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## МІЖНАРОДНА НАУКОВА КОНФЕРЕНЦІЯ «ПОЛІТИКА ТА ЗМІНИ У ЦЕНТРАЛЬНІЙ ТА СХІДНІЙ ЄВРОПІ»

Наукова конференція для студентів, які навчаються за спеціальністю 291 «Міжнародні відносини, суспільні комунікації та регіональні студії», за ініціативою завідувача кафедри міжнародних відносин Ольги Брусилівської об'єднала магістрів ОНУ та бакалаврів АМУ в Познані. Конференція відбулася 1 червня 2021 р. он-лайн. Серед питань, що розглядалися на конференції, чільне місце зайняв аналіз міжнародних відносин та зовнішньої політики держав (Елкхаїр А., Суперсон І., Новацька О., Світальська Н., Пальонова Г., Любінська М.), системної трансформації посткомуністичних країн (Бурганова В., Новак А., Дулевич М., Кахраман О., Навасардян Д., Жечицькі А., Полякова Є., Робейко А., Шевченко Ю., Маліцькі Т., Заза-літінова В., Дьоміна О.).

**Ключові слова:** міжнародні відносини, зовнішня політика, системна трансформація, посткомуністичні країни.

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## **THE ANALYSIS AND EXAMINATION OF BELORUSSIAN REGIME 2008–2021**

In the early 1990s, at the beginning of the system transformations, the main force of Belarusian nationalism was the Belarusian People's Front (BPF). The BPF was one of the few truly active mass organizations in post-communist Belarus. Being a modified party organization it had "a relatively active regional network based on cells, clubs, and caucuses; flexible membership, associated not with fees, but commitment to promote the party's name and ideology, and intensive 'street canvassing'". The party's popularity is evident by the fact that in the early 1990s its membership reached 150,000. No other political party could boast of such numbers.

However, the ideas of national revival preached by the BPF rapidly and unexpectedly ceased to attract favourable disposition of Belarusian society. As early as in 1994, there were no serious candidates for presidency from the nationalist movement. The main struggle for the office developed between the representative of the nomenclature, prime-minister V. Kebich, and a non-par-

ty candidate A. Lukashenko. Different researchers call attention to different reasons that caused the loss of popularity by Belarusian nationalists.

Political opposition groups are not illegal in Belarus, but authorities make it almost impossible for them to operate. Registration is obligatory but frequently denied for arbitrary and unfounded reasons. In 2007 dozens of opposition activists were beaten and arrested for a variety of trumped-up misdemeanours and criminal offenses.

On August 9, presidential elections were held in Belarus, in which, according to the data announced by the Central Election Commission, the incumbent President Alexander Lukashenko won with a result of 80.1 % of the vote. The protests that followed became unprecedented in terms of mass scale. Nevertheless, after more than a month of continuous street rallies, it can be argued that the safety margin of the Belarusian political regime turned out to be somewhat greater than the opposition representatives and many analysts assumed.

The protest on the very first day led to clashes with the police and mass arrests of participants in street actions. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, about 3 000 people were detained during the first night of protests for participating in unauthorized mass events. Massive protests and clashes with the police continued until 13 August. Their result was the detention of over 6,000 people. The Ministry of Internal Affairs also reported 121 wounded law enforcement officers.

While Western community initially recognized the results of elections as unfair and not free, Russia provided Lukashenko with “silent support” by not engaging in political discussion over legitimacy of regime. Obviously, this behaviour is determined by impossibility for Russia to claim the elections absolutely fair (which could be argued), but at the same time Moscow couldn't let change the power in Minsk, especially when it comes to some kind of so-called “colour revolutions”.

Undoubtedly, the events of 2020 will lead the Republic of Belarus towards significant changes in its political system and approaches to internal and external policies. At first glance, it seems that the main consequence would be a trend for centralisation of power in the country, but, to our mind, this could be only a short-term result. In mid- or even long-term period this could only mean a systemic transformation, where power institutions and their functions will become newly balanced. Theoretically, it would mean more democratic administration in the sense that political stability would be provided not by personality of the leader (A. Lukashenko), but by the system itself. By any means, at the moment it could be only centralisation, because political elites of Belarus are feeling external pressure.

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**NATIONAL MINORITY MOVEMENT IN MOLDOVA AND BULGARIA**

Transnistrian conflict is a conflict between Moldova and the unrecognized Transnistrian Republic. It's a socio-political conflict, which worsened after the withdrawal of Moldova from the USSR and grew into an armed confrontation in 1992.

The conflict has not yet been resolved by political means. At present, security in the conflict zone is provided by the Joint Peacekeeping Forces, which include military contingents from the Russian Federation, the Republic of Moldova, the Transnistrian Moldavian Republic and military observers from Ukraine. In the course of numerous negotiations with the mediation of Russia, Ukraine and the OSCE, it was not possible to reach an agreement on the status of Transnistria. Relations between the parties to the conflict remain tense. The Moldovan side has repeatedly spoken out in favor of the withdrawal of Russian troops from the region.

The conflict arose around the Law on the State Language, where the Moldavian language supposed to be the only official language. In Transnistria, this 1989 bill was perceived as discriminatory, which led to the emergence of a social movement advocating the introduction of two state languages in Moldova — Moldavian and Russian.

At the end of 1992, negotiations were resumed on the special status of Transnistria. Since 1994, the PMR and Moldova have signed a number of documents defining the principles for developing the status of Transnistria.

The Russian position on this conflict is very changeable. So, in 2012, Deputy Prime Minister and Special Representative of the President of Russia Dmitry Rogozin threatened to hang on Moldova the debt of Transnistria for the consumed Russian natural gas, if the state does not recognize the self-proclaimed entity. In October 2014, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that Transnistria will have the right to independently determine its future if Moldova changes its non-aligned military-political status, which will receive support from the Russian Federation. On September 17, 2006, a referendum on independence was held in the Transnistria (*Pridnestrovskaiia Moldavskaiia Respublika*). 97.1 % of Transnistrians voted for.

In 1990, Gagauzia (August 19) and Transnistria (September 2) proclaimed independence, which resulted in a campaign against Gagauzia. With the assistance of the Soviet Army and Transnistrian volunteers, the conflict was averted. These events marked the beginning of the formation of the modern Gagauz statehood, which from 1990 to 1994 existed in the form of the unrecognized Republic of Gagauzia, and since 1994 has existed in the form of a

special administrative-territorial entity within the Republic of Moldova (according to the Law of the Republic of Moldova "On the Special Legal Status of Gagauzia (Gagauz Yeri).

In 2008, after the proclamation of independence of Kosovo, the authorities of Gagauzia made a statement according to which Gagauzia as an independent state has more legitimacy than Kosovo.

In 2010, the Bashkan of Gagauzia Mikhail Formuzal in his interviews defined Gagauzia in relation to Moldova as a state within a state. In November there were protests in Comrat related to the policy of the Moldovan leadership. During the rally, the possibility of restoring the former status of the independent Gagauz Republic announced on August 19, 1990, in the event of the merger of Moldova with Romania, was again declared. The rally participants said that due to the fact that the authorities in Chisinau really want to go towards Romania or join the European Union and in all possible ways cut the status of Gagauzia within Moldova, the political agreement of December 23, 1994, concluded by both parties, should be voluntarily terminated, after which Gagauzia should return to the status of an independent Gagauz Republic.

In February 2014, a referendum was held in the Gagauz autonomy on the foreign policy course of Moldova and the postponed status of independence of Gagauzia. The turnout was 70.42 %. 98.9 % of those who took part in the plebiscite voted for the postponed status of independence.

In the study of national minority movement in Bulgaria we can analyse the political participation of the Turkish minority living in Bulgaria after the communist regime, the changes in this participation and the factors affecting the change, and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) (DPS in Bulgarian) and (HIQH in Bulgarian Turkish) were examined.

With the collapse of the Zhivkov regime, the communist era in Bulgaria ended and the Turkish minority entered a comfortable period. Bulgarian politics with the DPS Party, which founded in 1990, and from time to time became a partner in power of DPS with its inclusion in Bulgarian politics, the political activities of the Turkish minority increased; Significant successes have been achieved in the context of political participation and ethnic politics. It also put pressure on the recognition of minority status and the granting of minority rights. Gaining the support of other minorities, DPS expanded its electoral base; it has become a mass party in the identity of an ethnic party.

Bulgaria's desire to become a member of the EU and other international organizations is an important factor in Bulgaria's effort to move from communism to EU values without experiencing any ethnic conflict. Because, in order to solve the problems of minorities in his country, he implemented the "Bulgarian Ethnic Model", which aims at dialogue among ethnicities, integration of minorities into society and a multi-ethnic democracy.

Bulgaria, which became a member of the Council of Europe in 1992, in 1994 European Convention on Human Rights chapter signed and applied for full membership to the European Union the following year, recognized the mandatory jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights in 1998. Bulgaria also signed a European

Council introduced the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities in 1999. Thus, minority rights are also guaranteed at the international level. In the new period, the Muslim Turkish minority has been able to reclaim their names, to speak their own language everywhere, to worship freely, and to keep their traditions and culture alive.

While significant progress has been made in their right to engage in activities that will enable them to develop, there has been a long struggle in public schools regarding Turkish lessons. In 2004, Bulgaria's membership to NATO was accepted.

Representatives of the Muslim Turkish minority decided that it was necessary to become a party in order to defend the rights of the masses they represented. At the Foundation Conference held in Sofia on 26–27 March, the principles of the movement, the next line, the strategy it will follow, and the methods it will apply to achieve the goal were discussed. The party charter and program were also accepted after intense discussions at the conference, in which party leaders and management staff and party organs were also determined. In the Party Statute, it was stated that the Movement was established with the aim of defending the rights of all ethnic, religious and cultural minorities in Bulgaria, first through domestic law, using the opportunities provided by international agreements, and contributing to the integrity of Bulgaria.

For this purpose, it was emphasized that domestic legal arrangements should be made compatible with international principles and rules, and legal and social guarantees should be provided to protect the identity of the minority. In the program prepared for the implementation of the regulation, it was also emphasized that the Party will use peaceful and legal means to achieve its goals and fight within the framework of the Constitution. It was specifically stated in the program that while terrorism and other forms of violence were rejected as political tools, its fundamentalism would also be opposed. While the idea of autonomy, which was stated to prevent national reconciliation, was also rejected definitively in the Party Program, the principle of internationalism was adopted as the basis for the unity and harmonious coexistence of ethnic, religious and cultural communities in Bulgaria.

The permanent executive body of the MRF is the Central Management Bureau. The Office in Sofia consists of the Party Chairman, Party Vice-Presidents and 4 General Coordinators. The recommendation of the members of the Central Executive Bureau and the management of the Bureau are carried out by the Party President. The members of the Central Administration Bureau, which meets once a week, are responsible for the execution of the Party's activities in various fields, the coordination of the local organizations, the incoming continuous communication with other units from the evaluation of complaints it performs many tasks, up to and including. The local organization of the Party, on the other hand, was organized with the provincial Councils at the top, provincial Conferences and provincial Councils and their similar structures in the districts. The party's control bodies are the Ethics Commission and the Financial Audit Commission. Both commissions are obliged to submit their reports to the Central Council. According to interview

in 1994, Ahmet Doğan, the leader of the MRF, whose voters constitute 87 % of the Muslims, stated that the Movement was representing of the Muslims in the early days, however, Doğan emphasized that he is now looking for a much broader basis and strives to ensure that not only Turks but also everyone who has suffered from the old regime join the party.

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**TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME AS A THREAT  
TO THE SECURITY OF CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN  
COUNTRIES**

In Eastern and Central Europe, the fall of Communist regimes and end of tight border controls have attracted foreign criminal organizations. International criminal activity in the region increased rapidly in the early 1990s as new democratic governments focused on more fundamental political, social, and economic problems. Russian, Italian, ethnic Albanian, Nigerian, and Chinese criminal organizations and Colombian drug-trafficking groups have all made inroads into this region since the breakdown of the old order. In addition to developing these countries as targets for criminal activity, international organized crime groups are exploiting their relatively weak law enforcement and loose border controls to circumvent traditional points of entry into Western Europe, where customs and law enforcement measures have become more stringent. Several of the region's countries are transit routes for Southwest Asian heroin, and Poland and Croatia may be emerging as transportation routes for South American cocaine destined for Western Europe and new markets in Eastern and Central Europe.

Hungary's borders with seven countries and relatively well-developed transportation system make it a major transit zone for all kinds of contraband smuggling. Stricter border controls and concerted efforts against organized crime in recent years have helped alter drug-trafficking routes and shipping methods, but Hungarian officials caution that the amount of drugs moving through the country probably has not decreased.

Poland and the Czech Republic are also crossroads for smuggling directed at West European markets and extensive traffic in stolen vehicles being moved from Western Europe to the East. EU's officials consider that weak border controls on Poland's eastern border with Ukraine could provide a gateway for illegal immigrants and organized crime into northern Europe.

Bulgaria and Romania remain key countries on the traditional Balkan route between Turkey and central and northern Europe. Criminal groups in



the region take advantage of the heavy volume of commercial traffic along this route to conceal and smuggle contraband. The Balkan route — with Bulgaria as its gateway — has traditionally been the major avenue for smuggling Southwest Asian heroin to profitable West European markets.

The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime adopted by General Assembly resolution 55/25 of 15 November 2000 is the main international instrument in the fight against transnational organized crime. It opened for signature by Member States in Palermo, Italy, on 12–15 December 2000 and entered into force on 29 September 2003. The Convention represents a major step in the fight against transnational organized crime, including human trafficking. It signifies the need to foster and improve the international cooperation in order to tackle these problems. States that ratify this Convention commit themselves to taking a number of measures against transnational organized crime. These include the creation of domestic criminal offences; the adoption of new comprehensive frameworks for extradition, mutual legal assistance and law enforcement cooperation; and the promotion of training and technical assistance for building or upgrading the necessary capacity of national authorities.

General purpose of the proposed action is contributing to fight against and prevent trafficking in human beings in Europe. A cycle of transnational — itinerant workshops are proposed to allow each country-stakeholder with the final aim to account good practices so far developed and filling the existent gaps. The itinerant workshops will be directed to a multi-disciplinary group of members of NGOs and Coalition of NGOs specialized in the sector; prosecutors, lawyers, police forces, public administrators, social workers, educators, policy makers, etc.

During the second phase the activities will focus on the exchange of best practices in prevention measures. The creation of an online platform and the organization of web-seminars will be directed to a group of educators and communicators to allow them in exchanging their experiences and tools (educational kit, audio-visual spots, posters, flyers, information brochures, etc). The platform will be following used to launch a common awareness campaign prepared with the support of the scientific panel of experts on organized crime and human trafficking.

The campaign will target the general public as well as the competent national and local authorities in the selected countries. The campaign will support the confiscation of proceeds from organized crime. The campaign is directed to raise the awareness on the existence of large illicit financial and tangible properties produced by transnational organized crime as result of exploiting THB victims.

The trainings are based on the Policy Toolkit on The Hague Good Practices on the Nexus Between Transnational Organized Crime and Terrorism developed by UNICRI and the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), and are organized in partnership with the Coordination Centre for Countering Violent Extremism in Albania (CVE).

Albanian organized criminal groups have developed global networks which are intensely involved in transnational crimes such as drug trafficking, weap-

ons and human smuggling, and money laundering among the others. They often come into direct contact with violent extremist offenders. Data has shown that Western Balkans is the European region with the highest concentration of returning foreign fighters from Syria and Iraq. Reports indicate that they have travelled back home using forged or stolen travel documents (in some cases provided by criminals) and were aided by groups of smugglers operating across the Middle East and Europe.

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**BULGARIAN ECONOMY BEFORE AND AFTER THE PANDEMIC  
IN THE CONTEXT OF A GOVERNMENT CHANGE**

The Republic of Bulgaria is a parliamentary state located in the eastern part of the Balkan Peninsula and covers 23 % of its territory with an area of almost 111 thousand square kilometres and a population of about seven million people. Being an Eastern European country it is the 11th and 16th largest country in the European Union by area and population, respectively. In terms of economic indicators, Bulgaria is relatively abortive and locates in the backyard in terms of the GDP of the European Union, and along with Romania, it is one of the most corrupt states, which makes the study much more indicative. To be more precise, Transparency International's 2020 Corruption Perceptions Index ranked Bulgaria as the most corrupt member state of the European Union, it also ranked Bulgaria 69th worldwide.

It is important to consider how the key segments of the Bulgarian economy sustained prior to and during the outbreak of Covid-19, and try to understand what strategies are available and implementable to long-term recovery. The European Union and its authorities have agreed on a bundle of initiatives to stimulate investment and, as a result, security and job generation, the most important of which is the European Recovery Fund (which has a financial quantity of seven hundred fifty billion euros) will certainly help Bulgaria survive the crisis. It is essential that finances are not used to maintain the status quo, but rather to stimulate growth and innovation while considering environmental appropriateness and longevity, not to mention the political transformations of Bulgaria caused by the disgraced corruption and oligarchy of the country — it was the period of the pandemic that was able to open up its deep socio-political wounds and lead to the long-awaited change of the populist government of Prime-Minister Boyko Borisov that has been in power since 2009 and has failed both country's GDP and demographics.



Bulgaria's income has been increasing at a national average rate of 3.6 per cent consecutively in the years before the pandemic. At market prices, GDP climbed by 3.4 per cent in 2019, reaching BGN 118.7 billion (EUR 60.7 billion). As per official figures, Bulgaria's per capita GDP reached EUR 8,680 at market rates, although the country's economy was still behind the more advanced European countries, and this statistic represents just 53 % of the EU-27 average being measured in terms of purchasing power parity. On this metric, the country is ranked worst in the EU. Industry (23.1 per cent), wholesale and retail commerce, transportation, housing, and food services (22.6 per cent), and governance, defence, education, public health, and social work activities were the most prominent factors of Bulgaria's economy. In terms of exports and imports, the country has developed strong economic ties with other EU member states, with which it conducts approximately 64 per cent of its total commerce. The main problem before Covid-19 except for corruption was the demographic situation — the total population of the country will decrease by nearly 6 % or 415 thousand people.

The five-year boom phase came to a halt when the Covid-19 disease triggered a pandemic. Due to several economic restraints following the proclamation of the state of emergency on March 13, the EU Commission forecasted a 7.2 per cent annual decline in GDP by May 2020. The turnover of a large segment of the service industry has dropped by thirty to forty per cent. A number of negative repercussions on the industry have also been documented. The service sector, which employs over 60 % of the workforce, saw the biggest increase in the unemployment figures. Nevertheless, the pandemic period triggered widespread protests across the whole country that were directed against the growing influence of the oligarchy, corruption, and the policies of Prime Minister Boyko Borisov's government which disappointed the Bulgarians. After almost 300 days of protests, Borisov finally resigned which was accepted by the new parliament, thus Stephan Yaven (former Secretary of Security and Defence of President Rumen Radev, an active critic of Borisov's rule) has become the new head of government of Bulgaria. Despite the effect of the COVID, this certainly gives hope for a transformation of Bulgaria into a state worthy of the European Union.

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**EUROPEAN UNION POLICY TOWARDS THE WESTERN BALKANS**

As a matter of fact, the Western Balkans region embraces Albania and five former Yugoslav republics as follows Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo. What unifies the majority of

these countries apart from common historical background and regional affiliation is an aspiration to join the European Union, nevertheless the region is quite important for the EU as well. It's of utmost importance to mention that out of all the above-mentioned states Croatia only managed to meet the EU criteria and become the EU member whereas Albania along with Montenegro, Serbia, and North Macedonia are EU candidate countries. Such countries as Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo are yet to obtain the status of potential candidates.

Thus, in this essay the stress will be made upon contemporary strategies and initiatives of the European Union on its enlargement and care policy towards the Western Balkan countries.

November 2009 signified the establishment of an EU-Western Balkans Ministerial Forum on Justice and Home Affairs aimed at annual discussions on the preparation degree of the Western Balkan states to apply the EU acquis, in particular in areas namely the independence of the judiciary and the fight against organized crime.

Former EU enlargement commissioner Stefan Füle (2010–2014) has stressed upon the importance of bilateral disputes settlement before Balkan countries join the EU. When talking about Kosovo in particular, then The International Steering Group guiding Kosovo's democratic development has also reconfirmed that “enhanced regional cooperation is in the best interest of the Western Balkans and its European perspective”.

Another important project was initiated by German Chancellor Angela Merkel in 2014, primarily speaking of the Berlin Process. The aim is quite transparent as it's focused on the support of the non-EU Western Balkan countries “to make additional real progress in the reform process, resolve outstanding bilateral and internal issues, and achieve reconciliation within and between the societies in the region”.

In a political sense, the Berlin Process signified a certain kind of re-engagement between EU and Western Balkan leaders at a time when the EU and its member states were busy dealing with internal issues and on-going international crises. The Process is proclaimed to be a kind of a platform for EU and Western Balkan leaders so to negotiate upon the unresolved issues and facilitate up-to-date initiatives in order to boost the regional co-operation.

The Berlin Process is a step forward on the pave of further EU enlargement as it's providing Western Balkan leaders with an opportunity to discuss current issues and to encourage regional co-operation in general. Namely, the platform facilitated a slight improvement in Serbia-Albanian relations, as a former Albanian prime minister, Edi Rama officially visited Belgrade in November 2014. The Berlin Process touched upon the socio-economic challenges in the Western Balkans mainly market economy and competitiveness with the EU market. Therefore such institutions as the Instrument of Pre-Accession and International Financial Institutions were established to back the extension of trans-European transport and energy networks in the Balkans.

February 2018 witnessed the adoption of EU Commission strategy paper for A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with

the Western Balkans. The instrument comprises the necessary steps “aspirants, as well as EU member states, should take to complete the enlargement process in the forthcoming years”. The strategy is welcomed by Austria, France, Italy and Germany, for sure. Besides regional co-operation, it’s also focused upon sectorial integration and infrastructural development to make the Western Balkan stick to the EU standards. The recent years of 2020–2021 saw the adoption of Enlargement Package and An Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans.

The package includes a Communiqué on enlargement as well as the Reports to provide detailed annual assessment of drift of affairs in each candidate country, or potential candidate over the year and also there’s a room for recommendations on the reform priorities in the particular countries.

If talking about Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans, then its objective is to “prod into action the long-term recovery of the region, a green and digital transition, foster economic regional cooperation, boost economic growth and support reforms required to move forward on the EU path”.

Overall, the initiative to integrate the Western Balkan countries into the EU will take some time, as this objective is an integral part of the greater strategy of the Union. It’s said that the EU would be mostly ready to accept Western Balkan countries up to 2025. Now when the world is being affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU mobilizes large sums to support the region. Therefore, the EU has allocated €70 million in grants to the Western Balkans to ensure availability and access to reliable, effective and EU authorized COVID-19 vaccines. Another focus of EU financial aid is set upon the innovative businesses, farmers and agri-businesses, rural and tourism enterprises, as well as women- and youth-led businesses so that it could provide a lifeline for many people all over the Western Balkans, especially those working in vulnerable and small-scale enterprises. All these facts confirm that the EU is highly interested in the Western Balkans to reach prosperity and security both in the region and throughout the Europe.

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**CHINA’S POWER IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC, SLOVAKIA,  
AND MOLDOVA**

Over the past few years, the People’s Republic of China has become one of the most discussed issues in the international arena, and to each region of the world, China has a separate political approach. As for the countries of Central

and Eastern Europe, at the beginning of the 21st century, China created the format “16 + 1” (before Greece’s accession in 2019) as a separate interaction mechanism with the countries of the region.

It should be noted that the relationship of the Celestial Empire with the Czech Republic and Slovakia (members of V4) are an illustration of China’s desire to politically and economically entrench in the core of the European continent. The Chinese side hopes for the rapid economic development of countries V4, and on the growth of their political influence in CEE and the EU. Since, according to Beijing, Visegrad Four has a great value in the implementation of the “16 + 1” format and successful relations with these countries will contribute to stimulating contacts with all other dialogue participants.

Speaking about the relations of China and the Slovak Republic, the parties signed a number of international agreements on economic cooperation, as well as the Strategy for the Development of Economic Relations 2017–2020. Slovakia is a member of the Chinese project Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The relations of the two sides were not increased to a comprehensive strategic partnership, which gives an assessment of not much importance from China. However, Slovakia’s membership in the EU is the most important characteristic that determines the foreign policy approach of the PRC. China has been seeking to gain the favour of individual EU members as a means to influence the EU-level policy on issues of critical importance to China. Owing to the nature of foreign policy decision making in the EU Council, the support of any EU member can be important for China. Therefore, even small states like Slovakia can play an outsized role in the Chinese perspective.

Among the largest Chinese investment flows to Slovakia are 110 million euros from China South Locomotive Group and China Aerospace Science Industry Haying Group in the automotive industry; the purchase of 10 % of the shares of the largest investment company in Slovakia, J&T, by the Chinese company Huaxin Energy Group; the investment by Flame company of 10 million euros. In 2017, focusing on the superior geographical location and the strong demand of the logistics market in Central and Eastern Europe, CNIC Corporation Limited acquired the second-largest logistics park in Galanta. In addition, agricultural cooperation remains no less important for the two countries.

China welcomes Slovakia to actively participate in the joint construction of the Belt and Road and play a constructive role in China-Europe relations. The most significant is the new container route of the logistics company Metrans launched in 2019 from Xi’an to the Danube stand passing through Ukraine. Train Xi’an — Danube Streda is a successful example of a route on a new silk path.

Exploring Sino-Czech relations, they are relatively fresh in the international arena. With the coming to power in the Czech Republic Milos Zeman in 2013, cooperation between the countries began to develop rapidly. In the fall of 2015, it was stated that the President of the Czech Republic was invited as the only leader from the West to participate in Chinese celebrations on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II. This symbolically

fixed the reload in the Czech-Chinese relationship and was a prerequisite for “Economy of Foreign Policy”. Shortly after the Beijing celebrations, there was a wave of Chinese investment in the Czech Republic. In addition to several expensive Prague properties, the Shanghai-based CEFC corporation (the sixth largest private Chinese company) purchased a 60 % stake in the Slavia football club, almost 50 % of the shares in the Travel Service airline, and almost 80 % of the Lobkowicz brewery.

Due to the amount of Chinese investments, it was even said that Prague was a small Chinatown. However, the situation took a completely different turnover and changed 180 degrees in 2019. The Summit “17 + 1” in Beijing in 2020 was held without the participation of President of the Czech Republic Milos Zeman, who justified the refusal of inviting the inability of the PRC to fulfil investment promises. The President was disappointed with the lack of investment by the Chinese authorities. Over the past five years, political rapprochement hasn't brought expected economic benefits. The share of Chinese investments in the total foreign investment in the Czech Republic is still less than 1 %, significantly inferior to Japan and South Korea.

In October 2019, after the agreement between Prague and Beijing was finally broken down (around the controversial provision on the “One-China policy”), President Zeman wrote a letter to Xi Jinping, in which he acknowledges the contradictions in local relations and supported the interest of the Czech authorities in economic and cultural cooperation with China.

Speaking of Sino-Moldovan relations, in the economy, the trade and economic cooperation of the two countries supports the tendency of favourable development. China is now ranking sixth among countries trading with the Republic of Moldova, and the third place to export Chinese products in the RM. Wine production is one of the main types of an industrial product.

In 2011, China was granted the greatest gratuitous assistance in Moldova. In 2014, the RM signed an agreement on economic and technical cooperation with China, including within the framework of the Economic Belt of the Silk Road. The cooperation between China and Moldova made a major step forward in April 2019 when Moldova signed an infrastructure agreement with two Chinese contractors, China Highway Group and The China Railway Group Limited to build almost 300 kilometres of roads at an estimated cost of \$400 million.

Since this deal, China has increasingly signalled interest in economic engagement with the country. As an example, 12 Chinese major enterprises participated in the Chisinau Business Forum in April 2019, highlighting their willingness to enhance investment in the country.

Moldova is interested in cooperation in BRI because RM has a good strategic location from the point of view of transport route corridors: borders with Romania, proximity to the Black Sea, presence rivers and port of Giurgiulești.

In the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2021, China will provide Moldova with 150 thousand doses of vaccines in humanitarian aid.

Summing up, the rapid growth of Chinese presence in the region and millions of investments occur to acquire strategic assets in Western Europe,

infrastructure development and an increase in transport links in Eastern Europe, following the launch of the Silk Road project.

In addition, the markets of the countries of the Visegrad Group can serve as a gate for more active penetration of Chinese products into a single European market. However, it will be not easy, because V4 is too tightly integrated into general structures and are subject to general standards and EU rules. Despite this, in these countries, Chinese investors can get an important experience of further expanding their expansion to the West.

As for the Republic of Moldova, even though it has the potential, it is necessary to improve the conditions of infrastructure, transportation, manufacturing complexes, public services, as well as strict compliance and execution of the law to ensure favourable terms for investment activities in the country.

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**ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION OF UKRAINE AND BELARUS  
IN COVID ERA**

The COVID pandemic had a destructive influence on the global economy. Due to many COVID restrictions, world trade was disrupted, many businesses were losing their revenue, and some had to close up. It is still quite hard to evaluate the impacts of the pandemic on economies to the full extent, as the long-term consequences are still to come and the virus is not over. This study focuses on two states — Ukraine and Belarus as cases of both countries have totally different approaches to addressing this crisis.

The coronavirus pandemic could not but affect the Belarusian economy. The country's GDP in January-May 2020 decreased by 1.8 % compared to the corresponding period of 2019. Certain industries, such as tourism, passenger transport, and public catering, have been severely affected. Foreign trade also declined noticeably. Noteworthy, the spheres of e-commerce, online entertainment, production and sale of medical products and food delivery showed significant growth.

It is known that the Belarusian economy is interested in higher prices for oil raw materials. After the collapse of oil prices in April, since May, the export duty on oil has dropped sharply from about \$ 9 to \$ 1 per barrel, that is, it has practically dropped to zero. Nevertheless, in May 2020, the inflation situation improved significantly.

Since the beginning of the year, the dollar exchange rate against the Belarusian ruble has grown. But the floating exchange rate regime became the



key to the stability of the Belarusian ruble. In Belarus, in 2021, economic recovery is expected and the launch of a new investment cycle.

There are three scenarios for the Belarusian economy this year. First one is that there will be economic growth of 1.8 % due to the increased external demand. The second one is that the national economy will not grow this year. The third scenario assumes that the recession in Belarus will continue in 2021.

The Ukrainian government was not prepared to face the global pandemic. The Ukrainian economy was steadily improving each year, but instead of the expected 3.5 % GDP growth, it declined by 4 %. The highest shrank in domestic-oriented industries was in the sphere of temporary accommodation, catering, transport and logistics. However, the production volumes of construction, wholesale and retail trade, as well as the IT increased during the pandemic.

The government introduced a scheme to support small and medium enterprises. This helped some businesses to manage their finances by covering two-third of the payroll for underemployed employees.

The inflation rates were kept under control by the Ukrainian government, even though it had increased by 0.9 percentage point, or up to 5 %, which fully corresponds to the targeted goal of the UNB.

The economic recovery strongly depends on is whether Ukraine will receive a tranche from International Monetary Organization (IMF). So, September 2021 will be a defining one for the future of Ukrainian economic stability, as Ukraine has to return its debts so as IMF will make its final decision in regard to tranche. Thus, the economic impacts were drastic in some spheres, while some have managed to perform even better than during stable periods.

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## **DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING IN WESTERN BALKANS: THE ESSENCE AND LATEST TRENDS**

Democratic backsliding is becoming a common phenomenon well beyond the context of EU enlargement. In Europe two adjacent regions are constantly on the headlines: CEE countries (particularly, the cases of Hungary and Poland) and Western Balkan states.

Current studies provide no general definition of what a “democratic backslide” is and what impacts it has on internal and external relations. Democracy’s global demise is part of a larger theory-driven debate. Greskovits maintains that the features of de-democratization in CEE states are the declining

popular involvement in democracy and destabilization or reversal of democratic development.

Western Balkans countries — Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia are an ideal field for political scientists to research the gradations of democracy. Ever since the early 1990s, countries in the Western Balkans have experienced a variety of “hybrid regimes” (Collier & Levitsky, 1997) that fall somewhere between consolidated democracies and autocracies, but they have never achieved the state of full-fledged liberal democracies. The reasons being complex and stemming from among others corruption to religious conflicts in the area. Religious differences play a crucial role in decisions of domestic politics and on international political intervention and is a key topic for scholars in the region, whom all agree on the importance, but disagree on its exact roles (Gjana, 2012).

The apparent absence of the democratic rule of law profoundly impacts politics in the Western Balkans. The systemic structural weaknesses of democratic institutions are purposefully exploited by domestic competitive authoritarian regimes, which are able to misuse these fragile institutions to their advantage. Formal democracy has been established, however, in reality, elites are obstructing citizens’ political and individual rights by violating the rule of law. So, almost thirty years since the start of the democratization process, the institutionalization and viability of democracy in the region has numerous flaws.

The rule of law is deemed to be absent in some of the Western Balkan states. Democratic institutions are weaker than they appear, because domestic competitive authoritarian regimes are able to misuse these institutions to their advantage. In reality, elites are preventing the citizens from getting their political and individual rights by breaching the law. Thus, even though the institutionalization has lasted almost thirty years, democracy and rule of law in the region have numerous existing flaws.

The Covid-19 health crisis has exacerbated the Western Balkans’ already-present democratic governance vulnerabilities. Governments in the Western Balkans have frequently applied restrictions selectively and arbitrarily in reaction to the outbreak, sometimes utilizing these measures to stifle critics and opponents. Countries in the Western Balkans have had some of Europe’s highest rates of Covid-19 infections per capita during the pandemic. Different government policies in the Western Balkans relate to differing citizen reactions to the situation. Protests against the authorities occurred in Serbia, Montenegro, BiH, Albania, and Kosovo, all in response to the authorities’ harsh restrictions or insufficient handling of the health issue.

During the pandemic, media freedom suffered a significant setback. Although such limits appear to be justifiable in order to prevent the spread of incorrect information and data, they have been utilized by some governments to silence critical voices and further restrict freedom of expression and information (e.g. in Serbia and Montenegro). Personal data protection has also been hampered. Local authorities in Montenegro and Serbia illegally disclosed on the online portals the health records of people afflicted with the virus. The

names of those who breached self-isolation or quarantine procedures were also publicly available online in Serbia, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and BiH.

Another trend is the “marginalization” of parliaments. For instance, in Serbia President Vucic declared the state of emergency due to the emerging health crisis, although only Parliament is entitled with such authority. In Albania, an opposition boycott of parliament and the dysfunction of the Constitutional Court have given the government excessive power. The notable exceptions are only Montenegro and Kosovo, whose parliaments remained actively involved in political life during the virus outbreak.

Overall, Western Balkan leaders used the Covid-19 outbreak as an opportunity to strengthen their executive authority. The troubling development is the growing influence of right-wing and even extreme organizations. Power concentrations in the hands of the government, a breakdown of the system of checks and balances, opaque policies of secrecy, and violations of citizens’ basic rights and freedoms have long been criticisms levied against the region’s leaders by domestic and international actors. The current crisis around Covid-19 just bolsters the ruling class’ power to control, thus raising the issue of democratic backsliding to a new level.

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**ROLE OF WOMEN IN BELARUSIAN PROTESTS AND OPPOSITION**

Last year Belarusian women decided to oppose the authoritarian regime of Alexander Lukashenko. They have decided to go to the streets and protest, as men of Belarus were more likely to experience police brutality or even get arrested and imprisoned. Our research work is about women who are the face of the Belarusian protests and their role in them.

In August 2020 Belarus should’ve had elections that, in the minds of Belarusian people, could finally end the 26-year-old dictatorship of Alexander Lukashenko. In the lead up to those elections Lukashenko “got rid” of his three most prominent opponents. Two of them, Sergei Tikhanovkiy and Viktor Barabriko were arrested and sent to jail, and the other one, Valery Tsepkalo was banned from the elections. After the arrest of Sergei Tikhanovkiy his wife, Svetlana, announced that she will take the place of her husband in the elections. Her candidacy was approved by the commission. Later on, Veronika Tsepkalo, the wife of Valery Tsepkalo, and Maria Kolesnikova, Viktor Barbariko’s campaign manager, decided to join Svetlana Tikhanovskaya to be with her in the opposition. All three of them decided to advocate for the free elections together. Soon, Tikhanovskaya and her team gained a following from the fellow citizens.

Although she was popular among the citizens, Lukashenko did not see her, in particular woman, as a future head of state. As he said about woman being a president: “Our constitution is not for a woman. And our society is not ripe to vote for a woman. Because, according to our constitution, the president has strong power. Belarus is not Lithuania: Dalia Grybauskaite was president there; she came, smiled, sat and left. She was not responsible for anything, because Lithuania is a parliamentary republic. Belarus is not. The president will be a man; I am absolutely convinced of this. “

The nation-wide presidential election took place on August 9, 2020. Lukashenko himself announced the results with the claim he had won 80 % of the vote. Although elections under Lukashenko have never been viewed as free or fair by the OSCE, this particular election incurred mass response from the Belarusian people in the form of protests during which violent clashes between protestors and state-sanctioned police occurred. Nationwide protests began the night after the election and remain fraught with violence and a substantial amount of arrests both in Minsk and other cities.]The European Union, the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States have all placed sanctions on the Belarusian individuals involved with election rigging and state-sanctioned human rights abuses.

Ms. Tikhanovskaya was an unlikely presidential contender from the outset. Having never been in politics before, she was a stay-at-home mother who took up the candidacy when more established opposition figures, including her husband Sergei Tikhanovsky, a blogger, were jailed or forced into exile ahead of the vote. Ms. Tikhanovskaya, who before the election had given up a teaching career to care for her two children, was thrust into the spotlight as she vowed to continue her husband’s campaign. She found support from voters looking for an alternative to Mr. Lukashenko, as she called for change after years of economic stagnation and repressive rule. Tikhanovskaya has fled Belarus to Lithuania after the elections, under direct threats from Belarusian security forces, yet continues to lead the opposition from abroad.

When Tsepikalo’s husband Valery Tsepikalo announced his participation in the 2020 Belarusian presidential election, Tsepikalo accompanied him on his trips. On July 14, 2020, Valery was denied registration as a presidential candidate in Belarus. Veronika became her husband’s representative at the campaign rallies of Tikhonovsky, while Valery and his children left the country fearing for their safety. On July 30, 2020, during a rally in Minsk, Veronika spoke about the personal affairs of her family, and cited the falsification of a criminal case against her mother, who at that time was already in a serious medical condition. Fearing the loss of her freedom as a result of political persecution, she fled the country on the eve of the 2020 Belarusian presidential election, joining her husband in Moscow. She cast her vote at the Belarusian embassy in Moscow. Later on she fled to Poland, and later to Ukraine as she was afraid of following in Belarus.

In May 2020, Kalesnikava became Viktor Babaryka’s presidential campaign manager in the 2020 Belarusian presidential election. After Babaryka was arrested in June and banned from running for presidency, Kalesnikava

va joined alongside Veronika Tsepka in the campaign of Svetlana Tsikhounouskaya. Kalesnikava actively participated in numerous rallies in Belarus; she encouraged Belarusian citizens — factory workers, officials, diplomats, law enforcement officers, media employees, etc. — to take part in the protests. In early September 2020, Kalesnikava announced the formation of a new political party, Razam, which would operate independently from the Coordination Council.

On September 7, 2020, Kalesnikava was kidnapped by the “masked man” in Minsk. Following this her family filed a missing person report. On September 8 of 2020 Kalesnikava was spotted crossing the Ukrainian border. There is no legitimate information of what has happened at the border. Some sources claim that she tried to cross the border with two associates; other sources claim that she was detained after tearing up her passport. Next day after those events, Kalesnikava’s father stated that she was jailed at the detention centre in Minsk, from which she later was transferred to Zhodino. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of September, the Investigative Committee of Belarus charged Kalesnikava with “actions aimed at undermining Belarusian national security. She faces up to 5 years in prison if convicted. Kalesnikava refused to meet up with Lukashenko to discuss changes in constitution in an expression of solidarity to other imprisoned protesters and activists. Since then her pre-trial arrest is being prolonged all the time and she is facing new charges.

The protests in Belarus had started even before the elections took place. Although the pre-elections protests were pretty huge, they still did not become nationwide phenomena until Lukashenko announced his win of the elections, with such a big difference in percentage. In the early day of the protests men outnumbered women, although both men and women were joining the protests. However, when the violence from the police and authorities started to increase, men mostly one the ones who faced the violence in the earlier days of the protests. Because of that fact women decided to take over the protests. More and more women started going out to the streets to fight for freedom. The protests had a lot of risks for all the age and gender groups that were participating in them. In the beginning, as it was mentioned before, men faced more violence for any of their actions during the protests, although later on women reported also a lot of cases of physical and sexual violence.

After women witnessed a lot of horrors experienced by male protestors, they decided to step out and take change over the protests. Because of the gender roles and norms in the Belarusian society, women at first did not face the same risks of violence and threats to get imprisoned men did. So like that, women of Belarus created “Women in white movement”. They dressed in white clothes and took flowers, and like that they have started marching through the cities of Belarus. Belarusian women used the image of peaceful and loving women, chanting at the authorities “Only a coward can beat a woman”. With the beginning of women’s protests, it became harder for Belarusian authorities to control the protests. They attempted to tell women to go home and take care of their husbands and family, playing on the stereotypical gender roles.

Women of all the ages took part in the protests. Starting from teenage girls, up to elders, like Nina Baginskaya, who is 73 years old. She was encouraging women to fight Lukashenko regime and join the protests. Nina can be seen hitting a police officer with her purse. The officer does not arrest her. This can be attributed to the expectation that grandmothers and elderly women are to be respected and assisted when needed in Belarusian society. In another video, Nina walks down a stairwell proudly holding her white and red Belarusian flag which has become a symbol of protests. When police asked her where she was going and what she was doing, she responded, "I am going for a walk." The police officer, obviously torn between stopping her and respecting norms, eventually continued to yell at her while simultaneously grabbing her arm to assist her down the stairwell. Though the most visible of Lukashenko's elderly opponents she is, Nina is not alone. The older population holds weekly "pensioner protests" every Monday. The pensioners, including women, have been tearing gassed and some briefly detained, but all remain undeterred. The younger population, inspired by Nina and their grandparents are also stepped out in larger numbers. In a pensioner protest, students joined chanting, "Together we are the power! Women of Belarus instrumentalized femininity to fight the patriarchal regime, by acting as they are "supposed" to act. In the beginning of protests such tactic worked well for women, however later police has taken a harsher actions towards the female protestors.

Though less women were detained compared to thousands of men, women detainees still face risks. Those who are detained are threatened, humiliated, pushed/beaten and poorly treated. While several male journalists were arrested and beaten, one female journalist spoke about how they threatened to kidnap her children. The most common risk women face at the hands of security forces is an intense amount of persecution, intimidation and harassment.

Elderly women face lower risks. All older women are referred to as 'grandmothers' out of respect for their age. Police are not as likely to arrest or threaten these women though they do continue to teargas them.

The exception comes with Nina Baginskaya, who has been arrested several times over the decades and now pays off thousands of dollars of fines through a reduced pension. Lukashenko, however, announced that he had banned the police from arresting Nina. Her age and status were likely factors in this decision.

When the protests began, women did not face a high level of threat. It was far more difficult at the time for the regime, security and police forces to use overt violence against women. However, this has changed. Security forces, seemingly out of fear, threaten and detain women. Elderly women continue to face a lower level of threats because unlike elderly men, age provides them with more protection because of gender norms.

The vulnerabilities of female protestors within Belarusian society emerged as protests grew bigger. Women, even those who ventured into the public or political sphere were never paid much attention to. As the protests grew bigger, and as most of them were led and sustained by women, authorities and security forces started to detain women and make threats to them.



## INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE «POLITICS AND CHANGE IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE»

### Summary

The scientific conference for students majoring in 291 International Relations, Public Communications and Regional Studies at the initiative of the Head of the Department of International Relations Olga Brusylovska brought together Masters of ONU and Bachelors of AMU in Poznan. The conference took place on June 1, 2021 online. Among the issues considered at the conference were: the analysis of international relations and foreign policy of the states (Elkhair A., Superson I., Novatska O., Switalska N., Palyonova G., Lubinska M.), systemic transformation of post-communist countries (Burganova V., Nowak A., Dulevych M., Kahraman O., Navasardian D., Rzeczycki A., Polyakova E., Robeyko A., Shevchenko Y., Malicki T., Zazalitinova V., Domina O.).

**Key words:** international relations, foreign policy, systemic transformation, post-communist countries.

## МЕЖДУНАРОДНАЯ НАУЧНАЯ КОНФЕРЕНЦИЯ «ПОЛИТИКА И ИЗМЕНЕНИЯ В ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ И ВОСТОЧНОЙ ЕВРОПЕ»

### Резюме

Научная конференция для студентов, обучающихся по специальности 291 «Международные отношения, общественные коммуникации и региональные студии», по инициативе заведующего кафедрой международных отношений Ольги Брусиловской объединила магистров ОНУ и бакалавров АГУ в Познани. Конференция состоялась 1 июня 2021 он-лайн. Среди вопросов, которые рассматривались на конференции, видное место занял анализ международных отношений и внешней политики государств (Элкхаир А., Суперсон И., Новацкая Е., Свитальская Н., Палёнова А., Любинская М.), системной трансформации посткоммунистических стран (Бурганова В., Новак А., Дулевич Н., Кахраман О., Навасардян Д., Жечицки А., Полякова Е., Робейко А., Шевченко Ю., Малицьки Т., Зазалитинова В., Домина О.).

**Ключевые слова:** международные отношения, внешняя политика, системная трансформация, посткоммунистические страны.