revive EU-oriented reforms: the election of Abdullah Gül to the presidency signaled the military's retreat from direct intervention, and legal proceedings against alleged coup plots were launched after 2008²⁹. The party's pre-election rhetoric likewise indicated a renewed commitment to European integration, yet this expectation soon dissipated. The subsequent period was characterized by what scholars' term "loose Europeanisation," a phase of selective and inconsistent engagement with EU reforms³⁰. Although the Union's normative influence on Türkiye was real, it generally remained superficial and uneven³¹. However, keeping in mind that legislative alignment continued in certain areas - such as minority rights and refugee policy - yet progress stalled or even regressed on politically sensitive issues, including the Cyprus question, constitutional reform, and recognition of the Armenian genocide³².

Capitalizing on its electoral success, the AK Party introduced a series of reforms aimed at further strengthening civilian politics. For instances, following the September 2010 referendum, the Constitution was amended to

²⁶ Jacoby, "A Historical Perspective on the July 2016 Coup Attempt in Turkey", p. 125.

²⁷ Kalin, "After the Coup Attempt, Turkey's Success Story continues", p. 13.

²⁸ Jacoby, "A Historical Perspective on the July 2016 Coup Attempt in Turkey", p. 125.

²⁹ Yaprak Gürsoy, "The Changing Role of the Military in Turkish Politics: Democratization through Coup Plots?," *Democratization* 19, no. 4, 2012, p. 748, doi:10.1080/13510347.2011.623352.

³⁰ Beken Saatçioğlu, "AKP's 'Europeanization' in Civilianization, Rule of Law and Fundamental Freedoms: The Primacy of Domestic Politics," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 16, no. 1, January 2, 2014, p. 87, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/19448953.2013.864185>.

³¹ Tanja A. Börzel and Digdem Soyaltin, "Europeanization in Turkey: Stretching a Concept to Its Limits?," 2012, p. 7, <https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/handle/document/37173>.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 1.

place military personnel under the jurisdiction of civilian courts during peacetime, whereas previously military courts held authority in both wartime and peacetime. The ultimate legal dismantling of military judicial power was achieved by the April 2017 constitutional referendum, which resulted in the complete abolition of the Military Court of Appeals, the Military High Administrative Court, and all other specialized military courts. Concurrently, efforts were made to reduce the military's ideological and institutional footprint within the education system. Specifically, the national security course, which had been previously taught by military personnel in high schools, was eliminated in 2012. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education ceased organizing the traditional May 19th Youth and Sports Day celebrations in large stadiums, thereby ending the customary military-led formations involving high school students. This systematic reduction of military influence was further solidified by the revision of Article 35 of the Turkish Armed Forces Internal Service Code in July 2013³³.

However, relations between Türkiye and the EU have entered a period of stagnation, and in certain respects, regression since 2010s. This trajectory has been shaped not only by external factors such as the Syrian and Ukrainian crises, but also by domestic political developments within both Türkiye and the EU. Within this term, migration issue provided an opportunity to revive cooperation in Türkiye-EU relations. In this context, the Readmission Agreement and the Memorandum of Understanding were signed on December 16, 2013, initiating the Visa Liberalization Dialogue aimed at lifting the Schengen visa requirement for Turkish citizens³⁴. However, the Gezi Park protests of the same year, and the subsequent corruption investigations sparked debates about democratic backsliding in Türkiye, which were viewed with concern in reports by the European Parliament and the European Commission. Türkiye's "resolution process," launched in 2013 to address the Kurdish issue, also ended in 2015, further deepening the stagnation in EU-Türkiye relations. Despite this negative outlook, both sides launched a "Positive Agenda" to revitalize the

³³ Kars Kaynar, "Post-2016 Military Restructuring in Turkey from the Perspective of Coup-Proofing", p. 385.

³⁴ T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı, "Türkiye ile AB Arasında Vize Serbestisi Diyaloğu Mutabakat Metni ve Geri Kabul Anlaşması İmzalandı / T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı," accessed October 1, 2025, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkiye-ile-ab-arasinda-vize-serbestisi-diyalogu-mutabakat-metni-ve-geri-kabul-anlasmasi-imzalandi.tr.mfa>.

relationship³⁵, bringing strategic issues such as the modernization of the Customs Union onto the agenda. However, no concrete progress was achieved in this direction.

To compound these difficulties, Türkiye's path to EU membership suffered another major blow with the 2016 coup attempt. On 15 July 2016 Türkiye faced an attempted *coup d'état*. However, having experienced coups, coup attempts, and memorandums in 1960, 1962, 1971, 1980, 1997, and 2007, Türkiye was able to thwart the July 15 coup attempt³⁶. This shift was not entirely spontaneous; it should be noted that the EU also played an indirect role in shaping the conditions that limited military influence. Since 1999 - and especially after the AK Party came to power - Türkiye underwent significant reforms under EU conditionality policies, which gradually curtailed the military's dominance over civilian governance. Despite the successful thwarting of the coup, the coup process had a negative impact on Türkiye-EU relations. In the months immediately succeeding the coup attempt, the EU consistently emphasized the critical necessity of adhering to democratic principles, human rights, and fundamental freedoms within Türkiye. Specifically, the EU stressed the imperative of fully complying with the standards set forth by the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), including the right to a fair trial. Furthermore, the EU highlighted the significance of Protocol No. 13 of the ECHR, which mandates the abolition of the death penalty, thereby implicitly signaling a serious concern regarding any potential move to reinstate capital punishment in the context of the state's response to the coup attempt³⁷. On 24 November 2016, the European Parliament called for a suspension of full membership talks with Türkiye, pointing to the country's drift away from essential EU principles³⁸.

³⁵ Avrupa Birliği Başkanlığı, "Pozitif Gündem Açılış Toplantısı Gerçekleştirildi", 2012, <https://www.ab.gov.tr/47678.html>.

³⁶ Ali Balcı and Yıldırım Turan, "Eleştirinin Sefaleti: Batı'dan 15 Temmuz Darbe Girişimini Okumak", *Bilig*, no. 83, 2017, p. 54.

³⁷ Council of the EU, "Council Conclusions on Turkey" (Press office - General Secretariat of the Council of the EU, 2016), <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/07/18/fac-turkey-conclusions/pdf>.

³⁸ Ekrem Yaşar Akçay and Halil Emre Deniş, "Turkey-European Union (EU) Relations after the July 15 Coup Attempt within the Framework of the Random Walk Model," *MANAS Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi* 11, no. 2, 2022, p. 864, <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/mjss/issue/69506/1016825>.

This position was reaffirmed in a subsequent resolution on 6 July 2017, which again called for the suspension of accession talks³⁹.

Overall, undeniably, every political crisis, particularly instances of military intervention, has inflicted a profoundly detrimental impact on Türkiye, damaging not only the economy but also critical domains such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Consequently, these developments severely impede Türkiye's accession trajectory to the EU. Within this context, it can be stated that the military must acknowledge that every coup attempt has dragged Türkiye decades backward, undermining democracy, stalling economic and social progress, and isolating the country from the modern world⁴⁰.

Recent Developments in Türkiye-EU Relations

The preceding chapter established that the relationship between Türkiye and the EU has entered a phase of stagnation and even regression since 2011, alongside the fundamental causes of this situation. Particularly following the July 15, 2016, Coup Attempt, the EU underscored concerns regarding Türkiye's adherence to democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, consequently demonstrating a notable reluctance toward progressing the relationship. Within this context, the present section evaluates Türkiye-EU relations, focusing on the negotiation agenda between the parties, namely: the migration issue in 2015, the modernization of the Customs Union, and the 2023 Kahramanmaraş Earthquake.

Beginning with the migration issue, it constitutes one of the principal crises affecting both Türkiye and the EU, particularly since the Arab Spring. This challenge was primarily triggered by the arrival of millions of migrants, especially Syrians, at the borders of both parties. Notably, Türkiye has hosted 3.9 million Syrians, while the arrival of over one million migrants at EU borders in 2015 established that year as the core of the EU migration crisis. Essentially, relations between Türkiye and the EU, having stalled and

³⁹ European Parliament, "European Parliament Resolution of 6 July 2017 on the 2016 Commission Report on Turkey (2016/2308(INI))" (European Parliament, 2016), https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2017-0306_EN.html.

⁴⁰ M. Zeki Duman, "15 Temmuz Askeri Darbe Girişiminin Türkiye-Avrupa Birliği İlişkilerine Etkisi," *Liberal Düşünce Dergisi* 23, no. 90, 2018, p. 76, <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/liberal/issue/43456/530205>.

regressed, experienced a revitalization, albeit a thematic one, with the crisis itself. Confronted by the substantial influx of migrants, the EU and its Member States significantly intensified their endeavors to formulate an effective, humane, and secure common European migration policy. Although the European Commission has been actively pursuing the establishment of shared policies in the domain of migration since the 1990s, this objective has been consistently hampered by the well-documented reluctance of Member States to cede their national sovereignty and discretionary authority concerning the admission of third-country nationals⁴¹. This internal division is evident especially as the EU tries to develop a common policy on migration issues with mandatory quotas; some member states, such as Hungary⁴² and Poland⁴³, have securitized the issue by highlighting their Christian identities and asserting that solutions should be developed nationally instead of through a common policy. Since the beginning of cooperation on external migration policy, the EU has developed a series of bilateral cooperation frameworks such as readmission agreements, the EU-Turkey statement⁴⁴. Considering this, it can be stated that regarding the issue of migration, the EU primarily aimed to retain migrants in third countries such as Türkiye and sought to resolve the matter through the provision of financial assistance. This approach culminated in the EU-Turkey Statement of 18 March 2016 and the associated Readmission Agreement, which stipulates the application of the ‘one-for-one’ formula. Moreover, the EU committed 3+3 billion Euros in aid to Türkiye and initiated measures to retain the migrants within Turkish territory. Türkiye also strived to achieve visa liberalization for entry into the EU, but this issue has reached a standstill because it has not been able to meet all the criteria sought by the EU. In short, while the migration issue introduced a degree of

⁴¹ Paula Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik, “The Quiet Politics of Migration Supranationalization – Commission Entrepreneurship and the Intra-Corporate Transferee Directive,” *Journal of European Integration* 46, no. 3, April 2, 2024, pp. 365–86, doi:10.1080/07036337.2023.2295374.

⁴² Viktor Orbán, “Orbán Viktor’s Speech at the Europe Forum Conference,” *Website of the Hungarian Government*, May 8, 2014, <https://2010-2014.kormany.hu/en/prime-minister-s-office/the-prime-ministers-speeches/orban-viktor-s-speech-at-the-europe-forum-conference>.

⁴³ Andrzej Duda, “President for ‘Financial Times’: Poland Is Still pro-European,” *The Official Website of the President of the Republic of Poland*, January 18, 2016, <https://www.president.pl/news/president-for-financial-times-poland-is-still-pro-european,36062>.

⁴⁴ Arne Niemann and Natascha Zaun, “Introduction: EU External Migration Policy and EU Migration Governance: Introduction,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 49, no. 12, July 21, 2023, pp. 2965–85, doi:10.1080/1369183X.2023.2193710.

dynamism to Türkiye-EU relations, these developments regrettably failed to extend to other policy domains or foster broader cooperative efforts.

Turning now to the second key agenda item, the 2023 Kahramanmaraş Earthquake stands as the largest and most impactful seismic event to have occurred in Türkiye. Following the disaster, Türkiye issued a Level 4 alert, and the EU promptly responded to this appeal for assistance. Commissioner Lenarčič visited Gaziantep, located in southeastern Türkiye, on February 9, 2023, to evaluate the devastating earthquake's impact and identify potential avenues for the EU to escalate its relief operations in the country⁴⁵. Furthermore, to express its solidarity with the people of Türkiye and Syria, the European Council offered its deepest condolences to the families who suffered losses in the tragic earthquakes of February 6, 2023⁴⁶. The European Council endorsed the conclusions of the March 2023 Donors' Conference, emphasizing the imperative for swift and effective aid delivery to the people of Türkiye and Syria⁴⁷. The activation of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) was instrumental in initiating a large-scale rescue and relief operation, marking one of the most substantial mobilizations in the history of the EU. Through the UCPM, Türkiye has been the recipient of comprehensive assistance, which encompasses financial aid, support for search and rescue efforts, and resources directed toward addressing housing requirements.⁴⁸ This multifaceted intervention by the EU in response to the Kahramanmaraş earthquakes of February 6 substantively reinforces its position as a central actor in the domain of disaster management, thereby emphasizing the necessity for continuous collaborative efforts between Türkiye and the EU. Nevertheless, despite this comprehensive cooperation, following the seismic event, the trajectory of Türkiye-EU relations

⁴⁵ European Commission, "Read-out of the Call between European Commission President Ursula von Der Leyen and President of Türkiye Recep Tayyip Erdogan - European Commission", 2023, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/read-out-call-between-european-commission-president-ursula-von-der-leyen-and-president-turkiye-recep-2023-02-12_en.

⁴⁶ European Council, "Special Meeting of the European Council (9 February 2023) – Conclusions", 2023, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-1-2023-INIT/en/pdf>.

⁴⁷ European Council, "European Council Meeting (23 March 2023) – Conclusions", <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-4-2023-INIT/En/Pdf>, 2023, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-4-2023-INIT/en/pdf>.

⁴⁸ İKV, "İKV E-Bülteni | 2023 » 1-15 ŞUBAT » TÜRKİYE-AB GÜNDEMİ: AB Sivil Koruma Mekanizması Kapsamında Türkiye'ye Deprem Yardımı", 2023, https://bulten.ikv.org.tr/icerik_print.asp?ust_id=13654&id=13655.

demonstrably reverted to its preceding agenda, resulting in a discernible absence of substantive progress in the bilateral relationship.

Concerning the third key agenda item, the modernization of the Customs Union is one of the issues most frequently raised by Türkiye. It is quite logical to seek the updating of the Customs Union, which was signed in 1995 and implemented starting in 1996. A key reason is that because of the Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) the EU concludes with third countries, if products from that third country are sold to the EU at a lower price than Türkiye's, Türkiye loses a significant market share. To address this, suggestions are frequently voiced, such as joint negotiations, parallel negotiations, or the requirement that the EU stipulate those countries must also sign an FTA with Türkiye⁴⁹. It is also necessary to emphasize that Türkiye initially viewed the Customs Union process very favorably, considering it the final stage of the relationship. However, since full membership was never realized, Türkiye eventually began to state that the Customs Union needed to be updated. Subsequent to the preliminary exploratory dialogue, consensus was achieved between Türkiye and the EU on May 12, 2015, to undertake the modernization of the Customs Union. This was followed by the European Commission's formal request, dated December 21, 2016, to the EU Council and the Parliament for the requisite mandate to initiate formal negotiations. Furthermore, the Commission disseminated its comprehensive impact assessment report, which served to delineate the core rationale underpinning the CU modernization alongside the projected effects associated with disparate policy alternatives. Despite these procedural steps, relations have not seen any significant development regarding the modernization. For example, Minister of Trade Ömer Bolat stated, "The modernization of the Customs Union has become essential for both sides, not only to strengthen our economic integration but also to ensure a fair, predictable, and forward-looking trade environment."⁵⁰

In conclusion, the sustained failure to achieve full membership decades after Türkiye's initial application in 1959 suggests either mismanagement or mutual uncertainty regarding the feasibility of the final goal. Due to this stagnation in bilateral relations, both Türkiye and the EU

⁴⁹ Nas and Özer, *Turkey and EU Integration*.

⁵⁰ Ömer Bolat, "T.C. Ticaret Bakanlığı", <https://ticaret.gov.tr>, 2025, <https://ticaret.gov.tr/haberler/ticaret-bakani-bolattan-gumruk-birliginin-guncellenmesinin-elzem-oldugu-vurgusu>.

have shifted their focus away from the ultimate goal of full membership and toward thematic and strategic issues. However, achieving the aim - for which Türkiye has strived for over 65 years - would secure a significantly better status for the country. This improvement encompasses not only development in areas like human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, but also the possession of a more dynamic and robust economy and the maintenance of the EU as a foreign policy priority. Furthermore, the incorporation of a state such as Türkiye into the EU would yield demographic enrichment for the bloc, in addition to capitalizing on Türkiye's significant geostrategic leverage and its contributions to collective security. Consequently, a demonstrable commitment and concerted effort toward the objective of full membership by both parties would prove strategically advantageous for both Türkiye and the EU. Therefore, the parties should first and foremost strive for a resolution to the Cyprus issue; only after removing alternative proposals to full membership from the agenda should the necessary means be sought for Türkiye to comply with the accession criteria.

Conclusion

Türkiye's orientation toward Europe in its foreign policy has been an ongoing process since the foundation of the Republic - and even earlier, dating back to the Ottoman Empire's "Tanzimat Edict". Since its establishment, the Republic of Türkiye has turned toward the West and has sought to become part of the West by applying for membership in organizations established by Western countries. In 1949, Türkiye became a founding member of the Council of Europe and successfully joined NATO in 1955. Since 1959, it has been striving to become a member of the EU. However, shortly after its EU application in 1959, Türkiye faced the first military coup in the history of the Republic in 1960. The coup attempt had a detrimental impact on Türkiye's EU accession process, marking the first significant deterioration in bilateral relations. Once military rule gave way to civilian politics again, relations resumed, and in 1963, the Ankara Agreement was signed between the two parties. Following the agreement, the EU provided unilateral assistance to Türkiye, and the period up until the 1970s is generally considered a time of improved relations. However, in 1971, Türkiye faced another intervention - this time in the form of a military

memorandum. In the 1970s, with the signing of the Additional Protocol, Türkiye-EU relations entered the transitional phase. In the years that followed, Türkiye continued to experience military dominance in politics, facing yet another coup in 1980. Following this coup, relations with the EU were again disrupted, and only began to recover gradually starting in 1983.

Notwithstanding these recurring interruptions, while relations between Türkiye and the EU advanced into the final phase with the 1995 Customs Union Agreement, Türkiye unfortunately failed to fully decouple from domestic military influence. The February 28 process in 1997 once again strained relations between the two sides. However, relations gradually began to improve, and at the 1999 Helsinki Summit, Türkiye succeeded in becoming an official candidate country for EU membership. In 2005, the full membership negotiation process was officially launched. During this time, Türkiye entered a significant reform process within the framework of EU conditionality criteria. One of the key reforms in this period was the attempt to limit the military's influence over civilian politics. Although the pace of reforms slowed down between 2005 and 2011, Türkiye continued to implement various reforms in different areas. However, after 2011, Türkiye-EU relations entered a period of stagnation or even regression at times. In these processes, Türkiye was unable to fully free itself from military tutelage. On July 15, 2016, members of the FETÖ, who had infiltrated the Turkish Armed Forces, attempted a military coup. However, the coup plotters were met with widespread public resistance. Following the coup attempt, Türkiye-EU relations once again entered a strained period. The state of emergency declared by Türkiye, as well as the arrests and mass dismissals that followed, became focal points of criticism from the EU. In the aftermath of the coup, the EU frequently expressed concerns about the state of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law in Türkiye.

As a result of this protracted stagnation, bilateral relations have led both Türkiye and the EU to largely abandon the objective of full membership, resulting in a strategic convergence on transactional thematic issues. This paradigm shift is demonstrated by formal agreements on Syrian migrant management - wherein Türkiye manages migrant flows in exchange for EU financial aid - and by ongoing discussions concerning the modernization of the Customs Union and visa liberalization. Concurrently, Türkiye continues to prioritize the modernization of the existing Customs Union, though no tangible progress has been achieved on this front. Notwithstanding the support extended by the EU to Türkiye during the

Kahramanmaraş earthquake, it is evident that this cooperation did not translate into a substantive enhancement of their overall relations.

Despite these thematic collaborations, the present condition of the relationship - characterized by the suspension of high-level dialogues, a pronounced erosion of mutual trust, and the prioritization of strategic interests over adherence to the *acquis* - underscores a mutual distancing from full membership. This outcome, decades after Türkiye's initial application in 1959, suggests either profound institutional mismanagement or shared ambivalence towards the original accession goal. However, looking back over the past 60 years, neither Türkiye has given up on the EU, nor has the EU completely turned away from Türkiye. Therefore, it is essential to ease this long, complex, and challenging path, and to keep sight of the light at the end of the tunnel for the sake of the ultimate goal.

Bibliography

- Akçay, Ekrem Yaşar and Halil Emre Deniz, "Turkey-European Union (EU) Relations after the July 15 Coup Attempt within the Framework of the Random Walk Model", *MANAS Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi* 11, no. 2 (2022): 861–69. <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/mjss/issue/69506/1016825>.
- Avrupa Birliği Başkanlığı, "16-17 Aralık 2004 Avrupa Birliği Konseyi Brüksel Zirvesi Sonuç Bildirgesi", 2011. https://www.ab.gov.tr/_300.html.
- — —, "Ankara Anlaşması", 2011. https://www.ab.gov.tr/_117.html.
- — —, "Pozitif Gündem Açılış Toplantısı Gerçekleştirildi", 2012. <https://www.ab.gov.tr/47678.html>.
- — —, "Türkiye-AB İlişkilerinin Tarihçesi", 2024. https://www.ab.gov.tr/turkiye-ab-iliskilerinin-tarihcesi_111.html.
- Aybet, Gülnur, "Turkey and the EU after the First Year of Negotiations: Reconciling Internal and External Policy Challenges", *Security Dialogue* 37, no. 4 (December 2006): 529–49. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0967010606072947>.
- Balcı, Ali and Yıldırım Turan, "Eleştirinin Sefaleti: Batı'dan 15 Temmuz Darbe Girişimini Okumak", *Bilig*, no. 83 (2017): 53–77.
- Barysch, Katinka, "Turkey and the EU: Can Stalemate Be Avoided?", *Center for European Reform*, 2010. https://www.cer.eu/sites/default/files/publications/attachments/pdf/2011/pb_turkey_eu_barysch_dec10-182.pdf.

- Bolat, Ömer, "T.C. Ticaret Bakanlığı", <https://ticaret.gov.tr>, 2025. <https://ticaret.gov.tr/haberler/ticaret-bakani-bolattan-gumruk-birliginin-guncellenmesinin-elzem-oldugu-vurgusu>.
- Börzel, Tanja A. and Digdem Soyaltin, "Europeanization in Turkey: Stretching a Concept to Its Limits?", 2012. <https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/handle/document/37173>.
- Council of the EU, "Copenhagen European Council 12 and 13 December 2002 Presidency Conclusions", Council of the European Union, 2003. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/20906/73842.pdf>.
- — —, "Council Conclusions on Turkey", Press office - General Secretariat of the Council of the EU, 2016. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/07/18/fac-turkey-conclusions/pdf>.
- — —, "Declaration by the High Representative on Behalf of the EU on the Latest Developments in Turkey", PRESS RELEASE 639/16, 2016.
- Duda, Andrzej, "President for 'Financial Times': Poland Is Still pro-European", *The Official Website of the President of the Republic of Poland*, January 18, 2016. <https://www.president.pl/news/president-for-financial-times-poland-is-still-pro-european,36062>.
- Duman, M. Zeki, "15 Temmuz Askeri Darbe Girişiminin Türkiye-Avrupa Birliği İlişkilerine Etkisi", *Liberal Düşünce Dergisi* 23, no. 90 (2018): 71–95. <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/liberal/issue/43456/530205>.
- Erdem, Gökhan, "12 Eylül Darbesi'nin Türkiye'nin Avrupa İle İlişkilerine Etkileri: Avrupa Topluluğu ve Avrupa Konseyi'yle İlişkiler", *Ankara Avrupa Çalışmaları Dergisi* 14, no. 1 (n.d.): 29–64. Accessed September 30, 2025.
- European Commission, "2770th Council Meeting
General Affairs and External Relations
GENERAL AFFAIRS
Brussels, 11 December 2006", Text. *European Commission - European Commission*, 2006. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/pres_06_352.
- — —, "Read-out of the Call between European Commission President Ursula von Der Leyen and President of Türkiye Recep Tayyip Erdogan - European Commission", 2023. https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/read-out-call-between-european-commission-president-ursula-von-der-leyen-and-president-turkiye-recep-2023-02-12_en.
- — —, "Statement by Tusk, Juncker, Mogherini and EU Member States Present at ASEM Summit on Situation in Turkey", *European Commission - European Commission*, 2016. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STATEMENT_16_2554

— — —, *Turkey 2016 Report*, 2016.

— — —, *Turkey 2018 Report*, 2018.

— — —, *Turkey 2019 Report*, 2019.

European Council, “EU Migration and Asylum Policy”, 2024.
<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-migration-policy/>.

— — —, “European Council Meeting (23 March 2023) – Conclusions”,
<https://Data.Consilium.Europa.Eu/Doc/Document/ST-4-2023-INIT/En/Pdf>, 2023.
<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-4-2023-INIT/en/pdf>.

— — —, “Special Meeting of the European Council (9 February 2023) – Conclusions”,
2023. <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-1-2023-INIT/en/pdf>.

European Parliament, “European Parliament Resolution of 6 July 2017 on the 2016
Commission Report on Turkey (2016/2308(INI))”, European Parliament, 2016.
https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2017-0306_EN.html.

— — —, “Helsinki European Council 10-11.12.1999: Conclusions of the Presidency -
European Council Helsinki 10-11.12.1999: Conclusions of the Presidency”,
1999. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/hel1_en.htm.

Gürsoy, Yaprak, “The Changing Role of the Military in Turkish Politics:
Democratization through Coup Plots?”, *Democratization* 19, no. 4 (2012): 735–
60. doi:10.1080/13510347.2011.623352.

Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik, Paula, “The Quiet Politics of Migration Supranationalization –
Commission Entrepreneurship and the Intra-Corporate Transferee
Directive”, *Journal of European Integration* 46, no. 3 (April 2, 2024): 365–86.
doi:10.1080/07036337.2023.2295374.

İKV, “İKV E-Bülteni | 2018 » 16-31 TEMMUZ » TÜRKİYE-AB GÜNDEMİ: OHAL’in
Sona Ermesinin Ardından Türkiye-AB İlişkilerinde Normalleşme
Senaryoları”, 2018. https://bulten.ikv.org.tr/icerik_print.asp?ust_id=9321&id=9322.

— — —, “İKV E-Bülteni | 2023 » 1-15 ŞUBAT » TÜRKİYE-AB GÜNDEMİ: AB Sivil
Koruma Mekanizması Kapsamında Türkiye’ye Deprem Yardımı”, 2023.
https://bulten.ikv.org.tr/icerik_print.asp?ust_id=13654&id=13655.

Jacoby, Tim, “A Historical Perspective on the July 2016 Coup Attempt in Turkey”,
Insight Turkey 18, no. 3 (2016): 119–38.

Kakışım, Cemal and Seven Erdoğan, “Türkiye-Avrupa Birliği İlişkileri ve 15
Temmuz Darbe Girişiminin Ardından Yaşanan Gelişmeler”, *Karadeniz Sosyal
Bilimler Dergisi* 10, no. 18 (2018): 399–420.

- Kalin, Ibrahim, "After the Coup Attempt, Turkey's Success Story continues", *Insight Turkey* 18, no. 3 (2016): 11.
- Kars Kaynar, Ayşegül, "Post-2016 Military Restructuring in Turkey from the Perspective of Coup-Proofing", *Turkish Studies* 23, no. 3 (May 27, 2022): 383–406. doi:10.1080/14683849.2021.1977631.
- Keyman, E. Fuat and Senem Aydın Düzgit, "Europeanization, Democratization and Human Rights in Turkey", In Esra LaGro and Knud Erik Jørgensen (eds.), *Turkey and the European Union*, pp. 69–89, London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2007, doi: 10.1057/9780230223035_5.
- Milan, Francesco F., "Turkey: What Hides Behind a Failed Coup Attempt", *The RUSI Journal* 161, no. 4 (July 3, 2016): 28–32. doi:10.1080/03071847.2016.1228291.
- Mircioğlu, Doğa, "Türkiye'nin Avrupa Birliği'ne Yönelik Başlatmış Olduğu Üyelik Reformları İle 15 Temmuz Başarısız Darbe Girişimi Arasındaki Korelasyon İlişkisi", *Uluslararası İlişkiler ve Diplomasi* 6, no. 1 (2023): 16–31.
- Nas, Çigdem, and Yonca Özer, *Turkey and EU Integration: Achievements and Obstacles*, Taylor & Francis, 2017.
- Niemann, Arne and Natascha Zaun, "Introduction: EU External Migration Policy and EU Migration Governance: Introduction", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 49, no. 12 (July 21, 2023): 2965–85, doi:10.1080/1369183X.2023.2193710.
- Nisan, Fatma and N. Tülay Şeker, "Demokrasiyi Sekteye Uğratan Darbe Haberlerinin Çerçevenlenmesi: 15 Temmuz 2016 Darbe Girişimi Örneği", *TRT Akademi* 2, no. 3 (2017): 68–96.
- Noutcheva, Gergana and Senem Aydın-Düzgit, "Lost in Europeanisation: The Western Balkans and Turkey", in *From Europeanisation to Diffusion*, 59–78. Routledge, 2020.
- Orbán, Viktor, "Orbán Viktor's Speech at the Europe Forum Conference", *Website of the Hungarian Government*, May 8, 2014. <https://2010-2014.kormany.hu/en/prime-minister-s-office/the-prime-ministers-speeches/orban-viktor-s-speech-at-the-europe-forum-conference>.
- Özer, Yonca, "Modernising the EU-Turkey Customs Union as an Interest-Driven Initiative", *Ankara Avrupa Çalışmaları Dergisi* 19, no. 1 (2020): 175–97.
- — —, "Modernising the EU-Turkey Customs Union as an Interest-Driven Initiative", *Ankara Avrupa Çalışmaları Dergisi* 19, no. 1 (2020): 175–97. <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/aacd/issue/56074/771067>.
- Saatçioğlu, Beken, "AKP's 'Europeanization' in Civilianization, Rule of Law and Fundamental Freedoms: The Primacy of Domestic Politics", *Journal of Balkan*

and Near Eastern Studies 16, no. 1 (January 2, 2014): 86–101.
<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/19448953.2013.864185>.

T.C. Dışışleri Bakanlıđı, “Ek Protokol ve Deklarasyon Metni / T.C. Dışışleri Bakanlıđı”, Accessed October 1, 2025. <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/ek-protokol-ve-deklarasyon-metni.tr.mfa>.

— — —, “Türkiye İle AB Arasında Vize Serbestisi Diyalogu Mutabakat Metni ve Geri Kabul Anlaşması İmzalandı / T.C. Dışışleri Bakanlıđı”, accessed October 1, 2025. <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkiye-ile-ab-arasinda-vize-serbestisi-diyalogu-mutabakat-metni-ve-geri-kabul-anlasmasi-imzalandi.tr.mfa>.

Turan, İdris; Ekrem Yaşar Akçay and Selim Kanat, “An Overview to Turkey-EU Relations during the Justice and Development Party Period”, *Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi Vizyoner Dergisi* 10, no. 25 (October 28, 2019): 658–66.

UN Peacekeeping and Conflict Resolution in Africa: A Mandate-Outcome Analysis

Introduction

The complexities of contemporary armed conflicts in Africa have necessitated the continuous engagement of the United Nations (UN) in peacekeeping operations across the continent. With evolving conflict dynamics marked by ethnic tensions, state fragility, transnational armed groups, and governance vacuums, the international community has increasingly turned to UN peacekeeping missions as a tool for conflict resolution and post-conflict stabilization. Despite decades of engagement and significant financial and human resource investment, the success of these operations has been uneven. This raises critical questions about the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping mandates in achieving their stated objectives, particularly in contexts where peace remains elusive or fragile. The nature, design, and implementation of peacekeeping mandates have become central to understanding these outcomes.

This research focuses on the intricate relationship between UN peacekeeping mandates and actual conflict resolution outcomes in Africa, with specific reference to three emblematic missions: the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), and the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID). These missions represent diverse geographic, political, and operational contexts, offering a comparative lens through which one may

examine the role of mandate formulation in shaping peacekeeping results.¹ Central to this inquiry is the extent to which mandates are clear, context-specific, and adequately resourced, and how these factors influence the legitimacy, adaptability, and impact of peacekeeping efforts on the ground.

As the UN continues to recalibrate its peace operations in response to emerging challenges, understanding the mandate-outcome nexus is more urgent than ever. Peacekeeping mandates are not merely bureaucratic documents; they reflect the strategic intentions of the international community and set the parameters for action, accountability, and coordination. When mandates are unrealistic, vague, or disconnected from local realities, they risk undermining the legitimacy and effectiveness of the entire mission. Conversely, well-articulated and context-sensitive mandates, aligned with local needs and supported by regional and international political will, can serve as powerful instruments for sustainable peace.²

This study seeks to unpack the structural and operational elements that make certain peacekeeping missions more successful than others. By critically analyzing how mandate design, local ownership, regional collaboration, and political engagement intersect to shape outcomes, the research aims to contribute to broader debates on peace operations reform. In doing so, it advocates for adaptive and contextually grounded approaches to peacekeeping that are better suited to Africa's complex and evolving conflict environments.

1. Mandate Design and Clarity

1.1. Scope and Specificity of Mandates

The scope and specificity of United Nations peacekeeping mandates play a decisive role in determining the effectiveness and impact of missions in conflict-affected regions. Mandates that are narrowly tailored to the specific political, social, and security realities of the host country tend to offer peacekeepers clearer guidance, measurable objectives, and realistic expectations. Conversely, vague, overly broad, or contradictory mandates

¹ Róisín Burke, "Due Diligence and UN Support for African Union Security Forces", *Journal of International Peacekeeping* 21, no. 1-2, 2017, pp. 1–61.

² Céline Giuliani, "Advancing Peace through Human Rights in UN Peace Operations", *Journal of International Peacekeeping* 24, no. 1-2, 2021, pp. 252–84.

often create confusion in operational execution, dilute accountability, and weaken mission credibility. In Africa, where the nature of conflicts is fluid and multilayered, the articulation of peacekeeping mandates requires particular precision to align with on-the-ground needs and local dynamics.³

The United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) provides an instructive example of how a mission's mandate, when adapted to changing conditions, can increase operational relevance. Originally deployed to support the implementation of the 2011 Comprehensive Peace Agreement and build state institutions, the mission was quickly forced to shift focus following the outbreak of civil war in 2013. In response, the Security Council adjusted the mandate to prioritize civilian protection, human rights monitoring, and the creation of Protection of Civilian (PoC) sites. This strategic refocusing, while reactive, demonstrated a level of specificity that enabled the mission to protect thousands of lives. However, the reactive nature of the adjustment also highlighted a core weakness: the original mandate did not anticipate the fragility of the peace agreement or the likelihood of renewed conflict. This shortcoming suggests that even context-specific mandates must be dynamic and flexible to accommodate rapidly shifting conflict patterns.

In contrast, the mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) has been widely criticized for its expansive scope and lack of coherent prioritization. Initially created as MONUC in 1999 and later transformed into MONUSCO, the mission was tasked with a wide array of objectives, including the protection of civilians, disarmament, demobilization, reintegration (DDR) processes, security sector reform (SSR), electoral assistance, and state authority extension across a vast and unstable territory. While ambitious in its aims, the sheer breadth of the mandate overwhelmed the mission's capacity and diluted its strategic focus. The mission's failure to prevent massacres such as those in Beni and eastern DRC between 2014 and 2021 despite its robust mandate underscores the operational paralysis that can result from mandate overreach. The local population's growing frustration and skepticism further eroded the mission's legitimacy and complicated its relationship with the Congolese government.⁴

³ Richard Caplan and Anke Hoeffler, "Why peace endures: an analysis of post-conflict stabilisation", *European Journal of International Security* 2, no. 2, 2017, pp. 133–52.

⁴ *Ibid.*

UNAMID in Darfur similarly reflects the limitations of vague and politically compromised mandates. Established as a joint African Union-United Nations hybrid operation, UNAMID's mandate was hampered by competing interests between the AU and UN, restricted access granted by the Sudanese government, and ambiguous language around civilian protection and political engagement. As a result, the mission struggled to respond effectively to widespread violence and displacement. The lack of clarity regarding its role in facilitating peace negotiations or confronting human rights violations limited its impact and undermined local confidence in the mission's purpose. Its eventual withdrawal, without having fully stabilized the region, signaled a failure not only in implementation but in conceptualizing a realistic and enforceable mandate.⁵

These cases reveal that mandate specificity is not merely a technical issue but a political and strategic imperative. A peacekeeping mandate that reflects a nuanced understanding of local dynamics, offers a clear prioritization of goals, and is supported by adequate resources and political backing stands a greater chance of achieving its objectives. For future missions, the challenge lies in crafting mandates that are both contextually grounded and operationally achievable, while retaining the flexibility to evolve in response to changing conditions on the ground.⁶

1.2. Realistic vs. Ambitious Objectives

The balance between realism and ambition in United Nations peacekeeping mandates is a critical factor influencing mission success. While the Security Council often crafts mandates with the aspiration of promoting comprehensive peace, governance reform, and national reconciliation, these objectives can exceed what is feasible given the available resources, political constraints, and security realities in the host country. When objectives are too ambitious, they not only risk failure but also undermine the credibility of the mission and the legitimacy of the broader UN peacekeeping enterprise. In contrast, realistic mandates—grounded in the actual capacities

⁵ Felix Haass and Nadine Ansorg, "Better peacekeepers, better protection? Troop quality of United Nations peace operations and violence against civilians", *Journal of Peace Research* 55, no. 6, 2018, pp. 742–58.

⁶ Giuliani, *op. cit.*, pp. 252–84.

of the mission and the political will of local and international actors—are more likely to yield sustainable and measurable outcomes.

MONUSCO in the Democratic Republic of the Congo exemplifies a mission burdened by an ambitious mandate that has often outstripped its capacity to deliver. At various points, MONUSCO has been tasked with protecting civilians, supporting national security sector reform, aiding electoral processes, facilitating the extension of state authority, and neutralizing armed groups. These responsibilities span military, political, and developmental spheres across one of Africa's largest and most unstable countries. The mission has frequently been criticized for failing to deliver security and stability in eastern DRC, where armed groups such as the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), the March 23 Movement (M23), and various Mai-Mai militias continue to operate with impunity. Despite a robust mandate and the deployment of the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB), the mission has been unable to contain the violence. This has led to widespread local disillusionment, protests against the UN presence, and accusations of inaction and inefficiency. The gap between the mission's expansive goals and its practical achievements underscores the dangers of overly ambitious peacekeeping objectives in volatile contexts.⁷

UNAMID in Darfur offers a similar lesson in the limitations of ambition. Created as a hybrid operation between the African Union and the United Nations, UNAMID was envisioned to simultaneously protect civilians, facilitate humanitarian aid, and support the implementation of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur. However, its ambitious objectives were consistently undermined by logistical challenges, political interference from the Sudanese government, and inadequate force protection. The Sudanese regime frequently restricted UNAMID's movement and access, which hindered its ability to protect civilians or investigate human rights violations. Although the mission was symbolically significant as the first joint AU-UN operation, it failed to fundamentally change the security situation or lay the groundwork for a durable peace. The gap between its ambitious goals and its constrained operational capacity resulted in criticism from both international observers and the Darfuri population, further eroding the mission's legitimacy.⁸

⁷ Haass, Ansorg, *op. cit.*, pp. 742–58.

⁸ Obinna Franklin Ifediora, "A Regional Responsibility to Protect? Towards 'Enhancing Regional Action' in Africa", *Global Responsibility to Protect* 8, no. 2-3, 2016, pp. 270–93.

By contrast, UNMISS demonstrates how a mission can recalibrate its objectives in line with operational realities. After South Sudan descended into civil war in 2013, the mission's original state-building mandate was rendered unworkable. The Security Council adjusted the mandate to prioritize the protection of civilians and the management of Protection of Civilian (PoC) sites, which eventually sheltered hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons. While not without its challenges, this strategic pivot allowed UNMISS to concentrate on a limited number of achievable objectives that responded directly to the immediate humanitarian and security crisis. The realignment of priorities increased the mission's operational relevance and demonstrated the value of flexibility and realism in mandate design.

These examples collectively illustrate that while ambitious mandates may reflect the international community's normative commitment to peace, justice, and development, they must be grounded in an honest assessment of what is practically achievable. Peacekeeping missions operate in complex political environments where success often depends not only on the clarity of objectives but also on local cooperation, regional dynamics, and the availability of resources. The effectiveness of a mission is therefore not solely determined by the breadth of its goals, but by the degree to which those goals can be translated into credible, focused, and context-sensitive action on the ground.⁹

2. Operational Effectiveness and Legitimacy

2.1. Resources and Capabilities

The availability of adequate resources and capabilities is a cornerstone for the success of United Nations peacekeeping missions. A well-crafted mandate cannot be effectively implemented if the mission lacks the logistical support, personnel, technology, and financial resources required to fulfill its objectives. In many African contexts, the gap between the scope of UN mandates and the actual resources allocated to missions has been a recurring

⁹ Thierry Kaiser and Carlijn Ruers, "The Application of International Humanitarian Law to Peacekeepers", *Journal of International Peacekeeping* 24, no. 1-2, 2021, pp. 190–222.

source of mission failure or underperformance.¹⁰ Peacekeeping forces often face vast and difficult terrains, security threats from non-state armed groups, and institutional fragility, all of which require robust and sustained resourcing to manage effectively.

MONUSCO in the Democratic Republic of the Congo vividly illustrates the consequences of an imbalance between expansive mandates and insufficient capabilities. Although the mission includes a Force Intervention Brigade (FIB), with a more offensive mandate than typical peacekeeping forces, it has struggled to dislodge or neutralize well-armed and mobile armed groups in eastern Congo. The challenging terrain, porous borders, and vast geographical scope of the DRC present logistical nightmares for a mission operating with limited mobility, air support, and intelligence-gathering tools. Moreover, coordination among contingents from different countries with varied training, languages, and military doctrines often impedes operational coherence. Even when MONUSCO deployed drones and other surveillance technologies, the lack of actionable intelligence and rapid response mechanisms severely undermined the mission's ability to act swiftly during crises, such as the repeated attacks on civilians in Beni and Ituri. This mismatch between the mission's mandate and its material and operational capacity has contributed to a growing perception among Congolese communities that the UN is ineffective or indifferent.¹¹

UNAMID in Darfur also struggled with significant resource and capacity constraints. Despite its ambitious goals of civilian protection and peace facilitation, the mission faced chronic shortages in military equipment, helicopters, and logistical infrastructure. Operating in a hostile environment marked by desert terrain, sporadic violence, and limited road networks, the mission was frequently unable to reach conflict-affected communities in time to prevent attacks or provide meaningful protection. Additionally, the Sudanese government's obstructionism, including delays in issuing visas and blocking equipment shipments, exacerbated the mission's logistical weaknesses.¹² UNAMID's inability to project power or maintain a visible presence in key areas undermined deterrence and left many civilians

¹⁰ John Karlsrud, "UN Peace Operations, Terrorism, and Violent Extremism", in *United Nations Peace Operations in a Changing Global Order*, Springer International Publishing, 2018.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

exposed to violence and displacement. The symbolic presence of peacekeepers without the practical means to intervene created a dangerous illusion of safety that sometimes put vulnerable communities at even greater risk.¹³

In contrast, UNMISS in South Sudan showed how more targeted use of resources, even under constraints, can yield some degree of effectiveness. After the 2013 conflict erupted, the mission rapidly repurposed its existing facilities to accommodate tens of thousands of displaced civilians in Protection of Civilian (PoC) sites.¹⁴ Though not initially designed for such purposes, UNMISS adapted its logistical infrastructure, deployed more troops to vulnerable areas, and improved coordination with humanitarian actors. While far from perfect, these actions demonstrated how creative and flexible use of limited resources can help mitigate harm in complex emergencies. However, the strain placed on the mission also revealed the limits of adaptation without long-term logistical and financial reinforcement.

Overall, peacekeeping missions in Africa continue to face a recurring dilemma: the aspiration to perform multidimensional roles is rarely matched by the practical means required. Troop-contributing countries sometimes deploy poorly equipped or undertrained personnel, while financial pressures on the UN budget frequently lead to austerity measures that compromise mission effectiveness. The result is often a form of strategic paralysis, where missions are unable to implement even the most basic elements of their mandates. To avoid this, future peacekeeping operations must ensure that resources and capabilities are not an afterthought but an integral part of mandate formulation, based on a realistic appraisal of operational needs and conflict-specific challenges. Without such alignment, even the most well-intentioned peacekeeping efforts are destined to fall short.¹⁵

¹³ Jérémie Labbé and Arthur Boutellis, "Peace operations by proxy: implications for humanitarian action of UN peacekeeping partnerships with non-UN security forces", *International Review of the Red Cross*, 95, no. 891-892, 2013, pp. 539–59.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

2.2. Perceived Legitimacy and Local Support

The perceived legitimacy of United Nations peacekeeping missions and the degree of local support they enjoy are critical to their success or failure. In conflict-affected societies, the UN's presence is often interpreted through the lens of historical grievances, national sovereignty, and local expectations. When peacekeeping missions are seen as impartial, responsive, and respectful of local cultures and needs, they are more likely to receive the cooperation of communities, civil society actors, and national authorities. Conversely, when missions are viewed as externally imposed, ineffective, or politically biased, they risk alienating the very populations they are meant to protect, thereby undermining their ability to implement mandates effectively.¹⁶

MONUSCO in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is a striking example of how a perceived lack of legitimacy can erode a mission's effectiveness. Although initially welcomed, particularly after years of civil war and regional intervention, public support for the mission declined sharply as security conditions deteriorated and the mission appeared increasingly incapable of stopping mass atrocities and displacement. In areas like Beni and Goma, large segments of the population accused MONUSCO of inaction during attacks by the ADF and other armed groups.¹⁷ Frustration boiled over into violent protests in 2019 and again in 2022, with demonstrators attacking UN compounds, demanding the withdrawal of peacekeepers. These events illustrated how local disillusionment, rooted in unmet expectations and perceptions of impotence, can escalate into open hostility. The Congolese government's calls for MONUSCO's early exit further reflected the erosion of political trust between the host state and the mission.¹⁸

UNAMID in Darfur experienced a similar crisis of legitimacy. Although the hybrid AU-UN mission was established with the aim of providing an African-led solution to the region's humanitarian and security crisis, it struggled to win the trust of Darfuri communities. One of the key problems was its perceived inability to protect civilians from Janjaweed

¹⁶ Karin Landgren, "Unmeasured Positive Legacies of UN Peace Operations", *International Peacekeeping*, 27, no. 1, 2020, pp. 65–69.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Michel Liégeois and Murat Caliskan, "Peace Operations from the Perspective of Strategy and Doctrine", *Journal of International Peacekeeping*, 23, no. 1-2, 2019, pp. 24–49.

militias and government-aligned forces. Despite its mandate to deter violence and document human rights abuses, UNAMID was often unable or unwilling to confront the Sudanese government directly. This created the impression that the mission was complicit in the status quo or indifferent to local suffering. For many displaced persons living in camps or isolated villages, the peacekeepers' limited patrols and inconsistent presence translated into a lack of tangible protection. As the credibility gap widened, local communities increasingly turned to tribal and armed group leaders for security, further fragmenting the social landscape and weakening the mission's relevance.¹⁹

In contrast, UNMISS in South Sudan has enjoyed a comparatively higher degree of legitimacy among affected populations, particularly in the wake of the 2013 civil war. The establishment of Protection of Civilian (PoC) sites within UN bases offered immediate sanctuary to tens of thousands of civilians fleeing ethnic violence. Although these sites became overcrowded and occasionally faced security breaches, they were widely seen as lifelines for vulnerable populations. The perception that the UN was directly protecting people from government or opposition attacks helped reinforce the mission's legitimacy, even amid political resistance from the South Sudanese authorities. Community engagement efforts, such as involving local leaders in peacebuilding initiatives and maintaining dialogue with civil society actors, further strengthened UNMISS's relationship with the public.²⁰

These contrasting experiences demonstrate that legitimacy is not automatically conferred by the presence of a blue helmet or the authority of a Security Council resolution. It must be earned and sustained through consistent, transparent, and accountable engagement with local actors. Legitimacy is both a strategic asset and a fragile resource. Without it, peacekeeping missions may find themselves isolated, undermined, or rejected by the very communities they aim to assist. Therefore, the pursuit of local support and the preservation of impartiality must be central to peacekeeping doctrine, not only to enhance operational effectiveness but also to foster durable peace and reconciliation.²¹

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ A. Nikitin, "United Nations Peace Operations: Reconsidering the Principles, Reforming the Practice", *World Economy and International Relations*, 60, no. 3, 2016, pp. 16–26.

3. Political Will and International Coordination

3.1. UN and Regional Political Engagement

The effectiveness of United Nations peacekeeping operations in Africa is deeply influenced by the level of political engagement from both the UN system and regional actors such as the African Union (AU) and regional economic communities (RECs). Political engagement extends beyond initial mandate authorization; it includes sustained diplomatic efforts, mediation support, high-level dialogue, and backing for peace processes.²² When political engagement is strong, coherent, and coordinated, peacekeeping missions are more likely to be integrated into broader strategies for conflict resolution and post-conflict recovery. However, in cases where political support is fragmented, inconsistent, or undermined by competing agendas, missions often struggle to navigate the political complexities of the host environment and are left isolated in addressing deeply entrenched conflicts.²³

UNAMID in Darfur provides a case study of both the potential and pitfalls of regional and international political engagement. The mission was established as a hybrid operation jointly managed by the United Nations and the African Union, representing an innovative model of international-regional cooperation. While this partnership was politically significant, symbolizing African ownership and international legitimacy, it was fraught with institutional challenges.²⁴ The lack of clarity in decision-making authority between the AU and UN created operational ambiguities that affected the mission's performance. More critically, the Sudanese government, under President Omar al-Bashir, used diplomatic pressure and bureaucratic obstruction to limit UNAMID's reach and influence. Despite the Security Council's support, the UN's political leverage over Khartoum was constrained by geopolitical interests and competing priorities, which weakened the mission's ability to confront human rights abuses or enforce its protection mandate. The AU, in turn, often hesitated to publicly challenge

²² Francis Onditi; Gilad Ben-Nun; Edmond M. Were and Israel Nyaburi Nyadera, "Partnership in Peace Support Operations", in *Reimagining Security Communities*. Springer International Publishing, 2021.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

one of its member states, thereby diluting the political force of the mission's presence.²⁵

In the case of MONUSCO, international and regional political engagement has also yielded mixed results. While the mission operates under a robust Security Council mandate, including the use of force through the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB), the political dynamics between the Congolese government, regional neighbours, and the UN have complicated the implementation of its objectives. Regional actors such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC), under whose aegis the FIB operates, have supported stabilization efforts, but differences in threat perception and strategy have occasionally hindered coherent action.²⁶ The DRC government has also shown ambivalence toward MONUSCO's presence—at times relying on the mission's security support, while at other times calling for its withdrawal amid accusations of ineffectiveness. These tensions reflect a broader problem: when the UN lacks a unified and assertive political strategy that includes consistent engagement with both national and regional actors, peacekeeping missions become vulnerable to political manipulation or marginalization.²⁷

In contrast, the case of UNMISS in South Sudan highlights how sustained political engagement from both the UN and regional actors can enhance a mission's relevance. Following the outbreak of civil war in 2013, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) took a leading role in mediating the peace process, supported by the UN and international partners. The Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS), signed in 2018, was a product of this regional-international collaboration. UNMISS played a complementary role by providing technical support to the peace process, monitoring human rights violations, and facilitating dialogue among conflicting parties. While challenges remain, including delays in the implementation of the peace agreement and political fragmentation, the coordinated engagement of IGAD, the African Union, and the UN has helped maintain a fragile peace and prevent a relapse into full-scale conflict. The example of South Sudan illustrates that when political engagement is proactive, strategic, and

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Olihe Adaeze Ononogbu and Chikodiri Nwangwu, "Counter-Insurgency Operations of the African Union and Mitigation of Humanitarian Crisis in Somalia", *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 9, no. 2, 2018, pp. 117–29.

multilateral, peacekeeping missions are better positioned to support peacebuilding and reconciliation processes.²⁸

These cases underscore that peacekeeping is not merely a technical or military endeavour, but a profoundly political one. Missions must be embedded within broader political strategies that engage host governments, regional actors, and international stakeholders in a coherent and sustained manner. The credibility and impact of peacekeeping efforts are greatly enhanced when the UN, AU, and regional bodies present a united front, speak with one voice, and commit to shared principles of peace, justice, and accountability.²⁹ Without such engagement, peacekeeping missions risk becoming disconnected from the political realities on the ground, rendering even the most well-resourced operations ineffective or irrelevant.

3.2. Interagency and Multilateral Collaboration

Interagency and multilateral collaboration is vital to the success of United Nations peacekeeping operations, particularly in Africa, where complex conflicts often intersect with humanitarian crises, governance failures, and regional instability.³⁰ Peacekeeping missions rarely operate in isolation; they are embedded within a broader ecosystem of international, regional, and local actors. Effective collaboration among UN agencies, regional organizations like the African Union and regional economic communities, donor states, humanitarian agencies, and civil society actors ensures that peacekeeping is part of an integrated strategy for stabilization, recovery, and long-term peacebuilding. However, where coordination is weak or marred by institutional rivalries, overlapping mandates, or divergent political interests, peacekeeping missions become fragmented, duplicative, and inefficient.³¹

The case of MONUSCO in the Democratic Republic of the Congo illustrates the challenges and opportunities of multilateral coordination. MONUSCO has worked alongside a range of actors, including UNDP, UNHCR, UNICEF, and OCHA, in efforts to stabilize conflict-affected

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Vassilis Pergantis, "UN–AU Partnerships in International Peace and Security and Issues of Responsibility Allocation in Cases of un Support to Regional Missions", *International Organizations Law Review*, 13, no. 1, 2016, pp. 74–99.

³¹ *Ibid.*

regions, reintegrate former combatants, and support state capacity-building. However, the scale and complexity of the mission have often led to coordination breakdowns, especially between the military and civilian components. While the mission has a Joint Mission Analysis Centre and Integrated Strategic Frameworks designed to promote coherence, these mechanisms have not always translated into unified action on the ground. In particular, coordination with the Congolese government and regional actors has frequently faltered due to differing priorities and mutual distrust. For instance, while MONUSCO has pushed for comprehensive disarmament and the protection of civilians, the Congolese state has prioritized military offensives that sometimes disregard civilian impacts, creating a disconnect between the mission and its host. Moreover, attempts to coordinate with international donors and NGOs have been hindered by bureaucratic inefficiencies and competition over resources and visibility.

UNAMID in Darfur encountered even deeper interagency challenges due to its hybrid nature. As a joint mission of the United Nations and the African Union, UNAMID was intended to reflect both global legitimacy and African ownership. However, the division of labour between the UN and AU often lacked clarity, resulting in operational confusion, delayed responses, and institutional friction. Coordination with humanitarian agencies was also complicated by Sudanese government restrictions, which limited access to certain regions and impeded information-sharing among actors.³² The result was a fragmented operational environment where peacekeepers, aid workers, and political actors operated in parallel rather than in synergy. Despite efforts to establish joint planning and shared situational awareness, the failure to achieve seamless collaboration undermined the mission's ability to respond to escalating violence or provide coherent support to the peace process. UNAMID's experience demonstrates that hybrid models, while innovative, require rigorous mechanisms for decision-making, resource-sharing, and political alignment to avoid paralysis.³³

UNMISS, on the other hand, has made more effective use of interagency collaboration, particularly in the humanitarian sphere. The mission worked closely with UNHCR, WFP, and OCHA in managing Protection of Civilian (PoC) sites and providing services to displaced

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

populations. Coordination platforms such as the Humanitarian Country Team and the Cluster System enabled agencies to share data, coordinate logistics, and respond to emergencies more efficiently.³⁴ Additionally, UNMISS has partnered with regional organizations such as IGAD to support the implementation of the peace agreement. The mission's Civil Affairs Division has actively engaged with local governance structures, civil society organizations, and traditional authorities to promote community reconciliation and conflict prevention. While challenges remain, including tensions between military and civilian components and occasional disputes over mandate interpretation, the relatively high degree of interagency cooperation has enhanced UNMISS's ability to operate in a complex and rapidly changing environment.

The varied experiences of these missions highlight a central lesson: peacekeeping effectiveness is strengthened when interagency and multilateral collaboration is institutionalized, adequately resourced, and driven by shared strategic objectives. Successful collaboration requires more than coordination meetings or joint statements—it demands mutual accountability, information-sharing, harmonized planning, and a commitment to overcoming institutional silos. In the absence of such cooperation, missions risk duplicating efforts, wasting resources, and undermining their own credibility. As conflicts in Africa become more transnational and multidimensional, peacekeeping operations must embrace integrated approaches that leverage the strengths of a diverse array of actors, both international and regional, to create sustainable pathways to peace.³⁵

4. Local Ownership and Contextual Sensitivity

4.1. Community Participation and Ownership

Community participation and local ownership are fundamental to the long-term success of United Nations peacekeeping missions. When local populations are involved in the design, implementation, and evaluation of peace processes, the outcomes are more likely to be inclusive, sustainable, and reflective of the actual needs of those most affected by conflict.

³⁴ Francesco Presutti, "Financial Contributions by the EU to UN Peace Operations", *International Organizations Law Review*, 15, no. 1, 2018, pp. 77–129.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

Conversely, when peacekeeping is perceived as a top-down intervention imposed by foreign actors, it often fails to resonate with local realities, resulting in mistrust, disengagement, and even resistance.³⁶ The legitimacy and effectiveness of peace operations thus depend heavily on the degree to which local communities feel a sense of agency and partnership in the peacebuilding endeavor.

UNMISS in South Sudan offers a notable example of how community participation can enhance mission effectiveness, particularly in the wake of violent conflict. Following the outbreak of civil war in 2013, UNMISS quickly adapted its strategy to focus on the protection of civilians and the establishment of Protection of Civilian (PoC) sites within UN compounds. These sites, which provided sanctuary for hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons, became not only centers of physical safety but also platforms for community engagement.³⁷ UNMISS supported local peace committees, engaged with traditional leaders, and facilitated grassroots dialogues between rival ethnic groups. Through its Civil Affairs Division, the mission helped organize community-based reconciliation processes, especially in regions like Jonglei and Unity States, where intercommunal violence was rampant. While challenges remained, particularly with overcrowding and dependency in PoC sites, the effort to include local voices in peace efforts helped build trust between the mission and affected communities. This, in turn, strengthened the mission's credibility and enabled it to play a constructive role in local-level peacebuilding.

In contrast, MONUSCO in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has struggled to establish meaningful local ownership, particularly in its efforts to address the ongoing violence in eastern regions. While the mission has engaged in outreach activities and supported civil society actors, its interactions with local communities have often been criticized as limited, superficial, or inconsistent. Many Congolese citizens perceive the mission as distant, overly bureaucratic, and ineffective in responding to their security concerns. This perception has been exacerbated by the failure to prevent massacres and attacks by armed groups despite the presence of UN forces nearby. In cities like Beni and Goma, widespread protests against MONUSCO have underscored the depth of local frustration and the absence

³⁶ Hannah M. Smidt, "United Nations Peacekeeping Locally: Enabling Conflict Resolution, Reducing Communal Violence", *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 64, no. 2-3, 2019, pp. 344–72.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

of a genuine sense of ownership over the peace process. Although MONUSCO has the mandate and resources to support stabilization and recovery, its limited integration of community perspectives into planning and implementation has hindered its ability to build local legitimacy and resilience.³⁸

UNAMID in Darfur also faced significant challenges in fostering community participation, in part due to the operational constraints imposed by the Sudanese government and the volatile security environment. While the mission sought to promote dialogue between displaced persons, armed groups, and local authorities, it often lacked the access and flexibility required to build trust with communities. Furthermore, the mission's dual accountability to the African Union and the United Nations created bureaucratic hurdles that limited its responsiveness to local needs.³⁹ In many cases, Darfuri communities felt excluded from peace negotiations and development projects, leading to a sense of marginalization and skepticism toward international actors. This disconnect undermined the mission's ability to support durable peace and hindered efforts to facilitate voluntary returns, reintegration, and reconciliation at the community level.

The comparative experiences of these missions demonstrate that local ownership is not a peripheral concern but a central pillar of effective peacekeeping. Genuine community participation requires more than consultation or token representation; it involves creating sustained mechanisms for dialogue, feedback, and shared decision-making.⁴⁰ Peacekeeping missions must invest in building relationships with traditional leaders, women's groups, youth networks, and local civil society organizations. They must also respect and integrate local knowledge systems, cultural norms, and conflict resolution practices. When communities are empowered to shape their own peace, they are more likely to defend and sustain it in the long term. Therefore, prioritizing community participation is not only a matter of principle—it is a strategic necessity for transforming externally driven interventions into locally rooted solutions.⁴¹

³⁸ Denis M. Tull, "When They Overstay Their Welcome: UN Peacekeepers in Africa", *Journal of International Peacekeeping*, 17, no. 3-4, 2013, pp. 179–200.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Rashed Uz Zaman, and Niloy Ranjan Biswas, "'Not business as usual': changing realities and the transformations in peace operations", *Studia Politologiczne*, 2020, no. 56, 2020, pp. 299–317.

4.2. Cultural and Conflict Sensitivity

Cultural and conflict sensitivity are indispensable components of effective United Nations peacekeeping operations, particularly in Africa's diverse and often fragmented conflict environments. Peacekeepers operate in societies shaped by complex histories, ethnic identities, and localized grievances. Failure to understand and adapt to these cultural and conflict-specific dynamics can result in miscommunication, unintended offense, or even the exacerbation of tensions. Cultural sensitivity requires that peacekeeping personnel not only be aware of local customs and traditions but also engage with communities in ways that are respectful, informed, and inclusive. Conflict sensitivity, meanwhile, demands a nuanced understanding of how peacekeeping actions may influence local power dynamics, intercommunal relations, and the broader peace process.⁴²

The United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) has made notable strides in incorporating cultural and conflict sensitivity into its operations, particularly following the outbreak of civil war in 2013. The mission recognized early on that South Sudan's conflict was rooted in deeply entrenched ethnic divisions, primarily between the Dinka and Nuer communities, as well as long-standing grievances over land, power, and political exclusion. In response, UNMISS expanded its Civil Affairs Division to include staff with expertise in local languages and cultural practices. It facilitated interethnic dialogues, traditional reconciliation ceremonies, and localized peace agreements in areas like Jonglei and Upper Nile. These efforts were crucial in fostering communication across divided communities and ensuring that peace initiatives resonated with local populations. By adapting its approach to the unique sociocultural dynamics of each region, UNMISS was better able to prevent the re-escalation of violence and rebuild trust between previously hostile groups.⁴³

In contrast, MONUSCO in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has at times failed to fully incorporate cultural and conflict sensitivity into its operations, particularly in its dealings with communities in eastern DRC. The mission's presence in provinces like North Kivu, Ituri, and South Kivu — home to a multitude of ethnic groups, each with its own grievances and

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

historical narratives—requires a highly context-specific approach. However, peacekeepers have occasionally deployed standardized or technocratic strategies that did not reflect the localized nature of the conflicts.⁴⁴ For example, in certain areas, military patrols or disarmament campaigns were perceived as biased or threatening by local communities, especially when implemented without sufficient dialogue or community engagement. The lack of culturally appropriate communication strategies and the underrepresentation of Congolese cultural advisors in mission planning limited the mission's ability to anticipate and defuse tensions. This insensitivity sometimes deepened mistrust between the mission and local populations, undermining MONUSCO's legitimacy and effectiveness.

UNAMID in Darfur further illustrates how a lack of cultural and conflict sensitivity can limit a mission's impact. The Darfur conflict is rooted in a history of marginalization, ethnic discrimination, and competition over land and resources. Many of the conflict's dynamics are tied to tribal affiliations, customary land tenure systems, and long-standing grievances between nomadic and sedentary communities. Despite these complexities, UNAMID often struggled to engage effectively with local actors in a culturally competent manner. Language barriers, limited local representation in decision-making, and an overreliance on external frameworks of peacebuilding weakened the mission's ability to navigate the local context. In several instances, peacebuilding programmes failed to resonate with local traditions of dispute resolution or excluded key traditional authorities, thereby limiting their impact and acceptance.⁴⁵

The contrasting experiences of these missions underscore the critical need for culturally and conflict-sensitive peacekeeping. Missions must invest in local expertise, ensure the inclusion of cultural advisors in planning and implementation, and tailor their strategies to the specific social fabric of the areas in which they operate. Conflict sensitivity requires continuous analysis of how interventions may unintentionally reinforce power imbalances or fuel grievances.⁴⁶ Cultural sensitivity, on the other hand, involves deep respect for local norms, languages, and values. Together, these approaches enhance the credibility, effectiveness, and sustainability of peacekeeping

⁴⁴ Paul D. Williams and Alex J. Bellamy, "UN Security Council and peace operations", in *International Organization and Global Governance*, Routledge, 2018.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

efforts. They allow peacekeepers to build meaningful relationships, anticipate challenges, and respond to crises in ways that empower rather than alienate local populations. In an increasingly complex peacekeeping landscape, cultural and conflict sensitivity must be seen not as optional extras but as essential tools for achieving durable peace.

Conclusion

The analysis of United Nations peacekeeping operations in Africa through the lens of mandate design and conflict resolution outcomes reveals a critical need for recalibration in how missions are conceptualized, structured, and implemented. The experiences of UNMISS in South Sudan, MONUSCO in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and UNAMID in Darfur highlight the multifaceted challenges facing peacekeeping missions operating in complex conflict environments. These cases demonstrate that the success or failure of peacekeeping is not solely determined by the presence of troops or the endorsement of the Security Council but by the strategic coherence between mandates, resources, local contexts, and political engagement.

A key lesson emerging from this research is that mandates must be clear, context-specific, and realistic in scope. Overly ambitious mandates, though well-intentioned, often falter under the weight of limited capacities and shifting political dynamics. Conversely, mandates that are aligned with achievable goals and supported by adequate resources are more likely to deliver tangible results. The importance of dynamic and flexible mandate design, capable of evolving in response to new threats and opportunities, cannot be overstated. Missions like UNMISS, which adapted its priorities to emerging crises, illustrate the value of strategic recalibration and operational pragmatism.

Moreover, the effectiveness of peacekeeping mandates is deeply intertwined with the level of local ownership, cultural sensitivity, and sustained political support. Missions that foster inclusive community participation and respect local norms are better positioned to gain trust and legitimacy among conflict-affected populations. Where missions have failed to do so, as seen in MONUSCO and UNAMID, peacekeepers often become marginalized or viewed with suspicion, thereby undermining their mandate implementation. Similarly, interagency and multilateral coordination,

particularly with regional bodies like the African Union and IGAD, is essential to achieving a unified and credible approach to peace and security.

In conclusion, for UN peacekeeping to remain a relevant and effective tool in African conflict resolution, a fundamental shift is required—from static, externally imposed models toward adaptive, locally rooted, and politically engaged strategies. The future of peacekeeping lies in mandates that are not only technically sound but also politically viable, culturally informed, and community-driven. As Africa continues to face evolving threats to peace, including violent extremism, state fragility, and climate-induced conflicts, the UN must embrace a more integrated and responsive approach. Only then can peacekeeping operations serve as true instruments of transformation, rather than mere instruments of containment.

Bibliography

- Burke, Róisín, “Due Diligence and UN Support for African Union Security Forces”, *Journal of International Peacekeeping*, 21, no. 1-2 (2017): 1–61. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/18754112-02101001>.
- Caplan, Richard and Anke Hoeffler, “Why peace endures: an analysis of post-conflict stabilisation”, *European Journal of International Security*, 2, no. 2 (2017): 133–52. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/eis.2017.2>.
- Collinge, Daniel, “The Missing Link”, *Journal of International Peacekeeping*, 23, no. 1-2 (2019): 82–104. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/18754112-20200002>.
- Giuliani, Céline, “Advancing Peace through Human Rights in UN Peace Operations”, *Journal of International Peacekeeping*, 24, no. 1-2 (2021): 252–84. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/18754112-20210006>.
- Haass, Felix and Nadine Ansorg, “Better peacekeepers, better protection? Troop quality of United Nations peace operations and violence against civilians”, *Journal of Peace Research*, 55, no. 6 (2018): 742–58. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0022343318785419>.
- Hamilton, Kate, “The Role of Peacekeeping Operations in International Criminal Justice”, *Journal of International Peacekeeping*, 20, no. 3-4 (2016): 342–62. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/18754112-02003012>.
- Ifediora, Obinna Franklin, “A Regional Responsibility to Protect? Towards ‘Enhancing Regional Action’ in Africa”, *Global Responsibility to Protect*, 8, no. 2-3 (2016): 270–93. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1875984x-00803010>.

- Kaiser, Thierry and Carlijn Ruers, "The Application of International Humanitarian Law to Peacekeepers", *Journal of International Peacekeeping*, 24, no. 1-2 (2021): 190–222. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/18754112-20210004>.
- Karlsrud, John, "UN Peace Operations, Terrorism, and Violent Extremism", in *United Nations Peace Operations in a Changing Global Order*, Springer International Publishing, 2018. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-99106-1_8.
- Labbé, Jérémie and Arthur Boutellis, "Peace operations by proxy: implications for humanitarian action of UN peacekeeping partnerships with non-UN security forces", *International Review of the Red Cross*, 95, no. 891-892 (2013): 539–59. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/s1816383114000101>.
- Landgren, Karin, "Unmeasured Positive Legacies of UN Peace Operations", *International Peacekeeping*, 27, no. 1 (2020): 65–69. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2019.1710375>.
- Liégeois, Michel, and Murat Caliskan. "Peace Operations from the Perspective of Strategy and Doctrine." *Journal of International Peacekeeping* 23, no. 1-2 (2019): 24–49. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/18754112-20200003>.
- Nikitin, A., "United Nations Peace Operations: Reconsidering the Principles, Reforming the Practice", *World Economy and International Relations*, 60, no. 3 (2016): 16–26. <http://dx.doi.org/10.20542/0131-2227-2016-60-3-16-26>.
- Onditi, Francis; Gilad Ben-Nun; Edmond M. Were and Israel Nyaburi Nyadera, "Partnership in Peace Support Operations", in *Reimagining Security Communities*, Springer International Publishing, 2021. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-70869-6_8.
- Ononogbu, Olihe Adaeze and Chikodiri Nwangwu, "Counter-Insurgency Operations of the African Union and Mitigation of Humanitarian Crisis in Somalia", *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 9, no. 2 (2018): 117–29. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2478/mjss-2018-0032>.
- Pergantis, Vassilis, "UN–AU Partnerships in International Peace and Security and Issues of Responsibility Allocation in Cases of un Support to Regional Missions", *International Organizations Law Review*, 13, no. 1 (2016): 74–99. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/15723747-01301005>.
- Presutti, Francesco, "Financial Contributions by the EU to UN Peace Operations", *International Organizations Law Review*, 15, no. 1 (2018): 77–129. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/15723747-01501004>.
- Ryngaert, Cedric, "Apportioning Responsibility between the UN and Member States in UN Peace-Support Operations: An Inquiry into the Application of the

- 'Effective Control' Standard after Behrami", *Israel Law Review*, 45, no. 1 (2012): 151–78. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/s0021223711000070>.
- Smidt, Hannah M., "United Nations Peacekeeping Locally: Enabling Conflict Resolution, Reducing Communal Violence", *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 64, no. 2-3 (2019): 344–72. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0022002719859631>.
- Tull, Denis M., "When They Overstay Their Welcome: UN Peacekeepers in Africa", *Journal of International Peacekeeping*, 17, no. 3-4 (2013): 179–200. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/18754112-1704002>.
- Uz Zaman, Rashed and Niloy Ranjan Biswas, "'Not business as usual': changing realities and the transformations in peace operations", *Studia Politologiczne*, 2020, no. 56 (2020): 299–317. <http://dx.doi.org/10.33896/spolit.2020.56.18>.
- Williams, Paul D. and Alex J. Bellamy, "UN Security Council and peace operations", in *International Organization and Global Governance*, Routledge, 2018. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9781315301914-38>.

Norwegian Royal Discourse on Defending Democratic Values in Times of Crisis

1. Introduction

In times of turmoil, as these we have experienced the past five years, with the COVID-19-pandemic, the Russian aggression in Ukraine, the conflict in Israel and Gaza, and the shifting international relations worldwide, it is natural to attempt to find meaning and to try to understand the impact these crises have on society, but also to understand how well-established democracies deal with these crises. As all the Nordic countries promote democratic values, and considering that the Nordic region has historically been considered as stable and democratic, this analysis will focus on Norway, a country in which engagement in peace and reconciliation efforts has become part of its identity¹. Norway has openly assumed its role as a peace-promoting nation², and, as Skånland mentioned, the idea of ‘the Norwegian model’ enables Norway to contribute to peace-making processes in a unique and effective way, with positive consequences for Norway, while “the peace engagement is also linked to the core of Norwegian national

¹ Øystein Haga Skånland, “Norway is a peace nation. A discourse analytic reading of the Norwegian peace engagement”, in *Cooperation and Conflict*, 45(1), 34-35, SAGE publications, 2010, pp. 34-35.

² ***, “Norges engasjement i fredsprosesser siden 1993”, Regjeringen, 2019, https://www.regjeringen.no/no/tema/utenrikssaker/fred-og-forsoning/innsiktsmappe/etter_1993/id732943/, retrieved 30.09.2025.

identity”.³ Yet, in addition to the political discourse of the government, the monarch also contributes to this image of a peace-building nation, which has determined us to concentrate on how the New Year’s speeches of King Harald V have tackled the issue of defending democracy in times of conflict and crisis.

Although the New Year’s speeches addressed by monarchs are supposed to be apolitical and adopt a neutral tone, embracing the whole nation, they function as recapitulations of the events that took place throughout the year which preoccupied the nation, they offer perspectives on the nation’s perception of the themes discussed, and can be considered as “rhetorical seismographs that dominate national debates”.⁴ New Year’s speeches have a ceremonial character because they are delivered at a specific time, namely at the end of the year, in December. Hence, they are different from a common political message. It is a tradition for the Scandinavian monarchs to deliver such New Year’s speeches. The first such speech broadcast via radio in Norway was held by Crown Prince Olav in 1934, and, although the monarch is not as visible in Norway as in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, he still serves as a symbol of the nation⁵.

The analysis of the royal rhetoric of monarchs in Scandinavia has already been addressed by several scholars, including Hovland (2000), Kjeldsen (2019), as well as Demiri and Fangen (2018). Hovland (2000) has focused on the Scandinavian Christmas and New Year’s speeches as national rituals, Kjeldsen (2019) has explored immigration debate in New Year’s speeches delivered by the three monarchs in Scandinavia over a time span of 45 years, while Demiri and Fangen (2018) have taken up for analysis the issue of national identity in the Norwegian King’s annual addresses between 1960 and 2014. Hovland (2000) has stressed the fact that the monarch has gained a new sphere of influence, namely to articulate and define the nation, while the role of the modern constitutional monarchy is to unite what is

³ Øystein Haga Skånland, “Norsk utenrikspolitikk i fredens tegn: en diskursanalyse”, *Internasjonal Politikk*, 67 (3), pp. 321-348, Universitetsforlaget, 2009, p. 341.

⁴ Jens E. Kjeldsen, “Royal Interventions in the Public Discourse on Immigration: Rhetorical Topoi on Immigration in the New Year’s Speeches of the Scandinavian Monarchs”, *Javnost - The Public*, 26 (2), 2019, p. 1 (225).

⁵ Sandra Feride Demiri and Katrine Fangen, “The State of the Nation. The Norwegian King’s Annual Addresses – A Window on a Shifting Nationhood”, *National Identities*, 2018, pp. 444, 446.

divided.⁶ The novelty of our study resides in choosing the topic of democratic values in the 2022 – 2024 time span characterized by turmoil, as an outcome of the COVID-19-pandemic, the Russian aggression in Ukraine and the conflict in Israel and Gaza. In a Romanian context, the speeches of the Norwegian monarch have not been analysed before from a linguistic point of view.

King Harald V of Norway continues the tradition commenced by his father and delivers the New Year's speech every year on 31 December, at 19.30, a speech that is broadcast on NRK, the Norwegian national television, as well as on the radio and online. The texts of all the speeches the King has addressed starting with 1990, as a Crown Prince and later as King, are available (in Norwegian) on the website of the Royal House of Norway. As previously mentioned, we have chosen to focus on the speeches delivered in 2022, 2023 and 2024. Although the New Year's Speech King Harald V delivered on 31st of December, 2020, is not part of our research, it can be considered as relevant background for our research, as the King addressed in the 2020 speech the crisis we have all experienced, the COVID-19-pandemic, stating that it would pass, since the Norwegians had overcome great trials before, and the lesson learned from the great trials experienced was the belief in Norwegian democracy and society: "Then we will know that we managed it because we made use of the best in each of us, in our society and in our democracy. We will know that we got through it because we never gave up hope."⁷ As we will further demonstrate, the same belief permeates from the speeches we have analysed here.

2. Theoretical background

The current study examines how King Harald V's New Year's Speeches from 2022, 2023 and 2024 articulate and reinforce democratic values and how changes in discourse are relative to evolving global events. Discourse, as highlighted by Fairclough and Fairclough (2012), is a type of social practice that influences and is influenced by the sociopolitical environment in which it takes place. Therefore, discourse is always

⁶ Brit Marie Hovland, *Kongelege Jule-og Nyttårstalar som Nasjonale Ritual: tre Skandinaviske Eksempel*. København: Nordic Council of Ministers, 2004.

⁷ King Harald V of Norway, "Nyttårstale 2020" ("New Year's Speech 2020"), 31 of December, 2020, <https://www.kongehuset.no/tale.html?tid=186109&sek=26947&scope=0>.

contextual and deeply grounded in a socio-cultural context. Cultural norms, ideologies, and power dynamics are all interdependent and surface in discourse. In this context, this paper aims to highlight “the role language plays at serving different political actors”⁸. To examine how the speeches function as linguistic texts, communicative events, and reflections of larger socio-political dynamics, this study is underpinned by Fairclough’s (1995) three-dimensional model of discourse: text (with a focus on the linguistic features and recurrent key themes), discursive practice (how the text is produced and in what context it has been issued), and social practice (the broader social and cultural context that is influenced by the discourse).

Chilton (2004) introduces the cognitive approach to political discourse analysis and transfers to linguistics the responsibility of analysing political talk. In his view, at the heart of politics lies the attempt to get others to ‘share a common view’ about basic perceptions of good-evil, just-unjust, and language is considered to be the only means for achieving this.⁹ Political discourses are hence used to convince the readers and listeners, to create common grounds and to foster a shared view of the themes and events tackled.

3. Research methodology

3.1 Research aims and research questions

This paper provides a comparative analysis of three of King Harald’s New Year’s speeches from 2022, 2023 and 2024, with the aim of identifying democratic values in each of these three official statements.

Our research is guided by three research questions:

1. How much is democracy dealt with in the three speeches?
2. What are the dominant recurrent set of pronouns and relational markers in the three speeches?
3. What are the dominant themes in addition to democracy that are depicted in the three speeches?

⁸ Vilmar DeSouza, “Political discourse analysis (PDA): theoretical and practical considerations”, *Letras*, 2018, p. 124.

⁹ Paul Chilton, *Analysing Political Discourse. Theory and Practice*, London and New York: Routledge, 2004, p. 199.

3.2 Method

This study employs a mixed-method approach. The selected corpus was examined to identify and count recurrent sets of pronouns and adverbs. The corpus was analysed qualitatively, with content analysis focusing on thematic organization (e.g. democracy, peace/freedom, resilience, identity). Building on this frame, the coding matrix indicated a list of categories related to democracy. Additionally, the quantitative component of the research aimed to identify and count with Voyant Tools (www.voyant.org) recurrent sets of pronouns and adverbs to support the entire analysis of the corpus.

3.3. Corpus

Three speeches given by King Harald V of the Kingdom of Norway were included in the corpus. These speeches were chosen for their thematic relevance as they address significant geopolitical and social developments, including the war in Ukraine, and challenges to the international order, while simultaneously reaffirming democracy as a central national value. The three-year span allows for a comparative perspective on the evolution of royal discourse amid shifting global circumstances, which enhances the understanding of the commitment of the Norwegian monarchy to supporting democracy, freedom, solidarity and peace as core Norwegian cultural values. King Harald V's New Year's Speech from 2022¹⁰, his New Year's Speech from 2023¹¹ and the speech from 2024¹² all reveal a discourse that aims to promote the aforementioned values, ingrained in the Norwegian cultural identity.

¹⁰ King Harald V of Norway, "Nyttårstale 2022" ("New Year's Speech 2022"), 31 of December, 2022, <https://www.kongehuset.no/tale.html?tid=217352&sek=26947&scope=0>. All texts taken from official sources (The Royal House of Norway) in Norwegian have been translated by the authors into English.

¹¹ King Harald V of Norway, "Nyttårstale 2023" ("New Year's Speech 2023"), 31 of December,, 2023, <https://www.kongehuset.no/tale.html?tid=224699&sek=26947&scope=0>

¹² King Harald V of Norway, "Nyttårstale 2024" ("New Year's Speech 2024"), 31st of December 2024, <https://www.kongehuset.no/tale.html?tid=229540&sek=26947&scope=0>

4. Data analysis

Across King Harald V's New Year's speeches (2022–2024), a recurrent set of pronouns and relational markers were chosen for analysis. Thus, *we*, *us*, *each other*, *other*, *together* and *our* form a semantic layer that expresses collective identity, democracy, empathy and social cohesion. Within the quantitative component, each corpus was examined to identify and count these particular recurrent sets of pronouns and adverbs. This quantitative data provided a basis for observing linguistic frequency and distribution patterns between 2022 and 2024. The qualitative component focused on exploring how these linguistic elements are linked semantically and discursively to King Harald V's New Year's speeches. As the excerpts provide rich material for qualitative content analysis, a coding design was developed to identify common themes related to democracy, i.e. solidarity, peace or national identity.

The analytical framework underpinning the coding design focuses on Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (1995), particularly on how language reflects power, ideology, and social values, and on Chilton's Political Discourse Analysis (2004) that analyses the "we" - "our" construction. The analytical process was constructed by connecting text excerpts with themes and then interpreting the findings (e.g. text excerpts → keywords → themes → interpretation). The categories that resulted from the coding design included: democracy, nation/identity, values/ethics, resilience/hope, peace/freedom/solidarity.

New Year's speech from 2022

In the New Year's speech delivered in 2022, King Harald V of Norway stressed from the very beginning the importance of communities, of people getting together and supporting each other, and referred to how people may easily find themselves powerless in difficult times. The concept of togetherness can be considered as the leitmotiv of his speech, and King Harald V supported his choice of this particular concept by mentioning the World Mental Health Day message for 2022, namely "We need each other – lift your eyes!". Russia's brutal aggression in Ukraine is another topic tackled by the King, highlighting the necessity to not take peace, democracy and freedom for granted. Climate change and poverty are two other important issues addressed in this speech, as well as the need to strengthen security and democratic freedoms together with the West and Europe. The

underlying message of the speech is that Norwegian society can preserve and strengthen its achievements if each individual commits to providing help for the ones that need it.

The corpus from 2022 contained a total of 340 words. The frequency of the recurrent set of words was counted with Voyant tools: “we” (49 instances), “us” (12 instances), “each other” (10 instances), “other” (9 instances), “together” (9 instances) and “our” (13 instances). A collective voice is constructed with the personal pronouns “we” and “us” with the intention to create inclusiveness and a shared national perspective (e.g. “We need each other”). These recurrent words create what Chilton (2004) defines as a discourse of supporting inclusion as these linguistic structures build a symbolic cohesion: “we / us” - inclusion, “each other” - empathy, “other” - recognition of diversity and “together” - cooperative action.

Table 1 below indicates key expressions from the New Year’s speech delivered in 2022, the assigned themes and our interpretation:

Table 1. Sample Coding Matrix for Content Analysis of King Harald V’s New Year’s Speech from 2022

Excerpt	Key expressions	Assigned theme	Interpretation
“With Russia’s brutal warfare in Ukraine a new serious situation has come to our part of the world.”	“brutal warfare”, “our part of the world”	nation/identity, resilience/hope, peace/freedom/solidarity	It indicates the proximity to the crisis, the quest for peace and a shared European identity.
“Many people are worried, both here in Norway and in our European community.”	“here in Norway”, “our European community”	nation/ identity, resilience/hope	Encourages shared democratic accountability and inclusivity with a focus on resilience.
“Refugees are now establishing their new lives in Norway in the hope of finding safety and comfort - with the generous help of many who want them to make themselves at home.”	“safety”, “comfort”, “generous help”, “make themselves at home”	values, peace/freedom/solidarity	Reaffirms that moral and humanitarian principles are essential to Norwegian identity. Norway is portrayed as hospitable and inclusive.
“We fall, and we rise again. Again and again. But we rarely succeed alone. We need each other.”	“we rise again”, “we need each other”	resilience/hope	Resilience should be a collective trait. Hope and solidarity are salient.

Excerpt	Key expressions	Assigned theme	Interpretation
"In Norway, we have also been reminded of our democracy and the values on which we build our society."	"our democracy", "values", "build our society"	democracy, values/ethics	Positions democracy and shared values as the foundation of Norwegian society. Responsibility for maintaining democracy is paramount.
"To be able to speak our minds without risking our own lives."	"speak our minds", "without risking our lives"	democracy, values/ethics	Focus is placed on Norway's democracy as a salient value.
"Our democracy begins here: with the trust that we have each other's best interests at heart."	"our democracy begins here", "trust", "common good", "empathise"	democracy, values/ethics	Democracy is grounded in trust and empathy and is underpinned by solidarity.

New Year's speech from 2023

The speech delivered in 2023 is marked by Jon Fosse's authorship, as he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, the fourth Norwegian writer to receive such a recognition. King Harald V began his speech with Fosse's verse "Usynlege hender leier oss" ("Invisible hands guide us"), stressing the idea of togetherness and community. The King spoke of lighting candles to reflect over the situation of people found amidst conflicts, of people that are missed, to hope. "We" is the key word of this speech, and it stresses overtly the importance of a community, as well as the need to listen to the others and to support them when necessary, while reminding the audience about the regrettable policies of Norwegianization of the past, highlighting the necessity to reveal the truth and to continue building a better society together, the society which Norwegians call today 'home'. The end of the speech draws upon its beginning, expressing the King's hope that "we shall be the invisible hands that guide us".¹³

The corpus from 2023 contained a total of 318 words. The frequency of the recurrent set of words was counted with Voyant tools: "we" (30 instances), "us" (19 instances), "each other" (10 instances), "other" (4 instances), "together" (0 instances) and "our" (9 instances). A sense of mutual relationships and interdependence among citizens is created ("we

¹³ King Harald V of Norway, "Nyttårstale 2023" ("New Year's Speech 2023"), December 31, 2023, <https://www.kongehuset.no/tale.html?tid=224699&ssek=26947&scope=0>.

can all live in freedom and peace with each other”), suggesting that national strength is built through everyday acts of care and cooperation, and a shared effort.

Table 2 below indicates key expressions from the New Year’s speech delivered in 2022, the assigned themes and our interpretation:

Table 2. Sample Coding Matrix for Content Analysis of King Harald V’s New Year’s Speech from 2023

Excerpt	Key expressions	Assigned theme	Interpretation
“We all need some invisible hands. And many of us need them a little bit more right now”.	“we all need”, “invisible hands”	values/ethics, peace/freedom /solidarity	Solidarity is mutual and inclusive (“we”).
“Tonight, I would like to encourage you to light a candle. A candle for everyone who is suffering in wars and conflicts... And a candle for hope.”	“light a candle”, “suffering”, “hope”	values/ethics	The act of lighting a candle symbolizes collective empathy and solidarity.
“Hope that a better world, where we can all live in freedom and peace with each other, must be possible.”	“better world”, “freedom and peace”, “possible”	democracy, peace/freedom /solidarity, resilience/hope	Expresses democratic ideals as global aspirations. Reinforces faith in human resilience.
“For me, there is a defiant hope in this one word: We.”	“defiant hope”, “we”	nation/identity, resilience/hope	“We” becomes a symbolic representation of national and moral identity. Hope is salient in relation to courage and collective endurance.
“We is a small but roomy and beautiful word... the opposite of us and them.”	“we”, “the opposite of us and them”, “embraces us all”	nation/identity, democracy, values/ethics	It constructs an inclusive national identity, characterized by democracy and equality.
“We must acknowledge what has happened... and what we have to build on together – despite everything.”	“build on together”, “despite everything”	nation/identity	Collective cooperation is essential for progress, promoting a narrative of perseverance and resilience.
“Listening and speaking honestly are crucial for a community... we need that difficult patience.”	“listening”, “speaking honestly”, “patience”	nation/identity, democracy, values/ethics	Empathy and honesty are civic virtues that are in line with democratic practice.

Excerpt	Key expressions	Assigned theme	Interpretation
"It has taken us generations to build the society we know today, which we are proud of and feel at home in."	"generations", "proud", "at home"	nation/identity	The Norwegian society has been built over time, indicating responsibility across generations.
"Our most important means of protection is a robust and resilient people who can withstand pressure."	"robust and resilient people", "withstand pressure"	nation/identity, peace/freedom /solidarity	Peace and social cohesion are the foundation of national security. The need for collective defense is also suggested.
"We cannot take peace and freedom, resources and common goods for granted. We must be vigilant!"	"peace and freedom", "common goods", "vigilant"	democracy, values/ethics, peace/freedom /solidarity	It indicates the need to protect democratic principles, moral awareness and encourage civic duty.

New Year's speech from 2024

King Harald V's New Year's speech of 2024 is built around Leonard Cohen's verse "There's a crack, a crack in everything, That's how the light gets in"¹⁴ and begins with a reference to some troubling personal events that affected the Norwegian monarchy in 2024, stressing at the same time how important it is to overcome difficulties. The King highlights the idea of solidarity, which can bring hope even in difficult times, even to people in Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan, Afghanistan, and Syria, who find the strength to continue living their lives despite experiencing conflict. After addressing thanks to all those involved in supporting people from conflict areas, King Harald V reminds his audience of the Second World War, of the horrors that wars bring, and that peace and freedom mean everything. The idea of solidarity, that each individual can contribute to improving the lives of the others, is again central, drawing attention once more, at the end of the speech, to the idea that cracks allow the light to shine through.

The corpus from 2024 contained a total of 276 words. The frequency of the recurrent set of words was counted with Voyant tools: "we" (55

¹⁴ Leonard Cohen, *Anthem*; King Harald V of Norway, "Nyttårstale 2024" ("New Year's Speech 2024"), 31 December 2024, <https://www.kongehuset.no/tale.html?tid=229540&sek=26947&scope=0>.

instances), “us” (20 instances), “each other” (4 instances), “other” (4 instances), “together” (9 instances) and “our” (13 instances).

Table 3. Sample Coding Matrix for Content Analysis of King Harald V’s New Year’s Speech from 2024

Excerpt	Key expressions	Assigned theme	Analytical interpretation
“Tonight, I want to say a special thank you to all of you who are contributing in conflict areas - for humanitarian organisations, the armed forces, the foreign service and the press”	“thank you”, “contributing”, “humanitarian”, “armed forces”, “press”	democracy, resilience/hope, peace/freedom/solidarity	Focus is placed on civic duty and ethical action. Various actors embody democratic ideals.
“Out of war and enmity grew a will for reconciliation and cooperation that we have built on over these 80 years.”	“reconciliation”, “cooperation”, “built on”	peace/freedom/solidarity, democracy	Cooperation and democracy are paramount for rebuilding a nation.
“Our democratic values are our most important defence when we are put to the test as a people and a nation.”	“democratic values”, “defence”, “as a people and a nation”	democracy, values/ethics, nation/identity, peace/freedom/solidarity	Democracy is paramount for Norway.
“Because we can do a lot. We can stand up for what we believe in. We can be friendly and treat each other well. We can raise our hand when we are needed.”	“we can do a lot”, “stand up”, “be friendly”, “raise our hand”	values/ethics	Encourages active citizenship and everyday ethics.

A comparative analysis of the speeches indicates that emphasis on identity, democracy, and ethical values is present in all the three corpuses. As all the speeches indicate resilience and solidarity as important values, they acknowledge the ongoing challenges while reasserting faith in collective strength. The discursive evolution from compassion and solidarity in 2022, influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian aggression in Ukraine, the first military conflict that shattered Europe after the Second

World War, further developed in 2024 toward helping others to protect their democratic values and peace. The King’s use of inclusive pronouns (“we”, “us”) and moral metaphors (“light”, “hands”, “hope”) creates an ethical frame that promotes unity and shared identity.

Table 4 below indicates a comparative analysis of the recurrent set of words found in the three speeches, which does not necessarily reveal major changes in the use of these terms, but a rather linear occurrence of these words that strengthen the idea of solidarity and togetherness, one that is central to all the three speeches.

Table 4. Quantitative comparative analysis of the recurrent set of words in speeches between 2022 and 2024

Year	we	us	each other	other	together	our
2022	49	12	10	9	9	13
2023	30	19	10	4	0	9
2024	55	20	4	4	9	13

5. Discussions

When analysing the official discourse in Norway on the war in Ukraine, we have discovered that some of the key cultural values that are important in Norwegian culture, such as solidarity, unity, tolerance, kindness, and equality have been reflected in the discourse of the Norwegian Prime Minister¹⁵. These values represent key elements when discussing the cultural dimensions theory designed by Geert Hofstede and later developed by numerous scholars, particularly since, as Warner-Söderholm (2012) mentions, Norway has the highest score in Humane Orientation among the Scandinavian countries, reflecting social concern, which can be considered

¹⁵ Raluca Pop and Ioana-Andreea Mureşan, “Norwegian Cultural Values Emerging from the Discourse on the Russian Invasion in Ukraine”, in Pop-Flanja Delia, Herţa Laura M. (eds.), *Conflict Resolution and Crisis Communication. Transforming Conflicts and Building Peace. Proceedings of the Second Edition of the International Conference Crisis Communication and Conflict Resolution*, Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2022, p. 29.

characteristic of Norway¹⁶. Such analyses need to be completed by the perspective of the monarch in a constitutional monarchy such as Norway, since, as Kjeldsen mentions, the lack of political and institutional power of the Scandinavian monarchs provides them with this special rhetorical appeal, and they can be considered as both royal and distant, close and popular at the same time, with the Norwegian King probably all the more so, as he has been considered the people's King.¹⁷

The first research question aimed to identify whether the concept of democracy was dealt with in the speeches. In light of the content analysis of King Harald V's New Year's speeches from 2022 to 2024, findings indicate that the message conveyed articulates democratic values and frames democracy as an integral part of Norway's identity. The rhetorical strategies used by the Norwegian monarch have emphasized the need for strengthening social cohesion amid external crises.

The second research question aimed to identify a dominant recurrent set of pronouns and relational markers in the three speeches. A quantitative analysis of the corpuses revealed the following recurrent set of words: "we", "us", "each other", "other", "together" and "our". Table 4 indicated a quantitative comparative analysis of these recurrent sets of words. The frequency was higher for the "we" – "us" inclusion metaphor, tapping into solidarity, community and security values.

The third research question intended to identify other themes in addition to democracy that are depicted in the three speeches. Tables 1, 2 and 3 illustrate the key words chosen from the corpuses and their assigned themes, as well as an analytical interpretation. Findings indicate that concepts such as nation/identity, values/ethics, resilience/hope, and peace/freedom/solidarity are encountered in all the three speeches, supporting and enriching the metaphor of democracy.

¹⁶ Gillian Warner-Söderholm, "Culture Matters: Norwegian Cultural Identity within a Scandinavian Context", in *SAGE Open*, 2012, p. 6.

¹⁷ Jens E. Kjeldsen, "Royal Interventions in the Public Discourse on Immigration: Rhetorical Topoi on Immigration in the New Year's Speeches of the Scandinavian Monarchs", *Javnost - The Public*, 26 (2), 2019, p. 4 (228).

Research limitations

While this research offers valuable insights into the articulation of democratic values in King Harald V's New Year's speeches (2022–2024), several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the limited corpus size of three speeches restricts us from generalizing the findings, as focus was placed only on the speeches delivered after the outbreak of the Russian aggression in Ukraine, starting with 31st of December, 2022. Although these speeches are representative of royal discourse in Norway, they have been carefully crafted and analyzed beforehand. Thus, they may not depict the full range of democratic or political rhetoric present in broader Norwegian public discourse. Therefore, future research could expand the corpus to parliamentary speeches and other political statements that would also lend themselves to a longitudinal analysis. Secondly, the qualitative approach adopted in this study involves a degree of subjectivity. Although the analysis is grounded in theoretical frameworks (Fairclough 1995; Chilton 2004), the interpretation of themes, metaphors, and rhetorical strategies inevitably reflects the researchers' perspective. By triangulating discourse analysis with quantitative linguistic methods or even the reception of the speeches, we could achieve a more comprehensive and balanced understanding of the communicative impact of such speeches.

6. Conclusions

This research paper aimed to investigate how the Norwegian King's New Year's speeches portray democracy, freedom, peace, and solidarity as part of Norwegian national identity, through recurring linguistic and thematic patterns. Anchored in Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model of discourse, the analysis of the three speeches indicates that the interconnections between the textual component (recurrent linguistic features and key themes), the discursive practice component (the context in which the speeches were issued) and the social practice component (the social and cultural contexts influencing the discourse) created a rhetoric of moral mobilization, urging people to act ethically ("we can do a lot"), while reaffirming democratic values as the nation's defense. Hope is reframed as a civic virtue that sustains both national unity and international solidarity, reinforcing Norway's self-image as a peaceful, resilient, and morally conscious democracy.

King Harald V's New Year's speeches appeal to the Norwegian public in times of crisis which are marked by the Russian aggression in Ukraine, the conflict in Israel and Gaza, the shifting international relations worldwide. The King calls for solidarity with each and every Norwegian citizen experiencing difficult times, but also with those in need, those living in conflict areas and trying to survive. Defending democratic values and supporting peace are part of the Norwegian identity, and his message urges the listeners to contribute to these efforts. King Harald V of Norway, through his New Year's speeches of 2022, 2023 and 2024, conveys a message of peace aimed at bringing light in times of darkness.

Bibliography

- Chilton, Paul, *Analysing Political Discourse. Theory and Practice*, London and New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Demiri, Sandra Feride and Katrine Fangen, "The State of the Nation: The Norwegian King's Annual Addresses – a Window on a Shifting Nationhood", *National Identities* 21 (5): 443–62, 2018. doi:10.1080/14608944.2018.1498470.
- DeSouza, Vilmar, "Political discourse analysis (PDA): theoretical and practical considerations", *Letras*, 123-141, 2018. 10.5902/2176148532001.
- Fairclough, Norman, *Critical Discourse Analysis: the Critical Study of Language*, London: Longman, 1995.
- Fairclough, Norman and Isabela Fairclough, *Political discourse analysis*, London and New York: Routledge 2012.
- Harald V, King of Norway, "Nyttårstale 2020" ("New Year's Speech 2020"), 31st of December, 2020, <https://www.kongehuset.no/tale.html?tid=186109&sek=26947&scope=0>, retrieved 20.09.2025.
- Harald V, King of Norway, "Nyttårstale 2022" ("New Year's Speech 2022"), 31st of December, 2022, <https://www.kongehuset.no/tale.html?tid=217352&sek=26947&scope=0>, retrieved 10.05.2025.
- Harald V, King of Norway, "Nyttårstale 2023" ("New Year's Speech 2023"), 31st of December, 2023, <https://www.kongehuset.no/tale.html?tid=224699&sek=26947&scope=0>, retrieved 10.05.2025.
- Harald V, King of Norway, "Nyttårstale 2024" ("New Year's Speech 2024"), 31 of December 2024, <https://www.kongehuset.no/tale.html?tid=229540&sek=26947&scope=0>, retrieved 10.05.2025.

- Hovland, Brit Marie, *Kongelege Jule-og Nyttårstalar som Nasjonale Ritual: tre Skandinaviske Eksempel*. København: Nordic Council of Ministers, 2004.
https://www.sv.uio.no/mutr/publikasjoner/rapporter/rapp2000/rapport10.html#_Toc472315620.
- Kjeldsen, Jens E., "Royal Interventions in the Public Discourse on Immigration: Rhetorical Topoi on Immigration in the New Year's Speeches of the Scandinavian Monarchs", *Javnost - The Public*, 26 (2): 225–40, 2019.
 doi:10.1080/13183222.2019.1587702.
- Pop, Raluca and Ioana-Andreea Mureșan, "Norwegian Cultural Values Emerging from the Discourse on the Russian Invasion in Ukraine", in Pop-Flanja Delia, Herța Laura M. (eds.), *Conflict Resolution and Crisis Communication. Transforming Conflicts and Building Peace. Proceedings of the Second Edition of the International Conference Crisis Communication and Conflict Resolution*, Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2022, pp. 23-31.
- Skånland, Øystein Haga, "Norsk utenrikspolitikk i fredens tegn: en diskursanalyse", *Internasjonal Politikk*, 67 (3), pp. 321-348, Universitetsforlaget, 2009.
- Skånland, Øystein Haga, "Norway is a peace nation. A discourse analytic reading of the Norwegian peace engagement", in *Cooperation and Conflict*, 45(1), 34-35, SAGE publications, 2010.
- Warner-Søderholm, Gillian, "Culture Matters: Norwegian Cultural Identity within a Scandinavian Context", in *SAGE Open*, 2012, pp. 1-12.
- ***, "Norges engasjement i fredsprosesser siden 1993", Regjeringen, 2019,
https://www.regjeringen.no/no/tema/utenrikssaker/fred-og-forsoning/innsiktsmappe/etter_1993/id732943/, retrieved 30.09.2025.

Using Crisis and Conflicts to GOTV. Case Study: the UDMR

The UDMR¹, the party representing the Hungarian minority in Romania, has been a member of the Romanian parliament since its founding in 1990, and has participated in the government on several occasions. Of the various Central and Eastern European countries with Hungarian minority parties, the UDMR is the most successful because since the beginning it has not only won seats in both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate in every election but has also been a member of several coalition governments since 1996. Nevertheless, there are very few academic analyses of the UDMR's election campaigns. Yet the question of the success of ethnic parties is a tremendously interesting one. In this case study, I examine how the UDMR used crises and conflicts as a tool to mobilise its voters. The article consists of three parts. In the first part, I outline the framework of my analysis. The second part contains the case study. The third part highlights several research directions.

I. The margins of manoeuvre of ethnic parties

The framework of the case study can be divided into two parts. Firstly, there are the factors that determine the margin of manoeuvre of ethnic parties. Secondly, there is the use of crises and conflicts in election campaigns.

¹ Of the three abbreviations for the party's name, UDMR (Romanian), RMDSZ (Hungarian), and DAHR (English), I will use the Romanian version in this article.

It is obvious to everyone that ethnic parties do not operate in a vacuum, but are influenced by various factors, while they themselves also influence these factors. As Roger Brubaker wrote in 1986, there is a “triadic relational interplay” between “national minorities, nation states, and external national homelands”². In 1994, Milton Esman identified the kin-state, international organisations, ideological sympathisers, and friendly governments as external factors influencing ethnic conflicts.³ A few years later, in 2002, Antoine Roger defined ethnic parties as a “means of combining internal and external pressures”⁴. Building on this definition, I argue that the room for manoeuvre of parties representing ethnic minorities, and thus the framework of their election campaigns, is determined by the interaction between the following:

- the interests of the ethnic party
- the interests of other parties, depending on whether there are in parliament or not, and whether there are in government or not
- the interests of the country’s government
- the legal environment and electoral law in the country concerned
- financing (own resources, state aid from the country in question, financing from the kin-state)
- the interests of kin state’s government
- the interest of other parties from the kin-state
- the opinions of members of ethnic minorities on their own situation, the activities of the party, and issues concerning the country and the world
- the interests of international organizations.

We know that election campaigns are built around conflicts and crises. But nowadays, the use of crises has also become commonplace in election campaigns, if we just consider the framing of migration topic in Hungary, Italy, Germany, France, and the US. A careful reading of the literature on ethnic conflicts or ethnic parties makes it clear that, in the case of ethnic parties, the distinction between “Us” and “Them” and the conflicts between

² Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed. Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 6.

³ Milton Esman, *Ethnic Politics*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994, p. 261.

⁴ Antoine Roger, “Economic Development and Positioning of Ethnic Political Parties: Comparing Post Communist Bulgaria and Romania”, in *Southeast European Politics*, No.1, 2002, p. 27.

“our” and “their” interests exist because of the ethnic nature of the party itself. In his seminal work, “Ethnic Groups in Conflict”, Horowitz emphasises that, given the importance of participation in ethnic party systems, “there is no electoral reason to be moderate about ethnic appeals”⁵. He also stresses that in the case of ethnic voting, since the party’s potential voters are easily identifiable, “they are most readily mobilised by appeals to ethnic interests, threats, and hatred. The greater the collective danger, the greater the likelihood that politically apathetic group members will go to the polls”⁶.

As far as Romania is concerned, Preda emphasises that “the constitutional consensus of 1990–1991 gives ethnic content to the nation, which is considered to be an all-encompassing dimension of the state. Only the UDMR rejects this definition of the Romanian state. In this sense, nationalist tensions pit the UDMR against all Romanian parties”⁷. In one of the few articles analysing aspects of the UDMR’s election campaigns, Kiss, Székely, and Barna emphasise, in line with Horowitz, that “the electoral campaign of RMDSZ (UDMR) are more about mobilisation than about persuasion”⁸.

When applied to an election campaign, I would argue that crisis serves as an effective campaign communication tool, as illustrated in the diagram below⁹.



Figure 1. Campaign communication tool: crisis

Source: author’s illustration

⁵ Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic groups in conflict*, University of California Press, 1985, 332.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ Cristian Preda, “Les partis politiques dans le post-communisme roumain”, in Jean-Michel de Waele (ed.), *Les clivages politiques en Europe centrale et orientale*, Brussels, Éditions de l’Université de Bruxelles, 2004, pp. 182-183.

⁸ Tamás Kiss, István Gergő Székely, Gergő Barna, “Factors Affecting Turnout among Ethnic Minority Voters: The Case of Hungarians in Transylvania”, *Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics*, 3, 2017, p. 88.

⁹ I think this is true not only of ethnic parties, but of election campaigns in general. However, this article specifically focuses on ethnic parties.

In the case of ethnic parties, we can frame anything that the target audience (ethnic minority) might perceive as a crisis. These may include the following:

- the possibility that the opponent will win
- the rise to power of nationalists/far right/far left
- failing to get into parliament or the loss of governance
- migrants, the marginalisation of religion, integrative LGBTQ policies, restrictions on the right to protest, threats to values, equal rights for women, inequalities, economic crisis, war, unrestricted freedom of expression, loss of democracy, elites, the “old regime”, etc.

In the next section, I will present the conflict and crisis situations that UDMR has used in the election campaigns between 1990 and 2024. More specifically, I will focus on the conflicts between the Hungarian minority and the Romanian majority.

II. Crises, conflicts, election campaigns. Case study: UDMR.

The UDMR, the party representing the Hungarian minority in Romania, was founded in December 1989, at the fall of communism in Romania. The first president was Géza Domokos, who was replaced by Béla Markó in the 1993 election. Hunor Kelemen was elected the third (and current) president of the UDMR in 2011. The UDMR is not only the most successful party representing Hungarian minorities in Central and Eastern Europe but has also been a stable member of the Romanian parliament since its establishment. It has also been part of several governing coalitions since 1996.

Table 1. The results of UDMR for the Chamber of Deputies 1990-2024

Parliamentary election	UDMR votes	UDMR % in total
1990	991601	7,23
1992	811290	7,46
1996	812628	6,64
2000	736863	6,8
2004	628125	6,17
2008	425008	6,17
2012	380656	5,14
2016	435969	6,19
2020	339030	5,74
2024	585397	6,33

Source: Central Electoral Office

Building on the discussion in the first chapter about the room for manoeuvre of ethnic parties, the following model can be used for election campaigns.

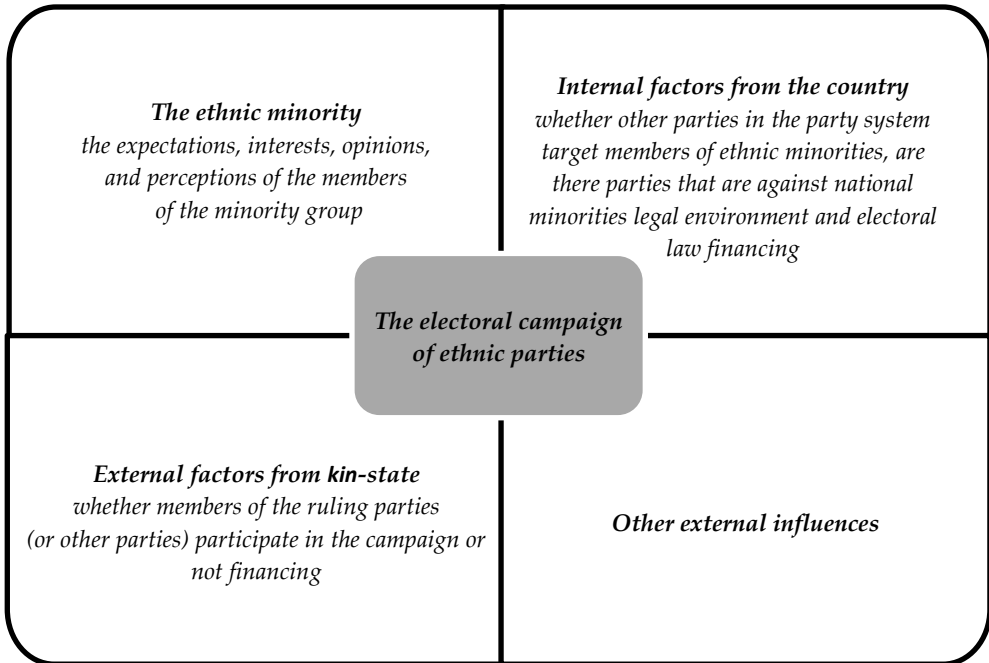


Figure 2. Factors influencing the electoral campaign of ethnic parties

Source: author's illustration

When examining election campaigns over such a long period, it is important to remember that Romania has undergone changes to its electoral and campaign financing systems over the 35 years. At the same time, the communication used in election campaigns have evolved. Consider, for example, the black-and-white flyers of the 1990s compared with the social media videos of 2025. During this period, not only did the presidents of the UDMR change, but the structure of the party also changed. This includes, among other things, the increased professionalisation of election campaigning. For instance, according to available information, the UDMR has regularly used surveys to inform its election campaigns since 1999¹⁰.

¹⁰ ***, Lapvélemények az RMDSZ-nek kormányba való lépéséről, 1996, <http://archivum.szabadsag.ro/archivum/1996/6dec-03t.html>, date consulted 25 August 2025; *, Az első átfogó közvélemény kutatás, <http://archivum.szabadsag.ro/archivum/1996/6okt->

However, press statements¹¹ suggest that public opinion polls were conducted as early as 1996.

If we analyse the UDMR's election campaigns conducted over the past thirty-five years, the biggest challenge lies in the resources we can rely on. During the internet era, resources for social media campaigns were better preserved than in the period before 2012/2016. In terms of conducting political campaigns on online platforms, it is worth noting that the UDMR launched its YouTube page on 11 October 2007 and its Facebook page on 7 March 2011 (according to the information on the pages). The sources used for this case study were the following: a personal archive collected during my PhD studies and personal archives collected from acquaintances; the UDMR YouTube and Facebook channels; and data from Facebook and the Google Ad Library. Building on these sources, I identified three major types of crises/conflicts used in UDMR election campaigns. Firstly, there are conflicts between the Hungarian minority and the Romanian majority. These include: the Hungarian minority versus the extreme-right Romanian parties; the Hungarian minority versus Romanian politicians or political parties who do not recognise or enforce the rights of Hungarians; and the interests of the Hungarian minority (including economic interests, such as the financing of local governments in Hungarian counties) versus the interests of the Romanian majority (in Romanian counties). Secondly, the topic of citizens versus the state arose in the 2024 campaigns. Thirdly, there was a focus on the potential danger of the RMDSZ not entering the government, which would have left them unable to adequately represent the interests of the Hungarian community. In the following two subsections, I will present some examples of the first type of conflicts/crises, as they occurred during the official campaign and on election day.

A. During the election campaign

Election campaigns highlighted the tensions between the Hungarian minority and the Romanians majority in several ways, as can be seen in Table

11t.html, date consulted 25 August 2025; Tamás Kiss, István Gergő Székely, Gergő Barna, « Factors Affecting Turnout Among Ethnic Minority Voters: The Case of Hungarians in Transylvania », *Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics*, 3, 2017, p. 98.

¹¹ Lapvélemények az RMDSZ-nek kormányba való lépéséről, 1996, <http://archivum.szabadsag.ro/archivum/1996/6dec-03t.html>, consulted 25 August 2025.

2. On the one hand, they emphasised that Hungarian would only be truly represented by Hungarian candidates, as in 2004: *RMDSZ Hungarian interests! Romanian party, Romanian interest!* (see the table below for other examples). On the other hand, they portray forces acting against the Hungarian people. For example, in 1992 “*dark forces are rising against us*” or in 2024, “*We are in danger! Anti-Hungarian forces are poised to win*”¹².

Table 2. Election materials¹³ from different years

1990 A parliamentary election information leaflet draws attention to the fact that “only the RMDSZ and its supporters have openly and sincerely committed themselves to the interests of the Hungarian community. Don’t be fooled by the promises of other parties.”
1992 An announcement by the RMDSZ national leadership (parliamentary elections) in a county newspaper: “Our voters! We are in a difficult situation. Dark forces are rising against us. (...) Voters! Because of our indifference and passivity, today we have a mayor who eats Hungarians, and tomorrow we may have a president who eats Hungarians. Voters! Our parliamentary group represents your view. Every vote counts! Vote!”
2004 Context: The local and parliamentary election campaigns were built around the “liberation” of the Arad Freedom Statue. The statue was intended to commemorate the martyrs executed in Arad in 1849 during the Revolution of 1848. Unveiled in 1890, when Arad belonged to Hungary, it was removed from its central location during the interwar period, after the Treaty of Trianon. Based on agreements with the PSD, the Liberty Statue was reinstalled in Reconciliation Park. Alongside campaign materials referencing this, a new type of material has emerged, a leaflet in red and black pointing to conflicts between Hungarian and Romanian interests. Together, free! Together for autonomy! On the right path to Europe! RMDSZ Hungarian interests! Romanian party, Romanian interests!
2012 In June 2011 Romanian political parties wanted to abolish the current counties. We prevented this from happening. The counties and historical regions of Transylvania must remain intact. In May 2012, They wanted to restrict the use of our national symbols and the Hungarian language. We did not allow this. Our mother tongue should be official wherever there is a significant Hungarian community. In June 2012. Two Hungarian men were sentenced to prison for returning the Székely Mikó College building in Sepsiszentgyörgy, which had been seized by the communists. 25,000 of us protested against this injustice. We will continue our fight to ensure that everyone gets back what is

¹² In 2024, they will also identify the enemy in the persons of AUR (Romanian far right party) and George Simion.

¹³ Unless I have specifically indicated that it is a video, all references are to posts or flyers.

rightfully theirs. September 2012: Romania obtained barely 9.6% of the available European Union funds. We want more EU money **for Transylvania**. We are creating jobs and supporting small and medium-sized businesses and farmers. The RMDSZ's only ally is the Hungarian community in Transylvania. We are not fighting against each other, but for each other, and for our rights as well as for our economic advancement. This is why we must push back anti-Hungarian sentiment. We stand for trust, security, and a future together, **always for Hungarians**.¹⁴

Strong representation for the safety of Hungarians!
(...)

We all want to live safely in our country as Hungarians. On 9 December, we must pass the 5% threshold! Only a united and robust parliamentary representation can **protect the Hungarian people**. This is why we need the Hungarian Democratic Alliance of Romania. This is why we are counting on your support!

2014 European Parliament elections

On 25 May, our community faces an important decision. The stakes are high, and the choice is clear. We must be present in the European Parliament to protect our community with EU instruments, but **if we do not vote, others will do so in our place, and only Romanian representatives will make it to Brussels**. If we are not present in Europe, the strength of the Hungarian community at home will be weakened and its security endangered. **On 25 May, there will be as many of us as there were who voted**. My name is Kelemen Hunor. Let's show the strength of our community once again! Vote for the RMDSZ!

2016

Context: The parliamentary election campaign was developed around Transylvania as a region. Transylvania was portrayed as being in conflict with Bucharest, the capital, and implicitly with the Romanians (Transylvania is home to the Hungarian minority).

Do we leave our taxes in Bucharest, or take them back to Transylvania? Do we want paper or asphalt roads? **Bucharest or Transylvania?** We will decide this on 11 December. Choose the future! Choose Transylvania! Transylvania is the future!

On 11 December, the **Hungarian people** will face a decision. The choice is clear: we can send people to parliament who will fight for our interests and represent Transylvania, or we can let others decide our fate, people for whom only Bucharest matters. Choose the future! Choose Transylvania! Transylvania is the future!

2019 European parliamentary election

Let's not entrust Hungarian representation to the Romanians. Vote!

The 2020 parliamentary election (in the time of the Coronavirus pandemic)

In the ad a man and a woman are talking: They are both completely mad. You must wear a mask even in bed. You can't even set foot on the street. But there are elections. I can see it's all over, and I'll shut everything down again, but I'm still going. Of course, then you'll catch Covid. Oh, give me a break, Joco. I've been there. I remember being cold in the summer, that must have been it. Sure, have you been everything? Now, turn that TV off. ... Romania had a record low voter turnout on 6 December. In fact, only two people voted:

¹⁴ 2012, campaign video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NR1-x9qIlbM>, consulted on 26 August 2025.

the President of the Republic. and the prime minister. Have a good day! The popular musician Adi Minune has been appointed Romania's ambassador to Hungary. On 15 March, in Csíkszereda (a city inhabited by Hungarians), they celebrated by dancing the hora (Romanian national dance). Take the mask. We're going to vote. I say we are going now. There will be two of us, you see, there are two of us. Do you know what that means? It means we'll be even, you know? Come on, come on, we're going to vote, come on come on let's go vote. Stop, let me put on something.....a mask. Come on.

Prevent your nightmares. Go and vote this Sunday!

2024

Important! Parliamentary elections are on Sunday. **We are in danger! Anti-Hungarian forces** are poised to win. **But we can stop them!** Whether Hungarians have representation, power and a future in Romania is up to you. Only together can we defend our schools, our mother tongue, our rights—ourselves. Remember this Sunday, you can only vote in the county where your ID card is registered. On 1 December, Hungarians cannot afford to lose. Cast your vote!

B. On the election day

In Romania, campaigning is not permitted on election day. It is also illegal to publish appeals encouraging support for specific parties. For this reason, parties use different strategies to mobilise their voters on election day. In the case of the UDMR, this happens in two ways. Firstly, they highlight the turnout in election participation throughout the day, emphasizing that Hungarian-populated areas lag behind the Romanian majority areas. Secondly, the messages (which are disseminated via social media, robocalls, sms-s, the party spokesperson or politicians) highlight the danger posed by Romanian nationalists (individuals, party, or generally just Romanians). Table 3 shows the UDMR Facebook posts published on election day between 2012 and 2024.

Based on the sources currently available to me, I think that this “dual” messaging was consolidated during the 2012 and 2016 elections. During the previous period, on election day, the turnout rates in the Hungarian and Romanian counties were displayed, along with their potential impact on Hungarian representation. However, the technical conditions prior to 2012/2016, i.e., traditional media and the limited number of platforms capable of delivering instant messaging to large audiences (robotic phone calls, phone calls, text messages), meant that few sources remain available for research today and made campaigning on election day less visible to today's researchers.

Table 3. Voter mobilization on election day

2012 Harghita and Covasna counties are in the last place! Árpád Antal: turnout could determine whether Orbaiszék will have a Romanian or Hungarian representative!
2014 Elections for the European Parliament Romanians are scaring each other with stories about Hungarians. They're sending each other text messages like this one. It is up to us to prevent them from achieving their goal! Time is running out! The polls close in 60 minutes. The European representation of Hungarians in Transylvania could be decided at the last minute! It's not too late! If you leave now, you can still make it to the polling station! Go and vote!
2016 If you don't vote, you're strengthening Romanian representation. If you don't vote, we lose and they win! Don't take any chances! Vote! There has been low turnout in Transylvania. The outcome will depend on the last few hours! Cast your vote! We can only count on ourselves! Go and vote! Choose a Hungarian candidate for yourself! Everything will be decided in the final hours! If everyone who hasn't voted yet goes to the polls, the Hungarian turnout could exceed the Romanian one! Let's show them! Pass it on!
2019 Don't entrust the fate of Hungarians to Romanian nationalists! If you haven't voted yet, you can do so until 9 p.m.!
2020 Voter turnout is low in Hungarian-populated settlements in Maros County. Vote! National participation is much higher than Hungarian participation! Cast your vote! Voter turnout is low among the Hungarian population in Bihar County. Stand up for our community! Don't let others decide for you! Cast your vote!
2024 If you're still in line at 10 p.m., you have the right to vote! Don't let them stop you! Don't give up – let's turn participation around! Time is running out – only 5 hours left! Vote now! We can only counter the growing hatred towards Hungarians by turning out in large numbers to vote today. The only way we can counter the growing hatred towards Hungarians is by turning out in large numbers to vote today. Only Hungarians can represent Hungarian interests. Vote! Attention! Record high turnout! Voter enthusiasm is growing rapidly in Romania's major cities! We Hungarians must not be left behind! Let's go out and vote!

III. Conclusion

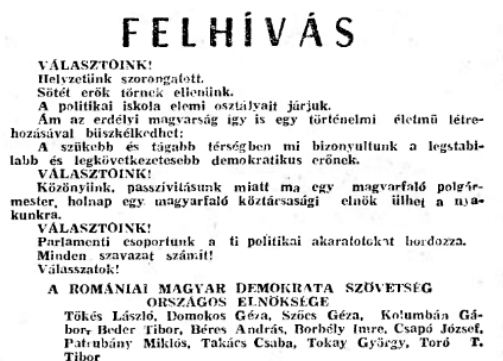
This article makes two new contributions to the study of ethnic parties and UDMR. Firstly, it establishes a model for analysing ethnic parties, and

then, builds on this to describe a model for interpreting their campaigns. Secondly, using specific examples from the period between 1990 and 2024, it illustrates the conflicts and crises exploited by the UDMR, the party representing the Hungarian minority in Romania. However, the research could be expanded and deepened to include other types of election, as it only covers examples from parliamentary elections. It would be interesting to compare UDMR election campaigns with those of other ethnic parties in Europe. It would also be important to examine how topics and campaign tools relate to electoral success.

IV. Annexes

Table 4. Flyers, videos, Facebook ads, from the UDMR election campaigns (see the text in chapter II, table2)

1990 1992



2004



Parlamenti és elnökválasztások, 2004. Plakátok



2012



RMDSZ

ERŐS KÉPVISELETTEL A MAGYAROK BIZTONSÁGÁÉRT!

December 9-én SZAVAZZON jelöltjeinkre!

www.rmdsz.ro

- Jól fizetett munkahelyeket hozunk létre.
- Támogatjuk a magyar gardákat és az erdélyi vállalkozókat.
- Átszervezzük a fejlesztési régiókat. Így lesz regionális és területi autonómiánk.
- Megvédjük közösen kiharcolt jogainkat.
- Megőjük anyanyelvünket, nemzeti szimbólumainkat.
- Megfélézzük a magyarellenességet.

Mindannyian biztonságban akarunk élni itthon, magyarként.
December 9-én **5%-ot** át kell lépünk az

Csak az egységes és erős parlamenti képviselő tudja megvédeni a magyar embereket.
Ezért van szükség a Romániai Magyar Demokrata Szövetségre.
Ezért számítunk az Ön támogatására!

MINDIG A MAGYAROKÉRT

RMDSZ

2014 European Parliament Elections



ANNYIAN LESZÜNK MÁJUS 25 AHÁNYAN SZAVAZUNK

0:27 / 0:36

15

2016



RMDSZ November 25, 2016 · 🌐

Ott hagyjuk adóinkat Bukarestben, vagy visszahozzuk Erdélybe? Papírból akarunk utakat, vagy aszfaltból? Bukarest vagy Erdély? Erről döntünk december 11-én! [#válaszdajövőt](#)
[#válaszdErdélyt](#) [#Erdélyajövő](#)

Bukarestnek lett volna ideje bizonyítani, hogy Erdély is számít.

¹⁵ 2014 campaign video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QGCBCwMFWAQ>, consulted on 26 August 2025.

RMDSZ November 25, 2016 · 🌐

December 11-én a magyar emberek döntés előtt állnak. A választás világos: olyan embereket küldünk a parlamentbe, akik a mi ügyeinkért harcolnak, és Erdélyt képviselik vagy hagyjuk, hogy mások döntsenek sorsunkról, akiknek csak Bukarest a fontos. [#válaszdajövőt](#) [#válaszdErdélyt](#) [#Erdélyajövő](#)



2019 European Parliamentary Election



2020



Ne várjuk meg, míg a rémálom valósággá válik!

RMDSZ 3.38K subscribers [Subscribe](#) [6](#) [Share](#) [Save](#) [...](#)

2024

>>> ADD TOVÁBB >>>

FONTOS!

Parlamenti választások vasárnap

Veszélyben vagyunk! A magyarellenes erők nyerésre állnak. De meg tudjuk őket állítani!

Rajtad múlik, hogy lesz-e a magyaroknak képvisellete, ereje és jövője Romániában.

Csak **együtt tudjuk megvédeni** iskoláinkat, anyanyelvünket, jogainkat – magunkat.

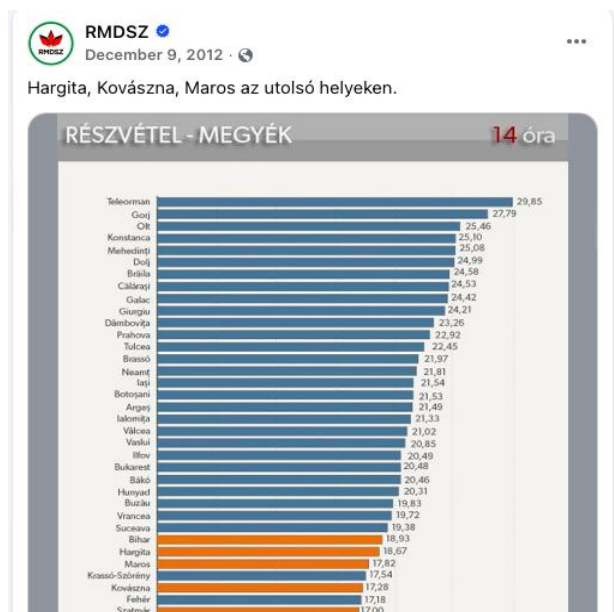
Figyelem! Most vasárnap csak abban a megyében szavazhatsz, ahová a személyid szól.

December 1-jén a magyarok **nem veszíthetnek.**

SZAVAZZ TE IS!

Table 5. Post from the UDMR election campaigns from Facebook (see the text in chapter II, table3)

2012





2014



2016


RMDSZ

December 11, 2016 ·

Ha nem szavazol, a román képviseletet erősíted. Ha nem szavazol, mi veszítünk, és ők győznek! Ne kockáztass! Szavazz!



+40723576109

lesiti romani la vot, sa scoatem unghurii din parlament. Acum ori niciodata. Votati PRU. Garda lui Tepes

160/1

PARLAMENTI2016.RMDSZ.RO

RMDSZ.ro - Újabb magyarellenes sms-ekkel mozgósítanak országszerte – az RMDSZ feljelentést tett


RMDSZ

December 11-én szavazunk!

December 11, 2016 ·



ALACSONY
a részvétel Erdélyben!

Az utolsó pár órán múlik!

SZAVAZZ TE IS!


RMDSZ

December 11, 2016 ·

Az utolsó pár órán múlik minden! Szavazz te is!



2019



2020



2024



RMDSZ
December 1, 2024

FIGYELEM! REKORDMAGAS A RÉSZVÉTEL!
A román nagyvárosokban
ROHAMOSAN NŐ a szavazói
kedv.
Mi, magyarok ne maradjunk
alul!
Menjünk szavazni!

Bibliography

- Antoine Roger, "Economic Development and Positioning of Ethnic Political Parties: Comparing Post Communist Bulgaria and Romania", in *Southeast European Politics*, No.1, 2002, pp. 20-42.
- Cristian Preda, "Les partis politiques dans le post-communisme roumain", in Jean-Michel de Waele (ed.), *Les clivages politiques en Europe centrale et orientale*, Brussels, Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2004.
- Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic groups in conflict*, University of California Press, 1985.
- Milton Esman, *Ethnic Politics*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1994.
- Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed. Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*, Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- RMDSZ, 2012 campaign video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NR1-x9qIlbM>, consulted on 26 August 2025.
- RMDSZ, 2014 campaign video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QGCBcWmFwAQ>, consulted on 26 August 2025.
- RMDSZ, 2020 campaign video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ky3s9-1qbGA>, consulted on 27 August 2025.
- Tamás Kiss, István Gergő Székely, Gergő Barna, "Factors Affecting Turnout among Ethnic Minority Voters: The Case of Hungarians in Transylvania", *Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics*, 3, 2017, pp. 87-119.
- ***, Lapvélemények az RMDSZ-nek kormányba való lépéséről, 1996, <http://archivum.szabadsag.ro/archivum/1996/6dec-03t.html>, date consulted 25 August 2025
- ***, Az első átfogó közvélemény kutatás, <http://archivum.szabadsag.ro/archivum/1996/6okt-11t.html>, date consulted 25 August

Populism in the Western Balkans

Overall, most research on populism has primarily concentrated on Western Europe. However, many of the relevant hypotheses about the sources of populism actually do not apply to the Western Balkans, a region in which the nature of populism is unique:

"In Southeastern Europe, the historical legacy of Communism, in addition to the EU accession and its lengthy process, have all impacted the nature of populism, and in this sense, even within the region, the origins and traditions of populist parties and movements before, during and post-Communism are unique. Today's post-communist context, where many countries of Southeastern Europe are still waiting for the promised and long-awaited rewards of capitalism and democracy, has provided populist parties and movements a reservoir of discontent to tap into. In addition, the EU accession process has impacted the nature of populism and its rise across the region, and many researchers see this process itself as having acted as a sort of 'pressure cooker' to populist temptations that were previously held at bay, even during poor socio-economic conditions."¹

The academic literature on contemporary populism in the Balkans has made considerable progress toward understanding the specificity and origins of populism in the Balkans, both "from above" and "from below."² Predominant research "followed the established methodological routes identifying populism as a 'top-down' phenomenon" and connected it "to the rise of the radical right of European politics." Yet, much of the current work on populism in the Western Balkan literature suggests the need for

¹ Dario Brentin and Tamara Pavasović Trošt, "Populism from below in the Balkans", in *Contemporary Southeastern Europe*, Vol. 3 (2), 2016, p. 9, <https://contemporarysee.org/populism-from-below-in-the-balkans>, accessed on 27.03.2025.

² *Ibidem*.

“rethinking, but also the need to expand the theoretical debate on populism with a perspective *from below* by introducing social, populist, and protest movements” and also by including populist movements of left ideology. For instance, by focusing on Kosovo’s Lëvizja Vetëvendosje leftist-nationalist party, Bilge Yabanci’s 2016 research based on qualitative documentary analysis of the party programme, manifesto, party publications, speeches of the leadership and interviews shows how Lëvizja Vetëvendosje “successfully melds a populist political style, leftist/social democratic agenda and contentious politics as a means to disperse its message.”³ Also, Ljupcho Petkovski’s analysis of the discursive construction of ‘the people’ in Macedonia’s illiberal discourse of Nikola Gruevski argues that the current scholarship on populism should also be complemented by discourse theory. The author explores the discursive process of “changing the political imagination of the majority of ethnic Macedonians, to create ‘the people’ and allow it to reclaim its place in history by providing channels for material, symbolic and emotional incorporation into the system of social classes that were traditionally excluded from society. This ‘democratic’ move came at a price: the nascent liberal and institutional channels for political participation in Macedonia’s young democracy were dismissed and new subalternity created.”⁴ Ljupcho Petkovski, explaining the specificity of the use of the term ‘populism’ in Macedonia, resorts to the example of the conservative party VMRO-DPMNE, led by Nikola Gruevski, showing that:

“VMRO-DPMNE’s populism shares the basic structural characteristics of other populisms in post- socialist societies. It is defined by broad appeals to the people creating a symbolic cleavage between the people and the former communist-turned-social-democrat and liberal elite that has dominated political and social life since 1945. It also tends - in the name of the people who have suffered historical injustices - to dismantle liberal institutions and principles that are supposed to organize democratic political competition. In other words, despite enabling channels for the inclusion of once-neglected social sectors into political life, the losers in

³ Bilge Yabanci, “Populism and Anti-Establishment Politics in Kosovo: A Case Study of Lëvizja Vetëvendosje”, in *Contemporary Southeastern Europe*, Vol. 3(2), 2015, p. 17, <https://contemporarysee.org/populism-and-antiestablishment-politics-in-kosovo-a-case-study-of-lvizja-vetvendosje>, accessed on 27.03.2025.

⁴ Ljupcho Petkovski, “Authoritarian Populism and Hegemony: Constructing ‘the People’ in Macedonia’s illiberal discourse”, in *Contemporary Southeastern Europe*, Vol. 3(2), 2015, p. 44, <https://contemporarysee.org/authoritarian-populism-and-hegemony-constructing-the-people-in-macedonias-illiberal-discourse>, accessed on 27.03.2025.

both transition and socialism, populism in Macedonia is fundamentally illiberal and authoritarian. Despite certain similarities, three characteristics distinguish the rise of populism in Macedonia from other populisms in the region. Firstly, Macedonia is an ethnically divided society where a complex power-sharing institutional arrangement between Macedonians and Albanians organizes political life. Secondly, the rise of populism coincided with a large-scale nation-building project aimed at revising the historical imaginary of the Macedonian nation. Finally, the populist and nationalist project of VMRO-DPMNE is a strategic one, as it is aimed at creating symbolic capital for a new right-wing elite that lacks a political historical tradition it can draw legitimacy from.”⁵

Irena Šentevska, analyzing populism in the Balkans by focusing on contemporary Serbia, shifts “the debate of the contemporary facets of populist ideologies from the realm of institutional politics to the realm of everyday life, popular culture, media and ‘invented traditions’”⁶ demonstrating how “these realms generate new sources and voices of populism.”⁷ The author used a sample of 4733 music videos produced between 1980 and 2010 to identify the paradigmatic strategies of (visual) communication of ‘Serbness’. According to the author, the concept of ‘Serbness’ derives from the political transition in former Yugoslavia, which was followed by a reshaping of ethnic identities and concepts of nationhood. Instead of a transition to democratic governance, the new regime focused on advancing the interests of the dominant ethnic and national group, defined as follows:

“Lacking minimal consensus on the common social (ethical) values, Serbia becomes a battlefield for competing champions of the national cause who seek mass support for their often elusive agendas: one of the most picturesque weapons in this war is popular culture shaped by tribal nationalism dressed in folk costumes. After the year 2000, the political elites currently in power embarked upon a search for a new tradition and ideal ancestors dissociated from the remnants of the “communist” history. They were found in the mythical rural landscapes of pre-modern Serbia, uncontaminated by “foreign” influences and communist “corruption” where

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 51.

⁶ Irena Šentevska, “On Populist Pop Culture: Ethno as the Contemporary Political Ideology in Serbia”, in *Contemporary Southeastern Europe*, Vol. 3(2), 2015, p. 87, <https://contemporarysee.org/on-populist-pop-culture-ethno-as-the-contemporary-political-ideology-in-serbia>, accessed on 27.03.2025.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

everything preceding this "historic demise" tends to be rendered in idyllic hues."⁸

Astrea Pejović and Jovana Papović concentrate on the question of the potential of popular culture to become an agent of leftist populist politics. Taking "The Bombs of the Nineties" (Bombe devedesetih) as a case study, the authors reveal that the main issue around which the group articulates their politics is class warfare and leftist discourses:

"As heirs of the working class, they consider themselves the biggest losers of the democratic transition in Serbia - "the non-working class". Using hip-hop, they promote the idea that the unemployed and disempowered youth from Serbia and the region can and should create a critical mass together. Aiming to position themselves as the leaders of the (sub)urban youth, they claim that their music is a tool that could oppose the right-wing discourse that prevails in the hip-hop scene and the media, but also among Serbian youth in general."⁹

Comparing the populist experience between the EU and the Western Balkans, Ognjen Radonjić and Rosana Antoni Kotorchevikj argue that Western Balkan post-communist countries like Serbia, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia have been continuously reelecting populist politicians for the past thirty years. The authors note that the trend began with the formation of their independent states following the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, a period marked by serious economic downturn and the escalation of nationalist rhetoric aimed at ethnic minorities residing in these nations as a result of the disintegration process. Populist leaders rose to power during times of crisis, focusing on the economic struggles faced by the electorate and intensifying sentiments of animosity and resentment toward different ethnicities and nation-states. The authors also introduce two separate forms of populism: inward and outward. Inward populism usually refers to "the core EU countries' populism which is built upon the aura of a newly found affection for self-sufficiency under the banner of anti-immigration sentiment, progressive and

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 90.

⁹ Jovana Papović, Astrea Pejović, "The Potential of Popular Culture for the Creation of Left Populism in Serbia: The Case of the Hip-Hop Collective "The Bombs of the Nineties", in *Contemporary Southeastern Europe*, Vol. 3(2), 2015, p. 117, <https://contemporarysee.org/the-potential-of-popular-culture-for-the-creation-of-left-populism-in-serbia-the-case-of-the-hiphop-collective-the-bombs-of-the-nineties>, accessed on 27.03.2025.

liberal value backlash, joined by economically isolationist policies targeting trade imbalances, economic inequality, wage stagflation, lack of labour productivity growth and high unemployment in the peripheral cities as opposed to the cosmopolitan big capital,”¹⁰ while outward populism reflects the case of the “Western Balkans countries such as North Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Albania — plus Croatia — as they exhibit Erdogan-like, neo-conservative and religious populism in support of economic integration with the EU, going hand in hand with ethno-nationalism, native mono-culturalism, and leftist welfare policies for the impoverished by expanding state activism.”¹¹ Ognjen Radonjić and Rosana Antoni Kotorchevikj identified the following main policy characteristics of populist parties in the EU and in the Western Balkans, while highlighting the fact that the difference between the inward and outward-oriented countries stems directly from historical differences in demographic, cultural, and socio-economic factors:

Table 1: Policy characteristics of populist parties in the EU area and in the Western Balkans (adapted from Radonjić and Antoni Kotorchevikj, 2020, pp. 66-68)¹²

Policy characteristics of populist parties in the Western Balkans	Policy characteristics of populist parties in the EU countries
Welfare policies “vote buying” via benefits, subsidies and free services.	Economic nationalism and isolationism.
Unproductive deficit spending on infrastructure.	Trade protectionism.
“Economic liberalization” image via ineffective FDI policies.	Immigration reduction or fully anti-immigration.
Fiscal irresponsibility and concealment of the long-term economic costs.	Individual and corporate tax reforms in the top wealth tiers
State controlled public institutions and administration.	National self-sustainability of the labour market.
Media control and lack of freedom of expression (Freedom House, 2017a,	Against financial globalisation with an emphasis on the negative effects of “too big

¹⁰ Ognjen Radonjić and Rosana Antoni Kotorchevikj, “Theories on the Roots of the EU and the Western Balkans Rise of Populism”, in Haris Dajč, Isidora Jarić, Ljiljana Dobrovšak (eds.), *Contemporary Populism and its Political consequences. Discourses and Practices in Central and South-Eastern Europe*, Zagreb: Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar, 2022, p. 65.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 66.

¹² *Ibidem*, pp. 66-68.

Policy characteristics of populist parties in the Western Balkans	Policy characteristics of populist parties in the EU countries
2017b).	to fail" banks and financial institutions.
Ethno-Nationalism-driven rhetoric.	Against the power of large globalised corporations, business elites.
State controlled judiciary system.	Euroscepticism, anti-EU austerity policies, pro-fiscal autonomy.
Lack of rule of law and corruption.	Anti-Europeanism, focused on national sovereignty and the nation state culture and values.
Party nepotism and state clientelism.	
Abuse of state resources for electoral gains and pressure on voters.	

Viorela Agolli's research explores the connection between authoritarianism and populism during the Covid-19 pandemic in the Western Balkan countries. The central hypothesis is that the border closures and the declarations of the state of emergency in the WB created an environment that promoted the rise of authoritarianism and populism in the region. The study shows that the Covid-19 pandemic created a "new environment of the 'political decision-making' in conditions of emergency. [...] Emergency politics is a central theme of authoritarian rule. Emergencies have given autocratic leaders the opportunity to destroy or suspend democratic institutions and their checks and balances"¹³ [...] "The political leadership of the six countries of this region took advantage of the emergency measures in the fight against the virus to further concentrate its powers by thus ignoring the democratic decision-making processes and institutions."¹⁴ Milan Vukomanović examines the intricate relationship between religion and populism, analysing three examples of religious populism in Serbia, Montenegro, and Republika Srpska. The author describes Western Balkan societies today as "societies of incomplete

¹³ Viorela Agolli, "Populism during the Covid-19 Pandemic in the Western Balkans", in *Serbian Political Thought*, Vol. 78, No. 4/2022, Year XXIX, p. 69, doi: <https://doi.org/10.22182/spm.7842022.4>, accessed on 27.03.2025.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 70.

secularisation”¹⁵ and argues that ‘political orthodoxy’ (i.e., the religious-political syncretism and the role played by the state and its organizations in creating this hybridization within the public sphere) “rejects secular values and a democratic political culture, becoming, thus, anti-European.”¹⁶ One example cited by the author is the strong criticism from the SOC regarding the 2004 draft of the European Constitution, which failed to explicitly acknowledge Christianity as the foundation of European civilization and culture in its preamble. According to Vukomanović, religion can, therefore, be used as a “political instrument in the hands of ruling populists,”¹⁷ while “retraditionalisation could include conservative trends as well when it evokes traditions that stem from premodern periods.”¹⁸ Vukomanović concludes that populist social and political movements, along with governments in Serbia, Montenegro, and Republika Srpska, undermine the EU’s structural and organizational authority by supporting external powers like Russia and China that challenge the international liberal order. These movements also promote exclusivist political processes and social identities. Additionally, the lack of a robust civil society and the ineffective nature of liberal democracy in the Western Balkans contribute significantly to the rise of religious populism. Admir Čavalić and Haris Delić examine the practical application of populism in the Western Balkans, particularly in Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, highlighting how government institutions and state-run media are utilized to disseminate populist messages. Through comparative research and analysis, it becomes evident that the populist strategies in the Western Balkans share striking similarities stemming from longstanding populist approaches that can be traced back to the 1990s and the disintegration of former Yugoslavia. “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.”¹⁹ According to this study, a characteristic of populism in

¹⁵ Milan Vukomanović, “Populism and Religion in the Western Balkans: the role of the Serbian Orthodox Church”, in Dajč Haris, Styczyńska Natasza (eds.), *Faces of Populism in Central and South-Eastern Europe*, Kraków: Jagiellonian University Press, 2023, p. 54.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 55.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 58.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹ Admir Čavalić and Haris Delić, “State Institutions as a Playground for Populism: Case Study of Western Balkans”, in *The Visio Journal*, No.7, 2022, p. 52, <https://visio-institut.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Visio-Journal-7.pdf>, accessed on 27.03. 2025.

Serbia “is the spread of the atmosphere of extreme crisis.”²⁰ [...] “First of all, Aleksandar Vučić pays a lot of attention to media control. By controlling the media, he also controls public opinion. [...]. 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.”²¹ Another characteristic of populist movements is the important role of the ‘charismatic leader,’²² its ‘chameleon character’²³ (e.g. “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”²⁴ and “finally, populism in Serbia is closely linked to nationalism, nativism, and xenophobia (i.e. “the people are equated with the state, and every enemy of the people is also the enemy of the state”²⁵).

Vedran Dzihic argues that many right-wing political parties and organizations in the Western Balkans prioritize authoritarian nationalism as a central element of their ideology and actions. They position themselves as the “protectors” of their respective ethnic communities, claiming to be motivated by humanitarian and patriotic sentiments. Their ethnocentric viewpoint centers around the defense of identity, which they argue is rooted in tradition, history, and culture. They perceive modern challenges, such as globalization, and differing interpretations of history as significant threats to their identity:

“Most right-wing political parties and organizations in the Western Balkans emphasize authoritarian nationalism as a key ideological concept in their program and performance. From the point of view of a single ethnic community, they present themselves as “protectors” of the values of that community and who are publicly engaged and guided by “humanitarian” and “patriotic” feelings. The main focus of their ethnocentric perspective is the tendency to defend identity as one of the main motives for action on which the question of tradition, history, and culture rests. The biggest threat to identity is interpreted as the challenge of the modern age (globalization) and the “correct” interpretation of the past (revisionism), which speaks in favor of such continuity. Contemporary economic and social trends

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 53.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 54.

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 55.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

(neoliberalism, multiculturalism) are viewed as foreign to the “ethnic being” whose vulnerability requires mobility and homogenization of the entire ethnic group. The ethnocentric content of the far-right program evokes the need for a clear demarcation between ethnic groups, creating an image of the other as an “enemy” which is based on historical experience and the heritage of war. A significant number of political parties and organizations in the Western Balkans emphasize territorial demands among their program principles, justifying expansionism with the need to complete the ethnic space and rectify “historical injustices.”²⁶

Based on the studies mentioned above, the rise of far-right movements in the Western Balkans has unique characteristics, primarily influenced by the challenging history of the 1990s’ wars. While the far-right in Europe was building its political profile focused on issues like national identity, Islamophobia, and anti-immigrant sentiment in the former Yugoslavia, their development was shaped by the impact of interethnic conflicts. The disintegration of the Yugoslav state represented a distinct outcome of the Cold War’s conclusion, deviating from the anticipated rise of liberal democracy. For the new political leaders, the focus shifted from dismantling the authoritarian Leninist legacy to embracing exclusionary authoritarian nationalism.

Currently, relations between illiberal leaders are intensifying. For example, Hungary found fertile ground in the Balkan countries to challenge the Union’s democratic foundation and geopolitical strategy. “Increasingly isolated in Brussels, Orbán has moved to build his illiberal bloc outside the EU by endorsing and inspiring the authoritarian behaviour of Balkan politicians with questionable democratic credentials and defending their interests before EU institutions. His allies in the region include politicians such as the Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić or the President of the Republika Srpska Milorad Dodik.”²⁷

²⁶ Vedran Dzihic, “The Far-Right in the Western Balkans: How the Extreme Right is Threatening Democracy in the Region”, in *Policy Analysis / Österreichisches Institut für Internationale Politik*, 1), Wien: Österreichisches Institut für Internationale Politik, pp. 13, <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-85191-9>

²⁷ Berta López Domènech, “Orbán’s illiberal ‘tentacles’ in the Western Balkans: What implications for EU enlargement?”, Discussion paper, European Politics and Institutions Programme, 5 March 2024, p. 3, <https://www.epc.eu/en/publications/Orbans-illiberal-tentacles-in-the-Western-Balkans~58c2a8>, accessed on 27.03.2025.

Bibliography

- Agolli, Viorela "Populism during the Covid-19 Pandemic in the Western Balkans", in *Serbian Political Thought*, Vol. 78, No. 4/2022, Year XXIX, pp. 61-71, doi: <https://doi.org/10.22182/spm.7842022.4>.
- Brentin, Dario and Pavasović Trošt, Tamara, "Populism from below in the Balkans", in *Contemporary Southeastern Europe*, Vol. 3 (2), 2016, pp 1-16, <https://contemporarysee.org/populism-from-below-in-the-balkans>.
- Čavalić, Admir and Delić, Haris "State Institutions as a Playground for Populism: Case Study of Western Balkans", in *The Visio Journal*, No.7, 2022, pp. 47-67, <https://visio-institut.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Visio-Journal-7.pdf>.
- Domènech, Berta López, "Orbán's illiberal 'tentacles' in the Western Balkans: What implications for EU enlargement?", Discussion paper, European Politics and Institutions Programme, 5 March 2024, <https://www.epc.eu/en/publications/Orbans-illiberal-tentacles-in-the-Western-Balkans~58c2a8>.
- Džihic, Vedran "The Far-Right in the Western Balkans: How the Extreme Right is Threatening Democracy in the Region", in *Policy Analysis / Österreichisches Institut für Internationale Politik*, 1). Wien: Österreichisches Institut für Internationale Politik (oiip), pp. 2-18, <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssolar-85191-9>.
- Papović, Jovana and Pejović, Astrea, "The Potential of Popular Culture for the Creation of Left Populism in Serbia: The Case of the Hip-Hop Collective "The Bombs of the Nineties", in *Contemporary Southeastern Europe*, Vol. 3(2), 2015, p. 107-126, <https://contemporarysee.org/the-potential-of-popular-culture-for-the-creation-of-left-populism-in-serbia-the-case-of-the-hiphop-collective-the-bombs-of-the-nineties>.
- Petkovski, Ljupcho, "Authoritarian Populism and Hegemony: Constructing 'the People' in Macedonia's illiberal discourse", in *Contemporary Southeastern Europe*, Vol. 3(2), 2015, p. 44-66, <https://contemporarysee.org/authoritarian-populism-and-hegemony-constructing-the-people-in-macedonias-illiberal-discourse>.
- Radonjić, Ognjen and Antoni Kotorchevikj, Rosana, "Theories on the Roots of the EU and the Western Balkans Rise of Populism", in Dajč, Haris; Jarić, Isidoram and Dobrovšak, Ljiljana (eds.), *Contemporary Populism and its Political consequences. Discourses and Practices in Central and South-Eastern Europe*, Zagreb: Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar, 2022, pp. 55-77.
- Šentevska, Irena, "On Populist Pop Culture: Ethno as the Contemporary Political Ideology in Serbia", in *Contemporary Southeastern Europe*, Vol. 3(2), 2015, pp.

87-106, <https://contemporarysee.org/on-populist-pop-culture-ethno-as-the-contemporary-political-ideology-in-serbia>.

Vukomanović, Milan, "Populism and Religion in the Western Balkans: the role of the Serbian Orthodox Church", in Dajč Haris, Styczyńska Natasza (eds.), *Faces of Populism in Central and South-Eastern Europe*, Kraków: Jagiellonian University Press, 2023, pp. 53-79.

Yabancı, Bilge, "Populism and Anti-Establishment Politics in Kosovo: A Case Study of Lëvizja Vetëvendosje", in *Contemporary Southeastern Europe*, Vol. 3(2), 2015, pp. 17-43, <https://contemporarysee.org/populism-and-antiestablishment-politics-in-kosovo-a-case-study-of-lvizja-vetvendsosje>.

The Role of the Court of Justice of the European Union in shaping the European Union`s Foreign Policy

I. Introduction

The Court of Justice of the European Union is the highest court of the European Union. According to Article 19 of the Treaty on European Union, the role of the Court of Justice of the European Union is to protect the legal interests of the Union¹.

“1. The Court of Justice of the European Union shall include the Court of Justice, the General Court and specialised courts. It shall ensure that in the interpretation and application of the Treaties the law is observed. Member States shall provide remedies sufficient to ensure effective legal protection in the fields covered by Union law.

2. The Court of Justice shall consist of one judge from each Member State. It shall be assisted by Advocates-General. The General Court shall include at least one judge per Member State. The Judges and the Advocates-General of the Court of Justice and the Judges of the General Court shall be chosen from persons whose independence is beyond doubt and who satisfy the conditions set out in Articles 253 and 254 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. They shall be appointed by common accord of the governments of the Member States for six years. Retiring Judges and Advocates-General may be reappointed.

3. The Court of Justice of the European Union shall, in accordance with the Treaties:

¹ Koen Lenaerts, “On checks and balances: The rule of law within EU”, *Columbia Journal of Law*, no. 2, vol. 29, 2023, pp. 25 – 26.

- (a) rule on actions brought by a Member State, an institution or a natural or legal person;
- (b) give preliminary rulings, at the request of courts or tribunals of the Member States, on the interpretation of Union law or the validity of acts adopted by the institutions;
- (c) rule in other cases provided for in the Treaties;”

It is widely acknowledged that EUCJ plays a double role: as a supreme court and as a constitutional court². Moreover, starting from 1 December 2009 the European Union can exercise a new competence: foreign policy.

For the first time since its conception, the European Union has the power to pursue its own foreign policy and the capacity to play an international role. The European Commission is among the top institutions to represent the Union in foreign policy, which has the capacity to negotiate and to represent the interests of the Union worldwide.

It is important to note that those competences mentioned above must have a legal framework and that framework is provided solely by the European Union Court of Justice. To underline the importance of the Court of Justice of the European Union, we will refer to five examples that are of utmost importance. The first example is related to the so-called *Scherms* decisions³. In the early 2000s, the European Commission concluded an agreement with the USA with the objective of regulating the transfer of personal data between the two parties.

Things proceeded without any issues until 2013 when Edward Snowden⁴ defected to Russia and presented the story that social media platforms had been used by the US intelligence agencies to place European citizens under surveillance, including important EU leaders like the German Chancellor. At this stage, an Austrian court of law brought before the CJEU a preliminary ruling to check the validity of the transfer agreement.

By its landmark decision, the CJEU decided that the agreement was invalid because the American side no longer provided enough security

² Jose A. Gutierrez – Fons, Koen Lenaerts, “The constitutioal allocation of powers, and general principles of EU law”, *Common Market Law Review*, no. 6, vol. 47, 2010, pp. 1630–1631.

³ EUCJ, case C-362/14 and case C-311/18, available at curia.eu, accessed on 30th September 2025

⁴ <https://www.reuters.com/article/technology/schrems-the-law-student-who-brought-down-a-transatlantic-data-pact-idUSKCN0S02NY/>, accessed on 30th September 2025

guarantees for the protection of the personal data of the European citizens⁵ (at that moment Facebook operated through its headquarters in Ireland and all personal data collected on the territory of the European Union were automatically transferred to its main headquarters in the USA).

The decision was shocking because personal data were no longer permitted to be transferred to the USA. The impact was significant also economically and in terms of trade, as companies like Facebook or Google were pillars of the American economy. Faced with such a situation, negotiations between the UE and USA started in 2016, for a new agreement to be concluded. A new agreement was concluded but was challenged once more before the CJCU. The result was the same and, for the second time, no legal framework existed for the transfer of personal data between the two jurisdictions.

The second example is related to state aid provided by some European Union member states to American companies that operated within the territory of the European Union. Some EU member states like Luxembourg and Ireland allowed the transfer of the profits made by the American companies (e.g.: Amazon) to tax friendly jurisdictions situated in the USA (e.g.: Delaware). The European Commission decided that those member states were at fault because they promoted an unfair tax competition with the other member states.

The European Commission issued administrative decisions asking member states to withdraw those tax advantages by forcing the American companies to pay their tax obligations at the fair rate. The administrative decisions were challenged before CJEU and the American government declared that the decisions issued by the European Commission were in fact a declaration of trade war between EU and USA⁶.

After many years of judicial battles, the Court of Justice of the European Union ruled in favour of the member states, backed by the big American companies and the decisions delivered by the European

⁵ Loic Azoulai, Marijn Van Der Sluis, "Institutionalizing personal data protection in times of global institutional distrust: Schrems", *Common Market Law Review*, no. 5, vol. 53, 2016, pp. 1369 – 1371.

⁶ *The European Commission's Recent State Aid Investigations of Transfer Pricing Rulings*, 2016, available at home.treasury.gov/system/files/131/WhitePaper-EU-State-Aid-8-24-2016.pdf, accessed on 30th September 2025.

Commission have been annulled⁷. By these decisions, the European Union Court of Justice pointed that EU is a safe place for businesses and for investors.

The third example is related to the Dieselgate scandal⁸. It is well known that cars produced by Volkswagen deliberately misrepresented the amount of gas emissions. The CJEU decided that the German carmaker was at fault for breaching the trust of consumers all around the world. In this case⁹, the CJEU decided that, irrespective of their nationality, the consumers had the right to seek compensations from the German carmaker. This case illustrates the international reach and protection provided by the decisions adopted by the Court of Justice of the European Union.

A fourth example is represented by an ongoing case before the Court of Justice of the European Union¹⁰. The case opposes the Micula brothers and the European Commission, related to the compensation obtained by the two businessmen before an international commercial tribunal. The story started in 2001 when Romania was still out of the European Union. The Romanian government concluded a deal with the two businessmen who are of Swedish citizenship. The two businessmen will make investments in the poor regions of Romania, and the Romanian government will provide tax exemptions for 10 years on the resulting business activities.

In 2005, Romania ended the negotiations for joining the European Union and the 1st of January 2007 was set as accession date. In this framework, the European Commission decided that it was necessary for Romania to remove every tax friendly treatment from its domestic legislation. Romania accepted all the requirements coming from the European Commission and became a member of the European Union since 1 January 2007. The two businessmen were dissatisfied with the decision adopted by the Romanian government because, from their point of view,

⁷ Anuschka Backer, Anca Aron, Dusan Arsenovic, *Proposed EU TP Directive and the Amazon Case – A New Lens on State Aid Investigation*, 2024, available at www.ibfd.org/sites/default/files/2024-09/free-article-proposed-eu-tp-directive-and-the-amazon-case-a-new-lens-on-state-aid-investigations-ibfd.pdf, accessed on 30th September 2025.

⁸ Matthias Lehmann, *A Further Twist to Emissions Scandal Litigation: Jurisdiction in Case of Self-Imported Cars*, 2021, available at <https://eapil.org/2021/06/08/a-further-twist-to-emissions-scandal-litigation-jurisdiction-in-case-of-self-imported-cars/>, accessed on 30th September 2025.

⁹ EUCJ, case C-343/19, available at curia.eu, accessed on 30th September 2025.

¹⁰ EUCJ, case C-891/24 P, available at curia.eu, accessed on 30th September 2025.

Romania breached the provision of Romania – Sweden treaty for the protection of mutual investments.

The dispute was brought before the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes in Washington and the tribunal decided in favour of the businessmen. Accordingly, they got a judicial decision that forced Romania to pay the amount of 250 million euros as compensation. The European Commission considered that the payment of those compensations represented an illegal state aid and in 2015 issued a decision ordering Romania not to pay those compensations or to recover them in the case those compensations were paid.

The decision of the European Commission was challenged before the CJEU and, 10 years later, the legal problem remains unresolved. The decision that the court is going to deliver will be a historic one for the future of the European Union's foreign relations. What is at stake is whether a decision rendered by an international arbitral tribunal in the field of business against a member state of the European Union can be considered compatible with the European Union law and implemented in the economic landscape of the European Union.

The fifth example is also related to a case still pending before the CJEU. At the beginning of 2022, the European Union adopted Regulation 1854/2022, which provided the framework for imposing additional taxes on the profits obtained by the players from the field of gas and oil. The European Union justified the adoption of this regulation related to the fact the member states economies should be supported in the context of the COVID crisis and the start of the war in Ukraine.

Big players in the industry like ExxonMobil and Shell, which are important representatives of the American and British economies, decided that the regulation was disavowable and had a lot of legal flaws. The case was brought before the Court of Justice of the European Union and is pending¹¹. The economic impact of the case is huge because the stake is above 10 billion euro, that being the amount of additional taxes paid by the two major oil companies. Also, the relationship with USA and UK will be clearly influenced by the decision, because energy is one of the crucial items in the modern world.

In conclusion, these samples from the case law of the European Union prove that the role of the Court of Justice of the European Union is far more

¹¹ EUCJ, case T-802/22, available at [curia.eu](https://curia.europa.eu/curia-eu/), accessed on 30th September 2025.

important than it is commonly perceived and has the power to influence the foreign policy of the European Union. In the following section, some of the landmark decisions of the CJEU, in various foreign policy areas, will be presented, together with their implications.

II. The relationship with the Muslim world

In the case *Istanbul Lojistik*¹² the Court was asked to analyze the compatibility of a Hungarian tax road imposed only on Turkish registered trucks. The Court decided as follows:

Article 4 of Decision No 1/95 of the EC-Turkey Association Council of 22 December 1995 on implementing the final phase of the Customs Union must be interpreted as meaning that a tax on motor vehicles such as that at issue in the main proceedings, which must be paid by persons operating heavy goods vehicles registered in Turkey and in transit through Hungarian territory, constitutes a charge having equivalent effect to a customs duty within the meaning of that article.

The decision delivered in this case is proof to the fact that the European Union Court of Justice plays the role of implementing the agreements concluded with countries that are part of the European Union customs union¹³ and are seeking to become members of the European Union and it is a proof that the rights of the third parties are respected inside the union once they are recognized by international agreements. Another important decision in relation to Türkiye is represented by the case *A*¹⁴, with the following decision:

Article 21(1) of Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection, for a uniform status for refugees or for persons eligible for subsidiary protection, and for the content of the protection granted, read in conjunction with Article 18 and Article 19(2) of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, must be interpreted as meaning that, where

¹² EUCJ, case C-65/16, available at curia.eu, accessed on 30th September 2025.

¹³ Ilke Göçmen, "Revealing the Potential of the EU – Turkey Customs Union: Case C-65/16, *Istanbul Lojistik*, 19 October 2017, ECLI: EU C:2017:770", *Legal Issues of Economic Integration*, no. 3, vol. 45, 2018, pp. 297 – 298.

¹⁴ EUCJ, case C-352/22, available at curia.eu, accessed on 30th September 2025.

a third-country national who has been granted refugee status in one Member State is the subject, in another Member State, on whose territory he or she resides, of an extradition request from his or her country of origin, the requested Member State cannot authorise extradition unless it has initiated an exchange of information with the authority that granted the requested individual refugee status and where that status has not been revoked by that authority.

The importance of this decision is represented by the fact the European Union Court of Justice considers compliance with fundamental human rights rules essential. By this decision the Court shaped the foreign policy of the Union, emphasizing that relationship with third countries, even with countries that aspire to become members of the European Union, should always be subject to the condition that fundamental human rights are respected.

In the case *Centraal Israëlitisch Consistorie van België and Others, Unie Moskeeën Antwerpen VZW, Islamitisch Offerfeest Antwerpen VZW*¹⁵, the Court was asked to deliver an opinion of compatibility between EU law and religious traditions. The court upheld the following decision:

1. Point (c) of the first subparagraph of Article 26(2) of Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 of 24 September 2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing, read in the light of Article 13 TFEU and Article 10(1) of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, must be interpreted as not precluding legislation of a Member State which requires, in the context of ritual slaughter, a reversible stunning procedure which cannot result in the animal's death.
2. The examination of the third question referred for a preliminary ruling has disclosed nothing capable of affecting the validity of point (c) of the first subparagraph of Article 26(2) of Regulation No 1099/2009.

Through this ruling, the Court explained that the European Union is open to immigration and to coexistence with different cultures and religions as part of the European foreign policy. But the rights derived from the democratic traditions of member states should be exercised in the framework of the minimum standard imposed by the European Union and no foreign interest is allowed to diminish the above standard. It is important to say that the decision was challenged before the other important European Court of Justice of the European continent, the European Court of Human Rights in

¹⁵ EUCJ, case C-336/19, available at [curia.eu](https://curia.europa.eu/curia-eu/), accessed on 30th September 2025.

Strasbourg. The Court of Strasbourg¹⁶ upheld the decision delivered by the Court of Luxembourg and decided that no fundamental freedom was breached.

In the end of this chapter, we consider that it is important to refer to another landmark decision that comes out of the EU – Algeria association agreement. In the case *X v Raad van bestuur van de Sociale verzekeringsbank*¹⁷, the Court stated the following:

1. Article 68(4) of the Euro-Mediterranean Agreement establishing an Association between the European Community and its Member States, of the one part, and the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, of the other part, must be interpreted as having direct effect, so that persons to whom that provision applies are entitled to rely on it directly before the Member States' courts to have rules of national law which are contrary to it disapplied.
2. Article 68(4) of the Euro-Mediterranean Agreement establishing an Association between the European Community and its Member States, of the one part, and the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, of the other part, must be interpreted as applying to the survivors of a worker who, wishing to transfer their survivors' benefit to Algeria, are not themselves workers and who reside in Algeria.
3. Article 68(4) of the Euro-Mediterranean Agreement establishing an Association between the European Community and its Member States, of the one part, and the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, of the other part, must be interpreted as not precluding a reduction in the amount of a survivors' benefit by reason of the fact that the recipient of that benefit resides in Algeria, where that benefit is intended to guarantee a basic income calculated on the basis of the cost of living in the debtor Member State and the reduction thus effected respects the substance of the right to transfer freely such a benefit.

The impact of this decision is significant because it allows Algerian workers coming to the EU to benefit from social rights, even related to periods of time when they worked in Algeria. This decision is a certain proof that EU is not discriminating based on religious grounds, but that the EU provides certain rights for foreigners who exercise their right to work fairly inside the EU and the do not have hidden purposes. Last, but not least, this decision is a good example that the relation with the Muslim world can be

¹⁶ ECtHR, cases no. 16760/22, 16849/22, 16850/22, available at [https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#{%22itemid%22:\[%22002-14290%22\]}](https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#{%22itemid%22:[%22002-14290%22]}), accessed on 30th September 2025

¹⁷ EUCJ, case C-549/22, available at [curia.eu](https://curia.europa.eu/curia.jsf?docid/172772), accessed on 30th September 2025.

developed on good faith grounds fostering fruitful foreign relations between the EU and the Muslim world.

III. The European continent - shaping relations

Although the European Union comprises mostly of the European states, there are still disputes between European states. In the case *Hungary vs. Slovakia*¹⁸ the court was asked to deliver a decision with the regard of free movement of persons, related to its application to official representatives of the state:

In order to rule on these two heads of complaint, it must be noted that the procedure established under Article 259 TFEU is designed to obtain a declaration that the conduct of a Member State is in breach of EU law and to terminate that conduct (see, to that effect, Joined Cases 15/76 and 16/76 *France v Commission* [1979] ECR 321, paragraph 27; Case C-456/05 *Commission v Germany* [2007] ECR I-10517, paragraph 25; and Joined Cases C-514/07 P, C-528/07 P and C-532/07 P *Sweden and Others v API and Commission* [2010] ECR I-8533, paragraph 119).

Thus, as the aim of the Treaty is to achieve the practical elimination of infringements by Member States and the consequences thereof (Case 70/72 *Commission v Germany* [1973] ECR 813, paragraph 13), an action under Article 259 TFEU concerning future possible infringements or limited to seeking an interpretation of EU law is inadmissible.

It must be stated that, by its second head of complaint, Hungary, first, merely pleads a risk of future infringements of Article 3 TEU and Article 21 TFEU, as well as of Directive 2004/38, and second, it does not claim that that risk, assuming it to be established, constitutes, in itself, an infringement of EU law.

As regards its fourth head of complaint, Hungary does not ask the Court to find that there had been an infringement on the part of the Slovak Republic, but seeks merely an interpretation of EU law. Moreover, that interpretation is allegedly necessary for the application of that law to a situation different to that at issue in the present case. The circumstances surrounding the incident of 21 August 2009 between Hungary and the Slovak Republic concern solely the President of Hungary and do not concern any other categories of citizens.

The importance of this case is that the Court decided that the fundamental freedoms did not apply to heads of states and governments.

¹⁸ EUCJ, case C-364/10, available at curia.eu, accessed on 30th September 2025.

Furthermore, the legal regime applicable was represented by international public law and any litigation that may arise would be decided by the International Court of Justice in Hague.

In the case *Slovenia vs. Croatia*¹⁹, the Court decided the following, in a conflict of border issue between the two parties:

Declares that the Court of Justice of the European Union lacks jurisdiction to rule on the Republic of Slovenia's action, brought on the basis of Article 259 TFEU, in Case C-457/18;

Similarly to the previous decision, the Court stated that EU law had a limited area of applicability and cannot be used in international law disputes as is the case of drawing borders. The important teaching of this case is that it has set a border between EU law and international law, which is of utmost importance for the foreign relations of the European Union.

In the end, we consider important to refer the problem of the accession of the European Union to the Council of Europe. The accession to the Council of Europe cannot happen without the express approval of European Union Court of Justice. In 2014, the Court²⁰ issued a negative opinion in relation to this problem because that would mean automatically that the Court of Luxembourg will automatically be under the jurisdiction of the Court of Strasbourg²¹. From our point of view, the failure of the European Union to join the Council of Europe because of legal flaws represents one of the biggest problems of the European Union foreign policy that should be place high among the top agenda priorities of the policy makers of European Union's foreign policy.

IV. Conclusions

As shown throughout this analysis, the role of the Court of Justice of the European Union is of utmost importance in shaping the balance of power and the overall architecture of the European Union's foreign policy. Although realism is one of the cornerstones of foreign policy, it should not

¹⁹ EUCJ, case C-457/18, available at curia.eu, accessed on 30th September 2025.

²⁰ EUCJ, opinion 2/2013, available at curia.eu, accessed on 30th September 2025.

²¹ Vassilis Pergantis, *Shade of Trust: The ECtHR, the ECJ and Their Evolving Relationship in Light of the 2023 Revised Draft Accession Agreement*, European Papers, no. 2, vol. 9, 2024, pp. 802 – 803.

be forgotten that the European Union is the response to the greatest tragedy of the 20th century – World War II. The protection of fundamental freedoms within the European Union cannot be achieved without a solid legal framework and the only institution capable of providing is the Court of Justice of the European Union.

Ultimately, it is necessary to conclude that a valid and modern foreign policy of the European Union without the CJEU cannot exist, and that the correct shape of the foreign policy of the European Union cannot be given without the highest and supreme judicial body of the European Union – the Court of Luxembourg.

Bibliography

Articles

Göçmen, Ilke, “Revealing the Potential of the EU – Turkey Customs Union: Case C-65/16, Istanbul Lojistik, 19 October 2017, ECLI: EU C:2017:770”, *Legal Issues of Economic Integration*, no. 3, vol. 45, 2018

Gutierrez – Fons, Jose A.; Lenaerts, Koen, “The constitutinoal allocation of powers, and general principles of EU law”, *Common Market Law Review*, no. 6, vol. 47, 2010

Lenaerts, Koen, “On checks and balances: The rule of law within EU”, *Columbia Journal of Law*, no. 2, vol. 29, 2023

Azoulai, Loic; Van Der Sluis, Marijn, “Institutionalizing personal data protection in times of global institutional distrust: Schrems”, *Common Market Law Review*, no. 5, vol. 53, 2016

Pergantis, Vassilis, “Shade of Trust: The ECtHR, the ECJ and Their Evolving Relationship in Light of the 2023 Revised Draft Accession Agreement”, *European Papers*, no. 2, vol. 9, 2024

Online sources

Backer, Anuschka; Aron, Anca; Arsenovic, Dusan, *Proposed EU TP Directive and the Amazon Case – A New Lens on State Aid Investigation*, 2024, available at www.ibfd.org/sites/default/files/2024-09/free-article-proposed-eu-tp-directive-and-the-amazon-case-a-new-lens-on-state-aid-investigations-ibfd.pdf, accessed on 30th September 2025

<https://www.reuters.com/article/technology/schrems-the-law-student-who-brought-down-a-transatlantic-data-pact-idUSKCN0S02NY/>, accessed on 30th September 2025

Lehmann, Matthias, *A Further Twist to Emissions Scandal Litigation: Jurisdiction in Case of Self-Imported Cars*, 2021, available at <https://eapil.org/2021/06/08/a-further-twist-to-emissions-scandal-litigation-jurisdiction-in-case-of-self-imported-cars/>, accessed on 30th September 2025

The European Commission's Recent State Aid Investigations of Transfer Pricing Rulings, 2016, available at home.treasury.gov/system/files/131/WhitePaper-EU-State-Aid-8-24-2016.pdf, accessed on 30th September 2025

European Union Court of Justice (Eucj) Decisions

Case C-362/14 and case C-311/18, available at [curia.eu](https://curia.europa.eu/curia/), accessed on 30th September 2025

Case C-343/19, available at [curia.eu](https://curia.europa.eu/curia/), accessed on 30th September 2025

Case C-891/24 P, available at [curia.eu](https://curia.europa.eu/curia/), accessed on 30th September 2025

Case T-802/22, available at [curia.eu](https://curia.europa.eu/curia/), accessed on 30th September 2025

Case C-65/16, available at [curia.eu](https://curia.europa.eu/curia/), accessed on 30th September 2025

Case C-352/22, available at [curia.eu](https://curia.europa.eu/curia/), accessed on 30th September 2025

Case C-336/19, available at [curia.eu](https://curia.europa.eu/curia/), accessed on 30th September 2025

Case C-549/22, available at [curia.eu](https://curia.europa.eu/curia/), accessed on 30th September 2025

Case C-364/10, available at [curia.eu](https://curia.europa.eu/curia/), accessed on 30th September 2025

Case C-457/18, available at [curia.eu](https://curia.europa.eu/curia/), accessed on 30th September 2025

Opinion 2/2013, available at [curia.eu](https://curia.europa.eu/curia/), accessed on 30th September 2025

European Court for Human Rights Decisions

Cases no. 16760/22, 16849/22, 16850/22, available at [https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#{%22itemid%22:\[%22002-14290%22\]}](https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#{%22itemid%22:[%22002-14290%22]}), accessed on 30th September 2025;

Japan's (In)Action on the Uyghur Question: Norms or Interests?

1. Introduction

The paper provides an overview of how Japan's attitudes and reactions towards the Uyghur issue evolved between 2014 and 2024. From a methodological point of view, the paper primarily uses a qualitative design, supported by selective use of quantitative data. With the exception of the theoretical points, the research is centered around primary data sources, including discourse tracing of official policy documents and opinion surveys in the 2014-2024 timeframe. In this logic, the study is guided by two research questions: How did Japan's discourse and policy responses to the Uyghur question evolve between 2014 and 2024? What factors influenced Japan's slow reaction to the topic, despite increasing international pressure?

In answering these questions, the research establishes the conceptual framework under the guidance of Social-Constructivism and Role Theory. Moving forward, the paper traced how Japan's identity has changed in the post-Cold War era, following several episodes of structural shifts in its foreign policy strategies. Building on the contextual setting and on concepts such as *identity*, *norms*, *role expectations* and *interrole conflict*, the study attempts to explore how Japan's discourse and attitude changed from *silence* to *inaction* under a process of cautious engagement on the issue. As such, it also tries to reveal a broader process of role negotiation in the context of intensifying great power competition and rising international attention to human rights issues, including the situation in Xinjiang.

Finally, the paper closes out with an attempt at understanding the pace of Japan's reactions, framing them through the help of theoretical and

practical factors. Moreover, the study also considers two alternative explanations, testing their validity against the timeline and the actual reaction. This approach ultimately offers a more comprehensive understanding of Japan's foreign policy discourse and cautious engagement.

Theoretical framework

The underlying conceptual backbone of the research is based predominantly on the Social-Constructivist paradigm, which draws attention to the *dynamic* nature of political life. In comparison to traditional materially inclined theories, Social-Constructivism, as a theoretical lens, provides fruitful means and avenues of exploring shifts of intricate policies, which go beyond a simple material approach, incorporating norms, diplomatic practices and strategic interests. Naturally, the theory does not discredit the role and importance of material factors, "but instead observes that the meaning and construction of that material reality is dependent on ideas and interpretations"¹. In this logic, the paper uses certain concepts pertaining to Social-Constructivism in exploring Japan's response to the Uyghur topic. Since Social-Constructivism, as a theory of International Relations, spans a wider spectrum of intellectual depth and conceptual diversity, the paper will focus on specific operationalizations of two relevant concepts which are widespread in the literature. This also allows the research to be empirically-grounded and to avoid a dilution of meanings within these concepts.

Foremost, the paper focuses on *identity* as a constitutive element of Japan's foreign policy interactions. In general terms, "identities determine whether countries see each other as friends or foes and thus whether relative power differences between countries are threatening or not"². However, identity perception and construction does not only apply to other actors (or generally defined as the 'other'), but also the performative actor (or generally defined as the 'self'). For this, Japan's identity on the international stage has

¹ Michael Barnett, "Social Constructivism", in John Baylis, Steve Smith and Patricia Owens (eds.), *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, 8th edition, New York: Oxford University Press, 2020, p. 193.

² Henry R. Nau, "Identity and the Balance of Power in Asia", in G. John Ikenberry and Michael Mastanduno (eds.), *International Relations Theory and the Asia-Pacific*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2003, p. 213.

evolved based on the interplay on two types of factors. First, international elements, such as expectations, legitimacy and normative constraints, have shaped both how Japan positions itself and how other relevant actors perceive Tōkyō throughout its foreign policy horizons. Second, domestic elements, including political leadership, historical memory and domestic normative expectations (i.e., pacifist or nuclear non-proliferation movements) have also influenced how Japan interprets and internationalizes norms and how it articulates its foreign policy roles and reactions.

Second, as mentioned above, identities, as part of the social view of international relations, are not static, in the sense that contextual shifts on the international stage (such as episodes of crises, political changes or divergence in the foreign policy of other actors) also trigger changes in identities (both for the actors involved and for the actors that react to them). In other words, an actor's identity is also shaped by the "norms that it pays respect to, and particular roles in the international context"³. *Norms* and *expectations* play fundamental roles for identity (re)formation. These are also, themselves, subjected to the duality mentioned above: normative expectations come from external actors (such as international partners or multilateral forums) as well as from domestic audiences.

Moving on, in complementing the general theoretical traits provided by Social-Constructivism, Role Theory deepens the analysis by highlighting, as the name suggests, the *roles* that states perceive themselves as manifesting (on the one hand) and are expected to play (on the other hand) within the international system. For operationalizing the theory, the paper focuses on Thies' conceptualization of Role Theory. To narrow down the practical interpretation of Role Theory and to avoid an analytical dilution, Thies considers the approach as a "perspective that begins with the concept of role as central to social life"⁴.

In line with Constructivist interpretations of international relations, the interactions between actors occur within a social world (or life, as defined above), which is subject to evolving situations or contexts. Moreover, Thies identifies four variables that help us understand the impact of roles in foreign policy: role expectations, role demands, the audience and the

³ Hidetaka Yoshimatsu, "Identity, Policy Ideas, and Asian Diplomacy: Japan's Response to the Rise of China", *International Area Studies Review*, 15, no. 4, 2012, p. 361.

⁴ Cameron Thies, "Role Theory and Foreign Policy", *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of International Studies*, December 22, 2017, p. 4.

location⁵. As indicated by the theoretical selection that complements Social-Constructivism with Role Theory (or vice-versa), several of the practical dimensions of these four variables above overlap with elements of Social-Constructivism. Role expectations and demands widely reflect the *normative environment* which shapes the structure where actors operate. The theoretical tradition highlights the fact that norms (which can be associated with expectations) and legitimacy (which can be associated with demands) create general expectations for state behavior by providing constraints on choices and by formalizing what is perceived as accepted. The audience (which, for the sake of convenience, refers to the external domain) exerts a pressure for either validation or contestation, providing what Thies defines as a “consensual reality for the role”⁶. Lastly, the location refers to the situational context in which roles are socialized (i.e., actors reinforce certain roles in certain international conditions), underlining the view that identities, behaviors and the international structure depend on each other through interactions.

2. Contextualizing Japan’s Identity

In a broad approach, Japan’s post-World War II foreign policy horizon was based on a strong commitment to peace and non-involvement. This was impacted both by political and legislative changes and by normative elements. Article 9 of the *peace constitution*⁷ formally prohibits Japan to wage war or to maintain offensive military forces. Aside from the constitutional foundation, Japan institutionalized pacifism as a core element of its identity, thus shaping the expectations of international actors. Under this approach, Tōkyō adopted a low-profile strategy during the Cold War, which enabled it to significantly develop its economic and cultural assets. This also limited Japan’s diplomatic reach, as its foreign policy mainly employed *softer* elements, pertaining to human connections and developmental cooperation.

The end of the Cold War impacted the international stage of politics. This also meant a change in expectations for Tōkyō to play a bigger role in international affairs. The late 1990s and the 2000s in Japan were dominated

⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 9-13.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

⁷ *The Constitution of Japan*, Chapter II, Article 9, 1947, [https://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution_and_government_of_japan/constitution_e.html], consulted September 29, 2025.

by short-lived governments, which limited Japan's ability to articulate a coherent foreign policy vision. However, there were subtle indications that Japan's own approach towards international politics was changing alongside a redefinition of its identity, as the 2004 National Defense Program Guidelines articulated a "direct connection between world peace and Japan's peace"⁸.

This was followed by Shinzō Abe's first term as Prime Minister. In-between 2006 and 2007, the Abe government has shaped Japan's foreign policy around two significant concepts: *values-oriented diplomacy* and *the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity*⁹. A common element of these concepts was the promotion of fundamental human rights and the rule of law. Ultimately, "these proposals intended the revival of the Japanese economy through free trade and included keen geopolitical calculations under the umbrella of values"¹⁰. At the level of ideas and expectations, the new foreign policy pillars attempted to shape Japan's international role within the liberal world order. However, due to political instability, such initiatives generated limited practical results in terms of policy visions and strategies. A more dynamic redefinition of Japan's identity took shape starting with 2012, changes initiated by Abe's second term as Prime Minister. Pacifism, as a norm guiding Japan's foreign policy horizon, saw a reinterpretation towards a more *proactive approach*¹¹. This gradual reinterpretation also saw the clash of more conservative domestic expectations (conservative in the sense that they opposed radical changes towards Japan's pacifism) and international pressure on Japan to assume a more active role in global issues. In this context, values and norms became central to Japan's political identity. Based on this normative shift, Japan moved to centralize its regional foreign policy visions around a series of shared principles, such as the rule of law and freedom of navigation. This vision materialized in 2016 into the *Free and Open*

⁸ "Defense of Japan 2020 (Annual White Paper)", Ministry of Defense of Japan, 2020, [https://www.mod.go.jp/en/publ/w_paper/wp2020/DOJ2020_EN_Full.pdf], p. 215, consulted September 29, 2025.

⁹ Tarō Aso, "On the 'Arc of Freedom and Prosperity'", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, March 2007, [<https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/pillar/address0703.html>], consulted September 29, 2025.

¹⁰ Murata Koji, "Kishida's 'Realism' Diplomacy: From the Yoshida Doctrine to Values-Based Diplomacy?", Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 2023, p. 3.

¹¹ "Japan's Proactive Contribution to Peace", The Government of Japan, 2014, [https://www.japan.go.jp/tomodachi/2014/spring-summer2014/japans_roactive_contribution_to_peace.html], consulted September 29, 2025.

Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy, underlining Tōkyō's commitment to regional stability, the promotion of universal values and the focus on economic development¹².

In regard to Japan's more proactive and values-centered identity, the demands of the role varied across the audience. More politically close partners (such as the US, the EU, Australia and India) drafted warmer signs of alignment and appreciation both to the 2007 period and the 2014-2016 period. This was mostly visible in Japan's relations alongside the US, its most important security partner since the post-World War II era. During the establishment of Japan's proactive approach and the FOIP, Washington remained Japan's most important supporter throughout its security reforms, encouraging Japan to adopt a more engaged leadership role in the regional context, which also included promoting shared values¹³. However, the normative commitment highlighted by Japan generated different reactions from other actors with whom Japan established more sensitive and less coherent partnerships, most notably China. Chinese media outlets negatively portrayed both the 2007 and 2014¹⁴ conceptualizations, being perceived as attempts at exclusion. Beijing's values-driven divergence impacted the framing of Japan's normative change as "an attempt to encircle and contain Chinese influence"¹⁵. By the 2014-2016 new foreign policy concepts, the relations were further impacted by the increasing tensions around the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands dispute. The 10th Japan-China Public Opinion Poll conducted by The Genron NPO and China Daily reinforced this view: in China, even amongst the general public, the territorial dispute was the most influential driver in determining negative perceptions, cited by

¹² "Free and Open Indo-Pacific", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2025, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/page25e_000278.html], consulted September 29, 2025.

¹³ "Joint Statement of the Security Consultative Committee", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, April 2015, [<https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000078186.pdf>], consulted September 29, 2025.

¹⁴ See also, "Abe's 'Values Diplomacy' Goes against the Grain", *China Daily*, July 2013, [https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2013-07/02/content_16702600.htm], consulted September 29, 2025 and "Abe's Fault Approach to China", *China Daily*, September 2013, [https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2013-07/09/content_16753713.htm], consulted September 29, 2025.

¹⁵ Christopher W. Hughes, "Japan's Response to China's Rise: Regional Engagement, Global Containment, Dangers of Collision", *International Affairs* 85, no. 4, July 2009, p. 854.

77.6% of respondents in 2013 and 64% in 2014 as the main reason for their view¹⁶.

Overall, this divergence in role reception showcases tensions within Japan's foreign policy identity. In contrast to the validation (or legitimacy) received from like-minded partners, Japan's values-based diplomacy and more proactive approach have been met with resistance by actors with diverging perspectives, especially in cases when Tōkyō's actions might be perceived as exclusionary or assertive. Moreover, this becomes even more challenging in case of normative inconsistencies: when Japan chooses moderate-to-no actions to preserve pragmatic needs. Plainly put, at times and under certain conditions, Japan fails to commit to its values-based approach, especially in cases of "prioritizing relations with non-democratic powers over the fundamental values it advocates"¹⁷. Such inconsistencies raise questions about Japan's role performance as a norm-promoting and upholding actor, particularly in relation to human rights. In this logic, Japan's reaction to the Uyghur question proves fruitful for understanding how identity, role performance and normative expectations shape and are reflected in Tōkyō's foreign policy choices, both at the level of discourse and practice.

3. Japan's Reactions to the Uyghur Question

3.1. Short Background

Before diving into the topic, the paper attempts to briefly define the core aspects of the Uyghur question to contextualize Japan's normative expectations associated with it. Throughout the paper, the term 'Uyghur question' (or 'issue') refers to the systemic human rights abuses perpetrated by the Chinese government against the minority Muslim population in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.

¹⁶ "The 10th Japan-China Public Opinion Poll", The Genron NPO and *China Daily*, 2014, [https://www.genron-npo.net/en/pp/docs/10th_Japan-China_poll.pdf], consulted September 29, 2025.

¹⁷ Naraoka Sochi, "'Value-Oriented Diplomacy' and Its Issues in Modern Japanese History", Discuss Japan, September 2023, [<https://www.japanpolicyforum.jp/diplomacy/pt2023092614314713368.html>], consulted September 29, 2025.

Up until the 2010s, the region was generally defined by a peaceful cohabitation between the Han population and the Uyghur population¹⁸. This was impacted by two exceptions. First, in the immediate post-2001 context, the Islamophobe “global climate was utilized by [...] the CCP to justify the implementation of repressive ‘strike hard’ policies against the minorities in Xinjiang”¹⁹. Second, in 2009, a factory in the region witnessed a conflict between Uyghur and Han workers, signalling, among other things, ethnic-based exclusion for the Muslim minority. These incidents created a convenient discursive framework in which the minority was portrayed in a “stereotype of fierceness, anger, and violence”²⁰. This was also intensified with the leadership of Xi Jinping, who adopted new exclusionary security strategies, especially targeting domestic terrorism as a threat to national security²¹. Pairing the minority stigma with the region’s status as one of the poorest in China²², “any criticism is portrayed by the state as a sign of separatism and extremism”²³. This framing virtually legitimizes state repression under the cover of national stability or counterterrorism. Fundamentally, this became much more visible with 2014, with Beijing’s declaration of a ‘Campaign against Violent Terrorism’²⁴, which intensified and centralized the government’s repressive control over the region.

Throughout the years, the actions of the Chinese government towards the Uyghur population were defined in a broad spectrum of concepts, ranging from human rights abuses to ethnic cleansing and genocide. In a

¹⁸ Ali Çaksu, “Islamophobia, Chinese Style: Total Internment of Uyghur Muslims by the People’s Republic of China”, *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2020, p. 176.

¹⁹ Ciara Finnegan, “The Uyghur Minority in China: A Case Study of Cultural Genocide, Minority Rights and the Insufficiency of the International Legal Framework in Preventing State-Imposed Extinction”, *Laws*, vol. 9, 2020, p. 6.

²⁰ Li Xi Yuan, “Ethnicity or Nationality? Minority Policy and Ethnic Conflict in Contemporary China”, in *Ethnicity as a Political Resource: Conceptualization across Disciplines, Regions, and Periods*, Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2015, p. 158.

²¹ Finnegan, *art. cit.*, p. 6.

²² Shen Maoying, “Poverty and Anti-Poverty in China Mountain Region”, XII World Forestry Congress, 2003, [<https://www.fao.org/4/XII/0510-A3.htm>], consulted September 29, 2025.

²³ Ali Çaksu, *art. cit.*, p. 177.

²⁴ “Uyghur Genocide and Concentrated Reeducation Camps in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of the People’s Republic of China”, Office of the Director of National Intelligence, [<https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/NIC-Unclassified-Report-Uyghur-Genocide-Concentrated-Reeducation-Camps-China-Oct2024.pdf>], p. 1, October 2024, consulted September 29, 2025.

2022 report published by the UN²⁵, Beijing was generally accused of *crimes against humanity* targeting minority populations in Xinjiang. Naturally, these developments have drawn criticism from other international actors, painting the Uyghur question as a human rights concern, inclining towards the ‘softer’ spectrum of classifications. For this reason, as a state deeply embedded into the liberal global order, Japan should have faced normative pressure (both externally and internally) to respond in a manner consistent with its identity and roles.

3.2. Japan’s Reaction during Abe’s Second Term (2014-2020): The Silence Era

Analyzing policy papers (mostly Diet Resolutions, Press Statements and Diplomatic Bluebooks), it becomes very clear that Japan’s reactions were dominated by an overt *silence* during this period on the Uyghur problem. A clear contradiction or rather a dichotomy began to form. Specifically, Diplomatic Bluebooks do in fact reference human rights topics, in line with Japan’s Proactive Pacifism, but aside from the assumed responsibility and the need of promoting and protecting such values, there is no specific reference to any abuses. For example, the 2014²⁶ and 2015²⁷ Bluebooks devoted significant space in referencing human rights, but there were no explicit mentions of China’s policies in Xinjiang. Moreover, by 2016, the term ‘human rights’ appeared 94 times throughout the Bluebook²⁸, with three pages dedicated to outlining Tōkyō’s human rights initiatives under section 1, ‘Efforts for Peace and Stability of Japan and the International Community’. But even so, there was no explicit reference towards the Uyghur question.

²⁵ “China: New UN Report Alleges Crimes against Humanity”, Human Rights Watch, [<https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/09/01/china-new-un-report-alleges-crimes-against-humanity>], 2022, consulted September 29, 2025.

²⁶ “Diplomatic Bluebook 2014 Summary”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, October 2014, [<https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/2014/html/index.html>], consulted September 29, 2025.

²⁷ “Diplomatic Bluebook 2015”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, October 2015, [<https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/2015/html/index.html>], consulted September 29, 2025.

²⁸ “Diplomatic Bluebook 2016”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, July 2016, [<https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000177707.pdf>], consulted September 29, 2025.

The only visible shift emerged with the 2020 Bluebook, which, for the first time, made a direct reference to the topic. Specifically, it highlighted “growing concern in the international community about the state of human rights in China”²⁹. Despite it being a rather brief acknowledgement (a single paragraph) it, nonetheless, marked a departure from the previous six years of silence. This was, at the same time, paired by a subtle evolution of bilateral summit discussion topics. In 2014, the Foreign Ministers’ Meeting³⁰ and the Summit Meeting³¹ focused almost exclusively on issues pertaining to traditional security. The reason was directly connected to restoring the depth of relations following the disputes regarding the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands (following Japan’s acquisition and nationalization of three of the islands in September 2012) and China’s declaration of an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) in November 2013 over East China Sea, which raised significant political anxieties for Tōkyō. On a similar note, 2015 formal meetings revolved around promoting the concept of a ‘Mutually Beneficial Relationship based on Common Strategic Interests’³², without referencing more contentious topics such as human rights.

In 2016, when Japan was drafting its FOIP vision, the April 30 Foreign Ministers’ Meeting³³ identified five areas of cooperation (financial cooperation, environment, aging populations, tourism and disaster preparedness) alongside three common challenges for regional stability. (North Korea, UN cooperation and counterterrorism and Middle Eastern affairs). Once again, human rights were entirely absent from the agenda, highlighting Japan’s cautious discursive and normative policy steps in its

²⁹ “Diplomatic Bluebook 2020”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, October 2020, [<https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100116875.pdf>], p. 45, consulted September 29, 2025.

³⁰ “Japan-China Foreign Ministers’ Meeting”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, November 2014, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/c_m1/cn/page3e_000262.html], consulted September 29, 2025.

³¹ “Japan-China Summit Meeting”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, November 2014, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/c_m1/cn/page4e_000151.html], consulted September 29, 2025.

³² “Japan-China Summit Meeting and Foreign Ministers Meeting”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, November 2015, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/c_m1/cn/page3e_000404.html], consulted September 29, 2025.

³³ “Foreign Minister Kishida Visits China”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, April 2016, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/c_m1/cn/page3e_000489.html], consulted September 29, 2025.

dealings with Beijing. This pattern continued throughout 2017, with an extensive focus directed towards economic cooperation.

By 2019, Japan's approach showed timid steps towards change. During the April 15 Summit of Foreign Ministers³⁴, Japan called for China to display transparency towards topics surrounding human rights. This track continued and the Abe-Xi Summit during the G20 Osaka Summit called for respect of universal values including human rights. Since then, the topic widely came to surface bilateral meetings, period that coincided with a heightened international discourse and attention towards the situation in Hong Kong. Probably the most notable and relevant development came on December 23, during the Summit Meeting between Abe and Xi³⁵, when Tōkyō, through the Prime Minister, expressed the first mention of the Uyghur/Xinjiang topic in a bilateral summit. The topic was not framed just as a bilateral concern, but rather as a wider topic of importance to the international society. Abe once again urged Beijing to demonstrate transparency regarding the situation. Even with the disruptions brought about by the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic, the Uyghur issue remained a consistent point of discussion in both bilateral settings (Foreign Minister and Summit meetings). Japan's approach on the topic evolved from a total silence towards a more active, but cautious engagement.

During this period, Abe's Japan held a largely silent approach, showcasing limited engagement with a human rights language in relation to China. Hence, although its identity as an emerging regional middle power centered on human rights, particularly under the guidance of *values-oriented diplomacy*, *proactive-contribution to peace* and later *the Free and Open Indo-Pacific*, Japan remained silent on the Uyghur issue. But a significant question emerges: why did Japan position itself in such a manner (in a very silent approach) in the 2014-2020 period?

This disconnect, which highlighted an ambiguous approach to the Uyghur question, can be better understood through three interconnected factors, highlighted by Role Theory and Social-Constructivism: role location (or, the timing of Japan's role performance), role conflicts and limited

³⁴ "Japan-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting and Working Lunch", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, April 2019, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/c_m1/cn/page3e_001007.html], consulted September 29, 2025.

³⁵ "Japan-China Summit Meeting and Dinner", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, December 2019, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/c_m1/cn/page3e_001144.html], consulted September 29, 2025.

domestic imperatives. First, role location (the timing) underscores the political sensitivities that dominated the discourse amongst the partners. Post-2012 (especially in the 2015-2018 timeframe when the Uyghur question became more visible globally), Tōkyō focused intensely on de-escalating tensions around the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands controversy and the East and South China Seas maritime disputes. For this reason, high-level communication (namely bilateral engagement summits and meetings analyzed in the paper) was rebuilt around the formative pillars of Japan-China relations: a mutually beneficial engagement. To preserve the constructive momentum and avoid an overtly fragile diplomatic space, Japan's general approach towards human rights was generally low-profile. For this reason, it can be stated that Japan has maintained ambiguity in its diplomacy towards China, especially in 'protecting' or maintaining engagement on security and economy-oriented interests. The timing also highlighted the fact that Japan sought to avoid very specific accusations of human rights abuses to build-up stability in their bilateral ties, following post-2012 tensions. This ambiguity can be witnessed, for example, in the Bluebooks, where Japan's focus on universal values and international norms was highly emphasized, especially following the establishment of the FOIP, without any direct criticism of human rights abuses in China. Timing, therefore, played a significant role in shaping Japan's more restrained approach.

The second factor relates to what Thies defined as "*interrole conflict*"³⁶ – meaning situations in which an actor is supposed to perform seemingly contradictory behaviors or use divergent language for different roles. Plainly put, Japan was caught between two partially conflicting role expectations. On the one hand, as a norm-promoter, Japan was expected by its partners with whom it shares a series of political values (mainly, traditional allies such as the US, Australia and the EU) to criticize and punish human rights abuses. This coincided with Japan's step-up in regards to its own regional more proactive role, focused on defending the principles outlined in the FOIP vision. On the other hand, within the timing mentioned above, Tōkyō also behaved as a more pragmatic regional middle power, influenced by the geostrategic realities of the region, complemented by the anxieties generated by Chinese political actions, which required a more limited voice on divergent topics. This non-confrontational approach aligned with Beijing's

³⁶ Thies, *art. cit.*, p. 6.

expectations towards Japan, allowing the two partners to at least maintain pragmatic cooperation and avoid further escalations. It is only logical that balancing seemingly contradictory roles proves challenging. For this reason, Japan's foreign policy language appeared to contradict at times its actions. This was particularly visible in its cautious stance on the Uyghur question, defining its silence on the topic.

Lastly, the third factor comes from Japan's domestic context, where the Uyghur issue historically received limited public attention. In May 2012, the 4th General Assembly of the World Uyghur Congress (WUC) was organized in Tōkyō³⁷. It generally criticized China's human rights abuses, but the Japanese participant audience was rather limited, with media sources covering the event. However, China's reaction came immediately, setting Beijing's ensuing approach towards the issue: the foreign ministry spokesperson criticized the Japanese government for allowing a presumed terrorist organization to schedule an anti-China meeting³⁸. In spite of this event, however, broader public awareness remained low. The Uyghur question gained resonance within small, diaspora-led groups, such as the Japan Uyghur Association (JUA), established in 2008, which organized small symposiums for the Uyghur cause³⁹. Occasional protests did occur. Following public backlash, the Uyghur groups and the Tibetan community in Japan organized a march for peace on the 2019 Human Rights Day (December 10)⁴⁰. As in the case of previous efforts, however, this was predominantly a diaspora-led movement. During the same month, witnessing the shallow impact of the Uyghur issue within the local community, manga artist Tomomi Shimizu created a manga comic called 'What Has Happened to Me' "to raise awareness of the 'daily suffering'

³⁷ "The World Uyghur Congress Successfully Concludes its 4th General Assembly in Japan", The World Uyghur Congress, 2012, [<https://www.uyghurcongress.org/en/the-world-uyghur-congress-successfully-concludes-its-4th-general-assembly-in-japan/>], consulted September 29, 2025.

³⁸ "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hong Lei's Remarks on the So-called 4th General Assembly of the 'World Uyghur Congress' Held in Japan", Ministry of Foreign Affairs – People's Republic of China, [https://www.mfa.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xw/fyrbt/fyrbt/202405/t20240530_11349124.html], consulted September 29, 2025.

³⁹ "Activity Reports", Japan Uyghur Association, [<https://uyghur-j.org/japan/category/%e6%b4%bb%e5%8b%95%e5%a0%b1%e5%91%8a/>], consulted September 29, 2025.

⁴⁰ "Tibetans Join Human Rights Day in Japan", Central Tibetan Administration, December 2019, [<https://tibet.net/tibetans-join-human-rights-day-in-japan/>], consulted September 29, 2025.

endured by the Chinese mostly Muslim minority”⁴¹. Through the popular nature of her art form, Tomomi Shimizu attempted to bring the Uyghur Question to a broader Japanese audience (especially the youth) and to move away from a strict political approach. This effort was complemented by The Japan Times’ community stories on Uyghurs in Japan⁴², which highlighted the experiences of Uyghurs living in Japan. In spite of these efforts, the overall domestic mobilization remained limited. As a result, Japan’s external diplomacy continued to be shaped primarily by stronger, more impactful elements, pertaining to strategic considerations of security (including traditional security and economic elements). The public support for the Uyghur issue did not have the necessary impact to shape national policies.

3.3. Japan’s Reaction during Suga and Kishida (2020-2024): The Inaction Era

By 2020, Japan’s official position on the Uyghur question began to slowly change. In this sense, the issue entered Japan’s foreign policy discourses, moving away from a relative period of silence. Under Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga (2020-2021), alignment with international efforts became increasingly visible. In October 2020, Japan became a part of an international statement, alongside 38 other partners pressing China to “respect human rights, particularly the rights of persons belonging to religious and ethnic minorities, especially in Xinjiang and Tibet”⁴³. This was a clear step-up, as Japan engaged on the issue through multilateral channels and within a coordinated alignment. In March 2021, Foreign Minister

⁴¹ Hideto Sakai, “With Uighur Comic, Japanese Manga Artist Aims to Highlight Everyday ‘Suffering’”, *Reuters*, December 2019, [<https://www.reuters.com/article/world/with-uighur-comic-japanese-manga-artist-aims-to-highlight-everyday-suffering-idUSKBN1YV0Q7/>], consulted September 29, 2025.

⁴² See also, “Uyghurs Living in Kansai Try to Deal with the Stress of a Crisis Back Home”, *The Japan Times*, November 2019, [<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2019/11/28/issues/uighurs-kansai/>], consulted September 29, 2025 and Carla Rodriguez, “Uighur Restaurants in Tokyo: Finding Heaven through Food”, *The Japan Times*, March 2019, [<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/life/2019/03/02/food/uighur-restaurants-tokyo-finding-heaven-food/>] consulted September 29, 2025.

⁴³ Catherine Putz, “2020 Edition: Which Countries Are For or Against China’s Xinjiang Policies?”, *The Diplomat*, October 2020, [<https://thediplomat.com/2020/10/2020-edition-which-countries-are-for-or-against-chinas-xinjiang-policies/>], consulted September 29, 2025.

Toshimitsu Motegi issued a press statement explicitly mentioning the human rights situation surrounding the Uyghur population in China, emphasizing the need for cooperation alongside like-minded partners to address the issues⁴⁴. The topic was also raised during an April bilateral Summit Meeting alongside the US, where President Joe Biden and Prime Minister Suga highlighted the importance of constructive efforts in addressing the human rights abuses⁴⁵. A month later, at the G7 Foreign and Development Ministers' Meeting, Japan joined its partners in calling for a neutral, independent body to assess the conditions on the ground in Xinjiang, Tibet and Hong Kong⁴⁶. The framing portrayed them as areas where China undermines democratic practices.

After Suga's short term, Fumio Kishida took office in 2021 and Japan's normative and discursive positioning on the topic became more structured. Kishida's very first telephone meeting with Xi Jinping also focused on the Xinjiang situation, indicating that the topic would remain on Tōkyō's agenda. In November 2021, Kishida appointed Gen Nakatani as Special Advisor of the Prime Minister for Human Rights Issues⁴⁷. With experience as Defense Minister, Nakatani adopted a stronger stance on human rights abuses, directly criticizing Chinese actions. Moreover, he also called for the need of a more coherent legislative framework to sanction human rights abuses. The same month also marked the 'revival' of the Japan Uyghur Parliamentary Association, formally established in 2012, but rather inactive or dormant in the following years. The culmination of these early moves occurred in February 2022, when the House of Representatives adopted a bipartisan resolution alongside the House of Councillors directly addressing

⁴⁴ "Press Conference by Foreign Minister MOTEGI Toshimitsu", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, March 2021, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/kaiken/kaiken22e_000022.html#topic2], consulted September 29, 2025.

⁴⁵ "U.S.-Japan Joint Leaders' Statement: 'U.S.-Japan Global Partnership for a New Era'", The White House, April 2021, [<https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/04/16/u-s-japan-joint-leaders-statement-u-s-japan-global-partnership-for-a-new-era/>], consulted September 29, 2025.

⁴⁶ "G7 Foreign and Development Ministers' Meeting: Communiqué – Excerpts", Consulat Général de France à Hong Kong et Macao, July 2021, [<https://hongkong.consulfrance.org/G7-Foreign-and-Development-Ministers-Meeting-Communiqué-excerpts-5-May-2021>], consulted September 29, 2025.

⁴⁷ "Japan PM Kishida to Appoint Ex-Defence Chief Human Rights Aide", *Reuters*, November 2021, [<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/japan-pm-kishida-appoint-ex-defence-chief-human-rights-aide-2021-11-08/>], consulted September 29, 2025.

the human rights situations concerning Xinjiang (Uyghur minority), Tibet, Southern Mongolia and Hong Kong⁴⁸. Interestingly enough, although the resolution referenced the regions above, it did not explicitly mention China as an abuser or perpetrator, reinforcing the cautious nature of Japan's legislative response. Between 2022 and 2024, such criticism continued throughout bilateral and multilateral platforms. Subsequently, in October 2024, Japan joined 14 other countries in a statement issued at the 79th Session of the UN General Assembly's Third Committee⁴⁹, becoming the only East Asian country (outside the Middle East and the Pacific) to sign such UN Human Rights Council statements specifically covering the Uyghur Question.

4. Understanding Japan's Slow Engagement

By 2020, Japan's official position towards the Uyghur question started to change, but the reaction was rather slow, especially compared to the US' labelling of the human rights abuses in Xinjiang as *genocide*⁵⁰. Initially, Tōkyō refrained from directly positioning vis-à-vis the topic, calling for 'transparency' and general expressions of 'concern' about the situation, showing a slow engagement with the Uyghur issue. Two key factors can help explain this stance.

From both a Social-Constructivist and Role Theory perspective, the identities and the roles of states are subject to a social process of negotiation. However, this does not occur spontaneously or unpredictably, but rather through a process of internalization and adjustment. As the Uyghur question garnered international attention given that the pressure from democratic

⁴⁸ "Resolution regarding the Serious Human Rights Situation in Xinjian Uighur and Other Areas", The House of Representatives, Japan, February 2022, [https://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_english.nsf/html/statics/english/ketugi_e220201-1.html], consulted September 29, 2025.

⁴⁹ "Joint Statement on the Human Rights Situation in Xinjiang and Tibet at the 79th Session of the Third Committee of the United Nations General Assembly, Item 71: Promotion and Protection of Human Rights", Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations, October 2024, [https://www.un.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_en/jointstatement102224.html], consulted September 29, 2025.

⁵⁰ Michael R. Pompeo, "Determination of the Secretary of State on Atrocities in Xinjiang", U.S. Department of State, January 2021, [<https://2017-2021.state.gov/determination-of-the-secretary-of-state-on-atrocities-in-xinjiang/>], consulted September 29, 2025.

partners increased, Japan adapted its role and employed a sort of ‘discursive engagement’ (in pretty pale language) acknowledging the situation but without escalating tensions or adopting a partisan position.

Consequently, the regional context played a double role for Japan’s alignment and diplomatic behavior. First, to avoid any major disruptions within its own China policies, Japan adopted a more normatively-neutral language towards the Uyghur question, while keeping engagement high with Beijing on topics of mutual interest (such as security and economy). Second, divergent perceptions within the region also played a role. This refers to both threat perceptions (namely how Japanese regional partners position themselves vis-à-vis China) and to the different standards in positioning on topics of human rights abuses. Especially within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), where such internal alignment on human rights remains rather inconsistent, Japan risked undoing significant progress in bilateral and multilateral relations if it adopted an exclusionary vision (of the type *either this or nothing*). For these reasons, Japan opted for a moderate balancing strategy: in support of universal values in multilateral platforms, but avoiding direct confrontation in bilateral diplomacy.

However, the slow pace of change could also prove a significant danger for Japan, given its identity and roles. Especially due to the intensification of great power competition between China and the US, Japan’s silence was also interpreted as an inconsistency, undermining Tōkyō’s own credibility given its calls for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific. Kingston identified three structural divers for this gap⁵¹. First, historical sensitivities played their part, as Japan’s colonial rule makes human rights and democratization debates awkward, given its own practices at that time. Second, Tōkyō’s developmental cooperation was targeted towards institutions (capacity-building) and hard infrastructure (to augment human security) in the detriment of the transformative powers of democratic practices. Third, the cooperation-competition dichotomy with China had to be taken into consideration, as conditionality in cooperation (such as improving democratic practices, protecting minority rights for economic packages) could prove unattractive for autocratic regimes, pushing them towards Beijing’s non-conditionality.

⁵¹ Jeff Kingston, “The Emptiness of Japan’s Values Diplomacy in Asia”, *The Asia Pacific Journal*, vol. 18, issue 19, no. 1, October 2020, pp. 3-5.

Seeking to mitigate negative effects for regional partners, Japan's FOIP vision overtly lacks a focus on democracy and human rights. As such, it mostly employs a pale nuance, where 'rule of law', 'transparency' and 'accountability' came to the forefront, while 'democracy' and 'human rights' receded. This provides a more pragmatic language. 'Rule of law' appears to be a much less *radioactive* in triggering various autocratic rulers and a much more *dynamic* concept (meaning different actors imbue different values into it) than 'human rights'. This difference plays on the different nature of norms. Norms can be constitutive (defining who the actors are) or they can be regulative (shaping what actors can and cannot do). Although *pacifism* as a norm guiding Japan's foreign policy changed, Tōkyō's proactive pacifism has been applied somewhat selectively. Abe's Proactive Contribution to Peace was significantly focused on hard security cooperation (equipment transfers, maritime security and collective self-defense), while Japan's approach remained significantly conservative or traditional on softer aspects, such as its reactions to human rights abuses. Japan's identity (based on constitutive norms) as a liberal democracy should result in a stronger defense against norm divergence. However, its operating rules (based on regulative norms) introduces a more pragmatic approach, meaning that more proactivity or engagement with various topics was selectively applied.

Overall, it is clear that Japan's reaction has changed from the 2014-2020 discursive ambiguity, which meant referencing general topics associated with human rights abuses without specific allusion, or the focus on more dynamic concepts overall associated with 'values', to a more structured, but limited reaction. During Suga's tenure (2020-2021), Japan aligned more publicly with liberal partners, as the administration engaged in multilateral efforts centered around the Uyghur question. Moreover, it positioned Japan as a subtle norm-follower in terms of human rights. Kishida (2021-2024) took steps towards institutionalizing Japan's normative commitments in the domain of human rights. This was visible through the appointment of a human rights advisor and through the bipartisan Diet resolutions focusing on the Uyghur Question.

In this later stage (2020-2024), Japan engaged into role negotiation, taking a more active position in multilateral settings. However, interrole conflict is still visible with the very limited practical actions. Significantly, however, Japan engaged in sustained multilateral efforts, being the sole East Asian state (excluding Middle-Eastern states such as Israel, or Pacific states) to sign statements directly referencing the Xinjiang situation. This is

performed in the detriment of unilateral action. However, a relevant question stands - if Japan focused on proactivity, why other issues (such as security-related dilemmas) triggered clearer and faster responses from Japan? Based on the analyses provided throughout the research, some potential answers lie in the concepts of normative hierarchy and role learning.

For normative hierarchy, Japan's relatively low-profile response to the Uyghur topic was impacted by strategic prioritization, as the role location *shaped* its reactions. In-between 2020 and 2024, Japan faced various foreign policy challenges. The regional security environment was deteriorating due to China's actions in maritime security and North Korea's military tests. On top of that, the coronavirus pandemic required complex diplomatic, economic and even political recalibration, while the War in Ukraine prompted Japan to align more closely with Western allies. In these cases, Japan performed its role as a liberal democracy more visibly and more strategically coherent. This also came through historical experience, especially in the post-2012 era, as Tōkyō applied its more proactive role fulfilment in selective cases pertaining to human security (which was also impacted by the coronavirus pandemic) and traditional security (through its *security renaissance*⁵²). Based on the factors above, by contrast, the Uyghur question was subjected to a sort of normative de-prioritization, as Japan balanced its values-based approach with practical interests. In regards to role learning, the Uyghur question presented three significant challenges, which slowed down Japan's adaptation process and ultimately its reaction. First, diplomatic maneuvering (as highlighted above) posed its barriers. The diplomatic risks and costs were high, while the political gains were lower than in the cases pertaining to traditional security. Moving forward, the civil society garnered rather incremental reactions towards the issue. Moreover, most programs were spearheaded by diasporas (the minority itself). This contrasted with more established human rights movements in partner countries. Lastly, Japan benefits from a weak institutional framework to draft and apply sanctions in cases of human rights abuses⁵³. This domestic

⁵² See also, Andrew L. Oros, *Japan's Security Renaissance*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2017.

⁵³ Masaya Kato and Takashi Tsuji, "Japan Eyes US-Style Law to Sanction Uighur Human Rights Abuses", *Nikkei Asia*, November 2020, [<https://asia.nikkei.com/politics/international-relations/japan-eyes-us-style-law-to-sanction-uighur-human-rights-abuses>], consulted September 29, 2025.

vulnerability was also shaped by Japan's support for development aid and institution-building, in the detriment of democratic practices.

5. Alternative Explanations for Japan's Limited Response

Before moving on to the conclusions of the research, it is equally important to focus on various aspects not covered by it. The most common and logical argument would be that economic dependence and vulnerability determines the reaction. As China came to be Japan's most important trade partner with significant exchanges between 2021 and 2023, it would be natural that Tōkyō should avoid confrontation over more sensitive and less impactful strategic topics, such as human rights issues. For reference, in 2022, Japan's trade relations with China were significant, totaling 325 billion US Dollars (144 billion in exports to China and 181 billion in imports from China)⁵⁴. However, the timeline complicates this explanation. Japan's more engaged stance on the Uyghur issue started around this period (around 2020-2021), when economic flows were disrupted by the global pandemic. If economic considerations were decisive, Japan's rhetorical engagement to more sensitive topics would have actually decreased rather than increased during these times.

Another argument could center around Japan simply following the reactions of its traditional allies, particularly the US. In this logic, references to human rights should be more prominent after key actions taken by the aforementioned traditional partners with whom Japan shares liberal principles. But the facts point towards more considerations than such correlations. For reference, Japan continued through its phase of *silence* in 2018, despite multiple US reports, statements and growing pressure condemning China over repeated human rights abuses⁵⁵. Tōkyō actually re-shaped its behavior and discursive practices in 2020, when US-China rivalry

⁵⁴ "Japan-Yearly Trade", Observer of Economic Complexity (OEC), [<https://oec.world/en/profile/country/jpn>], consulted September 29, 2025.

⁵⁵ For reference, see also, "China (Includes Tibet, Xinjiang, Hong Kong, and Macau) 2018 International Religious Freedom Report", U.S. Department of State, 2018, [<https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/CHINA-INCLUSIVE-2018-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf>], consulted September 29, 2025 and Lily Kuo, "US Considers Sanctions on China over Treatment of Uighurs", *The Guardian*, September 2018, [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/12/us-considers-sanctions-on-china-over-treatment-of-uighurs>], consulted September 29, 2025.

had already escalated. This timing, as above, points to a more complex dynamic, in which timing and role negotiation played a role in setting the depth, scope and tone of reactions. These alternative facets provide partial insight into Japan's stance, but they do not fully explain the more nuanced evolution observed across three Japanese administrations. For this reason, the research pointed towards the impact (and interplay) of identity, norms and roles in understanding the changes within Japan's positioning on the topic.

6. Conclusion

In line with its design, the research focused on tracing Japan's evolving policy and discourse on the Uyghur issue across three administrations: from Abe's silent era (2014-2020), to the period of inaction (or cautious engagement) under Suga and Kishida (2020-2024). Japan's positioning vis-à-vis the Uyghur question reflects the interplay of various dynamics that go beyond economic or alliance-driven forces. In this logic, the paper highlighted four overarching conclusions.

First, role location and normative hierarchy played a fundamental role in explaining Japan's selective proactive engagement (even if this sounds contradictory). The Uyghur issue ranked lower in Tōkyō's normative hierarchy of concerns: it was geopolitically distant from Japan, politically costly and domestically weak in support. Other crises, especially related to traditional aspects of security, were prioritized and garnered greater attention from the government in Tōkyō, including Chinese maritime assertiveness, the coronavirus pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Second, institutional measures for targeting and sanctioning human rights abuses were initiated but remain limited. Under the current law, the Foreign Exchange and Foreign Trade Act (FEFTA) remains the primary instrument for implementing economic sanctions⁵⁶. However, sanctions require cabinet approval, they can only target specific entities and individuals and are selectively applied. Accordingly, FEFTA-guided sanctions were applied on Russian individuals but, in a historic first, they

⁵⁶ "Foreign Exchange and Foreign Trade Act", Japanese Law Translation – Ministry of Justice, [https://www.japaneselawtranslation.go.jp/en/laws/view/4412/en#je_ch4at10], consulted September 29, 2025.

were used against four “Israeli settlers involved in violent acts”⁵⁷. This was basically the first use of FEFTA in response to human rights abuses, but no such action has been taken against Chinese individuals over the Uyghur controversies. The FEFTA sanctions against Israel settlers created a link between international peace and Japan’s own security. However, extending this to a Chinese autonomous region is politically challenging, as it would require framing human rights abuses in China as a direct threat to Japan’s security. This connection would most likely be impossible to defend.

Third, identity-based role conflict generated periods of instability. Japan’s identity as a liberal democracy contrasted with its more pragmatic side as a regional middle power. This produced the long Abe-era silence and the later shift to inaction. Even in its transition, Tōkyō adopted multilateral actions, while avoiding unilateral actions that might position it in a clearer stance.

Finally, the evolution from silence to inaction represents on itself an evolution, reflecting Japan’s role recalibration process. Tōkyō now actively participates in multilateral frameworks with more vocal positions on the topic. While it tries to do this, Japan also avoids destabilization in the regional framework. All in all, Japan has taken significant steps towards acknowledging and bringing light to the Uyghur question, but these steps are rather normative and symbolic than structural.

Bibliography

- “Abe’s ‘Values Diplomacy’ goes against the Grain”, *China Daily*, July 2013, [https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2013-07/02/content_16702600.htm], consulted September 29, 2025
- “Abe’s Fault Approach to China”, *China Daily*, September 2013, [https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2013-07/09/content_16753713.htm], consulted September 29, 2025.
- “Activity Reports”, Japan Uyghur Association, [https://uyghur-j.org/japan/category/%e6%b4%bb%e5%8b%95%e5%a0%b1%e5%91%8a/], consulted September 29, 2025.

⁵⁷ “Asset Freeze for Israeli Settlers Involved in Violent Acts”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, July 2024, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/me_a/me1/il/pressite_000001_00444.html], consulted September 29, 2025.

- Aso, Tarō, “On the ‘Arc of Freedom and Prosperity’”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, March 2007, [<https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/pillar/address0703.html>], consulted September 29, 2025.
- “Asset Freeze for Israeli Settlers Involved in Violent Acts”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, July 2024, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/me_a/me1/il/pressite_000001_00444.html], consulted September 29, 2025.
- Barnett, Michael, “Social Constructivism”, in John Baylis, Steve Smith and Patricia Owens (eds.), *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, pp. 192–206, 8th ed., New York: Oxford University Press, 2020.
- Çaksu, Ali, “Islamophobia, Chinese Style: Total Internment of Uyghur Muslims by the People’s Republic of China”. In *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2020, pp. 175–198.
- “China (Includes Tibet, Xinjiang, Hong Kong, and Macau) 2018 International Religious Freedom Report”, U.S. Department of State, 2018, [<https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/CHINA-INCLUSIVE-2018-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf>], consulted September 29, 2025.
- “China: New UN Report Alleges Crimes Against Humanity”, Human Rights Watch, [<https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/09/01/china-new-un-report-alleges-crimes-against-humanity>], 2022, consulted September 29, 2025.
- “Defense of Japan 2020 (Annual White Paper)”. Ministry of Defense of Japan, 2020, [https://www.mod.go.jp/en/publ/w_paper/wp2020/DOJ2020_EN_Full.pdf] consulted September 29, 2025.
- “Diplomatic Bluebook 2014 Summary”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, October 2014, [<https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/2014/html/index.html>], consulted September 29, 2025.
- “Diplomatic Bluebook 2015”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, October 2015, [<https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/2015/html/index.html>], consulted September 29, 2025.
- “Diplomatic Bluebook 2016”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, July 2016, [<https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000177707.pdf>], consulted September 29, 2025.
- “Diplomatic Bluebook 2020”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, October 2020, [<https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100116875.pdf>], p. 45, consulted September 29, 2025.
- Ethnicity as a Political Resource: Conceptualization across Disciplines, Regions, and Periods*, Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2015.

- Finnegan, Ciara, "The Uyghur Minority in China: A Case Study of Cultural Genocide, Minority Rights and the Insufficiency of the International Legal Framework in Preventing State-Imposed Extinction", in *Laws* vol. 9, 2020.
- "Foreign Exchange and Foreign Trade Act", Japanese Law Translation – Ministry of Justice, [https://www.japaneselawtranslation.go.jp/en/laws/view/4412/en#je_ch4at10], consulted September 29, 2025.
- "Foreign Minister Kishida Visits China", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, April 2016, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/c_m1/cn/page3e_000489.html], consulted September 29, 2025.
- "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hong Lei's Remarks on the So-called 4th General Assembly of the 'World Uyghur Congress' Held in Japan", Ministry of Foreign Affairs – People's Republic of China, [https://www.mfa.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xw/fyrbt/fyrbt/202405/t20240530_11349124.html], consulted September 29, 2025.
- "Free and Open Indo-Pacific", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2025, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/page25e_000278.html], consulted September 29, 2025.
- "G7 Foreign and Development Ministers' Meeting: Communiqué – Excerpts", Consulat Général de France à Hong Kong et Macao, July 2021, [<https://hongkong.consulfrance.org/G7-Foreign-and-Development-Ministers-Meeting-Communique-excerpts-5-May-2021>], consulted September 29, 2025.
- Hughes, Christopher W., "Japan's Response to China's Rise: Regional Engagement, Global Containment, Dangers of Collision", in *International Affairs* 85, no. 4, July 2009, pp. 837–856.
- Ikenberry, G. John and Michael Mastanduno (eds.), *International Relations Theory and the Asia-Pacific*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.
- "Japan PM Kishida to Appoint Ex-Defence Chief Human Rights Aide", *Reuters*, November 2021, [<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/japan-pm-kishida-appoint-ex-defence-chief-human-rights-aide-2021-11-08/>], consulted September 29, 2025.
- "Japan's Proactive Contribution to Peace", The Government of Japan, 2014, [https://www.japan.go.jp/tomodachi/2014/spring-summer2014/japans_roactive_contribution_to_peace.html], consulted September 29, 2025.
- "Japan-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting and Working Lunch", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, April 2019, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/c_m1/cn/page3e_001007.html], consulted September 29, 2025.

- "Japan-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, November 2014, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/c_m1/cn/page3e_000262.html], consulted September 29, 2025.
- "Japan-China Summit Meeting and Dinner", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, December 2019, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/c_m1/cn/page3e_001144.html], consulted September 29, 2025.
- "Japan-China Summit Meeting and Foreign Ministers Meeting", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, November 2015, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/c_m1/cn/page3e_000404.html], consulted September 29, 2025.
- "Japan-China Summit Meeting", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, November 2014, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/c_m1/cn/page4e_000151.html], consulted September 29, 2025.
- "Japan-Yearly Trade", Observer of Economic Complexity (OEC), [<https://oec.world/en/profile/country/jpn>], consulted September 29, 2025.
- "Joint Statement of the Security Consultative Committee", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, April 2015, [<https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000078186.pdf>], consulted September 29, 2025.
- "Joint Statement on the Human Rights Situation in Xinjiang and Tibet at the 79th Session of the Third Committee of the United Nations General Assembly, Item 71: Promotion and Protection of Human Rights", Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations, October 2024, [https://www.un.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_en/jointstatement102224.html], consulted September 29, 2025.
- Kato, Masaya and Takashi Tsuji, "Japan Eyes US-Style Law to Sanction Uighur Human Rights Abuses", *Nikkei Asia*, November 2020, [<https://asia.nikkei.com/politics/international-relations/japan-eyes-us-style-law-to-sanction-uighur-human-rights-abuses>], consulted September 29, 2025.
- Kingston, Jeff, "The Emptiness of Japan's Values Diplomacy in Asia", *The Asia Pacific Journal*, vol. 18, issue 19, no. 1, October 2020.
- Koji, Murata, "Kishida's 'Realism' Diplomacy: From the Yoshida Doctrine to Values-Based Diplomacy?", Report for Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 2023.
- Maoying, Shen, "Poverty and Anti-Poverty in China Mountain Region", XII World Forestry Congress, 2003, [<https://www.fao.org/4/XII/0510-A3.htm>], consulted September 29, 2025.
- Nau, Henry R., "Identity and the Balance of Power in Asia", in G. John Ikenberry and Michael Mastanduno (eds.), *International Relations Theory and the Asia-Pacific*, pp. 213–242, New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.

Oros, Andrew L. *Japan's Security Renaissance*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2017.

Pompeo, Michael R., "Determination of the Secretary of State on Atrocities in Xinjiang", U.S. Department of State, January 2021, [<https://2017-2021.state.gov/determination-of-the-secretary-of-state-on-atrocities-in-xinjiang/>], consulted September 29, 2025.

"Press Conference by Foreign Minister MOTEGI Toshimitsu", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, March 2021, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/kaiken/kaiken22e_000022.html#topic2], consulted September 29, 2025.

Putz, Catherine, "2020 Edition: Which Countries Are For or Against China's Xinjiang Policies?", *The Diplomat*, October 2020, [<https://thediplomat.com/2020/10/2020-edition-which-countries-are-for-or-against-chinas-xinjiang-policies/>], consulted September 29, 2025.

"Resolution regarding the Serious Human Rights Situation in Xinjian Uighur and Other Areas", The House of Representatives, Japan, February 2022, [https://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_english.nsf/html/statics/english/ketugi_e220201-1.html], consulted September 29, 2025.

Rodriguez, Carla, "Uighur Restaurants in Tokyo: Finding Heaven through Food", *The Japan Times*, March 2019, [<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/life/2019/03/02/food/uighur-restaurants-tokyo-finding-heaven-food/>] consulted September 29, 2025.

Sakai, Hideto, "With Uighur Comic, Japanese Manga Artist Aims to Highlight Everyday 'Suffering'", *Reuters*, December 2019, [<https://www.reuters.com/article/world/with-uighur-comic-japanese-manga-artist-aims-to-highlight-everyday-suffering-idUSKBN1YV0Q7/>], consulted September 29, 2025.

Sochi, Naraoka. "'Value-Oriented Diplomacy' and Its Issues in Modern Japanese History", Discuss Japan, September 2023, [<https://www.japanpolicyforum.jp/diplomacy/pt2023092614314713368.html>], consulted September 29, 2025.

"The 10th Japan-China Public Opinion Poll", The Genron NPO and *China Daily*, 2014, [https://www.genron-npo.net/en/pp/docs/10th_Japan-China_poll.pdf], consulted September 29, 2025.

The Constitution of Japan. 1947, [https://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution_and_government_of_japan/constitution_e.html], consulted September 29, 2025.

"The World Uyghur Congress Successfully Concludes its 4th General Assembly in Japan", The World Uyghur Congress, 2012, [<https://www.uyghurcongress.org/en/the-world-uyghur-congress-successfully-concludes-its-4th-general-assembly-in-japan/>], consulted September 29, 2025.

- Thies, Cameron, "Role Theory and Foreign Policy", in *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of International Studies*, December 22, 2017.
- "Tibetans Join Human Rights Day in Japan", Central Tibetan Administration, December 2019, [<https://tibet.net/tibetans-join-human-rights-day-in-japan/>], consulted September 29, 2025.
- "U.S.-Japan Joint Leaders' Statement: 'U.S.-Japan Global Partnership for a New Era'", The White House, April 2021, [<https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/04/16/u-s-japan-joint-leaders-statement-u-s-japan-global-partnership-for-a-new-era/>], consulted September 29, 2025.
- "Uyghur Genocide and Concentrated Reeducation Camps in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China", Office of the Director of National Intelligence, [<https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/NIC-Unclassified-Report-Uyghur-Genocide-Concentrated-Reeducation-Camps-China-Oct2024.pdf>], p. 1, October 2024, consulted September 29, 2025.
- "Uyghurs Living in Kansai Try to Deal with the Stress of a Crisis Back Home", *The Japan Times*, November 2019, [<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2019/11/28/issues/uighurs-kansai/>], consulted September 29, 2025.
- Yoshimatsu, Hidetaka, "Identity, Policy Ideas, and Asian Diplomacy: Japan's Response to the Rise of China", in *International Area Studies Review* 15, no. 4, 2012, pp. 359–376.
- Yuan, Li Xi, "Ethnicity or Nationality? Minority Policy and Ethnic Conflict in Contemporary China", in *Ethnicity as a Political Resource: Conceptualization across Disciplines, Regions, and Periods*, Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2015, pp. 151–167.

The 2023 Belgorod Oblast Incursions: an Analysis of Putin's Response to an Ongoing Crisis

Introduction

The incursions in Russia's Belgorod region represent a crisis that has lasted to this day, but they also demonstrate a crisis in Russian President Vladimir Putin's communication and situation management, as evidenced by his delayed and ultimately procedural response. Furthermore, these incursions from 2023 to 2025 have resulted in many losses, both human and material, leaving behind what psychologists refer to as the Belgorod syndrome, which I will discuss in this chapter; at the same time, these incursions represent one of the most serious cross-border attacks since WWII.

This article comprises four chapters:

1. The first part provides historical context for the Belgorod incursions, as well as information on the initial air raids that occurred in this region between May 22 and June 24, 2023.
2. In the second part, I chose to discuss the losses associated with these attacks. In the run-up to the fight, the Russian military ministry announced that 70 attackers had been killed. Among the material losses, numerous aircraft were shut down, an aspect that I will discuss in this section of my paper.
3. In the third part of this article, I choose to analyse President Vladimir Putin's response. Given the Russian President's comments and replies throughout the years, this response does not reflect his nature or

temperament. His history is marked by rapid, direct, and often highly personalised public statements regarding matters of national security. His measured, almost bureaucratic response to the Belgorod incursions, therefore, stands as a notable deviation from his established pattern of immediate political and rhetorical escalation.¹ The response that eventually came after the intrusions in the Belgorod region was more like handing out a prize to a person than addressing a combat that left many casualties behind.

I chose to analyse the Russian President's reaction because I believe it is vital to determine how much this type of response/reaction might influence a crisis such as those in the Belgorod region. With this research, I hope to highlight that the President's late response may indicate insufficient preparation for these types of internal conflicts. All the characteristics discussed in the introductory section potentially reflect, in some manner, a significant pattern in Putin's leadership style, a pattern that influences Russia's internal stability.

It is also crucial to discuss the reactions of countries such as Ukraine and the United States. Initially, Russia blamed Ukraine for the intrusions in the Belgorod region. However, the Ukrainian authorities disputed these charges, claiming that it was an attack by a resistance movement within Russia. The United States' reply was hesitant since it did not want to discuss too much about the incident, claiming that Russia is the sole country to be blamed for these incursions.²

In conclusion, the incursions in the Belgorod region, as well as the late response of Russian President Vladimir Putin, imply that the approach to such an internal war has highlighted key facets of domestic crisis management. This attitude by the Russian president reflects multiple discrepancies in the coordination of the internal conflict. All of this adds up to a situation that casts doubt on the Russian President's attitude and power in dealing with internal difficulties. From a psychological perspective, these incursions intensified fear among the residents of the Belgorod region, leading to what is called the Belgorod syndrome.

¹ Christian Baghai, "Belgorod Incursion: Analysing Putin's Sluggish Response to an Escalating Crisis", 2024, <https://christianbaghai.medium.com/belgorod-incursion-analyzing-putins-sluggish-response-to-an-escalating-crisis-c956ec4296e3> accessed on 23.06.2025

² Henri Astier, "Ukraine blamed by Russia for deadly blast in border city of Belgorod", 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-62025541> accessed on 17.06.2025.

Historical Background

In this part of the paper, I chose to offer a historical approach to the events in the Belgorod region from 22 May to 24 June. When the conflict in Ukraine began, on February 24, 2022, a series of strikes on Russia's Belgorod region ensued, in particular the Bryansk and Kursk areas. Russia's presidential administration made claims against the Ukrainian government about these attacks. The *Moscow Times* stated that "Ukraine [had] not claimed responsibility for the attacks ... while not formally denying being behind them."³ Following an attack on the Belgorod region in April 2022, Oleksii Danilov, secretary of the Ukrainian National Security Council, issued a statement confirming that these events were linked to the establishment of a Popular Republic of Belgorod.⁴ At the same time, these incursions have triggered several pranks. For example, residents of the region received calls and text messages from unknown numbers, particularly on the Telegram app, where "they referred to us as BNR, or the People's Republic of Belgorod, in their Ukrainian discussions by analogy with LNR and DNR."⁵ In March 2023, the Russian Volunteer Corps, a Russian nationalist organisation fighting the Russian government, claimed responsibility for a brief foray into neighbouring Bryansk.⁶

A spokesman for the Russian Freedom Legion stated that their goals were to divert Russian troops away from other areas of the front and encourage rebellion against the Russian government. In March 2024, Russian rebels launched another major cross-border operation in the Belgorod and Kursk regions.⁷

³ "Cross-Border Shelling Damages Russian Bridge, Refinery", *The Moscow Times*, 2022, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/06/06/cross-border-shelling-damages-russian-bridge-refinery-a77899> accessed on 17.06.2025

⁴ LB.ua, "Danilov on Explosions in Belgorod: They Must Understand This May be Throughout Russia", 2022, https://en.lb.ua/news/2022/04/01/12399_danilov_explosions_belgorod.html accessed on 17.06.2025

⁵ Ekaterina Maksimova, "How Belgorod region residents ended up in a war zone – an on-the-ground report", 2022, <https://theins.ru/en/society/253062> accessed on 17.06.2025

⁶ "Kremlin accuses Ukraine of violent attack in western Russia", *The Washington Post*, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/03/02/bryansk-russia-attack-ukraine-saboteurs/> accessed on 17.06.2025

⁷ "Russian war correspondents reported an attack by armed groups on the border areas of the Belgorod and Kursk regions", *Meduza*, 2024, <https://meduza.io/feature/2024/03/12/rossiyskie-voenkory-soobschili-ob-atake-vooruzhennyh-grupp-na-prigranichnye-rayony-belgorodskoy-i-kurskoy-oblastey> accessed on 26.06.2025

The First Raid (22 May - 25 May 2023)

On May 22, 2023, footage appeared on Russian Telegram channels of an apparent military raid on the Russian border crossing in the Grayvoronsky District of Belgorod Oblast.⁸ Furthermore, the governor of the Belgorod region, Vyacheslav Gladkov, claimed via Telegram that a “Ukrainian military group of sabotage and reconnaissance entered the region, and Russian forces took the necessary measures to eliminate the enemy.”⁹

The Russian Freedom Legion and the Russian Volunteer Corps took responsibility for the assault, stating that the two factions had seized control of the villages of Kozinka and Glotovo, and units had reached the district capital of Grayvoron.¹⁰ These units claimed to have done nothing but demilitarise the territory where Kozinka had been attacked, but the other places are unknown. There was no information regarding the involvement of these organisations in the attacks until June 4, when it was proven by photographs posted on the platform X, demonstrating their presence in the Belgorod region. At the end of May 22, the governor of the Belgorod area stated that steps to limit Ukrainian terrorist acts had been taken in the region. This limits civilian freedom of movement and communication, forces citizens to provide evidence of identity, and suspends industries that employ hazardous products, among other limitations.¹¹

On May 23, 2023, a drone strike on Belgorod was revealed, but the extent of the damage was unknown. According to the Ministry of Defence, the attackers were repulsed and forced to retreat to the Ukrainian border. On May 24, the governor of the Belgorod region stated that the troops who had attempted to destabilise the area were no longer present. It was revealed that

⁸ “Belgorod governor reports incursion into region by Ukrainian sabotage and reconnaissance group”, *Meduza*, 2023, <https://archive.ph/20230522173138/https://meduza.io/en/news/2023/05/22/belgorod-governor-reports-incursion-into-region-by-ukrainian-sabotage-and-reconnaissance-group#selection-179.0-179.96> accessed on 17.06.2025.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ “Counter-terrorist operation regime introduced in Belgorod region”, *Meduza*, 2023, <https://archive.ph/20230522174532/https://meduza.io/news/2023/05/22/v-belgorodskoy-oblasti-vveli-rezhim-kontrterroristicheskoy-operatsii#selection-279.0-279.64> accessed on 18.06.2025

Russian authorities formed a series of battalions (7 in total) to defend the Belgorod region from future attacks.¹²

The Second Raid (1 June - 14 June 2023)

At the beginning of June, two Ukrainian factions announced a second wave of raids on the Belgorod region. According to a Russian Ministry of Defence report, up to 70 Ukrainian terrorists with tanks and armoured vehicles conducted three waves of raids along the border in the Shebekinski district, killing at least 50 soldiers and destroying four of their armoured vehicles and a multiple Grad rocket launcher. The governor of Belgorod, Veaceslav Gladkov, stated that the Ukrainian military forces bombarded Shebekino with Grad missiles, causing damage to an administrative facility.¹³ According to the Institute for the Study of War, FRL and RVC arrived at Shebekino and Novaya Tavorzhanka on June 1, classifying the actions as raids. They described these as “small-scale assault operations involving rapid entry into hostile territory to obtain information, disrupt hostile forces, or destroy installations.”¹⁴

From June 4 to June 15, Telegram was studied with a series of videos created by soldiers urging Governor Gudkov; “Gladkov expressed willingness to meet with the group in Shebekino to discuss the current situation in the region and Russia’s future in exchange for the release of two Russian troops they had abducted.”¹⁵ During this time, an assassination attempt was carried out against Russian colonel Andrey Stesev. The colonel and his subordinates were accused of killing people during the two Chechen wars, battles in the former Yugoslavia, Abkhazia, and Ukraine. From June 6

¹² Andrew E. Kramer, “Moscow Says It Repelled Attackers Who Crossed From Ukraine,” *The New York Times*, 2023.

¹³ Guy Fulconbridge, “Russia says it repels new Belgorod border attacks, blasts rock the region”, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/belgorod-governor-says-eight-wounded-by-ukrainian-shelling-civilians-be-2023-06-01/> accessed on 18.06.2025

¹⁴ “Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment”, Institute for the Study of War, 2023, <https://www.understandingwar.org/background/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-june-1-2023>, accessed on 18.06.2025

¹⁵ “Anti-Kremlin militia claims to have yet another incursion in Belgorod Oblast, seeks meeting with local governor”, *The Kyiv Independent*, 2023, <https://kyivindependent.com/belgorod-oblast-governor-claims-he-is-ready-to-meet-anti-kremlin-militia-if-russian-pows-are-alive/> accessed on 18.06.2025

to 14, the governor of the Belgorod area announced that the assailants of non-governmental forces had left the region's jurisdiction and that the Russian army had re-entered and recaptured it.¹⁶

The economic and human casualties

According to Igor Konasenko, spokesman for the Ministry of Defence, 70 nationalist militants were killed during the May raid, and four of their armoured vehicles were destroyed.¹⁷ Russian official sources released photographs of multiple abandoned military vehicles built in the West and used by pro-Ukraine sources. Experts have questioned the legitimacy of the claims related to the vehicles, considering that their credibility is dubious.¹⁸

At a press conference on May 24, 2023, a representative for the Russian Ministry of Defence stated that Russian Army personnel seized a variety of weaponry, armoured vehicles, and took several captives. Furthermore, the government and Russian authorities have highlighted the precise quantity of losses, both material and human. However, some Russian soldiers assigned to the region reported a high number of casualties.

The 1009th regiment, which took part in these incursions, stated that it had difficulties and even failed to meet its objectives due to lack of supplies; an unverified video footage of a soldier claiming to be a member of the 138th Brigade stated that his unit suffered 80% losses (around 1,600 soldiers) during the fight.¹⁹ Since the raids began, Russian officials have reported at

¹⁶ "Belgorod region governor Gladkov: enemy no longer present in region", *Novaya Gazeta*, 2023, <https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2023/06/06/belgorod-region-governor-gladkov-enemy-no-longer-present-in-region-en-news> accessed on 23.06.2025.

¹⁷ Edna Mohamed and Dalia Hatuqa, "Russia-Ukraine updates: Belgorod attackers pushed back", 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2023/5/23/russia-ukraine-live-news-attacks-on-belgorod-region-continue> accessed on 23.06.2025

¹⁸ Frank Gardner and James FitzGerald, "Ukraine war: US distances itself from Belgorod incursion into Russia", 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-65691844> accessed on 23.06.2025

¹⁹ Isabel van Brugen, "Russian Soldiers Complain That Entire Regiments Are Being Wiped Out", 2023, <https://www.newsweek.com/russian-soldiers-belgorod-freedom-russia-legion-volunteer-corps-ukraine-war-1805354> accessed on 26.06.2025

least 13 civilian deaths and more than 50 injuries, and thousands of border communities have been evacuated.²⁰

The response of President Vladimir Putin

These breaches triggered a flurry of reactions from officials in the Russian Federation. Dmitry Peskov, the presidential spokesman, publicly stated that Vladimir Putin had been briefed about incursions in the Belgorod region. Dmitry Medvedev, Vice-President of the Russian Security Council, blamed the attacks on the Ukrainian government and demanded that the culprits be removed. On the other hand, Sergei Shoigu, the Russian Defence Minister, stated in a press conference that the Russian army should have responded more forcefully to these strikes.

For this analysis, I focused on President Putin's response, which, as many Kremlin insiders have stated, was at odds with the truth about the intrusions and lacked a clear strategy for defending the country's borders. The response of the Russian president was unusually slow and detached from the intensity of the attacks. His answer was essentially procedural, involving the presentation of a medal to a local administrator, rather than confronting the situation head-on.²¹

President Vladimir Putin's reply stands in stark contrast to the gravity and magnitude of the attacks in the Belgorod region. The intrusions in the Belgorod region, as well as the Russian president's response, or lack thereof, paint a more complete picture of Putin's leadership style.

These components of the Kremlin's response have far-reaching implications for Russia's internal and foreign policy and relations. The military incursions, spearheaded by organisations such as the Freedom of Russia Legion and the Russian Volunteer Corps, indicate not only internal opposition to Putin's administration but also the changing nature of the Russia-Ukraine conflict [...] these militias, despite operating under

²⁰ Oleg Artyushenko, "Everyone for Themselves: Attacks in Border Towns and Cities Bring the War to Russia's Doorstep", 2023, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-belgorod-attacks-ukraine-war-/32463704.html> accessed on 26.06.2025

²¹ Christian Baghai, "Belgorod Incursion: Analysing Putin's Sluggish Response to an Escalating Crisis", 2024, <https://christianbaghai.medium.com/belgorod-incursion-analyzing-putins-sluggish-response-to-an-escalating-crisis-c956ec4296e3> accessed on 23.06.2025

Ukrainian direction, are made up of Russian people, blurring the distinction between external aggression and internal protest.²²

Political analysts and researchers stated that these invasions only weakened the bond between Russian forces and the vulnerabilities along the Ukrainian border.²³ The above-mentioned relation, as well as the fact that the incursions appear to have caught Russian officials off guard, reflects a significant shift in the tactics used so far by the Ukrainian government and opposing groups, which claim that Kremlin spokesmen and various ministries intended to destabilise Russia's domestic policy. The change in target selection justifies this shift: instead of merely attacking military infrastructure near the border, these operations aimed to create a security crisis inside Russia's internationally recognised territory. Political analysts suggest this strategy sought to undermine public confidence in the Kremlin's ability to protect its citizens and domestic infrastructure, thereby forcing a reallocation of military resources away from the primary frontline in Ukraine.²⁴ President Putin's answer or reaction suggests a genuine internal challenge (a challenge to his authority).

From a psychological standpoint, the leader's reaction has sparked panic and fear among the population of Belgorod and other Russian territories, as it is believed that the presidential administration and the president himself did not provide the necessary security in the face of these waves of attacks. The tense atmosphere (artillery bombing and continual air attacks) and the tardy and nonchalant response exacerbated the situation on Russian soil, as did the dissemination of rumours on social media about a Ukrainian advance on the capital of the Belgorod area.²⁵

Furthermore, President Putin's response produced a sense of terror and helplessness (a sentiment shared by the people of both the Belgorod

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ Piotr Żochowski, "The Belgorod syndrome: the Ukrainian incursion reveals the weakness of the Russian regime", 2023, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2023-06-09/belgorod-syndrome-ukrainian-incursion-reveals-weakness-russian#:~:text=Even%20if%20these%20actions%20have,respond%20quickly%20to%20such%20incidents> accessed on 24.06.2025.

²⁴ Riley Bailey; Karolina Hird; Nicole Wolkov; Layne Philipson and Frederick W. Kagan, "Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 24, 2023," Institute for the Study of War (ISW), Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 24, 2023, accessed on 23.06.2025.

²⁵ Piotr Żochowski, "The Belgorod Syndrome: the Ukrainian incursion reveals the weakness of the Russian regime", 2023, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2023-06-09/belgorod-syndrome-ukrainian-incursion-reveals-weakness-russian> accessed on 23.06.2025.

region and other parts of Russia), which grew even stronger with the second set of raids among citizens, who no longer believed the media or Kremlin bodies. The Russian government, as well as state propaganda, have downplayed the significance of these subversive operations, insisting that they are terrorist fakes and specifically targeting civilians. This allows propaganda to portray Russia as a victim of a war that Ukraine would have triggered with Western support, attempting to harm Ukraine's image on the international stage.²⁶ All of these features, centred on the president's reaction and delayed response, reflect his habit of handling internal crises. This pattern is evident in previous unexpected domestic challenges where immediate escalation was politically detrimental or tactically impossible. Historically, when faced with domestic crises that expose state or leadership incompetence, such as the 2000 *Kursk* submarine disaster or the 2004 Beslan school siege, President Putin's immediate response has often been characterised by an initial period of silence and delayed public engagement. This delay allows the Kremlin to centralise control over the narrative and formulate a response that minimises personal political exposure.

Furthermore, we can point to potential gaps in the recognition of intrusions in the Belgorod region, calling into doubt the president's strategic approach to these domestic attacks.

Conclusion

The paper aims to clarify aspects related to the Belgorod intrusions. In the first section of this study, I offered a historical backdrop for these incursions in order to highlight their trajectory. A few months after the Kremlin decided to attack Ukraine (24 February 2022) on Russian territory in the Belgorod region, a cross-border area located on the border of Ukraine's Lugansk and Kharkov regions, one of the largest attacks since the beginning of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. In the second part of this study. These attacks sparked a pushback from presidential administration officials. Dmitry Peskov, the president's spokesperson, announced publicly that Vladimir Putin was briefed on the incursions in the Belgorod region, blaming the attacks on the Ukrainian government and demanding that the perpetrators be identified. As mentioned in the first part of the paper, the

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

Russian authorities publicly accused the Ukrainian authorities of being responsible for these incursions. What I demonstrated with this paper was that the incursions in the Belgorod region were not short-term attacks, but lasting operations that continue to this day. This persistence, evidenced by the recurrent raids and the establishment of permanent defensive units, signals a strategic goal of attrition and resource diversion. These lasting attacks also revealed an unusual image of the Kremlin leader due to his delayed and procedural response, which starkly contradicted his established 'strongman' persona and exposed a vulnerability in his authority. Ultimately, the incursions demonstrate a strong and significant intensification of the current conflict, successfully bringing the war onto internationally recognised Russian soil and establishing a new phase of internal security challenges.

In my study, I concentrated on President Putin's response and reaction, which many officials and members of the Kremlin's presidential administration claimed diverged from the reality of the intrusions and lacked a clear strategy for defending the country's borders. The Russian president's reaction was unusually slow and appeared disconnected from the severity of the attacks.

To summarise, I believe that although these incursions have significant military implications—considering the material resources used, armoured vehicles, and more—they exposed a lack of capability on the part of both the armed forces and the leader. The most crucial aspect remains the ability to deliver a rapid response and reaction, which, to some extent, aligns with the intensity of the situation. I think that, due to this pattern of leadership, swift response, and reaction, they have generated a wave of concern and fear among both the residents of the Belgorod region and the rest of Russia. Furthermore, this reaction from the Kremlin leader created a sense of helplessness, with little support from the presidential administration towards the people, and both the competence of the soldiers and the administration were called into question.

Bibliography

Astier, Henri, "Ukraine blamed by Russia for deadly blast in border city of Belgorod", 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-62025541>.

- Artyushenko, Oleg, "Everyone for Themselves: Attacks in Border Towns and Cities Bring the War to Russia's Doorstep", 2023, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-belgorod-attacks-ukraine-war-/32463704.html>.
- Bailey, Riley; Karolina Hird; Nicole Wolkov; Layne Philipson and Frederick W. Kagan "Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment", Institute for the Study of War (ISW), Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 24, 2023
- Baghai, Christian, "Belgorod Incursion: Analysing Putin's Sluggish Response to an Escalating Crisis", 2024, <https://christianbaghai.medium.com/belgorod-incursion-analyzing-putins-sluggish-response-to-an-escalating-crisis-c956ec4296e3>.
- Fulconbridge, Guy, "Russia says it repels new Belgorod border attacks; blasts rock the region", 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/belgorod-governor-says-eight-wounded-by-ukrainian-shelling-civilians-be-2023-06-01/>.
- Gardner, Frank and James FitzGerald, "Ukraine war: US distances itself from Belgorod incursion into Russia", 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-65691844>.
- "Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment", Institute for the Study of War, 2023, <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-june-1-2023>.
- Kramer, Andrew, "Moscow Says It Repelled Attackers Who Crossed From Ukraine", 2023.
- LB.ua., "Danilov on Explosions in Belgorod: They Must Understand This May be Throughout Russia", 2022, https://en.lb.ua/news/2022/04/01/12399_danilov_explosions_belgorod.html.
- Maksimova, Ekaterina, "How Belgorod region residents ended up in a war zone – an on-the-ground report", 2022, <https://theins.ru/en/society/253062>.
- "Russian war correspondents reported an attack by armed groups on the border areas of the Belgorod and Kursk regions", *Meduza*, 2024, <https://meduza.io/feature/2024/03/12/rossiyskie-voenkory-soobschili-ob-atake-vooruzhennyh-grupp-na-prigranichnye-rayony-belgorodskoy-i-kurskoy-oblastey>
- "Belgorod governor reports incursion into region by Ukrainian sabotage and reconnaissance", *Meduza*, 2023, <https://archive.ph/20230522173138/https://meduza.io/en/news/2023/05/22/belgorod-governor-reports-incursion-into-region-by-ukrainian-sabotage-and-reconnaissance-group#selection-179.0-179.96>

- "Counter-terrorist operation regime introduced in Belgorod region", *Meduza*, 2023, <https://archive.ph/20230522174532/https://meduza.io/news/2023/05/22/v-belgorodskoy-oblasti-vveli-rezhim-kontrterroristicheskoy-operatsii#selection-279.0-279.64>
- Mohamed, Edna and Dalia Hatuqa, "Russia-Ukraine updates: Belgorod attackers pushed back", 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2023/5/23/russia-ukraine-live-news-attacks-on-belgorod-region-continue>
- "Anti-Kremlin militia claims to have yet another incursion in Belgorod Oblast, seeks meeting with local governor", *The Kyiv Independent*, 2023, <https://kyiv.independent.com/belgorod-oblast-governor-claims-he-is-ready-to-meet-anti-kremlin-militia-if-russian-pows-are-alive/>
- "Cross-Border Shelling Damages Russian Bridge, Refinery", *The Moscow Times*, 2022, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/06/06/cross-border-shelling-damages-russian-bridge-refinery-a77899>
- "Kremlin accuses Ukraine of violent attack in western Russia", *The Washington Post*, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/03/02/bryansk-russia-attack-ukraine-saboteurs/>
- Van Brugen, Isabel, "Russian Soldiers Complain That Entire Regiments Are Being Wiped Out", 2023, <https://www.newsweek.com/russian-soldiers-belgorod-freedom-russia-legion-volunteer-corps-ukraine-war-1805354>
- Zochowski, Piotr, "The Belgorod Syndrome: the Ukrainian incursion reveals the weakness of the Russian regime", 2023, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2023-06-09/belgorod-syndrome-ukrainian-incursion-reveals-weakness-russian>

The Challenges of Transitional Governance in Post-Assad Syria

Overview

The phenomenon called *The Arab Spring*, which had broken out in late 2010 and continued in 2011, proved that the collective action can lead to tremendous political transformations in the Middle East and North Africa. Starting in Tunisia, as a response to economic stagnation and corruption, it quickly escalated across the Arab world, reshaping the political landscape of several countries. The amplitude of the Arab Spring was sparked by a combination of factors including dissatisfaction with authoritarian regimes, demands for greater political freedom and human rights or economic hardships.¹

A crucial role was played by the social media, enabling protesters to communicate, mobilize and coordinate on an unprecedented scale. Thanks to social media platforms, the protesters managed to capture attention and solidarity at the global level, rallying international support in an extremely fast pace.

The Arab Spring varied from one country to another. On the one hand, there is the example of Tunisia, where the protests reached their goal of removing the President Ben Ali from power, in January 2011. The event was quickly followed by democratic elections, and adoption of a new constitution. On the other hand, in other countries, like Syria, the uprisings

¹ ***, "Arab Spring" in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2025 [<https://www.britannica.com/event/Arab-Spring>], accessed on 3 September 2025.

escalated into prolonged armed conflicts, with disastrous consequences, leading to complex geopolitical dynamics and international interventions.²

In Syria, even though inspired by the movements in the other Arab countries, the phenomenon has its roots deep into the country's recent history. The year 1970 is considered the cornerstone of the Assad dynasty that lasted for more than half a century. Hafez al-Assad, the father of Bashar al-Assad, even though coming from the long-persecuted Alawi minority, seized power in the country after a coup, setting the premises of a centralized authoritarian regime based on repression and dominance of the military and security services.³

The personalised dictatorship of Hafez al-Assad generated a culture of fear that persisted in the society for decades. A terrifying episode of his leadership is represented by the Hama massacre, when the Syrian army suppressed a Muslim Brotherhood uprising, causing between 10,000 and 20,000 civilian deaths.⁴

Following Hafez's death in 2000, his son, Bashar al-Assad, ran as sole candidate for the presidential elections. At the beginning, the new president promised moderate political and economic reforms, tolerating discussions of democracy and pluralism.⁵ However, the "honeymoon" between the transitional president and Syrians did not last long and the regime returned to traditional authoritarian practices.

From an economic point of view, the period 2000–2010 was marked by selective market reforms, which favored elites close to the regime, reinforcing socio-economic inequalities between urban centers and rural regions.⁶ The severe drought of 2006–2010 aggravated the rural crisis, causing massive migration of peasants to cities, where poor infrastructure and high unemployment amplified social discontent.⁷

² *Ibidem*.

³ Patrick Seale, *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp. 132-135.

⁴ Leon Goldsmith, *Cycle of Fear: Syria's Alawites in War and Peace*, London: C. Hurst & Co. (Hurst), 2015, pp. 106–108.

⁵ Patrick Seale, *op. cit.*

⁶ Joseph Daher, *Syria after the uprisings: The political economy of state resilience*, London: Pluto Press, 2019, pp. 95-101.

⁷ Collin P. Kelley; Shahrzad Mohtadi; Mark A. Cane; Richard Seager; Yochanan Kushnir, "Climate change in the Fertile Crescent and implications of the recent Syrian drought", in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 112(11), <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1421533112>.

In this context, the wave of protests triggered by the Arab Spring, found Syria in a precarious balance. It began in mid-March 2011 with peaceful demonstrations in the south of the country, on the streets of Daraa, against the authoritarian rule of President Bashar al-Assad.⁸ The swift and brutal government response determined the eruption of protests nationwide. In its attempt to crush the dissent at an early stage by using deadly force, the Assad regime provoked the escalation of violence, that culminated in a devastating civil war, causing the displacement of over half of Syria's population and the deaths of around half a million people.⁹

Extremist Islamists, including al Qaeda, showed their interest in Syria, joining the cause of the moderate Syrian opposition. By 2014, the extremists dominated, ISIS growing stronger day after day. As there was a concern on the world stage that Syria would remain under terrorist domination, an international coalition, under the leadership of US, intervened to eliminate the group. What is more, the Kurdish fighters from the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) – known for being a US ally, effectively ended the territorial existence of ISIS.¹⁰

Any efforts to reach a diplomatic resolution have been totally unsuccessful. From the very beginning, Russia and China constantly used their vetoes to block any UN Security Council Resolution that would have condemned Assad's repression.¹¹ The involvement of external state and non-state actors in the Syrian civil war, turned it into a geopolitical one, making the resolution options exceptionally difficult to reach.

However, for a short period of time, the conflict seemed to settle down, until 2024, when the rebel forces led by *Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham* (HTS – "Organization for the Liberation of the Levant") reignited the dispute, seeking to take advantage of a weakened government, who could not count

⁸ Raymond Hinnebusch and Omar Imady, "Origins of the Syrian Uprising: From structure to agency", in Raymond Hinnebusch and Omar Imady (eds.), *The Syrian Uprising. Domestic Origins and Early Trajectory*, New York: Routledge, 2018, pp. 7-9.

⁹ ***, "What's happening in Syria? How the Civil War Is Worsening Hunger among Civilians", in *World Food Program USA*, 12 December 2024 [<https://www.wfpusa.org/news/whats-happening-syria-civil-war-worsening-hunger-among-civilians/>], accessed on 3 September 2025.

¹⁰ Michael P. Auerbach, "Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)", in *EBSCO*, 2024 [<https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/diplomacy-and-international-relations/islamic-state-iraq-and-syria-isis>], accessed on 3 September 2025.

¹¹ United Nations, *UN Security Council Meetings & Outcomes Tables*, [<https://research.un.org/en/docs/sc/quick>], accessed on 7 September 2025.

on the support of their key allies, due to their preoccupation with other conflicts.¹² For instance, Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, directing its whole attention and using its entire arsenal into the war.¹³ Meanwhile, Iran with its own internal difficulties and economic sanctions diminishing the regime's ability to maintain control over its territorial periphery.¹⁴

On 8 December 2024, following a deepening economic collapse, international sanctions, internal defections from his own military and Ba'athist elite and concluding with the HTS offensive, Assad was forced to step down and go into exile. As the regime had fallen, the power was taken over by a National Reconciliation Council, supported by the United Nations and the Arab League and an interim presidential installed under Ahmed al-Sharaa (also known as Abu Mohammad al-Julani), a former diplomat. In historical terms, the collapse of the Assad regime symbolized the end of the authoritarian-Baathist model that had dominated Syria for over 50 years.¹⁵

Key Actors Involved

For over a decade, various groups became involved in the civil war, worsening the situation constantly. At its center was the Bashar al-Assad regime, supported by the Syrian Arab Army (SAA), the paramilitary National Defence Forces, and the *Shabiha* Alawite militias, which operated as loyal paramilitary forces. The regime's resilience was ensured primarily by the strategic support of Russia and Iran.¹⁶ While the former was providing air and diplomatic support, the latter's Revolutionary

¹² ***, "Syrian civil war", in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2025 [<https://www.britannica.com/event/Syrian-Civil-War/Civil-war>], accessed on 8 September 2025.

¹³ Elias Götz; Per Ekman, "Russia's War against Ukraine: Context, Causes, and Consequences", in *Problems of Post-Communism*, 71(3) [<https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2024.2343640>] accessed on 7 September 2025.

¹⁴ Ayman Aldassouky, "The Remnants of the Assad Regime and the New Syrian Authority's Attitude toward Them: Assertiveness and Pragmatism", in *Al Sharq Strategic Research*, 17 January 2025 [<https://research.sharqforum.org/2025/01/17/the-remnants-of-the-assad-regime-and-the-new-syrian-authoritys-attitude-toward-them-assertiveness-and-pragmatism/>], accessed on 7 September 2025.

¹⁵ Rob Geist Pinfold, "Myth Busting in a Post-Assad Syria", in *Middle East Policy*, 11 February 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1111/mepo.12799>.

¹⁶ ***, "Syrian civil war", *op. cit.*

Guard and its Lebanese proxy, Hezbollah, contributed to the fights on the ground.¹⁷

The opposition units, even though made up of varied ideologies and beliefs, joined forces under the common goal of ousting the Syrian President, Bashar al-Assad. It included moderate groups such as the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and radical Islamist groups, including Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) – successor to al-Qaeda's Syrian branch (Jabhat al-Nusra), as well as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).¹⁸

A special role was played by Kurdish forces, especially the People's Protection Units (YPG) and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which collaborated with the United States in the fight against ISIS. They established an autonomous administration in northern Syria, known as Rojava.¹⁹ Turkish military interventions in 2016–2019 aimed to limit Kurdish expansion and prevent the formation of an autonomous corridor on the Turkish border.²⁰

The international dimension of the conflict was defined by the involvement of several external. While Russia and Iran were the main supporters of the Assad regime, the United States, Turkey, and the Gulf states provided different levels of support to opposition groups. The United States' motivation was particularly focused on counterterrorism efforts, while Turkey's primary interest was to limit the Kurdish autonomy along its southern border.²¹

Challenges

While the flee of the former president to Moscow marked the end of the Assad's dynasty and represented a significant turning point in Syria's development, it has not put an end to the country's crisis. Instead, it opened a new and totally uncertain phase, where the priorities shifted from survival

¹⁷ Christopher Phillips, "To the hilt: Assad's allies dig in", in Christopher Phillips (ed.) *The Battle for Syria: International Rivalry in the New Middle East*, London: Yale University Press, 2020, pp. 157-159.

¹⁸ Charles R. Lister, *The Syrian jihad: Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State and the evolution of an insurgency*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 97-101.

¹⁹ Michael Knapp; Anja Flach; Ercan Ayboga, *Revolution in Rojava. Democratic Autonomy and Women's Liberation in Syrian Kurdistan*, London: Pluto Press, 2016, pp. 243-245.

²⁰ Faysal Itani, Aaron Stein, "Turkey's Syria Predicament", in *Atlantic Council Issue Brief*, 3 May 2016, pp. 2-6.

²¹ Christopher Phillips, *op. cit.*

and territorial control to crisis resolution, legitimacy, and state reconstruction in a deeply divided and externally influenced landscape. As the former regime was overthrown by military force and not political instruments, a power vacuum was created.

Syria has entered a period of heightened political fragmentation, defined by the absence of a national consensus and the rivalry between local structures, emerging political organisations and external actors. The “new Syria” is more fragmented than ever. No party in the conflict holds full legitimacy or control.

The transitional government is facing major difficulties in rebuilding the administration and restoring public trust. The provisional structures have often been paralysed by inter-factional competition and a lack of institutional capacity. Even though the new leadership was welcomed with a sense of relief, the reality of the situation has now materialized, making the citizens understand the monumental task they all have ahead. Despite their ethnic, religious and political diversity, Syrians share the same need for solutions to their most pressing problems, like access to healthcare, basic necessities, securing food and electricity and so on. Addressing these urgent needs is the most critical expectation the population has from the transitional government.²²

The immense responsibility of rebuilding the country landed on the shoulders of the new *de facto* leader, Ahmed al-Sharaa. As written in the Constitutional Declaration of the new president, there will be a five-year transitional period that will grant them the necessary time to adopt a permanent constitution.²³ In his declarations to the press, al-Sharaa outlined that the current government is responsible to deliver what the Syrian population hopes for – a bright and sustainable future. In order to prove his commitment to diversity and protection of minorities, al-Sharaa’s government includes a Kurd, an Alawite and a Christian woman.²⁴ This ethnically and religiously mixed cabinet aims to convince the Western

²² Sinem Adar; Muriel Asseburg; Hamidreza Azizi; Margarete Klein and Guido Steinberg, “The Political Transition in Syria: Regional and International Interests”, in *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik*, 11 March 2025, doi: 10.18449/2025C11.

²³ ***, *Constitutional Declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic*, art. 52.

²⁴ ***, “Syrian president al-Sharaa unveils transitional government”, in *Al Jazeera*, 30 March 2025 [<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/3/30/syrian-president-unveils-transitional-government>], accessed on 10 September 2025.

countries to lift the economic sanctions imposed on Assad more than a decade ago.

However, there are seeds of mistrust in the person of al-Sharaa due to his position as leader of the rebel group Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, which is still labelled as a terrorist organisation by the UN, EU, UK and others.²⁵ Al-Sharaa has not shown any democratic inclinations before, but notable efforts are being made to keep an open dialogue with all the factions, regardless of their political orientation, ethnicity or religion.

Internally, the unstable dynamics are maintained by sectarian polarisation, structural economic crisis, and the fragile legitimacy of the new leader. Defining internal credibility is crucial for Syria's smooth transition. Nonetheless, it is utterly difficult to harmonise a system with so many factions with divergent values and principles. One of the substantial concerns of the leading power is the existence of uncontrolled fighters from much disorganised groups that participated in the removal of the former president. As most of them are foreign fighters, the government has limited authority over them. What is more, another worrying issue is the resurgence of ISIS fighters that are seeking the opportunity to take advantage of the currently unstable system.

On a similar note, another pressing issue of this transitional government is the need to recover from the atrocities committed during the war. The infrastructure is shattered, over 70% of Syrians live below the poverty line.²⁶ Based on the United Nation's reports, this tragic war has created one of the largest migration crisis in history.²⁷ The complete post-war recovery can take place only with the support and engagement of the external actors, in order to rebuild the infrastructures and create a momentum for development and a sustainable peace in Syria.

²⁵ Philip Loft; Claire Mills, "Syria after Assad: Consequences and interim authorities 2025", in *House of Commons Library*, 23 July 2025 [<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-10161/>], accessed on 10 September 2025.

²⁶ World Bank, *Syria Economic Monitor, Spring 2024: Conflict, Crises, and the Collapse of Household Welfare (English)*, 2024, Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group, [<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/099515505222471242>], accessed on 10 September 2025.

²⁷ UNHCR, *Global Report 2024 – Syria situation*, June 2025 [<https://www.unhcr.org/publications/global-report-2024>], accessed on 10 September 2025.

Foreign Affairs

Foreign policy agendas often work at cross purposes, complicating any unified peace plan. External actors have continued to exert a decisive influence on the trajectory of post-conflict Syria. Russia and Iran, although they have reduced their direct military presence, have remained dominant geopolitical actors, maintaining leverage through advisors, strategic investments, and security agreements.²⁸ In parallel, Türkiye has considered to consolidate buffer zones in the north, justifying intervention through arguments of national security and migration control.²⁹ The UAE and Saudi Arabia are re-engaging diplomatically and economically, while the US announced the lifting of sanctions under the new government.³⁰

The process of political and economic reconstruction in post-conflict Syria is deeply marked by the search for external legitimacy, without which the transitional regime cannot gain access to financing, investment and international recognition. In 2025, Syria tried to consolidate its image by resuming diplomatic relations with UN, Arab and European states, by reopening diplomatic missions and by official visits at the presidential level, intended to send a signal of progressive normalization.^{31,32}

The European Union has shown itself willing to reconsider the resumption of diplomatic relations, but it conditions this step on Syria's distancing from Russia and tangible evidence of a peaceful political

²⁸ Rob Geist Pinfold, *op. cit.*

²⁹ ***, "Syrians Face Dire Conditions in Turkish-Occupied 'Safe Zone'", in *Human Rights Watch*, 28 March 2024 [<https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/03/28/syrians-face-dire-conditions-turkish-occupied-safe-zone>], accessed on 10 September 2025.

³⁰ ***, "Fact Sheet: President Donald J. Trump Provides for the Revocation of Syria Sanctions", in *The White House*, 30 June 2025 [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2025/06/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-provides-for-the-revocation-of-syria-sanctions/>], accessed on 12 September 2025.

³¹ ***, "President al-Sharaa is first Syrian leader to visit UNGA in six decades", in *Al Jazeera*, 22 September 2025 [<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/9/22/president-al-sharaa-is-first-syrian-leader-to-visit-unga-in-six-decades>], accessed on 12 September 2025.

³² Elliott Brachet; Nissim Gasteli; Benjamin Barthe, "Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa, weakened by sectarian violence, looks to rebuild ties with France", in *Le Monde*, 7 May 2025 [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2025/05/07/syrian-president-ahmed-al-sharaa-weakened-by-sectarian-violence-looks-to-rebuild-ties-with-france_6741006_4.html], accessed on 12 September 2025.

transition.³³ The position outlined by the High Representative, Kaja Kallas, is specific to European diplomacy, conditioning the normalisation of relations with Syria to the degree of compliance with international standards on human rights and good governance.

Beside the diplomatic recovery, Syria faces persistent external threats, stemming from both regional instability and the lack of an internal consensus on national security. The integration of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) into the national defence structures has turned into a tense process, affected by mutual distrust and divergences in principles and values between Damascus and the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC). The SDF fears that integration into central institutions could lead to the loss of the autonomy gained during the war.³⁴ Amid these tensions, the reemergence of ISIS networks in rural areas of eastern Syria has exploited the security vacuum and institutional fragmentation. In the absence of an integrated crisis communication and security management framework, Syria remains vulnerable to new cycles of violence, fuelled by competition for control of resources and the lack of consensus on a constitutional future.³⁵

Communication battle

After the collapse of the Bashar al-Assad regime, crisis communication became one of the most fragile and contested tools of the new Syrian government. Crisis communication is central. Media is not just information—it is power. Legitimacy in post-conflict environments often depends on narrative control. The lack of a coherent institutional system, coupled with the public distrust accumulated during the authoritarian regime, meant that information circulated fragmentarily and often

³³ Alexandra Brzozowski, "EU to reopen embassy in Damascus to liaise with Syria's new leadership", in *Euractiv*, 3 February 2025 [<https://www.euractiv.com/news/eu-to-reopen-embassy-in-damascus-to-liaise-with-syrias-new-leadership/>], accessed on 12 September 2025.

³⁴ Samer al-Ahmed, "The Damascus-SDF agreement two months on: Fragile progress or delayed collapse?", in *Middle East Institute*, 9 May 2025 [<https://www.mei.edu/publications/damascus-sdf-agreement-two-months-fragile-progress-or-delayed-collapse/>], accessed on 13 September 2025.

³⁵ Caroline Rose and Colin P. Clarke, "The Return of ISIS", in *Foreign Affairs*, 18 September 2025 [<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/syria/return-isis>], accessed on 20 September 2025.

contradictorily.³⁶ In post-autocratic states, public communication must simultaneously perform the functions of rebuilding legitimacy, managing humanitarian emergencies, and strengthening social cohesion — a difficult balance in a context of political and economic instability. In Syria, this process was hampered by the overlapping messages coming from multiple centres of power — the transitional government, the Kurdish regional administrations, and local security structures — which often conveyed divergent narratives about the humanitarian situation and the reconstruction of infrastructure.³⁷

The absence of a national framework for strategic communication coordination facilitated the proliferation of disinformation, amplified by external media and social networks. As a result, the crisis communication process in post-Assad Syria turned into an arena of symbolic competition, where each actor — internal or external — attempted to shape public perceptions of political legitimacy and reconstruction progress. Communication is not just messaging. It is how groups build — or destroy — legitimacy.

Lessons from other Conflicts

For a smoother transition, Syria should learn lessons from other similar cases. For instance, the reconstruction of Iraq after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003, is a classic case study of the limits of external interventions and the failure to implement an inclusive governance model in a post-conflict context. The occupation forces led by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) adopted a centralised, top-down approach that neglected the social, ethnic, and sectarian realities of Iraq.³⁸ Decisions regarding state restructuring, including the dissolution of the army and the Ba'ath Party, created an institutional and security vacuum that fuelled insecurity and

³⁶ Gregory Waters, "Local Governance in Post-Assad Syria: A Hybrid State Model for the Future?", in *Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center*, 15 July 2025 [<https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2025/07/local-governance-in-post-assad-syria-a-hybrid-state-model-for-the-future?lang=en>], accessed on 20 September 2025.

³⁷ ***, "Syria media guide", in *BBC*, 9 December 2025 [<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14703914>], accessed on 20 September 2025.

³⁸ Rob Geist Pinfold, *op. cit.*

radicalisation.³⁹ In the absence of a local consultation process, political reconstruction was perceived as an external imposition, which undermined the legitimacy of the new state institutions.

The post-2003 Iraq was not rebuilt on democratic foundations, but on networks of sectarian loyalties that perpetuated conflict.⁴⁰ Thus, the failure to promote a framework of political inclusiveness and social reconciliation transformed the reconstruction process into a source of chronic instability, culminating in the rise of the Islamic State (ISIS) in 2014—a symptom of state fragmentation and public distrust of authority.⁴¹

Moreover, the adopted economic model – centred on rapid privatisation, liberalisation, and dependence on oil revenues – reinforced social inequalities and weakened the state’s capacity to provide essential public services. In the absence of participatory governance, reforms remained formal, without a basis for popular support.⁴² The experience of Iraq has demonstrated that democratic reconstruction cannot be imposed through external mechanisms, but must be built through local processes of negotiation, inclusion, and empowerment.

Another example is Libya. After the overthrow of Muammar al-Gaddafi’s regime in 2011, the country became an emblematic example of the failure of post-revolutionary reconstruction in the absence of a coherent plan for political transition. The lack of a legitimate central authority and the fragmentation of the security apparatus transformed the state into a patchwork of militias, parallel administrations, and temporary alliances. As W. Lacher observed, the fall of the Gaddafi regime did not bring a new political order, but rather a multiplication of decentralised power centres, each of them claiming revolutionary legitimacy.⁴³ In the absence of a transitional institutional architecture, the power vacuum was quickly filled

³⁹ Larry Diamond, *Squandered victory: The American occupation and the bungled effort to bring democracy to Iraq*, New York: Owl Books, 2005, pp. 107-110.

⁴⁰ Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, New York: Pantheon Books, 2012, pp. 3-7.

⁴¹ Michael P. Auerbach, *op. cit.*

⁴² Hisham Noori Hussain Al-Hashimy, Yao Jinfang, Waleed Noori Hussein, Haider Noori Hussain, “Resilience and Reconstruction: Unraveling the Economic Trajectory of Iraq Post-2003”, in *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Growth Evaluation*, 4(6), November 2023, <https://doi.org/10.54660/IJMRGE.2023.4.6.325-332>.

⁴³ Wolfram Lacher, *Libya’s Fragmentation: Structure and Process in Violent Conflict*, London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 2020, pp. 135-138.

by regional, tribal, and Islamist armed groups, which prevented the consolidation of a unified government.

As a result, Libya has entered a protracted cycle of instability, characterised by sporadic violence, an informal economy, and parallel governance. UN mediation efforts, embodied in the Skhirat Agreement (2015) and later in the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (2020), have only succeeded in postponing the confrontation without addressing the structural causes of the division – the competition for oil resources, the lack of political representation and the absence of a democratic institutional culture.⁴⁴ Thus, more than a decade after the fall of Gaddafi, Libya continues to face a statehood deficit, in which violence, corruption and external influences replace legitimate authority and functional governance.

Unlike other states in the region, Tunisia managed, at least in the first years after 2011, to follow a relatively successful democratic transition, thanks to a rare combination of still-functional state institutions, a robust civil society and inclusive political negotiation. After the fall of the regime of Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali in the Jasmine Revolution, the process of political reconstruction was not imposed by external forces but was based on internal compromise and national dialogue.⁴⁵

However, Tunisia's success was not without challenges. After 2019, the economic crisis, political polarisation, and authoritarian tendencies of President Kais Saied began to erode a significant part of the democratic gains.⁴⁶ Even so, the Tunisian experience remains a regional benchmark, demonstrating that resilient institutions and an active civil society can provide a sustainable framework for transition—a lesson for post-conflict states where the reconstruction process has been dominated by top-down logics and external interference.

The Northern Ireland peace process offers one of the most compelling examples of political and social reconstruction based on sustained

⁴⁴ Mary Fitzgerald, Mattia Toaldo, "A Quick Guide to Libya's Main Players", in *European Council on Foreign Affairs*, 19 May 2016 [https://ecfr.eu/special/mapping_libya_conflict/], accessed on 20 September 2025.

⁴⁵ ***, "Jasmine Revolution", in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* [<https://www.britannica.com/event/Jasmine-Revolution>], accessed on 22 September 2025.

⁴⁶ Sarah Yerkes, Maha Alhomoud, "One Year Later, Tunisia's President Has Reversed Nearly a Decade of Democratic Gain", in *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 22 July 2022 [<https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2022/07/one-year-later-tunisia-president-has-reversed-nearly-a-decade-of-democratic-gains?lang=en>], accessed on 22 September 2025.

negotiation and community reconciliation. After three decades of sectarian violence between Catholic (nationalist) and Protestant (unionist) communities, the agreement known as the Good Friday Agreement (1998) marked a fundamental transformation of the conflict, establishing a model of power-sharing and a framework for the peaceful resolution of differences.⁴⁷ This process was made possible by ongoing negotiations between the conflicting parties, conducted under the auspices of Great Britain, Ireland and international mediators, as well as by the involvement of community organizations that worked to rebuild social ties at the local level.⁴⁸

The success of the Northern Irish transition was largely due to the bottom-up approach to the reconciliation process. Trust between communities was not imposed by political elites, but was built gradually through local mechanisms of dialogue, joint educational programs, and economic cooperation initiatives.⁴⁹ The community dimension was crucial to the sustainability of the peace, complementing the formal institutional architecture created by the political agreements.

By contrast, post-conflict Syria does not yet have the social and institutional infrastructure necessary for a similar reconciliation process. Ethnic fragmentation, antagonistic confessions, and the destruction of social capital make it impossible, at least for the time being, to replicate the Northern Irish model. The lesson of Northern Ireland suggests that lasting peace is not simply the result of elite negotiations, but of a protracted process of reconciliation at the local level, in which communities become co-authors of political stability.

Peacebuilding efforts fail when international actors impose top-down solutions without understanding the needs of the population. Syria could learn from the mistakes of states like Iraq and Libya, and avoid repeating them, as well as it could learn the good practices used by Tunisia or Northern Ireland.

⁴⁷ George Mitchell, *Making Peace: The Inside Story of the Making of the Good Friday Agreement*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000, p. 60.

⁴⁸ John Darby, "Northern Ireland: The background to the Peace Process", in *Syracuse University Press*, 2003 [<https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/peace/darby03.htm>], accessed on 22 September 2025.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

Road to Sustainable Peace

The main question here is “How can sustainable stability be achieved in Syria after the fall of Bashar al-Assad’s regime?”

Effective crisis resolution in post-Assad Syria depends not solely on external peacebuilding efforts or military withdrawal, but critically on the development of inclusive local governance structures and credible crisis communication that rebuilds trust between fractured groups and institutions.

In order to prove that Syria is carefully moving on the path towards sustainable stability, it is vital to follow the models of the countries which have been at peace for large periods of time. The government could implement phased institutional reforms, using inclusive selection criteria for the public sector. Regarding the governance, they could expand the mechanisms for political participation of minorities, women, displaced persons or former opposition and integrate them into local administrations. Ensure representation is substantive, not only symbolic. On the judicial area, establishing a credible independent transitional justice commission, combining truth-telling with criminal accountability for major abuses could be of immense help in gaining the trust of the citizens. Another way to improve its legitimacy is to hold national dialogues with wide participation and to publish a roadmap with timelines for achieving the national objectives, for the sake of transparency. It would also enhance the credibility of the leadership if they demonstrated that the corrupted or authoritarian practices were buried with the Assad regime, by inviting external observers for elections and justice processes.

It is highly probable that Syria will not become a democracy in accordance with the European model in the following years, but it is crucial that all entities are now working in the same direction. Syrians have learnt an important lesson along the way: they must actively participate in the national dialogue, constitutional declarations, political life and elections, in order to make their voices heard.

The current situation in Syria creates a momentum for the international community to engage in the development of the state, help build a resilient civil society, strong institutions and academic entities. It is a quite rare chance to shape the system of a state from scratch. This transition period is not the end of the crisis, but the beginning of a new phase: rebuilding a deeply fractured state under heavy international scrutiny and involvement.

Despite its painful past and uncertain future, there are still some glimmers of hope.

Conclusions

The crisis in Syria did not end with Assad—and in many ways, it just became more complicated. *New Syria* stands at an inflection point with both promise and peril. If transitional governance remains inclusive, lawful, and gradual but firm, the prospects for stable peace are real. But exclusion, rushed or arbitrary reforms, opaque justice, or a heavy top-down governance structure risk repeating patterns of authoritarianism, fragmentation, or renewed conflict.

Resolving this conflict will require more than military deals or international summits. It will take patient diplomacy, honest communication, and a willingness to let Syrians—not foreign powers—shape their own future.

Bibliography

- ***, “Arab Spring”, in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2025 [<https://www.britannica.com/event/Arab-Spring>], accessed on 3 September 2025.
- ***, “Fact Sheet: President Donald J. Trump Provides for the Revocation of Syria Sanctions”, in *The White House*, 30 June 2025 [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2025/06/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-provides-for-the-revocation-of-syria-sanctions/>], accessed on 12 September 2025.
- ***, “Jasmine Revolution”, in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* [<https://www.britannica.com/event/Jasmine-Revolution>], accessed on 22 September 2025.
- ***, “President al-Sharaa is first Syrian leader to visit UNGA in six decades”, in *Al Jazeera*, 22 September 2025 [<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/9/22/president-al-sharaa-is-first-syrian-leader-to-visit-unga-in-six-decades/>], accessed on 12 September 2025.
- ***, “Syria media guide”, in *BBC*, 9 December 2025 [<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14703914>], accessed on 20 September 2025.
- ***, “Syrian civil war”, in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2025 [<https://www.britannica.com/event/Syrian-Civil-War/Civil-war>], accessed on 8 September 2025.

- ***, "Syrian president al-Sharaa unveils transitional government", in *Al Jazeera*, 30 March 2025 [<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/3/30/syrian-president-unveils-transitional-government>], accessed on 10 September 2025.
- ***, "Syrians Face Dire Conditions in Turkish-Occupied 'Safe Zone'", in *Human Rights Watch*, 28 March 2024 [<https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/03/28/syrians-face-dire-conditions-turkish-occupied-safe-zone>], accessed on 10 September 2025.
- ***, "What's happening in Syria? How the Civil War Is Worsening Hunger among Civilians", in *World Food Program USA*, 12 December 2024 [<https://www.wfpusa.org/news/whats-happening-syria-civil-war-worsening-hunger-among-civilians/>], accessed on 3 September 2025.
- ***, *Constitutional Declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic*, art. 52.
- Alexandra Brzozowski, "EU to reopen embassy in Damascus to liaise with Syria's new leadership", in *Euractiv*, 3 February 2025 [<https://www.euractiv.com/news/eu-to-reopen-embassy-in-damascus-to-liaise-with-syrias-new-leadership/>], accessed on 12 September 2025.
- Ayman Aldassouky, "The Remnants of the Assad Regime and the New Syrian Authority's Attitude toward Them: Assertiveness and Pragmatism", in *Al Sharq Strategic Research*, 17 January 2025 [<https://research.sharqforum.org/2025/01/17/the-remnants-of-the-assad-regime-and-the-new-syrian-authoritys-attitude-toward-them-assertiveness-and-pragmatism/>], accessed on 7 September 2025.
- Caroline Rose and Colin P. Clarke, "The Return of ISIS", in *Foreign Affairs*, 18 September 2025 [<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/syria/return-isis>], accessed on 20 September 2025.
- Charles R. Lister, *The Syrian jihad: Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State and the evolution of an insurgency*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 97-101.
- Christopher Phillips, "To the hilt: Assad's allies dig in" in Christopher Phillips (ed.), *The Battle for Syria: International Rivalry in the New Middle East*, London: Yale University Press, 2020.
- Collin P. Kelley, Shahrzad Mohtadi, Mark A. Cane, Richard Seager, Yochanan Kushnir, "Climate change in the Fertile Crescent and implications of the recent Syrian drought", in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 112(11), <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1421533112>
- Elias Götz, Per Ekman, "Russia's War against Ukraine: Context, Causes, and Consequences" in *Problems of Post-Communism*, 71(3) [<https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2024.2343640>] accessed on 7 September 2025.

- Elliott Brachet, Nissim Gasteli, Benjamin Barthe, "Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa, weakened by sectarian violence, looks to rebuild ties with France", in *Le Monde*, 7 May 2025 [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2025/05/07/syrian-president-ahmed-al-sharaa-weakened-by-sectarian-violence-looks-to-rebuild-ties-with-france_6741006_4.html], accessed on 12 September 2025.
- Faysal Itani, Aaron Stein, "Turkey's Syria Predicament", in *Atlantic Council Issue Brief*, 3 May 2016.
- George Mitchell, *Making Peace: The Inside Story of the Making of the Good Friday Agreement*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000.
- Gregory Waters, "Local Governance in Post-Assad Syria: A Hybrid State Model for the Future?", in *Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center*, 15 July 2025 [<https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2025/07/local-governance-in-post-assad-syria-a-hybrid-state-model-for-the-future?lang=en>], accessed on 20 September 2025.
- Hisham Noori Hussain Al-Hashimy; Yao Jinfang; Waleed Noori Hussein; Haider Noori Hussain, "Resilience and Reconstruction: Unraveling the Economic Trajectory of Iraq Post-2003", in *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Growth Evaluation*, 4(6), November 2023, <https://doi.org/10.54660/IJMRGE.2023.4.6.325-332>.
- John Darby, "Northern Ireland: The background to the Peace Process", in *Syracuse University Press*, 2003 [<https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/peace/darby03.htm>], accessed on 22 September 2025.
- Joseph Daher, *Syria after the uprisings: The political economy of state resilience*, London: Pluto Press, 2019.
- Larry Diamond, *Squandered victory: The American occupation and the bungled effort to bring democracy to Iraq*, New York: Owl Books, 2005.
- Leon Goldsmith, *Cycle of Fear: Syria's Alawites in War and Peace*, London: C. Hurst & Co. (Hurst), 2015.
- Mary Fitzgerald; Mattia Toaldo, "A Quick Guide to Libya's Main Players", in *European Council on Foreign Affairs*, 19 May 2016 [https://ecfr.eu/special/mapping_libya_conflict/], accessed on 20 September 2025.
- Michael Knapp; Anja Flach; Ercan Ayboga, *Revolution in Rojava. Democratic Autonomy and Women's Liberation in Syrian Kurdistan*, London: Pluto Press, 2016.
- Michael P. Auerbach, "Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)", in *EBSCO*, 2024 [<https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/diplomacy-and-international-relations/islamic-state-iraq-and-syria-isis>], accessed on 3 September 2025.

- Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, New York: Pantheon Books, 2012.
- Patrick Seale, *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- Philip Loft; Claire Mills, "Syria after Assad: Consequences and interim authorities 2025", in *House of Commons Library*, 23 July 2025 [<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-10161/>], accessed on 10 September 2025.
- Raymond Hinnebusch and Omar Imady, "Origins of the Syrian Uprising: From structure to agency", in Raymond Hinnebusch and Omar Imady (eds.), *The Syrian Uprising. Domestic Origins and Early Trajectory*, New York: Routledge, 2018.
- Rob Geist Pinfold, "Myth Busting in a Post-Assad Syria", in *Middle East Policy*, 11 February 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1111/mepo.12799>.
- Samer al-Ahmed, "The Damascus-SDF agreement two months on: Fragile progress or delayed collapse?", in *Middle East Institute*, 9 May 2025 [<https://www.mei.edu/publications/damascus-sdf-agreement-two-months-fragile-progress-or-delayed-collapse>], accessed on 13 September 2025.
- Sarah Yerkes; Maha Alhomoud, "One Year Later, Tunisia's President Has Reversed Nearly a Decade of Democratic Gain", in *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 22 July 2022 [<https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2022/07/one-year-later-tunisia-president-has-reversed-nearly-a-decade-of-democratic-gains?lang=en>], accessed on 22 September 2025.
- Sinem Adar; Muriel Asseburg, Hamidreza Azizi, Margarete Klein and Guido Steinberg, "The Political Transition in Syria: Regional and International Interests", in *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik*, 11 March 2025, doi: 10.18449/2025C11.
- UNHCR, *Global Report 2024 – Syria situation*, June 2025 [<https://www.unhcr.org/publications/global-report-2024>], accessed on 10 September 2025.
- United Nations, *UN Security Council Meetings & Outcomes Tables*, [<https://research.un.org/en/docs/sc/quick>], accessed on 7 September 2025.
- Wolfram Lacher, *Libya's Fragmentation: Structure and Process in Violent Conflict*, London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 2020.
- World Bank, *Syria Economic Monitor, Spring 2024: Conflict, Crises, and the Collapse of Household Welfare (English)*, 2024, Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group, [<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/099515505222471242>], accessed on 10 September 2025.

Ottoman Inheritance in the Republic of Türkiye. Impact on the Interactions with the West

Introduction

One of the most important matters in relation to the Republic of Türkiye is the Ottoman Empire. Even though they might be perceived as two different entities, the two are not separate entities, but one coming *after* the other and *from* the other. More precisely, the Republic of Türkiye is the transfiguration of the Ottoman State, emerging from the necessity to adapt to the rigours of the international community in the early 20th century.

We admit that *events* and *phenomena* are not isolated in time, but rather indirectly reproduce themselves under the form of “*inheritances*” – cultural, political, economic and social in general. In order to apply this to our case, we can therefore admit that some elements from the organisation of the Ottoman State have been incorporated into the current administrative system of the Republic of Türkiye, either in their original shape or by taking the form of different *Ottoman-inspired policies*.

Due to the vast Ottoman history, events, policies and attributes of the Ottoman state, this paper is not exhaustive; we rather focus on the aspects that have a greater impact and are, therefore, more deeply embedded in today's Türkiye.

Motivation for the Paper

The historical background of a state is of great importance for its present ties with other state entities, but also with international or regional organisations. That is because the present state *mirrors* its ancestry and *reflects* it through its policies – domestically and externally.

When analysing a country's profile, its inheritance is crucial for the past is, paradoxically, in direct connection with the future – in other words, what a country *did* motivates what a country *will do*. Nevertheless, it is to be mentioned that not all the attributes and aspects have translated to the actual state: some of them are kept isolated in the past, and some others have crossed the border between past and present and passed to the present.

We accept that *interaction* is the *sine qua non* condition of the current international community. In its absence, there would be no *community* – for, in itself, *community* is the opposite of *isolation*.

The importance of the interaction between Türkiye and the West is crucial, since the Republic of Türkiye is in numerous cases described as a “stable platform in the midst of instability”¹. One of the areas where Türkiye is most influential is in its cultural and linguistic vicinity, especially in Azerbaijan, due to the linguistic similitudes, influencing the country's politics to a great extent.² In strategic and economic terms, Türkiye is also influential when it comes to the Arab world, due to its control over the Tiger and Euphrates Rivers³, not to mention the ideological background of Islamism shared between Türkiye and the Arab world.

Objectives and Methodology

Our main objective is to establish the most important aspects resulting from the Ottoman state which are present in today's Türkiye; and to analyse to what extent those elements have an impact on Türkiye's relations with the West.

Our methodology is qualitative – more specifically, the historical-interpretative and analytical approach. We opt for this methodology because we intend to analyse the transposition of some relevant (visible) aspects from

¹ Robert D. Kaplan, *Răzbumarea geografiei*, București: Litera, 2023, p. 366

² *Ibidem*.

³ *Ibidem*.

the Ottoman period into the actual political and administrative system of the Republic of Türkiye.

Characteristics of the Ottoman State

Military State. Religious Ideology

The Ottoman Empire was founded on the basis of a military group, originating from the need to protect the pre-Ottoman tribes. The binding force of the military elite was the Islamic ideology – the cult teachings that turned the Ottoman state into a religious state. The mixture between the military and the religious is explained by Paul Wittek, through the *Ghazi Thesis* – the military elite were fighting in the name of religion, or for a religious aim – at the very basis against the Byzantines, the Christian alterity.⁴

Administrative Organisation. Sole Monarch

One of the most relevant aspects in terms of administrative organisation was the *principle of sole sovereignty* also known as the *principle of the sole monarch*.⁵ In other words, the entire state apparatus was in essence ruled by a single person that was the *sultan*.

In relation to this principle there was another one: the role of the sultan was *hereditary*, on the *masculine line* – the sultan was always one of the sons of the previous sultans, and was not chosen in its function like the other members of the Ottoman Empire's "elite", "having to earn their positions regardless of birth".⁶

⁴ Marinos Sariyannis and E. Ekin Tuşalp Atiyas, *A History of Ottoman Political Thought up to the Early Nineteenth Century*, Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2019, p. 30.

⁵ Mustafa Ali Mehmed, *Istoria turcilor*, Bucureşti: Editura Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică, 1976, p. 114.

⁶ Erin Blakemore, "Why the Ottoman Empire rose and fell", *National Geographic*, 6th December, 2019, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/why-ottoman-empire-rose-fell>, accessed in 08.04.2025.

Ottomanism

The Ottomanist doctrine refers to the importance of the Ottoman state per se, moving the focus on it, rather than on the person of the sultan himself.

In terms of judicial organisation, one of the most important starting points is the fact that it was a multicultural empire, binding together different ethnicities under the umbrella of *Ottoman citizenship*. In other words, Ottomanism was a means or an instrument that assured cohesion, therefore unity in the Ottoman state, regardless of its multi-ethnic profile.

Fratricide

The principle of the sole monarch was to a great extent related to the phenomenon of *fratricide*, a common practice in the Ottoman State, assuring the continuity of the state apparatus and preventing internal conflicts, even civil wars from happening.

As a mental inheritance, fratricide meant a sacrifice for the sake of the country, or in the name of the community per se.

The civil code of Fatih Sultan Mehmet (or Fatih the Conqueror) was called Fatih Kanûnnâmesi, literally translating as “*The Fatih Code of Laws*” or the “*Law Code of Fatih*” and legitimised fratricide for the continuity of the state apparatus and avoiding civil war – therefore legitimising the principle of the single ruler.⁷

Expansionism and Exceptionalism

The expansionist period of the Ottoman Empire took place in the 16th and 16th centuries – a territorial expansion in the name of Islam, with the help of the *ghazi* military elite⁸ and the later formed *yeniçeri*, “*the new army*”, by *devşirme* (literally, “*gathering*”), formed from former Christian young men, later converted to Islam⁹ and educated in a Turkish family.¹⁰ The territorial expansionism created a feeling or sense of exceptionalism, the Ottoman State

⁷ Mustafa Ali Mehmed, *op. cit.*, pp. 113-114.

⁸ Stanford Jay Shaw and Malcolm Edward Yapp, “The peak of Ottoman power, 1481-1566”, *Britannica*, in Ottoman Empire, 11th February, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ottoman-Empire/The-peak-of-Ottoman-power-1481-1566>, accessed in 08.04.2025.

⁹ Mustafa Ali Mehmed, *op. cit.*, pp. 138-139.

¹⁰ Norman Stone, *Scurtă istorie a Turciei*, București: Litera, 2021, p. 41.

becoming a tri-continental power, ruling in Asia, Europe and Africa. The feeling of exceptionalism was, to some extent, related to Ottomanism – since Ottomanism was the starting point in emphasising the importance of the state.

Multiculturalism. The *Millet* System

The different ethnicities under the umbrella of the Ottoman state are defined as “*millet*”¹¹, which is the community in its largest sense.

The word millet is of Arabic origin, where it means *religion* or *religious community* – therefore, the Ottoman millet was rather based on belonging to a different religion, rather than ethnicity. Later on, the term also gained the meaning of “*nation*”.

Due to the fact that “the Ottoman Empire was the last multinational empire in the Balkans and the Middle East, it had to adopt a new way of coexistence between different ethnic and religious groups”¹². Some scholars believe that before the 16th century, non-Muslims were more numerous than Muslims in the Ottoman Empire.¹³

The millet system implied that the Ottomans of different religions (than Muslim) would live in different neighbourhoods and wear different clothes, in order not only to differentiate from the Muslims, but also as a measure that would allow them to “preserve their own religion and traditions”¹⁴.

More than that, the members of the millet “were born under the spiritual, financial and administrative authority of the community concerned and could change their *community* only if they *converted* to Islam”¹⁵.

Turks themselves had changed their belonging to a different community – *spiritual* and *ideological* – when converted to Islam, from rudimentary to cohesive, guided by cult teachings. Therefore, in a way, they only perpetuated the same transformations they had been through.

¹¹ İlber Ortaylı, *Ottoman Studies*, Istanbul: Kronik, p. 23.

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ Douglas A. Howard, *O istorie a Imperiului Otoman*, Bucureşti: Polirom, 2021, p. 138.

¹⁴ Mustafa Ali Mehmed, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-25.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 26.

Transposition of Ottoman Inheritance in the Turkish Policy

When it comes to the interaction between the Ottoman Empire and modern Türkiye in terms of *religion*, we can state that today's profile marks a combination between the ideological inheritance of the Ottoman period and the Kemalist ideology. More precisely, the foundation of the state is secular, starting from the 1924 Constitution¹⁶, but actual practices suggest a turn towards faith-based diplomacy, including a revival of the role of religious institutions¹⁷. The Ottoman inheritance is very well underlined by the neo-ottomanist doctrine, characterising the Ottoman Empire by three important aspects: Islamism (it was an Islamic empire), multiculturalism and the cradle of civilisation. Therefore, Türkiye is its heir and responsible to promote this cultural inheritance.¹⁸

The Ottoman *past* is, in this way, *present*: *cultural diplomacy* policies focus on promoting cultural aspects coming from the Ottomans, such as the Ottoman Turkish language, or the Ottoman painting on water technique – *ebru*. In the field of cultural diplomacy, we can provide the example of the Turkish cultural centre – Yunus Emre Institute – where foreigners can learn several aspects related to the Ottoman past: Ottoman Turkish language, how to play the qanun or the oud, Islamic calligraphy, or *tezhîp* etc.¹⁹

When it comes to the transposition of the Ottoman exceptionalism in today's Türkiye, we can mention nationalism: *Turkish nationalism* can be seen as the transposition of the Ottoman exceptionalism in today's internal framework. If the Ottoman state was perceived as glorious, exceptional etc. today's nationalism focuses on the Turkish identity and the importance of the Turkish state. Nationalism is one of the six pillars of Kemalism and since the Kemalist Revolution, the national feeling was linguistically supported, one of the most known examples in this sense being "*Ne mutlu Türk'üm diyene!*", meaning: "*How happy is the one that says <<I am Turkish>>!*". This phrase originates from 1933, when Mustafa Kemal Atatürk uttered the

¹⁶ Irina-Maria Cosma, "Faith-based Diplomacy and Neo-Ottomanism", in Laura M. Herța and Delia-Pop Flanța (eds.), *Strategic Narratives in Turbulent Times: Communication, Legitimacy, and Global Stakes*, Cluj-Napoca, Presa Universitară Clujeană, pp. 167-168.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 172-173.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 170.

¹⁹ *** "Duyurular", *Yunus Emre Enstitüsü*, <https://yee.org.tr/tr/announcements>, accessed in 10.04.2025

speech on the occasion of the Tenth Anniversary of the Republic²⁰, reinforcing the importance of *Turkishness*.

In terms of administrative organisation, there is a *subconscious inheritance* from the Ottoman administrative system – if in the Ottoman Empire, only a male could become head of the state (that was a sultan), in today's politics, the principle does not exist anymore. The only conditions stipulated in the Constitution are: “a Turkish citizen that is at least forty years old, having completed superior education, being eligible to be a member of the parliament is elected directly by the people”.²¹ More precisely, there is no condition related to the gender of the president in terms of eligibility criteria. Nevertheless, till present times, the Republic of Türkiye has only had male presidents. This might be understood as a reflection of the Ottoman past's impact on the collective mind, becoming an aspect of *common sense*.

When it comes to the inheritance of the millet system and, extendedly, multiculturalism, we can state that the phenomenon of *multiculturalism* and the *millet* system actually turned the country into a very cohesive and unitary one. Even though the millet system was mainly related to the separation of religious communities into minority groups, the co-existence with various ethnic and religious communities led to the increasing importance of *community*, on which the focus have always been, rather than on the individual – translating into a collectivistic culture in today's Türkiye.

Impact on the Interactions with the West

“The Ottoman Empire was the one which played an essential role in establishing a tight bond between (*Ottoman*) Turks and Europe”.²² Therefore, the internal profile of the country has a very important role in generating and guiding the interactions between Türkiye and the West.

²⁰ *** “10. Yıl Nutku”, T.C. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, <https://www.ktb.gov.tr/TR-96294/10-yil-nutku.html>, accessed in 10.04.2025.

²¹ *** “Mevzuat”, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Anayasa Mahkemesi, Anayasa, <https://www.anayasa.gov.tr/tr/mevzuat/anayasa/>, accessed in 11.04.2025.

²² Robert D. Kaplan, *Războiul geografiei*, București: Litera, 2023, p. 379.

Impact of Religion

Türkiye's secular profile is rather *sui-generis*, due to the above mentioned faith-based policies, very important in terms of public and cultural diplomacy. Therefore, the inheritance of the Ottoman religious ideology is rather significant. This hybrid form is also theorised as an "Islamic democracy"²³, due to the country's oscillation between Orientalism and Occidentalism or *Occidentalisation*. As the religious inheritance has become part of the identity, in the case of Türkiye's interactions with Occidental actors, the message sent is that interaction and dialogue are possible while preserving the Turkish culture. In other words, this oscillation is rather a balance of Turks between their old past (Ottoman period) and near past (Kemalist period).

Another supporting example of this equilibrium between different eras of Turks' history is Atatürk's contribution: he focused a lot on the Anatolian region, where Turks were traditional and the population was deeply rooted in the Islamic culture. For instance, he replaced the capital city from Istanbul to Ankara, because Istanbul was too much related to the Ottoman Empire. Nevertheless, it was also more Occidental than Anatolia, where Ankara is. In terms of the interaction with the West, this profile of Türkiye could represent an opportunity of the West for creating and mediating relations with the East, especially with the Muslim world.²⁴

Impact of Neo-Ottomanism

The Turkish Cultural Centre, Yunus Emre Institute (*Yunus Emre Enstitüsü*) promotes Turkish culture, and especially the historical inheritance. Besides the Turkish language courses, some of the main courses are related to the above mentioned Ebru painting, Ottoman Turkish classes, or promoting personalities, such as Bâkî (Mahmud Abdülbâkî), known as "*sultanü'ş şuarâ*"²⁵ ("*the sultan of poets*"), who lived between 1526 and 1600 and was considered to be a poet of the divan, due to the new and innovative

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 378.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 370-378.

²⁵ *** "Şair Baki Kimdir?", T.C. Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı İstanbul / Bayrampaşa – Şair Baki İlkokulu, https://sairbakiilkokulu.meb.k12.tr/icerikler/sair-baki-kimdir_4524145.html, accessed in 05.05.2025.

elements he added to Turkish (Ottoman) poetry²⁶. Neo-Ottomanism is also a key factor in strengthening the ties with the Arab world, by means of religion and religious-based interactions. In terms of interactions with the West, not only Turks send the message that the (Ottoman) past is a very important area of focus, but also that Türkiye is re-ascending as an Islamic power in the Middle East, with which is essential to establish good relations (so that it counterbalances the influence of Iran in the area²⁷).

Impact of Nationalism

The way in which the country presents itself or introduces itself to the world is *essentially Turkish*, rather than international. In 2021, the country's international denomination officially changed from the English *Turkey* to the Turkish *Türkiye*. The interactions with the West are highly related to this matter, due to the fact that this move means an even more enclosed approach from the country – using the *national* language in *international* relations. National branding is also crucial in this matter, country's label changing from *Made in Turkey* to *Made in Türkiye* since the international denomination of the country officially changed. That can be interpreted as: the (products) are *international*, but promote *the national*.²⁸ This aspect might be given different connotations in the interaction with the West: on one hand, it could be translated as *transparent*, but on the other hand, it could be perceived as *rigid* or *inflexible* in certain aspects.

Impact of Collectivistic Cultures

In terms of interaction with the West, this aspect makes Türkiye quite *predictable*, in a way that Western actors already know what to expect; common, shared values are always of primary importance for Turks. Predictability comes from the characteristics of a collectivistic culture, mainly in terms of *shared* values and principles: people tend to guide

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁷ Robert D. Kaplan, *op. cit.*, p. 383.

²⁸ Irina-Maria Cosma, "Turkish Identity. Ethnic and Cultural Characteristics and Identity Formation", in *Studia UBB Europaea*, LXIX, 2, 2024, 291-309, doi: 10.24193/subbeuropaea.2024.2.13.

themselves unitarily, following a set of rules and values and those who go beyond those rules and values are rather exceptions. Therefore, interacting with such a cohesive community is rather straightforward because the generally accepted discourse is rather *non-elitist*.

Conclusions

Each country comes with a historical inheritance, with a past background. To some extent, each country is the reconfiguration of its own profile, but not all countries emphasise their past in the same manner – some countries are more oriented to their past than others.

In conclusion, the Ottoman past is revived not only by political means, but more importantly by *immaterial* means – we can state that many of the aspects in the present profile of the country are rather *indirectly* or *symbolically* manifesting the Ottoman past, for they are not directly transposed in the political profile, but rather serve as *determinants* of certain political decisions. This appeals to the subconscious of a people (here, of the Turkish people) and to the symbols they give to their past.

The Ottoman inheritance is of great importance in the case of Türkiye's interactions with the West, not only when it comes to the direct ties of the West with Türkiye, but also in relation with the interactions with the Middle East and the Muslim world.

Bibliography

- Blakemore, Erin, "Why the Ottoman Empire rose and fell", *National Geographic*, 6th December, 2019, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/why-ottoman-empire-rose-fell>
- Douglas A. Howard, *O istorie a Imperiului Otoman*, București: Polirom, 2021
- Cosma, Irina-Maria, "Faith-based Diplomacy and Neo-Ottomanism", in Laura M. Herța and Delia-Pop Flanja (eds.), *Strategic Narratives in Turbulent Times: Communication, Legitimacy, and Global Stakes*, Cluj-Napoca, Presa Universitară Clujeană
- Cosma, Irina-Maria, "Turkish Identity. Ethnic and Cultural Characteristics and Identity Formation", in *Studia UBB Europaea*, LXIX, 2, 2024, 291-309, doi: 10.24193/subbeuropaea.2024.2.13

- Howard, Douglas A., *O istorie a Imperiului Otoman*, București: Polirom, 2021
- Kaplan, Robert D., *Războiul geografic*, București: Litera, 2023
- Mehmed, Mustafa Ali, *Istoria turcilor*, București: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1976
- Ortaylı, İlber, *Ottoman Studies*, Istanbul: Kronik
- Sariyannis, Marinos and Atiyas, E. Ekin Tuşalp, *A History of Ottoman Political Thought up to the Early Nineteenth Century*, Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2019
- Stone, Norman, *Scurtă istorie a Turciei*, București: Litera, 2021
- Topçu, Canan, "Self-appointed guardians of secularism", *Development and Cooperation*, 18th September, 2008, <https://www.dandc.eu/en/article/turkeys-military-self-appointed-guardians-secularism>
- Shaw, Stanford Jay and Yapp, Malcolm Edward, "The peak of Ottoman power, 1481-1566", *Britannica*, in *Ottoman Empire*, 11th February, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ottoman-Empire/The-peak-of-Ottoman-power-1481-1566>
- Wastnidge, Edward, "Imperial Grandeur and Selective Memory: Re-assessing Neo-Ottomanism in Turkish Foreign and Domestic Politics", *Open Research Online*, 2019, <http://oro.open.ac.uk/58908/2/58908.pdf>
- *** "10. Yıl Nutku", *T.C. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı*, <https://www.ktb.gov.tr/TR-96294/10-yil-nutku.html>
- *** "Duyurular", *Yunus Emre Enstitüsü*, <https://yee.org.tr/tr/announcements>
- *** "Mevzuat", *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Anayasa Mahkemesi*, *Anayasa*, <https://www.anayasa.gov.tr/tr/mevzuat/anayasa/>
- *** "Şair Baki Kimdir?", *T.C. Mill Eğitim Bakanlığı İstanbul / Bayrampaşa – Şair Baki İlkokulu*, https://sairbakiilkokulu.meb.k12.tr/icerikler/sair-baki-kimdir_4524145.html

Mobilization and Media Framing of the Youth-led Protests during the 2024 Presidential Elections Crisis in Romania

1. Introduction

In the aftermath of the first round of the 2024 presidential elections in Romania, a wave of youth-led protests erupted across major cities including Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Iași, and Timișoara, as well as within Romanian student communities abroad. The immediate trigger was the unexpected success of independent candidate Călin Georgescu, whose radical nationalist rhetoric and Eurosceptic platform resonated with an important segment of the youth electorate.¹ However, for many others, the outcome symbolized a potential threat to the country's European orientation and an unsettling slide toward a more authoritarian model of presidency. Between November 25 and December 6, mass protests thus became both a symbol of civic resistance and a test for the Romanian authorities' capacity to withstand democratic backsliding,² reflecting broader anxieties about the erosion of democratic institutions and norms across Eastern Europe.³

¹ Felicia Macaleț, "Profilul alegătorului. Cine l-a votat pe Călin Georgescu", *Euronews.ro*, Published November 26, 2024, [<https://www.euronews.ro/articole/profilul-alegatorului-cine-l-a-votat-pe-calin-georgescu>].

² Fabio Wolkenstein, "What is democratic backsliding?", *Constellations*, vol. 30, no. 3, 2023, pp. 261-275. DOI: 10.1111/1467-8675.12627.

³ Tobias Spöri; Dániel Oross and Pál Susánszky, "Active Youth? Trends of Political Participation in East Central Europe", *Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics*, vol. 6, no. 4, 2020, DOI: 10.17356/ieejsp.v6i4.792.

Mobilized primarily by informal youth groups, student associations, and civil society networks, these public demonstrations drew on symbolic repertoires and collective practices rooted in Romania's protest culture.⁴ Echoing earlier moments of mass mobilization, such as the 2015 Colectiv nightclub fire protests and the 2017-2019 anti-corruption demonstrations,⁵ the 2024 youth-led protests expressed a generational claim to political agency, grounded not only in frustration with domestic politics, but also in a normative attachment to European democratic ideals.⁶ These mobilizations were also hybrid in nature, unfolding both in public places and on online platforms. Digital tools, such as hashtags, livestreams, and viral posts drew more people into the movement and gave Romanian students abroad the means to coordinate and voice solidarity, thereby reinforcing the transnational character of the protests.

These interplaying factors help explain why the spectre of nationalist authoritarianism resonated so strongly as a mobilizing threat for many young Romanians, particularly those living in urban areas, with higher levels of tertiary education and a more favorable view of the EU.⁷ It also reflects broader findings that young people across Europe increasingly combine distrust towards national political institutions and parties,⁸ with stronger attachment to transnational democratic values such as social justice, equality, the rule of law and active citizenship.⁹

Despite these moments of mobilization, studies show that youth political participation in Romania often remains constrained by structural barriers, including socio-economic inequalities, limited access to quality

⁴ Vlad Odobescu, "How Did Romanian Protest Culture Evolve?", *BalkanInsight.com*, Published March 2, 2017 [<https://balkaninsight.com/2017/03/02/how-did-romanian-protest-culture-evolve-03-01-2017/>].

⁵ Toma Burean, "Democrats on Tte Streets. Drivers of Student Protest Participation in Romania", *The Open Journal of Sociopolitical Studies PACO*, vol. 12, no. 12, 2019, pp. 22-42, DOI: 10.1285/i20356609v12i1p22.

⁶ James Sloam; Rakib Ehsan and Matt Henn, "<<Youthquake>>: How and Why Young People Reshaped the Political Landscape in 2017", *Political Insight*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2018 pp. 4-8, DOI: 10.1177/2041905818764697.

⁷ Macaleț, *op. cit.*.

⁸ Tomaž Deželan, *Young People's Participation in European Democratic Processes. How to Improve and Facilitate Youth Involvement*, Brussels: European Union Publishing, 2023, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/IPOL_STU\(2023\)745820](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/IPOL_STU(2023)745820).

⁹ Roger Soler-i-Martí, "Youth political involvement update: measuring the role of cause-oriented political interest in young people's activism", *Journal of Youth Studies*, vol. 18, no. 3, 2015, pp. 396-416. DOI: 10.1080/13676261.2014.963538.

education, and geographic disparities.¹⁰ While initiatives such as EU-funded civic education programmes, NGO-led projects, and youth consultative bodies have attempted to mitigate these challenges,¹¹ Romania still struggles to translate youth concerns into meaningful, sustainable, and responsive policy actions that grant young people influence over political decision-making.¹² As a result, protests remain a one of the few democratic avenues through which young people can articulate their political demands, contest institutional inertia, and advocate for a more participative model of governance that reflects their beliefs.¹³ This resonates with Della Porta's 2015 research, which positions protest as a corrective mechanism for underrepresented groups in contexts of institutional blockage.¹⁴

Less attention has been paid, however, to how youth-led protests are represented and contested in mass media. Media framing theory has long established that news outlets do not simply report events,¹⁵ but actively construct meanings that can either legitimize or delegitimize social movements.¹⁶ In other words, frames shape whether protesters are portrayed as defenders of democracy, irresponsible disruptors, or naive idealists,¹⁷ influencing how the public interprets both the grievances and the legitimacy

¹⁰ Gabriel Bădescu; Radu Umbreş; Mălina Voicu and Claudiu Tufiş, *Youth study Romania 2024: Opinions, Fears, and Aspirations of Youth in a Romania of Social Inequalities*. Bucharest: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2024, <https://romania.fes.de/ro/e/studiu-asupra-tinerilor-din-romania-care-sunt-opiniile-temerile-si-aspiratiile-noii-generatii.html>.

¹¹ Anne Crowley and Dan Moxon, *New and innovative forms of youth participation in decision-making processes*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2018, <https://edoc.coe.int/en/youth-in-europe/7625-new-and-innovative-forms-of-youth-participation-in-decision-making-processes.html>.

¹² Bădescu, Umbreş, Voicu, Claudiu Tufiş, *op. cit.*

¹³ Marius Ioan Tătar, "What Drives Individual Participation in Mass Protests? Grievance Politicization, Recruitment Networks and Street Demonstrations in Romania", *Journal of Identity and Migration Studies*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2020, pp. 112-140, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3743006>.

¹⁴ Donatella Della Porta, *Social Movements in Times of Austerity: Bringing Capitalism Back into Protest Analysis*, Cambridge: Polity, 2015.

¹⁵ Robert Mathew Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm", *Journal of Communication*, vol. 43, nr. 4, 1993, pp. 51-58. DOI: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x.

¹⁶ Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment", *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 26, 2000, pp. 611-639, DOI: 10.1146/annurev.soc.26.1.611.

¹⁷ Pál Susánszky, Ákos Kopper and Frank T. Zsigó, "Media Framing of Political Protests – Reporting Bias and the Discrediting of Political Activism", *Post-Soviet Affairs*, vol. 38, no.4, 2022, pp. 312-28, DOI:10.1080/1060586X.2022.2061817.

of their claims.¹⁸ Comparative perspectives also show that youth movements are particularly vulnerable to delegitimizing frames, being often depicted as inexperienced, emotional, or manipulated,¹⁹ whereas sympathetic media coverage can amplify their public visibility and credibility.²⁰

Building on this theoretical perspective, Romania's polarized and highly politicized mass media landscape²¹ provides a particularly salient context for examining how youth-led protests are framed. Systematic studies examining how Romanian news outlets portray social movements remain limited, making the coverage of the 2024 youth-led protests a revealing case for understanding how competing narratives shape public perceptions of youth political agency.

Therefore, this article analyzes six digital media outlets – Hotnews.ro, G4Media.ro, Digi24.ro, R3Media.ro, ActiveNews.ro, and Capital.ro – during the peak protest period between November 25 and December 6, 2024. Using content and discourse analysis of 24 online news articles, it identifies the dominant frames through which these protests were represented, revealing how media coverage shapes both the visibility and perceived legitimacy of young political actors in times of crisis. The study then examines whether these discourses reinforced youth as legitimate political participants or undermined their claims through delegitimizing and adversarial framing. Ultimately, the findings contribute to broader academic debates on protest framing,²² youth political participation,²³ and civic resilience,²⁴ offering

¹⁸ Mrhizou Hafid; Jalal Nouredine and Omar El Khalifi, "Protest Movements and Political Change: A Framework for Analysis", *International Journal of Innovative Research and Development*, vol. 13, no. 9, 2024, DOI: 10.24940/ijird/2024/v13/i9/SEP24009.

¹⁹ Stella Levantesi, "Enemies of Society": How the Media Portray Climate Activists", *Green European Journal*, Published October 17, 2023, [<https://www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu/enemies-of-society-how-the-media-portray-climate-activists/>].

²⁰ Gina M. Masullo; Danielle K. Brown and Summer Harlow, "Shifting the protest paradigm? Legitimizing and humanizing protest coverage lead to more positive attitudes toward protest, mixed results on news credibility", *Journalism*, vol. 25, no. 6, 2023, pp. 1230-1251. DOI: 10.1177/14648849231200135.

²¹ Mădălina Botan, "The Romanian Media System: Dynamics, Challenges, and Implications for Democracy", *Communication Policies and Media Systems: Revisiting Hallin and Mancini's Model*, vol. 12, 2024, DOI: 10.17645/mac.7847.

²² Teresa Geremew Chala, "Effects of Mass Media Framing of Protest Movements: A Meta-Analysis and Systematic Review of Mass Media Studies", *Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2022. DOI: 10.30935/ojcm/11538.

²³ Kitanova, *op. cit.*

²⁴ Sarah Pickard; Judith Bessant, *Young People Re-Generating Politics in Times of Crises*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

insights into the dynamics of media and youth mobilization in Eastern European democracies.

2. Theoretical Background

The youth protests that followed the first round of the 2024 Romanian presidential elections offer a compelling case for examining three interconnected areas of scholarship: youth political participation, the role of media framing in shaping the legitimacy of social movements, and the broader dynamics between protests and mass media in contemporary Romania.

2.1. Youth Protest Participation

Young people represent a significant and dynamic segment of the European population, with approximately 73 million citizens aged 15-29 across the EU.²⁵ However, research on youth political participation underscores a recurring dilemma. On the one hand, young people are often portrayed as disengaged from institutional politics, registering lower electoral turnout and weaker ties to political parties and organizations than older generations.²⁶ On the other hand, they are consistently at the forefront of innovative and unconventional means of political action, ranging from digital initiatives such as petition signing and online campaigns, to coordinated street-level action and mass political demonstrations.²⁷

Protest, understood as collective mobilization through which political claims are publicly articulated in ways that challenge existing power structures, influence public debate, and seek to shape policy outcomes,²⁸ has emerged as an increasingly important arena of youth participation. Far from being a symptom of political apathy, protests can function as compensatory

²⁵ European Commission / EACEA, *The situation of young people in the European Union. EU Youth Report 2024*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2025, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/170345>.

²⁶ Maria Teresa Grasso, "Age, Period and Cohort Analysis in a Comparative Context: Political Generations and Political Participation Repertoires in Western Europe", *Electoral Studies*, vol. 33, 2014, pp. 63–76, DOI: 10.1016/j.electstud.2013.06.003.

²⁷ Crowley, Moxon, *op. cit.*

²⁸ Bart Cammaerts; Alice Mattoni and Patrick McCurdy, *Mediation and Protest Movements* (1st ed.), Intellect, 2013. DOI: 10.2307/j.ctv36xw3km.

participation,²⁹ enabling young people to act when institutional responsiveness is limited. Comparative evidence suggest that while voting remains the most efficient action for young people across the EU, online activism, volunteering, and taking part in street demonstrations are increasingly embraced as alternative participation strategies.³⁰ Pickard and Loncle-Moriceau conceptualize this shift as “Do-It-Ourselves” politics,³¹ in which young people engage through horizontal, issue-based networks rather than through hierarchical formal institutions, often perceived as elitist and detached from their everyday concerns.³² Examples range from the 2011 international Occupy movement and the 2018 Fridays-for-Future climate strikes, to the 2020 Black Lives Matter mass demonstrations and the 2024 pro-Palestinian protests on university campuses, illustrating how young people increasingly combine digital mobilization tools with the physical occupation of public spaces. Sloam conceptualizes this phenomenon as the development of hybrid repertoires of political action.³³

Research on political participation suggests that these engagement patterns emerge from the complex interaction between structural limitations and broader political dynamics. In their 2014 study, Ang, Dinar, and Lucas highlight the influence of demographic and socio-economic factors, noting that large youth cohorts often face heightened unemployment, limited civic participation opportunities, and institutional overcrowding, which can increase the likelihood of social unrest and political contention.³⁴ Tătar further identifies youth as an ideal cohort for mobilization due to their lower social obligations and greater risk tolerance.³⁵ However, comparative

²⁹ Pippa Norris, *Democratic Deficit: Critical Citizens Revisited*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

³⁰ Deželan, Tomaž, *op. cit.*, pp. 17.

³¹ Sarah Pickard and Patricia Loncle-Moriceau, “Young People’s Political Discourse: Voice, Efficacy and Impact”, in Svendsen, Bente A. and Rickard Jonsson (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Youth Culture* (1st ed.), London: Routledge, 2023.

³² *Ibidem*.

³³ James Sloam, “<<The outraged young>>: young Europeans, civic engagement and the new media in a time of crisis”, *Information, Communication & Society*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2014, pp. 217-231, DOI: 10.1080/1369118X.2013.868019.

³⁴ Adrian U. Ang; Shlomi Dinar and Russell. E Lucas, “Protests by the young and digitally restless: the means, motives, and opportunities of anti-government demonstrations”, in *Information, Communication & Society*, vol. 17, no. 10, 2014, pp. 1228 – 1249, DOI:10.1080/1369118X.2014.918635.

³⁵ Marius Ioan Tătar, “What Drives Individual Participation in Mass Protests? Grievance Politicization, Recruitment Networks and Street Demonstrations in Romania”, *Journal of*

evidence suggests that macro-contextual factors such as institutional trust,³⁶ age of democracy,³⁷ participatory cultures among adults,³⁸ and levels of education³⁹ remain stronger predictors of youth engagement. At the same time, the availability of associations, organizations and social networks within a country is also related to higher levels of participation among young people.⁴⁰

Cultural and value-based approaches highlight generational shifts in contemporary protest movement. Recent data show that younger demographics – particularly women and the highly educated – prioritize issues of quality of life, including environmental protection, social justice, and democratic integrity.⁴¹ This pattern can be attributed to how political socialization and access to peer networks reinforce young people's awareness of systemic challenges and motivate them to engage in collective action. However, these post-materialist orientations⁴² coexist with persistent economic grievances, which remain powerful drivers of mobilizations in contexts of austerity, inflation and labor precarity.⁴³ Therefore, youth activism is best understood as the complex interactions between material insecurities and normative aspirations, with distinct cohorts mobilizing around political agendas that link economic demands to broader social, political, and cultural goals.

Identity and Migration Studies, vol. 14, no. 2, 2020, pp. 112-140, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3743006>.

³⁶ Gabriel Bădescu; Daniel Sandu; Daniela Angi and Carmen Greab, *Youth Study Romania 2018/2019*. Bucharest: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2019, <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id-moe/15268.pdf>.

³⁷ Magdelina Kitanova, "Youth Political Participation in the EU: Evidence from a Cross-National Analysis", *Journal of Youth Studies*, vol. 23, no. 7, 2019, pp. 819-836. DOI: 10.1080/13676261.2019.1636951.

³⁸ Martyn Barrett and Pachi Dimitra, "Macro contextual factors linked to youth civic and political engagement", in Barret, Martyn and Pachi Dimitra (eds.) *Youth Civic and Political Engagement*, London: Routledge, 2019, pp. 76-105, DOI: 10.4324/9780429025570-4.

³⁹ Pippa Norris, *Democratic Phoenix: Reinventing Political Activism*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

⁴⁰ Deželan, Tomaž, *op. cit.*

⁴¹ Sloam, Ehsan, Henn, *op. cit.*

⁴² Ronald Inglehart, *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.

⁴³ Ioana-Elena Oana; Hanspeter Kriesi and Argyrios Altiparmakis, "Dynamics of Protest Mobilisation in the European Poly-Crisis", *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 32, no. 8, 2024. pp. 1874–1905. DOI:10.1080/13501763.2024.2366388.

Technological transformations have also fundamentally reshaped the ways in which young people engage in protest actions. The growing use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has enabled youth to mobilize, coordinate, and amplify their demands outside formal institutional channels.⁴⁴ The 2020 student protests against restrictive education laws in Hungary and the 2024 anti-governmental protests in Serbia illustrate these trends. Both began as small-scale civic initiatives, with students occupying the University of Theatre and Film Arts in Budapest and The Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Belgrade, but rapidly expanded into nation-wide protests.⁴⁵ In these contexts, social media platforms and messaging groups not only facilitated the rapid dissemination of information, but also provided the organizational infrastructure that enabled students to transform local grievances into broader acts of democratic contestation.⁴⁶

Despite visible progress in expanding protest practices among young people, significant challenges remain. Recent Eurobarometer data indicate that 28% of young people in the EU lack basic digital skills, a figure that increases to 38% among those with lower educational background.⁴⁷ These disparities highlight the need for targeted policy interventions to address both the growing digital divide, but also the structural, socio-economic, and educational barriers that limit young people's effective civic engagement. Moreover, innovative protest practices, such as online petitioning and hashtag campaigns, risk remaining episodic and fragmented, as they frequently fail to translate into sustained collective action or real institutional impact.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the "value-action gap"⁴⁹ identified by Blake underscores the disjunction between the democratic and ethical principles young people endorse and the limited political behaviors they enact. Scholars argue that this gap reflects widespread perceptions of individual

⁴⁴ Ang, Dinar, and Lucas, *op. cit.*

⁴⁵ Susánszky, Kopper, and Zsigó, *op. cit.*

⁴⁶ Oana, Kriesi, Altiparmakis, *op. cit.*

⁴⁷ European Commission, *Flash Eurobarometer 545 – Youth and Democracy (May 2024)*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3181>.

⁴⁸ Themba Benjamin, "Social Media Activism: Limitations and Benefits, *INOSR*, vol. 4, no.1, 2018, pp. 30 – 37, <https://www.inosr.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/INOSR-AM-41-30-37-2018.pdf>.

⁴⁹ James Blake, "Overcoming the 'Value-action Gap' in Environmental Policy: Tensions between National Policy and Local Experience", *Local Environment*, vol. 4, no. 3, 1999, pp. 257–78. DOI: 10.1080/13549839908725599.

actions as ineffective, with many young citizens believing that meaningful change must come from governments they consider unreliable, rather than through coordinated acts of collective mobilization.⁵⁰

Taken together, the literature indicates that young people in Europe are increasingly embracing unconventional forms of political participation, including protests and mass demonstrations, often as responses to perceived institutional inefficacy and systemic constraints. At the same time, it highlights how contemporary youth protest movements increasingly embody a reconfigured repertoire of democratic action: one that is value-driven, digitally mediated, and capable of circumventing traditional institutional channels.

2.2. Media Framing

While protest participation reflects the political agency of young people, its broader social meaning is constructed through complex interpretative processes. As Erving Goffman argues, frames operate as “cognitive schemata”⁵¹ that organize experience and guide action, shaping how events are understood and acted upon. Framing theory therefore provides a useful lens for analyzing how protests are interpreted, legitimized, or delegitimized in the public sphere through mass media channels.

Within communication studies, Robert Entman conceptualizes framing as the selection and salience of aspects of reality to promote specific problem definitions, causal interpretations, and normative evaluations of events.⁵² Building on this, Benford and Snow emphasize the role of collective action frames in sustaining mass mobilizations, as seen in the U.S. civil rights of the 1960s and anti-nuclear war campaigns of the 1970s-1980s.⁵³ In these movements, diagnostic frames identified systemic injustices, while prognostic frames advanced concrete solutions to these issues, such as

⁵⁰ Catherine Happer and Greg Philo, “The Role of the Media in the Construction of Public Belief and Social Change”, *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2013, pp. 321-36. DOI: 10.5964/jsp.p.v1i1.96.

⁵¹ Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (3rd print). Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974.

⁵² Entman, *op. cit.*

⁵³ Benford, Snow, *op. cit.*

legislative reform and disarmament strategies.⁵⁴ Motivational frames, in turn, appealed to moral duty and collective solidarity, encouraging individuals to participate and sustain engagement over time.⁵⁵ Notably, these frames were not instructed in isolation, but they were embedded in wider political debates and continuously negotiated by opponents, bystanders, and, more importantly, by media institutions.

Mass media remains one of the most prominent vehicle for the distribution and dissemination of information worldwide.⁵⁶ Research on the “protest paradigm”⁵⁷ illustrates how mainstream journalistic practices systematically marginalize mass demonstrations by emphasizing disruption, deviance, or violence, while downplaying the grievances and goals of the participants.⁵⁸ This dynamic reflects an asymmetrical relationship in which social movements depend on media for visibility, legitimacy and wider public support, whereas media organizations hold disproportionate power to shape representations⁵⁹ and advance political agendas.⁶⁰ As a consequence, media can influence whether protests are perceived as legitimate democratic action or dismissed as disruptive noise. Conversely, more humanizing frames can disrupt the protest paradigm, fostering empathy, challenging stereotypes among audiences and reframing protesters as credible democratic actors part of a larger social movement.⁶¹

It is also important to note that audiences are not passive recipients of media representations. Contemporary theories of media reception stress that individuals actively interpret frames through their prior knowledge, personal beliefs, and interactions with others.⁶² As Happer and Philo note,

⁵⁴ *Ibidem.*

⁵⁵ *Ibidem.*

⁵⁶ Katherine Phipps and Katryna Szagala, “Social Movements and the News Media”, *The McMaster Journal of Communication*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2007, pp. 39-51, DOI: 10.15173/mjc.v4i0.237.

⁵⁷ Masullo, Brown and Harlow, *op. cit.*

⁵⁸ Geremew Chala Teresa, “Effects of Mass Media Framing of Protest Movements: A Meta-Analysis and Systematic Review of Mass Media Studies”, *Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2022. DOI: 10.30935/ojcm/11538.

⁵⁹ William K. Carroll and Robert A. Hackett, “Democratic media activism through the lens of social movement theory”, *Media, Culture & Society*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2006, pp. 83-104. DOI: 10.1177/0163443706059289.

⁶⁰ Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw, “The Agenda Setting Function of Mass Media”, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 36, no. 2, 1972, pp. 176–187. DOI: 10.1075/asj.1.2.02mcc.

⁶¹ Masullo; Brown and Harlow, *op. cit.*

⁶² Rodrigo Zamith, *The American Journalism Handbook: Concepts, Issues, and Skills*, Amherst: UMass Amherst Libraries, 2022, <https://books.rodrigozamith.com/the-american-journalism->

direct experience often influences how media narratives are received: when audiences lack familiarity with an issue, media frames exert stronger influence, whereas first-hand encounters can reduce reliance on subjective journalistic interpretations.⁶³

Furthermore, recent data indicate that media preferences differ significantly across youth demographics in Europe. While older cohorts (26-30) rely primarily on news websites, younger generations (16 – 25-year-olds) acquire much of their information from digital environments, such as social media, online news outlets, and messaging groups.⁶⁴ This shift expands their access to diverse information sources and perspectives, however it does not automatically translate into greater political engagement. Furthermore, differences in digital literacy skills combined with algorithmic biases of online platforms continue to limit young people's capacity to challenge misleading or delegitimizing media portrayals, ultimately undermining their willingness to participate collectively in protest actions.

These perspectives thus underscore a central paradox in the literature: youth movements depend on media visibility and credibility to resonate with wider publics⁶⁵, yet that same visibility often subjects them to frames that delegitimize and minimize their claims. Moreover, with mass media increasingly aligned with corporate and political interests,⁶⁶ the messages of young activists risk being filtered through frames that prioritize spectacle over more subtle motivations and demands behind a political protest.

2.3. Youth, Protest Participation, and the Romanian Media

Eastern Europe provides a particularly salient context for examining the intersection of youth, protest participation and media framing. As Dobek-Ostrowska argues, post-communist states in the region continue to grapple with legacies of authoritarian regimes, volatile economic systems, and fragile political and media institutions.⁶⁷ These factors have shaped not

handbook/files/Rodrigo%20Zamith%20-%20The%20American%20Journalism%20Handbook.pdf.

⁶³ Happer, Philo, *op. cit.*

⁶⁴ Ohme, Andersen, Albæk, de Vreese, *op. cit.*

⁶⁵ Carroll, Hackett, *op. cit.*

⁶⁶ Phipps, Szagala, *op. cit.*

⁶⁷ Bogusława Ostrowska Dobek, "25 Years after Communism: Four Models of Media and Politics in Central and Eastern Europe", in Dobek Ostrowska, Bogusława and Michał

only the way in which young people mobilize, but also the communicative practices through which their actions are mediated and understood by wider audiences.

Within this regional context, Romania represents a particularly distinctive case. While Poland and Hungary were initially hailed as “poster boys”⁶⁸ of post-communist transition and civic participation, the past decade has witnessed a gradual erosion of democratic norms and practices. These shifts have directly impacted youth activism in both countries, where young protesters contesting government policies have faced political repression and increased violence.⁶⁹ Romania, by contrast, followed a different trajectory, marked by chronic public distrust toward political institutions,⁷⁰ but also by recurring episodes of grassroots mobilizations in which young people gradually assumed a central role.

This study classifies post-1989 protests in Romania into four distinct waves, each reflecting broader political, socio-economic, and generational dynamics. The first decade (1990 – 1999) was characterized by fragmented and often repressed public mobilizations, propelled by disputed privatization processes, enduring economic hardships, and growing frustrations with the political leadership. Protest participation cut across distinct groups, from factory workers and pensioners struggling with transition costs to students voicing demands for political reform. A pivotal moment came with the 1990 *Mineriada* phenomenon, when several thousand students in Bucharest mobilized against the National Salvation Front’s (FSN) monopolization of political power and the slow pace of democratic reforms it had promised. President Ion Iliescu dismissed the demonstrators as “hooligans”,⁷¹ a label that Romanian media amplified, thus reinforcing a delegitimizing narrative of the mass manifestations. The state’s decision to summon miners to violently disperse the protests and ransack university

Głowacki (eds.), *Democracy and Media in Central and Eastern Europe 25 Years On*, 2015, Frankfurt: Peter Lang, pp. 11–46. DOI: 10.3726/978-3-653-04452-2.

⁶⁸ Tobias Spöri; Dániel Oross and Susánszky Pál, “Active Youth? Trends of Political Participation in East Central Europe”, *Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics*, vol. 6, no. 4, 2020, DOI: 10.17356/ieejsp.v6i4.792.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁰ Barrett, Dimitra, *op. cit.*

⁷¹ Toma Burean Gabriel Bădescu, “Voices of Discontent: Student Protest Participation in Romania”, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, vol. 47, no. 3/4, 2014, pp. 385–97, DOI: 10.1016/j.postcomstud.2014.10.004.

spaces not only deepened political polarization,⁷² but also left a lasting mark on a generation for whom political engagement became associated with vulnerability, stigmatization, and brutality.

The second phase (2000 – 2012) saw increased mobilization around socio-economic grievances, particularly in response to the government's austerity measures and rising inequalities. Protests culminated in January 2012, when thousands of people took the streets in major cities in Romania to oppose healthcare privatization and broader neoliberal reforms.⁷³ Although these demonstrations drew on diverse age groups, political elites and mainstream media largely portrayed them as chaotic outbursts of desperation rather than legitimate acts of civic resistance.⁷⁴ This framing choice obscured substantive critiques of political corruption and declining living standards voiced by protesters. Although youth participation remained fragmented and episodic, these protests marked the gradual consolidation of street protests as a legitimate form of democratic expression.

The third wave (2013 – 2019) marked a turning point in Romanian protest culture. Mass movements such as the 2013 Roșia Montană environmental campaign, the 2015 Colectiv nightclub protests, and anti-corruption mobilizations in the years that followed highlighted an important shift from narrow, individual concerns to collective, issue-driven protest agendas.⁷⁵ Young people, in particular, began leveraging online platforms to coordinate local mobilizations and build networks of intergenerational solidarity, moving from the margins to the forefront of political action. The 2017-2019 anti-governmental demonstrations combined street action with digital activism, as young participants organized massively through Facebook groups, shared viral posts, and consolidated a civic resistance movement known as #Rezist.⁷⁶ As a result, street protests became widely recognized as legitimate mechanisms for holding political elites accountable, framed explicitly in relations to European values of transparency and

⁷² *Ibidem*.

⁷³ Victoria Stoiciu, "Romanian Youth – Social Exclusion and Political Unrest", *Südosteuropa Mitteilungen*, No. 5, 2016, pp. 46-57.

⁷⁴ Tătar, *op. cit.*

⁷⁵ Clara Volintiru and Cristina Buzașu, "Shaping civic attitudes: Protests and politics in Romania", *Romanian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2020, pp. 118-146, DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.15713.12646.

⁷⁶ Burean, Toma. 2019.

accountability.⁷⁷ Romanian media, while occasionally sensationalist, struggled to delegitimize these movements in the face of widespread public sympathy and international visibility.⁷⁸

Since 2020, a fourth wave of protests has emerged, smaller in scale than the previous one, but nonetheless significant in terms of frequency, thematic diversity, and generational claims. Mobilizations have ranged from ad-hoc student demonstrations over education reforms, to recurring marches against gender-based violence, LGBTQ+ discrimination, and the pro-Palestinian encampment movement where young people were overwhelmingly at the forefront of political action.⁷⁹ These protests thus reflected a growing generational commitment of linking everyday grievances with wider democratic and social justice agendas.⁸⁰ Moreover, their hybrid character, blending digital activism with the symbolic occupation of public spaces, has enhanced the visibility and participation of young people in university centres like Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Timișoara, and Iași. Similar forms of contention have spread to smaller towns in Romania and among diaspora student communities, signalling a diversification of arenas for youth political participation. The youth-led protests following the first round of the 2024 presidential elections exemplify the characteristics of this protest wave, articulating pro-democratic messages in response to institutional opacity and contested electoral legitimacy.

Although youth activism has become an evolving feature of contemporary politics in Romania, significant discrepancies in youth participation and political attitudes persist. Survey data reveal that young Romanians continue to display low levels of civic knowledge, weak political

⁷⁷ Diana Mărgărit and Henry Rammelt, "The Revitalization of Social and Civic Participation in Eastern Europe? Industrial Conflict and Popular Protests in Romania", *Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics*, vol. 6, no. 4, 2020, pp. 93-109, DOI: 10.17356/ieejsp.v6i4.701.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁹ Alexandra Nistor and David Leonard Bularca, "Cum se raportează studenți din România la protestele pro palestinien din universitățile americane și britanice? – Între „Mi-e frică de violențe” și „e important să sprijinim cauzele în care credem”, *Hotnews.ro*, Published May 3, 2024. [<https://hotnews.ro/cum-se-raporteaza-studenti-din-romnia-la-protestele-pro-palestinien-din-universitatile-americane-si-britanice-ntre-mi-e-frica-de-violente-si-e-important-sa-sprij-3049>].

⁸⁰ Ruxandra Gubernat and Daniel Mărgărit, "Romania—Democratic Change and Protest Movements", Cătălina Crăciun, and Hans P. Rammelt (eds.), *Power and Protest in Central and Eastern Europe*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2025, DOI: 10.1007/978-3-031-77888-9.

representation, and significant socio-economic inequalities.⁸¹ At the same time, they report some of the lowest levels of institutional trust in Europe, particularly toward the parliament, government and political parties⁸² – precisely the institutions responsible for mediation in democratic societies. While these conditions often limit conventional participation like voting or party membership, they also render protests as one of the primary channels through which young citizens articulate political demands. Digital platforms amplify this engagement by enabling them to identify collective grievances and translate online activity into physical mobilization.⁸³ At the same time, the narrative of a uniformly democratic youth bloc is challenged by recent data indicating that certain demographics, particularly young men, are less engaged in civic actions and express increased support for authoritarian leaders.⁸⁴ This trend signals not only their disillusionment with current political institutions, but also the potential normalization of practices that could undermine rights and protections for vulnerable groups.

Within Romania's contested socio-political landscape, mass media play a decisive role in shaping the meaning and legitimacy of youth-led protests. Unlike in Hungary or Poland, where populist narratives often dominate coverage,⁸⁵ Romanian media oscillate between skepticism, neutrality, and occasional support, producing a fragmented information ecosystem where youth mobilization is both enabled and constrained. In her 2024 study, Botan cautions that this ambivalence stems from how journalists choose to report such events, rather than from structural issues in the media system.⁸⁶ Commercial pressures, weak professional standards, and recurrent political intervention blur the line between journalism and political propaganda,⁸⁷ narrowing the conditions under which protests can be publicly recognized as legitimate or meaningfully debated in the public sphere.

These vulnerabilities became particularly visible during the 2024 “super-electoral” year in Romania. A new report reveals that, just in the first

⁸¹ Bădescu, Sandu, Daniel, Angi, Greab, *op. cit.*

⁸² *Ibidem.*

⁸³ Toma Burean and Gabriel Bădescu. “Voices of Discontent: Student Protest Participation in Romania”, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, vol. 47, no. 3/4, 2014, pp. 385–97, DOI: 10.1016/j.postcomstud.2014.10.004.

⁸⁴ Bădescu, Umbreş, Voicu, and Tufiş, *op. cit.*

⁸⁵ Bogusława Ostrowska Dobek, *op. cit.*

⁸⁶ Botan, *op. cit.*

⁸⁷ *Ibidem.*

seven months alone, political parties had already spent more than half of their publicly subsidized media budgets on political campaigning,⁸⁸ without transparent reporting on how funds were allocated. Combined with the monopolization of media outlets, these practices help explain the persistently low trust Romanian youth expresses toward traditional media. Moreover, with news consumption also lagging behind the EU average – 59% in Romania compared to 72% in the EU –⁸⁹ informational asymmetries are amplified, leaving protest narratives more prone to editorial biases and limiting young people's access to diverse sources of information. Furthermore, the media's tendency to frame socio-political issues as individual failings, rather than systemic issues, correlates with the tendency of young people to internalize grievances instead of pursuing collective actions to challenge existing power structures.⁹⁰ This dynamic suggests that youth protest in Romania remains both a space of potential civic engagement and a site of persistent vulnerabilities, where the recognition of youth political agency remains a disputed and marginal practice.

Taken together, the literature provides a foundation for a nuanced understanding of youth-led protests as both expressions of democratic participation and contested communicative acts within increasingly polarized media environments. While existing studies highlight the growing importance of protest as a form of non-institutional engagement, few have examined how these dynamics operate in fragile political and media contexts such as Romania, where media fragmentation and democratic backsliding amplify the limitations of youth mobilizations. The 2024 youth-led demonstrations in Romania thus provide a compelling case for analyzing protests as dynamic spaces where the conditions of democratic participation are negotiated between young people, political institutions, mass media, and wider audiences.

3. Research design

The objective of this study is to investigate how Romanian online media framed the youth-led protests that followed the first round of the 2024

⁸⁸ Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, *Press Freedom: The State of Mass Media in Romania*. Bucharest: Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, 2025, <https://www.freiheit.org/publikation/state-mass-media-romania>.

⁸⁹ Botan, *op. cit.*

⁹⁰ Stoiciu, *op. cit.*

presidential elections, and to examine the implications of these portrayals for public perceptions of unconventional political engagement. More specifically, the study seeks to identify the dominant frames used in online news coverage between November 25 and December 6, 2024, analyze the discursive patterns through which young protesters were represented, and explore how these representations contributed to wider debates on democratic legitimacy and political participation.

For the purpose of research, “youth” or “young people” refers to individuals aged 16 – 30, a cohort widely recognized in European youth studies as both socially active and particularly vulnerable to political marginalization. The focus on digital news platforms, rather than television or print press, is motivated by recent consumption trends and the growing political significance of online journalism, which serve as a primary information source for Romanian youth.⁹¹

To guide this analysis, the article formulates three main research questions:

RQ 1: How Romanian online media framed the youth-led protests during the 2024 presidential election crisis?

RQ 2: How were young protesters represented within these frames, and what narratives were attached to their political role?

RQ 3: What implications do these media portrayals have for the legitimacy of unconventional youth political participation in the context of Romania’s fragile democratic environment?

The analysis employs a mixed-methods approach combining content analysis and discourse analysis. Content analysis provides a systematic overview of the dominant frames across media channels, while discourse analysis uncovers the editorial strategies and symbolic constructions that underpin these frames. The corpus consists of 24 news articles published across six major Romanian online news outlets: Hotnews.ro, G4Media.ro, Digi24.ro, R3Media.ro, ActiveNews.ro, and Capital.ro. These media platforms were selected purposively to ensure diversity in political orientation, editorial stance, and audience reach.

Frames are then operationalized using a coding framework that distinguishes between delegitimizing, neutral, and legitimizing portrayals of youth protest. For example, delegitimizing frames emphasize disruption, foreign intervention, or manipulation and depict youth as naive or destabilizing, while legitimizing frames highlight civic engagement,

⁹¹ Botan, *op. cit.*

democratic renewal, and portray young people as courageous and future-oriented. Neutral frames, by contrast, emphasize descriptive event coverage without explicit evaluation or political commentary.

This coding framework allows for both quantifiable and interpretive insights, as each article will be coded according to the presence and dominance of these frame categories, producing a descriptive distribution across the sample. This quantitative layer strengthens the methodological rigor by showing the frequency of different frames appearing across media outlets. Building on this, discourse analysis will then be applied to selected articles to uncover how frames are linguistically and symbolically constructed, focusing on narrative structures, symbols or evaluative language. Together, these analyses provide a foundation for the results, capturing both the prevalence of media frames and the subtleties of their construction, which will be further explored in the discussion and conclusion sections.

4. Results

Table 1 summarizes the media framing patterns identified in the 24 analyzed online news articles covering the youth protests during the 2024 presidential elections crisis in Romania. Each article was coded according to whether its coverage emphasized delegitimizing (negative) frames, neutral frames, or legitimizing (positive) frames, based on the focus, language used, highlighted data, portrayal of youth, and implied solutions. Notably, some articles combined neutral and legitimizing frames, meaning categories are not mutually exclusive. The full list of sources is included in **Appendix A**.

Table 1. Framing dimensions of youth-led protests across media outlets

Aspect of Coverage	Delegitimizing Frames (Negative)	Neutral Frames	Legitimizing Frames (Positive)
Focus	Protests described as disruptive, manipulated by elites/foreign actors, and potentially violent (Art. 1, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 19, 20, 22, 23).	Event-centred reporting: who, what, where, when (Art. 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 14, 15, 17, 21, 24); declarations framing protests as a trend (Art. 4, 18).	Civic engagement, nationwide mobilizations, pro-democracy and European messaging (Art. 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 14, 15, 17, 21, 24).
Language Used	"Riots" (Art. 20); "violence/crime" (Art. 10); "manipulated by Soros/ANTIFA" (Art. 1, 19); "globalist soldiers"	"Hundreds protested" (Art. 21); "manifestation against Călin Georgescu" (Art. 2), "written banners" (Art. 3),	"Thousands of students gathered" (Art.3); "students protesting for democracy" (Art.

Aspect of Coverage	Delegitimizing Frames (Negative)	Neutral Frames	Legitimizing Frames (Positive)
	(Art. 22); "leftist extremists" (Art. 19).	"for the fifth night in a row" (Art. 14).	14) "chanting against extremism and fascism" (Art. 8); "motivation to vote" (Art. 15).
Highlighted Data	Risk of disorder (Art. 20); threats to political candidates (Art. 10, 13) and media institutions (Art. 1); illegal nature of protests (Art. 12, 13).	Numbers of participants, location and timing, minor incidents (Art. 2, 3, 6, 7, 15, 17); weather conditions (Art 21, 24); counter-protests (Art. 5, 8, 9).	High turnout and diversity of participants (Art. 6, 17, 21), pro-EU / pro-NATO (Art. 4, 6) slogans, LGBT and women's rights support (Art. 9), democratic elections (Art. 2, 7, 14).
Portrayal of Youth	Naive, ideologically manipulated, desperate, overreactive, inefficient, violent, extremist (Art. 1, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 19, 20, 22, 23).	Energetic (Art 8, 9, 21), politically concerned (Art. 2).	Resilient, peaceful, politically engaged and future-oriented (2, 3, 7, 9, 14, 15, 17, 21, 24); digitally coordinated (Art. 6, 8).
Implied Solutions	More policing, restrictions, warnings from authorities, media calls to avoid street action (Art. 10, 22).	None; factual reporting leaves interpretation to the audience (Art. 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 14, 24).	Civic dialogue, need for transparency and reform, calls to vote responsibly (Art. 8, 9, 15, 17, 21).

Note: Some articles were coded under both neutral and legitimizing frames due to overlaps in coverage.

4.1. Content analysis

The analysis of Romanian online media coverage of youth-led protests during the 2024 presidential elections crisis reveals striking differences in the framing of both protests and their participants. Across the 24 articles analyzed, delegitimizing frames were dominant in 10 articles, most prominently in Activenews.ro and R3Media.ro, which consistently portrayed young protesters as manipulated, naive, or prone to violence. These outlets emphasized disruption, alleged ideological manipulation, or threats to public order, often invoking alarmist references to external actors

such as “the extreme-left ANTIFA brigades”⁹² or conspiratorial figures like Hungarian billionaire George Soros.⁹³

By contrast, outlets such as Digi24.ro, G4Media.ro, Hotnews.ro and Capital.ro foregrounded neutral or legitimizing frames, which together accounted for roughly two-thirds of their reporting. Neutral coverage (13 articles) relied on factual, event-centred reporting, focusing on general details of the protests: when and where they occurred, how many people participated, and how the demonstrations unfolded. These reports generally avoided interpretive commentary or solutions to the political crisis. A small number of pieces, including two from Capital.ro and two from G4Media.ro, offered a mixed portrayal, alternating between neutral documentation and quotations from far-right political figures such as Călin Georgescu and George Simion, who questioned the authenticity and effectiveness of youth mobilizations.

Legitimizing frames (11 articles) highlighted the civic and democratic significance of the protests. On-the-ground journalists often provided detailed accounts of the manifestations, incorporating direct statements from participants and highlighting the political demands of young demonstrators. It is important to note that several articles were coded as both neutral and legitimizing (11 articles) because they combined descriptive, fact-focused reporting with elements that valorized youth participation. For example, reports by Digi24.ro and Hotnews.ro documented attendance figures and event chronology (neutral) while simultaneously emphasizing slogans, banners, or testimonies that underscored civic engagement (legitimizing). This overlap reflects the multi-dimensional nature of Romanian media coverage, where even neutral reporting can subtly reinforce the legitimacy and importance of youth political action.

4.2. Discourse analysis

To analyze the discursive strategies underpinning these frames, a subset of eight articles was selected for closer qualitative analysis. The sample included three delegitimizing articles from ActiveNews.ro and R3Media.ro, three neutral reports from Digi24.ro, and three legitimizing articles from HotNews.ro and G4Media.

⁹² See Appendix A, article 19.

⁹³ See Appendix A, article 20.

Delegitimizing narratives frequently portrayed young people as emotionally driven, ideologically co-opted, or lacking political maturity. ActiveNews.ro, for example, regularly invoked conspirational actors (“globalist soldiers”)⁹⁴ and historical analogies (“the new miners”)⁹⁵ to frame young people as susceptible to manipulation and potentially disruptive. R3Media.ro echoed this tone, using sarcastic and ironic commentary that compared the 2024 youth protests to the earlier #Rezist demonstrations.⁹⁶ In many cases, open comment sections attached to these articles echoed and amplified such portrayals, further discrediting protesters through sarcasm and mockery.

Neutral coverage, by contrast, focused on giving readers a clear sense of the protests’ scope and dynamics, describing the sequence of events and timing (“Protests against presidential candidate Călin Georgescu continued on Thursday evening”),⁹⁷ locations (“in Piața Universității”),⁹⁸ and attendance (“There are over 500 people, mostly young people, students of universities in the Capital.”).⁹⁹ By maintaining an objective tone, the reporting allowed readers to engage with the events directly, forming their own interpretations while preserving the integrity and transparency standards of professional journalism.

Legitimizing coverage, particularly in Hotnews.ro and select G4Media.ro pieces, depicted the young protesters as civic-minded and digital savvy, with emphasis placed on peaceful mobilization, anti-extremist messaging (“No to fascism, no to war, no Georgescu in the second round”),¹⁰⁰ and European/NATO alignment (“Romania don’t forget, Europe is your home”).¹⁰¹ Public speeches, symbolic banners and flags, along with the visible involvement of participants across different age groups,¹⁰² were consistently highlighted as indicators of public support, reinforcing the portrayal of youth as capable of shaping political discourse independently. This narrative was further supported by direct testimonies from participants.

⁹⁴ See Appendix A, article 21.

⁹⁵ See Appendix A, article 20.

⁹⁶ See Appendix A, article 23.

⁹⁷ See appendix A, article 3.

⁹⁸ See appendix A, article 5.

⁹⁹ See Appendix a, article 6.

¹⁰⁰ See Appendix A, article 9.

¹⁰¹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰² See Appendix A, article 8.

For example, one high school student stated that “Teachers told us that if we want to see the map of Romania on the map of Europe, we should go vote”¹⁰³, while university students participating in Bucharest protests added that “Tonight, we showed them that the youth love democracy”¹⁰⁴. Such first-hand accounts further reinforce the portrayal of youth as thoughtful and politically engaged citizens.

Media narratives also shaped the perceived dynamics of the protests. Reports highlighted the geographic expansion of youth mobilization, with initial activity concentrated in university cities such as Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Timișoara, and Iași, later spreading to smaller cities and Romanian communities abroad. The coverage of G4Media.ro and Digi24.ro addressed the peaceful, organized nature of mobilizations, including documentation of political chants, banners, and symbolic gestures, while HotNews.ro noted minor incidents or police presence, typically framed as minor or contained. Digital platforms were central to these dynamics, enabling coordination via WhatsApp groups and amplifying participation through real-time multimedia content on Instagram and TikTok. Meanwhile, coverage of pro-Georgescu counter-protests was comparatively limited and smaller in scale, highlighting the asymmetry in media attention and the construction of pro-European youth activism as a credible and proactive democratic force.

5. Discussion and conclusion

This study examined the youth-led protests during Romania’s 2024 presidential election crisis through the lens of media framing, with particular attention to how young protesters were represented and how such portrayals shaped the perceived legitimacy of unconventional political participation.

The first finding (RQ1) reveals that Romanian media coverage of youth protests, in the articles analyzed, was highly polarized, reflecting deep-seated ideological and political divides. Mainstream outlets such as Hotnews.ro, G4Media.ro and Digi24.ro consistently framed the protests as authentic expressions of civic responsibility, linking local actions to broader democratic norms and pro-EU orientations. These platforms presented the

¹⁰³ See Appendix A, article 15.

¹⁰⁴ See Appendix A, article 8.

demonstrations as valid responses to institutional failures, emphasizing the protesters' demands for electoral integrity, protections of human rights, and enhanced political accountability. By contrast, ideologically-driven outlets including Activenews.ro, R3Media.ro and, in certain cases, Capital.ro, emphasized narratives of disruption, alleged external influence, and potential threats to public order. The divergence between the two media clusters reflects ongoing tensions between democratic and authoritarian discourses in the Romanian public sphere.¹⁰⁵

In terms of media representations (RQ2), young protesters were consistently positioned at the centre of debates assessing their credibility and potential to drive effective political change. While delegitimizing frames depicted the participants as naive, inexperienced, and impressionable actors, legitimizing frames emphasized their organizational capacity, political awareness and digital abilities. At times, neutral reporting blurred this divide by offering detailed descriptions of the protests, including slogans, banner messages, and participant testimonies, which lent the protests a subtle sense of validation. This distribution suggests that although youth mobilizations have been increasingly visible and influential in Romania, they remain highly contested and vulnerable to narratives that question their authenticity and political significance.

The implications of these media portrayals for the legitimacy of unconventional youth political participation (RQ3) are particularly revealing. On the one hand, delegitimizing or negative portrayals risk further marginalizing young voices and diminishing public recognition of their political agency and preferred modes of activism. On the other hand, legitimizing frames hold the potential to amplify the demands of young citizens and signal to broader audiences that protests constitute valid expressions of civic participation. This recognition exerted significant normative and political pressure on Romanian authorities in 2024, compelling them to respond decisively to the unfolding political and electoral crisis. Therefore, the annulment of the first round of the 2024 presidential elections on December 6 demonstrates how media framing can operate simultaneously as a gatekeeper and amplifier, shaping both public perception and tangible political outcomes.

Several limitations should be acknowledged in assessing the scope and implications of this research. Firstly, the sample size of 24 articles, while

¹⁰⁵ Gubernat, Mărgărit, *op. cit.*

sufficient for in-depth qualitative analysis, does not capture the full spectrum of Romanian media coverage during this significant period. Incorporating a larger and more diverse dataset, including news articles from international media outlets, could have provided a more comprehensive view of protest framing practices. Secondly, the focus on six online news outlets excludes television and print media, which still play an important role in shaping public opinion, particularly among older demographics. Lastly, the emphasis on framing inevitably prioritizes journalistic production over audience reception, leaving open questions about how young people and the wider public actually interpret these portrayals. The aforementioned limitations, however, also delineate the scope of this research, allowing for a focused analysis of online media narratives at the intersection of youth political participation and democratic resilience.

Overall, this study underscores the centrality of media framing in shaping how youth-led protests are understood, evaluated, and legitimized within public discourse. The mass mobilizations during the 2024 presidential election crisis in Romania demonstrate that youth political participation cannot be reduced to episodic moments of political dissent; rather, it embodies a layered and dynamic form of civic action, combining digital activism with street-level demonstrations to voice demands, fight democratic backsliding, and influence political decision-making in real time. The findings also extend Entman's conceptualization of framing as political power, revealing how journalists, politicians, and protesters alike compete to shape narratives and construct the discursive frameworks through which the legitimacy of political engagement is evaluated. What is ultimately at stake is not only the representation of young people in the media, but also the capacity of public authorities to accommodate youth activism rather than marginalize it. Therefore, future comparative research on youth-led protests across Eastern Europe could further clarify how distinct political institutions, media landscapes, and cultural norms condition the effectiveness of mass mobilizations and how young citizens reconfigure the boundaries of contemporary political participation.

Bibliography

- Ang, Adrian U., Dinar, Shlomi and Russell. E Lucas, "Protests by the young and digitally restless: the means, motives, and opportunities of anti-government demonstrations", in *Information, Communication & Society*, vol. 17, no. 10, 2014, pp. 1228 – 1249, DOI:10.1080/1369118X.2014.918635.
- Barrett, Martyn and Pachi Dimitra, "Macro contextual factors linked to youth civic and political engagement", in Barret, Martyn, and Pachi Dimitra (eds.) *Youth Civic and Political Engagement*, London: Routledge, 2019, pp. 76-105, DOI: 10.4324/9780429025570-4.
- Bădescu, Gabriel; Umbreș, Radu; Voicu, Mălina and Claudiu Tufiș, *Youth study Romania 2024: Opinions, Fears, and Aspirations of Youth in a Romania of Social Inequalities*, Bucharest: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2024, <https://romania.fes.de/ro/e/studiu-asupra-tinerilor-din-romania-care-sunt-opiniile-temerile-si-aspiratiile-noii-generatii.html>.
- Bădescu, Gabriel; Sandu, Daniel; Angi, Daniela and Carmen Greab, "Youth Study Romania 2018/2019", Bucharest: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2019. <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id-moe/15268.pdf>.
- Benford, Robert D. and David A. Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment", *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 26, 2000, pp. 611-639, DOI: 10.1146/annurev.soc.26.1.611.
- Benjamin, Themba, "Social Media Activism: Limitations and Benefits", INOSR, vol. 4, no.1, 2018, pp. 30 – 37, <https://www.inosr.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/INOSR-AM-41-30-37-2018..pdf>.
- Blake, James, "Overcoming the 'Value-action Gap' in Environmental Policy: Tensions between National Policy and Local Experience", *Local Environment*, vol. 4, no. 3, 1999, pp. 257–78. DOI: 10.1080/13549839908725599.
- Botan, Mădălina, "The Romanian Media System: Dynamics, Challenges, and Implications for Democracy", *Communication Policies and Media Systems: Revisiting Hallin and Mancini's Model*, vol. 12, 2024, DOI: 10.17645/mac.7847.
- Burean, Toma, "Democrats on the Streets. Drivers of Student Protest Participation in Romania", *The Open Journal of Sociopolitical Studies PACO*, volume 12, no. 12, 2019, pp. 22-42, DOI: 10.1285/i20356609v12i1p22.
- Burean, Toma and Gabriel Bădescu, "Voices of Discontent: Student Protest Participation in Romania", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, vol. 47, no. 3/4, 2014, pp. 385–97, DOI: 10.1016/j.postcomstud.2014.10.004.

- Carroll, William K. and Robert A. Hackett, "Democratic media activism through the lens of social movement theory", *Media, Culture & Society*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2006, pp. 83-104. DOI: 10.1177/0163443706059289.
- Cammaerts, Bart; Mattoni, Alice and Patrick McCurdy, *Mediation and Protest Movements (1st ed.)*, Intellect, 2013. DOI: 10.2307/j.ctv36xw3km.
- Crowley, Anne, and Dan Moxon. *New and innovative forms of youth participation in decision-making processes*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2018, <https://edoc.coe.int/en/youth-in-europe/7625-new-and-innovative-forms-of-youth-participation-in-decision-making-processes.html>.
- Della Porta, Donatella. *Social Movements in Times of Austerity: Bringing Capitalism Back into Protest Analysis*. Cambridge: Polity, 2015.
- Deželan, Tomaž, *Young People's Participation in European Democratic Processes. How to Improve and Facilitate Youth Involvement*, Brussels: European Union Publishing, 2023, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/IPOL_STU\(2023\)745820](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/IPOL_STU(2023)745820).
- Entman, Robert Mathew, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm", *Journal of Communication*, vol. 43, nr. 4, 1993, pp. 51–58. DOI: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x.
- European Commission / EACEA, *The situation of young people in the European Union. EU Youth Report 2024*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2025, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/170345>.
- European Commission, *Flash Eurobarometer 545 – Youth and Democracy (May 2024)*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3181>.
- Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, *Press Freedom: The State of Mass Media in Romania*, Bucharest: Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, 2025, <https://www.freiheit.org/publikation/state-mass-media-romania>.
- Goffman, Erving *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience (3rd print)*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974.
- Grasso, Maria Teresa, "Age, Period and Cohort Analysis in a Comparative Context: Political Generations and Political Participation Repertoires in Western Europe", *Electoral Studies*, vol. 33, 2014, pp. 63–76, DOI: 10.1016/j.electstud.2013.06.003.
- Gubernat, Ruxandra and Daniel Mărgărit, "Romania—Democratic Change and Protest Movements", Cătălina Crăciun and Hans P. Rammelt (eds.), *Power and Protest in Central and Eastern Europe*, in London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2025, DOI: 10.1007/978-3-031-77888-9.

- Hafid, Mrhizou; Jalal Nouredine and Omar El Khalifi, "Protest Movements and Political Change: A Framework for Analysis", *International Journal of Innovative Research and Development*, vol. 13, no. 9, 2024, DOI: 10.24940/ijird/2024/v13/i9/SEP24009.
- Happer, Catherine and Greg Philo, "The Role of the Media in the Construction of Public Belief and Social Change", *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2013, pp. 321-36. DOI: 10.5964/jspp.v1i1.96.
- Inglehart, Ronald, *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.
- Kitanova, Magdelina, "Youth Political Participation in the EU: Evidence from a Cross-National Analysis", *Journal of Youth Studies*, vol. 23, no. 7, 2019, pp. 819-836. DOI: 10.1080/13676261.2019.1636951.
- Levantesi, Stella, "Enemies of Society": How the Media Portray Climate Activists", *Green European Journal*, Published October 17, 2023, [https://www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu/enemies-of-society-how-the-media-portray-climate-activists/].
- Macalet, Felicia, "Profilul alegătorului. Cine l-a votat pe Călin Georgescu", *Euronews.ro*, Published November 26, 2024, [https://www.euronews.ro/articole/profilul-alegatorului-cine-l-a-votat-pe-calin-georgescu].
- Mărgărit, Diana and Henry Rammelt, "The Revitalization of Social and Civic Participation in Eastern Europe? Industrial Conflict and Popular Protests in Romania", *Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics*, vol. 6, no. 4, 2020, pp. 93-109, DOI: 10.17356/ieejsp.v6i4.701.
- Masullo, Gina M.; Brown, Danielle K. and Summer Harlow, "Shifting the protest paradigm? Legitimizing and humanizing protest coverage lead to more positive attitudes toward protest, mixed results on news credibility", *Journalism*, vol. 25, no. 6, 2023, pp. 1230-1251. DOI: 10.1177/14648849231200135.
- McCombs, Maxwell and Donald Shaw, "The Agenda Setting Function of Mass Media", *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 36, no. 2, 1972, pp. 176-187. DOI: 10.1075/asj.1.2.02mcc.
- Nistor, Alexandra and David Leonard Bularca, "Cum se raportează studenți din România la protestele pro palestinienae din universitățile americane și britanice? – Între „Mi-e frică de violențe” și „e important să sprijinim cauzele în care credem”, *Hotnews.ro*, Published May 3, 2024, [https://hotnews.ro/cum-se-raporteaza-studenti-din-romnia-la-protestele-pro-palestinienae-din-universitatile-americane-si-britanice-ntre-mi-e-frica-de-violente-si-e-important-sa-sprij-3049].

- Oana, Ioana-Elena; Kriesi, Hanspeter and Argyrios Altiparmakis, "Dynamics of Protest Mobilisation in the European Poly-Crisis", *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 32, no. 8, 2024. pp. 1874–1905. DOI:10.1080/13501763.2024.2366388.
- Odobescu, Vlad, "How Did Romanian Protest Culture Evolve?", *BalkanInsight.com*, Published March 2, 2017 [<https://balkaninsight.com/2017/03/02/how-did-romanian-protest-culture-evolve-03-01-2017/>].
- Ohme, Jakob; Andersen, Kim; Albæk, Erik and Claes H. de Vreese. "Anything Goes? Youth, News, and Democratic Engagement in the Roaring 2020s", *International Journal of Press/Politics*, vol. 27, no. 3, 2022, pp. 557-568, DOI: 10.1177/19401612221093008.
- Norris, Pippa, *Democratic Deficit: Critical Citizens Revisited*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Norris, Pippa, *Democratic Phoenix: Reinventing Political Activism*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Ostrowska Dobek, Bogusława, "25 Years after Communism: Four Models of Media and Politics in Central and Eastern Europe", in Bogusława Dobek Ostrowska and Michał Głowacki (eds.), *Democracy and Media in Central and Eastern Europe 25 Years On*, 2015, Frankfurt: Peter Lang, pp. 11–46. DOI: 10.3726/978-3-653-04452-2.
- Pickard, Sarah and Judith Bessant, *Young People Re-Generating Politics in Times of Crises*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.
- Pickard, Sarah and Patricia Loncle-Moriceau, "Young People's Political Discourse: Voice, Efficacy and Impact", in Bente A. Svendsen and Rickard Jonsson (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Youth Culture* (1st ed.), London: Routledge, 2023.
- Phipps, Katherine and Katryna Szagala, "Social Movements and the News Media", *The McMaster Journal of Communication*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2007, pp. 39-51, DOI: 10.15173/mjc.v4i0.237.
- Sloam, James; Ehsan, Rakib and Matt Henn, "<<Youthquake>>: How and Why Young People Reshaped the Political Landscape in 2017", *Political Insight*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2018 pp. 4-8, DOI: 10.1177/2041905818764697.
- Sloam, James, "<<The outraged young>>: young Europeans, civic engagement and the new media in a time of crisis", *Information, Communication & Society*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2014, pp. 217-231, DOI: 10.1080/1369118X.2013.868019.
- Soler-i-Martí, Roger, "Youth political involvement update: measuring the role of cause-oriented political interest in young people's activism", *Journal of Youth Studies*, vol. 18, no. 3, 2015, pp. 396-416. DOI: 10.1080/13676261.2014.963538.

- Spöri, Tobias; Oross, Dániel and Pál Susánszky, "Active Youth? Trends of Political Participation in East Central Europe", *Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics*, vol. 6, no. 4, 2020, DOI: 10.17356/ieejsp.v6i4.792.
- Stoiciu, Victoria, "Romanian Youth – Social Exclusion and Political Unrest", *Südosteuropa Mitteilungen*, No. 5, 2016, pp. 46-57.
- Susánszky, Pál; Kopper, Ákos and Frank T. Zsigó, "Media Framing of Political Protests – Reporting Bias and the Discrediting of Political Activism", *Post-Soviet Affairs*, vol. 38, no.4, 2022, pp. 312–28, DOI:10.1080/1060586X.2022.2061817.
- Tătar, Marius Ioan and Dan Apăteanu, "Multiple Exclusions: Civic and Political Disengagement of Vulnerable Youth in the European Union", in Karla Melida Barth, Mircea Brie, Dragoș Dărăbăneanu and Polgar Istvan (eds.), *The Role of Intercultural Communication in Adapting Ethnic Groups to the European Union Social Space*, Beau Bassin: LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, 2019, pp. 477-505.
- Tătar, Marius Ioan, "What Drives Individual Participation in Mass Protests? Grievance Politicization, Recruitment Networks and Street Demonstrations in Romania", *Journal of Identity and Migration Studies*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2020, pp. 112-140, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3743006>.
- Teresa, Geremew Chala, "Effects of Mass Media Framing of Protest Movements: A Meta-Analysis and Systematic Review of Mass Media Studies", *Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2022. DOI: 10.30935/ojcmnt/11538.
- Volintiru, Clara and Cristina Buzașu, "Shaping civic attitudes: Protests and politics in Romania", *Romanian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2020, pp. 118-146, DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.15713.12646.
- Zamith, Rodrigo, *The American Journalism Handbook: Concepts, Issues, and Skills*, Amherst: UMass Amherst Libraries, 2022, <https://books.rodrigozamith.com/the-american-journalism-handbook/files/Rodrigo%20Zamith%20-%20The%20American%20Journalism%20Handbook.pdf>.
- Wolkenstein, Fabio, "What is democratic backsliding?", *Constellations*, vol. 30, no. 3, 2023, pp. 261-275. DOI: 10.1111/1467-8675.12627.

APPENDIX A - List of online press articles on the 2024 presidential elections youth-led protests

1. Active News, "STARE DE ALERTĂ: Protestatarii amenință postul Realitatea PLUS! Poliția a venit la sediu! ANCA ALEXANDRESCU și CĂLIN

GEORGESCU în direct la Culisele Statului Paralel: SISTEMULUI ÎI E FRICĂ DE CANDIDATURA UNUI OM INDEPENDENT, STATUL PARALEL SE CLATINĂ”, *R3Media.ro*, Published Dec 12, 2024, [<https://www.activenews.ro/stiri/STARE-DE-ALERTA-Protestatarii-ameninta-postul-Realitatea-PLUS-Politia-a-venit-la-sediu-ANCA-ALEXANDRESCU-si-CALIN-GEORGESCU-in-direct-la-Culisele-Statului-Paralel-SISTEMULUI-II-E-FRICA-DE-CANDIDATURA-UNUI-OM-INDEPENDENT-STATUL-PARALEL-SE-CLATINA-193527>].

2. Bancăș, Loredana, “A treia seară de proteste împotriva lui Georgescu. Mii de oameni în stradă, în marile orașe: „Nu o țară putinistă, România progresistă”, *Digi24.ro*, Published Nov 27, 2024, [https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/a-treia-seara-de-proteste-impotriva-lui-georgescu-mii-de-oameni-au-iesit-in-strada-in-marile-orase-o-tara-ca-afara-nu-e-legionara3023633?__grsc=cookieIsUndef0&__grts=58794337&__grua=3c9fc7ddec9b58823c1c96756dbd45d8&__grm=1].
3. Bancăș, Loredana, “Protestele anti-Georgescu continuă pentru a patra zi la rând. Mii de tineri din marile orașe strigă în stradă „democrație, nu tiranie”, *Digi24.ro*, Published Nov 28, 2024, [<https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/protestele-anti-georgescu-continua-pentru-a-patra-zi-la-rand-mii-de-tineri-din-marile-orase-striga-in-strada-democratie-nu-tiranie-3025561>].
4. Bian, Nicolae, “Atac homofob al liderului AUR, George Simion, la adresa studenților care protestează împotriva lui Călin Georgescu: Nu-i mai trimiteți pe băieții ăia slăbuți la protest. Că este frig, e frig afară și o să răcească la ovare”, *G4media.ro*, Published Nov 26, 2024, [https://www.g4media.ro/derapaj-al-liderului-aur-george-simion-la-adresa-studentilor-care-protesteaza-impotriva-lui-calin-georgescu-nu-i-mai-trimiteti-pe-baietii-aia-slabuti-la-protest-ca-este-frig-e-frig-afara-si-o-sa.html?uord=Qo_uvCg0tGlCMB%3DxnYpnQsR%3DvKIuwVLtKv2nQEf7i4RohbcRZ6KomI2MR4ScpXg8skICSRfYZasVry5GhZM6QSCoy6k35vSAuXQuliPtL1/67EcghSc%3DhucOZCGszosyR5-Au-Y8].
5. Bonea, Monica, “A cincea seară de proteste în București. Tinerii strigă „Vrem libertate, nu fascism”. E anunțată și o manifestație pro-Georgescu”, *Digi24.ro*, Published Nov 29, 2024, [<https://www.digi24.ro/alegeri-prezidentiale-2024/a-cincea-seara-de-proteste-in-bucuresti-tinerii-striga-vrem-libertate-nu-fascism-e-anuntata-si-o-manifestatie-pro-georgescu-3026943>].
6. Bonea, Monica, “Mitinguri în mai multe orașe împotriva lui Georgescu: „O țară ca afară nu e legionară”, *Digi24.ro*, Published Nov 26, 2024, [<https://www.digi24.ro/alegeri-prezidentiale-2024/mitinguri-in-mai-multe-orase-impotriva-lui-georgescu-o-tara-ca-afara-nu-e-legionara-3022281>].
7. Both, Ștefan, “VIDEO FOTO Proteste în Timișoara și Cluj Napoca: Sute de tineri strigă împotriva leionarismului și candidatului Călin Georgescu”, *G4media.ro*, Published Nov 27, 2024, [<https://www.g4media.ro/cateva-sute-de-tineri-s-au>].

adunat-si-miercuri-seara-in-timisoara-libertate-putin-nu-uita-romania-nu-i-a-ta.html].

8. Bularca, D. Leonard and Ștefania Gheorghe, "Mii de tineri au manifestat din nou împotriva lui Călin Georgescu. S-a protestat la Universitate în București și în alte orașe: „Tinerii vă cer în cor, nu votați un dictator”, *Hotnews.ro*, Published Nov 26, 2024, [<https://hotnews.ro/un-nou-protest-impotriva-lui-calin-georgescu-anuntat-pentru-marti-seara-in-capitala-si-in-mai-multe-orase-universitare-1845976>].
9. Bularca, D. Leonard; Mărăcine, Adelina and Nicolae Cotruț, "VIDEO Proteste anti-Georgescu în București și în alte orașe: „Democrația arde, CCR se piaptână”, „Iubirea de țară nu e legionară” / Imnuri legionare la contramanifestațiile simpatizanților candidatului extremist: „Nu vrem să sărutăm picioarele NATO și UE.”, *HotNews.ro*, Published Nov 28, 2024, [<https://hotnews.ro/doua-manifestatii-una-impotriva-lui-calin-georgescu-alta-pentru-sustinerea-lui-au-loc-joi-seara-in-bucuresti-in-locatii-foarte-apropiate-1847934>].
10. Dincă, Andrei, "Candidatul prezidențial Călin Georgescu amenințat cu moartea de brigăzile ANTIFA sub ochii Jandarmeriei Române: "Un Crăciun ca al lui Ceaușescu!" Andrei Dincă: Câteva prime concluzii, după ce fenomenul Călin Georgescu a bulversat România", *ActiveNews.ro*, Published Nov 26, 2024, [<https://www.activenews.ro/opinii/Candidatul-prezidential-Calina-Georgescu-amenintat-cu-moartea-de-brigazile-ANTIFA-sub-ochii-Jandarmeriei-Romane-Un-Craciun-ca-al-lui-Ceausescu-Andrei-Dinca-Cateva-prime-concluzii-dupa-ce-fenomenul-Calina-Georgescu-a-bulversat-Romania-193474>].
11. Drăguț, Andrei Eugen, "Călin Georgescu avertizează tinerii din România: Așa cum au fost scoși în stradă, vor fi scoși la război", *Capital.ro*, Published Nov 27, 2024, [<https://www.capital.ro/calin-georgescu-avertizeaza-tinerii-din-romania-asa-cum-au-fost-scosi-in-strada-vor-fi-scosi-la-razboi.html>].
12. Duma Carp, Călin, "Eșec lamentabil al „protestului pro-democrație” de la București: doar câteva sute de persoane. Activiști LGBT, seculariști, adepți ai carantinei în pandemie și „ai lemnului și spațiilor mici”, prezenți s-o susțină pe Lasconi", *R3Media.ro*, Published Dec 12, 2024, [<https://r3media.ro/foto-esec-lamentabil-al-protestului-pro-democratie-de-la-bucuresti-doar-cateva-sute-de-persoane-activisti-lgbt-secularisti-adepti-ai-carantinei-in-pandemie-si-ai-lemnului/>].
13. Ivan, Oana, "Câțiva tineri protestează la Universitate împotriva lui Călin Georgescu. Un tânăr cu o Biblie a fost huiduit: Traveștiții împotriva lui CG / Un Crăciun ca a lui Ceaușescu pentru Georgescu!", *R3Media.ro*, Published Nov 25,

- 2024, [<https://r3media.ro/tineri-protest-universitate-calin-georgescu-alegeri-prezidentiale-video/>].
14. Lefter, Ștefan, "FOTO & VIDEO Protest pro-democrație în Piața Universității, pentru a cincea zi. Sute de studenți și tineri scandează vineri seara în ploaie: „CCR rușine mare, ești complice la trădare", *G4media.ro*, Published Nov 29, 2024, [<https://www.g4media.ro/foto-video-protest-pro-democratie-in-piata-universitatii-pentru-a-cincea-zi-sute-de-studenti-si-tineri-scandea-vineri-seara-in-ploaie-ccr-rusine-mare-esti-complice-la-tradare.html>].
 15. Lefter, Ștefan, „Profesorii ne-au spus că, dacă vrem să mai vedem și harta României pe harta Europei, să mergem la vot" – Ioana, elevă de liceu, despre primele alegeri pentru generația ei", *G4media.ro*, Published Dec 5, 2024, [<https://www.g4media.ro/profesorii-ne-au-spus-ca-daca-vrem-sa-mai-vedem-si-harta-romaniei-pe-harta-europei-sa-mergem-la-vot-ioana-eleva-de-liceu-despre-primele-alegeri-pentru-generatia-ei.html>].
 16. Luca, Iulian, "Călin Georgescu îi pune la punct pe tinerii care protestează împotriva sa: Este manipulare!", *Capital.ro*, Published Nov 25, 2024, [<https://www.capital.ro/calin-georgescu-ii-pune-la-punct-pe-tinerii-care-protesteaza-impotriva-sa-este-manipulare.html>].
 17. Mihăilescu, Robert, "VIDEO LIVE Peste 1.000 de tineri în stradă la București / Mesaje anti-CCR, anti-servicii și anti-Călin Georgescu / Rușine CCR! CCR nu te juca cu democrația", *G4media.ro*, Published Nov 28, 2024, [<https://www.g4media.ro/foto-a-patra-zi-de-proteste-pro-europene-in-piata-universitatii-pest-300-de-tineri-sunt-in-strada-dupa-ce-candidatul-rusofil-si-cu-discurs-legionar-calin-georgescu-a-intrat-in-al-doilea-tur-la-pre.html>].
 18. Mihăescu, Alexandru, "Membru al Academiei Române despre protestele anti-Călin Georgescu: E în cale afară de ciudat cât de manipulați sunt tinerii de pe străzi căci resping tendința pro-pace al cărei exponent este Calin Georgescu / Soros cu ong-urile și cu milioanele lui s-au izbit de partidul invizibil al profamiștilor creștini și al tradiționaliștilor", *G4media.ro*, Published Dec 1, 2024, [<https://www.g4media.ro/membru-al-academiei-romane-despre-protestele-anti-calin-georgescu-e-in-cale-afara-de-ciudat-cat-de-manipulati-sunt-tinerii-de-pe-strazi-caci-resping-tendinta-pro-pace-al-carei-exponent-este-calin-geo.html>].
 19. Nicolae, Andrei, "Protest ANTIFA la Universitate împotriva lui Călin Georgescu: JOS LE-GI-O-NA-RII! Călin GEORGESCU, noul ANTONESCU!", *ActiveNews.ro*, Published Nov 25, 2024, [<https://www.activenews.ro/stiri/Protest-ANTIFA-la-Universitate-impotriva-lui-Calina-Georgescu-JOS-LE-GI-O-NA-RII-Calina-GEORGESCU-noul-ANTONESCU-193470>].

20. Nicolae, Andrei, "Lasconi-Iliescu cheamă noii mineri în stradă pentru "apărarea democrației". PERICOL DE TURBULENȚE. Încălzirea brigăzilor SOROS/ANTIFA pentru un maidan anti-Georgescu după alegeri?", *ActiveNews.ro*, Published Dec 4, 2024, [<https://www.activenews.ro/stiri/Disperare-mare-la-USR.-Lasconi-ii-scoate-din-nou-pe-tinerii-frumosi-si-liberi-in-strada-193692>].
21. Nistor, Alexandra, "Sute de tineri au protestat din nou la Universitate. „Vot observat, nu manipulat” / „Nu fascism, nu război, nu Georgescu în turul doi” – VIDEO", *Hotnews.ro*, Published Nov 29, 2024, [<https://hotnews.ro/protestatarii-anti-georgescu-se-reintalnesc-vineri-seara-la-universitate-1849148>].
22. Onciu, Adrian, "Toate tunurile pe inamicul public nr. 1", *ActiveNews.ro*, Published Nov 26, 2024, [<https://www.activenews.ro/opinii/Adrian-Onciu-Toate-tunurile-pe-inamicul-public-nr.-1-193491>].
23. R3Media, "Mișcarea #rezist s-a trezit la viață. Proteste în mai multe orașe împotriva lui Călin Georgescu: Jos legionarii! Alertă antifascistă! Feminism, nu fascism", *R3Media.ro*, Published Nov 26, 2024, [<https://r3media.ro/%f0%9f%9a%91-miscarea-rezist-s-a-trezit-la-viata-proteste-in-mai-multe-orase-impotriva-lui-calin-georgescu-jos-legionarii-alerta-antifascista-feminism-nu-fascism/>].
24. Ungureanu, Laurențiu, "FOTO/VIDEO Un nou protest al tinerilor în Piața Universității, împotriva lui Călin Georgescu: „Legionarul de unde are banul?", *Hotnews.ro*, Published Dec 4, 2024, [<https://hotnews.ro/foto-video-un-nou-protest-al-tinerilor-in-piata-universitatii-impotriva-lui-calin-georgescu-legionarul-de-unde-are-banul-1853773>].

Index

- Africa, 13, 40, 41, 44, 45, 73, 74, 75, 77, 80, 83, 85, 87, 90, 92, 93, 197, 219
- armed groups, 73, 77, 79, 81, 88, 89, 208
- collective narcissism, 22, 23, 24, 25
- Conflict Resolution, 13, 73
- Conversational Valence on X, 13, 33, 40
- crisis management, 15, 186
- crisis resolution, 202, 210
- democracy, 14, 20, 24, 25, 53, 54, 61, 65, 66, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 104, 105, 106, 107, 109, 110, 116, 133, 134, 139, 141, 174, 175, 178, 198, 210, 222, 229, 233, 244, 248
- Digital Diplomacy, 34
- Donald Trump, 7, 32, 34, 40, 42
- double-mindedness, 23, 24
- election campaign, 14, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 123, 126
- elections, 119, 120, 121, 123, 197, 198, 210, 227, 231, 240, 243, 244, 245, 249
- ethnic party, 114, 115
- EU foreign policy, 14
- foreign intervention, 243
- Hybrid war, 7
- Image Repair, 13, 31, 34, 36, 45
- inheritance, 216, 218, 220, 221, 222, 224
- interactions, 15, 88, 158, 159, 221, 222, 223, 224, 233, 236
- international relations, 97, 111, 159, 223
- Japan's foreign policy, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, 162, 163, 169, 170, 174, 175
- media framing, 231, 237, 244, 248, 249, 250
- Middle East politics, 166, 197, 223, 224
- Norwegian cultural values, 101
- Norwegian identity, 103, 111
- Ottoman Empire, 15, 52, 65, 215, 217, 218, 219, 220, 221, 222
- Peacekeeping mandates, 74
- political discourse, 98, 100, 247
- Populism, 133
- post-conflict reconstruction, 73, 83, 204, 206, 208

- post-conflict transition, 203, 205, 206, 207, 208, 210
- post-Soviet Russia, 7, 8, 9, 11, 20, 139, 146
- pseudo ethics, 13
- Republic of Türkiye, 15, 52, 58, 65, 215, 216, 217, 221
- Role Theory, 15, 157, 159, 160, 167, 172
- Romania, 15, 113, 115, 116, 117, 120, 121, 122, 123, 148, 149, 227, 228, 230, 231, 238, 239, 240, 241, 242, 243, 244, 247, 248, 249, 250
- royal discourse, 14, 101, 110
- Russian-Ukrainian war, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 19, 20, 97, 99, 101, 102, 103, 107, 108, 110, 111, 149, 175, 177, 187, 188, 191, 193, 200
- Serbia, 20, 135, 136, 138, 234
- Social-Constructivism, 15, 157, 158, 159, 160, 167
- solidarity, 63, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 197, 228, 236, 239
- South Africa-USA Diplomatic relations, 5, 13, 31, 32, 33, 38, 39, 40, 42, 43
- The European Union Court of Justice, 6, 14, 40, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 154, 155
- totalitarianism, 12, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 27
- transitional governance, 15, 211
- United Nations, 13, 31, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 81, 83, 85, 86, 87, 89, 90, 92, 200
- Uyghur question, 15, 157, 163, 165, 167, 169, 170, 172, 173, 174, 175, 177, 178
- Western Balkans, 14, 133, 136, 137, 139, 140, 141
- youth protests, 16, 231, 235, 242, 243, 244, 247, 248

List of contributing authors

Laura-Maria Herța has a Ph.D in History and is Associate Professor of International Relations and Vice-dean at the Faculty of European Studies within Babeș-Bolyai University, Romania. She is also senior Research Associate at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa. Author of several books and articles on the history of Yugoslavia and the wars in Former Yugoslavia, as well as author of chapters and articles tackling humanitarian intervention in Sub-Saharan Africa, armed conflicts and humanitarian emergencies in East and Central Africa, transformation of war. Interested in: peace and security studies, humanitarian intervention, the Balkan region, Sub-Saharan Africa, social-constructivist theorizing. Contact: laura.herta@ubbcluj.ro

Delia Pop-Flanja is an Associate Professor in Communication Sciences at the Faculty of European Studies of Babeș-Bolyai University – Cluj-Napoca, Department of European Studies and Governance. She holds a doctorate in Philology, with a thesis on Cultural Typologies and Cross-Cultural Adaptation, an MA in Intercultural Business Communication and a BA in Philology (French and English). Her research interests include intercultural communication, multilingualism, discourse analysis, crisis communication, political communication, and civil society engagement. Contact: delia.flanja@ubbcluj.ro

Adrian-Gabriel Corpădean is Habilitated Associate Professor Dr. and Dean of the Faculty of European Studies, Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania. His research interests are: the history and current state of the European Union's enlargement policy, with particular emphasis on the newly recognized candidate states (chiefly Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova), seen through the lens of institutional reform, as well as the support granted by East-Central member states. Contact: adrian.corpadean@ubbcluj.ro

Lyubov Naydonova is dr. Sc. in Psychology, Deputy Director in Scientific Work, Institute for Social and Political Psychology of NAES of Ukraine, Kyiv, Ukraine; professor, Institute of Psychology, PAN, Warsaw, Poland. Contact: mediasicolo@gmail.com

Mykhaylo Naydonov is dr. Sc. in Psychology, professor, director, Institute of Reflective Studies and Specializations (IRSS) Kyiv, Ukraine. Contact: iris_psy@ukr.net

Liubov Hryhorovska has a PhD in pedagogical sciences and is associate professor, Institute of Social and Political Psychology of the NAES of Ukraine, Kyiv, Ukraine; Contact: grigorovskaya_lv@ukr.net

Anna Oksiutycz is an Associate Professor in the Department of Strategic Communication at the University of Johannesburg. Anna has expertise in strategic communication, business management, marketing communication and research. She teaches research and strategic communication modules on undergraduate and postgraduate courses and has successfully supervised many postgraduate students, including over 50 honours students and 20 masters' students. As the Editor-in-Chief of *Communicare: Journal for Communication Studies in Africa*, she champions academic debate and promotes the contribution of African scholars to global theory and research in communication. Her research interests are: strategic communication, stakeholder communication and engagement, governance and transparency, brand communication, internal communication strategy, government communication, Public Relations in Africa. Contact: aoksiutycz@uj.ac.za

Elizabeth Lubinga is an Associate Professor at the Department of Strategic Communication. Her teaching experience spans across various communication subjects at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. She is an NRF-Rated Researcher. She has published several peer-reviewed journal articles, edited books, book chapters and presented papers at various national and international conferences. She has supervised postgraduate students at different levels. Her research interests are: Health Communication, Communication for Development and Social change, Digital Health communication, Digital Health Disparities, Health Communication Strategies. Contact: elizabethl@uj.ac.za

Yusuf Avar is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science and Public Administration at the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Kilis 7 Aralık University. He received his master's and doctoral degrees in European Union Politics and International Relations (English) from Marmara University. His research interests include International Relations, the normative power of the European Union, EU-Turkey relations, EU migration policy, international migration, European and regional studies, Turkish foreign policy, and international organizations. Contact: yusufavar@kilis.edu.tr

Abraham Ename Minko is a senior researcher and policy analyst in peace, security, and conflict resolution. He holds a Ph.D. in Political Science and International

Relations. His research interests are UN Peace Operations, Terrorism and Counter Violent Extremism, Peace and Conflict Resolution, Mediation and Negotiation, International Humanitarian Law and Armed Conflicts, Peacekeeping, and Peacebuilding. ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-0565-0973>. Contact: abrahamminko@gmail.com

Ioana Andreea Mureșan is senior lecturer at Babeș-Bolyai University, the Faculty of Letters, the Department of Anglophone and Scandinavian Studies. Her research focuses on Norwegian-American migration literature, but also on multiculturalism, cultural values, and translation studies. She is also a literary translator from Norwegian and Danish. Contact: ioana.muresan@ubbcluj.ro

Raluca Pop is senior lecturer at Babeș-Bolyai University, the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences. Her research area comprises communication skills, intercultural communicative competence, digital literacy, and teaching English, Norwegian, and Swedish as foreign languages. She teaches various pre-service teacher training courses. Contact: raluca.petrus@ubbcluj.ro

Réka Horváth is a university lecturer at the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration at Babeș-Bolyai University. She holds a PhD in Political Sciences and two Master's degrees in regional economics and political sciences. In 2006 she defended her doctoral dissertation titled 'The Political Representation of the Hungarian Minority in RomaniaError! Bookmark not defined. between 1990 and 2004' at the ULB (Free University of Brussels). She lectures on European economics, the history of economic theories, business ethics and CSR. In her current research, on one hand, she focuses on business ethics in the Central and Eastern European companies. On the other hand, she examines the relationship between economics and politics with a particular focus on the Hungarian minority in Romania. Contact: reka.horvath@econ.ubbcluj.ro

Ramona Adriana Neagoș has a Ph.D in the field of International Relations and European Studies, a master's degree in Conflict Management and a BA in International Relations and European Studies. She is currently teaching assistant at the Faculty of European Studies, Babeș-Bolyai University. Her scientific interests include: negotiations, mediation, peacebuilding, and conflict resolution. Contact: ramona.rosu@ubbcluj.ro

Tudor Vidrean-Căpușan has a PhD in international relationsError! Bookmark not defined. and is currently teaching at the Faculty of European Studies, UBB Cluj - Napoca. The main areas of interest are EU law, international public law and Tax Law. Besides, the author has a broad range of experience before the European Union Court of Justice being engaged in procedure in his capacity as a lawyer. Contact: tudor.vidrean@ubbcluj.ro

Claudiu-Bogdan Aldea holds a PhD in International Relations and European Studies from the Faculty of European Studies - Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. His doctoral research focused on Japan's regional foreign policy. He also holds a Bachelor's Degree in Philology and a Master's Degree in International Relations, Foreign Policy and Crises Management. His areas of interest include: peace and security studies, International Relations Theory, Japanese foreign policy, Asian security studies. Contact: aclaudiubogdan@gmail.com

Miron Madalina is a third-year PhD candidate in Political Sciences from the International Relations and European Studies Doctoral School, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca. She holds a master's degree in international communication from the Faculty of European Studies in Cluj-Napoca and a bachelor's degree in philology from the Faculty of Letters in Cluj-Napoca, where she studied English and the Russian language. Her research interest is represented by youth political movements whose nationalist rhetoric concerns everything that represents the non-Russian population based on two case studies, whose rhetoric blends with nationalism and xenophobia, namely, the Skinhead and *Nashi* movements. Her publications address issues of post-Soviet society, especially youth political movements that flourished immediately after the dissolution of the USSR. She has several interests, including photography, essay writing, and Russian culture and history. Contact: ioana.miron@ubbcluj.ro

Ramona Goga is PhD student within the Doctoral School "International Relations and European Studies", Faculty of European Studies. Her research is centred on the Western Balkans, with a specific focus on institution building and international state building efforts in Kosovo. Contact: ramona.goga@ubbcluj.ro

Irina-Maria Cosma is a PhD Student in International Relations and European Studies at the Faculty of European Studies, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. She graduated from the Faculty of European Studies with a Master's Degree in Cultural Diplomacy and International Relations and a Bachelor's Degree in International Relations and European Studies. The fields of interests in research are related to Turkology (Turkish Studies) and the Middle East. Contact: irina.cosma@ubbcluj.ro

Andreea-Elena Cioată holds a Master's degree in International Communication from Babeş-Bolyai University, Faculty of European Studies, and a Bachelor's degree in International Relations and European Studies from the University of Bucharest, Faculty of Political Science. Her research focuses mainly on political participation, youth, and communication studies. She is particularly interested in the intersection between media and politics, and is dedicated to fostering inclusive spaces for young people through digital literacy initiatives. Contact: cioataandreea@yahoo.com



ISBN 978-606-37-2824-2