

BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS

**INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE ON SOCIAL
AND HEALTHCARE STUDIES**

November 15-16, 2022



International Conference on Social and Healthcare Studies

DAY 1:
ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, POLITICAL, LEGAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL
CONSIDERATIONS IN THE NEW WORLD

DAY 2:
HEALTHCARE IN THE POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

Book of Proceedings

EDITORS:
**Valon Murati, Filip Ruxho,
Bekim Ramabaja, Hyrmet Mydyti,
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This conference aimed to bring together researchers, scientists and scholar students to exchange and share their experiences, new ideas, and research results about all aspects of contemporary and sustainable development issues on today's dynamic world.

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THE ROLE OF BUSINESS INCUBATORS IN LOW DENSITY TERRITORIES

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ABSTRACT

The implementation of a Nest of Companies (NE) and Business Incubators, in low density territories, aims at the development of a region, and it is a phenomenon that has been coated with some regularity in Portugal (Caetano, 2012). In order to overcome the difficulties and needs felt by entrepreneurs, the municipality of Ferreira do Alentejo created an infrastructure for hosting and incubating businesses in order to stimulate entrepreneurship and thus contribute to the permanence of companies in the region, fostering the development of the territory. To achieve this purpose, questionnaire surveys were used to be applied to incubated business leaders and local entrepreneurs and conducting interviews with those responsible for the NE and the municipality of Ferreira do Alentejo. The results obtained in this research allowed us to conclude that entrepreneurs and managers of incubated companies consider this type of support structure (NE) a lever for entrepreneurship and a strategic tool for the development of the territory. It was also concluded that NE is a factor in strengthening the business fabric and creating attractive conditions, population setting and, consequently, the development of the territory.

Keywords: Local development; Entrepreneurship; Entrepreneur; Nest of Companies; Low Density Territories.

1. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of entrepreneurship has been the subject of study by different social sciences, including Geography, Sociology, Economics (Qian, 2016), having been officially addressed for the first time in the mid-17th century by authors such as Cantillon (1755/1931), Ahmad and Seymour (2008).

The Portuguese territory presents great asymmetries, in which about 70% of the territory corresponds to micro-territories of a markedly rural nature, mostly located in the interior of the country (CIC, 2015). Based on the adoption of criteria such as population density, demography, population, physical characteristics of the territory, socio-economic characteristics and accessibility, the CIC proceeded to classify low-density territories, with 164 municipalities being represented, including the municipality from Ferreira do Alentejo.

In this context, the present investigation emerged with the aim of knowing and analyzing the dynamics of a low-density territory such as the municipality of Ferreira do Alentejo, in order to understand the role of the NE in the process of business incubation, seeking to identify the factors that inhibit and enhance entrepreneurship and the development of the territory.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of regional development accompanies the evolution of society, in order to respond to the problems that arise in countries, regions or territories.

The concept of development only acquires scientific validity and political-institutional recognition after the Second World War, due to internal events in the countries still colonized, and the change in the international political reality (Bernstein, 1971).

Over the years, the concept of regional development has evolved, becoming more complex and comprehensive. The increased interest aroused by local economies and in particular by the way in which they create wealth and increase the quality of life, which agents are involved, which are the conditions and determining factors, feed the growing interest of academics and policy makers in the subject (Lopes, 2011).

Regional development is determined, among other factors, by innovation, competitiveness, technology, human capital, tourism, and infrastructure and equipment, as documented by Bronzini and Piselli (2009), Shapiro (2006), Rutten and Boekema (2007) and Jackson and Murphy (2006), Lopes (2011).

Developing the territory has, however, become a generalized priority in order to create jobs, provide services and reduce territorial imbalances, integrating various aspects and new concepts (CE, 2019).

According to Courlet and Pecqueur (2013), the territory is a place of relationships and uncertainties inserted in a changing environment. It must, therefore, be in constant evolution and adaptation and must not be perceived as a grouping of areas, but as a fabric. The territory, when understood as a fabric, involves a tangle of interactions between actors integrated in a network and proximity. The dynamics of the territory is then explained by the coordination and intentionality of its actors generated by a collective purpose.

The design of low-density territory is supposedly simple, referring to a territory of rural character and low human density (Bento, Ramos and Azevedo, 2013).

The territories in the interior of the country are characterized by low-density areas, due to a vicious circle (Silva, Lima and Chamusca, 2010), which, due to their complexity, condition the ability to respond to these problems, compromising an integrated development frame-

work and sustainability of these territories.

As advocated by authors such as Audretsch and Keilbach (2004), Bjørnskov and Foss (2016) and Bosma, Content, Sanders, and Stam (2018), the settlement of population in Low Density Territories will only be possible if these territories are able to create economically productive and socially recognized job opportunities. Otherwise these territories will continue to be depopulated in the coming years.

It is important to point out that the local development of a low-density territory, as is the case of Ferreira do Alentejo, can have entrepreneurship as an important ally in the fight against economic and social devitalization. And, for this reason, in recent years, public policies and instruments that enhance entrepreneurship in a local context have been developed.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 The research problem

The issue of developing low-density territories stems from the need to find answers to a set of questions. This paper focused on this issue, which led to the following question: Could the incubator be a tool to encourage and support entrepreneurship and local development in low-density territories?

3.2 Sample

The target population of this study consists of those responsible for the incubated companies, those responsible for the nest of companies and for the promoting entity and local entrepreneurs.

In the construction of the sample, some procedures for inclusion and exclusion of participants in the study were considered, in particular with regard to the target population made up of local entrepreneurs, where the most important companies were defined as inclusion criteria, either in terms of survival, either in terms of employability and dimension, with other entrepreneurs being excluded from the sample. That is, for the construction of the sample, an attempt was made to include local entrepreneurs/companies with a level of survival above one year (100%), companies with a greater number of people at work and a level of employability (740 workers), having been covered the following sectors of activity: agriculture, industry, construction and services.

Thus, with a universe of 1085 companies, with business headquarters in the municipality of Ferreira do Alentejo, the sample was made up of 65 local entrepreneurs.

4. RESULTS

For Kumar and Kumar (1997), the incubation process refers to a set of activities designed to facilitate the formation of new companies, through entrepreneurship and technology transfer. Many researchers explain the development of companies, through a set of steps that are taken step by step, in a gradual and progressive way, until they become independent and stable.

According to the interviews carried out with those responsible for the nest of companies, the installation in the nest of companies, on the one hand, tries to reduce the risk, and on the other hand, facilitate its survival and growth through interaction with other companies headquartered in the same space and who are often the first customers of new companies [Responsible A and B].

Currently, NE has 5 incubated companies and generates approximately 6 direct jobs. The pre-incubation process takes place through the preparation of a business plan and an economic viability plan guided, when necessary, by the technical team of the business support office. By supporting the elaboration of a business plan, the business nest offers support for the elaboration of strategic planning.

For this business incubation process in the municipality, those responsible for the business nest highlight the activities carried out by the business nest, including:

- I. Conducting training actions;
- II. Administrative support to resident companies (telephone, computer, printer, electricity, water, water, cleaning service, office furniture).

The incubator is important for business development and the creation of an entrepreneurial culture, offering support of the most varied types for the company to grow and, subsequently, to be in the business market.

The present study also had the objective of knowing and analyzing the motivations inherent to the development of an entrepreneurial spirit, more specifically in the creation of the company/business, as well as in the management of one's own time.

Thus, according to the results obtained through the questionnaires applied to those responsible for the incubated companies, 2 pointed out the opportunity and need to create their own business, 1 respondent what motivated him/her was the desire to be an entrepreneur, and 2 of the respondents did not respond.

5. CONCLUSION

The issue of low territorial density highlights existing asymmetries in Portugal, strengthening the need to awaken the potential of these territories, proceeding with the delimitation of policies and strategies aimed at overcoming existing obstacles and constraints, with a view to promoting an integrated regional development framework and sustainability.

Therefore, entrepreneurship has been evoked as a strategy for boosting local economies and, consequently, for boosting and revitalizing low-density territories.

Throughout this work, the case of the business nest in Ferreira do Alentejo was analyzed and from the investigation carried out, it was concluded that the business nest is and will be of vital importance for the region, which are reflected in the following results:

- The reasons that led these entrepreneurs to settle in the nest of companies were the physical conditions of the same and, also, the services available and the need for a place to install the company;
- 100% of those incubated refer that the infrastructure nest of companies is a basic support in the development of a low-density territory;
- The importance of the nest of companies and in the creation of conditions for the strengthening of the business fabric, it only exists if the nest of companies creates technical conditions, such as the availability of other services, among training, promotion and information.
- The proposal to enunciate strategies, in order to stimulate low-density territories is exposed by the inquired entrepreneurs as fundamental.

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INVESTIGATING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HOUSEHOLD BEHAVIOR AND THEIR INFLATION EXPECTATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The analysis of publications in the national and daily press shows that the study of inflation expectations among consumer groups testifies to the heterogeneity of their formation for different agents. In this article, we examine whether this heterogeneity is related to the financial capabilities of the target group of households, their investment intentions, propensity to save, and their potential for assessing the state of the environment. Using microdata provided by the National Statistical Institute for a survey on the inflation expectations of Bulgarian households, we constructed an indicator of “propensity to invest”. According to the results, this indicator helps to explain the level of inflation expectations: respondents with relatively higher incomes are relatively more conservative and tend to have relatively lower and more accurate inflation expectations.

Keywords: *inflation expectations, financial capabilities.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The past year, 2021, has turned out to be extremely eventful. If we start our balance sheet with the global lockdown, the second wave of the COVID pandemic, then the beginning of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, the continued policy of the Chinese government of total lockdown, sharp release, and optimism, which found its immediate reflection in the main indicators of the financial markets, taking advantage of long-term negative interest rates in the majority of them, 2022, unlike the previous one, saw an increase in the price of basic food and energy resources. And although there are significant groups of goods in the European Union that have fixed prices, i.e., observed prices, a significant part of them are exchange-regulated; they are formed in the markets of tradable goods, and their prices are formed, including under the influence of interrupted chains of value creation.

Lending is an inherent activity of banks as part of the modern financial system. Lending can cause economic growth in the country, but at the same time, it should be noted that excessive financing from bank assets can be the cause of accelerating inflationary processes. In the context of a monetary council, membership in the Eurozone and the upcoming adoption of the euro put inflation targeting in line with the Maastricht requirements, which in turn implies ensuring price stability. Therefore, a deeper understanding of the functioning of the credit channel by assessing the impact of credit processes on inflation will help in the future in making informed decisions to achieve the inflation target. Examining the works of other authors on the impact of credit on inflation, we can conclude that the most popular method of assessing the impact of credit on inflation is the use of the method of correlation coefficients.

It should also be noted that most foreign authors consider the impact of the total volume of lending, but some authors focus on examining the impact of lending to individuals, in particular consumer lending. Based on this, this work assessed the impact of lending processes using models of vector correction of residuals and vector autoregression and also considered the impact not only of the total volume of lending but also of loans issued for consumer purposes and loans to legal entities.

The results show that the impact of credit on prices in the short term is limited, and credit to legal entities has a greater impact on prices than consumer credit. Furthermore, the authors examine the existence of a relationship in the long run and conclude on the impact of lending on inflation in the long run.

The first section is a literature review that examines similar works by other authors. The second section describes the research methodology as well as a list of variables used. This is followed by a discussion of the results section, which describes the results of the econometric experiment.

The conclusions of this study are the last section of the paper.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous studies can be found in the databases that are devoted to the relationship between inflation and lending dynamics. These relationships are viewed in the context of the state of the economy and the stage of the business cycle that the global economic system is at.

According to representatives of the monetarist school, the amount of money in the economy is seen as the main driver of price increases. According to M. Friedman, inflation is a monetary phenomenon caused by the higher rate of growth of the money supply in circulation. He based his theory on the basis of the quantitative theory of money (Friedman.). In this way, the growth of the money supply caused by the credit supply can affect the development of the economy and at the same time cause inflation. It should be noted that in addition to the money supply, there are many other factors that can have a significant additional and stimulating effect on the dynamics of asset prices and consumer goods. As such, fiscal and monetary policy, inconsistencies between the markets, changes in the external environment for the financial system, etc. may appear. These

connections and interactions are the subject of a considerable amount of research, in which the authors have reached results that are sometimes very divergent in their meaning and significance when it comes to different parts of the world and time horizons. Various econometrics have been used to achieve sufficiently reliable results methods and techniques.

In his research Cheong Tang (2001) through the application of the VAR-method has investigated inflationary processes in Malaysia, examining the relationship between the dynamics of bank credit and money supply. Subjecting to an experimental study the long-term relationship between the already proposed variables by building an unconstrained model in order to eliminate possible a errors. The results of the econometric experiment show that money supply and bank lending have a long-term effect on inflationary fluctuations in this country. But he also found that inflationary processes here are also influenced by import prices because of the wide open economy and real money income of households.

Aidah Nanyonjo (2018) in his research thesis he applies various analysis techniques and obtains interesting results: with a cointegrating vector, he establishes a long-term relationship between bank credit, inflation and economic growth in the economy. The Granger causality test, the author applied to establish the direction of causality, He found that inflation Granger causes economic growth and also economic growth. Granger causality is also established for a two-way causality between inflation and Gross Domestic Product at 1% significance. Finally, the author concludes that a strong monetary policy is needed to limit the amount of money in circulation against the promotion and measures taken by politicians to limit the high levels of inflation in the country to ensure the growth of the economy.

Haroon Rashid Khan (2015) in his study on the relationship between growth and inflation in Pakistan over the period 1991-2011 found a negative impact on inflation. He evaluates economic growth with money supply, deposit base and private sector credit, finding the relationship between these three variables to be positive and significant. With the indicator “Bank credit to the private sector” a weak negative relationship is also proven. The present study confirms the inverse correlation between economic growth and inflation. From everything so far, the author has concluded that inflation reduces the efficiency of the financial sector in the long-term and short-term time horizon. Development in a positive direction is possible through policies and analyses. Growth in the real sector implies growth in the indicators of the financial system. Government spending on welfare also makes the financial system stable in the long run. Necessary are appropriate measures by the Government to control inflation in the country, therefore also to have a positive impact on the development of the financial sector.

Ganchev (2022) has established the significant deviation from the planned inflation for Bulgaria in 2022 - from 5.6% to 15% at the end of July compared to the levels for the same period of the previous year. As well as the effects on the revenue and expenditure part of the budget, and hence on the budget deficit. In general, the author’s conclusions are reduced tax revenues due to lower GDP growth, which will be compensated by increased revenues from VAT, excise taxes, direct taxes and increased maximum social security income. G. Ganchev shares that, in fact, the short-term forecasts do not contain prerequisites for significant difficulties in fiscal finance policies, unless the changed conditions of the international debt markets are taken into account, from where additional financing of the budget deficit will be sought. And all this in view of the country’s preparation for joining the Eurozone.

Vasylieva *et al* (2016) considers the factors important for the state of the banking sector as a result of the interaction of endogenous and exogenous factors in the conditions of crisis. Applying a regression analysis with variable main indicators of the system, the authors reach the conclusion about the important role of macro prudential supervision on the behavior of banks, where credit expansion, accompanying risks and created buffers determine their sustainable behavior.

Debora *et al* (2018) in their study found that the variable interest rates and inflation are partially negative and have an insignificant impact on the distribution of credit, while the variable Purchasing power has a significant negative effect. They believe that any fall in the exchange rate will increase the credit supply through banking. And as inflation increases, the number of credit supply loans from banks will decrease. Also, when purchasing power decreases, the supply of credit will increase.

The role of inflation and its relationship with the money supply are studied by Todorov (2013), Todorov (2016) and Todorov *et al* (2020). They establish the possibilities for a fiscal and monetary impact on the rate of inflation in the conditions of the Bulgarian monetary board.

The changes in the government deposit in the “Issuance” management had an effect on the money supply, the interest rate on the interbank market and the monthly rate of inflation. The empirical results show that the automatic mechanism of achieving external equilibrium of the economy, characteristic of the orthodox monetary councils, does not work in Bulgarian conditions. With the Bulgarian monetary board, there is no long-term equilibrium relationship between the balance of payments, the monetary base and the money supply either in pure form or with elements of discretion.

3. THE RICE OF INFLATION IN REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA

Rising prices of basic consumer goods and a sharp rise in the inflation rate — which shows a rise in the level of prices of goods and services for households and businesses — are causing concern with the period set at the end of the period at a record 5.1% last month, according to the latest data from the European central bank.

Reasons can be sought in the high prices of energy sources and, secondly, of food. Their growth compared to those in January in the Eurozone reached a growth of 28.6% compared to the same month last year. Not so high - the prices of services and goods rose by 2.4%.

Post-pandemic recovery and hostilities on the territory of the European continent are identified as the main reasons for these increases. The lifting of restrictions, the restoration of social and cultural life, a tangible rebound in the economic field have not helped to cope with the rapidly growing demand and the restoration of global supply chains. China’s policy of a complete lockdown and the European industry’s access to vitally important components have played a major slowing role in the pace of finished production, which has reflected on the greater likelihood that companies will pass these costs on to their customers in the form of higher prices.

Oil, gas and electricity Energy prices rose as oil and gas production also lagged behind rebounding consumer demand after the pandemic.

According to the ECB, because so much of what companies and people spend is energy-related, the price of oil, gas and electricity have been the biggest contributors to headline inflation: half of the recent rise in inflation is due to higher energy prices.

All components of general uncertainty have had a direct impact on the behavior of both households and businesses in terms of credit, long-term investment, and savings.

Annual inflation in Bulgaria for September 2022 continues to accelerate; compared to the same month last year, it reached 18.7%. On a monthly basis, the price went up by 1.2%. This is shown by the data of the National Statistical Institute (NSI), which has been published. This situation is particularly critical considering that Bulgaria is in the European exchange rate mechanism (ERM II), preparing to accept the euro as its national currency after leaving the currency board system in 1997.

The critical levels of inflation, significantly different from the predicted 3%, and the fiscal deficit of 6% are particularly dangerous in the conditions of political instability and lack of a government to make important decisions in this direction.

Information on the inflation expectations of citizens, households, and businesses plays

an important role in the regular assessment of the economic and monetary situation and is formed under the influence of various factors. The dynamics of their monitoring, as well as the relationship with basic macroeconomic indicators such as credit dynamics, inflation in the Eurozone, and national inflation, have to solve several important tasks.

- Monitoring the measurement and drivers of inflation expectations based on indicators based on a methodology developed by methodologists and reported in studies based on a database on the state of the financial market.

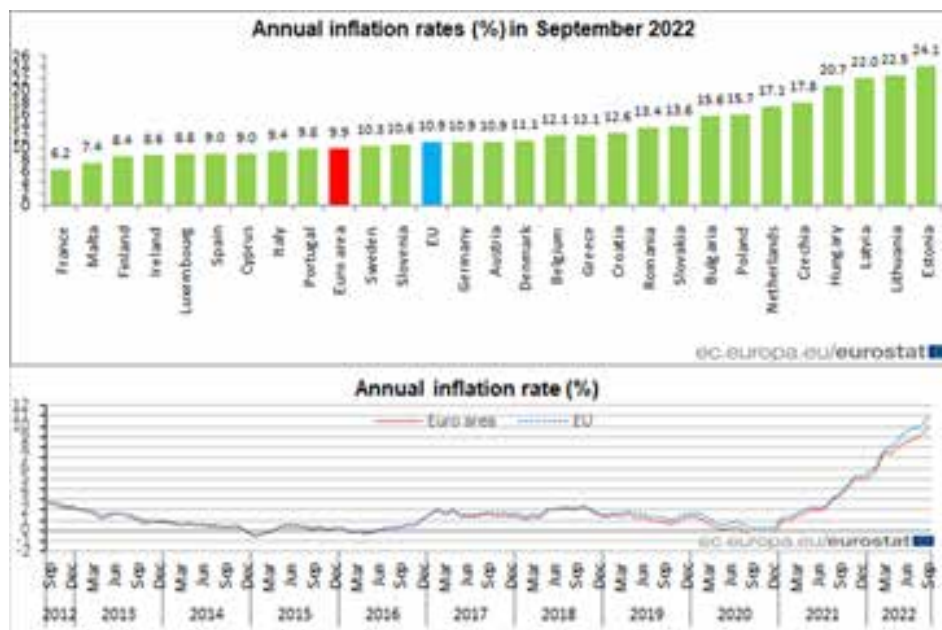
Moreover, given the central issue of anchoring expectations in a period of low inflation, longer-term inflation expectations

- Inflation expectations for the purposes of medium-term forecasting through a link with the main macroeconomic indicators.

4. DATABASE AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Inflation in the Eurozone reached double digits and another new record in September. According to preliminary data, the negative effects of the global economic recovery from the COVID-19 crisis and from Russia’s war in Ukraine continue to take a heavy toll on European economies. On Graff. № 1, the main 4 threats - inflation, unemployment, poverty and social inequality and the coronavirus pandemic - which the respondents ranked over time, as well as the change in positions over time 2020 - 2022, can be seen. Eurostat, the European Union’s statistics agency, estimates that inflation in the 19 Eurozone countries reached 10.0% in September, up from 9.1% in August. The latest price rise was fueled by energy - the price of which is now 40.8% higher than in the same month last year - while food, alcohol and tobacco prices are believed to have jumped 11.8% annually.

Graff. № 1 Inflation threat as a risk



Source: www.statista.org

Bearing in mind that the economic and financial systems of the Republic of Bulgaria function under the conditions of a currency board and the euro is chosen as a reserve currency - the observation of the dynamics of a basic criterion, such as inflation, is of particular importance in the formation of basic policies carried out by fiscal and monetary authorities.

Graff's. №. 2 No. You can see the annual inflation in the Eurozone from the end of the financial and economic crisis in 2012 until September 2022. The data shows sustained negative interest rates in the period up to September 2016, above zero by September 2019 and a decline to negative levels during the COVID crisis. A very strong movement of the levels is established from the middle of September 2021, which coincides with the beginning of military actions in Ukraine after the attack by Russia.

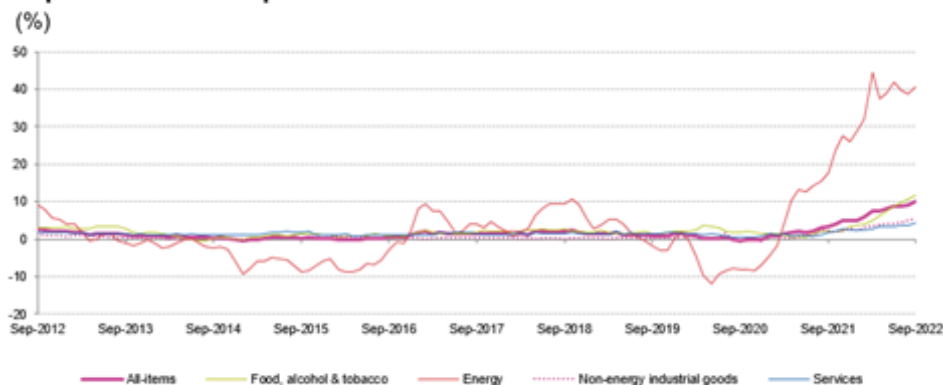
A huge challenge for the Eurozone member countries is the generation of economic growth, and an overly restrictive fiscal policy is an obstacle to the realization of this goal. The European Central Bank's target is inflation "below but too close to 2%", with deviations from these levels posing a threat, according to the bank's leadership.

First, this target increases the risk that temporary shocks will cause an inevitable change in interest rates being raised in response to temporary shocks, for example energy prices. Such actions are not considered to pose a threat to medium-term price stability.

Second, the "below but close to 2%" inflation target leaves very little room for change within the euro area. Countries with significant public debts, such as Italy and Spain, cannot solve the problem by devaluing their currency, for them the only solution is to reduce their costs relative to other countries in the Eurozone. This can only cause deflation and a debt trap for countries with larger debt portfolios.

Graff. № 2 EU-Zone inflation.

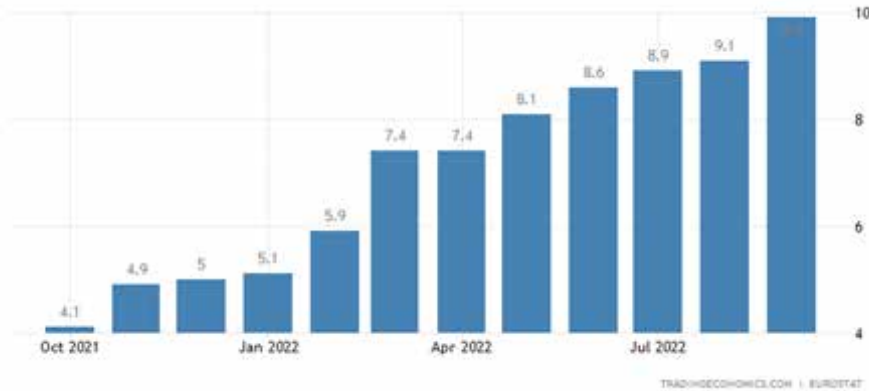
Euro area annual inflation and its main components, September 2012 - September 2022



Source: Eurostat (online data code: prc_hicp_manr)

eurostat 

Graff. № 3 EU-Zone inflation.

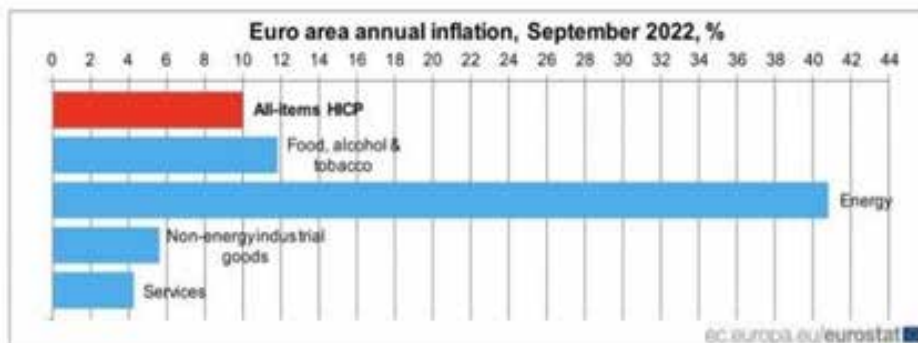


On the Graf. No. 3 can be seen the significant growth marked by inflation in the European Union, already including the processes in the other member countries after the second quarter of 2021.

On Graf. No. 4 presents the weights of the factors that structurally determine inflation in the European Union, namely - more than 40% are formed by energy carriers, 11.5% of the prices of basic food products, 4% of the increase in the prices of services and 5.8% from non-energy goods.

Here, in no case should an explanation of this gradation be sought solely in the stimulated market prices of goods as a result of the military actions in Ukraine. Let us recall that one of the main factors is the policy of over-stimulation by central banks, zero interest rates and negative interest rates on savings and savings, and this stimulates government debt financing to enormous proportions. The shock increase in demand due to systemic positive market fluctuations and low yields on prime government securities is expected to stimulate capital markets and the lingering long-term low yields to finally mark expected uptrends in equity prices for stability-seeking investors.

Graff. № 4 Price' dynamics of most important consumer goods



Source: Eurostat

Observations of the macroeconomic indicator inflation as one of the main Maastricht criteria is an important element of the efforts towards a real convergence of the Bulgarian economy in the European Union. About how important this criterion is, Ivan Todorov (2012) confidently shares in his research that although Bulgaria meets the other criteria, “the inflation criterion remains a serious obstacle”.

On the Graf. № 5 can be seen how inflation has changed in the Republic of Bulgaria after The month of August 2021 year, showing a growth of 10 percentage points within a calendar year. As predictors of these levels, the elevated ones are mainly defined by the repeatedly increased prices of energy carriers, basic food products and other tradable goods.

Graf. № 5 Dynamics of inflation in the Republic of Bulgaria

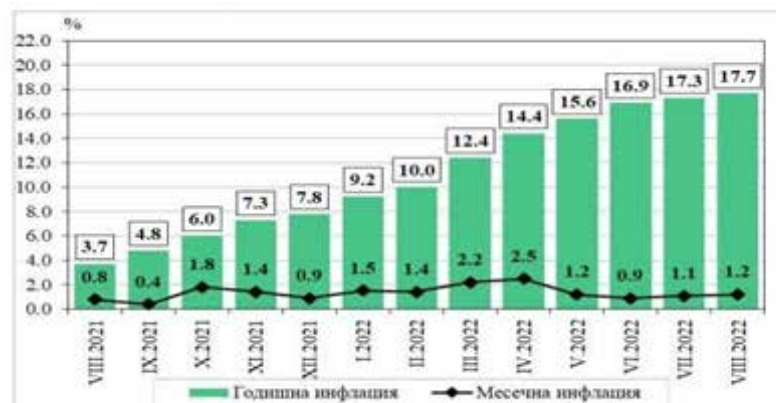


Table. № 1 Macroeconomics variables

The theoretical explanation of this development of attitudes can be found through the Law of Inflationary Expectations, of Irving Fisher, a famous economist of the 19th and 20th centuries - the so-called Fisher equation, describes real and nominal interest rates, as well as the relationship between them.

$$(1 + i) = (1 + r) (1 + \pi) \quad (1)$$

i – the nominal interest rate

r – the real interest rate

π – the inflation rate

5. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF THE INFLUENCE OF INFLATION IN THE EU AND BULGARIA INFLATION EXPECTATION

In order to establish the relationship between inflation and loans granted during the analyzed period, the level of inclusion of the Bulgarian banking system in the global process of digitization of the financial industry, a methodology and database for conducting an econometric experiment is organized. On the basis of data from the website of the Bulgarian National Bank and the National Statistical Institute, a temporary series of several variables have been formed for the period 2021-2022 with the intention of reporting the relationship between credits and inflation in the Republic of Bulgaria and inflation in the Eurozone.

As analyzed macroeconomic indicators are applied:

Table. № 2 Macroeconomics variables

Macroeconomics Indicator	Acronym	Importance
BG Inflation	<i>INFL.BG</i>	Inflation is a macroeconomic indicator that has a direct relationship with the state of the money supply as a result of the policies implemented by the central bank and the state of the real sector. Bulgaria's inflation is considered as the main evaluator of the state of the economic and financial systems and being one of the main monitored indicators before the country's accession to the Eurozone
Credits	<i>CREDITS</i>	Credit as an observed macroeconomic variable is at the center of the study due to the fact that it evaluates the parameters of the money supply, the free resources in the financial system and the possibility, through an additional infusion of resources, to limit inflation through investment and purchases of tangible assets.
EU inflation	<i>INFL.EU</i>	Inflation in the Eurozone is an important indicator and an indispensable part of any study of inflation expectations in Bulgaria. Due to the fact that under the conditions of a monetary board, inflation is transmitted through the channels of the reserve currency, such as the euro, the inflation of the Bulgarian lev, which has a fixed exchange rate to the euro, is also transmitted through the same channel. This transmission has a lagged nature, usually of several months, but actually the timing is a function of the strength and scope of the inflationary wave.
Consumer trust	<i>CONS.TRUS</i>	This consumer confidence indicator provides an indication of future developments of households' consumption and saving, based upon answers regarding their expected financial situation, their sentiment about the general economic situation, unemployment and capability of savings. An indicator above 100 signals a boost in the consumers' confidence towards the future economic situation, as a consequence of which they are less prone to save, and more inclined to spend money on major purchases in the next 12 months. Values below 100 indicate a pessimistic attitude towards future developments in the economy, possibly resulting in a tendency to save more and consume less. (OECD)
Inflation expectations	<i>INFL.EXP.</i>	People's expectations about how underlying prices will change in the future affect how they spend, borrow, save or invest. This in turn affects the economy and is therefore important for central bank monetary policy. A better understanding of people's inflation expectations makes decisions more informed.

To test the adequacy of the model, we formulate several research hypotheses:

H01 There is a correlation between *INFL.EU* and the *CREDITS* granted in the Bulgarian banking system.

H02 There is no correlation between *INFL.EU* inflation in the *INFL.BG*.

H03 There is a correlation between *INFL.EU* and the *INFL.BG*.

H04 There is no correlation between *INFL.EU* and *CREDITS* in Bulgarian banking system

H05 There is no correlation between *INFL.BG* and *CREDITS* the Bulgarian banking system

H06 There is a weak correlation between *CONS.TRUST* and *INFL.BG*

H07 There is a strong correlation between *CONS.TRUST* and *INFL.BG*

H08 There isn't correlation between *CONS.TRUST* and *INFL.BG*

H09 There is a weak correlation between *INFL. EXP* and *CREDYTS*.

H10 There is a strong correlation between *INFL.EXP* and *CREDYTS*.

If we analyze the structuring of the coefficients from the correlation matrix, we can draw the following conclusions:

The coefficient of 0.9882 between macroeconomic indicators *INFL.BG* and *INFL.EU* shows a very strong positive correlation dependence between the two indicators. This is because, as we have already mentioned, the *BGN* has a fixed exchange rate to the euro. This legal dependence predetermines the high permeability of inflation impulses from the Eurozone to the Bulgarian economy.

Between *CREDITS* loans and *INFL.EU* inflation in the Eurozone, the relationship is estimated with a coefficient of -0.0579, which is marked with a negative sign, so the dependence is negative, but considering the value, the relationship is at the level of weak.

If we look at the third coefficient of - 0.0969, evaluating the relationship between *CREDITS* and *INFL.BG*, we can confidently conclude that this is a negative and extremely weak relationship. Credit growth appears to be influenced by factors other than the inflation rate.

Table No. 3: Correlation matrix for the values of the analyzed variables

	<i>CREDITS</i>	<i>INFL.BG</i>	<i>INFL.EU</i>	<i>CONS.TRUST</i>	<i>INFL.EXP.</i>
<i>CREDITS</i>	1				
<i>INFL.BG</i>	-0,0969	1			
<i>INFL.EU</i>	-0,0579	0,9882	1		
<i>CONS.TRUS</i>				1	
T	0,0653	0,3126	0,3894		
<i>INFL.EXP.</i>	-0,1923	0,0195	-0,0317	-0,3983	1

The Author's contributions

The analysis of the coefficients between *CONS.TRUST* and *CREDITS* shows a very weak correlation but between *CREDITS* and *INFL.EXP*. There is a negative but weak correlation.

If we look at the third coefficient of - 0.3126, evaluating the relationship between *CONS, TRUST* and *INFL.BG*, we can confidently conclude that this is a positive and not such a weak relationship. Credit growth appears to be influenced by factors other than the inflation rate.

The analysis of the coefficients -0, 39836 between *CONS.TRUST* and *INFL.EXP*. shows a very weak correlation.

Table No. 4

Anova: Single Factor						
SUMMARY						
Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance		
CREDITY	12	29,5	2,458333	4,305797		
INFL.BG	12	152,4	12,7	20,16727		
INFL.EU	12	84,2	7,016667	3,821515		
CONS.TRU	12	-350,2	-29,1833	484,6033		
INFL.ECSP	12	464,9	38,74167	32,70265		
ANOVA						
Source of Variance	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	28413	4	7103,249	65,09569	3,29E-20	2,539689
Within Groups	6001,606	55	109,1201			
Total	34414,6	59				

The application of ANOVA-test aims to establish whether the results of the study are significant and whether to reject the null hypothesis for the relationship between the analyzed variables or to accept the null hypothesis.

The value of F in Table No. 3 can be found as $F = 33.49837 > i.e. 5 >$, which means that the null hypothesis cannot be rejected and very strong relationships are established between the individual variables.

Table 5. Initial data for determining the critical point

If	Then
T-test < critics value	A null hypothesis cannot be ruled out
If	Then
T-test < critics value	A null hypothesis cannot be ruled out
	The null hypothesis is rejected
33,49837.> 3,284918	The null hypothesis is rejected

Table 6. Descriptive statistics

	CREDIDS	INFL.BG	INFL.EU	CONS.TRUST	INFL.EXP.
Mean	2,458	12,7	7,016	-29,183	38,74166667
Standard Error	0,599012866	1,296381912	0,564322245	6,354810077	1,650824327
Median	1,965	13,2	7,3	-37,1	36,85
Standard Deviation	2,075041438	4,490798674	1,9548696	22,01370785	5,718623218
Sample Variance	4,30579697	20,16727273	3,821515152	484,6033333	32,70265152
Kurtosis	7,343386672	-1,701896	-1,527362172	10,18374917	4,193263492
Skewness	2,409347644	-0,17956659	-0,086651202	3,111734598	1,823381395
Range	8,45	12,2	5,8	80,4	21,8
Minimum	0,01	6	4,1	-41,8	32,1
Maximum	8,46	18,2	9,9	38,6	53,9
Sum	29,5	152,4	84,2	-350,2	464,9
Count	12	12	12	12	12
Largest(1)	8,46	18,2	9,9	38,6	53,9
Smallest(1)	0,01	6	4,1	-41,8	32,1
Confidence Level(95,0%)	1,31841843	2,853317349	1,242064886	13,98684267	3,633439846

NOTES:**All variables are expressed in natural logarithms**

The analyzed period, the three variables show different behavior in the context of their degree of interaction and the effects they realize on the macro-environment as a whole.

The analysis confirmed and denied some of the research hypotheses formulated at the beginning of the econometric experiment:

Econometric research refutes the hypothesis that **H01** on the correlation between inflation in the Eurozone and the growth of loans granted in the Bulgarian banking system is dismissed.

The econometric study confirmed the hypothesis **H02** for missing correlation between inflation in the Eurozone and the inflation in Bulgaria. There is very weak negative correlation

The econometric study confirmed the hypothesis **H03** for the correlation between inflation in the Eurozone and the inflation in Eurozone. There is a strong positive correlation between analyzed values.

The econometric study refutes the hypothesis **H04** for a correlation between inflation in the EU and loans in the Bulgarian banking system. There is a very weak negative correlation.

The econometric study refutes **H05** for missing correlation between inflation and loans in the Bulgarian banking system. There exists a very weak positive correlation.

H06 about correlation between **CONS.TRUST** and **INFFL. BG** is confirmed.

H07 about weak positive correlation between **INFFL. BG** and **CONS.TRUST** are confirmed.

H08 about positive correlation between **INFL.BG** and **CONS. EXP.** have been refuted by econometric research.

H09 about weak positive correlation between **INFL.EXP.** and **CREDITS** for positive correlation have been refuted.

H10 about weak correlation between **INFL.EXP** and **CREDITS** for negative correlation have been confirmed.

Table № 7

№	Hypothesis	Relations	Dependence	Strength of relation
1	H01 H02 H03 H04	CREDYTS → INFLBG CREDITS * INFL EU CREDITS * CONS.TRUST CREDITS * INFL.EXEP.	Negative Negative Positive Negative	Very weak relation Very weak relation Week relation Very weak relation
2	H05 H06 H07	INFLBG * INFL EU INFLBG * CONS.TRUST INFLBG * INFL.EXEP.	Positive Positive Positive	Very strong relation Medium strong relation Very weak relation
3	H08 H09	INFL EU * CONS.TRUST INFL EU * INFL.EXEP.	Positive Negative	Medium strong relation Medium strong relation
4	H10	CONS.TRUST * INFL.EXEP.	Negative	Medium strong relation

The Author's contributions

6. CONCLUSIONS

The economic systems of the countries of the European continent are going through a difficult stage, accompanied by significant shocks due to the irregularity of the international supply chains from China, with whom the majority of the leading industries are resource-connected. This uncertainty has direct effects on the exchange rates of traded currencies such as the pound, the euro, but it has also caused significant changes in the monetary policies of central banks, which have been forced to come out of the depth of negative interest rates and adjust in accordance with the state and reserves of financial systems.

Econometric research has shown that inflationary processes transmit their impulses the fastest, most efficiently and with the most significant effect. The influence of external inflation on lending rates has a negative sign, while domestic inflation has a statistically insignificant positive influence. These findings are of great importance for the behavior of the monetary authorities, who decide on the applied instruments of influence in the conditions of a highly open economy, resource dependent and with an exchange rate fixed to a reserve currency.

We may see very strong relation between inflation in EU and Bulgaria as a consequence of strong connection between currency trend of EURO and Bulgarian levs and needed implementation of EURO as soon as possible, because till now Bulgaria carried all Eurozone' shocks but didn't use its advantages.

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THE IMPACT OF PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITIES ON COSTUMER BEHAVIOUR

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ABSTRACT

Most promotional activities are aimed at developing products in different business environments. This paper contributes to the development of promotional activity in Kosovo, in terms of the beverage industry in the country, by developing research with primary and secondary data. The result of the analysis shows the connection through the promotional activities in the consumer behavior within the consumers of the drinks consumption.

The research is structured and worked with the purpose of informing the effect of the promotion activities and through the analysis of the variables extracted in the paper and examined in the paper therefore, seeing that the consumer today in the market up to the decision-making aspect has many points and many factors on who determines the purchase decision, this will be a paper which will measure the effect of the consumer, namely his buying behavior, considering that there are many promotional opportunities for products, we will deal with how different offers affect promotional campaigns of products, such as: promotion tools what effect do they have, product samples in promotions what effect do they have as well as free coupons in promotional activities what effect do they have, therefore the marketing mix or marketing implemented by a company must train each element of the mix, and especially in promotional activities, all promotional tools to provide appropriate promotional activity.

Keywords: *promotion, activities, product development, environments, decision makers.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Today, we have many types of promotions in the market.

Promotion as a marketing activity is the element that builds relationships for communication with customers and in thesis we will deal with how the beverage industry organizes promotional activities for their products, and how the process of product promotion by beverage manufacturers is achieved.

Promotional activities have become one of the most powerful tools for marketers to change buyers' perception of a brand and to stimulate purchase interest. As market competition increases, marketers must adopt various strategic techniques to make their products stand out as well as to attract more customers.

Most large companies study consumer buying decisions in great detail to answer the questions of what do consumers buy, where do they buy, how much do they buy, when do they buy, and why do they buy? Marketing specialists can study a consumer's actual purchases to find out what they buy, where and how much. But learning the "whys" of consumer buying behavior is not so easy, the answers are often found buried deep in the consumer's mind (Kotler & Armstrong, 2013).

The company's promotional mix, also called the marketing communications mix, consists of the specific combination of advertising, public relations, personal selling, sales promotion, and direct marketing instruments that the company uses to convincingly communicate value for customers and to build customer relationships (Kotler & Armstrong, 2013).

Sales promotion is an element of promotion which aims to bring different effects to improve sales and increase sales as well. Sales promotion is the shortest-term of the promotional mix instruments. While advertising or personal selling says "buy", sales promotion says "buy now" (Kotler & Armstrong, 2013).

The main objective of the study is to identify the impact of different types of sales promotion on the purchasing behavior of consumers in the beverage industry in Kosovo.

In order to identify the impact of sales promotion on consumer behavior, within the beverage industry in Kosovo, we have established the following research objectives:

To examine whether the "Buy One Get Free" offer has an impact on consumer purchasing behavior in the beverage industry.

To determine the impact of coupons on consumer purchasing behavior in the beverage industry.

To find out the influence of free samples on consumer buying behavior in the beverage industry.

To identify the impact of bonus packages on consumer purchasing behavior in the beverage industry.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Sales promotion concept

Promotional activities are one of the essential parts of a promotional mix, and promotion is one of the main components of the "marketing mix". According to Kotler et al. (2013), promotional activities are among the main components in the market field, containing motivational tools, generally for a short period of time, designed to stimulate faster or excessive purchase of certain products or services by consumers or trade (Kotler, Koshy, & Jha, 2013). This leads to the impulsive decision of the consumer to buy that product or service (Murganatham, G. & Bhakat, R.S., 2013) defined impulse buying as "the consumer who buys a

product with little or no planning after the effect of a sudden, impactful stimulus”.

Promotional activities are classified as one of the marketing tools used to attract customer consideration (Bhandari, 2014). Retail promotions are used by retailers in modern commerce to increase sales to consumers, such as displays and instant price reductions. Several factors contribute to the rapid growth of sales promotion, especially in consumer markets. First, within the company, product managers face greater pressures to increase their current sales, and promotion is seen as an effective short-term sales instrument (Kotler & Armstrong, 2013).

In addition, promotional activities are an essential marketing tool for manufacturers as well as retailers. Promotional activities are used to increase sales. It is a motive for customers to buy more. Promotional activities include free sample offers, free coupons, price reductions and buy one get one free offer also a retailer or manufacturer promotes their product or service using strategic communication method. A retailer should focus on customer feedback while using sales promotion tools. By using sales promotion tools, a retailer or manufacturer can accelerate the level of customer purchase. Promotional activities can stimulate the customer to buy in terms of behavioral responses (Nasir & Bal, 2016).

2.2. The main instruments in promotional activities

To achieve sales promotion objectives, many instruments can be used which present different results.

Consumer promotions include a wide range of instruments, such as product samples, coupons, payment discounts, premiums, point-of-sale displays, sweepstakes, and event sponsorships (Kotler & Armstrong, 2013).

Sales promotion often uses a variety of tools to influence the market as efficiently as possible. Using the target group as a criterion, the means of sales promotion are divided into: consumer stimulation, intermediary stimulation, sales personnel stimulation, and opinion stimulation (Reshidi & Ceku, 2006).

In the paper we will prove the hypothesis that we have received, in the following we present the first hypothesis:

H1. Sales promotion tools have a significant positive impact on Consumer Buying Behavior.

2.3. Product sample

Among the first instruments of sales promotion is the product sample, using them for promotional purposes and always putting them in promotional activities, as a first informative step of the product for customers who are interested in that product.

Sampling is the most effective but most expensive way to introduce a new product or create new hype for an existing product (Kotler & Armstrong, 2013).

A free sample gives recognition for a new product in the market to generate demand. The sample may be small but it should be in large quantities to give a great experience of your product to the target market, you can say that the examples are representative of your product. When demand for products increases then you can stop offering free samples (Ashraf *et al*, 2014). Other studies found that when a company produces a new product, no one knows that product to the public to introduce that product to the market, marketers use various mar-

keting tools to create awareness of that product to the public, free sampling is also one of the most important tools to introduce newly launched products. In free sampling people take the product from the seller to use it and that sample free of charge creates interest among consumers. A sample is a somewhat small amount of product for consumer testing. Similarly, free sample techniques are to increase our sales. The assumption of this study is that receiving free samples has a positive relationship with consumer purchasing behavior (Ahmad, *et al*, 2015).

Moreover, the free sample method is used to encourage customers to try the newly launched products. It depends on the nature of the product and the time requirements. The Free Sample tool is highly effective in driving behavior toward purchase decisions by involving customers in their brand preferences. It helps in increasing the sales of a promoted product (Shamout, 2016).

H2. Free samples have a significant positive impact on Consumer Purchase behavior.

2.4. Free coupon offer

The free coupon offer is another product promotion tool in the market, and this opportunity in the juice industry is used a lot, to see that customers always see at the first opportunity what they will really benefit from a promotion point. The word coupon is associated with those customers who are eligible to receive coupons to get a refund for the product at its regular price. The free coupon offers help to get a price discount on a specific product. Coupons are useful for trial purchase of any product or service. Free coupon offers can be a powerful tool for switching brands. By giving out coupon offers, a manufacturer or retailer is promoting their brand, product or service (Mughal, *et al*, 2014). Similarly, the word coupon advertisement is related to those customers who take advantage of products at the original price. Coupons are defined as invaluable for a specific product, for which customers cannot buy at its original price. Coupons are easily accessible and easy for the customer to understand and are very useful for trying your product for the first time (Mughal, *et al*, 2014)

H3. Free coupons have a significant positive impact on Consumer Buying Behavior.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the paper we used two types of data to carry out this research: primary and secondary. Secondary data was collected from the literature to better understand the importance of sales promotion, as well as their importance in the context of consumer behavior. The paper is mainly based on primary data collected through questionnaires.

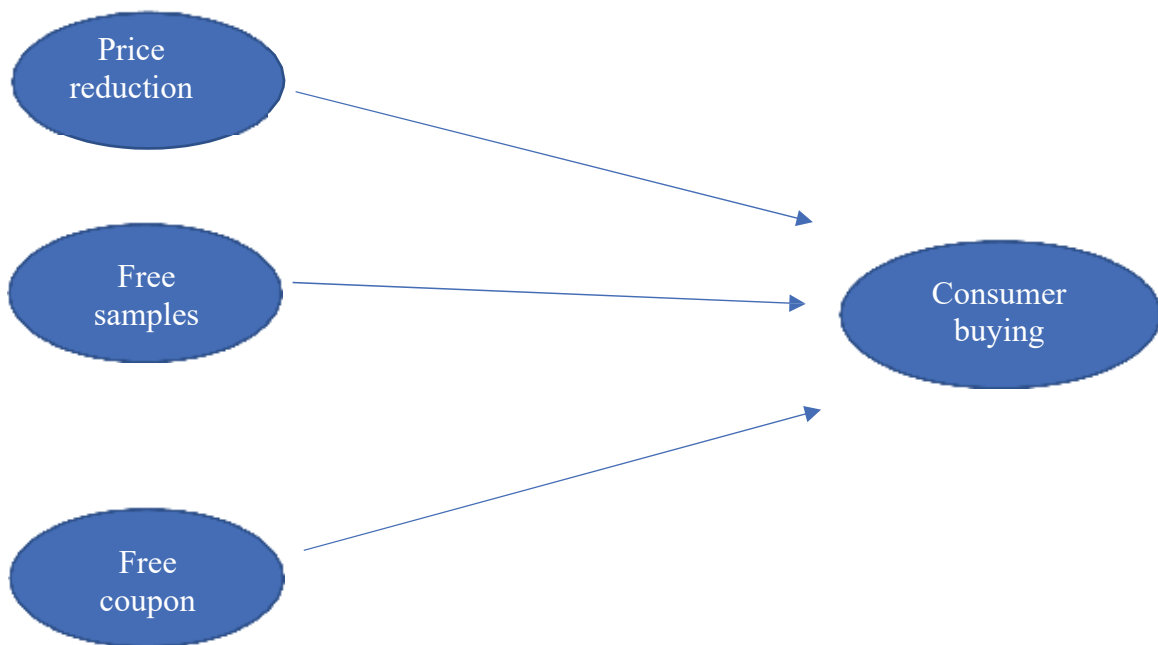
The nature of this research is descriptive and follows the quantitative approach to collect the data and based on the literature review test the developed hypothesis. The independent variables for this research are price discounts, free sample offers, free coupon offers. The dependent variables are consumer purchasing behavior and the research area is consumers who use local beverages. The main idea of the mixed research setup is to use the quantity as well as the subjective plan to give a good understanding of the subject matter in the exam (Morse, 2016). The questionnaire was distributed among one hundred and five randomly selected consumers by distributing the questionnaire in large market centers that have local

products listed in their markets. The purpose of the analysis and the questions were worked out to the respondent before sending the form, so they would simply fill the form with the relevant answers and for further analysis these forms were coded and entered into the SPSS sheet. The questionnaires were distributed in the period August 2021- September 2021 and the total number of distributed questionnaires was 105 questionnaires, where we received 80 completed questionnaire.

3.1 Research model

The research model that we have adopted is the correlation of variables, which we will investigate in the research questions that we have posed to randomly sampled consumers and to see the relationship of independent variables (price reduction, free sample, free coupon) to the dependent variable (influence on consumer purchasing behavior).

Figure 1. Research model of variables



3.2 Research hypotheses

The hypotheses raised in the research are:

H1. Sales promotion tools have a significant positive impact on Consumer Buying Behavior.

H2. Free samples have a significant positive impact on Consumer Purchase behavior.

H3. Free coupons have a significant positive impact on Consumer Buying Behavior.

The hypotheses have been raised based on the research we have developed and are validated by means of the statistical program SPSS, and after the validation of the hypotheses we will also present the analysis of the results derived from the regression method and we will present the derived results.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

The purpose of the research is to study the relationship between different types of promotional tools and their impact on consumer behavior, consumer buying behavior related to fast moving consumer goods. But also, to see the relationship of these variables with each other. To test the relationship between variables, hypotheses and the impact of related research activities, we used regression analysis to see the impact between variables.

4.1. Regression analysis

Regression analysis is used to test the impact that sales promotion has had on consumer behavior, taking the beverage industry in the country as a case. The regression results showed that taste promotion tools have a significant impact on consumer behavior. Thus, we can conclude that the hypotheses for the influence of sales promotion on consumer behavior were accepted and verified according to the results obtained from the regression analysis.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.958 ^a	.918	.917	.21544

a. Predictors: (Constant), Product promotion helps the consumer in choosing the product.

Figure. 1. Summary of the model - the first hypothesis

Prediction (constant) Product promotion helps the consumer to choose the product. According to the R model, the positive result is predicted with .958, as well as the adjusted r square base with 0.917, also positive

Coefficients ^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	.460	.084		5.452	.000
Product promotion helps the consumer in choosing the product.	.850	.029	.958	29.568	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Promotional tools facilitate the purchase of the product.

Figure. 2. The coefficient for the first hypothesis

The unstandardized coefficient in relation to the variable following product promotion helps the consumer in choosing the product beta 0.46 and 0.850 positive compared to the standardized coefficient beta 0.958 where it has a higher value than the previous variable.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.844 ^a	.713	.709	.42213

a. Predictors: (Constant), Promotional tools have positive effects on consumer purchasing behavior

Figure. 3. Summary of the model - from the second hypothesis

Prediction (constant) Promotional tools have positive effects on consumer purchasing behavior according to the R model, the positive result is predicted with .844, as well as the adjusted r square base with 0.709, also positive.

Coefficients ^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.675	.154		4.384	.000
	Promotional tools have positive effects on consumer purchasing behavior	.688	.049	.844	13.912	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Product promotion informs consumers about products

Figure. 4. The coefficient for promotional tools have a positive effect on consumer purchasing behavior

The unstandardized coefficient in relation to the following variable, promotional tools have a positive effect on consumer purchasing behavior; beta 0.675 and positive 0.688 compared to the standardized coefficient beta 0.844, where it has a higher value than the previous variable

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.931 ^a	.867	.866	.39719

a. Predictors: (Constant), Free samples help the consumer in choosing the product

Figure. 5. Summary of the model - from the third hypothesis

Forecast (constant) Free samples help the consumer in choosing the product according to the R model, the positive result is predicted with .931, as well as the adjusted r square base with 0.866, also positive.

Model Summary

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	-.161	.111		-1.452	.150
	Free samples help the consumer in choosing the product	1.033	.046	.931	22.581	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Free samples make it easy to buy the product

Figure. 6. Coefficient for the third hypothesis

The unstandardized coefficient in relation to the following variable free sample facilitates the purchase of the product - positive beta 0.65 and 0.688 compared to the standardized coefficient beta 0.844 where it has a higher value than the previous variable.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.909 ^a	.827	.825	.42134

a. Predictors: (Constant), Free coupons make it easy to buy the product

Figure. 7. Summary of the model - the fourth hypothesis

Forecast (constant) Free coupons make it easier to buy the product

According to the R model, a positive result is predicted with .909 and the adjusted r square base is also 0.825 also positive.

Coefficients ^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	-.392	.181		-2.169	.033
	Free coupons make it easy to buy the product	1.099	.057	.909	19.297	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Free samples have positive effects on consumer purchasing behavior

Figure. 8 Coefficient for the fourth hypothesis

The unstandardized coefficient in relation to the following variable: free coupons facilitate the purchase of the product - beta -0.392 negative and 1.099 positive compared to the standardized coefficient beta 0.909 where it has a higher value than the previous variable.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.932 ^a	.869	.867	.32136

a. Predictors: (Constant), Free coupons have a positive effect on consumer purchasing behavior

Figure. 9 Summary of the model - free coupons have a positive effect on consumer purchasing behavior

Prediction (constant) Free coupons have a positive effect on consumer purchasing behavior. According to the R model, a positive result is predicted with .932 and the adjusted r square base is also 0.867 also positive.

Coefficients ^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.649	.115		5.632	.000
	Free coupons have a positive effect on consumer purchasing Behavior	.833	.037	.932	22.746	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Free coupons help the consumer in choosing the product

Figure. 10 Coefficient for free coupons have a positive effect on consumer purchasing behavior

The unstandardized coefficient in relation to the following variable: free coupons have a positive effect on consumer purchasing behavior, negative beta 0.649 and positive 0.833, compared to the standardized coefficient beta 0.932, where it has a higher value than the previous variable.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the present study are largely consistent with other studies that proved the significant and positive effect of promotional activities programs and consumer buying behavior during the sales period.

It has been established that sales promotion programs are the main reason to motivate selected purchasing behavior in different regions. The bottom line is that sales promotion programs are one of the most prominent tools used in marketing communication strategy, and it is the biggest influencer on buying behavior significantly, immediately and quickly.

Based on the findings of this study, we recommend that manufacturing organizations in general can always engage in more mixed promotional strategies, and also tend to be cre-

ative for consumers; this in turn would increase and increase sales revenue.

From the obtained results, we have seen that product samples always have a positive effect on the promotional activities of the beverage industry, and from the hypothesized hypotheses, we have seen that they are all proven correct, and a descriptive and explanatory research of promotional activities has been developed.

This is in line with the suggestion of Odunlami and Ogunsiji (2011) that the organization should create a more effective sales promotion department with experienced staff, with the goal of developing more promotional strategies in line with the company's objectives.

In addition, the sales promotion budget should always be adequate in organizations.

This would also give sales reps and customers' performance to attend. This is in line with Bamiduro's recommendation (JA, 2001) that sales promotion objectives must be well defined and staff must be well informed in order to achieve the stated objectives.

Finally, there should be an improved and computerized distribution system, this strategy will create performance and skills for field managers and supervisors who monitor customer sales and complaints.

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EMPLOYEE'S PERFORMANCE AND THE IMPORTANCE OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

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darjel.sina@uet.edu.al**ABSTRACT**

Today, in a competitive environment, the organization must constantly improve its performance by reducing costs and increasing the quality of the product and service in the market. Human resource management is a set of practices on the effectiveness of employees to meet the operational needs of the organization. The primary purpose of this research is to present data on human resources, the basic concepts of human resources, the development of human resources and the performance of employees through the literature review. The purpose of the research is to measure the performance of employees and the role of human resources management in the private sector of the municipality of Pristina through a completed questionnaire. For the realization of this study, the methodology of statistical analysis of primary and secondary data was used. The primary data were collected through a survey of 120 private sector employees employed in different companies in the municipality of Pristina. People over the age of 18 who were in employment had the right to participate in the research. Out of 120 respondents, 50.0% were male, while the other half 50.0% were female. No significant differences were observed between the two sexes in their performance at work [$p > 0.05$]. Even in the comparison between certain age groups in their work performance, no significant difference was found [$p > 0.05$]. The 26-55 age group had the best performance at work. A significant difference between the performances of employees was found in those who claimed to receive bonuses in their workplace compared to those who did not receive bonuses [$p < 0.05$].

Keywords: Human resources, management, employee performance, legal framework.

1. INTRODUCTION

Successful organizations are those that value and develop their human capital to achieve their goals and objectives. The objective of human resources is to maximize the return on investment of the organization's human capital and minimize financial risk. It is the responsibility of human resource managers to carry out these activities in an effective, legally fair and sustainable manner. Companies tend to increase their productivity in order to be able to compete with each other at the national and international level, following the dynamics of changes occurring in society in order to ensure their existence in the current market.

Human resources (HR) are the most important component in a company or organization to run the business. The organization must have a goal that must be achieved by the members of the organization through development and improvement. Changes towards improvement require the mobilization of all human resources and reason to realize what is aspired to. The development of human resources is a process of changing human resources with the transition of the organization from a current situation to a new situation desired for the future.

The process of human resources management begins at the stage of recruiting individuals, based on their skills and professional preparation, as well as the subsequent processes of training and continuous qualification. A proper program of training and development of human resources helps to increase the performance of employees and therefore also to increase the performance of the organization.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Development of human resources

Human resource management (HRM) is the practice of recruiting, hiring, placing and managing an organization's employees. An organization's human resources department is typically responsible for creating, enforcing, and overseeing policies that govern the organization's practices and relationships with its employees. The term human resources were first used in the early 1900s, and then more widely in the 1960s, to describe the people who work for the organization.

Human resource development is the process of increasing the knowledge, skills, and capacities of all employees in a given organization. According to Silva (1997), in economic terms this can be described as the accumulation of human capital and effective investment in the service of economic development. Practice has shown that investment in people is a guarantee for survival, ensuring competition and the future of the organization. This is why Naisbitt and Aburdene stated that "In the new information society, human capital has replaced financial capital as a strategic resource". Human resources departments have been transformed in such a way that they face the many and complex challenges to take advantage of the opportunities presented to you. The transformation of human resources today is a direct call to rapid changes within businesses in order to face the challenges of rapid globalization. According to researchers Maier, Brad, Nicoara and Maier (2014), to face the challenges of globalization and to direct the "waves of change", future managers or human resource specialists must be effective and of high quality. Without a doubt, the achievement of the organization's objectives cannot be imagined separately from human resources, from their work, knowledge, habits and creativity. These objectives of the organization can be

achieved by the group of individuals working in these organizations, but always considering the individual in particular. According to Cornescu for the achievement of individuals, the organization should offer three types of motivation:

- Economic motivation (salary increases, bonuses, etc.)
- Professional motivation (position, status, etc.)
- Psychological motivation (appreciation from the group, from the organization, etc.),

The organization must be aware that in a competitive market it is necessary to motivate its employees and stay close in fulfilling the tasks assigned to them with creativity and innovation in the development of competitive advantage.

2.2. Performance

Organizations try their best to maintain a balance between employee commitment & performance of the organization. Every organization has come up with its rewards & recognition policies which helps the employee to boost their morale & keeping them passionate & their self-esteem higher. Oosthuizen (2001) stated that it is the duty of managers to motivate the employees successfully and influence their behavior to achieve greater organizational efficiency. La Motta (1995) is of the view that performance at a job is the result of ability and motivation. The performance evaluation and rewards are the factors that are considered as bonding agents of the performance evaluation programs. Among financial, economical and human resources, human resources are more vital that can provide a company competitive edge as compared to others. Lawler (2003) stated that health, prosperity and survival of the organization is determined through the human resources & how the employee is treated. It has been observed that the organizations gain tremendous success if they comply with their business strategy & a well-balanced reward and recognition programs for employees. Deeprose (1994) argued that the motivation & productivity of employees can be enhanced through providing them effective recognition resulting in stupendous performance of the organization as a whole. The entire success & progress of an organization depends on how an organization motivates its employees & evaluates the performance of employees for job compensation. Freedman (1978) is of the opinion that along with attractive rewards and recognition if a healthy working environment is produced then employees are motivated immensely to excel in their performance. Employees take recognition emotionally which in turn boosts up morale of employees which ultimately increases productivity of organizations. In this way motivated employees are retained with the organizations thus reducing extra costs of hiring.

2.2.1 Performance and assessment methods

A very essential issue in the management of human resources is also the evaluation of the performance of employees, which can be realized by referring to several methods as below:

Top down method. According to this method, the manager is the most suitable person to carry out the performance evaluation, taking into account that the direct relationship with the employee allows him to closely follow the fulfillment of the tasks of his subordinate, during a working year

Descriptive method. The descriptive method aims to illuminate the current issues or problems of a data collection process that enables them to describe the situation.

Method of management by objectives. Management by Objectives is a personnel management technique, where managers and employees set objectives and monitor their achievement for a certain period of time. According to this evaluation method, the employee's work objectives are determined in accordance with the work objectives of the entire institution.

360 ° (scale) method. This method includes later developments in the use of appraisal for performance management, including what the person has achieved and how he or she acts not only by the line manager, but also by others who are in contact with him or her provide such feedback. This structured feedback information can be received from different sources to evaluate the person in improving the performance. This process must be well designed, otherwise there will be no benefits.

Peer-to-peer method. Communicating effectively with colleagues minimizes misunderstandings and maximizes work efficiency. Effective communication also produces healthy work relationships and allows your colleagues to solve issues cooperatively.

Graphical method. The graphical method is the traditional approach to job evaluation and is still used mainly because of the clarity of the final result.

The matrix method. This evaluation method works well in those organizations where there is more than one manager who interacts with a work group. Based on the matrix system, an employee is evaluated by several managers based on different criteria.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the aforementioned goals, the research questions are as follows:

1. Is there a difference in work performance between the two sexes?
2. Do younger or older age groups perform better at work?
3. Do bonuses increase employee performance?
4. Is the duration of work in a certain institution related to the employee's performance?

4. HYPOTHESES

After posing the research questions, the following hypotheses were presented:

- H1. There is no difference between the two genders in their performance at work.
- H2. Experienced employees perform better at work.
- H3. Bonuses received on salary affect the performance of employees
- H4. The longer an employee has worked in the firm, the better his job performance.

5. METHODOLOGY

For the realization of this study, the methodology of statistical analysis of primary and secondary data was used. A significant part of the secondary data was generated from various works published in popular management journals, from various books, and from other sources, which are fully cited in the references section of the research. Data published on the relevant pages of certain ministries of the Republic of Kosovo, including the Ministry of Trade and Industry, the Ministry of Economy and Environment as well as from the Statistics Agency of Kosovo were used. Primary data was collected through the completion of a ques-

tionnaire. A total of 120 employees in the private sector from different companies in the municipality of Pristina were surveyed. The questionnaire has been carefully compiled, much attention has been paid to the structure of the questionnaire so that it is as understandable as possible to the respondents. Demographic data such as gender, age, personal experience at work are also included in the questionnaire. The duration of the data collection lasted about two months and the completion of the questionnaire was completely anonymous.

6. RESULTS

Table 1. Respondents by gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	60	50.0
Female	60	50.0
Total	120	100.0

Table 1 shows the gender of a total of 120 surveyed employees. From the table we see that out of 120 respondents (n= 100), 50% of them were male (n= 60) and 50% female (n= 60).

Table 2. Distribution based on age group

Age group	Frequency	Percentage	Average	DS
18 - 25 years old	34	28.3	40.08	± 14.798
26 - 40 years old	20	16.7		
41 - 55 years old	42	35.0		
> 56 years old	24	20.0		
Total	120	100.0		

Table 2 shows the breakdown of respondents based on their age group. The largest number of respondents belong to the 41-55 age group in a total of 42 cases or 35.0%. A smaller number of respondents belong to the 18-25 age group with 34 cases in total or 28.3%. While few respondents belong to the age group of 26-40 years with only 20 cases or 16.7%. The mean age of the respondents' ± SD was 40.08 ± 14.79 years.

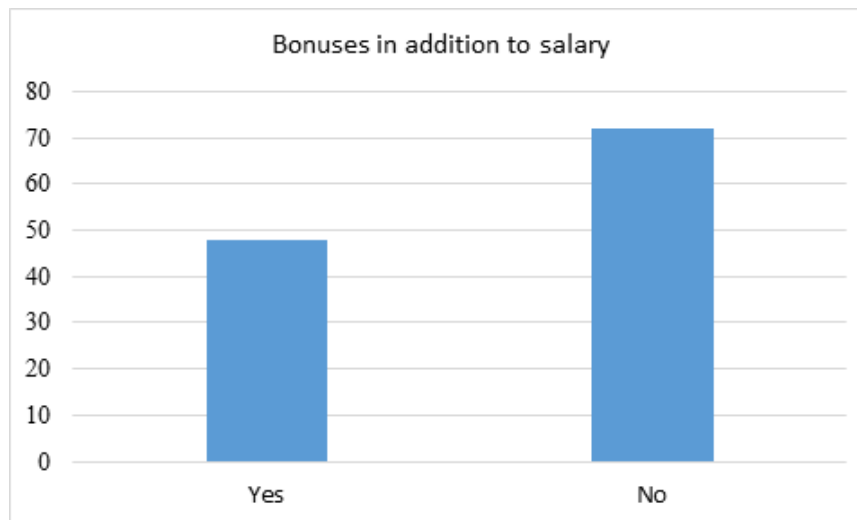
Table 3. Work experience

Question		Frequency	Percentage
How long have you been working at this company?	< 1 year	40	33.3
	1 – 5 years	29	24.2
	5 – 10 years	29	24.2
	> 10 years	22	18.3
How long have you held this position in this company?	<6-months	36	30.0
	6 – 12 months	58	48.3
	>1 year	26	21.7
Total		120	100.0

Table 3 shows the work experience of the respondents. In the question "how long have you been working in this company?", out of a total of 120 respondents, 33.3% of them (n= 40) declared that they were employees in that company for less than a year, 24.2% (n= 29) declared that they worked in that country for a period from 1 to 5 years, the same declared for the period from 5 to 10 years, for more than 10 years a total of 22 respondents (18.3%) declared. In the question "how long have you held this job position in the company?", the majority of respondents declared for 6 - 12 months in a total of 48.3% of cases (n= 58), less than 6 months in total 30.0% (n= 36), whereas a total of 26 respondents or 21.7% declared more than one year.

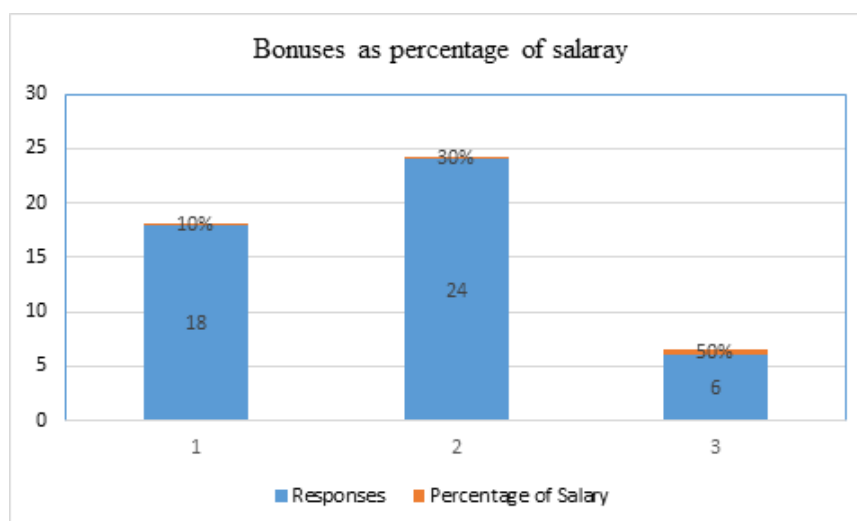
In the following, we will present the responses of employees regarding their work performance and all factors related to it, including the basic way of rewarding their work and benefiting from bonuses.

1. Do you get bonuses in addition to your basic salary?



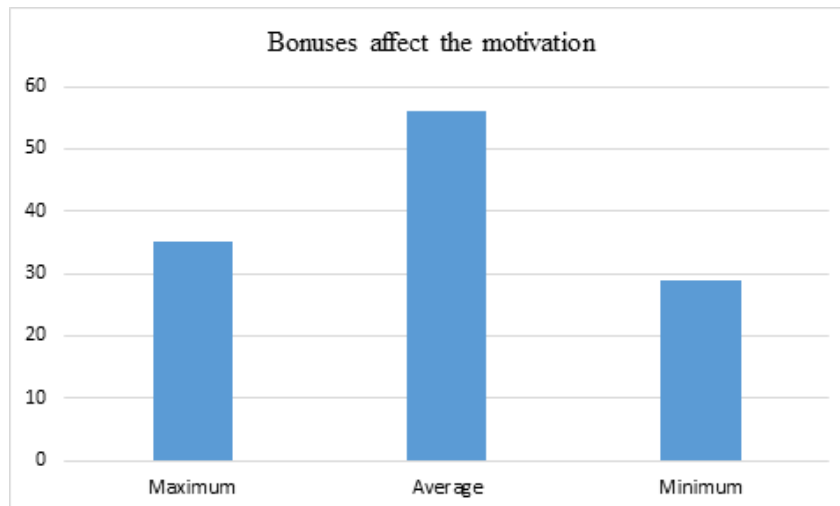
In the first question addressed to the employees participating in this research, "Do you receive bonuses in addition to the basic salary?", 40.0% of them affirmed such a thing, while the majority of them, 72.0% of them, declared that they do not benefit from additional bonuses on top of the salary.

2. What percentage of the salary is the bonus earned during the fiscal year?



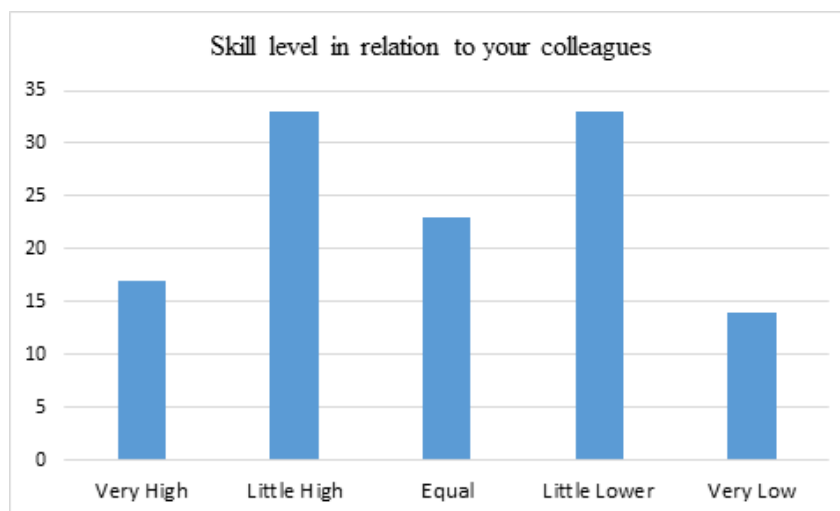
In the second question addressed to employees "what is the percentage of bonuses received in relation to the basic salary during a fiscal year?", 18 employees stated that the bonuses received were up to 10% of the basic salary, 24 respondents stated that the bonuses were from 10 to 30% of the basic salary, while a smaller number of respondents (n= 6) stated that the bonuses received were from 30 to 50% of the basic salary.

3. How much do bonuses affect your motivation?



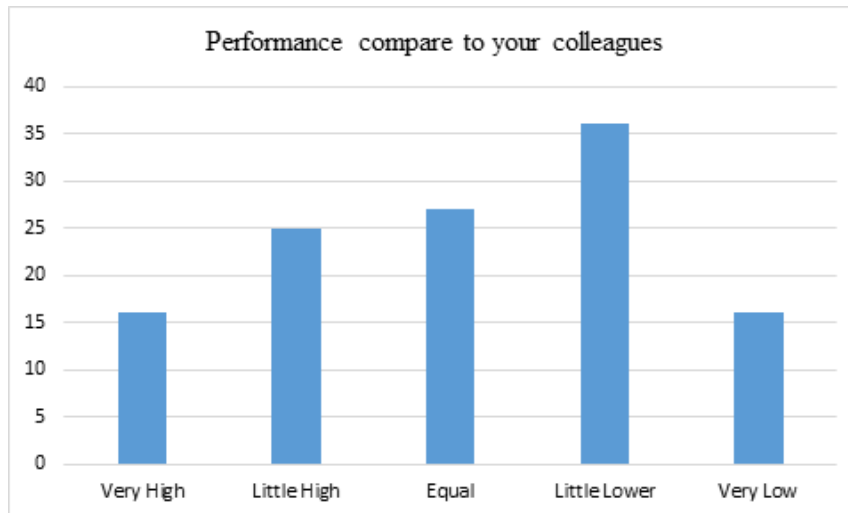
In the third question addressed to the respondents, "how much do bonuses affect your motivation?", 29.2% of them answered that bonuses have a maximum impact on them, 46.7% of respondents declared that bonuses have an average impact on them, while 24.2% of respondents stated that bonuses received have minimal impact on their work performance.

4. How would you rate your skill level in relation to your colleagues?



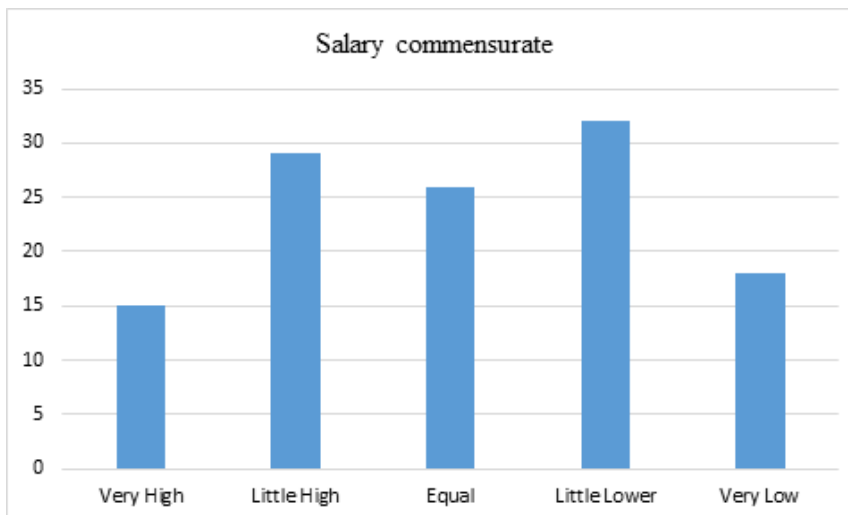
In the fourth question in a row, "how would you rate the level of your skills in relation to your colleagues?", 14.2% of respondents declared that their skills were much higher compared to their colleagues, 27.5% of respondents declared that their skills were slightly higher than the skills of their colleagues, 19.2% of respondents declared that their skills were equal to those of their colleagues, 27.5% of them declared that their skills were slightly smaller compared to their colleagues and 11.7% of the respondents declared that their skills were at a much lower level compared to their colleagues.

5. How is your performance compared to colleagues who do the same job as you?



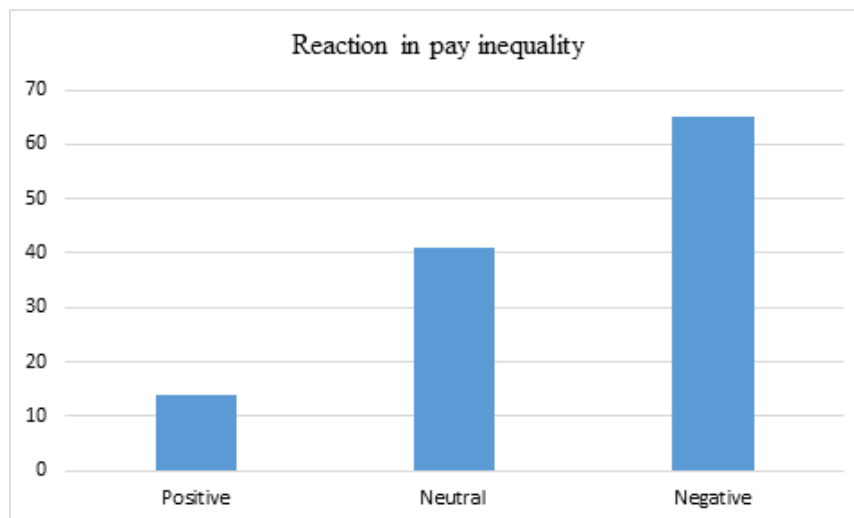
In the fifth question of the series "how is your performance in relation to colleagues who perform the same work as you?", 13.3% of respondents declared that their performance is much higher compared to their colleagues, 20.8 % of the respondents declared that their performance was slightly higher than the performance of their colleagues, 22.5% of the respondents declared that their performance was equal to that of their colleagues, 30.0% of them declared that the performance of theirs was slightly weaker compared to their colleagues and 13.3% of respondents declared that their performance was at a much lower level compared to their colleagues.

6. How is your salary commensurate with the work you do?



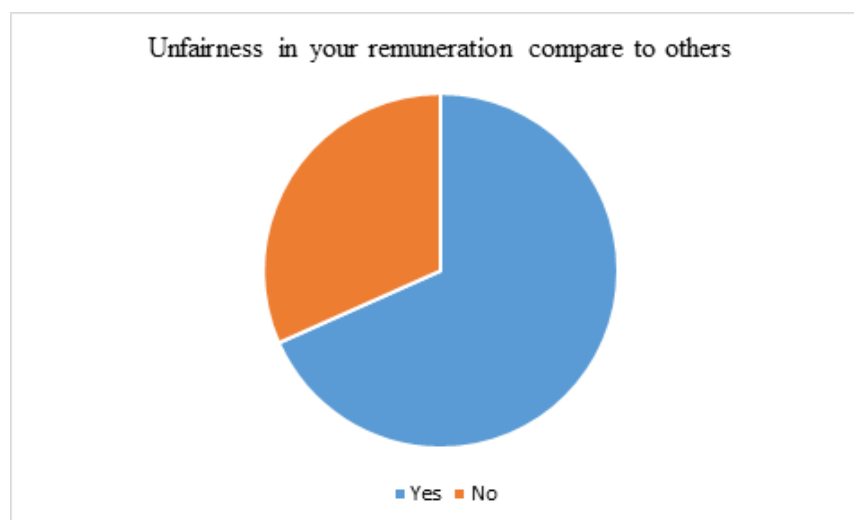
In the sixth question "how is your salary in accordance with the work you do?", 12.5% of the respondents stated that their salary is much higher compared to the work they do, 24.2% of the respondents stated that the salary theirs was slightly higher than the work they do in the company, 21.7% of the respondents stated that their salary was equal to the work they do, 26.7% of the respondents stated that their salary was slightly lower in compared to the work they do and 15.0% of respondents declared that their salary was at a much lower level compared to the work they do.

7. How would you react if you observed pay inequality?



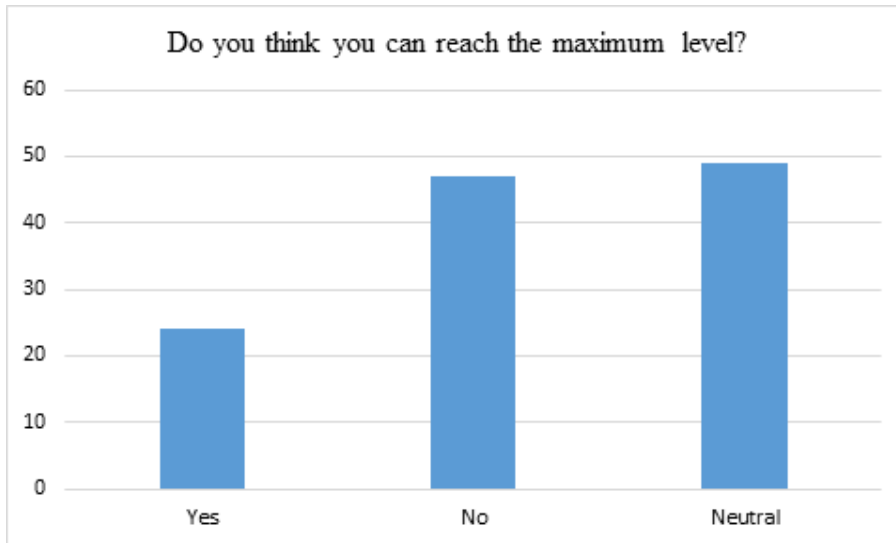
In the seventh question "how would you react if you observed inequality in relation to salary?", 54.2% of the respondents declared that they would not react well (they would react negatively), 34.2% of the respondents were declared that they would react neither good nor bad, while the remaining 11.7% declared that they would react positively.

8. Do you find unfairness in your remuneration compared to others?



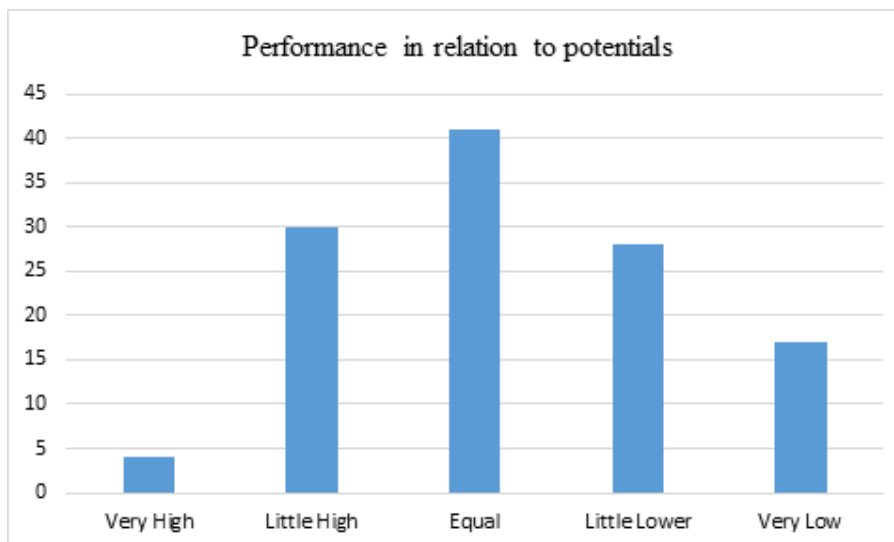
In the eighth question "Do you find injustice in your remuneration compared to others?", 68.3% of the respondents declared that there is injustice between colleagues in terms of the remuneration they receive and the work they do, while 31.7% of the respondents denied that there are injustices among the staff in terms of the remuneration they receive and the work they do.

9. If your place of work allows you several levels of remuneration depending on performance, do you think you can reach the maximum level?



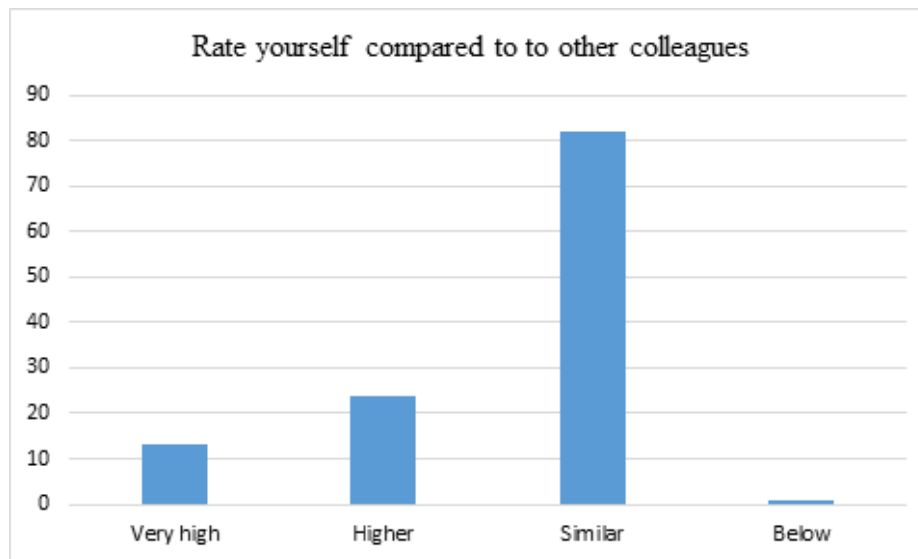
In the ninth question addressed to the respondents that "If your place of work allows you several levels of remuneration depending on performance, do you think you can reach the maximum level?", 20.0% of the respondents were optimistic that if there would be remuneration in based on their work they would reach the maximum level of performance at work, 39.2% of the respondents denied such a thing, while 40.8% of the respondents were neutral.

10. How is your performance in relation to your potentials and abilities?



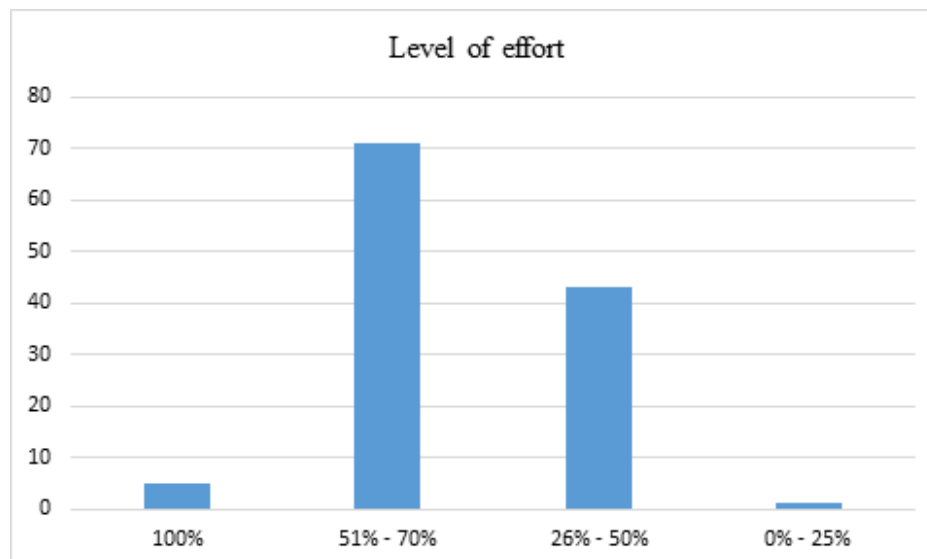
In the tenth question "how is your performance in relation to the potentials and skills you have?", 3.3% of the respondents stated that their performance is much higher compared to the skills they have, 25.0% of the respondents stated that their performance was slightly higher than the skills they possess, 34.2% of respondents declared that their performance was equal to the skills they possess, 23.3% of respondents declared that their performance was slightly better low compared to the skills they have and 14.2% of respondents declared that their performance was at a much lower level compared to the skills they possess.

11. How do you rate yourself compared to others colleagues?



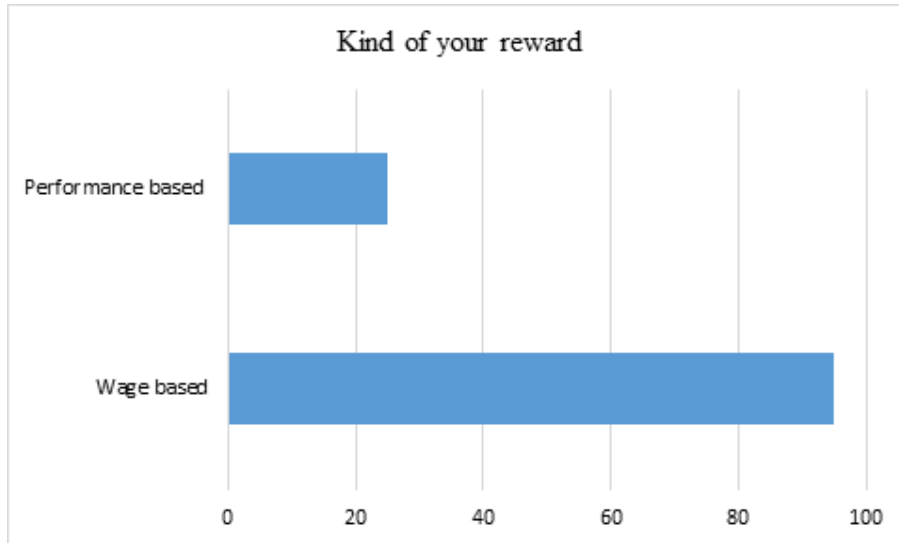
In the eleventh question "how do you rate yourself compared to others colleagues?", 10.8% of the respondents stated that they feel that they are at a much higher level than their work colleagues, 20.0% of the respondents declared that they feel that they are at a higher level than their work colleagues, 68.3% of the respondents declared that they value themselves the same as other work colleagues, while only 0.8% declared that they consider themselves weaker.

12. What is the level of effort you put into the current reward?



In the twelfth question about "what is the level of effort you make with the current reward?", 4.2% of the respondents declared that they give their maximum in their work, 59.2% of the respondents declared that they only give 51 - 75% of their abilities in the work they do, 35.8% of the respondents declared that they give only 26-50% of themselves in the work they do, while 0.8% of the respondents declared that they give of themselves only 0-25% of their abilities.

13. What is the form of your reward?



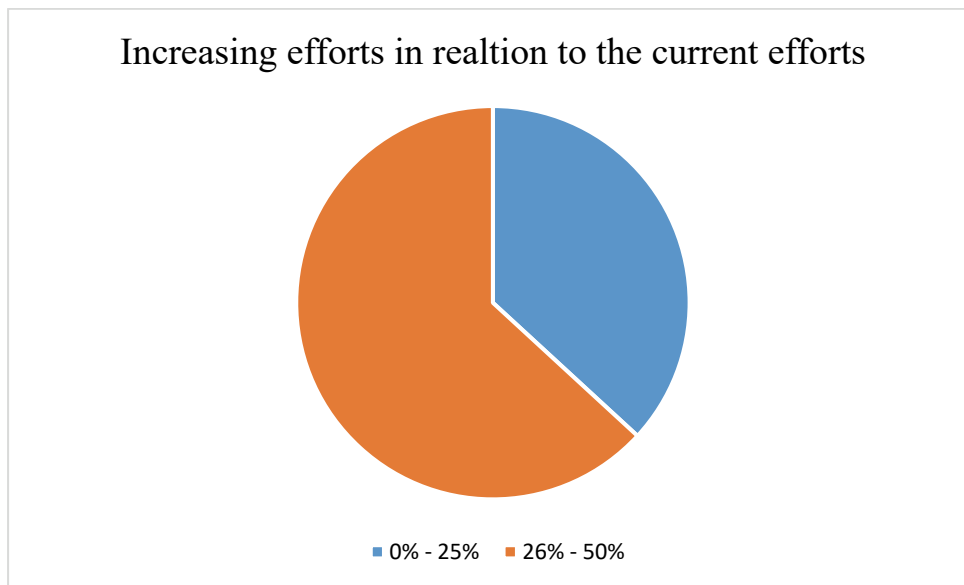
In the thirteenth question addressed to the respondents "What is the form of your remuneration?" 79.1% of the respondents declared that they are paid with a fixed salary, while 20.9% of the respondents declared that they are paid based on individual performance.

14. Which form of reward do you prefer?



In the fourteenth question "which form of reward do you prefer?", 51.7% of the respondents declared that they prefer to be rewarded with a fixed salary, 34.2% of the respondents declared that they prefer to be rewarded based on individual performance, while 14.2% of the respondents declared that they prefer to have salaries based on the scales (based on the position within the firm).

15. If the form of reward you are looking for is implemented, how much will you increase your efforts in relation to the current efforts?



In the fifteenth question "if the form of reward you request is applied, how much will you increase your efforts in relation to the current efforts?", 40.0% of the respondents stated that if they were rewarded in the way they want they would increase their efforts from 0 – 25% compared to the work they do now, while 60.0% of the respondents declared that they would increase their performance by 26 – 50% of the current efforts they make at work.

Test of Hypothesis

H1. There is no difference between the two genders in their performance at work.

Gender	N	M	DS	t-testi	Value p
Male	60	28.88	3.692	3.265	.627
Female	60	28.58	3.021		

The table above shows the testing of the first hypothesis that "there is no difference between the two genders in their performance at work". From the table we see that there was no difference between the two genders in their performance at work ($p > 0.05$), which therefore proves the hypothesis.

H2. Older age groups, because of their experience, perform better at work.

Age Group	N	M	DS	ANOVA (F)	Value p
18-25 years	3	28.0	3.459	.663	.577
	4	9			
26-40 years	2	29.2	3.518		
	0	0			
41-55 years	4	29.0	3.306		
	2	5			
> 56 years	2	28.7	3.368		
	4	1			

The table above shows the testing of the second hypothesis that "Older age groups, due to their experience, have better performance at work". From the table we see that there was no significant difference between the age groups in their performance at work ($p > 0.05$), and therefore the second hypothesis falls down, it does not hold.

H3. Received bonuses affect the performance of employees.

Bonuses	N	M	DS	t-testi	Value p
Yes	48	31.2	3.152	20.265	.03
		1			
No	72	24.4	3.213		
		1			

In the table above, the testing of the third hypothesis of the paper "bonuses received affect the performance of employees" is presented. From the table we see that there is a significant difference between the performance of employees who claimed to receive bonuses in their workplace compared to those who did not receive bonuses ($p < 0.05$). This proves hypothesis number three (H3).

H4. Employees with longer experience have better performance at work.

Work Experience	N	M	DS	ANOVA (F)	Value p
< 1 year	40	28.3	3.568	.539	.656
		0			
1 – 5 years	29	28.9	3.735		
		0			
5 - 10 years	29	28.6	2.894		
		6			
> 10 years	22	29.4	3.127		
		1			

The table above shows the testing of the fourth hypothesis of the paper "employees with longer experience have better performance at work.". From the table we see that there is no significant difference between the performance of employees who have worked for a longer time in the company and those who have not been employees of the company for a long time ($p < 0.05$). Consequently, these findings reject hypothesis 4 (H4).

7. CONCLUSIONS

A total of 120 respondents were included in our research. Out of 120 respondents, 50.0% ($n= 60$) were male, while the other half 50.0% ($n= 60$) were female.

The mean \pm SD age of the respondents was 40.08 ± 14.79 years. Most of the respondents belonged to the age group of 41-55 years with a total of 35.0%. Out of a total of 120 respondents, 33.3% of them ($n= 40$) declared that they worked for less than a year in the current company, while 18.3% of the respondents were employees in the company for more than 10 years. 48.3% of respondents stated that they were in the same position within the company for 6-12 months, while 21.7% stated that they held the position within the company for more than 1 year.

There was no difference between the two sexes in their performance at work ($p > 0.05$). Even in the comparison between certain age groups in their work performance, no significant difference was found ($p > 0.05$). The 26-55 age group had the best performance at work.

A significant difference between the performance of employees was found in those who claimed to receive bonuses in their workplace compared to those who did not receive bonuses ($p < 0.05$). Employees who received bonuses showed better job performance compared to those who did not receive bonuses. No significant difference was found between the performance of employees who have worked for a longer time in the company and those who have not been employees of the company for a long time ($p < 0.05$).

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Bonuses received in addition to the basic salary in the workplace are welcome and in a "necessary" way to raise the quality and performance of employees within a company, so as such, it is recommended that organizations or companies practice different bonuses for employees.

Adequate management of human resources plays a key role in the productivity of a company. Managers, through the use of different methods, should stimulate employees for maximum performance. It is recommended that companies should employ professional managerial positions with a clear vision in achieving the goals and objectives of the organization. The right professionals successfully manage and motivate the company's employees and together add value to the organization.

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CO-CREATION PROCESS: A PERSPECTIVE WITH STUDENTS FROM A POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Prahalad and Ramaswamy [2004] claim that, nowadays, the challenges faced by organizations are increasing. Organizations will have to identify entities or people who are able to help them, in a creative and innovative way, in the search for the best solutions that are able to respond quickly to any signs or trends that have not yet been perceived. One of the possible solutions involves the adoption of a co-creation process.

In Portugal, 12 Polytechnic Institutes identified this opportunity and applied for a project with community funds whose main objective is to promote entrepreneurship through the training of students in the area of co-creation.

The innovation co-creation project using the Demola methodology aims Innovation Co-creation, with teams of students with multidisciplinary training, companies and teachers who stimulate and lead the Innovation Co-creation process. The objective is for students and companies in a co-creation process to present solutions to respond to the challenges presented by organizations. The challenges posed by organizations are transformed into "case design" and posted online. Students apply online to the cases available at each of the polytechnics that make up the consortium. The facilitators select the various candidates to ensure the necessary skills to resolve the case, the multidisciplinary team is constituted.

This study aims to evaluate the contribution of students from the Polytechnic Institute of Beja in the development of new products, new processes for companies in the region. Preliminary analysis of the data allows us to state that the use of this co-creation process added value to organizations, namely through creativity, innovation and new ideas that were presented by students.

Keywords: *Co-creation, entrepreneurship, stakeholders, innovation, creativity.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Co-creation is a management strategy that helps organizations redefine their value proposition (Ind and Coates, 2013). According to the same author, this is a process in which organizations interact with different interlocutors with the purpose of solving a certain challenge. Sharma and Conduit (2016) state that higher education institutions should cooperate differently with the organizations around them, namely through the implementation of cooperation processes. The co-creation procedure can be used to fulfill this objective. For this, it is necessary to change the way of teaching, namely through the implementation of the Demola methodology. Debnath, Tandon and Pointer (2007) corroborate this solution, considering that in the higher education system, teachers should be facilitators in the learning to be carried out by students.

In Portugal, twelve institutions of polytechnic education competed for two community programs that allowed funding for this new way of teaching and interacting with the community. In the first phase, training is provided on the Demola methodology to higher education and professional education teachers and, in a second phase, teams of students and organizations will be integrated. These organizations will present challenges that will later be solved in cooperation with the students. The challenges posed by organizations are transformed into “case design” and posted online. Students apply online to the cases available at each of the polytechnics that make up the consortium. The facilitators select the various candidates to ensure the necessary skills to resolve the case, the multidisciplinary team is constituted.

This study aims to evaluate the contribution of students from the Polytechnic Institute of Beja in the development of new products, new processes for companies in the region. From the analysis of the results, it appears that this project was important for organizations, because the students added value to the company, namely, in the implementation of new and unexpected ideas, in the development of better products and processes and in the improvement of the organizations’ financial performance.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Co-creation is a way for different entities to cooperate with each other with the aim of jointly achieving a final result that adds value to an organization (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). Piller, Vossen and Ihl (2012) state that co-creation is a management strategy increasingly used by companies, namely in their relationships with consumers. For Sharma and Conduit (2016), higher education institutions consider that organizations must change the way they develop their businesses and, for that purpose, they must adopt co-creative behaviors. Brodie, Fehrer, Jaakkola and Conduit (2016) states that co-creation is a collaborative process that involves an organization and its stakeholders. This process is important for organizations as it allows them to understand how the future will affect their business.

3. CO-CREATION PROCESS IN DEMOLA PROCESS

The Demola method consists of applying its own methodology that consists of active cooperation between organizations, facilitators and students. For its implementation in an initial phase, it was necessary to provide training to teachers of higher education and vocational schools or with vocational education. The training of teachers in the Demola meth-

odology is carried out using the POCH Program – Human Capital Operational Program, Pedagogical Innovation Project. The Complete Program (Link Me UP Project) finances the operationalization of the innovation co-creation process and the development of the Ideas Contest - Poliemprende.

The innovation co-creation project using the Demola methodology aims that students and organizations, working together, are able to respond in an innovative and creative way to the proposed challenges. In the proposals to be presented to organizations, it is intended that students are able to present solutions that demonstrate a vision for the future in relation to the challenges proposed by organizations. For this, it will be necessary for students to have the sensitivity to see small signs not yet perceived and to identify trends in the market. Student teams are made up of a maximum of six students, of which three must have training in the area of the challenge, two in related areas and one, called a joker, in an area unrelated to the challenge. The joker is someone who can come up with out-of-the-box solutions.

4. METHODOLOGY

In order to respond to the proposed objectives, the most appropriate information collection techniques were document collection, direct observation, questionnaire surveys and interviews. Thus, the direct observation technique was used, which according to Marconi and Lakatos (2003, p.190), consists of a “data collection technique to obtain information and uses the senses to obtain certain aspects of reality. It does not consist only in seeing and hearing, but also in examining facts or phenomena that one wishes to study”.

Regarding the questionnaire survey, it is focused on a set of questions about the problem under study, previously prepared, addressed to a certain group of subjects. As stated by Ghiglione and Matalon (1992, p.119), “The construction of the questionnaire and the formulation of the questions constitute, therefore, a crucial phase in the development of a survey. [...] Any error, any ineptitude, any ambiguity, will have repercussions on the totality of subsequent operations, up to the final conclusions”. The questionnaire was structured in 6 groups of questions, with a total of 28 questions subdivided into sub-items, involving mostly closed questions and open questions, having been applied to local entrepreneurs.

It should be noted that a five-level Likert scale was used (where 1 represents “Not important” and 5 “Very important”) to capture the perceptions of the partners who participated in the project about the students’ contributions to the improvements to be made in your entities.

The questionnaire comprises the following questions:

- The ideas that our customers bring contribute a lot to improve our products/services.
- The partner company’s ideas inspire us to improve or develop new products/services.
- The partner company’s ideas inspire us to implement improvements in our internal processes.
- We often exchange ideas with our (potential) customers when we think about implementing improvements or launching new products/services.
- In addition to the questionnaire survey, the semi-structured interview was chosen because it is a flexible instrument for data collection and can be defined as:
 - [...] a meeting between two people, so that one of them obtains information about a certain subject, through a conversation of a professional nature. It is a procedure used in social investigation, to collect data or to help in the diagnosis or treatment of a social problem. (Marconi and Lakatos, 1996, p.84).

The interviews were, therefore, directed to the entities participating in the project. The questionnaire comprises the following questions:

- How did the co-creation process go?
- Was your participation active?
- How many meetings are held with students?
- How did the meetings work out?
- Were there discussions about partial results?
- Did they influence the solutions presented at the end by the students?
- What was it like?
- Did the students add anything new?
- Do you plan to implement some of the proposed solutions?

The sample under analysis in this study includes the 40 representatives of companies / organizations participating in the project in the first four editions of the project.

5. EXPECTED RESULTS

From the analysis to the results, it appears that this project was important for organizations, because the students added value to the company, namely, in the implementation of new and unexpected ideas, in the development of better products and processes and in the improvement of the organizations' financial performance.

6. CONCLUSION

After an initial analysis of the collected data, it is concluded that the companies obtained promising results from the cooperation with the students throughout the Link Me UP Project. Some of the solutions presented are already being implemented and in the evaluation process. Participants in this study claim that this cooperation was important because it helped organizations understand how the future will affect their activity; it helps identify future signals and trends; it has promoted the discussion of future scenarios.

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THE CONTINUING EDUCATION OF EMPLOYEES IN KOSOVO'S PRIVATE COMPANIES

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ABSTRACT

This research presents the approach of companies in Kosovo about investing in the continuing education of their employees. Through this research we show how companies plan employee development and how many employees take development initiatives themselves. So, in this research we analyze the attitudes of employees of private companies in continuing education. For the research we used the quantitative method, where part of the research were 184 companies, domestic and foreign. The results show that there is a different approach between domestic and foreign companies in investing in employee development. Small companies have not shown any commitment to professional training of employees. Employees are more focused on performing work tasks, than to advance their knowledge, this is also related to job positions. The results suggested that companies should allocate separate budgets for employee development, which builds a sustainable business future.

Keywords: *Continuing education, Companies, employee's development, investment.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Continuing education means maintaining and developing knowledge, skills and experiences related to your professional activities (Institute KAF, 2017). Today, continuing education is one of the best professional measures because it contributes to being updated and to follow the progress in development. At the same time professional development indicates sustainability and development for business. Thus, (Marques & Ratten, 2020; QUARTIERO & CERNY, 2005) specify that corporate education comprises training projects offered by companies to their employees in order to institutionalize a culture of continuous learning and foster employees' acquisition of new competencies. These skills must be based on the organizations' strategy. According to (Western Governor University, 2020), the importance of continuing education is based on six reasons that people can benefit: Increasing chances for promotion, salary, career, improving image and marketability, personal development and improving lifestyle. On the other hand, businesses should see this as an advantage, because only with qualified employees can they develop the business and have sustainability.

Existing studies provide consistent evidence for the positive effect of employee education on firm business outcomes, the perception of investment in employee education by potential capital providers has never been explored. In addition, considering that managers decide the amount of investment in employee education (Li, et al., 2017). Therefore, employees should be seen as assets in the company and firms should always invest to increase their capacity.

So, people in addition to studies need continuous education through training and professional courses, but it is very important to learn by doing. The responsibility of continuing education is every person for himself. I.e., the self-initiative to learn and develop. This is the greatest success for both the individual and the company because the wish to learn is a more important role than the wish to invest in education. Of course, investments by businesses in quality improvement, are accompanied by budget allocations that they make in the framework of budgeting, the allocation of funds to encourage employees in building intellectual and professional capacity.

In the last years, the expectations of the employers were changing a lot so today young people should be "job ready" which determines the education system to change the way of teaching more appropriate "employability" skills (Dumitran, et al., 2019).

In Kosovo, there are 172,278 active businesses, about 80.5% of them are individual businesses, about 16% limited liability companies and about 4% others (Biznese te hapura, 2021).

Also, Kosovo as a country in transition in addition to facing a high unemployment rate of 25.7%. (Kosovo Agency of Statistics, 2018) In addition to unemployment, Kosovo also faces the qualification of employees. This is the challenge that businesses also face. Their barriers remain professional training and creating sustainability in business.

In Kosovo employees also face low salaries and small opportunities for development, as businesses in Kosovo have a concentration of family governance. On the other hand, foreign companies that bring foreign experiences to the country, face professional resources and development possibilities, because of the visa regime with European countries.

The approach to continuing education and professional training of employees is distinguished between local and international companies. Companies with foreign capital follow different forms of employee development and certification, while domestic companies still

have family governance over companies.

People with work experience are more demanded in the labor market and this encourages businesses to target the employment with experience, precisely on the basis of inclusion to teach them. Even this category requires attention to be up to date and to maintain high motivation at work.

Given the importance of continuing education which affects the development of employees in the company, we have raised two hypotheses:

H1- There is a statistically significant correlation between encouraging enterprises for continuing education and the benefits that education helps in job and careers.

H2- There is a statistically significant correlation between employer financial support for continuing education and employee motivation.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research was conducted on the basis of primary data, where through quantitative methods the objectives of the research were achieved.

According to data from the Ministry of Industry and Trade, there are 172,278 active businesses in Kosovo, where all companies with less than 50 employees were excluded from the research due to a lack of human resources department and no development strategies used by staff. After elimination, the population is 340 companies, which have over 50 employees. Based on this, the sample was determined based on Slovin's formula, to have a more representative sample, for more see the equation below, where the sample taken for research are 184 companies:

$$N = \frac{N}{1 + N * (e)^2} = \frac{340}{1 + 340 * (0.05)^2} = 184$$

Since the companies are categorized by capital, we surveyed 92 foreign companies and 92 domestic companies.

Before processing the data, we measured the reliability of the instrument based on the value of the Cronbach alpha coefficient, $\alpha = 0.941$, where referring to this value we conclude that the reliability of the questionnaire is acceptable.

The questionnaire is structured, this question is formulated based on the Likert compliance rate, which is created through Google Forms. Data processing was done by the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

The presentation of the results was done graphically, and Pearson correlation was used to measure the relationship between dependent and independent variables.

The survey was conducted with 184 respondents, 54% male and 46% female. Also, they are responsible for the level of education and their role in the company. 48.5% of respondents had a bachelor's degree, 28.5% had a master's degree and 23% of respondents had only completed high school. This means that respondents are in senior positions in the company. 40.5% have a managerial role in the company, 24.5% are experts or specialists in the company, and 34% are officials or low positions in the company.

3. RESULTS

Years of experience of employees in the company are important, because it shows their seniority and the experience gained during the work. 52% of respondents work for same company for more than 5 years, 19%, work 3-5 years, 26% work 1-3 years.

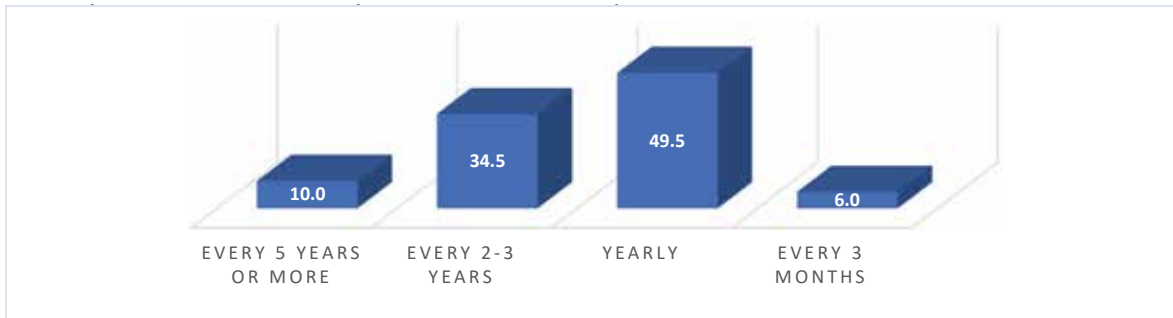


Figure SEQ Figure * ARABIC 1 Organizing courses and trainings by companies for their employees

Figure 1 shows how often the companies organize training and courses for their employees. Based on the results 49.5% responded that they attend training or courses on a yearly basis, 34.5% have attended training or courses within 2 or 3 years, 10% have attended any training or courses for more than 5 years and only 6% have frequent training and courses.

Most foreign companies have a higher attention to the organization of training and courses and their focus on employee development.

In addition, respondents were asked how they view their company, how the company encourages continuing education to employees. 49.5% are responded, almost never, or never, while 40% are answered, almost every time.



Figure SEQ Figure * ARABIC 2 Financial support of companies in professional training for certification of employees

Figure 2 shows how the company supports them financially to increase their capacity through continuing education and development plans. 39.5% responded strongly disagree, 29.5% have been neutral while 20% responded agree.

From this, we understood that employees require more financial support in continuing education. This helps in addition to the development of the individual; it will also be added value for the company.

This is also related to the answers that they gave about how they are informed about the company's budget for training and development of employees. 49.5% have no budget information at all, 7.5% do not have information, 21% have been neutral, 22% agreed that they are informed about the budget.

During the survey, the respondents have told how they have self-initiatives in continuing education to attend education programs. 50.5% are agreed that they have self-initiatives in continuing education, while 49.5% do not have self-initiatives to attend any training or courses for their development plan.

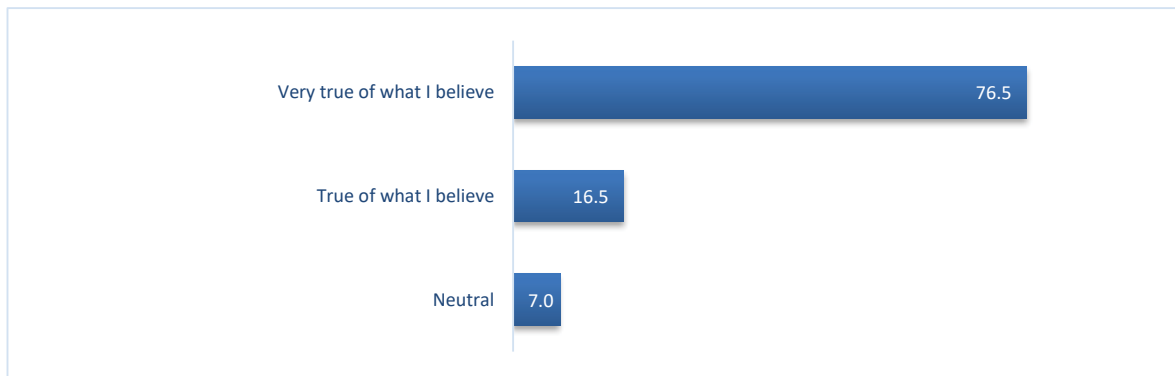


Figure SEQ Figure * ARABIC 3 Continuing education helps in professional work and carrier

Figure 3 shows how people believe that continuing education helps them in their job and career. 76.5% strongly believe that education helps them, also, 16.5% believe and only 7% have been neutral.

Except that they believe they will feel more motivated if the company has a strategy of employee development through continuing education. 83.5% strongly agreed and 16.5% agreed.

Correlation results

Table 1 Correlation of Encourage enterprise development through continuing education and benefits of continuing education at work and in career

Correlations			Encourage enterprise development through continuing education	Benefits of continuing education at work and in the career
Encourage enterprise development through continuing education	Pearson Correlation	1	.385**	0.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
	N	185	185	
Benefits of continuing education at work and in the career	Pearson Correlation	.385**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		
	N	200	200	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

To measure the relationship between the two variables, dependent (Benefits of continuing education at work and career) and independent (Encouraging enterprise for development through continuing education) Pearson correlation was used as we have normal distributions of data based on the normality test where $p > 0.05$. Based on the value of the correlation coefficient, $r = .385$ and $p < .01$, we conclude that there is a weak positive linear correlation between encouraging the enterprise to develop through continuing education and the benefits of continuing education at work and career.

Table 2 Correlation of employer financial support for continuing education and employee motivation

Correlations			Employer financial support for continuing education	Employee motivation
Employer financial support for continuing education	Pearson Correlation		1	.692**
	Sig. (2-tailed)			0.000
	N		185	185
Employee motivation	Pearson Correlation		.692**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000	
	N		185	185

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

To measure the relationship between the two variables, dependent (Employer financial support for continuing education) and non-dependent (employee motivation) Pearson correlation was used as we have normal data distribution based on the normality test where $p > 0.05$. Based on the value of the correlation coefficient, $r = .692$ and $p < .01$, we conclude that there is a moderate positive linear correlation between financial support from the employer for continuing education and employee motivation.

4. DISCUSSION

The results of the research showed that mostly employees stay long in a company. This gives an advantage over companies that easily retain employees despite the fact that in the world one of the challenges is keeping talent at work (Wong, et al., 2017). The long stay of employees in domestic companies is mainly related to the lack of opportunities and the high unemployment rate, while foreign companies easily retain employees for a long time because they differ in approach to employees compared to domestic companies. Domestic companies have to create development programs that retain employees from willingness to contribute.

That foreign companies have a greater commitment to employee development is also shown in the question of how often training and courses are organized. Mainly foreign companies organize courses several times a year, while domestic companies do not have such an orientation. Most of their employees have declared that they do not attend training often. Companies through the improvement of knowledge and skills (Gölgeci, et al., 2021) of employees contribute to the growth and development of the business. Local companies are recommended to encourage their employees to develop through continuing education in order to gain new knowledge and experience, for which respondents also stated that they are not encouraged by companies. After that employees must implement new knowledge within the company. To support employee training, of course companies need to support themselves financially and have a dedicated budget for employee development and training. From the research we understood that employees in addition that do not rely financially on continuing education, are not sufficiently informed about the budgeting of funds for professional development through forms of education.

The employees assessed that continuing education helps them to develop professionally in their careers, and also assessed that professional development opportunities are a very important motivating factor. This research is especially the encouragement and support of developing businesses to employees and increase their motivation through continuing education. The research clearly shows that domestic companies lack access to learning and intellectual capacity building while foreign companies have a different approach and are focused on development and education.

One of the main factors in the structuring and modernization of businesses should be the support of employees in continuing their educational training. We can conclude that continuous learning plays a significant role in creating long-term relationships between employer and employee.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on Pearson's correlation, we conclude that there is a weak linear correlation between encouraging the enterprise to develop through continuing education and the benefits of continuing education at work and career. This connection has to do with accessing and informing the developing businesses of its employees and creating a long-term sustainability. This conclusion has the greatest weight in local companies which, in addition to encouraging, do not inform employees about budget plans for professional training and capacity building.

According to Pearson's correlation, we can conclude that there is a moderate positive correlation between financial support from the employer for continuous education and motivation of employees. Also, we conclude that people have self-initiatives in continuing education, but on the other hand, we conclude that there is not enough information about the planned budget for various training and courses.

The conclusion also rests on domestic private companies which show a very low commitment to employee development, it is clear that local companies do not see employees as value, but as something that should only be exploited.

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GOOD MANAGEMENT IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR IN THE REPUBLIC OF KOSOVO

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ABSTRACT

Management of an organization is a very sensitive matter which involves many aspects. The most important aspect of good management is to do the things which are necessary and in the correct places in order to achieve higher effectiveness which is desired by all the management staff. In order to achieve this a good manager needs to possess abilities to envision the future development of the section he's in charge of by applying proper strategies. Motivation, proper management of the staff, setting goals that need to be achieved and proper rewarding of the people are things that are necessary to be applied.

The most important thing crucial to the public sector as a significant part of a nation's economy is good management of people. The significance of proper motivation of the staff is also crucial.

This paper will discuss these aspects and especially the aspect of implementation of good management in the Republic of Kosovo. The economy worldwide indicates serious changes especially in the public sector. The aspect of the role of the managers in the process of moving forward and applying good management policies will also be discussed paying special attention to the decision making process, motivation, and rewarding of the staff in the public sector.

Nevertheless, one thing that has to be also noted is proper and regular training of the employees in the public sector in order to raise their performance by doing things efficiently and in such a way to achieve the desired effectiveness.

Empirical research that was made and which will be shown here will emphasize the level of good management implementation in the Republic of Kosovo and the areas that need to be improved.

Keywords: *Good management, public sector, effectiveness, proper management of the staff, ecision making.*

1. METHODOLOGY

In order to complete this paper, both qualitative and quantitative data related to the subject were utilized. This study makes reference to a number of publications, including reports from international scholars and researchers from other nations as well as publications, scientific journals, conferences, etc.

The study in this work was carried out to investigate the perception and impact on good management in the public sector in the Republic of Kosovo. Also, the study presents a consistent empirical analysis of the collected data, as well as the identification of different theoretical concepts on effective management and the characteristics of good management.

2. INTRODUCTION

In the course of the 21st century the global economic development, its challenge and complexity as a whole create needs for good management policies. The public sector itself represents an enormous apparatus of a state, and cannot be isolated from the surrounding processes which demand changes in that area too. The managers of the public sector have to improve their knowledge in managing the staff strategically in order to achieve a higher level of effectiveness.

In the public sector, the mission is the factor which in the strategy of a good management, referring to the public good that government officials have given the group permission to deliver to the general population. Therefore, rather than focusing on the amount of money they have made, public organizations evaluate the value they provide in terms of the achievement of their objective.

This work will show some of the characteristics of good management policies of the public sector and it will show some results of the empirical research made in the Republic of Kosovo that will show some areas that show what kind of management policies are currently applied.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to achieve good and effective management in the public sector, every year different publications and literature are published with concepts, characteristics and theories that present new ways of managing in different sectors and the relationship between management and the profile of a good manager and efficiency.

The definition about the public sector author describes that (Pathirane & Derek) The general government, public non-financial corporate (and quasi-corporate) firms, and public financial institutions make up the public sector, according to the SNA. A description of the public sector is also defined by the author (Popa, 2017) where the primary goal of the public sector economy is to demonstrate the significance of the public sector concept in the evolution of economic phenomena and to demonstrate the need for this sector's presence through the institutional framework that has been established as a result of the distribution of resources at the state level and its level of economic participation. Because it is understood that competent managers will spur change in the sector, public sector management is a crucial component of public service. Because it is linked with boring occupations, a lack of prospects, bureaucracy, bottlenecks, and red tape, the public sector has too frequently been seen as the weak link in any economy (Betchoo, 2016).

According to the author (Eva, 2018) public companies have a crucial distinguishing trait that has significant consequences for human resource management: they are mission-driven. The limitations on managerial discretion, the perception of red tape, and the employees' passion for public service are further distinguishing characteristics of public companies that have an impact on people management and its impact on societal, organizational, and employee outcomes.

4. GOOD AND EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT

Different authors, leaders and businessmen constantly make efforts to create new effective models to have the best and quality management. Good and effective management in the public sector is based on similar characteristics as management in the private sector. In order to have good management, there must be a close structural link in the form of a hierarchy to coordinate relations with the public.

Betchoo (2016) describes that the efficacy of state and local administrations is significantly impacted by the effectiveness of the human resource incentive system. Analysis of the current functions and procedures as well as research into the variables influencing human resources' desire to carry out the functions and procedures effectively are crucial for the administration offices of human resources to produce outcomes that are intended.

5. CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD MANAGEMENT

Management principles are the fundamental truths that exist within an organization to support its growth and sustain its viability. Employee feedback is critical in managing change. Holding focus groups with employees is a great way to gauge reaction and monitor the progress of change.

Through the author (Meir, 2013) we must cooperate and serve others inside organizations. We need to be able to relate to others well in order to accomplish our goals together. All this can be accomplished through effective management such as:

- Catch people doing things correctly, and then acknowledge their good behavior.
- Use feedback to keep up with what others are doing in your sphere of influence and responsibility.
- Focus on quality above all else, especially for tiny products.
- Allow workers to voice their ideas and opinions without fear of retaliation or ridicule.
- Get other people engaged before making a change that will affect them if you intend to do so.

You also can encourage employees to provide feedback through email or the company intranet. Applying good management strategies has aroused the need for the ongoing pace of activities, making daily decisions under pressure, focusing on the crucial matters that need direction and initiative as well as prioritizing matters that are of fundamental importance of an area in the public sector run by a management staff. The responsible manager of the area has to have strong management capabilities because in order to give directions, regardless of being short or long term he / she has to be aware of the environment, both internal and external, and to be aware of the constant and continuous changes and fast pace of the environment as well.

The changes in the needs of the society, the trends in the politics, relations between governments, fiscal policy and expectations of the citizens as well make constant changes in the responsibilities in both the state and local government as well. Capability to anticipate these changes and effective adaptation to them requires responses that are flexible, forward-looking and efficient which labels strong management capacity able to strategically provide these responses.

According to Nirmal Kumar Betchoo (2016) there are 9 areas that need to be considered when it is aimed to apply good management strategies. However, these are by no means absolute since the society is changing continuously so some others may arise in the future.

These are the areas:

1. Appraise the needs and concerns of the public service in the future.
2. Understand seismic shifts in the public service.
3. Develop strategies to build a citizen-centric government.
4. Develop the cluster concept in the public service.
5. Use analytics to better define the future public service.
6. Identify selected visions of the public sector in the future.
7. Apply digital democracy to the digital citizen.
8. Learn the need for crowdsourcing in the public sector.
9. Appreciate the effort of innovative collaboration in the public sector.

The needs and concerns of the public service in the future represent the uncertainty that the public sector has to deal with and at the same time to provide effective services and cope with the constant changes.

The table below shows the seismic shifts in the public service that is what was and what should the public service be like:

• Citizen under control	• Citizen in control
• Governing for citizens	• Governing with citizens
• Organization silos	• Organization networks
• Public sector organizations as big, all-in-one giants	• Public sector organizations as small, flexible, purpose-driven entities
• Government as service provider	• Government as service facilitator/ broker/commissioner
• Government owning inputs and processes	• Governments and citizens owning outcomes
• Measuring outputs	• Measuring outcomes
• Forced cooperation based on enforcement	• Mutual collaboration based on trust
• Trust in the ‘strong leader’	• Trust in each other, the ‘servant leader’

Table 1. Seismic shifts: Bridging from now to the future

As it can be seen the shape of the policy for the public services has shifted towards the citizens, the public sector has stopped being self-centered, it should measure the quality of the provided services and the managers have to be mutually cooperative.

Building a citizen-centric government implies that the citizens should also take responsibility for the outcomes and this is achieved by involvement of citizens, that is, end users in the design and the future development of the services.

The development of the cluster concept in the public service requires development of the processes such as innovation, knowledge, and supply-chain. However central coordination is needed due to the external nature of some of the activities and raising the meaningfulness of the dialogues between the public and the private sectors and that means involvement of internal ministries and/ or internal agency committees that will make the concepts, the designs and will respond to the policy recommendations.

The usage of analytics will raise the efficiency of the operational level of the public sector, reduce the costs, optimisation of the public sector workforce and managing risks as well, and the services that need to be provided to the citizens will not be disrupted by this activity.

Selected visions of the public sector in the future and applying digital democracy to the digital citizen are seen as applying digital means in the public sector services. This also directs to the development of e-government and e-services as the modern era and the development of the society dictates.

Modern development requires the need for crowdsourcing in the public sector and it is recognized now that it is very important to reveal the preferences among different options (i.e. public opinion), measuring the levels of support for specific actions and examining or testing for ideas or suggestions.

The effort of innovative collaboration in the public sector is understood as recognising the power of social innovation, and the activities include establishment of legal entities which will facilitate the innovations by funding the promising innovative models.

In addition to all the said above motivation must not be forgotten. The public employees have to be motivated as motivation itself creates a feeling of appreciation and meaningfulness for the person's efforts to perform and the performance itself will be increased if the employees are rewarded frequently.

6. THE LINK BETWEEN GOOD MANAGEMENT AND THE MANAGER IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Good management relates to the duties, tools, and techniques a manager use to provide the most favorable work environment. A successful manager must be able to broaden his creative knowledge, accomplish the set goals and objectives, and bring the purpose and vision to life (Krypa, 2020). Change may occur in an organization's environment, structure, technology, or employees, according to writers Robbins and De Cenzo (2012). Because tomorrow wouldn't differ from today, the work of managers and leaders would have been simpler, decision-making would have been easier, and planning would have been simpler (Robbins and De Cenzo, 2012).

In order to have good and effective management in the public sector, managers must organize, manage, direct, and control workers or solve problems in order to manage and ac-

comply with specific goals and objectives. In order to accomplish goals, managers are required to follow the steps involved in accomplishing them, as well as to monitor and evaluate how resources are used (Zeqiri, 2016).

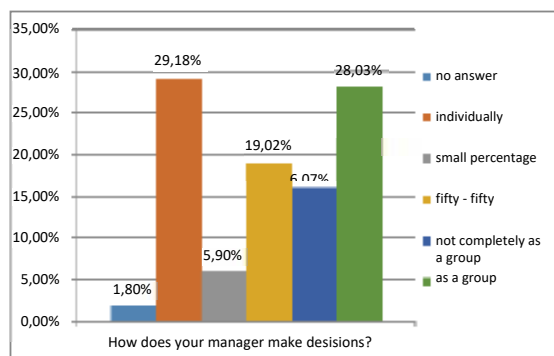
7. AN INSIGHT OF THE MANAGEMENT OF THE PUBLIC SECTORS IN THE REPUBLIC OF KOSOVO

The way the areas in the public sectors are currently managed in the Republic of Kosovo is shown with research. The public employees are those who are directly involved in the public sector and their responses are plausible. This research shows a scientific insight and clear picture of the reformation processes and their presence and / or non-presence as well as their slowness which naturally become an obstacle in the further development in the further development of efficient and effective public administration. The research was conducted in the period July-August on 610 respondents. The group of respondents included the employees in the ministries, state agencies and municipalities: managers, professionals and professional-administrative officials.

The research itself covers various areas but for the purposes of this paper the following are extracted as the most important.

The first picture shows the answers to the question and covers the way managers make their decisions.

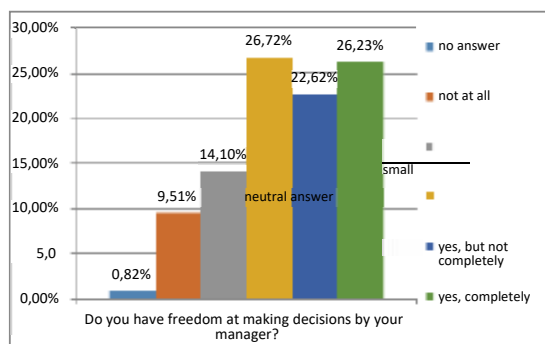
The analysis showed that 29,18% of the responders consider that their managers make individual decisions which means that up to 1/3 of the institutions covered by the research autocratic way of managing things is still present. This fact is not good if it is compared with the 28,03% responses that show a group way of decision making process.



Picture 1

How does your manager make decisions?

The second picture shows the level of freedom given to employees by their managers.

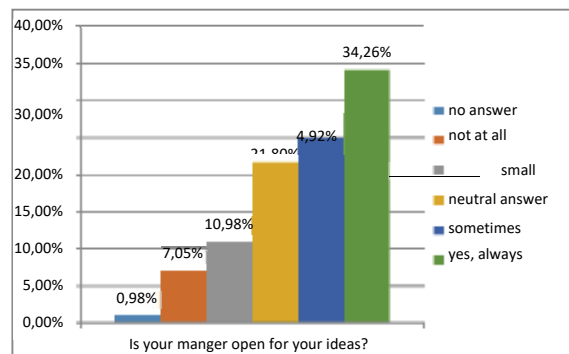


Picture 2

Do you have freedom at making decisions by your manager?

Complete freedom at making decisions by their managers has 26,23% which is not a satisfactory percentage especially if it is about respondents from whom sometimes are required to make decisions in the absence of their managers. The data of 51,15% (if the responses are neutral, small percentage and those without the freedom of making decisions are added) are almost without freedom of making decisions, which brings concerns since this high percentage shows presence of autocratic management in those organizations.

Openness for ideas, that is, whether the managers are open for the employees' ideas show the data in the following picture.

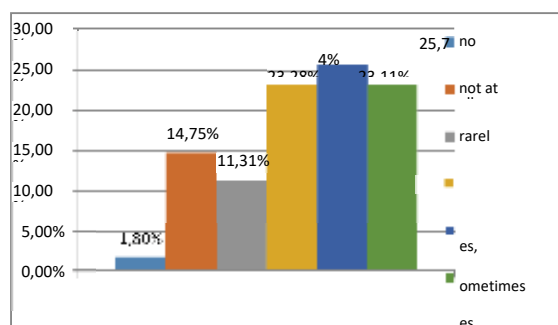


Picture 3

Is your manager open to your ideas?

Regarding to openness for ideas 34,26% and 24,92% or total of 59,18% from the managers are almost always open for ideas of the employees, yet a high percentage of 40,82% remains with those managers who do not allow their employees to show creativity and to express their ideas.

The training of employees is also very important so the next question goes to that i.e. the respondents were asked about attending training for the specific work areas.

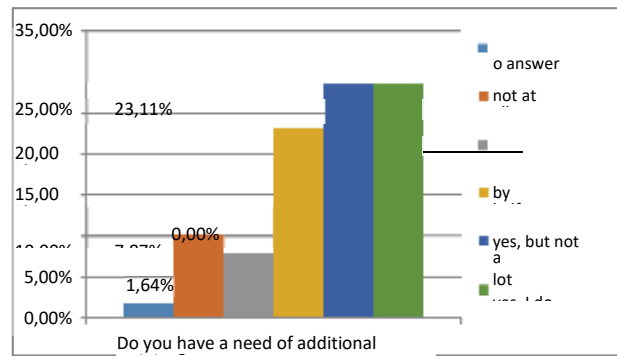


Picture 4

Have you attended training in the area where you work?

The training attendance of 23,11% and 25,74% i.e. total of 48,85% cannot be a positive way of movement since a large portion of 51,15% goes to respondents who answered that they have never or rarely attended training in the areas where they work. Global changes are influencing the national changes which do not make the organizations of public administration immune and therefore they have to pay attention to appropriate training of their employees.

As a support of the previous question the respondents were asked if they have a need of additional training.



Picture 5

Do you have a need for additional training?

An indicator showing that 28,69% and 28,69% i.e. total of 57,38% of the respondents feel that they do have a need of additional training in the area where they work which is necessary if we intend to follow the constant changes in the environment. All the indicators that were listed above show that the public administration in the Republic of Kosovo has a long way to go in order to achieve satisfactory progress towards the reforms and to gain efficient and effective modern administration.

8. CONCLUSION

As nature changes, society changes too. Developing a good management team is a critical component of running a successful organization. The modern 21st century has brought fast economic, business and social pace. Nothing can be kept in a shell – so the inertness of the public administration has to be eliminated. There are areas that need to be improved and changed and to shape the future looks of the public administration. It has to be understood that the public service has shifted the way of providing their services and that it is now more than obvious that it has to serve the citizens. On the other hand, the awareness of the citizens has to be raised and they have to take responsibility too in shaping and improving the public administration. Resources will always be limited, and the whims of human nature make it difficult to manage, much alone motivate, public sector personnel even under ideal circumstances.

The government – both at the state and local level, has to find ways to motivate and finance the innovative positive processes and to improve the dialogue between the private and the public sector. Creating e-government public services needs to be sped up, there are some attempts in the Republic of Kosovo but they are far from sufficient. The necessity of conducting on-line research shows up where citizens can be asked about many issues and the responses may be used for further improvements.

Training, as it is seen out of the research, is an additional point that public administration employees have to receive. That will improve their performance in their working places and the performance of the organization will be better too.

Last but not least is motivation. It must be present – it is human nature to be praised and rewarded.

By doing so the management will raise the self-confidence of the employee and that should be done at regular intervals.

All in all the reformation process is slow and it takes time but it also needs initiative from the current management of the public sector to conduct the changes in full.

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PEACE IN BALKANS: BEHIND SERBIAN-RUSSIAN POLICY OF PEACE WITH THORNS

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ABSTRACT

The unstable Balkans, as a result of being sidelined by the EU policy of enlargement, pave the way for Russia's involvement in Europe as a force seeking its return as a geo-political and strategic actor on the continent. The purpose of this article is to reveal and outline the destabilizing mechanisms from Russia-Serbia [in] formal alliance toward Western Balkan countries. Current agreement of mutual consultations between two Foreign Ministries is signed for possible conflicting situations in the region of Balkans to fade the Russian-Ukrainian war. If the war in Ukraine goes according to the Russian plan, the Balkan crisis will become even hotter in terms of the involvement of many international actors, politically and military. The recent departure of Serbian officials from Kosovo's institutions is a step towards the unpredictability of the situation. Three cases were considered on analyzing the inhibitory activities by Serbia, as a Russian stretched hand in the Balkans, toward Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro.

Keywords: *peacebuilding, Balkans, pan-Orthodoxism, Russia, Serbia, Kosovo.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The process of transition of ex-communist countries, after initial enthusiasm, is “backsliding.” (Cianetti, Dawson & Hanley (2018). The worst situation is within the states out of the EU, as a free zone for East involvement. Actual crises in the Balkans are fertile substrate for future possible escalation. Vladimir Djukanovic, a member of Serbian Parliament from the ruling Serbian Progressive Party, SNS, believes that “Serbia might be forced to engage in the “denazification” of the Balkans” (N1 Belgrade, (2022). The same narrative as the Russian one toward Ukraine. The recent agreement reached by both foreign ministers of the Russian Federation and Serbia in the margins of the UN General Assembly session, foreseen to last two years, on mutual consultations and dynamizing the foreign policy (AP News, 2022), shows determination of the Serbian policy to be on the side of the Russian foreign policy. Russian statement that: “In the negotiations on the future of Kosovo Russia will support a solution which is acceptable to the Serbian people ‘ (TASS, 2022), does not leave space for compromise. Patriarch Kirill, head of the Russian Orthodox Church, preparing spiritually his followers for war said that “sacrifice in the course of carrying out your military duty washes away all sins.” (Radio Free Europe, 2022). In such circumstances of Russian-Serbian coordinated political, economic, security and spiritual forms of influence the peacebuilding process in the region of Balkan, which suffered a destructive wars, will mark back. Politically, there is unequivocal Russian support in the UN Security Council for Serbia. Their economies are closely linked in many areas, especially in energy, in terms of military and security mutual cooperation through armament and military expertise cooperation. Hindering the pathway of Euro-Atlantic integration through destabilizing their neighborhood is a more than two decade policy of both countries. Hampering spreading democracies, fueling pan-orthodox nationalism, creating unsecure environment, and imposing the expansion barrier of the EU in the region through media, are some of the mechanisms used from this coordinated alliance. As a member of the UN Security Council, Russia has reinforced Serbia’s position on not accepting Kosovo’s independence and freezing the negotiation process. Those factors and the permanent inclination of Serbian political structures in favor of Russia and against Western democracies created the pro-Russian-Serbian substratum. Behind the motive for territorial aggrandizement is swept under the carpet of protecting fellow nationals.

The public opinion of Serbian citizens is dominated by the opinion of Russians as the people who are Serbia’s closest and most important foreign policy partner. 51 % of Serbian citizens will vote against entering the EU if there will be a referendum on this issue, and only 31 % of them will vote pro (Demostat, 2022). Identically with Russia intentions of hampering spreading the democracies in neighbor states, Serbia is destabilizing the easily vulnerable parts of Balkan region which have been left, partially or fully, out of Euro-Atlantic integrations, through primitive expansionist nationalism and policy of dominance: “Where there is one Serb living, there is Serbia”, complementary to the Russian policy: “Where there is an orthodox, there will be Russia”. Crisis in Nagorno Charabah, South Ossetia, Crimea and the war with Ukraine are practical, not accidental examples of imposition of the “Russian democracy”.

Destabilization tendencies by Serbia toward Kosovo, with NATO inside, Montenegro within NATO, and Bosnia and Herzegovina with partly contested international presence are

in coherence and complementary with Russian intentions. A simple observation on approaches of the Serbian political leadership attitudes, media, the Serbian Orthodox Church, civic opinion concludes on the same shared views with that of reincarnation of Russian Empire, even by force and impunity. Serbian different EU policy stance regarding the Russia-Ukraine war compared with unanimity of European countries on sanctions, present Serbia the “black ship” in Europe.

As a member of Slobodan Milosevic’s cabinet during the war in Kosovo 1998-1999, a radical oriented politician, Aleksander Vucic, today Serbia’s President, still believe and is working hard on returning Kosovo under Serbian rule as a condition for peace and integration within EU, a peace with thorns. Serbian leaders artificially appeared to be surprised when German Chancellor, Olaf Scholz, directly asked for the resolution on mutual recognition between Kosovo and Serbia, as European perspective for both countries (Euronews Albania, 2022) formulated at the resolution by EU Foreign Committee and European Parliament (EU Parliament, 2022). Vucic reacted that this “is their will, not ours” (Beta, 2022).

His policy of closeness with Russia can serve in the later stages as a currency, *tit for tat*, for turn towards the west: firstly, benefiting in the case of Kosovo, division of North Kosovo, preserving any connection between Serbia and Kosovo or to establish any kind of autonomy for Kosovo Serbs; secondly, profiting at the timing of integration of Serbia in EU; and thirdly, gathering economical infusion from EU.

Conflict situation in the Balkans suits only Russian aims. The hotbeds that could provoke conflict in the Western Balkans (WB) include involvement by Serbia. The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo as two countries outside Euro-Atlantic integration, and indirectly Montenegro and North Macedonia, within NATO, whose opposition parties are in close relation with Serbian political orientation, i.e. anti-integration within EU, may provoke instability. The initiative of “Open Balkan”, led by Serbia, is a response against the postponing policy of the integration of the Balkans into the EU and suggestion that WB countries will survive even outside the EU, as a group of countries with neutrality toward West and East.

2. EU CLOSENESS TOWARD WB - THE CHANCE FOR EAST

Current political and security situation in WB is not promising, despite enormous international financial assistance during the last three decades, with EU as main donator,¹ but without the capacity to enforce the rules as a regional hegemony stabilizer. Anti-government protests in N. Macedonia and Albania, divisions among political parties in Montenegro on Serbian Church status, political and institutional uncertainty within Bosnia and Herzegovina are signs of durable instability in the region. EU is set on his soft power engagement in the region, allowing new funds for the next period (European Commission, 2022), but, the new reality at world geopolitical and economic trends such economic growth of China and militarized Russia are emerging, cautions for new division of world interests. China’s neutrality towards the war in Ukraine is not very credible, given the rising tensions in Taiwan. This situation could produce an alliance between Russia and China to oppose the western bloc. And, both of them are linked to Serbia with the same policy of not-sanctioning the Russian war in Ukraine.

1 According to the OECD International Development Statistics database, 62 Billion US \$ were invested in WB from 1993-2018. According to the European Commission, European Strategy for the Western Balkans, through the Stabilization Association Process a total of €20 billion, humanitarian aid aside, was allocated by the Union between 1995 and 2020.

A dangerous competition phase, created by European Union long-lasting procedures (conditioning of) of process of integration and entropic EU nationalized foreign policy instead of Europeanized of national politics, as result of member state vetoes, in one side, and East autocratic availability, in another side, is eroding economic, political, and democratic achievements in the region. There is lacking full American practicality in terms of global hegemony leaving space to the Europeans.

Russian leadership, empowered by nuclear-military power, have channeled in the direction of establishing the Russian Empire based on pan-orthodox ideology. Putin stated that: the “Peter’s (Great) conquest of Swedish-controlled land - which is now St. Petersburg - was not initially recognized by other European powers”(Cheng & Thebault, 2022), disrobe the Russian “taking back and reinforcing” mega imperialist mentality by Russia. Based on the premise that democracies do not enter the war easily, Putin is imposing such features internally, by impoverishing internal democracy, and internationally, by annexing the pieces of foreign territories populated by ethnic Russians and destabilizing regions with orthodox population.

A simple reader does not find it difficult to notice that most of the Orthodox Balkan entity, affected by several forms of Russian influence, including that within NATO, are supporters of Russian policy in the Balkans. The warning about the opening of the branch of “Russia Today” in Serbia, is the Russian determination for influence. Putin’s hand in Balkans are Serbian President Vucic, leader of Republika Srpska, Milorad Dodik, Serbian political leaders in Montenegro and part of North Macedonian opposition. Serbian stand-by policy towards the West and East - the façade of political and military neutrality - is producing uncertainty in the current geopolitical situation. Serbian determination against imposition of the sanctions on Russia and rhetoric of the inadmissibility of the Russian occupation of Ukraine is linked with the situation of Kosovo-Serbian relations. Every sided positioning by Serbia would affect actual relations, restructuring international constellations through repositioning toward the Kosovo issue. Serbia’s current position maintains the *status quo* until the end of the Ukraine crisis, after which new realities would be created. In the event of a favorable outcome for Russia, the likelihood of Serbia’s aggressive tendencies will increase.

3. AFTER COMMUNISM, FAITH BECAME STAKEHOLDER OF POLITICAL DECISION-MAKING

Territorial expansion, ethnicity and ideology were the most usual *casus belli* for international disputes. In today’s new circumstances at the world level the Russian-Serbian post-communist leadership is generating the archaic policy and behavior of the XIX century Russian-Serbian political and religious alliance causing the wars in Balkan, and now in the post-Soviet countries. Transition from communism to democracy was characterized with significant return of population to faith. The role of the Orthodox Church was equalized with the state. Fighters were blessed by the priests before going to war. Religion leaders became political stakeholders and co-decision-makers. The head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kiril, implicitly supported Vladimir Putin’s invasion of Ukraine, asking for unity of Russians in difficult times, claiming for the “Russian world” (The Moscow Times, 2022) and predicting that “Russia is not the aggressor”! (The Economist, 2022). The “emerging

Orthodox Christian Right” propagated a “mixture of political conservatism and clerical nationalism...and homophobia” (Byford, 2003, p.6). In 2019 the Ukrainian church broke away from the Russian church by declaring its independence from the Russian church.

Russian President threatens NATO and western world in general, that “they would pay high cost” if they become directly involved in current Russian invasion in Ukraine as “part of Slavic or Russian world”² and classifying as enemies countries for imposing sanctions against Russia. After the “special operation of armed forces” in Ukraine, Putin gave the menacing shout to discipline not only Ukraine and the former Soviet Union members, now independent states but even challenging the West to “defeat Russia on the battlefield” (TN World Desk, 2022). Russian intention of putting Ukraine within a Russian Empire umbrella is foreseen through the possible internal destabilization of the EU and NATO which could result in the termination of the enlargement process with members of Eastern and Southern Europe. In implementation of this goal, Russia is relying on the support of its satellites, such as Serbia and Belarus, in the direction of creating a hotbed for crisis in the Balkans in the name of defending Orthodoxy as it used to do during the Ottoman Empire, thus possibly disrupting the harmony of Western countries.

4. REGIONAL PEACEBUILDING INHIBITION BY RUSSO-SERBIAN ALLIANCE

4.1. The dream of “All Serbs in one state”

During the wars in the former Yugoslavia, the Serbs, despite having the former federation army under their command, aiming at the inclusion of the territories where Serbs lived, waged three bloody wars with elements of genocide, achieved mixed success, losing territory and expelling the Serb population from Croatia, and in Bosnia and Herzegovina established the Serb entity within the Bosnian state. Kosovo, even though it never was their natural part of it, has finally left Serbian rule. This outcome from the aggressive Serbian policy has not calmed the Serbian nationalists, who demand its revision by returning to the issue of Bosnia & Herzegovina, Kosovo and Montenegro. The best way to reset the Serbian issue is to destabilize these former Yugoslavia units as is going to be the case by Russia toward ex-Soviet Union units. Those units have a significant Serbian population in both Bosnia and Montenegro, which support the Serbian aspiration toward, now, independent states. Kosovo, under UN Resolution 1244, is still an inexistent Yugoslav creature, with Serbia as successor. In all these cases, Serbia has the support of Russia, endangering peace-building and leaving a bitter legacy for generations.

A new eventual crisis in the Balkans would help Russia’s engagement in Ukraine. Serbia so far is playing this task skillfully through its seemingly neutral official policy, as it needs the Kremlin’s and Kiev diplomatic support on Kosovo, under high people pressure of Russophile (Hosa & Tchereva, 2021), even though the sport (Bascet News, 2022) as a determining element of its foreign policy and at the same time being armed. Exactly on the

2 The “Russian World” ideology has been cited by both Vladimir Putin and Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill over the past two decades. It asserts, the theologians write, that “there is a transnational Russian sphere or civilization, called Holy Russia or Holy Rus’, which includes Russia, Ukraine and Belarus (and sometimes Moldova and Kazakhstan), as well as ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking people throughout the world.” From: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/03/15/orthodox-christian-unity-broken-by-russian-world-heresy-a76922>.

23rd anniversary of the massacre in the Kosovo's village Rezallë, where Serb army, police and paramilitary forces killed 98 ethnic Albanians, Serbia is going to be better prepared for newly circumstances, purchasing anti-craft system, in a veiled operation, by China (Stojanovic, 2022).

There is no explanation for the Serbs' worship of Russia, except the period of its support for annexation of territories with ethnic Albanians south of the city of Nis during 1877-78 and the Russian stance in the UN Security Council on the issue of independence of Kosovo. Even during the last Balkan war Russia had imposed sanctions on Yugoslavia, in addition to refusing NATO military intervention against Yugoslavia, 1999. Both countries "suffer from the imperial complex, whose reality has long been out of their hands"(Ćosić, 2022).

Devotion to nationalism was the feature of all nations of Balkan people, mainly instrumental and led by the interests of the great powers. The Serbs' perception of themselves as a primordial people, as a myth deriving from Kosovo's mythology, (Folic, 2022) and by belittling others as newcomers to the Balkans, evokes feelings of rejection. The roots of Serbian nationalism are based on myths, which "were skillfully transformed by intellectuals into tools for expansionism" (Anzulovic, 2017). Serbian nationalism stood in the greed of the Russians becoming complementary to the Serbian aspirations, transformed at expansionist pan-Slavic policy, with intention of penetration into Mediterranean and Adriatic waters in the South. "The competition for land, conflict attitudes and interest between the Serbs and Albanians has developed steadily on the territory of Kosovo over four and a half centuries of the Ottoman rule" (Bebler, 2015, p.151). The Russian Empire in its competition with the Austro-Hungarian Empire for influence in the Balkans, had actively encouraged and supported the territorial ambitions of Serbia, Montenegro and other predominantly Christian Orthodox states (Anufrieva, pp. 57- 60). Using the hidden or open diplomacy and military support, "their clear intention was to prevent the birth of an independent Albanian state on the ruins of the "Sublime Porte" (Bebler, 2015, p.152).

The doctrine of Nachertanie (Načertania), used to be central policy, camouflaged or overtly, by the Serbian regimes from the past and, unfortunately by the present one, was product of Russian servants but adapted to Balkans environment by early Serbian statesman Ilia Garasanin. The document Nachertanie predicts that the gap that would be created with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire would be filled with a Christian Slavic state, which could exist between Austria and Russia. "With Nachertania, Serbia targets its neighbors, and to this day, all Serbian regimes secretly or publicly adhere to this document" (Dragović, 2022). The Serbs, led by the ideology of regional hegemony in Balkans, insisted on the idea of uniting the southern Slavs within a state creature dominated by Serbs. It was pan-Slavic ideology that inspired the assassination of Austro-Hungarian Archduke in Sarajevo in June 1914, an event that accelerated the outbreak of World War I. At the end of WWI, with accordance by the West and East, the creation of South Slavs was supported, but minorities suffered. The Albanians, Germans made up 23.8% of Vojvodina population according to the 1921 census (Mentzel, 1993), Hungarians,... were subject of discrimination.

4.2. Current Serbian policy: Destabilizing Kosovo path

At the end of WWI, more than half of the territory and Albanian population became part of South Slavs Kingdom and Greece, suffering the state physical and systemic outrage and anti-humanities such as humiliation, deportation, and assimilation. After WWII, the Alba-

nian population within Yugoslavia, to be easily ruled, was split between Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro. At the beginning they experienced the same treatment as before the war, but only with the Yugoslav constitutional changes of 1974, their position improved, gaining more but not full independence from Serbia as was the will of Kosovo's Albanians during the 1968 uprisings and discussions on constitutional changes.³ Even with the status of nationality, not a nation, such position of Albanians will become a dump in the eyes of the Serbian nationalists, which fostered the nationalism of Kosovo Albanians over its economic stagnation compared to other parts of the former Yugoslavia. The 1981 student's demonstrations in Kosovo demanded equal political and economic status with the other six republics within Federation which became a *casus belli* for the Serbian attack on the achievements of the Albanians, who were numerically the third population in Yugoslavia, after the Serbs and Croats. This movement of Albanians was identified by Serbian politics as Albanian nationalism, contra-revolutionary and irredentism, while Albanians as enemies of the brotherhood and unification of the Yugoslav peoples, in order to incite ex-Yugoslav entities against entire Albanians, especially toward Kosovo Albanians, creating a climate for the abrogation of the 1974 constitution. This became a turning point in Serbian-Albanian relations when the political and police machinery of Serbia achieved this goal in 1989. Even the killings of Albanian protesters didn't stop the intention to overthrow the Kosovo constitution. As a reaction, Kosovo declared independence from Serbia, in 1990, organized a referendum in 1991, which was recognized only by Albania. During the '90s Kosovo Albanians established originally state mechanisms of Kosovo in the field of education, finance, health, culture, out of Serbian rule, and managed to organize the armed struggle, which took the lives of more than twelve thousand Albanians. NATO's humanitarian intervention forced the Serbs to stop further genocide actions toward Kosovo civilians. Eight years after the war, Kosovo declared independence, which is recognized by 117 democracies but not from autocracies and some states with internal ethnic problems, still is part of unrecognized states (Caspersen & Stansfield, 2011, pp.1-8). Kosovo and Serbia are building their antagonistic foreign policies in an effort to gain as much recognition as possible, respectively to prevent international recognition of Kosovo's sovereignty.

None of the former Yugoslav republics agreed to remain in a joint state with Serbia, as a result of its hegemonic behavior towards other republics. Even Montenegro did not, as a closest nation to the Serbs. Restoring the hegemony in the region, Serbia has been narrowed toward destabilizing the independent entities, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Kosovo, by presenting them as entities which are not capable of self-governance, through instrumentalization of the ethnic Serbs minority by offering and being seduced by the unification of all Serbs in one state, Serb-centrism, or by religion pressure as is the case with Montenegrins. There are countless actions that Serbia has taken for this purpose, especially to Kosovo. Before the war, even though an agreement was reached for the release of school facilities, Serbia did not implement it. During the war in Kosovo, in 1999, in Rambouillet peace talks, France, the Serbian delegation did not

3 In the meeting in Gjakova, 16 August 1968, were three requests that supported by majority of at citizens, including intellectuals, as Fehmi Agani, Gazmend Zajmi, Ali Hadri, Dervish Rozhaja, Bardhyl Çaushi, Mark Krasniqi, Rrezak Shala, Ramadan Vraniqi, Hajredin Hoxha, Syrja Pupovci,... : In the constitution of the SFRY, the Albanian nationality should be named as a nation; to regulate the use of the Albanian national flag; the Province of Kosovo to be declared a Republic of Kosovo.

accept the text of the agreement offered by the international community, and as a result it was bombed by NATO; after Kosovo was placed under United Nations administration, and after talks led by UN special envoy Martti Ahtisaari, Serbia again rejected the plan offered by the UN; after the declaration of independence of Kosovo in 2008, Serbia demanded the opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the Hague on the violation of international law by Kosovo Interim Institutions for this action. The answer by ICJ, that “the declaration of Kosovo’s independence does not constitute a violation of international law”, did not change attitude toward Kosovo as a Serbian territory.

In order to ignore the state of Kosovo, several unfriendly activities were undertaken by Serbia: a train from Serbia had departed to the northern Kosovo with the inscription “Kosovo belongs to Serbia”, which had been stopped by the Kosovo border police; dozens of Serbs enlisted in Kosovo institutions are continuously detained and threatened by Serbian state security services to leave them, especially by the Kosovo Security Force; started technical and converted to political ones, negotiations under EU auspice are deteriorating; Serbia undertakes political-diplomatic actions in order to stop new recognitions or even trying to influence de-recognition by different states; it uses all means to prevent Kosovo’s membership in international organizations; while Kosovo special forces, were conducting operations to prevent smuggling on the border with Serbia, during September 2021, surprisingly, Russian Ambassador to Serbia Alexander Botsan-Kharchenko accompanied the Serbian army and police forces in the borderline with Kosovo, which were on standby to act against Kosovo; in January 2022, Serbia tried to held referendum on Constitution within Kosovo territory in an attempt to legitimize Kosovo as part of Serbia, to be repeated again not allowing Serbian elections in Kosovo in April this year as well; and recently, the attacks on daily bases of Kosovo Police forces in the north of Kosovo, the recent departure of Serbian officials from Kosovo’s institutions, avocation for unrecognizing the Republic of Kosovo, ...all such actions are oriented on destabilizing the region and return at prewar circumstances. Russia, permanently acts in three directions related to Kosovo: 1. encouraging Belgrade to maintain a tense situation with Kosovo by undermining the implementation of agreements; 2. advocating for the Serbian interests in obstructing of Kosovo’s recognition and its membership in international organizations; 3. threatening the west over their “reckless steps” on Kosovo’s future.⁴

Current Serbian leadership is obstructing the process of peace building in Kosovo through state activities and political statements on Kosovo, while committing to the elimination of the ethnic Albanian element in southern Serbia by deleting their residential addresses from the civil registry, not recognizing of student diplomas, not punishing Serbian crimes and war criminals in Kosovo, but in contrary, glorifying, decorating and advancing them in state positions, ...and spreading untruths about developments in Kosovo and threatening the western international community.⁵ The designation of Kosovo, officially and unofficially, is a

4 The articles published at Serbian area, such are Sputniknews, B92, Politika, Vecernje Novosti, ...are in the directions of both, Russian and Serbian official policy toward Kosovo, example: „Russia calls on the West: Do not force any artificial deadlines for an agreement between Belgrade and Pristina“. From [https://rs-lat.sputniknews.com/rusija/202102261124727578-rusija-ne-forsirajtevestacke-rokove-za-postizanje-sporazuma-beograda-i-pristine/Putin saves Serbia from Western pressure!](https://rs-lat.sputniknews.com/rusija/202102261124727578-rusija-ne-forsirajtevestacke-rokove-za-postizanje-sporazuma-beograda-i-pristine/Putin%20saves%20Serbia%20from%20Western%20pressure!)“, <https://www.novosti.rs/vesti/politika/969207/putin-spasava-srbiju-zapadnog-pritiska-zaharova-jasno-porucila-forsirajte-vestacke-rokove-postizanje-sporazuma> .

5 Informer,(2022). UĆUTITE BAR TAJ JEDAN JEDINI DAN! Vučić zagrmeo iz Kraljeva: Nikada nećemo zaboraviti naše žrtve! “Those blind from the NATO alliance ... told us that it was an operation

pejorative one. The terms like “Kosovo and Metohija”, the “so-called Kosovo”, “the false state”, “provisional institutions”...are usual in daily basis use in media and official treatment.

4.3. Serbia’s intentions of destabilizing the Montenegro

Montenegrins, similar to Albanians, were an obstacle for Serbia to reach the sea waters. When recognized as an independent state, Montenegro’s territory was effectively doubled from 1878. In 1910, it became a Kingdom, and in 1918, losing sovereignty, became part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, or later, Yugoslavia. At the founding Congress of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia for Montenegro, 1948, in his speech, Blažo Jovanović says: “The so-called unification of Montenegro with Serbia, in November 1918, it was carried out, not only contrary to the Constitution and mood of the Montenegrin people, but also with the help of the bayonet of the Serbian army and in the most rude way, through force and deception” (Dragovic, p.132). Christmas uprising by Montenegrins, in early January 1919, after the controversial decision by ad hoc elected National Assembly, (Littlefield, 1922) and in absence of the King Nikola Petrovic I and government in exile in France, was defeated by unionist fraction. Supported by Serbian and French army, Assembly formalized the rule under Serbian dynasty of Karadjordjevic, unified with Serbia, annihilating the nation of Montenegrins (Littlefield, 1922)! Did they volunteer? There wasn’t a people’s referendum on the issue of unification with Serbia as used to be two times later on. Montenegro’s status within communist Yugoslavia was advanced and equalized with six constitutionalist republics which lasted until 1992, when it became twined with Serbia creating the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, FRY. During the war, Montenegrins fought together with the Serbs in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Kosovo. In 2003, FRY renamed itself as “Union of Serbia and Montenegro”, to be split by referendum held in 2006, gaining its independence again after nine decades. The referendum threshold was set by Parliament and strong support by the EU to be, surprisingly, 55%, rather than by a simple majority. Determinants of 55.5% in the referendum were Albanians, Bosniaks, and other minorities who voted for secession from Serbia. The incredibly vague threshold set up to 55% by Parliament was because “there was a danger that they (the Serbs, author) would have boycotted, and this would have delegitimize the election”, (Teslik, cited Janusz Bugajski, 2006). This move produced deep political division in Montenegrin society, mainly among Montenegrins and the Serbs which compose 30% of the population. Reactions in Serbia on referendum results were mixed. The Serbian President Boris Tadic accepted them as a legitimate will of Montenegrins, Prime-Minister V. Kostunica, through his “chef of cabinet and the Minister of the Interior were apparently giving direct instructions to the pro-union parties in Montenegro, at list to contest the results”, and as “deserted lover” by citizens (Batt, 2006).

Serbs and some Montenegrins never agreed to split from Serbia. Influenced by Russian soft-power activities during the last decade, on the day of the parliamentary election on 16

of a humanitarian nature, and that the children were collateral damage ... Do those who did that and shot at those children have any consideration? Do they have a soul? How do they sleep?” said Dodik in an anti NATO electoral meeting in presence of Serbian President Vucic in Kragujevac, but he didn’t mention 1476 Albanian children killings among 13.000 victims in Kosovo by Serbian forces when A. Vucic served as Minister of propaganda during the war in Kosovo. 24 march 2022. From <https://informer.rs/vesti/politika/689092/aleksandar-vucic-kraljevo-pomen-nato-bombardovanje>

October 2016, a coup d'état against the government of Milo Đukanović had been executed. The Montenegrin Supreme Court sentenced, on 2019, to 68 years in prison two local Serbian leaders, Andrija Mandić, Milan Knežević, two Russian citizens, Vladimir Popov and Eduard Sismakov, and several others (Jankovic, 2020). Their aim was to prevent Montenegro from joining NATO and move towards EU accession. Russia's reaction was that Montenegro was trying to eliminate the opposition in the country and that it was politicized, bringing relations between the two countries to the lowest level in history. According to the analysis, there are hundreds organizations, mostly electronic portals, in the Serbian speaking region oriented according to pro-Russian policies, led by the Sputnik agency (Brey, 2022). In addition, political leaders of Serbia are frequently promoting the "Serbian World", the key to the survival of the Serbian people, including Montenegro as "a state created by Serbia" (Sofranac, 2022). Although part of NATO, Montenegro was seriously attacked by pro-Serb political-religious liturgies, similar to ones organized in Kosovo by S. Milosevic during '80s, when the government of Montenegro adopted the Law on Freedom of Religion, launching the question of identity of Montenegro. Activities resulted with the loss of ruling party DPS and government change in Montenegro. In a meeting with Russian president, V. Putin in Belgrade, Knezevic and Mandic, bowed to him saying that: "The majority of Montenegro also sees it as its president", while Putin returns the favor by telling them: "You are real heroes"(DF, 2019). Mandic and Knezevic were invited to visit the Russian Federation, by the Committee for International Cooperation of Russian Duma, of mutually beneficial cooperation. Upon their return, they also meet with SOC Patriarch Porfirije, who gave them support to oppose Prime Minister Krivokapic, with the wholehearted help of Aleksandar Vučić and Serbia (Vurušić, 2021). The Montenegrin government has sanctioned Russia on Ukrainian invasion. Result of such internal and external interference, the prime minister lost the support of the Montenegrin parliament, creating a government crisis in a time of global crisis, the Covid-19 and the war in Ukraine.

The new minority government headed by Dritan Abazovic trying to reset bilateral relations by voting the agreement with Serbian Orthodox Church opened a new chapter of instability, and did not survive the vote of the Montenegrin parliamentarians. The source of instability will continue to come from the same factors, inside and outside of Montenegro. The minority government will be subject to criticism by big parties, especially by that of Montenegrins President Milo Djukanovic, DPS. Efforts to form the autocephalous Montenegro Orthodox Church will continue, opposing strengthening the Serbian Orthodox Church. Ethnic divisions of Montenegrins and Serbs will be more on the surface and thus the profiling of political parties on ethnic grounds. Paternalistic influences from Serbia in supporting Serbs in the country will fuel destabilizing interethnic tensions in Montenegro, while maintaining hope for access to "Serbia's Adriatic Sea". Russia will be in the role of orchestrator of Serbian policy toward Montenegro. The positive circumstances are Montenegro membership in NATO and possible influence by EU to Belgrade on reciprocity and good neighborliness.

4.4. The Serbs and Bosnia and Herzegovina

Occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, in 1878, from Austro-Hungary accelerated an inflated opinion within Serbia and urged Russia, as *tit per tat*, to benefit from using the Straits

at Bosphorus. After Germany's declaration of support for Austria, Serbia recognized annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, on 31 March 1909, announcing that "she would be a "good neighbor" to Austria-Hungary" (Trueman, 2015). A month after assassination of Archduke Franc Ferdinand by a Serbian nationalist organization, Austro-Hungary declared a war against Serbia, which involved other countries supporting parties in conflict. After WWI, Bosnia will be part of South Slavs Kingdom. Muslims within the Serbian, Croats, and Slovene Kingdom, were not recognized as constitutive ethnicities. They will benefit from this status only after WWII within the Yugoslav Communist Federation. Bloody decomposition of Yugoslavia revived territorial aspirations between three constituent nationalities of Bosnia and Herzegovina during 1990, which were avoided by the US sponsored Dayton peace accords in 1995 that recognized two entities and three ethnicities within the unitary state of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Influenced by the Russian indoctrination of Serb-centric creature in the Balkan, the recycling of hate rhetoric is emerging again (OSCE, 2022) after a quarter of the century, in the Bosnia and Herzegovina area, means that peacebuilding process did not touch on its essence, the reconciliation between the three constitutional state nationalities. Serb nationalist leader Milorad Dodik, supported by Serbia's and Russian Presidents, and with lack of any political pressure by EU⁶, was pushing for separation of the Republika Srpska from Bosnia and its integration with Serbia through "peaceful dissolution" of Bosnia (N1, 2021). While the Bosnia's Serbs have the support of Serbia, (Predsednik RS, 2022) the Croats from Croatia, (DW, 2022), the Bosniaks have the only hope in the international community, in the preservation of the unitary state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Nationalistic options as such are the ethnicization or peaceful disintegration of Bosnia and Herzegovina are demands that take the country back to the years of the terrible war of the 1990s and the proof that multiethnic and multi-religious societies have little space for coexistence even after the enormous peace-building investments. The crisis followed ex High Representative Valentin Inzko's imposed changes to laws banning genocide denial and glorifying war crimes,⁷ which action served Dodik to boycott work in BH state bodies and urge parliament to initiate unconstitutional decision, such is that of December 2021 the process of "returning of competencies" from the state to Republika Srpska entity in the main fields of state sovereignty, that of defense, judiciary and police, threatening the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity and undermining peace and stability of the region. Embracement of western policy by Serbia will create preconditions for renegotiating the Dayton Agreement and serious commitment to the issue of Kosovo. Vučić said to US senators that "Serbia respects the territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the Republika Srpska within BH" (SNews, 2022), "but don't agree with imposed decisions" (OHR, 2021), referring to Special Representative on Law on Prohibition of Genocide Denial in BH, meaning that there will not be any solution without Serbian approval.

In general, forms of involvement of Serbia toward ex-Yugoslav units are of direct and in-

6 UK Government, Press release (2021): UK announces sanctions under Bosnia and Herzegovina sanctions regime: 11 April 2022, from <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-announces-sanctions-under-bosnia-and-herzegovina-sanctions-regime-11-april-2021>. M. Dodik since years ago was in "black list" of USA, and currently UK has sanctioned Milorad Dodik, Bosnian-Serb member of Bosnia and Herzegovina's state-level Presidency, and Zeljka Cvijanovic, President of the entity of Republika Srpska, for their destabilizing activity in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

7 OHR, (2021). "High Representative Valentin Inzko introduced today amendment to the BH Criminal Code", High Representative Valentin Inzko introduced amendments to the Criminal Code of Bosnia-Herzegovina today, sanctioning the glorification of war criminals convicted by final and binding judgments and the denial of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. From <http://www.ohr.int/high-representative-valentin-inzko-introduced-today-amendment-to-the-bh-criminal-code/>

direct nature. In the table are presented the main used mechanisms aiming to destabilize the region of WB countries. As table shows, the forms of pressure are toward countries outside Euro-Atlantic integration, i.e. Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Table: *Forms of Serbian interfering in neighbor states*

Forms of Serbian involvement	Kosovo	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Montenegro	Macedonia
Military threat	✓	✓		
Security	✓	✓	✓	
Political	✓	✓	✓	✓
Diplomatic	✓	✓		
Economic	✓	✓	✓	✓
Administrative	✓			
Education	✓	✓	✓	
Culture	✓	✓		
Sport	✓			
Trade	✓			
Traveling	✓			
Subversion	✓		✓	
Corruption	✓	✓	✓	
Pressure to individuals	✓	✓	✓	
Religion	✓	✓	✓	✓
Minority incitement	✓	✓	✓	
Inspire radicals	✓	✓	✓	
Calls for civil disobedience	✓	✓	✓	
Media campaign	✓	✓	✓	
Radical rhetoric	✓	✓	✓	
Interethnic tensions	✓	✓	✓	
Panic	✓	✓	✓	
Boycott of institutions	✓			

5. CONCLUSIONS

Behind the Serbian peaceful official politics are hidden the destabilizing tendencies of the types presented in the analysis. In all of these destructive forms and mechanisms, the influence of Russian policies, seductive to Serbia, is present, as result of pro-Russian leadership, spiritual and intellectual orientation. This influential trinomial also cemented the faith of the majority of the Serbian population, making it hostage to Russia's political behavior. The twin strategy, hesitating between alternatives of democracy and authoritarianism or between west and east geopolitical orientation by Serbia will further endanger the process of peacebuilding in fragile Balkans, particularly Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina and to some extent, Montenegro and North Macedonia.

The five non-recognizing EU states of Kosovo's independence have been put in the service of obstructing the peace-building process in the region, feeding Serbian leaders and population with the hope of returning Kosovo to its sovereignty. These states are indirectly and accidentally in coherence to Russia's policy of regaining its influence in the Balkans and tangents with the ideas of Euro-skeptics.

Unwillingness to impose sanctions on Russia for its brutal aggression against Ukraine, the questionable establishment and functioning of the Russian humanitarian center, a liaison office of the Russian Ministry of Defense on strengthening military ties with a traditional ally in the Balkans, Russian media coverage of Serbian spoken area, present the clear determination on mutual Russian-Serbian geo-political and security cooperation on destabilization neighborhood. The Serbian initiative of "Open Balkan" is a stretched hand of Russian influence as a reaction against EU enlargement drowsiness and tendency for prejudice the status of Kosovo within the Serbian state and enlargement of the economic zone for the interest of Serbia. Current agreement of mutual consultations between two Foreign Ministries is signed for possible conflicting situations in the region of Balkans to fade the Russian-Ukrainian war.

The elimination of obstacles that are the result of non-unitary in Bosnia and Herzegovina, making the state functional, recognition of Kosovo by no-recognizing countries will open the path toward NATO membership, will push Serbia to drawn by subversive ideas and focused to Euro-Atlantic integrations, democratization of the society and promoting regional stability, will be significant steps toward normalization of the region. Postponing the westernization of the Western Balkan states, including Kosovo, will increase expectations by nationalist movements on creating "the Greats" in the region with an unperceived outcome.

Eventually positive outcomes for Russia, in terms of territorial aggrandizement, from Russian-Ukrainian war will decrease hopes for lasting peace in the West Balkans and ultimately increase conflict possibilities. The extreme fragility in the Balkans was shown in the case of the escalation of the situation on the Kosovo-Serbia border when the Kosovo government decided to apply reciprocity measures towards Serbia.

Notes:

1. In political, academic, cultural and even sports circles, the myth about "divine or heaven Serbia" is widespread. Jovan Raskovic, Novak Djokovic, a Serbian tennis player, ... used the term "heaven Serbia".
2. Nachertanija was written under the influence of the political program by Adam Char-

torisky, of native Polish, Russian Foreign Minister, in the years 1803-1806, entitled "Advice according to which Serbia should be guided", drafted in January 1843. Chartorisky's "Advice to Serbia" and FranjaZahov's "Slovenia's Serbian Policy Plan" envisioned Serbia taking on the role of Piedmont of the South Slavs. There Chartorisky gave detailed advice on how Serbia could prepare for the unification of the "other Serbian provinces" that had remained under Turkish rule. Among many other instructions, it was given that Serbia should constantly strive to expand.

3. An overwhelming majority of Serbians see Russia (95%) and China (91%) as an ally or a necessary partner, only 11% of Serbian citizens regard the EU as an ally. Presidents of Russia, Putin, of Turkey, Erdogan, and Hungarian Prime-minister, Urban, were among the most popular politicians.
4. The Serb-dominated Yugoslav army commits the murder of some 100,000 people, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, by 1995, 80 percent of them Bosniaks. In Srebrenica Massacre/genocide, between, 11 July 1995 – 22 July 1995, were killed 8.372 Bosniaks. In Kosovo around 12.000 civilians, of them 1476 children.
5. There is a split in the Ukrainian war between the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate and World Orthodox Church. In a joint meeting with heads of religions in Russia ten years ago, the heads attributed to Putin the "miracle of God" by Patriarch Kirill and by Mufti Ismail Berdiyev, that "You are the only person who has shown the United States its place". Gleb Bryanski, Russian patriarch calls Putin era "miracle of God", 8 February 2008. See more at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-russia-putin-religion-idUKTRE81722Y20120208>, Accessed on 2 April 2022. The "Russian World" ideology has been cited by both Vladimir Putin and Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill over the past two decades. It asserts, the theologians write, that "there is a transnational Russian sphere or civilization, called Holy Russia or Holy Rus', which includes Russia, Ukraine and Belarus (and sometimes Moldova and Kazakhstan), as well as ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking people throughout the world." See more at: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/03/15/orthodox-christian-unity-broken-by-russian-world-heresy-a76922>, Accessed, 3 April 2022.
6. The OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is alarmed by a recent spate of hate incidents registered in various localities, including Bijeljina-Janja, Prijedor, Brčko, Gacko, Istočno Sarajevo, Ilidža, Foča, Doboj and Bužim. The Mission notes that the growing use of inflammatory, divisive rhetoric by some officials in BiH, including in recent days in Republika Srpska (RS), is contributing to the proliferation of such incidents.

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THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IS A GLOBAL CHALLENGE OF THE 21ST CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the centuries of history, humanity has had crucial challenges to overcome, the management of human and therefore economic resources has had ups and downs. Their bad management has often brought serious problems in human life. It is difficult to give a precise answer to these dilemmas. Throughout the centuries of history, people have always been in contact with each other. The fact is that the more contact there has been between people, the more challenges have been faced. Pandemic, by the very word, has sweeping consequences. People exchange good things with each other, experiences, trade, scientific inventions, but also problems. The Covid-19 pandemic that planet Earth is still experiencing is the syndrome of globalization and living in a global system. It had been more than 100 years since a pandemic of this magnitude had occurred because the world was closed and when a severe epidemic occurred, it was localized to specific regions and did not spread to the rest of the world. Now, when the borders have fallen symbolically, international business has flourished, but the acute problems of the Covid-19 pandemic have also flourished, it is a complex process that you need to know how to manage.

Keywords: challenge, crisis, management, global, planet, land.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

It is enough to briefly list the titles of the work and we are convinced of the clarity, academic fluency, scientific competence, cognitive, research, argumentative values and the areas where the trend of globalization is spreading and appearing rapidly in the world. It is enough to briefly list the titles of the work and we are convinced of the clarity, academic fluency, scientific competence, cognitive, research, argumentative values and the areas where the trend of globalization is spreading and appearing rapidly in the world. On the other hand, we also have the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, which remains a challenge of the 21st century. During this research I have expressed myself in an understandable language and I have illustrated with works or quoted authors with a contemporary voice where I would single out McNeil Jr DG (*February 2, 2020*), Zhu H, Wei L, Niu P (*March 2, 2020*), Chan JF, Yuan S, Kok KH, To KK, Chu H, Yang J, et al. (*February 2020*), Zhang T, Wu Q, Zhang Z (*April 2020*). Sun J, He WT, Wang L, Lai A, Ji X, Zhai X, et al. (*May 2020*). Smith N (*1 February 2020*).

1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

During the preparation of this scientific paper, I have used academic literature from internationally known scientists who have dealt with this issue which is very disturbing for humanity, citing authors such as: McNeil Jr DG (*2 February 2020*), Zhu H, Wei L, Niu P (*2 March 2020*), Chan JF, Yuan S, Kok KH, To KK, Chu H, Yang J, et al. (*February 2020*), Zhang T, Wu Q, Zhang Z (*April 2020*). Sun J, He WT, Wang L, Lai A, Ji X, Zhai X, et al. (*May 2020*). Smith N (*1 February 2020*). Rogers K, Jakes L, Swanson A (*18 March 2020*), Kampf, Günter (*20 November 2021*). Kuhn SA, Lieb R, Freeman D, Andreou C, Zander-Schellenberg T (*March 2021*). Fonzo, Erminio (*18 July 2021*). These global human-driven rates of change far exceed the rates of change driven by geophysical or biospheric forces that have altered the trajectory of the Earth System in the past.

1.3 OBJECT OF THE STUDY

The object of the study is the Covid 19 pandemic, which quickly swept the entire globe, causing high mortality of humanity and creating anxiety and panic, since humanity was not prepared for a pandemic of such proportions, so the consequences were unforeseen. In addition to the loss of millions of lives, the Covid-19 pandemic also caused economic decline, bankrupting hundreds of thousands of private and public enterprises across the globe. The object of my study is focused on what were the causes and consequences of the Covid 19 pandemic during this period of time and what measures should be taken in the future to fight this pandemic of global proportions, and with extremely high consequences which remains the challenge of the century .

1.4 RESULTS OF RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

In this scientific paper, I used the comparative method of the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic in different countries of the world, comparing the losses, the economic, health, cultural and educational consequences according to the countries.

In Figure 1, we have shown the semi-registered plot of new weekly cases of COVID-19 in the world and the top six countries with the most widespread current deaths, as plotted: USA, Brazil, Germany, Japan, France, Italy for during the months of January 10 - July 31.

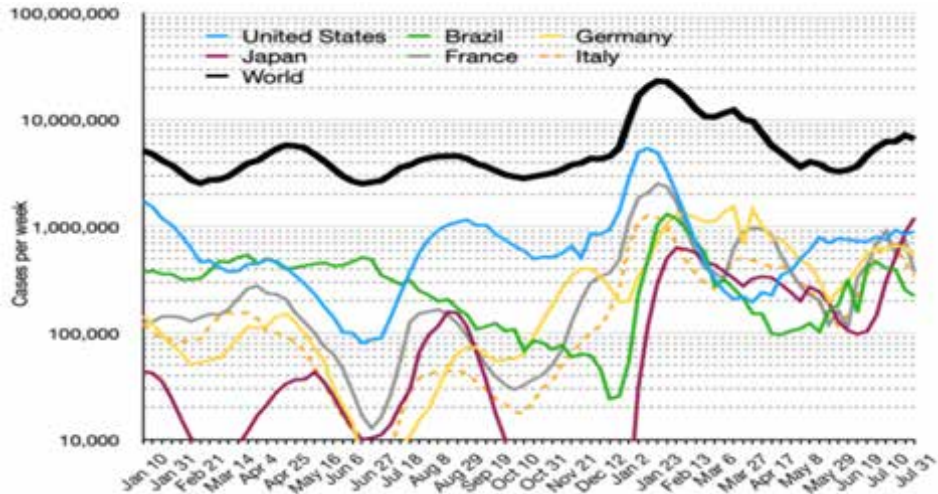


Fig.1 Semi-log plot of weekly new cases of COVID-19 in the world and the current top six countries (mean with deaths)

In the second figure we have presented the total case of Covid-19 per 100,00 people from selected countries, therefore we have the following scheme: here we have presented the scheme with the total case of Covid-19 per 100,00 people from selected countries, as UK, China, USA, Spain, Italy, Germany, Brazil for the time period: Mar- 20-Mar-22

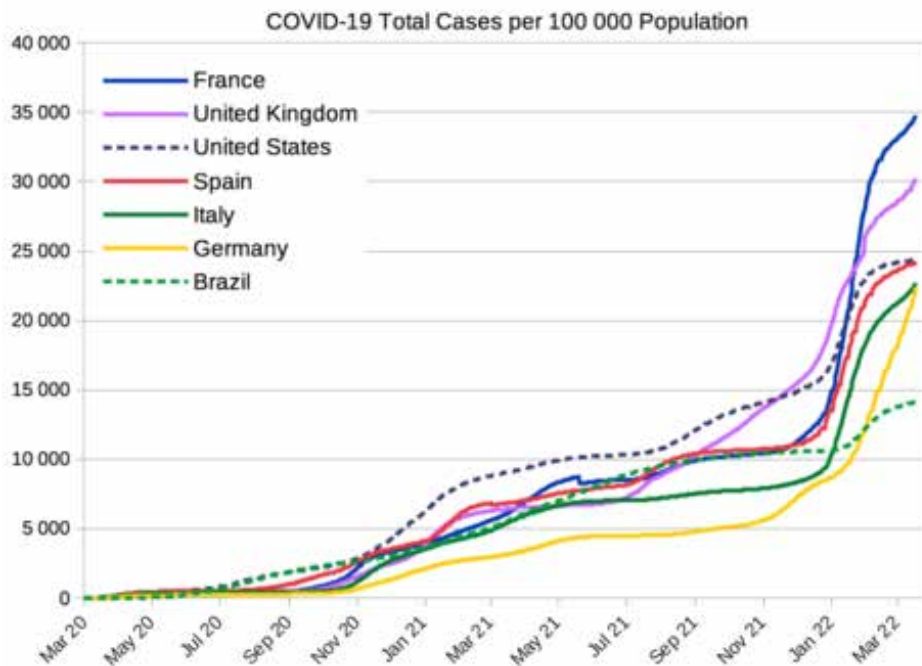


Fig.2 Total COVID-19 cases per 100,000 people from selected countries

In the third figure we have presented the total case of Covid-19 per 100,00 people from selected countries, therefore we have the following scheme: here we have presented the scheme with the total case of Covid-19 per 100,00 people from selected countries, as Germany, United Kingdom, France, Italy, Spain, Brazil, USA for the time period: Mar- 20-Apr-22

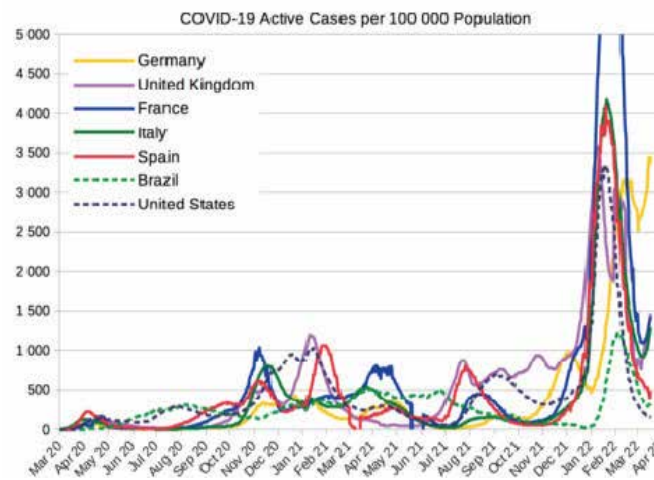


Fig.3 Active COVID-19 cases per 100,000 people from selected countries

In this stock index chart shows the stock market crash 2020. The pandemic and the reactions to it damaged the global economy. On February 27, 2020, concerns about the outbreak weighed on US stock indexes, which posted their sharpest declines since 2008. Oh S (28 February 2020). Tourism collapsed due to travel restrictions, closures of public places, including travel attractions, and government anti-travel advisories. Airlines canceled flights, while British regional airline Flybe collapsed. "Collapsed Flybe: 'Do not travel to the airport'". (BBC News. 5 March 2020). The cruise line industry was hit hard The Sydney Morning Herald. Retrieved 5 April 2020). and train stations and ferry ports were closed. ("Coronavirus scare: Complete list of airlines suspending flights". India Today. Reuters. 27 February 2020. (Retrieved 7 March 2020). International mail stopped or delayed. (Cherney M, Craymer L (5 May 2020). "You've Got Mail... Finally: The Pandemic Is Jamming Up the World's Post". (The Wall Street Journal. Retrieved 15 May 2020). The retail sector faced reductions in store hours or closings. (National Retail Federation 21 March 2020), (Coronavirus Resources for Retailers, retrieved 23 March 2020). Retailers in Europe and Latin America faced a 40 percent drop in traffic. Retailers in North America and the Middle East saw a 50-60 percent decline. (How Retailers Globally are Responding to Coronavirus by Aislelabs", Aislelabs, 2 April 2020, retrieved 3 April 2020). Malls experienced a 33-43 percent drop in foot traffic in March compared to February. Mall operators around the world responded by increasing sanitation, installing thermal scanners to check shoppers' temperatures, and canceling events. (Aislelabs (23 March 2020), "How Shopping Centres Globally are Responding to Coronavirus by Aislelabs", Aislelabs, retrieved 23 March 2020). Hundreds of millions of jobs were lost. ("Half the world's workers face losing their jobs, says ILO". Al Jazeera. 29 April 2020). (No jobs, so what future? Half the world's workforce on the edge". The Monitor. 6 May 2020). including more than 40 million Americans. (Room T (28 May 2020). "Americans have filed more than 40 million jobless claims in past) According to a report by Yelp, about 60% of American businesses that closed will remain closed permanently. (weeks, as another 2.1 million filed for benefits last week". The Washington Post.) The International Labor Organization (ILO) reported that income generated in the first nine months of 2020 from labor worldwide fell by 10.7 percent, or \$3.5 trillion. (Yelp data shows 60% of business closures due to the corona virus pandemic are now permanent". CNBC. 16 September 2020).

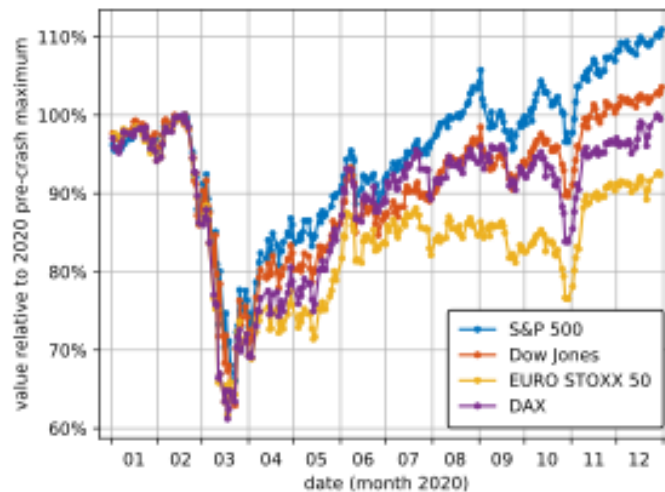


Fig.4 A stock index chart shows the 2020 stock market crash.

1.5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the level of treatment of Covid Pandemic 19 must be fully localized by implementing the rules and obligations of CSO, since the vaccination of citizens is one of the key factors in the fight against this pandemic with deadly effects for humanity.

If we refer to Dr. Mike Ryan, in a press conference on December 28, 2020, the head of the WHO Emergencies Program and other officials state that the current COVID-19 pandemic is not one of the highest risk pandemics, if we talk about pandemics in the future which could be of catastrophic proportions. The emergency chief called for WHO and UN preparedness, warning that the world must address and find the cause of the pandemic and not just the health symptoms and economic consequences. The October 2020 'pandemic era' report by the United Nations Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, signed by 22 experts in the same fields, declares that anthropogenic destruction of biodiversity is paving the way for the era of pandemic and may result in the transmission of up to 850,000 viruses from animals, especially birds and mammals, to humans. The "exponential growth" in the consumption and trade of goods such as meat, palm oil and metals, mainly from developed countries with a growing population, are the main drivers of this concern. According to Peter Daszak, the leader of the team that prepared the report, "there is no mystery about the cause of the Covid-19 pandemic or any modern pandemic. The same human activities that promote climate change and biodiversity loss also increase the risk of pandemics through impacts on our environment. "Proposed policy options from the report include taxing meat production and consumption, cracking down on the illegal animal trade wildlife, removing high-risk species from the legal wildlife trade, eliminating subsidies for businesses that are harmful to the natural world, and creating a global surveillance network. In June 2021, a team of scientists convened by Harvard Medical School's Center for Global Health and Environment warned that the main cause of pandemics so far is and remains the anthropogenic cause of the natural world through such activities, including deforestation and hunting which is being constantly ignored by world leaders. Finally, I recommend all relevant international institutions such as the UN, WHO and the EU to take immediate action to combat pandemic diseases that could be a threat to life on planet earth.

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THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM THROUGHOUT HISTORY 2019-2021: INSIGHT FROM THE REALIST APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

Understanding the possible changes of the international system is very problematic. In such cases, it is necessary to analyze the theories of International Relations to give some kind of explanation as to why historical events have flowed in that way and how they will be organized in the future. Pandemics have never been a key factor in changing the international system. The intention to research this topic is of high importance because it is not addressed in the field of International Relations, but it actually gives clear results that can help states and the international system. Through the qualitative method, analysis and comparison I make efforts to defend the realist theory that emphasizes that states are selfish and do not want to be threatened by anyone else. After being overshadowed after the fall of communism, this theory of International Relations made a strong comeback during the Covid-19 pandemic and is being seen as the only approach to be used in the future restructuring of the international system. This is because the liberal theory failed to foresee and explain tense events and isolation between states, while constructivism does not offer clear predictions since it is essentially a non-predictive theory. One thing is certain, the international system will not be the same after 2022, perhaps it will be organized in bipolar form between the USA (West) and China (East), or it would be based on multipolarity of the European Concert type. However a change of the actual international system is expected to happen especially after the recent political, economic and military events.

Keywords: COVID-19, International System, International Relations, Realism, Liberalism, Constructivism.

1. INTRODUCTION

World pandemics are events that have tested humanity in many historical cases, there are a significant number of such diseases that have captured humanity and have caused great damage. Thus, from ancient times with cases of disease in Ancient Greece to the Spanish Flu of the last century, often considered one of the deadliest viruses to ever exist, pandemics have affected the societies of the time, depending on the preventive measures and the decisions taken.

The international system is a complex organization which although it can be described as having existed for a long time, today we refer more to the period from the beginning of the birth of modern states after Westphalia.

Covid-19 has been a new challenge for the world, bringing stunning changes in the way of living, communicating and even thinking. But the new events that this pandemic has produced can often be unaffordable for ordinary people. In international relations, so many events happen in a day that sometimes it is impossible to summarize them. However, cases such as the possibility of changing the international system have a very special importance, especially for researchers of International Relations. There are not many studies regarding the explanation of such a phenomenon as the international system, by means of one or several theories of International Relations, that is why I have chosen from a realistic point of view to explain all the events that have been happening since the beginning of the pandemic Covid-19.

The recent changes in international policies, especially with the rapid growth of China in these last 10 years, are one of the elements that we will deal with during the paper, and we will even see the current state of the international system and the explanation of realism for the actions of states, during and after Covid-19. Because of these events, the realist thesis has been re-actualized after some time, to give its evidence that no matter how states and the international system develop, they will still return to their first beginnings to rely on their self-help, because their nature is selfish. During the paper, we will see China's commitment to become a world superpower and the preventive measures that the USA has taken, to continue enjoying the special "throne" for 30 years now, but how feasible will these appetites be to the countries wrapped in the consequences of Covid-19 to change the international system, we will understand at the end of the paper.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this research I have used the qualitative method, through which I will argue this topic which is very current and important for the future of the world. There has been a lack of literature specifically on the issue that I have addressed, but through a combination of sources such as scientific journals, scientific articles and other reliable sources, I have created an argument regarding the issue that I have addressed, namely the realist approach and changing the international system after Covid-19.

Interviews and statements of world leaders regarding the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the international system during the years 2019-2021 and the possibilities of changing the international system after the Covid-19 pandemic have been taken as secondary sources.

Hypotheses

H.1: "The COVID-19 pandemic re-actualized the realist thesis that states are selfish and rely on their own self-help"

H.2: "The COVID-19 pandemic has influenced the change of the international system during the years 2019-2021 due to the isolationist policies of the states"

Main research question:

Has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the change of the international system during the years 2019-2021?

Secondary questions:

- Are the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic so great as to change the international system?
- Has the COVID-19 pandemic undone interstate solidarity?

3. THE BASIC POSITIONS OF REALISM REGARDING THE COOPERATION OF STATES IN THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

3.1. The main ontological and epistemological positions of realism for the ways of cooperation

Realism is recognized as the oldest theory that has preceded state developments since the ancient period. Initially, this theory had mainly served to elaborate on topics related to power and war. In Ancient Greece, Thucydides was the first to speak about this, and in other Asian civilizations, Sun Tzu is among the most famous. Some other well-known realists who continued to expand this theory were Machiavelli, Hobbes and perhaps the most famous of this theory, Morgenthau (Reka, Bashota, & Sela, 2016).

The main positions of realism are mainly because it sees the international system as an anarchy, in which there is a lack of a supranational authority that takes care of the international order, and from this arises the insecurity of states that then leads to conflicts with other states. Realism focuses a lot on the power that each state should have, emphasizing the fact that there must always be a balance of states' powers, in order to have peace. They see the national interest above all other interests and values, because for them the most important thing is that the state always survives.

In a word, realism starts from the premise that man is inherently selfish and always puts himself before others. The same with the state, which must place state interests as primary. People are inclined to dominate others, therefore the role of man and the state can often be compared, which in many cases can be the same. Classical realism recognizes the state as the only actor in the international system, while neorealism affirms the existence of other non-state actors in the international system, but it elevates and separates the role of the state in the organization of the international system.

But, realism as a paradigm of International Relations, calls that the national interest of a state should be above all other interests (Reka, Bashota, & Sela, 2016). In cases such as the various pandemics, this approach gives signs of preparation that the state must rely on their self-help, unless it comes from an allied state. Realism foresees constant dangers and threats

from other states, therefore, in order to mitigate and balance political power, it is necessary to create alliances with other states. These cooperation mainly put the military support between the allied countries in the front line, continuing with the political, economic and other supports (Reka, Bashota, & Sela, 2016).

Realists rely on and conceive the world as they see the inside of man, that is, as evil. Therefore, any help that might come from any non-allied country would be considered a political claim to control the country that needed the help. According to them, in no way should a state develop cooperation to the extent that it is interdependent with another state. Realists equate interdependence with weakness. Meanwhile, in any form, the survival of the state is required in the large space of states that make up the anarchic international system (Reka, Bashota, & Sela, 2016).

Aristotle observed that: "When men are friends, they do not need justice, but when they are just they also need friends" (Nicomachean Ethics: 1155a: 24-6). Meanwhile, Thucydides had in mind that military power and alliances are like double-edged swords, both helping to provoke and stopping conflict (Dunne, Kurki, & Smith, 2013). Meanwhile, Walt argues that cooperation between states is difficult because of the concern about the uncontrolled empowerment of one state (Walt, 2020). Both allies and adversaries may have common or opposing interests, which also help to make more definite predictions. Common interests facilitate cooperation – although, of course, anarchy and relative advantage always work against successful cooperation (Burchill, et al., 2005).

So, the realistic approach requires cooperation with other states in order to survive and create a balance in the anarchic sphere where states operate, but these types of cooperation must of course be taken with reservations. You should never allow the set goals of alliances to be crossed, as a small concession can turn "friendship" into enmity. The maximization of benefits and interests of the state should be primary in cooperation with other states in the international system.

Realpolitik and terms such as Machiavellianism are often mentioned, in fact all these terms come from realist theory, who judge rationally and without feelings, separating morality from politics, to maximize the planned benefits. At the same time, we often hear calls from two allies spreading their positivity due to the cooperation of the two states, but according to realists these are only actions of interest and that notions such as love and feelings do not really exist.

Contrary to the realistic paradigm of liberalism, which proclaims that the greater the cooperation of states and their integration in supranational bodies, would bring peace. But we will talk about the attitudes of this theory and constructivism in the last chapter.

3.2. Construction and history of the international system

The international system is an abstract space which consists of different states as well as certain relations between each other. So, starting from the breakdown of the word system, let us understand that this type of whole with connection and relationship between them, which are decided to act as unity or community (Fjalë, 2022b). When we talk about the words international, we understand that it has to do with relations between different countries or peoples. (Fjalë, 2022a). It mainly refers to the division that means the relations between nations

that deal with each other, different initiatives such as types of cooperation at the world level or its opposite, conflict.

According to the realist approach, the international system is built only by states, as single actors. However, other approaches to International Relations prove that after the 20th century, international organizations, interest groups, multinational corporations and other actors are also part of this system, which make up the international system and are an integral part of relations as part equal. However, the neo-realist approach, as a new realist thought, admits that there are other actors in international relations, but that their role is very small and, to say the least, insignificant. However, this "updated" spirit of realism emphasizes the importance of the state and its power to be sovereign in international relations. So, we can understand that when it comes to systems, they also exist in the natural sciences, but in people and the relationships between them, they are more special because they consist of human beings themselves.

There are some special rules that maintain the international system, some of these rules are obvious, and some are hidden. They include who can be a member, what rights they have, and what kind of actions or counteractions occur between states (Goldstein & Pevehouse, 2001). For realists, the concept of the international system is vital to their analysis (Mingst, 2008). According to Mingst, realists have complete clarity when they talk about the essential features of the international system, considering it first as anarchy. Traditional realists accept that states act independently and shape the system, while neorealists believe that states are constrained by the structure of the system. But, despite such differences, the two sides believe that anarchy is the basis of the international system, separating, first, its national interests. Otherwise, they categorize the international system based on the dimensions of polarity and stratification. According to the realists, the order of the balance of power, as in the case of the European Concert, makes it possible to have no ambitions for conflicts between states and if it happens that a state becomes too powerful and tries to "devour" other states, then will face the alliance of all other states against them. The specific case was France, which tried to expand to become the superpower of the time, having hegemonic ambitions, but this was stopped by the great European states of the time (Mingst, 2008, p. 118). Meanwhile, there are different debates among realists regarding the efficiency for the great peace in the world, in cases where the international system is unipolar and bipolar. Some realists conclude that the world was mostly at peace during the Cold War, with minor wars here and there. Others think that hegemony means the establishment of a "world police", which cares and has the ability to punish others for breaking international rules. But even for these attitudes there are strong criticisms, especially in the case of American hegemony after the fall of communism in the 90s. The stratification that Mingst considers important for realists in the structure of the international system refers to the unequal distribution of resources among different groups of states. The international system is therefore divided into layers in accordance with the vital resources that the states have, such as oil, military or economic power (Mingst, 2008, pp. 123-124).

But, throughout history, we have had major changes in the international system, or better to say, a kind of arrangement of the community of groups or peoples that were organized in different forms of states, starting from ancient times when people began to organize them-

selves in larger groups, as in Egypt, Babylon, etc. The development of the international system began with the birth of the Greek city-states, when the then polises had advanced in their state organizations. The relations they had between them, especially the collaborations and conflicts, began to distinguish the creation of an international order, continuing later with the inclusion of Persia, but this type of international system that works today, we can say that it has only a basis from this period that we mentioned, since the way of state organization, however similar it may be in principle, is much more different from modern states (Goldstein & Pevehouse, 2001).

With the destruction of Ancient Greece, another development of the international system began when the strengthening of the Roman Empire and many other empires of the new era began. Such division through different periods of the international system continued especially during the Middle Ages when great discoveries began to be made that made different civilizations and that would change humanity. Feudalism is the form of state organization in the Middle Ages, when a kind of internal state order begins to take place, diplomacy begins to develop and endless wars between peoples take place. Europe has experienced a great darkness during the Middle Ages, but the point that made the big change in the international system, where it is called the starting point of the modern international system, is the Treaty of Westphalia (Goldstein & Pevehouse, 2001).

The formation of modern states, that is, the states that exist today, are based on principles and organizations that date back six centuries. Beginning with the period of the European Enlightenment, and since the order of the international system was largely determined by a single empire, wars were endless and usually without any particular motive, other than to grow and satisfy the appetites of the emperors, a civil uprising started from a province then German, called Bohemia. It started as an uprising to have freedom of religious choice, but continued to end as a bloody 30-year war, between 1618-48. These great losses suffered by Europe were stopped by the Treaty of Westphalia, when the first rules of the modern state were established, on territorial autonomy, state sovereignty and the separation of religion from the state. The signing of this peace agreement in 1648, the modern state is conceived as an organization where each state must have a certain territory, where there is a legitimate monopoly and extent of sovereignty in that territory, without allowing interference from outside or from religious authority.

3.3. The impact of the biggest historical pandemics on the international system

Pandemics have always existed. They have appeared mainly from dirt in different periods of time, since ancient times, and among them the most famous were plagues. These communicable diseases that spread extremely quickly in the population are very difficult to manage and resolve quickly. In most cases, pandemics are unpredictable and put the leaders of the states in great difficulty, since new diseases with special features appear every time, which require time and study to discover its symptoms, effects and consequences. The biggest consequences are in the loss of people's lives, and as a result of panic and not finding a quick and appropriate solution, then the health, economic, and finally the political system begins to collapse.

During the history of mankind normally there have been and still are many pandemics,

few of them were or are deadly. But few such are known as severe pandemics that are remembered for their major impact on changes in the international system or the course of history. Starting with the plague of Troy, written in Homer's Iliad, which cut the Greek army in half during the Trojan War, in the 7th century BC (History, 2019). A similar plague came in Ancient Greece, otherwise called the Plague of Thucydides, which had an enormous impact, taking over 2/3 of the population's lives (History, 2019). Despite the fact that throughout history humanity has faced many pandemics, we will talk briefly only about some of them and their impact on the change of the international system.

In the Middle Ages, one of the greatest diseases in history, otherwise known as the Plague of Justinian (541-589 AD), was named so because of the Emperor Justinian who ruled the Byzantine Empire at that time. This plague, according to the Greek historian Procopius, caused about 10,000 deaths a day in Constantinople, and as a conclusion, historian John Horgan says that this plague left about 25-50 million people dead (Media&PR, 2021). Because of these consequences, the empire was greatly damaged militarily because many people had died, and the agrarian economy was also damaged so much that it collapsed. In addition to greatly affecting the military, this pandemic caused plans for the reunification of the Roman Empire to collapse and greatly weakened the power of the Byzantine Empire, allowing parts of the empire to be divided by different peoples (Media&PR, 2021).

Finally, we can consider what impact it would have if half the world's population died, the idea of reuniting the Roman Empire would finally be "buried" and the Dark Ages would begin (Bose, 2020). During the Middle Ages, many other pandemics would be experienced, especially among the deadliest were a series of plagues that would take the lives of almost 2/3 of the population, especially after the "black death" (1346-53). But, apart from the economic problems and in most cases the social problems that will arise as a result of such pandemics, there would not be major changes in the international system. Normally, the number of consequences in humans would be much smaller, and especially with the discovery of vaccines, many such diseases would be prevented. This time lasted until the beginning of the 20th century, when for the first time in hundreds of years a new disease, undiscovered until that time, had broken out.

The freshest case of a pandemic in the history of modern states is related to the "Spanish Flu", otherwise known as the influenza pandemic. This pandemic started from 1918 and ended in 1920. The impact of the consequences of the Spanish Flu on the international system were not great. Despite the fact that at the same time when this disease was spread, the First World War was taking place, its influence on the end of the war was not significant. But it brought about a health crisis all over the world and affected the economy tremendously. The Spanish flu, despite being one of the deadliest pandemics in human history. The big states lost more people, but its influence was not decisive in changing the world order (Bose, 2020).

Unfortunately, even today, the Spanish flu is very little mentioned in the history of international relations as a factor of that time, perhaps the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 had distracted all attention to the fear of war between countries and the Spanish flu was "ignored" as the primary problem to be solved. But, according to Kahl and Wright, the influenza pandemic had influenced the end of the First World War, both in the agreements negotiated in Versailles and in the politics of internal wars. They point out that the example

of the Spanish flu shows how a pandemic can shape the international system by undermining the material capabilities of powerful states and producing random historical events that occur from time to time. Problems within the state, weakened economies, the deepening of social inequalities, as well as people's uprisings for their rights, are just some of the effects of the changes in the international system. They argue that the Spanish flu has not been given the importance it deserves, concluding that the Covid-19 pandemic will have similar consequences that will lead to the acceleration of the end of another international order and thus the creation of a new one (Bose, 2020).

After the theoretical elaboration of realism and the history of the impacts of world pandemics on changes in the international system, we will now analyze the impact of covid-19 from a realistic perspective, to see if after the end of this pandemic there will be reorganization or change of the international system. Unlike the previous 100 years, today we live in a different time and the time context is different. It is known that each period has its own characteristics, but the interesting thing this time is that the last world changes were established almost 100 years ago.

4. REALISTIC APPROACH ON THE CONSEQUENCES AND IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM IN 2019-2021

4.1. The situation after the closure of the states: Quarantine

Since the end of the Cold War, the international system has been considered unipolar under the leadership of the US. With the fall of communism and the rapid rise of democracies, it was the liberal approach that was dominating international relations. In the 90s, a new idea was developed and implemented that was proposed by the USA, globalism. This process basically had the desire for people to get as close as possible to each other, bypassing state borders, national problems or any kind of conflict. Globalism aims to eradicate differences based on the fact that we are all human beings, while other differences do not matter. Until the spread of Covid-19, globalism had reached the highest peak of cooperation between countries, especially in the part of the world economy. The ultimate goal of globalism is to eliminate state borders, since it is a liberal idea, it envisages having a world government through international organizations.

But when the first cases of the Covid-19 virus were announced in China at the end of 2019, the whole story changed. Following this, apart from being a very heavy burden for the health of any country, this pandemic would become the object of geo-political battles between many great powers, with special emphasis between the USA and China. In reality, the first signs of the weakening of American hegemony had begun to be felt since the attacks of September 11, 2001, and then the great shock from the world economic crisis in 2008. Tensions between these countries had also begun after Covid-19, especially the battles in the fields of trade, military and economy. After the pandemic spread to other parts of the planet, the finger was pointed at China as responsible for the inability to localize cases and prevent worldwide spread. These accusations came directly from President Trump, who accused the Chinese government and people of spreading Covid-19, calling it the "Chinese virus" (Moynihan & Porumbescu, 2020).

The closing of the borders and the beginning of the quarantine in most countries of the

world, brought to the fore the differences that the countries have with each other. These closures together with the preventive measures established in internal state policies made the world see the differences. For a moment, international organizations, globalism and freedom of movement around the world were forgotten. From this point on, state governments had the reins in their hands to provide care for their citizens, returning to the time of the earliest pre- globalization organization based on reliance on state autonomy and sovereignty.

There were some international preventive measures, but it was again up to the states, depending on leaders, health experts and public opinion, to decide what kind of measures to take. Here we saw a great disconnection of cooperation between states, where in a word each state only looked at its own work within its territory. The quarantine highlighted the many differences and opinions that people have about the state and that they are not ready to give up their belief in the power of the modern state.

The realist approach best explains the events surrounding Covid-19. Most countries have turned inward, implementing travel and entry bans, export controls, information gathering, border closures and quarantines to control and contain the Covid-19 virus. During this tight international order, states have done their best to find the curative vaccine with a one-sided approach. Kenneth Waltz wrote in his book, *The Theory of International Politics*, that the domestic imperative is "specialize" and the international imperative is "take care of yourself." After the first production of vaccines, all countries first distributed it to their own people, and then when there was enough, they began to distribute it to other countries. Such a case when state sovereignty was above all, was when Italy was experiencing the great crisis in the middle of 2020, even though it was calling for help, no one actually offered it, not even the European Union (Basrur & Kliem, 2020). Nationalist political tendencies that reaffirm the sovereignty of the state will continue. The structures and practices of the world order will not be the same as before Covid-19 (Higgot, 2020). But, according to (Walt, 2020), a very important thing in cases of such crises, especially pandemics, is also the form of state power. He says that based on the opinions of earlier scholars, dictatorial regimes are more exposed to famine, epidemics, and other disasters because they try to suppress information and senior leaders do not recognize the danger of the situation until the reaction of it becomes too late. This is more or less what China and Iran are like during Covid-19 (Walt, 2020).

The state, which is the main actor of the international system in the zero-sum game, is rational and self-governing. They avoid cooperation because there is a possibility of "deceit" in possible cooperation [Newmann, Morgenstern, 1944]. This is why states choose self-help over cooperation, making it another reason to choose isolation (Kanapiyanova, 2020). The reasons why realism prevails in the case of this pandemic is also the unilateral closing of the borders of the EU states, which can also be explained with this example of Hadfield, who criticizes the EU, which instructed that the services health issues are the responsibility of states, rejecting the cross-border solidarity that this organization proclaims (Hadfield, a.d.).

4.2. Growing hostility between states

At the beginning of this chapter, we explained the facts of how the quarantine, or to put it another way, the isolation of the states from each other, has affected the policies for closing the borders. During this time when safety and survival are in question, people were inclined

to believe more in their nation-state, thus increasing their nationalism. The international system in the realist perspective, according to Eric Woords, is intertwined in the way that the state acts alone, therefore the fight of the world pandemic by each state separately, has created a new type of the concept of new nationalism (Kanapiyanova, 2020).

This ideology revived recently, but primarily the concept of a deglobalization of the world, because of the problems that arise when borders and people are closed. Secondly, along with nationalism, populism is growing from politicians around the world, which people are also embracing (Bremmer, 2020).

The great clash of the two world superpowers was present for the past 10 years, but with China's rapid economic growth, it was foreseen that the US would use all means to prevent China from becoming a superpower equal to it. This thing is simple and very clear in reality, since a state feels itself in danger from the growth of someone else, or otherwise called a security dilemma, the necessary steps will be taken to prevent the strengthening of the party. So, at that moment when China grows economically, extends its influence through soft power, invests around the world, dominates world markets and recently strengthens the military, they are a direct threat to the US. Therefore, realism very accurately explains the reactions of states when one state begins to threaten the comfort zone of another state. It all starts with uncertain information, proceeds to a competitive game of strength, and culminates in conflict. Both sides are trying to attract their allies and try to increase their power as much as possible (Raj, 2021).

The rise of nationalism is not that it has affected only these two powerful states, but since the future of the current international system depends on the steps of these states, then it makes them the main part of the analysis. In these cases, realism predicts that when there is such competition between two states, there will be other states that will try to be included and strengthened as much as possible. In our case, Russia is seriously threatened, or to say the least, is getting ready to be replaced as the biggest power after the USA. So if the international system is somehow changed after Covid-19 and the US-China bipolar order is placed at the top of it, it would be a big concern for Russia. Despite maintaining a sort of middle ground, cooperating with China in trade terms and with the US in geo-political terms, they would remain outside the new world order that would be created. But the rise of powers from countries such as India, Brazil, Japan and the European Union often makes the above hypothesis fall down (Abiru, 2021). India in the last two years has had long-distance conflicts with China, because in any way that China would become a superpower, then India's role would not only be greatly diminished in the international system, but it would also lose a lot in regional and continental aspects. It is the same for Japan, which has western tendencies even though it is located in Asia, the excessive strengthening of China would pose a great threat against them, especially considering the historical conflicts between these two states. So, if in a group of countries, one of them becomes more powerful, then there is a response from the whole group, a specific case is France after the European Concert.

All these events took place during Covid-19, a period which stopped neoliberal ideas to return once again to the oldest approach that exists, the realist one.

4.3. "Pointing the finger" of states at each other and finding the culprit

States accused and still accuse each other for the problems they have encountered since the pandemic began. For almost three years now, the finger pointing to find the culprit has been mainly done to China. Critics have often accused it of being a "laboratory virus" that only aims to harm powerful states and elevate China to the world stage. On the other hand, China continues with its continuous economic growth and claims that it has no other goals, except for economic development and cooperation with other countries.

But this is only the beginning of the problems, as this would continue with numerous criticisms directed at the World Health Organization, which President Trump described as the Chinese Health Organization. This escalated so much that the US cut off financial support for the WHO, threatening to leave forever if there were no reflections (Fideler, 2020).

The West criticizes that during Covid-19, a rising China and a resurgent Russia are the main culprits in destabilizing the global order. They act in flagrant opposition to its norms: they threaten their neighbors, export authoritarianism, subvert democratic processes and undermine multilateral institutions. Moreover, they are a threat to the liberal order and the global supremacy of the United States (Lo, 2020).

These competitions and the plan of the USA to hinder China's all-round growth, from the technological part and the obstacle to the distribution of new equipment, especially for the 5G network in the world, but also in the economic aspect with various sanctions, the satellite technology part, military, etc. On the other hand, China tends to accuse the US and the West of politicizing the origin of Covid-19 for its own purposes ("China Accuses US of Politicizing", 2021).

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the international system is very large, we can conclude that this crisis may be the biggest that has shaken the foundations of the international system since the Second World War. So, the first health crisis that came at the beginning of 2020, now entering the third year of this pandemic, we can clearly observe how Covid-19 has brought to light the international problems that the world had been facing for a long time. Pointing the finger at who is to blame for all this, normally thought to be legitimized by the USA, to maintain its position in the new international system, why not, maybe even strengthen it even more. Historically and in support of the realist point of view, we can conclude that the international system and the great powers are strengthened and weakened during their "shine". For this reason, in this chapter we have elaborated on the most specific issues that are affecting the change of the international system, especially we have made it clear how the realistic approach sees these actions. Indeed, in times of crisis, liberalism has been criticized for not being able to provide solutions and that only after the end of conflicts, it comes close to providing solutions. In reality, the same had happened after the First World War with the creation of the League of Nations, where Liberal Internationalism had taken the theoretical lead, leaving the realist paradigm in the shade. But when things began to deteriorate with the rise of nationalism and threats from states, liberals could not offer a solution until World War II ended. So, when we compare the liberalism at that time and the great development that globalism has made these last two decades, we can draw a parallel of similarity, since even globalism failed to provide an answer to the solution of the health, economic and political crisis of Covid-19.

This is not to say that globalism has totally failed, because in international relations, or in general, when we try to make predictions about the political future, we can tend to fail. This is because the world is unpredictable and as much as historical events are similar and come as a result of similar historical factors or elements, it does not mean that the conclusion will be neither similar nor the same. Normally, when a thesis is argued that foresees the future of the international system after Covid-19, I have the right to think that this international system will be different. In principle, we should all agree, since such a thing is clear and evident. But what are the exact results that can come from that new world order, it is difficult to predict, since other events can happen, for example that the unipolarity of the USA is strengthened even more, or the opposite, for another side to triumph in the race between the US, China and Russia. According to the realistic approach, Covid-19 has drastically changed the way of organization within the state and outside the state between 2019-21. The consequences that came from this pandemic are strong and will influence the shaping of the future of the states. The future will be different.

5. COMPARISON WITH THE VIEWS OF OTHER THEORIES OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

5.1. The liberal view on the possible changes of the international system by Covid-19

Liberalism is facing its greatest crisis since the end of the Cold War. Meanwhile, according to Bobby Lo, we are in the biggest crisis of international leadership since the 1930s (Lo, 2020). Yes, neoliberalism and globalism stem from classical liberalism, and when we talk about the liberal view, we include all these new approaches. In the previous chapter we talked about how the Covid-19 pandemic took the world and international and intergovernmental organizations by surprise. Fearing a pandemic that nothing was known about, countries and peoples were quick to turn their attention only to their own countries, forgetting about international cooperation. The strongest point on which globalization is based is the economic aspect, trade agreements and transfers that are made all over the world between countries, are key elements of globalization. The year 2020 was very negative for them, because the whole world covered in its state borders. But, with the discovery of the vaccine against covid-19, the impasse of liberalism began to soften, this is because the states began to soften the preventive measures against the pandemic, allowing the free movement of markets, goods and people. Above all, cooperation resumed between states, although with a clear breakdown of relations between states.

From the liberal point of view, in their view, this pandemic has made it clear that in such cases, states and other international actors must cooperate and stand in solidarity with each other to avoid the common evil and remove a disease that has taken the lives of many people. There it is highlighted that it is imperative that cooperation be raised at the international level and that international bodies be empowered to have common and clear guidelines and laws for the prevention of the COVID-19 pandemic. Liberalists also claim that aid such as the donation of vaccines to countries in need, assistance with medical and biological staff, are just some of the few elements that have established as clear that people are not selfish and the world is showing solidarity among itself. They see that the international system must change even more by cooperating in an international hierarchy for the benefit of humanity.

Powell, in one of his scientific articles, finds that the Covid-19 pandemic has also served to accelerate world trends that were ready to explode even before 2020. He shows that despite the misunderstandings and lack of solidarity at the beginning of 2020, the Union The European Union and its member states had created a common response to the economic crisis that came as a result of the pandemic, approving a package with 750 billion dollars, which is included in the long-term planning of the EU. According to him, the pandemic has reminded States that the main focus should be on major transnational challenges, which require more international cooperation, rules and institutions (Powell, 2021).

Joseph Nye argues that not always pandemics have changed the world, this also applies to Covid-19. He says it is a mistake to think that Covid-19 will end the era of globalization, or "kill" liberal democracy, or increase China's soft power. Giving a comparison with the Spanish flu, we can say that Covid-19 has changed our way of life, it has exposed health system problems, with many negative effects in economic areas such as employment, but the consequences of Covid-19 cannot cause changes in the world order, only if US foreign policy is affected by great internal polarization and chaos. The possibility that the world will change is evident, there will be changes in terms of technology, travel and others, this means that globalism will change, but not disappear (Nye, 2020).

Liberals recognize that there will be eventual changes in the international system after the Covid-19 pandemic, but democratic states and globalism will not die out, this will be a period where even states that are predicted to be more powerful, such as China, have used and will use globalization as a tool for the economic field. Even China's economic growth in the last 20 years was the result of world cooperation in all fields. Therefore, according to them, cooperation and solidarity will remain with states as well as trust in international organizations, however much it fluctuated at the beginning of the pandemic, now they are stable and will help make the world a better place to live.

5.2. The constructivist view on the possible changes of the international system from Covid-19

Constructivists disagree with realists regarding the existence of anarchy in the international system, since according to them it is only intersubjective. So, constructivism moves away from the part of seeing and judging objectively, because it sees concepts such as anarchy, state, organization as ideas that are thought in people's heads. The idea is key in this theory, because they are the very composition of the structure, especially of the social structures and the social world, therefore they judge that international relations are always changing, since the ideological positions on certain events also change, or otherwise called as dynamism of developments (Reka, Bashota, & Sela, 2016).

Otherwise, Jackson and Sorensen define that in this theory, "The physical element exists, but it is secondary to the intellectual element, which fills it with habits, plans, organizes and guides it" (Jackson & Sørensen, 2010). Constructivists reject the possibility of an objective truth in the social realm, since it is impossible to discover an ultimate truth about the world (Jackson & Sørensen, 2010, p. 200).

So, constructivists are based on ideological attitudes that are constructed in people's minds. So, identities, beliefs and roles, in essence, determine how actors behave in inter-

national politics. The possibilities of cooperation, from a constructivist perspective, are not limited by the anarchic state in which states coexist (as realists would have it), but by our beliefs about what is feasible and what is not in such a state (Pouliot 2011). Moreover, states fail to cooperate despite the urgency of the Covid-19 crisis because they are weighed down by the unquestioned notion that, even under the onslaught of a pandemic, self-help must come first and the exercise of power must shape action. This worldview, for the constructivist, is an ideological construct that must be overcome if cooperation is to be achieved. Moreover, states fail to cooperate despite the urgency of the Covid-19 crisis because they are weighed down by the unquestioned notion that, even under the onslaught of a pandemic, self-help must come first and the exercise of power must shape action. . This worldview, for the constructivist, is an ideological construct that must be overcome if cooperation is to be achieved. In short, constructivism is not a predictive theory and tends to be unfalsifiable and, more pragmatically, not very useful, other than to stimulate new thinking. How to move from the current ideational structure to a more desirable structure when a crisis erupts remains a key problem in the explanation of this theory (Basrur & Kliem, 2020, pp. 1-10).

Constructivism, unlike realism, which depicts competition as inevitable, constructivists are agnostic about competition or cooperation—because they focus on the social processes that produce these outcomes (Lim, 2021).

The constructivist theory does not give us a clear opinion on whether the international system will change after the Covid-19 pandemic, but it explains to us that the processes in the establishment of states and the initiative to change the international order depend on identities that are not immutable, that is, they depend from mutual interference between states, in this case the USA and China (Lim, 2021).

6. CONCLUSION

The organization of states and the international system has always been a complex issue to study, and especially to explain the changes that are made from time to time. There is a saying that historically every international system changes every 100 years, or on the eve of every beginning of a new century, perhaps it can be taken as a basis for such a thing, since during the last four centuries such a formula has worked. But, knowing that the great economic and technological development of the states can change the course of changes in the international system.

Realism is not for nothing considered a paradigm, since it has resisted them at different times and still managed to offer similar explanations as at the beginning. Realism in essence is cold, unfeeling and prejudiced, because as I explained at the beginning of the paper, realism presents the natural form of man as selfish, while the most important thing is survival. The fear of a large increase is immediately considered a fear or threat to the other state, since the security dilemma begins to take the appropriate steps for countermeasures. With the rise of nationalism, populism and other extreme ideologies after 2015, we have clearly noticed that tensions between states have begun to rise, people are reluctant to trust supranational institutions or organizations, and according to their recent actions from the pandemic, people still believe in the modern state. There is no readiness for states to surrender their sovereignty, on the contrary, their greatest empowerment is being encouraged.

Historically, we saw that pandemics were not the main engine of historical change, but were secondary or solvent factors of eventual change. The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed the scum of the international system, just as nature often removes human waste from the oceans. That cluster of problems was there even earlier, the indicators were clear that the world was not moving towards liberal solidarity and globalization would not be the form of a global government, but the pandemic was the climax where the last blow was given, it was the pretext to continue with a new international system.

People came back to "love" the state once again and during these last three years we have seen that in addition to increasing tensions between states, there is the creation of alliances, maybe a bipolar world will await us again after 2022, but not divided not only into two states, but into two ideologies, liberal democrats from the west on one side and authoritarians from the east on the other. But, one cannot but foresee a type of multipolarity, the same as in the 19th century. Quarantine and the closing of state borders increased hostility between states, where states wanted to be successful in any showdown of forces with other states. The various accusations and pointing the finger of blame for this pandemic only made clear the great differences between the West and the East.

This pandemic caused a strong return of realism in international relations, because it revealed once again the selfish nature of states and their desire for as much power as possible. At this time, a kind of undoing of interstate solidarity and departure from globalization and international liberalism was observed. The first signs of the change of the international system in the post-Covid-19 period have only appeared, therefore the realism represents that the international system will be changed or reorganized after 2022 in another form of international order.

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THE NEW WORLD BETWEEN TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT AND IDENTITY CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

National identitarianism is a cultural conception that recalls a nostalgic and autarchic idea of the way in which one relates to others. Yet, a certain idea of nationalism seems to be spreading around the world at a time when Europe is going through a profound crisis precisely because of nationalism. It is quite unusual that certain historical legacies are recalled in an era in which, between pandemics, conflicts and climate change that afflict the whole world, the sense of unity should prevail over individualism and national identity. In recent years, a dominant role in social relations has been taken by technology. The implementation of digital tools and their practical application in carrying out daily activities has led to a series of changes in the social organizational dimension. Often, the use of digital technology has been the lifeline that has allowed the use of services and the continuation of daily activities, including educational ones, in compliance with the rules on social distancing. Over the course of a few decades, information and communication technology has become an integral part of our daily life so much so that it is not lacking even in the theatre of war. In addition to the use of missile warheads, there are also cyberattacks, fake news and self-congratulatory propaganda slogans disseminated through the Internet. This irrepressible interference of technology in the daily routine makes the development of new skills in the digital field, which can be acquired through the enhancement of digital literacy paths, increasingly important.

Keywords: Digital literacy, identity culture, technology, digital divide, inclusion.

1. INTRODUCTION

The past few years have seen the contemporary social order besieged by multiple upheavals. The pandemic, global warming, geopolitical imbalances are certainly among those with the greatest impact. After the frustrating pandemic years, a global renewal of the sense of unity and cohesion was expected in order to better respond not only to the new challenges of science but also to the devastating climate changes affecting the entire planet.

Human nature with its prerogatives of selfishness, oppression and arrogance, as often happens, upsets and undermines the good intentions of civil coexistence and social justice.

Indeed, indignation and dismay are provoked by all those autocratic and nationalist regimes which, to various extents, base their socio-political balance on the complete absence of democracy in constant and illegitimate violation of human rights.

The current military conflicts are leading to a new arms race no longer limited to conventional weapons but also to hi-tech and nuclear ones. At the same time, the new battlefield develops not only on the ground between armed contenders but also through cyber wars, fake news and financial market manipulation.

As happened with Hitler's madness, the spreading of terror and disinformation among civilians becomes part of the sadistic strategy of death and oppression of the weakest, today also perpetrated digitally.

This highlights the dual role of digital technology which, if on the one hand was created with a presumed democratic potential and as a tool for improving social life, given its enormous global diffusion it can easily become a deadly weapon of mass deception capable even of questioning community identity issues.

Digital is an integral part of the contemporary daily life of citizens of all the most developed countries, therefore it is able to easily reach and mobilize large numbers of people.

Distance learning and smart working during the lockdown restrictions to curb the spread of the pandemic have shown that there are still people who do not have access to the Internet and they are, therefore, excluded from political, working, educational, economic and social life. The problem is so felt in international scenarios that digital literacy has also been included among the objectives of the 2030 Agenda in a reference framework for fair, sustainable and inclusive development.

2. THE CONCEPT OF IDENTITY IN THE TECHNOLOGICAL SOCIETY

The whirlwind of concern over the pandemic emergency, global warming, financial and energy crisis seems to have fuelled a certain loss of focus in contemporary society.

Just when a slow return to the serene flow of life began to emerge after tragic years of pandemic characterized by continuous ups and downs, new tensions have returned to threaten the security of European citizens and all the world's nations. After more than 70 years of apparent tranquility in Europe, the invasion of Ukraine horrified peoples and threw the entire world stability into chaos.

National identitarianism is a cultural conception that recalls a nostalgic and autarkic idea of the way we relate to others and which seemed to belong to distant memories of the history of certain populist movements of the past. Yet, in Italy, as well as in other areas of the world, there seems to be a social enlargement aimed at the return of nationalism at a time when

Europe is going through a profound crisis due to nationalism.

As long as individualisms and nationalisms remain, the desire to abuse others and violence will always find fertile ground. In this sense, education can actively contribute to spreading the concept of global identity that promotes solidarity, cohesion and peace.

National identitarianism is synonymous with blood identitarianism, religious and ethnic identity. It is a reality that ignores respect for one's neighbor and therefore implicitly for the planet and the common good. It excludes any form of social cohesion other than that with which one wishes to identify.

More and more frequently the mass media of every country in the world hypothesize the possibility of an extension of the conflict with the consequent involvement of multiple nations. In order to expand the social terror, there are the continuous intimidations of a possible recourse to the use of weapons with a high destructive potential, such as chemical and nuclear ones, repeatedly enunciated by the belligerent oppositions.

Global uncertainty also has a negative impact on the stability of financial markets, forcing extraordinary policies in a desperate attempt to contain the dizzying increase in the prices of basic necessities, such as food, clothing, electricity, gas, oil, often subject to speculative maneuvers, which increase the condition of extreme poverty of thousands of families already in difficult economic conditions.

One wonders how this incredible madness could have come about in a civilization that seemed to have laid down its arms to embrace the banner of peace in full respect of human rights. It is no coincidence that Freud maintained that law and violence are opposite terms.

“Conflicts of interest between men are therefore in principle resolved through the use of violence. This happens throughout the animal kingdom, of which man is unequivocally a part.” (Freud, 1932).

Since the origins of humanity, man has always been a social animal afflicted, over the centuries, by recurring epidemics and wars which, together with famines, have forced us to re-evaluate priorities and create new adaptation strategies. Nonetheless, the consequences have often been hecatombs capable of upsetting the fate of peoples and empires.

The rampant and present social depression almost gives rise to the desire for a return to the status quo ante, that is, when nations lived in apparent tranquility, free from imminent threats and the main social attentions concerned crime and youth unemployment. Yet, precisely in that illusory world balance are hidden the conditions that have allowed both the spread of the pandemic and the destabilization of international balances, as well as the onset of the catastrophic climatic upheavals that are manifesting themselves all over the planet with floods, hurricanes, rising seas, drought, violent rainfall and hail.

In recent years, and particularly in times of Covid, the implementation of digital tools and their application in carrying out daily activities, both private and professional, has led to a series of changes in the social organizational dimension, reserving a dominant role for technology in interpersonal relationships.

The digital presence is not lacking even in the management of the war conflict. It has been added to traditional firearms, with cyber-attacks, fake news and self-celebratory propaganda slogans spread through the Net with the intention of shaping and confusing public opinion. The WEB, which was born as an incredible tool for sharing information and democracy, has

a destructive potential that is difficult to neutralize.

Thus, we discover that the “well” in which we all go to “drink” information turns out to be a deposit of putrid water. Fake news has the ability to attract the masses but also to create opposing alignments and fragment society. Among the reasons for the ease of spreading fake news is the presence of multimedia content that lowers the level of attention, making certain information more credible and shareable at first glance.

The considerable quantity of information that spreads on the Net from the most disparate sources pushes many researchers to speak of an excess of information which translates into disinformation. In order to be able to make wise use of the contents served on the digital tray, it is not enough to have access to the information, but it is necessary to be able to identify and select what is relevant, to evaluate it correctly, and to be able to put it in the right perspective by combining different sources and materials (Hassan and Pinelli, 2022).

The scarcity of digital literacy leads to a lack of critical digital skills, and therefore to the impossibility of knowing how to interpret a message on a comparative basis of information, not to mention the fairly widespread practice among cybernauts of searching for content that confirms one's beliefs. Therefore, some people are already psychologically predisposed to believe and divulge news of dubious origin.

It would be necessary to reflect on the critical issues that emerged during the pandemic in terms of digital inclusion to transform them into opportunities for social development through digital.

If it is true that the social digitization process was not born with the pandemic, it is equally true that when it was impossible to interact with people in an “analog” way, digital was, in many cases, the lifeline that allowed the use of services and the continuation of daily activities, including educational ones, in compliance with the rules on social distancing.

In doing so, inhomogeneities emerged in the micro and macro territorial areas which accentuated the pre-existing technological gap between industrialized and developing countries. The digital divide is one of the most significant causes of exclusion from participation in the political, economic and social life of some people (Hassan, 2010). Among the sectors most affected by the massive use of digital is the school sector with the adoption of distance learning which has created many disagreements between families for and against, almost as if there were a safe alternative for their children.

The education sector has changed radically with the arrival of Information Technology and even more with the spread of the pandemic in which the digital world had reached its maximum application potential during the restrictive phases of the lockdown. Although with start-up problems due to digital illiteracy, technological skepticism, infrastructures lacking especially in certain social contexts, the school 2.0 has confirmed itself as a valid and precious resource, worthy of its educational work.

Even in pre- and post-pandemic times, the use of computers, whiteboards and the Internet increases the quality of education. Teachers and students have new tools to support teaching and learning at their disposal.

Digital communication and information technology has quickly become an integral part of our daily lives, and certainly not as a result of the pandemic. Some people say that the world has changed more in the last 30 years than in the previous 100. Indeed, through a ret-

rospective analysis we can see aspects of true digital addiction in a non-pathological sense in such apps as those for managing physical activity, and also for financial management.

This disruptive intrusion of technology into the daily routine makes it increasingly important to develop new digital skills that can be acquired through the enhancement of digital literacy courses.

Today, we often hear about socio-political guidelines promoting sustainable development. Sustainability is an empty word without individual behaviours that are respectful of others and, therefore, of the environment itself. Technology can favour the process of sustainable development through the implementation of robotics and digital intelligence in particularly strategic and sensitive sectors.

Paul Gilster is considered among the first to use the expression digital literacy in his 1997 book entitled “Digital Literacy”, which he defines as “the ability to understand and use information, in different formats, starting from a wide range of computer-accessible sources” (Gilster, 1997).

Subsequently, several other scholars followed one another with ever more precise definitions. Among these stands out that of Wilhelm who, in 2004, defines the digitally literate person capable of “accessing, managing, integrating, evaluating and creating information” (Wilhem, 2004) while the American Library Association, argues that it is “the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills” (American Library Association, 2013).

This dynamic approach to new technologies requires an openness to change that starts from a proactive digital mindset so that the acquired knowledge leads to effective practical skills.

Anthropologist Curtis Marean writes that “the ability to collaborate, together with advanced cognitive abilities, allowed our ancestors to adapt to new environments and these conditions were the cradle of innovation and a revolutionary technology, namely the construction of more advanced throwing weapons” (Strauss, 2019).

What makes human beings extraordinary and unique is the adaptive ability to create and perfect tools. Monkeys take the objects they find and use them, but “the first distinctive trait of man is the ability to give shape to sticks and stones, to make them suitable for a specific use” (Strauss, 2019).

Then one would almost wonder what exactly Freud meant when he claimed that “everything that promotes civil evolution also works against war” (Freud, 1932).

Today we are witnessing a new democratic organization of knowledge thanks to huge digital databases containing information of all sorts that can be easily reached through an Internet connection. This global approach to sharing opinions, information and documentation significantly favors scientific collaboration by breaking down geographical, cultural, religious and political barriers.

The economy and society are changing rapidly in this age dominated by technology with the development of artificial intelligence, robotics and big data. These innovations open up unprecedented scenarios for the improvement of our lives and for a sustainable future.

The newly minted Society 5.0 cannot fail to take into account the progressive implemen-

tation of increasingly impacting and conditioning technologies in everyone's life.

From technology we receive undoubted and fundamental advantages aimed at improving our society. The processes of globalization and digitization impose the need to adopt a new model of social development based on the enhancement of all forms of diversity in respect of cultural identity, human rights and sustainable development.

Innovation presents itself as the perfect medium to provide a shared model of peace and prosperity for people and the planet, in the present and in the future. The responsibility for how we decide to use the new development tools will depend only on our ability to grasp priorities on a planet in extreme suffering.

The pandemic has kicked off a phase that starts from new needs and new eco-sustainable balances that affect all social partners and which require solidarity and collaboration between peoples. Remaining anchored to nationalistic closures based on indifference, violence and abuse of neighbour demonstrates a retrograde form of selfishness and immaturity of man who does not want to grow.

3. DEMOCRACY AND THE TECHNOLOGICAL CHALLENGE

The profound changes due to new technologies encourage theoretical reflection to rethink from a different perspective some problems that revolve around the nexus of democracy and innovation in the new global context marked by pandemic and war. However, the strength and power of technologies are no longer the mythical tool that helps tell a story of the future. The dreams of total palingenesis and the expectations of salvation linked to new technologies lasted a short season, however intense and full of imaginative strength. Today it would be unthinkable to speak of a return to the roots of Greek democracy, as Grossman did, one of the first American visionaries, with the utopian charge he had, which was certainly very different from the classic European utopias. The whole debate on the new direct democracy with the construction of new participatory institutions took place even before the commercial success of the Web, with its logic of cataloging (Rodota, 2004), flattening and reduction to a single, dominant logic. However, that same debate with utopian hues, imbued with the rhetoric of the new digital fever has not lost its centrality and value. Certainly, the perspectives have changed and the discussion has become a careful and rigorous analysis of the concrete experiences and of the theoretical implications of this change; all the more in the face of the crisis and the rethinking of democracy both in the Italian and international context. Democracy in its long journey of changes is presented to us today in its various articulations of deliberative democracy and participatory democracy, the two forms that most intersect with new technologies and the debate on e-democracy. The problem is never just technological, it is political. Behind the discussion and the definition of what electronic democracy is or is not, there is the discourse on democracy in general, on its limits, on the possible procedural artifacts and on overcoming its incompleteness. Therefore, the key theme of political participation does not concern only new technologies, but it is directly related to the crisis of a suffering democracy. Of course, the network is not democratic by itself, so we have a new paradigm of a democracy without reference to the center, which goes beyond the nation state.

Democracy, therefore, needs to be rethought and can be placed in this paradigm; it will certainly not be the consequence of a quantitative diffusion of the networks, but of the men-

tality of the networks, of a different way of relating between the center and the periphery and between the top and the base. Information, knowledge and the experiences of citizens are structured around the network. This certainly means that the availability of the Web in a technical sense is necessary. I am referring to the perennial problem of the digital divide and the theories which maintain that the lack of availability of the Web for some people widens even more the economic, knowledge and opportunity gap between people (Morchella and Atkinson, 1998), (Norris, 2001). Above all, the network mentality with its logical and cultural categories is also necessary. Even in the relationship with the State a new relationship is sealed, in which the demand for a state-function replaces the idea of a state-subject.

These changes that are already underway are often thwarted by political choices that move in a completely different direction. It is precisely on this point that politics has often shown a delay and a profound incomprehension of the new paradigms. The perception of change does not always change the self-referentiality of a complex system. Political systems present themselves as outdated, unable to invent new formulas, and their autonomy is called into question by information flows. The electoral machines themselves seem asphyxiated with respect to the flows of communication and the circulation of ideas. The speed of the changes should enhance the ideas of the network, of horizontality, of bidirectionality of the processes and give a mortal blow to a rigid system of conservation of political and cognitive power. But in any case, despite the resistance, we are witnessing a deconstruction of the processes with the continuous creation of micro communities, incubators of forms of participation from the lowest levels. There are few examples of politicians and policies that manage to enter the network mentality. In the new public sphere that we are facing, the network is an indispensable imperative, and at the same time it is the new political rhetoric, the new “hyperdemocracy” at the risk of populism and easy commodification. However, in the crisis of political mediators, of mass parties that have become “liquid parties” in the best of cases, the lack of political facilitators and intermediate agents, the new technologies mark a point that forces change. Of course, the Internet is a huge economic space and large companies have understood this well, but it is also the place where innovative production models are born, based on cooperative exchange and free forms of knowledge. New forms of participation and organization of public opinion are being tested on the Web. Certainly, the places of politics are redefined and the same citizens without intermediaries take on a different role.

If many definitions and articulations of democracy have been given, the same goes for e-democracy (Bentivegna, 2002). The term encompasses the practices and new experiments that we find above all locally (in Italy), but it also includes expectations and projects. New technologies have broken ancient dynamics and opened up new possibilities, just think of Obama's staff's ability to obtain considerable funding via the Internet, creating independence from the powerful “regular” lenders of US politics. Obviously, not only the new technologies have changed, but also reality itself. Languages, references, social relationships and even the very ways of constructing identity have changed. More than a permanent revolution we can speak of “permanent democracy”.

The speech is part of the already open debate on US-derived deliberative democracy (L. Bobbio), a project for a government by discussion. Everything, therefore, depends on the opportunity to create an active citizenship capable of influencing decisions. The experiments

and experiences promoted by local authorities in Italy have fully entered the traditional system of representation, but the participation of citizens has been encouraged by creating a complex digital network integrated with direct meetings. The concept of e-democracy involves citizens in political participation in its various forms and articulations. E-government, that is, the dual process of information on the one hand, and simplification on the other, is certainly a prerequisite of democracy, but not its substance. An important parenthesis could also be opened on the profound change that information, not only that which starts from the government towards citizens, but also the information system in general which is facing the darkest moment of the publishing crisis. The entire information ecosystem is being forced to change, from individual journalists to the very organization of the newspapers.

Returning to our topic, it is necessary to clearly identify the discourse that promotes the efficiency of a system towards an improvement in functioning through the inclusion of distant population groups which leads to an active participation in policy making. The efficiency of a system and the participation of citizens should not be confused, just as electronic democracy should not be confused with e-government, even if both can be inserted in the same horizon of paradigm change. Considering that complete information is the basis of any inclusion process, the deliberative polls that Fishkin (2009) and Ackerman have experimented and even patented in the United States could certainly have a wider value and a more concrete possibility of realization if they had been conducted via the Internet. The limit of the deliberative poll model lies precisely in the high cost and organizational complexity, but new technologies can help open up a new horizon to which politics can look in order to improve the quality of public discussion and political decisions.

Perhaps it is better to take a step back and briefly explain what deliberative polls are according to the original project of the founders. It was Fishkin and Ackerman's intention to be able to intervene in the formation of public opinion in order to avoid disinformation and manipulation as much as possible. Unlike the traditional survey in which the irrational, random element can determine the answers, in the deliberative survey the citizen is correctly informed and from multiple points of view. Only then is he subjected to a survey, only when he can consciously and rationally express his considered opinion. The model foresees a deliberative day in which a sample is brought together. Well, let's imagine this model applied to the network society, in which not just a small sample, but anyone can participate in this process. The value of Ackerman and Fishkin's project would thus pass from the phase of experimentation to the possibility of implementation on large numbers. Naturally, politics would guide the process. When politics has intervened for the diffusion of the Internet, there have been positive results for the reduction of the digital divide which, however, remains a problem that is not simply reduced to access, but to the use that is made of this access. Political interventions are often desired also on the regulation of the Internet itself. Despite the vastness and openness of the Internet, in reality, it can instead represent a self-referential, closed world without the possibility of a real exchange of opinions, but also of information (Sunstein, 2003). Everyone creates their own niche, everyone even creates their own blog; millions of blogs read only by the small circle of people who think like us. Our freedom to seek only the information that interests us paradoxically collides with the possibility of exchange and with the possibility of knowing realities different from ours. This sounds the

alarm for disintegration and fragmentation due to the explosion of information. Only participation and exchange create integration, social cohesion and shared values. The Internet paradox is therefore the creation of closed niches, but democracy, on the other hand, needs openness and sharing.

4. PROJECTIONS OF SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL GROWTH

An in-depth analysis of the changes affecting the world is certainly an impossible and utopian undertaking, but if we pay attention to the current socio-political scenario, it may help us to understand as much as possible.

The world connected to the transformations in new technologies has radically dominated the social economy, profoundly revolutionizing the daily life of a generation that is struggling to leave the world as we know it today for a prophetic existence that is not yet known.

It is evident, however, that today's generation, even if strongly conditioned by limits of economic resources, possesses the ability to respond to the problems and implications that they are often forced to face during the course of their lives. As Anna Granata (2012) says, ours is *«a generation that can and will suffer a lot from the difficulty of managing requests and visions that are sometimes in conflict with each other, but which at the same time has infinite potential within itself»*.

Young people therefore represent a significant component of an evolving society, because they are capable of developing skills and creativity even in times of difficulty.

Furthermore, it is young people who are most familiar with the new technology that has predominantly invaded many sectors of our society. So, in the field of robotics and artificial intelligence they are more at ease unlike those people who, up to not long ago, did not imagine the technological developments we are experiencing. *«Digital technologies - continues Anna Granata - have changed the panorama of society in recent decades, compressing times and distances and modifying habits, perceptions, methods of interaction. The cultural repercussion of this change is complex and inevitable. The Internet is configured as a heterogeneous container of ideas that are confronted on a global scale, in a system that alters some of our previous beliefs, such as the fact that information is difficult to find or that a communication takes time to be transmitted»* (Granata, 2012).

On the contrary, having digital equipment, the information is transmitted in real time through translation and critical reworking skills.

Thanks to new technologies, if used meticulously, society is on its way to progress and prosperity. Indeed, the importance of expanding the technological park represents the future challenge of a society that has made media expertise its reason for socio-economic development.

The training of young people represents the primary objective for overcoming the current crisis, exacerbated by the Covid 19 emergency, and now also by the war in Ukraine which is gripping all of humanity.

We are shyly facing the new world that is upon us with its unknowns.

Transforming the crisis into an opportunity is certainly the goal of those who care about evolution for the social and economic well-being of our society. Consistent with the times we are living in, digital transformation is the only process capable of dealing with the chal-

lenges that the future holds for us, and it is capable of bringing greater competition on national and international markets with growing innovation.

There are now many industries that are focusing their recovery expectations on digitization and some have already planned the process of transforming their companies so as not to find themselves late at the finish line of a changing world.

It is true that for the digitization of one's companies it is necessary to have an open vision and a spirit of enterprise, in order to bet on technology that day after day opens ever more cutting-edge doors for social and economic improvement.

Facing the challenges of the future is now a task that can no longer be postponed. The period of profound change we are experiencing leads us to the only path to take, that of open innovation. In order to have a better chance of survival and to overcome business challenges, companies might consider organizing their innovation processes to open up fully operational production facilities.

If the current pandemic has exacerbated the crisis, on the other hand, it has made companies aware of their backwardness. In fact, at the time of greatest efficiency during the pandemic emergency, these companies became completely socially disconnected and a blockade of all activities soon followed. Only those few far-sighted companies that have focused on research by adapting more to the latest technologies have been able to continue their activities, perhaps transforming their production or using smart working to meet the needs of the moment.

An example of change comes precisely from smart working which represented, in the most critical moments during the pandemic, the only remedy to be able to continue the company's production activities.

Smart working adopted on a wide range, according to experts, could not only represent the revolution in corporate relations of the future, but if used well, it would have the ability to eliminate the strong inequalities between regions to the advantage of the most disadvantaged areas.

Considered a tool of minor importance before the pandemic, smart working has proved to be a great resource when applied, and not only in times of emergency. It can also be used to support the future renewal process of the industrial sector, to reduce the physical presence in the factory, to broaden the audience of people involved in the production process, even if at considerable distances, and for the inclusion of people with disabilities.

The socio-working integration of people on the margins no longer represents a burden for society, because new technologies like smart working overcome architectural barriers by working from one's own home with suitable technological tools. These new technologies represent a great opportunity to promote attention to universal rights, especially for the disabled whose ability to enter the working world restores dignity and quality of life to their existence.

In addition, the development of fiber in all industrial areas has allowed for fast connections and has made the most of existing technologies.

Therefore, fully seizing the opportunities of digitization represents a great resource for creating a serene working environment, capable of supporting the renewal process and adapting to the needs of the moment in order to then open up to other business models.

Therefore, with a view to resilience, companies immediately resumed those projects that had been set aside to accelerate digitization, which now represents the future. Furthermore, in order to adapt quickly to the new operating methods, they allocated resources to actions that encourage the adoption of new technologies.

The updating of the fleet of companies undoubtedly leads to greater productivity and, consequently, to greater competition on the markets. This undoubtedly benefits everyone, thus leaving behind the social crisis of low incomes and unemployment.

The internationalization of the pandemic has therefore shaken the consciences of far-sighted entrepreneurs and shrewd politicians who have seen the possibilities of a digitization that would allow far-reaching maneuvers in order to avoid grappling with improvisations that lead nowhere as was the case during the Covid emergency.

It is therefore necessary to be organized in order to overcome emergencies that seem to be hidden around the corner.

Being well organized means facing difficulties having the audacity of a person who is aware of their ability to overcome them.

5. CONCLUSION

The uncertainty and instability of the financial markets due to the latest geopolitical and health changes have led to serious social destabilization and a slowdown in social growth.

The social balance that seemed to have been achieved during the long period of peace in Europe has been upset by the ongoing military hostilities. This highlights the fragility of the balance between the various world political systems.

We observe, therefore, that over the last fifty years two great world political orientations have been formed. The one founded on the democratic principle, and therefore on the values of equality and freedom, which contrasts with that of nationalist and autocratic regimes inclined to the use of force as an exercise of domination for fear of losing part of their power. True peace in Europe will be difficult to achieve until the logic of nationalist and imperialist cultural identity is abandoned.

The challenge is to create new opportunities for cultural enrichment precisely in the light of dissent so that the high values of civil society, such as peace and everyone's freedom, are always and unquestionably guaranteed.

The Net can foster the process of social renewal through new forms of collaboration, as it did during the pandemic to meet emergency measures. The A.I. could be the possible answer to the incorrect use of digital through the constant monitoring, filtering and verification of the veracity of the enormous amounts of data disclosed.

Once again, education and digital literacy, that is to say culture and technology, prove to be essential tools for the healthy growth of today's society, in order to avoid the disintegration and fragmentation.

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Note: The concept of identity in the technological society, written by Ammaturo, P.; Democracy and the technological challenge, written by Hassan, C.; Projections of social, economic and technological growth, written by Ammaturo, C.

EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATION AFTER THE MADRID SUMMIT

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ABSTRACT

Changes in the security environment are arguably taking place with the emergence of new complex challenges, risks, and threats, but also with the reappearance of the conventional ones. The Russian aggression against Ukraine directly confirmed the mutual connection of those different forms of threats, and additionally emphasized global geopolitical competition, with reflections on the political and security situation in the Western Balkans and beyond. This paper analyzes the current political and security challenges, and their impact on the Euro-Atlantic integration processes of the Western Balkans countries, with the emphasis on Bosnia and Herzegovina. The analysis will address interests of various players, complementarity of their endeavors, their competence and efficiency, as well as the outcomes of this interplay in order to show how it impacts on the Euro-Atlantic integration processes but also on the overall security and stability in the region. There are tangible indications of deliberate attempts to prevent further progress, while on the other hand there seems to exist a high level of consensus to overcome the obstacles. Therefore, the aim of this paper is also to explore possible answers to address the security dilemma when contemporary security challenges are fully reflected on the aspirant partner countries which do not enjoy security benefits of the Collective defense. There is empirical evidence that various steps have been taken to secure an adequate response as elaborated by the New NATO 2022 strategic concept, but also of those considered by tangible efforts made by the EU. The implications of this policy are far-reaching, including new programs and initiatives to enhance European security, and to accelerate the process of Euro-Atlantic integration. Data collection was done through the method of qualitative research and through secondary research, which includes an analysis of official documents, and an observation of the actual developments as they occurred.

Keywords: Security challenges, Ukraine, Euro-Atlantic integration, Western Balkans, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

1. INTRODUCTION

Obviously, various literature sources suggest that there is a broad consensus around the fact that the international arena is changing rapidly and dramatically, strongly influencing the European security architecture, and especially after the Russian aggression in Ukraine. The Euro-Atlantic community remains facing diverse type of threats, risks, and challenges, which come from different strategic directions. Although in recent decades the focus has been placed mainly on asymmetric threats, it is obvious that conventional ones are also strongly present in today's security environment. What makes the situation particularly complex is the fact that asymmetric threats do not disappear with the deactualization of conventional threats. Terrorism, transnational crime, proliferation of WMD, cyber threat, irregular migration, human trafficking, and many others remain present and imminent.

Distinctly, reappearance of conventional clashes occurs in a new setting of international order, which has turned out to be a multipolar one. China's rise to global power is becoming a serious warning to the West. This was particularly manifested by the disgusting use of new and disruptive technologies. This indicates the possibility of a direct conflict of economic interests with the maintenance of constant security competition, which could damage both international security and the existing international order.

However, the Russian aggression against Ukraine revealed the true dimensions of the security threats of the modern age. Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the entire Western Balkan Region, cannot remain isolated from these processes and influences.

2. THE ACTUAL SECURITY CHALLENGES

Evidently, a variety of literature sources suggest that there exists a broad consensus over the fact that the international arena is changing rapidly and dramatically, strongly influencing the European security architecture, and in particular after the Russian aggression in Ukraine.

The Euro-Atlantic community remains facing diverse types of threats, risks, and challenges, which come from different strategic directions. Although in recent decades the focus has been placed mainly on asymmetric threats, it is obvious that the conventional ones too are strongly present in today's security environment. What makes the situation particularly complex is the fact that by re-actualizing conventional threats, the asymmetric threats do not disappear. Terrorism, transnational crime, proliferation of WMD, cyber threat, irregular migration, human trafficking, and many others remain present and imminent.

Evidently, reappearance of conventional clashes occurs in a new setting of international order, which has turned out to be a multipolar one. The rise of China into a global power is becoming a serious warning to the West. It has been particularly manifested by the revolting use of emerging and disrupting technologies. This indicates a possibility of a direct conflict of economic interests taking place maintaining a constant security contest, which could undermine both the international security and the existing international order.

The Russian Federation has recently been identified as the most significant and explicit threat to the Euro-Atlantic security, and to the overall peace and stability. By annexing Crimea in 2014, the Russian Federation announced a new era of hostile relations with the West. However, the ongoing Russian aggression in Ukraine has caused a direct hostile conflict not just against the Euro-Atlantic associations, but also against the entire democratic

world. In such circumstances, in addition to numerous other actors, NATO's efforts are aimed at trying to ensure an adequate response that would neutralize the Russian pressure and its aggressive activities, but also to all the other existing challenges and risks, simultaneously.

The Western Balkans region has for decades been severely exposed to, and it is especially pronounced in today's time of intertwining foreign interests and projections, including the great powers, the Russian Federation, China, as well as others. It is apparent that several actors pursue their national interests in the region. The impact grows and has taken the form of aggressive behavior, understandably with the objective in view to prevent the region's Euro-Atlantic integration. Lately, the Russian Federation appeared as the most imminent threat in that regard. There are numerous examples of violations and interferences with the security and with the functioning of the institutions of the states of the region.

It is interesting to note that initially, in the first decade after the end of the Cold War, the Russian Federation showed no significant signs of open opposition against the NATO integration process. However, an absence of the West's focus in the Western Balkans, and its reluctance to accelerate the Euro-Atlantic integration process in the region have enabled Russia and some other foreign actors to take advantage of that situation and their influence in the region more vigorously. This can certainly be said regarding the Russian Federation, which created the situation that developed to further its political, economic, cultural and even military agenda in the Western Balkans countries.

There are numerous indicators suggesting that the Russian Federation has recently stepped up its activities in the region. With the aim to create an anti-NATO platform. Achieving that, obviously requires collaboration of its proxies in the region. Russia found its collaborators largely among the local politicians eager to assist Russian accomplish its geostrategic goals in the Western Balkans. Determination of some political officials in the region to intensify their cooperation with Russia, and especially in the context of preventing NATO expansion, was justified through the narrative of a traditional friendship with the Russian people, cultural ties, and by a shared interest in energy supply. However, numerous indicators show that much of it has been used by politicians for manipulation of their citizens. They have based. When addressing on strategic matters the political elites appeal to emotions promoting hostile feelings towards the West, while promoting an association with Russia. As Janjic elaborated in his analysis: "We love Russia, but we would mostly like to live in the countries that are members of the European Union (EU) and NATO, according to most surveys conducted in Serbia over the past few years" (Janjić, 2017).

Russia's aggressive approach has been most evident in the Republic of Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and North Macedonia. Using the capacity of diplomatic representation in an extreme manner in each of those countries, has to a great extent pushed the limits of the established diplomatic practice.

The existence of the so-called humanitarian center (Russian-Serbian humanitarian center, 2023) in the Serbian town of Nish, which has operated for more than ten years, is likely to be an additional platform for the Russian influence, as it is through that center that Russia's hybrid activities were intensified reaching all over the region. Numerous examples testify direct attempts to destabilize Montenegro, which on many occasions has been done by providing an open support to the pro-Serbian Democratic Front, which organized a series of

anti-NATO activities. There is clear evidence about the involvement of e Russian spies who have, together with some actors from Serbia, been involved in organizing anti-NATO protests in Podgorica in 2015. "Until the protests of the Democratic Front escalated, the Montenegrin government avoided announcing the obvious: that Russia is trying to destabilize Montenegro in various ways" (Nikolaidis, 2015). However, president Djukanovic clearly confirmed the existence of hybrid warfare activities on many occasions. Illegal espionage activities of Russian diplomats were discovered recently, which was confirmed by a post at the official Twitter account of Montenegro's Foreign Affairs office:"The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has declared 6 diplomats of the Embassy of the Russian Federation accredited in Montenegro as persona non grata, due to their activities that contradict the Vienna Convention on diplomatic relations and relations of mutual appreciation and respect between the two countries" (MFA, 2022).

Extensive strategic activities of the Russian Federation, aimed at preventing further NATO enlargement, are distinctly validated in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Russian influence in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been revealed through a whole range of hybrid actions. "That it was a comprehensive strategic undertaking by the Russian Federation, directed against the expansion of NATO, is confirmed by the events in Ukraine, and also by the destructive activity in BiH, which can be argued through examples of foreign-political activities of Russian officials, their activities in the UN, the behavior of the Russian ambassadors in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and through the decisions of the Peace Implementation Council in Bosnia And Herzegovina" (Kozljak, 2022, p.10).

An important question remains what would happen in the region if Russia succeeded in achieving its goals within the first weeks of its military campaign in Ukraine. Several events which occurred indicated that the aggression in Ukraine has been synchronised with the hybrid warfare in the Western Balkans. Continuous contacts maintained between Russian officials and their proxies in the region proves that this warning has been well founded. There is clear evidence about a series of meetings being held between officials of the entity of Republika Srpska and of the Russian federation, including at least ten meetings between Milorad Dodik and Vladimir Putin between 2012 and 2022 (Kozljak, 2022, p.11). This has been coupled by continuous verbal support with an aggressive tone, an intensive propaganda and disinformation activity, as well as through continued activity of disruption of the state-level institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This was evidently a part of the agenda aimed at setting up blockades on the Euro-Atlantic path of Bosnia and Herzegovina both externally and internally as well as at obstructing that process in the entire region. This sort of behavior by Russia suggests with great certainty that a grave security threat exists in the region. Therefore, it is of vital importance to look at the security concerns in the region from the perspective of the Euro-Atlantic integration process.

3. THE NATO 2022 STRATEGIC CONCEPT

The new NATO 2022 strategic concept, which has been adopted at the NATO Summit in Madrid in June 2022, represents a systematic determination by the Allies to respond comprehensively and adequately to the current and future security threats and challenges. This addresses several external and internal issues and ongoing debates and includes very demand-

ing tasks and objectives. Thus, the Strategic Concept is intended to be both, comprehensive and concrete, tackling most of the related concerns, but also providing adequate answers to all of them. The very structure of the document indicates seriousness of the situation and an intention to respond properly. The opening remarks referred to the purpose and principles of the Alliance, emphasizing the three key tasks: "deterrence and defense; crisis prevention and management; and cooperative security" (NATO Concept, 2022, p.6). The security environment has been described as very complex, more dangerous than during the Cold war time, and is explained by the: "strategic rivalry, persistent uncertainty, and frequent surprises, suggesting that the threats are global and interrelated and unpredicted" (NATO Concept, 2022, p.4). For the first time ever the Russian Federation has been openly recognized as an immediate threat to the international order. It has been stated that Russia has been engaged in establishing spheres of influence in the region, and has violated the international rules and standards, thus directly confronting the European security architecture. Putin's regime has been characterized as authoritarian, suspected of being involved in illegal investments, hostile hybrid activities, but also as an aggressor. This has been judged as a very challenging testing resilience of NATO overall. Consequently, NATO has been pushed towards reinforcing its deterrence and defense assets, improving flexibility against Russian coercion, but also towards supporting partners to be able to respond to the destructive interference, including the scenario of an open aggression. Such measures have been justified by the Russian attempts to destabilize the countries positioned to its East and South, to disrupt the autonomy of the Allies' routes across North Atlantic, its military build-up in the Baltic region, and in the Black Sea and Mediterranean Sea regions. Even though due to these activities of Russia NATO no longer considers it as its partner, the Strategic Concept leaves the possibility open so that further talks with Russia in that regard may still take place in the future.

Comparing the essence of the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept with the previous one from 2010 one may notice that the three essential tasks have persisted and have remained unchanged. Yet, the perception of the international security environment reflected in the new Concept is fairly different, hence affecting both the way in which the tasks are to be executed and the rationale behind it. Above all, it may be noticed that when compared to the new one, the NATO 2010 Strategic concept did not identify the conventional threat to be as imminent as it is today (NATO Concept, 2010, p.4). Consequently, more attention was paid to asymmetric threats, including terrorism, proliferation of the WMD, cyber security, climate change and others. As it is observed in the Cooperative security paragraph, cooperation with the Russian Federation occupies an important place, in which importance of arms control and reduction of nuclear weapons have been emphasized. The previous strategic concept also included the Open-door policy as a subtopic, with specific reference to the Western Balkans, which as a result had three countries, Croatia, Montenegro, and North Macedonia, being granted a full NATO membership.

Terrorism has been previously, and still is, classified as one of the most significant security threats. Nevertheless, other asymmetric challenges, including internal conflicts, fragility and instability beyond the Euro-Atlantic area, global warming, health diseases, irregular migration, and food and energy insecurity, are detected as vital for Euro-Atlantic security and stability.

The multipolar aspect of the new security environment is highlighted by identifying China as a direct risk, as another feature which differentiates the new strategic concept from the previous one. Evidently, China's intention to become a global power has been characterized as a forcible policy. There is a specific concern regarding an increasing strategic cooperation between China and Russia, which is viewed in the context of attempts to destabilize the current international order, including the European security architecture.

The new strategic concept also elaborates on cyber threats, distracting technologies, damage to the arms control arrangements and disarmament activities which are viewed as current challenges that jeopardize international security.

Considering the Crisis Prevention and Management as a tool for preserving stability and managing conflicts, NATO provides a development of specific capabilities and skills with which to answer sufficiently to such challenges. That includes exercises, coordination activities, international crisis response operations and enhancement of interoperability.

The Cooperative Security paragraph of the new Strategic concept undoubtedly reaffirmed the significance of NATO enlargement, as a means to strengthen security and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area. In that regard, it is important that NATO has verified its resolve for implementation of the Open-Door policy by stating that the Alliance remains open to all European democracies. This sends an encouraging message to the aspirant countries to continue with their national reforms and their integration efforts. This should be an important signal to the opponents of the NATO integration process, particularly in the context of the recent developments, and continued attempts to obstruct the autonomous decision-making process of the aspirant countries.

Also, by granting membership status to Sweden and Finland, NATO has outlined new configuration settings in terms of European security. Membership of these two countries in the Alliance increases the number of members to 32, adding another 1,300 kilometers of NATO border with the Russian Federation, and it also increases the political and military strength of NATO and its relevance.

4. IMPACTS ON ASPIRANT COUNTRIES

Evidently, the new NATO 2022 Strategic Concept additionally highlighted the importance of partnerships, with the aspirant countries, as well as the Allies' commitment to view the security of these countries as an integral part of the security of the Alliance.

Acknowledging that the current security threats, risks, and challenges have been well identified in NATO's new Strategic Concept, it is important to highlight that most, if not all of them apply to the partner countries as well. They are particularly relevant with regards to the aspirant countries which cannot utilize the security assurances that the membership in the Alliance includes. Therefore, the concerns expressed by the aspirant states facing these complex security challenges in such circumstances is understandable. In fact, as a result the expectations that the Alliance should guarantee security of its partners have been increased.

Thus, the commitment to deliver a substantial amount of support, which includes protection of sovereignty and territorial integrity of the aspirant countries remains to be of vital importance. This is clearly stated in the document as a pledge of the Alliance to enhance political and practical cooperation with the aspirant countries, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia

and Ukraine (NATO Declaration, 2022, p.2). A strong support is given for the Euro-Atlantic integration activities, and to security and stability of the aspirant countries, which have been exposed to a direct threat from the Russian Federation. In the same context, the new NATO Strategic Concept stresses out the importance of the Western Balkans and the Black Sea regions, as well as continued collaboration with its strategic partners - the European Union for example.

The impact of the new Strategic Concept on Bosnia and Herzegovina, as an aspirant country of the Western Balkans region, has been emphasized by the recognition of the fact that security of the aspirant countries is interlocked with NATO overall security. This statement was delivered at the time when continued attempts to undermine sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina persisted from both internal and external actors. That recognition of interlocked security includes measures against destructive interference from the Russian Federation. These interferences involve conventional, hybrid, and cyber methods, and the possibility of an open aggression is not excluded. The NATO stance has been supported by the assurances that the allies will contribute to strengthening the aspirants' capabilities to deal with the challenges. Therefore, it may be noted that NATO adopted a new tailor-made set of measures in terms of political and practical support, which includes defense-capability building package also through increased cooperation in providing weapons, in the area of counterterrorism, crisis management, counter-disinformation efforts, cyber security, and other areas. The resolve of NATO's stated position has become clear soon following the summit. The UK government adopted a decision, which includes sending military experts to Bosnia and Herzegovina, and to allocate financial support to the creation of a Cyber security center in Sarajevo (GOV.UK, 2022). This is viewed as a concrete support, both politically and in practical terms, provided to the institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina in coping with hybrid threats, as a follow up to the Madrid summit decisions. In effect, NATO's promise to support the country's efforts to respond to security threats, and to strengthen its resilience against destructive interference from outside, has been perceived as timely and significant.

NATO partner countries were also explicitly mentioned in the paragraph 40 of the 2022 Strategic Concept, under the Cooperative Security topic. The Open-door policy has been highlighted as a strategic interest for the Euro-Atlantic area. That is particularly important for Bosnia and Herzegovina, which has been recognised as the only Membership Action Plan (MAP) consumer. This is an additional motivating fact for all relevant actors which participate in the integration efforts. Therefore, the challenge to address the complex threats present currently at the same time offers an opportunity for Bosnia and Herzegovina to accelerate its Euro-Atlantic integration process.

Also, being recognised as a relevant aspirant country, Bosnia and Herzegovina has been given multiple promises of support to be extended by NATO allies towards enhancing the integration process. By recognising the MAP status of the country as an important fact, the Madrid summit decisions should ensure a more proactive cooperation in developing and submitting the Annual national programs speed up policy reforms, and also create the conditions which are necessary if we are to see the country invited to join NATO in the sooner rather than later. All previous elaborations suggest that the positive momentum has been

created in Madrid. There are clear propositions that the momentum should be exploited so that the integration process is accelerated through joint efforts. We are constantly reminded of the fact that the Western Balkans appears as a potential front line against NATO forces, therefore, the region's resistance against such a scenario must be strengthened and the region integrated within NATO. If that does not happen, the region is likely to remain a constant source of instability. One of the obvious options available is to make the NATO membership more certain. The country's NATO membership would certainly enhance stability in the long term, encourage internal integration within the country, attract foreign investments and thus bring economic benefits. That stresses out the importance of NATO's invitation to join in the light of its contribution to international security.

It is evident that a comprehensive approach of the Alliance, as elaborated in the new 2022 NATO Strategic Concept, indicates that the Alliance demonstrates its role in providing security, as the most relevant international organization in Europe. This is evidently and strongly manifested in the changes being made in the European security architecture.

5. CONCLUSION

The Euro-Atlantic integration process after the Madrid summit has obviously taken on new forms and a different character. Bearing in mind the current security challenges and threats that have caused tangible changes in the international arena, it is obviously necessary to take an innovative approach regarding the emerging security dilemma. The combination of the conventional threat represented by open military conflict in Europe with hybrid and numerous other modern forms of warfare forced the Alliance to offer adequate responses at its latest summit in Madrid. All of this had a major impact on the partner countries, especially the aspirants for NATO membership. The fact that they still don't enjoy the benefits of the collective defence has prompted the Alliance to find alternative options. Decision to invite Finland and Sweden to the Alliance significantly changed the security architecture of Europe. The summit decision to incorporate remaining aspirants, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the Alliance's security concept clearly marked the Euro-Atlantic future of the country. The introduction and implementation of the Defence Capacity Building Initiative undoubtedly demonstrated decisive step to implement its decisions by concrete programs and measures, which will assist Bosnia and Herzegovina and other Western Balkans countries to integrate into the Euro/Atlantic associations, NATO and the EU.

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ACCELERATED INTEGRATION OF FINLAND AND SWEDEN INTO NATO DUE TO THE WAR IN UKRAINE: POSSIBILITIES AND OBSTACLES

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ABSTRACT

The Russian invasion of Ukraine brought about major changes in international relations, ranging from relations between states to defense and security policies. The start of this conflict was a signal that the security of many countries was being threatened, therefore many countries began to invest in their armies. States that are territorially close to Russia obviously felt more threatened because the political and territorial aspirations of the Russian state might extend to their countries. Two of these countries are Sweden and Finland, which until this conflict were militarily neutral, but after Russian aggression in Ukraine began, they started to realize that being neutral at this moment and this geopolitical context has no meaning. Consequently these two countries applied to join NATO, which as the most powerful military organization in global scale firmly opposed Russian aggression in Ukraine. Up till now Finland made it to become a NATO member while Sweden is blocked by Turkish veto. According to article 5 of the Atlantic Charter, an attack on any member state is considered an attack on the organization itself. Hence, with their membership in NATO, the possibility of Russian aggression on these countries will lessen since it is obvious that Russia wants to avoid open military conflict with NATO. It is obvious that Finland and later Sweden as NATO's member, will increase their military capacities upgrading their security vis-à-vis Russia, but also benefits for NATO will be huge too. In this paper we will discuss about causes of Russian invasion on Ukraine but mostly we will examine the reasons that influenced Finland and Sweden to apply for membership in NATO, why Turkey is blocking Sweden membership, the reaction of the organization regarding the application for membership, which are benefits for Finland and Sweden in one side and for NATO in other side and the geopolitical changes that would bring the membership of these countries to NATO.

Keywords: Russian invasion, security, Sweden, Finland, membership, NATO, aggression, Ukraine.

1. INTRODUCTION

Russia's attack on Ukraine on the 24th of February of last year has shaken the current system of international relations and paved the way for deep geopolitical changes. This war has caused a global crisis at least in economic-, political and security terms. Also, the crisis has revealed a number of problems that were ignored for a long time. Among them are Europe's energy dependence on Russian gas and oil, tolerance of Russia's aggressive policy towards its neighbors, little attention given to the consequences of hybrid warfare waged particularly by Russia and the possibility that Russia will use the weak points of the European security system to destabilize Euro-Atlantic interests. When it comes to the latter there are different regions which are vulnerable to Russian diversions, most notably the Western Balkans, Baltic Sea region and Caucasus region.

The possibilities of destabilization in the Western Balkans through Russian interference mostly could occur on what are seen as weakest spots: Bosnia and Herzegovina's internal divisions and lack of the functionality of the central state, Montenegro's ethnic composition, and relationships between Kosova and Serbia. Bosnia and Herzegovina comprises Federation Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska which comprises 49% of the territory of the state and is considered to be an ally of Vladimir Putin's Russia. Montenegro's Serbian population is more than 30% and its political representatives are prone to be influenced by Belgrade, and Kosovo still is not recognized by Serbia and particularly the latter is exerting huge political influence on the Serbian minority concentrated on the north of Kosovo, which remains hot spot for Kosovo's and regional stability. So at a certain moment these political contexts might be used by Russia to destabilize Western Balkans. One should not forget the Serbia through the Serbian population has influence in all three countries, and furthermore Serbia is the only country in the Western Balkans that has not imposed sanctions on Russia. On the other side also Caucasus region with ongoing conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan as well as Russian direct interference on Georgia is prone to destabilization.

However, in this paper, we will not focus on the Balkans and Kosovo, but on the Baltic Region and on another situation that has resulted from the war in Ukraine, the admission of Finland in NATO and Sweden pending application to become a member of NATO with accelerated procedures. Sweden and particularly Finland were traditionally militarily neutral countries. Particularly the position of Finland because of shared geography with Russia used to be and is still very precarious. The war in Ukraine has influenced the security of the Baltic Sea region as well. Therefore the main research question for this paper is whether the Russian aggression against Ukraine prompted the application of Finland and Sweden for NATO membership? An additional questions are whether this process is of mutual benefit for Finland and Sweden in one side and NATO in other side and whether there are any obstacle inside NATO for this process? We will try to answer these questions through thorough literature review and through analyzing the most recent actions, statements and policies of relevant political actors. The war in Ukraine has changed many geopolitical contexts in different parts of the world but most prominently in Europe. In this context Baltic Region is most affected from these changes. Relationships between Finland and Sweden with Russia have changed dramatically. Europe attitudes towards Putin's Russia has changes as well. And this war, as the cases of Finland and Sweden show, but also of Ukraine itself, has changed also NATO forever.

2. RUSSIAN "JUSTIFICATION" OF THE WAR AND CAUSES OF THE AGGRESSION ON UKRAINE

Russia has for a long time expressed dissatisfaction with the expansion of NATO near its borders, especially in the Baltic republics, but also in other countries of the former Soviet bloc. It has been considered that during the first years after the fall of communism and dissolution of the USSR, Russia lacked the force and political will to deal with this issue more directly. This changed with Putin rise to power in 2000, which was accompanied with Russia using its oil and gas resources to improve its economic performance and consequently to gain again political and

military assertiveness accompanied by no serious reaction by the West (Ash, 2023; Plokhy, 2017; Mearsheimer, 2014). It should be noted that particularly Russian energetic policies were successful in regard to EU countries and Europe in general since it made them dependent on Russian oil and gas and therefore increased Russian political influence in Europe. According to the European Council (2023) ‘Russia’s share of the market was around 50% until the second half of 2021. Since then, the share of Russian gas started to decline rapidly and the market shares of other suppliers started to grow. This process sped up in 2022 in particular. Since June 2022, Russia’s share of EU gas imports is below 20%. In November, it was 12.9%’.

At the April 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest, the US administration was interested in paving a clear path for the admission of Ukraine and Georgia to NATO. However, this was opposed by France and Germany and in the final statement it was mentioned that these countries will become members of NATO in the future without specifying the concrete steps. Shortly after this summit, Russia attacked Georgia and took control of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which it later recognized as independent states. The reaction of the West was extremely weak (Ash, 2023). The dramatic developments in Ukraine in 2014 culminating with the Maidan Revolution lessened Russian influence in Ukraine, which remains as Plokhy (2017) points out at the core of the concept of ‘Russian World’. Political changes in Ukraine in 2014 were used as a pretext for the open Russian occupation of Crimea and disguised implication of Russian forces in the uprising of pro-Russian forces in Eastern Ukraine in 2014. As a consequence of this political and military context Russia started on 24th of February of 2022 the unprovoked aggression on Ukraine. This was also been justified from Russian side, among other things, by the possibility of NATO getting even closer to Russia’s borders, in areas that Russia considers its sphere of interest, or as it has been defined by Russian strategists and politicians ‘near abroad’, and turning Ukraine into an anti-Russian state (Mearsheimer, 2022a; Nye, 2022; Mearsheimer, 2014; Putin, 2022; Plokhy, 2017).

The causes of war was and is still a hot topic of debate among politicians and academicians in the West (Nye, 2022). Even in the West there are prominent political scientists as John J. Mearsheimer (2014; 2022a) which since 2014 considered that war in Ukraine is the fault of West because of its tendencies to incorporate Ukraine within its sphere of interest, with final aim to integrate it within NATO disregarding Russian interest and grievances. And in general this attitude prevailed in analysis of the causes of the war (Person & McFaul, 2022). Nevertheless other authors, among them Person and McFaul (2022), argue that main reason behind this aggression is not military threat of Ukraine being part of NATO, because as they point out Russia is aware of defensive purposes of NATO and has cooperated with it many times in the past (particularly during NATO intervention in Afghanistan) but it is the fear of Putin from expansion of democratic regimes on its neighborhoods as in Georgia and Ukraine and influence that these democratic tendencies might have in Russia itself and Putin’s autocratic regime.

3. PUTIN BACKFIRES ON THE BALTIC SEA

In other side the reaction of West on the Russian aggression on Ukraine, led by US was prompt, changing its many policies and priorities, including those in economic and energy sphere, in security and military issues, but also in international relations, etc., however remaining cautious on dealing with Russia (Mankoff, 2023; Joffe, 2023). The war is also changing the dynamics within the European Union. There is an effort to strengthen European integration, but also to strengthen the security component within it. The return of Germany as a future military power will be one of the consequences of this war. However, it is clear that the security of EU countries and Europe as a whole still depends on the military power of the USA and its role within NATO (Ash, 2023). From the beginning there were many scenarios which may risk the escalation of the situation and involvement of the West with possibilities of the nuclear war particularly if Russia is losing the war or if USA and NATO is dragged to the conflict itself (Mearsheimer, 2022b). Up till now, however there is no direct involvement of NATO or

any NATO member in warfare, apart from their direct involvement in supplying Ukraine Army with military equipment and expertise and imposing heavy economic and political sanctions on Russia (Pifer 2023; O'Brien, 2023). As for Russia itself, it is trying to use this war to establish a new balance of forces in global scene, concentrating in Global South (Africa and Latin America) to exert political and economic influence but also trying to establish close relationships with China and India (Goul-Davies, 2023; The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, 2023).

Among other things, this aggressive Russian policy was intended to send signals to countries such as Sweden and Finland not to move further in their rapprochement with NATO. But this Putin's policy failed spectacularly in the case of Finland and Sweden (Joffe, 2023; Gunter, 2022; Kannianen, 2022). Furthermore both of them from two militarily non-aligned countries, although close and in partnership with NATO, decided to apply with accelerated procedures for NATO membership, with Finland finally becoming a NATO member on 4th of April 2023. As NATO General Secretary Jens Stoltenberg (2023) said "President Putin had as a declared goal of the invasion of Ukraine to get less NATO... He is getting exactly the opposite... Finland today, and soon also Sweden will become a full-fledged member of the alliance" ("Putin triggered 'historic' Nordic enlargement of NATO", 2023).

During the Cold War, these two countries, especially Finland, due to its distinct geopolitical context and historical considerations, had a neutral political and military stance known as Finlandization. Finland suffered many Soviet invasions in the wake of the Second World War and during that war. It also shares a long border with Russia, as it is seen in fig.1 below. Therefore after the war and during the Cold War there was a consensus on Finland's neutrality (Gunter, 2022, p.92). This political neutrality ended with the end of the Cold War and the membership of Finland and Sweden in the EU in 1995, but a policy of military independence and non-membership in NATO dominated the politics of the two countries until the beginning of Russian attack on Ukraine. As Gunter (2022) points out that "Ironically, "Finlandize" may soon come to take on a new, almost opposite meaning!"(p.92).

Fig.1. Map showing the 1340 km long border between Finland and Russia.



Note: This map has been taken from "What is Nato and why is Finland joining?", 2023.

Even different authors and experts such as Ann-Sofie Dahl (2017), Christopher S. Chivvis (2017) etc., were skeptical about the possibility that these two states one day will become part of NATO. Although according to Anne Sofie Dahl, benefits of such memberships for all parties, meaning Finland, Sweden and NATO will be great on terms of increased security for Baltic Region, and improvements of military capacities of NATO itself as well as decreasing possibilities of Russia to use these territories of these countries in any future confrontation with the West (p.77-78).

4. PUBLIC OPINION MOOD ON NATO ACCESSION

Public opinion in Finland and Sweden has been against the application for NATO membership for a long time. It has been considered in both countries that this military neutrality is beneficial politically and economically for them. And to a certain degree this was true up to the beginning of the Russian aggression on Ukraine. On one side they were quite integrated militarily into NATO structures without being members and on the other side they also benefited from close economic cooperation with Russia. However Russian invasion on Ukraine changed the mood of public opinion in both countries since there was increased need and demand for greater strategic security (Forsberg, 2023).

According to Gallup surveys, Finland's citizens during the years 2005 - 2021 were mostly in high numbers against the accession to NATO, which ranged from a minimum of 51% against (year 2021) to a maximum of 71% against (year 2012). At the same period a maximum yes vote was in the year 2014 with 30% and the minimum was 18% (year 2012) in favor of NATO membership (cited by Kanninen, 2022).

With the beginning of the war, citizens' mood on this issue changed drastically. Therefore according to Gallup surveys in February 28, 2022 – 53% of citizens approved NATO membership, in March 14, 2022 – 62%, in April 27, 2022 – 65%, in May 6, 2022 – 76% and in June 26, 2022 - 79% (cited by Kanninen, 2022, p. 286). Also according to a survey conducted by Finnish Business and Policy Forum EVA 78% of Fins in November of 2022 had a positive attitude toward NATO membership (“Finnish Support for NATO Membership Rises to 78%”). While all recent data as shown above on this issue suggest high approval rate on Finland membership to NATO, acting prime minister, social democrat Sanna Marin, which led Finland's effort to join NATO, lost elections on 2nd April 2023. However support for NATO membership remained strong because there is a national consensus on this issue. Two days after national elections in Finland which shaped another majority that will form government, Finland officially joined NATO (Bland, 2023; Gonzalez & Lynch, 2023; Kirby, 2023).

In Sweden in January 2022, only 42% were in favor of joining NATO, and after the beginning of the Russian aggression, 51% were in favor and only 24% against (Gallup survey cited by Kanninen, 2022). According to Ipsos, Novus etc., (cited by Statista, 2023) in May 2022 58% and in July 2022 64% of Swedes were in favor of joining NATO. Comparing these figures with those of April 2014 and December 2014, when 56%, respectively 47%, were against NATO membership (cited by Statista, 2023), the contrast could not be more obvious. And this contrast in the mood of public opinion in Sweden is directly related to the danger that Swedish citizens have felt for their security as a result of Russia's attack on Ukraine. Lastly there was also a change in Sweden's government, where after many decades social-dem-

ocrats lost election resulting with a center right government (coalition of Moderates, Liberals and Conservatives) in Sweden supported by the right wing populist party (Sweden Democrats). However the direction of Sweden foreign policy regarding NATO membership didn't change as well as public support for this issue ("The Impact of Sweden's Next Government on NATO Accession and the EU", 2023). In the Gallup survey of September 2022, 81% of Finns and 74% of Swedes approved of NATO's leadership (Reinhart, 2022).

5. THE ROAD TO NATO MEMBERSHIP

Finnish and Swedish politics reacted quickly to these changes in public opinion, even though at the beginning of the war, politicians still continued to be skeptical of NATO membership. Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty (1949) which guarantees the solidarity of member states in the event of an attack by a foreign country to a NATO member state was appealing for both Scandinavian countries in the new unsecure geopolitical context. Therefore on May 18, 2022 Finland and Sweden applied for membership. On June 29, 2022, at the Madrid Summit, NATO leaders officially extended an invitation to Finland and Sweden to become full member states (Madrid Summit Declaration, 2022).

However the accession process has been a thorny road to both countries, but particularly to Sweden. Although NATO wanted both countries to be admitted simultaneously, once Finland cleared the hurdles of membership with Turkey, NATO decided to admit Finland, despite Sweden's admission being delayed due to Turkish objections. This should be seen also from the perspective of the fragility of Finland's geographical context and its relationships with Russia, considering that Finland as it was seen shares more than 1.300 km with Russia. Furthermore as stated above Sweden already is integrated in many NATO military structures. The latter's accession protocol up till now has been ratified by 28 countries except Turkey and Hungary ("Sweden's road to NATO", 2023).

The reaction of Putin and Russia was milder than expected. During a visit in Kazakhstan in 2022 he emphasized that Russia does not have territorial problems with Finland and Sweden as it has with Ukraine and that the only problematic issue will be the establishment of military installations and equipment in these two countries for which Russia must to respond by increasing its military potential in the Baltic Sea (Roth, 2022). The recent Russian reaction of Finland becoming a NATO member is concentrated around Finland losing its neutrality and according to the Russian Foreign Ministry also its influence in international relations. Furthermore Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu pointed out that this move will risk further escalation of the situation in Ukraine and the Kremlin stated that Russia will take 'counter-measures' ("Finland joins NATO in historic shift", 2023). However, there is no clear idea what is meant by these counter-measures. In the current context, it seems that Russia is willing to react only if offensive weapons, including nuclear weapons, are placed on the territory of Finland, which could be seen as a step to endanger Russia's territory. This is not likely to happen and USA and EU allies seem very cautious about this issue. But as in the case of arming Ukraine (Pifer, 2023), Russia's red lines are not clear, regarding the Baltic Region generally and Finland and Sweden specifically.

6. MUTUAL BENEFITS

From the beginning all those that favored the accession of two Scandinavian countries in NATO considered that it would be of mutual benefits. Finland and Sweden will benefit mostly on security

terms being part of the strongest and biggest collective security and military alliance in the world. Also the fragile position of the Baltic member states would be strengthened and in this new geopolitical context they will feel more secure. On the other side NATO will benefit from a new advanced geopolitical and geostrategic position in the Baltic Sea but also NATO will admit two countries with a highly developed economy and modern and strong military. It should be noted, as it is indicated in fig.2 below, that Finland has one of the best armies in Europe. Finland is among few states that retained a conscription army and its air and naval forces are prepared and equipped to counter Russian attack (“Finland joins NATO in historic shift”, 2023). It is also important to stress that Sweden has a powerful military industry which might serve as a very important component within NATO structures once admitted as a full member (Gunter, 2022). Furthermore NATO will benefit also from having two countries with exemplary liberal democracy by further strengthening the values it proclaims to protect: democracy, freedom and human rights. As Chivvis (2017) points out “Both countries share the core political values on which NATO has been founded for 70 years” (p.1).

Fig.2. Finland and Sweden armed forces according to the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) in 2022.

	 Finland	 Sweden
Troops total	257,250	24,600
Active 	19,250	14,600
Reserve 	238,000	10,000
Main battle tanks 	100	120
Combat aircraft 	107	96
Helicopters 	19	106
Armoured personnel carriers 	613	1,064
Artillery 	672	357

Note: These data taken from IISS are elaborated and cited in “What is Nato and why is Finland joining?”, 2023.

7. THE TURKISH RESERVATION AND HUNGARY DOUBTS

The Turkish reservation for the membership of Sweden and Finland in NATO is resulting recently in blocking this process only for Sweden. Among reasons of this blockade one may mention, concerns about terrorism and security issue linked to organizations such as PKK, YPG and FETO⁸, Turkey's repositioning within NATO – trying to revive the F-36 purchase agreement from the US, the attempt to influence the change of US policy in Syria and the attempt to assert Turkey's role in global and regional matters as new regional power (strate-

8 PKK is Kurdistan's Workers Party which is engaged in political and military struggle with Turkish state for autonomy (previously also for independent state) for the Kurds in Turkey. PKK is designated as terrorist organization by Turkey, USA and EU. YPG is People's Defense Units, is a mainly Kurdish group in Syria and the primary component of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). FETO (Fethullah Terrorist Organisation) is name given by Turkish state to the Gulen movement, which accuses this movement on failed 2016 coup attempt.

gic autonomy from the West although part of the alliance) with an influence on international relations and a role in mediating between Russia and Ukraine (Alaranta, 2022).

As it stands, after huge pressure on Turkey regarding this process, the main reason why Turkey is not giving up its veto on Sweden admission to NATO is related to its request for extradition of those persons that Turkey deems as terrorists and demanding also from Sweden no to harbor terrorist organizations. While Sweden stresses that it changed its terrorist laws and is abiding to

Trilateral Memorandum of Understanding signed in Madrid in 2022, Turkey denies that Sweden is complying with the terms of this memorandum. Many of the extraditions have been blocked by Sweden courts, with Sweden justification that there is a clear division of powers between executive and judicial branches in Sweden. Recently another hurdle is standing in the path of Sweden to NATO membership. That is the burning of Koran by some right wing activists which Sweden is considering that it falls within the legal framework of the freedom of speech while Turkey considers that it is a hate crime and therefore there should be criminal prosecution. However it is considered that this Turkish position will be changed after 14 of May general and presidential elections, which for the first time are deemed to threaten President Erdogan's presidency (Levin, 2023; "Why are Turkey and Hungary against Sweden joining NATO?", 2023).

On the other side Hungary has joined Turkey in blocking Sweden from becoming a NATO member. While Hungary is letting Turkey to lead in this process, the reason behind this Hungarian reservation is constant Sweden criticism of Viktor Orban's policies regarding human rights, rule of law and democracy in Hungary. This Sweden stance has angered Prime Minister Orban which is using the Turkish position to further criticize Sweden's attitude on Hungary ("Why are Turkey and Hungary against Sweden joining NATO?", 2022). However when Turkey changes its position it is considered that Hungary will lift its veto and Sweden's path to join NATO alliance will be cleared.

8. CONCLUSIONS

Russia's attack on Ukraine should be viewed from two seemingly incompatible perspectives, but which essentially reflect the character of Russian politics, both domestically and externally. First, the Russian invasion is a reaction to the fear of losing strategic depth in Ukraine with the possibility of Ukraine being integrated into Euro-Atlantic structures, mainly in NATO. The best Russian foreign policy analysts consider that Ukraine continues to be the central pillar of the "Russian World" concept. But this policy is not confined only toward Ukraine. Its intentions are deeper, trying to affect other neighboring countries and regions, especially in the Baltic region, Belarus, Moldova and the Caucasus. On the other hand, this attack should also be viewed from the perspective of Putin's authoritarian regime's fear of the expansion of democracy in its neighboring countries. And while Ukraine is not only a large country, but with close relations in the past with Russia, the fear of a "new wave" of democratization that would pave the way for replacement of Putin from the power and Russia's democratization might seem real from the Kremlin's perspective.

Russian invasion on Ukraine has paved the way for geopolitical changes that have also caused a shock on the European security system which in other ways has influenced the

dramatic changes of policies so far. In addition to changes in energy policies, the increased cohesion of the NATO and EU member states has also occurred, mostly due to the fear of Russia jeopardizing European collective security. Now Europe is building policies to remove its energy dependence on Russian oil and gas by finding alternative solutions to European energy problems. On the other hand, it seems that the NATO alliance has received another impetus and a new consensus about its importance in the European collective security scheme even among some of the skeptical EU states.

Such a rapid change has influenced the application of Finland and Sweden to become NATO members influencing not only on the security of these two countries but also contributing to the change in the balance of power in the Baltic Region in favor of NATO alliance, isolating Russian sphere of influence on that region and potentially decreasing threat on security of the Baltic countries by Russia. In this regard, Russia's attempt to stop the expansion of NATO, especially in the Baltic region, has completely failed. The signals sent by the Russian attack achieved the opposite effect. Instead of stopping expansion, Russia is doing the opposite. Neutral Finland and Sweden set NATO's borders deep in the Baltic region.

It is more than certain that the benefits from the membership of the two Scandinavian countries in NATO will be mutual. On the one hand, Finland and Sweden will increase their defense capacities and will create the conditions to prevent any Russian adventure in the Baltic, increasing the security of both countries. On the other hand, NATO expands its borders in a very important strategic region and, moreover, gains two members that have armies with high professional capacities and sophisticated military equipment, which will increase the common worth of the joint forces of the NATO alliance. Moreover, NATO also benefits in terms of the values it represents, given that both countries are models of democracy, human rights and social welfare.

Until now, Turkey (and to some extent Hungary) are blocking the entry of Sweden into NATO with accelerated procedures, while this blockade have been lifted for Finland. Even the Turkish blockade must be seen in the light of geopolitical changes and the efforts of various actors to reposition themselves in the changing world. However it is expected that after the general election that will be held in Turkey on 14th of May 2023 this Turkish stance will change. Therefore, the end of this process seems not too distant. With the finalization of Sweden's membership in NATO, the defeat of Russian foreign and security policy in the Baltic Region will be completed.

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INTERETHNIC RELATIONS AND DEMOCRACY IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA

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ABSTRACT

Being one of the youngest democracies in the old continent, the Republic of North Macedonia has been faced with immense challenges in its road to statehood, democratization, and international integration. Being a multiethnic, multilingual, and multi religious country has made Macedonia a very specific case of a permanent struggle for "domination" and gaining the virtue of being "state builders" and "state owners" amongst its ethnic groups, mainly the two dominating ones: the Macedonians and the Albanians. The first always striving to perceive the country as their ethnic domain and permanently promoting the "idea" that the "Albanians do not need an additional motherland since they have Albania and Kosovo", while the latter have permanently insisted on the fact that Macedonia should be built as a land of equal citizens in which collective rights will not depend on one's background. Such contradictions have further burdened the at times very fragile country.

Having in mind the specific balances that have to be maintained in Macedonia, it's obvious that the maintenance of stable if not good interethnic relations has been and will remain one of the main pillars of guaranteeing Macedonia's functionality. But, on the other hand those same interethnic relations have played a crucial role in pushing forward the democratic processes in the country. Therefore, the main idea behind the paper is to provide an analysis of the importance of the interethnic relations on Macedonia's democratization, both from a researcher's as well as from ordinary citizens' point of view.

Key words: *interethnic relations, multiethnicity, Republic of North Macedonia, democracy*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Republic of North Macedonia, besides being the second youngest democracy in the old continent (after the Republic of Kosovo), is also one of the most specific countries in the region, both in terms of the functionality of the political system and in the specifically built democracy. This due to the fact that North Macedonia during the first decade of its existence maintained a system of total domination of one ethnic group over the others, while during the other two decades of its existence has (according to some successfully and according to others unsuccessfully) has built some sort of a “democracy” based on numbers.

Macedonia, being one of the constituent Republics of former Yugoslavia, was without a doubt one of the least developed Republics, but at the same time one of the most attached ones to Serbia. Perhaps due to the similar ethnic composition, the Macedonian political elite seemed to follow all anti-Albanian policies created and declared by certain political circles. This on the other hand, resulted in permanent worsening of the inter-ethnic relations within Macedonia. Such worsened inter-ethnic relations continued to worsen even further after the country’s independence due to the major differences in understanding of the concept upon which the country should have been developed between the Albanians and the Macedonians being the two major ethnicities with the country (Aziri & Emurllai, 2014, 472).

As Macedonia parted from the Yugoslav federation, it also left behind the communist Marxist ideology, re-orienting itself towards Europe and the occident. But its path towards this new strategic orientation is characterized by ambiguities, oscillations, and many challenges. The first foreign policy formulations were made on a document adopted by the then Republic of Macedonia’s Parliament, ten days after the declaration of independence. This document stressed the alignment of North Macedonia with key United Nations’ resolutions, while emphasizing that the strategic interest for the country was joining the European integration process (Sokalski, 2003).

After the breakdown of former Yugoslavia, the state-building process of the Republic of Macedonia, from the legal aspect, began with its Constitution of 1991, which was expected to reflect positively in terms of ethnic relations, but, this did not happen, because the state was defined under historical fact that Macedonia is established as a national state of the Macedonian people, in which full equality as citizens and permanent co-existence with the Macedonian people is provided for Albanians, Turks, Vlachs, Romanians and other nationalities 5 , which was not supported by political representatives of the ethnic Albanians, which considered that this Constitution began to build a specific type of ethnocentric regime with ethno-centric character as a historical injustice to the Albanian people which was unacceptable for a multiethnic society (Shazivari & Zejneli, 2014).

The Macedonian–Albanian relationship has been a defining feature of Macedonian politics. This dynamic has been especially amplified since Macedonia’s independence in 1991. The Albanian population’s dissatisfaction with its political status and with the Macedonian nation-building process lies at the heart of this dynamic. The root cause of this situation is the adoption of the 1991 Constitution of the Macedonian state, which denied the non-majority communities’ equal status both on paper and in reality (Reka, 2008, 55).

From the beginning, Macedonian political parties wanted to make it clear to the Albanians that this country is called Macedonia, that Albanians will continue to be foreigners in

their own ethnic lands and that their rights will continue to depend on the desire and the will of Macedonian political parties and the Macedonians. On the other hand, Albanian political parties were making it clear that, in the future, they will not allow Albanians to remain “tenants in their own home”. Bearing this in mind, it is not too difficult to conclude that the first decade of the pluralist life in Macedonia was characterized by the tendency for dominance and positioning (Aziri, 2008, 44).

The reasons behind the political crisis in the Republic of Macedonia are rooted in the very beginnings of political pluralism. There are three important issues that need to be mentioned. First, the deterioration of the inter-ethnic relations in the country as a result of not having the correct approach and idea regarding democracy and pluralism. In fact, pluralism was not perceived by the representatives of the two numerically largest communities as a competition between ideas and programs in building a sustainable society. Second, the privatization of the public companies, a privatization characterized in many cases by bribery, corruption and a lack of professionalism. Third, the country’s admittance to the United Nations, under its temporary name Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) (Aziri, 2016).

Most ethnic Macedonian politicians and average citizens alike acknowledge that, historically, ethnic Albanians have been excluded from the country’s decision-making processes. Notwithstanding the talk of equality that greeted the post-Yugoslav transition of the early 1990s, Albanians were the subject of political and economic discrimination during Macedonia’s first decade as an independent state, as they had been in communist times. Albanian power was always nominal, certainly at the elite level. Instead, Albanian power was limited to control of peripheral ministries, a ploy designed to lend the state a veneer of legitimacy in the eyes of Macedonia’s largest ethnic minority community ...Macedonians controlled all major levers of power. In the same vein, Albanians were underrepresented in the public administration, and use of the Albanian language in parliament and higher education was prohibited. For the Albanian community, which, given its size, felt entitled to the same rights and privileges as the titular nation, the lopsided concentration of power established at independence was a source of great discontent, one which its political representatives proved unable to address through Macedonia’s fledgling democratic institutions (Rilipovski & Pendarovski, 2013).

As reported by USAID/Macedonia during the first decade of Macedonia’s existence as an independent country “While Macedonia is a multi-ethnic society, two groups, Albanians and Macedonians, predominate. Social, geographic and political cleavages tend to reinforce the basic ethnic one. The political system is organized largely along ethnic lines. Political parties are ethnic parties, the mixed proportional representation electoral system encourages ethnic voting, the media and civil society are segmented, the civil service is heavily Macedonian in makeup, and education is separate below the university level. Macedonia appears locked into the political system that revolves around ethnicity, rather than one that emphasizes civic identity and loyalty to a set of political ideas (USAID, 2020)”.

What has changed since?! Not much in reality, but a lot if expressed in numbers. Now the Republic of North Macedonia (since the Prespa agreement), remains a multiethnic country, a country for several issues divided along ethnic lines, dominated by the Macedonians and Albanians. The political parties in the country remain largely ethnic parties, also during the

last couple of years this division has been blurred due to the ability of the Social Democratic Union (SDSM) to attract ethnic Albanians within its structures. The electoral system has transformed into a proportional system, but one that is a source of permanent dissatisfaction among political parties and elites. The media are quite fragmented, but lately not along ethnic lines as much as along party lines. Civil service remains heavily Macedonian, although in institutions led by ethnic Albanians there has been a surge in the employment of ethnic Albanians based on the principles of the Ohrid Framework agreement. The political systems at large, continues to revolve around ethnic lines, although lately other ethnicities (the Bulgarians as required by the Republic of Albania) have become a source of political debate, but once more political debate based on “ethnic emotions”.

One still cannot shake a feeling that the Macedonians continue to struggle to convince themselves and the rest of the world that they are “ancient Macedonians according to some” and/or “Slavic Macedonians” according to others. On the other side the Albanians remain firm that being direct descendants of the Illyrians they are the original inhabitants, native to geographic Macedonia and therefore cannot be considered and treated as non-equal to the ethnic Macedonians. This feeling is especially enforced by the fact that if compared, Serbs in neighboring republic of Kosovo constitute no more than several percent of the total population (as contrasted to over a third of the total population of North Macedonia being ethnic Albanians), but still enjoy much greater collective rights and freedoms compared to the Albanians in North Macedonia.

Surely one of the main issues that has been in many cases a burden to the overall development of the Republic of Macedonia have been the unsolved inter-ethnic relations, mainly due to a major gap in understanding the nature of the country among the two main ethnical groups. The ethnic Macedonians tend to view Macedonia as a crooning of centuries in sacrifice for the creation of an ethnic Macedonian country and therefore prefer to consider the Republic of Macedonia as a country of the Macedonians in which other ethnicities live and co-exist as well. On the other hand, in many cases the ethnic Albanians tend to view the Republic of Macedonia as Tito’s creation and consider themselves autochthon to the regions they inhabit for the moment. Besides this, the Macedonian political elites in many cases have stood shoulder to shoulder with the Serb political elites in the creation of state policies which in many cases were anti-Albanian and this has without a doubt complicated the inter-ethnic relations even further (Aziri& Lutfu, 2014).

In general the following generalizations regarding the Republic of North Macedonia can be made:

- The second youngest democracy on the old continent
- Multiethnic state
- Multi-religious state
- Multilingual country
- The only republic that managed to secede from the former Yugoslav Federation
- A place where the parliamentary and governmental structures have a mixed religious structure
- Country of the "small majority" and the "big minority".
- A country where collective rights depend on representation in the ethnic structure of the population.

- A place where everyone invokes historical rights, but rarely anyone deals with the present and the future.
- A place where the "other ethnic side" is always the bearer of the blame for state and social failures.
- Country of those who claim "Political East"
- Country of those who claim "Religious East"
- Country of those who spiritually claim "the West"
- Country of those who declaratively claim "the West"
- Place of scandals and "bombs"
- Place of deep inter-ethnic tensions
- Place of relaxed inter-ethnic relations.
- A rare place that has compromised with the look of the flag.
- A rare place that has compromised on the name of the place.
- A rare place that makes compromises in the way it weaves history.
- A country that still has not regulated relations between religious communities.
- A secular country, but where the state takes care of the Macedonian Orthodox Church and the latter claims a key role in preserving the Macedonian fabric.
- NATO member country.
- Place in deep debates regarding the compromises that must be made in terms of language and history to guarantee the removal of barriers on the way to the European Union. Several defining moments with serious impacts on the interethnic relations in the Republic of Macedonia should be kept in mind:
- Since the independence of Macedonia was not understood equally by the political subjects of the Macedonian bloc and the Albanian political parties, contradictions were presented from the beginning which will leave a deep mark on the relations between the two numerically largest ethnic groups in the country.
- Approval of the Declaration on the Sovereignty of Macedonia,
- Referendum for the independence of Macedonia
- Adoption of the 1991 Constitution
- September 1991: Four-day mass protests were held in Struga that carried a single request: The re-opening of parallels in the Albanian language.
- At the end of September, the Albanian political parties in Macedonia, under the motto of peace, equality and democracy, organized massive protests in all the cities inhabited by Albanians.
- January 1992 - Referendum for political-territorial autonomy of Albanians in Macedonia.
- The events of Ladorishti
- Skopje Bit Bazaar events
- The events surrounding the establishment of the UT
- Police violence in Gostivar
- The 2001 conflict
- The proposal of the Academy of Sciences and Arts of Macedonia for the exchange of territories

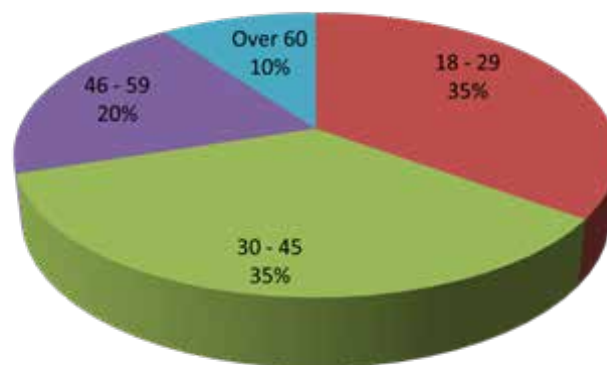
- Signature of MKO
- Encyclopedia of the Academy of Sciences and Arts of the Republic of Macedonia,
- Problematic textbooks for primary school students,
- The insistence that Albanian students learn the Macedonian language as a regular subject from the first grade,
- The events around the Skopje Castle and their reflection on inter-ethnic relations,
- The killing of two young Albanians in Gostivar by a police officer,
- The mass protests of Albanians in Gostivar, the incident in Smilkovcë and the "Monts-
ra" operation that followed it,
- Permanent fights between Albanian and Macedonian youths in Skopje,
- Changes in the names of streets and schools in the municipality of Çairi and Gostivar,
- Arbitrary behavior of anti-Albanian laws
- Proposal for a law on the special rights of members of the Macedonian security forces who have been direct participants in the war against Albanians during the 2001 conflict and the failure to issue a similar law for former members of the KLA and their families

2. SAMPLE AND DATA DESCRIPTION

Since the main objective of the paper was to determine the role of interethnic relations in building a democratic society in the Republic of North Macedonia, a total of 650 citizens from different backgrounds were asked to take part in the survey, and only 528 of them responded positively to the questionnaire.

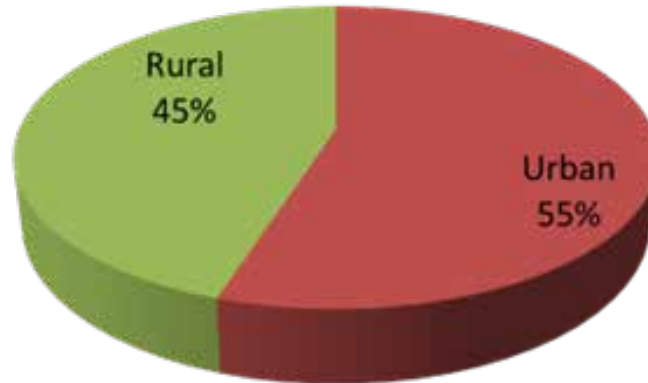
The sample was rather balanced when it comes to the sex structure of the respondents, having in mind that around 51% of respondents were male and the rest female.

Chart 1. Respondents' structure based on age



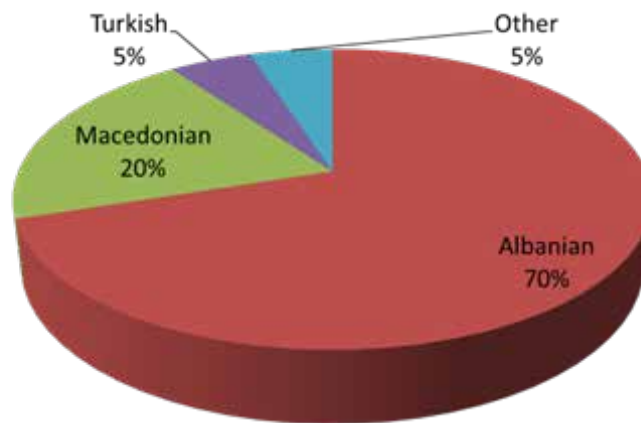
The sample is somewhat dominated by younger respondents, as can be noted from chart 1. In fact around 70% of the total number of respondents are 45 years old or younger. Only a fifth of the total number of respondents are between 46 and 59 years old, and only a tenth of the respondents can be considered elders in this sample.

Chart 2. Respondents' structure based on place of residence



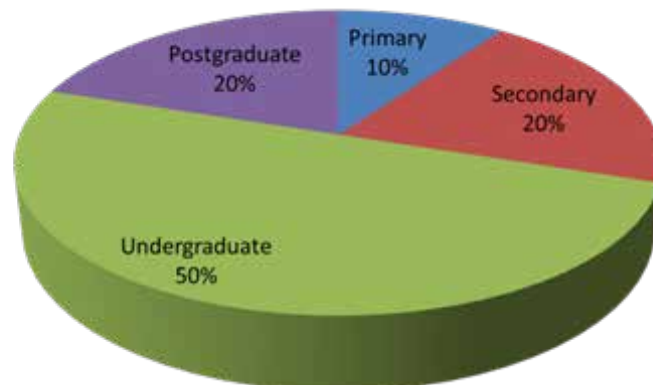
The sample is dominated by urban population as contrasted to population residing in rural areas of North Macedonia (55% as opposed to 45%).

Chart 3. Respondents' ethnic structure



As can be noted from the data presented in chart 3, around 70% of the total number of respondents are ethnic Albanians, a fifth are Macedonians, 5% are Turks and the other 5% of the respondents are from other ethnic groups. The structure of the sample from this point of view is quite normal in terms of distribution, since the study was implemented primarily in the Pollog region since it is the region with most ethnic tensions since the very independence of the Republic of North Macedonia.

Chart 4. Respondents' educational structure

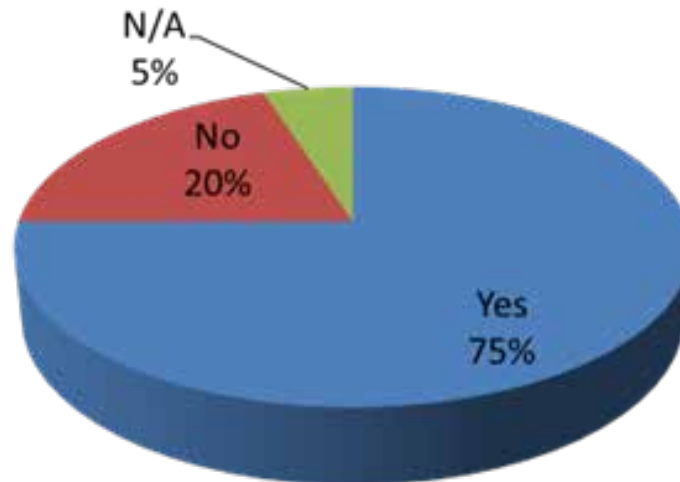


Around half of the total number of respondents have finished their undergraduate studies and a fifth have finished master studies or obtained their doctorates. In contrast, less than a third of the total number of respondents have only finished primary or secondary education.

3. DATA ANALYSIS

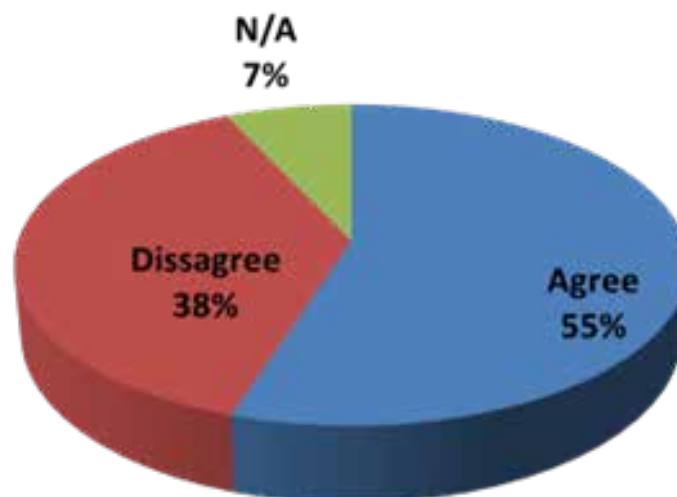
The study shows a high level of awareness regarding the importance of interethnic relations for building a democratic society in the Republic of North Macedonia, chart 5.

Chart 5. Respondents level of agreement that interethnic relations are of great importance for the democratization of the Republic of North Macedonia



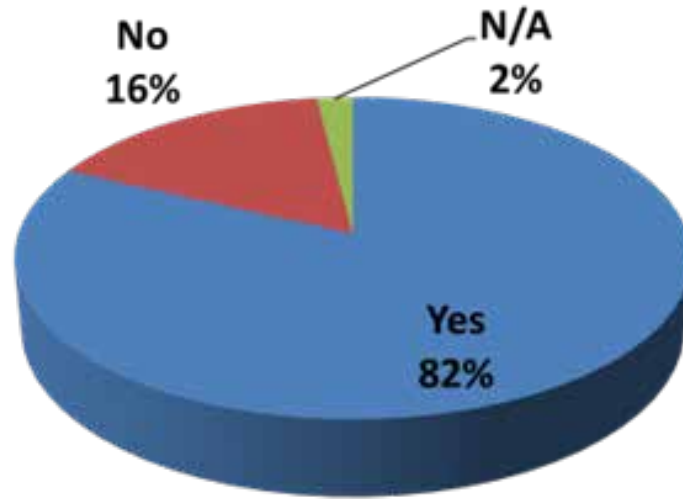
As can be noted, around $\frac{3}{4}$ of the total number of respondents agree that interethnic relations are of great importance for building democracy in the Republic of North Macedonia, while only a fifth of the respondents disagree with them.

Chart 6. Respondents level of agreement that interethnic relations are relaxed in the Republic of North Macedonia



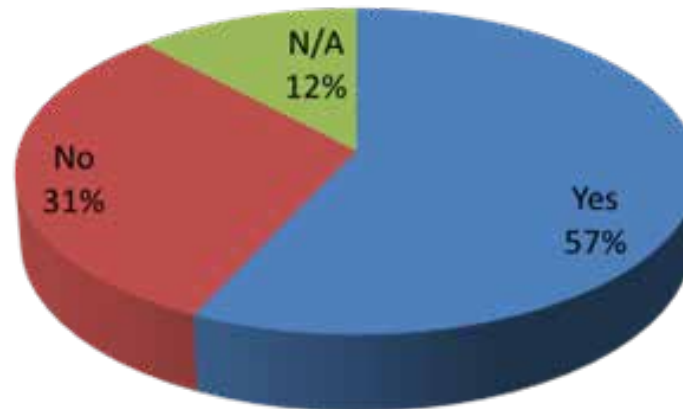
As can be noted, around 55% of the total number of respondents agree that interethnic relations are relaxed in the Republic of North Macedonia, while only 38% of the respondents disagree with them.

Chart 7. Respondents level of agreement that interethnic relations have further relaxed during the last five years



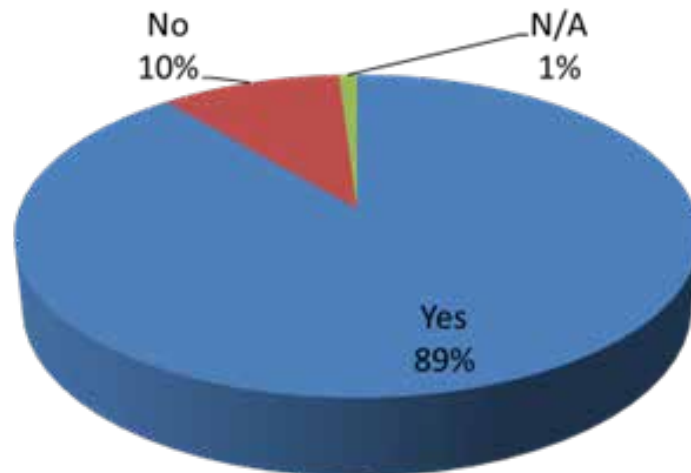
Around 82% of the total number of respondents agree that interethnic relations have relaxed even further during the last five years in the Republic of North Macedonia, while only 16% of the respondents disagree with them.

Chart 8. Respondents level of agreement that interethnic relations at their current level are not an obstacle for the integration of North Macedonia in the European Union



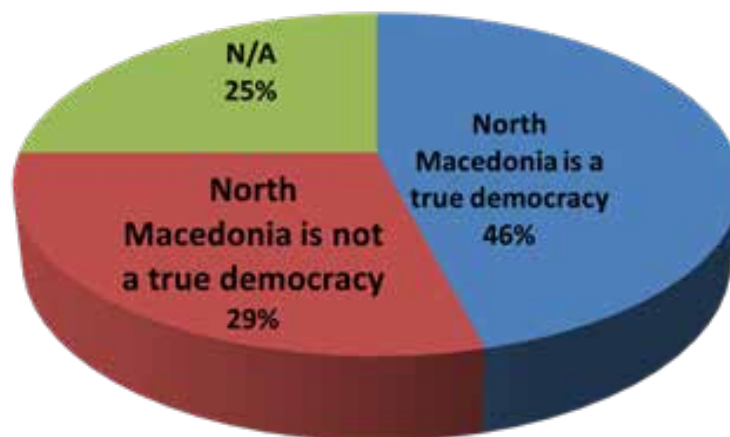
As can be noted from the data presented in chart 8, less than a third of the total number of respondents believe that interethnic relations at their current level are an obstacle for the integration of North Macedonia in the European Union, while 55% of the total number of respondents believe that the interethnic relations at their current level are not an obstacle for the integration of North Macedonia in the European Union.

Chart 9. Respondents level of agreement that more should be done in terms of improving the interethnic relations in North Macedonia



Even beside the fact that respondents have shown a high level of optimism regarding the interethnic relations in the Republic of North Macedonia, still around nine in ten respondents believe that much needs to be done in terms of improving the interethnic relations in North Macedonia.

Chart 10. Respondents' opinions on the general level of democracy in the Republic of North Macedonia



As can be noted from the data presented in chart 10 less than a half of the total number of respondents perceive North Macedonia as a true democracy and around 29% are convinced that North Macedonia is not a true democracy. This is a serious issue that needs to be further analyzed since it shows a very high level of dissatisfaction with the general level of democratization of North Macedonia, based on respondents' responses.

Aside from the already mentioned results, as the study shows:

- Around 62% of the total number of respondents believe that additional steps should be taken in order to further improve the rights of the smallest ethnic communities in the Republic of North Macedonia, while only 10% of the total number of respondents disagree with such an attitude.

- Only a quarter of the total number of respondents do not believe that Bulgaria's veto to North Macedonia's advancement to EU integration will not result in worsening interethnic relation in the country and 55% of them believe that Bulgaria's veto to North Macedonia's advancement to EU integration will result in worsening interethnic relation in the country.
- On the other hand, 58% of the total number of respondents not believe that North Macedonia's advancement in the EU integration will lead to improving the interethnic relation in the country and 28% of them disagree with such an opinion.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Building good inter-ethnic relations is an important prerequisite for the development of Macedonia as a post-independent and democratic state. In North Macedonia, there is a relaxation of inter-ethnic relations, but it is still necessary to invest in the direction of creating a sense of equality between the ethnic communities in the country. The institutions of the system must take concrete steps to eliminate the dependence of ethnic communities on representation in the total population, when it comes to the enjoyment of collective rights.

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HEALTH LAW AND THE CHALLENGES OF ITS DEVELOPMENT IN KOSOVO

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ABSTRACT

Health law is a branch of law that deals with issues related to both individual and collective health, healthcare, and how the healthcare system operates. In addition, health law looks into public policies that affect the health of particular people, groups, and society as a whole. It also discusses how health law relates to other social structures and occurrences. In other words, its focus is on how this law affects larger social determinants and society as a whole. As a result, the health law offers a framework for the regulation of health care, whose primary purpose is to restore the individual to his/her surroundings while also reintegrating him/her into society.

It is well understood that health problems reduce community members' quality of life and limit their capacity to work and operate effectively at the family, community, and societal levels. Another objective of health policies, which is also accomplished via healthcare insurance, is to prevent a decrease in the quality of life triggered by medical problems. As a result, according to both legal and constitutional provisions, health insurance access is a guaranteed right in Kosovo. Regrettably, the accomplishment of the right to health insurance is severely limited and a selective privilege, causing a decline in quality of life and, as an outcome, the polarization of Kosovar society.

This paper examines the legal foundations of healthcare insurance in Kosovo, along with the level of implementation, as well as the societal consequences of a lack of health policy implementation. The paper solidifies the main challenges in the implementation of the regulatory framework for healthcare coverage utilizing analytical, quantitative, and qualitative methods of research.

Keywords: *Health law, countries in transition, healthcare policies, social security system.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Health law is the branch of law that deals with various aspects of health care, such as medical professional practices and patient rights (Annas, 2018). Health law is a branch of law that focuses on the legal authorities and duties of government institutions "to provide conditions for people to be healthy," as well as how to balance these authorities and duties with "individual rights for autonomy, privacy, liberty, and other legally protected rights and interests (Gostin 2008, p. 4). The health law has a broad scope. Health law issues range from narrow legal interpretation to complex issues involving public health policy, social justice, and ethics.

Statutes, regulations, and litigation have all played critical roles in historic and modern public health accomplishments, such as advances in disease control, food safety, occupational health, injury prevention, response, and emergency preparedness (Moulton et al 2007, p. 3-7). There is a broad spectrum of academic and judicial literature on the interaction of law and health. Scholars in the related fields of health law, bioethics, and health policy teach practice and analyze law and health in schools of law, public health, and health administration. These fields of study are known as health law, health care law, law and medicine, forensic medicine, and public health law.

The right to health seeks to foster a surrounding in which health promotion coexists with the protection of civil rights and the principle of equality and justice. The right to health has become very important over time, both nationally and internationally. Due to the fact that health and human rights are closely linked, it is critical to integrate health law and health policy. The impact of health law on health policy-making is expected to grow, particularly in Europe, as a result of several developments, such as the internationalization of health care, the issue of citizen protection, and the legalization of society. This necessitates a strategy for fostering a fruitful interaction between health policy and health law (Legemaate 2002, p.101-110).

Health policies and health laws are two important tools that states can use to protect citizens from health-related threats. The policy can exist without recourse to legal provisions, but in case that the policy is intended to be sustainable and overall compliance is lacking, legal intervention may be necessary to ensure that the policy is enforced.

The laws can only ensure legal mechanisms for the implementation of a given policy, but the latter can prevail without the use of the law. Finally, legal provisions should derive from the policy itself in order to entrench the sustainability of policies, conformity, and legal security for citizens.

Health law defines the responsibilities of individuals and organizations, as well as the duties of government to act for the health of society. Laws define the jurisdiction of public health officials and the manner in which they exercise their authority. Laws can also establish norms for healthy behavior and create social environments in which people can be healthy. Legislators, courts, and administrative agencies serve as conduits for social debates on critical public health issues within the context of rights, obligations, and justice in general (Snezhanna 2011, p.12). Although there is broad agreement that legislation is necessary for good public health, the objectives and content of the law remain a challenge. Many countries' rights to health still do not respond to modern developments; do not clearly define the responsibilities entrusted to public health agencies, boards, and officials at various

country-specific levels and the relationship between them; fail to equip public health officials with the necessary competencies to control disease; lack adequate privacy protection standards, and are not yet based on up-to-date disease classification schemes that address contemporary health problems (Snezhanna 2011, p.12).

Access to health services is undoubtedly one of the pillars of the right to health. This approach is a critical human right that the state must fulfill vis-a-vis citizens. The quality and frequency of access to health services are heavily influenced by citizens' health insurance coverage. Specifically, the issue of health insurance (mandatory, private, hybrid, or even complementary) has impacted citizens' quality of life and, as a result, is a major violation of human rights.

This paper aims to address not only the legal framework of health insurance in Kosovo, but also the necessity of its implementation and the consequences in society caused by the reluctance to implement the legal framework, which is causing major violations, such as the creation of inequalities, differentiations, and polarization. This research paper employed legal-dogmatic, quantitative, qualitative, and comparative methods.

2. THE HEALTH LAW AS SEEN THROUGH THE WELFARE STATE AND HUMAN RIGHTS PRISMS

Depending on social needs and the level of overall social progress, health rights can be tackled from different perspectives. Mostly, the right to health services is analyzed and updated through the lens of human rights violations/respect in accessing health services, as well as denial and limitation of this right against excluded and marginalized groups in society. Furthermore, the right to health is examined through the lens of legal sociology in order to examine the legal framework, the societal effects, and the legal framework's suitability to the current needs of citizens. For the needs of this research work, a combined approach was used, analyzing the main problem from the perspective of human rights but also the perspective of legal sociology with the aim of unfolding the problem identified, including potential solutions.

2. 1. The welfare state and the right to health

The welfare state is the context that entitles its citizens to live a life that meets their needs aiming to create the common good for its citizens. The concept of the welfare state is also defined as public policies of institutions to achieve the welfare goal. In general, this term is attributed to the country, which assumes the fulfillment of social functions with the aim of alleviating the suffering or ills of society through approved financial arrangements while providing social services at all levels of the social structure (Filo 2006, p.9).

Regardless of the definitions of the welfare state, three basic characteristics are distinguished that are part of state action:

- 1.** The performance of the social function for ensuring the adequate living of citizens and reducing suffering - which means the policies undertaken and legally consolidated as an organic part of the functioning of the state apparatus. While on the other hand, it means ensuring the basic standards of life by consolidating a living

minimum below which one passes into the poverty zone. In other words, fighting poverty is one of the hallmarks of the welfare state (Heywood 1994, p.244).

2. The framework of socially affirmed budgetary implies - which suggests the state's commitment to the well-being of its citizens, in which case social costs (therapeutic care, instruction, etc.) make up the biggest portion of open costs.
3. Social administrations at all levels of the social structure - which implies the execution of open approaches to contract course contrasts and to diminish and eliminate destitution (Filo 2006, p.11-12).

It is broadly acknowledged that the social welfare state incorporates two primary components: social help and social protection. Social help is additionally known as a social recompense advantage which incorporates benefits for war veterans, child benefits, benefits for pregnant ladies, and by and large benefits for citizens living in poverty (Filo 2006, p.14-15). While social protection manages the consideration and arrangement of material advantages for residents in the difficult times of their lives joined by stamped monetary hardships or even in instances of sickness and handicaps. Social protection is partitioned into eight essential frameworks: Medical coverage; Protection for moms with kids; Joblessness protection; Family stipends; Protection from injuries at work; Protection for advanced age annuities; Incapacity protection; and handicap protection (Tomeš 1998, p.10).

It is very apparent that the capacity and eagerness of the state to mediate in tending to different social and particularly well-being needs of its citizens could be a capable marker of measuring the state's social welfare. In countries in transition, as is the case with Kosovo, the state's commitment to ensure citizens' well-being is being rivaled by insurance companies that have turned this state commitment into a profitable commerce.

2.2. Human rights and the right to health

The right to health encompasses a wide range of interconnected issues, as health and well-being are intertwined in all stages and aspects of life. A human right entails meeting all human needs, whether physical or social and psychological, such as the need for family and society. Following WWII, the UN Charter stated unequivocally that member states owe human rights obligations. The right to health is explicitly stated in Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which states that everyone has the right to a standard of living that ensures his or her own and his or family's health and well-being, including clothing, food, medical care, shelter, and needed social services (Benedek 2009, p.164).

A broad definition of health is also given in the WHO preamble, as a state of complete mental, physical, and social well-being and not only the absence of diseases. This view of the inviolability of the right to health emphasizes the fact that most health policy is done outside the usual health sector, and yet affects the social health social factors. Article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) of 1966, which serves as the foundation of the right to health, states unequivocally:

1. The States parties to the ICESCR recognize that every citizen has the right to the best mental and physical health possible;
2. The measures to be undertaken by States Parties to ensure the full exercise of this right must include:

- a. Promoting healthy child development as well as reducing newborn and infant mortality;
- b. Improving environmental and industrial hygiene aspects;
- c. Control, treatment, and prevention of occupational, endemic, epidemic, and other diseases;
- d. Establishing circumstances that in the event of a disease, everyone would have access to medical services and care (Benedek 2009, p.165-166).

The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly, includes a preamble and a total of 30 articles that explain what constitutes discrimination against women. Article 12 of this convention recognizes the right to health insurance and requires member states to take steps to eliminate all forms of discrimination in the field of health insurance. According to Article 22 of the Kosovo Constitution, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women has direct application and takes precedence over Kosovo's internal laws (The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, United Nations General Assembly, 1979). Likewise, the "Convention on the Rights of the Child" is a document that defines children's civil, political, economic, social, health, and cultural rights. This convention, adopted by the General Assembly on November 20, 1989, includes a preamble and 54 articles that protect the aforementioned children's rights. The Convention has been ratified by 193 States and Article 25 recognizes the right of children to health insurance and invites States Parties to take steps to create opportunities to realize the rights declared by the Convention. This Convention is also directly applicable in Kosovo in accordance with Article 22 of the Kosovo Constitution.

There are also a number of regional treaties that further define the right to health, such as Article 11 of the European Social Charter of 1961 and Article 10 of the Additional Protocol to the American Convention on Human Rights in the economic, social and cultural spheres (1988), and Article 16 of the African Charter of Human Rights from 1981.

Governments have addressed their obligations in Article 12 of the ICESCR in a variety of ways, and the body empowered to oversee the application of the Covenant has issued a document entitled General Comment 14. This general comment was approved in 2000. It emphasizes that the fulfillment of the right to health depends on the fulfillment of other rights, including the right to life, food, housing, work, education, and participation in and enjoyment of scientific achievements. The general comment also defines four criteria for assessing the right to health. Existence, including public health, facilities, health goods and services, and program functions that must be present in sufficient quantity. Access to health care facilities, goods, and services in a non-discriminatory manner, including physical access, opportunities, and appropriate information. Acceptability, which requires that all health facilities, goods, and services must be acceptable in accordance with medical ethics and the particular culture, with gender requirements and life cycles, as well as envisaging the respect of confidentiality and the improvement of health and health status of those in need. Quality requires that health facilities, goods, and services are scientifically and medically appropriate and good (Benedek 2009, p.167-168).

The obligation of the state to make sure the enjoyment of the very best standards of health to the members of society needs various dedication. The requirement to respect proper health implies that the state cannot interfere with or violate this right. The protection of the right to health means that the state should forestall non-state actors from interfering in any manner with this right. If the violation occurs, the state must provide the individuals with some kind of reparation. This additionally means that the state is obligated to enact necessary and applicable laws that regulate and supervise the management of deadly waste, and so forth. The fulfillment of this right implies that the state should move in providing access to health care (Benedek 2009, p.173-174).

On the other hand, the European Social Charter and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights do not apply in the context of Kosovo. However, Kosovo's constitution, Article 51, stipulates that health and social security rights are governed by separate laws and are not related to international standards defined in international treaties. The right to health in Kosovo is therefore governed by the following organic laws:

1. Health Law enacted in 2013 (Law No. 04/L-125). This law aims to create a legal basis for protecting and improving the health of citizens of the Republic of Kosovo through health promotion, preventive activities, and the provision of comprehensive and quality health services.
2. Law on Rights and Obligations of Citizens in Health Care (Act No. 2004/38). It defines the rights and obligations of patients.
3. The Health Insurance Act provides for the rights and obligations of having compulsory health insurance.

3. HEALTH INSURANCE AND ITS SOCIAL IMPORTANCE

Health insurance systems are essential components of social security and protection designed to protect citizens from health-related challenges. As such, health insurance refers to the assistance provided to citizens who are afflicted. The health insurance system plays an important role within a society by fulfilling human rights to free and equal access to health services, meeting important social needs, and meeting important economic needs.

As the goal of modern states is to provide the best possible well-being for their citizens, the right to health care appears as one of the fundamental rights that must be fulfilled on a large scale. In everyday life, citizens face various physical limitations, become victims of various accidents, are affected by various diseases, or are even born sick. As a result, they require efficient and effective health care in order to protect their health and complete rehabilitation. Health insurance is one of the most developed forms of social protection because it forces citizens to take care of their health while taking into account all of their health needs. As a result, in many countries around the world, health insurance is also referred to as state health protection for its citizens. Health insurance systems are social security components that aim to protect citizens from health-related risks. As such, health insurance companies take on cover medical costs in case of illness. The need to treat illness comes with high economic costs and requires government intervention as a catalyst to create and operate funding systems to cover the cost of medical services during illness. A perfect health system

is therefore one in which basic health services are easily accessible and fully acceptable to the public in terms of quality (Memia 2016, p.32-33).

Different societal categories of care needs have challenged human societies and will continue to do so. Inequality in society has economic, social, environmental, biological, and genetic characteristics, and is characterized by families with poor civic groups, the uneducated, the unemployed, and the lonely elderly and causes social phenomena as a result. Social justice continues to express citizens' efforts to benefit from services that depend on their social needs by being included in social protection systems that are manifestations of social solidarity with low-income groups and categories of society. Health insurance schemes, therefore, are social protection schemes aimed at protecting citizens from health deterioration by defining social interaction procedures to create financial mechanisms for health protection (Memia 2016, p.36-37).

Equality in health insurance inclusion manifests itself through all inclusion in the insurance scheme, which is guaranteed by law vis-a-vis all social categories that do not have the opportunity to contribute to the insurance fund in order to receive health services (Companje et al 2009, p.55). Because the state is the guarantor of citizens' social rights, it has established the balance and universal principle of social inclusion. The concept of social solidarity embodies the fundamental principle of the health insurance system, implying system subsidization and balance between the rich and the poor (Colombo et al 2011, p. 6). "The law on health insurance in Kosovo states that health insurance is the provision of universal access of citizens and residents of the Republic of Kosovo to qualitative basic health care services, with the goal of improving health indicators and ensuring financial protection from impoverishment due to large health care expenses, through the establishment and regulation of the public health insurance system" (Article 1 of Law No. 04/L -249, for Health Insurance, 2015).

The legal application of a collection and service activity within the state for all its citizens constitutes the universality of health insurance. This universality principle aims for the effective and efficient implementation of administration and control of the system of health protection, relying on the organization of supporting schemes to ensure protection for all citizens of the country. This entails implementing health policies that are equitable for all citizens (Memia 2016, p.36-38).

The health insurance system is critical in the psycho-physical rehabilitation of citizens in transitional countries, particularly those that have experienced severe conflict. This critical social need frequently falls to the bottom of reform priorities in transitional societies, resulting in severe economic, social, and health consequences.

3.1. Designing the health insurance system

In order to reduce poverty and improve population health, which is one of the Sustainable Development Goals, many low and middle-income nations primarily adopt health insurance coverage expansion. However, because the health insurance market is largely confined to the public sector in most developing nations, persons working in the private or informal sector are more at risk of facing excessive medical expenses and being forced to forgo costly medical procedures. Additionally, because of asymmetric data and insufficient competition,

private health insurance marketplaces in these nations frequently fail. These market failings in health insurance, along with the unequal distribution of health care resources, support the need for government involvement in health insurance to cover some disadvantaged sectors of the population.

In order to achieve universal health care, numerous developing nations have recently tried to increase the number of people covered by health insurance. Both political and technological considerations go into the development and execution of national health insurance. How a site addresses design features and general viability will depend on the opinions and support of stakeholders. Several government ministries, healthcare organizations, patients, employers, and funders are all involved in the operationalization of insurance in developing nations. In order to manage expectations, make sure that decisions are supported by technical analysis and data, and establish common ground among conflicting interest groups, policymakers and technical specialists must comprehend and articulate the following points:

1. How will insurance support broader national goals?
2. How will insurance work to combat poverty and promote equality?
3. Who are the key players and what are their stances on the expansion or development of health insurance?
4. What political challenges might there be?
5. What are some potential solutions to the problems?
6. How can a political coalition be formed to successfully advance and maintain health insurance changes on the political agenda (Hong et al 2010, p. 6)?

Typically, the efficiency and equity objectives of health policy are used to evaluate the benefits and drawbacks of health insurance. The following is an example of one of the goals:

- Services ought to be accessible to those who stand to gain the most from them.
- For any given level of service, costs must be kept to a minimum.
- Equal access should be provided to those with similar requirements.
- Priority should be given to programs that are most likely to improve health as a result of the available resources.
- The treatment procedure and results must be acceptable to service consumers.

Concerns about not enough money being raised to support access to healthcare services have always played a role in the creation of health insurance systems. The issue of adequacy is best understood as a level that is regarded as adequate given total resources, preferences, and other development priorities because there is no clear solution to the question of what degree of support is necessary (Jacobs & Goddard 2000, p.16).

It is an imperative guideline that we ought to learn from the encounters of other nations, but not attempt to duplicate precisely the frameworks that have been created in specific situations. It is imperative to consider healthcare financing frameworks within the setting of the chronicled, political, and social foundation. The points of interest of the organization of subsidizing and conveyance of care have regularly emerged as a result of the moderate

advancement and adjustment of teaching to meet modern challenges. Within the case of well-being protections, the advancement of the framework, at first in Germany, owed much to the design of industrialization and the developing impact of organized labor (Jacobs & Goddard 2000, p.18-19).

The design of the health insurance system must be preceded by a number of actions of feasibility studies and assessment of the current needs of the given context. This necessary phase which reveals the specifics of the context, and the human, technical and financial resources on which the system itself must be designed, is constantly neglected by countries in transition which are in a hurry to design public policies, strategies, and action plans. Moreover, this dismissive approach has been observed in the countries of the Western Balkans, with special emphasis in the context of Kosovo. Consequently, the designed health insurance system is not functional, in which case the pressure of citizens on the power holders is increasing due to the necessity of the operation of this system.

3.2. Health insurance models and systems

According to the WHO, there are three types of health insurance models:

1. Bismarck's model (1883), which is called the classical (compulsory) health insurance;
2. Beveridge's model (1948), known in the literature as the model of budgetary health insurance or national health services;
3. The national health insurance system represents the mixture of the Bismarck system and the Beveridge system in the organization and operation of the health insurance system.

The Bismarck system is a type of health insurance that is essentially non-profit and has a solidary character, where the insurer has the right to reimburse medical costs in accordance with the contribution he makes in the name of health insurance. This is handled by the institution that handles questions related to health insurance. The representatives of the insured, insurers and other interest groups manage the accumulated fund in accordance with this structure. This paradigm is typical of European nations including Germany, France, Luxembourg, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, etc. When the co-payment from the employer was divided by 50% or 3.5% from the employer and 3.5% from the employee, the premium was calculated as 7% of the employee's gross salary (Shkoza & Lekiqi 2012, p.28-29).

The Beveridge health insurance funding model is applicable in countries like Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Great Britain. The state serves as the primary insurer in Beveridge's health insurance system and is responsible for managing the system as a whole, financing the delivery of health services, and providing health facilities. Taxes are used as the basis for the financing system, which means that funding comes from the general state budget. In this system, taxes are viewed as the cost of the public good. Doctors are paid a monthly salary or are compensated based on performance, and medical facilities are owned by the government. Although the insured and employers are not involved in the administration of the health insurance system, the system is founded on solidarity. This system permits

all citizens to receive medical care and gives them the option to select their physician, among other things. General practitioners are given special consideration, and all members of the population have access to healthcare without having to pay for it out of pocket. Furthermore, there is a macro-level implementation of effective control over all healthcare spending. This system stands out due to the government's stringent oversight, which tries to track down transactions for the services utilized by the insured. This control also applies to the private sector, where the cost of paying for a particular health service has been carefully considered, and when compared to the Bismarck system, it is more centralized. The funds collected for health insurance are managed by a separate, specialized organization under the Bismarckian system, whereas under the Beveridge system, the government directly controls and manages the funds (Shkoza & Lekiqi 2012, p.29).

When it comes to how the national health insurance system is set up and runs, it combines elements of both the Bismarck and Beveridge systems. This system aims to fix the problems with how government organizations oversee and manage the overall system, as stated by the Beveridge system. It also tackles the drawbacks of the Bismarck system's centralized fund administration. In accordance with this system, the insured makes a contribution in the form of an exclusive health insurance policy, and the government makes payments whenever the insured utilizes the pertinent service. Canada, South Korea, and Taiwan can all use this model. This system is characterized by a friendly approach of the two systems, that of Bismarck and Beveridge, since in terms of paying premiums there are elements of the Beveridge system and in terms of fund management, there are characteristics of the Bismarck system from that the collected funds are managed by a separate and independent authority (Shkoza & Lekiqi 2012, p.29-30).

3.3. The designed health insurance system in Kosovo

Refinancing Kosovo's health system has been a debated issue since the war, with the first steps taken between 2011 and 2014. In 2014, the legal basis for the Health Protection Scheme was created. However, after the drafting and adoption of the Health Insurance Act, no serious steps were taken to implement it. Kosovo continues the system of direct medical funding that it internationalized shortly after the last war. The need for health financing restructuring appears to be necessary as a result of the low levels of funding in health care and the inefficiency of the current system in reducing the financial burden of citizens. The lack of implementation of the Health Insurance Act has led to a significant deterioration in the quality of medical services, leaving Kosovo below the average among the Balkan countries. The Health Insurance Act of 2014, drafted with the participation and consultation of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, has improved the opportunities as well as the challenges that Kosovo's healthcare system may face. In practice, the following challenges can be expected in the implementation of relevant legislation:

1. Collect insurance premiums from citizens and have no positive impact on improving service quality.
2. Misuse of funds raised, as consistently occurring in healthcare budgets (Hoxhaj & Braha 2017, p.3).

However, the implementation of the new system according to current legislation can solve the structural and operational problems related to the current healthcare system. Political parties have used the issue of health insurance in their political offerings without having achieved much. Since 2014, the Ministry of Health has continuously committed itself to start collecting premiums, hiring staff for the health insurance company and testing the instruments for implementing the Law (contracts with health institutions, development of the system for payment of premiums, a package of services and price list of the Services). However, there were no developments that caused the health insurance plan to become operational budgets (Hoxhaj & Braha 2017, p.4). As always with the change of power, the topic of health insurance was taken up again this time, without raising great expectations among the citizens. But even on this occasion, a number of difficulties and challenges stand out that need to be addressed to make the health protection system work:

1. Collection of contributions at the beginning of the implementation of the Health Insurance Act;
2. Create a database of insured citizens;
3. Respond to grievances from private sector workers;
4. Preparation of service specifications and price lists by healthcare facilities;
5. Modification of the current health law.

One of the biggest obstacles to the health insurance law's implementation continues to be the collection of premiums to start with its implementation. Therefore, the employer and employee should each get 7% of the gross income, or 3.5%, in accordance with Article 37 of the Law on Health Insurance. The significant difficulty of raising the initial sum for the start of the implementation of health insurance was noted during the law's development phase. To acquire the roughly €120 million required for the start of the law's implementation, the prospect of borrowing debt from the state itself was even given consideration (L.Hakaj, personal communication, November 11, 2022). Governmental organizations and the International Monetary Fund have not endorsed this notion. Contrarily, it is virtually impossible to gradually collect premiums over the course of two to three years without providing any form of health insurance to guarantee the sum required to pay for medical bills (V.Murati, personal communication, November 11, 2022).

The creation of a database of insured persons is one of the most important components for the operationalization of the health insurance system and consequently for the implementation of the law. Among other things, it is necessary to update the Health Information System (HIS) on the basis of which the insurance process would work. To this end, the health insurance company is in regular contact with the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare to obtain the data to be used by the registry office for the establishment of the pedigree necessary for the registration of the insured. Likewise, the first draft of the list of health services that health institutions can provide has been drawn up and work is underway to establish the prices for these services (RTK's interview with Fatmir Plakiqi, March 12, 2018).

However, from 2018 until today, there is no visible progress or even an attempt to test said tools. Moreover, even before the beginning of the implementation of the law, a speech in favor of the modification of the current law emerged, without having had the opportunity to analyze the possible impact that the implementation of the latter. The dissatisfaction of employees in the private sector is one of the challenges that institutional actors must face in implementing the health insurance law. The law in question stipulates that the person who fails to pay the premium for three consecutive months is terminated from the health insurance coverage from the fund and to renew the insurance coverage, before starting to use the rights from the mandatory health insurance, the premium must be paid on time for at least three consecutive months without interruption within the last 12 months (Article 12 of Law No. 04/L-249, for Health Insurance, 2015). On the other hand, it is known that salary payments in the private sector are not regular and that in many sectors (such as construction) the nature of work is such that it is not consistent with the annual calendar. As a result, the vast majority of private sector workers would be subject to Article 12 violations and would consequently be punished with a lack of health care (T7, Chronicle, December 18, 2021). This issue should also be addressed by intensifying control, inspection, and complaint mechanisms and increasing the level of implementation of workers' rights guaranteed by labor law, which guarantees remuneration for work done (monthly salary).

One of the most frequently stated justifications by those in power is the eventual amendment of the existing law on health services. Furthermore, the complaints are directed to the fact that the law was drafted without any reliable preliminary feasibility study, but only based on an analysis of some needs, and thus it is impossible to implement this law. However, seven years after the law's passage, in July 2021, a feasibility study on the topic "Financing of Health Care - Transparency, Digitalization, and Innovation" was conducted. The study was carried out by the Swiss consulting firm "Muller Healthcare Consulting-MHC," which was contracted and funded by Lux-Development, and was based on an agreement signed between the Ministry of Health of Kosovo and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg's Organization for International Cooperation, Lux-Development. Concrete recommendations for the relevant institutions involved in the functionalization of the health insurance scheme are provided in the report, as are possible timelines for the implementation of the reform approach in the financing of Kosovo's public health system (Kosovo Health Insurance Fund Report, 2021). The Kosovo Patients' Association, on the other hand, has expressed their dilemmas and doubts that the health insurance law will not be implemented before 2026 because it will be necessary to draft a large number of by-laws and test the mechanisms and instruments derived from the law in order for the entire health protection system to function in satisfactory proportions. Many by-laws are still missing, and many instruments have yet to be created (T7, Chronicle, December 18, 2021).

3.4. Medical treatment of citizens outside public institutions

According to Kosovo's Budget Law for 2019, €9,544,257 has been allocated to the Health Insurance Fund for the purpose of managing human resources, capital expenses, goods and services, as well as subsidies and transfers (Health Insurance Fund Annual Report 2019, p.22). The majority of these funds are intended to subsidize (cover) the medical expenses

of citizens who have recovered in private health institutions in Kosovo or even abroad, primarily in clinics in Turkey. So, €8,700,000 was spent in 2019 to cover these costs. The Program for Medical Treatments Outside Public Health Institutions (PMTOPHI) aims to provide health services where Public Health Institutions are unable to do so. These services are provided by private health institutions located within or outside of the country. The operation of this program is governed by an administrative instruction that specifies the procedures for benefiting from the program as well as the bodies in charge of its administration (Administrative Instruction No. 03/2017, for Medical Treatment Outside Public Health Institutions, 2017). In 2019, 1,436 patients sought treatment outside of public health institutions, with 1,312 receiving approval. There were still 124 unapproved subjects, either due to administrative procedures or documentation requirements. The majority of the payments were made to cover all of the obligations of 2018, as well as some cases of 2019 that were urgent, other cases when the patient's health condition worsened, and urgent cases sent to European Union countries that refuse to carry out the patient's treatment without the payment being executed, despite the presence of the Fund's letter of commitment (Administrative Instruction No. 03/2017, for Medical Treatment Outside Public Health Institutions, 2017).

Administrative Instruction No. 03/2017, Medical Treatment Outside Public Health Institutions, establishes the procedure for covering healthcare costs for citizens seeking services outside of public health institutions. According to this instruction, if the administrative requirements are met, any Kosovo citizen has the right to apply to the Fund. In other words, a Medical Commission within the University Clinical Center of Kosovo (UCCK) must justify the request for treatment in private institutions within or outside of Kosovo, and an estimate of treatment costs must be attached, in which case the Fund provides the citizen with a pledge through which the citizen is eligible to have the expenses covered. This method of addressing the need for health care has resulted in significant expenditures from the Kosovo budget, as well as citizen dissatisfaction due to procedural delays. Only in 2018 and 2019, 26 citizens filed lawsuits against the Fund in the appropriate court. Meanwhile, as a result of a joint memorandum of understanding signed in 2019 between the Ministry of Health of Kosovo and that of Germany, the Health Insurance Fund began cooperation with the German Health Insurance Fund, AOK, around 2020. AOK will assist the Fund in increasing its professional capacity as a result of this agreement.

This collaboration includes many processes, such as:

- defining and clarifying the insured's statute, and legislative support,
- clarifying the process of collecting premiums and other generated revenues,
- defining the list of drugs that will be reimbursed by the Health Insurance Fund,
- the types of diseases covered and the groups that will benefit,

Issues concerning the status of the Health Insurance Fund's insured, methods of collecting contributions, and the calculation and balancing of the Fund's income and expenses have been elaborated during this phase of technical and professional support as well.

4. THE CONTEXT OF THE EMPIRICAL STUDY

These surveys were conducted to understand the scope of the issues raised in the introductory part of the paper. Information technology and access to various electronic media facilitated the collection of qualitative data through surveys distributed to various municipalities in Kosovo. Various civil society representatives, colleagues, university professors, and students made it possible to collect the necessary data from the questionnaire. The surveys used provided complete anonymity to the interviewees and contained 11 questions whereby 500 respondents from 6 municipalities of Kosovo answered the survey. During the survey, a non-probabilistic and deliberate approach to the selection of the research sample was used in order to minimize the margin of possible errors or even the appearance of an opinion that does not belong to reality. The approach used has provided very real and objective opinions which are easily verifiable by the research of institutes and international organizations that have partially addressed this issue.

5. RESULTS OBTAINED

The age of the respondents varied in an attempt to dominate the working age group. As a result, the vast majority of respondents were aged 31 to 50. In terms of gender, 290 men (58%) and 210 women (42%) were polled.

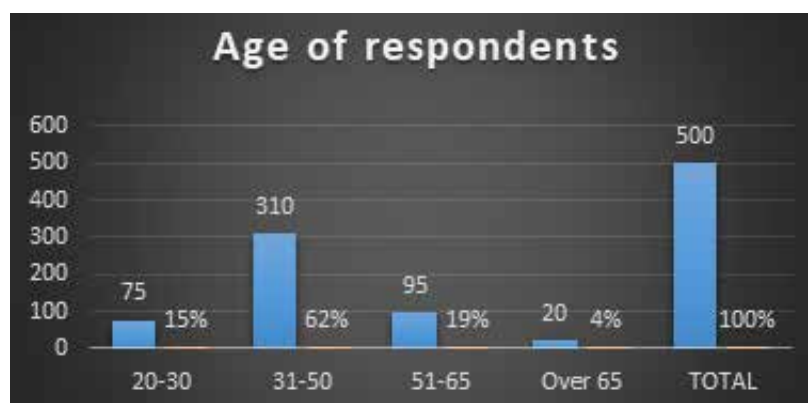


Figure 1: The age of the respondents

While the entire quantitative research was conducted in six municipalities in Kosovo: Mitrovica (120 respondents), Vushtrri (120 respondents), Ferizaj (120 respondents), Fushë Kosova (120 respondents), Skenderaj (70 respondents), and Obiliq (70 respondents). The respondents' educational levels ranged from primary (85), secondary (160), and higher education (255).

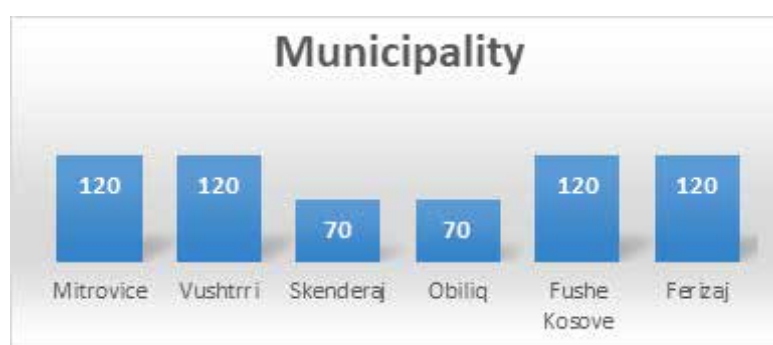


Figure 2: Number of respondents per municipality

The majority of respondents, 78% (390), stated that they seek health services in public health institutions, while only 14% (70) seek these services exclusively in private health institutions. Although this outcome was anticipated, it was not in these proportions.

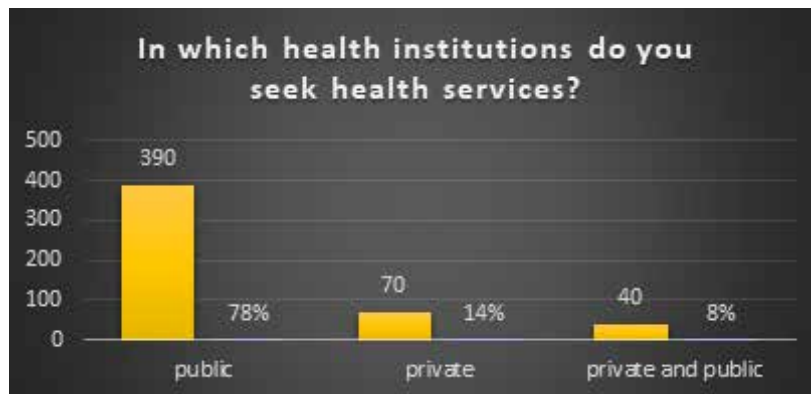


Figure 3: Health services obtained in public/private health institutions

The vast majority of those who seek health services in private institutions (110 respondents, 22%) stated that it is necessary due to better service quality (84), urgent needs (10), and services that are not provided in public health institutions (16).

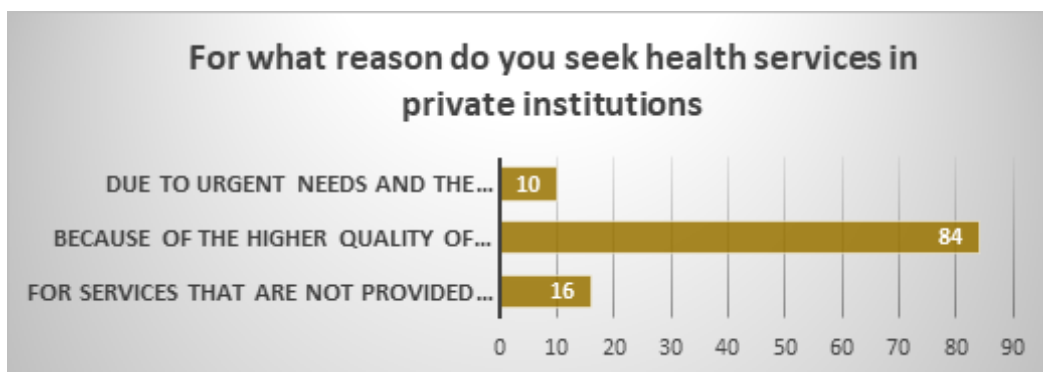


Figure 4: Reasons of seeking health services at private health institutions

The majority of the respondents, as well as Kosovo citizens, believe that health care in private institutions is prohibitively expensive and out of line with citizens' financial means. About 28% (140) of respondents said these services are too expensive, while 72% (360) said they are unaffordable.

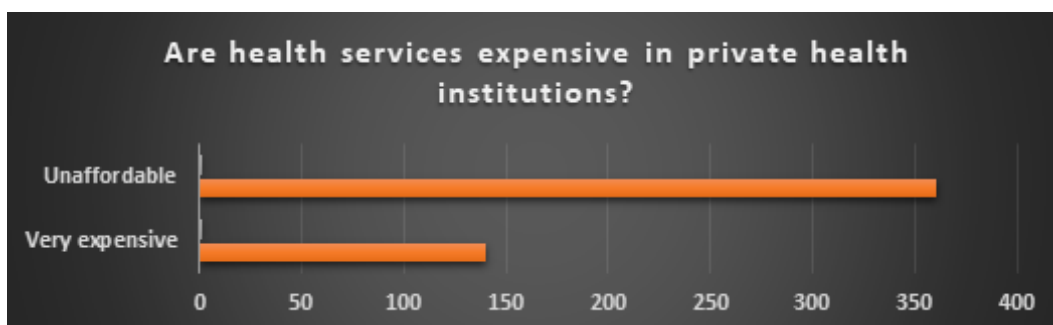


Figure 5: Health service costs

According to the findings, the majority of respondents, 69% (345) spend around €21-50 per month on health services, followed by 19% (95) who spend up to €20, 9% (45) who spend between 51- €100, and only 3% who spend more than €100.

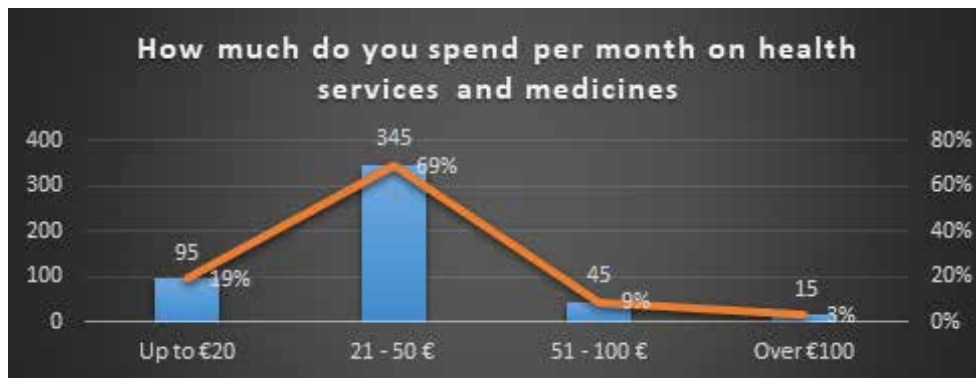


Figure 6: Monthly health service expenditures

The income data are completely consistent with the expenses for health services. The majority of respondents 47% (235) have incomes of up to €300, 19% (95 respondents) have incomes of up to €100, 14% (70) have incomes of up to €500, and only 8% (40) have incomes of more than €500.



Figure 7: Respondent's monthly income

Surprisingly, none of the 500 respondents had private health insurance, which is provided by various insurance companies. During a conversation with some of the respondents, they emphasized that a negative perception has been created towards these companies that charge high health insurance premiums while failing to fulfill their contractual obligations.

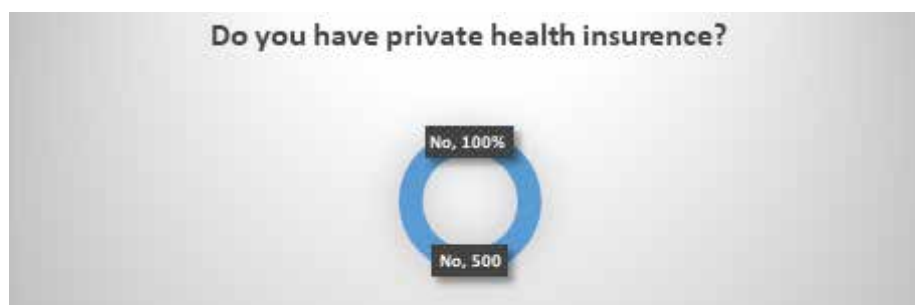


Figure 8: Private health insurance of respondents

Furthermore, the vast majority of respondents had no knowledge of health insurance law. Thus, 84% (420 respondents) are unaware of the existence of the health insurance law, compared to 16% (80) who are aware of its existence.

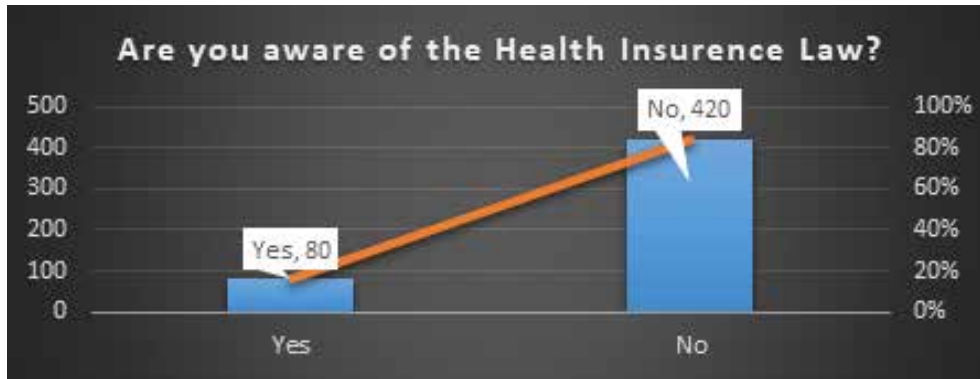


Figure 9: Awareness of the existence of Health Insurance Law

However, if respondents had effective health insurance, 94% (470) would seek health care in private health institutions, compared to 6% who would continue to seek care in public health facilities.



Figure 10: Health service preference

In case of very serious illnesses, Kosovars are forced to seek health services outside of Kosovo. The vast majority of respondents, 71% (355), stated that the expenses for healing needs are mainly collected through humanitarian actions, 29% (145) of them emphasized that the extended family takes care of collecting the money, and none of the respondents stated that any help is offered by state institutions.

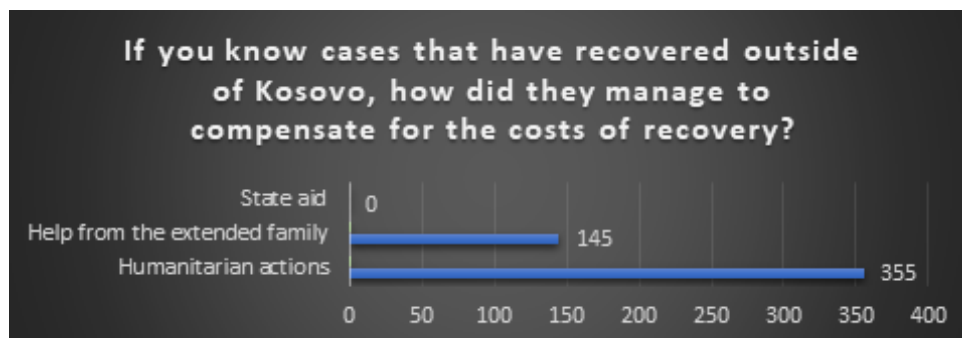


Figure 11: Health expenditures coverage

The interviewees emphasized that the lack of health insurance affects the quality of life since the citizens only use health services in urgent cases (medication, therapy, etc.) due to financial implications. Consequently, the preventive approach is almost non-existent.

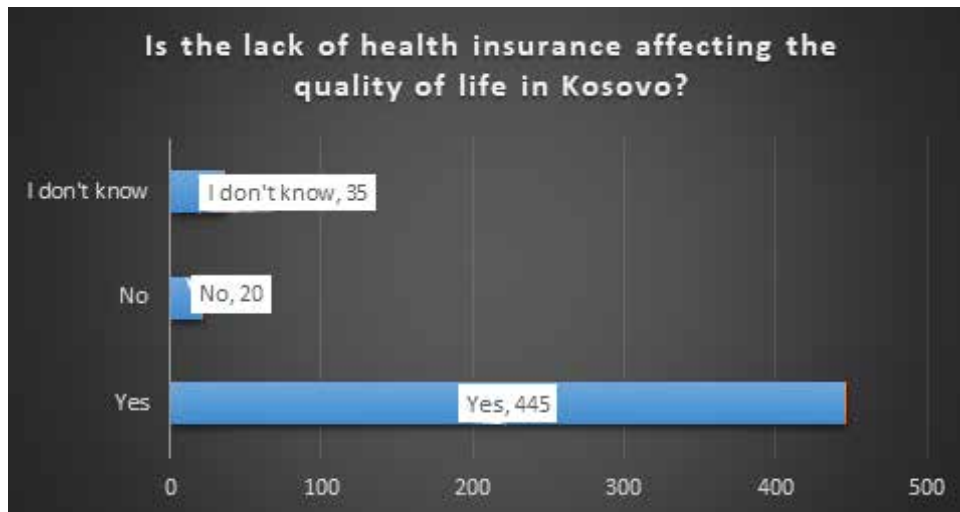


Figure 12: Health insurance and quality of life

6. CONCLUSION

The health insurance system is an essential component of the overall healthcare system. As a result, health insurance plays an important role in protecting citizens' health by preventing public health risks that can have far-reaching consequences in other areas of life. This was especially evident during the COVID-19 pandemic when a clumsy health system and a lack of equal access to health services had disastrous consequences for citizens' health and lives. The ramifications have been and continue to be visible in education, the economy, and social welfare in general.

The Republic of Kosovo's political-administrative institutions have consistently expressed their desire to build a social welfare state, but in the field of health, particularly in relation to health insurance, the desire has been expressed only declaratively. Since the passage of the health-care law eight years ago, there has been no positive reflection on citizens' health. The passage of the aforementioned law resulted only in the creation of new administrative institutions (Health Insurance Fund), which were unable to create a foundation for the operation of this fund on the basis of collected premiums, but instead functioned as an executive agency and an additional burden on the state budget. Even the manner in which this institution operates remains covert, contributing to the status quo.

Furthermore, this institution was established to implement the aforementioned law and create an insurance system based on Bismarck's model, while existing practices employ the Beveridge system. This institution took eight years to complete a feasibility study, create a draft list of health services, a draft price, and a draft health information system that has yet to be tested. Above all, before the law approved in 2014 can be implemented, it must first be amended. It is clear that the law on health insurance was drafted with the best interests of citizens in mind, despite indirect pressure from certain circles of interest who would benefit if the law was more balanced and included profitable components in favor of private sector parties of interest. However, political will is the only factor that can make a significant contribution to the law's implementation, protecting citizens' interests against the interests of other parties involved in this process.

The research data clearly revealed citizens' difficulties in accessing health institutions that provide efficient and effective services in the absence of health insurance. It has also been observed that insurance through private companies is not seen as a solution for citizens due to their negative perception and the high prices for individual and family insurance.

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SOME FEATURES OF POLICE CORRUPTION IN THE STATES IN TRANSITION: THE CASE OF KOSOVO

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ABSTRACT

The issue of police corruption is recognized almost all over the world as a serious problem. Surely, the exception is for the states in transition, which are reluctant to identify and take seriously the issue of police corruption. Many states in transition believe that the police corruption is a minor issue within their state system. However, the police corruption is a serious challenge and for the society, it constitutes a lack of confidence in police. It is difficult to find a definition, which would be universally accepted, but we think that definition of corruption, according to a group of Interpol experts on corruption, presents a real finding: "corruption is any action or inaction by individuals or organizations, public or private, against the law or trust, for profit purposes". This paper tackles the forms and characteristics of the police corruption, the problems which appear due to the presence of corruption within the Kosovo police. Further, the paper specifies the importance of fighting the police corruption. In conclusion, the paper includes recommendations for the police job in the countries in transition, including Kosovo, in terms of the fight against corruption within the police.

Keywords: Police corruption, law, transition, Kosovo.

1. INTRODUCTION

Police is a civil service of a state which is responsible for the prevention and detection of crime. The police are the initial faces of law enforcement and commence the criminal justice process and thus hold significant responsibility for functioning law and order (Singh, 2022). Corruption is a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon, hard to define, to measure and to tackle (Cariolle, 2018).

Corruption is a serious problem for many countries in the world. This finding does not save Kosovo either (Shishani, 2019). It is difficult to find a definition that would be universally accepted, but we think that the definition of corruption according to Interpol expert group on corruption is a realistic finding: “corruption is any act or omission by individuals or public or private organizations in violation of the law or trust for profit” (Interpol, n.d.).

Corruption erodes trust, weakens democracy, hampers economic development and further exacerbates inequality, poverty, social division and the environmental crisis (Transparency International, n.d.). The negative effects of the phenomenon of corruption are numerous: “it can undermine political, social and economic stability, and ultimately threaten the safety and security of society as a whole” (Interpol, n.d.). Corruption is a dangerous phenomenon in society, but the danger is hugely amplified when it is the police themselves that are corrupt. It is they who should be the guardians of the rules and norms that we agree to live by (Pyman et al., 2012).

But, especially in transition states, it is evident that police services are often not equivalent to citizens' expectations. This is because societies in transition face many challenges during the transformation of the police from the influences of older systems into a democratic system and police. “While many changes have been made in police organizations in terms of declaratory statements of policing officials, legal frameworks and symbolic and structural reforms implemented (such as changing the name of the organization from militia to police, changing uniforms and rank structures), they have often proven superficial and do not yet appear to have succeeded in fundamentally changing the working values, habits and practices of the police to the point where they could be said to fully embody democratic policing” (Caparini & Marenin, 2005).

The changes in the transition states regarding the police require a fast, but also determined dynamics in such a way that the police can be a service loved by the citizens, and become a partner with them in the fight against corruption within itself by being transparent and friendly to the public opinion. The police cannot yet be said to espouse a service mentality and the relationship between citizens and police must still undergo fundamental change before it can be said that police are accountable and enjoy public consent and legitimacy (Caparini & Marenin, 2005).

The following paper will deal with police corruption in general, then it will deal with some characteristics of police corruption in transition states, and after that it will also reflect the police corruption in Kosovo. In the end, some conclusions on the work of the

police in countries in transition, including Kosovo, in the direction of the fight against corruption within the police are included.

2. ON POLICE CORRUPTION IN GENERAL

As key representatives of the state, the integrity of the police in all societies is pivotal to retain public trust in the rule of law and the preservation of internal security (Singh, 2022). Inappropriate behavior in the police can result in dissatisfaction and a decrease in trust in the legal system and the rule of law on the part of citizens. Since the collapse of communism, many countries in the transition region have been characterized by low and declining levels of trust, and high and increasing levels of corruption (EBRD, n.d.).

When police corruption is exposed or is perceived by the public to be prevalent, confidence in and communal relations with the police force become disjointed (Singh, 2022). Police corruption is an international problem (Bayley & Perito, 2011).

In many countries, the police force is commonly identified as one of the most corrupt governmental institutions (Transparency International 2017b). According to the Transparency International Global Corruption Barometer, (Report 2010-2011) the police is the institution most often reported as being the recipient of bribes. Because the police are the primary institution for implementing law in any society, police corruption stops the implementation of the rule of law in place. When police sell their services for private profit, the rule of law ceases to exist (Bayley & Perito, 2011).

There is generally a consensus in literature regarding the definition of police corruption as defined by Transparency International: “the abuse of entrusted power for private gain”. Police corruption therefore exists when illegal actions are undertaken by a police officer, or by a group of police officers, which actions are prohibited by law. However, corruption will exist even if these police officers do not undertake the actions that are permitted by law. In this context, (Ivkovic et al., 2004) defines police corruption: “As an action or omission, a promise of action or omission, or an attempt of action or omission, committed by a police officer or a group of police officers, characterized by the police officer’s misuse of the official position motivated in significant part with the achievement of personal gain”. The Toolkit on Police Integrity defines police corruption as: “The solicitation or acceptance (directly or indirectly) by police personnel of any money, article of value, gift, favour, promise, reward or advantage, whether for himself/herself or for any person, group or entity, in return for any act or omission (failure to act) already done or omitted to be done or omitted in the future in or in connection with the performance of any function of or connected to police work” (DCAF, 2012).

It is known that, when corrupt actions are carried out by police employees, they are more serious than when they are carried out by citizens. This is because the police are a state institution that must fight corruption. The police service is the state agency that the public expects to control the behavior of others, including other state officials; if the police cannot be trusted, there is no other obvious agency to which the public can turn to uphold the law and maintain public order. (DCAF, 2012). Police corruption gives a bad example for society. To encourage respect for the law, the state must ensure those responsible for implementing laws are positive role models. Therefore, it is very useful

for the police to be proactive in fighting corruption in their ranks, because through this way, they would gain the trust of the citizens in many aspects, such as; in the prompt reporting of cases where policemen may be corrupt, but also in providing information that would help the police find suspects, victims, witnesses, etc. On the contrary, if corruption and other inappropriate behaviors in the police are not fought, the legitimacy of the police and the state itself would be damaged.

3. POLICE CORRUPTION IN TRANSITION STATES

The rapid change in the political and social aspects, from a dictatorial system to a democratic one, is a feature of states in transition. Citizens want police officers to perform their duty honestly, correctly, and impartially, therefore, it is natural to demand from the state leadership to provide them fast and fair services from state institutions, including the police services. In conditions where society demands are ever higher, the government's measures to reduce corruption must be ever more concise and efficient (Matei & Popa, 2009).

But, having in mind the abovementioned, when the changes are done hastily and perhaps not strategically, they can also have a negative impact on the consolidation of the state institutions of countries in transition, especially on their police forces. Countries in transition, undergoing rapid social and political changes, are certainly characterized by the increase in criminality, therefore, the state authorities of these countries, in order to fight crime, often make mistakes in their efforts. The authorities sometimes react to this by substantially increasing the number of police recruits, often lowering their entry standards, which happened in El Salvador (Legget, 2007). On the other hand, the creation of a new sustainable legal system, starting from the drafting of laws and their adoption, is another common characteristic of countries in transition. Even when such legislation is adopted, lawmakers' lack of experience of the new type of system means that the first versions are often deficient; there are ambiguities and loopholes. (DCAF, 2012).

The transition differs depending on the earlier system that the states went through, therefore, the factors that affect police corruption in these states are also different. Unlike transition states in Latin America, Southern Europe, and South Africa, post-communist states needed to replace the political system but also the economic system; within a short time, they sought to shift from an overwhelmingly state owned and centrally planned economy to a predominantly privately owned one run mainly on market principles. In many countries, this economic transition was accompanied by a much more questionable accumulation of wealth, and substantially increased economic inequality (DCAF, 2012). "This resulted in widespread resentment, as the 'losers' in post-communist transition assumed that many of the new 'winners' had become wealthy via crime. Many police officers knew from their own experience that some of the new wealth had been acquired via improper and sometimes explicitly illegal means" (DCAF, 2012).

It is expected, in this situation, that the dissatisfaction within the society be evident. Therefore, it often happens that countries in transition get assistance from various foreign agencies in order to more easily solve transition problems, especially within their

police forces. Kosovo is one of the states in transition that had and still has this privilege. In Kosovo, those agencies are: American ICITAP, OSCE, EULEX, DCAF, etc. The engagement of these agencies was very necessary and successful in building institutions. The problems of transition countries related to police corruption cannot be solved easily. The heads of countries in transition, together with the heads of the police, must oppose and fight the creation of wealth illegally. Rapid reaction as soon as a corrupt action is discovered within the police would be the best way that would affect the increase of the integrity and positive image of the police in transition states.

4. POLICE CORRUPTION IN KOSOVO

The Kosovo Police is a public service within the scope of the Ministry of Internal Affairs enforcing the law and public order. It was established on 6 September 1999. At that time, the OSCE Mission in Kosovo, in accordance with United Nations Resolution 1244, opened the police school and started training candidates for members of the Kosovo Police. This service was run by the International Police for a long time almost in every segment, even though their role was allegedly to be monitors. Powers and duties of the Kosovo Police, its organization and other issues related to the activities and actions of the police, are governed by the Constitution of Kosovo, the Law on Police No. 04/L-076. This law entered into force in March (2012). In the strategic documents of the Kosovo Police, a mission and vision is foreseen to provide law enforcement in a professional and efficient manner.

However, despite the police's engagement, corruption in Kosovo is endangering the core values of our civilized democratic society, then bringing the dilemma of respecting the law, the equality of citizens before the law, violation of rights and freedoms of citizens. Due to the social risk of this phenomenon, the state is trying to fight any form of corruption successfully.

Honesty, professional integrity, responsibility, accountability, self-restraint, etc., are some of the values proclaimed by the Kosovo Police (Kosovo Police, n.d.)

Kosovo Police is a success story of the international community and the people of Kosovo. In Kosovo, as in any other country, the police are on the front line in the fight against corruption and other negative occurrences. The pace of general developments in Kosovar society is very fast, so the police must respond as an organization capable of fulfilling its mission. The results in the fight against corruption in Kosovo are evident. Naturally, there were also arrests based on the orders of competent Kosovo prosecutors' offices. However, for the Kosovo society, the problem is the official corruption and criminal offenses against the official duty set forth in Chapter XXXIV of the Criminal Code of Kosovo. Hence, despite the commitment of the police in Kosovo, corruption continues to exist even within the police organization, endangering the essential values of our democratic society. Thus, the Kosovo police has not been immune to corruption so far. The most common form of police corruption is accepting bribes where this form but also many other forms of corruption, such as disregarding the traffic law, misuse of official duties, etc., have often characterized the Kosovo Police, especially in the last three (3) years.

Overview of criminal offenses with elements of official corruption and against official duty	2019	2020	2021
1. Abusing official position or authority	26	28	27
2. Falsifying official document	1	0	01
3. Accepting bribes	4	3	01
4. Trading in influence	1	1	02
5. Disclosing official secrets	1	0	02
6. Giving bribes	0	0	0
7. Misappropriation in office	1	0	0
8. Conflict of interest	1	0	0
9. Misusing official information	1	0	0
Total	36	32	33

Table 1. Reflects the number of police officials who are presumed to have committed one of the criminal offenses with corrupt elements as presented in the table.

As it can be seen at the end of the table, it is interesting that the total number of police officials who have committed criminal offenses with elements of official corruption and against the official duty is approximately the same in the last three years (Police Inspectorate of Kosovo, 2021).

5. CONCLUSIONS

The problems of countries in transition regarding police corruption cannot be solved easily. This is because the presence of corruption deforms political and economic systems. “It undermines the legitimacy of the state, which is seen to favour some citizens over others, and thus weakens policy-makers’ ability to drive through socially difficult structural reforms. Corruption also hampers the efficient delivery of public services, as it reduces the state’s tax revenues and diverts resources which should be available for public use to private hands” (EBRD, n.d.).

The Heads of police must react quickly when they discover the presence of corruption in their police force. Police must be dominant against crime and also create the public image that they are such. If they do not get the help of citizens to be informed about the actions of the corrupted and the reporting of the suspects, the police will find it difficult to perform their duties.

Countering police corruption has become an all European effort. During the last decade, several European countries have developed multi-institutional systems for police integrity. On EU level, platforms like the European Partners against Corruption (EPAC) were introduced, enabling specialised anti-corruption institutions to cooperate and share experience.

In addition, Europol, Interpol and the UN developed and shared the blueprints of common standards and good practices in preventing police corruption (Dzhekova et al, 2013).

In order to limit the corruption, a successful method which is being used by foreign organizations, especially European ones, is setting as a condition limiting of the corruption prior to accessing organizations in which countries in transition must become members, such as the European Union. Kosovo Police should maintain their professional integrity if they want the public to trust the police in the future and cooperate in the prevention and fight against corruption. Kosovo Police should continue to be a civic, friendly, helpful, and trusted force to the public. However, the precondition for such a thing, that is, for the cooperation of citizens with the police, is no corruption of police officials, respectively, there should be no police corruption.

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WHY SHOULD THERE BE A TWO-PARTY SYSTEM IN KOSOVO?

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ABSTRACT

The Republic of Kosovo has a multi-party system which has almost all the time caused the need for the political parties to enter coalitions. The design of the party system in the Republic of Kosovo represents a relevant topic as this has been a major cause of political stability issues in Kosovo. The current multi-party system has generally caused tremendous fragility in almost every government, which since the independence of the country, has basically consistently failed to complete a regular four-year term.

Therefore, based on the aforementioned problems of the multi-party system, this paper argues that it would be more suitable for the country of Kosovo to operate in a two-party system. A two-party system has been argued to promote better decision-making and political information and most importantly, greater stability. The paper attempted to defend its thesis through extensive literature review which provides ample evidence over the usefulness of the two-party system in the context of Kosovo. The conclusions associated with this paper provide a relevant contribution in a topic which until now is yet in need for greater discussion.

Keywords: *political parties, party system, Kosovo, instability, two-party system*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Kosovo is known for its multi-party system. Taking into consideration this political environment in Kosovo, it follows that it was quite often necessary for the past governments to exist only through coalitions. However, as it will be further discussed in this article, the presence of a multi-party system and constant coalitions has caused for the governments to be rather fragile and the political environment of the country has been largely plagued by this fragility.

This article will provide a theoretical discussion of political parties and party systems in terms of the number of political parties. In this regard, countries are generally divided between two-party and multi-party systems. While both systems have their merits and demerits, this paper will argue for the merits of the two-party systems. More specifically, the paper will put the debate in the context of the country of Kosovo by providing empirical evidence on the political instability the current multi-party system has caused.

The paper will provide an intertwining between theoretical contribution in the area of party systems and empirical information provided by the focus in the country of Kosovo. Furthermore, the analysis provided in the paper will further attempt to strengthen the argument over the assumed benefits if a two-party system were to be established in Kosovo. The conclusion will provide the final remarks on the matter and thus will attempt to leave a lasting impression over the argument concerning the merits of a two-party system in the context of Kosovo.

2. AN INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL PARTIES

Political parties represent one of the most vital institutions in a democratic society. Political parties in general represent groups of people that are willing to take part in elections and eventually hold power in the government. It must be emphasized that individuals that are part of specific parties tend to agree on particular programs and policies regarding the functioning of the society and also share a specific view that promotes the common good (Uppal, p. 72, 2022).

Being a good example of pluralism in a democratic society, political parties tend to represent the “political divisions” that are part of a specific society. Parties tend to represent a part of the society and this group of the people associated with the specific political party tend to represent the element of partisanship. It must be noted that there must be some general agreement over three main elements in a political party: what cause it stands for, whose interests tend to represent and what main policies tend to support. Each political party must have three main components. Those three components involve the leaders of the party, active members and the group of followers (Uppal, p. 72, 2022).

As mentioned at the beginning of this discussion, political parties are a characteristic of democratic societies. With this being the case, political parties tend to have a role in the promotion of democracy within a particular society. Political parties have many functions that directly or indirectly contribute to the level of democracy in a particular country. Some of these functions have been highlighted in the article entitled “The Political Parties and Party System” and include: political parties must be able to behave responsibly and create their identity so that ensures that they have the trust of their fellow citizens; they must ensure

that they recruit talented individuals and that such individuals hold public offices; parties must ensure that they are promoting the principle of accountability in a democratic society; they must be inclusive in the sense that they must promote a broad portion of interests in a society; parties must operate independently from the unhealthy influence of the incumbent parties in the government (Dunleavy & Kippin, pp. 93-94, 2018).

While political parties are relevant to the existence of democracy, they also suffer from a variety of challenges that have the potential to undermine their operation. First, political parties tend to often suffer from a lack of internal democracy which means that power is concentrated in a number of handful individuals. Next, political parties tend to have a rather difficult upward mobility in the sense that it is rather difficult for individuals to move into the higher echelons of the party. Furthermore, political parties are disproportionately influenced by more affluent individuals that have the opportunity to exclude other members in higher powers. The last relevant challenge for political parties is that they have started to abandon their ideological profiles which then creates confusion to the electorate (Uppal, pp. 82-83, 2022).

3. POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE CONTEXT OF REPUBLIC OF KOSOVO

After providing a general overview of political parties, it is important to shift the discussion to the context of Kosovo. The country of Kosovo operates in a multi-party system in which there are more than two major parties. In fact, 28 political parties participated in the 2021 extraordinary elections that were held for the formation of the government (Shehu, 2021). This implies that the Republic of Kosovo tends to have a rather high degree of pluralism which in this context translates for a healthy democratic society in terms of the existence of different views.

Political parties in the context of Kosovo began their existence during the nineties. However, it must be emphasized that during this period, it was almost impossible for these parties to function properly as the country of Kosovo was facing a form of apartheid under the Serbian regime. The first political party to be formed was the Democratic League of Kosovo which was then followed by the Albanian Christian Democratic Party, the Peasants Party, the Parliamentary Party and others. It is relevant to mention that such parties lacked internal democracy as all decisions were taken by their leaders (Zejnnullahi, p.30, 2016).

After the war of 1999, the political landscape of Kosovo was enriched with the presence of several other parties which marked the beginning of the multi-party system that was to characterize the country of Kosovo. Political party organization in Kosovo is regulated by law. Thus, the country of Kosovo by definition is a pluralistic parliamentary system. Throughout the years, the dominant parties in Kosovo have been PDK (Kosovo Democratic Party), Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), Self-Determination (VV) and to a lesser degree we could also include the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (Zejnnullahi, p.31, 2016).

It must be noted that the current multi-party system of Kosovo tends to create a situation in which almost all the time no political party has had the majority needed to form the government. (Tahirbegolli, p.11, 2020). Nevertheless, it was Vetëvendosje (Self-Determination) which in the last parliamentary elections held in Kosovo was able to win more than 50% of popular vote, and thus for the first time, to secure a majority of seats within the legislature.

It must be noted that while the country of Kosovo operates in a multi-party system which is a symbol of pluralism, most of the major political parties have had the chance to lead the government together in the form of coalitions. This has led some experts to call the system of Kosovo a rather moderate multi-party system (Tahirbegolli, p.12, 2020).

The last point that must be made is that there has been a tendency for the elections in Kosovo to follow the general standards set by international representatives in the country. In fact, during the last elections, Kosovar parties were urged to focus on ensuring that the electoral process was to be characterized by “inclusiveness and transparency” (Shehu, 2021). It is relevant to mention that the country of Kosovo and its political landscape have generally benefited from this pressure to promote values that remain typical for a democratic society.

4. PARTY SYSTEMS: AN OVERVIEW

One accepted definition regarding party systems is “A party system is the system of interactions between political parties that results from their mutual competition or cooperation” (Santori 1974, as cited Mair, 2001). One major criterion for the existence of party systems is that more than one party ought to operate. Furthermore, there must be a clear interaction between the parties which operate in a certain political environment (Mair, p.567, 2001) While there is relatively little research regarding the definition of the party system, there is a general assumption over the existence of party systems in those polities which tend to have a plurality of political systems.

Nevertheless, one basic attempt to distinguish between party systems is by taking into consideration the number of political parties that take part in such systems. Duverger (1954) is credited with providing the most basic duality of party systems: two party system and multiparty which implies the existence of more than two party systems (Mair, pp. 567-569, 2015). It must be emphasized that this classification of political parties originally reflected a clear distinction between the rather stable democracies such as United States and United Kingdom (representing typical examples of the two-party system) and relatively unstable and conflictual types of democracies represented by Fourth Republic France, Italy and Weimar Germany which were perceived to be typical examples of multi-party systems. While there has been debate over the relationship between the number of parties and levels of political stability, this classification between two and multi-party systems has been widely accepted in the literature of comparative politics (Mair, p. 567, 2001).

Political systems are inevitably linked with the concept of democracy. They represent democracy in the sense that they represent means of resolving potential conflicts within pluralistic societies which represent a quality of democracy. Single-party systems thus tend to operate in situations where there is no tolerance for political conflicts (Britannica, par 1). Furthermore, the distinction between two-party and multi-party systems is not as clear as it seems in the first place. For example, in classic two-party systems, there are other smaller political parties in addition to the two major political parties and often a third smaller party tends to prevent the main parties for attaining the majority of seats in a particular legislature (Britannica, par 2).

Before ending the discussion over the party systems, it is important to briefly mention one other form of classification which is based on the degree to which the general structure of

the political parties' competition is open or closed. In this regard, there are the wholly closed systems represented by the United States and United Kingdom in which the formation of the new government follows a general pattern and where the third party is always excluded. In addition to this, if we consider the other extreme, it might be difficult to recognize the existence of a political system at all in the sense that there is no clear pattern as to how political parties are expected to be formed. This means that each political party often has a chance of eventually forming the government. Party systems are considered to be strong in a closed competition and weak in the context of wholly open structures of competition (Mair, p. 568, 2001).

5. TWO PARTY SYSTEM AND ITS MERITS

This paper was aimed at supporting the two-party system. Before proceeding with the argument over the appropriateness of the two-party system in Kosovo, it is necessary to discuss the general merits of the two party system. Two party systems tend to be associated with a number of advantages in terms of how the existence of two major political parties tend to affect the functioning of governments. In general, it has been concluded that a two party system has the tendency to promote centrism and less extremism in general. Furthermore, a two party system is considered to be more stable than the other multi-party system and thus makes it easier for the parties to govern. This is related to the legislature as a multi-party system might lead to "hung parliament" and thus negatively impact political processes in a particular country (Saylor Academy n.d.).

While the existence of a multi-party system tends to be associated with pluralism and democracy in general, it must be emphasized that the existence of many parties tends to limit proper representation of citizens. In this regard, a two-party system tends to form governments which are representative of a broader portion of the population in a particular country (Saylor Academy n.d.). This component of representation within governments that derive from two-party systems is an important attribute of the latter. Because of the fact that two-party systems tend to encourage the triumph of majorities in elections, it is very difficult for candidates from third political parties to win in elections in which there are two major political parties (Shivaji College n.d.).

A Two-party system is not only relevant in terms of providing proper representation for its citizens but also tends to speed up the work of the government as it ensures that there are no unnecessary gridlocks that would hamper the work of the parliament in taking important decisions. This is particularly important in such instances when the government is expected to react to various specific situations which may call for urgent government action. Another representation advantage of the two party system is that it tends to make it easier for political representatives to clearly define their views to their constitutions. As candidates tend to belong to one of the major parties, it is easier for citizens to understand their position on major issues. In this regard, it must be emphasized that the existence of two major parties tends to make the election process in general much more straightforward and thus tends to present political information in a much more convenient way for the population (Shivaji College n.d.)

Finally, there is a clear pragmatic component in the two-party system, as this system

tends to contribute to a strong executive which tends to have the necessary powers to take decisions when required. Interestingly, in relation to the pragmatic element of the two-party system, we must also consider the “voter paradox” according to which the existence of more than two choices in a set of given circumstances for citizens tends to lead to choices which ultimately do not represent the views of the majority (Kainz, pp 73-74, 1978).

The two-party system being one of the two major forms within the major party system classification tends to provide a rather straightforward approach to the democracy in a particular society which generally translates to a more practical and efficient governing process.

6. KOSOVO POLITICAL INSTABILITY AND THE CASE FOR THE TWO PARTY SYSTEM

As it was mentioned earlier in this paper, one of the advantages of a two-party system was that it ensured greater political stability. In this regard, as the country of Kosovo operates with a multi-party or rather moderate multi-party system, it could be followed that the country of Kosovo has had its own fair share of trouble with political instability. Therefore, it becomes necessary to at least consider the alternative of establishing a two-party system.

Nevertheless, before making the case for the two-party system in the context of Kosovo, it is necessary to provide some context. According to a study from Group for Legal and Political Studies entitled “The political (In)stability and Cabinet Duration in Kosova: Why are governments short-lived?” No Kosovar government has successfully completed a four-year term. Moreover, as of 2020, the average time of cabinet duration was 240.9 days. It must be mentioned that this is lower than the average for countries in Eastern and Western Europe. In fact, this situation in 2020 went as far as it caused for three different governments to be elected in the same year (Sejdiu, p.4, 2021). These statistics are relevant because they represent the major political inconsistencies created by the current multi-party system of Kosovo.

In line with the previous arguments provided in this paper, the main reason for this great political instability in the context of Kosovo was the fact that the country of Kosovo operated within a fractionalized and polarized political system which led for governments to refuse to go into coalitions with one-another. This then caused the process of government formation to be rather difficult and complex (Sejdiu, p.4, 2021). Furthermore, Adem Beha, a lecturer of political science at the University of Pristina, said that this lack of stability of Kosovo’s governments is a “consequence of the country’s electoral system”. Furthermore, while this electoral system ensured that it was almost impossible for a political party to govern alone (although this changed in 2021 when Self-Determination won more than 50% of the popular vote), it also created such circumstances which called for the formation of government based on coalitions between parties which had great differences in terms of their political program (Isufi, 2019).

The existence of a two-party system based on the model of the US and UK, even if it would require some political parties to potentially merge or some others to leave the political landscape of the country, would simplify the government formation process as rather often major parties would ensure a majority of popular vote. Political program differences

and the number of partners in various coalitions, according to Beha have led to difficulties in decision-making as this process required different parties to harmonize their positions on various issues (Isufi, 2019). Decision-making is much simpler in a two-party system when we consider the fact that the ruling political party has the majority of seats in the legislature. In relation to the program-related issues in a multi-party system, a two-party system ensures that there is much more simplicity in this regard. Major political parties would generally represent their main divisions in certain issues which would then benefit the electorate as it would clearly simplify the political information which would then inform political vote. Again, while political parties tend to sometimes blur their stances on various issues, a two-party system would clearly reduce the complexity for the voters.

Another important aspect to mention is that this current pluralistic or moderate pluralistic system in Kosovo has also been a function of the PR electoral system which has also included reserved seats for minorities. This system has thus produced weak majorities. In fact, it must be emphasized that since 2001, only Vetëvendosje (Self-Determination) has been able to win a majority of the popular vote. The fact that most governments have been formed by coalition has led to weak unsatisfactory decision-making and governmental performance in general. One important element in relation to this landscape of political parties in Kosovo is lack of proper cooperation. More specifically, political parties have not shown proper ideological and programmatic cooperation. This system has also discouraged political parties to work on profiling themselves (Krasniqi, p.75, 2019). While a two party system might sometimes deepen divergences between the existing parties, the idea of duality of opinions on major issues is helpful for voters and, in the context of Kosovo, would contribute to encouraging greater political participation.

One of the major advantages of a two-party system was its ability to help decision-making and thus make governments more effective in this regard. This advantage of a two-party system is particularly relevant when it comes to handling specific crises. While Kosovo has been characterized by instability, this was particularly relevant during the COVID-19 crisis. Before and during the pandemic, the country of Kosovo has experienced one of the most politically unstable periods as three different governments were changed during this period. In this regard, the pandemic was not only a crisis on its own, but it did help exacerbate an already polarized political system (Prishtina Institute for Political Studies, p. 16, 2022). Majority governments are particularly relevant in such circumstances in which effective decision-making is particularly important, and, it must be emphasized that the importance of effective-decision making is also related to preventing ripple effect problems for a particular government. In fact, in relation to the decision-making issues, according to Beha “Kosovo has suffered and is suffering not because its post-war governments have been short-lived, but because of their longevity in taking bad decisions for the country for a long time,” and this tendency demonstrates how influential a flawed political system could be (Isufi, 2019).

Generally and in line with the previous discussion, the political instability of Kosovo has been attributed to the following factors; party system polarization; lack of consistent parliamentary majorities; presence of small king-makers as a result of polarization; constitutional court decisions and slow process of government formation (Sejdiu pp. 17-21, 2021). These factors are relevant as they help wrap-up the discussion in this paper by restating the main

issues associated with the current pluralistic party system. Meanwhile, they help strengthen the argument for the hypothesis that a two-party system would be more effective in the country of Kosovo in which the current political landscape has generally produced instability, improper decision-making, and a lack of political information which has negatively influenced the level of democracy.

7. CONCLUSION

The Republic of Kosovo operates within a multi-party system which has sometimes been described as a moderate pluralistic system. The existence of several parties has produced political instability in the sense that most of the post-war governments have been short-lived and the process of government formation itself has been difficult too. In relation to this situation, the aim of this paper was to provide an argument over the appropriateness of establishing a two-party system in the context of Kosovo. The argument for the two-party system has generally been centered on the idea that this system tends to contribute to greater levels of political stability.

The paper followed a rather straightforward structure by first providing a theoretical discussion of the main elements that have been part of this argument. The paper began with a general overview of political parties, their main functions and most importantly their role in enriching democracy in general. The discussion of political parties was then shifted to the context of the Republic of Kosovo. This part of the paper offered a rather chronological overview of the evolution of political parties in Kosovo. A part of discussion here was centered on the idea of current parties and multi-party system which then served to provide context for the argument.

Before arriving at the final part of the discussion regarding the appropriateness of the two-party system, it was necessary to provide a theoretical discussion regarding the political systems and merits of the two-party system. There tends to be a general agreement over the basic classification of parties in terms of the number of parties in a given political system which creates the division between the two-party and multi-party system. For the needs of this paper, there were several arguments in regards to the merits of a two-party system which generally is associated with better stability, more effective decision-making and greater political information clarity. The last part of the discussion attempted to provide the main argument over the paper- that of the effectiveness of a two-party system in the Republic of Kosovo. Since the country of Kosovo has operated with a multi-party system in which only one majority government was formed, this has caused great political instability issues which has then affected the decision making process and democracy in general. Establishing a two-party system would contribute positively to the current political system in Kosovo as it would directly contribute to the country's political stability. Furthermore, establishing this system would also enrich the level of democracy as it would ensure greater governmental effectiveness. Furthermore, the ideological differences between the two major parties would lead to a better voting process for citizens. Ultimately, the volatile political context of Kosovo would greatly benefit with a two-party system whose advantages are largely associated with the much-needed aspect of political stability.

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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

In any area of knowledge Artificial Intelligence - AI ability to manage and interrogate large amounts of data, make connections between disparate data sources, identify areas where real-time interventions make it possible to make more correct/assertive decisions. Taking coevolutionary learning into account, we decided to link agile development methodologies with coevolutionary learning and artificial intelligence The Agile Methodology for Coevolutionary Teaching with AI - [ATAI] (Rodrigues, 2022), allows the teacher to follow the student's evolution and understand which contents need more work. Thus, AI makes it possible to generate a learning path for each student, which is specific to them and designed to accommodate their weaknesses, talents, and challenges. The implications of this are huge. Truly personalized learning provides students with the best environment in which they can reach their full potential. The methodology presented, leads us to discuss Agile Learning because of the interactive, adaptive, and incremental characteristics, which allow the student several opportunities to acquire new knowledge through short and simple learning processes that become more complex. It is with this information that AI will have its preponderant role, as it allows all students to have a relevant growth with consistent results. While it provides predictive information about the probability of a certain student dropping out, which allows the institution to take preventive measures to reverse the situation. For teachers, it allows them to improve the teaching-learning process by anticipating students' difficulties, new teaching methods by anticipation.

Key words: Artificial Intelligence, Agile Development Methodologies, Co-evolutionary Learning.

1. INTRODUCTION

Analyzing the use of Artificial Intelligence in education is a way to seek solutions that can add value to the teaching-learning process. However, we should not neglect human characteristics such as critical thinking, creativity, among others, (Bates, 2019) According to the same author, the attempts to replicate the teaching-learning process using artificial intelligence (AI) started around 1980, but only recently have there been advances. It is noteworthy that there is a lot of potential in the use of AI artificial intelligence in the educational process as a support for the teaching-learning tasks. Let us see some examples in the use of AI in the teaching-learning process: adaptive learning, intelligent tutors, diagnostic tools, data mining in education, recommendation systems, classification of learning styles, gamification, virtual worlds. Focusing on adaptive learning, which aims to use technology to meet the individual needs of students to customize their tasks, (Soflano, Connolly, & Hainey, 2015). However, according to (Tseng, Chu, Hwang, & Tsai, 2008), to carry out adaptive learning, we must first understand the student's learning behaviours. Pedagogically adaptive learning points to the use of technology as a way of responding to the individual learning needs of the learner (Soflano, Connolly, & Hainey, 2015). According, to (Al-mohammadi, Hagrass, DaniyalAlghazzaw, & Aldabbagh, 2017), (Melo, et al., 2014) technology solutions based on AI are being developed to identify the student's learning profile and thus promote adaptive learning to the student's needs. In this sense, some works unite AI with interactive resources, such as the research of (Dogmus, Erdem, & Patoglu, 2015), in which they propose an interactive educational tool for applying AI with robotics which agrees with (Bates, 2019) who refers learning with interactive resources allow to increase learning, which implies a greater dynamism with the user and thus an immediate response. It is my understanding that we should consider the Adaptive Interactive Software for Teaching (MIAOE) development methodology allows working in balance with ergonomic software, software quality factors and Human Interface Computer/User Interface Design. (Rodrigues, E. 2012). This methodology allows developing educational applications adaptable to the particularities of each student, which originated the Adaptive Interactive Software for Teaching (SIAOE) . However, the model does not allow to associate IA, which implied the change of a new model that would allow this interaction, through the Agile Methodology for Coevolutive Teaching with AI - (ATAI), (figure 1) this allows the teacher to follow the student's evolution and understand which contents need to be further worked on (Rodrigues, E. 2022).



Figure 1

The methodology presented leads us to discuss Agile Learning due to its interactive, adaptive, and incremental characteristics, which allow the student several opportunities to acquire new

knowledge through short and simple learning processes that gradually become more complex. Thus, why not interconnect agile development methodologies with Coevolutionary Learning and Artificial Intelligence? The Agile Methodology for Coevolving Teaching with AI - (ATAI) (Rodrigues, 2022), allows the teacher to follow the evolution of the student and understand which contents need to be further worked on. Since, in any area of knowledge, the capacity of AI to manage and interrogate large amounts of data, and to establish links between disparate data sources, can help to identify areas where real-time interventions or additional support can help to make more correct/assertive decisions, so that the student can achieve the objectives of the curricular units. On the other hand, institutions also benefit from this proposed model, as it can help them in their decision-making to support students and contribute to their success. This work proposes to test this model in the database curricular unit of the Informatics Engineering course (1st year/2nd semester) of Instituto Politécnico de Beja. To compare the data obtained after the use of the ATAI methodology in the curricular unit, it is first necessary to analyse the data from the two previous academic years, in which the methodology was not applied. For the academic year 2022/2023, during the 2nd semester, the methodology will be applied.

2. AIMS OF THE STUDY

The study's main objective is to help students, teachers, and Educational Institutions in solving school failure. There are scientific areas where school failure is quite significant. There are many variables that can contribute to this situation, such as economic/financial issues, student workers, etc. However, the variable we will consider is related to the assessment methodologies. Normally, the data-based assessment has a moment in which students are proposed a group work, in which the students choose the group element. Most of the time it happens that this choice implies that we can have very good groups and other very weak groups, which sometimes implies that there is a big failure in the curricular unit. So we propose to create a bot that applying the ATAI methodology, creates itself the elements of that group in a more balanced, more personalized way. I believe that, in this way, we will be able to reduce school failure. It will generate a learning path for each student that is specific to them and designed to accommodate their weaknesses, talents, and challenges. The implications of this are huge. Truly personalized learning provides students with the best environment in which to reach their full potential. In addition to the positive effect this will have on their academic performance, the student's attitude to school, to the level of engagement to deal with their everyday life and with others with greater happiness and well-being.

For this whole process to develop, what will I need? Students, Innovative Teachers, Visionary Leaders, Technological means and infrastructure (Figure 2).

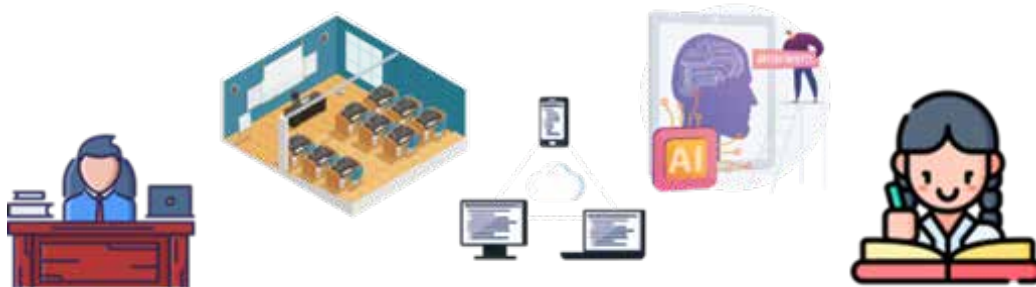


Figure 2

What I am applying? Coevolutionary Agile Learning with AI. And the digital resources: Microsoft Azure, Microsoft Teams, Trello, murals, zoom, quizzes,

3. CONCLUSION

On the other hand, the educational institutions also benefit from this methodology, as it will allow them to take preventive measures to reverse situations where the coevolutionary learning process is not being achieved by the students.

For the students, it foresees the difficulties, improves their skills, improves the learning process, reinforces their knowledge by obtaining better results.

For the teachers, it allows them to foresee the students' difficulties, improves the teaching-learning process, which implies defining new teaching methods by anticipation.

The generated Lorem Ipsum is therefore always free from repetition, injected humour, or non-characteristic words etc.

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THE IMPACT OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES ON SMES PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to focus on the impact of ICT on the performance of SMEs performance

Design/methodology/approach –Both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed. The methods section [research design] explains the study population, and methods of data analysis.

Findings – The findings of the empirical investigation provided encouraging responses to the proposed research questions and demonstrated the validity of the research problem. The literature and empirical data both provide insightful information on how ICT might help SMEs operate better and increase their competitiveness.

Keywords – ICT, SMEs, Performance, Growth.

1. INTRODUCTION

Today's business world has been deeply influenced by Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and the application of ICT among business is widespread. ICT is rapidly changing global production, work, business methods, trade and consumption patterns between enterprises and consumers. Because of the affordability and cost-effectiveness SME-s are using widely information and communication technology. Furthermore, the role of small to medium size enterprises (SMEs) is important for economic growth of a country.

This research paper aims to highlight the implications of Information and Communication Technologies on SME-s performance. The following is how the article develops. First, the research on how ICT has affected SMEs performance in Kosovo is conducted. Using a practical sampling technique and a structured questionnaire adapted from the literature, one hypothesis was developed about the impact of ICT on data drawn from a sample of 46 SMEs in Kosovo (Prishtina). The data collection strategy and analysis are further explained. Finally, the research outcomes and potential future research are presented.

2. STUDY BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

Information and communication technologies (ICT) and its implications in the economic and social development has become a very important topic of scientific research in recent years.

Beckinsale and Ram (2006) defined ICT as 'any technology used to support information gathering, processing, distribution and use' ICTs are all types of technologies and products that are used to create, produce, analyze, process, package, distribute, retrieve, store, transmit, or receive information electronically in a digital form, such as computers, email, the internet, websites, social networking, and other wireless communications devices, networks, broadband, and as a wide range of software, hardware, telecommunications, and information management techniques, applications, and devices (Porter and Millar, 1985; Brady et al., 2002, Nicol, 2003). Theoretical and empirical studies have demonstrated the necessity to gain and exploit the positive outcomes of ICT adoption and implementation on SMEs. small and medium enterprises are among the most important factors in the growth of the global economy. In Europe, SMEs play a key role in job creation and economic growth and are therefore often referred to as the backbone of the European economy. SME support is one of the main policies of all European Union governments (OECD, 2010). SME's currently make up 99% of the Kosovar economy, and they have the ability to significantly contribute to economic expansion. Due to numerous priorities, including cost reduction, effective and sensible promotion, faster communication, quicker realization of products and services, etc., the use of information technology in SMEs in Kosovo is growing quickly. Particularly, the private sector and private firms are responsible for the creation and development of information technology (Berisha-Namani, n.d.).

There are several empirical and theoretical reviews on the matter of business performance whilst using ICT innovations. Mutua, J.M and Wasike, W.S.K (2009) reviewed the literature on ICT adoption and its impacts on firms in both developing and developed countries and analyses the determinants of ICT adoption and their impact on firm's performance. The study shows that adoption and use of ICT is a key factor to helping enterprises to raise their productivity and competitiveness (Suleiman, 2016). (Alam & Noor, 2009) examined the relationship between ICT adoption and its five factors which are perceived benefits, perceived cost, ICT knowledge,

external pressure and government support. The results of this study show that three factors examined are significantly important to the adoption of ICT whereas perceived cost and external pressure are found to be insignificant in determining its adoption. This study provides a greater understanding of SME's perception about ICT adoption in their service business. On the other hand, (Gatauti, 2013) demonstrates that ICT may improve both internal and external communication, and that for optimal results, ICT investments should be coordinated with internal resources and organizational procedures. The actual advances in technology are not as significant as the resulting social and economic developments. (Cuevas-Vargas, 2016) claims that there is sufficient empirical evidence that ICTs facilitate innovation by having this positive and significant influence. It was also discovered that both innovation and the use of ICTs have a major impact on the performance of the organizations under study. (Chege, 2020) shows that technological innovation has a favorable impact on corporate performance. According to the survey, entrepreneurs should create cutting-edge plans to improve business performance. Government policy should focus on enhancing the ICT infrastructure, supporting the technical externalities of SMEs within the industry, and building ICT resource hubs to promote the performance of SMEs. (Yunis, 2017) illustrates that ICT and innovation are strategic resources. However, their contribution to sustainable competitive advantage vitally depends on the implicitness and entrepreneurial behaviors of those involved. It is through this capability that ICT and ICT-based innovations could make a difference in organization's performance – both present and future.

(Consoli, 2012) analyzed scientific literature of ICT's impact on companies and identified and categorized the main effects into four groups as shown in Figure 1, which is adapted from Consoli.



Figure 1. *Impact of ICT on private companies*

According to Consoli (2012), Figure 1. presents the four groups of the main effects of ICT: performance, growth, expansion, and new products. Each of the groups consists of several dimensions. It is also known that ICTs make services more easily tradable and increase productivity in manufacturing enterprises. The paper's objective is to examine the impact of Information and Communication Technology in SMEs in Kosovo, and based on the discussion above, the research proposes the following hypothesis:

H0: Information and Communication Technology has a positive impact in performance of SMEs

Ha: Communication Technology has a positive impact in performance of SMEs

In addition, in this research paper, the link between the education of the owners of the respective enterprises and the use of the internet and marketing in enhancing their productivity, revenue growth etc. is elaborated.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Data collection and sample size

The main objective of this study is to examine the impact of ICT on the performance of SMEs while it is done through quantitative data analysis. The data analysis is based on the data set which is collected using an online, self-administered questionnaire. A data set in the study is collected using an online questionnaire. There were chosen 45 SMEs to whom the questionnaire was sent to the emails of business owners to fill the questionnaire. There were received 45 responses in total. Of the 45 respondents, there were 18 females and 27 male respondents. All the enterprises are registered accordingly as Individual and Social Enterprises to The Business Registration Agency operates within the Ministry of Trade and Industry. The whole process for the data collection was lasted approximately one month.

3.2. Questionnaire design

The questionnaire was developed and validated using a mixed methods study design. The questionnaire consisted of 16 questions. The questions were all related to the impact of ICT in their respective businesses. A semi-structured questionnaire with both quantitative and open-ended questions was used to collect the data. SPSS 22.0 was used to examine the data. The hypotheses are tested based on chi-square tests of independence and one sample T-test.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents out of where 27 were males and 18 females. 24 respondents belonged to the age group of 25-39 and 20 respondents were from 40-60 years old. 55.6% of the respondents were graduates from high school whereas 22.2% graduated with a bachelor's degree.

Question	Frequencies	Percentage
Gender	N	%
Male	27	60
Female	18	40
Age Group	N	%
18-24	1	2.2
25-39	24	53.3
40-60	20	44.4
+60	0	0
Education	N	%
12-th grades or less	9	20
Graduated from high school	25	55.6
Bachelor's Degree	10	22.2
Post Graduate Degree	1	2.2
Vocational School	0	0

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the sample

Source: Author

In addition, table 2 presents the sector and number of years the enterprise has been in business. According to the table, 20% of the respondents work in the retail business, 13.3% of the respondents are owners of a fast food, 13.3% own a manufacturing business, 8.9% own a bakery whilst 13.4% own a beauty saloon or produce handcraft products. 55.6% of the enterprises have been on the market for 5-9 years.

Question	Frequencies	Percent
Business sector the enterprise belongs to:	N	%
Manufacturing	6	13.3
Restaurant/Hotel	4	8.9
Retail	9	20
Bakery	4	8.9
Coffee Shop	4	8.9
Fast Food	6	13.3
Beauty and Cosmetics	3	6.7
Handcraft Products	3	6.7
Other	6	13.3
Number of years the enterprise has been in business:	N	%
1-4	6	13.3
5-9	25	55.6
10-14	9	20
+15	5	11.1

Table 2. . Sector and number of years the enterprise has been in business **Source:** Author

In addition to the purpose of the paper, the table below presents the opinion of the respondents regarding the use of the internet according to the education channels that are divided into four categories. If the chi-square is higher than 0.05, we do not have significant statistical differences according to the level of education of the business owner for the issues presented, while if the chi-square is lower than 0.05, we have significant differences. In this case, there are no significant differences between the use of the internet and the level of education.

Question	12-th grades or less	Graduated from high school	Bachelor's Degree	Post Graduate Degree	Significant differences
Does your business use the internet?	Frequencies	Frequencies	Frequencies	Frequencies	Chi-square
Yes	6	23	10	1	P=0.106
No	3	2	0	0	
Does your business have a website?	Frequencies	Frequencies	Frequencies	Frequencies	Chi-square
Yes	5	18	8	1	P=0.602
No	4	7	2	0	
Does your business use the internet to provide and/or market its services?	Frequencies	Frequencies	Frequencies	Frequencies	Chi-square
Yes	6	23	10	1	P=0.106
No	3	2	0	0	

Table 3. Use of internet in business

Source: Author

Table 4 presents the opinion of the respondents about the use of marketing in enhancing the business or revenue growth according to the education channels. Using the Chi-square test it is estimated that no significant differences were found between the linkage of the use of marketing and the respective education.

Question	12-th grades or less	Graduated from high school	Bachelor's Degree	Post Graduate Degree	Significant differences
Does your company make use of social media marketing?	Frequencies	Frequencies	Frequencies	Frequencies	Chi-square
Yes	7	23	10	1	P=0.380
No	2	2	0	0	
If yes, what social media your business use the most?	Frequencies	Frequencies	Frequencies	Frequencies	Chi-square
Facebook	4	15	9	1	P=0.458
Instagram	4	9	1	0	
Twitter	1	1	0	0	

Table 4. The use of digital marketing

Source: Author

Table 5 shows that the impact of ICT in the SME-s performance in comparison with the respective education of the owners has no significant difference.

Question	12-th grades or less	Graduated from high school	Bachelor's Degree	Post Graduate Degree	Significant differences
To what extent do you feel that using ICT would increase value added to your business?	Frequencies	Frequencies	Frequencies	Frequencies	Chi-square
Very little value added	1	1	0	0	P=0.387
Some value added	2	4	3	0	
Significant little value added	5	20	6	1	
Great little value added	0	0	1	0	
Do you have adequately trained staff that handle ICT matters in your organization?	Frequencies	Frequencies	Frequencies	Frequencies	Chi-square
Yes	4	10	5	1	P=0.665
No	5	15	5	0	
To what extent has your business experienced revenue growth while adopting ICT technology?	Frequencies	Frequencies	Frequencies	Frequencies	Chi-square
High increase	1	7	3	0	P=0.473
Substantial	6	17	7	1	
Steady	2	1	0	0	
To what extent has your business adopted the use of ICT technology in its operations and performance?	Frequencies	Frequencies	Frequencies	Frequencies	Chi-square
Below Average	2	2	2	0	P=0.664
Average	1	0	0	0	
Good	6	22	8	1	
Excellent	0	1	0	0	

Table 5. The impact of ICT on the SME-s performance

Source: Author

4.1. Hypothesis testing

Based on the results of the tests presented above, where we have presented the questions related to ICT in all three questions, we have estimated P less than 0.05 so that we have sufficient empirical evidence to reject the null hypothesis and to accept the alternative hypothesis, so we conclude that Information and Communication Technology has a positive impact on SME's performance.

H0: Information and Communication Technology has a positive impact in performance of SMEs

Ha: Communication Technology has a positive impact in performance of SMEs

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
To what extent do you feel that using ICT would increase value added to your business?	.932	44	.006	.100	-.12	.32
Do you have adequately trained staff that handle ICT matters in your organization?	3.411	44	.001	.256	.10	.41
What are the perceived benefits your business experienced through ICT adoption?	4.271	44	.000	1.256	.66	1.85

Table 6. Hypothesis testing

Source: Author

5. CONCLUSIONS

The main goal of this study was to examine how Information and Communications Technology (ICT) has affected small and medium-sized businesses. The influence of ICT on SMEs has been meticulously reviewed in a thorough literature review for this study. It utilized a questionnaire survey as the major data collection tool. The information gathered by the questionnaire was designed to address the research problem of the papers by addressing the research questions that were formulated. The findings of the empirical investigation provided encouraging responses to the proposed research questions and demonstrated the validity of the research problem. The literature and empirical data both provide insightful information on how ICT might help SMEs operate better and increase their competitiveness.

Additionally, social media applications become more appealing to both marketers and consumers because they allow businesses to communicate with and tap into much larger communities that might not have otherwise been accessible through conventional advertising channels while also promoting their websites, products, or services through online social channels. Customers who receive advertisements through social networks have an easy method to learn about the most popular marketing initiatives and keep updated by subscribing, which increases customer awareness and the relationship between businesses and consumers.

ICT is no longer just a theoretical idea; rather, it is a real cause and driver that gives businesses opportunities to compete on a global scale with increased productivity and better ties to their customers and suppliers. ICT adoption frequently necessitates strategic reform or change; thus, businesses must accept change as a natural part of doing business.

Limitation of the study

It's vital to emphasize the study's limitations even if it has produced a thorough grasp of the influence of ICT on small and medium-sized businesses. Further study on the impact and uptake of ICT is required, with an ideal sample size of 100 or more potential participants, due to the small number of SMEs polled and the scarcity of information on SMEs.

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VACCINATIONS AS A MEDICAL INTERVENTION: EXAMPLE AND LIABILITIES ARISING FROM VACCINATIONS

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the legitimacy of mandatory vaccinations has been called into question. Recently, many countries' supreme courts and the ECHR have been expected to render decisions on the constitutionality of mandatory vaccinations and COVID-19 vaccinations. These decisions have been examined in the context of where vaccinations stand in the light of human rights. At the same time, childhood vaccinations, which are considered mandatory, have been disputed. These two types of vaccinations have several peculiarities in common: being known as mandatory, the questioned constitutionality, the arising hesitancy towards vaccinations, the violation of personality rights through mandatory vaccines, and protecting public health by battling contagious diseases. It is necessary to establish criteria for mandatory vaccinations on a scientific scale. Yet, mandatory vaccinations can be considered a medical intervention. Medical interventions' compliance with laws carries several criteria to prevent violation of personal rights. Additionally, many countries responded to vaccine hesitancy with mandatory legislation in the pre-and post-pandemic period. The need for a new vaccination policy will be called into question with this work.

Keywords: *Mandatory vaccination, compatibility with the human rights, herd immunity, vaccine safety, public health, right to refuse medical intervention, pandemic*

1. VACCINATIONS AS A MEDICAL INTERVENTION

1.1. Medical Intervention and Personal Rights

Medical activities are applied since the dawn of humankind. Medical interventions can be considered as one of the medical activities. The term medical intervention changes and evolves but the prior aim of these interventions remains the same: providing longer and healthier lives for individuals. As a social science branch, the law is considered within harmony with medicine (Herring, 2020). The legislators harmoniously set out several rules aiming at a legitimate ground for the law. In this regard, primarily, the medical intervention should be necessary, a just cause should exist (*justa causa*), the patient's consent to treatment should be valid, and the intervention should be applied by the individuals who are authorized. As it can be seen, due to the attributed importance of any interventions' legitimacy, interventions as legal action need to be carried on within the framework of the law. The primary above mentioned criteria have not only been accepted by scholars but they also find their own place in the majority of law systems.

On account of being a violation of physical integrity, vaccinations can be considered a medical intervention example. In addition, since the increment of new pandemics, the legitimacy of mandatory vaccinations is heavily litigated. In this work, the legal nature of vaccinations within the scope of personality rights and the current discussions in international law, will be briefly analyzed.

Medical interventions may carry out because of various motives. In doctrine, medical interventions are divided through several criteria. One division is traditional medical interventions and new medical interventions (Ayan, 1991). For understanding traditionally motivated medical interventions, traditional medicine needs to be examined. According to WHO, traditional medicine aims to utilize the totality of knowledge, and practices derived from theories, beliefs, and experiences that are inherent to various cultures, and used in the preservation of health as well as the prevention, diagnosis, and improvement of illness (World Health Organization, 2013). As can be seen, traditional medicine can derive from various factors, such as religious activities or cultural effects. Within this scope castration, circumcision, or several medical interventions that are carried out while childbirth can be counted as an example. Additionally, it can be observable that throughout history, the ideals of medical activities such as medications and operations that aim the rectifying individual's health are time to time overlooked, and several medical interventions are considered drastic medical interventions (Roelcke, 2004). As a result, the medical intervention term is also connected with medical ethics.

According to *Fuller*, any medical activity relies on medical interventions whether they are preventive or curative (Fuller, 2022). In addition, cosmetic surgeries (Miller et al., 2000) and circumcision (Wahedi, 2019) are also medical interventions even though the intervention is performed on a healthy body. At first glance, vaccines can be conceivable as a preventive intervention. Especially, childhood vaccinations are considered mandatory in the public eye. For some individuals, any intervention that is performed on a healthy body includes risks. As a result of this public belief, the anti-vaccination movements have been accelerated (He et al., 2022). This occasion raises this question on the legal ground: Are the lawmakers not able to provide convincing legislation for medical interventions? What if the doctrine

that prevails public health above the personal choices of individuals is not valid anymore because of the extinction of some diseases or acceptance that diseases or virus-related illnesses are a result of the course of nature? These questions can be observable in many countries' supreme courts and the ECHR's several decisions (Vavříčka and Others v. The Czech Republic, 2021).

As mentioned, vaccinations are considered a medical intervention. Vaccinations not only aim to prevent diseases beforehand (*Vaccines and Immunization*, 2021) (Stein, 2011) but also exert therapeutic effects on virus-related lesions and illnesses that already exist (Lin et al., 2010). As will be shown throughout this work, vaccinations can be divided into, preventive (prophylactic) and curative (therapeutic).

An inclusive categorization for medical intervention can be delineated as not only diagnosing and treating all kinds of physical and psychological illnesses of individuals but also, if the treatment is not possible, alleviating the symptoms or easing the pain. Furthermore, preventing illnesses and population planning is also considered a medical intervention (Özcanoglu Görkey, 2022), within the scope of personality rights. When we discuss the legal ground for vaccinations, we should also bear in mind this inclusive categorization.

All types of medical activities should be applied by individuals who are authorized within the confines of the procedures and principles which are accepted by the medical science and are considered a medical intervention (Özçetin & Balaban, 2015).

The implication of any medical intervention is only allowed to health care professionals and medical specialists, because of the possible side effects (Hakeri, 2022). Medical intervention can be described as all types of operations, treatments, and procedures that are applied to the human body (Hakeri, 2022). The medical intervention covers several procedures. The classic examples can be enumerated as follows: surgical operations, anesthesia, roentgen therapy, radiation therapy, shock therapy, ultrasound, and medical treatment. In addition, various types of interventions, such as preventive vaccinations, blood tests, organ function tests, laparoscopy, and endoscopy are also considered medical interventions (Akipek Öcal et al., 2018).

Medical intervention term is widely used in the Council of Europe's regulations, one of them being the European Convention of Human Rights and Biomedicine, but medical intervention is not defined in the European Convention of Human Rights and Biomedicine (Akipek Öcal et al., 2018). The legal instrument of the European Union that aims to protect human rights in the healthcare area is the European Convention of Human Rights and Biomedicine (Raposo & Osuna, 2013) (Seatzu & Fanni, 2015) (*Oviedo Convention and Its Protocols - Human Rights and Biomedicine - Publi.Coe.Int*, n.d.). The European Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine of 1997 is described as the greatest present-day example of "the Protection of Human Rights and of the Human Being with regard to the Application of Biology and Medicine" (CETS n. 164), adopted in Oviedo on April 4, 1997, and, entered into force on December 1, 1999 (Andorno, 2005).

The medical intervention term can be understood from the examination of General Provisions and additional provisions of the Convention of Human Rights and Biomedicine. Simply, it could be described as the application of biology and medicine (Akipek Öcal et al., 2018).

Objectively, medical intervention can be described as, a physical and psychological initiative that is applied by the individuals who are authorized to practice the medical profession for protecting health, diagnosing and treating diseases within the boundaries of medicine in accordance with professional obligations and liabilities.

Within the scope of these explanations above, mandatory vaccination is also defined by scholars. One definition for mandatory vaccination explains the mandatory nature of vaccines through legal sanction. If a person does not voluntarily receive a particular vaccine, that person will face legal sanctions (Krasser, 2021). Sanctions can occur in the form of forced vaccination, fines, or preventing the unvaccinated person from benefiting from certain social and legal opportunities. Regardless of the severity of the sanction, it is accepted that the obligation to be vaccinated should be mentioned whenever a negative consequence of not vaccinating is connected. Besides being a medical intervention, not receiving vaccinations may cause an inability to reach some essential rights (Palmieri & Goffin, 2022). For example, the right to education.

On the other hand, there is a necessity when access to a service or place is tied to vaccination or if the access condition offered as an alternative to vaccination requires excessive effort (Palmieri & Goffin, 2022). The severity of the sanction is important in assessing whether the vaccination requirement legislates measurements that align with the principle of proportionality. According to the ECHR's *Vavříčka and Others v. the Czech Republic* decision, the court stated that the vaccinations are not applied by force. That outcome points out that with the assumption that the sanction is the forced administration of the vaccine, the Court would look for much more serious reasons to qualify the interference as measured (*Vavříčka and Others v. The Czech Republic*, 2021).

1.2. Personality Rights within the Scope of the Medical Intervention

Any real person has all the rights-respecting his/her life, bodily integrity, and health. This principle in Civil Law is correlated with one of the essential rights: "the right to life" (Krasser, 2021) (*The Human Rights Act | Equality and Human Rights Commission*, 1998). As mentioned, the right to life is ranked among one of the essential rights. Any intervention that is made without the consent is considered unlawful, even though the intervention benefits the higher good of that individual (Dural & Ögüz, 2022). Originally, fundamental rights are designed to govern the relationship between the States and citizens (Barkhuysen & Lindenbergh, 2006). It is obvious that the right to life is highly connected with the medical interventions that are only applied by individuals (healthcare workers such as doctors, nurses, dentists, etc.) who are authorized by the States. In various court cases, it is observed that not only the limits of healthcare workers' personal status and personal rights but also the patient's personal status and personal rights cause vex (O'Neill, 2022). These facts will lead us to the discussions regarding mandatory vaccinations.

As an outline, according to Private Law medical intervention is against personality rights. In order not to invade personality rights, medical intervention should carry several criteria, which are mentioned above, to be considered legal.

1.3. What are other measures besides the medical intervention?

The illnesses that are caused by a pathogen (agent) or the toxic effects that are caused by a pathogen. Illnesses spread by transmissions. These transmissions can occur between infected persons, animals, or contaminated objects to a host.

Since transmission of infectious diseases causes enormous burdens on public health systems over time, authorities took various types of precautions. These precautions are going as follows: Hygienic measures, culling animals, social distancing, surveillance, and most importantly immunization (Krom, 2014).

Authorities aim to prevent diseases beforehand, for that reason there are several other measures taken for preventing infections to spread. In other words, to “breaking the chain of infection” (Waters, 2021) (Towers et al., 2018) several legislations need to be adopted for creating a legal ground within the scope of personality rights.

2. LIABILITIES ARISING FROM VACCINATIONS

Liabilities in the law of persons cover both liabilities with fault and liabilities without fault. Fault in liability law is divided into three categories in law. The broad liability covers both contractual and non-contractual liabilities. (Oğuz, 2016). Liabilities and vaccination policies are strictly connected.

Every state has its own vaccination policies. In the eyes of the public, it is said that in Germany there are not any vaccinations that are mandatory (*Vaccinations*, 2016), the vaccinations are known as recommended. On the other hand, in some countries, authorities announce to the public that some vaccinations are mandatory, such as Turkey. According to the Turkish Ministry of Health, there are thirteen mandatory vaccinations in the Childhood Vaccine Schedule. The mandatory vaccines are stated as; diphtheria, pertussis, hepatitis B, hepatitis A, haemophilus influenzae type B, tuberculosis, measles, mumps, rubella, varicella, and pneumonia (*Aşılama Takviminde Değişiklik Yapıldı*, 2020).

It is obvious that, even though the term mandatory is not applied to the legislation, the State’s authority differentiates regarding the applicability of vaccinations. If comprehensive research concludes, it could be observable that in every country, there are commonly acknowledged vaccinations prescriptive.

There is a lack of legal ground for some of the countries mentioned above, as well as others. For instance, even though the Ministry of Health announces that there are thirteen mandatory vaccinations in Turkey, there is only one vaccination legislated as mandatory, and that vaccination is against the variola virus. The legal ground for smallpox disease is, article 89 of Public Health Law, which is numbered 1593 and dated 1930.

Contrastively, there are discussions regarding mandatory measles vaccination in Germany (Bundesministerium für Gesundheit et al., 2022), which could be an example of controversies about personality rights and public health. According to studies, being mandatory caused two drastically different approaches: high acceptance or extreme rejection (Neufeind et al., 2022).

The main reason for a belief to get vaccinations might be the moral belief that is created through time. When we derive from above mentioned examples, in the Turkish Republic's case, as a newly founded republic, the Turkish Republic attributed great importance to vaccine schedules and immunization for childhood diseases. Especially after the First World War. On the other hand, in Germany's case, moral belief is caused by trusting the institutions.

Furthermore, many countries announced that for some occupations, vaccination will be mandatory, for example, healthcare workers are vaccinated against COVID-19 in whole around the world (Maltezou et al., 2019) (Walter, 2021). If these mandatory vaccination regulations are questioned, it can be said that in these cases not only healthcare workers' best interests are aimed to protect but also public health is aimed to be protected. When the mandatory vaccination policies regarding health care workers are examined, the individual's personal choices and the limits of their right to live should be bear in mind, under this sense, mandatory vaccination discussions regarding individuals could be gradually understood.

It is accepted that compulsory vaccination constitutes an intervention with personal rights and human rights and should not be considered as a first expedient. According to the prevailing opinion, mandatory vaccination may be necessary in cases where vaccination is offered or referred as advised and other persuasion methods are tried and unsuccessful, in order to achieve herd immunity level or to prevent hospitals from losing their function due to occupancy.

In addition, the connection between death and important health problems, especially after vaccination, should be investigated effectively. To identify a presumptive violation an effective investigation is needed.

The foreseeable contribution of this work in progress could be summarized. First, vaccinations can be divided into mandatory and recommended vaccinations, based on the risk that arises and the threat to public health. This work is aimed to focus on mandatory vaccinations. Because recommended vaccinations can be implacable to any individual due to their own consent. The disputable part of recommended vaccinations can be considered as the legal guardian's consent for individuals who lack of legal capacity or who have incapacity. In addition, the healthcare authorities were well aware that for increasing the health conditions for all individuals, a strict and well-defined vaccination program is needed. But abiding by the laws and regulations cannot be made by force, within the scope of Civil Law and personality rights. For this purpose, legislators should consider not only the constitutional force of the laws but also the moral belief that needs to be created in the public eye to avoid vaccination hesitancy.

Secondly, the term moral belief is widely connected with the other aspects of personality rights. This correlation needs a methodology to be thoroughly examined. The essential rights which are internationally accepted and the capacity of individuals to act regarding mandatory vaccination policies will be continually examined throughout this work.

Finally, the aimed methodology will be a division of the vaccinations in comparison of various States through questioning the constitutionality of mandatory vaccinations and their compatibility with personality rights. For this purpose, Constitutional Acts, Civil Law Acts, Secondary Acts, and International Acts will be continually analyzed.

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PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN PATIENTS BEFORE AND AFTER COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

Physical activity in patients before and after covid-19 includes all the movements and activities they perform during the day such as walking, participating in sports, as well as activities they do at their working place and home activities and exercises.

With a random sampling for this study, 50 patients with problems of the osteo-muscular system, the cardio-respiratory system, and the immune system were recruited in the DIO-DOR Physiotherapy Clinic in Ferizaj.

The average age of the participants was 37.4 ± 7.1 . According to gender, 50% of the participants were female, while 50% were male.

The research data was collected with the following instrument: Survey for patients with problems before and after covid-19 in the DIO-DOR physiotherapy clinic in Ferizaj.

The instrument consists of two parts: the first part consists of 5 questions about how their activity was before covid-19, whereas the second part consists of 5 questions for patients after covid-19. The participants in the research answer questions about the state of their physical activity, before and after covid-19.

Research participants were informed of the purpose of the study and their rights to voluntary participation and withdrawal. They are assured of anonymity and confidentiality of the data. The data were collected during the month of September 2022. Data analysis was done with statistical software for social sciences [SPSS, 22].

The general health condition of patients before covid-19 was 75% good, 17% very good, 8% not good. The physical activity of patients before covid-19 was 50% very good.

The immune system was 80% very good before covid-19. Patients did not have problems with the cardio-respiratory system 65% before covid-19. Only 50% of patients were involved in active sports before covid-19.

After covid-19, the general health condition of patients is 60% not good.

50% of patients declare that they have a problem with the cardio-respiratory system after covid-19.

The immune system after covid-19 is not good in 65% of patients.

Physical activity among patients after covid-19 is 65% not good. Only 30% performed sports activities after covid-19.

Keywords: *physical activity, covid-19, patients, general health condition, immune system.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Physical activity in patients before and after covid-19 includes all the movements and activities they do during the day such as walking, participating in sports, as well as activities they do at work and around daily life.

The cardio-respiratory and osteo-muscular systems benefit from regular physical activity. Physical activity can lower high blood pressure, help clear airways, control body weight, and reduce the risk of heart disease.

Physiotherapy has a very important role in patients with Covid-19:

- It helps to free the airways through exercises recommended by professional Physiotherapists.
- Strengthens the osteo-muscular system in patients through various physical exercises (walking, running, and exercises recommended by the physiotherapist) in order to preserve function and osteo-muscular stability.
- Outdoor physical activity holds strong potential as an effective coping and preventive strategy given its many well-documented physical, social, and mental health benefits for people of all ages, especially those with or at risk of developing chronic diseases [1,2].

Many empirical studies suggest that physical activity can prevent chronic diseases (e.g., cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and obesity), improve brain health and conditions, promote mental health (e.g., reduced depression and anxiety), and reduce falls or fall-related injuries [3,4]. Activity and health during the sars-cov2 pandemic (asap): study protocol for a multi-national network trial [6]. The objective of this study was to assess changes in patients' well-being since the coronavirus outbreak in affected countries. Additionally, we will evaluate the impact of digital home-based exercise programs on pa as well as physical and mental health outcomes. It was a month-long program of protocol and the importance of exercise.

2. THE PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The main purpose of this paper was to evaluate the condition of patients before and after covid-19.

3. SETTING PRIORITIES

Research opportunities and finding successful modalities in order to improve the condition of patients, after covid-19 by gathering the opinions of patients. It's important to find whether the pandemic covid-19 had an impact on the health condition of the patients that were treated in my clinic. The course of rehabilitation before and after covid-19 will also have an impact on the disease itself.

By concluding results at the end of the paper, interesting facts can be noted that physical activity had a crucial role in those patients.

4. RESEARCH METHOD

For the analysis and elaboration of this research, several study methods were used, such as:

Analytical method

Statistical method (tabular presentations and graphs)

But the main study is based on the survey specific to the patients where their direct opinion was collected.

5. MATERIAL AND METHODS

For the analysis and elaboration of this research data were collected from:

Existing literature related to patients who have been infected with Covid-19, as well as 50 patients that were surveyed at the Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation Clinic DIO-DOR in Ferizaj.

All those patients were observed during therapy which means before and after the course of rehabilitation. The questionnaire that was used has been analyzed in detail and this reflects in the results that will be presented below. We divided all patients based on questions such as age, gender, and condition with the main questions for physical activity exercises during and after covid-19.

The focus of this aspect of the literature search was to analyze the scientific information production of one of the most traditional scientific databases which is PubMed (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/>).

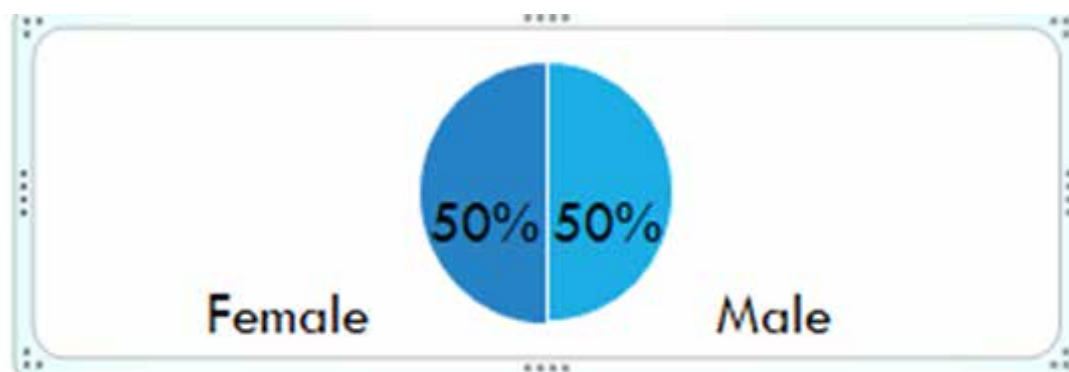
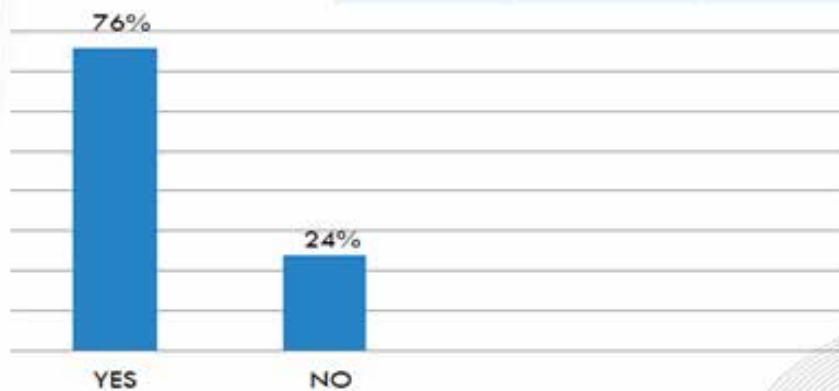
6. RESULTS

The average age of the participants was

37.4±7.1 years.

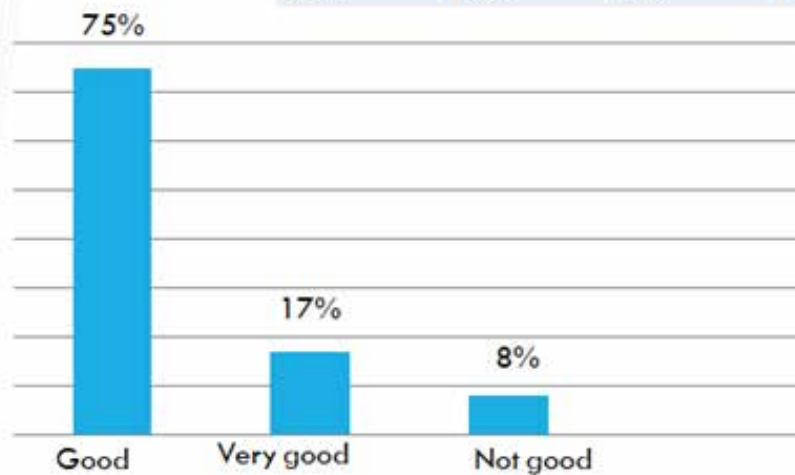
RESULTS

Have patients had problems with the cardio-respiratory system after Covid-19?	YES	NO	Total
	25	25	50
	76%	24%	100%



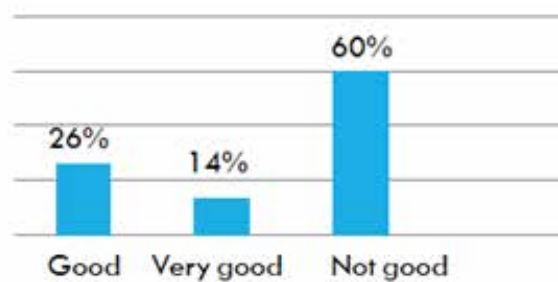
RESULTS

General condition of patients before covid-19?	Good	Very Good	Not good	Total
	38	8	4	50
	75%	17%	8%	100%



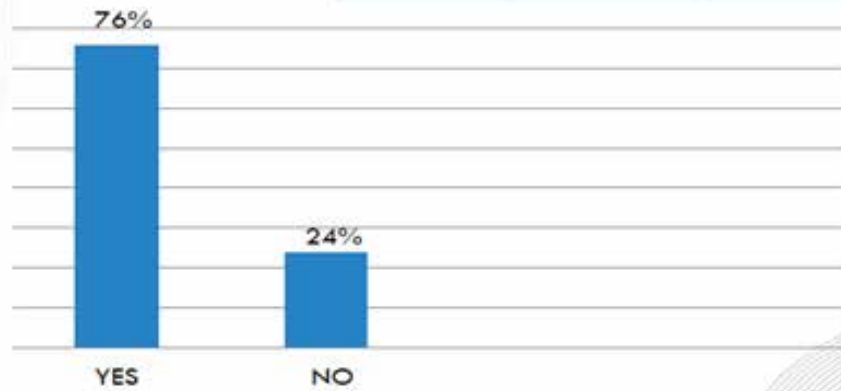
RESULTS

General condition of patients after Covid-19?	Good	Very Good	Not good	Total
	13	7	30	50
	26%	14%	60%	100%



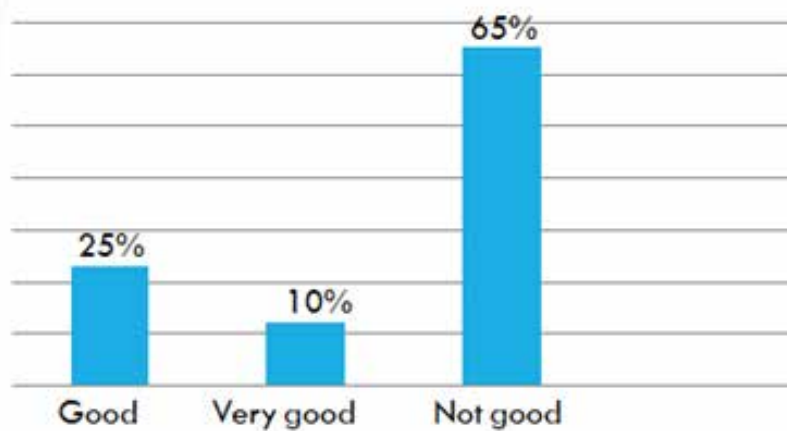
RESULTS

Have patients had problems with the cardio-respiratory system after Covid-19?	YES	NO	Total
	25	25	50
	76%	24%	100%



RESULTS

Physical activity of patients after Covid-19?	Good	Very good	Not good	Total
	12	5	33	50
	25%	10%	65%	100%



7. DISCUSSIONS

The general health condition of patients before covid-19 was 75% good, 17% very good, 8% not good. The physical activity of patients before covid-19 was 50% very good.

Their immune system was 80% very good before covid-19. Patients did not have problems with the cardio-respiratory system (65%) before covid-19. Only 50% of patients were involved in active sports before covid-19.

Also, as indicated by other authors, such as Vancini R.L. and colleagues on physical exercise and its relation to covid-19 pandemic, published in PubMed: “two months of dynamics and one year of original scientific production”, they came to a conclusion and their findings show the dynamics of scientific production on the covid-19, in a situation so unique such as a pandemic, denoting that the practice of physical activity is essential to improve and/or maintain physical and mental health.

On the other hand, our main aim was to conduct a review of physical exercise and covid-19 on the PubMed database.

Our research is relevant because we show the dynamics of scientific production on the covid-19, in a situation as unique as a pandemic. It was possible to observe that the scientific production on covid-19 and physical exercise has been growing during the pandemic, being almost a “space race” and that aroused the interest of the world scientific community given the gravity of the situation even today. In general lines, the practice of physical exercise is essential to improve and/or maintain physical and mental health, in situations as serious from the point of view of public health as the one we are experiencing as health professionals, scientists and people [5].

The link between physical exercise and physiotherapeutic rehabilitation especially for respiratory diseases in improving their health condition has a crucial role in before and after Covid-19.

8. CONCLUSION

Based on the results obtained from the research through the analysis of the researched data and then the survey - questionnaire with patients we can conclude that:

The general health condition of the patients before covid-19 was good, this is stated by the vast majority of respondents.

After covid-19, the general health condition of the patients is not good, this is how more than half of the patients declared.

The physical activity of the patients before Covid-19 was very good, as reported by the majority of the surveyed patients.

More than half of the patients have declared that after covid-19, their physical activity is not good.

The patients did not have problems with the cardio-respiratory system before covid-19, this is what most of the respondents say.

The majority of patients declare that they have a problem with the cardio-respiratory system after covid-19.

9. RECOMMENDATION

Patient suitability research findings demonstrate the need for:

- Wider and deeper research in this field, increase physical activity in patients.
- Monitoring and control of the cardio-respiratory system is required, for e.g. blood pressure, oximetry tool for O₂ saturation, and heart rate.
- Special importance is attached to the immune system in order to reach the ability to start their activity in sports and physical exercise.

The general state of health improves continuously in patients. The osteo-muscular system should be at the right level. Physiotherapists recommend certain exercises such as: breathing exercises, aerobic exercises, walking and running on a daily basis, fitness exercises, and exercises in sports gyms.

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THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE PRESENTATION OF SPINE SYMPTOMS

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of the research is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the presentation of spine diseases with special emphasis on cervical syndrome and lumbar syndrome. Material and methods - All data for patients with back problems were collected and analyzed retrospectively. The data were collected during the time period January - June 2022. 38 patients

with spinal column symptoms were included in the research. A total of 38 patients were included in the research, of which 23 were women and 15 were men. Out of a total of 38 patients, 27 of them changed their jobs to home conditions during the pandemic. Out of a total of 38 patients, 22 of them showed symptoms of the spinal axis for the first time. Out of a total of 38 patients, 20 of them had symptoms in the cervical part and 18 lumbar symptoms. Changes in the spine attack women more than men. The modification of workplaces in domestic conditions has increased the number of cases of patients with spinal problems. The upper part of the spine shows more frequent symptoms compared to the lower part of the spine. Physiotherapy, Kinesiotherapy or active exercises, breathing exercises, stretching exercises, electrotherapy, thermotherapy or cryotherapy affect the improvement of spinal axis symptoms. Educating patients about the application of exercises in home conditions, the adequate position of the posture is an important step for the prevention and improvement of the symptoms of the spinal axis.

Keywords: COVID-19, pandemic, cervical syndrome, lumbar syndrome.

1. INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

Current estimates of the incubation period of the virus range from 2-10 days. The CDC believes that the incubation period for COVID-19 can range from 2 to 14 days after exposure.

Infected patients with COVID-19 present a wide range of symptoms. Most appear to have mild disease, and about 20% of cases progress to severe disease, including pneumonia, respiratory deficiency, and in some cases death.

The disease initially manifests with fevers, dry cough, myalgia or fatigue and breathing difficulties. Some patients had obvious upper respiratory tract signs and symptoms (eg, rhinorrhoea, sneezing, or sore throat), indicating that the target cells may be located in the lower airways. In severe cases, the virus causes severe pneumonia but also failure of the function of other organs (renal insufficiency).

Recovery will largely depend on the state of their immune system. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected different people in different ways.

Purpose - The main purpose of the research is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the appearance of spinal diseases with special emphasis on cervical syndrome and lumbar syndrome.

Material and methods - In a retrospective manner, all the data of patients with back problems were collected and analyzed. The data were obtained during the time period January - June 2022.

38 patients with spinal symptoms were included in the research.

Results and discussion - A total of 38 patients were included in the research, of which, 23 were women and 15 were men. Out of 38 patients, 27 of them, during the pandemic, have modified their workplaces in domestic conditions. Out of 38 patients, 22 of them have shown spinal symptoms for the first time.

Out of 38 patients, 20 of them had symptoms in the cervical part, and 18 lumbar symptoms.

Conclusion- Changes in the spine attack women more than men. The modification of workplaces in domestic conditions has increased the number of cases of patients with spinal problems.

The upper part of the spine shows more frequent symptoms compared to the lower part of the spine.

Physiotherapy: kinesiotherapy or active exercises, breathing exercises, stretching exercises, electrotherapy, thermotherapy or cryotherapy affect the improvement of spinal axis symptoms.

Educating patients about the application of exercises in home conditions, the adequate position of the posture as an important step for the prevention and improvement of the symptoms of the spinal axis.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19)

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Patients with COVID-19 infection present a wide range of symptoms. Most appear to have mild disease, and about 20% of cases progress to severe disease, including pneumonia, respiratory failure, and in some cases death.

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Recovery will largely depend on their immune system. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected different people in different ways.

1.2. Cervical syndrome and lumbar syndrome

The cervical spine consists of seven vertebrae in a lordosis shape and is generally the most flexible and injury-susceptible part. [2]

Cervical syndrome is a set of symptoms that are reported by pain that can be localized in the neck region, the occipital region, the region of the arms, shoulders and along the upper sides accompanied by numbness and greater or lesser neurological deficit. From the physiological point of view, this syndrome represents a set of symptoms related to irritation or compression of nerve fibers in the intervertebral holes or compression of vascular and sympathetic elements.

However, in the neck region there are a large number of different structures that can be the source of pain such as: bones, muscles, ligaments, blood vessels, nerves, etc.

In 90% of cases with this syndrome, the main role is played by degenerative changes in the cervical region. [3].

The lumbar spine consists of five vertebrae and is lordotic. The vertebral bodies are largest in the spine, and each vertebra increases in diameter as it approaches the sacrum. [2]

With lumbar syndrome we understand the pains and obstacles that appear in the lumbar part.

Lower back pain is one of the biggest concerns in today's world. [4]

Because of the strategic position of the lumbar spine, this structure should be included in any examination of the spine as well as in any examination of the hip or sacroiliac joint. Unless there is a definite history of trauma, it is difficult to determine the beginning of the examination in the lumbar spine, sacroiliac joints or hip joints, so all three should be examined regularly.

1.3. Etiology

The etiology of cervical syndrome includes:

- Degenerative processes
- Inflammatory processes
- Traumatic injuries
- Congenital malformations
- Deformities of the spine (scoliosis)
- Vertebral osteophytes (osteoporosis)
- Primary and secondary tumors

The etiology of lumbar syndrome - the etiological factors of lumbar syndrome are numerous, but in 90% of cases the degenerative process of the intervertebral disc between the L4-L5 and L5-S1 rings is the cause. The etiological factors of lumbar syndrome can be divided into vertebral etiological factors which include: degenerative processes (spondylosis, discartrosis), inflammatory processes, traumatic injuries (fractures, lux, subluxations), congenital malformations, spinal axis deformations (scoliosis), vertebral osteophytes (osteoporosis), primary and secondary tumors and extra vertebral etiological factors which include: skeletal etiology (statistical disorders of C/F joints, abbreviations, anomalies in the soles), muscular (permanent professional hypertonus, lumbar myofibrositis), vascular (occlusion of blood vessels), neurogenic (diabetic neuritis, herpes zoster), visceral (urogenital and gynecological system diseases) and psychogenic diseases.

1.4. Examination and diagnosis

Diagnosis is usually based on symptoms, history of the disease and medical examination. Medical history and doctor's examination include:

Subjective examination (anamnesis) which includes:

- Identification data (name, surname, date of birth/age, personal identification number of the patient, place of residence, health insurance, date and time of examination).[5]
- Main complaints
- Anamnesis of the disease (time of appearance of the first symptoms, the way of the onset of the disease, the body diagram of the extent of the pain, the character of symptoms, intensity, diurnal spectrum)
- Life anamnesis (previous diseases of the patient)
- Personal anamnesis (all actions of the patient in their daily life)
- Family anamnesis (data on diseases of family members to obtain information on the genetic factor)
- Socio-epidemiological anamnesis (patient's lifestyle)

Objective examination:

- Observation
- Palpation
- Amplitude of mobility (ROM): ROMa, ROMp, recited isometric movements
- Muscular strength
- Neurological examination - reflexes

- Functional tests [6]

The diagnosis of cervical and lumbar syndrome can be made on the basis of data on the history of the disease, clinical, laboratory and radiological examination, EMNG, CT, MRI, as well as not excluding similar pathologies.

MRI-MRI with its fine soft tissue contrast has tremendous potential for characterizing disc quality through functional morphology.

CT-can be used to accurately measure range of motion of vertebrae when a load or torque is applied, in vivo.[7]

1.5. Treatment

In cervical syndrome, we distinguish the acute and chronic phase

A. Treatment of the acute phase:

Drug treatment - in the acute phase, analgesics and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) are given to eliminate pain and relax the muscles.

They can be given together with vitamin B as in cases of inflammation or compression of the spinal nerve roots.

Intramuscular or oral corticosteroids can quickly relieve symptoms.

Muscle relaxants affect the increased muscle tone of the paravertebral muscles. An approximate relaxing dose in the muscles is also gained by giving sedatives (tranquilizers).

Rest - At this stage, 'bed rest' is also necessary due to the unloading of the spine, therefore it is important that the mattress should be soft so that it can take the shape of the roll and be placed as such under the neck to maintain its physiological lordosis and the horizontal position of the head in relation to other parts of the spine.

Cervical collar (neck brace) - at this stage it is also necessary to rest or 'immobilize the entire cervical part'

This is achieved with cervical collars (neck brace) for the application of which size is important. The cervical collar must not be worn for more than 6-8 weeks.

Traction - has great value in the treatment of cervical syndrome, the role of which is based on the opening of the intervertebral holes and the intervertebral space - the extension of the paravertebral muscles and ligaments and the correction of the deformities of the vertebral joints.

Traction of the cervical part causes elongation of the intervertebral, paravertebral ligaments and muscles.

Traction is performed in several ways, but continuous or intermittent traction is usually applied through the extezomat, which is loaded with 5 kg with a duration of 15-20 min.

The work method is performed in the supine position. Traction must not be prolonged because the volume of the intervertebral disc is strengthened and the symptoms of cervical syndrome worsen.

Cryotherapy - cryotherapy in the form of cryo massage has a very effective role.

In the acute phase of the disease, other physical therapy procedures are also applied

Voltage-(50-70 Hz/ 20-30 minutes)

B. Treatment in the chronic phase

Thermotherapy - in the form of: hydrotherapy (warm water shower, warm water tub, thick scarf heated with cold water 40 °C), paraffin therapy 60 °C, peloid therapy 42 °C, phototherapy.

Kinesio therapy: self-improvement exercises, isometric contraction exercises, relaxation exercises, strengthening exercises based on muscle test examination, and aerobic conditioning exercises.

Extension exercises: MSCM, mm. Scaleni, m.trapezius, m.levator scapulae.[9]

In lumbar syndrome, we distinguish the acute and chronic phases.

A: Treatment in the acute phase - in the acute phase the patient has great pain, the spinal axis is curved on one side where it manifests as antalgic scoliosis or otherwise called protective scoliosis because in this way the intervertebral disc is protected from further damage.

During this phase, the recovery of the paravertebral muscles is indicated. The mobility of the spinal axis is limited and accompanied by pain in all directions, especially the inclination.

The intensity of the pain worsens with coughing and sneezing.

During this phase, that is, in the acute phase, medications such as: anti rheumatic drugs, analgesics, anti-inflammatory drugs and corticosteroids are given in sufficient doses.

Infiltrations (blockades) with anesthetics and corticosteroids can also be applied to the pain points, widely acupuncture.

MTP in the interspinal ligaments.

If during this phase rest is necessary for a longer time, then static exercises can be applied in order to prevent atrophy of the paravertebral muscles.

In the acute phase, the therapy consists of rest in a pain-free position, bed rest for a sufficient duration (7-10 days).

During rest in a pain-free position, the static and dynamic loading of the spine is eliminated. The rest should last until the pain subsides. So, we have the Williams position where the patient must stay at least one hour during the day in this position for four to five days. This serves to maintain the lumbar lordosis. In the Williams position, the legs and hips are at 90 degrees.

During this phase, the following physical therapy procedures are used:

Cryotherapy in the form of cryo massage 8-12 min during the day

Electrotherapy: TENS, US (can be applied with some types of medications where this procedure is called sonophoresis).

B. Treatment of the chronic phase-

Even during this stage the purpose is comforting.

Here as well we do MTP (deep transversal massage) on the interspinal ligaments.

We relax the patient in pronation (resting on the stomach), hands in external rotation.

During this phase, physical therapy comes into action. Even in this phase, we have electrotherapy: diadynamic electric currents (DD), interfering electric currents, TENS, thermo-therapy: paraffin therapy, IR rays, hydrotherapy, peloid therapy, sonotherapy.

Kinesiotherapy: In lumbar syndrome, kinesiotherapy aims to increase the muscular strength of the paravertebral muscles, stabilize the spinal axis, achieve the full range of motion of the lumbar spine, enlarge the intervertebral space, increase the strength in the abdominal muscles, lengthen the muscles of the dorsal of the femoral region m.femoral etc.

Joint maintenance is done through passive mobilization of the spine.

1.6. Education

First, the patient must be informed of the nature of the disease.

The spine should be kept in a neutral position, lifting and carrying weights should be done in a straight back position.

In this position, the intervertebral disc is loaded equally, so the risk of injury is minimal

The patient should also be taught about the position of keeping the spine straight even when lying down, sitting and standing.

Education for the continuation of learned exercises in home conditions.

How to maintain spinal function:

- Strong chair with a straight back is recommended
- The bed should be moderately firm, flat and with a small possibility of bending.
- The weight should be lifted from the ground with a “straight back”.

2. PURPOSE

The main purpose of the research is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the manifestation of spine diseases with particular emphasis on cervical syndrome and lumbar syndrome.

2.1. Research hypotheses

Based on the purpose of this research and our primary objectives these hypotheses were presented:

- I. Modification of workplaces affects the presentation of spinal symptoms.
- II. Physical therapy helps relieve spinal symptoms.

3. MATERIAL AND METHODS

Retrospectively, all the data for patients with spinal problems were collected and analyzed. The data were collected during the period January-June 2022. The research included 38 patients with spine symptoms.

3.1. Procedures

The results of the treatment and rehabilitation of the symptoms of the spinal axis are based on:

1. Anamnesis:
 - Subjective examination (anamnesis)
 - Objective examination
2. Dynamic evaluation (movements of the cervical and lumbar joint) and the nearby joints.
 1. Specific tests for the cervical part: Sharp-Purser test (for the transverse ligament), Alar ligament test, vertebral artery test, compression and distraction test, head and trunk rotation test for vertigo.
Specific tests for the lumbar part: SLR, Sorensen, Bow string sign
4. Other examinations such as MRI, EMNG, TC
5. Measurement of the perimeter - done in order to identify hypotrophy or loss in muscle mass.
6. Neurological tests: dermatomes, myotomes, reflexes.

The necessary research team included: Surgeon, orthopedist, physiotherapist, the nurse.

Exclusion criteria

The criteria for not being included in the research are:

- Patients with infections
- Patients who for personal reasons could not follow the rehabilitation program until the end.

3.2. Data processing methods

The data were processed with the statistical program by calculating the basic parameters.

4. RESULTS

38 patients with symptoms of the spinal axis were included in the research.

During the rehabilitation period, depending on the acute or chronic condition, the following procedures were used:

- electrotherapy,
- sono therapy,
- thermotherapy, paraffin therapy,
- cryotherapy,
- kinesiotherapy, as well as
- ergonomic tips

It has been noticed that the period of the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced the increase in the presentation of spinal problems. This can be seen from the table below.

Table 1. Patients by gender

Gender	No. of patients	Percentage
Male	15	39.5%
Female	23	60.5%
Total	38	100%

Based on statistical data, spinal problems affect women more. Out of 38 patients, 23 of them (60.5%) are women, while 15 of them (39.5%) are men.

Table 2. Patients according to work conditions.

Working conditions	No. of patients	Percentage
Modified office	27	71.0%
Normal office	11	29.0%
Total	38	100%

Based on statistical data, at the time of the COVID 19 pandemic, most of the patients who had spinal pain had modified their workplaces, respectively 27 patients (71.0%) out of a total of 38 patients (100%).

Table 3. *Patients according to the appearance of symptoms.*

Frequency of symptoms	No. of patients	Percentage
For the first time	22	57.9%
More than once	16	42.1%
Total	38	100%

Based on statistical data, during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, the largest number of patients had symptoms of the spinal axis for the first time. Exactly, out of a total of 38 patients, 22 of them or 57.9% had symptoms for the first time, while 16 patients (42.1%) had symptoms repeatedly.

Table 4. *Patients according to the type of symptoms*

Type of symptoms	No. of patients	Percentage
Lumbar symptoms	18	47.4%
Cervical symptoms	20	52.6%
Total	38	100%

Based on statistical data, patients with spinal axis symptoms suffered more from cervical axis symptoms, respectively 20 patients (52.6%) out of 38, compared to 18 patients (47.4%) with lumbar axis symptoms, out of 38 (100%).

Table 5. *Patients after physiotherapeutic treatment*

Condition after physiotherapeutic treatment	No. of patients	Percentage
Improved	35	92.10%
Neutral	3	7.89%
Worsened	0	0%
Total	38	100%

Based on statistical data, patients after physical therapy have expressed an improved condition with a decrease to the complete elimination of symptoms. Out of 38 patients, 35 (92.10%) of them have shown good results after physical therapy with the reduction and elimination of spinal axis symptoms, while 3 (7.89%) of them have shown that even after physical therapy, spinal axis symptoms are still present, in the intensity close to the beginning of the treatment, while not a single patient has resulted in the worsening of the condition, in terms of the appearance and increase in the severity of the symptoms of the spinal axis.

5. DISCUSSION

The results obtained through research have enabled us to achieve an adequate evaluation of the treatment of patients with symptoms of the spinal axis. The patients included in the research were of both sexes, with different professions and different residences, which enabled us to include a variety of our population in the research.

In the first hypothesis, we said that the modification of workplaces affects the presentation

of spinal axis symptoms. We came to this hypothesis based on:

- the knowledge gained from previous studies that inactivity, inappropriate living conditions, the unchanged over-extended position of the spine, and wrong posture are some of the causes that affect the appearance of spinal symptoms.
- Access to health institutions, physiotherapeutic practices during studies in state and private institutions.

The facts that prove the hypotheses are tables 2 and 3, which provide an overview of the appearance of symptoms after the modification of workplaces.

In the second hypothesis, we have said that physical therapy helps in relaxing the symptoms of the spinal axis. We came to this hypothesis based on:

- The knowledge gained during the studies, that the appropriate physiotherapeutic treatment helps relieve spinal symptoms.
- Access to health institutions.
- The practice of physiotherapeutic procedures for the symptoms of the spinal axis during the study practices.

The facts that prove the hypothesis are table no. 5, which gives an overview of the treatment of the symptoms of the spinal axis by means of physical therapy.

We found similar results in Germany, specifically in an interview on the World Day of Physiotherapy, September 8, where physiotherapists Lisa, Jasper and Eva showed that they are treating an increasing number of patients with spinal diseases related to COVID-19.

According to them, many patients suffered from back pain for various reasons: modification of workplaces in domestic conditions, and poor workplace design, hospitalization, passive life due to the closure of clubs and fitness centers resulting in weight gain, etc.[10]

6. CONCLUSION

Changes in the spine attack women more than men. The modification of workplaces in domestic conditions has increased the number of cases of patients with spinal problems.

The upper part of the spine shows more frequent symptoms compared to the lower part of the spine.

Physiotherapy: kinesiotherapy or active exercises, breathing exercises, stretching exercises, electrotherapy, thermotherapy or cryotherapy affect the improvement of spinal axis symptoms.

Educating patients about the application of exercises in home conditions, the adequate position of the posture as an important step for the prevention and improvement of the symptoms of the spinal axis.

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SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, EXERCISE AND SUPPLEMENTS AT FOOTBALL PLAYERS AFTER COVID -19

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: To study physical activity and exercise, use of β -alanine supplement among professional players after COVID -19.

Methods: The questionnaires on the assessment of Exercise, β -alanine supplements-carnosine, level of information and evidence sources were supplemented by the two football clubs in the city after COVID-19. Mean age 24.6 ± 5.8 years. Total of 32 football players were surveyed through a questionnaire. Not all of them were affected by the virus.

Goal of research: The goal of every research or study work is to get familiar with an issue of problem and how to overcome and find the way of achieving results and better understanding of a phenomenon of pandemic COVID -19 influence and physical activity at football players. Its goal is to make judgments about impact of COVID -19 on health of players, their functionality and exercise impact after pandemic.

Results: out of 32 players in total, the main age was the average age of football players was 24.6 ± 5.8 years. In the end shows that 93.75 % of the players high intensity exercise impacted in a positive manner, while at 6.25 % did have impact.

Conclusions: Pandemic had an impact also in exercise, taking into account several players infected with the virus SARS-COV 2. But when combined with daily physical activity and their exercise, use of supplements improved their overall health condition and no consequences were minor and return to daily life was for 7-14 days. Involvement of Clubs, Physiotherapists on breathing techniques, aerobic exercise, kinesiotherapy, cardio workout, balance, endurance and speed together with O₂ saturation and heart rate with blood pressure were points of interest. Recovery after covid-19 had some issues at large population, but as players are with a young age, regular exercise, proper nutrition this issue was resolved faster and continued exercise helped them to return to normal training scope.

Keywords: COVID-19, Exercise, activity, supplement; questionnaire, football, Physiotherapists.

1. INTRODUCTION

Covid-19 is caused by a coronavirus called SARS-CoV-2. Not only Older adults and people who have severe underlying medical conditions like heart or lung disease or diabetes seem to be at higher risk for developing more serious complications from COVID-19 illness [1]. It's a disease that affects the whole buddy and organism of any age. Since it's a new virus the lack of research was obvious because in the beginning of any illness it's difficult to come to the right approach. Some older viruses helped medical professionals on how to approach but still in different ways. Physical activity after Covid-19 helps to clear the airways, lowers high blood pressure, and helps the Cardio-respiratory system in football players, improves oxygen saturation, which we have taken as a sample for research [2]. The osteo-muscular system in football players must have stability, since we are dealing with high-intensity training in football players [3].

Physiotherapists play a key role in the treatment and rehabilitation of athletes, both in terms of physical, mental and conditioning. Motor abilities, such as endurance and the optimal level of physical activity, play a fundamental role in football as they are necessary to maintain the high effectiveness of the training process. The aim of this study was the observation of the trend of changes in the level of cardiorespiratory endurance of young football players in a one-year cycle overlapping with the COVID-19 lockdown and an assessment of the impact of the training intervention during home confinements [4].

2. THE PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The purpose of any research is to know a problem and a way to overcome it and find a way to achieve results and a better understanding of the phenomenon of the COVID-19 pandemic impact and physical activity in football players and the use of b-alanine supplementation has reduced recovery time. Some recent comments, statements and meta-analyses have shown that supplementation with β -alanine (recommended total dose of 4-6 g day-1 or 65-80 mg kg-1 day-1 dose (can increase Lysine muscle levels, intramuscular capacity, improved high intensity and permanent exercise and is legitimate according to the code of WADA. Trexler et al. (2015).

Its purpose is to make judgments about the impact of COVID-19 on the health of players, their functionality and the impact of post-pandemic exercise.

Some studies confirmed that also at football players Covid -19 had impact Gatoni et colleagues (2022).

3. RESEARCH METHOD

For the elaboration of this research, several study methods were used:

- Analytical method
- Statistical method (tabular presentations and graphs)
- The main research is based on the specific survey of football players and where was their direct opinion collected.

Contemporary literature related to patients who have been infected with Covid-19, as well as The football players of the two clubs were surveyed in the city stadium, and their opinion on Covid-19 was obtained.

Rehabilitation course

- Exercises on:
- breathing techniques,
- aerobic exercise,
- kinesiotherapy,
- cardio workout,
- balance, endurance and speed together with SpO2 Saturation
- and heart rate with blood pressure were improved especially after recovery of two weeks.

In a broad spectrum exercise on breathing techniques are very important aspect on rehabilitation course. According to Tuala A.Santino and colleagues breathing exercises have been widely used worldwide as a non-pharmacological therapy to treat people with asthma. Breathing exercises aim to control the symptoms of asthma and can be performed as the Papworth Method, the Buteyko breathing technique, yogic breathing, deep diaphragmatic breathing or any other similar intervention that manipulates the breathing pattern. The training of breathing usually focuses on tidal and minute volume and encourages relaxation, exercise at home, the modification of breathing pattern, nasal breathing, holding of breath, lower rib cage and abdominal breathing [5].

Breathing exercises as we know that will improve as with patients and sport players who might have medical issues as well as in those patients with no respiratory issues. In physiotherapy we give important role in the rehabilitation course, since like this we keep the standard of healthy lungs as parameter for healthy living and treatment in times of Covid-19 also and not limited too.

As a second protocol of exercise used in this paper was aerobic exercise. Aerobic exercises recommendations and specifications for patients with covid-19: a systematic review. This review demonstrated that patients with covid-19 should follow a regular program of aerobic exercise for 20-60 min. This program should be in the form of cycling or walking with an intensity of 55%-80% vo2max or 60%-80% of maximum heart rate. This program should be repeated 2-3 sessions/week, these previous parameters could safely enhance immune functions without producing any exhaustion. [6]. Aerobic exercise also at our football players has crucial role, since football players constantly do their aerobic exercise also when they are not infected with covid-19 or post covid-19.

Kinesiotherapy at post-acute sequelae of covid-19: the potential role of exercise therapy in treating patients and athletes returning to play as emphasized in paper Luna Kavigli and colleagues [7] a multidisciplinary rehabilitation program, including both physical training and psychological treatment, was conducted by a multidisciplinary team including physical trainers, nurses, psychologists, cardiologists, and sport medicine physicians in post patients (symptoms continuing after 4 or more weeks after the end of the infection).

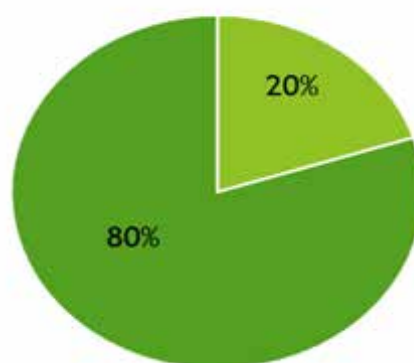
At the bottom of rehabilitation such as cardio workout, balance, endurance and speed together with SpO2 Saturation and heart rate with blood pressure were improved especially after recovery of two weeks.

4. RESULTS

- > The average age of football players was
- > 24.6 ± 5.8 years.

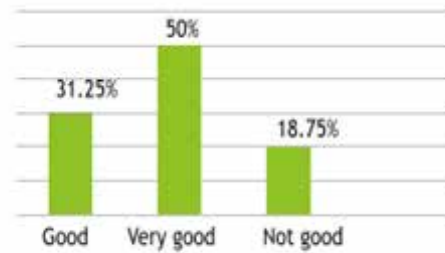
Age group	Frequency	Percent
16-22	10	36%
22-28	15	49%
>28	7	15%
Total	32	100%

Is the general condition of Football players good after covid-19?	YES	NO	Total
	26	6	32
	80%	20%	100%



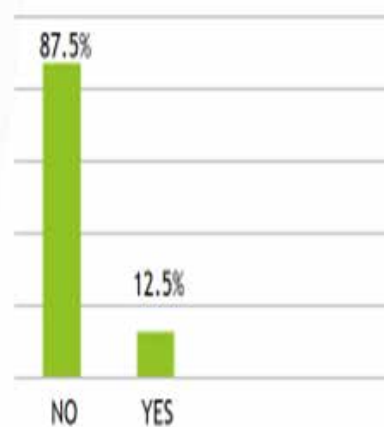
Results

	Good	Very good	Not good	Total
Physical activity of football players after Covid-19?	10	16	6	32
	31.25%	50%	18.75%	100%



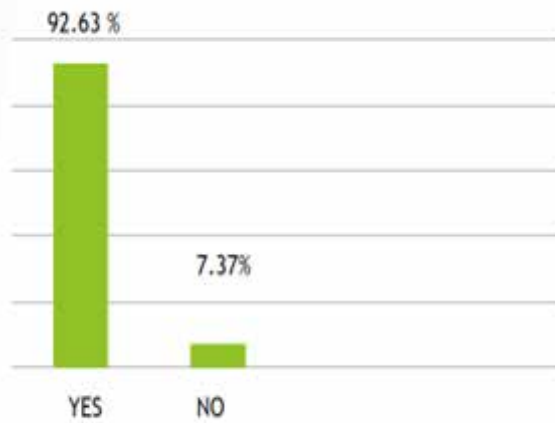
Results

	NO	YES	Total
Have football players had problems with the cardio-respiratory system after Covid-19?	28	4	32
	87.5%	12.5%	100%



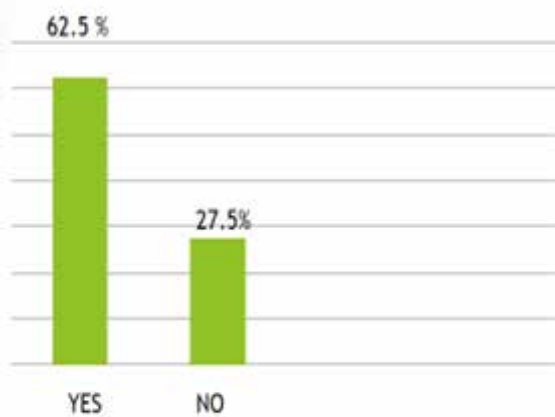
Results

► Have footballers used the b-alanine supplement after Covid-19?	YES	NO	Total
	29	3	32
	92.63 %	7.37%	100%



Results

► Have they reported general fatigue and muscle fatigue after Covid-19?	YES	NO	Total
	20	12	32
	62.5 %	27.5%	100%





5. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results obtained from the research through the analysis of the researched data and then the survey - questionnaire with patients/athletes we can conclude that:

The general condition of football players after covid-19 was good, this is stated by the vast majority of respondents.

Also, physical activity after covid-19 has been relatively good with some exceptions.

Additional research is needed in adequate training and exercise surveys with practical examples.

6. RECOMMENDATION

- Research findings indicate the need to:
- For the significance of specific physical activity and exercise, kinesiotherapy, aerobic exercises, cardio exercises, as a significant effect and reduction of healing time, gradual monitoring and control of the cardio-respiratory system is needed.
- Physiotherapists, and conditioner trainers, may give specific exercises to increase muscle strength and muscle tone.
- Monitor the immune system with the use of supplements.
- Particular importance is given to the osteo-muscular system with stretching and balance exercises.

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EXCESS MORTALITY IN LITHUANIA DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

Relevance. In recent years, various crises have occurred in the world, such as natural disasters, economic, and social crises, or epidemics, but the coronavirus pandemic is the first in 100 years, which has so strongly changed the whole world (Maison et al., 2021). According to the Lithuanian Statistics Department (2021), the COVID-19 pandemic and the disrupted availability of health care services had a negative impact on the death statistics in the country, as a significant excess mortality was observed throughout the pandemic. Results. Over 15,500 more people died in Lithuania since the start of the COVID pandemic compared to the number of deaths in 2019, and the number of lives lost grew every month from the start of the pandemic (March 2020) until the end of 2021. In the 10-12 months of 2021, the cumulative number of excess deaths grew faster than in the first quarters of that year, which means that the crisis deepened at the end of 2021. Lithuania is among the countries where the excess number of deaths in most months was higher than the European average (European institute of health and sustainable development, 2022). In Lithuania, the number of excess mortalities in January 2020 compared to 2016-2019 mortality data was negative (-12.4 percent) and since then, the number of excess deaths in Lithuania began to increase and in 2020 in April, the Lithuanian average was 2.4 percent, and the highest peak in the number of excess deaths in Lithuania was in December 2021 .

Keywords: *excess mortality, covid-19, coronavirus, pandemic, Lithuania.*

1. INTRODUCTION

- **Relevance of the topic.** In recent years, various crises have occurred in the world, such as natural disasters, economic, and social crises, or epidemics, but the coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2 virus) pandemic is the first in 100 years, which has so strongly changed the whole world (Maison et al., 2021). In March 11, 2020, The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global pandemic (WHO, 2020). A situation like the outbreak of the COVID-19 infection has quickly become the biggest challenge and a major global problem. The entire health care system and its staff have contributed greatly to the management of this situation. At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, when the situation was rapidly changing, there were no clear operational models, well-established good practices that would teach how to properly respond to the crisis in ensuring the organization of health care services (Bourdin et al., 2022). According to the Lithuanian Statistics Department, the COVID-19 pandemic and the disrupted availability of healthcare services had a negative impact on the death statistics in the country, as a significant excess mortality was observed throughout the pandemic. Therefore, after the end of the pandemic, it is very important to pay special attention and prepare in advance for emergency situations and analyze the lessons learned, the experience gained and not repeat the mistakes in the future, if the world or the country is hit by another pandemic. Research conducted by researchers is increasingly focusing on health policy and the entire work of the healthcare system during the COVID-19 pandemic (Civinskas et al., 2017; Eurostat, 2022; Lithuanian department of statistics, 2021).

- **Problem of the topic.** During the COVID-19 pandemic in Lithuania, in order to control the extent of the spread of the virus and free itself from the grip of the pandemic, the governing authorities had to make decisions that undoubtedly had an impact on the availability of health care services in both inpatient and outpatient settings, as a result of which it is likely that delayed cases of diseases and increase the incidence of various diseases, mortality and morbidity in the population (European Institute for Health and Sustainable Development, 2022; State sick fund under the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Lithuania, 2021a, 2021b).

The purpose of the study is to reveal the situation of excess mortality in Lithuania and Europe during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. RESEARCH METHODS AND ORGANIZATION

A review of scientific and professional literature, the purpose of which is to find out excess mortality statistics in, as well as changes in personal health care services during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study was conducted in 2022. In June, Scientific and professional literature was searched in Internet Archive Scholar, Web of Science, Scopus, PubMed, Directory of Open Access Journals databases. Excess mortality data were collected in the databases of Eurostat, the European Institute of Health and Sustainable Development, the World Health Organization, and the Lithuanian Department of Statistics, as well as data from the reports submitted by the Institute of Hygiene of the Republic of Lithuania and the State Health Fund of the Republic of Lithuania. Scientific articles were collected for the period 2020-2022, and excess mortality data for 2015-2022 period. Keywords used in the search: excess mortality, Covid-19, mortality, pandemic, Lithuania. Data analysis was carried out by processing the received data with Word and Excel programs of the 2016 version of Microsoft office software.

3. RESULTS

In 2019 December 31 A case of what later turned out to be the SARS-CoV-2 virus (COVID-19) was recorded in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. Then the World Health Organization (WHO) defined it as pneumonia of unknown cause (WHO, 2020). During the COVID-19 outbreak, 2020 On March 11, the WHO declared the disease COVID-19 a pandemic, and in 2020 December 29 79 million cases have already been registered in the world and just over 1.7 million deaths since the beginning of the pandemic (WHO, 2020b).

At the beginning of 2021, the virus had already affected more than 180 countries (Sanyaolu et al., 2020). In 2022 according to the data of June 23, almost 540 million cases were recorded in the world, and the COVID-19 disease caused more than 6 million human death (WHO, 2020a)

The state and society have a heavy burden and the treatment of COVID-19 patients is also very expensive. During the first half of 2021, 42.7 million euros was spent for the treatment of COVID-19 patients. Treatment of a person suffering from the COVID-19 disease in a hospital costs 2 thousand euros on average, and the cost of treatment for those suffering from this disease depends on the duration of the disease, its complexity, the need for applied measures, the patient's co-morbidities and other factors. In some cases, the treatment of this disease can cost tens of times more. For example, if a patient receives artificial lung ventilation lasting more than four days, such treatment costs an average of 8.3 thousand euros (the price varies from 5 to 33 thousand euros). In special cases, for example, when extracorporeal membrane oxygenation is applied to a COVID-19 patient, the cost of treatment can reach more than 50 thousand euros (Lithuanian department of statistics, 2021).

Since the beginning of the pandemic, more deaths have been registered in Lithuania every month than were registered in the corresponding months of 2019. The change in the number of deaths, calculated by comparing the data of the corresponding weeks/months of 2020-2021 and 2019, is considered the main indicator of the intensity of the pandemic in a specific period. The rate of change in deaths reflects the dynamics of both deaths due to COVID-19 and deaths due to other causes (Eurostat, 2022b).

The assessment of the overall change in deaths is important because: there are differences in the registration of causes of death between countries, the practice of registering the causes of death in individual countries is changing, the course of the COVID-19 pandemic and its management are adjusting the mortality due to other causes. Since the beginning of the pandemic, more deaths have been registered in Lithuania every month than were registered in the corresponding months of 2019. The increased number of deaths compared to the pre-pandemic period is described in the international literature by the term "excess number of deaths" (European Institute for Health and Sustainable Development, 2022).

By summing the weekly and monthly excess deaths since the start of the pandemic, the "cumulative excess deaths" is calculated. The cumulative number of excess deaths since the start of the pandemic indicates the total number of lives lost to the pandemic or the depth of the health crisis. The change in the total number of deaths since the beginning of the pandemic shows the dynamics of the pandemic. In Figure 1, we can see that over 15,500 more people died in Lithuania since the start of the COVID pandemic compared to the number of deaths in 2019, and the number of lives lost grew every month from the start of the pandemic (March 2020) until the end of 2021. The growing number of lives lost means that the health crisis caused by the pandemic

was not contained in either 2020 or 2021. In the 10-12 months of 2021, the cumulative number of excess deaths grew faster than in the first quarters of that year, which means that the crisis is not only uncontrolled, but even deepened at the end of 2021. If the number of deaths recorded in a week or month compares with the indicator of the corresponding period of 2019, it would mean that the cumulative number of excess deaths has stopped growing. The cumulative number of excess deaths that do not increase for 5 weeks should be considered as a criterion for controlling the pandemic. Lithuania is among the countries where the excess number of deaths was higher than the European Union average in most months.

In 2020, Lithuanian state institutions measured the change in deaths by comparing the monthly and weekly death rates of 2020 with the averages of the rates of the corresponding periods of 2015-2019 (five or four previous years), and not with the rates of the previous year (2019). Applying this methodology, it was determined that there were no excess deaths in Lithuania until the end of the summer of 2020, so it could be said that the health crisis was managed very well. Due to the rapid increase in the number of deaths, in the fall of 2020, the number of deaths in Lithuania was the highest since 2009 (European Institute for Health and Sustainable Development, 2022). Since 2021, Lithuanian state institutions have almost stopped using this methodology to determine the depth of the health crisis, when the mortality rates of one year are compared with the average rates of previous years. It is likely that the methodology was abandoned after it lost its propaganda value.

At the beginning of 2022, the indicators of 2021 and 2020, which are already compared with each other, make it possible to assess changes in mortality during the year, but make it difficult to understand the overall scale of the health crisis. According to the scientists of the European Institute of Health and Sustainable Development, when measuring the impact of the pandemic and its control/uncontrollability on the health of the population, it is appropriate to consider the change in mortality compared to the pre-crisis (pre-pandemic) year 2019 as the main indicator. The data for the years 2015-2019 are important in order to compare the mortality rates, which could have been if the trend of the five years before the crisis had remained in 2020-2021 (European Institute for Health and Sustainable Development, 2022; Eurostat, 2022b).

According to the data of the European Statistics Department (2022), the number of excess mortalities in Lithuania in January 2020 compared to the mortality data of 2016-2019 was -12.4 percent, while the average of the European Union was -5.7 percent, from 2020. In January, the number of excess deaths in Lithuania and throughout the European Union began to increase in 2020. In April, the Lithuanian average was 2.4 percent, and the European Union's average was 25.2 percent. The highest peak in the number of excess deaths in Lithuania was in 2021. in December (70.3%), and in the European Union - in 2021. in November - 40 percent. (Eurostat, 2022a).

4. DISCUSSION

Analyzing the main causes of death in Lithuania in 2020 and 2021, it can be said that after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the causes of Lithuanian deaths have changed. Until 2020, for many years, the top five causes of death in Lithuania were the same - circulatory system diseases in first place, malignant tumors in second place, external causes of death in third place, digestive system diseases in fourth place, and respiratory system diseases in fifth place. Analyzing statistics during the

pandemic, it can be seen that COVID-19 really had an impact on the main causes of death of Lithuanians, as a significant difference is visible - the four main causes of death in 2021 were diseases of the circulatory system, malignant tumors, external causes of death and COVID-19 disease - accounted for 84,3 percent all causes of death. Almost half died from diseases of the circulatory system, i.e. 48.2 percent of all deaths (0.4 percent more than in 2020). 16.2 percent died from malignant tumors, 14.7 percent from the COVID-19 disease, and 5.1 percent from external causes of death, of all the dead.

Lithuania is one of the most affected countries in Europe and the world, considering the loss of population both from the COVID-19 disease and from other diseases. One of the possible reasons for such a result is that a large part of the excess mortality was caused by the limited availability of health care services during the pandemic, it is also likely that the population engaged in self-medication more than usual, and this whole complex may have had an effect on the increase in other than COVID-19 deaths of patients with diseases.

The reason that cannot be ignored is that the sedentary nature of patients increased during the quarantine, as well as less movement during the quarantine, which contributed to the exacerbation of diseases and the occurrence of tragic outcomes. Probably most doctors have seen patients who were suffering from chronic cardiovascular disease, but they had found a certain routine of their own, physical activity, that helped. Therefore, such a patient is more vulnerable and at the beginning of the pandemic, it is likely that it was not foreseen what threat the quarantine could have to patients with cardiovascular diseases, the greatest attention was paid to patients with the disease of COVID-19. Attention should also be paid to the vaccination statistics since it is likely that the population of Lithuania did not fully reach the highest-risk population when vaccinating. Undoubtedly, COVID-19 worsens the course of other diseases and even an already acquired infection increases the probability of death from existing co-morbidities up to 3 times.

The last factor, in the opinion of the authors of the article, which could also lead to such a high excess mortality, is the age of the Lithuanian population. The rate of population aging in Lithuania is very high, which is related to poorer health and comorbidity of the population. Research has shown that the average age of those who died from COVID-19 in Lithuania was approximately 77.3 years, and the deceased population had an average of 5.3 co-morbidities (Nielsen et al., 2021). These aspects could also have an influence on the increase in the excess mortality of the Lithuanian population.

In summary, it can be said that the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021 provided a lot of significant lessons that must be analyzed and decisions made, which are likely to prevent future pandemic control errors, which manifest themselves in a very large excess compared to other countries' mortality not only from COVID-19, but also from other diseases.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Since the beginning of the pandemic, more deaths have been registered in Lithuania every month than were registered in the corresponding months of 2019, and since the beginning of the pandemic, over 15,500 more people have died in Lithuania compared to the number of deaths in 2019, and the number of lives lost has also increased every month since the beginning of the pandemic (2020 March) until the end of 2021. In Lithuania, the number of excess mortalities in January 2020 compared to 2016-2019 mortality data was negative - -12.4 percent. and since then, the number of excess deaths in Lithuania began to increase and in 2020 in April, the Lithuanian average was 2.4 percent, and the highest peak in the number of excess deaths in Lithuania was in 2021 in December - 70.3 percent.

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