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RJSP@POLITICE.RO
HTTP://WWW.RJSP.POLITICE.RO/
HTTPS://WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/RJSP.POLITICE.RO

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ABOUT

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Guest Commentary

Russism – New Nazism. Denazifying denazifier: Neo-Nazis as the only international support for Putin's aggression on Ukraine[1]

Orhan DRAGAŠ

Dr. Orhan Dragaš is a Serbian expert on security and international relations. He is the founder and director of the International Security Institute, based in Belgrade. He is the author of numerous expert articles, newspaper columns, as well as the books "*The Modern Intelligence-Security Community, Utopia or Reality*" and "*Two Faces of Globalization - Truth and Deceptions*".

e-mail: dragas@isi-see.org

ABSTRACT

Denazification, as one of the proclaimed goals of Russian aggression against Ukraine, stems from the concept of "Russian world", the ideological basis on which Russia's internal social model is built, and especially its position in relation to its environment and the world. This model has many similarities with the system established by the National Socialist Party in Germany in the 1930s and many parallels can be drawn between Nazi Germany and today's Russia, as aggressive and imperial powers. Civilisational superiority, national homogenisation, leadership cults, militarism, opposition to the values of Western liberal democracy, return of "historical territories – these are some of the similarities between these two systems. Russia's aggression against Ukraine has received support exclusively from neo-Nazi groups in Eastern Europe and the US, among others. This support is the result of years of Russia investing huge amounts of resources in discrediting liberal democracies, undermining the unity of Western integration and reshaping the narrative in which Russia, as one of the victors over Nazism in World War II, feels it has enough credit to turn into the opposite against which it fought and won 80 years ago.

Keywords

■ Russia ■Ukraine ■Russian world ■Neo-Nazism ■Extremism ■Imperialism ■Aggression ■Eastern Europe ■Balkans

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[1] ***Note from the editor:*** This piece refers to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, in progress at the time this issue was being prepared for publication (April 2022). The author pointedly makes the case that the "denazification" goal of the Russian invasion is untenable, while the support from the world for actions of Putin's Russia comes from neo-Nazi organizations. The dramatism of these developments and the timeliness of the content have determined the RJSP editorial team to include this text in the current issue, which was scheduled to appear in December 2021 and was not published in time due to previously unforeseen events.

I. Introduction

Along with demilitarisation, Russia's second proclaimed war goal at the beginning of the invasion of Ukraine was "denazification". These two goals were announced by Russian President Vladimir Putin on 24 February 2022, the day the invasion of Ukraine began, defining them as "the purpose of this special military operation"[2]. Since then, these terms have become the backbone of Russian propaganda and narratives within which the action in Ukraine is conducted. State and military officials, all media in Russia, but also their supporters around the world, who justify and support the Russian invasion, firmly hold on to these expressions.

While "demilitarisation" is relatively easily understood as a motive for aggression, because it has military content and can sound like a tangible reason for someone's armed action, "denazification" has caused a lot of surprises and disbelief around the world. Where did the fight against the Nazis come from in the twenty-first century, almost eight decades after their military and political destruction? What does it mean to "denazify" someone, and especially to "denazify" an entire country, which also happens to be one of the largest in Europe? How will the military operation, with this goal, be able to end, who will be able to measure that the degree of "nazification" of Ukraine has been reduced to zero?

Occupation is the only realistic goal Russia has had in mind. One cannot denazify and demilitarise a large country and go back home. Therefore that true goal was to annex Ukraine and to destroy and capture anyone in Ukraine who opposed Russia. This is why Putin and Russia propaganda outlets were always insisting that Ukraine does not exist and in fact is all Russia.

It is difficult to give rational answers to these questions, but the explanation can be seen if we invoke psychoanalysis. Things become simpler and more logical when we view the issue of "denazification" as a form of projection, one of the most common mechanisms for defending oneself from one's own unacceptable subconscious. The leader of one nation (Putin) talks about "denazification" by projecting it on his enemy (Ukraine) because he is

[2] *** (2022, February 24). *Full Text: Putin's declaration of war on Ukraine*, The Spectator, available at: https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/full-text-putin-s-declaration-of-war-on-ukraine.

trying to defend himself from his own ego-driven subconscious, which tells him that he, and not someone else, is a Nazi.

The glorification of Russian culture, proclaiming Russia as an alternative civilisation and at the same time absolute biased and militaristic criticism of western countries by Russian propaganda left no doubts that the Russian doctrine of so called "Russian world" is nothing but modern-day fascism.

The old fascism utilised symbolism, spiritualism and glorification military might. This new Russian fascism (*Russism*) similarly worships the dead (fallen soldiers during the Second World War), has made a cult from the victory itself and managed to unify this cult with the Russian Orthodox Church.

There are many patterns and evidence of the identification of Russia and its leader with Nazism in the motives for the invasion of Ukraine, its war goals, the behaviour of the Russian army, and especially in the long period of preparation that preceded this war. In addition, the support from the world that Putin received for his aggression against Ukraine comes exclusively from individuals and organisations with distinct Nazi values and patterns of behaviour. In this article, we will primarily talk about them, as an important parameter that marks the policy of the Russian leader and his country as "pro-" or "neo-"Nazi.

II. Nazi Germany – Putin's Russia, a reflection in a mirror

There are many parallels between today's Russia, created by the twenty-year rule of Vladimir Putin, and the Nazi movement that shaped Germany in the first half of the twentieth century. The aggression on Ukraine brought many of these similarities to the surface and made them visible to the global population.

Just as Hitler once homogenised the nation and made it a collaborator in creating a false narrative with which he could embark on a war of conquest, presenting it as justified, so Putin has long shaped the public in his country, making them partners in creating a common "reality", which gives reason to conquer.

However, Putin is not Hitler, nor is Russia Nazi Germany. Umberto Eco said that it would be very simple if someone appeared in a black shirt and said that he wanted to send all Jews to concentration camps and form a state on Nazi principles[3]. Then everything would be easier because we would know clearly what kind of evil we are dealing with and how to fight it. There are frightening similarities between Putin's Russia and Hitler's Germany, but we must be aware that in addition to numerous, almost identical phenomenological designations of these two regimes, there are significant differences between them. It is the detection of these differences, no matter how seemingly small and irrelevant to the final outcome for the victims of these two criminal regimes, that forms the basis of the strategy for combating Putin's aggression. Putin's operation has been prepared for a long time and has been carried out in several directions.

One branch of this complex and lengthy operation was aimed at Russia from within. Systematic suppression of the critical public, through the banning of the media, pressure, persecution and even the physical liquidation of independent journalists (Anna Politkovskaya) is a Russian everyday life during Putin's rule. The same recipe applies to political opponents (the murder of Boris Nemtsov, the arrest and poisoning of Alexei Navalny). Eliminating opponents was even more important in the circle of rich Russians, if they showed even a hint that they could engage in politics, or oppose the social and political model dictated by Putin. Their list is long, and the methods of reckoning are brutal, from murders to arrests. It was also brutal to organise a meeting of President Putin with the biggest Russian “oligarchs” at the very beginning of the invasion of Ukraine, because it represented forcing of allegiance in the “brotherhood in blood”, and an open threat to stay with the national cause regardless of sanctions and the economic damage they will experience.

The Russian world and Russian Marches have a long history. Even Alexey Navalny was an organiser or Russian Marches. These were alt-right events saturated by Chauvinism and perhaps even a literal glorification of Russian nationalism.

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[3] Eco, U. (1995). “Ur-Fascism”, The New York Review of Books, available at: https://www.pegc.us/archive/Articles/eco_ur-fascism.pdf.

In addition to intimidation, the Russian population has been subjected to a terrible psychological operation for years, which was supposed to (unfortunately, to a large extent succeeded) create robots ready to do anything at the moment when the "great leader" wants it.

Narratives that have been distributed to Russian citizens for years are a mixture of post-Soviet nostalgia, fictional historical stories about the former greatness and glory of Imperial Russia, the celebration of the "Great Patriotic War" (the Second World War), through military parades which were supposed to show the power of Russian weapons, resentment for great deception and humiliation that a "corrupt and perverted West" inflicted on Russia, rejection of "Western perversions and decay" and acceptance of "traditional values of the Russian people", which are mainly based on perverted Orthodoxy and cults invented for current needs.

In addition, very similar to Hitler Jugend in Nazi Germany, youth organisations were formed, such as the Nashi movement, which would spread ideology of Putinism among the youth and develop a fighting spirit in them. Night Wolves, a biker organisation that gathers criminals, looks especially tragicomic, and with its iconography and appearance it irresistibly resembles the crime group of motorcyclists from Hollywood dystopian films of B-production.

This psychological operation that the Russian regime is conducting against its citizens, no matter how inconsistent it may seem in its messages and often stupid in its claims, has achieved a notable result with the intimidation campaign, because the vast majority of Russians support the aggression against Ukraine. The ideological thread on which this propaganda activity is based is in the works of Alexander Dugin, who all those familiar with the situation in Russia consider Putin's main ideologist.

The second branch over the years has been focused on the most influential Western countries, their public, as well as members of the political and economic elite. The goal of the long-term systematic hybrid operation was to destabilise the traditional institutions of liberal democracies, cast doubt on their efficiency and fairness, as well as to create a rift in the bloc of liberal democracies, primarily in their relationship with Russia.

For that purpose, cyberspace in the largest Western countries was manipulated, systematically and under the control of the state of Russia, and with a lot of success. There is ample evidence that Donald Trump's presidential term is the result of Russia's destructive influence on the American public, in which, for example, in just two years (2015-2017), thirty million social media users shared and communicated messages generated by Russia's Internet Research Agency (IRA)[4]. There were such operations in France, Britain, members of the European Union, and all together aimed at the Western liberal world awaiting some future Russian operation, which will have strategic geopolitical significance, divided and disoriented. Just like the aggression on Ukraine.

Just as the Nazis in Germany created an alternative world with Germany at its centre, Putin's regime managed to convince the Russian population of belonging to a special civilisation, completely different, and even superior to others. In the time of Hitler, this concept was expressed in the Third Reich, and in the Putin era –it is in terms of the Russian world. Scientists close to the Kremlin, media commentators, artists and the Russian Orthodox Church have been working on and developing this concept since 2000, when Putin came to power, and made his field debut with Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, when Putin himself justified the action with the nature of the "Russian world". This concept basically strives for the unification of the Russians, regardless of the borders of independent states, the restoration of national unity, and above all sees Russia and the Russians as a separate "civilisation" that must defend itself from external forces, especially the West.

The ideology of the "Russian world" was created by Alexander Dugin in the book "The Fourth Political Theory", which he published in 2009[5]. Dugin is the sharpest opponent of liberal democracy, that is, capitalism, and he directs his blade at fascism and Marxism, which he mostly resents for not being able to break liberalism, but for helping it survive. Dugin believes that a fourth political theory, which is based on the mythical understanding of the people, as something that exists forever and stems from language, culture, history

[4] Howard, P. N. *et al.* (2018). *The IRA, Social Media and Political Polarization in the United States 2012-2018*, Oxford, UK: University of Oxford.
[5] Dugin, A. (2012). *The Fourth Political Theory*, translated by: Sleboda M. and Millerman M., London, UK: Arktos Media.

and religion is necessary. Of course, in his ultranationalist vision, the Russians are that great historical nation with a historical mission. In his opinion, Russia must reject both fascism and Marxism, which prevent it from fighting liberal democracy, and embrace his theory of the people in order to suppress the "evil of liberalism that leads both man and people to certain ruin".

It is clear that Dugin's theory has its geopolitical origins, which he explained in several of his books (such as Foundations of Geopolitics (1997); The Great Awakening vs the Great Reset (2021)), articles and media interviews. Dugin stands for Eurasia, a community of people who have a common language, culture, religion and "national values", as opposed to the Atlantic world. Dugin believes that Russia's main geopolitical mission is to challenge US dominance in the world and regain all "Russian" territories. Dugin strongly advocated the annexation of Crimea, supporting the separatists in Donbas and Luhansk, which he calls New Russia.

In his "memorandum" published on social networks, Dugin stated that Russia's war is not a war with Ukraine, but with globalism as a planetary phenomenon. Dugin believes that this is a war on all levels, both ideological and geopolitical. According to Dugin, Russia's biggest enemies are unipolarity, Atlanticism, liberalism, and anti-traditionalism. He describes the war in Ukraine as a "great reset" and the fight against European leaders who are all part of the Atlantic elite.

Alexander Dugin's influence is visible in Putin's speech given at the beginning of Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Putin denied the existence of the Ukrainian nation, which was created by the division of the Russian people, of course under the influence of the Bolsheviks and later the West. He referred to the Russian language as an identity determinant, which is allegedly banned in Ukraine. Putin's reference to history, spirituality, and even mysticism is part of Dugin's vocabulary, and even the words "Anti Russia", which he used to describe his view of the situation in Ukraine, is related to Dugin.

In this concept, one can read through parallels with Nazism –the feeling of the need to regain "historical territories", once the Sudetenland, today Crimea and Donbas, once Austria, and today Ukraine. In both concepts, the people are mobilised and united around the principle of "blood and soil", once German, now Slavic, Russian. Both ideological

narratives inevitably give birth to a cult of personality, because the firm, determined and patriotic leadership of one man is a precondition for the historical mission to be carried out, once Hitler, today Putin.

Like the Nazis in the past, Putin's Russia today blames the West for its suffering and problems, its economic and democratic achievements, which it considers corrupt, unjust, even violent, and certainly aimed at destroying the once German and today Russian social model. Just as the Jews who, in the eyes of the Nazis, were an emanation of that danger for German society under Hitler and were considered an entity that has no (and should not have) existence, so Putin's Russia denies the independence of Ukraine and Ukrainians. "Ukraine has never had a tradition of true statehood", Putin said on the day of the Russian invasion, in full accordance with the narrative broadcasted by his propaganda for years according to which Ukrainians are a kind of artificial national creation, but that they are actually Russians.

Even the model for the beginning of the aggression irresistibly draws a parallel between Nazi Germany and Putin's Russia. Just as Germany suddenly, without warning or reason, attacked Poland in 1939, so Russia attacked Ukraine after persistently repeating that it had no military ambitions and that the offensive was not only ruled out, but was a product of Western propaganda.

III. Preparing Europe

At the time of the cooling of relations between Russia and the West and the imposition of sanctions on Moscow over the annexation of Crimea, there were as many as 45 influential political parties and movements across Europe that supported Russian policy, shared its values and understood its interests, especially in relations with the West[6].

Among them, on the far-right were the Alternative for Germany (AfD), the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), the Greek Golden Dawn, the Hungarian Jobbik, the French National

[6] Dennison, S. and Paradijs, D. (2016, June 26). "The world according to Europe's insurgent parties: Putin, migration and people power", European Council on Foreign Relations, available at: https://ecfr.eu/publication/the_world_according_to_europes_insurgent_parties7055/.

Front, the Italian Northern League, the British UKIP, and the Belgian Flemish Interest (VB). On the far-left the pro-Russian parties are AKEL from Cyprus, the German Left Party (Die Linke), the Czech KSCM, Podemos in Spain, Syriza in Greece, as well as the Italian Five Star Movement and the Human Shield in Croatia.

These parties were not necessarily directly influenced by Moscow to pursue their policies, although the direct ties (including financial) of some of them were later revealed, but no doubt their activities largely allowed the creation of an environment in which Russian aggression on Ukraine could take place. They created a favourable pretext within the EU and NATO for some Russian imperial interests to be treated as legitimate and to lead to a sharp confrontation within Western integrations and ultimately to weaken the internal cohesion ties of Western partners. This was precisely the long-term interest of Moscow, which fit into its anti-Western narrative, but also as an important factor in which it could freely develop its aggressive plans for the realisation of the "Russian world".

In addition, Moscow has corrupted leading politicians from many European countries in various ways, tying them to itself and its interests. Gerhard Schröder and Francois Fillon, as well as entire sets of conservative governments in Vienna, are just some of the most famous European leaders who have moved from politics to the management boards of Russian energy giants.

IV. Recruitment of neo-Nazis

At the same time, Russia sought and found allies for the realisation of its imperial and aggressive ambitions among extremist, neo-Nazi and terrorist groups throughout Europe and even America. Just as in the case of legal and influential parties, the ideological structure of these pro-Russian organisations is the same. They nurture a strong anti-migrant attitude, in the case of extremists it is pure racism, a very strong anti-systemic orientation that denies the values of Western, liberal democracy, then a strong bias towards minorities of all kinds, especially sexual, and many have pronounced white supremacism and anti-Semitism.

1. The USA

It is in America that groups of white Supremacists are most susceptible to Russian influence, those who inherit Nazi values such as anti-Semitism, the fight against the conspiracy of international capital and intolerance towards the LGBT. US investigators have identified The Base as a neo-Nazi and terrorist group, and its leader Norman Spear as a Russian agent. European media, the BBC and the Guardian will later prove that his real name is Rinaldo Nazzaro and that he was in Russia in 2019 as a guest of the government at an exhibition dedicated to security, as well as that he organised branches of his organisation in Britain, Australia and Canada.

David Duke, a former member of the Louisiana State Congress and leader of the Ku Klux Klan, also found refuge in Russia. Faced with a federal investigation into embezzlement, the racist and anti-Semite has been to Russia on several occasions, where he has received a warm welcome, often spoken in public, and his book My Awakening has been sold in bookstores in the Russian parliament.

The Russian ties of Jared Taylor, leader of a white supremacist organisation named the American Renaissance, and Matthew Heimbach, leader of the Traditionalist Worker Party, were also proven as they were meeting with Russian ultranationalist leaders in 2015 and 2017[7].

Recognising it as the main channel for organising a transnational network of terrorist and extremist organisations, at the expense of Russian imperialist goals, the State Department in 2020 marked the Russian Imperial Movement as a terrorist organisation[8]. It is an organisation that undoubtedly functions with the support of the Kremlin, although it is hardly visible due to the complicated connections between the state, capital, intelligence services and church circles. As in the case of the international "military wing" of this same

[7] Grimm Arsenault, E. and Stabile, J. (2020). "Confronting Russia's Role in Transnational White Supremacist Extremism", Just Security, available at: https://www.justsecurity.org/68420/confronting-russias-role-in-transnational-white-supremacist-extremism/.

[8] Foggett, S., Saltskog, M., Clarke, C. (2022). "How Are Putin's far-right Fans in the West Reacting to his War?", War on the Rocks, available at: https://warontherocks.com/2022/03/how-are-putins-far-right-fans-in-the-west-reacting-to-his-war/.

octopus, the Wagner group, which undoubtedly has the patronage of the Kremlin, although it persistently denies it.

2. Eastern Europe

The network of Russian partners from the circle of extremists and neo-Nazis is especially developed in Eastern Europe, an area of priority interest for Russia's ambitions to complete the "Russian world". These are mostly small but very aggressive groups, which are easy to manipulate and even easier to buy. The Hungarian Sixty-Four Counties Youth Movement is a typical example, because its actions coincide with Russia's interest in denying the existing order in Eastern Europe and encouraging ethnic and cultural differences in this region, including crossing the border of violence. This organisation, which gathers Hungarian right-wing youth, recruited like-minded people outside the country, emphasised territorial claims to Ukraine ("Transcarpathia is not part of Ukraine"), organised protests in support of the Donetsk People's Republic, and even called for a boycott of chocolate which was produced by the company of former Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko[9].

In Poland, the counter-intelligence service investigated Mateusz Piskorski, the leader of the left-wing organisation Change, as well as activists of the ultra-right Confederation of Independent Poland (KNP) on charges of espionage on behalf of Russia. They organised actions in Ukraine to provoke conflicts against ethnic Poles in the west of the country. A "consulate" of the Donetsk People's Republic was opened in the Czech Republic in 2016, without the approval of state bodies, with the help of several extreme right-wing groups, including the paramilitary group Territorial Defence Force.

3. The Balkans

Russia has also found a very fertile ground for the recruitment of extremist and neo-Nazi groups for its own purposes in the Balkans, a region it has traditionally been interested in

[9] Kreko, P. and Gyori, L. (2017, May). "From Russia with Hate: The Kremlin's Support for Violent Extremism in Central Europe", Atlantic Council, available at: https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/from-russia-with-hate-the-kremlin-s-support-for-violent-extremism-in-central-europe/.

and in whose instability it recognises its strategic interest in matching Europe's integrative ambitions. Given the dominance of the Orthodox population in several Balkan countries (Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, partly Bosnia and Herzegovina), Russia seeks to abuse widespread pro-Russian sentiment to exacerbate ethnic differences to full conflict, as it is a good way to keep the region in a state of constant instability and away from European and Euro-Atlantic integration. Although not every Russophile in the Balkans is a neo-Nazi, every neo-Nazi in the Balkans is a Russophile –they are perhaps more precisely a fan of Vladimir Putin, his current, and especially his imagined future Russia.

One leader, one religion, and one nation –this is just one of the common "values" of Balkan extremists, turning them into replicas of old, Nazi ideas. There is also the superiority, and the Orthodox Slavs being the chosen ones in relation to other religions and nations. Anti-Semitism is also implied, as is racism towards migrants from the Middle East and local Roma. All pro-Putin groups in the Balkans present themselves as militant and militarised, ready for arms. Like their predecessors in the 1930s, they long for the return of territories that "naturally" belong to Serbia (or Russia). Their role models from the past are quislings from the period of German occupation in the Second World War. In the Balkans, they do not recognise the existence of any nation other than the Serbian one; they celebrate war crimes from the 1990s against Muslims and Albanians, especially the genocide in Srebrenica as a heroic act. After Putin, Ratko Mladić is the greatest idol and authority.

During the first month of the war in Ukraine, two major street demonstrations were organised in Belgrade, at which support was given to Russia and Putin for their armed aggression. Both were organised by extreme right-wingers from the People's Patrols, the Serbian-Russian Movement and the Serbian Action[10]. According to all the characteristics, they are pure neo-Nazis, who also adore the Russian president and consider him the leader of the Orthodox world in the fight against the West.

Muscular, tattooed and uniformed guys from the Serbian Honor organisation, originally registered in Niš, Serbia, are very active in Republika Srpska. There is a Russian-Serbian Humanitarian Center in this city, officially an interstate hub for quick interventions in cases

[10] Euractiv (2022, March). *Second pro-Russia rally held in Belgrade*, available at: https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/second-pro-russia-rally-held-in-belgrade/.

of natural disasters, but for years under great suspicion of the West that it is actually a Russian intelligence and logistics point in the centre of Serbia. It was in that centre that members of the Serbian Honor were photographed several times, and according to media reports, they practiced shooting from firearms there.

Russia's aggression against Ukraine gave these neo-Nazi groups the conviction that a great plan for the unification of Orthodox Slavs had begun, under one leader and one hegemon –namely Russia. In the realisation of that plan, they see their place and the accomplishment of their goals as a kind of little hegemon in the Balkans. Therefore, the members of the organisation Serbian Action announced that, "The Russian-Ukrainian conflict is not an ordinary regional conflict, but part of a great mystical conflict of good and evil. In that spirit, we wholeheartedly support this campaign".

V. Conclusion

The effort of Russia and its leader Putin to justify aggression against Ukraine with the goal of "denazification" is a terrible example of cynicism, calculated to disguise their own motives and ambitions, which irresistibly coincide with the values and models of their realisation under Nazism. The imperial project of the "Russian world" is based on total control of information, elimination of all critical thought and public, militarism and aggressive behaviour towards nations and states that are considered part of "historical Russia" that needs to be renewed.

In order to weaken the capacity of the main opponent of this project, namely the West, Russia has been investing huge resources in a range of areas for two decades, including in the political, intelligence, technological and financial fields, in a bid to create a network of supporters of its interests in the most influential Western countries.

The aggression against Ukraine, and especially the proclamation of "denazification" as a war goal, also exposed the fact that Russia especially invested in the creation and expansion of neo-Nazi groups throughout Europe, in the United States and beyond. The Ukrainian crisis has shown that these groups, with all their openly neo-Nazi character and values, have remained the most loyal supporters of Putin's project. And in that way, they extremely

convincingly discredited the Russian narrative about the "denazification" of Ukraine, revealing at the same time the true nature of the regime in the Kremlin.

Putin's regime is very reminiscent of Nazism, just as all totalitarian dictatorships resemble each other. However, there are some differences in ideology and geopolitical aspirations between Nazism and Putin's totalitarianism. In this paper, we have listed the steps of Putin's ideology, whose main representative is Alexander Dugin, and the main geopolitical goals that he is already trying to achieve by aggression against Ukraine. Knowledge of the ideology and geopolitical aspirations of Putin's totalitarianism is a necessary condition for its quick destruction and elimination of the danger that Putin's Russia poses to the free world.

Although the famous saying, "The fascists of the future will call themselves antifascists", is often attributed to Winston Churchill, he did not express something akin to that. But it still touches on what we see today as the official policy of Russia and its undisputed leader Vladimir Putin.

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THE ROMANIAN JOURNAL OF SOCIETY AND POLITICS

Care in post-socialist Romania: Between gendered regulations, silencing and political concerns

Anca DOHOTARIU
Ionela BĂLUȚĂ

Anca Dohotariu is Associate Professor at the Faculty of Political Science, University of Bucharest.

e-mail: anca.dohotariu@fspub.unibuc.ro

Ionela Băluță is Professor at the Faculty of Political Science, University of Bucharest.

e-mail: ionela.baluta@fspub.unibuc.ro

ABSTRACT

Care is a multi-layered concept that includes not only formal/informal aspects and public/private significations and effects, but also inherent political and gendered dimensions. Starting from the perspective according to which care is political by definition, this article takes a closer look at the political regulation of care in post-socialist Romania in order to reveal how it is conceived and delimited as a political concern, as well as in order to inquiry the extent to which care has been politicised (or not) after the fall of the former political regime. When and how does it become part of the strategic political plans as main political-administrative documents? And to what extent does the national political discourse encompass care as a real political problem? Seeking to address these questions, this article has a twofold structure. The first part of the article is dedicated to an overview on existing scholarship regarding care as a political concern. This analysis is indispensable for an in-depth understanding of the ways in which this issue has been tackled and theorized so far. Second, the article consists of a documentary analysis of the main governmental plans and political strategies elaborated between 1992 and 2020 in order to analyse the hegemonic political approach to the topic of care in post-socialist Romania.

Keywords:

■Childcare ■Politics of care ■Care policies ■Gendered regulations ■Gender equality.

Introduction

Scholars in social, political and legal studies generally agree that it is difficult, if not impossible, to give a clear definition to care. This multi-layered concept (Pfau-Effinger & Rostgaard, 2011) includes not only formal/informal aspects and public/private significations and effects, but also financial and emotional features (Hochschild & Machung 2012), and first and foremost, inherent political and gendered dimensions that have been little tackled in academic research until recently (Dahl 2017; Hoppania & Vaittinen 2015). At the same time, early feminist research has presented care as antithetical to political regulation (Wærness, 1987: 115). Regulation has yet become indispensable in order to establish legal rights and obligations for those involved in care activities:

> "Regulating care is not neutral. It matters how care is ruled, as it shapes our understanding of ourselves and our responsibilities. Thus, any form of regulation creates a specific way of seeing the social world, a framework of political obligations and an understanding about the roles and responsibilities of social agents." (Dahl 2017: 118).

More precisely, regulations contribute to different logics and cultural meanings related to care – either as social good or as object of choice and consumption. Regulations also play a crucial role in relation to care services – i.e. regulation can push forward the professionalization of care activities, or they can slow down their social recognition.

In Romania too, domestic care services have developed and became increasingly more visible and pervasive after the fall of the former communist regime. In the specific context of the transition towards the liberalisation of the labour market, some significant changes occurred at the national level. Female unemployment increased, although the presence of women in the labour market remained relatively comparable to other Central and Eastern European countries – CEECs (Băluță, 2014a: 234; Geambaşu, 2016). At the same time, a specific withdrawal of the state from welfare provision (Fodor *et al.*, 2002) has overlapped with an important development of some of the family policies instruments (i.e. parental leave provision), revealing a complex combination of neoliberal and conservative political approaches regarding family life and care services (Dohotariu 2015). While post-socialist family policies have not been shaped by pro-active social reforms, one can observe that

dominant cultural meanings and social practices, norms and values related to care have still remained governed by an essentialist and differential gender perspective, according to which women are responsible for organising family matters and the household (Băluță, 2014a: 239). For instance, whenever family relatives, usually grandmothers, are not an available option, domestic childcare services seem to be the most appropriate solution, at least for emerging middle-class families living in urban areas (Kovács, 2016; Băluță & Dohotariu 2019).

Moreover, at least two general observations are particularly relevant for the specific Romanian post-socialist context where the politicisation of care was supposed to take place. First, it is only since 1996 that the domestic government agenda has included the diagnosis and the setting of political objectives and priorities, structured on chapters, which are also the main sectorial directions of the political vision, outlining the sectors that are likely to be included within the spectrum of policymaking. For example, in 1990 there was no proper governmental plan, but rather a rough economic agenda introduced by the Prime Minister's decision (Postolache, 1990), once the new government had been installed. Only two years later, the strategic governmental plan (1992) started being shaped, in both form and content, similarly to what such document should look like within any democratic regime in the late 20th century. Second, Romania's accession to the European Union[11] has played a significant role in introducing certain themes and subjects on the political agenda. EU is thus an actor that has a considerable role within the puzzle of ideas, interests and institutions that have influenced the domestic political agenda and the successive governmental plans[12].

In spite of this political and societal dynamics, domestic research on care as a political concern has still remained insufficiently developed. Existing research can be structured in

[11]Romania's request to become a member of the EU was first made in 1995. The negotiations began on 15 February 2000, being concluded in 2004, at the Brussels summit. The Accession Treaty was signed on 25 April 2005, and the accession itself took place on 1 January 2007.

[12] This inquiry should be developed further with a wider analysis on the Europeanization process of the domestic politics and policies. See, for example, the analysis on EU's ascension as a democratisation process, and especially with a focus on the conditionality dimension (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2005). Moreover, for an analysis of Europeanization seen as a possible process of structural transformation, see Coman, R., Kostera, T. and Tomini L., 2014.

three main categories: a) literature on family policies (Dohotariu, 2015; 2018; Fodor *et al.*, 2002; Inglot, Szikra & Raț, 2011; Stănescu & Nemţanu, 2015); b) literature on children's rights and parenting that emphasises mostly aspects related to the social construction of parenting (Cojocaru D., 2008; 2011; Robila & Krishnakumar, 2006), the social assistance services for children's protection (Cojocaru Ș. and Cojocaru D., 2008), as well as the biological parenthood and care (Cojocariu C., 2017; Cojocaru D., 2009); c) literature on early childhood education and care (ECEC) (Matei, 2014) d) literature on gender mainstreaming, work-life balance, childcare, and gender equality, which focuses on the ways in which the political approach correlates care with equal opportunities policies on the labour market, such as work-life balance (WLB) policies, or with the political principle of gender mainstreaming (Crușmac & Köhler, 2016; Băluță, 2014b). However, these publications do not focus on the process of politicizing care or on care analysis through the lens of the strategic political regulation in post-socialist Romania.

In line with the approach stating that care is political by definition (Dahl 2017; Hoppania & Vaittinen 2015), this article takes a closer look at the political regulation of care in order to reveal not only the degree to which it is conceived and delimited as a political problem, but also in order to inquire the hegemonic political vision stemming from the ways in which care is regulated through governmental plans and strategies – i.e. the standards that are established in relation to care receiving and also in relation to the professionalization of care activities: *what are the main aspects related to care that draw Romanian politicians' attention?* and *what kind of ideological and political approach prevails in defining and setting care politics?*

Starting from these preliminary questions, this article has a twofold structure. First, a brief overview of the main research axes related to the concept of care and to care as a political concern is very useful for an in-depth understanding of the ways in which this issue has been tackled and theorised so far. Second, we use these epistemological tools for analysing the hegemonic political approach to this topic in post-socialist Romania. More precisely, in line with the approach according to which "Changing words creates new understandings and new worlds." (Dahl, 2017: 107), we use the method of the thematic content analysis in order to identify all themes related to the issue of care within the main strategic political plans and strategies elaborated and adopted between 1992 and 2020. A lexical analysis of

the governmental plans is useful for observing when and how many times the issue of care appears in these documents, seeking to understand when and how exactly does care manage to enter the hegemonic political documents and discourse. We decided to focus on governmental plans and strategies as the two categories of sources have not (yet) been analysed through the lens of care as a political concern, at least in the Romanian case. Both strategic governmental plans and national strategies are fundamental sources that need particular attention in order to understand the political vision, as well as the policy options that are at play whenever care is being addressed, defined and also transformed from a social fact into an object of public policy (Pløger 2021). An exhaustive and qualitative analysis of these documents is also useful for an in-depth understanding of care politics as well as a starting point for any other enquiry on this subject. Hence, this article addresses a gap within the existing research findings on care as a political concern in post-socialism. Furthermore, it aims to contribute to the development of further analyses on care as object of the main processes that are at the heart of the current political sphere in Romania.

I. Care as a political concern

Beyond the fact that one cannot define care as such, as it refers to a multi-layered reality which is always context related, scholars generally agree that care is based on vulnerability and corporeal relationality (Hoppania 2015). These features invite us to reflect upon care as a matter of power and, consequently, as a political issue by definition. However, care has only relatively recently started to be conceived as a political concern in Western societies. In fact, it is only starting with the 1970s and the 1980s that theorists from the second wave of feminism contributed to bringing different forms of care (as work, as an ethical issue etc.) into research agendas as well into the public sphere. More recently, the increasing governance of care has implied the need to extend the political analysis of this issue, although one can hardly state that care has definitively entered the fundamental lexicon of political thought (Hoppania 2015, p. 26). Therefore, a brief theoretical overview of the concept of care is necessary in order to reach a better understanding of both its conceptualisation as a political concern, and the limitations of such perspective.

In the context of the redefined position of housework in Western societies, characterised by the increasing involvement of well-educated women within housework (Anttonen & Zechner, 2011: 16-17), second wave feminists start to examine the economic value of women's unpaid domestic work. On the one hand, care was discussed in terms of 'costs of caring', putting the focus on the socio-economic loss of those providing care. On the other hand, this perspective focusing on the 'liberation from care' did not include the idea that caring can also be a matter of choice (Kremer, 2007: 30-31). However, starting with the 1980s, care begins to be associated with positive emotions. Care is thus analysed as a moral attitude or as an 'emotional labour' (Hochschild 1983) that cannot be reduced to a simple economic activity. Nevertheless, in spite of these theoretical developments, care still remained described as a difficult object of study. After the 1990s, the two approaches on informal unpaid care and formal paid care work are mingled to a larger extent, in a way in which paid care too starts to be seen as related to values, such as commitment and love (Knijn & Kremer, 1997: 330). Furthermore, 'hybrid' forms of care work (combining formal and informal care arrangements) are described through the concept of "informal care employment" related to the undeclared care work done inside households (Geissler & Pfau-Effinger, 2005). More recently, since the 2000s onwards, care research has been influenced by three main inter-related aspects: a) the need to consider intersectionality as an indispensable methodological choice in approaching care; b) the need to focus on care through the lens of care-receiving, not only from the perspective of caregiving; c) the need to analyse care in relation to the recent context of migration and globalisation.

Apart from the perspectives on care as work, another strand of research has been developed with a special focus on the ethical dimensions of care. For instance, Joan Tronto analyses moral theory in Western democracies and discusses the discursive historical shifts that naturalised care and pushed it into the private sphere (Tronto, 1993). According to this approach, care is both an (ethical) disposition and a practice, and it can be defined in terms of four intertwined phases – 'caring about', 'taking care of', 'caregiving' and 'care-receiving': care is thus a complex ethical practice and process, not a simple natural/biological instinct (Tronto, 1993: 102-110). Moreover, unlike the political philosophy that states the prominence of interactions among equals in humanity, the ethics of care requires paying more attention to unequals, as well as to lived and practical

experiences that actually dominate social life. Hence, the concept of care invites us to perceive the shift from the dominant ideal of autonomy and control, stemming from the liberal political thought, to a more sophisticated sense of gendered human interdependence and vulnerability.

Despite Tronto's seminal work, care still remains insufficiently assessed within the more recent context characterised by a "care deficit" or a "crisis of reproduction" (Fraser, 1996), and by different ways in which the democratic systems of governance address these concerns. At the same time, considering the prevalence of the economic logic of the market within the current socio-political contexts, care has become a "central site of the political in present day society" (Hoppania 2015, 50). In other words, beyond the hegemonic discourse that advances market rationality (of growth and competition), new political theory research needs to assess and explain the political mechanisms that lead to the recently visible transformations of human relations into capitalist life forms and consumer-producer rationalities. Starting from this assumption, Hoppania and Vaittinen have developed an analysis related to the logic of care (care rationality) alongside the level of the governance of care – the latter embracing various national and transnational social policies, as well as political discourses and marketisation tendencies of care. The Finnish authors reveal that care is a corporeal relation materialised through embodied encounters between care receivers, caregivers and the socio-political context providing resources, and thus an object of governance, regulation and commodification (Hoppania & Vaittinen, 2015). More precisely, care has its own logic or rationality, different from the classical logic of choice that increasingly prevails in marketised care and requires thinking about it in terms of transactions. Care can thus be referred to as an "ongoing process" (Mol, 2008: 11), denoting first and foremost a relationship. Consequently, the logic of care embraces the whole complexity of care practices and relations (including for instance the role of technology) and does not imply 'good care' as a natural response. It is, by definition, a political concern.

Furthermore, in line with the approach developed by Carol Bacchi (2009), the feminist political scientist Hanne Marlene Dahl interrogates care as a political problem through the lens of a post-structuralist perspective, according to which "everything is constituted relationally" (Dahl, 2017: 94). The Danish author's inquiry is of particular interest as it

invites us to investigate the process of politicising care, as well as two specific aspects that this process entails: the silencing of care, as well as the gendered regulation of care (Dahl 2017).

Dahl examines the opposition between care and the dominant discourse of autonomy and control – the latter stemming from the liberal political thought in Western societies, and reveals that care has become a paradox: on the one hand, it is a precondition for civilization, and on the other hand it threatens it, as it remains incompatible with the current dominant norms and ideals (Dahl, 2017: 96). At the same time, when care is being politicised, (i.e. when it becomes part of both political-administrative discourse *and* regulations), it also has to become intelligible in a political-administrative logic – i.e. "something that has to fit into our governing rationales of reason and control" (Dahl, 2017: 97), so that it can be governed. In other words, when care becomes governable (i.e. split into categories related to care activities and care needs, that fit into the politico-administrative logic), it is also suppressed and silenced, as its dimension related to the expectations of both caregivers and care receivers remain shadowed, as they remain outside regulations. Nevertheless, although political regulations do not cover all aspects of care, it would be scant to consider them as being antithetic: public discourses on care and the will to regulate it has definitively amplified, at least within consolidated democratic systems, which makes the process of politicising care more visible (Dahl, 2017: 115-116).

Moreover, politicising care refers to the fact that it becomes part of the political-administrative discourses and thus an object of political regulation: in other words, politicising care means that it is "waged, managed, governed and part of the professionalizing process" (Dahl, 2017: 91). However, as Dahl underlines it, politicising care is not a simple or linear attempt: on the contrary, it includes silencing of gender[13] and different aspects of care, as well as silencing of other less valorised aspects of human existence.

According to this perspective, silencing is an active and continuous process that can be identified within political discourse and documents. Moreover, it is a constitutive feature

[13] "The silencing of gender means that potential gender biases have been ignored and an androgynous discourse used as though a gender equal society had been reached." (Dahl 2017: 140).

of the political discourse, "that reproduces and transforms discourse into a different discourse" (Dahl, 2017: 95), and which is also similar to 'doing gender' or 'gendering' (Dahl, 2017: 95). Silencing thus refers to "the lack of power that manifests itself when subjects, objects, relations and spaces cannot be described and hence do not seem to exist" (Dahl, 2017: 94). Therefore, identifying silence or silencing is not an easy attempt:

> "Silence is something that is absent, that which is not said and which cannot be said. […] Silence points two aspects of power: silence as normalization and silence as the forgotten/the unspeakable. […] Silence is about both sides of the power game. Power as dominance is the power to name something and 'which goes without saying', such as when whiteness is the dominant norm and everything is silently related to it." (Dahl, 2017: 93)

Furthermore, the regulation of care can encompass both silencing of gender or of any aspect of care itself: "In the regulation of care, we can identify silencing when relations, objects and particular subjects (positions) cannot be expressed and therefore cease to exist." (Dahl, 2017: 104). More precisely, the choice to investigate gendered regulations[14] is not limited to an analysis of the extent to which regulations increase or minimize gender differences. Instead, "Gendered regulation refers to indirect gendering, as it occurs in the way dichotomies and hierarchies are created concerning work vs. non-work, public responsibility vs. private responsibility and the professional vs. unprofessional." (Dahl, 2017: 139).

In line with the theoretical perspective presented above, the second part of our article consists of an analysis of the ways in which care appears within the main political governmental plans and strategies in post-socialist Romania.

[14] "In sum, gendered regulation is neither exclusively about men, women nor gendered subjectivities. It is about investigating the potential silencing of gender, and the way social dichotomies are at play, and the fact that some of these dichotomies are also hierarchies: they prioritize some aspects of reality over others, for example warm versus cold, work versus (what was traditionally perceived as) non-work and scientific knowledge over knowledge of the body." (Dahl 2017: 140-141).

II. Politicising care in post-communist Romania

This empirical analysis starts from a simple yet complex question: when, and how more precisely, does care become a political subject and also a political problem within the Romanian post-socialist political agenda? Although our inquiry is based on a broader perspective on care, it insists yet on both the recognition of this kind of work (that has been invisible until recently, as unpaid and "naturally" attributed to the family, especially to women) and its recognition on the labour market. Furthermore, it focuses on the establishment of public infrastructure and services, the concern for those in need of care and the preoccupation to ensure a framework that guarantees both the quality of care and the human and ethical dimensions related to it. Considering all these aspects, we seek to analyse the extent to which care has been politicised (or not) in post-socialist Romania: when and how does it become part of the strategic political plans as main political-administrative documents? What are the 'silencing' processes and the gendered dichotomies in relation to care that these documents (re)produce and reinforce? what kind of tensions do these documents reveal? – i.e. what is their significance? what do they mean? how to identify and understand them? what do they teach us? Moreover, what is the political connection between the issue of care and the broader interconnected subjects and areas, such as family life, the labour market, equal opportunities, child protection, disability and elder care?

Starting from these questions, we analyse the strategic political documents elaborated in post-socialism (i.e. governing plans and national strategies) as two main categories of sources:

a) The governmental plans from 1990 to 2020. A government-planning programme conveys the electoral programme and the political vision of the party or of the coalition that won the majority of the votes during elections, therefore it can be considered as the hegemonic political approach related to a legislative cycle. The diagnostic assessment, the principles and the political objectives formulated within the preamble of these documents outline the political agenda underpinning the public policies related to each mandate (Pløger 2021: 3-6). However, our choice is to limit our analysis to post-election governmental plans, in order to be able to

compare different political approaches that had been validated through the electoral poll (in 1990, 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012 and also in 2016).

b) The sectorial national strategies directly linked to the issue of care: equal opportunities strategies, employment strategies, as well as child-protection strategies. Brimming with political meaning, national strategies include an overall examination of the specific field they are addressing and also establish their major objectives over the period of governance, thus being fundamental documents for the analysis of the way in which policy objectives are being transposed into effective public policies.

The qualitative method of discourse analysis has been very useful in order to capture the key aspects that arise from the process of politicizing care. We have started with a lexicometric quantitative analysis, using the word "care" as main analysis unit seeking to identify the occurrence of the term and to highlight the chronology of its use[15]. We decided not to extend further this lexicometric analysis, as our approach is a qualitative-comprehensive one. More precisely, we have used the classical thematic discourse analysis as main methodological option, for several reasons: it allows us to analyse both the explicit as well as the latent content, and it also allows us not only to make correlations with the socio-political context, but also to use intertextuality for the purpose of identifying the connections between all our documentary sources (Coman *et al.* 2016: 135-159). All these methodological choices entail carefully reading and analysing our sources though the lens of the main themes revealed by our research object. As we focus on the chronological introduction of the term care within the strategic governing documents, we also seek to reveal both its scant presence as well as the implicit related silencing.

a) Care through the lens of post-socialist strategic governmental plans

Our analysis starts with the governmental plans based on winning electoral agenda implemented between 1990 and 2020, seeking to examine all the themes relevant for the

[15] All quotes from governmental plans and national strategies used in this paper were translated by the authors.

issue of care – i.e. care work, social policies, family policies, equal opportunity policies, gender equality, care services, work-life balance (WLB) incentives and the labour market, as well as ECEC provision (Sarceno, 2011). Our lexical analysis also identifies care, as well as all the forms derived from the Romanian term of care – i.e. "îngrijire", "îngrijitor", "a îngriji" – within the main post-socialist governmental plans (for methodological reasons, we chose to exclude from our investigation any reference to health care).

Governmental plans	**1990**	**1992-1996**	**1996-1998**	**2000-2004**	**2005-2008**	**2009-2012**	**2013-2016**	**2017-2020**
Occurrences of the word *care* and its derivates	0	0	0	2	1	6	8	5

The main result of this classic lexical analysis is crystal clear: before 2000 the electoral programmes that turned into governmental agendas[16] had never used the term of care, nor other derivate expressions. Later on, right after the official beginning of the negotiations for Romania's accession to the EU, all governmental plans constantly use the term of care and its multi-layered meanings.

Our content analysis reveals that the first three governmental plans focus mainly on economic issues or institutional and legislative reforms. More precisely, from 1990 to 1992, the dominant political actors seemed to have no apprehension for the major social themes such as family life, children, youth or education. The issue of care was missing completely from these documents. The 1996 governmental plan, the best elaborated one from the first decade of the newly installed democratic system, casts light from the very beginning of the need to increase the birth rates and to protect mothers and children. The document also referred to "family allowance" (defined as a social provision aimed at covering the costs of raising and educating children – i.e. food expenses, school insertion, clothing and supervision) as well as to the creation of "specialised institutions" in the field of the legal protection of, disabled people, families with children, and orphans.

[16] The limited length of this article does not allow us to approach and to proceed to an in-depth analysis of the ideological and political party dimensions that should be tackled through the main electoral plans. See for instance Jiglău and Gherghina, 2011; Kitschelt *et al.*, 1999; Soare, 2004.

In 2000, the governmental plan outlined from the beginning that the European and the Euro-Atlantic requirements constituted a benchmark in setting the government's objectives and strategies. These priorities were exclusively related to economic, justice and state institutions reforms. In the field of social assistance, the planned political approach settled the family at the heart of the social concerns, mainly through two types of subsumed instruments: subsistence allowances and family development allowances. For the first time, a post-socialist governmental plan had a separate chapter on social policies (chapter 5), which included three strands of the political agenda of that time: "families with young toddlers, marriages and intra-family relationships, as well as work-family balance". However, the document did not contain any concrete reference either to measures and actions necessary to support the implementation of these objectives, or to the need to find solutions related to the caring for non-autonomous people. It insisted yet on the need for family counselling and the importance of maternity. Furthermore, only the child protection subchapter (5.3) mentioned, among many other objectives that generally refer to children's rights, the need to adjust social benefits in order to financially support families. However, more emphasis was put on the way in which families were to be taught to care for their children, leaving aside the need to create new public tools and infrastructure.

The next governmental plan (2004-2008) contained a single chapter (7) dedicated to social protection. The document mentioned from the beginning some fundamental governing directions, among which the idea of strengthening individual freedoms and increasing the safety of citizens and of family (position 3), as well as the principle of equal opportunities (item 8). The chapter on education (5) referenced to the need to create new nurseries, kindergartens and support programmes for parents with children with special needs, but all these issues remained limited to education aspects, as if they were not care public services for children as well. Chapter 7 also included references to the labour market mainly from an economic perspective. It also discussed gender equality strictly from the point of view of the necessity to design some national institutions and strategies, as well as family policies from a pronatalist perspective based on different forms of financial support that could encourage birth rates – for instance, monthly allowances for mothers raising their children up to the age of 2 or 3 years old (p.116). The reference to care appeared only when the governmental plan mentioned elder care, insisting thus on the need to create

"specialised services to provide social and medical care as well as home assistance", and also on the necessity to ensure training sessions for the staff providing such services (pp. 121-124). The word care was also used in connection to disabled people (page 125).

In 2009, the governmental plan was based on 10 principles, among which the second one was related to "equality, non-discrimination and guaranteeing fundamental rights", and another one that treated all together the issues of family, child protection and equal opportunities (Chapter 9). The chapter on education evoked the necessity for building kindergartens, but strictly for educational purposes, excluding any care aspects. For the first time within the post-socialist governmental plans, one can also observe the reference to "school after-school" programmes, allowing pupils to stay eight hours per day at school. But once again, the arguments in favour of such plan are rather educational. Otherwise, Chapter 9 explicitly introduced the notion of WLB policies, with all related measures and instruments: increasing the number of nurseries, supporting the professionalization of homecare services' network, as well as increasing the preoccupation for the situation of disabled people, especially through allowances and other financial support for families.

The 2013-2016 governmental plan reflected and relied on a number of principles underpinning European governance: (p.2) equal opportunities and protection against injustice and discrimination; flexicurity on the labour market; social protection for families, and birth and family "stimulation" (p.3). The chapter on education cast light on the educational perspective without making any correlation between it and the care dimension, although some objectives could be interpreted as related to care as well: the creation of another 50.000 places in nurseries and kindergartens, and also educational campuses adapted to the regional needs of children and youth (p.42). The chapter on work explicitly mentioned the need for childcare and other dependent family members in order to ensure the (re)conciliation of work and family life (p 101). The explicit reference to care also appeared in the chapter on social assistance that included several directives: improving family services, such as education and surveillance services within pre-school or after-school programmes; services for disabled people; elderly care services, as well as medical care services for dependent people; the development of social care services for children and other dependent family members, as well as supporting the recognition of caregivers' work at home (p. 102). The chapter on social protection for the family and the child was

mainly focused on parental support mechanisms such as WLB strategies: standardizing the quality of day-care services for children within the domestic care and education system, supporting accredited and qualified childminders, as well as introducing a monitoring system of these services (fiscal deductibility for employers that furnish nurseries or kindergartens services, p. 103). As for elderly people, one of the goals was to develop first and foremost home-based services.

Last but not least, the governmental plan for 2017–2020 insisted, at least at the level of the governance principles and objectives, on the family institution, which became prevalent against the individual. Furthermore, the chapter on public policies for labour and social justice matters referenced an integrated set of measures: "support for housing, transport, childcare and medical care or recovery" (p. 53). Moreover, the "support for families and children" was conceived as "promoting mechanisms for supporting parents' work-life balance" (p. 55). This governmental plan also introduced the need to "regulate the professional status of social assistants" (point 11). The chapter on education largely reiterated the previous objectives, focusing again on the educational aspects, and without correlating it with care.

As we have already observed through the lexical analysis, care appears for the first time within the 2000 governmental plan, when the negotiations related to Romania's accession to the EU were officially launched. One can easily remark that the government's objectives had been established in relation to the European and Transatlantic requirements. All five post-socialist governmental plans do not make any link between care and education, although some of the proposed measures could be interpreted as leading to this correlation. At the same time, only the last two governmental plans mention, in their chapters related to the labour market, the need for the WLB measures, and also refer to the development of childcare services, disabled people, elder people and dependent others. Furthermore, since 2009, the professionalization of care services has been taking place, mainly though the regulation of childminders' profession (2009) as well as though the regulation of the professional status of personal social assistants (2017). However, until 2009, the reference to care appears strictly in the chapters dedicated to the family, social assistance and equal opportunities. Although, very slowly, the need for care services becomes officially recognised, it has largely remained a family responsibility within the political discourse.

Furthermore, the fact that all governmental plans have constantly maintained the interest for increasing birth rates and developing pronatalist policies – culminating, in 2017, with the objective of the "security" of the family as opposed to the social assistance for individuals – actually, it reveals the predominantly familialist political vision (Dohotariu, 2015), supplemented by a traditional view on gender roles, according to which maternity and care remain woman's natural and social "duty".

The European principles, legislation, strategies and political agenda undoubtedly influence the domestic political agenda. However, the lack of an integrated political vision that usually links different fields between them (e.g. – education, labour market, family, social assistance, gender equality and equal opportunities), as well as some options somewhat paradoxical (the neoliberal perspective on work, the conservative familialist perspective related to family life, and also the references to equal opportunities and work-life balance) are, in our view, highly relevant for the inconsistency and the eclecticism of the post-socialist governmental plans. These programmatic documents do not convey a clear political will, either to promote gender equality, or to create efficient care policies congruent to the democratic gender equality principle.

b) The national strategies related to the issue of care

The analysis of care through the lens of the way in which the hegemonic political vision is being transposed into public policies invites us to consider at least four thematic topics: a) family institution; b) work, c) gender equality, and d) children. In order to maintain a diachronic view and to address all these topics, we have chosen to focus on the related national strategies as reference documents for any public policy. Incidentally or not, all four domains are coordinated by the same ministry – i.e. the Ministry of Labour and Social Justice (MMJS), which has been re-entitled many times[17], and which subsumes different

[17] Some of the Ministry's different designations are suggestive for the ways in which the issues of family, work, children and equality are ideologically tackled or correlated. For example, this governmental institution was previously entitled as *the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Protection and Elder People.* Moreover, before 2014, it was designated either as *the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection*, or *the Ministry of Labour, Social Solidarity and Family*, or as simply as *the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity*.

national 'Agencies' (or 'Authorities'), among which *the National Authority for the Protection of Child's Rights and for Adoption* (ANPDCA), *the National Agency for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men* (ANES), as well as *the National Agency for Employment* (ANOFM). More precisely, children, work and gender equality (or equal opportunities) are treated as three different areas of interest. Each of them is the subject of some distinct national strategies elaborated after 2000 (as programmatic documents), and, moreover, each of them is being coordinated by different national agencies/institutions. In return, there is not any national agency or authority, or subsequent national strategy, for the issue of family[18], in spite of the fact that the website of the Ministry of Labour explicitly refers to 'family', as a distinct field of interest covering 'family policies' as well as parental leave issues.

Before analysing, through the lens of care, all national strategies reminded above, one has to make at least two preliminary remarks. First, from the point of view of the availability of information, one must underline the utter disorganisation of the websites of these institutions as well as the incredible lack of interest for the preservation of an electronic institutional archive. Moreover, the evaluation reports on the implementation of every national strategy within the three areas are not publicly available, although they are mandatory by law. This reveals the lack of transparency and systematisation that may be paradigmatic for the insufficient attention paid to both policy-making process and to national strategies' implementation.

Second, although the governmental plans define the institution of family as being central for the issue of care, there is not any national strategy in this field. On the one hand, childcare allowances and different parental leave schemes represent the main public instruments that serve, among others, children's interests. More precisely, childcare is being conceived first and foremost as a family responsibility, which explains the fact that parental leave allowances are the main public policy tool designed for childcare.

[18] There was also a *National Agency for Family Protection*, but it was disbanded by H.G. 1385/2009 regarding the establishment, organization and functioning of *the National Authority for the Protection of Child's Rights*. This institutional reorganisation is suggestive for the way in which the issue of family is, somehow, being approached and reduced to the field of children's protection. Nevertheless, one has yet to be reminded that there is not any national strategy for the family institution in post-communist Romania.

Nevertheless, the analysis of the length, the payment and the eligibility criteria related to all forms of parental leave in post-communist Romania reveals that: a) financial interests are first and foremost behind the hegemonic political concern for childcare; b) there is no political determination to diminish the asymmetric gendered parental responsibilities related to childcare, which reveals old tensions between care and health features related to childcare, and which can also be understood as one of the main reasons that stalled the development of domestic ECEC provision (Dohotariu, 2018). On the other hand, elder people are the subject of a distinct legal framework that was created in order to provide care services for seniors (social assistance services as well as retirement homes)[19]. Without explicitly providing clarifications regarding this distinction, all national strategies on family life, work, equal opportunities and children refer to childcare on one hand, and to elder care on the other, as if they belong to different fields of interest – i.e. the former as a family concern by definition, and the latter as a mainly health care issue.

National Strategies for Employment

The recognition of care activities as work and their regulation as paid work can be considered as one of the major junctures registered at the level of politics and policies of care in post-socialist Romania. At the same time, WLB and childcare are two interrelated issues of public concern: public policies that offer concrete solutions for childcare allow both parents to be active in the labour market. All these aspects invite us to analyse the way in which care, and all related aspects, are being tackled within all National Strategies for Employment (SNOFM) entered into force after 1990.

Similarly to the governmental plans, the institutional and sectorial public policies development took place only after the first decade following the fall of the communist regime, being also utterly influenced by the EU accession process. At the institutional level, the National Agency for Employment and Professional Training is a public institution with legal personality, which started its activity in 1999. In 2000 it became the National Agency

[19] http://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/index.php/ro/2014-domenii/familie/politici-familiale-incluziune-si-asistenta-sociala, last consulted in May 2018.

for Employment (ANOFM). Law 202/2006 regulates its structure and functioning, and H.G. 1610/2006 stipulates its institutional status[20]. After 2000, two national strategies related to employment have been adopted: SNOFM 2004-2010 and SNOFM 2014-2020.

The first one is not very clearly structured. It makes only one indirect reference to WLB policies and care – i.e. when it addresses the need to make working contracts more flexible in the labour market.

Unlike the first strategy, SNOFM 2014-2020 has a much clearer and organised content, and it includes several parts: a policy diagnosis, European directions (according to the *Europe 2020 strategy*), setting objectives, a presentation of policy measures and actions, and also an implementation plan. All these five parts highlight the low female employment rates compared to the male ones. Considering that increasing population's contribution to the labour force (including women, youth, and other vulnerable social categories) is one of the main EU priorities, SNOFM 2014-2020 underlines that the development of care facilities – for children as well as for other dependent people – has still remained insufficient (p. 51). More precisely, the concern for the issue of care is linked to the need to promote gender equality in the labour market, being also directly correlated with the broader objective of increasing women's employment participation (O2, Action 2.2; p. 50). The development of care services is presented as a WLB tool. At the same time, the concern to reduce gender stereotypes that disadvantage women in the labour market indicates the link with the Objective 2 of the strategy – i.e. "Improving the occupational structure as well as women's and other vulnerable person's participation in the labour market" (p. 52). The action plan also provides for two types of measures (2.2.8 and 2.2.9, p. 81): developing childcare infrastructure and "identifying the demand for personal-care services for dependent people, as well as developing training and motivational programmes for formal caregivers working in the labour market". Furthermore, the indicators presented within this document refer to the number of services and beneficiaries, with no reference to the need to update and adjust the current legislative framework. Finally, the budgeting is, in our view, the most vulnerable element of SNOFM 2014-2020. More precisely, "local budgets

[20] More details regarding the structure and the objectives of ANOFM are available on its website: http://www.anofm.ro/prezentare-generala-actualizat, last consulted in May 2018.

within the limit of funds available" (pp. 81-82), as well as the European funds, are referred to as the main source of funding for the national public measures in this field.

National Strategies for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men

Three National Strategies for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (SNES)[21] and their Implementation Plans, have been successively adopted: SNES 2006-2009, SNES 2010-2012 and SNES 2014-2017. Each of these documents makes reference, among different objectives and planning activities, to the institutional functioning of the National Agency for Equal Opportunities (ANES) which is the main public authority responsible for the elaboration and the implementation of all governmental strategies in the field of equal opportunities between women and men[22]. All these national strategies focus on gender equality in different areas (i.e. on the labour market, as well as at the social and political decisional level, or in the areas of education or family life), mainly through the lens of the need to deconstruct gender stereotypes and to fight against discrimination and violence. Furthermore, care is also addressed and correlated especially to the issues of WLB, family responsibilities or parenting.

SNES 2006-2009 is structured into eight "intervention areas" to which are being assigned different objectives, actions, as well as institutions responsible for their implementation. The document makes reference to care three times, once in relation to WLB, and twice in relation to the objective of "equal participation of women and men within the family". SNES 2006-2009 underlines that, in order to achieve WLB, fathers have to be "encouraged" to get more involved in childcare and thus to apply for paternity and parental leave, but the document makes no reference to the ways in which fathers could be

[21]The fourth SNES 2018-2021 was approved by the Government, on 24 May 2018: http://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/index.php/ro/comunicare/comunicate-de-presa/5151-cp-strategia-nat-anes-24052018, but it has not been legally adopted yet: http://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/index.php/ro/transparenta/proiecte-in-dezbatere/5003-20171026-proiect-hg-strategie-nat-es-vd (last consulted in June 2018).

[22] Invested with legal personality, ANES is under the subordination of the Ministry of Labour. It was created in 2002 (Law 202/2002), dissolved in 2010, and reintroduced as an institutional authority in 2015 (Law 229/2015). For more details regarding ANES and the institutional framework on gender equality in Romania, see Băluță, 2014b.

stimulated for taking such commitments (III.3.A, III.3.B). The strategy also reminds us the need to promote the development of public social services for care for children and other dependent family members (III.3.C), but there is no other detail related to the implementation of such measure. Furthermore, SNES 2006-2009 makes no connection between care (assigned mainly to the issue of family responsibilities, including parenting and domestic tasks) and education (approached though the lens of the gendered access to education, teacher's training, gender balance within the educational management, the need to include gender education in school curricula and textbooks), except only one implicit mention related to the urge to sustain father's involvement in children's education.

Later on, SNES 2010-2012 explicitly incorporates all targets set by the Governmental Plan 2009-2012, which contains a chapter (i.e. Chapter 9) treating all together the issues of family, child protection and equal opportunities (p. 4). Although it is better structured compared to the previous national strategy, SNES 2010-2012 makes even less references to care. More precisely, while care ("îngrijire") is not mentioned at all, in return, childcare is being tackled rather indirectly, twice, without being formulated as such (i.e. it was replaced by "child rearing and education"). Firstly, SNES 2010-2012 mentions the need to introduce the gender approach within formal and non-formal education (Education, 1.B; 1.C). Secondly, the document envisages achieving the objective of WLB through a) "an information and awareness campaign for fathers, about the need to stimulate their involvement in raising and educating their children" (Labour market, 2.A), and b) "editing a guide that contains work-life balance models and legislative provisions, to be distributed at national level." (Labour market, 2.B).

Finally, similarly to the previous national strategy, SNES 2014-2017 incorporates all targets set by the Governmental Plan 2013-2016 in the fields of 'Work/Labour market' and 'Education'. In addition, SNES 2014-2017 reminds us the most salient differences between the three national strategies on equal opportunities. First, SNES 2006-2009 insisted mainly on information and awareness campaigns. Second, SNES 2010-2012 planned a broader approach for the implementation of gender equality, including a concrete budget, but, finally, it had been almost abandoned in the context of the economic depression and the subsequent disbanding of ANES, which was the main institution responsible for its implementation. Third, SNES 2014-2017 focused on some distinct "areas of intervention":

education, labour market, gender balance within decision-making, gender mainstreaming and gender violence.

Overall, the analysis of SNES 2014-2017 through the lens of care reveals several silencing processes. Although the document reminds us that the EU's approach on WLB insists on the need to develop further childcare provision and facilities (p. 13), the strategy addresses the issue of care only twice, without making any kind of correlation between care and education. Care is mentioned only within two of the objectives related to the theme of the labour market. First, the document underlines the need to increase people's awareness related to the legislation in the field of equal opportunities for women and men, and it thus recommends one research study and one conference meant to reach a better understanding and legal support for "equal access to professional promotion of women returning to work after extended periods of care for children and other dependent family members" (Labour market, 2.b). Second, SNES 2014-2017 underlines the need to raise the degree of awareness related to WLB, seeking to "encourage private companies to provide day-care services for the children of their employees", to "support flexible working programmes for workers who have to care for their children and other dependent family members", as well as to "encourage the private life partnership between women and men and to stimulate men to take over childcare responsibilities" (Labour market, 4.a). Unfortunately, the only solution assigned to this objective is an "information campaign". All in all, the strategy's analysis reveals not only that its objectives in terms of care remain rather scant, but it also clear that there is neither a budget, nor any other concrete solution to address the identified problems.

National Strategies for the Protection and the Promotion of Children's Rights

The preoccupation for children's situation, especially the institutionalised ones, has occurred within all governmental plans since 1990[23], although the establishment of a specialised institution responsible for the protection of children's rights and interests was

[23] These concerns are definitively linked to the numerous public outrages and debates that occurred also within international media, about the situation of orphan institutionalised children, and later on about the issue of international adoptions.

created as late as around 2000, with many reorganisations and restructurings ever since. O.U.G. 192/1999 and H.G. 96/2000 regulated the creation of the National Agency for the Protection of Child's Rights (ANPDC). Only one year later, the Agency was disbanded (H.G. 216/2001), its prerogatives being taken over by the National Authority for Child's Protection and Adoption (ANPCA).

In the context of all institutional restructuring within the public administration produced by the economic depression of the time, a new national authority was established, taking over the prerogatives of several institutions: the National Authority for the Protection of Family and Child's Rights (ANPFDC), (H.G. 1385/2009).

Finally, in 2014, the National Authority for the Protection of Child's Rights and Adoption (H.G. 299/2014) is re-enforced as a specialised body of the central public administration with legal personality, subordinated to the Ministry of Labour and Social Justice. In the context of these fluctuating and unpredictable institutional changes, the delayed formulation of a National Strategy, the lack of centralization of data on the various institutions and their actions, and the poor implementation of specific public policies, are not surprising at all.

One has to be reminded that the improvement of the child protection system was a condition within the process of Romania's accession to the EU (SNPPDC 2008-2013, chapter XI). As for care, the 2008-2013 Strategy focuses especially on children in special situations (particularly orphans, living in placement centres, or in the care of foster carers) or on children with special needs (i.e. with various forms of disabilities), which placed the issue of care under the perspective of some specific emergencies or some special situations. As for the rest of children, the document makes reference to family policies and to social assistance policies regulating services for children and families, as well as the related benefits: 'new-born allowance', 'state allowance', 'complementary family allowance', 'single-parent family allowance', 'the allowance for children placed within the social protection system', as well as 'child rearing allowance for toddlers under two years old'. The document also includes different objectives and actions particularly related to counselling and education as well as raising parents' and carers' awareness, in order to ensure that children's rights are being respected in accordance to the related international legislation. Care per se seems to be less important within these strategies particularly

concerned by children's rights and protection. Furthermore, whenever tackling the issue of childcare, the document makes reference exclusively to family and parents, as if care were not at all a paid work, but a simple 'labour of love'. While childcare is presented as a simple "natural" duty of the family, children's education is more often approached as a public concern.

The current National Strategy for the Protection and the Promotion of Children's Rights (SNPPDC 2014-2020) also emphasizes the issue of child's welfare and development. The document also tackles the issue of the necessary training of the professional staff working in day-care centres (p. 11), as well as the issue of WLB, which requires the development of day-care services (p. 12). In addition to these new objectives, the strategy maintains the interest for developing care services through the "maternal assistants" system, or care services for children with special needs. Consequently, the 2014-2020 Strategy introduces a new perspective on care that recognizes, at least partially, this activity as work or as a service that families need, especially from the WLB perspective. The document also addresses the problem of the professional training of people working in childcare institutions, which suggests the public interest for the professionalization of care that goes beyond the sphere of family life.

Concluding remarks

Our analysis reveals that the theoretical choice to tackle care as a political concern allows us to achieve a more nuanced understanding of the way in which this universal human phenomenon is treated at the level of political thought, public policies, as well as at institutional level. However, our work had to be limited to two major sources – the governmental plans and the national sectorial strategies, including also a very brief examination of the specific institutions related to care, which allows us to formulate the following concluding remarks.

First of all, one may observe that the first decade after the fall of the former communist regime can be characterised as a period during which the professional approach to governance had slowly been built, and, at the same time, the institutional construction of different care related areas (such as family policies, child protection and social assistance

policies, labour market policies and, last but not least, gender equality measures) had also begun. Moreover, the institutional settings and the related public policies started being developed after 2000, which was explicitly connected to the process of Romania's accession to the EU. As one may understand, especially from the preamble of the analysed sources, the governing objectives were set in connection with the norms and strategies of the EU or of other international partners, such as the United Nations. All institutional changes, the absence of any reliable budget, the missing reports on the implementation of the national strategies, the missing information on the related institutions' official websites – all these aspects show that, at least within the mentioned areas, the politics and policies of care in Romania occurred mostly in a top-down logic and have very rarely been implemented, revealing thus a lack of accountability.

The governmental plans use the term of care as late as 2000, first of all in relation to family policies, child protection and social assistance. Later on, these documents also mention the need to create a public infrastructure to ensure care services – since 2004 more precisely, as well as WLB incentives – since 2009. However, in Romania there is a clear lack of correlation between different areas that should develop specific (but integrated) public policies. This would not have been the case if care were a real governance technique (Howarth, 2010; Mungiu-Pippidi *et. al.*, 2011). Moreover, the analysis of care as a political problem reveals different relevant details, such as: a) the concern for increasing births' rate and for supporting the family as the main social institution providing care services; b) the marginal and also simply formal interest in care and gender equality.

As for the main national strategies related to the field of family life, work and gender equality, they reveal that although some random references to care have appeared since 2008-2010. At the same time, it is only in the latest strategies that there are, however, several objectives and actions explicitly related to care as paid work, as gender equality or WLB instrument, as well as some indirect concerns for the ethics of care within professional services. Nevertheless, there is no reference to the development of a legislative framework that should inflict public policies changes necessary for the implementation of these objectives. Therefore, according to the legislation in force, family allowances remain the only real policy instrument for childcare. In addition, there are no well-defined

indicators and no clear budget for achieving these objectives, which place the existing approach to care either into a future area that needs to be further developed (including specific legislative, financial and human resources), or into a paradigm revealing the absence of a real political will to change the current approach. The later could also be interpreted as the lack of any political determination to transform the limitation of the current politics and policies of care from their simple existence on paper, into a real sustainable correlation with the EU priorities and policies. In a nutshell, one can clearly observe that care is currently correlated with the family institution, which reveals the continuity of a traditional approach to care as a 'natural' domestic task. Moreover, especially in the case of childcare, the pronatalist policies, as well as the familialist and conservative dimensions of the national political thought related to family life suggest the prevalence of the political option for family childcare (especially mothering). While in many European countries, the political principle of gender equality has contributed to the reform of national public policies related to the issue of care, in Romania it still remains a minor political value, in a context in which there is no evidence of the implementation of the political principle of gender mainstreaming.

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Intelligence sector reform in Romania. The impact of international cooperation

Emilian Alexandru IONIȚĂ

Currently enrolled as a Ph.D. student at the Doctoral School of the National University of Political Science and Public Administration (SNSPA) Bucharest, Romania, studying Political Science, Emilian Alexandru Ioniță specializes in the democratization of the intelligence sector in Central and Eastern Europe.

e-mail: emilian-alexandru.ionita@drd.snspa.ro

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to contribute to the relatively scarce scholarly literature regarding the democratisation of the intelligence sector in post-communist Europe, with a focus on the experience and lessons that can be learned from the case of Romania. Essentially, the article addresses the impact of external pressure (derived from international cooperation, both at the national and agency level) on the reforms undertaken by Romania after 1989 and in preparation for its accession to NATO and the EU. I build upon literature in intelligence studies and civil-military relations and I analyse the two waves of legislative and institutional changes reflected in official documents, legislation, and public interviews by prominent members of the intelligence community. I also highlight the importance as well as the limits of international cooperation of Romanian agencies with their Western counterparts (NATO/EU institutions as well as agencies in member states) as a factor of democratization.

Keywords

■Intelligence ■Democratization ■Romania ■NATO ■EU ■SIE ■SRI

Introduction

International cooperation in the highly competitive realm of intelligence is generally thought of as a pragmatic undertaking, usually limited to intelligence and assessment exchanges between actors ultimately interested in pursuing their own objectives. Faced with increasingly complex security threats, most of which are cross-border in nature (e.g. terrorism, cyber-crime), intelligence agencies turn to cooperation mainly as a means of expanding their tools for fulfilling the national security mandate. Former director-general of the UK Security Service (MI5) Stephen Lander argues that:

> "*Intelligence cooperation is something of an oxymoron. Intelligence services and intelligence collection are at heart manifestations of individual state power and of national self-interest. The very language used about the work [«national security», «defence and foreign policies»] makes the point*" (Lander: 2004, p. 481).

One apparent exception to this model is international cooperation in the field of intelligence sector reform. In the European context, this type of cooperation usually took place when the intelligence agencies and institutions of "old" democracies offered assistance to post-communist democracies in the process of establishing a new intelligence institutional framework. The process targeted two main objectives:

- **a.** the professionalization and capacity building in newly established agencies - through exchanges of know-how and good practices and sharing of intelligence and assessments;
- **b.** the democratisation of the security/intelligence frameworks.

For the purposes of this article, I define democratisation as the process of regulating the intelligence sector within a democratic framework, aimed at reaching a balance between the need for secrecy and the need for transparency (Matei, 2009b, p. 668). At a minimum, the reform process would:

> *"(1) delineate the rights, obligations, and powers of the intelligence organizations, as well as the arrangements for their governance and accountability; (2) provide the intelligence system with guidance as to what it can and cannot do; (3) indicate who is in charge and who oversees the activity*

> *of intelligence; (4) ensure that the intelligence apparatus is responsible before the law in the case of abuses; and (5) make sure that the intelligence community benefits from legal protection if it observes the legally agreed guidance and directions"* (Ibidem).

The need for international cooperation in post-communist contexts derives from the lack of relevant and useful "blueprints" – democratic traditions, precedents, or sets of good practices well enough adapted to the local culture and security context. Thomas Hammond notices the lack of an empirical foundation that would guide the reform efforts in this sector – "*policymakers and legislators simply do not know how to identify the most appropriate structure for the intelligence community*" (Caceres-Rodriguez & Landon-Murray: 2019, p. 144).

In working out a new regulatory framework for the security sector and the adjacent mechanisms of democratic oversight, more often than not, states were driven to seek international assistance – which was initially understood as a means of "importing" know-how and ready-made models of regulatory frameworks from "consolidated democracies" and, in certain cases, direct foreign involvement in the reform process.

After the initial early 1990s "push", the reform process was subsequently continued under the pressure of NATO and EU legislative and institutional integration processes – fulfilling the requirements for accession meant that the security sector in general, and the intelligence agencies, in particular, would have to be reformed and aligned to "Western" standards of democracy and effectiveness. This process was also doubled by an increase in direct cooperation with Euro-Atlantic intelligence agencies. This increasing number of contacts further led to progress in the professionalization and democratisation of the post-communist agencies involved.

Within this context, it is important to distinguish between two types of cooperation for reform, both having different focuses:

a) **Agency-level cooperation** – between national intelligence services and their foreign counterparts.

This type of cooperation is focused mainly on the capacity-building aspects of reform. The pragmatic incentives are obvious – the assistance providers are interested in helping future

allies in becoming more useful and contributing to the collective security, while the receivers are interested in increasing their capacities and their prestige (both nationally and internationally);

b) **Political level cooperation** – comprised of contacts between the authorities of democratizing states and the structures within the international organisation, as well as representatives of their member states.

The focus falls mainly on the democratisation side of the reform process, but also on achieving a sufficient degree of efficacy, that would turn the newly reformed agencies into a political asset. Thus, the main drive for reform is political, and not specific to the intelligence sector. In the case of post-communist democracies, the objective was fulfilling the preconditions for NATO or EU accession.

The aim of this article is to highlight the limits of external cooperation as a factor for democratisation in post-communist democracies seeking to gain membership to NATO and the EU. I will illustrate these limits using the case of Romania, focusing on the assistance offered by NATO and EU institutions, as well as member-states of both organisations in the reform of the intelligence sector. I explore, on one hand, the main steps Romania and its intelligence agencies undertook for reforming the sector (both for increasing its efficacy and its accountability of its main civilian intelligence services[24] – the Romanian Intelligence Service/SRI and the Foreign Intelligence Service/SIE), and on the other hand, on the international cooperation Romania was engaged in, both at political and agency level.

The analysed case seems to suggest that international cooperation has had a greater impact on increasing the effectiveness of Romanian intelligence institutions than their accountability and the mechanisms of civil-democratic oversight. I argue that the narrow scope of international cooperation essentially prevented it firstly from having a profound

[24] The term civilian refers to the scope and mandate of the two agencies (i.e. not military intelligence) despite their being militarized institutions – a particularity of the Romanian intelligence framework, as many similar independent (not under ministerial subordination) agencies in, for instance, NATO member states are civil institutions (even though their cadres often enjoy special status).

impact on the implemented reforms and secondly from remaining at all relevant after the political goals of the decision-makers have been fulfilled.

The limits of international cooperation

Scholarly literature points out the positive effect on democratisation of "external" factors such as international cooperation. Matei and Bruneau (2011) identify the NATO and EU integration processes – including technical assistance, intelligence exchanges and foreign aid specifically targeted towards reforming the intelligence/security sector institutions – as one of the main factors that would push policymakers to follow through with an adequate intelligence sector reform.

Similarly, Croissant and Kuehn (2017) identify three mechanisms through which "external" factors produce effects in the democratisation of the security sector in new democracies. Firstly, modifications in the threat landscape of national decision-makers modify or extend the mandate of intelligence agencies and create pressure to "update" the mechanisms of democratic oversight.

Secondly, the states' perspectives for NATO and/or EU accession will drive them to adopt regulations that would allow them to fulfil the accession requirements. These criteria, especially those pertaining to civil-democratic control, are equivalent to

> *"achieving a reliable functional inter-relationship between the democratic society, state and its armed forces as well as the other security institutions in such a way that at any stage of this interaction the principles of pluralistic democracy, market economy and the rule of law are implemented while national security is guaranteed"* (Pantev & al.: 2005, p. 103).

Thirdly, bilateral international cooperation triggers both the direct and indirect involvement of foreign partner agencies in the reform process.

Even though, as we have seen, the "external factor" is generally viewed as having a strong impact on the reform of the intelligence sector, in post-communist settings, many reforms were driven mainly by the short-term political or personal prestige objectives of the decision-makers (Croissant, Kuehn: 2017, p. 8). This only produced seemingly superficial changes, failing to create profound shifts in organizational culture, or to overcome the

distrust of intelligence cadres towards foreign involvement and "international good practices".

Kieran Williams and Dennis Deletant (quoted in Bruneau & Dombroski, 2014), notice that "western-styled" reforms were often implemented in post-communist countries in an "artificial" manner, inorganically grafted onto societal contexts that were (and still are) ailed by a chronic mistrust in state institutions, with strongly politicized bureaucracies, and without a democratic institutional culture. In these contexts, as other authors, such as Caceres-Rodriguez and Landon-Murray (2019) also notice the "external factor" generates a phenomenon of "institutional isomorphism" – under structural (coercive, mimetic, or normative) pressure, larger or smaller organisations seek to obtain internal and external validation and legitimacy by adopting institutions and practices of larger, prestigious and more mature organisations – often, these changes disregard the real needs of the institutions that implement them and do not fully take into consideration national interest (such inadequate choices are difficult to correct, as any effort in that direction would have to change not only the institutions but also the "philosophy" that guide their functioning).

Thus, accomplishing the reforms required does not guarantee the continual and sustained long-term implementation of democratic standards, especially in those cases where mechanisms of oversight are not functional, despite their being formally implemented. The reform process is gradually abandoned after the "grand" objectives have been reached: on the political level – accession to NATO and EU; on the institutional level – reaching a sufficient degree of trust between national intelligence agencies and their allied counterparts.

A further obstacle in the path of an increased role of international cooperation in the intelligence sector reform is the pervasively national nature of intelligence activities. This has two main consequences.

Firstly, bilateral cooperation in intelligence is circumscribed to the pragmatic interests of the intelligence agencies (according to the realist principle "states don't have friends, they have interests"). This aspect pronouncedly limits interactions with regard to reforms, none of the parties being truly interested in deepening this type of dialogue beyond certain clear boundaries. Thus, the provider of international assistance is interested in increasing its

sphere of influence/prestige and obtaining allies that, at least formally, share its own values and standards. The receiver of international assistance is interested in building trust and gaining access to the intelligence sharing that takes place between the "big players".

Secondly, both NATO and the EU lack genuine integrationist ambitions that target the intelligence sector. Thus, cooperation between member states on intelligence topics as well as reform remains within the boundaries of voluntary cooperation as there are no "common rules" dictating how oversight should be conducted or how transparent intelligence agencies should be. In the case of the EU, the idea of increasing the level of integration of intelligence agencies has been well received by politicians and academia, while unanimously rejected by intelligence practitioners (Palacios, 2020) – for example, Ilkka Salmi, former head of INTCEN and former director of the Finnish Security and Intelligence Service (SUPO) assessed in 2014 that:

> *"for the moment [there is] no real need nor will on the part of the Member States to take any steps towards that kind of integration. The trend is rather to identify the areas where multi-European intelligence cooperation can give real added value to the Member States".* (Ibidem)

The main argument invoked by the opponents of increased integration of intelligence agencies is Article 4 (2) of the Treaty on European Union (consolidated version after the Lisbon Treaty) – which states that "national security remains the sole responsibility of each Member State". While this phrasing leaves room for debate, most practitioners agree that, as the intelligence sector is a crucial provider of national security, its activity must remain the exclusive prerogative of national authorities, without external oversight. Similarly, Ballast (2018) notices that even after the Paris terrorist attacks, the reluctance towards any initiative that would increase the degree of intelligence agency integration was specific to those states with developed and "prestigious" intelligence systems that would have the least to gain from increased cooperation (The United Kingdom, Germany, France, Spain, Italy; the German internal affairs minister assessed that, at that time, he "cannot imagine how European states would agree to give up national sovereignty" in the field of intelligence).

These phenomena are well illustrated by post-communist transitions in Central and Eastern Europe, where the reform of the intelligence sector took place in at least two "waves" – a

first phase immediately after 1989, a second one during preparations for NATO, and/or EU accession. The institutional change was often undertaken without sufficient consideration for the national context and without identifying the most adequate institutional configurations. Rather, the reforms undertaken were shaped by the short-term objectives of the politicians and whichever the most "active" foreign partners were at the time[25].

Methodological considerations

In the next sections of the article, I will review the impact of international cooperation on the post-communist transformation of the Romanian intelligence sector, focusing on the experiences of the country's two main national intelligence agencies – SRI and SIE.

As I have shown, the aim of the article is to highlight the limits of international cooperation (understood as both agency and political level cooperation) as a factor of democratisation. A direct approach – the only one that would establish a clear causal link between democratisation and international cooperation – would be to uncover in-depth the incentives and the inputs of stakeholders for each of the steps of the reform process. This however would be next to impossible due to the fact that much of the data needed is classified.

Instead, I approach the task indirectly, by comparing the trajectory of democratic reform in the Romanian case to that of international cooperation at the agency and political level, on the other hand, reinterpreting existing research, while also bringing it into discussion under-researched primary data. I argue that, since the two trajectories do not mirror each other (i.e. increased cooperation does not equal increased concern with democratisation), the effects of international cooperation one democratisation are neither long-lasting (e.g. impacting democratisation beyond the initial accession requirements pressure) nor profound (e.g. changing the organisational culture of the reformed agencies). Other factors

[25] For instance, in Romania's case, in the immediate aftermath of 1989, one of the most involved contributors to the intelligence sector reform was the FBI – an institution whose main attributions pertain to law enforcement and judicial investigation, not primarily collecting and analysing intelligence.

(beyond the scope of this article) may have a greater impact or, in the long run, diminish the positive impact of international cooperation.

The data available on the subject is somewhat scarce and does not generate a balanced overview of the development of all Romanian intelligence agencies. In the case of the Romanian Intelligence Service (SRI), the time frame 1989 - 2015 is relatively well documented and I rely on the following main sources: the yearly activity reports issued by the institution26, that are most likely redacted versions of the documents presented to the Supreme Council of National Defence – the CSAT), the two public "strategic vision" documents27 elaborated by the institution, as well as several publications edited by the institution – the most useful being «Monografia SRI» book, published in 2015 and edited by Iulian Diculescu (that uses extensively information published in the aforementioned activity reports). After 2015 the SRI has not published any more detailed information regarding its activity – with the exception of yearly reports regarding requests to public information (a quantitative summary of requests received by the institution under Law no. 544[28] regarding the free access to public information).

Data referring to the reform process underwent by The Foreign Intelligence Service (SIE) and its relationship with Euro-Atlantic partners are considerably harder to find (there are no public documents on the subject issued by the institution, nor any yearly activity reports). But, in this case, the most useful sources have been from the journalistic

[26] The activity reports offer an overview – with varying levels of detail - of the agency's activity, on topics such the main threats addressed by the institution, the way it has fulfilled its mandate, international cooperation, human resources, its relation with the CSAT, and the democratic oversight organisms, as well as with the civil society. It also sets out the priorities for the next year. The documents cover the period between 1994 and 2014 (with the exception of a short unaccounted period between September 1996 and May 1997), http://arhiva.sri.ro/rapoarte-de-actiivitate.html

[27] "Strategic Vision 2007 – 2010" and "Strategic Vision 2011 – 2015: «SRI in the information age»", http://arhiva.sri.ro/documente-programatice.html

[28] Law no. 544 of 12 October 2001 on free access to information of public interest, https://www.sri.ro/assets/files/legislatie/legea544.pdf

interviews offered by SIE's former director Mihai Razvan Ungureanu[29] and former deputy director Silviu Predoiu[30].

The first wave of post-communist reforms in Romania

Larry Watts (2016) argues that in the case of Romania the intelligence sector had, in 1989, reached „a complete loss of domestic legitimacy" – which generated for the post-communist decision-makers an immediate concern for the swift regulation of the new intelligence agencies – SRI and SIE. The ensuing legislative process did not have, as a guideline (at least initially) a coherent vision regarding the reforms, firstly because its main goal has not been to achieve an effective and professional intelligence apparatus. Instead, the main concern was neutralizing the risk of repressive structures of the communist regime (which were thought to still hold a certain amount of influence) gaining any influence in the first post-communist reforms (Matei 2009a, p. 678). Secondly, the politicians leading the reform process lacked expertise in the field of security sector reform. The result was a quasi-lack of adequate legislation and a clear inefficacy of those civil-democratic oversight mechanisms that were put in place (Ibidem).

The establishment of the modern Romanian intelligence framework started with the dismantling of the „Securitate", formally „The Directorate for State Security" (DSS), at the moment a department within the Ministry of Internal Affairs. On the 30th of December 1990, through Decree no. 33 issued by the National Salvation Front Council (CFSN), the DSS was decommissioned after all its internal structures and personnel had been moved from the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the Ministry of Defence. On the 26th of March 1990, the Provisionary Council for National Union ("Consiliul Provizoriu de Uniune Naţională" – CPUN) issued the Decree no. 181, formally establishing a new agency - the SRI, which would take over, with some exceptions, all components of the former DSS. The most

[29] Mixich, V., 2009, "*Interviu cu directorul SIE, Mihai Razvan Ungureanu: Dintr-o Dacie, SIE s-a transformat intr-un Rolls-Royce*", Hotnews, https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-esential-5459490-interviu-directorul-sie-mihai-razvan-ungureanu-dintr-dacie-sie-transformat-intr-rolls-royce.htm

[30] Fati, S. (2019), "*Silviu Predoiu: Cum influenţează serviciile secrete politicul*", Europa Liberă, available at : https://romania.europalibera.org/a/silviu-predoiu-serviciile-secrete-influen%C8%9Beaz%C4%83-politicul/30303635.html

notable exceptions are the Foreign Intelligence Center (which would remain part of the Ministry of Defence until the 13th of December 1990, when it became an independent institution), the Counterintelligence Direction, and the Security and Guard Direction (which would become the new Protection and Guard Service). The decree (which was never officially published, only unofficially in the Romanian mass-media[31]) is comprised of only eight articles, two of them establishing the institutional subordination of the new service (namely SRI would answer to the Provisional National Unity Council (CPUN) until the upcoming 1990 general elections[32], and after that to the President of Romania) and its oversight mechanisms (CPUN and the Parliament, respectively, may establish oversight committees for the control of the way the activity of SRI complies with the constitutional principles and norms, and with the fundamental rights and freedoms of the citizens). The document contained no further details in that respect.

In 1991, Law 51[33] on the National Security of Romania brought some clarity regarding the role of each component of the intelligence apparatus[34]. However, a proper statute for SRI would only be issued in 1992 through Law no. 14[35], which confers the agency several specific intelligence attributions in the field of national security, it also authorises the institution to "possess and use specific means, adequate to its mission"[36], and on the 30th

[31] Iacob, B.T, (2019), "26 martie 1990: Povestea misteriosului decret de naștere a SRI", Inpolitics, https://inpolitics.ro/26-martie-1990-povestea-misteriosului-decret-de-nastere-a-sri26-martie-1990-povestea-misteriosului-decret-de-nastere-al-sri_18442303.html

[32] The Provisional National Unity Council had, as its main task elaborating a new electoral law that would be used in organising the general elections of May 1990. The organism had both executive and legislative prerogatives and served, in place of a Parliament, as an oversight institution for SRI until the investiture of the new Legislative. It did not establish any specialised committees for that task, so its oversight prerogatives did not take effect.

[33] Law no. 51/1991 on the National Security of Romania, https://www.sri.ro/assets/files/legislatie/Legea51.pdf

[34] Law no. 51 determines that SRI is the state agency specialized in collecting intelligence within the national borders while SIE is specialized in gathering intelligence abroad. The activity of the two institutions is „organized and coordinated by the Supreme Council of National Defence".

[35] Law no. 14/1992 regarding the organisation and functioning of SRI, https://www.sri.ro/assets/files/legislatie/Legea14.pdf

[36] In the first article of the Law it is also stated that „yearly or whenever the Parliament decides, the head of the Romanian Intelligence Service hands in reports regarding the manner in which the agency's attributions set by the legislation have been fulfilled" and that „for the purpose of exercising concrete and permanent oversight, a joint bicameral committee is to be established. The organisation, the functioning and the means of exercising said oversight are to be established by subsequent resolutions adopted by the Parliament".

of June 1993 a permanent joint parliamentary committee would be established, tasked with the oversight of SRI activity.

SIE's first "statute" is even briefer – Law no. 39/1990[37], through which the CSAT was established, grants the agency the status of an independent public institution, without regulating any other aspect of its functioning or setting the limits of its mandate. The institution would only be granted its proper statute in 1998 (as part of Romania's preparations to NATO accession, as I will show in the next section).

The same time frame also marks the beginning of international cooperation for the two Romanian institutions, but only after an initial moment of confusion – opening up to foreign intelligence agencies, especially Western ones, initially happened reluctantly, as intelligence practitioners perceived a "*certain initial ambiguity of the Romanian state regarding its relations to other countries*" (a justifiable ambiguity, if we take into consideration that the former enemies had become friends and vice-versa) as the "*geo-strategical options had not yet been clearly defined. The boundary between friend and foe was not yet clear enough*" (Diculescu 2015, p. 63).

After the clarification of the new geopolitical coordinates, the attention of Romanian intelligence services was directed firstly towards "*agencies from powerful Western states (the US, Great Britain, Germany and France)*" and secondly towards "*agencies in neighbouring countries*" – the first contacts were generally exploratory, centred around trust-building efforts, without any particular focus on the reform process. Already, by 1996, "*several agencies assigned liaison officers in Bucharest, feeling the need to deepen the dialogue [with their Romanian counterparts]*" (Ibidem).

The *ex post factum* reflection of this period in SRI sanctioned literature points to the idea that the Romanian service was "*aware of its being subjected by its foreign partners to a «study», an ongoing test of trust*" (Ibidem). In this context, it sought to manifest its openness regarding cooperation and to learn the "lesson" of democratic approaches, but

[37] Law no. 39/1990 on the Establishment, organization and functioning of the Supreme Council of National Defence, https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocumentAfis/815

also to highlight that, it is able, in its own right, to offer expertise on certain topics to other agencies.

On the other hand, this "learning" period was not reflected in a subsequent legislative reform, as the legal framework, set out by Law no. 51, remained much the same. SRI's activity report for 1996 points out that there were still significant legislative gaps and the legislation framing its operations was inadequate[38]. Furthermore, SIE still had no statute – a further obstacle in the way of deepening international cooperation, despite the good faith shown by the two Romanian institutions.

The second wave of post-communist reforms in Romania. Accession to NATO and EU

In Romania's case, the most relevant push towards reform came in the context of NATO and EU accession. Between 1997 and 2007, all institutional reforms and international cooperation efforts were channelled towards meeting the accession requirements for NATO and EU respectively. As Matei (2009) argues, even though policymakers at the legislative and executive level set out to create and develop a functioning post-communist intelligence community and sought to establish effective and transparent agencies, their role was secondary compared to the „*carrots and sticks*" approach requirements for EU and NATO accession. This new context also enabled increased pressure from mass media and civil society, including several entities financed or directed from abroad).

The first step towards a reformed intelligence sector was setting up a regulatory framework for SIE. This took the form of Law no. 1/1998[39] (still enforced) which confers to the agency the status of "state organ specialized in foreign intelligence" and establishes the democratic control and oversight mechanisms - the Supreme National Defence Council (executive control) would assess the effectiveness of the institution in fulfilling its mandate, while the Parliament, through a specialized committee (parliamentary oversight) would verify

[38] Report with regard to the performance of his duties, according to the law, the Romanian Intelligence Service, to achieve national security - October 1995 - December 1996, http://arhiva.sri.ro/fisiere/rapoarte/raport96.pdf

[39] Law no. 1/1998, regarding the organisation and functioning of SIE, https://www.sie.ro/pdf/legislatie/1.pdf

"compliance of SIE's activity with the Constitution and with the state's relevant policies"[40]. It is to be noted that although formally established, the new committee would only start functioning at the end of October of 1998.

The first set of guidelines for the security sector reform consisted of the monitoring instruments set out after the 1999 Washington NATO Summit (the Membership Action Plan/MAP) and the 1999 Helsinki European Council (based on the Copenhagen and Madrid criteria for the enlargement process. Accession negotiations for Romania started in 2000 (Diculescu 2015, p. 136). Matei (2009) points out that international cooperation increased significantly especially in preparation to Romania's NATO accession[41].

Several areas were targeted, among which were the intelligence exchange, technical assistance in the reform process, work visits, and know-how sharing. Several Western agencies were involved, the US and Great Britain (through the NSA, FBI, the CIA, the Secret Service, as well as the British MI6) having a prominent role in the process. In 2001, the FBI opened a liaison bureau in Bucharest tasked with increasing cooperation in combating organized crime. Subsequently, in 1999, SRI and SIE notably gained membership in the Middle European Conference (MEC), a multi-lateral cooperation format formed by European intelligence agencies, which was seen as a "*success and a confirmation of both the Romanian agencies professionalism and their embracing democratic values*" and Euro-Atlantic standards (Diculescu 2015 p.148).

In the case of SRI, international cooperation manifested as technical assistance for NATO accession – one of the agency's most important partners being the NATO Office of Security (NOS) as „*NOS officers offered permanent advice on all topics*" (Diculescu 2015, p. 148). At the same time, "*an important role in adapting the SRI to the NATO standards*" and

[40] Article 3 stipulates that "oversight over the activity of the Foreign Intelligence Service is exercised by the Romanian Parliament, observing the secrecy of means and sources of intelligence. To this purpose, a special committee is to be established, formed of three deputies and two senators, chosen from the members of the defence, public order and national security committees of both chambers of Parliament". Law no. 69/2017 raised the number of members to four deputies and three senators, without changing the principles on which the committee functioned or the (lack of) concrete levers at its disposal.

[41] Although much of this cooperation was not aimed at democratizing the emergent agencies, but at increasing their effectiveness and interoperability with their Western counterparts.

fulfilling the accession standards" was played by some allied states' intelligence agencies (Ibidem).

In 2001 SRI adopted its first International Cooperation Concept, a strategic document, on the basis of which, between 2002 and 2004, cooperation with other agencies was strengthened. In 2003, following the efforts in the context of NATO and EU accession, a new dedicated structure was established within the SRI, tasked with "coherently liaising" with EU and NATO institutions specialized in intelligence and security.

Between 2001 and 2004 SRI benefited from technical assistance not only in matters pertaining to its mandate (anti-terrorism, cyber-crime) but also in the legislative sphere – regarding the protection of NATO classified information and documents, focusing on regulating and operationalizing public access to the archives of the former "Securitate". The most prominent partners in this undertaking were the FBI/US and the DGSI/France (Diculescu 2015, p. 266).

Information on how SIE was reformed after 1999 is relatively scarcer. However, the former director of the institution, Mihai Răzvan Ungureanu, claims that

> "*[after] SIE became autonomous and its activity complimentary to that of SRI, in the beginning of the 1990s, it gradually transformed (depending on how much the policymakers trusted the special institutions) until this gradual pace became insufficient. [...] Romania's membership in NATO fundamentally changed our security paradigm, with everything it entails: from how our Defence Ministry was structured, to how the special services were organized*"[42].

The new guideline for intelligence sector reform became achieving compatibility with NATO and Romania's counterparts within the member states; „*there would automatically become partner agencies [...] which guaranteed a continuous professional, coherent, credible and result-oriented dialogue*"[43], however, somewhat conditioned by Romania's

[42] Mixich, V., 2009, "*Interviu cu directorul SIE, Mihai Razvan Ungureanu: Dintr-o Dacie, SIE s-a transformat intr-un Rolls-Royce*", Hotnews; available at https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-esential-5459490-interviu-directorul-sie-mihai-razvan-ungureanu-dintr-dacie-sie-transformat-intr-rolls-royce.htm
[43] Ibidem;

compliance to leave behind the „undemocratic heritage" and the cadres' willingness to undergo a "mentality reform".

Moreover, de-structuring and reconstructing SIE was done using a "*Western matrix*", aided by foreign assistance – with the „*undiscriminating help of our partners, which were also interested in Romania having an effective, resilient and cooperation-oriented espionage agency*"[44].

Aftermath

Despite promising results in the field of democratisation (reaching a balance between transparency/democratic oversight and effectiveness), after 2007 the reform focus in the intelligence sector shifted towards effectiveness, transparency and oversight being more and more neglected (Matei: 2014, p. 636). This tendency lingered on despite the fact that Romania became increasingly connected to the Euro-Atlantic processes and can be traced on two levels:

a) **agency level -** the Romanian intelligence agencies became increasingly engaged in international cooperation, however not cooperation for reform, but capacity building and intelligence/assessment sharing - as means to raise their own profile within NATO, the EU, and in relation to the Western counterparts.

For instance, in 2007, SRI adopted a new International Cooperation Concept which focuses on developing intelligence exchanges and international cooperation on topics related to the agency's legal mandate, as well as on the concept of intelligence diplomacy[45], through which "the national interest would be pursued, contributing to Romania's efforts to achieve its security objectives". The agency also becomes increasingly visible in security multilateral formats (at UE and NATO levels) and even starts to offer assistance for the

[44] Ibidem;

[45] Intelligence diplomacy refers to using the intelligence agencies' network of contacts and personnel to accomplish diplomatic tasks (oftentimes, maintaining an unofficial dialogue with actors with whom an official contact is not possible or advisable). This type of activity sees intelligence agencies non-transparently assume prerogatives outside their legal mandate, to overlap that of the "traditional" diplomacy.

modernisation and reform of agencies in the prospective of NATO members (Diculescu 2015; p. 267).

The gradual shift away from democratic concerns is also reflected in SRI's "Strategic Vision" documents. The report for 2007-2010[46] identifies "*consolidating democratic values within and outside of the organisation*" as one of the key principles that would guide the activity of the institution. The document also states that SRI "*recognizes its own role in a democratic state*", even if it is not clear what is entailed in applying this principle. In stark contrast, the 2010 – 2015 "Strategic Vision"[47], a continuation of the former document, contains no references to democracy or the principles that the institution adheres to. Instead, it focuses on capacity building and the security threats the institution must address. According to the "vision" it sets out "*increasing performance will consolidate the role of the Service as a national authority in its areas of responsibility, offering the opportunity to position itself as a lead provider of strategic knowledge within the national security framework*". Shifting the focus away from democratisation concerns may suggest either the disregard for such, issued after 2007 - 2010 or, more likely, the understanding that the institution had been sufficiently aligned to democratic standards and that further reforms in that direction would be detrimental to the overall efficacy of the agency.

b) political level - the withdrawal of policy-makers from the reform of intelligence services and the oversight mechanisms they require is traceable in the institutional evolution of both SRI and SIE after 2007.

SIE's statute was set out in Law no. 1/1998 regarding the organisation and functioning of SIE[48] and has only been amended once, in 2017, when Law no. 69[49] modified the structure of the Parliamentary Committee (increasing the number of members by two) and changed the investiture procedure for the director of the organisation (replacing the CSAT with the

[46] SRI, (2007), "*Strategic Vision 2007 – 2010*", http://arhiva.sri.ro/documente-programatice.html
[47] SRI (2011), "S*trategic Vision 2011 – 2015: «SRI in the information age»*", http://arhiva.sri.ro/documente-programatice.html
[48] Law no. 1/1998, regarding the organisation and functioning of SIE, available at https://www.sie.ro/pdf/legislatie/1.pdf
[49] Law no. 69/2017 regarding the organisation and functioning of SIE, https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/188417

Parliament as the authority competent to appoint a new director and unchanging the President's role to propose a candidate for the appointment).

In the case of SRI, its statute was regulated in Law no. 14/1992 regarding the organisation and functioning of SRI (still in force), and it has only been modified twice after 2007 – through Law no. 255/2013[50] (which expands its mandate in the field of judicial criminal proceedings) and through Emergency Ordinance 6/2016[51] (which regulates the relation of SRI with judicial authorities in the matter of surveillance). No other changes to the control and oversight mechanisms of the two institutions have been made, which is to say that the original frameworks established before Romania's accession to the NATO and EU (and which proved their inefficacy in several instances) are still in place.

Furthermore, draft law no. 209/2007[52], regulating the statute of intelligence officers, is a piece of legislation that would, in fact, demilitarize the Romanian intelligence services and potentially contribute to further democratise the sector. The draft has only been rejected by the Chamber of Deputies in 2021, after more than 14 years after its initial approval by the Senate. No equivalent draft legislation is currently being discussed in the Romanian Parliament.

The Parliamentary Oversight Committee for SRI did however issue, in the "Maior Report"[53] a series of recommendations regarding possible improvements to the extant oversight mechanisms:

a) setting up coherent and transparent legislation regulating the relations of SRI with other institutions;

b) strengthening the mandate of the oversight committee;

c) legislative amendments that clearly define the legal beneficiaries for SRI.

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[50] Law no. 255 for the implementation of Law no. 135/2010 on the Code of Criminal Procedure and for amending and supplementing some normative acts that include criminal procedural provisions, https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/150697

[51] Emergency Ordinance no. 6/2016 regarding some measures for the execution of the technical supervision mandates ordered in the criminal process, https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocumentAfis/176546

[52] PL-x no. 609/2007 Draft Law on the Status of Intelligence Officers, http://www.cdep.ro/pls/proiecte/upl_pck2015.proiect?cam=2&idp=8658

[53] A report by the Committee investigating allegations of politicization of SRI activity by former director of SRI, George Maior. The report discusses the relation between SRI and the National Integrity Agency.

There has been no follow-up on Committee's proposals.

As Zulean (2018) notices, the interest for the democratisation of the intelligence sector also vanished from the intelligence studies sphere – a field best represented in Romania by the "Mihai Viteazu" National Intelligence Academy (ANIMV, affiliated with SRI). Zulean argues that of all the articles published in the Romanian Intelligence Studies Review (open access and double-blind peer-reviewed academic journal edited by the ANIMV) between 2009 and 2017 (19 issues, each containing an average of 15 articles), none deals specifically with democratic oversight in the intelligence sector. I notice that Zulean's conclusion stands true even after 2017 – the six issues published between 2018 and 2021 focus more and more on the tradecraft of intelligence while neglecting critical analyses of the role of intelligence in modern democracies. The same tendency can be noticed in other areas where the University is active. For instance, only one of the 123 volumes published by the ANIMV Publishing House[54] has democratic control as the main theme.

Furthermore, the Proceedings of the four consecutive ANIMV's annual "*Intelligence in the Knowledge Society* International Conference", from the period of 2013 to 2016, resulted in four published volumes, comprised of 102 papers. Within the Proceedings, democratic oversight is only discussed in-depth as a "modern challenge" that intelligence services must adapt to, especially in the context of the increased need for mass surveillance[55].

In fact, the foreword to the "*Intelligence in the Knowledge Society - Proceedings of the XVIIIth International Conference"* addressed democratisation not as a current concern, but as finalized historical stage:

> "*Romania has offered an interesting case as an Eastern European country suffering from a totalitarian past, whose Communist security service had gained quite an ill-reputed fame before 1989. In this specific historical context, the Romanian Intelligence Service had to undergo, immediately after its creation in the early 90s,*

[54]According to the National Library of Romania online catalogue (as of January 22nd, 2022) - Stroe, R. (2013), "*Controlul parlamentar - între certitudine şi aşteptări"* ("Parliamentary oversight - between certainty and experctations), ANIMV Publishing House, Bucharest.
[55]E.g. Liluashvili, G. (2016), "*The protection of personal data and intelligence needs. An impossible equilibrium?*" and Lesidrenska, R., Bancheva, V. (2013), "*Adaptation of Intelligence and Security Services to Contemporary Challenges*".

> *two parallel reform processes, of democratisation and modernization, which made it aware of the need to shed away the legacy of its past and promote an open relationship with the academia and the society as a whole*" (Ștefan & Dumitru: 2013, p. 1-7).

The gradual alteration of priorities also impacted the role of civil society and mass media as informal components of the civil-democratic oversight framework. As Matei (2014) argues, until Romania's accession to the EU, any digression from the path of intelligence sector democratisation had been promptly sanctioned by the public opinion and quickly addressed under NATO/EU pressures, although after 2007 these external pressures "evaporated", the task is passed on solely to the mass-media and civil society. However, this shift had limited success as the two sectors were insufficiently developed and, in the absence of international backing, proved to be ineffective as means of keeping the intelligence sector under scrutiny. This also led to increasing tensions between the intelligence agencies and the mass media, as intelligence services seem to consider most of the mass media as "sensationalist" and incapable of responsibly addressing national security intelligence. Likewise critical, the mass media considers that the agencies have not undergone sufficient reforms, they are not transparent enough, and that they are not subjected to a sufficient degree of democratic oversight (Matei.: 2009b, p. 580).

Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to contribute to the relatively scarce scholarly literature regarding the democratisation of the intelligence sector in post-communist Europe, with a focus on the experience and lessons that can be learned from Romania's case. Without being representative for all post-communist transitions, it highlights some of the pitfalls of "fast" reform processes that relied on international cooperation without building oversight frameworks well adapted to national contexts. It also shows the limited scope of international assistance for reform in the field of intelligence agencies.

The data available brings into question the limits of international cooperation as a factor of democratisation processes. Despite its initial positive effect on the democratisation of the intelligence sector, it appears to have had a limited impact on the manner that reforms are

implemented and on how profound the reform processes are once initiated. For Romania, fulfilling the NATO and EU accession requirements was the main drive behind international cooperation, both at the policy and agency levels. After the political objectives had been achieved, policy-makers assumed a quasi-passive role with regard to intelligence agencies.

Beyond that, international cooperation was led by the intelligence agencies themselves and gradually directed international cooperation towards increasing capabilities and interoperability with allied counterparts, in the absence of strong incentives that would maintain focus on democratic concerns.

There are several ways in which future research can build upon the findings of this article. Firstly, the literature on the democratisation of Eastern European intelligence sectors would benefit from a wider-scale comparative study on democratisation trajectories *versus* international cooperation, acknowledging at the same time the distinction between political and agency-level cooperation. Secondly, a more in-depth mapping of actors involved in the democratisation process, their respective incentive structures, as well as contacts with foreign counterparts may paint a more accurate picture of the mechanisms that dictate why reform sometimes stops short of achieving coherent oversight frameworks – an issue not limited to emerging or new democracies.

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Exploring the need for human-centred cybersecurity. The WannaCry Cyberattack

Claudiu Mihai CODREANU

Currently enrolled as a Ph.D. student at the Doctoral School of the National University of Political Science and Public Administration (SNSPA) Bucharest, Romania, Claudiu Mihai Codreanu focuses in his research on cybersecurity policies and strategies, e-democracy and digital authoritarianism. His most recent research paper, published by the Europolity journal, deals with the issue of state-sponsored cyberattacks during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic.

e-mail: cl.codreanu@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Cyber operations, especially cyberattacks, have emerged to become one of the most significant security threats for state actors in the last decade or so, but they have also become increasingly disruptive for individuals. Moreover, one path generally taken by governments, authoritarian and democratic alike, is trying to enhance cybersecurity at the expense of privacy and anonymity of individuals and groups, begging the question whether cybersecurity and cyberattacks can be studied from a less state-centric perspective, focusing on people. The literature on cybersecurity from the perspective of Critical Security Studies is still rather scarce, and there is a need of more research, a gap which I aim to fill through this paper. Critical International Relations theory emphasizes the societal factors and individuals, looking further than the state. Moreover, Critical Security Studies focus on the security of people, proposing a human-centred approach to security. For this research, I shall start by describing the role of the state in cybersecurity and how Critical Security Studies can relate to cybersecurity. Furthermore, I shall explore the possibility of designing a human-centred cybersecurity endeavour. There is a growing need for changing the focus to the individual, especially because of the nature of current cyberattacks and governments' responses. Following this, I shall focus the discussion on the relationship between Critical Security Studies and cybersecurity around the WannaCry global ransomware attack, which is regarded as one of the most disruptive cyberattacks in history.

Keywords:

■Critical Security Studies ■Cyberattacks ■Cybersecurity ■Human-centred cybersecurity ■WannaCry cyberattack.

Introduction

In the last 10 years, the importance and visibility of cybersecurity issues have increased considerably, as state actors begun using cyberattacks more frequently in a much more disruptive way than previously. The WannaCry ransomware cyberattack was one of the most disruptive global cyberattacks in history, and it managed to spread all over the world, affecting hundreds of thousands of computers (Greenberg: 2017; Christensen, Liebetrau: 2019). Even more, the ransomware spread on a large variety of computer systems and networks, affecting UK's National Health System and disrupting its activities, putting at risk the health and/or lives of patients. In addition to this, 2017 was the year of another transnational cyberattack, which actually started as a cyberattack targeting a single country. The NotPetya attack disrupted a large set of activities in Ukraine, but then it spread to other countries and it caused billions of dollars in damages (Perlroth, Shane: 2019). Both of the cyberattacks were based on a software vulnerability and exploit in Microsoft's Windows operating system, discovered by the US National Security Agency and stockpiled for further usage, until it was stolen by other state hackers, leaked online, and then used by other state-sponsored hackers (Greenberg: 2019; Newman: 2019). Thus, the NSA managed to indirectly decrease the level of security in the world, and especially in the cyberspace, whilst on a quest to increase the US national security, by employing the exploit against other states regarded as adversaries (Dunn Cavelty: 2014).

Since these two cyberattacks have been indirectly caused by a state-actor (the United States) who was attempting to improve and advance its security, adopting a pure state-centric view may not provide sufficient insights into the issue. Therefore, in this paper I shall use a human-centred approach to cybersecurity, in order to discuss both the cyberattacks and the issue of intelligence agencies stockpiling software vulnerabilities and exploits, taking into account the WannaCry ransomware campaign. The study starts by providing an overview of the relevant literature regarding Critical Security Studies (CSS), cybersecurity and the relationship between the two, as well as the literature on human-centred cybersecurity approaches. Furthermore, the study also focuses on the role of the state in cyberspace and cybersecurity, highlighting that intelligence agencies have a significant role and contribute to also maintaining states' role in cyberspace. Going further,

the paper explores the concept of human-centred cybersecurity, focusing on the case of the WannaCry cyber campaign, which showcases the need of implementing an approach based on this concept, and also of discussing the state's role in cybersecurity. My argument is that cyberattacks such as WannaCry highlight the need of questioning state-centric views on cybersecurity and attempt to place humans at the centre of all endeavours regarding the processes of ensuring cybersecurity. Moreover, placing human beings at the centre of cybersecurity endeavours would bring more attention to the effects that malicious cyber activities and cybersecurity activities have on individuals, provided that ensuring security in cyberspace should not come at the cost of digital rights and freedoms. Even though the Critical Security Studies literature on cybersecurity is not very vast, it can significantly contribute to the research on cyberspace by considering the individual as the referent of security. In cyberspace this issue might be complicated, but it is important to discuss if and how CSS can relate to cyberspace and cybersecurity, and how its concepts can be used to create more knowledge. CSS stands for avoiding a state-centric approach or a statist point of view (Peoples, Vaughan-Williams: 2010), hence the role of the state in cyberspace needs to be further problematised, together with the potential role of individual human beings. Furthermore, in this study, human-centred cybersecurity, or a human-centred approach to cybersecurity, is viewed as an approach that puts human beings, and not states, at the centre of cybersecurity processes and endeavours. Human-centred cybersecurity is also referred to as human-centric cybersecurity in scholarly literature, but I shall use mainly the form of human-centred throughout the paper.

Key aspects of Critical Security Studies

Critical Security Studies (CSS), also sometimes referred to as the Welsh School, represents an International Relations (IR) school of thought based on a Marxian interpretation of the world and mainly on Critical Theory (or the Frankfurt School). CSS proposes an approach to the concept of security built from its broadening (expanding the scope of security beyond military issues), deepening (linking the way we perceive security to our understanding of the world) and extending (taking into account multiple actors and going beyond the state,

mainly to individual human beings) (Peoples, Vaughan-Williams: 2010, pp. 17-18; Wyn Jones: 1999, p. 166).

The school of Critical Security Studies is built on a critique of statism and state-centric approaches, asserting that human beings are the fundamental referents of security. CSS argues that all threats, no matter the sector they are included in, affect people before anything else, and hence the state, represented in some abstract way, should not be the ultimate referent of security, but the very human beings, which constitute the state anyway, should be considered the primary referents of security (Peoples, Vaughan-Williams: 2010, pp. 23-32).

The Copenhagen school (represented mainly by Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde) contributed to a certain degree to Critical Security Studies, as it extended the concept of security by proposing five sectors of security: military, political, economic, societal and environmental. Moreover, it introduced the theory of securitization, which refers to the speech process through which an actor, mainly leading governmental figures, labels an issue as a security issue, thus justifying extraordinary measures. However, from a human-centred security perspective, securitization theory does not do enough by broadening the dimensions of security, as the state still holds a significant position (Nyman: 2013, pp. 51-60).

CSS does not use only state-centric approaches, extending the scope of security beyond military threats, and it "anchors the theory and practice of security in a broader concern with human emancipation" (Wyn Jones: 1999, p. 5). Thus, CSS assumes the goal or purpose of "emancipation", which refers to freeing the people from constraints (human or physical) that refrain them from doing what they would choose to (Peoples, Vaughan-Williams: 2010, pp. 31-32). One of the main scholars of Critical Security Studies, Ken Booth, clarified the concept of emancipation in a 1999 paper, arguing that "'Security' means the absence of threats. Emancipation is the freeing of people (as individuals and groups) from those physical and human constraints which stop them from carrying out what they would freely choose to do" (Ken Booth: 2011p. 319).

A Critical Security Studies approach can be used in a state-centric research, but only if the research avoids being statist too (Yau: 2019, p. 37). Furthermore, CSS considers that "real security" can be built upon the concept of emancipation (ibid.). In some cases, the state does not act as the guarantor of security, but as a threat to its citizens (like in the case of authoritarian regimes), while sometimes only certain institutions of the state produce forms of insecurity for their own citizens. This supports the idea that significant threats can come even from their own state, even if it fundamentally attempts to provide a secure environment for its citizens (Krause, Williams: 1997, p. 44; Wyn Jones: 1999, p. 99). In other words, "both emancipatory and regressive actions can be pursued in the name of security" (Ken Booth: 2011, p. 289).

Untangling cyberspace and the role of the state

Cyberspace is both a physical and "socio-technological environment", consisting of the networked system of computers, servers and other digital devices that "interact in digital space" (Valeriano, Maness: 2015, p. 24). In other words, cyberspace comprises the hardware real-world elements used for accessing and interacting in the digital space, and also the elements created in the digital world. Furthermore, in the view of Thierry Balzacq and Myriam Dunn Cavelty, cybersecurity is "a multifaceted set of practices designed to protect networks, computers, programs and data from attack, damage or unauthorised access" (2016, p. 183). In other words, cybersecurity can be understood as a set of practices and policies employed by a variety of actors to increase the security of cyberspace (Balzacq, Dunn Cavelty: 2016, p. 180).

Moreover, a cyberattack can be defined as:

> *"an electronic attack to a system, enterprise or individual that intends to disrupt, steal or corrupt assets where those assets might be digital (such as data or information or a user account), digital services (such as communications) or a physical asset with a cyber component"* (Hodges, Creese: 2015, p. 34).

Cyberattacks can have a major impact on society as a whole and on individuals too, as it became apparent after the Cambridge Analytica scandal, the Russian information operations targeting states' elections, and the Brexit referendum (Burton, Lain: 2020, pp.

6-7). A large part of cyber incidents are operations in which a state actor tries to steal classified or sensitive information from another state's institutions, meaning that a significant proportion of malicious cyber activity can be described as cyber espionage (Valeriano, Maness: 2015, p. 9). Cyberattacks have become increasingly common over the last decade or so, and are now used by individuals, state and non-state actors in various ways, and in pursuit of various interests and objectives. Additionally, since this research refers to the WannaCry ransomware campaign, the concept needs to be properly defined. The ransomware is a type of malware that tries to capitalize on people's fear of losing important data or being faced with permanent hardware damage. Ransomware lock or encrypt victims' computers and demand a payment, or a ransom, in exchange for unencrypting the data, which is not always the case (Kharraz et al.: 2015, p. 3).

The role of the state in cybersecurity and cyberspace has expanded since the first years of the Internet, with the state acquiring multiple roles throughout the years, as suggested by the research of Myriam Dunn Cavelty and Florian Egloff (2019). At the very beginning, from the 1980s and 1990s, the state had the sole role as the *owner of the networks*, followed by the new role of *problem owner* (or problem solver) in cybersecurity. Since the 2000s, the state acquired the role of the *originator of the problem*, as states started to become more active in cyberspace thus creating issues for other actors involved. The state still has the responsibility to protect its military and civil networks, thus being the *guarantor of its institutions' cybersecurity*. At the same time, the state plays the role of *partner* in relation with private companies, especially regarding critical infrastructures. Moreover, beside its role of a partner, the state also functions as *legislator and regulator* in relation with both private companies, institutions and citizens (Dunn Cavelty, Egloff: 2019, pp. 47-49).

However, cybersecurity increasingly depends on internet service providers (ISPs), private companies which operate critical infrastructure, and big tech companies overall, in particular Microsoft, Google, Facebook and Apple (Burton, Lain: 2020, p. 5). In many ways, cybersecurity is the "responsibility of every individual and every company" (Dunn Cavelty, Egloff: 2019, p. 48). Nevertheless, intelligence agencies, including military agencies, gained a significant role in cybersecurity and the cyberspace, both for offensive and defensive cyber operations, and it can be argued that they are the most important actors,

especially in the strategic use of cyberspace (Burton, Lain: 2020, p. 2; Dunn Cavelty, Egloff: 2019, p. 47). The United States is regarded by scholars as the state most targeted by cyber espionage, and the second most active user of cyber espionage operations against other states, with the first being China (Valeriano, Maness: 2015, p. 9). According to Brandon Valeriano and Ryan Maness (2015), cyber espionage activities pursued by state-actors are the most common type of operations in cyberspace, and they can be broadly defined as an attempt by a government to steal important or confidential information from another government (p. 9). This suggests that the state has to work on finding the right balance between freedom and security in cyberspace, since giving more powers to security agencies can have a negative impact on civil rights in the digital space (Dunn Cavelty, Egloff: 2019, p. 51). Thus, as the CSS approach suggests, the process of enhancing security in cyberspace by expanding the mandate of responsible state's agencies comes against emancipation, and can actually produce insecurity for individuals, since the majority of the ways of enhancing security in cyberspace involve a negative trade-off of civil rights, such as anonymity and privacy.

Overall, in the race of enhancing offensive cyber capabilities, state actors actually manage to create more insecurities and endanger their own national security which they are trying to protect, and also indirectly endanger the national securities of other states, including allies. Intelligence agencies search for and exploit security flaws in various software and operating systems in order to gain the ability to access systems and networks for espionage, potential disruptive cyberattacks or surveillance. In some cases, intelligence agencies find or create the software vulnerabilities and use them later, as they can be exploited at any time as long as the victim does not detect the security flaw (Dunn Cavelty, Egloff: 2019, p. 47).

CSS's view on cyberspace and state practices in cybersecurity

Critical Security Studies literature on cybersecurity and cyberspace is rather scarce. Up until the 2010s, critical security literature focused almost entirely on the discursive process of cyber incidents, and devoted little attention to specific events or developments in cyberspace. However, in the last years, critical security literature moved further from

analysing discursive constructions, and turned its focus to material aspects of cyberspace and cybersecurity, and on practice-related issues (Dunn Cavelty: 2019, pp. 139-140).

One downside of CSS's work on cybersecurity is that most of the literature does not take into account that "cyber-security is a type of security that enfolds in and through cyberspace, so that the making and practice of cyber-security is at all times constrained and enabled by this environment" (Balzacq, Dunn Cavelty: 2016, p. 179). Cybersecurity is produced by a multiplicity of actors, expanding across different sectors of society, from every individual computer user, CEOs, regulatory bodies and standardisation organisations, to computer security specialists and other. In this ecosystem, the role of politicians and government officials is secondary to those producing cybersecurity, since they can unravel various developments and events in cyberspace, take action in the form of statements (with the aim of securitization), and can create and implement policies (Balzacq, Dunn Cavelty: 2016, p. 180).

Challenges, risks and threats in cyberspace, and cybersecurity in general, go beyond state borders. The state is now far from being the single actor in cyberspace, even though it still has a central role. Private companies have become some of the most important players in the cyberspace and in cybersecurity too, especially because they own and operate the large majority of the ICT infrastructure. In addition to this, companies (like Microsoft or Google) develop software and digital devices used by state institutions, citizens, private companies and civil society in a big part of the world (Christensen, Liebetrau: 2019, pp. 395-397).

There are a lot of reasons for the critique of states' role in cyberspace, and also for avoiding a statist approach. Aiming to gain the ability to access more data and to prepare for potential conflicts, intelligence services over the world are actually making cyberspace more insecure in a direct way. For instance, it has been reported by the media and civil society since before 2013 that the NSA is actively engaging in acquiring and exploiting various zero-day vulnerabilities in software and hardware to inject its own malware in strategic locations in the Internet infrastructure. Thus, instead of alerting software vendors of vulnerabilities in order to patch them, intelligence agencies exploit them and keep them secret. Furthermore, it is unknown which software have vulnerabilities that can be exploited, nor which systems have been compromised. The backdoor programs injected in

various software and hardware can be activated at any time and used for espionage, surveillance, and also for potential disruption. Thus, actors can employ actions with the aim of increasing security, which can also be responsible for making both cyberspace and the real word less secure, either directly or indirectly (Dunn Cavelty: 2014, pp. 702-710).

After the discovery of a software vulnerability, a security agency can alert the company developing the software in order to patch it, but the security flaw can also be used for offence, exploiting it stealthily and secretly. Because of this, thinking only in terms of cyber offence and cyberwarfare can play a significant part in creating cyberthreats and more cyber insecurity, in opposition to building a cybersecurity of and for the people, a healthy cyberspace. This can be done by consolidating people's knowledge of cybersecurity and promoting an efficient cybersecurity culture (Yau: 2019, p. 47), proving the need for a human-centred approach to cybersecurity.

Nevertheless, exploiting such vulnerabilities means keeping security flaws unaddressed, and this reduces the security of the entire cyberspace, ultimately reducing security for everyone. Furthermore, it cannot be known if the backdoors are under the full control of the agency that created them, nor if anyone else discovered them, and hence these vulnerabilities can be exploited or identified by other state actors with potential malicious intents. Therefore, such actions taken by the state have become not only a threat for human security overall, but also for the very same state who employs the use of such vulnerabilities. Consequently, if states do not refrain from creating more vulnerabilities and security flaws in the system, then the race for enhancing national security will mean generating less cybersecurity, and hence less national security overall, taking into account the unpatched vulnerabilities left in critical infrastructures (Dunn Cavelty: 2014, pp. 710-711).

Even though some practices employed by the state constitute a major source of insecurity in cyberspace, a safe, secure and open cyberspace can only be created with the involvement of the state (Dunn Cavelty: 2014, p. 711). So, it is difficult to adopt a pure human-centred view regarding cyberspace. Nonetheless, this still means that a statist view can and sometimes should be avoided.

Practices that introduce vulnerabilities into the networks comprised in the cyberspace have a negative effect on the exercise of human rights of individuals everywhere and hence the usage of such practices should be heavily restricted and closely monitored. However, intelligence agencies may still retain the ability to request exceptions, as long as their actions and policies are as transparent as possible. For instance, the US government considers on a case-by-case basis whether it should disclose or keep secret the discovery of software vulnerabilities, both options aiming at increasing security. Nevertheless, from a human-centric standpoint, making cyberspace deliberately more insecure comes into opposition with the objective of securing cyberspace for all users. Consequently, these exceptions should be limited and publicly justified (Deibert: 2018, p. 415).

The main aspects of a human-centred cybersecurity approach

One significant reason for the disregard of human beings in cybersecurity research and/or policy making is the sole focus on digital equipment and technical systems as targets, also leading to responses taking into account only technology elements in cybersecurity. Computer systems, servers and other devices or equipment are non-human objects and they are indeed valuable for societies, but they cannot be considered entirely separated from human life. Cybersecurity is not only a technical concept in which networks or systems act as referents of security, and this can be seen even in states' cybersecurity strategies. Even though most of the threats included in this kind of strategies ultimately affect individuals, networks and computer systems are still perceived as the main object of security (Dunn Cavelty: 2014, pp. 706-707; Klein, Hossain: 2020, p. 6).

Cybersecurity should take into account the people's needs and not only those of the state. A human-centred cybersecurity approach focuses on digital privacy and the privacy of data, Internet freedom and the violations of digital human rights, aiming at employing policies and practices that empower individuals to freely exercise their rights. In addition to this, protecting critical infrastructures is crucial in this regard, as societies depend more and more on ICTs and individuals rely on their functioning in almost all aspects of life. Likewise, the same goes for providing a secure cyberspace for citizens (Liaropoulos: 2015, pp. 15-19; Klein, Hossain: 2020, p. 7).

Despite this, safeguarding and enhancing cybersecurity is an action that involves international organisations, private companies, individuals and non-governmental organisations across states, but also state actors. In the current environment, it can be argued that the state remains the main actor that can secure human needs. Moreover, the needs of humans are addressed in some ways by the state-centric or traditional view of security, since providing a safe and secure environment for a state's citizens is the main objective of the majority of national security policies. However, not all current policies regarding cybersecurity provide a secure cyberspace (Liaropoulos: 2015, pp. 18-19).

One of the milestones of developing a human-centred security approach, based on protecting the security and well-being of individuals and communities, was the 1994 Human Development Report of the UNDP (United Nations Development Program), which adopted the concept of human security. Furthermore, a human-centred cybersecurity approach is built upon the consideration that individuals and communities are both objects and subjects of cybersecurity, and it stands as a framework for developing and implementing policies placing human wellbeing and civil rights at the centre of cybersecurity policies (Zojer: 2020, pp. 358-360). Human security considers individuals and communities as the objects of security, and not the state, as opposed to traditional approaches to security. Thus, human security advances an approach based on linking well-being to a security centred on individuals (and communities) that safeguards the freedom from fear, want, vulnerability and indignity (Klein, Hossain: 2020, p. 6). More than this, human security issues, like the right to privacy or freedom of speech, should be seen as actually contributing to overall cybersecurity (in opposition with the current view), because increasing the proportion of encrypted data will help reduce both cybercrime and cyber espionage, which will benefit both state-centred and human-centred security (Dunn Cavelty: 2014, p. 711).

The human-centred approach to security positions human beings, no matter their citizenship, as the ultimate objects of security. Furthermore, a human-centric cybersecurity approach considers as primary objects of security the whole undifferentiated global network, and it aims to guarantee that the integrity of cyberspace is upheld worldwide. Yet, state actors are not ignored and they can still play a significant part as supporting

institutions which have the objective of safeguarding the wellbeing and rights of individuals (Deibert: 2018, pp. 412-415).

An unprecedented global ransomware campaign, a Windows exploit and NSA's role

A ransomware campaign is a type of malware threating to publish data. After the malware infection, the ransomware tries to contact a server for the information it needs to activate, and afterwards all of the data on the PC is encrypted and held for ransom. Ransomware, like most malware, spread from infected Microsoft Word documents, PDFs or other files sent in emails, but it can also spread through computers that are already infected by malware which provide backdoors for access. After the files are locked, the infected computer shows only a message asking for a payment to decrypt the data, threating to destroy all of it if the payment is not made. Most of the time, ransomware include a timer so that victims are constrained to make the payment (Hern, Gibbs: 2017).

WannaCry is a perfect example of state institutions and state actors producing insecurity with the aim of enhancing security. The malware was based on a software vulnerability which the U.S. National Security Agency (NSA) stockpiled for cyber espionage and potential offensive cyber operations. The WannaCry ransomware spread in over 150 countries and affected hundreds of thousands of computer systems, causing widespread anxiety and fear, especially for individual users. Overall, the damages caused by the ransomware are estimated to have gone over 4 billion dollars. The ransomware attack became known on 12 May 2017, affecting over 300.000 computers around the world since. By some estimations, the group that stole and leaked the ransomware earned little over 50.000 dollars, so it can be argued that creating chaos, and not raising money, was their objective. For instance, the group behind the Angler ransomware campaign managed to gain over 60 million dollars before 2015 (Burton, Lain: 2020, p. 12; House of Commons: 2018, p. 4; Greenberg: 2017; BBC News: 2017).

Vulnerabilities discovered in common software can trigger access to a significant number of targets, and it can become a major asset for intelligence services. But, at the same time,

the harm done by finding or creating a vulnerability in widely-used software can be greater than the advantage given by granting a backdoor. Stockpiling this kind of vulnerabilities and refusing to disclose them to the affected companies or to the public represents a risk for the citizens of which the security agency tries to protect, but also to citizens of other countries. Failing to disclose a zero-day software vulnerability can lead to its discovery by other governments or malicious cyber actors who can exploit the vulnerability against other states or even against the state which discovered it, causing potential widespread disruption, as in the case of WannaCry. Thus, governments attempt to balance between keeping the vulnerability secret for future usage and also safeguarding their own citizens, companies or institutions from the vulnerability (Christensen, Liebetrau: 2019, p. 402).

The vulnerability of the ransomware, the so-called kill switch, was actually discovered by a malware analysis expert. Thus, the cyberattack was stopped by an individual and not by national security agencies (Burton, Lain 2020, p. 13). The kill switch was actually built inside the malware's code, and the malware expert who stopped the attack just had to register the domain which the malware tried to contact for encrypting the files (Greenberg: 2017).

The group of hackers who launched the WannaCry global ransomware campaign acquired the EternalBlue exploit discovered by the NSA sometime before 2016. However, cybersecurity company Symantec discovered that the EternalBlue exploit was obtained by a Chinese hacking group back in 2016, and it was already used in an espionage campaign, but it ultimately was the Shadow Brokers group who made in public. In 2016, the Russian group Shadow Brokers posted five leaks of hacking tools which were stolen from the National Security Agency, most probably with the aim of discrediting the NSA and the US. The exploit was named EternalBlue by the NSA, and it was included in the hacking group's final leak. However, the NSA did in fact announce Microsoft about the vulnerability after it was stolen and before it was leaked online, and hence the security flaw was patched by the company in a software update one month before Shadow Brokers released the hacking tool (Hern: 2017; Greenberg: 2019).

The WannaCry ransomware campaign hit UK's National Health System (NHS), Spain's Telefonica company, it affected German railroads and over 200.000 organizations around

the world. The cyberattack infected a significant part of NHS's computers in just six hours, as the malware spread from computer to computer through networks (Hern, Gibbs: 2017; Perlroth, Shane: 2019). Because of the ransomware, NHS hospitals had to cancel around 20.000 appointments and operations, and some patients in the affected hospitals' emergency departments even had to be diverted or transferred to other hospitals (House of Commons: 2018, p. 4).

US and UK accused North Korea for the WannaCry ransomware attack and publicly declared Pyongyang was responsible (BBC News 2017). Nonetheless, the ransomware was based on a vulnerability extracted from publicly leaked NSA documents and tools which encrypts the content of Windows PCs, demanding an online payment for decrypting the data (Hern, Gibbs 2017). The White House and the NSA denied any responsibility for not disclosing the vulnerability (Christensen, Liebetrau: 2019, p. 401).

As stated by a 2018 UK House of Commons report on the cyberattack, hospitals could have prevented the spread and effect of the ransomware by updating the operating systems (OS) and installing Microsoft's patch for Windows 7. Moreover, hospitals were alerted by the NHS to install the security patch, but there was one significant issue – applying patches and updates to medical equipment's operating systems can disrupt its operation and can constitute a clinical risk to patients (House of Commons: 2018, p. 12).

Despite being the first ransomware campaign, WannaCry is not the only cyberattack based on the EternalBlue exploit stolen from the NSA. In June 2017, Russian military intelligence combined EternalBlue with another tool leaked from the NSA (EternalRomance) and targeted Ukraine. The NotPetya cyberattack, which was designed to look like a common ransomware, but aiming at destroying the data, wiped about 10% of Ukrainian computers. Moreover, the attack spilled over beyond Ukraine's borders, causing major disruptions in companies as Maersk, FedEx and Merck, the damage done being estimated at more than 10 billion dollars. Nevertheless, the use of the exploit made full circle around the globe and the US was also targeted by Russia, Russian hackers using EternalBlue to compromise hotel Wi-Fi networks (Greenberg: 2019; Perlroth, Shane: 2019).

In 2019, EternalBlue was allegedly used by hackers in a ransomware campaign against Baltimore local authorities in the US, freezing thousands of computer systems and disrupting digital services like platforms used for paying for utilities and taxes, but also for sending health alerts and so on. The cyberattack also disrupted other activities of the city authorities, as the staff was unable to use email services from their accounts. The authorities decided to not pay the ransom, which consisted in 13 Bitcoin (accounting then for over 100.000$), but the computers remained locked and the services frozen (Perlroth, Shane: 2019; BBC News: 2019).

The NSA did not accept its responsibility for choosing not to disclose the discovered vulnerability and for creating, failing to secure and losing control of the exploits. The US agency has never officially made a comment on the issue and it never disclosed exactly what led to losing control of the hacking tools (BBC News: 2019). However, since 2010 the US has implemented the Vulnerabilities Equities Process program, which requires the disclosure of zero-day vulnerabilities and exploits by intelligence agencies to other government agencies, in order to review them and decide if they can be kept secret or if they need to be disclosed to affected companies (Newman: 2017).

Towards a human-centred cybersecurity approach. Is it possible to overcome existing challenges?

The cyberspace, as well as cybersecurity ideas and policies have evolved considerably in the last 10-15 years. Nowadays, the majority of the world's states have adopted national cybersecurity strategies or they at least incorporated cybersecurity issues into their national security strategies. Moreover, even though the role of private companies increased over time, states still play a major role in cyberspace, both in practice and policy making, especially when it comes to intelligence services (Dunn Cavelty, Egloff: 2019; Balzacq, Dunn Cavelty: 2016; Dunn Cavelty: 2014). Private companies, besides owning large parts of the infrastructure, have become key cybersecurity providers, even for states.

Thus, the question remains: where do individual human beings fit into this whole development? It seems that individuals and communities were rather left behind all of this

progress, even though they are the main beneficiaries of the progress in technology and the Internet of Things, and, more importantly, among the main targets of malicious cyber activity, both in form of cyberattacks and cybercrime. In matters of individuals' and communities' role in cyberspace and cybersecurity, it can be argued that they are still considered to be only weak links in ensuring a sound national cybersecurity, and also that their digital freedoms are obstacles for enhancing national cybersecurity. In these matters, progress is yet to be made. For example, the 2020 European Union Cybersecurity Strategy highlights the need to protect human rights and freedoms in the cyberspace, aiming to ensure that digital technologies are human-centric and that the Internet remains open, free and global (European Commission: 2020, pp. 19-20).

Taking into account the main considerations and proposals of Critical Security Studies, such as the broadening, deepening and extending of security, avoiding state-centric approaches, identifying human beings as the ultimate referents of security and considering emancipation as an objective, developing a human-centred cybersecurity is a rather difficult endeavour. In the particular case of the WannaCry ransomware attack, the argument for the need of a human-centred cybersecurity can be made more easily. Hospitals and medical equipment were affected, computer systems and networks were disrupted, but human beings, individuals, were ultimately the most impacted, since critical health services were disrupted (Hern: 2017; House of Commons: 2018). While there were no reports of patients severely affected by the disruption, and thankfully no direct or indirect fatalities, few efforts have been made to mitigate the direct impact it had on the people (House of Commons: 2018; Christensen, Liebetrau: 2019). Thinking exclusively in military terms, or from a state-centric perspective, leaves out a multiplicity of issues, actors, developments and potential actions to improve cybersecurity. Issues regarding cyberspace go beyond the state, both inwards and outwards, from state institutions to private companies, NGOs, communities, individuals, as well as outside state borders, to other states and international or transnational organisations and networks.

Nevertheless, is a human-centred approach possible in cybersecurity? We argue that an approach focusing on individuals and communities is possible, but the state cannot be completely left out of the problem. While the state can be a creator of insecurity, it can still

contribute to increasing cybersecurity and there are few ways of going around it to majorly improve cybersecurity overall. This may not be the case with authoritarian regimes, but in the case of liberal democracies, even if some security agencies actively decrease security directly or indirectly, there can be some workarounds.

Since the state is both security guarantor and insecurity creator, can it refrain from using vulnerabilities if other states act in the same matter? The answer may very well be yes. Less vulnerabilities in software also means less potential security breaches inside the state, and less opportunities for malicious cyber campaigns (Dunn Cavelty: 2014). In addition to this, even if other state or non-state actors are discovering exploitable vulnerabilities, if one state's intelligence agency would work on identifying security flaws and rapidly alert software vendors, the vulnerabilities would get patched faster resulting in less damage overall (Christensen, Liebetrau: 2019; Dunn Cavelty: 2014). Of course, this leaves out the strategic opportunity of exploiting the vulnerability in favour of said intelligence agency, which would contribute to enhancing cybersecurity overall. Even so, intelligence agencies can make the argument that some security flaws need to be stockpiled and exploited as they are essential for cyber defence activities, gaining the ability to know beforehand of an adversary actor's plans or actions. That would also mean that the security agencies must be held responsible if they lose control of hacking tools and exploits, and if they indirectly or directly cause disruption or put at risk their citizens.

As smart technologies are becoming more widespread, one should ask which argument would be used in the future for hiding a security flaw in the software or hardware of a smart electric vehicle, even a self-driving bus. By exploiting the vulnerability, the state would be able to use it for surveillance, disruption, or for other purposes, but failing to inform the software vendor would also mean that other malicious actors, state or non-state, have the possibility of exploiting the vulnerability for more disruptive purposes (Newman: 2017; Dunn Cavelty: 2014; Christensen, Liebetrau: 2019). Likewise, preinstalling backdoors on digital devices would make intelligence agencies' work easier, but that would also mean that individuals become more vulnerable to hackers, too. This is also why having the ability to use encrypted messaging services matters in cyberspace, from a human-centred point of

view. If the services already have a flaw in its design, it can be exploited by cyber criminals too.

Therefore, a human-centred approach cybersecurity approach is to a certain degree possible. In other words, there is a great need to pay more attention to individuals and communities regarding cybersecurity, but it is rather difficult in the current context to place them in a central point regarding all issues, or in the focus of the whole cybersecurity endeavour. What needs to be done is granting individuals a greater role in cybersecurity policymaking and practices, and taking them into account when those policies are being developed and implemented. Cybersecurity policies and practices should also consider the online experience of minority or marginalised groups, based on gender or gender identity, romantic orientation and on ethnic or religious background, as these groups are more vulnerable to malicious cyber activities than the average population (Burton, Lain: 2020, p. 16). Moreover, attention should also be focused on civil society groups and activists, political groups, journalists and so on, as these groups are also more likely to become targets of various cyber operations.

In addition to this, actors in cyberspace should rely more on resilience-based policies and practices, such as promoting a culture of cybersecurity and implementing activities to ensure networks' security, internal security and device security, computer hygiene habits, which can be done by both designated cybersecurity experts and individual users alike (Valeriano, Maness: 2015, p. 207). These activities should not be limited to governments, since civil society groups and other organisations should play a greater role in promoting a culture of cybersecurity among the general population, institutions, academia and journalists alike. Furthermore, when it comes to scientific endeavours, cyberspace and cybersecurity can and should be studied from a Critical Security Studies perspective and from a human-centred point of view, as this perspective can fill many gaps in the efforts of finding ways of safeguarding cyberspace. The most important proposal brought forward by CSS is that security in cyberspace cannot be increased at the expense of the rights and freedoms of individuals. Doing so would only mean decreasing security for individuals, which ultimately means decreasing national security overall. Cybersecurity should be ensured as a collective effort of all actors involved in the process, and also of all actors,

individuals, groups or organisations affected by malicious cyber operations and by cybersecurity policies that can restrict digital rights or those that can contribute to a more vulnerable cyberspace.

Conclusion

Linking Critical Security Studies and cyberspace is not a straight-forward endeavour, but it is an attempt that must be worked upon. Critical Security Studies are not problem-solving theories, so research does not necessarily produce proposals or suggestions for state institutions or other types of government. Nonetheless, CSS can be used for analysing and problematizing cybersecurity and issues regarding cyberspace, which is a complementary perspective, since most research is focused on specific problems, issues, developments or incidents, and there must be times when a researcher must question if problems arise because of how the whole environment is constructed. This may not always be the case, but for cyberspace, avoiding a statist view in research may be helpful in order to produce more knowledge and gain a further understanding of the whole context. In addition to this, using a human-centred cybersecurity approach is helpful considering that, in many cases, the state decreases the level of security in cyberspace in the effort of protecting its own security.

Both progress and issues in cyberspace develop rapidly, and so cybersecurity is a very dynamic issue to study and more research is needed. Latest cyberattacks against the US, the surge of cybercrime and state-sponsored cyber operations during the COVID-19 pandemic are only a part of the type of developments and problems that can arise from vulnerabilities in cyberspace, and so they need to be properly addressed and studied to prevent future serious damage across societies.

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Book review

The Narrow Corridor: States, Societies, and the Fate of Liberty. By Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson. London: Penguin Press, 2019. 576p. $13.55 cloth.

Vlad SURDEA-HERNEA

e-mail: Surdea-Hernea_Vlad@phd.ceu.edu

Since the dawn of their prolific collaboration in 1998, Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson have confronted a plethora of cardinal questions in social sciences: Which institutions support long-term growth (Acemoglu et al., 2005)? What economic conditions facilitate the consolidation of democracy (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2006)? Does modernization induce democracy? (Acemoglu et al., 2008)?

Drawing on this accumulated knowledge, *The Narrow Corridor: States, Societies, and the Fate of Liberty*, evaluates "how and why societies have achieved or failed to achieve liberty" (p. xiii). This recent book serves as a spiritual successor to Acemoglu and Robinson previous volume, *Why Nations Fail* (2012), recognizing the limitation of solely using economics to explain political development. Accordingly, *The Narrow Corridor* is a cogent, trans-disciplinary project combining historical, political and economic theory to unearth the roots of human liberty.

The first two chapters contain a diligent attempt at apprehending the elusive notion of liberty. Acemoglu and Robinson wander through historical snippets illustrating liberty as the absence of "dominance, fear, and extreme insecurity" (p. 26). However, the authors shift from a negative definition of liberty, as *freedom from*, towards a positive interpretation of liberty, as *freedom to*, since "liberty requires not just the abstract notion that you are free to choose your actions, but also the ability to exercise that freedom" (p. 31).

In this respect, throughout Chapters 3-14, the concept of liberty is used lithely, with its ontological status contingent on the socio-political conditions embedded in different environments. This definitional variation is deliberately pursued by Acemoglu and

Robinson to facilitate the comparison of markedly dissimilar cases: Classical Greece, Merovingian kingdoms or Saudi Arabia. Following this eclectic comparative cases, the authors reach a daring conclusion: liberty flourishes in a *narrow corridor* (p. 17*)*, where a "state with the capacity to enforce laws, control violence, resolve conflicts and provide public services" meets a well-organized society (p. 24).

Borrowing Thomas Hobbes' terminology, the authors label the state residing in the narrow corridor of the *Shackled Leviathan.* By contrast with this model, Acemoglu and Robinson define two other archetypes: the *Despotic Leviathan*, and the *Absent Leviathan*. The *Absent Leviathan* represents the natural state of human societies. To manage anarchy, these societies develop a rigid *cage of norms*, stipulating "what is right and wrong in the eyes of others […]" (p.53). On the other side of the corridor lies the *Despotic Leviathan*, where a powerful and unaccountable state "provides no means for society and the regular people to have a say in how its power and capacity are used" (p. 52). Constant threat of repression, either driven by the *cage of norms* or by the repressive state apparatus, inhibits the sustenance of liberty. However, poignant issues of variable measurement (e.g., the relative power of state or society) are mostly ignored. While Acemoglu and Robinson make sparse references to existing literature, such as to Tilly's *Popular Contention in Great Britain,* they fail to provide a coherent account of how the strength of the society or of the state should be measured, especially in non-European contexts.

Having established this tripartite classification, Acemoglu and Robinson argue that political development is a messy tussle between state and society (p. 136), where liberty is rarely the outcome. In an original turn, the authors argue that this struggle is path-dependent (p. 137). The two are nevertheless careful to avoid establishing a teleological theory, which they believe is a problem with theories of scholars like Francis Fukuyama or Yuval Noah Harari.

Without specifying an explicit causal relationship, the struggle of state-society relations is treated as the explanatory variable determining the type of Leviathan present at any given moment. The authors argue that staying in the *narrow corridor* is possible only when "the state's role and capacity is advancing to meet new challenges while society also becomes more powerful and vigilant" (p. 466). Drawing from Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland,*

the authors label this phenomenon as the *Red Queen Effect*. While this term is bound to stick in the reader's mind, it is likely to also be the subject of criticism for minimizing the impact of international relations on regime transition, consolidation and diffusion.

The Narrow Corridor presents an argument that has been previously put forward researchers such as Ragurham Rajan, Andreas Wimmer, or Peter B. Evans, about the need to simultaneously develop the state apparatus and civil society. When looking for the novelties within this book, we should bear in mind that the theoretical framework employed in *The Narrow Corridor* was already being used by Acemoglu from 2017 for his lectures on the *Political Economy of Institutions and Developmen*t (Acemoglu, 2017). Therefore, the origins of the theory reflect its innovative scope of application: as a tool for understanding why similar institutional circumstances and contexts lead to vastly different development trajectories (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2020).

Acknowledging this scope of utilization, some chapters are stronger than others in explaining this divergence. For example, when describing the *Red Queen Effect* in the USA (Chapter 10), Acemoglu and Robinson manage to be precise and scrupulous with their evidence. This contrasts with the less meticulous application of the framework in Yemen (Chapter 11), where a new category, the *Paper Leviathan,* had to be introduced to patch their theory. While patching, as an expression of improvement, is quintessential for modern research, a book whose theoretical framework is inherently fragmentary might impede academia from fully engaging with the innovative framework designed by Acemoglu and Robinson. In their defense, many points raised in the book can be strengthened when complemented by previous papers that paved the way for *The Narrow Corridor*, which have presented more rigorous mathematical models that could serve as appendices to this volume (Acemoglu et al., 2012).

Overall, Acemoglu and Robinson deliver a timely book that serves as a reminder of how fragile liberty is. Despite lacking the traditional structure that a book of this breadth would ideally embrace, *The Narrow Corridor* has already permeated into mainstream. While this book is likely to become a must-read for political scientists, the main contribution is making debates surrounding liberty accessible to the larger audience – not different from the impact of *Why Nations Fail.*

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