<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Articles</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charles J. Sullivan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptualizing the Collapse: Stalin, Gorbachev, and the Downfall of the USSR</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aleksandra Cavoski</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idealism or Realism in the Process of EU Enlargement: The Case of Serbia</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direct Democracy Notes</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yevgenya Jenny Paturyan: The 2015 Referendum in Armenia</td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alenka Krasovec: The 2015 Referendum in Slovenia</td>
<td>303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stoycho Stoychev: The 2015 Referendum in Bulgaria</td>
<td>313</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONCEPTUALIZING THE COLLAPSE:
STALIN, GORBACHEV, AND THE DOWNFALL OF THE USSR

Charles J. Sullivan
School of Humanities and Social Sciences
Nazarbayev University

Abstract
A variety of academic studies have endeavored to explain the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics for nearly a generation now. In a modest attempt to revitalize academic discussion on the downfall of Soviet power, this article puts forth an innovative conceptualization of the Soviet collapse by highlighting the findings of some of the most notable scholarly works on this subject to date. Accordingly, this article argues that it is useful to analyze the collapse of the USSR by means of a binary comparison, emphasizing the importance of certain “core policies” that were implemented at the behest of Iosif Stalin and Mikhail Gorbachev which, in turn, led to the institutional development and decline of Soviet power, respectively. As such, in examining the respective reigns and core policies of these two Soviet leaders along with the institutional foundations of Soviet power, this article stresses that perhaps academics can come to more succinctly comprehend the nature of those forces which significantly influenced the rise and fall of the USSR.

Keywords: Stalin, Gorbachev, institutional foundations, reform, Soviet Union

Introduction
25 December 2016 will mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Over the course of the past generation, Russia has indeed lost a great deal. Gone are the Communist empire and the superpower status of the Soviet Union. Gone are the Marxist-Leninist ideology, the annual celebratory marking of the Great October Socialist Revolution, as well as the concept of the “Friendship of the Peoples.” In spite of all this, Russia has reconstituted itself into a major geopolitical player on the world stage. Nevertheless, the way back has been a long and arduous one for Moscow. This

Author's correspondence e-mail: charles.sullivan@nu.edu.kz
upcoming August will also mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the 1991 failed coup, when the GKChP (State Committee on the State of Emergency) sought to abort the enactment of the proposed new Union Treaty by removing General Secretary of the Communist Party and President of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev from power. Why was the attempted coup such an important event? Overall, the 1991 August coup retains significance to this day because it ended disastrously. Still, the putsch arguably succeeded in terms of ensuring the downfall of the last Soviet leader, for in the wake of the failed coup Boris Yeltsin seized the moment of opportunity and rose to political prominence. How though should we conceptualize the collapse of the USSR? To date, scholars have put forth a series of competing explanations pertaining to the Soviet collapse. In a modest attempt to revitalize discussion, this article (by analyzing the findings of some of the most notable scholarly works on this subject to date) argues on behalf of assessing the downfall of the USSR from an altogether unique perspective.

In adhering to an institutionalist perspective, this article posits that the key to understanding the Soviet collapse lays with highlighting the importance of certain “core policies” that were implemented at the behest of two Soviet leaders, Iosif Stalin and Mikhail Gorbachev. The respective core policies of these leaders contributed to the institutional development of Soviet power during the 1930s, as well as its decline over the course of the 1980s. In analyzing a variety of secondary historical sources this article thus argues that Stalin proved to be consequential in terms of laying the institutional foundations of Soviet power by advancing a set of core policies (namely collectivization, terror, and the promulgation of a multifaceted chronicle for the Soviet citizenry to embrace) throughout his reign. Conversely, in advancing his own set of core policies (perestroika [restructuring], the adoption of a more democratic variant of Soviet socialism, and glasnost [openness]) this article further posits that Gorbachev initiated the USSR’s institutional decline. In accounting for the occurrence of the Soviet collapse, this article thus argues that the governing styles of both

---

1 See Sakwa (2013, pp.65-69) for an overview of the academic literature concerning the proposed causes behind the Soviet collapse.

2 In regards to Stalin and Gorbachev’s “core policies,” this article stresses their importance in terms of giving shape to the general nature of power dynamics within the Soviet Union. Accordingly, Stalin’s respective core policies notably contributed to the institutional development of Soviet power via the construction of a highly authoritarian sociopolitical system exercising control over most economic activities, while Gorbachev’s respective core policies wrought the opposite effect, spelling the institutional decline of Stalinist-inspired Soviet power dynamics.
Stalin and Gorbachev are integral to comprehending the nature of those forces which sounded the death knell of the Soviet Union a quarter-century ago.³

This article initially explores several of the leading academic arguments concerning the occurrence of the Soviet collapse. Thereafter, this article discusses Stalin’s role in terms of overseeing the institutional development of Soviet power by analyzing the Soviet leader’s aforementioned core policies. This article then transitions into a discussion pertaining to Gorbachev’s role in orchestrating the Soviet Union’s institutional decline by analyzing an altogether different set of core policies, coupled with the maturation of Gorbachev’s political rivalry with Yeltsin. Finally, in reflecting on the causes behind the Soviet collapse this article argues on behalf of the importance of both institutions and individuals in terms of explaining historical events of such magnitude.

Accounting for the Soviet Collapse
On 17 March 1991 the question, “Do you consider necessary the preservation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics as a renewed federation of equal sovereign republics in which the rights and freedom of an individual of any nationality will be fully guaranteed?” was put to the Soviet populace via referendum at the behest of Mikhail Gorbachev. Out of 148.5 million people, 76.4% answered in the affirmative (Siegelbaum (a)). That said, six of the fifteen union republics did not partake in the March referendum and the Warsaw Pact was disbanded the following month thereafter (Siegelbaum (b); Sakwa 2013, pp. 68-69).

Perhaps the significance of the March referendum can be called into question. Beissinger (2002) contends that the results of the referendum are susceptible to criticism due to the abstract wording of the question itself. Accordingly, the manner in which the question was posed does not clearly reveal as to whether any newly revised USSR would have been unitary or confederal in nature (Beissinger 2002, p. 420). Although Beissinger’s critique here is noteworthy, the wording of the question may well not have mattered so much to the Soviet citizenry after all. In regards to the nature of the USSR’s institutional framework, it can be argued that the Soviet Union was essentially a “federal” state led by a “centralized” party, owing to its ethno-federal structure combined with single party rule (Hale 2008, pp. 96-97; Pipes 1964, pp. 242-243). Moreover, while the

³ This article does not seek to discount the importance of primary sources. Rather, since a great deal has been written on the subject of the Soviet collapse and scholars continue to debate the causes of this historical event, it is worthwhile to see if a novel argument can be fashioned by analyzing the scholarly findings of a variety of secondary sources.
Conceptualizing the Collapse

Soviet Union espoused the notion of “nationalist in form, socialist in content” (thereby alluding to the supremacy of the Party), the constitution nonetheless bestowed upon the Soviet Socialist Republics the right to secede (Hale 2008, p. 97). Finally, it is worth mentioning again that most Soviet citizens who partook in the March referendum were not in favor of the dismantlement of the USSR, based upon the aforementioned results. So, why did the Soviet Union collapse only a few months later?

Scholars continue to debate whether the USSR could have successfully undergone political and/or economic reform. In writing under a pseudonym, “Z” (1990) argued towards the end of Soviet rule that any efforts to reform the system would ultimately fail on account of the Party’s inability to relinquish power. In other words, the structural design of the USSR (consisting of a command economy and guided by a political system emphasizing a strict adherence to Party rule) could not undergo reform (Z 1990). Similarly, Kotkin (2001) argues that Gorbachev’s efforts to transform Soviet socialism into “socialism with a human face” significantly contributed to the collapse by laying bare the shortcomings of communism in comparison to post-World War II western capitalism (Kotkin 2001, pp. 1-3, 171-174). In contrast, Cohen (2004) claims that many aspects of the Soviet system were seemingly revisable. Accordingly, had Gorbachev pursued a different course of action in carrying out his reforms and the 1991 August coup never taken place then perhaps the Soviet leader would have succeeded in revitalizing the USSR (Cohen 2004).

On another note, Sakwa (2013) contends that the Soviet experiment represented a botched attempt at modernization in the sense that although the USSR had been “founded on the notion of emulation of the western form of modernity while claiming to resolve its defects,” such a system of rule nevertheless did not succeed in the end “to find a way of achieving similar goals by different methods” (Sakwa 2013, p. 75). In this sense, the Soviet Union failed to create an “alternative modernity” based on the absence of the “free market,” the establishment of a governing system based on “popular sovereignty,” the eradication of class-based identities, and the adoption of a “revisionist stance in international affairs” (Sakwa 2013, p. 66). But did the USSR fail because of its “limited adaptive potential” (Sakwa 2013, p. 75), or might other forces have largely ushered in the downfall of Soviet power?

Bunce (1999) posits that a unique set of institutional features largely set the stage for the Soviet Union’s downfall. Although in her work she highlights the importance of decisions made by Soviet elites, Bunce emphasizes that the arrangement of certain institutions (which in the past provided structure to the
conduct of politics both within the USSR and between the Soviet Union and its Eastern Bloc counterparts) contributed to its demise (Bunce 1999, pp. 130-136, 141-142). Domestically, Bunce contends that during the latter half of the Soviet era the preeminent power dynamics of Soviet rule (i.e. the unrivaled position of socialism as the guiding ideology to achieving development; the Party’s control over political and economic matters; the merging of the Party and state; and the permeation of the Party’s activities in people’s lives) had weakened considerably in light of the rise of a “homogenized” citizenry, economic malaise, and the Party’s abandonment of terror and endorsement of “stability in cadres” (Bunce 1999, pp. 20-37). To counter these effects, Gorbachev embarked upon a reformist course. In doing so, however, those very forces that had once been disempowered under Soviet rule became empowered due to the USSR’s own institutional design. According to Bunce, the “radial” structure that characterized Soviet-Eastern Bloc relations served to ensure that the introduction of reformist measures in the USSR would quickly spread outward to the satellites (which were completely dependent upon Moscow for their sustained survival) and thereafter blow back into the union once the ruling regimes of the Bloc were overthrown. In this aftermath, nationalist sentiments within some of the union republics became quite pronounced while ruling elites at these levels began distancing themselves from the Party and empowering the national institutions at their disposal in light of the federalist composition of the USSR. Such factors, operating in tandem with a Russian nation which sought to abandon socialism and a Soviet military not predisposed to repressing its own people, ushered in the collapse (Bunce 1999, pp. 38-52, 62-70, 84-101, 112-115, 117, 120).

Generally, Bunce’s argument remains one of the leading academic theories in accounting for the Soviet downfall. That said, this article contends that the Soviet Union had evolved into a formidable state under Stalin’s stewardship and was not destined to eventually collapse. In emphasizing this point, this article (in similar fashion to Bunce’s work) adopts an institutionalist theoretical perspective while simultaneously stressing the importance of decisions made by certain high-ranking political figures. Bearing this in mind, this article contends that the USSR underwent modernization within the confines of a unique set of institutions that were the logical outgrowth of a set of core policies promoted by Stalin during his reign. As a result of such processes, the USSR suffered from a variety of inefficiencies. The Soviet Union though demonstrated itself to be a highly resilient entity throughout the Stalinist and much of the post-Stalinist era. In trying to explain the occurrence of the Soviet collapse, this article therefore argues that Gorbachev (in his efforts to dismantle the Stalinist-inspired institutions of Soviet rule) significantly undermined the durability of Soviet
Conceptualizing the Collapse

power by implementing his own core policies, thereby leaving the USSR vulnerable to breaking apart. Hence, perhaps a productive way to comprehend the Soviet collapse lays with a comparison of the governing styles of the two Soviet leaders who largely oversaw the institutional development and (later during the twilight of the USSR) decline of Soviet power, and deciphering how the core policies of the latter sparked a ruinous unraveling of the achievements realized during the reign of the former.

The Fortress that Stalin Built

In order to comprehend the collapse of the Soviet Union, it is necessary to understand the consequentialness of the Stalinist era. In assessing this historical period from a social scientific perspective, this article posits that Stalin essentially constructed the institutional foundations of Soviet power (heretofore referred to as the “Stalinist Fortress”) by endorsing certain core policies, (namely collectivization, terror, and the promulgation of a state-sponsored chronicle concerning the multi-national composition, history, and global stance of the USSR). In turn, the implementation of such policies ensured that the Soviet Union evolved into a consolidated entity. In initiating discussion, this article commences with the close of the 1920s but not with the intention to discredit Vladimir Lenin’s contribution to the founding of the Soviet Union or the significance of the Russian Civil War (1918-1921). Rather, the Soviet Union had yet to become a consolidated entity in control of a nationally-cognizant populace during its first decade of existence. Furthermore, the policies which spurred the rise of the Soviet Union were primarily instituted during the 1930s under Stalin’s rule.

Tilly (1985/1992) describes the state-building process as a type of violent competition between rival states for political supremacy (Tilly 1985, pp. 169-191; Tilly 1992, pp. 96-126.). In a sense, the Russian Civil War can thus be conceptualized as the onset of the Soviet state-building endeavor, with one entity triumphing over another. Yet it would be wrong to assume that the state-
building process simply ended with the close of the civil war, for the Bolsheviks at that time did not exercise much authority over the vast lands of the former Russian empire. Lenin also halted the policy of War Communism in the aftermath of the civil war because it had devastated agricultural production and angered the peasantry. In the early days of Soviet rule the Bolsheviks were essentially forced to institute the New Economic Policy because they could not dominate the peasantry (Viola 2007, pp. 7-8). Bearing this in mind, it is noteworthy that the nature of economic relations between the Party and the peasantry during the 1920s was basically unsustainable, for “Z” (1990) contends that the intolerant political nature of the Bolsheviks rendered the New Economic Policy a temporary arrangement. In other words, it was but a matter of time before opponents of the NEP in the Politburo would gain the upper hand over its supporters because had industrialization occurred under the guise of the NEP then the Party would have eventually had to compete for power with an autonomous force in the peasantry (Z 1990, pp. 305-310).

Service (2005) contends that Stalin sought to do away with the NEP mainly through reliance on coercion (Service 2005, p. 253). In seeking to collectivize the countryside, Stalin called upon Party loyalists (deemed the “25,000ers”) along with the OGPU (later NKVD) secret police to partake in this endeavor (Viola 1987, pp. 36-120). In the end, the collectivization drive was instituted in an extremely violent manner, resulting in the deaths of millions of peasants (Fitzpatrick 1994, pp. 48-79). In liquidating the peasantry, confiscating their lands, and coercing them into working for the state on collective farms, the Party managed to quickly undergo industrialization. The Soviet state’s application of violence through collectivization (operating in tandem with industrialization) can thus be perceived through an ideological prism. Yet Stalin also implemented this core policy so that the Bolsheviks could assert nearly complete authority over the peasantry. The end result, however, was the creation of a command economy equipped with a multitude of shortcomings (Lewin 1993, pp. 272-284; Yanowitch 1977). Still, perhaps the most remarkable aspect of this new economic system was the speed at which it had been built. For in spite many obstacles, the USSR had successfully completed its initial five-year plan by 1933 (Kuromiya 1990, pp. 287-288).

In furtherance of the state-building process, Stalin relied upon another core policy, terror, to cow the Soviet population into submission. By institutionalizing terror, Stalin succeeded in cementing control over society by atomizing the populace. As an instrument of rule, it is worth emphasizing that this policy was not founded by Stalin. As Applebaum (2003) notes, the usage of terror by the secret police or Cheka predated the Stalinist era (Applebaum 2003, pp. 8-9). That
Conceptualizing the Collapse

said, the Stalinist regime empowered successor organizations at the expense of the rest of society. In analyzing this core policy, it is tempting to start with 1 December 1934. After all, it is well-known that on this particular day Sergey Kirov, a high-ranking member in the Politburo, was murdered under mysterious circumstances. Although the exact details of the Kirov murder remain murky, it is clear that Stalin utilized Kirov’s death as a pretext to institute martial law, unleash the secret police, and liquidate the Party leadership (Conquest 1991, p. 37; Khlevniuk 2009, p. 127). The GULAG, the show trials of former leading Party figures, and the purging of the Red Army high command during the 1930s came to comprise the most prominent features of Stalin’s purges. The focus of our analysis here, however, concerns terror with a lower-case “t.”6 Terror was first employed by Stalin against the kulaks during the Party’s dekulakization campaign of 1929-1932. Those people designated as such were usually arrested or rounded up by the authorities and deported to the remote lands of the USSR, where most survivors were forced to live out their remaining days in deplorable conditions (Fitzpatrick 1994, pp. 54-59; Viola 2007). Thereafter, the employment of terror became even more widespread with Stalin’s elevation of the secret police to an organization capable of operating above the law. Stalin crafted a social environment in which his acolytes could arrest people on false charges, elicit confessions through torture, and do away with virtually anyone.

The GULAG also served as a reservoir of slave labor from which the Soviet Union could draw upon to support its industrialization drive. The economic gains though derived from the GULAG labor force are questionable (Lazarev 2003, pp. 189-197). Still, terror contributed to the state-building process, not so much by providing the Soviet Union with slave labor but by denying civil society the ability to flourish. During the Stalinist era, the Soviet power structure decimated any person who sought to criticize it. Consequently, the best and the brightest in the arts, sciences, and other professions were by and large removed from their positions, ridiculed in their professional fields, and/or liquidated by state agents, only to be replaced by Stalinist sycophants. Yet Stalin did not stop with targeting the intellectual class. In propagating the notion of evil-doers hiding amongst loyal citizens within society, Stalin also set the stage for terror to be disseminated throughout the wider populace. The General Secretary’s endorsement of terror touched off a whirlwind of fear and social anxiety, sowing trepidation within the minds of ordinary people. Soviet citizens could be reported to the secret police by covetous friends, jealous neighbors, ambitious

6 Fitzpatrick (1999) defines “terror” as a type of coercive political instrument which ensures that ordinary people are “subject on an unpredictable but large-scale basis to arrest, execution, and other forms of state violence” (Fitzpatrick 1999, p. 190).
administrators in need of fulfilling quotas, or work colleagues for speaking out (Fitzpatrick 1999, pp. 205-209; Harris 2002, pp. 201-227). By institutionalizing terror, the Stalinist regime therefore molded the Soviet Union into a highly authoritarian system capable of silencing virtually all dissent.

Lastly, Stalin orchestrated the Soviet Union’s social development by spearheading an effort to solidify a collective consciousness within the minds of Soviet citizens. The Soviet state sought to promote a type of chronicle, highlighting the multi-national composition of the peoples, a shared history, and the global stance of the USSR. During the early Soviet era, the Bolsheviks tasked themselves with drawing up the USSR’s borders. In analyzing this effort, Hirsch (2005) challenges the conventional wisdom that the Soviet Union’s borders were designed purely according to an imperialist blueprint. In contrast, the Bolsheviks were debatably just as interested in advancing their respective ideological aims. In the 1920s, Lenin contracted with ethnographic researchers of the imperial establishment to conduct a census throughout the Russian empire for the purpose of categorizing peoples. From the onset of Soviet rule, the Bolsheviks thus sought to govern over peoples of various nationalities and develop them. In turn, they endowed such groups with the privileges to speak their native tongues and practice some of their cultural traditions within their ancestral homelands. The Bolsheviks bestowed autonomy upon such nationalities according to the logic that assisting them with the development of national consciences would gradually permit them to embrace the tenets of Marxism-Leninism (Hirsch 2005, pp. 4-10, 21-61, 101-144).

The Soviet Union was designed in such a way so that the newly minted Soviet Socialist Republics (“union republics”) were to be governed by titular nationalities (since SSRs were endowed with their own governing institutions). The Party oversaw the “institutionalization of nationhood and nationality” by drawing boundaries and empowering titular national ruling elites through its policy of korenizatsiia [“nativization”] during the 1920s and 1930s (Brubaker 1996, pp. 28-39; Slezkine 1994, p. 433). Slezkine (1994) and Brubaker (1996) further contend that the USSR went so far in terms of developing national identities that the Soviet government codified citizens as members of ethnic groups with the introduction of a domestic passport regime in the 1930s (Slezkine 1994, p. 444; Brubaker 1996, p. 31). Brubaker also argues on behalf of the notion that the idea of a “Soviet People” was portrayed as a type of “supranational” identity which coexisted alongside a variety of other “sub-state” national identities that had been officially assigned by the government (Brubaker 1996, p. 28). During the mid-1930s, however, Stalin began trumpeting the Russian nation as being “first among equals” in comparison to all of the
other nationalities of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the Soviet Union’s state-sponsored glorification of the Russian nation did not take place at the expense of all of the other national minorities, for the USSR during Stalin’s rule and throughout the post-Stalinist era openly heralded the concept of the “Friendship of the Peoples” and endorsed the public display of “national cultures” (Martin 2001, pp. 432-461).

Stalin also sought to restrict interpretations of Soviet history. In the latter half of the 1930s, Leon Trotsky penned a critique of Stalin’s rule. In The Revolution Betrayed, Trotsky depicts Stalin as the “Soviet Thermidor” (Trotsky 1972, pp. 86-114). Shortly thereafter, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union published History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union: Short Course (1939), a distorted interpretation of the early Soviet era. In discussing the 1930s, Short Course contrastingly depicts Stalin as a vigilant leader focused on the home front, with Trotsky and others trying to disrupt his efforts. In the end, the book portrays Stalin as the watchful steward of the USSR, guiding the country along to modernity, and champions the notion of a triumphant Party fulfilling the task of developing Soviet socialism (Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union 1939, pp. 280-352). In summarizing the main points of Short Course, it is noteworthy that (owing to the formative time in which this work was introduced to the Soviet public) its distribution arguably served to further refine the contours of the Soviet chronicle by amplifying citizens’ interrelated nature.

The last facet of the Soviet chronicle concerns the global stance of the USSR under Stalin. Soviet foreign policy during the 1930s was mainly characterized by isolationism. This was so because Stalin early on advanced the cause of “socialism in one country” (Service 2005, p. 136; Cohen 1971, pp. 147-148). Perhaps Stalin was attracted to this doctrine because it bided him time to implement his other core policies. On this point, such a foreign policy arguably fit nicely with Stalin’s fomenting of domestic threats. But Stalin also harbored a negative outlook towards the West in general, grounded in his own understanding of international relations. Service (2005) provides a window into Stalin’s views on foreign affairs by highlighting some of the General Secretary’s remarks made in a famous speech which he delivered in 1931 at a conference (Service 2005, p. 272). Similarly, Zubok (2007) argues that in addition to his “dark, mistrusting mind and cruel, vindictive personality,” Stalin’s conceptualization of international relations was primarily realist in nature, coupled with some revisionist aspects (as displayed in Stalin’s desire to seek out opportunities to expand the USSR’s imperialist hold over Europe) (Zubok 2007, pp. 16-21). In depicting Western powers as the enemies of Soviet socialism, Stalin therefore
further contributed to the evolution of the Soviet chronicle by driving a stake between the USSR and the West. Taken together, by adhering to a governing style characterized by extreme violence, treachery, paranoia, and a wanton disregard for human life for nearly a generation, Stalin presided over the construction of the institutional foundations of Soviet power. By the twilight of Stalin’s rule, the Soviet Union had become a highly authoritarian political system exercising a substantial degree of control over most social and economic activities.

**Storming the Stalinist Fortress**

By invading the Soviet Union in June of 1941 Nazi Germany sought to destroy the Stalinist Fortress and conquer the USSR. As fate would have it, however, Soviet military forces triumphed over their adversaries and dealt a devastating blow to Fascism with the USSR’s victory in the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945). That said, the first attempt to overhaul the Stalinist Fortress from within also ended in failure. During his tenure as First Secretary, Nikita Khrushchev sought to expose the crimes of the Stalinist regime through his destalinization campaign, as well as inject new life into the Party by proposing fixed terms in office for apparatchiks. In response, the defenders of the Stalinist Fortress shook Khrushchev off by ousting him in a coup (Kotkin 2001, pp. 37-38). As such, the notion of reform went into a period of hibernation with the First Secretary’s removal.

Yurchak (2005) notes that although the period associated with Leonid Brezhnev’s rule is widely perceived as a time of zastoi [“stagnation”], the time during which Brezhnev served as General Secretary only came to be seen as such after Gorbachev came to power, on account of the notion that reform by then had come to be seen as necessary. Furthermore, at no time during the Brezhnev era did the system appear susceptible to collapse because “authoritative discourse” within the USSR (consisting of “rituals” and “performative acts” to demonstrate the resiliency and legitimacy of Soviet power) had not yet come under reevaluation (Yurchak 2005, pp. 1-33). The Soviet Union under Brezhnev was also successful in cloaking the country’s economic overreliance on producing heavy industry outputs due to the substantial revenues derived from the sale of oil reserves (Kotkin 2001, pp. 15-17). Thus, Brezhnev’s reign is best conceptualized as a time in which the Party decided for the most part to keep

---

7 See Service (2005, pp. 592-595) for a discussion on Khrushchev’s destalinization campaign and its aftereffects. See also Dyker (2013, pp. 8-9) for a discussion on how Khrushchev’s assault against the Soviet apparatchiks led to his political downfall.
Conceptualizing the Collapse

the institutional foundations of the Stalinist Fortress intact. Yet with Brezhnev’s passing and Gorbachev’s eventual ascendancy to the helm of power the notion of reform would go on to assume pronounced importance in an economic and political sense once again.

Following the death of Stalin, it is important to emphasize that the USSR’s institutional foundations began to undergo some modifications. Zimmerman (2014) argues that the practice of terror largely became deinstitutionalized in the early post-Stalinist era and (as a consequence) the future losers of high-level political contests did not (on account of their losing) forfeit their lives (Zimmerman 2014, pp. 130-131, 137). In addition, the Party in the post-Stalinist era (particularly during the reign of Brezhnev) no longer sought to regularly mobilize citizens in furtherance of state goals. Instead, people were largely permitted to go about their daily lives without state interference, provided that they did not publicly challenge the supremacy of the Party (Zimmerman 2014, pp. 132, 146-148, 154-161).

The Gorbachevian era, however, signaled a drastic break with Stalinism. Gorbachev’s rise to power was spurred by the successive deaths of Soviet leaders Brezhnev (d. 1982), Yuri Andropov (d. 1984), and Konstantin Chernenko (d. 1985), as well as other figures such as Mikhail Suslov (d. 1982) and Dmitry Ustinov (d. 1984). The passing of the “Old Guard” therefore paved the way for a new generation of leadership (Kotkin 2001, pp. 49-57, 176). Upon assuming office, the new General Secretary’s governing style began exhibiting many differences from that of his predecessors. In particular, Gorbachev sought to alter the workings of the command economy, initiate a change in the conduct of Soviet politics within both the domestic and international arenas, and revise the Soviet chronicle. Over time, such modifications weakened the institutional foundations of Soviet power. Hence, by implementing his own set of core policies (perestroika, democratic Soviet socialism, and glasnost), this article posits that Gorbachev presided over the USSR’s institutional decline.

The command economy played an integral role in overseeing the industrialization of the USSR. The fact of the matter though is that such a system was incapable of maintaining pace with the West after nearly three decades of intense competition. In spite of its early successes, the USSR had significantly fallen behind the West economically, making it out to be a lagging superpower.

---

8 Still, it is noteworthy that after Khrushchev’s ouster, the Party did not engage in a “reversion to full Stalinism,” for “terror” was never institutionalized by Brezhnev to the extent that it had been under Stalin (Service 2005, p. 595).
Charles J. Sullivan

(Treisman 2011, pp. 13-14; Brown 2007, p. 6). In particular, industrial production had slowed down considerably in the post-Stalinist era while agriculture never really rebounded from the devastating effects of collectivization (Dyker 2013, pp. 3-7). Gorbachev firmly believed that the Soviet Union needed to undergo reform. In attempting to revamp the Soviet economy, he sought to allow for some level of market incentives to stimulate production levels. Such hopes turned out to be unrealized on account of unforeseen consequences. One of Gorbachev's economic directives was the 1988 “Law on State Enterprises,” designed so that Soviet industries could both fulfill production quotas and (upon doing so) make a profit by choosing what to produce and at what rate afterwards. Not everything worked out so well, however, for while prices remained under state control managers (who were now beholden to their workers on account of this law calling for the holding of elections) kept raising wages, leading to inflation and the weakening of the Soviet economy (Treisman 2011, pp. 16, 32). Other shocks (such as the decline in world oil prices during the 1980s, the Soviet government’s decision to borrow a substantial amount of funding from the West, and Gorbachev’s restrictions on the production and sale of alcohol) took their toll as well, causing the USSR to incur substantial financial losses (Treisman 2011, pp. 14-15, 31). Yet in proclaiming perestroika as the solution to the Soviet Union’s malaise and implementing unsound economic directives of his own, Gorbachev began calling into question the long-term feasibility of the command system, thereby kick-starting the process of chipping away at the Stalinist Fortress.

On the domestic scene, Gorbachev strove to recast the USSR’s Stalinist-inspired brand of Soviet socialism into his own version of “socialism with a human face” (Kotkin 2001, pp. 2-3). Perhaps his greatest achievement proved to be the revitalization of civil society. Gorbachev encouraged Soviet intellectuals to provide substance to what he referred to as the “blank pages” of history (Nove 1990, p. 37). But in order for this to happen, civil society had to be permitted to express its voice, thus entailing a need on behalf of the Soviet leadership to refrain from utilizing terror as a political instrument. Surprisingly, Gorbachev’s revitalization of civil society surpassed even that of Khrushchev’s destalinization campaign, setting into motion a countrywide debate on a variety of controversial issues under glasnost (Taubman & Taubman 1990; Nove 1990, pp. 73-102, 191-223). Gorbachev further demonstrated his penchant for change by releasing dissident Andrey Sakharov from internal exile, initiating shake-ups within the Party at the regional and local levels, and overseeing the founding of the Congress of People’s Deputies which selected membership in the Supreme Soviet of the USSR (Treisman 2011, pp. 14-17). Overall, Gorbachev was willing to move towards democracy due to his belief in the need to revise Soviet socialism.
Soviet foreign policy vis-à-vis the United States and Europe during the Gorbachevian era was also revolutionary in nature (particularly in comparison to Stalin’s isolationist and belligerent stance towards the West throughout much of his reign) (Zubok 2007, pp. 316-317). The Soviet government’s response to the mass protests across Eastern Europe during the autumn of 1989 reveals Gorbachev’s inherent belief in a more democratic variant of Soviet socialism. Historically, Khrushchev and Brezhnev felt compelled to violently suppress the popular uprisings in Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968). When faced with a similar situation in 1989, however, Gorbachev did not respond in kind. Instead, the Soviet leader held firm to a foreign policy based on “noninterference” in this instance, arguing on behalf of the principle that Europeans should be permitted to resolve their own political matters. In pursuing such a course of action, Gorbachev though forfeited a hard-won prize in terms of realist geopolitical thinking, in return for what amounted to only short-lived fanfare from the West (Zubok 2007, pp. 321-330).

It is somewhat difficult to explain why Gorbachev, a product of the Soviet political establishment and a former pupil of Yuri Andropov, pursued such policies at home and on the international stage. Did Gorbachev truly understand the significance of what he was doing? Or did he only come to comprehend the consequences of his actions when it already had become too late to reverse course? To explain Gorbachev’s democratizing impulse is no easy matter. Perhaps the nuclear meltdown at Chernobyl in 1986 served as a catalyzing moment in his mind, thereby causing him to embrace a reformist agenda (Hosking 1990, pp. 128-129; Kotkin 2001, pp. 67-68; Brown 2007, p. 11). Or maybe he was simply an ineffective leader, in the sense that his personal idiosyncrasies wrought policy blunders (Zubok 2007, pp. 311-321). On this point, Zubok (2007) argues that while Gorbachev fashioned himself as an “idealized Lenin” he turned out to be (in contrast to Stalin) a poor “state-builder” (Zubok 2007, p. 315). Yet Gorbachev’s disapproval of Stalin’s system of rule also likely figured prominently into his decision-making calculus. Kotkin (2001) notes that Gorbachev could not abandon his reformist measures amidst those moments of revolutionary change, for doing so would have tarnished his “international reputation” and challenged his personal beliefs (Kotkin 2001, p. 177). By valuing the promise of reform over a reliance on brute force, Gorbachev thus threw caution to the wind. In retrospect, it appears that Gorbachev did not adequately gauge the degree to which the Communist regimes of Eastern Europe had grown illegitimate in the eyes of their citizens, which in turn rendered the ruling elites there vulnerable to overthrow absent military support from Moscow (Brown 2007, p. 4).
Through his encouragement of the revitalization of civil society Gorbachev also shook the very foundations of the Stalinist Fortress by challenging certain facets of the aforementioned Soviet chronicle. Initially, it was thought that the overriding purpose of *glasnost* was to expose Stalin as an abomination once and for all, so that the USSR could finalize a divorce with the former General Secretary and come to institutionalize a more democratically-oriented political system (Kotkin 2001, p. 70). In this sense, Gorbachev (as Khrushchev had endeavored before him in an effort to reform the Soviet political system) sought to thoroughly discredit his predecessor’s dictatorial governing style (Dyker 2013, pp. 7-8), and he did so by authorizing the publication of a variety of articles in newspapers and journals, exposing the crimes of the Stalinist regime (Hosking 1990, pp. 130-131). Although the Gorbachevian intellectual assault against Stalin’s fictitious portrayal of Soviet history was a commendable development at the time, *glasnost* turned out to be an unregulated enterprise.

There appears to have been little to no consideration as to whether Soviet citizens (upon learning the truth about the horrors which transpired throughout the course of Stalin’s rule) would be able to cope with the rapid exposure to a plethora of new and highly controversial information. On this point, “Z” (1990) and Kotkin (2001) contend that *glasnost* weakened the Soviet citizenry’s faith in socialism and delegitimized the Party’s claim to power in the eyes of a more politically aware populace (Z 1990, pp. 324-325; Kotkin 2001, pp. 69-70). Recent research conducted by Sullivan (2013) also indicates that some Russian citizens still evaluate the unstructured public airing of the most appalling features of the Soviet past as destabilizing to the fabric of society (Sullivan 2013, pp. 468-469). Taken together, Gorbachev’s implementation of reformist measures coupled with his rebranding of the Soviet chronicle gravely undermined the system which Stalin had built up over the duration of his reign.

Lastly, in trying to account for the occurrence of the Soviet collapse it is necessary to highlight the significance of elite feuding, as well as the occurrence of the 1991 August coup. Looking back, Stalin proved to be extremely effective at remaining in power. Gorbachev, in contrast, showed himself to be a much less competent potentate, and this is most evident in the staging of the coup itself. Moreover, the significance of the attempted coup should not go understated, for in its aftermath certain ruling elites (most notably in the Ukrainian SSR) assessed the value of adhering to a possibly “exploitative” future governing
In focusing on the late Soviet era, Treisman (2011) traces the origins of the volatile relationship between Gorbachev and Yeltsin back to a public falling out. Prior to the souring of relations between these two political heavyweights, Gorbachev had initially awarded Yeltsin the post of First Secretary of the Moscow Communist Party, owing to his admirable work ethic and endorsement of *perestroika*. But Yeltsin overstepped his bounds by criticizing Gorbachev’s alleged lack of support for the reformist cause at a meeting of the Central Committee in October of 1987. Gorbachev exacted his revenge by demoting and humiliating Yeltsin. Yet Gorbachev’s decision proved to be extremely shortsighted, for his abrasive handling of Yeltsin transformed an unpredictable ally into an embittered foe (Treisman 2011, pp. 17-19).

Upon regaining his political footing, Yeltsin (who would go on to be elected President of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic in June of 1991) began undermining Gorbachev. In June of 1990 the RSFSR issued a public declaration of “sovereignty,” argued on behalf of Russian over Soviet laws, and issued ownership claims over “Soviet property” in Russia (Hale 2004, pp. 189-190). To further complicate matters (and in response to the Soviet leader’s loosening of societal restrictions), an outpouring of protests flowed amidst the backdrop of this feud. Sensing a change in the popular mood, Yeltsin tapped into the prevailing Russian nationalist sentiment (Beissinger 2002, pp. 390-401, 409-411). In the end, however, it was the attempted coup that spurred Gorbachev’s undoing. For in its aftermath, he could neither turn to Yeltsin nor mend ties with those who had just sought to oust him. Gorbachev thus found himself to be alone, standing amidst the rubble of the Stalinist Fortress.

---

9 Furthermore, Hale (2004) argues that in declaring independence, Ukraine’s leaders did not seek to empower the Commonwealth of Independent States, owing to a lack of “trust” between them and Yeltsin (Hale 2004, p. 190).

10 That said, it is important to highlight that other factors were influencing Yeltsin’s decision-making calculus at the time. On this point, Treisman (2011) argues that many of Yeltsin’s policies were in line with Russian public opinion; that Yeltsin tried to find common ground with Gorbachev regarding the institutional makeup of a reformed Soviet Union even after the failed coup; and that on account of the collapsing economy, bureaucrats appropriating state-owned resources, and Ukraine’s declaration of independence, Yeltsin had to act quickly (Treisman 2011, pp. 170-175).
What if the 1991 August coup had somehow been averted? Realistically, even if an attempted coup had never been staged, Gorbachev would still have faced a steep uphill climb, with him literally having to start from the beginning in constructing new governing institutions to hold everything together (assuming the new Union Treaty went into effect). After all, the new Union Treaty would have replaced the word “Socialist” with “Sovereign” in the USSR’s title, as well as granted legal supremacy and control over natural resources to the union republics (Siegelbaum (b)). The fact of the matter though is that an extralegal move was made against Gorbachev prior to the ratification of the treaty, which resulted in making the Soviet leader into the last of his kind. The significance of the 1991 August coup therefore lays not with its occurrence, but with when it transpired. It happened at a time when Party rule had become thoroughly discredited, the institutions of Soviet power had significantly declined, and Gorbachev was at his most vulnerable. Hence, the Soviet collapse was not a preordained event, but the outcome of a series of policies endorsed by a well-intentioned leader who (in his efforts to reform the USSR from within) inadvertantly imperiled the system and triggered a violent backlash, thereby assuring his own political doom.

Conclusion
This article argues that perhaps a productive way to conceptualize the Soviet collapse is by means of adhering to an institutionalist perspective and engaging in a binary comparison concentrating on the governing styles of the two most consequential leaders of the USSR. It is accurate to say that the Soviet Union’s “sprint to modernity had slowed to a crawl” by the onset of the Gorbachevian era, particularly in comparison to the United States (Treisman 2011, pp. 13-14). However, the USSR was not on the precipice of collapsing under its own weight since it unquestionably remained a superpower within the international system, irrespective of its many shortcomings. Bearing this in mind, it is rather unsurprising that Gorbachev’s assault on the Stalinist Fortress angered hardline dissenters (who eventually sought to put a stop to his reformist measures by force), for Gorbachev sought to undo a system of rule which had (in spite of tremendous sacrifices) nonetheless engendered many noteworthy advancements in terms of education, mathematics, industrial development, space exploration, and military power (Treisman 2011, p. 13). Yet the 1991 August coup seemingly could not have averted the downfall of the Soviet Union, for the attempt to maintain power through brute force only further discredited the Party’s political legitimacy at a time when it had seemingly reached its nadir. Situated in a post-failed coup political atmosphere, Yeltsin decided to abandon
Conceptualizing the Collapse

all hope for the ratification of a new Union Treaty.\textsuperscript{11} In the end, Gorbachev ultimately suffered a tragic fate because he was a quixotic leader. He ardently believed in the idea that the Soviet Union could undergo reform, so long as he willed it. However, his utopian dream of perfecting Soviet socialism devolved into a real-life nightmare due to the rigidness of the Stalinist Fortress, coupled with his inability to manage the changes which he himself had set into motion. Hence, Gorbachev’s implementation of reformist measures triggered the weakening of the system, the staging of the 1991 August coup, and his own political ruin.

To argue that the Soviet collapse was an historical inevitability or simply one man’s fault is wholly insufficient. Neither Stalin nor Gorbachev ushered in the end of Soviet rule on their own accord, and the USSR was not predestined to suffer a total collapse. Academics should also refrain from explaining the occurrence of the Soviet collapse by proclaiming that the system suffered from “contradictions” (Sakwa 2013, pp. 66-68). After all, no social order is beyond reproach and the USSR managed to overcome various ordeals despite its inconsistencies. Instead, this article has sought to account for the Soviet downfall by analyzing the core policies endorsed by Stalin and Gorbachev, coupled with the consequences of the latter’s well-intentioned yet haphazard implementation of reformist measures. Gorbachev sought not simply to reform the USSR but to build it anew according to a different blueprint. Perhaps a fruitful way to conceptualize the Soviet downfall thus entails envisioning a failed attempt at carrying out a controlled demolition.

In closing, this article stresses the notion that institutions clearly matter in terms of explaining various phenomena, but so do those individuals in positions of power who are tasked with adhering to those institutions. In a modest attempt to explain the occurrence of the Soviet collapse, this article therefore argues on behalf of the importance of both institutions and individuals. Specifically, by advancing his own set of core policies, Stalin was able to largely pave the institutional foundations of the USSR. The exercise of power during the Stalinist era (and throughout much of the post-Stalinist era) thus flowed according to the contours of institutions sculpted during the course of his reign. Decades later, Gorbachev’s assault (which was brought about by the implementation of his own set of core policies) against the Stalinist-inspired features of Soviet rule destabilized the very exercise of power. Based upon this argument, it would

\textsuperscript{11} Hale (2008) argues that Yeltsin supported the notion of a new Union Treaty even after the failed coup. However, the decisive factor which influenced Yeltsin to opt for the dissolution of the USSR was the Ukrainian SSR’s push to secede (Hale 2008, pp. 112-114).
Charles J. Sullivan

seem that even though the USSR was not destined to suffer a collapse, it could not successfully undergo reform either (or at least not without jeopardizing its own survivability). As such, the Soviet collapse stands today as an informative example of the complexities involved in endeavoring to alter the flow of power within an institutional context.

Acknowledgements
I would like to extend my thanks to the Institute for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies (IERES) at The George Washington University in Washington DC, the A. Michael Hoffman Dissertation Fellowship program, and the following members of my dissertation committee: Dr. Henry E. Hale (The George Washington University); Dean/Dr. James Goldgeier (American University); Dr. Henry Farrell (The George Washington University); Dr. Muriel A. Atkin (The George Washington University); and Dr. Eric M. McGlinchey (George Mason University). I would also like to express my gratitude to the reviewers of East European Quarterly for their comments and suggestions on how to improve my work.

Funding Source
The research presented in this article was conducted as a portion of my dissertation study while serving as a doctoral candidate at The George Washington University in Washington DC. I am very grateful for the generous financial support provided through the Hoffman Dissertation Fellowship (2011-2012). This funding source did not assume any role in the design of my work.
Conceptualizing the Collapse

Bibliography


Conceptualizing the Collapse


IDEALISM OR REALISM IN THE PROCESS OF EU ENLARGEMENT: THE CASE OF SERBIA

Aleksandra Cavoski
Birmingham Law School
University of Birmingham

Abstract
This article examines the ongoing process of Serbia’s accession to the European Union from a realist perspective. While much of the discourse surrounding European Union enlargement has celebrated the re-uniting of Europe, enlargement has been a success as it has mutually fulfilled the interests of EU member states and accession countries. Thus, the motivation of Serbia as an accession country is to secure stability, modernization and economic growth. The process is best understood through a realist framework that can explain the motivations and incentives of the actors involved. In this realist model EU member states are playing a two-level game where their interests are aggregated at the EU level. However, domestic constituencies and electorates in the EU have become less supportive of integration and enlargement. Furthermore, the key foreign policy challenges currently faced by the EU will not be resolved by enlargement. This questions its future utility for both member states and accession countries.

Keywords: EU, Serbia, enlargement, accession, realism, two-level game

Introduction
The enlargement process has been described in rhetorical terms of reuniting Europe and restoring the continent undivided. However, the impetus of European Union (EU) accession in the case of Serbia has been driven by the interests of member states in a strategically important region. Similarly, the willingness of Serbia as a candidate country to undergo the rigors of the accession process is motivated by the understanding that accession will strengthen and consolidate a relatively weak state. Yet, in recent years this impetus of enlargement has slowed. The economic recession since 2008 has
spilled over into the enlargement process and the member states are less focused on accession countries. Successive Euro-crisis, instability in the EU ‘near abroad’ such as north Africa and Ukraine, and wavering British commitment to membership have undermined member states’ interests in the Balkans. Perhaps more importantly the rise of populist parties of both the left and right in EU member states has changed the domestic sources of foreign policy in key member states and diverted member states’ interests and attention from further enlargement. Thus, the paper will argue that EU accession in the case of Serbia can be primarily understood from a realist perspective. However, changing interests of member states and of Serbia itself mean that accession is becoming less of an interest for both sets of parties. This provides an important alternative perspective on the enlargement process: if the key motivation for the accession of a strategically important candidate country is primarily realist and instrumentalist then it is questionable whether accession will occur at all.

The argument will be made that member states aggregate their interests in the region, namely first and second order security, and the EU pursues this through the tool of conditionality. The EU is playing “a two-level game” where at the domestic level it must adopt EU policies appealing to domestic constituencies, i.e. member states (Putnam 1988). This means that EU institutions, in particular the Commission, subjugate its enlargement agenda to member state preferences at a time when there is little appetite amongst member states to pursue deeper integration or further enlargement. At the international level, the EU tries to accommodate national interests by successfully using conditionality in the accession countries. This paper will argue that the motivation of the EU for enlargement in the Western Balkans is primarily instrumental with the primary aim to extend its writ into the Balkans and stabilize the region to ensure that there is no repeat of the war and instability of the 1990s. The policy of member states, and as a result of the European Union, has been to sustain their position in the Balkans relative to competitors (in particular Russia) and to shape the milieu of a potentially unstable neighboring region. However, this overall policy aim must also be reconciled with changing domestic politics in key member states. As the EU has undergone centrifugal forces of economic crises such as repeated Euro crises and external pressures, such as Russia’s intervention in Ukraine so have the interests of key member states changed.

On the Serbian side the motivation for EU accession is almost purely instrumental. Serbia, with a relatively unstable party system and little genuine public enthusiasm for the EU, regards membership primarily as a means to an end. This end is primarily based on a realist rationale of strengthening the relatively weak institutions of the Serbian state. Thus the “EU is indispensable as
the state cannot offer the same measure of security and prosperity” (Milward 2000, p. 3). Just as European integration rescued the nation state after the Second World so the accession process will bring Serbia on a path of security and economic modernization. The secondary objective is to ensure greater economic prosperity. However, as this paper will examine in more detail, there is decreasing public support for accession amongst the general public in Serbia. At the international level, the Serbian government has treaded a line between greater commitment to EU accession and a closer relationship with Russia. In turn, the questions of Kosovo and Serbia’s relationship with Russia have influenced public perceptions of the EU. Coupled with the highly technocratic and lengthy accession process, this has negatively affected the perception of future EU membership in the accession countries and, in time, potentially reduces the incentives for enlargement.

In supporting this argument the first section of the paper critically examines the key theoretical models used to explain EU enlargement. In the second section the policy of the EU in the Balkans is analyzed. The paper then examines how this realist approach is matched on the Serbian side. The paper concludes by exploring lessons beyond the Serbian case, in particular, broader questions of accession countries’ motivation for membership and the process and goals of enlargement itself.

A Realist Approach to Serbia’s EU Accession

The theoretical literature provides explanatory models that can be roughly divided into two categories, constructivist and rationalist (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier 2002). A rationalist approach renders institutions secondary to actors’ interests while a constructivist approach argues that interests are shaped by institutions. In analyzing the Serbian case a constructivist approach has little explanatory force. The key precepts of constructivism are absent in the case of Serbian accession. In particular, the principal assumption underlying constructivist analyses, namely a clear alignment of values between the applicant state and member state is lacking in the case of Serbia. To paraphrase Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, who wrote of the characteristics of applicant state politics, it is highly questionable whether Serbia subscribes to the integrationist project or even fully adheres to the liberal-democratic value foundations of the EU (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier 2002). While international organizations may influence the process of democratization (Pevhouse 2002) any such influence from the EU has not run contrary to Serbia’s pragmatic and piecemeal compliance with the EU accession process. The model of Europeanization (Grabbe 2001; Radaelli 2008), whereby governance models in applicant states become increasingly similar to the EU, is not inconsistent with a
realist interpretation. The key mechanism of Europeanization is conditionality, namely if an accession country implements the types of governance demanded by the EU and key member states, it will be subsequently rewarded, ultimately with EU membership. The member states of the EU have an interest in propagating its own rules, legal order and models of governance.

Thus a realist based assessment of these cost benefit calculations motivates not only the Serbian government’s position but that of the EU as well. Waltz’s argument that “only when the United States decides upon a policy have European countries been able to follow it” (Waltz 2000) is unfair as EU member states have consistently articulated a policy of enlargement in Central and Eastern Europe. Germany in particular has interests in the Balkans that it has articulated through the EU and conditionality. While Germany remains a ‘civilian power’, as its participation in the 1999 Kosovo intervention demonstrated (Hyde-Price 2001) it still has a security interest in maintaining stability in the Balkans.

Indeed it is questionable whether a constructivist model accurately reflects the preferences and actions of the EU itself in regard to the Balkans. Much of the discourse around the accession of central and eastern European countries in 2004 celebrated their ‘return to Europe’ (European Parliament 2001). However, this idealistic vision has been absent from EU policy towards Serbia and the Balkans generally. Successive wars, refugees and general violence and instability rendered former Yugoslavia, in particular Serbia and Bosnia – Herzegovina, the object of EU member states’ interests. These included the creation of lasting peace, stability in the Balkans and ensuring that any further political fragmentation would be peaceful and negotiated. This comprises part of a broader overall aim to ensure that the ‘security community’ of the EU is extended to and embedded in former Yugoslavia (Kirchner 2006). However, this focus and interest of member states to the enlargement process has waned with increasing normalization in the Balkans, various crises both within the EU (e.g. the euro) and without (e.g. Ukraine) and, most importantly, increasing levels of populism and anti-EU sentiment within member states.

For realists, in an anarchic international system it is the preferences of nation states that determine the enlargement process. In the case of the EU these are articulated by the member states, particularly larger member states. Whilst there are some differences amongst member states over policy questions in the Balkans, for example the recognition of Kosovo’s independence, the primary goal of member states in the Balkans has been the maintenance of first order security. While in reality this has been provided by NATO, who deployed
stabilization forces to both Bosnia and Kosovo, this is in line with large member states policy. In terms of second order security, member states have aggregated their preferences and delegated the EU, primarily the Commission through the conditionality tool, to articulate their interests. On the other side of the accession equation, it is the applicant state that interacts with the EU. In the case of Serbia this is articulated, albeit often incoherently, through the state as an actor.

The section on Serbia below will outline how Serbia’s approach to the EU is primarily instrumentalist, there is little European identity and enlargement is mainly regarded as a method of strengthening weak, post-transition institutions of the Serbian state. Rather than aligning the country with European ideals of liberalism and democracy successive Serbian governments have voiced support for EU accession only insofar as it bolsters the Serbian state. The goal of Serbian policy has been to use the accession process instrumentally to support its own long-term existence.

The choice of Serbia as a case study is due to the fact that it is of topical interest as it is likely to be the next country to accede to the EU. However, Serbia is also worthy of examination due to the importance of certain issues have not been as salient for other accession countries. Cooperation with the ICTY and the status of Kosovo and Serbia’s relationship with it are not issues that have affected other accession countries (with the exception of Cyprus and Croatia). The Serbian case is also of note due to the Serbian public’s often negative perception of the EU, the ‘West’ and the idea of European integration.

**EU Member States and the Enlargement Process**

As argued above, member states are the key actors in the enlargement process. However, the EU acts as an intervening variable between member state’s interests and external actors (Hyde-Price 2006). Member states articulate their interests through the EU’s foreign policy. At the EU level member state governments aggregate views of domestic interest groups, whether government ministries or national electorates. Thus, Putnam’s model of the two-level game is particularly useful in exploring the process of EU enlargement. The accession process can be categorized as an international negotiation. The game is played at both the national level and the international level. Thus, “at a national level, domestic groups pursue their interest by pressurizing the government to adopt favorable policies, and politicians seek power by constructing coalitions among those groups” (Putnam 1988, p. 434). At the international level, national governments seek to maximize their own ability to satisfy domestic pressures while minimizing the adverse consequences of
foreign developments (Putnam 1988, p. 434). The EU is not a national actor and is negotiating with national states during the accession process. However, the EU is an actor on the international stage, both de jure and de facto (Bretherton & Vogler 2006). The benefit of using Putnam’s two-level game in examining accession is that it is underpinned by a clear cost-benefit analysis at both the domestic and international level and thus provides a clearer explanatory model for member state actors at both the EU and national level.

Member states are, by definition, national actors and they have domestic constituents who have preferences. The difference between the EU accession process and other two-level games, such as trade negotiations, lies in the relative power of the EU vis-à-vis accession countries. As this paper will argue, EU member states are able to use pressure to induce changes in accession countries through the attraction of membership and the political conditionality that accompanies it. However, the incentive for membership in the case of Serbia is largely instrumental and is diminishing as the process continues. In her analysis of political conditionality in the Balkans Noutcheva (2012, p. 28) asks “do the arguments based on cost-benefit calculations predominate the thinking of political actors in government?”. With some notable exceptions, such as the Czech Republic, there has been a consensus amongst candidate countries’ political and economic elites in support of accession. However, Serbia may be replicating a pattern identified in other accession countries where there is initial support for integration followed by increasing skepticism regarding the normative basis of enlargement, in particular regarding economically liberal values of the single market (Rohrschneider & Whitefield, 2006). The key difference with Serbia is that this debate has been rendered more salient by non-economic issues, in particular the future of Kosovo and cooperation with the ICTY. However, Serbia’s cost benefit analysis is underpinned by a realist assumption of benefits. This type of analysis will not guarantee that public opinion is favorable to integration. Gherghina (2010) has shown that there is a correlation between worsening economic performance and negative attitudes to integration in recently acceded countries.

There is no doubt that enlargement is considered to be a success story having had a democratizing effect in accession countries and ensuring the alignment of national systems with the EU legislation and policies (Vachudova 2014; Epstein & Jacoby 2014). It is also considered to be a most effective foreign policy tool, one that has rendered the EU, through its constituent member states, a truly regional actor (Smith 2011; Grabbe 2014). The objectives of member states through the enlargement process are to extend peace, stability and prosperity and expand their influence in the accession countries, with the rhetorical
The articulation of member states’ interests in the enlargement process is not a new development. The importance of member state interests was evident very early on in the process with the introduction of several methodological mechanisms by member states after the enlargement in 2004, including “the introduction of ‘benchmarks’, changes in the very application procedure and through the enhanced emphasis on ‘absorption capacity’” (Hillion 2010, p. 18). As Hillion argues, these changes embodied creeping nationalization of the EU enlargement policy with the objective of operationalizing the member states’ desire to control and slow down the pace of enlargement (Hillion 2010, p. 18). This change is concurrent with an increasingly realist EU at every policy level. One can argue that since the start of the economic downturn in 2008 the Commission has not been a key proponent for deeper integration. At the same time, the key policy mechanisms to deal with the Euro-crisis have been intergovernmental and ad hoc such as Euro bailout troika and the European Council. Likewise, the Euro-crisis and the rise of Euro-skepticism rendered the voice and preferences of member states even more acute. It became evident that all the EU’s political capital for integration was to be deployed in addressing these urgent issues leaving aside discussion on further enlargement. The internal dynamics of integration moved the enlargement down the list of priorities and exposed a lack of federalist agenda in regard to enlargement.

The first trigger was the beginning of the Euro crisis marked by the collapse of the Lehman Brothers in September 2008 and the urgent need to preserve the smooth functioning of financial institutions in the EU. Since then there have been successive banking, financial and economic crises across the EU. This has been the focus of the European political elite both at the national and EU level.
Several bouts of reactive policy making continued right up until the 2015 agreement with Greece on a renewed bail-out. The ongoing response to the financial crisis in Europe has lasted nearly seven years and has diverted attention and resources away from EU enlargement.

The impact of growing Euro-skepticism in large EU member states on enlargement should not be underestimated either. Although the EU institutions are relatively stable and EU enlargement policy remained intact over the years despite opposition to further enlargement, it seems that in recent years EU has had to reconcile its institutions’ federalist enlargement agenda with the internal perception of enlargement in member states. In time, Euro-skepticism became an integral part of the political landscape of most member states and the EU institutions had to moderate their pro-European discourse (Brack & Costa 2012). This discourse has come from both parties of the left and right. Usherwood and Startin identify three types of Euro-skeptic party; single issue pro-sovereignty parties (such as UKIP in the UK), parties of the radical right (such as Geert Wilder’s PVV in the Netherlands) and parties of the radical left (such as Syriza in Greece) (Usherwood & Startin 2013). Many of these parties are either in government or supporting governing coalitions and performed well at the 2014 European Parliament elections. The reasons for the success of these parties are varied but the effect has been a marked skepticism towards both deeper integration and EU enlargement in many member states. Euro-skepticism is arising at the EU level too. Although at the EU level the European Commission is considered to be a supranational and pro-European institution, recent studies demonstrate the existence of a sizeable minority of inter-governmentalists who believe that member states should be the key players in the EU policy process (Dehousse & Thompson 2012). The rise of Euro-skepticism in member states also led to the increasing number of Euro-skeptics not just in the European Parliament but also in the Council of the EU (Brack & Costa 2012). There was also a succession of Council presidencies led by states whose governments are openly Euro-skeptical (Brack & Costa 2012). The erosion of public support for the European integration is also noticeable in member states, in particular in France, Germany and the UK (Medrano 2012).

Growing Euro-skepticism can be seen in the trend in public opinion against enlargement. The number of countries where the general public is against enlargement outnumbers countries whose publics are in favor. According to the latest results from 2013, there has been a marked increase in opposition to enlargement in four countries: Austria, France, Finland and Germany (Eurobarometer 80 2013, p. 130). This change is also evident in countries that have been traditionally pro-integration and pro-enlargement such as Italy and
Netherlands (Eurobarometer 80 2013, p. 130). The change in EU policy towards enlargement is thus consistent with Putnam’s two-level game model, where member state governments are aggregating the interests of key constituencies.

These sentiments within EU member states have been reflected in the greater electoral success of anti-EU populist parties of both the left and right. Even the main stream parties are pushing in the Euro-skeptic direction, while federalist proponents want to “keep the show together” rather to expand to troublesome countries. The rise of asylum applications from candidate countries or potential candidates prompted even more the growing Euro-skepticism in some EU member states. According to latest data from the Europe's Asylum Office there was a 30% increase in number of applications compared to 2012, mostly from Western Balkans countries (EASO Annual Report 2014). Immigration issues are widely used by the right wing populist parties which are making an explicit causal link between the immigration and unemployment. For example, the UKIP poster campaign for local and EP elections in 2014, explicitly claiming that immigrants were taking jobs, was a good illustration. Finally, the perennial British debate on Europe and its latest manifestation as a referendum will also distract from the enlargement process. On a more fundamental level, it could also provide opponents of EU accession in candidate countries with an argument that if a relatively politically and economically successful country such as the UK prefers to leave the EU, then there is little reason for countries such as Serbia and Macedonia to join.

EU international level game and use of conditionality
The international level game entails the endeavor of national governments to maximally satisfy domestic pressures, while minimizing the adverse consequences of foreign developments (Putnam 1988, p. 434). As noted above, while the EU is an international organization it acts like a national actor in the enlargement process. The Commission is delegated by member states to undertake negotiations with candidate countries and impose conditionality. It means that the EU, at the international level, has to achieve its own institutional interests while at the same time ensuring that its international agenda is in line with member states’ views of further enlargement. Likewise, the EU not only has to aspire to satisfy its interests but must prove to be a credible and singular actor at the international level. The use of conditionality use is even more important now when member states suffer from enlargement fatigue and tight conditionality is a prefect risk mitigation tool (Szolucha 2010). In its latest Enlargement Strategy 2013-2014 the Commission underlined that “the accession process today is more rigorous and comprehensive than in the past” and it is based “on strict but fair conditionality with progress towards membership
dependent on the steps taken by each country to meet the established criteria” (European Commission 2013, p. 2). This approach reflects the EU institutions’ awareness of the internal dynamics of integration and how it influences its mandate at the international level. This is best illustrated by Commission president Juncker’s view of the enlargement process. In outlining his five priorities during his term, Juncker openly admits that “pause from enlargement so we can consolidate what has been achieved among the 28” (Juncker 2014). He also estimates that no further enlargement will happen in next five years as a result of the need to address internal challenges within the EU (Juncker 2014).

The EU has always regarded itself as a value-based community embracing all those who are committed and share the same values which are expressed through membership criteria (Bretherton & Vogler 2006). Its enthusiasm for enlargement to countries of central and eastern Europe was an expression of the federalist intention to “reconstruct European's identity by returning this region back to Europe” (Bretherton & Vogler 2006, p. 25). There was a general agreement among most European elites and influential member states such as Germany that enlargement is an imperative both for the accession countries and the EU; a “sine qua non for the CEECs” and “the history-centered values-based Community focused on reuniting Europe and the need for reconciliation” (Schmidt 2012, p. 178). The EU has tried to bolster the extension of its political and legal order to new members by certain post-accession mechanisms, in particular Article 7 TEU. This has had mixed results in Hungary and Romania (Sedelmeier 2014).

The EU’s policy on enlargement has always been motivated by the interests of member states. The fact that the Balkans in the early 2000s still represented a potential threat to first order security in Europe has driven member state policy since then. Member states’ and thus the EU’s interest in the Balkans are much more than just value based. This supreme goal of rebuilding a European value-based community does not apply to countries of Western Balkans which are “seen to be Balkan rather than European” (Friss & Murphy 2000, p. 780). The interest in this region is often explained by the EU’s responsibility towards the region as it would have been unacceptable for the EU not to act at the international level when the main values upon which it is based are jeopardized (Friss & Murphy 2000). Likewise, the impact of the ever growing conflicts affecting several countries at the time proved to be a decisive reason for the EU to take action in order to protect the stability of existing and prospective member states (Bretherton & Vogler 2006). The EU’s international agenda was self-imposing as the EU had little choice but to act as the conflict was happening on its door step. With the rising influence of Russia, in particular in Serbia as the
Aleksandra Cavoski

biggest country of the region, the EU’s security project, as Grabbe points out, has suddenly returned (Grabbe 2014). No less important was the opportunity to display and test its ‘actoriness’ in the region as a further step in developing the EU as a global actor.

The EU’s pursuit of its own interest at the international level and satisfying the domestic, i.e. member states’ interests, depends on its ability to aggregate these interests, present itself as a coherent policy actor and deliver. The fact that the EU is able to act in this way in the enlargement process is bolstered by conditionality and the EU’s position in relation to accession countries. Again conditionality is one of its preferred and most successful policy tools which is a testament to EU’s success in playing the international level game. Besides changing the behavior and preferences in candidate and potential candidate countries, conditionality ensures the credibility of the EU’s enlargement policy (European Commission 2013). The case of Serbia represents a good example of how member states can use conditionality successfully even when it comes to modifying behavior on issues that are not the traditional remit of the enlargement process, such as cooperation with the ICTY and Kosovo.

The EU first deployed positive conditionality with Serbia in the European Partnership Agreement 2003 by promising assistance which depended on further progress in satisfying the Copenhagen political criteria (Council of the EU 2004). Just few months after the opening of the negotiations on a Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) with Serbia in October 2005, the Commission decided to call off the negotiations with the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro in May 2006 “due to the failure of Serbia to meet its commitments on cooperation with the ICTY” (European Commission 2006, p. 7). After the parliamentary elections in 2007 Serbia made the required institutional changes, handed over the documents requested by the ICTY and arrested two ICTY indictees which was sufficient for the Commission to continue with the negotiations one year after the stalemate. The cooperation flourished again in 2008 when Serbian authorities arrested Radovan Karadzic, one of the highest profile indictees, and transferred him to The Hague. Still, the Commission emphasized that full cooperation would require the arrest and transfer of the two remaining fugitives, Ratko Mladic and Goran Hadzic (European Commission 2008, p. 19). The arrest of Karadzic together with the significant progress in visa liberalization talks with the EU secured Serbia a reward in the form of the visa-free regime with the EU in December 2009. This was a significant gain for the pro-European Serbian government in power at the time. Serbia was also encouraged to apply for membership; the application was submitted in December 2009.
The necessity of addressing the issues with Kosovo was already powerfully pronounced in the Commission’s Feasibility Study Report where the Commission emphasized that only “constructive engagement on the Kosovo issue will help to advance Serbia and Montenegro’s European perspective, while obstruction could turn into an obstacle” (European Commission 2005, p. 9). This was a key issue for several large member states, in particular those who subsequently recognized Kosovo’s independence. However, the turning point came after the declaration of independence by Kosovo authorities in 2008. In the first place this act presented “a major setback” for regional cooperation as the question of representation of Kosovo became a significant issue that needed to be resolved quickly (Papic 2013, p. 557). It also created a situation where the EU had to be more reactive in formulating its foreign policy response. Finally, the declaration influenced domestic Serbian politics whereby the “disagreements regarding links between Kosovo and EU integration, particularly in the context of the SAA, finally led to the fall of the government and brought a more EU oriented coalition” (European Commission 2008, p. 8). It also further politicized the perception of the European integration in Serbia as the future EU membership became equated with the recognition of Kosovo independence.

However, the use of political conditionality in regard to regional representation was not very effective until 2010 when the EU successfully used its new powers to turn a fresh page in the use of this tool. In September 2010 the EU was entrusted by the UN with the responsibility to facilitate a dialogue between the two parties. This recognized the importance of member states’ influence in the region, as the main political actors in the Balkans (GA Assembly 2010). Since the decision on the application for membership was pending, the EU took its chance to use political conditionality and based the opening of accession negotiations on Serbia achieving “further significant progress in taking further steps to normalize relations with Kosovo” (European Commission 2011, p. 12). This proved to be a powerful incentive for Serbia which agreed to the Agreement on Regional Cooperation and Integrated Border Management technical protocol. This agreement allowed for Kosovo to participate and sign new agreements on its own account and to speak for itself at all regional meetings, thus marking a new phase in establishing relations with Kosovo. Although the practical application of the agreement was not smooth for both parties and it risked stalling the negotiations, it coincided with the election of the new Serbian government which embraced every chance to prove its new European affiliation. The landmark outcome of political conditionality came in the form of the First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations between Serbia and Kosovo (known as the Brussels Agreement) negotiated on 19 April
2013 by Serbian Prime Minister Ivica Dacic and Kosovo Prime Minister Hashim Thaci. Several more agreements on specific technical issues followed. This decision of the Serbian government was crucial as on 22 April 2013 General Affairs Council and Foreign Affairs Council of the EU discussed the state of play of negotiations between Serbia and Kosovo (Council of the EU 2013). On the same day the European Commission recommended the start of accession talks with Serbia (www.seio.gov.rs). Despite the fact that negotiations were stalled for almost two years, Serbia and Kosovo signed another four agreements in August 2015 on energy, telecoms, establishment of the Association/Community of Serb majority municipalities and the Freedom of Movement/Mitrovica Bridge (www.eeas.europa.eu 2015).

**Enlargement as a means to an end for Serbia?**
While the process of accession is not purely motivated by European idealism on the part of the EU, it is even less so from a Serbian perspective. The motivation for membership in Serbia is almost wholly instrumental. Serbia, with a relatively unstable party system, weak institutions and little genuine public enthusiasm for the EU, regards membership primarily as a means to achieve greater economic prosperity and political stability. This phenomenon is present both within the political elite and the general public. Other studies have focused on the variable of ‘national identity’ in accession countries (Pawalec and Grimm 2014; Freyburg & Richter 2010). While the concept of national identity is helpful in understanding the motivation of EU member states or accession state governments during the membership process it is more productive to examine the actions of the participants. Thus, as Pawalec and Grimm note, ‘national identity’ cannot explain full compliance with EU conditionality but a realist argument based on the strengthening of the Serbian state can (Pawalec and Grimm 2014).

The Serbian case is unusual given its ambivalent position towards the EU and Russia and unresolved issues over its territorial status. However, Serbia has committed to membership partly as Russia does not offer a realistic alternative. Wallace noted in 2002 that “the alternative to EU membership is often portrayed as a kind of wilderness of exclusion, a scenario of weak voice and asymmetrical dependency” (Wallace 2002, p. 622). This situation remains the same. The primary motivation for Serbia is to ensure that it will have a voice relative to its regional rivals and, more significantly, leverage the prospect of membership to ensure the country’s modernization.

The EU renewed its formal relations with Serbia immediately after the democratic changes in October 2000. At the time, Serbia as part of the Federal
Republic of Yugoslavia, accepted to join the stabilization and association process and began preparing for the negotiations on the SAA. In February 2002 FRY was transformed into the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro which affected the negotiations on the SAA. The subsequent proclamation of independence of Montenegro on May 2006, as well as insufficient cooperation with the ICTY, stalled the SAA negotiations for over a year and half.

The SAA negotiations were reopened in June 2007 and five months later the SAA between the EU and Serbia was ratified. In December 2009, Serbia submitted its application for EU membership. In October 2011, the European Commission gave a positive opinion on Serbia’s application for membership to the EU, provided that the Serbian Government demonstrated progress in normalizing the relations with Kosovo. Though Serbia was granted a status of a candidate country in March 2012, the formal start of negotiations and the opening of individual chapters were delayed for two years due to the EU’s insistence on Serbia opening talks with Kosovo.

Instrumental use of EU at the national level
Putnam’s two-level game can also be applied to the national level. Political parties, as aggregators of public opinion, have differing views on European integration. Interest groups in Serbia such as big business have not been strident in support of integration, perhaps due to the fact that increased competition would prove challenging. At the national level, Serbian political parties successfully changed their programs and made themselves more appealing to the general public but also to the international community. This was partly a result of the successful use of EU’s conditionality which slowly led to change of social and political behavior among political elites. In addition, political parties realized that a purely instrumental use of the prospect of the EU membership is a way to secure votes at elections and ensure international support. The promise of prompt accession to the EU became a main electoral slogan which has significantly influenced the discourse and the outcome of Serbian elections in recent years, as elsewhere (Herranz-Surrealles 2012). This realist approach in Serbian political life is best illustrated by continuous and calculating change of views on EU membership even by right wing parties which have a history of strong opposition to the EU membership.

The Serbian Progressive Party (SPP) is the most striking example of a purely realist approach. SPP did not find it difficult to change course once it became clear that this was the only option to gain political advantage. Before the party came to power in 2012, its president Tomislav Nikolic was very vocal in expressing his negative views on membership to the EU by stating that “there
will never be any negotiations with the EU” (newsweek.rs 2015). Similar views were expressed in regard to the status of Kosovo, which he considered as an “inalienable part of Serbia” (newsweek.rs 2015). The sudden change of heart was also apparent in the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), once led by Slobodan Milosevic. Indeed, it was Ivica Dacic, once a close political associate of Milosevic, who signed the agreement with Kosovo. The two parties with clear and unchanging positions towards the accession to the EU are the Democratic Party of Serbia, which is against the EU membership (Democratic Party of Serbia Manifesto 2014) and the Liberal Democratic Party of Serbia, which strongly supports membership and recognizes the lack of future Serbian control over Kosovo (Liberal Democratic Party Manifesto 2012).

Successive governments were also quite skilled in the instrumental use of the prospect of membership in pursuing partisan interests and ensuring a wider support for numerous governmental policies. The need to fulfill membership criteria is declared as the main reason for almost all economic and administrative reforms both within the public and private sector, instead of undertaking reforms for the benefit of the country and its citizens. What is interesting about the domestic level game is that successive governments were able to undertake unpopular reforms under the EU pretext, despite the lack of European idealism and support among the general public in Serbia. The Government vocally justified a cut of state employees’ salaries and pensions in 2014 by external pressure to reduce the budget deficit. The general trend in support for EU membership has gradually decreased since 2009, despite expectations it would rise with the start of the negotiations with Serbia in 2013 (Cavoski 2013). It was also surprising that significant progress milestones in the integration process have had little or no effect on public support for the EU. This was evident in 2008 when there was a decrease in support from the previous year despite the fact that Serbia signed the SAA in that year (Public opinion polls 2008). The decision on visa liberalization resulted in a slight increase in support (Public opinion polls 2009)\(^1\), but the recent normalization of relations with Kosovo with the signing of the Brussels agreement demonstrate that those landmark events have no real impact on the general public (Public opinion polls 2014 & 2015). Nevertheless, the government is aware that most of the population regards EU membership as a place of greater employment opportunities and a brighter future for young people rather than a better forum for the protection of individual rights or

---

1 These polls are undertaken every six months by the Serbian European Integration Office. The sample size is usually around 1000 respondents and is random nationally representative sample of adult citizens of Serbia. More information is available at http://www.seio.gov.rs/documents/national-documents.223.html
guarantee of long-term peace in the EU (Public opinion polls 2013). Thus, successive Serbian governments have cited the EU, or even ‘Europe’ generally, as the justification for many of their policy choices and actions.

Moreover, membership of the EU is regarded as a vital and strategic objective for Serbia and its main foreign policy aim. It is also a safe way for the government to ensure support of both the EU and individual member states. Key EU member states and the European Commission embraced the new coalition government of the SPS and the SSP in 2012 as it proved a long awaited counterpart willing to address the Kosovo issue. This is particularly illustrative of the strength of conditionality to achieve the interests of large member states in an accession country by bringing about significant political change. It also demonstrates the ability of the EU to act as a coherent international actor capable of pursuing and delivering its international agenda and effectively delivering interests of its member states. At the Serbian level, greater international support for domestic policies invariably raises the government’s profile at the national level and gives more confidence to citizens to offer their support.

Although the prospect of membership is an overwhelming catchword in daily rhetoric of the political discourse in Serbia, neither the government nor political parties actually have an accurate or precise understanding of membership and its implications. This realist approach, though beneficial for successful domestic level game, is problematic for two main reasons. First, it seems that every reform taken in almost any policy area is justified by the need to approximate national legislation and standards with the EU acquis. The ‘EU’ is often invoked as the driver for change in areas where there are no harmonized rules at the EU level such as education policy or health. On the other hand, it is always easier for national governments to subsequently “blame Brussels” for unpopular or costly measures. This further fosters a negative perception of the EU for citizens who are already pessimistic about the prospects of enlargement.

In order to satisfy pressures at the domestic level, successive Serbian governments have portrayed the EU primarily as a source of money and not as an institution that would help to bring stability and modernization to the country. It may be often heard in media and stated by politicians that the one of the main reasons to join are the EU structural and cohesion funds. Moreover, there is no public discourse regarding the future obligations and potential costs of membership. Undoubtedly, the funds are extremely significant for countries such as Serbia where there are large differences in prosperity levels between regions. Again, this purely instrumental approach as propagated by successive Serbian governments is problematic for two reasons. First, the EU should not be
regarded as a ‘cash machine’ as membership entails much more. Moreover, the high expectations of citizens may be put under question if the regional policy is reformed in the meantime as a result of a more stringent EU budget. Secondly, membership comes with obligations and costs but these are not publicly discussed in Serbia. The general public in Serbia is not aware that integration is a costly process and may have ‘winners and losers’ as was the case in other accession countries.

Taking sides at the international level?
Bearing in mind its geopolitical position and importance of history and cultural ties with Russia, the Serbian government still wants to maintain this relationship. However, with the onset of crisis in Ukraine since 2013 Serbia has been forced to choose between support for Russia and aligning itself more explicitly with the EU. In terms of the domestic level game, there are constituencies in Serbia that advocate closer ties with Russia. With the Ukrainian crisis EU member states’ concern about Russia’s relative influence in the region has affected Serbia’s ability to maintain its relationship with the EU while also satisfying domestic pressures. At the same time, EU conditionality regarding the resolution of Kosovo issues as a pre-requisite of the accession process and the further delays of negotiations negatively impact the ability of the Serbian government to reconcile the domestic level game with its international agenda.

As Grabbe points out, the EU’s appeal comes from its combination of stability, prosperity, security and personal freedoms (Grabbe 2014). In the case of Serbia, the attraction of joining the EU is predominantly explained by security and economic reasons, a European rescue of the Serbian state to paraphrase Milward (2000). Despite general agreement on the EU as a major foreign policy objective, most political parties try to find a balance between a pro-EU agenda and allegiance to Russia. In the political manifesto of SPS there is a strong emphasis on maintaining links with other important countries such as Russia (Socialist Party of Serbia 2010). In the party manifesto of the Serbian Progressive Party there is a rather non-committal approach to the EU membership where the “Serbian decision to join the EU should not be disputed, although Serbian can only join together with Kosovo and Metohija as its inalienable part. At the same time Serbia must foster close ties with Russia” (Serbian Progressive Party Manifesto 2011, p. 2).

However, with the increasing assertiveness of Russia it becomes a challenge to maintain this balance between the two foreign objectives and preserve unity within the government. The Ukrainian crisis proved to be an additional test for Serbia’s relationship with Russia, which resulted in intensifying diplomatic
relations with Russia and releasing cautious statements about the territorial integrity of Ukraine. Even still, there has been a latent disagreement between the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Prime Minister about the territorial integrity of Crimea. At the same time, Russian presence in Serbia is more than noticeable in the last year starting with President Putin’s visit in October 2014 followed by other political representatives from Russia as well as promises of Russian investments into the Serbian economy. Even the decision to stop South Stream gas pipeline project did not weaken the developing links with Russia.

Nevertheless, these foreign policy objectives created visible differences within the majority party SPP and within the governing coalition. The president of Serbia, Tomislav Nikolic has been quite vocal in pledging his allegiance to Russia and uses every opportunity to demonstrate his loyalty, best illustrated by meetings in 2015 with Russian President Vladimir Putin at Yerevan and Victory Day parade in Moscow, an event which was conspicuously avoided by western leaders. According to Nikolic, Serbia represents a bridge between the East and the West with the aim to ensure more effective cooperation between both sides (www.politika.rs 2015). On the contrary, Prime Minister Vucic is more inclined to develop links with the United States and reduce energy dependence on Russia (www.blic.rs 2015). Still, the government is for the moment in agreement that Serbia remains neutral and Serbia would not impose sanctions on Russia. This may prove to be the point of disagreement in future both within the SPP and within the collation government as it is clear from High Representative Mogherini’s statements that the EU member states expect Serbia to align its foreign policy with that of the EU (www.danas.rs 2015).

The resolution of issues regarding Kosovo also has had a negative impact both on the stability of the coalition government of the SRS and SPS and also on the perception of the EU among the general public. This question invariably weakens the ability of the government to play its international level game successfully as it involves an issue of territorial dispute and national sovereignty. Thus the complexity of the two-level game increases as Serbia must satisfy domestic political pressure on questions regarded as impinging on ‘sovereignty’ while maintaining a credible negotiating position with the EU. As Grabbe points out, the reality is that after the Cyprus experience the EU will never allow in a country with an unresolved conflict over its status (Grabbe 2014). In the Serbian case, this is interpreted by EU officials as “normalizations of relations with Kosovo”. However, for the Serbian government it begged the question of what exactly it is expected to do and what are the conditions for membership? According to Minister of Foreign Affairs Dacic, Serbia fulfilled all the provisions of the Brussels Agreement and requested clarification of what needs to be done in order to
practically start with negotiations with the EU, which were formally opened in January 2014 (www.politika.rs 2015). It is also quite clear that this issue caused strains within the coalition government illustrated by the statement of Dacic that even if Serbia recognized Kosovo there always will be some new membership conditions (www.blic.rs 2015). Similarly, Prime Minister Vucic has said that “patience is running thin” with the EU (www.blic.rs 2015). This issue is also used as a weapon for interparty fights as is the case with the SPP. The President of Serbia, Tomislav Nikolic, has fiercely used Kosovo and has proposed a so-called “Kosovo platform” to regain his position within the party which has been undermined by those loyal to Prime Minister Vucic.

At the same time, conditions for membership play an important role in justifying the lack of public support for the EU among the general public. These conditions are raised in the political discourse at times when issues of significant importance are on the agenda for the coalition in government (Public opinion polls 2011). Pertaining to membership criteria is the perception that the EU has double standards when it comes to Serbia. Since 2008 the EU’s continuous conditionality politics was perceived by the public as blackmailing of Serbia and as a major impediment to joining the EU in the future (Public opinion polls 2013). What is even more disconcerting is that a significant proportion of the public believe that the EU will constantly impose new requirements for Serbia (Public opinion polls 2008-2015). Serbia is also characteristic with its low European identification unlike some other Western Balkans countries such as Macedonia and Albania (Balkan Monitor 2009, p. 2). According to the available official polls, there is an increase in the number of people who hold a negative opinion of the EU, while there is steady decrease of the number of those who have a very positive perception of the EU (Public opinion polls 2013).

**Conclusion**

Before assessing the findings of this paper it is worth addressing possible areas of further research. This paper is a single case study – a broader comparative analysis of Balkan accession countries would be an obvious avenue. Many of these countries share similar challenges to Serbia in the enlargement process. The two-level game model raises questions regarding other important national constituencies. For example, an assessment of the business communities in Balkan accession countries, who in Serbia have not been particularly vocal in support of accession, would be fruitful. Finally, at the time of writing, a new chapter of EU member state involvement in the Balkans is unfolding in the form of the migration crisis. This would benefit from further research.
There are several broad findings that can be drawn from this analysis of the accession process in Serbia and its implications for enlargement and the region. The first is that enlargement may cease to become a key foreign policy tool of the EU. The reasons for this are evident in the Serbian case. The initial interest of EU member states in the early 2000s was to ensure the first order security of the Balkans. The enlargement process and conditionality gave member states the tools to pursue these interests in the region. As the decade progressed these changed to shaping the milieu of the region and extending the norms and values of the EU and its member states. More recently, it has also meant countering the relative influence of Russia. However, as the two-level game analysis in this paper has shown, the domestic pressures within member states have rendered them less focused on enlargement. Furthermore, the key foreign policy challenges faced by the EU in recent years, namely instability in North Africa and the Middle East and the Ukrainian crisis, will not be addressed by EU enlargement. The risk for the enlargement process is that if it no longer secures the main foreign policy interests of large member states then they will have little incentive to support it. At the domestic level game, key constituencies such as populist parties, are opposed to further enlargement and the European project. Thus, there is a risk that enlargement may have outlived its usefulness for member states.

This will have an effect on candidate countries as the case of Serbia has shown. While Serbia’s motivation for enlargement has primarily been ‘a European rescue of the Serbian state’ the complexity, length and impediments of conditionality have changed the equation for Serbia. This is the perception both at the level of the political elite and amongst the general public. As enlargement becomes less of a focus for EU member states, partly due to other crises and partly due to domestic opposition, this will render it less attractive for candidate countries. This may lead to a vicious circle of lowered interest and expectations of enlargement amongst EU member states and thus lowered incentives for accession countries. This would render enlargement, a key success of EU and thus member state foreign policy, largely impotent. This pessimistic conclusion is not at odds with a realist explanatory model of the enlargement process. Enlargement can only succeed in the future if the interests of both member states and accession countries are fulfilled and this may not be the case.
Bibliography


First Agreement on Principles governing the normalization of relations.


Gherghina, S., 2010, Unraveling romance: An Assessment of Candidate Countries’ Support for the EU. Comparative European Politics, 8(4), pp. 444-467


Idealism or Realism in the Process of EU Enlargement


Presidency Conclusions October 2008, 14368/08.

Presidency Conclusions December 2008, 17271/1/08.

Presidency Conclusions June 2009, 11225/09.


Standard Eurobarometer 80, 2013. Directorate-General Communication. “Statement by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini following the meeting of the EU-facilitated dialogue”, Available at: http://eeas.europa.eu/statements-e eas/2015/150825_02_en.htm[Last accessed February 5, 2016].


UNGA Res 64/298 (13 October 2010) UN Doc A/RES/64/298.


Idealism or Realism in the Process of EU Enlargement


Newspaper articles
“Federika Mogerini: Ne gledamo Srbiji “kroz prste“ zbog Kosova”, (We don’t turn a blind eye to Serbia because of Kosovo), Available at: http://www.danas.rs/danasrs/politika/federika_mogerini_ne_gledamo_s rbiji_kroz_prste_zbog_kosova.56.html?news_id=299403 [Last accessed December 28, 2015].

“Srbija je spona izmedju istoka i zapada” (Serbia is a bond between the East and the West), Available at: http://www.politika.rs/rubrike/dogadjaji-dana/Nikolic-Srbija-je-spona-izmedju-istoka-i-zapada.lt.html [Last accessed February 1, 2016].


“Tako je govorio Tomislav Nikolic: Izjave koje cemo pamtiti”, (Spoken like Tomislav Nikolic; Statements to be Remembered), Available at: http://www.newsweek.rs/srbija/57924-tako-je-govorio-tomislav-nikolic-izjave-koje-cemo-pamtiti.html [Last accessed January 5, 2016].

“Umorni smo od strpljenja prema EU”, (We are tired of being patient towards the EU), Available at: http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Politika/560292/Vucic-Umorni-smo-od-strpljenja-prema-EU [Last accessed January 5, 2016].

“Razlike izmedju javnog stava EU i uslova nekih clanica”, (Differences between the common position of the EU and conditions required by certain member states), Available at: http://www.politika.rs/rubrike/Politika/Dacic-Razlike-izmedju-javnog-stava-EU-i-uslova-nekih-clanica.lt.html [Last accessed January 20, 2016].
“Uvek ce postojati neki novi uslovi za ulazak u EU”, (There will always be some new conditions for joining the EU), Available at: http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Politika/548895/Dacic-Uvek-ce-postojati-neki-novi-uslovi-za-ulazak-u-EU [Last accessed January 15, 2016].
DIRECT DEMOCRACY NOTES
THE 2015 REFERENDUM IN ARMENIA

Yevgenya Jenny Paturyan
Political Science and International Affairs
American University of Armenia

Outline

- The referendum was about the change from semi-presidential to a parliamentary form of governance in Armenia.
- The proposal was introduced by the government; the opposition views it as an attempt by the party in power to strengthen and prolong its rule.
- According to the official results, the proposed Constitution was adopted.
- There are serious concerns about the legitimacy of the outcome due to numerous instances of electoral fraud.
- Armenia will transition to the new form of governance in 2017-2018; 2017 parliamentary elections will be crucial in determining the future prospects of democracy in the country.

Background
The December 6, 2015, referendum in Armenia was officially about amending the existing Constitution. In essence, it was about a major change: a shift from a semi-presidential to a parliamentary form of democracy. The “amendments” were more like a new Constitution, envisioning a substantial overhaul of governing structures, including a shift of power from the President (directly elected most powerful figure in the state) to the Prime Minister elected by the National Assembly (NA, the parliament). The NA is currently elected through a mixed, proportional and majoritarian system; according to the new Constitution, all of it will be elected through a proportional representation system. Assigning seats to representatives of national minorities is a new provision, welcomed particularly by the representatives of the Yezidi community in Armenia.

The initiator of the change was the government of the President Serzh Sargsyan. However, the proposal of making Armenia a parliamentary republic was on the

Author's correspondence e-mail: ypaturyan@aua.am
The 2015 Referendum in Armenia

political agenda since 1991 independence. In 1994, and in 2004, oppositional groups drafted constitutions, envisioning Armenia as a parliamentary state. These proposals were put forth in the framework of lead-up to 1995 referendum (which ratified the Constitution) and 2005 referendum (which amended it). The government at the time disregarded those proposals (Markarov 2001; Vasilyan 2006). In 2013, the government embraced the idea and spearheaded the change, although the composition of political forces at the helm of the state did not change since 1998. President Serzh Sargsyan spoke of the need to amend the constitution on several occasions, describing the current system as over-personified and over-centralized. The criticism is warranted. It is, indeed, characterized by a heavy tilt of power towards the office of the President and the executive. The parliament is weak; the judiciary independence is poorly protected (Iskandaryan 2015).

Although the President is the most politically powerful figure in the state, the office of the presidency has suffered from a lack of legitimacy throughout most of the history of the third Republic (established in 1991), with the exception of its early years. In 1998, the first President Levon Ter-Petrosyan made himself so unpopular with the public and with the ruling elites that he had to resign. Robert Kocharyan (who was appointed as Prime Minister one year prior to Ter-Petrosyan’s resignation) was elected the second President. Kocharyan ruled with an iron fist; he was criticized for maintaining a strong vertical of power with very little inclusion and restricted space for societal input into governance processes.

President Serzh Sargsyan (also appointed as Prime Minister one year before the elections) was elected in 2008 and faced a major challenge right from the start. The official results of the elections were contested by mass demonstrations that led to violent clashes with police, leaving ten people dead: the only case of a lethal outcome of demonstrations since 1991. This incident overshadowed President Sargsyan’s reign and created what some describe as a deep rift between the party in power and the society at large (Nedolyan 2013; Bertelsmann Stiftung 2016). Public opinion data on attitudes towards the president shows a steady decline of trust: from 53% in 2008 to 19% in 2013. Given this context, the President’s argument that the current governance system is over-personified, unbalanced, and in need of change is not unreasonable. The commonly voiced counter-argument is that given the political will, the existing system can function in accordance with principles of democracy.

The proposed shift from the presidential to the parliamentary form of governance means a substantial change both in terms balance of power and in
terms of basic procedures of government formation. Instead of a people-elected President, the parliament-elected Prime Minister becomes the most powerful figure in the country. There are no limitations to the number of terms a Prime Minister can serve: s/he can remain in office as long as her/his political party maintains a majority in the legislature or a leading position in a government coalition. The office of the President is maintained, but his/her role is envisioned as largely symbolic.

The reaction of the opposition to the proposed amendments varied. The Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) political party, which was always in favor of the parliamentary system, endorsed the proposed change. The rest of the opposition vehemently opposed it, fearing a plot by the ruling elite to consolidate further its grip on power. Given that the governing Republican Party had already secured a strong majority in the legislation, the opposition argued that it was well placed to harness its incumbent advantages and secure its position as the ruling party under the new system. Misuse of administrative resources and widespread electoral fraud in past elections were projected onto the future, fuelling fears that the Republican Party will steal the founding elections of the new system. Moreover, since President Sargsyan’s second and final term will come to an end in 2018, the speculations were that he sought an opportunity to remain in power as a Prime Minister.

In September 2013, the Specialized Commission for Constitutional Reforms under the President’s Administration was formed by a Presidential Decree. The commission was made up of experts including the Chairman of the Constitutional Court. The work took almost two years; the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe\(^1\) provided its opinion at an intermediary stage in 2014 and again in August and September 2015. Its opinion on the final draft was favourable though there was a suspicion that the draft negotiated with the Venice Commission experts and the draft submitted to the NA on 21\(^{st}\) of August 2015 were different in at least 12 articles (The Citizen Observer Initiative 2016). The draft Constitution was discussed in the NA during several sessions; on 5\(^{th}\) of October, it received an approval of the overwhelming majority of the MPs. The approval vote was easily secured, as the ruling party holds most of the seats and has a support of the second largest, politically ambivalent faction of Prosperous

\(^{1}\) The European Commission through Law, better known as the Venice Commission was established in 1990 as an Advisory body to the Council of Europe on constitutional affairs. It is composed of constitutional and legal experts, judges and members of national parliaments.
Armenia party. Two MPs of an oppositional Heritage fraction changed positions last minute and supported the draft.

The legal framework for the referendum was specified in Chapter 8 of the Constitution in effect at the time. Article 111 stipulated that Constitution shall be adopted and/or amended through a referendum, initiated by the President of the Republic or the President of the NA. In the case of President’s initiative, the NA has to give its consent, by a majority of votes. According to Article 113, the draft is considered adopted through a referendum if “… more than half of the participants of the voting, but not less than one-fourth of citizens enrolled in electoral lists, have voted in favor.” Eighteen-year-old citizens have the right to take part in the referenda, except those found incompetent by a court decision, sentenced to prison or serving the sentence (Article 30).

According to the OSCE/ODHR, Armenian legal framework “provides a solid basis for the conduct of referenda”; it is the public confidence in the electoral process that needs to be improved. In order to achieve that, OSCE/ODHR has repeatedly recommended: “…improving accuracy of voter lists, preventing misuse of public resources in electoral campaigns, strengthening safeguards against voting day irregularities…” (OSCE/ODHR 2016, p.4).” In the run-up to, and during the referendum, these problems became evident.

The Campaign
The official start of the campaign was announced on 8th of October by a Presidential Decree, which called for the Referendum on 6th of December, 2015. The campaign ended one day before the voting.

The governing Republican Party spearheaded the “Yes” campaign, also endorsed by the ARF and Prosperous Armenia parties. Extensive use of public resources was claimed by the OSCE observer mission and local Citizen Observer Initiative. Key political figures, such as the Prime Minister, the President’s chief of staff, a number of ministers, regional governors and other influential figures led the campaign while receiving their salaries from the state budget. Ruling party affiliated community mayors were put under pressure to secure “Yes” vote in their respective local government units. The staff of budgetary and private organizations headed by party members was also under pressure to support the amendments. The media broadcasted a lengthy interview with the President, promoting the reform, giving the “Yes” campaign an undue advantage (OSCE/ODIHR 2016; The Citizen Observer Initiative 2016).
The “No” position was promoted by a loose coalition of several parliamentary and extra-parliamentary oppositional parties and movements. Among most noticeable players were the Armenian National Congress (ANC) political party, Heritage political party, Rule of Law political party, and New Armenia movement. While the ANC and Heritage focused on opposition to the referendum and on attempts to document and expose fraud, the New Armenia movement argued for boycotting the referendum and focused on organizing protests. The “No” front also tapped into a relatively recent but popular form of activism in Armenia: the so-called “civic initiative” format of collective action (social-media powered self-organization of interested individuals around a specifically defined narrow issue). A bilingual “Cheq Anckacni/No Pasaran” initiative sprang into existence. It maintained an Armenian and English website and a Facebook page (6,367 likes at the time of writing of this article) which were used for information dissemination and mobilization.

Despite the variety of actors, creative tactics, and attempts to tap into the general anti-government sentiment, the performance of the “No” block in was not impressive. The rally turnouts were significant for Armenia but not too big: in thousands, rather than in tens of thousands.

The campaign overall focused less on specific details of the draft, more on the fact of change as such. The proponents of the reform argued that the change will make Armenia more “democratic” and improve the overall balance of power between the three branches of government. The opponents argued that this was not a genuine reform, rather an attempt of ruling elite to consolidate its grip on power and extend their rule into the future.

Results
According to the official results of the referendum, 51% of eligible voters cast their ballots; 66% of the valid votes cast were in favor of the reform. Just like the previous two referendums and virtually every nationwide election in Armenia so far, the results were disputed by the opposition and overshadowed by numerous fraud allegations.

OSCE/ODHIR had a team of only four experts; its mandate did not include systematic observation of voting, counting, and vote tabulation. Nonetheless, OSCE observers did witness “serious problems” including “…interference and intimidation by proxies of supporters of the “Yes” campaign leading to alteration of the actual vote results.” (OSCE/ODIHR 2016, p.2)
The most systematic effort at observing the referendum was carried out by the Citizen Observer Initiative coalition of 28 NGOs, including some of the most prominent human rights and advocacy organizations. Nearly 1,000 people observed one-quarter of all precincts in the country. The final report of the observation mission postulates “... gross, multiple, and widespread examples of voting violations and electoral fraud, unprecedented in recent years...” (The Citizen Observer Initiative 2016, p.5); more than 1,000 violations were reported by voters and mass media. The document acknowledges authorities’ attempts at addressing the complaints but characterizes those as not appropriate.

A total of 79 recount requests were made; 53 of those were granted but led to no significant difference in the final outcome. The opposition claimed that those were the “Yes” campaign recount requests, while “No” campaign recount requests were not prioritized. Three requests to invalidate the vote were made but denied (OSCE/ODIHR 2016).

The government pledged to investigate every valid complaint. The police reported receiving 427 reports of violation and opening 17 criminal cases. Another 499 reports were filed with Prosecutor General’s office resulting in 52 criminal cases. One Republican Party member had been detained one week before the referendum, for offering a bribe to an opposition member to remain silent about upcoming referendum frauds (OSCE/ODIHR 2016). At the time of writing of this article more than 60 cases are open, 32 individuals have been charged; the court has issued its verdict in a handful of cases, handing out fines for about $1,000 or suspended two-three years in prison.

Table 1: Results of the 2015 referendum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of referendum:</th>
<th>06 December 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Electorate</td>
<td>2,566,998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referendum question</td>
<td>Do you agree with the draft amendments to the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total votes cast</td>
<td>1,302,613 (50.74%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total valid votes</td>
<td>1,247,089 (95.74%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid votes in favor</td>
<td>825,521 (66.20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid votes against</td>
<td>421,568 (33.80%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On 13th of December, the Central Electoral Commission announced the final results: the new Constitution is adopted. A parliamentary appeal to the Constitutional Court did not gather the required number of signatures in the NA. A non-stop street protest campaign by the opposition failed to attract enough supporters and petered out, although a small group continues to maintain its
presence in one of the central squares of the capital. On 1st of January 2016 one of the activists of the New Armenia movement, Gevorg Safaryan, was arrested in a scuffle with the police. He is being held in pre-trial detention, despite criticism and repeated calls for release, issued by human rights organizations, including the Human Rights Watch.

**Conclusion**

After the referendum, Armenia will gradually transit from the presidential to the parliamentary form of government, with upcoming parliamentary elections of 2017 envisioned as the turning point. The NA will be elected through a proportional representation system. The NA will then elect the Prime Minister, who will, in essence, govern the country.

One of the predictable impacts the change will have on the overall political system is that political parties are likely to become more prominent. Indeed, new trends are already visible. The ARF party (the only political force in Armenia that has maintained a systematic position on this issue throughout two decades, advocating for a parliamentary form of democracy in Armenia) has formally entered into a coalition with the current government. Also, new parties and party alliances are being formed. The Armenian party system has not achieved a level of stability one would expect from two decades of contesting elections; it will certainly enter a new stage of development now.

The 2017 parliamentary elections will be very important in shaping the practicalities of the parliamentary democracy in Armenia. If the opposition fails to gain a strong presence in the NA, the risk of Armenia turning into a dominant party system for decades to come is real. The Republican Party already has a strong hold on power, which it will likely consolidate more under the new system by appointing the Prime Minister from its ranks, securing key positions in the Cabinet, the Judiciary, in the regions and among the administration. With no limitations on the Prime Minister’s term in office and a track record of electoral fraud, the system can reach an unhealthy equilibrium of no serious challenge to the incumbents. This outcome is likely to deepen public disappointment with democracy as a form of governance that has for two decades remained an elusive prospect.

---

2 For example, the former foreign minister Oskanian has announced his plan to form a new opposing party to compete in the next year’s parliamentary elections; while the Rule of Law political party joined forces with 11 other parties to form Armenian Renaissance Association political group.
The 2015 Referendum in Armenia

On the other hand, the change to the parliamentary system may create the much needed chance for the opposition to make inroads into the governance system. The opposition has been on the margins of decision-making since the mid-90s; the situation can change if the opposition secures enough places in the NA and receives an offer to form a coalition. Overall, the change from the presidential to the parliamentary form of governance may signal a change from high-stake winner-takes-all political setting to one more open for compromise if major players involved are willing to compromise.

The most crucial question is: when will Armenia finally have a free and fair election, recognized as such by the public at large. So far the very foundations of democracy remain jeopardized. The 2015 referendum, unfortunately, did nothing to dispel the disappointment; it failed to create basic legitimacy for the founding document on which the new system will be built.

Bibliography:


THE 2015 REFERENDUM IN SLOVENIA

Alenka Krasovec
Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Ljubljana

Outline

- The Law on Changes and Amendments to the Law on Marriage and Family Relations was rejected by an almost two-thirds majority and in all eight constituencies.
- Although the National Assembly (the lower house of parliament) rejected a referendum motion, by a narrow majority (5:4) the Constitutional Court allowed a referendum to be held.
- The topic of the referendum was overwhelmingly presented as the choice between the protection of children on one side and as a question of marriage equality and inclusive society on the other.
- Despite there being 39 organizers of the election campaign, two campaign camps were clearly visible: a camp against the amendments under the slogan ‘Children Are at Stake’, and a camp in favor of the amendments under the slogan ‘It’s Time for Yes’.
- The voter turnout of 36.4% is among the highest at referendums in Slovenia in the last decade.

Contrary to 2014 when Slovenia was faced with several elections and one referendum, only one such an event happened in 2015; a nation-wide referendum on the Law on Changes and Amendments to the Law on Marriage and Family Relations. The amendments that had been passed in the National Assembly in March 2015 redefined marriage, and therefore allowed same-sex marriages, and such couples were granted the right to adopt children in the same way as other couples. The topic constantly attracted attention throughout 2015, albeit a referendum was only held in December. Given the content of the amendments, this is not surprising since the libertarian–authoritarian cleavage in Slovenia has been continuously prominent and, even more, it has frequently overlapped with other cleavages, like center–periphery,

Author’s correspondence e-mail: alenka.krasovec@fdv.uni-lj.si
The 2015 Referendum in Slovenia

state–church, urban–rural, modernism–traditionalism, liberalism–conservatism (clericalism), and communism–anticommunism (Fink-Hafner 2012). In this way, the libertarian–authoritarian cleavage has been even stronger and led to large-scale polarization in the political arena as well as in society. The rights of homosexuals attracted huge attention and led to intensity of the cleavage already several years ago when the peak was reached by a referendum held in 2012. However, some important differences in the regulation of referendums have happened since.

After the 2013 changes to the referendum regulation, a referendum can only be held if 40,000 voters demand one. The 2015 referendum was the second one to be held under the rule that a referendum may reverse an adopted piece of legislation if the majority of valid ballots are against the passed legislation, but only if at least one-fifth of all eligible voters vote in that way. The new regulation also restricts the range of issues upon which a referendum may be held: referendums may not be held for laws concerning implementation of the state budget; emergency provisions for national defense and security or a natural disaster response; the ratification of international treaties; and unconstitutional affairs in human rights and other areas. Given such restraints, the government believed the potential referendum on the topic of the rights of homosexuals in 2015 would not be allowed.

Background

Socialist Slovenia was long a champion in terms of the rights of homosexuals in the area of former Yugoslavia, and at the end of the 1980s in the wave of new social movements indeed remained in step with developed Western European countries with the demand for legal equality of homosexual partnerships with heterosexual ones in terms of adoption of the law on registered same-sex couples (Krasovec & Ramet 2017). Also in democratic Slovenia the rights of homosexuals were put on the agenda, and the first Law on Registration of Same-Sex Civil Partnerships was prepared in 1998, although it was only passed in the National Assembly in 2005 under a center-right government, despite center-left governments having held power since 1992 (Kuhar 2006). However, the law does not provide homosexual couples with the same rights in terms of social security, health care, pension security, inheritance... as are given to heterosexual couples, nor the right for same-sex couples to marry (Krasovec & Ramet 2017).

The center-left government under Pahor (2008–2012) had sought to grant some of such rights to homosexual couples and, after three years of debates, finally decided to prepare a new draft Law on Marriage and Family Relations.
The proposed law included two controversial provisions that triggered huge dispute in society: one stating that marriage is a lifelong community of two persons of the same or opposite sex; and another that two same-sex partners may adopt a child. In particular, at the time the non-parliamentary center-right New Slovenia (NSi), together with civil society organizations closely connected with it, led the opposition to the proposed law, promising they would demand a referendum if such measures were to be adopted. NSi was supported by the center-right parliamentary opposition of the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) and the Slovenian People’s Party (SLS).

At the time, the government was confronted with economic difficulties, conflicts and instability within it and, therefore in an attempt to avoid another referendum (in 2011 it had already lost at four referendums), it modified the provisions of the draft law so that marriage was declared a lifelong community of men and women, and that two same-sex partners may only adopt a child if one of the partners was the child’s biological parent (Krasovec & Haughton 2012). Although such amendments had been passed in the National Assembly in June 2011, opponents continued to push for a referendum. The center-left government demanded the Constitutional Court’s opinion on whether, from the perspective of constitutionally-defined principles and the rights of citizens, such a referendum would be allowed. The Constitutional Court allowed the referendum to be held and very quickly the ‘Civil Initiative for the Family and the Rights of Children’ under leadership of Mr. Ales Primc collected the 40,000 signatures needed for the referendum to be called.

The referendum was held in March 2012 and the (by then former) government lost. The amendments were rejected by 54.5% of those voting at the referendum (the turnout was 30.3%). All former and current parliamentary parties were involved in the campaign. In addition, the Catholic Church was an active opponent of the Law on Changes and Amendments to the Law on Marriage and Family Relations. The predominant Catholic Church, along with the Muslim and Serbian Orthodox churches, had publicly called on voters to reject the law, while the Lutheran Evangelical Church endorsed it (Slovenia Times 2012).

Due to the considerable political turbulence and huge economic pressures in 2013 (see Krasovec 2016), not to mention that according to the legislation the National Assembly is obliged not to pass any law whose content would be in contrast to the will of people expressed at a referendum for a period of one year after the referendum was held, it was only in 2014 that the center-left government announced another attempt to ensure equal rights of homosexual
The 2015 Referendum in Slovenia

couples. However, the draft law was finally sent into the legislative procedure by the left-oriented opposition United Left (ZL) coalition. And in many respects the developments seen in 2011 and 2012 were repeated.

The Law on Changes and Amendments to the Law on Marriage and Family Relations, alongside the ZL coalition, was fully supported in the National Assembly on 3 March 2015 by two government parties (the Modern Centre Party - SMC and the Social Democrats - SD). Also the opposition Alliance of Alenka Bratusek (ZaAB) supported the law, while only some MPs of the governmental Democratic Party of Retired Persons (DeSUS) did so. The centre-right parliamentary opposition (SDS and NSi) did not support it. Already in the 2011 parliamentary debates, a low level of deliberation was detected since a relatively high level of intolerance and low level of argumentation were revealed (Kuhar & Petrovčič 2015), and it seems the situation in this regard had not changed in the 2015 parliamentary debates on changes to the Marriage and Family Relations Law.

Despite only a small change being made to the Law on Marriage and Family Relations, it triggered great dissatisfaction among more conservative parties and persons in Slovenia due to its redefinition of marriage. According to the passed amendments, marriage was no longer defined as a union between man and woman but as a union between two consenting adults. Moreover, this small change also granted same-sex couples the right to have a chance to adopt children. Only a day after the amendments were passed, opponents had already started to collect voters’ signatures to demand the calling of a referendum. At the end of March 2015, a majority of the National Assembly rejected a referendum motion initiated by a Church-backed conservative group, citing the 2013 changes to the Constitution prohibiting referendums on issues that address unconstitutional situations – namely with the passed amendments an unconstitutional situation, that is the inequality of homosexuals, would be eliminated (Slovenia Times 2015a) as well as by arguing that marriage is a human right that should not be subjected to a popular referendum (Surk & Chan 2015). In October 2015, the Constitutional Court disagreed with the National Assembly’s decision and by a narrow majority of 5 judges to 4 (as was also the case in 2011 with the Court’s decision) allowed the referendum to be held. Signatures of 40,000 voters to back the demand to call a referendum were quickly collected and 20 December 2015 was set as referendum day – just before Christmas, predominantly a family-oriented holiday.
The Referendum Campaign

In Slovenia, referendum campaigns (the same is with election campaigns) can officially start 30 days prior to polling and must finish 24 hours before polling. Referendum campaigns remained largely unregulated until 2007. The last amendments to the Elections and Referendum Campaign Act were passed in 2013 and, among other changes, donations from companies were ruled out, while donations from individuals of up to 10 times the average monthly salary are still allowed, and parties are still permitted to make transfers from their ordinary bank accounts to special referendum accounts. The Act sets the spending limit in referendum campaigns to EUR 0.25 per voter. Since there was a total of 1,714,055 voters at the time of the referendum, each campaign organizer was allowed to spend up to EUR 428,513. How much money was actually spent by each organizer will only be revealed in a few months when the reports are delivered to the Court of Auditors. Given the limitation on the finances allowed to be spent in line with the regulation on the financing of campaigns, the observation by Hocevar (2015) that the campaigns were mainly conducted via the Internet is not a big surprise.

In the end, 39 parties, associations, movements and individuals participated in the campaign. All parliamentary parties participated, while the government supported the law but did not participate in the campaign (Irish Times 2015). One reason so many parties, associations, movements and individuals participated in the campaign is that public radio and TV are obliged to provide time for the presentation of standpoints and views of all campaign organizers; in such a way, they assured free-of-charge media access for the presentation of their views nation-wide (Hocevar 2015). Nevertheless, two campaign camps were clearly visible: a camp against the amendments was active under the umbrella of the ‘Children Are at Stake’ group co-led by Mr. Ales Primc, a man with experience from the 2012 referendum, while a camp in favor of the amendments was united under the slogan ‘It’s Time for Yes’.

During the campaign, both camps also received some international back-up; the Yes camp received an endorsement from Human Rights Watch which joined a large chorus of Slovenian human rights NGOs calling for marriage equality. ‘The right to marry is a fundamental right, as is the right not to be discriminated against, and same-sex couples should not be denied the right to marriage equality’ (Slovenia Times 2015b). On the other hand, Pope Francis addressed Slovenian pilgrims during a general audience at St. Peter’s Square in the Vatican. He told them to ‘communicate my gratitude to the entire Church in Slovenia for its efforts for the benefit of the family. I wish to encourage all Slovenians, especially those in public capacity, to preserve the family as the
The 2015 Referendum in Slovenia

basic unit of society’ (Slovenia Times 2015b). The Slovenian Catholic Church was again very active in supporting the No camp and its leader, the Archbishop of Ljubljana, Mr. Stanislav Zore called on all religious men to fulfil their civic duty and reject the Law on Changes and Amendments to the Law on Marriage and Family Relations since ‘we are experiencing an attempt to redefine a family as undermining the foundations on which we stood as a Church and as a society’ (in Hocevar & Kapitanovic 2015).

The referendum campaign of the Children Are at Stake group was mainly organized around calls to assure the rights of children and future of families, for example: ‘we are going to decide on rights of children and on the fate of family life’. On the other hand, the It’s Time for Yes group called for the ‘right of a child to be adopted in the most suitable environment’ and ‘for an extension of rights to all, which will simultaneously not alter our rights’. Due to huge mobilization of people in both camps, the campaign was even more intense than the one in 2012.

Results

On 20 December, after a very heated and often intolerant campaign and debates 394,482 people or 63.5% of all who voted were against the amendments, with a turnout of 36.4%. The amendments that had been passed would be voted down according to the referendum regulation of 2013 if at least one-fifth of all eligible voters had also voted that way. According to the size of the electorate, this quorum was 342,811 voters. The results showed the No camp had succeeded in preventing the enforcement of the Law on Changes and Amendments to the Law on Marriage and Family Relations since 23% of the whole electorate had voted against it.

Table 1: Results of the 2015 referendum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of referendum</th>
<th>20 December 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Electorate</td>
<td>1,714,055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referendum question</td>
<td>Do you agree that the Law on Changes and Amendments to the Law on Marriage and Family Relations passed by the National Assembly (ZZZDR-D) on 3 March 2015 should be implemented?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total votes cast</td>
<td>623,541 (36.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total valid votes</td>
<td>621,133 (99.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid votes in favour</td>
<td>226,651 (36.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid votes against</td>
<td>394,482 (63.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Official Gazette of Slovenia, 13/2016 (19.2.2016)
Several analyses were made after the referendum. One cluster of them dealt with the pattern of voter behavior (yes/no vote) throughout Slovenia. As the results show, in all eight constituencies (volilna enota) the law was rejected, the lowest percentage against the law being recorded in the center (in the Ljubljana-Centre constituency), and the highest in the east of Slovenia (in the Ptuj constituency). The situation is a little different if we look at the second tier of constituencies (volilni okraj) since the law was “only” rejected in 74 out of 88 of them (Slovenian Electoral Commission 2015). A closer, more spatial analysis of the referendum results (yes/no vote) at 3,113 polling stations in Slovenia was made by Tiran (2016) who found that there are two worlds in Slovenia, separated both spatially and in terms of values. People living in rural areas are, on average, very conservative and have a traditional view on the family and rights of homosexuals, while people in cities have a moderately conservative to predominantly liberal attitude to these questions (Tiran 2016). The finding that Slovenia is divided along rural-urban lines is indeed not new, although it is surprising that this divide is so distinctive and has deepened in relation to the 2012 referendum results (Tiran 2016).

The second cluster of analysis dealt with the question of whether the referendum results indicate a shift in the Slovenian political arena. It seems this is not the case since after the referendum an analysis of a public opinion research center revealed that the mobilization of voters who otherwise do not support center-right parties and would never vote for the SDS or NSi had been crucial to the success of the No camp; even 110,000 votes more against the law in comparison to the 2012 referendum came from supporters of governmental parties (Hocevar & Potič 2015). Zorko (in Hocevar & Potič 2015) therefore evaluated the No camp campaign as strategically very well prepared and implemented; this camp namely ‘managed to mobilize and convince grandparents that their grandchildren would be taken away from them if the law was adopted and something happened to their parents’. According to Zorko, ‘within the Yes camp the main problem was the limited mobilization capacity of the ZL coalition as a front-runner of the Yes campaign, as well as the fact that parties of the governmental coalition indeed were not actively involved in the campaign, even though they supported the law’.

Conclusions
After the referendum results were published, the No camp co-leader Mr. Primc expressed his ‘hope that no one would understand the results as a defeat, while it is true that such a result is a victory for our children’. On the other hand, his political spirit was given encouragement since after the referendum victory he announced his more active involvement in party politics, and directly
also mentioned the possibility of establishing a new, Christian party even though NSi clearly identifies itself as such a party. NSi, however, issued a statement that the referendum results were definitely a huge defeat for the government, while the PM Miro Cerar, leader of the SMC, estimated that the results cannot be seen as a sign of non-confidence in the government. Taking into account Zorko’s above-mentioned statement on the inactivity of governmental parties in the Yes campaign camp, this may well be true.

The parliamentary ZL coalition, as the formal initiator of the Law, accepted the results, while insisting that the violation of human rights and discrimination against minorities cannot be allowed. At the end of the referendum day the No camp announced that efforts would be made to update the existing law on same-sex partnerships. Indeed, in January 2016 the Children Are at Stake group presented its own draft law on same-sex couples' rights, involving an expansion of the rights of same-sex couples, but not marriage equality. According to Mr. Primc, the draft law equalizes the legal status of homosexual couples with those of heterosexual couples, the only exception being the adoption of children and fertilisation with biomedical help. The ZL coalition was very critical of that draft law and evaluated that discrimination against same-sex couples is continuing and the ZL could not accept the proposed solutions (24ur 2016).

Under these circumstances, someone can expect that in the future an additional attempt to grant homosexual couples the same rights as held by heterosexual couples will emerge. Based on the two cases (in 2012 and 2015), and in the circumstances of the re-traditionalization of society (Kogovsek Salamon in Vukelić et al. 2015; Tiran 2016), heated debates can again be expected in that event.
Bibliography:
Slovenia Times, 2015b. Eyes on Slovenia as gay marriage referendum nears, December 17. Available at: http://www.sloveniatimes.com/eyes-on-
The 2015 Referendum in Slovenia

slovenia-as-gay-marriage-referendum-nears [last accessed December 26, 2015].


THE 2015 REFERENDUM IN BULGARIA

Stoycho P. Stoychev
Department of Political Science
Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”

Outline

- The 2015 referendum was the first of its kind in history to be initiated by the presidential institution.
- The President proposed three questions for the referendum: a) introduction of a mixed electoral system; b) adoption of compulsory voting; and c) introduction of internet voting.
- The National Assembly reduced the questions to internet voting only.
- The turnout did not meet the normatively required threshold for binding force of the result, but the legislature was obliged to consider the issue.
- As a result, the National Assembly adopted amendments to the Electoral Code introducing experimental internet voting starting from the 2018 parliamentary elections.

Background

The political turmoil in 2013 marked by mass demonstrations against the Borisov government in February and even greater protests opposing the succeeding Oresharski cabinet in June raised substantial concerns regarding the operating principles of the Bulgarian political system. The latter were inspired by the scandalous appointment of the controversial figure of Delyan Peevsky to the national security agency, interpreted as a demonstration of complete takeover of the state by organized crime. Both protest waves led to the resignation of the respective cabinets. Borisov resigned several months before the completion of his term, while Oresharski had to withdraw just a year after his appointment.

In January 2014 President Plevneliev made an Address to the Nation and appealed for the National Assembly to hold a referendum on a new electoral system (Stoyanov 2015) as an attempt to regain trust in public institutions and

Author's correspondence e-mail: stoycho@stoychev.eu
The 2015 Referendum in Bulgaria

democratic procedures. The President proposed that the referendum should be held together with the elections for members of the European Parliament in May 2014. His proposition contained three issues to be decided by the citizens: a) a proportion of the MPs to be elected by plurality; b) the introduction of compulsory voting; and c) the introduction of e-voting over the internet in elections and referendums (President of the Republic of Bulgaria 2014).

In his address, the President pleaded for substitution of the acting PR electoral system with a mixed one that would provide the benefits of both the PR and majoritarian electoral systems while diminishing their drawbacks. He saw in the mixed system a remedy for the disunity in society, a preservation of the multipartism and a new deal for voters to opt for political personalities. Plevneliev also claimed that compulsory voting would address political alienation and boost the legitimacy of the democratic regime, therefore stabilizing public institutions (President of the Republic of Bulgaria 2014). Not least, electronic voting would provide more than 1.5 million voters living abroad the opportunity to participate in elections and would further improve turnout and legitimacy. As there are no options for distance voting, Bulgarians living abroad can cast their preferences only in the polling stations opened by the government in the premises of the diplomatic missions or elsewhere, which in some cases makes it impossible for people living far away to exercise their democratic right.

The governing majority of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF), together with Ataka (which in Bulgarian means Attack) publicly opposed the initiative claiming it served the narrow political interests of the Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (CEDB) and unofficially decided to postpone the decision through procedural actions. Nevertheless, the Parliament discussed and rejected the proposition in June 2014.

In February 2014, a committee in support of the President’s initiative was established. It was comprised primarily of professors from Sofia University who were engaged in the protests against the Oresharski government. The committee initiated a campaign for the collection of at least half a million signatures in order to oblige the Parliament to take into account the initiative and hold a referendum. The committee was supported by the opposition parties and personally by the former (by that time) Prime Minister Borisov.

In March, the same year, the committee led by Georgi Bliznashki, a professor in law at Sofia University, managed to submit approximately 500,000 signatures in
support of the referendum to the National Assembly. According to the acting legislation, the National Assembly was obliged to hold a referendum within three months after the submission of the petition if all of these signatures were valid (Law on the Direct Participation of Citizens in the State Government and the Local Self-government 2014, Art. 10).

The validity check announced in May, however, showed more than 100,000 invalid signatures. The acting legislation empowered the Chairperson of the National Assembly to allow the committee to provide additional valid signatures within a month. Nonetheless, the Chair refused to do so and left the initiative with no consequences, despite the protests of the initiative committee.

The elections for Members of the European Parliament in May 2014 were indicative of the collapse of electoral support for the Oresharski government. In June, the MRF announced the withdrawal of its support for the cabinet and in July Oresharski resigned, just fourteen months after the formation of his cabinet. The new caretaker government appointed by the President was led by prof. Bliznashki who had the task of organizing the early elections in October. The elections produced a highly fragmented parliament and a wide coalition government, comprising of four parties, led by Boyko Borisov and CEDB was formed in November (Kostadinova and Popova 2015).

In an interview for a major newspaper given in February 2015, the President announced his intention to submit to the Parliament a new request for referendum containing the same three questions. In June the request was approved. The proposition was for the referendum to be held together with the municipal elections in October.

In July the Parliament discussed amendments to the law for direct participation of citizens in state government, which regulates referendums. CEDB initially promoted the idea to lower the threshold for the validity of referendums to 40% of the eligible voters (mediapool.bg 2015a). The requirement by that time was that a referendum should obtain at least the same turnout as its preceding parliamentary elections. Yet, if at minimum 20 percent turnout was achieved, the Parliament would be obliged to discuss the issue in a plenary session (Law on the Direct Participation of Citizens in the State Government and the Local Self-government 2014, Art. 23).

Only MRF declared firm support for the status quo. However, quite unexpectedly CEDB abandoned the idea and left the threshold for validity unchanged by abstaining from voting at the plenary session. A possible
The 2015 Referendum in Bulgaria

explanation was an exchange of support with MRF for judicial reform, which at that time required a constitutional majority (Krastev 2015). On the other hand, the majority supported lowering the number of signatures necessary for initiating a referendum from 500,000 to 400,000 and, most importantly for the President’s initiative, amended the law to allow for the simultaneous arrangement of referendums and municipal elections.

Meanwhile the Parliament discussed the proposition of the President in a plenary session and decided to hold a referendum only for the adoption of e-voting in elections and referendums. The vote in Parliament led to tensions in the government coalition and mutual accusations. CEDB blamed the Reformist Block for opposing the question on the mixed electoral system. The latter accused CEDB of not supporting their wording of the question (mediapool.bg 2015b). Arguably, the decision was driven primarily by fear in the small parties of a plurality voting system and compulsory voting as they would increase the actual threshold and close their access to parliament.

Campaign

In August, the President set the two ballots for October 25th. The campaign started officially on September 25th together with the campaign for the municipal elections, as the legislation limits the duration of the campaign to 30 days prior the polls. The combination of municipal elections and referendum was expected to confuse the voters. In some polling stations they had to vote simultaneously for mayor, municipal council members, district or local mayor and to participate in the referendum. The referendum was open for participation from abroad, as well. As expected, the ballot was complicated and unprecedentedly expensive.

Thirty parties, one coalition and eight initiative committees were registered in the campaign for the referendum (mediapool.bg 2015c). Most of the registered participants were in favour of e-voting and supported the Yes option. Six parties and five committees supported the No option. Out of the parties represented in Parliament, only Ataka registered for a campaign for the No option. CEDB, the Reformist block and ABV registered in the Yes camp. The rest did not register, thus contributing to a lower turnout and respective failure of the referendum.

Despite the confusing wording of the question (the literal translation is “Are you in favour of being able to vote remotely by electronic means in realizing elections and referendums?”), the dividing line was clear. The rationale of the “Yes” camp was twofold. On the one hand they claimed that internet voting would ease the participation in elections of about two million citizens living abroad, who
contribute to the economy by sending back money to their families and therefore have the right to participate more actively in political life. On the other hand, they insisted that this innovation would limit the effects of controlled voting and vote-buying by increasing the turnout and the participation of young and educated voters, thus limiting the relative weight of the manipulated votes; in addition it would provide the voters with the opportunity to change their vote in case of being forced or bribed to cast it in a specific way (Manov 2015).

The “No” camp advocated just the opposite argument. In their view, internet voting would worsen the problems with controlled voting and vote-buying because it will take place in an uncontrolled environment, where the identity of the voter could not be completely identified and the secrecy of the vote could not be a hundred percent guaranteed. Besides, the security of internet communication could be compromised, allowing for manipulation of the final results. They provided examples of failed internet voting experiences around the world and pleaded that it was still too early for such an innovation, given the very few countries that currently employ it in a real environment (Enchev 2015).

The supporters of e-voting advocated the introduction of electronic voting over the internet and thus, in an uncontrolled environment, while the opponents were against such an option. Although mainstream political parties clearly stated their positions, the campaign was sluggish and apathetic (Bedrov 2015). Only the initiative committees conducted some sort of campaign, which given the poor interest of the media, took place mainly on the Internet and in a low number of public meetings.

**Results**
The referendum took place on October 25th 2015, but not without problems. At the beginning of the day, most of the 12,175 polling station committees did not instantly provide the ballot paper for the referendum, but asked the voters if they want to participate in it in addition to the municipal elections (dariknews.bg 2015; btvnovinite.bg 2015; segabg.com 2015). Following the complaints from some initiative committees, the Central Electoral Commission issued an instruction to the polling station committees to instantly provide the referendum ballot papers, but its broadcast was hindered by a hackers’ attack on its institutional webpage.

Similar attacks blocked the webpages of the Ministry of Interior and the Civil Registry Service (GRAO), which was interpreted by the “Yes” camp as a sabotage of the referendum and an illicit campaign against it, because it demonstrated the vulnerability of internet security.
Nevertheless, the result was classified as a success for the supporters of internet voting. Expectedly, the turnout did not reach the corresponding level of the previous parliamentary elections in absolute terms (3,500,585 votes), but the share of the valid votes out of all registered voters (6,766,619) was 38.24 percent. Out of the 2,587,593 valid votes, 1,883,411 (72.79%) were in favour and 704,182 (27.21%) were against the adoption of internet voting (Central Electoral Commission 2015). The 122,339 invalid votes were numerous given the simplicity of the ballot paper. Yet, the level of turnout obliged the Parliament to consider the issue and to take a decision.

Table 1: Summary of the Referendum Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date of referendum</td>
<td>25 October 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of voters according to the registry</td>
<td>6,766,619</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Votes casted according to the signatures</td>
<td>2,708,716 (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Votes casted according to the found envelopes</td>
<td>2,709,210 (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total valid votes</td>
<td>2,587,593 (38.24%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid votes in favour</td>
<td>1,883,411 (72.79%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid votes against</td>
<td>704,182 (27.21%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invalid votes</td>
<td>122,339</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Central Electoral Commission, 2015.

Conclusions

In summary, the second national-wide referendum in contemporary history was a step forward in expanding the application of direct democracy tools. The turnout in absolute terms was nearly double the turnout of the previous referendum on nuclear energy, which got about 1.4 million votes. In a briefing to the national media, the President himself classified the referendum as an “undisputed success for the democratic development of the state.” (Plevneliev 2015). The turnout of almost 40% and 2.7 million votes in absolute terms is an impressive result given the growing disappointment of citizens in public institutions and the high levels of distrust. Notably, in the spring of 2016 two other referendums were initiated and in May the Parliament decided to hold the first one together with the presidential elections in the autumn, while the second is still to be discussed in a plenary meeting.

At the same time, the Parliament started the discussion required by the referendum results. Six alternative proposals for implementation of internet voting were discussed (Dimitrov 2016). At the end of April 2016, the National Assembly finalised the amendments in the Electoral Code. The final decision,
which gained widespread support and only 6 MPs from BSP who attended the meeting voted against, was to introduce experimental internet voting for three consecutive elections starting from 2018. If the system proves to work well, it will be implemented in real elections with binding results at the national level. Until 2018 the Central Electoral Commission will conduct three simulations of internet voting to prepare for the experimental part.

The process triggered other amendments in the Electoral Code as well. The MPs decided that the participation in elections shall be mandatory, which corresponds to the second question raised by the President. However, the application of this measure is questionable given that there are no real sanctions for non-compliance. Another decision was to add an option “I support no one” in the integral ballot paper that will give expression to protest votes. These votes will be treated as valid, but will not be included in the calculation of the electoral threshold, which would have limited the access of small parties. Finally, the Parliament decided that the presidential institution would determine the timing of referendums from now on, provided that there is a decision of the National Assembly to hold one.

Bibliography:


Btvnovinite.bg, 2015. Whistle-blowers from the country: They do not provide ballot papers for the referendum. btvnovinite.bg, October 25. Available at: http://mestniizbori.btvnovinite.bg [Last Accessed May 16, 2016].

Dariknews.bg, 2015. They do not provide the ballot paper for the referendum. dariknews.bg, October 25. Available at: http://www.dariknews.bg [Last Accessed May 16, 2016].


The 2015 Referendum in Bulgaria


Segabg.com, 2015. Citizens complain that ballot papers for the referendum are provided only upon request. segabg.com, October 25. Available at: http://segabg.com [Last Accessed May 16, 2016].