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The impact of the quality of transport networks on economic competitiveness in the European Union*

Cezar TECLEAN**

Abstract

This paper assesses the impact of transport infrastructure quality on economic competitiveness in the European Union (EU), context in which we argue that the quality of the different modal transport networks has a differentiated contribution on competitiveness. The purpose of our analysis aims to quantify the qualitative contribution of each modal transport network to economic competitiveness in the EU. The econometric quantification of the mentioned impact emphasizes a contributory hierarchy as follows: the quality of port and railroad infrastructure contributes most substantially to economic competitiveness, followed by the quality of the air transport infrastructure, the inland waterways and the road network. Based on the iterated results, we sequenced the EU member states with the lowest quality of networks with the highest impact on competitiveness. Thus, we identified the states for which the priority improvement of the quality of the port and railway infrastructures would significantly improve their economic competitiveness.

Keywords: transport infrastructure, sustainable quality, economic competitiveness, spatial competitiveness, European Union

Introduction

The concern of European governments and institutions to ensure sustainable growth in the European Union (EU) has led to the permanent focus of Union forums on improving economic competitiveness and its determinants. One of the catalytic premises of competitiveness is the quality of transport infrastructures from its position of simultaneous adjuvant factor of several dimensions of development, complementary to competitiveness: spatial accessibility, interregional connection, development of endogenous territorial potential, increase of territorial cohesion. This plurivalence of the quality of transport networks in relation to development and competitiveness, has made European decision-makers in recent years focus not only on the territorial expansion of transport infrastructures,

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but also on their quality (Mullen and Marsden, 2015, p. 2). According to the European Commission's Transport White Paper 2011, the European transport strategy aims to increase economic performance and improve competitiveness (Purwanto *et al.*, 2017, p. 2882) based on increasing the quality and capacity of transport networks by 2050 under efficient use of available resources (European Commission, 2011, p. 9).

Given the above imperatives, the contribution of transport infrastructure to increasing competitiveness is a very high stake in the EU (Annoni and Dijkstra, 2019, p. 20), which makes it essential to know to what extent the Union's competitiveness is sustainable based on the quality of transport networks. On the background of the quality gaps of the transport infrastructures within the EU, we support the hypothesis according to which the quality of the transport networks has a differentiated contribution by modes of transport on the economic competitiveness. Moreover, we show that the recent Brexit has also changed the contribution of different modes of transport to the competitiveness in the EU.

The overall purpose of our research aims to quantify the contribution of the quality of each modal transport network on the economic competitiveness in the Union space. For the quantitative assessment we use a gravitational econometric model consisting of a set of multiple regression equations that successively quantify the impact of the quality of each modal transport network on economic competitiveness in the EU. Quantitative knowledge of the relationship between the quality of the various modal transport components and economic competitiveness is relevant for prioritizing decisions to improve modal networks with the most significant impact on economic competitiveness.

Our study covers an unprocessed area in the literature, namely the comparative investigation of the behaviour of different modal transport networks in relation to economic competitiveness in the EU with and without Great Britain. On these coordinates, we design the concept of sustainable quality of transport networks to define the quality levels of these infrastructures from the perspective of their ability to sustainably sustain a certain level of economic competitiveness in the spaces they equip. Against this background, the original contribution and practical implications of our research are given by the identification of spaces equipped with insufficiently sustainable transport infrastructures in terms of quality in order to formulate intervention priorities to improve the quality of infrastructure components with maximum potential to improve economic competitiveness.

Our paper is structured modularly, starting with an introductory section followed by a review of the essential elements of the literature. The next section contains the methodology of the empirical research, continued with the presentation and discussion of the results obtained and finally the presentation of the concluding remarks.

1. The quality of transport networks as a premise of economic competitiveness

The implications of the quality of transport infrastructure in terms of economic competitiveness and further on the evolution of the entire European economy have led to an increase in scientific analysis of the relationship between the quantitative and qualitative development of transport networks and the dynamics of EU economic competitiveness. The different perspectives of the approach considerably extended the epistemological and conceptual area of the analysed field. Competitiveness is a concept specific to the integrated and globalized world influenced mainly by the four determinants of the Porter model ("Porter's Diamond": resource fund, business environment, related industries and domestic market demand) as the main factors (Porter, 1990), to which are added a number of other complementary factors, among which the quality of the transport networks remains the essential factor for generating accessibility and capitalizing on the regional potential (Chacon-Hurtado *et al.*, 2020), making good cross-border connections, reducing trade costs (Kurmanalieva, 2020, pp. 5, 10) and attracting capital investment (Cervero, 2009, p. 212). On this background, Feldman *et al.* (2008) explain that economic benefits come at the end of a value chain on the basis of which the parameters generating competitiveness (including transport networks) encourage competition which in turn delivers economic results. In this regard, Button (2003) shows that the link between the availability of transport infrastructure across the EU and economic development is a positive correlation which, according to Stough *et al.* (2002) and von Hirschhausen (2002) are the engine of competitive development, including for the less developed areas of the EU.

The idea of EU-wide competitiveness and the contribution of transport infrastructure quality to its realization is gaining a growing niche on the academic discourse agenda, given that the notion of competitiveness at national level still provokes heated debates from a conceptual and methodological point of view. Thus, Krugman (1994, pp. 28, 41; 1996, p. 17) disputes the thesis that a country's well-being depends on its competitiveness in international markets, but rather on the domestic productivity of labor and capital, which makes it more feasible to address the impact of the quality of transport networks on competitiveness rather at EU level as a whole. In this context, Greaves (2019, p. 35) and Mačiulis *et al.* (2009, p. 97) show that the quality of modal networks comes with the efficiency of green transport as a prerequisite for the sustainability of Community transport systems within the single European transport area. But the gradual fulfillment of these planned steps in stages by 2030 and 2050, respectively (European Commission, 2011, pp. 9, 17, 27), involves the allocation of significant financial resources to improve transportation systems (Laird and Venables, 2017, p. 2) as a condition for improving spatial competitiveness (Kiel *et al.*, 2014, p. 78). In an analysis of the return

on capital invested in transport infrastructure, Aschauer (1989, p. 197) argues that the most relevant infrastructure elements to sustain competitiveness are roads, ports and railways, a conclusion resulting from the application of the public capital analysis method of social rates of return and not the classic cost-benefit analysis. Without challenging the "core infrastructure" status that Aschauer assigns to the three modal infrastructures mentioned, we consider that by circumventing the cost-benefit analysis method, the possibility of economic-spatial evaluations through the parameter of transport costs is emaciated, an indicator to which Krugman (1991) assigns a key role in determining the configuration of space economies through the epistemic lens of the new economic geography.

The relationship between the quality of transport networks and competitiveness is one of the themes subsumed by the concept of sustainable development and from the perspective of the regional and local levels. Based on the cost-duration-quality analysis model, Wang *et al.* (2018, pp. 3, 18) show that the sustainability of transport is a key element of sustainable regional development through the multiple spillover effects in terms of space, economy and environment that transport networks induce at the regional level. However, Polyzos and Tsiotas (2020, p. 21) found that the major beneficial impact of transport infrastructure development at all levels (European, national, regional) can only be achieved through the simultaneous application of appropriate transport infrastructure policies. At the same time, the Cambridge Econometrics / Ecorys-NEI report (2005) for the European Commission highlights a number of issues that depend on the level of analysis and the mode of transport, showing that:

Every region has its own specific needs in terms of both overall scale of transport networks and particular modes of transport. A minimum level of transport infrastructure is necessary for regional competitiveness, but this is not necessarily the same level in all regions (Cambridge Econometrics / Ecorys-NEI report, 2005, p. 24).

On the other hand, Boschma (2004, p. 1001) compares the competitiveness of regions with that of firms, but states that "there are serious limits in enhancing the competitiveness of regions" compared to firms, because "it is difficult to copy or imitate a successful model from elsewhere, and new trajectories often emerge spontaneously and unexpectedly in space" (Boschma, 2004, p. 1002). Also, the airport infrastructures exert a specific influence on their regions, but within the limits given by the evolutions and morphologies of the metropolitan areas (Cidell, 2015, p. 1125).

Local research in recent years has developed the concept of sustainable mobility which emphasizes the role of the link between spatial planning and transport quality to minimize urban

transport costs as a precondition for sustainable urban development (Banister, 2008, p. 73). However, depending on the regional level of development and local specificities, there are different situations within the EU (Nowak, 2022, p. 46). Thus, Dyr and Ziółkowska (2014, p. 18) show that in Poland there is a weaker link between transport infrastructure and regional competitiveness compared to the impact of energy and water supply infrastructure on regional competitiveness. In the United Kingdom (UK), on the other hand, the good development of transport networks has been manifested in terms of competitiveness through an increase in foreign trade and wages, but at the same time has led to an increase in land prices. (Eddington, 2006, p. 19). In terms of local transport, however, in the UK there has been a lag behind the quality of urban transport networks compared to the situation in European and North American cities, which generates negative effects on regional competitiveness (Docherty *et al.*, 2009, p. 321).

Against the background of interregional changes in competitiveness, Camagni (2002, p. 2395) defines the concept of territorial competitiveness as a phenomenon by which regions, unlike states, are in a single monetary area which makes them compete with each other based on the principle of absolute advantage and not on the principle of comparative advantage. Therefore, the author argues that on a regional scale the success of territorial competitiveness depends to a decisive extent on the quality of each modal transport infrastructure, which clearly surpasses the quality indices of governance (Shala and Qehaja, 2021) and legislative regulations (Rodrigue and Notteboom, 2020, p. 102).

2. Research methodology and data

To investigate the relationship between economic competitiveness and its determinants, we use an econometric model that quantifies the impact of the five quality indicators of the modal transport infrastructures that are successively added to the set of five relevant factors for supporting competitiveness. Basically, we use a transversal gravitational model (by state, at the level of 2019) consisting of a set of multiple regressions that explain the economic competitiveness in the EU (as dependent variable) depending on the basic factors of competitiveness and quality indices of the five modal transport networks (as independent variables) (Table 1, Table 2 and Table 3).

Table 1. The determining parameters of economic competitiveness

DEPENDENT VARIABLE
Economic Competitiveness: Competitiveness Index (World Economic Forum)
INDEPENDENT VARIABLES
BASIC DETERMINING FACTORS:
Labour productivity (The World Bank)

Total investments – Gross fixed capital formation (The World Bank)

Research & Development expenditures (Eurostat)

The act of governance quality: Government Effectiveness Index (The World Bank)

The business environment quality: Economic Freedom Index (The Heritage Foundation)

QUALITY INDICES OF TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURES:

Road infrastructure quality index (The World Bank)

Railroad infrastructure quality index (The World Bank)

Port infrastructure quality index (The World Bank)

Air transport infrastructure quality index (The World Bank)

Inland waterways quality index (Author's computations)

Source: Author's representation

Table 2. Basic determining factors of economic competitiveness in the EU

Countries	Labour productivity (GDP/ Person employed/ Year)	Investment – Gross fixed (billion \$)	R&D expenditures (% of GDP)	Government Effectiveness Index (points)	Economic Freedom Index (points)
Belgium	127,390	129.33	3.16	1.14	67
Bulgaria	50,327	12.82	0.83	0.20	69
Czechia	84,220	68.36	1.93	0.95	74
Denmark	113,216	74.04	2.89	1.90	77
Germany	102,132	830.89	3.17	1.52	74
Estonia	76,696	7.90	1.63	1.17	77
Ireland	186,080	213.90	1.23	1.29	81
Greece	69,379	21.70	1.28	0.34	58
Spain	96,505	279.74	1.25	1.00	66
France	115,812	640.67	2.19	1.37	64
Croatia	71,958	13.39	1.08	0.49	61
Italy	103,928	361.82	1.46	0.48	62
Cyprus	62,694	4.85	0.71	0.99	68
Latvia	67,945	7.95	0.64	1.10	70
Lithuania	77,631	11.73	0.99	1.04	74
Luxembourg	156,142	12.33	1.18	1.73	76
Hungary	69,650	44.29	1.48	0.49	65
Malta	86,550	3.22	0.59	0.85	69
Netherlands	106,351	193.45	2.18	1.80	77
Austria	113,616	111.07	3.13	1.52	72
Poland	78,090	109.27	1.32	0.54	68
Portugal	75,124	43.45	1.40	1.16	65
Romania	66,786	56.49	0.48	-0.19	69
Slovenia	81,434	10.63	2.05	1.08	66

Countries	Labour productivity (GDP/ Person employed/ Year)	Investment – Gross fixed (billion \$)	R&D expenditures (% of GDP)	Government Effectiveness Index (points)	Economic Freedom Index (points)
Slovakia	71,598	22.72	0.83	0.58	65
Finland	103,901	63.95	2.80	2.00	75
Sweden	110,728	130.32	3.39	1.70	75
UK	99,947	510.07	1.71	1.48	79
EU-28	97,693	3,480.05	1.67	1.06	47.14
EU-27	94,926	2,969.98	1.67	1.04	45.96

Sources: The World Bank, Eurostat, The Heritage Foundation, 2019

Table 3. Economic competitiveness and quality indices of transport infrastructure in the EU

Countries	Competitive ness Index (points)	Quality of Roads (points)	Quality of Railroad (points)	Quality of Port Infrastructure (points)	Quality of Air Transport (points)	Quality of Inland Waterways (points)
Belgium	76.4	4.4	4.1	5.6	5.6	6.1
Bulgaria	64.9	3.4	3.1	4.3	4.5	3.4
Czechia	70.9	3.9	4.5	3.2	5.0	3.8
Denmark	81.2	5.6	4.5	5.8	5.8	3.5
Germany	81.8	5.3	4.9	5.2	5.5	6.3
Estonia	70.9	4.7	3.1	5.6	4.6	3.0
Ireland	75.1	4.4	4.0	5.0	5.5	3.9
Greece	62.6	4.6	3.0	4.8	5.4	2.1
Spain	75.3	5.7	5.4	5.4	5.6	4.7
France	78.8	5.4	5.0	5.2	5.5	5.8
Croatia	61.9	5.6	2.4	4.7	4.8	3.2
Italy	71.5	4.4	4.1	4.7	4.9	4.1
Cyprus	66.4	5.1	-	4.3	5.1	-
Latvia	67.0	3.6	4.6	4.9	5.7	2.7
Lithuania	68.4	4.8	4.6	4.8	4.9	3.1
Luxembourg	77.0	5.5	5.0	4.4	5.6	3.9
Hungary	65.1	4.0	3.8	3.2	4.6	4.1
Malta	68.5	3.3	-	5.1	5.5	-
Netherlands	82.4	6.4	5.7	6.4	6.4	6.3
Austria	76.6	6.0	5.3	3.7	5.2	4.2
Poland	68.9	4.3	3.9	4.5	4.8	4.9
Portugal	70.4	6.0	4.2	4.9	5.0	3.2

Countries	Competitiveness Index (points)	Quality of Roads (points)	Quality of Railroad (points)	Quality of Port Infrastructure (points)	Quality of Air Transport (points)	Quality of Inland Waterways (points)
Romania	64.4	3.0	2.8	3.9	4.6	4.6
Slovenia	70.2	4.9	3.1	4.7	4.6	2.9
Slovakia	66.8	4.0	4.0	3.1	3.8	4.3
Finland	80.2	5.3	5.5	6.4	6.3	4.3
Sweden	81.2	5.3	4.0	5.3	5.7	4.5
UK	81.2	4.9	4.3	5.2	5.3	5.2
EU-28	72.4	4.8	4.2	4.8	5.2	4.15
EU-27	72.0	4.8	4.2	4.8	5.2	4.11

Sources: World Economic Forum, The World Bank, Author's computations, 2019

In the absence of a quality indicator for inland waterways in the established databases, we have built a quality index of this infrastructure based on the value scale compatibility of the quality indices used for the other modes of transport (with values from 1 to 7), according to the following algorithm:

- we started from the eight size classes of the inland waterways (according to ECMT / UNECE Classification, 1992) and for each class we considered the maximum possible value of 100% correlated with the maximum possible value of the quality index of 7. We divided the scale 0-100% by 7, resulting in value ranges (rounded for practical reasons) of 0-15%, 15.1-30%, 30.1-45%, 45.1-60%, 60.1-75%, 75.1-90% and 90.1-100%; for each range of values we have given in ascending order a benchmark value from 1 to 7: 1 for the range 0-15%, 2 for 15.1-30%, ... , 7 for 90.1-100%;
- for each state we observed the share held by each navigable category and gave it the value 1, 2, ... , 7 corresponding to the range of values in which it falls; if a state does not have navigable sections falling into one of the eight categories we have assigned the value 0 for that category;
- the arithmetic mean of the string of the 7 values thus determined represents the value of the quality index of the inland waterway network of the State concerned.

The choice of the categories of indicators and statistical data mentioned took into account the following selection criteria: the criterion of necessity and opportunity, the criterion of representativeness, the criterion of compatibility of data series and the criterion of data availability. The proposed research is feasible as it is based on a consistent background of data available in the official statistics mentioned.

At the same time, we use as analysis tools reports from European bodies (European Commission, 2011; Annoni and Dijkstra, 2019) and other institutions with reference to economic competitiveness and the development of transport networks in the EU (Cambridge Econometrics /Ecorys-NEI, 2005; World Economic Forum, 2019; The Heritage Foundation, 2019). The reference administrative-territorial units are the EU Member States, for which we use the data of the indicators from the last year (2019) of the UK's presence in the EU.

The variables used meet the conditions of validity with econometric relevance: the classical indicators used as factors of competitiveness are representative (labor productivity, investment, research & development expenditure, quality of public management and quality of business environment) and economically feasible, i.e. are able to avoid the generation of multicollinearity effects that would affect the solidity of the delivered results.

The standard formula of the regression equation will be a logarithmic equation of the type:

$$\ln C_i = a_0 + a_1 \ln P_i + a_2 \ln I_i + a_3 \ln R\&D_i + a_4 \ln G_i + a_5 \ln E_i + a_6 \ln IQ_i + \varepsilon \quad (1)$$

where: C_i – economic competitiveness in each country i ;

P_i – labour productivity (GDP/ Person employed/ Year);

I_i – total volume of investments (Gross fixed - % of GDP);

$R\&D_i$ – research and development expenses (% of GDP);

G_i – Government Effectiveness Index of each EU Member State;

IQ_i – Infrastructure Quality Index of each EU Member State;

$a_0, a_1, a_2, \dots, a_6$ – multiple regression coefficients;

ε – regression residual.

The proposed econometric model includes the following regression equations: an initial equation in which independent quantities are only the basic factors of economic competitiveness to which are added, in turn, one additional independent variable representing the quality of one of the five modal transport systems. Basically, in addition to the initial equation, we construct five more successive regression equations according to the pattern of the standard equation (1), respectively one for each iterative transport network iterated in the gravitational model. Adjusted coefficients of determination (adjusted R^2) and the coefficients of the terms of the equations explain the contribution of the quality of each modal network to the improvement of economic competitiveness in the EU and

render the hierarchy of the qualitative impacts of modal transport infrastructures on competitiveness. By consecutively adding a modal transport network to the initial regression, we obtain the cumulative explanatory proportion that the basic factors of competitiveness have plus the added transport infrastructure; the difference between the adjusted R^2 coefficients of the two successive regressions represents the explanatory contribution of the respective network to the configuration of the economic competitiveness. The evaluation scheme is running for both the EU-28 (with the UK) and the EU-27 (without the UK), in order to determine the extent to which the UK's departure from the Union has changed the weight of the contributions of different modes of transport to EU competitiveness.

By running this evaluation model, we expect the contribution of the package of basic factors to be an overwhelming one in the configuration of competitiveness given their character as components of the competitiveness index, but we want to find out the concrete additional contribution of each modal transport infrastructure to improving competitiveness; at the same time, we want to identify (through the regression terms coefficients) the change in behaviour of each factor in the core package depending on the association with the different transport networks taken into account.

The estimation of the contribution of the transport networks in explaining the economic competitiveness with the help of the econometric model used is valid because it is based on data regarding the whole community space, and testing the veracity of the results obtained is ensured by values below 0.05 of the significance factor (F-significance) for each of the operated regression equations.

In the next stage, we selected the states with the lowest quality values (below the first value quartile) of the transport networks with the highest impact on competitiveness in order to identify priority areas for intervention to rehabilitate the quality of infrastructure with maximum potential for improving the competitive potential. In this context, we will call infrastructures with sustainable quality those transport networks whose quality indices have values located above the limit of the first value quartile, respectively with unsustainable quality the networks with values of quality indexes below the first quartile.

3. Findings and discussions

The results obtained by using the econometric model above confirm the hypothesis that the quality of transport networks has a clearly differentiated contribution of modes of transport on economic competitiveness, and Brexit has moderately changed the share of the contribution of different modes of transport to competitiveness in the EU-27. The adjusted coefficients of determination (R^2 adjusted) and the coefficients of the terms of the equations (Table 4) prove the

iterated assumption and quantify the contribution of each modal transport network to the configuration of economic competitiveness, according to the targeted objective of our research.

Also, the testing of the contribution of the analysed indicators confirms the theoretical assumptions initially assumed. Indeed, the variation in EU-wide economic competitiveness is explained by 88% (in the case of the EU-28) and 87.4% (in the case of the EU-27) by the variation of the basic determinants (labour productivity, investment, research & development expenditures, quality of public management and quality of business environment). This evolutionary model is in fact in line with the dynamics of the average value of economic competitiveness in the EU: for the EU-28 we have the average value of competitiveness of 72.4 points, and for the EU-27 it is 72.0.

Table 4. The relevance of transport infrastructure for economic competitiveness in the European Union

Independent Variables	Multiple Regression Coefficients (<i>Ordinary Least Squares Method</i>)											
	(Initial)		(1)		(2)		(3)		(4)		(5)	
	EU-28	EU-27	EU-28	EU-27	EU-28	EU-27	EU-28	EU-27	EU-28	EU-27	EU-28	EU-27
GDP/ Person employed/ Year	0.05**	0.05**	0.04**	0.14**	0.04**	0.05**	0.04**	0.04**	0.03**	0.03**	0.05**	0.05***
Investment	0.01***	0.01***	0.01***	0.28***	0.02***	0.02***	0.01***	0.01***	0.01***	0.01***	0.02***	0.02***
R&D Expenditures	0.05***	0.06***	0.05***	1.95***	0.06***	0.06***	0.05***	0.05***	0.05***	0.05***	0.06***	0.06***
Government Effectiveness Index	0.04***	0.04***	0.03**	4.98***	0.02**	0.04***	0.04***	0.04***	0.04***	0.04***	0.04***	0.04***
Economic Freedom Index	0.30***	0.27***	0.32***	0.18**	0.30***	0.28***	0.26***	0.23***	0.27***	0.23**	0.31***	0.29***
Quality of Road Infrastructure			0.04**	0.06**								
Quality of Railroad Infrastructure					0.06**	-0.01**						
Quality of Port Infrastructure							0.10***	0.10***				
Quality of Air Infrastructure									0.10**	0.16**		
Quality of Inland Waterways											-0.01**	-0.01**
Obs.	28	27	28	27	28	27	28	27	28	27	28	27
Adjusted R ²	0.880	0.874	0.881	0.901	0.913	0.888	0.922	0.918	0.905	0.904	0.899	0.893

Note: ***, **, * represent the level of significance / relevance of 1%, 5%, and 10%, respectively.

Source: Author's proceedings based on World Economic Forum, The World Bank, Eurostat, The Heritage Foundation (2019)

In the EU-28, the hierarchy of modal transport networks in terms of contributing to improving economic competitiveness had the following configuration (Table 5): the quality of port and rail infrastructure had the most significant contribution to improving competitiveness (4.2% and 3.3%, respectively), followed by air infrastructure (2.5%), the network of inland waterways (rivers, lakes and waterways) contributing 1.9%, while road infrastructure had the most modest impact of only 0.1% on the configuration of competitiveness. For the EU-27, the grid of the impact hierarchy keeps on the first position the port infrastructures with a weight of 4.4%, followed on the second position by the air infrastructures with 3%, then by the road infrastructure with 2.7%, the inland waterway

network with 1.9% and railway networks with only 1.4%. The predominance of port infrastructures in explaining the economic competitiveness corroborated with the beneficial effects of the agglomeration savings generated by the ports in the adjacent areas (van Klink and van den Berg, 1998; Sanchez *et al.*, 2003, p. 205; Nordas and Piermartini, 2004, p. 18), positions port intermodal nodes as the most important transport infrastructure for EU economic development.

Table 5. The contribution of the quality of the transport networks to the configuration of the economic competitiveness in the European Union

Competitiveness factors	EU-28 (%)	EU-27 (%)
Basic factors of competitiveness	88.0	87.4
Quality of road network	0.1	2.7
Quality of railroad infrastructure	3.3	1.4
Quality of port infrastructure	4.2	4.4
Quality of air transport infrastructure	2.5	3.0
Quality of inland waterways network	1.9	1.9

Source: Author's computations based on World Economic Forum and The World Bank data

According to the table above, the departure of the United Kingdom seems to have resulted in an apparent increase in the contribution of the road, port and air network to competitiveness, but this is not because the relative increases in the contribution of the mentioned transport networks result from the addition of factors. basic initials, which in turn declined. Therefore, the departure of the community club by the United Kingdom in 2020 had the effect of reducing by 0.6% the explanatory contribution of the basic factors of competitiveness in the EU-27, and the size of the contribution of modal transport networks, road infrastructure was the only one that brought an increase (2%) in the explanatory contribution to competitiveness, while all other European transport infrastructures reduced their contribution after leaving the UK: the railway network decreased its competitive impact by 2.5%, the inland waterway network by 0.6%, the port infrastructure by 0.4% and the air transport infrastructure by 0.1%. Basically, we can say that Brexit has led to a moderate decline in the competitiveness of the EU-27, and road infrastructure has been the only transport segment that has generated a positive value for the EU-27 by leaving the UK due to its "deadlock road" type of the British road network[†] in the northern and south-western outlying regions, from which the European general road network "escaped" by leaving the UK.

[†] In measuring the quality of road networks, the World Economic Forum allocated a score of 4.9 points for the quality of the UK road network, a size very close to the EU-28 average of 4.8 points. This is largely due to the "deadlock" road

By summing up the contributions of all modal transport infrastructure, we found that within the EU-28 all transport networks explained the improvement in economic competitiveness by 12%, and with Brexit the loss of British transport networks led to a decrease in EU-27 competitiveness with -1.6%.

In terms of the impact of an elementary infrastructure unit (1 km of motorway, 1 km of railways, 1 point of the index of efficiency of government or economic freedom, etc.) on economic competitiveness, the situations in the EU-28 and EU-27 they are much closer or even identical. If we work on a scale of relevance of 5%, we see from Table 2 that the most striking decreases refer to the reduction per unit of the quality of the business environment (economic freedom) with the departure of Great Britain, which reflects the high degree of economic favorability offered by the Anglo-Saxon regulatory framework compared to the European one. From this point of view, the departure of the UK is a loss for the EU-27. On the other hand, in the segment of good governance, the discrepancy is in favour of the EU-27 after the departure of Great Britain and is visibly expressed mainly by the coefficient of determination of the regression equation regarding the road network; on the other regression equations the respective divergence is more attenuated. The explanation stems from the reluctance that the United Kingdom has always had towards European decisions, which is reflected in the gap between the values of the coefficients in question (4.98 for EU-27 compared to 0.03 for EU-28).

The interpretation of the regression coefficients shows that, on the road infrastructure, to increase by 1% the level of competitiveness it was necessary to increase the road quality by 0.04 points in the EU-28 and by 0.06 points in the EU-27, despite the increase of the road contribution by 2% shaping competitiveness after Brexit. The railway infrastructure highlights a bizarre situation resulting from the technical inhomogeneities of the mainland railway networks (differences in gauge, type of power supply, etc.), elements that still keep the European railway insufficiently competitive: in the EU-28 the 1% increase in competitiveness is explained by the 0.06 point increase in the quality of railway infrastructure, while in the EU-27 the 1% increase in competitiveness is accompanied by a 0.01 point decrease in railway quality! This is reflected in the sharp decline in competitive rail input from 3.3% to just 1.4% after Brexit, which shows that the rail contribution to competitiveness in the EU-28 was artificially iterated by the very good contribution of the British railway which thus blurred the insufficient railway contribution. from the mainland. On the other hand, port infrastructure, which has the largest explanatory contribution to both economic competitiveness in both the EU-28 and the EU-27 as a whole, also shows the same consistent contribution at unit level: with or without the UK

situation in the far north of Scotland and the Cornwall Peninsula, which has led to a certain reduction in the quality index of the UK road network, despite very high standards of reliability on the British road network.

a 1% increase in competitiveness is ensured by a 0.1 point increase in the quality of port infrastructure, in line with the contribution of over 4% to the configuration of competitiveness with or without the UK. In the field of air transport in the EU-28, each percentage increase in competitiveness was explained by a 0.1 point increase in the quality of air infrastructure, and in the EU-27 an increase of 0.16 points is needed, which attests to the net superior quality of British airports. For inland waterway infrastructures, unfortunately, their quality not only does not contribute to increasing competitiveness, but also seems to work in the opposite direction: with an increase in economic competitiveness on the continent by 1% the quality of inland waterways decreases by 0.01 points! This shows, as in the case of the railways, poor maintenance and underutilization in relation to the opportunities offered by these infrastructures.

Also, the comparative unitary contribution of each mode of transport illustrates the behavioral hierarchy of modal transport networks before and after Brexit. Thus, in the EU-28 the 1% increase in competitiveness was ensured by the increase by 0.04 points of the quality of the road infrastructure, by 0.06 points of the quality of the railway infrastructure and by 0.1 points of the port and air infrastructure. In the EU-27, for the same 1% increase in competitiveness, it is necessary to increase the quality of the road network by 0.06 points, by 0.1 points of the port infrastructure, by 0.16 points of the air infrastructure, while decreasing by 0.01 the quality of the railway network.

Instead, the basic factors of competitiveness have evolved relatively constantly. In order to increase economic competitiveness by both the EU-28 and the EU-27, a 5% increase in labour productivity, a 1 billion euro increase in total investment volume and a 5% increase in expenditure on R&D in the EU-28 and by 6% in the EU-27, by 0.04 points in the quality of the governing act and by 0.30 points in the EU-28, and by 0.27 points in the EU-27 by the quality of the business environment. The analysis of the unitary impact of the factors of competitiveness clearly shows that the quality of the business environment, i.e. legislation and economic freedoms, is the most important element for increasing competitiveness in the EU.

In order to rank the priorities of intervention, we identified the states with the lowest quality of modal networks with the greatest impact on economic competitiveness. As we have seen, port infrastructures represent the transport systems with the highest potential for increasing competitiveness, therefore the states with the poorest quality of these infrastructures (with values below the first value quartile) constitute the first priority for intervention: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Hungary, Austria, Romania and Slovakia. For these states, the recovery of port capacities and their interconnection in the form of intermodal hubs is the measure that would most quickly lead to the improvement of economic competitiveness.

The second modal category with a relevant impact on competitiveness in the EU-27 is the category of air transport infrastructures. Among the states with the lowest quality of air infrastructures (below the first value quartile) are Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia. For these states, improving air infrastructures (including their intermodal connection) would be the second feasible priority that would bring more competitiveness. If we consider the EU-28, the second priority would be to improve the railway infrastructure, a recommendation valid for Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, Croatia, Romania and Slovenia. We note that in any variant (EU-28 or EU-27), Bulgaria, Estonia, Romania and Slovenia are eligible for the rehabilitation of both their infrastructures (air and rail) bearing premises for improving economic competitiveness. At the same time, it is noted that in the post-Brexit era a number of countries such as Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia are on the list of both priority needs for improving competitiveness (rehabilitation of both their port and air infrastructure).

Conclusions

The results of our analysis show that in both the EU-28 and the EU-27, the quality of transport networks has a differentiated impact on modes of transport on economic competitiveness, and Brexit has moderately changed the share of the contribution of different modes of transport on EU-27 competitiveness. The UK's exit from the EU in 2020 decreased by 0.6% the contribution of the basic factors of competitiveness, at the same time with the decrease of the contribution of the transport networks. Brexit has led to a slight slowdown in European competitiveness across the EU-27, and road transport has been the only component of transport systems to increase its competitive contribution to the EU-27, given the peripheral nature of the British road network.

Within the EU-28 all transport networks made a 12% contribution to improving economic competitiveness, but with Brexit the loss of British transport networks led to a decrease in competitiveness for the EU-27 as a whole by 1.6%. In the EU-27, the hierarchy of the competitive contribution of modal transport networks places port and air infrastructures at the top of the ranking, followed by road, inland waterways and railway infrastructures.

Across the EU as a whole, there is a low impact on the competitiveness, especially in the post-Brexit era, of rail networks and inland waterways, i.e. exactly the transport systems on which there are high expectations given the trend of sustainable development and green EU approaches, which shows poor maintenance and underutilization of these infrastructures in relation to the opportunities they offer.

Among the basic factors of competitiveness, the quality of the business environment registered the most relevant decline after Brexit. Economic freedom and the quality of legislation have had the most visible impact on the decline in competitiveness in the EU-27, reflecting the high degree of economic favourability offered by the Anglo-Saxon regulatory framework compared to the European one. On the other hand, in the segment of good governance, the discrepancy is in favor of the EU-27 after the departure of Great Britain amid the reluctance that the United Kingdom had permanently towards European decisions.

The reporting of the spaces with the lowest quality of the most contributing transport networks to the creation of competitiveness illustrates the intervention priorities for increasing competitiveness and demonstrates the need to profile spatially differentiated policies for the development of different transport networks. Differentiated approaches would also be useful along the lines of budget allocations for different programs for different states. Thus, for Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Hungary, Austria, Romania and Slovakia, the draining of the community's financial effort should aim at the rehabilitation of port capacities, which, for these spaces, would most quickly lead to the improvement of the competitive potential. Also, a customized approach is required for Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia, aimed at connecting budgetary policies with those aimed at improving the quality of air infrastructures, an approach that would bring more competitiveness for the mentioned states. At the same time, double priority programs are desirable for Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia, aimed at improving both port and air infrastructures, as conditions for improving economic competitiveness.

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Industry 4.0 and the impact of technology on the future of work. A qualitative approach to the IT jobs

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Abstract

Scientific research leads the scientific progress based on which information technology (I.T.) professionals drive technology changes, impacting our daily life, business, and work models. The same inventions are impacting the work of the software developers, the ones responsible for building this technology. While I.T. professionals are building new tools for automation used in the industry, the work of I.T. professionals is significantly impacted by the tools they build. Paying heed to these considerations, the paper intends to bring forward qualitative research based on semi-structured interviews with 18 I.T. professionals. The research purpose is to scrutinize to what extent the workers in the software development industry are aware of the transformations happening in their profession, how they see the future of their jobs and how they prepare for that future. The I.T. engineers taking part in the interviews see the impact of technology in changing their work models, making them more productive rather than a threat to their jobs. They also understand the importance of continuous learning, keeping up with technological changes and soft skills.

Keywords: industry 4.0, technology, automation, future of work, IT jobs

Introduction

The topic of Industry 4.0 and the future of work, its impact on business management models, and its social implications started to gain momentum in the academic literature (Roblek *et al.*, 2016). The impact of technology on the work models is discussed across different industries like transportation, medicine, or manufacturing.

From a bird's eye view, the impact of technology changes on the software industry itself is discussed only broadly. The I.T. industry building technologies like robotic process automation and machine learning, which are responsible for work automation in many industries, is being itself changed by those technologies. In the same way, robots have changed the nature of traditional industry software while automation is augmenting and even replacing the need for manual jobs in

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work like application deployment (Talwar *et al.*, 2005) or automatic code generation. While the number of technology jobs is growing (Schrage *et al.*, 2020), the introduction of cloud computing and significant data machine learning are creating employment and augmenting a substantial number of software development tasks. Even if automation of I.T. processes has not yet replaced numerous software development jobs, it is increasingly changing the nature of those professions and reducing the prevalence of several traditional I.T. professions.

Kurzweil (2005) and Tegmark (2017) describe the exponential rate of change based on the diminishing time between technology breakthroughs such as the internet and IoT and predicting the artificial intelligence impact on human jobs, potentially replacing even the technical professions. Most of the research analyses the jobs being replaced by automation, jobs becoming more demanding, and new professions being established (Manyika *et al.*, 2017; Tytler *et al.* 2019; Schwab *et al.*, 2020). There are also proposals on what the appropriate responses to changes in the job market are. I.T. skills continue to be in extremely high demand and are predicted to grow (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d.). Like the famous “boiling frog” that is in tepid water and boiling slowly, it does not see the danger. The question to be answered by I.T. employees through empirical studies would be about the extent to which the workers in the software development industry are aware of the transformations happening in their profession and how they see the evolution of their work, and how they prepare for that future. Answering such questions would add to the existing literature in the field and would complement the empirical initiatives unfolded in international studies and technical reports.

Starting from these considerations, the paper is intended to bring forward qualitative research based on semi-structured interviews with 18 I.T. professionals. The research purpose is to scrutinize to what extent the workers in the software development industry are aware of the transformations happening in their profession, how they see the future of their job and how they prepare for that future. Furthermore, the study seeks to explore the perception about the future of the work of I.T. employees and compare it with formal global research on this topic.

This paper expands on an earlier study on the sustainable management of I.T. enterprises, measuring the perception of IT managers about how managerial strategies are prepared to cope with the accelerated rate of technology change and its impact on the workforce (Pînzaru *et al.*, 2021). To this end, the paper is organized into several main sections: future of work literature review, qualitative interviews with IT professionals, findings and discussion of the findings and conclusions.

1. The impact of digital transformation on the future of work

"Technology is moving so quickly, and in so many directions, that it becomes challenging even to pay attention" (Manyika *et al.*, 2013, p. 5) McKinsey institute has identified twelve potential economic disruptive technologies: Mobile Internet, Automation of knowledge work, The Internet of Things, Cloud Technology, Advanced Robotics, Autonomous and near-autonomous vehicles, next-generation genomics, energy storage, 3D printing, advanced materials, advanced oil and gas exploration and recovery, Renewable energy (Manyika *et al.*, 2013). According to (Vidu *et al.*, 2022), with the adoption of Artificial Intelligence, every manager must consider the readiness of their transformation business. New technologies are responsible for the highest net job creation in I.T. and engineering (European Political Strategy Centre, 2019).

The future of work concept is attracting the interest of academic researchers and international organisations. The consensus from systematic literature reviews (Piccarozzi *et al.*, 2018), research (Webb, 2019), consultancy firms such as McKinsey (Manyika *et al.*, 2017), Deloitte (Schwartz, Monahan, *et al.*, 2019), (Schwab *et al.*, 2020) and organizations like World Economic, and OECD (Arntz *et al.*, 2016) is that low-skilled repetitive work like clerk's operation managers and call centre operations are most likely to be an the other hand, jobs involving soft skills like social services, healthcare, education, and highly skilled professions are expected to be in higher demand (Schwab, 2018).

McKinsey (Manyika *et al.*, 2013) has researched the drivers of changes. Further, the World Economic Forum (Schwab, 2018) proposed a list of future jobs as "Data Analysts and Scientists," "A.I. and Machine Learning Specialists," "Big Data Specialists," "Process Automation Specialists," "Information Security Analysts," "People and Culture Specialists" and skills like "Analytical thinking and innovation," "Active learning and learning strategies," "Creativity, originality and initiative" and "Technology design and programming." All these components may be considered as a prerequisite to what the future holds for this field of interest.

In order to support the emergent technologies, the nature of I.T. jobs is also changing with the increased demand for Data Analyses and Science, A.I. and Machine Learning, Big Data Specialists, Digital Transformation Specialists, New Technologies Specialists, Process Automation Specialists, Human-Machine Interaction Designers, Service or Solution Designers. Roles like data entry clerks and administrative jobs are likely to disappear, and be replaced by automation. Analytical thinking, active learning, creativity, design and programming, critical thinking, complex problem solving, and emotional intelligence systems analysis skills are expected to demand higher demand (Schwab, 2018). From this example, we see that accelerated technology changes, built by software engineers, are generating more demand for certain I.T. professions and requiring new a new set of skills.

An important factor in job transformation is digital transformation. That is defined as "Digital transformation is concerned with the changes digital technologies can bring about in a company's business model, which result in changed products or organizational structures or the automation of processes" (Hess *et al.*, 2016, p. 124), having the following dimensions: Explore and exploit new digital technologies; Changes in organizational structures, processes, and skillsets necessary to cope with and exploit new technologies; Ability to finance a digital transformation endeavour; Changes in value creation reflect the influence of digital transformation on a firm's value creation. More permeable and agile organizational, continuously adaptable structures are needed. to support swift technological transformations (Hanelt *et al.*, 2021).

Subsequently, the jobs of the engineers producing the recent technologies are impacted by the technology they are developing. Not only that, we have new technologies impacting the workforce, but the speed of change has been growing exponentially Kurzweil (2005). We see Moore's low predicted doubling of the number of transistors on integrated circuits every year and a half, validated from 1970 until today (Moore, 2009). The growth of data is projected at 40% to 60% per year (Cassard *et al.*, 2018).

In line with Roblek (2016), the literature review on Industry 4.0 identifies EBSCOhost, ProQuest, ScienceDirect, Web of Science, and Google Scholar as good sources for information on this topic. The topic of industry 4.0 gives a general context of the industry technology trends, as are the smart infrastructure, IoT, Health care sensors, security, and privacy. Industry 4.0 literature review covers the impact on the organizational model with concepts such as Self-Organization adaptation to human needs and digital sustainability (Piccarozzi *et al.*, 2018; Roblek *et al.*, 2016). The impact on the professions is covered more by the future of work literature is explored in scientific papers, as shown in systematic literature reviews (Piccarozzi, *et al.*, 2018) and research (Webb, 2019).

On the topic of future of work, a significant body of research is done by big five consultancy companies McKinsey (Manyika, 2017), Deloitte (Schwartz, Hagel *et al.*, 2019) and international organizations, including the World Economic Forum (Schwab, 2018), and OECD (Arntz *et al.*, 2016). The general conclusions are that business ecosystems are becoming more agile and networked (Soto-Acosta *et al.*, 2016; van der Aalst *et al.*, 2018; Stratone *et al.*, 2022).

The most common suggestion for employees to cope with the accelerating rate of change is education for technical literacy and, in general, continuous education to adapt to market changes. Deloitte's (Schwartz, Hagel, *et al.*, 2019) research recommends that employees engage in lifelong learning, shape their career paths, and pursue their career paths. According to the same study, the organization must redesign technology and learn and implement new organizational structures,

leadership and culture. Governments are expected to support lifelong learning and reassess policies and regulations.

As seen with Mitchell (2022) literature review on the future of work, the focus has shifted from impact of automation to workplace changes, employee wellbeing and telecommuting. The reviews enforce the conclusion that employees working on routine jobs are likely to be soon replaced by digital technologies but it also introducing the technology as the enabler for remote communication and remote work. Skills, in particular soft skills, are present as key for success in an ever-changing world. Research by Kolade and Owoseni (2022) shows that while the between 2018-2020 the key themes were post work prospects and the adoption of digital technologies into creative domains, post 2021 the key themes are the emergence of industry 5.0, remote work and human-computer collaboration.

Based on this theoretical background, the following research questions are worthy of being formulated, that is, R1: In the context of Industry 4.0, what is the technology's impact on work automation and efficiency? R2: What are the effects of digital transformation on I.T. jobs? R3: To what extent are the I.T. jobs likely to change, and what would be the drivers of future work shifts?

Pursuant to the aforementioned research questions, the goal of the qualitative research is to examine the respondents' perceptions of the digital transformation, past changes in their jobs and profession, technologies generating these changes, expectations of future changes and the way they prepare to cope with the accelerated rate of technology evolution and job market evolution.

2. Research methodology

The research is conducted following the method described by Gill (2008) for semistructured interviews, as the most common method for data collection in qualitative research. Fugard and Potts (2015) suggest a wide range of participants needed in qualitative interviews between 12 and 101, but concludes that 6-10 respondents are recommended for interviews and saturation occurs within 12 interviews. The respondents have been selected using a judgment sample strategy (Marshall, 1996) from different small medium and large organizations in Romania. The respondents had been informed about the ethical principles and anonymity. The interviews have been recorded and transcribed.

Eighteen information technology professionals from various start-ups and small and large organizations were included in the interview. The questionnaire was sent in advance and was discussed in face-to-face meetings or via Microsoft Teams. The results were processed with NVivo 12 qualitative data analysis solution. It includes a balanced mix of line managers (54%) and individual contributors (44%). While all the people responding to the interview are working in

delivering software solutions, 15 are engineers, while 2 are economists, and 1 has psychology studies. Nine respondents have under ten years of experience, and seven have from 10 to 19 years and only 2 with over 20 years of experience. That is correlated with a typical seniority distribution in a young I.T. industry (U.S. Bureau of Labour Statistics, 2020). The managers' category includes project and delivery managers. Individual contributors come from a mix of delivery professions: developers, manual and automatic testers and dev-ops. Respondents are working in various organizations and have different past professional experiences. This mix of profiles, jobs, and experience helps the research with a different perspective, making similar responses more valuable.

The interview guide has five chapters and a total of 18 questions. The first set of questions captures the biographical data relevant to the research as possession, position, and years of experience. The second part has one open question about the definition of work. The following two sessions look at past changes in their work, their view on the future of their profession, and how they prepare for such a future.

The first question is defined as a baseline for what the respondents understand from digital transformation. Responses include keywords like technology change, automation, lower cost, improved performance, new behaviours, change in society, easy life, and lower risk. One particularly interesting response was "changing people's habits, perceptions, way of living and working, adopting latest information technology and software products," referring to technology's impact on people's way of living and culture. The responses are generally capturing professional life but also the technology's impact on work automation and efficiency.

The next set of questions captures the changes responders had in their past careers, moving to new roles or transformations that they have seen in the same profession. That distinction was not evident in all responses, but the data covers all aspects, with people giving a personal perspective on their resumes. The data analyses have separated and made a distinction between the two types of changes.

The third part of the interview takes the perceptions of the interviewers of how I.T.'s job is likely to change, what will drive the change and what is expected to be the role of automation. Finally, the last part is about how they see their careers evolving, what skills they need to develop, and how they prepare for that.

3. Findings

Focusing on the definition of digital transformation, the responses cover a wide range of topics, from technology and social change with automation generating new behaviours leading to

increase efficiency, lower cost, lower risk, improved performance and making an easier life. The rate of change is seen in some cases as disruptive: "Digital transformation incurs a disruptive change in how a wide variety of professions, activity domains and companies large or small perform their daily activities" (A.I, I.T. manager) by persons with more work experience and more responsibilities, but if we look at the day to day work that is perceived as "slow migration of people's day by day needs and activities into the digital world" (P.M., QA Test Automation Engineer). Digitalization is changing the way we work "the digital transformation is a new behavioural approach which is bringing a new way how the market's actors (producers and consumers) or business partners are exchanging information" (S.V.G., Consultant). From the first question, technology is seen to impact the future of work dramatically, "everything becomes digital sooner or later" (V.C. I.T. manager). A similar perspective on the disruptive impact of technology comes from A.M.L. (Development Manager) - "Science Revolution," when easy jobs, without any challenge, consisting of repetitive tasks will be replaced by robots or computers." Others, like S.C. (Development Manager), do not see the high impact of technology change. "I.T., we still follow a traditional way of working."

Changes in past roles are reported to happen from every six months in some cases to even up to 10 years for some engineering professions. The most significant impact was in the case of V.C. (Business Analyst), who had lost their previous job because of automation: "My first job was in insurance, as a data entry operator... Now those contacts are scanned and automatically...". Not only are non-IT jobs replaced by automation but also, in certain I.T. professions, "there are no Project Managers, or Enterprise Architects" (S.C., Development Manager). Another job rapidly losing ground is manual testing - "Initially I was working as a manual Q.A. engineer, but now I am an automation Q.A. Engineer" (C.L. QA Engineer). "My role changed from testing manually an entire release to testing automatically more than 50% of a release, which means building automated tests from previously written test cases in order to speed the delivery" (C.M, Integration Engineer). But new jobs have appeared and employed more and more people like DevOps - "The deployment model changed, and the storage of the source code needed adjustments to follow DevOps guidelines" (E.C., Developer).

For developers, is it more about keeping up to date with rapid technology change - "In my case, being a developer needs first of all to be up-to-date with technologies I am working on" (A.M.L, Development Manager) but also more automation on development work - "New technologies enabled more automation in the area of software development and especially software deployment... Effort in keeping the technical stack of your application up to date is taking up much more capacity than it used to 15 years ago" (S.C., Development Manager).

Even when we do the same work, the way we do that is now different "possibility of having a Work from Home... collaboration between teams that are geographically placed in different locations" (M.C., Integration Engineer) and "work model changed from coordinating teams collocated to distributed teams in different locations and countries" (R.M., Release Manager). One of the respondents is considering the organizational model and how projects are managed - "release manager following mostly waterfall methodology to a more agile project manager" (R.M., Release Manager).

In summary, all respondents agreed that they need to adapt to keep up with technological changes by changing jobs, roles, or ways of working. As pointed out by S.G.V. (I.T. Consultant) - "I had to adapt the specificities of my roles to the new expectations (speed, quality, visibility, communication, etc.) to remain as relevant."

The technologies responsible for job changes are identified in the major new developments we have seen in Cloud Computing, Machine Learning but also specific software technologies and frameworks like software as a service, virtualization, microservices, as well as communication and collaboration tools as professional social tools. As in the previous question, developers are looking at the rapid introduction of new frameworks or new versions of existing tools "frameworks (especially Spring), NET, Android, React / Angular" (A.M.L., Developer), "Distributed applications, web services, Containers" (E.C., Developer). The listed technologies depend on the person's role, with some considering more the software deployment tools, "DevOps systems like Kubernetes, dockers, etc." (M.P., Development Manager).

Planning and collaboration tools are also mentioned: "The introduction of new planning tools (excel and Microsoft project plan lose market share in favour of Jira, Jama, etc.)" (A.I., I.T. manager), "Tools like Jira, that eliminate the need for a PM" (S.C., Development Manager). C.D. (Testing Lead) mentioned the Internet as a critical driver to change, being the only answer that took into consideration a longer time frame of about 20 years while he only has 11 years of professional experience but looks at a radical change factor not only for the I.T. profession but the entire humanity.

The perspective on the *future of I.T. jobs* is similar to the perception of past changes. A combination of new programming languages, software adoption as a service platform coupled with a transition from waterfall project management to agile methodologies, increased automation testing and distributed teams collaborating using technology.

Three of the responses show that software development becomes more manageable, and it is expected for Automation to keep enhancing automatic code generation - "Frameworks that generate code. A.I. will be capable of writing basic functions. Features" (S.C., Development Manager). The fact that the manual testing profession is likely to disappear has been pointed out in many cease -

"Manual QA. I see that as a dying profession. I am surprised the demise of manual Q.A. is not happening sooner" (S.C. Development Manager) "Q.A. engineers will not exist anymore their role will be taken by programmers" (C.L., QA engineer).

In all cases, the perception of all people being interviewed is that change happens "at least once per year you get to work with something new and challenging" (P.M., QA engineer), "developer will have to reinvent her/himself every i.e., four years or even faster" (A.I., I.T. Manager). With many repetitive jobs being replaced, humans are expected to be needed more on expert jobs - "Automation will replace simple tasks, the ones with higher repetition rate, the ones who will deal with a huge amount of data. Humans will be experts supervising the results and the well-functioning of the systems" (C.M., Integration Engineer). A project manager's view is that automation will eventually replace all types of jobs except the ones involving creativity - "Both – most manual work will be replaced, but innovation will still rely on human creativity" (R.R., Program Manager). One developer does not see technology as a threat to the jobs but as a way to make work easier and increase efficiency - "The automation will not replace the human agent in I.T. but is making it be more productive and implement faster other automations" (E.C., Development Manager). There is even the perception that with information technology driving the industry 4.0 revolution, "the total number of jobs can increase" (G.M., Architect). Regardless of how many and how fast the jobs will be replaced it is essential to remain agile - "flexibility will be key, so I count on my capability to adapt" (A.I., I.T. manager).

Concerning *technology*, artificial intelligence is mentioned in almost all responses, "A.I. – not yet extremely visible, but on its way to come and become indispensable" (M.P. Development Manager). Artificial intelligence is perceived to be the technology to replace the work of software engineers - "A.I. developers, but once he gets to technological maturity, they will become obsolete as well" (V.C., Delivery Manager). Even quantum computing, which is, for the moment, more of a research project (Hey, 1999) with almost no impact yet in the industry, is seen as a potentially disruptive factor - "quantum computing which will force the rethinking infrastructure and applications" (N.S., Project Management).

A.I. (I.T. manager) has anticipated the last set of questions concerning the way professionals need to prepare for future changes in the job market. "On average, 15 years would be required for an education plan to affect the labour market. Therefore, there will always be a hunger for top talents because of this speedometer gap between what society can offer to a fast-paced industry".

The last set of questions in the interview is about *their future*, what they see themselves doing, what skills they need, and how they plan to build those skills. Most people indicate they will stay in similar jobs or will likely to move to more senior positions as they gain development in architecture. There is

one response taking a significantly broader perspective in the fact that the jobs of the future will likely be in the gig economy rather than full-time employed - "Self-employed, consultant" (P.M., QA engineer), "I see myself working towards my own company" (S.C., Development Manager) or doing volunteering work "shift to volunteering in education, if not, then I would see myself leading A.I. projects" (M.P., Development Manager).

Regarding *skills*, developers tend to think about continuous changes in their toolsets. "DevOps (programming in Java / Android / React / Angular, etc.; scripting, database performance, use of automation tools – Jenkins / TeamCity, etc.)" (A.M.L., Development Manager). Non-IT skills are recognized to become more important than technical "1. Creativity, 2. Communication skills, 3. Adapting to change" (C.D., QA engineer). The answers, in general, cover a mix of developing soft skills with keeping up to date with the technology - "ability to adapt to constant change, agility, understanding of the business processes and ability to optimize them using new technologies," "soft skills and comfortable with the technologies the role requires" (M.A, I.T. Manager).

From the development perspective, the interviewed I.T. professionals prefer self-learning, including online platforms "I try to do several online technical trainings using Udemy and/or PluralSight every year" (A.I., I.T. Manager), professional experience "Learning by doing" (C.L., QA engineer) or massive online open courses (MOOC) "Not very formally for the moment, more following different online MOOC courses (i.e., Coursera, TedX) or following online webinars (i.e., Gartner)" (M.A., I.T. Manager). While I.T. companies do offer training programs (ANIS, 2019), there was only one answer talking about formal training programs as well as "reading books and attending courses" (S.D., Java Developer).

When processing the responses of the participants in the study, attention was also paid to the overall set of responses to see what the words described and what is in the mind of I.T. professionals regarding their professional future. The findings revealed that automation and learning have the highest frequency. The overall word cloud includes project, development and software specific to their work, and A.I. is mentioned as the most important disruptive technology, whereas Q.A./testing is most often pointed out as a job being automated (Please see Table 1 and Figure 1).

Table 1 Word count derived from the interviews

RANK	WORD	FREQUENCY
1	AUTOMATION	28
2	SOFTWARE	27
3	DEVELOPMENT	23
4	PROJECT	21
5	MANUAL	20
6	DEVELOPER	19

The ability to finance the transformation was not touched on in any of the responses. That may be explained by how the title of the research has framed the context of technology impact in the work of software engineers and not the company as the actual purpose of the study. The I.T. professionals do see the digital transformation impact on their lives as well. Personal aspects are not part of this definition or research and are not related to the evolution of jobs, but people do feel how technology is impacting their lives.

Most people being interviewed have seen significant changes in their work model from as frequently as six months up to 5 to 10 years. However, there are four situations where there was no change or at least no significant one. There is no direct correlation between people who responded that their job had not changed with any specific profession or number of years of experience. For those who reported changes, the reason was always technology. The job impact is coming from having to stay up to date with technical changes, using cloud computing and machine learning for developers, moving from manual to automatic testing for quality assurance professions, moving from developer to closer to the business architecture jobs, implementing RPA (Robot Process Automation) ending with a situation where a banking operation manager job was automated, and he had to find a new technology job.

Jobs reported being replaced: project managers with Agile Coach, manual testing with automatic testing, and developers with Dev-Ops, in this order. The World Economic Forum is forecasting a spike in the number of software engineers and recruiters, and human resource specialists while reducing the number of positions for support specialists, system administrators, and most crucial project managers (Schwab, 2018). The same report puts mobile internet, cloud computing, the internet of things, and artificial intelligence as the most disruptive technologies for the job market. Cloud computing and the internet are also a result of our interviews. On top of that, the I.T. professionals interviewed for this study consider social media, mobile communication, and robotic-process Automation as technologies changing the work in I.T. The changes are in the tools they work with, as well as the work model enhanced by technology with collaboration platforms, enhanced processes, and leaner organizational structures. Hierarchies are replaced by flat teams (Malone, 2004), enhancing collaboration.

While some of the people responding to the survey had to change their jobs, they have seen changes in their existing roles. Developers must continuously keep up to date with the change in technologies. Collaboration technics and remote work are changing everybody's way of working. Geographically distributed teams, network teams (Schwab *et al.*, 2020) remote staff, and virtual workplaces (Hagel, *et al.*, 2019; Schwab *et al.*, 2020; Hanelt *et al.*, 2021) prove similar to this

research results. The Deloitte report also includes "comprehensive technical skills" as the main factor in changing the nature of I.T. jobs.

Looking forward, WEF predicts that jobs most impacted by Automation are operations managers, accounting, and administrative positions (Schwab, 2018). This list is not specific to I.T. One response concerning the jobs expected no longer to be relevant starts with "non-I.T. jobs" that are any other jobs outside the industry. For the I.T. professions, the jobs likely to continue to disappear are manual testing, service desk, release managers, and repeated tasks. Project managers' jobs are also predicted by the persons being interviewed and not be relevant in the future.

New jobs expected to become in more demand, according to the World Economic Forum, are data analysts, Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning, and big data specialists, all related (Weil, 2019) to the development of artificial intelligence. Other professions are Software Application Specialists, Process Automation Specialists, Information Security Analysts and

User Experience and Human Machine Specialists. The research similarly points out big data and machine learning, security analysts, and design as the primary change driver. DevOps is also seen as a profession getting increased traction. The analyses included in the review and the research results show that new professions expected to be in increased demand are both in the technology space as well as design and innovation (Weil, 2019).

People need to prepare for the changes in I.T. professions and even more for jobs expected to disappear. Analytical thinking and innovation, active learning, creativity, originality, initiative, problem-solving, technology design, and problem-solving are presented (Schwab, 2018). as essential skills to cope with future changes. That does match with research responses of creativity and problem-solving. The responses and the research results show that even when using different concepts like emotional intelligence, soft skills, leadership, and cultural awareness. The research also points out I.T.-specific technical skills: dev-ops and cybersecurity or data experts. Most important, adapting to change and agility are seen as critical aptitudes. Books, open learning platforms, conferences and, in fewer cases, formal training are used to build these skills. MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) are considered the new form of online training well suited for self-directed learning (Margaryan *et al.*, 2015). Self-directed training was mentioned in all responses, while formal in-class training was only in 10% of the cases.

Correlating the number of years of experience with the perceptions of changes in the I.T. industry, we observe that young professionals do not see accelerated change as more experienced professionals do. The fact can be explained considering that younger generation Z people have access to technology from a very early age, not having much time to notice radical technology evolution, with digital technologies impacting their entire lives(Pînzaru *et al.*, 2019).

While technology had a significant impact on 95%, technology workers reported the need to adapt to changes in their development tools and collaboration tools. Managers are more interested in the efficiency increase from Automation and changes in management models making the organizations leaner and more responsive to dynamic markets. Some of the people responding to our research have lost their jobs due to Automation and had to learn a new skill moving into I.T. professions.

With only a few exceptions, the perception of change was limited to one's role and environment. Only 3 of the interviewed persons have considered the entire industry and the complex ecosystems of roles involved in building complex software solutions.

Conclusions

With increased attention and research on the topic of Industry 4.0 (Kamble *et al.*, 2018) and the future of work (Mitchell *et al.*, 2022), the impact on the jobs in the high-tech industry driving this change does not get any special attention. However, the results of this qualitative research do match the conclusions of more extensive studies and, in addition, do provide specific insight into the I.T. professions with examples as project managers not having a role in agile I.T. organizations or having more and more software development tasks automated by the new dev-ops profession.

Automation is increasingly replacing non-IT jobs. Specific jobs in software development are disappearing and being replaced with new jobs developing. Even for occupations that have not changed and are not expected to change, the nature of the work is impacted by using new tools and learning new technologies continuously. The organizations adapt their structures by reducing the number of management levels, project management roles in particular, and becoming more flexible and responsive to market changes. The skills required to build future careers are technology-related, mainly concentrated on big data and machine learning. I.T. professionals increasingly recognise that soft skills such as creativity and problem-solving are becoming as important as technical skills.

I.T. is a new industry, and I.T. employees are used to the rapid technological change rate. While we investigate the perceptions of the future of I.T. professions, the interviews show that the future is already happening in terms of rapid changes in the tools and work models pushed by technological changes. The perception of the interviewed IT professionals, they are not concerned about losing their jobs. Instead, they see technology as a means to make them more productive. Technology is seen as taking on repetitive processes while letting the experts focus on the innovative component of the work and building knowledge.

Skills building, are recognised by the people being interviewed as being essential to once keep up with the new tools used in software development and well

To sum up, this qualitative research is only a first step in understanding the perceptions of I.T. employees about the I.T. impact on their work. However, it is a necessary step in order to provide context for future research. Quantitative research on this subject would develop more specific conclusions and industry trends.

Limitations and Future Research

The group size is an important consideration. By its very nature, qualitative research only allows for a limited number of participant responses and is of no use for in-depth research. The results of this research are intended to help define the research questions for quantitative research with a statistically relevant number of respondents.

In order to develop a better understanding of the future of work in the hi-tech software profession, more research has to be done not only on the technology and nature of the jobs but also on the underlying social, economic and political factors influencing the job market as well the elements making this industry sustainable. Existing reports on the future of work and results of this research show that education and continuous learning coupled with an agile approach of the employees and organizations are the main factors enabling the workforce to adapt, justifying more detailed discussions on this topic. On one side, future research will need to consider the specific changes in the I.T. profession, the skills that employees and organizations will need to develop accordingly and how local factors in Romania and managerial strategies are influencing the transformation of I.T. jobs.

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Dissecting political landscape of post-war Armenia

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Abstract

This paper explores the political landscape of post-war Armenia, focusing on both domestic and foreign policy implications of the devastating war of 2020. More specifically, it aims at explaining the aftermath of the 2020 war, with a special emphasis on Armenia's growing dependence on Russia. Since September 2020, Armenia has plunged into a deep crisis. The Nagorno-Karabakh war had a series of implications, both for conflicting parties and a wider region. The ceasefire agreement which entailed huge territorial concessions took many by surprise and raised questions as to the transparency and accountability of the government. Although the Russian-brokered ceasefire ended the hostilities, yet it left many fundamental matters unanswered. Furthermore, the war has exacerbated the pre-existing divisions amongst the foremost political actors and the general public. Combined with the war and its aftermath, the COVID-19 pandemic has also invited challenges, which resulted in an increased human toll, slowdown of economy, and deepened public anger and mistrust of the authorities. The situation is compounded by Armenia's deepening dependence on Russia, which has been largely treated as war-torn Armenia's irreplaceable ally by the Armenian leadership.

Keywords: Post-war Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh war, Russia, Armenian-Turkish relations

Introduction

The change in political leadership in Armenia instilled hope that the initial strive of new government toward democracy would help solve the deep-seated socioeconomic problems, and improve the country's immunity as it pertains to external threats. The newly incumbent Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan put forward an ambitious reform agenda, focusing on such objectives as cutting up corruption, attracting foreign investment, ending political influence over the courts, etc. Yet, regardless of certain political reforms, no large-scale institutional changes ever took place. Later, the above-mentioned objectives have been overshadowed by the existential problems related to the Nagorno-Karabakh war of 2020 and its aftermath.

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The ceasefire agreement, which took many by surprise, undermined the government's legitimacy, exacerbated political divisions, and brought new challenges many of which still remain unaddressed. For opposition parties and the society in general, the terms of the ceasefire called into question the position of the prime minister, who was presented as a traitor and whose resignation was demanded during the protests following the ceasefire agreement. Prime Minister resigned in April of the last year after months of anti-government protests. Yet, he was re-appointed as a result of the snap parliamentary elections of June.

The war also resulted in the decrease in civil space and liberties. The restrictions implemented first under the COVID-19 pandemic state of emergency, and later by martial law, led to disproportionate or groundless restrictions of media operations in the country. Growing hate speech and manipulating news content, particularly on social media, turned to be one of the growing problems in Armenia.

Combined with the war and its aftermath, the COVID-19 pandemic has also invited challenges, which resulted in an increased human toll, slowdown of economic and political reforms, and intensified public anger and mistrust of the authorities.

The Russian-brokered ceasefire ended the fighting but apparently Nagorno-Karabakh is still far from a stable peace. The issue of prisoners of war, demarcation and delimitation, mass displacement, the persistent belligerent rhetoric of Azerbaijan, and, more importantly, the open status question of Nagorno-Karabakh make way for new hostilities.

This paper specifically addresses the following question: *What are the implications of the war for Armenia's political landscape?*

The paper is structured as follows. First, I discuss the political crisis that Armenia plunged into in the aftermath of the 2020 war, including anti-government protests and government's attempts at restricting the freedom of expression. Subsequently, I delve into Armenia's deepening dependence on Russia due to the deployment of Russian peacekeepers in Nagorno Karabakh and post-war hardships facing the country. In the next section I discuss the Armenian government's attempts at normalizing relations with neighboring Turkey. The conclusion briefly discusses the main findings.

1. The post-war crisis in Armenia

The year 2020 was a year of profound challenges for Armenia. After Pashinyan announced about the painful ceasefire agreement of November 9, masses of people stormed government and parliament buildings. Protesters accused the government of betrayal, labeling Pashinyan as

‘traitor’. The public was unprepared for such an outcome as the authorities did not fully reveal information on the territorial concessions and defeats. Pashinyan’s tweet (2020) from November 9th, in which he stated that the battle for Shushi was ongoing even after Armenian forces lost control over the city, is one of the examples of misguided information policy.

The defeat in the war unified former authorities and their supporters. They called the trilateral agreement an act of capitulation and even treason and issued an ultimatum for Pashinyan to step down by midnight. Ishkhan Saghatelyan, an opposition politician for the Armenian Revolutionary Federation party, announced the start of coordinated civil disobedience in a televised address after the deadline passed (Reuters, 2020).

The Helsinki Committee of Armenia, which monitored the right to assembly during the year, reported inconsistent enforcement of the restrictions by security forces. Some gatherings were allowed to proceed, some received verbal warnings, whereas others were dispersed by force. Major protests were held after a ceasefire was secured in November. The November demonstrations were marked by intense public anger as well as calls for the resignation of PM Pashinyan. On a few occasions, gatherings turned into riots (Freedom House, 2021).

In response to these demonstrations, the government has repeatedly argued that Azerbaijan’s military might had left no other option. Not only Pashinyan did not resign, but he also blamed his predecessors for the defeat (PM Interviews and Press Conferences).

Following the post-ceasefire crisis, Pashinyan started to lose support, even within his own parliamentary group. Several MPs, including the head of the Deputy Prime Minister Office Varak Sisseryan, have resigned following Pashinyan’s Facebook post on 15 November. In this message, the leader appeared to suggest that frontline Armenian troops should come to Yerevan to deal with the opposition. The post was seen as a call for civil conflict even though later Pashinyan explained that he has been misunderstood (Konarzewska, 2020).

Numerous authorities, among them the Katholikos of the Armenian Apostolic Church and the President of Armenia, called for the resignation of the Prime Minister and for holding snap parliamentary elections (BTI, 2022).

In addition, some Armenian opposition parties created a joint platform, the Armenian Salvation Movement, and nominated former Prime Minister Vazgen Manukyan as a candidate to head a transition government before snap elections (Ibid). However, this movement, mainly composed of former leaders, has been unable to mobilize large groups of the population.

The post-war crisis in Armenia and an alleged attempted coup in February 2021 led by the Chief of the General Staff of the Armenian Armed Forces triggered snap parliamentary elections

in June 2021. The campaign was highly polarized and marred by violent rhetoric, with little substantive discussion of issues. At one rally, Pashinyan brandished a hammer, threatening to come after his opponents. Leaders of the two sides blamed each other for the defeat in Nagorno-Karabakh, and traded insults, describing each other as 'traitors', lunatics' and 'criminals' (EPRS, 2021). A record number of political parties and alliances have registered with the Central Electoral Commission (CEC), including those led by Armenia's first and second Presidents Levon Ter-Petrosyan and Robert Kocharyan. The results of voting have been surprising to many. Three parties gained seats in Parliament, with Pashinyan's Civil Contract Party winning a stable majority 71 seats with 53.9 percent of the vote. Though Pashinyan's win was contested by the opposition, the Constitutional Court upheld the election results (The Decision of the Constitutional Court of RA), and international observers considered the elections to be competitive and generally well-organized (OSCE PA, 2021).

After the elections, many imperative post-war issues remain unresolved, among them the issue of demarcation and delimitation of border with Azerbaijan, prisoners of war (POWs) and other captives, investigation of war crimes, etc.

The question of Armenian-Azerbaijani border demarcation and delimitation creates new risks for national security and territorial integrity. The territorial transfer left some Armenian villages exposed to new Azerbaijani military positions and risked the future of a major highway that weaves across the *de jure* border (Freedom House, 2021). Armenia and Azerbaijan have already signed a decree establishing a commission on border security and delimitation between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The first meeting of the heads of a joint commission took place on May 25 at the two countries' border in which "procedural and organizational issues relating to joint activities of the commissions" have been discussed (Azatutyun, 2022). In the post-war reality, this problem will surely be problematic. As Pashinyan himself admits, Azerbaijan is trying to somehow keep the military tension along the border for presenting hidden or open territorial claims against Armenia during the demarcation process.

Furthermore, Azerbaijan continues to hold an unknown number of Armenian soldiers and civilians in custody in blatant disregard to IHL and the November 9 ceasefire agreement. Reports of gross mistreatment and torture has exacerbated public anger at the government's failure to secure their return (Freedom House, 2021).

The trust in the government has also been challenged by the fact that no progress was made in investigating war crimes and other violations of international humanitarian law during the 2020 conflict and its aftermath (Amnesty International, 2022).

Another factor contributing to the lack of trust was the mismanagement of the pandemic by state authorities. In the aftermath of the mandatory lockdown, thousands of people in Armenia who work either abroad, or on a daily cash basis faced serious financial problems. In addition, like in several other countries, there has been a lack of strategic communication in the management of the COVID-19 outbreak in Armenia, due to which the public was unable to form an accurate perception of risk. The attributed “irresponsible behavior” of citizens was an example of this failed communication (Giebel, 2020). Although the Government has initiated a number of support measures to reduce the social impact of coronavirus, as to the results of the survey of the CRRC (2020), the overwhelming majority of respondents (65%) said that they and their family benefitted from none of the support measures undertaken by the Government (CRRC, 2020). Particularly, at the onset of the second wave of the pandemic the general attention shifted more to war crisis.

Moreover, according to the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression, the restrictions implemented under the COVID-19 pandemic state of emergency, and later by martial law, led to disproportionate or unfounded restrictions of media operations in the country (BTI, 2022).

Indeed, simulated, unauthentic, and manipulative news content has been a growing problem in Armenia. Since 2018, it has been particularly manifested in social media, as Prime Minister Pashinyan chose Facebook posts and livestreams as his main communication tool with society. Much of online public discourse has been concentrated on Facebook, although Twitter and Telegram use among Armenians increased during the 2020 war (Freedom House, 2021, p. 8). Prior to the war, in April 2019, Pashinyan ordered the National Security Service, Armenia’s intelligence agency, to crack down on social media users who spread “fake news” about the government. This move was heavily criticized by the opposition parties and the country’s human rights ombudsman as a threat to the freedom of expression (BTI, 2022). The problem became even more acute during the war and its aftermath. Seemingly, wartime restrictions on media coverage and risky conditions in war zone limit the opportunities of independent journalism (Freedom House, 2021, p. 19). As such, the State Unified Information System became the only reliable source of getting information. However, after the ceasefire announcement, the skepticism toward the state information system has significantly grown.

The government imposed several new restrictions on journalistic freedoms in 2021, including limiting the free movement of journalists in the parliament and in parts of the Syunik region. These measures have been widely criticized by local and international organizations, and local media organizations have called for an end to government obstruction of the media (Freedom House, 2022).

During the post-war period, there has also been a growing hate speech particularly on social media, which as former Ombudsman Arman Tatoyan aptly notes “has nothing to do with freedom of

speech” (Public Radio of Armenia, 2021). Pro-government and opposition politicians have regularly accused each other of running troll factories to bully and discredit political rivals. On April 15, 2020, the Armenian parliament adopted amendments to the Criminal Code to criminalize public hate speech. According to the amendments, publicly calling for violence, threatening anyone’s life or health, and publicly justifying or inciting such violence, will be subject to penalties, from fines up to imprisonment (BTI, 2022).

On October 9, 2021 the Armenian Constitutional Court upheld recent legislation, which substantially increased the penalties for insulting individuals for their “public activities”. In effect, the law is consistent with measures that non-democratic governments resort to in order to silence dissent. Meanwhile, amongst the driving forces behind the 2018 Velvet Revolution was the Armenian people’s fervent desire to flourish in a more democratic country, where their political freedoms are protected. Thus, the Armenian authorities have provided the legislative ground for controlling the media narrative on politically sensitive issues.

The political instability in Armenia further complicated following opposition parties’ rallies demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinian in May -June 2022. As a result, hundreds ended up detained in anti-Government Protests (Radio Liberty, 2022).

Regarding safeguards against official corruption, in April 2021, the parliament adopted legislation providing for the creation of an anticorruption court. The government also established the Anti-Corruption Committee (ACC) - a new agency to investigate cases of corruption. However, regardless of such developments, international bodies, including the UN Human Rights Committee (OHCHR) and the Council of Europe’s anticorruption monitoring unit, the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO), have found that serious shortcomings remain in the government’s anticorruption strategies; as of 2021, GRECO has deemed the Armenian government’s compliance with global corruption prevention standards unsatisfactory (Freedom House, 2022).

As it relates to civil society, notwithstanding the constrained political space, a vibrant civil society has evolved in Armenia over time. Yet, since the revolution, civil society has been “nationalized” in the sense that many leaders and activists moved to the ruling party “My Step” and into the government (BTI, 2022).

During the war and its aftermath, the Armenian civil society and the population in general have demonstrated a strong sense of solidarity and support towards persons displaced by the conflict, including by providing shelter and necessities to them. Such efforts were all the more outstanding as the population was also faced with the hardships caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Commissioner for Human Rights, 2021).

When Pashinyan came to power, it was expected that the new government would closely cooperate with civil society groups having field-specific expertise. Still, the government often failed to properly check or discuss ideas with local experts or researchers before taking action, something which is indispensable to effectively taking country characteristics into account (BTI, 2022).

As to international rankings for post-war period, the results are remarkable. According to 2021 report issued by Freedom House, “the political crisis that followed the Second Karabakh War poses extraordinary challenges for democratic progress in 2021, including security risks along the Armenia-Azerbaijan border, low public trust in the current government, economic strain, and the toll of the COVID-19 pandemic.” (Freedom House, 2021). Interestingly, just a year later Armenia improved its position in international rankings, moving from authoritarian to hybrid regime (Freedom House, 2022). Positive score improvements have been traced in national democratic governance, electoral process and judicial framework, whereas there has been a decline in independent media rating. Still, it is mentioned that such regimes may be democratic in the minimal sense that they feature regular, competitive elections, but their dysfunctional institutions are unable to deliver the definitive components of a liberal democracy. Arguably, the Armenian government has somehow improved democratic governance to “offset” the heavy war defeat and thus to enhance its legitimacy. Nevertheless, the attempts at restricting the freedom of expression remain of serious concern as there has been a tendency to control media narratives on politically sensitive issues, related particularly to the Nagorno Karabakh conflict.

2. Russia’s strengthening role

Before coming to power, Pashinyan positioned himself more as a pro-Western politician. He even initiated in parliament a bill on Armenia’s withdrawal from the EAEU. Yet, as a Prime Minister, Pashinyan denied the possibility of a withdrawal from the EAEU and reasserted the continuity of strategic relations with Russia. The newly-elected Prime Minister explained the change of his beliefs by the fact that his political role had changed and now he should be guided not by the political situation, but by the national interests of Armenia.

Pashinyan declared at every opportunity that there were no problems in bilateral relations with Russia, however, he himself became the initiator of some incidents that triggered Moscow’s irritation. One of such incidents happened months after the change of power in Armenia. Yerevan has charged the head of the Russia-led security bloc with the crime of “subverting public order” with regard to 2008 bloody crackdown in Armenia. Although Armenian officials emphasized that the charges have

only to do with Khachaturov's role in the 2008 events and had nothing to do with the CSTO, this was not perceived enthusiastically in Moscow (Kucera, 2018). Former Armenian President Robert Kocharyan, who does not hide his close relations with the Russian President Putin has also been accused in the same case.

Certainly, with the passing of time, Pashinyan remained more faithful to the CSTO military bloc and the EAEU economic union. Armenia's official reaction to Kazakhstani President Tokayev's appeal to the CSTO for military intervention in Kazakhstan was symbolic in this regard. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, the then holder of the CSTO's rotating presidency, announced hours later that Russia and four other ex-Soviet states making up the bloc will send troops to Kazakhstan to help "stabilize and normalize the situation" there. Furthermore, in March Armenia abstained from voting on a UN security resolution calling for Russia's withdrawal from Ukraine. Days later, when the UN Human Rights Council called for an urgent debate on the war, Armenia again abstained (The Jerusalem Post, 2022).

The 44-day war was a turning point in the South Caucasus region, which drastically altered the geopolitical configuration of the region. A joint statement of November 9, 2020 by the leaders of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia put an end to the war in Artsakh and set the way for the deployment of Russian peacekeepers in territories remaining under the *de facto* control of Artsakh and along the Lachin Corridor. With the deployment of its forces (although relatively modest in number), Russia extended its involvement beyond diplomacy and ensured its presence in the region for at least next five years.

In the interim, Russia faced an arduous task of balancing its relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan. Although Moscow's influence has amplified, so has its vulnerability, due to the position of its peacekeepers, who are both in Armenia-controlled Nagorno-Karabakh and the critical Lachin Corridor, now under the control of Azerbaijan (Bohlen, 2021).

After the deployment of troops, Russia has also been expanding its soft power in Artsakh. Last year, the Artsakh National Assembly, by a vote of 27 to 0, adopted a bill making Russian an "official language" in Artsakh. Several years ago, Russian parliament speaker Vyacheslav Volodin suggested giving Russian language an official status in Armenia, the only EEU member, where this is not the case. Nevertheless, Armenian officials rejected the idea at the time (USC Institute of Armenian Studies, 2021).

Historically, Russia has perceived the South Caucasus as an area of existential importance for its national security. As Sergei Markedonov aptly argues, Russia's approach to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was always highly cognizant of developments concerning Armenia, Nagorno-

Karabakh and Azerbaijan, with a historic lens dating back to imperial times. In this context, Russia has always formulated its own specific approach toward the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and it has always been commensurate with Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh being important components of its southern security flank (Markedonov, 2019, pp. 1-9).

The recent announcements made by Russia seem to be an indirect message on the possible shift of trilateral format. At an April meeting in Moscow with his Armenian counterpart, Ararat Mirzoyan, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov accused the United States and France of Russophobia and cancelling anything that has to do with Russia.” “As for the activities or the future, I would even say, of the troika of the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group, I do not know what the future will be,” Lavrov said (Ria Novosti, 2022). The breakdown at the Minsk Group comes as tensions between the United States and Europe, on one side, and Russia, on the other side, have escalated dramatically since Russia’s military operations in Ukraine began in February. While Pashinyan would previously raise the issue of revising inherently asymmetric relations with Russia, his government has been unable or unwilling to do so. Moreover, the deployment of Russian peacekeepers in Nagorno Karabakh further plunges Armenia into the orbit of the Russian influence. Meanwhile, Russia’s strengthening role is likely to impair Armenia’s further rapprochement with the European Union especially amid the Russian-European escalating confrontation in their shared neighborhood. Armenia’s consistent solidarity with Russian policies significantly impair the country’s ability to achieve a Russian - European balance. Moreover, Armenia’s depending dependence on Russia may adversely affect the state of human rights and democracy across the country, as it did in the other countries of the Russian-led Eurasian Union, including Belarus and Kazakhstan.

3. Attempts at normalizing relations with Turkey

The future role of Russia in the region to some extent depends on the recent process of normalization of the Armenian-Turkish relations - one of the several attempts since Armenia regained its independence. As Poghosyan (2022) argues, it will open a new horizon for Turkey to increase its influence in the region and better compete with Russia.

On August 29, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan stated that Turkey was ready to normalize relations with Armenia based on “neighborliness and mutual recognition of territorial integrity”. He also expressed hope that the actions of Armenia’s new government would be constructive as the region needed new approaches (Azatutyun, 2021). Weirdly, this call for constructive approach is being made by the leader of the country, which directly supported Azerbaijan

in its military offensive against the people of Nagorno-Karabakh, including the transfer of mercenaries to Azerbaijan. This has been asserted not only by the Armenian authorities and a number of international periodicals, but also by the European Parliament (EP report, 2020).

On December 2021, Armenia and Turkey announced the appointment of Special Representatives for the normalization of relations and the possibility of resuming charter flights. The normalization process was officially launched on January 14, 2022 when Special Representatives, Ruben Rubinyan and Serdar Kılıç, met in Moscow. The groundwork for this meeting began in mid-2021, when the Armenian government proposed the idea of peace in the South Caucasus and normalizing relations with Azerbaijan and Turkey (Poghosyan, 2022). During the Moscow meeting, the special representatives exchanged their initial views on the settlement process through the Armenia-Turkey dialogue. The parties agreed to continue negotiations for a full settlement without preconditions (MFA of the RA). During the second and third meetings both held in Vienna, the Special Representatives confirmed that the ultimate goal of the negotiations is to achieve full normalization between Armenia and Turkey and reiterated their agreement to continue the process without preconditions. Earlier Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu announced the existence of agreements on "border clarifications". However, the Armenian Foreign Ministry denied any such agreement or discussion of the issue (News.am, 2022).

The 'no preconditions' policy is a rare illustration of foreign policy continuity inherited from the previous Armenian authorities. It consists of removing any direct linkage between normalization efforts and other long-standing issues, including Turkey's acknowledgement of the Armenian genocide and progress on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Armenia has expected Turkey to take a reciprocal stance and has made it clear that any demands or prerequisites imposed by Turkey on Armenia would derail the process between the countries (Giragosian and Aydıntaşbaş, 2022).

Prior to 2021, Armenia and Turkey last tried to normalize relations in 2008-2009 in what was named "football diplomacy." The culmination of "football diplomacy" was the signing of the Zurich Protocols on October 10, 2009, by the foreign affairs ministers of Armenia and Turkey. By signing the Zurich protocols, Armenia and Turkey were agreeing to open the border two months after the protocols would be ratified. Furthermore, the participants agreed to construct a working group chaired by the two countries, which would work toward creating an intergovernmental commission. The protocols also included a clause on creating a joint commission which would address historical issues between the two countries by examining historical documents and archives. However, the preconditions were later imposed on Armenia. Just weeks after the signing of Protocol Erdogan

announced that Turkey could not take positive steps toward Armenia unless ethnic Armenian armed forces withdrew from Nagorno-Karabakh (Dermoyan, 2022).

Thus, the declarative statements made during the meetings of Special Representatives do not guarantee the success of the process, particularly given the former experience of the last-minute demands from Turkey. There is still no roadmap nor an agenda on the table for starting substantive negotiations.

Much of the future in Armenia and Artsakh as well as in a wider region also depends on the evolving events in Armenia. There were anti-government protests in Armenia, in May and June based on the fears that Prime Minister would make substantial concessions to Azerbaijan. Opposition figures who organized these protests accused and continue to accuse Pashinyan of planning to allow Azerbaijan take complete control of Nagorno-Karabakh, and they demand the Prime Minister's resignation. Nevertheless, the opposition has been unable to mobilize the Armenian society and despite the latter's growing disillusionment with Pashinyan's government, he does not seem to be threatened by his rivals. A fitting explanation for Pashinyan's lingering legitimacy is less about the public favoring Pashinyan and more about the public's painful recollections of the former administrations of presidents Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan, who are currently the opposition leaders. While former President Serzh Sargsyan ran into huge resistance, when he strived to normalize relations with Turkey in 2008, the Armenian society appears less sensitive to possible Armenian-Turkish normalization, especially after the 2020 heavy war defeat.

Conclusions

Consequently, the war and its aftermath, combined with the adversities produced by the pandemic caused a tragic death toll, a slowdown in the political and economic developments, undermined governmental legitimacy, and exacerbated the pre-existing divisions amongst central political powers and the general public. Furthermore, the government's failure to secure the return of POWs, the lack of progress in the investigation of war crimes, and the mismanagement of the pandemic, have all contributed to public anger and mistrust of the authorities.

Artificial and manipulated news content as well as hate speech are also growing problems in Armenia. Regardless of some amendments initiated by the government with regard to these issues, no effective measures have been taken to prevent the increasing marginalization of civil society actors. Rather, on some occasions, officials' public comments contributed to the problem or the measures undertaken led to disproportionate or groundless restrictions.

As to civil society, notwithstanding the constrained political space, a vibrant civil society has evolved in Armenia over time. During the war and its aftermath, the Armenian civil society and the population in general have demonstrated a strong sense of solidarity and support to those affected by the war. Still, there is no close cooperation with civil society groups having field-specific expertise, which is of notional importance for addressing post-war issues.

With the deployment of its forces in the aftermath of the war, Russia extended its involvement beyond diplomacy and ensured its presence in the region for at least next five years. In the meantime, it faced a hard task of maintaining a balance in its relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan. Although Moscow's influence has augmented, so has its vulnerability, because of the position of its peacekeepers who are in both Armenia-controlled Nagorno-Karabakh and the critical Lachin Corridor, now under the control of Azerbaijan. Overall, Armenia has further plunged into the orbit of the Russian influence with its ensuing adverse effects on the state of human rights and democracy across the country. Meanwhile, Armenia's deepening dependence on Russia and consistent solidarity with Russian policies significantly impair the country's ability to achieve a Russian-European balance.

The political configuration of the region is also contingent upon on the normalization of Armenian-Turkish relations. Although the process is ongoing based on 'no preconditions' policy, the previous experience of Turkey making last-minute demands does not allow for much confidence in the success of this process. There is no roadmap nor agenda for commencing substantive negotiations just yet.

The November agreement was far from a true peace treaty. It left many issues unresolved, among which the status question which lies at the heart of the conflict. Ongoing incidents of military hostilities threaten the livelihoods of civilians living in Nagorno-Karabakh and along the Armenia-Azerbaijan border. The threat of new hostilities will persist as long as there is no internationally recognized status for Nagorno-Karabakh.

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Weaponized interdependence versus economic sanctions: The case of human rights abuses in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region

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Abstract

The situation of the human rights abuses in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) is frequently reported in the Western media and it has gained a central place in the Euro-Atlantic political discourse which condemns Beijing's attitude towards human rights at home. However, the sanctions adopted by both the US and the EU in relation to the treatment applied by the Chinese government to the Uyghurs in the XUAR are strongly discouraged and limited by the economic dependencies of the two Western giants on China. The goal of this paper is to discuss the effectiveness of the economic sanctions in supporting the human rights international regime in the context of current economic interdependence between the European Union (EU) and the United States (US), on one side, and China, on the other side. The hypothesis of the paper is that the asymmetrical economic interdependence is undermining the effectiveness of the economic sanctions in supporting the human rights international regime. When there is an increased interdependence between a supporter and promoter of human rights, in this case the US and the EU, and a great economic power that does not regard the human rights as having a universal value in the current international order, the effects of the economic sanctions are inefficient in addressing this problem due to the high economic and political costs for both their issuers and their targets.

Keywords: interdependence, economic sanctions, human rights, China

Introduction

The paper focuses on the case of the abuses to which the Uyghur community in XUAR is subjected. These abuses have been reported in recent years by several international non-governmental organizations, including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, and have also been closely analysed by the United Nations Human Rights Council. A significant number of members of the international community protested and expressed dissatisfaction with the Chinese authorities' treatment of ethnic Uyghurs in western China but, according to the United States Institute for Peace, the “toolkit” used by those actors that support and act in order to protect human rights at international

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level have failed to influence Beijing to stop its discriminatory policies in XUAR (Baillie and Vandenbrink, 2020).

Because of the current economic interdependencies and highly concentrated global value chains, international actors, states and international governmental organizations, use economic sanctions in exceptional cases, such as the violation of fundamental norms of the international order by other state and non-state international actors. As a response, China is weaponizing the asymmetrical interdependence with the US and the EU, which leads to a reduction in the effects of sanctions aimed at ending the Chinese government abusive policies in the XUAR.

The goal of this paper is to discuss the effectiveness of the economic sanctions in supporting the human rights international regime in the context of current economic interdependence between the European Union (EU) and the United States (US), on one side, and China, on the other side. The hypothesis of the paper is that the asymmetrical economic interdependence is undermining the effectiveness of the economic sanctions in supporting the human rights international regime. In this sense, the present paper has three secondary objectives. First of all, the paper aims to highlight the harmful link between economic interdependence and human rights international regime. The second objective of the paper is to reveal the fragility of international sanctions as a response to the human rights abuses by great powers that have a strong influence over the international economic networks. The third objective of the paper is to point out the vulnerabilities of the US and the EU in front of China's economic power as an obstacle for the promotion and protection of liberal ideals such as human rights.

The reactions of the US and EU can be identified in the political discourse of the officials of the American and European high officials. However, the focus will be mainly on the sanctions imposed by the US and the EU on Chinese government officials and Chinese state-owned companies operating in the XUAR, as well as on the local industry. We will be able to observe a common pattern of the US and the EU regarding the type and intensity of the sanctions they are deploying in the case of the Chinese government's human rights abuses in the XUAR. The discourses of the Beijing leadership that categorically rejects Western accusations and, on the other hand, the instrumentalization of China's power in economic sectors important to the US and the EU are relevant to explain this phenomenon.

Discussions regarding economic sanctions will start from the broader framework of international sanctions so that, following the analysis of the theoretical views on international sanctions, they will be limited to the concept of thematic sanctions (targeted sanctions). The logic of the present paper is one of causality. The US and the EU are supporters and promoters of human

rights on the international stage. However, the application of sanctions on China's human rights abuses in XUAR is discouraged and therefore limited by the US and EU's economic dependencies on China, which the latter effectively exploits. The US and EU's imposition of sanctions only on certain Chinese individuals, institutions and companies reflects the relation of causality between the weaponized interdependence and the limited and low intensity sanctions.

The first part of the paper outlines the theoretical framework that will be used to explain how China's is weaponizing the US and EU dependencies on its economy in order to limit the intensity of the sanctions imposed by them. In this section, the concepts of weaponization of interdependence and sanctions will be analysed in relation with the international regime of human rights. The second part focuses on the human rights situation in XUAR and the inconclusive reaction of the international community to it. The third part of the paper highlights the economic sanctions imposed by the US and the EU on the Beijing government for abusing the local Muslim population in XUAR. The last part of the paper is dedicated to explaining how China is using the US and the EU dependencies on its economy to limit the effects of economic sanctions and to continue its abusive policy in XUAR. Also, the last part pays special attention on how the Beijing regime is exercising its institutional control over the domestic economy and on how China is weaponizing economic power in two important economic segments for the US and the EU.

1. The harmful link between interdependence and human rights

When analysing the effects of interdependence on the effectiveness of the economic sanctions in supporting human rights, one should must have in mind two defining elements of the liberal international order.

The interdependence is one of the basic characteristics of the state of the global market economy and it also reflects the fact that the expansion of global economic networks plays a key role in maintaining international peace and security in the post-World War II era. In other words, as the leading theorists of interdependence in the twentieth century, Keohane and Nye (2011), argue, economic cooperation and the emergence of interdependence are essential pillars of international peace. According to them, interdependence means "situations characterized by reciprocal effects among countries or among actors in different countries" (Keohane and Nye, 2011, p. 8). Keohane and Nye considered that the concept of interdependence should be developed beyond this basic definition and proposed complex interdependence as an updated version that will better suit the current features of the global economy and which is defined by three main characteristics: the multiple channels that

connect societies, the absence of hierarchy among issues (in a situation of complex interdependence between two actors, military security loses its place on the agenda of the parties), and the diminished relevance of military power in managing conflicts between states in conditions of complex interdependence (Keohane and Nye, 2011, p. 21). In many cases, the relation of complex interdependence that take place between two parties generates asymmetries regarding the dependencies. These asymmetries can “provide sources of influence for actors in their dealings with one another. Less dependent actors can often use the interdependent relationship as a source of power in bargaining over an issue and perhaps to affect other issues” (Keohane and Nye, 2011, p. 9).

Drezner (2021) defines weaponized interdependence as “a condition under which an actor can exploit its position in an embedded network to gain bargaining advantage over others in a contained system” (Drezner, 2021, p. 8). At first, the concept was developed by Farrell and Newman (2019). They are providing a different theoretical framework regarding the interdependence and its effects through “a structural explanation of interdependence in which network topography generates enduring power imbalances among states” (Farrell and Newman, 2019, p. 45). Farrell and Newman emphasize that weaponized interdependence is the product of asymmetric network structures “in which some states are able to leverage interdependent relations to coerce others”, and those states that have political authority over the “central nodes” of these structures “through which money, goods, and information travel are uniquely positioned to impose costs on others” (ibidem.). There are two ways to weaponize interdependence. Those states that have “superior institutional capacity in these asymmetric networks”, a strong economy and are as less dependent as possible can use their control over the complex interdependencies in order to “gather information or choke off economic and information flows, discover and exploit vulnerabilities, compel policy change, and deter unwanted actions” (ibidem.). In order to support their thesis on the weaponization of interdependence, Farrell and Newman show how the US use the logistical and political advantages over The Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT) payment system and the global Internet to increase domestic security, but also to manage external threats such as terrorism and nuclear proliferation in the case of Iran.

The discussion regarding the weaponization of interdependence is essential for the subject of this paper because it offers the theoretical explanation necessary to understand the interdependence beyond the liberal account of this concept and how great powers use the rules that weave global economic networks in order to exert power and enhance their security in international politics.

Following the logic of complex interdependence in the absence of a hierarchy of international issues, after the end of the Cold War we are witnessing a growing interest from the international

community, especially the Western powers, in protecting human rights globally, particularly in former regions that were in the Soviet Union's sphere of influence.

Currently, the protection of human rights is one of the main normative principles on which the liberal international order is based on. The international regime of human rights was born as a reaction to the atrocities committed in World War II that resulted in the deaths of millions of innocent people. Since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the international regime of human rights has been supplemented by a series of normative additions and practical tools designed to ensure “the dignity and worth of the human person and the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in greater freedom” (United Nations, n.d.). Despite the prominent international dimension of human rights protection, states are legally primarily responsible for the domestic implementation of human rights treaties and conventions (Donnelly and Whelan, 2018, p. 16).

There are situations in which the international human rights regime is not effective enough to combat the “systematic, massive, and flagrant violations of certain key rights that lead to significant loss of life and destruction of livelihoods” and, in these circumstances, “the international community may be empowered to intervene coercively” to prevent genocide and crimes against humanity (Donnelly and Whelan, 2018, p. 171). After the end of the Cold War, in the context of the decline of geopolitical competition, the practice of humanitarian intervention became a recurring feature in international politics (Forsythe, 2018, p. 82).

In the context of global economic networks and the interdependencies generated by them, in order to punish acts that endanger international peace and security or that lead to mass human rights violations, the international community is resorting to economic sanctions to correct the slippage of some states, to the detriment of use of military force. When the costs of other actions (such as economic incentives and military intervention) are too high, the sanctions are one of the most often used instrument on the international stage in order to manage and to shape the actions of the other actors.

In a recent comprehensive study regarding the evolution of the economic sanctions enforced by the EU, the United Nations and the US since the end of the Cold War, Weber and Schneider are observing that the economic sanctions applied from 1989 to 2015 were not very effective in achieving their goals (Weber and Schneider, 2022, p. 97). The two provide a definition of economic sanctions that can be easily identified with the definition of power as it was shaped by Robert Dahl (Dahl, 1957, pp. 203-204). According to the authors, “the sanctions are, generally speaking, a measure of economic coercion through which senders try to force a target to change a behavior that they deem unacceptable” (Weber and Schneider, 2022, p. 99). The EUSANCT study provides that most

economic sanctions are addressing “issues that directly affect the international community, such as exercising political influence over a third state, militarized actions, territorial disputes, alignment choices, weapons production and proliferation, illegal nuclear enrichment, support of terrorist group, and drug trafficking”, but also issues that concern the domestic policies of the third state including “human rights violations, electoral frauds, violation of the constitutional order, and enhancing leadership change” (Weber and Schneider, 2022, p. 102).

David P. Forsythe identified three means used by states in their foreign policy to protect human rights when they are violated in other states: diplomatic, economic and military. According to him, states “do sometimes suspend full trade, and also development aid or other types of foreign assistance [...] for the lack of other appealing options – e.g., diplomacy alone has proven ineffective but military action is not desired” (Forsythe, 2018, p. 219). Forsythe does not consider that economic sanctions are useful enough in addressing the protection of human rights against violations because of their “unintended or unwanted effects” as in the case of the sanctions imposed on the Saddam Hussein regime in 1990s (*ibidem.*). Despite these shortcomings, when countries such as China and Russia systematically violate human rights within their own territory, sanctions may become the only reliable tool for the international community to remedy humanitarian situations.

A similar understanding of the shortcomings of the application of economic sanctions in the case of human rights violations by different states can be considered as the one that gave rise to a new paradigm of sanctioning such abuses. In a recent European Parliament (EP) report dedicated to global human rights sanctions framework implemented by the US, Canada, the UK and the EU, Martin Russell highlights the new Western approach to address human rights abuses at the global level, whether they are systematic or not (Russell 2021). Russell makes a clear distinction between thematic and geographic sanctions. Depending on their scope, geographical sanctions are “limited to a particular country” while thematic (global) sanctions “can be applied to particular types of perpetrators, regardless of the geographical location” (Russell, 2021, p. 2). This new approach is defined by the targeted sanctions which are dedicated to specific individuals, firms and political institutions without having direct effects on states and their economies.

This model of sanctions applied by the West, including that of the EU, is based on the one implemented by the US since 2012. Called today the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act, the US sanctions regime was originally used to sanction a number of Russian citizens after the suspicious death of Sergei Magnitsky, a Russian tax expert, who revealed several financial irregularities in the high circles of the Kremlin regime. The current US Global Magnitsky Act has an “unlimited geographical scope; whereas previous measures targeted individuals and entities from

specified countries (Russia in the case of the 2012 US Magnitsky Act), no such restrictions apply to the global version of the act” (Russell, 2021, p. 2). According to this EP report, “the choice of global sanctions could be explained by a wish to limit the damage to bilateral relations with countries that are geopolitically important or significant trade partners” (Russell, 2021, p. 11). But as we will see below, the targets of these sanctions, whether imposed by the US or the EU, are individuals and entities who carry out the orders of a national government (in this case the Chinese central government) and implement a series of policies which negatively affects the human rights situation.

2. The case of human rights violations in Xinjiang and the reactions of the international community

XUAR is an autonomous region in the West of China with a population of 25.85 million people (Statistics Bureau of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, 2021). In XUAR the Uyghur ethnic majority make up 45% of the total population, while the religious majority is Muslim and accounts for 60% of the region's residents.

Tensions between the Chinese government and the Xinjiang Uyghur ethnic community have their origins in the violent riots of 2009 and Beijing's harsh crackdown on them. The main cause of these riots in XUAR is the mass migration of Han ethnic groups, accompanied by a series of economic and social policies that offer them an advantage in the labour market and in the economy of the autonomous region to the detriment of the local Muslim population (Human Rights Watch, 2009). These policies have caused Uyghurs dissatisfaction and as a result individuals identified as belonging to this ethnic group have committed a series of attacks such as the one in Tiananmen Square in 2013 and the one in Kunming Railway Station in 2014.

Beijing's response to these attacks came shortly after. Thus, since 2014, the Chinese authorities have developed and implemented the concept of "re-education camps" in which detainees, most of whom are Uyghurs, are subjected to detention, torture and deprivation of rights. The main purpose of these practices is thought to be the political indoctrination of the Uyghurs and the destruction of their identity in order to achieve the cultural assimilation of the Muslim ethnic groups and a stronger governmental control over the local population (Cronin-Furnam, 2018). The tightening of political control can be justified by Beijing's intention to fundamentally change the XUAR due to its geographical location, which plays a central role to the Belt and Road Initiative. According to the 13th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China, the Chinese government must ensure that “Xinjiang becomes an important window for opening up

westward” and “the core region for the Silk Road Economic Belt” (Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, 2016).

Under the pretext of fighting terrorism, the Muslims in XUAR have been subjected to treatments that can easily be described as inhumane and degrading for any human being. According to the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, since 2017 the Chinese authorities in the XUAR have implemented a birth control campaign targeting the detained Uyghur women (Zenz, 2020). Moreover, the Chinese government declared Islam “a contagious disease” (Samuel, 2018). In order to hide these actions, the Chinese authorities prevent millions of people living in XUAR from communicating freely about Beijing’s abuses and ban foreign journalists and investigators from entering the region (Amnesty International, 2022, pp. 126-127).

These events in XUAR should be understood in the light of a somewhat ambivalent view of China regarding human rights. Beijing's human rights policy is different from that promoted under the UN system, or at least the concept is given a different meaning. For this reason, the issue of human rights is a sensitive topic for the Chinese Communist Party policy, and therefore a red line in China's foreign policy. The Chinese concept of human rights is not a liberal one as that in Western democracies, where individual rights and liberties prevail over those of the society as a whole (Xie, 2019, p. 428). Since 1989, several narratives about the role of human rights in the Chinese society and economy have been promoted by the political leadership of the Chinese state. When it comes to protecting human rights, the arguments of Chinese officials support authoritarian conceptions of sovereignty and national interest, deny the relevance of the liberal conception of human rights in relation to Chinese interpretations of the concept of justice, support the cultural relativization of human rights and the primacy of socio-economic well-being to the detriment of the protection of human rights (Pils, 2018, p. 40).

Although the government's activities in XUAR do not comply with the current international human rights regulations, the reactions of relevant international actors to the issue are still quite ambiguous and undecided. One of the most expected reactions is that of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

The situation of human rights violations in XUAR came for the first time to the attention of the OHCHR in 2018. During the 39th session of the UN Human Rights Council, Michelle Bachelet, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, pointed out that the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination had identified “deeply disturbing allegations of large-scale arbitrary detentions of Uyghurs and other Muslim communities in so called re-education camps across Xinjiang” (HC Bachelet Global Update, 2018). Only recently, in 2021, the OHCHR has identified in XUAR “the use

of arbitrary detention and ill-treatment in institutions, coercive work practices and the erosion of social and cultural rights in general" and is due to report on the human rights situation in this region of China (Richardson, 2021). But the completion of the report depends on an on-site analysis by OHCHR specialists. In this context, China has put pressure on OHCHR to delay as much as possible the visit of its human rights specialists to XUAR and, as a consequence, to postpone their report on the situation (Bermingham, 2022).

3. The sanctions imposed by the US and the EU on China in the case of human rights abuses in XUAR

Over the last few years, the US has taken the strongest position on the international stage on the human rights situation in XUAR. The reactions of the last two US administrations have followed and complemented each other so that the measures taken by the Trump administration against China's actions in XUAR have been continued and even tightened by the Biden Administration. In March 2019, after meeting with several Uyghur minority survivors in XUAR detention camps, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo highlighted the US's awareness of the human rights situation in the western region of China and called on the Chinese government to release all abusively detained persons (U.S. Department of State, 2019).

In October 2019, the US enforced its first sanctions to Chinese officials responsible for managing XUAR detention camps and human rights violations. The Trump administration's Commerce Department also imposed a series of restrictions on US companies that were banned from exporting goods and services to a number of Xianjiang-based entities that were suspected of being involved in the implementation of the detention, repression and surveillance system (U.S. Mission China, 2019). The US sanctions on Chinese companies for their involvement in the Chinese government's abusive activities in XUAR have continued for the next two years. Thus, in July and December 2020, the US Treasury imposed restrictions on US exports to several Chinese companies operating in the field of textile and cosmetics manufacturing, in the medical field, but also in the field of artificial intelligence (Whalen, 2020). The Biden administration has imposed new sanctions on the Chinese company SenseTime Group for developing the facial recognition system used in XUAR for tracking people belonging to Muslim ethnic groups (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2021), as well as 23 other Chinese companies (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2021a).

On June 17, 2020, the US Congress passed the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act. This act authorized the use of U.S. resources "to address human rights violations and abuses, including gross violations of human rights, by the People's Republic of China" (U.S. Congress, 2020). Following the

enactment of this normative act, the Trump administration imposed new sanctions on the visas and properties of several Chinese officials - including Chen Quanguo, a member of the Political Bureau of Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC) - for their role in "serious violations of human rights" in the XUAR. The Biden Administration continued the sanctions policy of the Trump administration and, in March 2021, the US Treasury imposed new restrictions on the tangible and financial assets of Wang Junzheng and Chen Mingguo, senior Chinese XUAR officials working for the XPCC and the Xinjiang Public Security Bureau (XPSB) (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2021).

The toughest economic sanction imposed on China by the United States is the restrictions on all imports of goods from XUAR. This sanction was enacted on December 8, 2021 by the adoption of the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act by the US Congress (U.S. Congress, 2021). In adopting this normative act, the American Congress starts from the presumption that all goods imported from Xinjiang region are produced by forced labor. Thus, in order to be able to export goods to the USA, companies operating in XUAR must clearly demonstrate that their products do not result from the subjection of Chinese citizens in this region to forced labour and slavery.

On the other hand, the EU-China relationship in matters related to human rights is defined by the broader framework of strategic cooperation between the two. This is made clear in the conclusions of the 2016 Council of the European Union, which emphasizes "that the promotion of human rights and the rule of law will continue to be a core part of the EU's engagement with China" and that draws attention to the EU's focus on measures China is taking to "ensure a safe and enabling environment for civil society - including foreign NGOs - and to protect the rights of people belonging to minorities, not least in Tibet and Xinjiang" (General Secretariat of the Council, 2016, p. 3).

Regarding the human rights situation in XUAR, the EU has expressed itself mainly through the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. She called on China to allow the OHCHR monitoring team access to XUAR. An urgent debate took place in the EP, in which Federica Mogherini supported the request of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to approve his access to the XUAR and called on the Member States to provide protection for Uyghurs fleeing China and to respect the principle of non-refoulement, and in the EU-China Human Rights Dialogue raised the issue of re-education camps for the first time (EEAS Press Team, 2019).

At present, we cannot talk about a long history of major economic sanctions imposed on China by the EU in serious cases of human rights violations. The harshest such sanction was imposed by the European Communities after violent retaliation against the June 4 protests by the Chinese government, and was limited to an arms embargo on China, which is still in force. Until March 22, 2021, the arms embargo was the last and the only sanction imposed by the EU due to human rights

abuses in China. In accordance with The EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime, established on December 7, 2020, the Council of the European Union (CEU) has decided to impose sanctions on four Chinese officials operating in XUAR and on the XPCC, which was accused of using Uyghur forced labour. The sanctioned Chinese officials were Zhu Hailun, allegedly the architect of the mass surveillance against the Uyghurs; Wang Junzheng, Communist Party Secretary for the XPCC; and Wang Mingshan and Chen Mingguo, both charged with large-scale arbitrary detention and degrading treatment of Uyghurs (The Council of the European Union, 2021). Compared to the US sanctions regime applied in the same case, the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime is weaker than the tools used by the US government.

Chinese officials' responses to the international allegations regarding Chinese authorities' treatment of Uyghurs and other Muslim ethnic groups do not follow an official common and unified line of argument. Thus, In 2020 the Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying denied US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's allegations and accused the US of hypocrisy over discriminatory and racist measures that gave rise to the Black Lives Matter movement in USA (Chunying, 2020). The Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi argued during the debates that took place on the sidelines of the 46th session of the Human Rights Council that the Chinese government was taking lawful counter-terrorism measures by implementing the UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism and the results were the four years during which Xinjiang enjoyed “social stability and sound development” without any “terrorist case” (Yi, 2021). Also, during the 49th Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, Yi emphasized that China did not accept the use of double standards regarding human rights by the other members of international community, nor do other states' lectures on how international human rights norms should be implemented (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People's Republic of China, 2022).

The approach in the case of Xinjiang human rights abuses indicates a high level of restraint on the part of the US and the EU regarding its political and economic relations with China. As the world's second largest economic power, China has some leverage over other great powers, including the United States.

4. Weaponized interdependence - China's reaction to the sanctions imposed by the US and the EU

Perhaps China's most important economic asset relative to Western powers is its status as the world's workshop. The Chinese products are located in many supply chains but most of the Chinese companies are manufacturing final goods whose main feature is that they cannot be easily identified

on international markets (Kroeber, 2018, p. 238). Unlike European products that have a strong global reputation, Chinese products are competitive in matters related to costs and supply efficiency. This is reflected in China's position as the world's largest exporter, with a total trade volume of 2,732 billion dollars in 2020 (The World Bank IBRD – IDA, n.d.). Also, the US-China trade balance is not favorable to the US, with a trade deficit of 355 billion dollars in 2021 (United States Census Bureau n.d.). China is the largest import partner of the US, most imports being composed of electronics, equipment and installations and textiles (Siripurapu, 2022). Also, of the total US exports, 7.6% of them are going to China (ibidem.). The EU is finding itself in the same situation, having a trade deficit with China of 249 billion euros (Eurostat, 2022). According to Eurostat, the most imported Chinese goods by the EU Member States are telecommunication equipment, automatic data processing machines, electrical machines and apparatuses, and electronic tubes, valves and related articles. On the other side, China is a big market for the motor cars, motor vehicles and motor vehicle parts that are produced in EU (ibidem.).

These trade imbalances work in China's favor, allowing Beijing to weaponize the attractiveness of the size and growth rate of its economy to shape the behavior of states that want to benefit from its dynamics and expansion. In the wake of sanctions imposed on China for abusing the Muslim population in XUAR, Beijing is exploiting US and EU dependence on exports of components for solar power systems and textiles produced in XUAR in order to reduce the possibility of further sanctions that could affect political and social stability in China.

XUAR is an important producer of cotton, polysilicon (a critical component of solar panels), cashmere, tomatoes, and other goods. The US sanctions on XPCC have a direct impact on polysilicon and cotton on the supply chains of American companies. XPCC plays an important role in the XUAR economy as it controls one third of cotton farms and produce 30% of the Chinese cotton (Dou, 2020), and has direct control over at least one of the largest polysilicon companies in XUAR (Funaiole, 2021). Moreover, these sanctions imposed on companies operating in the region do not affect them, as the commodities they produce are well integrated into global supply chains. But the sanctions have indirect effects on the local population, affecting the local labor market and people's incomes (Zhang, 2021).

The market for photovoltaic systems is a growing one. This trend is driven by global ambitions for climate neutral economies. Worldwide, approximately 95% of solar panel modules are made of polysilicon. China is the world's leading producer of polysilicon, but also has a dominant position in the production processes of other components such as ingots, wafers, and cells that are assembled into solar modules. Most of the photovoltaic panels produced worldwide are made of polysilicon.

XUAR's polysilicon production covers almost 50% of the world's market for this product (Funaiole, 2021). Given the US sanctions imposed on products that are based on forced labor, the US government is taking a significant part of its polysilicon imports out of the game. These sanctions have a direct effect on the efficiency of solar panel production in the United States and on the cost of installing new renewable energy capacity (Shepherd, 2021). In October 2021, John Kerry, United States Special Presidential Envoy for Climate, argued that a ban on imports of solar panels from XUAR could affect the US's ability to implement the Biden administration's ambitious climate change policy (Hudson and Nakashima, 2021).

Another economic sector that China is exploiting to counter Western internationally imposed sanctions is textiles. The XUAR produces 20% of the cotton on the international market. But this cotton is not exported by China in its raw form, but in the form of textile products produced by Chinese companies. In 2020, H&M, the Swedish company and the world's second largest clothing retailer, announced that it would no longer use cotton from XUAR to produce its clothing. This decision, based on the release of reports on forced labor in XUAR published by human rights and media NGOs, led to a boycott of H&M products by Chinese citizens. Several users of Weibo, the Chinese social media network, have denied the human rights abuses in XUAR and accused the political and conspiratorial nature of the Swedish company's statement. This campaign has led to the closure of several H&M clothing stores in several major Chinese cities, including Urumqi, the capital of XUAR.

The Chinese government has been directly involved in this boycott campaign through the Communist Youth League and Beijing-influenced media trusts (Reuters 2021). Also in June 2021, China's General Administration of Customs confiscated and destroyed several imported shipments of H&M, Nike, Gap and other products. According to the Chinese authorities, those products posed a potential threat to the health of consumers (Karen, 2021, p. 53). This was a clear escalation in a broader campaign of retaliation against these Western brands following their statements regarding forced labor in XUAR. In the next days, several e-commerce platforms have removed H&M products from their product lines. This led to a 23% decrease in sales of H&M products in China between March 1st, 2021 and May 31st, 2021.

According to recent studies published by Agroisolab in Jülich and the Hochschule Niederrhein University of Applied Sciences, two German research institutes, German clothing firms Puma, Adidas, Hugo Boss, Jack Wolfskin and Tom Tailor have broken their promises regarding the elimination of cotton products imported from XUAR (Oltermann, 2022). Using isotopic-based technology, the two institutes identified that the cotton used in several products of the five companies

was cultivated in XUAR. This hesitation on the part of German clothing companies undermines the homogeneity of the European discourse condemning the Chinese government's abuses against the Uyghur and Muslim minorities in XUAR and gives credibility to accusations from Beijing and the Chinese people regarding the political nature of European accusations.

The US isolation of 20% of world cotton production and almost 50% of polysilicon production is certainly having a negative effect on the international prices of these commodities. This affects both the US and the EU, as well as the competitiveness of American and European companies on the international markets in the field of solar energy and textiles, final or not.

The boycott of European clothing companies by Chinese citizens has been amplified by the Chinese authorities through the use of state institutions. This indicates that Beijing is taking seriously the effect that the withdrawal of Western companies from the Chinese market can have on its economy. Such actions can have a negative impact on the image of the Chinese state's political leadership as well as on the Chinese economy as a whole. Beijing's low intensity counter-measures mimic those taken by the US and the EU. The Chinese government did not react harshly to Western sanctions precisely because it understands that economic sanctions and boycott on XUAR have effects also on the United States and the EU due to existing interdependencies.

We cannot talk about China's ability to weaponize the existing interdependence in relation with US and EU without its strong institutional control over the central nodes of economic networks. Regarding the case study of this paper, this type of control is facilitated by the authoritarian nature of the Beijing regime which exercises strict institutional control over the foreign and Chinese companies, especially the state-owned ones.

In addressing the US and the EU allegations and sanctions regarding the situation in XUAR, the political rhetoric of the Beijing officials was accompanied by its counter-offensive on the Western objectors. In order to justify its response to sanctions imposed on Chinese companies by other states, the Chinese Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) has adopted the “Rules on Counteracting Unjustified Extra-territorial Application of Foreign Legislation and Other Measures” which compel the Chinese companies to report “unjustified extra-territorial application of foreign legislation and other measures” that “prohibits or restricts the citizens, legal persons or other organizations of China from engaging in normal economic, trade and related activities with a third State (or region) or its citizens, legal persons or other organizations” (Ministry of Commerce People's Republic of China, 2021). This normative act was completed in June of the same year by the Anti-Foreign Sanctions Law, which creates new internal institutional structures that deal with the implementation of restrictions on companies and individuals who take actions that endanger the situation of Chinese citizens or have

implications for internal affairs of China. These two regulations, along with the Export Control Law and the Unreliable Entities List adopted in 2020, shape the package of measures taken by China to combat Western sanctions.

The elaboration of this normative framework in such a short time was a result of the sanctions applied by the western powers in the case of XUAR and indicates the high capacity of Beijing to control the domestic market in relation to foreign companies. These regulations also create the framework that Chinese companies can use to avoid the effects of sanctions, at least in part. With this response, the Beijing government sends a clear message to those who impose sanctions on Chinese companies and individuals: that it can protect its interests and not be intimidated.

China's retaliation against the US sanctions was imposed in December 2021. China announced sanctions on Tuesday on four members of the US government's Commission on International Religious Freedom. Wang Wenbin, a spokesperson for the Chinese Foreign Ministry, argued that these sanctions imposed on the basis of the principle of reciprocity and sanctions are intended to "defend China's sovereignty, security and development interests and protect the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese personnel, and pursuant to relevant provisions of China's Anti-Foreign Sanctions Law" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People's Republic of China, 2022). Also, in 2021, counter-sanctions were imposed by the Beijing regime on several European parliamentarians and several European entities, including Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights, the Council's Political and Security Committee, and several European think tanks and academics (Parry 2021).

The reason why Beijing has not imposed tougher sanctions on the US and the EU is underlined by Robert Blackwill and Jennifer Harris in their study on economic techniques of statecraft in international politics. The two point out that the Beijing government does not attribute a positive connotation to international sanctions, considering them "an abuse of power by developed countries, notably the United States" and opposing them "out of fear of losing out on imports of vital commodities that support economic growth at home" (Blackwill and Harris 2017, p. 138).

But this reaction of Beijing gave the EP a chance to play its part in shaping the EU's position on the human rights situation in XUAR. This position was clarified on May 20, 2021, when members of the EP voted to block the ratification of the EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investments (CAI) and at the same time called for a tougher approach in relation to Beijing (European Parliament, 2021). Although members of the EP did not refer to it as a sanction, the decision to block the CAI can be considered a powerful blow to China's economic ambitions regarding the EU. The EP decision is all the more harsh as the CAI has been negotiated for seven years and was meant to create a more flexible and stable framework for trade and investment in each other's markets. Moreover, the

adoption of the CAI involves expanding the business of European companies in as many regions of China as possible, including XUAR. This means that these companies can directly or indirectly become involved in abuses against Muslims in XUAR, which is to be avoided by the EU.

Conclusions

Human rights are currently an important issue in the dynamics of international politics, being a defining element for Western political identity as well as a disruptive element for powers with authoritarian regimes such as the China. The paper highlights the fact that the lack of effectiveness of the economic sanctions on matters that regards the violation of the human rights by the great economic powers like China is based on the asymmetrical economic interdependence from which the latter benefits in relation to the US and the EU.

Threats of strangling some global economic networks discourage the US and the EU from reporting objectively and decisively on Chinese government abuses against Uyghur minority in the XUAR region. The current global human rights sanctions regimes are not powerful enough to discourage China from further violating the human rights of the Muslim population in XUAR because they have little impact on China's economy and the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party, as perceived by its own citizens. The economic impact on China is extremely small compared to the scale of trade between China and the West. We can consider that the US and the EU are more interested in how China can influence their global economic interests and to a lesser extent in how China treats its own citizens.

Reducing dependencies on China-controlled economic nodes may increase the effects of economic sanctions to reduce human rights abuses in XUAR. The multilateral or concerted use of economic sanctions by Western powers, following the model of sanctions imposed on Russia in the context of the Ukrainian war, can have visible effects on China's economy, but there is the possibility of starting economic wars that can extend globally, beyond the geographical boundaries of Eurasia.

Therefore, by using the theoretical framework proposed in this paper, new research directions can be approached and developed regarding how China is taking advantage of its control over other essential economic nodes in the global economy to discourage political incursions by Western powers in issues that Beijing considers sensitive for the political stability of the Chinese state and for the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party, such as the democratic freedoms in Hong Kong or the contested status of Taiwan.

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Creating a 21st-century heroic myth around a living person – example of the Croatian general Ante Gotovina

Domagoj KRPAN*

Abstract

One of the most important topics of Croatia accession to the EU was cooperation with International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in Den Haag. ICTY was created by the international community to prosecute war crimes committed during the wars in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. In Croatia, there was an opinion that the court will prosecute only Serbia and there was a shock when the first indictments were sent for war crimes committed by Croatian forces. A personification of this process was general Ante Gotovina, who was accused among others as a member of a joint criminal enterprise but, in the end, he was found not guilty. At the same time, some parts of Croatian society and media started to build a mythical status around Ante Gotovina. This paper will analyze this type of media coverage and how it did shape opinion and consequentially created a modern myth around Gotovina.

Keywords: Homeland War, Ante Gotovina, ICTY, breakup of Yugoslavia, myth

Introduction

When people hear the word “myth,” they often think about ancient times or a period dating back to the dawn of civilization, and most might say that it cannot be created today since we rely on modern technology that helps us to persevere history. Such technology is useful because there is a lesser chance of separating facts from fiction. Today, people often harbor romantic views of the past; they are altering history, and certain stories from the recent past are becoming blurry. In former communist countries of central, eastern, and south-eastern Europe, following the fall of communism, there was a demand for a new beginning that would break up the chains that connected them with the communist rule. Their desire to distance themselves from the old regime was so strong, in some cases, that some people and events from the near or more distant past were becoming glorified as ideals that the new generation should follow. Furthermore, in some aspects, narratives about them became so

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exaggerated that it was difficult to decipher where the facts ended and the myth began. This kind of narrative became the founding myth of newly dependent countries.

Ante Gotovina was a Croatian general during the 1990s Homeland War. In the aftermath of the war, the International Criminal Tribunal's custody for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) accused him of the individual and command responsibility of crimes against civilians and rebel forces during the war's final days. He spent several years as a fugitive because he maintained his innocence. He was, in 2005, arrested and transferred to ICTY but was, in the end, acquitted on all charges. For Croatian citizens, Gotovina became the personification of Croatian efforts during the war. During his time as a prisoner, whatever was happening to him was perceived as happening to the country itself. Political parties used his image to build their narrative about the war. For right-wing parties, the prosecution of Gotovina was nothing short of an international conspiracy against Croatia. In their view, the international community was attempting to delete the border between the aggressor and the victim. In other words, they were trying to find Croatia's side guilty of war crimes. On the other hand, left-wing parties tried to use his example to show that there were crimes on both sides. Furthermore, they saw this as an opportunity to face the Croatian public with the dark side of the war conflict.

During that time, far-right parties began to rally around Gotovina's narrative that depicted him as a saint – not just as a person who had not committed or ordered any war crime but rather as a person who could not do wrong. As a result, Gotovina started to slip from a human to a demigod who, in their view, would return one day to the homeland and lead them into a new battle against all the state's enemies. The only problem with this way of thinking was that nobody asked Gotovina would accept this role. All the information came from people close to him or who were in contact with him, but no in-depth knowledge about his state of mind was available. He kept his private life away from the public eye and never presented himself as a celebrity. So, there was much disappointment when he returned from The Hague and home to live a peaceful life.

This paper will examine the myth that was built around Gotovina from his arrest in 2005 until his release in 2012. It will address the causes that became the foundation for the creation of this myth and analyze media coverage of Gotovina and his possible future upon return to Croatia. To better understand the narrative built around him, this paper will first present the causes that led to the outbreak of the Homeland War that would, in the end, elevate Gotovina to his current status.

1. The myth

One of the earliest forms of remembering history is an oral tradition. In the early days of human society, people would gather around and tell tales about their ancestries; however, those same stories drifted further from the truth over time. Tale-tellers would add new aspects to the story, while at the same time, others would disappear. Those same stories became devoid of objective truth and became myths. A myth expresses and confirms society's religious values and norms, it provides a pattern of behavior to be imitated, testifies to the efficacy of ritual with its practical ends, and establishes the sanctity of cult (Honko, 1984, p. 49). Furthermore, in myths, the main heroes are gods, demigods, or supernatural humans, while the stories of ordinary humans are usually contained in legends rather than myths (Bascom 1965, p. 9).

There are several roles that a myth has to fulfill. Person, places, and events depicted are considered sacred, which makes anyone brave enough to bring its validity into question is regarded as an enemy of the community. An essential part of myths is people whose duty is to keep the story alive. They must make sure that the community participates in its proper commemoration. In other words, a myth does not exist on its own; there is a correlation between the myth and the ritual (Segal, 2004, p. 61). This connection is meaningful because the community has to have collective memory about the past to survive. Furthermore, it has a sacred duty to transfer a message to the new generation because myths have people's subjective truth communicated through stories, symbols, and rituals (Sinha, 2016).

One of the challenges for people who want to move past the mythological era is that the community might consider them an enemy and excommunicate them. Even if they have all the facts that can prove a mythological story is false or has been presented falsely, it is still not enough for the community because there is a crucial difference between facts, fiction, and myths. Facts are everybody's truth, fiction is nobody's truth, and myths are somebody's truth. (Shaikh, 2018). This definition of truth is a functionalistic part of myths. Secondly, there is euhemerism in myths since storytellers repeatedly elaborate upon historical accounts until the figures in those accounts gain a godlike status. (Bulfinch, 2004, p. 194) In other words, something happened, but through time, it mutated into a myth. Finally, allegory or personification is part of mythology. For example, objects or philosophical concepts such as the Sun or judgment in ancient Greece were associated with the god Apollo or Athens (Honko, 1984, p. 45).

It may seem odd that we are discussing myths in the modern era because we live in times when things are well documented, and there are enough sources that diminish the value of oral tradition.

However, in recent times, there has been a rising interest in oral history because, to understand how people remember and understand the past, historians have to explore the history outside of written documents. Tosh (2002) groups oral materials into two categories: oral reminiscence – the first-hand recollections of people interviewed by a historian, usually referred to as oral history, and oral tradition, i.e., the narratives and descriptions of people and events in the past which have been handed down by word of mouth over several generations.

Of course, someone could argue that when historians explore an individual's life, they should look into his personal papers to understand his way of thinking since public opinion about someone could be based on erroneous assumptions that take root in the public conscience. However, in more recent, this might pose a challenge given that certain significant public figures did not leave a paper trail of their lives, and historians have to collect the impressions and recollections of such figures from their surviving colleagues and associates (Tosh, 2002). Tosh (2002) maintains that there are two social functions that oral traditions have to fulfill. First, they could serve as a means of teaching the values and beliefs which are integral to a particular culture, such as the proper relationship between humans and animals or the obligations of kinship and affinity. They might also serve to validate the particular social and political arrangements which currently prevail, such as the distribution of land or the pattern of relations with a neighboring people.

This is where we can find the connection between the oral tradition and the ritual. Oral tradition helps simplify important cultural points that become the foundation for the ritual. The ritual is merely the codification of key cultural aspects already known in a particular society.

2. The breakup of Yugoslavia and the Homeland War

The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (hereinafter: Yugoslavia) was a country in southeast and central Europe that existed from 1945 until 1992. It was composed of six republics: Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Macedonia, and two autonomous provinces within Serbia: Vojvodina and Kosovo. It was a one-party communist state with a strong cult of personality embodied by its president, Josip Broz Tito, who was considered one of the country's founding parts. His passing in May 1980 became the beginning of the end for many people.

During the 1980s, two crises struck Yugoslavia: economic downturn and the rise of nationalism. Yugoslavia had had one of the biggest and strongest growths globally since the 1950s, but its cost was very high because growth comes thanks to foreign creditors (Woodward, 1995). At the beginning

of the 1980s, the accumulated debt was difficult to repay (Crampton, 1997, p. 386). At the same time, Yugoslav companies were not following the world's economic trends, so they started taking even more credit to pay their workers and avoid bankruptcy. Unfortunately, instead of investing this money in production and resources that could help the companies stay viable in the international market, the money was used for payments to workers and the growing bureaucracy. An important factor in economic troubles was widespread corruption. The most famous case of this management was the Agrokomerc affair from 1987 when it became public knowledge that managers of Agrokomerc had issued promissory notes without collateral, forcing the state to assume responsibility for their debts when the company finally collapsed (Crampton, 1997, pp. 386-87). The living standard began to decline as inflation exploded from 21% in 1979 to 160% in 1987 (Crampton, 1997, p. 388). In addition to the federal economic problems, animosity started to grow between the republics.

Slovenia and Croatia were the most developed republics in the federation, so their income contributed to the development of the less fortunate republics. Simultaneously, Serbia demanded even more payment from Croatia and Slovenia, arguing that they needed to help more than ever (Crampton, 1997, p. 388). With regards to the average worker, his earnings dropped by 25% from 1979 to 1985, while, in 1988, the emigrant remittances to Yugoslavia totaled over \$4.5 billion (USD), and by 1989 reached \$6.2 billion (USD) (Massey and Taylor, 2004, p. 159).

Yugoslavia was ethnically very diverse. Serbs were the biggest ethnic group, but they did not form the majority. There was some "bad blood" left from the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, a state that had existed between the two world wars, and from World War II, there was much inter-ethnic fighting between those who supported Nazi collaboration governments and those who opposed them (Ramet 2006, ch. 4). Tito's idea was that, through economic development, these wounds would heal. That is why one of the main slogans in Yugoslavia was "Brotherhood and unity!" (*Cro.* "Bratstvo i jedinstvo!"). However, the economic crises of the 1980s showed that this was merely a facade. Consequently, a new rise of nationalism became one of the primary and most important causes of Yugoslav wars in the 1990s.

3. Anti-bureaucratic revolution

In the second half of the 1980s, Slobodan Milošević rose to power in Serbia. He used the people's disappointment of elites to consolidate his power in Serbia, followed by his move to take control of Yugoslavia. In Kosovo, a region with an Albanian majority, the situation was very intense because there were many rumors that Albanians were raping Serbian women and sweeping away any

trace of Serbian history and culture (Crampton, 2013, p. 148). Milošević's loyalists put in motion an amendment that would cut Kosovo's autonomy and delegate Serbia's power. Albanians boycotted the vote in the Kosovo parliament, but it did pass. (Krieger 2001, p. 522) This was unconstitutional because this vote needed a two-thirds majority in Kosovo's Parliament to pass (Krieger 2001, p. 522). In the second autonomous province situation was equally intense. Milošević's loyalists organized a protest in Novi Sad, the capital of the province (Milosavljević, 2003, p. 325). After the local government could not handle the situation, they resigned, and Milošević's loyalists gained control of the region (Milosavljević, 2003, p. 325). The final part of this act happened when Milošević's loyalists took over Montenegro in January 1989 (Milosavljević, 2003, p. 329).

One of the consequences of this movement was that Yugoslavia's Presidency, the country's highest political body, could not function properly anymore. There were eight members, one from each republic plus two from autonomous provinces, with half of them under Milošević's control. If other republics had tried to put any proposal that went against Milošević's interest, they were vetoed, which led other republics to consider their options, ranging from attempts to reform Yugoslavia to their full independence. Other republics put an independence proposal forward because Milošević was attempting to turn Yugoslavia into a centralized country with Serbian hegemony. In his 1989 speech on Gazimestan, Kosovo, during the commemoration of 600 years of the Battle of Kosovo between the Ottomans and Serbs, he drew a comparison with the need to fight for Serbian identity once again (Sell, 2004, p. 88). In his mind, if other republics did not meet his proposals, then the armed conflict would be the sole solution. He exploited Great Serbian nationalism, believing that all Serbs must live in one country to gain control. His political platform was based on myths about orthodox Serbs being threatened by Muslims, Croats, and the West (Obućina, 2011, p. 34).

In Croatia, the Communist party allowed the first free democratic elections in 1990, and the winner of this election was The Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), whose president Franjo Tuđman became the president of the Presidency of Croatia (Bideleux and Jeffries, 2007, p. 197). In December of the same year, the Croatian Parliament adopted a new constitution in which it defined Croatia as a country of the Croatian nation and other minorities (Bonacci, Skenderović and Jareb, 2004, pp. 737-39). The problem was that Serbs in Croatia were placed in the minority category, although the old constitution defined them as a nation. Milošević used all these changes in Croatia to fuel the old prejudice between the Croats and Serbs, while at the same time, on the Croat side, there were people who were also in the same state of mind. As a result, Serbs in Croatia created their own Serbian Autonomous Oblast Krajina (SAO Krajina), and many Serbian politicians left the Croatian Parliament to join it. (Caspersen, 2010, p. 55). The situation was on the brink of war. Croatia declared its

independence in 1991 (Brown and Karim, 1995, p. 117). The Serbs' response was to declare the independence of SAO Krajina, now called The Republic of Serbian Krajina (RSK), in which they created parallel structures of government (Armatta 2010, pp. 160-64). The final goal of RSK was to unite with Serbia and form a new country called Greater Serbia, where all Serbs would live while expelling other nations (Tomasevich, 1975, pp. 167-68). RSK ceased to exist in August 1995 after Croatian forces completed Operation Storm (Ahrens, 2007, p. 174).

4. Ante Gotovina

The biography of Ante Gotovina before the Homeland War is very scattered and mostly unknown. There are not many reliable sources about his early life or, to be more specific, when he left Yugoslavia and returned in 1991. He was born in Tkon on 12 October 1955, but his family moved to Pakoštane (Vuković, 2012). When he was 17 years old, he left Yugoslavia to serve in the French foreign legion. Later, Gotovina received his French citizenship, and, at some point in the 1980s, he moved to Columbia, where he got married and had a daughter (Vuković, 2012). The most famous book that describes his early life is *The Warrior – An adventurer and general* (Croatian: *Ratnik – pustolov i general*) by Nenad Ivanković. The book is not an actual biography but rather an adventurous novel about Gotovina's life. Therefore, unless Gotovina decides one day to tell us his life story, the public will be left guessing what is fact and what is fiction.

Ante Gotovina returned to Croatia in the summer of 1991, when he, as a volunteer, joined the 1st brigade of the Croatian National Guard (*Cro. Zbor narodne garde* or ZNG), later nicknamed "Tigers" (Lučić, 2015, p. 474). He was wounded in December 1991 during the fight in western Slavonia (Lučić, 2015, p. 204). At the begging of 1992, the fighting ceased in Croatia, and around one-third of Croatia territory was under RSK. Croatia's land territory was cut in half between Dalmatia and northern parts of Croatia. The only connection was by the sea or the island of Pag, which has a bridge connecting it with Dalmatia. That is why in January 1993, the Croatian army began with Operation *Maslenica* that finally connected northern and southern parts of Croatia and during which Gotovina earned praises for his actions as a commander (Bobetko, 1996, p. 369). Until 1995, he commanded a Croatian force in south Dalmatia and Livno in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where he successfully defended the city of Livno (Jularić, 2015). He rose through ranks and, in 1995, he became Lieutenant General and commanded over the sector South headquartered in Split (Marijan, 2007, p. 69).

5. Operation Storm

Beginning in 1992, UN peacekeepers (UNCRO) were located along the border zone of Croatian and RSK forces. For the international community, there were no questions about whether Croatia has the right to incorporate occupied territory within her international recognition borders. RSK political and military leaders refused all calls for peaceful resolutions of conflict. After rejecting the Z-4 Plan, the plan that guaranteed significant autonomy of RSK, the Croatian side was granted the right to engage in military action (Ahrenes 2007, pp. 171-73). Operation “Storm” (*Cro. Operacija Oluja*) started at 5 a.m. on 4 August 1995, and three hours before the operation itself, the Croatian side informed UNCRO of the imminent Croatian offensive (Marijan, 2007, p. 129). Under Ante Gotovina, the troops in sector South had the task to liberate Knin, the capital of RSK. The HV 4th & 7th Guards Brigade entered Knin around 11 a.m. on 5 August 1995 (Marijan, 2007, pp. 72-73). Major fighting ended on 8 August, when the 21st Kordun Corps Army of RSK surrendered to Lieutenant General Petar Stipetić (Marijan, 2007, pp. 111-12).

Croats and other non-Serbs were killed or expelled from the RSK territory during the war. In 1991, the RSK government initiated a campaign of ethnic cleansing against Croat civilians, and 84,000 Croats fled the Serbian-controlled region (Blitz 2006, 244). The number of displaced people ranges from 170,000 to 250,000, while the number of killed amounted to several thousand (Human Rights Watch, 2001). Serbs committed other war crimes. During Operation Storm, there was a mass exodus of Serbs from RSK; around 200,000 people left this area (Prodger, 2005). Serbian civilians left in the newly liberated place of former RSK became victims of war crimes: six civilians in Grubori were killed almost a month after the operation had ended (Petranović, 2020).

Consequently, ICTY began investigating Croatian actions before, during, and after Operation Storm. One of the primary pieces of evidence for prosecutors was the Brijuni transcripts – a set of recordings from the islands of Brijuni, where the final meeting of Croatian political and military leaders took place before Operation Storm (Matković, 2014, p. 130). The Chief Prosecutor Carla del Ponte issued indictments against three senior Croatian commanders, Lieutenant General Ivan Čermak, Lieutenant General Mladen Markač, and Lieutenant General Ante Gotovina (Ivanković 2015). Čermak was commanding the Croatian Army’s Knin corps, and Markač the special police. The three were charged under individual, joint criminal enterprise (JCE), and command responsibility for war crimes and crimes against humanity (Ivanković, 2015). The Prosecutor considered President Franjo Tuđman, Minister of Defence Gojko Šušak, General Janko Bobetko, the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces, and his successor Zvonimir Červenko also part of JCE. However, they

had died before the official indictment. After interrogation, the ICTY dropped charges against Rear Admiral Davor Domazet Lošo, the Chief of counterintelligence, and Lieutenant General Petar Stipetić, the commander of Sector North (Ivanković, 2015).

6. Fugitive years

Gotovina's life from July 2001 until December 2005 is shrouded in mystery. There are many stories about where he was and with whom. The Croatian reporter Ivo Pukanić conducted in 2003 an interview with Gotovina (Pukanić 2003). In that interview, Gotovina stated that he was ready to talk with prosecutors in Zagreb, not in The Hague if he was granted the status of a suspect. Since his time in the French Foreign Legion, he learned to respect different ethnicities (Pukanić, 2003). The Croatian government forbade him to talk with prosecutors in the late 1990s (Pukanić, 2003). After publishing this interview, the Croatian police interrogated Pukanić, but he refused to reveal who had helped him contact Gotovina, citing newspaper ethics. Gotovina's lawyer confirmed the interview had taken place (Duspara, 2003). Gotovina's arrest has been a hot topic since the moment the Croatian date for opening talks on EU membership became connected with Gotovina's arrest (Bowley, 2005). In other words, negotiations between Croatia and the EU would not start before Gotovina had been arrested. The Croatian government repeatedly denied any knowledge of Gotovina's whereabouts. The Spanish police arrested him in the Canary Islands on 7 December 2005 during dinner (Ivanković, 2015). They found two fake passports that had stamps from Tahiti, Argentina, China, Chile, Russia, the Czech Republic, and Mauritius (The Guardian, 2005).

During this period, the foundation of the Gotovina myth started to grow. In January 2000, in Croatia, six left-wing and central parties formed a new government. Election results were a significant blow to HDZ (Croatian: Hrvatska demokratska zajednica or HDZ) and all other right-wing voters. HDZ had been the leading party in Croatia since elections in 1990, and Franjo Tuđman was one of the founders and the first leader of the party. Soon, nationalists began accusing the new Prime Minister Ivica Račan, leader of The Social Democratic Party of Croatia (*Cro. Socijaldemokratska partija Hrvatske* or SDP), of betraying Croatian nation ideals in an attempt to bring Croatia back into a new form of Yugoslavia and criminalizing the Homeland War (Mautner, 2007). Ivo Sanader, the new leader of HDZ, used this accusation to rebuild HDZ's political power. In 2001, after the Croatian Prosecutor indicted Mirko Norac, another Croatian general, a mass protest erupted against war crimes. In Split, Croatian veterans and others held a big rally.

There, Sanader accused the SDP government of betraying Croatian soldiers, presenting himself and HDZ as the only power in Croatia who could protect the veterans and Croatia as a state (Polšak Palatinuš, 2018). These protests helped Sanader to gain momentum and win the 2003 parliamentary elections. Although Sanader's government helped to arrest Gotovina, this did not stop them from using his public persona to generate support in the 2007 parliamentary polls. They showcased themselves as the party who would help Gotovina prove his innocence and protect the memory of the Homeland War memory (Jungvirth, 2007).

7. Gotovina's trial

During the trial against Gotovina, Čermak, and Markač in The Hague, there were other ongoing trials for war crimes committed by both sides in Croatia, including debates about the Homeland War. If somebody had tried to point out some wrongdoings from Croatia's side in the war, the nationalist groups would label that person as a traitor. Gotovina's face became, in a way, a part of everyday life. His picture was put on T-shirts, billboards, wall paintings. Many songs were written about Gotovina that mentioned him either directly or indirectly, such as:

*If Ante is guilty, then we are also guilty, as well
as all those who died bravely for us.
He was betrayed by those who chickened out,
Ivica and Stipe, and other faggots.*

*Ako je Ante kriv, krivo smo i mi,
i svi oni što su za nas hrabro ginuli
Izdali ga oni što su glave skrivali,
Ivica i Stipe i slični pederi.*

Gotovina became part of the Croatian way of life. The trial started in 2008 and finished in 2010 (Pavić, 2010). News coverage from the trial placed Gotovina in the foreground because of his recognizability. If there was a report from ICTY or a story related to the prosecution, in most cases, his picture was the only one published.

Furthermore, Gotovina's picture took up the most space in newspapers, while Čermak and Markač were hardly visible. For example, in *Jutarnji list*'s report on the news about the closing arguments in 2010 entitled *Gotovina must wait a bit more* (Cro. *Gotovina mora još malo pričekati*), the picture of Gotovina was published as part of the article while omitting the other two generals or their picture (Pavić, 2010). Čermak and Markač were mentioned in the article's text, but for someone merely looking at the headlines, it seemed as if only Gotovina was put on trial.

The announcement of the first-degree verdict was expected on 15 April 2011. Several weeks before the verdict, the veterans decided to hold a rally for Gotovina the day after the verdict. In the case of an acquittal, this rally would be turned into a celebration; however, it would turn into a protest if he were found guilty. Gotovina's lawyer, Luka Mišetić, informed the press that Gotovina did not want any demonstration on his behalf (V.P.P. 2011). The leader of the rally, Željko Sačić, told the media that he believed that Mišetić was talking on his own and not on Gotovina's behalf and that maybe Mišetić was expressing this view because the Croatian government was afraid of the rally (V.P.P. 2011). ICTY's first-degree verdict found Gotovina and Marakač guilty and sentenced them to 24 and 18 years, respectively, while Čermak was acquitted (Corder, 2011). The protest erupted in Croatia following the verdict and, since Croatia was a candidate for accession into the EU, only 23% of people agreed with joining the EU following the ruling (Butković, 2011).

The announcement of the appeal verdict was expected on 16 November 2012. The day before the ruling, there were many gatherings all over Croatia, especially in churches, to show support for Gotovina and Markač (PSD 2012). The Appeals Panel of the ICTY presided over by Theodor Meron, acquitted Gotovina and Markač on all charges (Simons 2012). After the announcement, there was an outburst of celebrations around Croatia. For many, this was a moment when the war was finally over. Now, there was confirmation that Operation Storm was legitimate and that Croatian's military and political leaders were not members of JCE. That same day, Gotovina and Markač returned to Croatia, where they were welcome on the Ban Jelačić square, the central square in Zagreb, Croatia's capital.

In his speech, Gotovina said that the war was over and that people should turn to the future. He talked about the state's help and that the Homeland War was now a part of history and a founding stone for our future (HINA, 2012). Yet, many veterans did not look favorably on his speech. The article counted all his sins since he left The Hague, including thanking Croatian institutions, not mentioning Tuđman and Šušak, declaring that the war had come to a close. The prosecution of Croatian veterans remained (V.P.P. 2012). They expected Gotovina to join them and enter the political arena to reform Croatia in the way they found it suitable. Nevertheless, Gotovina shattered all these expectations and chose to live a private family life, and turned to run a private business (Bogelić, 2019).

8. Building a myth around *Gotovina et al.*

After the traumatic experience of Yugoslavia's breakup and the Homeland War, the Croatian society was looking for a new beginning in nation-building. As Yugoslavia became regarded as

something terrible, it was the right time to find a new flag to rally behind. Heroes from the Homeland War became the central point of this narrative. Every war is a traumatic experience, and post-traumatic stress disorder does not only happens to soldiers but to civilians as well. People searched for a sign that would bring balance to their lives, and Croatian soldiers were the answer. The ICTY started to prosecute war crimes from both sides, while most Croats expected that only the aggressors, the Serbian side, would be charged. As a result, people began questioning ICTY's good intentions because they were asked to consider the possibility that the person in whom they put their hope, faith, and prayer was a war criminal. For most people, this leap of faith was unacceptable.

The army veterans were among the first to start to question any critic of the Croatian side's involvement in war crimes. Some people have trouble coping with trauma, and for them, the best way to cope with it is to re-live those events. Commemorations became their meaning in life. Every year, dates such as the 5th of August are the central point of army veterans' gatherings to spend time with their former brothers in arms and retell war stories. The 5th of August is the day when Croatia commemorates the liberation of Knin, and it is officially considered as Victory and Homeland Thanksgiving Day and the Day of Croatian Defenders. The narrative about the war was formalized through time, and questioning some of its parts became highly undesirable. To the new generation, who did not have this experience, or others who wished to distance themselves from the war, this seemed repetitive. It did not necessarily mean that they did not respect the Homeland War or were not patriots; they simply tried to move forward with their lives and have something to look forward to in the present and future. Remembering the war would not help them find employment or put food on the table. So, they voiced their dissatisfaction with Croatia's current situation and the repeated mentioning of the war. It may have seemed to some army veterans that the whole year was one big commemoration and that they were living from one remembrance to another.

In the situation where two groups have a different view of the same thing, certain opportunistic politicians decided to capitalize on this discontent. They took hold of the narrative, accusing thereby the critics of being traitors. One of the consequences was that a new community was formed. The membership in it was connected with the level of respect for the Homeland War. However, they needed a symbol that would stand as personification or allegory. This would become the role of Gotovina – his impeccable career as a soldier who started from the bottom and climbed his through ranks on account of being a skilled commander. In the oral tradition, Gotovina's image had fulfilled two social functions. His career record was ideal for teaching the values and beliefs on how to be a patriot. Also, his innocence validated the affirmation that Homeland War was a justified, defensive

war for the independence and integrity of the Republic of Croatia against the aggression of the joint Greater Serbia forces.

One of the reasons why the oral narrative has had such a significant impact is that Gotovina did not provide any private papers that could shed light on his in-depth thoughts. That is why, regarding almost all information about his biography, historians must rely on recollections and impressions from his associates and colleagues. Gotovina was not interested in becoming a public persona. He did not wish to give an interview about his war days or talk a lot about politics. In a way, he was a blank slate on which people could write what suited them best. This is the reason why, for example, when Gotovina's lawyer thanked the public on Gotovina's behalf for the demonstrations but informed them that Gotovina did not want any organized in his name. Because of this, the lawyer was attacked as the person who does not speak in Gotovina's name. This example shows how strong his name had become as a symbol when even his lawyer's word was not enough to convince people. The person who was in contact with Gotovina daily was less informed about his intentions and wishes than the people who may have communicated with him once a year if even that often. Gotovina was no longer the person who had his own opinion; the others' opinions became his. This is why some were shocked when he returned to Croatia and decided to lead a private life. It was expected that he would lead the way in the fight against everything terrible in Croatian society, but at the same time, there was no proof that he was interested in it. He never said that he would be the leader of this movement or was interested in being involved in it. Again, others had decided what Gotovina wanted without any substantial evidence. This is how myths work since it does not matter what the actual person thinks but rather what the community wishes him to think.

There were not many media sensationalist articles about Gotovina's fugitive years. There are still many uncertainties about who financed his fugitive time. After the investigators examined his fake passports, they found that he was all around the world, for example, in French Polynesia, Mauritius, Argentina, and the Dominican Republic (Mamić, 2014). The journalist never went deeper into the story to find out what he did there. In the media, Gotovina was connected with the criminalization of Operation Storm. The media never had much control over the myth since the people had their own opinion, and for almost everybody, there was no question about his innocence. After the first ruling, the poll showed that 95% of people thought the verdict was unjust, although the Croatian and European politicians claimed that this was a verdict against Gotovina, not against the Croatian state or its people (Butković, 2011). So, the media tried to give an objective explanation of the verdict and its consequences, but the ordinary people had already made up their minds.

This way of thinking could be found in similar cases of building a myth around a still-living person. During the final stage of the battle of Waterloo, Pierre Cambronne was captured. However, according to some reports he made his famous statement: "La garde meurt mais ne se rend pas!" ("The Guard dies but does not surrender!") (Boller and George, 1989, p. 11). This phrase made him a living legend in France. These words were even put on the base of his in Nantes after his death (Boller and George, 1989, p. 12). The only problem was that until his death, Cambronne claimed that he never said these words, but popular opinion was already made. This is another example of how a myth is constructed. Cambronne and Gotovina did not want to become famous people. Their actions showed that their way of life is different from public opinion. Still, even the hard evidence provided by these guys could not change their public persona image. The belief is sometimes stronger than any reasonable or logical evidence the other side could bring to the table, even if that other side is the person in question.

The Remembrance Day of Operation Storm is always connected with Gotovina and sector South, which was important because Knin, the capital of RSK, was located there. Still, if Stipetić had not defeated the enemy in sector North, Operation Storm would not have been considered successful since its main objective was to fully liberate the Croatian territory. Since Gotovina became such a powerful symbol of the war, his image had become almost synonymous with Operation Storm, and other participants are regarded as almost second-class.

When the ICTY commenced with the trial, it was too much for people to accept. Accusing Gotovina of war crimes felt like every Croatian citizen was put on trial. The name of the case was *Gotovina et al.*, so even the ICTY unintentionally helped build a future myth around Gotovina since they named him a critical part of the case. At the same time, Čermak and Markač did not receive the same treatment. It would have been better if the ICTY had called the case *Gotovina, Čermak, and Markač*. Also, the accusation from the EU that Croatia is hiding Gotovina further fueled the myth around him. After he had been captured, the documents showed that he was traveling around the world. Still, only the Croatian government was considered inefficient in locating and capturing Gotovina. Some other fugitives from the ICTY were arrested in their homeland, while Gotovina was seized in Spain. In Gotovina's case, international reactions helped to convince people that this was a kind of fight between David and Goliath.

Today, Gotovina is still a well-respected person in Croatian society. He does not make many public appearances, but the political parties still try to gain his support. During the presidential race in 2019, the public wanted to find out who would get his vote, but he successfully dodged the questions. Instead, he reaffirmed his commitment to his family and business (Zdelar, 2019).

Furthermore, the media attention shifted away, and now most articles about him are published to mark the anniversary of his arrest or acquittal.

Conclusion

In the last decade of its existence, Yugoslavia was in turmoil, culminating in a war. After the war experience, Croatian society looked for ways to start a new life. The conflict itself proved to be an excellent foundation for the newly independent Croatia, with Ante Gotovina becoming the allegory for the Croatian side of the conflict. His modesty in public appearance and unknown past helped him build a modern folk hero's reputation. When he returned to Croatia, he was in a position to ask for anything, and he would receive it because, at that moment, he was no longer perceived as human but at least a demigod if not a god. His family and choice to lead a private life have granted him an even higher status among most people because he showed them that he had remained a simple man. Although his peaceful approach burst a few dreams, his image has remained so strong in the public conscience that his physical presence is no longer required. It seems safe to say that Gotovina belongs to everybody. Whatever he says or does will not matter in the long run because he is already a legend, and every legend eventually grows into a myth. Facts from his life are not crucial for the average person's opinion because, as somebody once said, *when the legend becomes fact, print the legend.*"

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