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AFRICA

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONTEMPORARY DIPLOMACY

Editorial • Foreign policy and international relations • Correspondence • Book review

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SUMMARY

EDITORIAL

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The Romanian Diplomatic Institute (RDI) dedicates the second 2023 issue of *România Occidentală* journal to Africa. The decision was not accidental, given that Africa is powerfully back on Romania's foreign policy agenda. Before 1989, our country developed significant relations with numerous African states that were going through different reconstruction processes in the post-colonial era. Trade exchanges, Romanian technology exports, and educational opportunities outlined a foreign policy in which African countries were receiving a great attention in Bucharest. After 1989, for three decades, our country's foreign policy went through major changes, being oriented by the values of democratic development as well as by the European and Euro-Atlantic integration. After the successful processes of joining NATO (2004) and the European Union (2007), Romania made essential efforts towards integration and enjoyed several advantages that led to economic growth and rising living standards to levels unprecedented in the history of the country, although regional inequalities remain visible. National security has improved to unprecedented levels, which is crucial for the stability and sustainable growth of our economy and society.

In this historical context, Romania is now ready to inaugurate a new stage of its development, one in which it also seeks to renew relations with longstanding partners, including countries of the wide and important African continent. The tour undertaken by President Klaus Iohannis in November 2023 to Kenya, Tanzania, Cabo Verde, and Senegal marked the beginning of this new phase. Shortly afterwards, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also publicly announced the release of the foreign policy paper *Romania's New Strategy for Africa: Partnership for the future through peace, development and education*.

On 18 December 2023, the strategy was presented to the press by the Romanian Foreign Affairs Minister, Luminița Odobescu, together with the State Secretary for Global Affairs and Diplomatic Strategies, Traian Hristea. Among the speakers at the press conference were Simona Corlan-Ioan, former Ambassador to several African countries and initiator of African studies programmes at the University of Bucharest, the Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt in Bucharest, H.E. Moayad Fathallah Mohamed El Dalie, and Mr. Mihai Sebe, representing the European Institute of Romania. The event took place at the Gafencu Hall of the MFA, in the presence of a large audience of foreign and Romanian diplomats, together with media representatives.

Considering that Africa is a continent with a high impact on future developments around the world, Romania's new strategy for this vast region is built on the core idea of partnership between equal actors, and as a particular contribution to the EU agenda for Africa. The starting point for this approach is the historically close relations between

Romania and many African states, but also between Romanian and African people who have established personal contacts over several decades. After a long period of stagnation, the time has come for Bucharest to renew its relations with its traditional African partners, also benefiting from the positive profile that it has built and maintained on this continent throughout contemporary history.

The Romanian Diplomatic Institute has joined this effort with three main inputs in 2023. The first one is the commitment to the organisation and implementation of the MFA training program attended by 22 diplomats from sub-Saharan Africa (22-28th October 2023). The second one was the lecture offered by the General Director of RDI within the framework of the training programme *Building resilience to disinformation in a changing communication environment* (3-8th July 2023), to which attended representatives of governments and mass media from 10 African countries, co-organised by the Romanian MFA and the Romanian Agency for International Development Cooperation (RoAID). The third contribution is represented by this special RDI's issue of *România Occidentală* journal, dedicated to Africa.

On this occasion, we offer our readers a selection of valuable texts signed by experts in the field. The opening article, signed by Secretary of StateTraian Hristea, has placed Romania's initiative in the current global context, through its new strategy for Africa. Simona Corlan-Ioan shared her vast experience as a diplomat in Francophone countries in Africa and as the founder of the oldest and most solid African studies programme in the Romanian, and even in the East-European academia. Two current Romanian ambassadors to Africa, H.E. Olivia Toderean (Egypt) and H.E. Nicolae Năstase (Senegal) contributed with diplomatic correspondence from the capitals where they represent our country.

In the analytical section, RDI researchers Mihai Constantinescu and Valentin Nicolescu proposed an evaluation of the "summit diplomacy" in the relations of global and regional leaders with Africa, and, respectively, a critical analysis of the idiom "failed state", concerning situations on the African continent. Sînziana Dumitrescu and Claudiu Codreanu (RDI) analyse the export of specific technologies by the People's Republic of China to some authoritarian regimes on the continent, while Adrian-Eugen Preda, lecturer at the University "Constantin Brâncuși" of Târgu Jiu, evaluates the influence of the Russian Federation in Africa through the actions of the Wagner Group. Israel Campos, a well-known Angolan journalist, takes a critical look at the global issue of human migration from conflict-affected areas of Africa.

Book recommendations are offered by Robert Gabriel Ciobanu, PhD student at the Interdisciplinary School of Doctoral Studies, University of Bucharest, and Adam Smith Fellow at the Mercatus Center, George Mason University, USA. The publications proposed are the first translations into Romanian of important works of David Mitrany, a Romanian-born British political scientist, namely *The Functional Theory of Politics* and *An Operational Peace System*. The prefaces of both volumes are signed by H.E. Mr. Marius Lazurcă, currently Romanian Ambassador to Mexico, a remarkable diplomat and intellectual. The editor-in-chief of RDI's publications, Delia Voicu, closes this issue of *România Occidentală*, as always, by presenting the main activities and achievements of RDI since the last issue's release.

AFRICA — A NEW STRATEGIC APPROACH IN ROMANIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

Traian Hristea
Secretary of State for Global Affairs and Diplomatic Strategies
Romanian MFA

NEW REFERENCE POINTS IN ROMANIAN FOREIGN POLICY

After the establishment of the democratic, constitutional, and pluralist political regime in 1990, Romania focused its foreign policy efforts for three decades on restoring, developing, and strengthening relations with its traditional partners and allies in Europe and North America. These relationships were significantly affected during the communist dictatorship and the "Cold War".

The efforts were aligned with the strategic objectives of NATO accession and EU integration. By achieving these goals in 2004 and 2007, Romania not only achieved two major foreign policy successes in the early 21st century, but also gained the most prestigious international status and the broadest security guarantees in its history.

However, after an initial decade (1991-2000) in which the pre-eminence of the US and the EU in global affairs was nearly unquestionable, the beginning of the current century coincided with an unprecedented acceleration of the dynamics of international relations: the 2001 terrorist attacks and the "global war on terrorism" launched by the US; Russia's return to a foreign policy based on a neo-Soviet imperial and revisionist project at the end of 1999; the 2008 financial crisis; the 2015 migrant crisis, seen as a direct security threat to post-war Europe (originating from the Middle East and Africa), which continues to the present day; and, last but not least, Russia's military aggression in Ukraine, launched on 24 February 2022.

Viewed holistically, this dynamic has dramatically changed the position, role, and prospects of the "southern hemisphere" (Asia, Africa, and Latin America) in the foreseeable global developments throughout the 21st century. This transformation is influenced not only by geopolitical and geoeconomic developments, but also by demographic changes. In 1900, the combined share of the West (Europe and North America) in the world's population was 33%, whereas today it stands at 16%. Projections for the year 2050 suggest a further decrease to only 12%.

In this global context influenced by systemic changes, **the need for a realignment in Romania's foreign policy gradually took shape**. This realignment needs to take into more prominent and pragmatic consideration the trends observed in the southern hemisphere, which hosts the emerging powers that will significantly influence the global order in the coming decades. Considering that the NATO and EU membership, as

well as the Strategic Partnership with the US, are now the cornerstones of guaranteeing the fundamental interests of the state and its citizens, Romania has synchronised with this global dynamics to adaptively pursue its national interests through increasing the attention and priority given to relations with countries in these three major complexes.

Last but not least, it is worth noting that Romania's trade relations with the entire African continent, as well as with states in Asia or Latin America, are characterised by a **trade surplus**. This partially offsets the significant deficits accumulated in relations with other states. This fact further justifies the increasing attention given by Romania's foreign policy to the southern hemisphere. The revitalisation of strategic involvement in these areas will open up additional economic opportunities, contributing to stabilising Romania's balance of trade and favouring the overall development of the country.

This **readjustment/rebalancing of attention to the southern hemisphere** comes forth in the context of a new level of regional and global relevance that Romania has gained, particularly in the last decade and especially after 2022, through its stance against Russia's military aggression in Ukraine. Through our country's prompt, multisectoral, and consistent response, which places the values and principles of the Euro-Atlantic security community at the centre of our political-diplomatic actions, Romania is part of the states having an increased geopolitical and geostrategic importance, willing to actively engage, alongside as many like-minded partners as possible, in defending the global order based on the principles of the UN Charter and international law. The context of the war in Ukraine makes it even more necessary for Romania to build at the global level relations that provide a broad platform for promoting our country's perspective and assessments on the situation in the Eastern Neighbourhood. Through these relations, Romania aims to actively contribute to shaping a more favourable global environment for promoting the interests and values of the Euro-Atlantic community.

AFRICA – CENTRAL ACTOR IN TODAY'S, AND MORE PRECISELY, TOMORROW'S WORLD

The 21st century will be strongly influenced by the pivotal role played by Africa, particularly sub-Saharan Africa, on a global scale. According to medium and long-term projections by the UN, the African continent will have a substantial impact on managing climate change, protecting vital ecosystems, global economic growth, ecological transition, and international security. Last but not least, Africa will play a particularly important role in the global balance of power. Unfortunately, from this perspective, Africa has (re)emerged over the past 20 years as a geopolitical battleground between state actors attempting to overturn/modify the international order based on the UN Charter of 1945 and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the UN in 1948, and state actors attempting to safeguard this order by seeking stability and development for the continent through its integration into the current international order.

It is not coincidental that Africa, the continent most exposed to risks of food insecurity, has become the most fertile ground for Russia's current false narratives and disinformation campaigns regarding its aggression against Ukraine and its consequences. On a broader scale, the "battle for the heart and mind of Africa" will be

decisive in the efforts of Western democracies to safeguard the current rules-based international order and the rule of law.

On the other hand, it should be noted that the decision adopted on 24 August 2023, at the 15th BRICS Summit in Johannesburg, to admit six new members, including two African state actors with a significant presence at the continental level – Ethiopia and Egypt – once again underscores the growing role of Africa in the architecture and dynamics of the so-called "Global South". Within the community of Western democracies, in fact, throughout the "Western world", we must be prepared to adapt to these developments, including by understanding that, in the absence of a substantial reform of the UN to reflect the global realities of the 2020s, and not those of 1945, several states from Africa (and similarly, Asia and Latin America) feel that their current weight – economic, political, demographic, etc. – is not adequately reflected in the institutional-decisional weight at the global level. The recent admission of the African Union as a member of the G20 at the New Delhi summit is a first step through which Africa reaffirms its place in global decision-making centres.

ROMANIAN-AFRICAN RELATIONS – UNDER THE SIGN OF A NEW BEGINNING

The massive reform efforts undertaken by Romania after 1989 in its domestic and foreign policy had an opportunity cost reflected in the decline in the intensity of Romania's cooperative relations with African states, which were at particularly high levels on multiple dimensions before the 1990s. There is still significant potential for Romania to define a specific role in Africa, complementing the visible reorientation of some of Romania's strategic partners toward the continent. In this regard, a decisive signal is the new *Romania – Africa Strategy: Partnership for the future through peace, development, and education*, approved at the highest level at the end of 2023.

Romania continues to enjoy a reservoir of fondness from African partners. They have expressed openness to cooperation with Romania on various occasions during bilateral contacts in recent years. More recently, the contacts of the Minister of Foreign Affairs with African partners on the sidelines of the high-level segment of the 77th session of the United Nations General Assembly (September 2022) revealed the opportunity for a consolidated dialogue on food security. The diplomatic tour of the President of Romania to Kenya, Tanzania, Cabo Verde, and Senegal confirmed this new dynamics in Romania's relations with Africa, and with our African partners and friends. Thus, Romania can and will capitalise, both bilaterally and in the European/Euro-Atlantic context, on its traditional relationships with several African states that have a well-defined regional profile, through a genuine and pragmatic revitalization of bilateral dialogue.

IMPACT OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE ON AFRICA AND ROMANIA'S ROLE IN THIS CONTEXT

One of the areas in which Romania engages in sincere and pragmatic dialogue with African states concerns the impact of the war in Ukraine on the rules-based international order, as well as on food security across the African continent.

Prior to the Russian invasion, Ukraine played a crucial role in ensuring food security, both in Europe and globally, and especially for African states. With an annual wheat production of 25-30 million tons, Ukraine, together with Russia, represented a third of the global wheat market, ranking seventh in the world for wheat production and sixth for corn production. Ukraine was also among the top three global exporters of wheat, corn, rapeseed, seeds, and sunflower oil. In the 2020/21 agricultural season, Ukraine was the fourth-largest global exporter of corn and ranked sixth in wheat exports, according to data from the International Grains Council.

Cereal exports accounted for nearly one-fifth of Ukraine's total exports, with 98% of them being shipped through the Black Sea ports. The port of Odessa alone represented 60% of the country's port activity, exporting 5 million tons of agricultural products monthly through the terminals in Odessa and Mykolaiv.

The Russian invasion in Ukraine severely disrupted the processing and export of grains from the country, consequently affecting global agricultural markets. This created a situation of global food insecurity – especially in Africa and the Middle East – during a post-Covid recovery period already characterised by inflationary pressures related to energy, raw materials, fertilizers, and freight transport.

In this equation, it is crucial not to forget that millions of people are already affected by famine and food insecurity, especially in Africa. According to the Global Report on Food Crises 2023 Mid-Year Update, 238 million people in 48 countries face severe food and nutritional insecurity, with the majority living in African countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan, and others.

Russia continues to promote a false narrative, somewhat successfully in the Southern Hemisphere, complicating the efforts of the EU and states willing to assist Ukraine, including in its food exports. A relatively recent move was made by Russia during the *2nd Russia-Africa Summit*, when it promised to deliver free cereals to African states such as Zimbabwe, Somalia, Eritrea, Mali, the Central African Republic, and Burkina Faso. Romania and like-minded states, however, continue firm actions to counter Russia's false and aggressive narrative and its intensions to use it, along with food, as weapons. Thus, together we create greater predictability and stability in the food market. Moreover, it is important to note that Russia's efforts have been doubled by aggressive and increasingly frequent actions which involve bombing the civilian infrastructure of Ukraine's Danube ports (after Russia's withdrawal from the Black Sea Grain Initiative – BSGI), adding tension and additional pressure to ensure grain transportation.

It is well known that since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, Romania has made multidimensional and multi-institutional efforts to support its neighbouring state, including facilitating the transit of cereals through Romania to global markets, including African ones. We considered this support natural, given our proximity to Ukraine and within the broader context of the joint effort at the European Union level through the *EU-Ukraine Solidarity Lanes Initiative* (SL). Launched in May 2022, this initiative aims to facilitate agricultural exports from Ukraine.

In this context, food security has been, since 2022, and continues to be, one of the main topics of interest on the international agenda. Romania has taken steps within the UN, EU, and other international organisations to promote concrete measures that contribute to avoiding a major global food crisis, including supporting the transit of cereals from Ukraine. Currently, there is one significant route for the export of cereals from Ukraine – *the EU-Ukraine Solidarity Lanes Initiative* (SL). This option has remained almost singular (except for sporadic and high-risk transport directly from Ukraine through the Black Sea) after Russia decided not to extend its participation in the Black Sea Grain Initiative (BSGI) from July 2023.

Romania's contribution to the *Solidarity Lanes* has been and continues to be over 60%, our country managing to contribute to ensuring food security for several African and Middle Eastern states, as well as contributing to building trust in international markets and reducing the price of cereals, which peaked in May 2022. The Port of Constanța, the largest at the Black Sea, has become the main exit gate for cereal shipments from Ukraine, facilitating the transit of over 30 million tons of cereals to third countries by the end of October 2023.

Starting in 2024, Romania will host a European Regional Agrometeorology Centre, innovative for Europe. Through the data it provides, the centre is a key factor in adapting food production systems to climate change and improving access to food globally, including in the Global South. The centre will also offer internships and training for agrometeorologists from developing countries, with a special focus on Africa, building on Romania's strong history of providing capacity-building training.

Moreover, the MFA, in collaboration with the Romanian Agency for International Development (RoAid), has organised a series of courses for African experts in recent years. The program aimed at enhancing the resilience of African societies to disinformation campaigns (Bucharest, July 2023) has also addressed topics related to Russian disinformation in the context of the war in Ukraine. The program, organised in cooperation with the National Sanitary, Veterinary and Food Safety Authority and the business environment in Romania (June 2023), focused on providing a detailed presentation of food safety standards at the EU level, among the highest in the world. Through the transfer of best practices, Romania aims to support the improvement of food safety in Africa, a key factor in the success of food systems in African countries.

Looking ahead, Romania can use its positive image capital constructively. Benefiting from the advantage of not having a colonial past, cultivating traditional relations with the entire African continent, and substantially contributing to the social development of many African states, Romania's positive image capital could influence the balance in favour of forming a more nuanced opinion about the overall activity of the Euro-Atlantic community and the importance of supporting the UN Charter.

DIPLOMACY IN AFRICA AND AFRICAN DIPLOMACY ON THE GLOBAL STAGE: OLD AND NEW CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT: *African diplomacy is at a turning point as the continent faces multiple challenges. From historical resentments with the West to the rise of new geopolitical players like China, India, and Turkey, Africa navigates a complex international landscape. Regional integration efforts face obstacles, exemplified by the stalled Arab Maghreb Union. The African Union, amidst reforms, is seeking to strengthen continental diplomacy, with leaders like Alpha Conde and Paul Kagame emphasizing financial autonomy. Migration is emerging as a central issue, straining EU cohesion, and requiring innovative diplomatic responses. Complementary diplomacy, including religious initiatives, is taking on an important role. As borders evolve, redefining identity and preserving national unity remain central concerns. Amidst these complexities, diplomacy emerges as a crucial tool for Africa to find cooperative solutions and shape its future on the global stage.*

Diplomacy plays a crucial role in ensuring stability and security in Africa, both within the continent, and on the global stage. Unfortunately, in the past few years, many African nations have been plagued by crises, ranging from military coups in Western Africa, to interethnic and religious conflicts in regions across Central and East Africa. The threat of terrorism has further complicated the situation, making it imperative for African states to work together to find comprehensive solutions. It is only through diplomacy and collaboration that Africa can overcome these old and new challenges and emerge as a strong and stable continent.

National diplomacies are becoming increasingly diverse and adaptive to complex realities on the continent, which is also witnessing the emergence of a new continental diplomacy, building on the institutional structures of the African Union. With each change in presidency, political leaders push for reforms and strengthening of the organisation's institutions, highlighting the importance of adapting to the ever-changing landscape of African diplomacy. The aspirations for a united and strong Africa, with a unique identity, that were expressed by the founding figures of independence, appeared to have lost their momentum in the later part of the 20th century due to the focus of political leaders on strengthening national sovereignty. However, these ideals have resurfaced with renewed relevance. In response to geopolitical shifts and the emergence of new centres of economic development and identity articulation, regional

integration initiatives that include political, economic, and cultural dimensions are becoming more diverse and refined.

In addition to the unique challenges faced by African diplomacy, the ever-changing global landscape requires continuous adjustments and evaluations in the way that countries and the continent as a whole position themselves on the international political stage. Diplomatic strategies have become more intricate due to the increasing number of pressing issues on the agenda and the diversity of actors involved. In the realm of foreign policy, there have been significant changes in the way things are done, including cooperation between nations, diplomatic negotiations to resolve conflicts, and addressing issues such as terrorism, migration, and global governance. These areas face complex challenges nowadays. With the globalisation of international affairs, the monopoly of states over diplomacy has diminished. The involvement of various economic structures, universities, media networks, NGOs, and the diaspora have contributed to the complexity of diplomacy due to the diverse interests and concerns among the parties involved.

To thoroughly analyse African diplomacy, one must consider three levels of approach – national, regional, and continental – and the complementary diplomacies that are involved, such as economic, cultural, academic, religious, and institutional diplomacy. In addition, it is important to acknowledge the presence of new actors with distinct practices who have gained recognition on the global stage. Despite new approaches, many of the priority issues have remained unchanged, and the connection with the past is what gives African diplomacy its specificity.

The relationship between Africa and the West has been greatly affected by past resentments that have been present for centuries, including the slave trade, racist theories, colonization, and decolonization. In recent times, African political leaders have been trying to move past this history by establishing a new political and economic alliance with Asia. This new orientation is evident in the increasing cooperation between Africa and countries like China, India, and Turkey.

China became Africa's leading trading partner in the first decade of the 21st century. The Sino-African Cooperation Forum held in Beijing in September 2018 saw participation from all 53 heads of states and governments from the continent, highlighting the significant importance African states place on this relationship. On the first day of the meeting, President Xi Jinping pledged "the unconditional" assistance of $60 billion to Africa, which coincided with investments made in infrastructure over the past decades. The cultural diplomacy efforts centred around the network of *Confucius Institutes*, and a scholarship system was introduced to train new professionals, technicians, and journalists. These elements are essential in understanding the foundations of this ongoing cooperation.

China's engagement with African nations is not solely driven by economic interests. Political considerations have played a crucial role in shaping the relations with each nation on the continent. In particular, China has prioritised the issue of Taiwan, seeking to persuade states that had previously recognised Taiwan to switch their allegiance to China. To achieve this goal, Beijing has utilised all available diplomatic resources

at its disposal. China's foreign policy decisions have gained significant support from representatives of African countries in international forums, and its positions are rarely challenged. This has established China as a viable alternative when the West imposes sanctions on regimes that violate principles of good governance and human rights. It is worth noting that African nations are not limiting their cooperation with the United States, the European Union, or other emerging countries despite the growing importance of Asian countries in the African continent's politics and economy.

The national boundaries of modern-day Africa reflect its changing demographics, urbanisation, economic, military, and religious aspirations. In this context, borders, whether physical or symbolic, historical or natural, are both defended and contested amidst identity redefinitions. Many of the challenges that the African continent faced after gaining independence and forming new nations are still relevant and reflected in contemporary diplomacy. The most sensitive issue among them is the preservation of national unity.

After gaining independence, the political map of most African nations remained the same as it was during the colonial era. This was because the Western powers that drew the maps did not take into consideration natural landmarks, economic factors, ethnic groups, or languages. Some attempts were made to restructure political maps, based on ethnic, national, or historical criteria, but these were mostly unsuccessful. In 1964, the Organization of African Unity passed a resolution in Cairo that mandated the preservation of colonial borders. This put the responsibility of ensuring national unity and cohesion on national states, and made it their challenge to provide a common sense of purpose for the nation-building processes.

During the colonial period, political territories were established and national borders were superimposed over them. Other complex boundaries were also defined based on economic and cultural criteria. After the end of colonialism, diplomacy has been used to support the respective national causes and maintain the integrity of newly-formed states. Political and diplomatic priorities have been largely determined by the presidents of the newly independent states, reflecting their will. An interesting example of this can be seen in Senegal. The 1960s were marked by the Cold War, when Western and communist countries were hostile towards each other. In response to this, President Léopold Sédar Senghor, an African intellectual of Western cultural influence, developed African diplomacy based on three core principles. These principles were African identity (*negritude*), the rule of law, and modernity. The aim of this diplomacy was to create a strong "African presence" on the global stage, with a unified voice that would be heard and respected. The approach was aimed at maintaining a balanced stance towards both the West and the Communist Bloc.

The establishment of multiparty systems and democratic transitions in the early 1990s made it challenging to justify national constructions and the structure of the nation-state due to the assertion of diverse cultural identities in electoral processes. These developments destabilized the national borders, which were protected by the OAU Charter. One effect was a certain reduction in the opportunities for genuine political intervention and a distortion of the principle of national citizenship.

In recent times, political, cultural, ethnic, and religious differences have caused new tensions on the continent during moments of crisis. From 1992 to 2002, and from 2002 to 2012, the leaders of Mali, Alpha Oumar Konaré and Amadou Toumani Touré respectively, set an example of democracy. The Mali crisis was handled effectively at regional and continental levels, providing hope and strengthening confidence in the political leadership capacities in Africa. National diplomacies unanimously advocated for the imperative need to preserve the territorial integrity of the Malian nation, which was threatened by the declaration of independence of Azawad on May 27, 2012, and the proclamation of an independent Islamic State in the northern part of the country. The danger of ethnic and religious conflict, manipulated politically and leading to the emergence of "killer identities," was perceived more acutely than ever at that time. It was important not to set a precedence of failure and all diplomatic leverage was employed towards this purpose.

Despite facing numerous obstacles, regional integration continues to be seen as a viable solution in the medium term for creating a sense of coherence within cultural constructions that are still in the process of being defined. In recent decades, priority was increasingly given to strengthening regional institutions as a means of counteracting the fragility of the national ones. The success of regional economic structures provides a positive example of this approach. ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States), ECCAS (Economic Community of Central African States), CEMAC (Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa), and UEMOA (West African Economic and Monetary Union) are making progress towards strengthening themselves and becoming effective, despite challenges faced by their member states. However, political issues have turned out to be stronger in some cases, hindering regional integration. The Arab Maghreb Union (UMA) is currently unable to act, as long as the land border between Algeria and Morocco remains closed. Additionally, relations between Tunisia and Morocco have become strained after the recent withdrawal of ambassadors.

The consolidation of regional diplomacy, based on shared political cultures, could serve as the foundation for continental diplomacy. This later type is meant to counteract various, detrimental forms of national leadership and pride. The African Union (AU), which succeeded the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), was established in 2002 with the goal of promoting democracy, human rights, and overall development across the continent.[1] With 55 member states, the Union is now undergoing a period of reform, as new leaders seek to restore its moral authority and make it a true regulator and mediator of regional policies.

The 29th summit of heads of state in July 2017, dedicated to youth and reform, was named *Le Sommet de l'emancipation de la tutelle étrangère et de la prise en main de leur destin*.[2] The then-elected president of the AU, Guinea's President Alpha Conde,

[1] The treaty establishing the AU was signed in Duban, South Africa, in July 2002, thus implementing the Declaration of Syrte of September 9, 1999. A year later, on the occasion of the Maputo Summit in Mozambic, a set of documents was signed, which established the institutions of the AU: the Commission, the Pan-African Parliament, and the Peace and Security Council.

[2] Jeune Afrique (July 3, 2017).

aimed to reform the organisation during his mandate by streamlining its functioning and ensuring financial self-sufficiency through each member state contributing 0.2% of the value of exports. Approximately 70% of the funds needed for operation are international, with major contributors being China, Turkey, the EU, and the USA. A committed pan-Africanist and advocate for common policies on the continent, Alpha Conde advocated for greater political and economic integration, the development of trade among African countries through the establishment of free-trade zones, the introduction of the African passport (initially for diplomats), a common defence policy for the rights of the African diaspora, and the promotion of the principles of the African Union's operation on the continent. *L'Académie de leadership de l'Union Africaine* (AULA) is expected to take on the mission of training the continental elite that will implement programs and adhere to the Union's agenda until 2063. It will also be responsible for developing a new long-term strategic vision for Africa.

Rwanda's President Paul Kagame, succeeding Alpha Conde as the head of the Union, continued the reformist approach, particularly emphasizing measures to ensure effective financial management and consequently, the organisation's independence. His focus on financial management was foreseeable, given that Kagame had been appointed since 2016 to lead the institutional reform process of the African Union. In that quality, he headed a pan-African committee of experts tasked with proposing programs for Agenda 2063 as solutions to the continent's challenges. However, the assessment of his tenure fell short of satisfaction. The presidency of the pan-African organisation returned to Egypt in 2019, with President Al Sissi expressing intentions to concentrate on reforms for a better economic integration of member states. This aligned with Egypt's significant exports to African markets. Equally ambitious was the project to shift geographic priorities in AU policies, giving greater importance to the Horn of Africa, Libya, and the Sahel.

Economic issues remained a priority for subsequent presidencies, as evidenced by President Azali Assoumani's intervention at the Russia-Africa summit, addressing the cereal crisis resulting from the conflict in Ukraine. Recent coups that brought military leaders to power in Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Gabon made it challenging to achieve a common continental position.

However, complementary diplomacies have proven to be particularly effective in recent years when national states faced challenges of unprecedented magnitude, such as migration and terrorism, necessitating changes in attitudes and practices. Political leaders from both migrant-origin and destination countries have made efforts to build a common strategy based on a set of shared historical, cultural, and civilisational values. These values, promoted by diplomacy with a unified voice, facilitate understanding and acceptance of the Other/Compatriot within the nation. Over time, a diplomacy for the diaspora has also been forged, allowing institutions of African states to implement policies for the defence of citizens who have chosen to live abroad. However, political strategies alone are unlikely to be effective when easily manipulated media becomes a significant opinion shaper, creating a new enemy: the migrant-terrorist. In a world frenzied by the immediate consequences of population exodus from Africa and terrorist

attacks, in a world increasingly discussing clashes between civilisations, cultural diplomacy plays a crucial role alongside various humanitarian organisations. Its task is to raise public awareness of the refugee crisis and gradually change mindsets.

Migration within the African continent has been a longstanding challenge for national states. The phenomenon is driven, among other factors, by political instability, interethnic conflicts, and natural disasters. Few projects have proposed medium- or long-term solutions to address this issue. In recent years, migration from Africa to the West has become a foundational topic in international negotiations. Whether it is economic migration, or a result of long-standing acute interethnic conflicts, civil wars, or the policies of dictators who view respect for human rights as merely optional, Western Europe has faced sustained pressure that risks causing long-term imbalance.

At the European Union level, no other issue has deepened the divide between east and west to such an extent, jeopardizing the very survival of the Union. Fences have been erected at the old borders between member countries, rendering some of its founding principles meaningless. Parts of the media have embraced accusations following the line set by certain politicians, demonising and holding responsible the Other/Migrant for the problems facing national states, regardless of their nature. The solutions proposed by Western political leaders to address the migration phenomenon have remained only on paper.

The agreement signed by the heads of states and governments, gathered at the European Council Summit on June 29, 2018, was focused on measures to alleviate the crisis, better protect borders, and strengthen reception rules within the Union. It envisioned the voluntary reception of migrants from Africa and the Middle East in refugee centres in member countries. To facilitate the process, the establishment of landing platforms in North African and Balkan countries was suggested – a kind of facility where asylum requests would be processed and screened, allowing EU Member States, also on a voluntary basis, to take in selected individuals.

Reactions from countries outside the bloc were negative, despite substantial funds promised for this purpose. Morocco and Tunisia, through their foreign ministers, immediately rejected the proposal to host such bases, simultaneously recalling the efforts their countries are making from their new position as transit and destination countries for migration from sub-Saharan regions. The Maghreb countries, facing their own political and economic challenges after the Arab Spring, are struggling with the exodus from sub-Saharan Africa. The confrontations in 2023 between the residents of the city of Sfax in Tunisia and migrants awaiting opportunities to reach Europe precisely reflect the complex level reached in this situation.

In the realm of complementary diplomacies, religious diplomacy will also play a significant role in defending and promoting the true values of different civilisations. Morocco has already taken the first steps in this direction. As a promoter of moderate Islam, the kingdom inaugurated on March 27, 2015, in Rabat, an institute – *L'Institut Mohammed VI de formation des imams prédicateurs et prédicatrices* – with the aim of training imams to promote the just values of the Muslim religion and prevent extremist tendencies by preaching in mosques in Europe and Africa. On September 19, 2015,

through a joint statement in Paris and Rabat, France and Marocco expressed their support for the proposal that the Mohammed VI Institute, in cooperation with mosques and associations in France, should start the training program.

Globalization and the reshaping of borders, coups and wars, terrorism, migration, identity and cultural redefinitions are challenges that leaders worldwide must face and find solutions for at a rapid pace. Forms of diplomatic cooperation and negotiation have multiplied and refined, as diplomats strive to cope with ever-changing situations, complex geopolitics, and the overloaded agenda of international relations. The international diplomatic landscape has changed, and African and Western diplomacies have followed its rhythms, with many old issues regarding the past being more relevant than ever.

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SUMMIT DIPLOMACY. CONCEPTUAL REPOSITIONING IN THE CONTEXT OF AFRICA + 1 MEETINGS

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ABSTRACT: *This study scrutinizes the evolving engagement of Africa in global summit diplomacy and the emergent Africa+1 format. The research has delved into two interrelated dimensions: conceptual roots of summit diplomacy and the African context, dissecting theoretical underpinnings and historical perspectives on high-level meetings. It underscores the significance of these summits as platforms for diplomatic manoeuvring, shedding light on Africa's strategic repositioning. The investigation incorporates five key Africa+1 case studies (Turkey, China, European Union, United States, Russian Federation), elucidating recent engagements and their impact on Africa's geopolitical landscape. However, amid heightened diplomatic engagements, inherent challenges and paradoxes emerge. Issues of conflicting agendas, bureaucratic complexities, and ethical dilemmas surface, potentially diluting the efficacy of summit diplomacy. The research advocates for a nuanced reevaluation, emphasizing the imperative for cohesive African positions and sustainable solutions to leverage the continent's engagement in global forums.*

INTRODUCTION

On March 2nd, 2022, the United Nations General Assembly was summoned to adopt Resolution ES-11/1 condemning the large-scale act of aggression launched by the Putin regime against Ukraine only a few days earlier. Although the emotion of the moment was strong, and the result of the vote was expected to be overwhelming, the reality showed the opposite. The African continent was the striking case in that context. There was considerable media and diplomatic pressure. Few expected African states to take a discordant note and not to vote for the adoption of Resolution ES-11/1. However, out of 54 African countries, 26 abstained, were absent, or voted against the adoption of that resolution. What was presented in the international media outlets as a major diplomatic success covered in fact a simple truth. Africa, a central space in the strategies of the great powers, a continent with colossal natural and human resources, reiterates something already obvious: the continent is ready to take advantage of the centrality and notoriety it enjoys, being willing to have non-partisan discussions with all international actors.

Considering the debates on Africa's revised posture in relation to the international environment, how the continent engages in discussions at the highest level with powerful actors of the system deserves in-depth analysis. Recently, the phenomenon of summit diplomacy has gained momentum, being essentially described as a set

of programmatic events bringing together senior officials in a limited setting. The meetings enjoy increasing popularity at the level of the great chancelleries and are closely watched by the international public opinion. Thus, the analysis of the summits in which Africa is the protagonist offers important clues about the efficiency and usefulness of this format of meetings. At the same time, it can provide explanations on the strategy recently adopted by African states regarding the engagement in non-partisan relations, with an improved margin of material or immaterial profit.

The following analysis is based on a two-dimensional, complementary approach. The first section consists of a structured presentation of the theoretical roots and conceptual developments that summits have undergone over the past 70 years. The second section proposes five examples of high-level meetings with Africa at the centre (Turkey, China, European Union, United States, Russian Federation). They are presented in chronological order, focusing on the most recent summits and on the decisions and policies adopted in the "Africa+1" format. The analysis of the five case studies exposes the relations with Africa of the main actors indicated above, while also introducing Turkey as a variable of summit diplomacy undertaken by regional powers with concrete influence on the extended space of the Black and Mediterranean Seas.

SUMMIT DIPLOMACY. CONCEPTUAL REPOSITIONING

Epistemological beginnings

Winston Churchill is credited as the conceptual founder of summit diplomacy less than four years after he also launched the idea of the "Iron Curtain" (Melissen, 2003). In the vision of the former British Prime Minister, diplomacy needed to scale up the mediatization of bilateral relations, the summits providing the ideal framework for debating global issues under a broader spotlight. Thus, at the beginning of the 1950s, against the backdrop of increasing tensions between the Communist and the Western blocs, the need was felt to create direct channels of communication between the leaders of the two ideological camps. In addition, television was beginning to rise in popularity, with the summits being widely shown at prime time in both the Western democratic and Communist spaces (Melissen, 2003).

In the early phase, high-level meetings appealed to collective emotion. The meetings benefited from extensive publicity both before and after the event, trying to capitalize on concerns generated by a fragile international context (Day & Wedderburn, 2022). Gradually, senior decision-makers have noticed that, regardless of the outcome of the discussions, summits provided a generous stage and an important audience through which they could carve out a solid personal brand. Not infrequently, political leaders have used the diplomacy of emotion for quick image gains, a recent and easy example being the case of Donald Trump. Surrounded by controversy both at home and abroad, the former President of the United States has used the sensitive North Korea file for personal gain. Meetings in Singapore and Vietnam with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un,

peppered with acid exchanges of words and tendentious rescheduling of events, remain reference points in the conceptual analysis of summits (Brookings, 2019).

Conceptually, summit diplomacy does not have a precise definition, discussions focusing rather on those basic characteristics that embody the term. So, we refer to summits as a precise event, organised with the goal of solving concrete aspects of international politics, through channels of direct communication between heads of state and government or high representatives (Mishra, 2022; Plischke, 1972). Therefore, unlike other forms of diplomatic interaction, summits propose a more flexible format, with strategic valences that underpin, through joint statements, follow-up projects and discussions among participants.

Africa and the summit diplomacy game

The need of high-level interactions between Africa and the rest of the world has come against the backdrop of a mutual desire for deeper engagement. In the early stage, the daily diplomacy of African states suffered due to a reduced apparatus of representation in transcontinental relations which, additionally, was mostly constituted of people who occupied diplomatic positions via clientelist chains (Mishra, 2022). Furthermore, according to the South African author Colin Legum, post-colonial Africa went through a steep process of self-awareness regarding its own position in relation to other regions. Thus, the leaders of African states, crushed by significant frictions and gaps, considered the summits a historic chance to implement an intrinsic need to solve Africa's problems through a consolidated unity of the pan-African group (Legum, 1961).

An early form of summit diplomacy involving African states derives from the continent's own colonial past. Likewise, the Francophone and Anglophone areas maintained active communication with France and United Kingdom, participating in various discussion forums, but without producing notable results (Mishra, 2022). However, this type of diplomatic exercise contributed to the coagulation of a continental identity, later exported at the level of the United Nations General Assembly where, regularly, extended groups of African states adopted common positions (Mishra, 2022). Moreover, it can be affirmed that the diplomatic exercise enhanced the vision that led to the adoption of the Charter of the Organization of African Unity, the forerunner of the current African Union.

Analysing the reasons behind the development of coherent formats of high-level meetings between African countries and the international environment must have a binary perspective on the founding interests. On the one hand, France, by virtue of traditional relations and influence, is considered the pioneer of summit diplomacy in Africa. In 1986, in Versailles, the first meeting of the International Organization of Francophonie was held, a platform through which Paris aimed to cement its strategic position in former colonies (Perspective Monde, 2023). On the other hand, African leaders, in a perpetual continental competition for the absorption of influence and

resources, considered the summits an ideal tool through which to consolidate their power and image in domestic politics, as well as a platform with global visibility on economic and security issues (Soulé, 2020). A major example is the Dakar Consensus, a joint statement by six heads of state and government from the West African region, a manifesto that sought to stimulate a reshuffle of the traditional way through which the International Monetary Fund deals with foreign direct investment, or FDI (Faujas, 2019).

Gradually, summit interactions branched out into two complementary dimensions. First, more and more states of the world began to consider Africa a priority region. If during the Cold War the summits were the exclusive prerogative of the great powers, currently the middle powers, as well as relatively small states in terms of global influence, have begun to engage in high-level discussion formats. South Korea, Turkey, Estonia, or Hungary are just a few recent examples in this regard. On the other hand, African leaders have been constantly receptive to the development of relations with the world, growing aware that the summits strengthen their own legitimacy and represent an opportunity for the thematic management of Africa's problems, many of the meetings addressing aspects related to critical infrastructure, climate change or public policy (Soulé, 2020).

Summit diplomacy. A pragmatic approach

Any element developed in an inorganic manner risks being emptied of its essence. This is also the case of summit diplomacy. Currently, we are discussing at least four transcontinental meetings that focus on Africa: EU – Africa; USA – Africa; Russia – Africa; China – Africa. These meetings have an increasing frequency, limiting real progress on resolving cases of regional, or even systemic relevance. Apart from *ad hoc* summits dealing with pressing issues, such as migration, or food security, the rest of the formal meetings face a major risk of generating incompatible and overlapping long-term policies. For instance, policies regarding the reduction of the negative effects of climate change, a phenomenon that mainly affects Africa, stagnate due to a discursive and decision-making incoherence. Actors such as the European Union or China propose divergent policies, often accepted without question by African leaders (Van Wyk, 2018).

Moreover, summits can become a highly bureaucratic, super-stratified and sometimes cynical phenomenon. First, the two days that usually make up a high-level meeting are preceded by a multitude of meetings of the working groups and ministries involved. For African states with limited diplomatic resources, in a scheme involving at least one summit a year, the format tends to become tiresome and unproductive. Secondly, most summits are accompanied by a wide range of related events, usually dedicated to the business environment. Although the strengthening of economic relations remains an essential objective of high-level meetings, emphasizing this dimension risks jeopardizing the development and management capacity of the other sectors. Third, it becomes almost impossible to accommodate common interests in an ethical context. Many African leaders or those close to them are subject to international

sanctions, with the European Union and the United States often overriding their own principles and sanctions (Van Wyk, 2018).

SUMMIT DIPLOMACY. FIVE CASE STUDIES

Summit diplomacy. Turkey – Africa

Turkey aims to become a key player in relations with Africa, the continent offering a viable alternative as well as significant opportunities for Ankara in its strategic repositioning in the extended Black Sea and Mediterranean area. Following the example of global powers, in the last 15 years, Ankara has organised 3 summits with the African Union, most recently in 2021 (Özkan & Orakçı, 2023). The first meeting took place in 2008, without notable progress in terms of joint projects, but with considerable success regarding increasing diplomatic interactions. Since 2005, President Erdoğan has undertaken 31 official visits to Africa, while the number of Turkish embassies on the continent has increased from 12 to 43, and that of the representations of African states in Ankara has reached 32 in a relatively short period (Republic of Turkey – Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023).

Turkey's presence in Africa aims both to strengthen economic exchanges and security related aspects. According to several sources, the total value of trade between the two sides varies between 25 and 35 billion dollars annually (Özkan & Orakçı, 2023). Moreover, the summits stimulated the establishment of 43 business councils, with an increase in trade volume forecasted to reach over 50 billion dollars in the coming years (Özkan & Orakçı, 2023). Turkey also proposes an active involvement in the management of security problems in Africa, joining UN peacekeeping efforts in countries such as Liberia, or the Democratic Republic of Congo, as well as anti-piracy actions in the Horn of Africa (Tanrıverdi Yaşar, 2022). Additionally, Turkey recently inaugurated a centre dedicated to military training in Somalia (TURKSOM), which aims to train the security forces in the region of the capital city, Mogadishu (Nordic Monitor, 2022). Finally, the summits strengthened Turkey's presence in Africa, including in the fields of health and education. Since 2016, the Maarif, a foundation controlled by the government in Ankara, has become an important vector of Turkey in supporting primary and secondary education on the African continent (Özkan & Orakçı, 2023).

Summit diplomacy. China – Africa

For China's great power ambitions, summit diplomacy is strongly rooted in the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. The principles were developed in the context of the signing of the Sino-Indian Agreements in 1954 and aim to develop fair and mutually beneficial relations, as well as aspects related to respecting the territorial integrity of the partner states (Eekelen & Van Eekelen, 1968). With this strategic foundation, relations between China and Africa have developed naturally, Beijing seeking to capitalise on Russia's temporary disengagement in the 1990s. China presents itself as an optimal alternative to the neo-liberal policies promoted by the United States in the logic of the Washington Consensus. Therefore, in 2000, the Forum on China – Africa Cooperation

(FOCAC) emerged. This platform, established to some extent at the suggestion of the former prime minister of Madagascar, Lila Ratsifandrihamanana, also became one of the first regional forums in which Beijing took part (Mishra, 2022).

However, the dynamics of relations between China and Africa seem to have taken a new turn. The last FOCAC meetings have concluded without major results, limiting themselves to maintaining a convenient *status quo*. On the one hand, since 2009, China remains Africa's main trading partner, with Beijing being a net exporter to its African partners (LSE, 2021). On the other hand, Africa's absorption rate of Chinese foreign direct investment was only four percent, hampering the rate of development of several major infrastructure projects (LSE, 2021). The most recent FOCAC summit took place in 2021, for the first time in an online format. It was a relatively awkward meeting from a strategic point of view, but highly productive in terms of health diplomacy, China being one of Africa's main suppliers of vaccines during the COVID-19 pandemic (Shinn & Eisenman, 2023). However, in the context of major military crises in several hot spots of the planet, FOCAC 2024 promises to be a real feast both for African leaders focused on the strategy of diversifying transcontinental relations, as well as for the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party. As significant boost to economic development, they can access new markets and areas rich in natural resources on the African continent (Shinn & Eisenman, 2023).

Summit diplomacy. European Union – Africa

We can currently discuss about six editions of the EU-Africa summit. Although the origin of high-level meetings can be identified in the 60s, with the major reform undergone by the European Union through the Maastricht Treaty (1992), the high-level meetings between representatives of the Union and African leaders are a rather recent development. Gradually, African states also began to participate in summits under the African Union's umbrella, taking over the model proposed by Brussels through which singular interests are better represented in a compact group (Locke, 2018). But the summits continued to bring together dozens of heads of state and government. This made it difficult on different occasions to reach unanimously accepted joint statements, while some of the concrete actions agreed on were eventually postponed.

The 6th EU-Africa summit took place on 17-18 February 2022, just six days before Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The most important aspect of the meetings resides in the adoption of the EU-Africa 2030 Common Vision, a programmatic document that aims to provide guidelines for a multi-sectoral development between the two blocs (African Union, 2022). Among the component elements, Vision 2030 includes aspects related to the consolidation of relations on the dimensions of solidarity, peace, security, and sustainable economic development (Danglade & De Toulmin, 2023). Following the 2022 summit, the African continent has gone through an extensive process of transformation under the auspices of the African Union. The most notable is the implementation of the Continental Free Trade Agreement, an essential step in the creation of a single African market similar to the European one (Danglade & De Toulmin, 2023).

Summit diplomacy. United States of America – Africa

From 13 to 15 of December, 2022, Washington D.C. hosted the most recent US-Africa summit. Bringing together 45 African leaders and the African Union, the summit focused on the idea of enhancing bilateral relations in an expanded framework, addressing topics such as climate change, development, and food security (Ray, 2022). However, the tense situation in Taiwan and the full-scale war started by the Russian Federation in Ukraine were the background issues that dominated discussions. The Biden Administration tried in this context to outline a response to the growing influence of Beijing and Moscow in Africa.

Four main aspects emerge from the meetings held at the end of 2022. First, President Biden expressed his firm desire to include the African Union in the G20, an initiative supported by the EU through the voice of the European Commission. The accession to the G20 format represents a significant step and a strong signal that global leaders are giving Africa a key role in the future international system (Mason et al., 2022). A financial aid package of $50 billion was also announced for African states between 2022 and 2025, with another $15 billion in investments and joint economic and social development endeavours (Prosper Africa, 2023).

However, the December 2022 summit called into question two other promises made by President Biden. The long-awaited African tour of the American leader, an event that should have taken place in 2023, will most likely be rescheduled without any solid explanation and with consequences that are still difficult to anticipate (Lemire, 2023). Another negative aspect concerns the presence of Teodoro Obiang at the summit, the Equatorial Guinea dictator being targeted by several international sanctions and being involved in numerous corruption scandals. This detail calls into question Joe Biden's claims about the need to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms (Detsch, 2022).

Summit diplomacy. Russian Federation – Africa

Although the relations between the Russian Federation and Africa are closely related to the Cold War period, the large-scale invasion against Ukraine has changed the nature of the interplay. During the Cold War, Soviet Union promoted itself as an ideological alternative to the neo-colonial policies attributed to the United States and Western Europe. Having a strong desire to diminish the influence of the old metropolises, many African states accepted the hand extended by the Soviets. In the first phase, it was mainly about providing military training to African liberation movements. But the end of the colonial period and Cold War put Russia in a relatively comfortable position on the African continent, having close relations with most states through different energy and security related policies (Ogunbadejo, 1980).

Returning to the present, the attitude of African countries towards the Russian Federation is nevertheless paradoxical. In the vote to condemn the Kremlin's unjust actions against Ukraine, the African bloc abstained *en masse*. However, the same actors also decided not to honour the invitation to send heads of state or government to the Russia – Africa summit held in July 2023 in St. Petersburg (Katamadze, 2023). The summit, held from 27 to 28 of July, 2023 in St. Petersburg was an atypical one.

Placed in the context of the recent *coup d'état* in Niger and the decision of the Russian Federation to temporarily suspend the Agreement on Grains Transportation through the Black Sea, the summit brought together only 17 African heads of state and government. Unlike previous editions, most states decided to send delegations consisting of lower-ranking representatives in response to Moscow's bellicose policy (Klyszcz, 2023).

Although the meetings were perceived by international public opinion as talks "between friends", the African leaders did not shy away from challenging Putin regime's decision to block Ukrainian grain exports, some of them calling for a quick mediation of the situation (Bilban & Hainzl, 2023). However, tough discussions were rather peripheral, Vladimir Putin directing the attention of the participants to the importance of Russia's military presence in Africa. Thus, in line with the essay signed by Putin in the summer of 2023 (Putin, 2023), Russia is committed to provide military support to African partners seeking an alternative to the presence of the United States and Western Europe on the continent (Bilban & Hainzl, 2023).

All in all, the 2023 edition of the Russia-Africa summit, although dominated by major organisational and logistical problems, brought gains on both sides. For African leaders close to Putin regime, Russia remains a guardian of the perpetuation of their own authoritarian regimes.[1] It should be noted Russia's initiative to deliver a considerable volume of cereals to the continent, in theory free of charge and in practice with a preferential regime for friends (Bilban & Hainzl, 2023). For Moscow, the meeting in St. Petersburg served as an image shot against China and the West, trying to reaffirm Russia's global reach as well as to break through the diplomatic blockade started by the international community after February 24 full-scale invasion.

CONCLUSIONS

Conceptually, summit diplomacy remains an ambiguous term without concrete or specific characteristics. Emerging from a practical need to quickly resolve systemic problems during the Cold War, summit diplomacy faces difficulties of a theoretical nature. On the one hand, summits provide a stage with an extended area of media coverage, enhancing both the reputation of the leaders and the attention given to the topics addressed. However, the increased frequency of +1 type meetings dilutes the conceptual essence through contradictory approaches and complicates the bureaucratic and diplomatic process at ministerial and institutional level. Moreover, exacerbating sensitive topics, such as the North Korean nuclear file, or the climate change, may affect the long-term credibility of summit diplomacy.

The Africa+1 format complements the assumption on the declining effectiveness of summits and the need for a conceptual and empirical repositioning. The need for African leaders to assert themselves at the international level, as well as the pressing problems of the continent (demographic explosion, slow economic development, security instability) are part of the reasons that underpin the desire of global powers

[1] Regarding this aspect, see also the text by Adrian Eugen Preda in this issue of *România Occidentală*.

to engage in in-depth discussions with Africa. The analysis of the most recent Africa+1 summits highlighted the need for repositioning, especially on the African side. The lack of a common position at the African Union level, the contradictory partisanships of African states in relation to the United States, China, or Russia, affect the effectiveness of the summits, as well as their capacity to formulate concrete, sustainable, and advantageous solutions for the harmonious development of Africa.

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FAILED STATES OR FAILED SCIENCE? DISCUSSING THE ASSUMPTIONS BEHIND THE FAILED STATES THEORY. A CRITICAL REASSESSMENT

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ABSTRACT: *For more than 30 years, academics and policymakers have employed the "failed state" theory to address a plethora of political, social, economic, and cultural phenomena predominantly appearing in the postcolonial world. Over time, the term has been widely adopted in various circles, including in the media. Nevertheless, the literature in the field is still suffering from several fundamental conceptual problems, such as ignoring the diversity of existing states, conflating the absence of central government with anarchy, and the normative distinction between "accomplished" and "failed" states by relating to a particular understanding of statehood, or the path-dependent ideological belief in the convergence of all nation-states (see Call, 2008, 1491-2). After the 9/11 attacks, the research regarding failed states was significantly boosted in terms of resources and intellectual interest, whilst core issues regarding the theory and development of the concept remained relatively out of the debate.*

In this paper, for the issue of the România Occidentală *journal dedicated to Africa, I aim to address this issue critically by exploring the assumptions upon which the failed states field is built. Usually, we are asking "Why do states fail?" instead of "What is state failure, and why do we conceptualize it as such and not differently?" Therefore, what is it "failing" and how are we thinking about it? Thus, instead of focusing* ab initio *on how state failure can be understood and defined, or on its causes and effects, I plan to adopt a different approach, aiming to critically examine the intellectual infrastructure behind the failed states concept.*

INTRODUCTION

On the 26th of July 2023, the Presidential Guard in Niger announced on national television that President Mohamed Bazoum and his family were detained and that a newly formed junta – the National Council for the Safeguarding of the Homeland – took the reins of power, thus ending Niger's democratic regime for the time being. This was the 7th coup d'état in sub-Saharan Africa since 2020, illustrating the region's endemic issues in terms of political stability, and the trend of undemocratic transfer of power which characterised the African continent since decolonisation (Roessler, 2016).

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Similarly, during the first half of 2023, yet another civil war erupted in Sudan, this time opposing the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the ethnically Arabic paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) of Janjaweed origins. By the time this paper was written, there were serious reports regarding another Darfur massacre by the RSF and their allies, particularly in the town of Geneina in West Darfur, which was reportedly transformed into a ghost town (Qiblawi, Goodwin, Elbagir, Alkhaldi, 2023).

The Sahel and Sudanese crises are epitomic for the so-called failed states phenomenon, encompassing widespread political instability, extreme poverty, personalisation of power and the coup trap, a recurrent humanitarian and refugee crisis, endemic corruption, violent paramilitary rebellions and civil wars, weak institutions and so forth. This also appears to show another important characteristic of the failed states issue, namely that it is mostly occurring on the African continent, although it is assumed to be a world-wide phenomenon, as widely reflected by the literature (Rotberg, 2004; Roessler, 2017; Osaghae in Cornwall and Eade, 2010, 281). Although most of the failed states phenomenon historically occurred in the African continent, there are plenty of non-African examples, covering a vast geographic expanse, from the Caribbean and Latin America to the Far East.

Perhaps a better way to put the failed states issue into perspective is to not refer to it in spatial terms, but to see it as a characteristic of the non-European, post-colonial world (or, as it was called during the Cold War era, the Third World). This should start to raise some eyebrows and some legitimate questions regarding the concept and its usefulness. Criticising both the concept and the rhetoric it stemmed, Bøås and Jennings (2005, 386) asked *for whom* are states failing and *how* are they failing. This suggests that there is an underlying bias shaping the concept and its explanatory power. Bøås and Jennings were not alone in their rebuttal – state failure, despite having a relatively short history, received harsh criticisms over the years, from diverse intellectual and political standpoints, which eventually lead many researchers to switch from "failed" to the apparently more convenient term "fragile". Nevertheless, despite seemingly solving some of the fundamental issues of the failed states concept, the newly adopted term proves to be just as problematic, mainly due to its origins amongst the donors, technical agencies and some governments, in the areas of development, humanitarian assistance and peace-building (Nay, 2013, 327). Thus, perhaps the more important question is whether the failed states concept and its avatars are still useful for both researchers and policy makers. It must be stressed, though, that approaching the failed states concept and its usefulness critically implies with necessity a wider discussion of its underlying theoretical background and assumptions. Thus, instead of focusing *ab initio* on how state failure can be understood and defined, or on its causes and effects, I plan to adopt a different approach, aiming to critically examine the intellectual infrastructure behind the failed states concept.

First, I will attempt to discuss the international political context in which the failed states concept was coined, and the ways in which it was employed by policy makers. My focus will be on official acts of the United States Presidential administration and Congress relating to the issue. That is because the period when the failed states term

appeared and started to be used coincided with Washington's uncontested hegemony during the first decade following the Cold War, thus being a product of that specific era. Secondly, I will succinctly explore the evolution of the term in the academic world, observing the various attempts to clarify the definition, and several critical issues raised overtime. In the third section of the paper, I will identify and discuss the main underlying assumptions upon which the failed state thesis relies. Finally, in the last section of the paper, I will examine how the underlying assumptions generated policies towards postcolonial states, and how these policies in turn became one of the generating factors of instability and "failure", thus creating a vicious circle. In the concluding remarks, I suggest possible directions of inquiry beyond the failed states paradigm.

POINTS OF ORIGIN – A MUCH NECESSARY CONTEXT

To have a clear image of both the concept of failed states and of the assumptions behind its inception and current use, one needs to first take a closer look at the international environment in which it appeared, the decade following the end of the Cold War, and the impact of the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

After the fall of the Soviet Union and of its Eastern European satellites between 1989 and 1991, the US were left as the sole, "lonely" superpower in the now uni-multipolar world (Huntington, 1999, 36). It was the era of global liberal democratisation, free trade, and the neo-Hegelian cry for the end of history professed by Francis Fukuyama (Fukuyama, 1992). At the time, the American hegemonic project was defined in terms of cooperation and promotion of (liberal) universal values, and not by imposing dominance through force. This practically translated into the foreign policy domain the American moral exceptionalist credo, projecting the image of the US as an exceptional country that stands for freedom and democracy around the world (Forsythe, 1995, 111-2). Or, as president G. H. W. Bush expressed it in 1991, during the first Iraq war: "What is at stake is more than one small country; it is a big idea: a new world order – where diverse nations are drawn together in common cause, to achieve the universal aspirations of mankind: peace and security, freedom and the rule of law" (Lazar & Lazar, 2008, 229).

The US had therefore to rethink its global agenda to reflect those principles by identifying the emergence of new global threats to the new, consent-based liberal order. Those threats needed to be addressed, and amongst them were the failed states phenomenon. The G. H. W. Bush 1993 National Security Strategy of the United States (NSSUS) took up the task of framing the vision of the new liberal world order, which could be summarised by two main directions – worldwide promotion of open, democratic, pluralist, and representative political systems, and free-market prosperity based on an open international trading and economic system, which would be beneficial for all participants (White House, 1993, 3). It was argued that "democracy was the ideology on which our victory in the Cold War was based, and it continues to be the only system which guarantees individual civil and human rights" (ibidem, 4).

The 1993 NSSUS does not specifically identify the failed states phenomenon *per se*. It nevertheless does that indirectly by stating that democracies and democratisation processes can be fragile and therefore require external support, thus arguing for greater US involvement in promoting democracy globally. This was essentially a tribute to the dominant narrative of the time, that envisioned a future wave of "global democratic revolution" (Huntington, 1991, 12) that would eventually bring an era of peace and prosperity throughout the world. However, during that time, there were already signs of a different future, characterised by internal strife, ethno-religious conflicts and weakened political institutions that boosted centrifugal tendencies in former communist and post-Soviet states. Similar tendencies were also identifiable elsewhere, from the Yugoslav civil war, to the emergence of phantom states in the greater Black Sea region (Transnistria, Abkhazia, and so forth), and to the Somalian crisis and the failed Restore Hope operation in 1992 (see Hesse, 2011, 40).

At the same time, the third world states had to face the challenges of a post-bipolar world order. Lyons and Samatar (1995, 1) noted that "artificial states without a strong social base of support, resources, or popular legitimacy often survived during the Cold War thanks to superpower patronage and international norms that favored stability and sovereignty". The withdrawal of Western support after 1990-91 lead many of the post-colonial states either to endemic instability, or to complete collapse of the central authority, as it was the abovementioned case of Somalia. These developments were noted by both analysts and decision makers, the failed state issue being propelled on the US national security agenda in 1999, during the Clinton administration. Clinton made a clear statement of principles by quoting president F. D. Roosevelt: "we have learned that our own well-being is dependent on the well-being of other nations far away" while the US "remains the world's most powerful force for peace, prosperity and the universal values of democracy and freedom" (White House, 1999, iii). Such statements implied that *any* failure of those principles and values worldwide was to be perceived as a security threat to the United States, thus literally equating it to state failure – "every dollar we devote to preventing conflicts, promoting democracy, opening markets, and containing disease and hunger brings sure return in security and long-term savings" (ibidem, iv). Consequently, the National Security Strategy of 1999 is the first official US document discussing the failed states issue as a global security threat and attempting to define the concept. In this respect, the document identifies two main types of failure, both originated in the principles stated above.

The first type includes states which are unable to "provide basic governance, safety and security, and opportunities for their populations, potentially generating internal conflict, mass migration, famine, epidemic diseases, environmental disasters, mass killings and aggression against neighboring states or ethnic groups" (ibidem, 2). The second category refers to states that have the capacity to govern, but "may succumb to the inflammatory rhetoric of demagogues who blame their nation's ills on and persecute specific religious, cultural, racial or tribal groups". In this way, the respective states fail to "respect the rights of their own citizens and tolerate or actively engage in human rights abuses, ethnic cleansing or acts of genocide." Such states "not only

harm their own people, but can spark civil wars and refugee crises and spill across national boundaries to destabilize a region" (ibidem). Thus, the concept of failed states was constructed as a security threat, viewed as such through Western political lens (Bøås and Jennings, 2005, 388), and as an ideologically normative aspiration, towards a Weberian demo-liberal modern state.

After the terrorist attacks on 9/11, 2001, the US Security strategy under the presidency of G. W. Bush acknowledged the fact that prior development assistance strategies failed to deliver according to expectations, and therefore decided on a major overhaul of the whole process. Unfortunately, the Bush administration was unable to identify the objective causes of this failure. Therefore, the reformation process underwent by following the same (neo)liberal developmentalist logic: a 50 percent increase in the core development assistance given by the US; improving the effectiveness of the international network of development banks in order to increase living standards; insisting on measurable results and ensuring that development assistance is really reaching and having an impact on the lives of the world's poor; open societies and investment as engines of economic growth, and so forth (The White House, 2002, 21-22).

At the same time, the Strategy added a new dimension to the failed states concept, by identifying a new manifestation of the phenomenon – the rogue state. According to the Strategy, the rogue states shared a number of commonalities: brutalising their own citizens and squandering their national resources for the personal gain of the ruling class; disrespecting the international law, treaties and norms; using threats against their neighbours; rejecting basic human rights values and "hate the United States and everything for which it stands"; sponsoring terrorism across the globe; and, finally, aspiring to acquire weapons of mass destruction and advanced military technologies in order to further push the aggressive intentions of their regimes (The White House, 2002, 13-14). This newly added category expanded the number of failed or failing states, thus implicitly diluting the explanatory power of the concept by pushing its definition closer to being an empty signifier, eventually having only political value and use. At the same time, it is worth noting that the text only mentions the term fragile states once, and only in relation to political entities on the African continent. In practice, the USNSS of 2002 rethinks the idea of failing or failed states by adopting the term "fragile" primarily in relation with the African states, and adding the rogue states dimension which ultimately could allow the US to subjectively identify a state as rogue by just labeling it as "anti-American".

Engendering the dichotomy fragile/rogue states marked the end of the official use of the failed states as a category to this day and the shift towards the abovementioned terms. Even in the Trump era, this situation was maintained. The 2017 NSS referred to both rogue and fragile states as priorities for the United States, "when state weakness or failure would magnify threats to the American homeland" (see The White House, 2017, 25-26, 38-39). Moreover, this shift was confirmed by the Global Fragility Act of 2019, followed in 2020 by the *United States Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability*,

which tackles the issue from a developmentalist standpoint, aiming to eventually produce economic and political modernisation in the target states.

The post-Cold War international order as a discourse-in-the-making expressed the American hegemonic project as a globalisation of liberal values and norms that clearly set up the basic criteria for inclusion/exclusion or accession/acceptance and treatment within the community of states (Lazar & Lazar, 2008, 229). This in fact reflects a centre/periphery logic in which the centre is populated by economically developed and politically advanced Western liberal democracies, while the periphery is populated by states in various stages of development and democratisation. This centre-periphery dichotomy thus appears to be the underlying principle behind the continuum that opposes failed/fragile/weak states to advanced, developed ones. As I will discuss in the following pages, this is an inherently normative, path-dependent approach, rooted within a particular ideological understanding of the international order, which not only fails in addressing actual problems, but rather contributes to their perpetuation.

HISTORY OF A CONCEPT IN SEARCH OF A DEFINITION

In 1992, Gerald B. Helman and Steven R. Ratner noticed in a seminal *Foreign Policy* article the emergence of a "disturbing new phenomenon": "the failed nation-state, utterly incapable of sustaining itself as a member of the international community" (Helman&Ratner, 1992, p. 3). The authors identified several domains where the failed/collapsing states were underperforming, such as civil strife, government breakdown and economic privation, and the threat that they were posing to their neighbours, in terms of a spillover of instability through refugees, random warfare and contagious internal political instability (ibidem). Helman and Ratner's text represents the starting point of the recurring saga of state failure in Western academia, inventing a new category of political (dis)organisation that is impacting to this day both theory and policy vis-à-vis these weak political entities. But the real failure appears to have been embedded within the concept itself, as the authors chose to confine the phenomenon mostly to the post-colonial world (post-Soviet space included). A clear (culturalist) causality is thus placed at the heart of the issue, with failed states seen as originating in the decolonisation processes that ended up in a proliferation of newly formed independent states shaped by former metropoles.

The underlying assumption behind this process was the belief that the self-determination principle alone would suffice to ensure the survivability of the new political organisation (despite having arbitrary, artificial borders that reflected the previous imperial administrative regions). A second assumption was that, by adopting the institutional model of the Western modern nation state, the former colonies would be firmly put on the path towards resilient economic and political development. Although credited with coining the term, Helman and Ratner were not the first to tackle the issue. Its first iteration was most probably coined by Robert Jackson during the 1980's through what he called *quasi-states*. Those were states solely by name, due to international courtesy, but lacking the real capacity to assert control over their territory, or to have

an actual monopoly over means of violence, thus lacking what Jackson called positive sovereignty (see Jackson, 1990, Jackson, 1987, Jackson and Rosberg, 1982). Similarly, Joel S. Migdal (1988, 35) discussed the issue of *weak states* in the post-colonial world, that is, states weakened by tensions between themselves and the respective societies.

In 1995, Lyons and Samatar analysed the Somalian crisis and noted that, after the end of the Cold War order, several artificial states collapsed due to two main factors – withdrawal of external aid and support, doubled by increased societal demands for economic advancement and better governance (Lyons and Samatar, 1995, 1). This revealed another aspect of state failure, i.e. state collapse, which appears when "structure, authority, legitimate power, law, and political order fall apart, leaving behind a civil society that lacks the ability to rebound to fill the vacuum" (ibidem). The same year of 1995, the phenomenon of weak, failed and collapsing states would enter the mainstream discussion in academic research when William I. Zartman published his seminal edited volume on collapsed states. In the introductive chapter, he defined state collapse as a "deeper phenomenon than mere rebellion, coup, or riot. It refers to a situation where the structure, authority (legitimate power), law, and political order have fallen apart and must be reconstituted in some form, old or new" (Zartman, 1995, 1).

After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Robert Rotberg led a research project on failed and collapsed states at Harvard University, which produced two edited volumes on the issue (Rotberg, 2003; Rotberg, 2004). In the introductory chapters of both books, he tried to offer theoretical clarifications on the concept itself, stressing that state failure occurs when internal violence erupts and the state is unable to deliver positive political results to its people, this resulting in the government losing its legitimacy. The very nature of the nation-state itself becomes illegitimate in the hearts and minds of its citizens (Rotberg, 2004, 1, Rotberg, 2003, 1). He approaches state failure from a functionalist perspective (seeing the state as a provider), but at the same time not dismissing the Weberian paradigm, by also seeing the state as a provider of security against societal violence, through its monopoly over means of violence (Kasfir in Rotberg, 2004, 55). In a similar fashion, Steward Patrick identifies four main functions that the state must perform to avoid failure, by using as point of reference the Western, developed world. Those functions are physical security, legitimate political institutions, economic management, and welfare (Patrick, 2006, 29).

The authors discussed above analysed different aspects of a single phenomenon, attempting to frame definitions which they see as being best suited to describe actual issues observed on the ground. They also attempt to identify new degrees in which the dissonance between the Westphalian international state system as a globally enforced norm and local post-colonial societies manifested itself. However, consensus was not reached regarding a commonly accepted definition for the failed states. To this respect, Ruth Gordon (1997) underscored the shortcomings of the failed states approach from a post-colonial critical standpoint, writing that "our views on how to approach and define state disintegration are shaped by our beliefs regarding the inherent capabilities and incapabilities of certain peoples [...] we are shaped by our past, if not wedded to it,

and thus these perceptions persist today despite our best efforts, although the locus of our biases is currently more difficult to pinpoint" (ibidem, 422). Gordon's approach was particularly focused on African states and societies, but her view can and certainly should be applied to various other geo-political and cultural settings, such as the Balkans, Eastern Europe, and the post-Soviet space.

On the other hand, Stein S. Eriksen underscores the fact that viewing states either as being fundamentally providers of goods and services, or as enforcing a monopoly on violence in the Weberian sense, reflects a normative ideal describing the way in which states should look like (Eriksen, 2010, 231-232). This in turn is transferred to the theoretical understanding of the state-failure process, which sees the failed, fragile, weak, or collapsed states as an unsuccessful attempt to mimic the Western, mature form of the state. Thus, "the absence of anything like a modern state in many countries is seen as a problem to be addressed, in order to enable a 'normal' state to emerge" (Eriksen, 2010, 234).

At the same time, as Bruce Kapferer observed, the gap between the normativist Weberian consensus driving researchers and policy makers alike, and the empirical reality found on the ground is not only widening. It also contradicts the tenets of failed states theorists, by offering many examples of emerging alternative political organisations within ungoverned or collapsed states (Kapferer, 2005). Trying to solve this blatant contradiction, Kapferer attempts to redefine the state from an anthropological standpoint, as a formation of oligarchic control, where the command of political organisations and institutions is assured by close-knit social groups such as families or familial dynasties, groups of kin, closed associations or tightly controlled interlinked networks of persons. The sole purpose of the commanding entities is the relatively exclusive control of economic resources and their distribution (Kapferer, 2005, 285). Kapferer opens the essential discussion regarding the usefulness and applicability of concepts as state failure, but also questions the very definition of the state itself as a constitutive element of the wider discussion regarding state weakness, failure, collapse, or fragility.

BUILDING THE CONCEPT — ASSUMPTIONS BEHIND THE FAILED STATE THEORY

1. Methodological statism and the Weberian consensus in international relations

Perhaps the most obvious assumption is the one regarding the state and its attributes. The current international system is forged around several core concepts, of which the Westphalian state and its sovereignty are at the centre. The state, as it is currently employed by both researchers and policy makers, is a historically European concept, the product of conditions and contexts starting with Italian city states of the 14th century (see Skinner, in Ball, Farr and Hanson, 1995, 90-131). As such, the modern state is an abstract concept that "serves both the ideals of the Enlightenment and the needs of modern capitalism" (Migdal, 2004, 232). Nowadays, the modern state seems to many to be a natural part of the international order, a structure predisposed to function toward structuring structures (Bourdieu, 1992, 53).

In other words, the modern state and the international system of European-style nation states is taken canonically as the norm, and this understanding generates theories and policies which reciprocally reinforce themselves. This is a particular manifestation of what is generally known as methodological nationalism, which tends to equate between state and society (Chernilo, 2006; Chernilo, 2007; Chernilo, 2010; Hagmann and Hoehne, 2009, 44), and which would better be referred to as *methodological statism* within the international relations (IR) theory. However, this should not be confused with state-centrism, which in IR theory refers to the state as the primary unit of analysis and as the main actor in world politics.

Methodological statism/nationalism is a form of reductionism, concentrating debates on three basic ideas. Firstly, the natural aggregation of all human societies is ultimately the nation. Secondly, all nations must be part of a modern nation state. Lastly, modern nation states are the constitutive units of a larger grouping of similar political organisations, the international system. Best illustrating this situation are the biases of methodological nationalism and its statist spinoff, which are embedded in the very concepts used by researchers and practitioners alike – inter*national* relations, inter*national* system of states, inter*national* aid and so forth. Thus, methodological statism literally condemns non-European societies to adopt the modern nation state institutional framework as to become equal partners at the discussion table (Jackson, 1990, Jackson and Rosberg, 1983). The reality is that state failure is embedded in the world system as a structuring structure.

At the crux of this reductionist construct lays the Weberian consensus in social science, and particularly in the international relations field, regarding the definition of the state as a territorial political organisation that has legitimate monopoly over the means of violence, and being recognised as such by both the members of the society and by other similar political entities (Weber, 1958, 78). Weber's definition requires a wider perspective, so first we need to underscore the culturalist bias of Weber's taxonomy of ideal types regarding the state, which is somewhat tributary to the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries orientalist European political thought (Osborne, 2022, Nafissi, 1998). Secondly, Weber himself openly displayed in multiple instances throughout his work *Orientalist and plainly racist characterizations of the colonial or Asiatic other* (Farris, 2022, 414), all indicative of the inherent biases structuring his taxonomy of political organisations.

Consequently, the Weberian modern rational bureaucratic state must be understood not as a value-free conceptual tool, but as the expression of a deeper, embedded assumption of a qualitative difference between Europe and the rest of the world (Bhambra and Holmwood, 2021, 141). That is while the Weberian model remains the aspirational norm within the international system, as an idealised concept of statehood (Eriksen, 2010, 235). Perhaps, as suggested by Hagmann and Hoehne (2009, 43), in order to surpass the canonical "state convergence thesis", researchers should shift their focus towards empirical statehood and study more thoroughly local realities. I would add that researchers should also try to adopt a transdisciplinary approach while doing the above. Such strategy would be particularly productive when analysing, for instance,

the short existence of the Islamic State, the phantom states in the wider Black Sea region, which escape scrutiny based on the Weberian model.

2. The path-dependent ideological-normative assumption

Just as there is an institutional norm for state building, there is also a required way to achieve a higher standard of living, access to better education, a higher income, a better economic environment, and so forth – and that is through development. Economism and modernism are the central tenets of the developmentalist approach, and consequently modernisation and development are inextricably linked to the state as a normative concept. Therefore, there is also a "right" path to development, and a "wrong" one, too (Wylde, 2017, 81). The dominant view, at least since the late 1950s and the early 60s, was that inspired by the modernisation theory, which was and still is seen by many as the correct path for post-colonial societies towards economic and political development. An intellectual product of the Cold War era, modernisation theory was designed from the start as a powerful liberal, hence ideological response to the communist challenge. It asserts that development can only be achieved in non-European societies by reproducing the historical stages of modernisation as they were experienced in the West.

One of the first and probably most preeminent exponent of this view was Walt W. Rostow, who set the foundations of current modernisation theory in his work, *The Stages of Economic Growth. A Non-Communist Manifesto* (1960), followed by *Politics and the Stages of Growth* (1971). In his writings, Rostow proposed solutions based on the economic growth founded on the principles of the 19th century Western economic liberalism, solutions that were eventually reflected by international institutions and their policies, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. In Rostow's Eurocentric perspective, the only real way of overcoming the developmental problems facing the post-colonial world was to replicate the successful Western model, which implied a path-dependent transition from the inferior traditional society (agrarian, non-scientific and economically unproductive) to the modern one (industrial, scientific, capitalist and consumerist), while the main strategy consisted in a mobilisation of the internal and international economies for economic growth investment (Rostow, 1971, 4-16). Rostow's strategy of development meant, in a nutshell, the displacement of traditional, "primitive" values by modern ones, originated in the Western historical experience (Webster, 1990, 49).

His ideas have been repeated *ad nauseam* by a plethora of modernisation theorists up to this day, reinforcing the belief that the internationally supported (neo)liberal model is the right path to solving the endemic socio-economic and political problems of the post-colonial world (see Haynes, 2005; Escobar, 1995; Stathakis and Vaggi, 2006, Pieterse, 2010). This imperial mimicry strategy received overtime harsh theoretical criticisms for its Eurocentrism and normativism. Perhaps the most important such criticism has come with the multiple modernities theory proposed by Eisenstad (2000; 2017), which unfortunately failed to have a relevant impact on global institutions

and policies of development, being confined within the academic field, as valued intellectual endeavour.

Alternatives to solutions inspired by the modernisation theories also appealed, in the good liberal tradition, to the free-market mechanisms and to the structuring of the economic relationships of the post-colonial states in ways not consistent with their interests – e.g. the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNACTAD). All such projects proved essentially dysfunctional (Chishti, 2002, 231). At the same time, the liberal modernisation thesis, according to which the international free market would lead to technological gains by the Third World states pursuant to the investments made by Western corporations, proved wrong as well. The relation between the frail Third World economies and massive transnational corporations produced monopolistic situations and generated dependency and underdevelopment.

Finally, the trust granted by various international financial bodies to some of the Third World states proved to be ungrounded as well. The IMF and the World Bank negotiated with state actors, considered to be fully sovereign in Western terms, and consequently capable of independently managing public projects and policies. However, more than once, the international institutions had to face the pre-Westphalian reality present especially on the African continent. The receiving states proved unable to implement the negotiated agreements or, as in the case of Tanzania's Julius Nyerere, funds provided by the international financial institutions turned out to be "black hole investments" – once employed in the implementation of unrealistic projects, they eventually helped the consolidation of the personal authority (Schneider, 2004).

3. The culturalist vision

One of the narratives legitimating Western imperial expansion and colonisation throughout the world was centred around its civilising mission, seen as a key element for progress. As Reeves (2004, 16) put it, "'civilization' was the perfect term with which to set out deliberately and consciously to conquer *others* and thereby force a better standard on them". People in the former colonies are formally or informally still seen or perceived as being "uncivilized" and unable to properly manage their imperial heritage. This phenomenon is not limited to the former Western colonial world, but encompasses diverse historical experiences, involving black, brown, yellow and white people from the peripheral regions of the imperial worlds (such being the case of former or currently aspiring imperial powers, as Russia, China and so forth). It must also be noted that a similar situation can be observed today in relation to states and societies that historically were not formally under Western authority, such is the case of Japan, Thailand, or Korea, and which do not fall under the failed or weak states category.

As an example, it took close to a century for the United States to initiate a trilateral arrangement with Japan and South Korea, this act still being questionable in relation with US' other security arrangements in the Pacific region, such as the alliance with Australia and New Zeeland. Why discriminate between native Asian actors and those that inherited and kept the Western culture and institutional traditions of the British Empire? Why not aim to create a coherent bloc of Western and non-Western actors

united by common values and institutions to meet the challenges of the 21st century? The US (and the Western world in general) seems willing to operate with culturalist assumptions that clearly distinguish between states in terms of their ethnic and civilisational background, thus creating specific international institutional frameworks designed to reflect a power relation which is clearly grounded in cultural, hierarchical understandings (see Gordon, 1997).

This raises very important questions regarding the ideological bias fueling the failed states discussion nowadays, when certain non-Western actors could feel emboldened to use anti-Western culturalist criticism to support their own imperial projects. Therefore, the culturalist bias appears to be a more delicate issue than is usually thought of or discussed, reflecting instrumentalized political and ideological ambitions throughout the world, irrespective to the relation with the Western world as a (post) imperial and civilisational space.

FAILED STATES – A SELF-FULFILING PROPHECY?

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was used – at least during the Cold War and the decade following it – as a standard for humanitarian aid and intervention in states confronted with either humanitarian crises, such as refugees, famine, epidemies, etc., or that have repeatedly and violently abused human rights (see Dobos, 2010, 20, Hildebrandt, Hillebrecht, Holm and Pevehouse, 2012, 2; Aloyo, 2016). The logic of the global ideological conflict during the second half of the last century made the Third World the actual field of struggle for global dominance. Leaving aside the humanitarian armed intervention, which emerged during the post-Cold War era due to a specific global security context (Orford, 2003, 2; Krieg, 2013, 7), one must note that humanitarian and development aid was the indispensable tool for both superpowers to rally the support and/or loyalty of the post-colonial Third World states throughout the post WW2 period. Foreign aid was seen, at least in the Western world, through a Eurocentric developmentalist lens (Ray & Das, in Pathak & Das, 2019, 39-40), as an essential tool. It linked state construction and state intervention to generate industrial development, the overall aim being – at least formally – to stimulate economic development, thought to be the main vehicle for higher standards of living, poverty reduction, capacity building, corruption reduction and so on. All these were seen as contributing to overall stability, generically understood as part of the modernisation process.

Two main schools of thought were competing in this area: one political, the other one economic. The political school emphasised the role played by strong state political institutions in promoting and implementing economic developmental policies. The economic approach was more interested in the specific economic policies that are needed to stimulate growth in late development stages (Wylde, 2017, 19). Although this was predominantly a scholarly debate, it closely reflected the reality of aid policies during the Cold War and well beyond, into the 21st century. But the theoretical and ideological

assumptions behind the developmentalist approach, as part of a Western-style (neo) liberal capitalist political and economic modernisation, provided in fact the very basis for its subsequent failure and the engines of the state failure phenomenon, within the wider structural framework of the Cold War.

On one hand, the inherent normativity of the developmentalist project itself (in both its iterations, political and economic) as an aspirational political credo was doomed to fail, as a ready-made, fits-all path-dependent paradigm meant to generate modernization on demand and without considering local specificities. It was (and still is) built upon a Eurocentric normativist understanding of states, societies, and economies. Moreover, the developmentalist project aims to apply uncritically the same set of aid policies to very different contexts and still expect the same results.

The best example of this was offered by Jason Hickel when examining the so-called "girl effect" as a developmentalist strategy constructed within wider categories of development aims, such as gender equality and women's empowerment. Hickel notes that "empowerment interventions rely on assumptions about 'freedom' that are particular to the Western liberal tradition, which focuses on achieving individual authenticity and self-mastery. According to this tradition, liberation is a process of prying the individual free from the stifling constraints of 'traditional' social norms, which in the girl effect discourse are conceptually condensed in the specter of 'premodern' kinship and gender relations. Because this project [...] carries such high moral value in the minds of Westerners, it has become a vital narrative around which messianic interventions can be organized" (Hickel, 2014, 1356).

On the second hand, the top-down development and humanitarian aid policies, designed during the Cold War to attract Third World states toward one superpower's camp or another, added in fact an instrumental or utilitarian dimension to the abovementioned ideological-normative one. Former colonies were seen as pawns on a gigantic political and economic map of conflict between the two superpowers. They were therefore thought of solely in terms of usefulness, allegiance, and success as reflecting the validation of a particular ideological paradigm. Both features, among other factors already mentioned, created the premises for instability, corruption, and conflict in the Global South, therefore condemning many of the new political entities to failure in relation to Eurocentric dominant norms, values, and practices.

The dissonance between Western political institutions, assumed to be essential in providing unifying democratic, stable, and prosperous nation states and societies, and the real local traditions, norms, and centrifugal tendencies (such as ethnic divisions and rivalries just to name one) in the Third World, stimulated the state failure phenomenon by encouraging local groups to compete internally for aid as a resource. This approach kept in place a system developed during the Cold War, which was actually encouraging the failed state phenomenon through economic and humanitarian aid. It did so by stimulating in artificial, post-colonial states a competition amongst various groups, organisations and/or elites for the informal appropriation of the international aid, seen locally as a valuable resource worth competing for. This eventually led

to increasing corruption, political instability, and the potential for civil conflict in those areas. The vicious circle was and still is a constitutive part of the failed states phenomenon.

CONCLUSIONS: BEYOND THE FAILED STATE PARADIGM?

I have tried here to discuss and synthesise some of the assumptions that play a constitutive role in forging the current understanding of the failed states concept. Over time, there were many attempted iterations of the failed state phenomenon, from Jackson's late 1980s concept of quasi-states, to Zartman's collapsed states, and to the concept of fragile states, currently employed by many researchers in the field. This leads one to believe that, on the one hand, we are facing a real-world problem which is, secondly, badly approached epistemically. In other words, there is an inherent problem with the way in which the so-called failed states issue is conceptualised, in a determinist manner.

Abstract theoretical structures are developed in particular cultural and historical settings, such as the Eurocentric Weberian state theory adopted as a fundamental way of not only defining, but also for understanding and acting towards political organisations. These structures are complex and biased, shaping as such understandings, attitudes, expectations and consequently policies towards political systems that fail to adapt to and implement this normative framework. They thus fail also to be recognised as a legitimate part of the international system. At the same time, the abovementioned abstract structures have historically legitimated economic, political, and military decisions and actions that forged hierarchical systems of rules, norms, and values. Based on dependency and an inherent culturalism, those hierarchical systems restricted even more the potential options of the former colonial societies in such a manner that we can speak of a *state failure path dependency*.

So, what about the future? Should we keep on relating on this biased abstract concept, i.e. failed state, to formulate policies towards troubled political actors in the world? Or, should we denounce it as a product of a by-gone era, and throw it away as being not only useless, but also charged with counterproductive preconceptions meant to enforce a certain understanding of societies, institutions, and power relations? The answer to this question is both simple and complex. To answer it bluntly, yes.

The failed states paradigm is not a good conceptual tool to address the political, economic, and social issues throughout the post-colonial world and the academic community and policy makers should abandon it. Some have done this already, at least partially. However, just rethinking the real-world problem by essentially using the same conceptual toolkit is doomed to failure. It would perhaps produce only another name for a badly understood phenomenon. Therefore, abandoning the failed states concept should be just the first step to be followed by an honest and pragmatic discussion regarding a wider constellation of concepts and theories. This effort should build on a bold exploration of the value-based normativist bias behind taxonomies like formal and informal economies, corruption, and so on.

Going beyond the state as a next step, as suggested by Hagmann and Hoehne (2009, 44), might represent one path towards a better understanding of the underlying structures behind the issues currently brought under the umbrella of the failed states concept and theory. Similarly, the discussion opened by Buzan and Acharia (2010) regarding non-Western approaches to IR theory might prove essential in the overall process of overhauling, or perhaps even abandoning the conceptual infrastructure of the wider social sciences field.

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ERODING DEMOCRACY THROUGH DIGITALISATION, EXPORTING REPRESSIVE DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES TO AFRICAN STATES

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ABSTRACT: *The article aims to examine the export of repressive digital technologies to Africa, as China gained a leading role qua main supplier of digital infrastructure and systems in the region. Leveraging the BRI and DSR projects, Beijing has sought to strengthen its influence in African countries, especially in the ICT sector. Relying on enterprises linked to the state, China has exported its model of digital authoritarianism along with repressive technologies that have facilitated the undermining of democracy. The study focuses on digital technologies exported both by China and Western states, the infrastructure development of 4G and 5G networks, internet traffic control systems, as well as the dissemination of Chinese approaches to cyberspace governance. The main recommendations are about the need for policies that focus on protecting human rights and internet freedoms, pursuing digital transformation whilst ensuring cybersecurity and a democratic cyber governance, as well as restricting the export of repressive-enabling technologies to non-democratic countries.*

INTRODUCTION

The last two decades saw an increase in Africa's digital connectivity, as various partnerships aided the development of national ICT (Information and Communication Technology) infrastructures. However, while digital technologies have enhanced economies, increased connectivity, and public participation in a wide array of countries, they have also enabled measures of surveillance and censorship, strengthening authoritarian rule. African countries have been no exception to these developments, especially considering that they relied on partnerships with China, a country keen on exporting its model of digital and internet governance, facilitating abuses of digital tech with consequences online and offline.

China is a leading exporter of technology that enables digital repression. Beijing's information control tactics focus on regions of Asia, Latin America, and Africa – an area loosely described as the 'Global South' (Global Engagement Center 2023, 2). China has been a lead provider and exporter of ICT infrastructure in Africa, and both China and Russia have been regarded as key partners for strengthening cybersecurity in the region (Ifeanyi-Ajufo 2023, 151). Around 45% of smartphones sold in Africa are produced by Chinese companies, whilst US companies have 14% of the market and South Korean producers around 33% (Munga & Denwood 2022). Moreover, Chinese companies, particularly Dahua, Hikvision, Huawei, and ZTE, supplied AI (artificial intelligence) surveillance systems in more than 60 countries, Huawei providing them

to over 50 countries (Feldstein 2019, 1). Nonetheless, companies based in the US, France, Germany, Israel, and Japan are also key players in the market of supplying AI surveillance technology, as over 75 countries have implemented AI technology for surveillance systems (Feldstein 2019, 2). Among other issues, AI is fuelling coordinated disinformation campaigns on social media. These operations play an increasingly malicious role in African countries, especially for marginalised groups (e.g., different ethnic groups, women, LGBTQ+, etc.) and most notably during elections (Madung 2023).

Authoritarian and hybrid regimes are more prone to abuse and misuse surveillance systems than liberal democracies (Feldstein 2019, 2). According to the Economist's 2022 Democracy Index, Africa has 27 authoritarian regimes, 6 flawed democracies, 16 hybrid regimes and only one full democracy (Mauritius). Likewise, the 2023 Freedom on the Net Report, published by Freedom House, shows that global internet freedom declined once again, for the 13th consecutive year, as restrictions on freedom of expression increased and became more common around the world. The report analysed the situation in 17 African countries, out of which twelve are partly free (Angola, The Gambia Ghana, Kenya, Libya, Malawi, Morocco, Nigeria, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe), four are not free (Egypt, Ethiopia, Rwanda, and Sudan), and only one country has a free internet (South Africa). Moreover, the trend is positive in nine countries, negative in five, and neutral in three countries.

Thus, in this study we shall analyse exports of repressive digital technologies and digital authoritarianism to African countries, focusing on the activities of China and its state-linked companies. The paper will begin by offering an overview of digital authoritarianism and of China's investments in Africa in the context of the Belt and Road (BRI) and Digital Silk Road (DSR) initiatives. This section will be followed by a discussion regarding China's export of digital authoritarian models, policies, and tools to African countries, and their abuse by various governments. In the conclusion of this research, the benefits and disadvantages of receiving technologies capable of enhancing repression will be discussed, as well as the issue of Western companies exporting similar technology. This conclusive discussion will be preceded and introduced by a series of recommendations compelled by the authors after scrutinising the literature on these issues.

BACKGROUND OF CHINESE INVESTMENTS IN AFRICA AND THE ISSUE OF DIGITAL AUTHORITARIANISM

The export of digital authoritarianism and repressive digital technologies

The rise of digital authoritarianism around the world was highlighted by the 2018 Freedom on the Net report (Shahbaz 2018). Digital authoritarianism has been defined as the use of digital technologies and of the internet by states with authoritarian tendencies to repress, manipulate and surveil domestic and foreign citizens, undermine civil liberties, decrease trust in public institutions, and increase political and social control (Polyakova & Meserole 2018, 2; Yayboke & Brannen 2020, 2). The right to

personal privacy, freedom of expression (especially of political dissent), human rights, and civil liberties are in danger of becoming even more fragile (Yayboke & Brannen 2020, 2).

China has become one of the leading suppliers of digital surveillance technology to hybrid and authoritarian regimes (Polyakova & Meserole 2018, 2). Repressive digital technologies include mass and individual surveillance tools (now mostly relying on AI), censorship technology, espionage software, cyberattacks and various malware programs. Likewise, both China and Russia, countries that adopted models of digital authoritarianism, are exporting policies and technology to similar regimes, but democratic countries are also adopting tools and strategies of digital authoritarianism on a smaller scale (Yayboke & Brannen 2020, 2).

Beijing and Moscow promote the idea of cyber sovereignty in international discussions on internet governance, aiming to make their national regulations the global model (Weiss 2020). For instance, China's artificial intelligence legislation requires generated content by AI platforms to reflect the values of the Chinese Communist Party, banning content that is perceived as undermining the government (O'Shaughnessy 2023). As such, it can be expected that China promotes the same values when implementing these technologies in other countries, keeping in mind regulations that condition private companies to follow similar policies of filtering digital content. Chinese companies are the main suppliers of AI surveillance systems to 24 countries worldwide, mostly hybrid regimes, including Algeria, Botswana, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Morocco, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe (Feldstein 2019).

The tactics of digital repression encompass censorship, social manipulation, cyberattacks, targeted persecution, surveillance, and internet shutdowns (Feldstein 2020). Moreover, internet shutdowns comprise of full blackouts of connections, completely cutting off access to the internet, disruptions of mobile service, slowing down connection or blocking certain platforms (Feldstein 2022, 2). The key aspect is that they are temporary in nature, even though in some countries such measures are being transformed into permanent restrictions on internet access (Feldstein 2022, 2).

China's investment strategy in Africa in the context of BRI and DSR

Ever since President Xi Jinping came to power, China has increasingly prioritised its relations with African states, building a more constructive image of its involvement in the region. Beijing's influence in Africa has grown significantly in the light of new technological and economic developments. China's economic development also came with a huge need for raw materials and oil, and therefore Africa was targeted as the main partner that could provide necessary long-term supplies. Beijing has become heavily engaged in key sectors of Africa's economies, including infrastructure, manufacturing, and telecommunications (Albert 2017). It has relied on three economic levers to increase influence in African countries: trade, investments, and loans.

The loan instrument has proved effective in deepening cooperation with African partners. For Beijing, providing loans to African countries serves two main goals – it offers the opportunity for Chinese firms to develop their business on their territory,

but also gives Beijing a tighter geopolitical control. In its dialogue with African states, Beijing places itself on an equal basis with its partners, focusing its discourse on South-South cooperation, on the premise that multilateral engagement is the key to deeper cooperation (Were 2018). China has several advantages when it comes to financial assistance to Africa. For instance, the reimbursement term of loans is longer than the ones provided by Western countries, or by other international organisations like the World Bank. Moreover, China has two main principles in conducting the loan policy towards Africa: mutual benefit and noninterference. African leaders typically favour Chinese financial assistance due to the lack of further political constraints (Mlambo 2022). Given the perceived non-interference of Beijing in the domestic affairs of African countries, they tend to be more receptive to Chinese loans, rather than to those coming from the West.

Hence, China has provided 1,243 loans to 49 African nations since 2000, distinguishing itself as the region's top creditor. Financial support was extended to African governments from 2021 to 2022, Beijing offering up to 16 loans totalling $2.22 billion (Boston University Global Development Policy Center 2023). However, several African countries have found themselves in debt default, with some of them, such as Angola, Djibouti, or Rwanda, accumulating foreign debts that exceeded 75% of their GDP (Akeredolu 2023). Following accusations of debt trap diplomacy, the Chinese government cancelled 22 loans to 17 African countries last year, which represented an unprecedented move (Olander 2022).

Gradually, China has become the largest trading partner of the African continent, reaching $312 billion in trade with countries on that continent in 2022. Although a much wider range of products is being imported from China, technology, apparel, and electronics top the list (Bociaga 2023; Subban 2022). When it comes to trade and investment ties, China has been able to cooperate with most African states, but it has kept its focus on states with substantial natural resources, such as South Africa, Angola, and Nigeria (Statista 2023; Miao et al. 2020). The Sino-African relations are based in the last year on BRI, which is the main factor that boosts investment flows, as well as trade opportunities. By 2021, 40 out of 55 African countries had signed a memorandum of understanding or agreements with Beijing on BRI (Van Raemdonck 2021, 38). Apart from the infrastructure component, which implies more efficient interconnectivity to facilitate trade and investment, BRI also has a digital component – the Digital Silk Road (DSR), a policy initiative launched in March 2015, promoting the development of the necessary infrastructure for digital infrastructure and communication technologies.

Thus, China's Belt and Road Initiative focuses on information technology through the DSR (Gravett 2020, 155). In a 2014 speech, Xi Jinping outlined Beijing's aim of turning China into a "great cyberpower" (The National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China 2023). One year later, the Chinese leader also added that, to achieve this objective, China must build solid domestic technology and focus on international cooperation (Whuzhen 2023). An estimated 40 countries in the sub-Saharan region are part of the BRI and could potentially be involved in the DSR. African countries have been more open to engaging in digital projects offered by the DSR, as they are less likely to

require a higher budget compared to infrastructural projects. The initiative offers a huge opportunity for Chinese firms to develop their businesses and expand worldwide. Chinese companies like Huawei, ZTE and China Telecom are the main pillars of Beijing's economy, so this policy initiative provides them financial, as well as diplomatic support (Shen 2018).

Chinese telecom firms have long operated in Africa; currently, they manage nearly all the continent's infrastructure, from cables and satellites to big data and cloud computing (Calzati 2023; Monsenepwo Joost 2020). Kenya was the first African country to benefit from Chinese investment, including from Huawei in 1998, while Nigeria is the largest telecom market in Africa in which Huawei has operated for more than 16 years (Agbebi 2018; Calzati 2023). Huawei has expanded enormously across Africa and has become the leading provider of 4G and 5G networks. Huawei's strategies to facilitate its access in Africa include establishing a network with relevant stakeholders, adaptive pricing, and the introduction of green-energy equipment (Rukato 2023).

In addition, Huawei enterprises have also established cooperation agreements with various local research organisations to encourage transitioning to digitalisation and identifying promising talents in the ICT industry. To begin with, Huawei has signed a partnership agreement with the Algerian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research to launch several ICT labs in the country's top universities (El Kadi 2022). In South Africa, Huawei has not only supplied the faculties with the required equipment, but has also paid particular attention to training programmes. In this regard, it has teamed up with Telkom, a local South African company, to support the Talent Plan programme, providing grants for postgraduate students (Institute of Developing Economies n.d.). In Kenya, Huawei's Seeds for the Future project aims to promote knowledge transfer and regional development by increasing participation in the digital community. Burkina Faso, Egypt, Ghana, Guinea, Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal, Uganda, and Zambia are among the African countries where Huawei has run programmes in universities, whereas in Namibia, Huawei has provided funds to train 26 government cybersecurity and ICT technologies employees (Huawei 2023).

Links between Chinese tech companies and the state

China Telecom, CloudWalk, Dahua, Hikvision, Huawei, Uniview, and ZTE (Zhongxing Telecom) are the main Chinese companies involved in overseas investment and export of ICT technology enabling digital repression (e.g. network infrastructure, telecom infrastructure, surveillance equipment, etc.). The companies have been identified by their press statements for news agencies, research reports and relevant academic papers, as well as their links to the Chinese government and intelligence agencies (Agbebi 2022; ASPI 2023; Bartlett 2020; Dutton 2023; Feldstein 2022; Global Engagement Center 2023; Gravett 2020; Greig 2023).

A major concern highlighted by Western countries is that at least part of the largest Chinese technology companies has ties to the government (Agbebi 2022, 7). Research and official statements suggest, or state explicitly, that China's largest tech companies cooperate closely with the country's government agencies and intelligence agencies

(Wang 2021). A part of these companies are private businesses, but they are required to answer to the government and comply to several restrictive policies enacted by Beijing (Gravett 2020, 155). Thus, some of these companies are owned by the Chinese state, and others are private companies that are influenced by pressure and censorship coming from the government (Wang 2021).

For instance, Hikvision, a major supplier of surveillance systems, is considered close to the Chinese state, which holds majority shares in both ZTE and Hikvision, either directly or through other government-controlled companies. Furthermore, the US government has claimed that Huawei is controlled by the Chinese Communist Party, which uses the equipment and technology supplied by the company to collect intelligence and monitor critics (Agbebi 2022, 7). Huawei reportedly receives billions of dollars in subsidies and has strong ties to Chinese intelligence agencies (Gravett 2020, 155-156). The company's links to the government are highlighted by its ownership model and access to financial support from the state. This has prompted Western governments to restrict the involvement of Huawei in network infrastructure projects out of cybersecurity and espionage concerns (Agbebi 2022, 7-8).

CHINESE EXPORTS OF REPRESSIVE DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES TO AFRICA

The cyber environment in Africa

Computer and digital systems in Africa are increasingly vulnerable to cyberattacks employed by both state actors and cybercriminals. This issue also applies to critical infrastructure. Even though only a few countries digitalised their essential services, sound cybersecurity measures were not put in place (Van Raemdonck 2021, 9-10). For instance, in July 2023, Kenya was the victim of a large-scale cyberattack that affected thousands of government services and e-government platforms (Mwai & Nkonge 2023). Cybercrime is estimated to cause damages of several billion dollars to African economies (Van Raemdonck 2021, 11).

In 2018, the Cybersecurity Expert Group was established by the African Union to provide advice on cybersecurity matters (Van Raemdonck 2021, 5). However, only a third of African countries have adopted national strategies in the field, and less than half have implemented Cyber Emergency Response Teams (CERT) (Ibidem, 24). There are also other efforts to mitigate the effects of malicious cyber activities in Africa. One example is the Malabo Convention (African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection), adopted by the African Union Commission in 2014 and providing basic cybersecurity recommendations and principles to establishing a safe and secure digital environment. The document can act as a foundation for cooperation in cybersecurity issues across the continent (Ibidem, 6; see also Ifeanyi-Ajufo 2023, 148).

Current state of repressive digital tech exports

Chinese companies offering cheap alternatives to the hardware and software developed by some Western companies are gaining ground in markets all around

the world. For instance, China's BeiDou (Baidu) navigation system has become more widely used than its US-based equivalent, GPS (Wang 2021). Moreover, platforms such as TikTok, Alibaba and AliExpress have become widespread and key players in their area, alongside WeChat, which is used by the Chinese diaspora. Huawei is the largest provider of ICTs in Africa, and an increasing number of countries and persons rely on Chinese 5G and AI companies.

Huawei has built almost three quarters of Africa's 4G networks (Gravett 2020, 155). In addition to this, the tech company and its subsidiaries own almost 70% of 4G networks in sub-Saharan Africa, and more recently it launched a 5G network in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (Bartlett 2023a). In South Africa, ZTE reached an agreement with MTN Group, a local telecom provider, to collaborate on developing 5G infrastructure and networks (ASPI 2023). In Tanzania, Chinese companies constructed the national fibre optic cable network, making it compatible only with Huawei routers (Agbebi 2022, 4-5). Concurrently, Chinese companies have become leading smartphone providers in African countries (Gravett 2020, 155).

China plays a very important role in surveillance projects in African states, too, especially in the so-called "smart cities" projects. Huawei Smart Cities programs have been implemented by Angola, Botswana, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia (ASPI 2023). In March 2018, CloudWalk partnered with Zimbabwe to deploy facial-recognition technology in the country (Gravett 2020, 154). Several of these countries also partnered with other Chinese companies, such as Hikvision and Uniview, for public surveillance cameras and systems (ASPI 2023). Hikvision partnered with a local company to install more than 15.000 cameras in Johannesburg (Gravett 2020, 155). This kind of deal is beneficial for both parties. Chinese companies gain the ability to train their algorithms and diversify the datasets and accuracy of their systems and governments gain access to affordable surveillance technology and biometric databases allowing them to monitor citizens, political opposition, civil society, and various marginalised groups (Gravett 2020, 154).

Furthermore, Huawei and China Telecom built data centres in Egypt, Ghana, Mali, South Africa and Tanzania (ASPI 2023). In July 2023, Huawei opened an Innovation Centre in Johannesburg, receiving praise from the country's president, Cyril Ramaphosa (Bartlett 2023a). South Africa's partly state-owned telecommunications operator, Telkom, launched its 5G network in 2022 using Huawei technology, whilst Vuma, a South African internet provider, partnered with Huawei to offer higher speeds for fibre internet (Bartlett 2023a). In September 2023, Huawei announced that it will invest 430 million dollars in North Africa to build its first cloud centre, alongside offering training programs to thousands of developers (Dutton 2023).

Supporting autocracies and enabling digital repression

Thus, Beijing has exported repressive digital technology to African states over the last decade or more, in this way promoting and enabling surveillance and censorship. Various African governments have reportedly used systems provided by Huawei, with

assistance from Beijing, to intercept cellular location data and communications of members of the domestic political opposition (Global Engagement Center 2023, 15). Moreover, several African countries used Huawei systems to filter and inspect internet traffic, whilst also blocking access to certain websites (Global Engagement Center 2023, 15).

In this context, more than 14 African governments implemented Internet shutdowns in their countries since 2019, most commonly by reducing internet speeds or blocking certain websites or social media platforms (Van Raemdonck 2021, 27). Starting with Chad, Ethiopia, Mauritania and now many others, internet shutdowns are becoming increasingly common in Africa, especially during times of social tensions (Gravett 2020, 157). Internet shutdowns are used for cutting off access to certain media websites, social media platforms, or messaging applications, with the aim of interrupting digital connections between people during protest movements, or restricting access to media articles perceived as threatening by authorities. However, such shutdowns also cut access to important government services, business, or even news, media, and communications unrelated to protests. For instance, in June 2023, Senegal cut off internet access 12 hours a day during the trial of an opposition figure to repress dissent (Greig 2023). Likewise, Burkina Faso, Chad, Republic of the Congo, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gabon, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, South Sudan, Sudan, Uganda, and Zambia implemented internet shutdowns during events of protests, elections, conflicts and/or military coups (Feldstein 2022, 11).

Chinese exports of digital equipment and services were also accompanied by an export of a digital authoritarian model, proliferating authoritarian policies and practices on the African continent, such as in Nigeria or Tanzania. The export of Chinese technologies also includes a set of principles and values stemming from Beijing's authoritarian approach to governance and cyberspace (Wang 2021). Beijing promotes its model of digital authoritarianism to BRI countries through seminars and workshops for foreign officials, partnerships, and official visits, but it is not yet clear whether they have significant practical effects (Gravett 2020, 157; Weiss 2020; Feldstein 2020).

In 2018, Freedom House revealed that the adoption of authoritarian-style media and cybercrime laws in Uganda and Tanzania was preceded by an increase in the activity of Chinese companies and officials on the continent (Shahbaz 2018). Moreover, Chinese software and technologies, which are basically designed to filter malware and illegal online content, can also be used for censoring legitimate internet content. Such examples can be found in Angola, Egypt, Ethiopia, Rwanda, South Africa, and Zimbabwe (Van Raemdonck 2021, 29).

Surveillance has also become prevalent in Africa, as several countries have passed legislation approving widespread communication interception practices without court warrants. Such examples are present in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe, whilst Nigeria started using its military agencies to monitor anti-government content online (Van Raemdonck 2021, 28-29).

Kenya, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe imported surveillance technologies from Chinese companies, along with digital authoritarian policies from the Chinese

government, creating an increasingly authoritarian cyberspace, closer and closer to the Chinese internet governance model (Van Raemdonck 2021, 39). Kenya, Uganda, and Zimbabwe implemented Huawei Smart Cities programs, alongside installing Hikvision systems for public surveillance (Bartlett 2023b). In this context, according to a *Wall Street Journal* investigation, Huawei employees have aided Ugandan and Zambian governments to spy on political opposition and activists critical of the authorities (Feldstein 2020). Barlett (2023b) has also documented how governments in Uganda and Zambia used Chinese technology to spy on political opposition and critics. In another example, ZTE provided the Ethiopian government with systems used to monitor opposition activists and journalists (Gravett 2020, 155).

Furthermore, cybercrime legislation has been used to repress dissent and critics, masking it as countering fake news or hate speech (Van Raemdonck 2021, 28). This kind of tactic became widespread during the COVID-19 pandemic, as Ethiopia, Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria, and several other countries convicted citizens critical of the government on this basis. However, civil society groups strive to reverse restrictions on internet freedom, and human rights lawyers managed to successfully fight against such regulations at the level of the constitutional court in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda (Van Raemdonck 2021, 28).

LIMITING THE PROLIFERATION OF DIGITAL AUTHORITARIANISM AND PROMOTING AN ALTERNATIVE MODEL

Perks of Chinese investments in digital infrastructure and the possibility of turning back

Chinese companies benefit from investing in African countries in the context of DSR and BRI, receiving state support and financing which also allows them to meet their corporate goals. Beijing also stands to benefit from these investments, consolidating its engagement in Africa and thus becoming a key player in the ICT sector globally (Agbebi 2022, 5). However, African countries also benefit from this relationship, developing their telecommunications infrastructure, digitalising their public services and businesses, and helping to bring their citizens online (Agbebi 2022, 5).

There are also cases in which African countries halted partnerships with Chinese companies, or in which they opted for Western companies. For instance, even though Tanzania cooperated closely with Beijing and promoted digital authoritarian policies and practices that mirrored those of China, the country suspended a major project financed by China in 2019 out of concerns of unfairness (Weiss 2020). In other cases, African governments choose vendors from both China and the West. Washington announced in 2022 that the US-backed telecom company Africell invested in developing a 5G network in Angola (Bartlett 2023a). Johannesburg also has a contract with US company IBM for public digital surveillance (Bartlett 2023b). Moreover, several African countries with democratic tendencies and stronger civil society groups have managed to implement more protection measures for citizens. Unwanted Witness,

a Ugandan civil society group, found that countries like South Africa and Nigeria implemented more robust user data protections than more authoritarian countries such as Uganda (Feldstein 2022, 26).

At the African Union (AU) level, prior to the discovery that its headquarters had been bugged by Chinese operatives, the organisation intended to build a framework of cooperation with China on cybersecurity. Such plans are now on hold (Van Raemdonck 2021, 39). In 2012, a new headquarters was built for the African Union, the construction being funded by China. Six years later, in 2018, African Union employees found that alleged Chinese hackers set up servers to covertly record audio and video footage from the building complex (Global Engagement Center 2023, 16). At least 180 sensitive government buildings were renovated or constructed by Chinese companies in Africa, alongside more than a dozen of telecommunication networks used by governments (Global Engagement Center 2023, 16).

In addition to this, bringing people online consolidates repression, but can also build a more connected and active civil society. Constructing and developing Africa's network infrastructure could also trigger positive outcomes, as increasing connectivity could contribute to enhancing citizen participation, including fora to share information, publish and discuss journalist investigations, and promote public demonstrations. Public demonstrations and protest movements can become more widespread with the use of digital technologies. Nevertheless, technologies supplied by Chinese companies have also been used to repress opposition movements and collective action in a variety of countries, from Ethiopia to Uganda or Zambia (Agbebi 2022, 11).

Western exports of surveillance and censorship systems to African countries

The US, UK, and the EU financed several projects to support the digitalisation of public services and businesses in Africa, but this cooperation also paved the way for the export of digital technologies from Western countries convertible into tools of authoritarian governance (Van Raemdonck 2021, 40). Technology and software systems that contribute to repressing dissent, undermining democracy, and suppressing civil liberties in Africa are, indeed, supplied by countries other than China (Agbebi 2022, 11-13). For instance, surveillance and censoring systems have been supplied to the Ethiopian government by Chinese companies alongside their European counterparts. Companies from Italy, Germany and the UK have reportedly aided Ethiopian authorities in surveilling political opposition and censoring opinions critical of the government (Agbebi 2022, 13).

Companies from Europe, the United States, and Russia also supplied repressive technology to authoritarian countries, including technology for video surveillance, tracking spyware, hacking software, or internet filters (Feldstein 2020). Firms based in France, Germany, Israel, Spain, the UK, and the US are leading providers of public security surveillance worldwide and some of their clients are authoritarian and hybrid regimes (Feldstein 2019; Feldstein 2020). For instance, Israeli companies exported surveillance technology to Angola and Kenya (Van Raemdonck 2021, 29). More than this,

software developed by Israeli spyware company Pegasus was sold to various African governments, some of which are governed by authoritarian regimes (Bartlett 2023b).

Recommendations

African countries should adopt and promote cybersecurity and internet policies that focus on international cooperation, democratic cyber governance and protecting human rights and internet freedoms. Africa's digital transformation should be pursued whilst also strengthening cybersecurity and cyber governance, ensuring a transparent, secure, resilient, and dependable cyberspace (Ifeanyi-Ajufo 2023, 147). Some of these measures are also supported by previous strategic documents adopted by the African Union. In 2020, the African Union Commission adopted the Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa. According to the strategy, digital transformation should be promoted alongside efforts to strengthen cybersecurity policies, increasing the countries' capabilities to detect and counter cyberattacks (Ifeanyi-Ajufo 2023, 146-147).

One of the most important measures that should be taken by democracies is restricting the export of surveillance systems to non-democratic countries (Yayboke & Brannen 2020, 9). Another response to digital authoritarianism should be imposing targeted sanctions against countries that adopt such models, and on private companies that export to authoritarian regimes technologies and systems that can be used for repressive purposes (Polyakova & Meserole 2018, 11). Moreover, ensuring transparency and democratic guidelines that focus on human rights for technology companies, social media platforms, and AI developers should also contribute to a decrease in the risk of digital authoritarianism becoming the norm (Yayboke & Brannen 2020, 9). Thus, democracies should pursue efforts to restrict international abuses of digital technologies and software, but also limit the activities of domestic companies that engage in the export of repressive digital technology. A step in this direction has been taken in 2023. The US, the UK, France and other eight countries signed a joint statement on the need for domestic and international controls to counter the proliferation and misuse of commercial spyware (GOV.UK 2023).

Moreover, democratic countries should pursue efforts to raise public awareness around this issue (Polyakova & Meserole 2018, 12), but also support civil society, democracy activists, and journalists in countries where digital authoritarianism has become the norm or is on the rise. EU's new policy regarding investments in Africa, viewing African countries more as partners rather than development recipients, could contribute to an increase in a more fruitful cooperation in these areas (Van Raemdonck 2021, 49). EU's Digital Roadmap is now focused on boosting engagement and cooperation with Africa, contributing to the continent's digital transformation processes (Ifeanyi-Ajufo 2023, 147). However, Cabo Verde, Kenya, and Niger are the only African countries signing Declaration for the Future of the internet promoted by the US and EU, a document highlighting the main principles of a democratic alternative to digital authoritarianism (European Commission 2022). The declaration states that the digital technologies should promote human rights, fundamental freedoms, democracy, and the rule of law, whilst the internet should be global, secure, free, and open (European Commission 2022).

The key response of democratic countries should be agreeing to, developing, and promoting a democratic model of internet governance at the international level. Democracies have different approaches to cyberspace, but current developments such as the Declaration for the Future of the internet or international restrictions on spyware proliferation could spark a swing towards reaching a consensus on this issue. This should also mean that democracies will limit their own repressive practices in cyberspace and through the usage of digital means, and restrict the export of repressive-enabling tech from companies based in democratic countries. In this context, liberal democracies should ensure that current UN discussions on developing international norms for responsible state behaviour in cyberspace include aspects of respecting human rights and civil liberties.

CONCLUSIONS

China is a key player in the export of repressive digital technologies to Africa, a highly vulnerable continent for democracy building and global development. China has a long history of cooperation with African states, based mainly on trade and investment, and thereby succeeding in expanding its influence in cyberspace, too. China has managed to export its digital authoritarian model, policies, and tools to several African governments using its state-linked enterprises such as Huawei, which is the most proactive Chinese company in the region. Nonetheless, several Western companies have also exported digital technologies that could enable repression, although at a smaller scale.

The presence of repressive digital tech has increased oppression against civil society through censorship, social manipulation, cyberattacks, targeted persecution, surveillance, and internet shutdowns. However, a positive aspect of this issue is the opportunity to develop and create a digital network across African countries, followed by better people-to-people connectivity that could contribute to improving public participation and even building social movements in many places. With the use of digital technologies, civil society could encourage various forms of freedom of expression like public demonstrations and protest movements, increasing democratic resilience. Moreover, increasing digital connectivity in Africa could also lead to bringing African citizens on the global internet, accessing international media, social platforms, and commercial services. Increased connectivity also produces an opportunity for African governments to digitalise public services, as some countries have already done.

Liberal democracies should focus on efforts to counter the export of digital authoritarianism in Africa, whilst promoting a democratic alternative to internet governance. Nevertheless, this means that Western governments should follow policies that view their African counterparts as potential partners. Through companies providing 5G infrastructure, smartphone vendors, satellite internet access, cybersecurity solutions, and through promoting a set of democratic policies regarding cyberspace, liberal democracies could diminish China's leading role in this area and, at the same time, boost democratic practices globally.

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A LONG-STANDING, INCOMPREHENSIBLE ISSUE FOR AFRICANS

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ABSTRACT: *In this article, radio journalist Israel Campos analyses the European Union's policy towards immigrants from outside the continent, starting from the hypothesis of discrimination based on ethnic, racial, and religious criteria. Presenting the case of African immigrants with relevant statistics, the author claims that the Schengen visa granting procedures are not based on sociological realities and respect for human rights, but on a series of prejudices and erroneous premises developed during colonialism. Israel Campos concludes that the European Union must reform the legislation on non-European immigrants in the spirit and letter of equality in relation with African countries, thus strengthening economic and social cooperation.*

The Angolan government, a vast country in sub-Saharan Africa, has recently decided to grant visa-free entry to the country, for annual entries of up to 90 days, to citizens from 98 countries across the world, including all 27 countries that make up the European Union. Although the measure was politically justified as an attempt to boost the country's tourism sector, as the country tries to move away from its heavy dependence on oil revenue, it was received with a certain scepticism by some nationals. And it is not that difficult to understand why.

As an Angolan citizen, I have heard many foreigners, especially from Europe and the US, who have visited or attempted to visit my country, voice concerns on how difficult it was to get a visa to enter this country. However, as they would further expand on the challenges they faced, one thing would always catch my attention: the fact that, despite the alleged "difficulties" in the visa-granting process, most of them said that they were able to obtain the visa after a week or two following the request, some even saying they received it within days.

Any African who has attempted to get a Schengen visa would surely agree that obtaining one in such a time frame is almost a miracle for us. Why? Because there has, for so long, been an incomprehensible issue with the Schengen visas granting process to African-passport holders, in most European consulates spread across Africa.

It's an all too common story. I could confidently say that every single African who has attempted to enter the Schengen area with an African country issued passport has a different one to tell. If it's not them, it's a friend or a cousin or a friend of a friend. A Schengen visa is surely one of the worst nightmares an African must face when

trying to enter Europe. And it does not matter the reason, whether it is for study, work, medical treatment, or even for attending an academic and professional conference.

In addition to being a very bureaucratic process – where an endless list of documents is generally required, including an application form, identity photographs, civil status certificate, proof of accommodation, round trip flight itinerary, travel health insurance, proof of sufficient financial means and sometimes even a cover letter explaining "why you are applying for a visa, what you plan to do during your stay, how long you will stay in the Schengen Area", etc. (SchengenVisa Info, n.d.) – the way African applicants are usually treated at Schengen visa centres is quite dehumanising. The unreasonable and invasive interrogation that is generally made only confirms the narrative surrounding these spaces, which is generally one that puts the African applicants in a desperate position, willing to do whatever it takes to finally "settle in Europe".

It is understandable that Europe has enough evidence supporting the idea that there are many Africans who would like to move there permanently, given the migrants crisis the old continent is facing. However, assuming that every single African who applies for the Schengen visa does not want to go back home is still a quite wrong premise that honestly does more harm than good to the Africa-EU relations, as Foresti & Mantegazza (2023) note.

Strongly believing that all Africans dream of settling in Europe – which obviously is a misjudgment – seems to play a determining role in the way in which Africans who intend to visit Europe are treated. The result is a rather problematic EU's foreign policy, which practically denies the rights of many people to move between continents. It is also an unfair one, as Europeans can easily visit most African countries, in many cases only needing to pay a fee and receive a visa upon arrival.

In an article on "Visas and Non - Discrimination", investigating whether EU's Schengen visa scheme discriminates on racial or religious grounds, Heijer (2018) claims that the EU's current visa policy perpetuates worldwide economic inequalities. Visa grant constraints contribute to these inequalities, among other things, by making it harder for people from countries in the global south to move between their nations and Europe.

Foresti & Mantegazza (2023) confirm that the Schengen visa rejection rates across the world are particularly high for African countries, when compared to Asia and America. According to Schengen Visa Information (2022), the list of three most rejected Schengen visa countries is exclusively made up by African nations: with "Guinea-Bissau, with 53 per cent of the applications for a Schengen visa lodged by its citizens being rejected. Senegalese nationals are listed second with 52.2 percent of their visa applications being rejected, and Nigerians third with 51 per cent of their applications turned down."

These numbers also highlight a certain lack of clarity regarding the real intentions of strengthening EU-Africa relations, as is generally claimed by EU officials. Taking "this relationship to the next level" given proximity and history of the two continents, as the EU (2020) says, implies understanding that the principle of equality must apply in bilateral relations intended. To achieve this, it is critical that the EU drops off the

prejudices and misconceptions created over the years, as a result of the shameful and brutal history of the European presence on the African continent.

Migration and mobility continue to play a very important role in international cooperation between Africa and Europe. African mobility within Europe has been an issue for the EU since 1995, with the removal of the internal border between EU member countries (Schöfberger, 2019). Since then, the EU's migration and mobility policy towards Africa has taken a particularly focused approach on tackling irregular Africa migration, when the levels of African migrants worldwide account only 14%, a very low number compared to other parts of the world (Bisong, 2023). The media coverage on irregular African immigration towards Europe, through the Mediterranean, has greatly expanded interest in this issue (Bisong, 2023). Perhaps it has also contributed to the construction of a limiting, and therefore inhumane narrative about Africans and their wishes and intentions once in Europe.

For this reason, many argue that the EU should rethink its mobility and migration approach towards the African continent, understanding its diversity and complexities (Bisong, 2023). Not simply because of the benefit that this will bring to mobility between citizens of both continents, but above all because of the need to establish important and mutual principles that might help to challenge the existing misconceptions and stereotypes embedded in certain European policies targeting Africa and its people.

If there is a real commitment to implementing a strategic partnership of benefit to both stakeholders, as the Africa-EU Partnership outlines (European Commission, 2022), in addition to other concerns, the EU commission must have the ability to try to understand why "travel to and transit through Europe is difficult for Africans", as Kimeu (2023) demonstrates.

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THE INFLUENCE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION IN AFRICA. THE CASE OF THE WAGNER GROUP

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ABSTRACT: *The article discusses Wagner Group's involvement in Africa, analysing its methods of exercising influence, as well as its role in the efforts of the Russian Federation to expand its influence on the African continent. Starting from a combination between the concept of "informal empire" and the meaning of institutions within the theory of Institutional Economics, from the perspective of Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, the paper argues that the Wagner Group represents an instrument of informal imperial dominance for the Russian Federation in Africa. The study considers four case studies of the influence of the Wagner Group on the African continent, focusing on the Central African Republic, Sudan, Libya, and Mali. The focus is on three main methods of exerting influence in the area: disinformation, involvement in the extractive industry and the deployment of military instructors.*

INTRODUCTION

The context in which this paper emerged is linked with the events related to the current war in Ukraine following the Russian invasion on February 24, 2022. With this occasion, the PMC Wagner Group (WG) gained worldwide notoriety due to the heavy fighting for the city of Bakhmut and the actions and discourse of its former chief – now officially dead – Yevgeny Prigozhin. Even though the WG was founded in 2014, i.e. after the war in Donbas started, and has been involved in other war zones, such as Syria and sub-Saharan Africa, since 2017, the present war in Ukraine contributed to establishing the worldwide WG notoriety. However, this paper concentrates on the role of the WG mercenary missions in Africa, as they served as a foreign policy tool for the Russian Federation to establish an influence on the African continent. For Russia, the WG represents a tool for delivering mercenary services to friendly countries, used for warfighting, security provision and training (Reynolds 2019, 1).

This paper has several objectives. The first is to sketch a concise theoretical framework to analyse Wagner's actions in Africa. Building on that framework, the second objective is to analyse three case studies based on the main methods used by the WG to exert its influence, namely disinformation, involvement in the extractive industry of the target countries, and the deployment of military instructors with specific missions. The third objective, starting from the abovementioned case studies,

is to concentrate the analysis on the three primary influence methods applied by the WG in four countries, namely the Central African Republic (CAR), Sudan, Libya, and Mali.

The argument from which the present paper starts is that the WG represents an instrument used by the Russian Federation to exert an influence that can be framed within the conceptual framework provided by the *informal empire*. More explicitly, the WG operating in Africa represents a tool in the hands of an informal empire for Russia. Moreover, the African countries in which the WG operates have weak regimes. Thus, from an institutional perspective, the private contractors protect the state authority by keeping in power the local elites, which rely on outputs of extractive industries for their wealth and influence. Therefore, the WG has a twofold role in Africa as a foreign policy tool for Russia, while it acts as a protector for the local elites linked to extractive industries.

The structure of this paper is the following: the first part sets the theoretical framework, the second part concentrates on disinformation methods in Africa, the third part describes the Wagner presence in the extractive industry, the fourth part analyses the role of the military instructors, while the final part presents the conclusions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework builds on the conceptualisation of informal empire, completed by institutional theory. This combination can deliver a clear explanation concerning WG operations in African countries by revealing their particularities. Simply put, an informal empire represents an indirect form of domination by a centre on a periphery, involving control over a "friendly" government. Formal imperial rule is simply direct political-economical control on the periphery. Informal imperialism, in this case, can have the same effects, with the difference that the centre needs a subordinated, legally independent, but informally dependent government. At the same time, the degree of penetration is given by the tightness of control exerted by the dominant power (Doyle 1986, 37-38).

David A. Lake defined informal empires as those forms "through which dominant states control substantial areas of policy in subordinate polities – even some typically regarded as purely domestic – but subordinates continue to interact with third parties based on sovereignty" (Lake 2001, 133). The institutional perspective deals with the importance of political and economic institutions in determining the economic outcome of a state. What is relevant in this perspective regards the importance of the political elites as actors that design and maintain institutions (Acemoglu & Robinson 2012). Political elites whose wealth and influence are dependent on extractive industries rise to power within failed or weak states, with little degree of centralisation and capacity to exert the monopoly of legitimate violence. They can also emerge in centralised dictatorships, having the aim to remain in power at all costs and extract wealth from the society, by using repressive political and economic institutions (Acemoglu & Robinson 2012, 70-95).

Within a larger context, the Russian influence exerted through PMC Wagner in Africa serves the foreign policy objectives of the Kremlin in its strategy to check the West at the world level. In general, targeted countries have rich resources and weak regimes,

subject to failure as states are affected by a vacuum of security in the area. Those countries are threatened by a multitude of armed groups with various motivations (ideological, religious, etc.) aiming to change the regime.[1] The Russian involvement in Africa dates from 2014, aiming for a pragmatic approach based on blurred connections, providing Moscow with the possibility of plausible deniability in certain instances, especially given that WG is not legally registered in Russia (Reynolds 2019, 1; Duursma & Masuhr 2022). To protect the African regimes in which it operates, as well as to advance Russian interests, the WG uses several methods, such as disinformation campaigns, obtaining mining concessions and military involvement. This paper will only concentrate on WG's disinformation, the presence of military instructors and the involvement in the extractive industry in four countries: Central African Republic (CAR), Sudan, Libya and Mali.

According to a 2022 report by the Africa Center for Strategic Studies, since 2014, 23 disinformation campaigns have been identified on the African continent, with 16 of them related to Russia. The disinformation campaigns focus on various subjects, such as elections, the Ukraine war, commerce, and politics. For example, in 2022 in Mali, since the French military retreat – with Wagner eager to replace the French forces – the pro-Russia attitude raised at the same time as the anti-France attitudes intensified, depicting Russia as a viable alternative to the West (Le Roux & Knight 2023, 1). Overall, the disinformation campaigns are integrated within the Russian strategy of thwarting the Western influence in Africa by discrediting the democratic system as insecure compared to the authoritarian Russian model, presented as a viable alternative. Another aspect of Russian disinformation is obscuring Wagner's actions to exploit the African natural resources (Africa Defense Forum 2023). An essential role in these activities is the Internet Research Agency (IRA), that is, the so-called "troll farm" from St. Petersburg (Fasanotti 2022), which used to be controlled by Prigozhin.

Another established WG practice in the countries where it exerts influence is the involvement in the extractive industries, such as gold, diamonds, uranium and oil. This practice is interlinked with the one involving military instructors, as they protect the weak leaders in exchange for mining rights, as well as with the disinformation practices, which are designed to keep in power the client leaders, raise the pro-Russian sentiments and cover up activities in natural resources extraction. In general, the mining concessions come in exchange for the Russian PMC activities (including Wagner) in Africa through companies such as Lobaye Invest, or M Invest/Meroe Gold and subsidiaries, whose activities are protected by the mercenaries against local protestors (Parens 2022).

The Wagner military instructors' presence in Africa is related to security provisions for vulnerable leaders against contesting movements (rebels, Islamists) in exchange for exploitation rights on natural resources. Wagner first came to Africa in 2017 to help the Sudanese president to suppress the protests against him, and then the group

[1] For an introductory discussion regarding the armed groups operating in Africa, see Alecu & Miroiu 2021. For a theoretical discussion regarding armed groups, see Miroiu 2020.

was deployed in CAR and Libya. The military instructors offered surveillance services, personal protection for African leaders, logistics training and fighting force against rebel groups (Ibrahim & Ochieng 2023; Logan 2023; Siegle 2023). After Prigozhin's rebellion on June 23, 2023, Wagner operations in Africa continued, as military instructors were sent to CAR at the end of July to protect President Faustin Archange Touadéra during a referendum conceived to allow for his third term in power (Defense Post 2023). However, Wagner is accused of committing atrocities among the civilian population in Africa during its military operations, as violence is common practice for the group, recognised as such in Ukraine, or Syria (Siegle 2023).

DISINFORMATION

Disinformation is defined as, "verifiably false information that is shared with an intent to deceive and mislead" (UK Government Communication Service 2021, 8). The Russian disinformation activities in countries such as CAR, Sudan, Libya, or Mali are conceived as to sustain the Russian interests on the African continent in general, as well as to maintain in power the friendly, but weak regimes that offer natural resources exploitation rights in exchange for protection provided by Wagner. The disinformation campaigns represent a valuable practice in the Russian influence toolkit. Meanwhile, the IRA, the so-called "troll farm", formerly owned and funded by Prigozhin, exerted its influence on social media through propaganda posts that glorified WG and labelled France as a plunderer for Africa. It works in symbiosis with the Russian official state media as public diplomacy tools by expanding the coverage of RT and Sputnik, suspended in the European Union after the invasion of Ukraine (Sellier 2023). Even since 2020, in the disinformation campaigns, the IRA-linked fake accounts addressed issues such as LGBTQ, civil rights, or black history before turning to a political nature after gathering more relevant numbers of followers (Woollacott 2020).

Russian disinformation campaigns in Africa involve not only social media channels. Other classical propaganda-disinformation means are used, such as filmmaking and broadcasting. In the CAR, Yevgeny Prigozhin financed film productions to sustain the national propaganda effort. The propaganda film *Touriste* was broadcast on a stadium in the capital of Bangui, with the intent to glorify the Russian soldiers that fought rebel groups in the wake of the 2020 elections, ignoring the abusive behaviour of those mercenary troops. The film draws attention to the actions of the Russian soldiers in Africa, to Russian interests and the help Russia offers, while portraying the UN peacekeepers as incapable and France as a neocolonial power. Another film, *Granite*, presented a WG mission against rebels in 2019 as successful, while it was in fact a total defeat that determined a mercenary retreat. Even though Moscow and Bangui deny the presence of Wagner mercenaries, the CAR is included in a coordinated Russian disinformation campaign undertaken with direct WG involvement (Africa Defense Forum 2022).

The cooperation between Sudan and Russia begun in 2017. Since the Muslim Brotherhood-sponsored, Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir turned his eyes to Russian help to stay in power, the Kremlin propaganda machine entered into force. To protect

the regime from a revolution in 2020, the disinformation tactics employed by WG included accusing the protesters of setting fire to mosques, separating al-Bashir's image from the unpopular party in power, while various Wagner-linked Facebook pages tried to create a positive image of Russia and spark an anti-Western attitude (Human Rights Foundation 2023). As a strategy to protect the Sudanese regime and advance the Kremlin's interests in Sudan, WG used disinformation tools to delegitimise the Sudanese opposition. Prior to the 2019 coup, Prigozhin demanded the local government to depict the opposition as pro-LGBT, pro-Israel and anti-Islamic, hence serving foreign interests, hostile to local culture. When it came to suppressing the anti-regime protesters, the Russian media outlets maintained that they were merely suppressed by some obscure people dressed as soldiers (Ramani 2019).

In 2019, Libya was included in a broad disinformation campaign with seven other African countries: Madagascar, CAR, Mozambique, DRC, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, and Sudan. Three networks of fake Russian Facebook and Instagram accounts were identified and taken down for trying to influence the domestic politics of the targeted countries by commenting falsely on global and local political issues, including the Russian presence on the continent (Al Jazeera 2019). Libya was included in a third network, with 15 accounts and 12 pages treating local and geopolitical topics (France24 2019). The disinformation campaign in Libya addressed domestic topics in the Arabic language, such as migration, internal terrorism, crimes, state violence, critics of the Government of National Accord, American and Russian foreign policy or support for the Gaddafi family. To carry out the campaign, it used a mix of Egyptian individuals, fake and corrupted profiles, and news from Sputnik and RT (Meta 2019).

After the failed French military mission in Mali, resulting in retreat, the void was filled by the WG. Before Wagner's arrival, Mali was under threat of military coups and terrorist activities stemming from disenfranchised people and weak rule. In the disinformation campaign that covered the Wagner deployment in Mali, the mercenaries depicted themselves as a capable counter-terrorist force. To promote national support for WG before its arrival, a Facebook campaign was launched to promote Russia as a good partner instead of the neocolonial West, while encouraging the resumption of the elections. This worked in tandem with criticism by a Russian think tank regarding the UN peacekeeping force deployed in 2013, which depicted the UN as a creator of terrorist organisations. Even though Putin and Lavrov admitted the WG presence in Mali, the Group was credited with commercial activities, while the Kremlin role was denied (US Department of State 2022).

WAGNER'S PRESENCE IN THE EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRY

WG's presence in the extractive industry represents a hallmark of the mercenary activities in Africa, as the Group offers protection to weak governments in exchange for resource extraction. We argue that Wagner's presence in extractive industry is linked to the practice of informal empire envisaged by Russia, which, by the obscure character of the WG activities, permitted the Kremlin to deny its involvement. Resource

extraction for the Russian benefit in exchange for local elites' protection permits a cheaper power projection and control for Moscow's political gain. Practically, Russia extracts resources from the African countries where WG mercenaries are deployed by indirect administrative control, using local elites of extractive industries. In a neo-institutional fashion, the extractive local elites attempt to stay in power with the help of WG. Therefore, the institutional force that keeps in power the local elites is external (Russia and Wagner), as the state also develops a more centralised administration.

In CAR, the mining concessions were made in exchange for Wagner protection services for President Touadéra. These were traded for the WG presence in the diamond and mining industries, plus further geological activity. For instance, in 2020, Wagner was deployed on missions to counter the anti-presidential rebels, who rose against the Touadéra regime, while the elections from that year were seen as rigged. The profits made by the economic activity of WG in CAR are unclear, as the money made by the Group is directed more to financing the local mercenary activities, than to the profit of Russia. Other voices argue that the aim of Wagner in CAR is not to extract resources, but to engage the French presence in Africa (Faulkner 2022, 32).

In Sudan, since 2017, the Russian presence was established after an agreement signed between Russia and the then Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir. This document involves rights in natural resources exploitation, geological drilling, or hydrocarbons. The Sudanese Ministry of Minerals signed an agreement with M-Invest company, which is known to be under Prigozhin's control. In exchange, WG came with security services for the local regime (Faulkner 2022, 31). M-Invest has the role of shielding the Wagner operations and keeping away the democratic opposition in Sudan, while using IRA-inspired disinformation practices. Through its Meroe Gold subsidiary, M-Invest supervises the gold mining activities in Sudan. At the same time, the mother company relied on subordinate figures to perform the tasks, namely M-Invest Director General Andrei Mandel and Mikhail Potepkin, a former IRA employee, as M-Invest and Meroe Gold Regional Director. To evade the US sanctions, Prigozhin used a vast network of collaborating firms from Thailand or Hong Kong to facilitate the multi-million dollars financial operations (US Department of Treasury 2020).

Ravaged by civil war and disorder since the NATO-led coalition intervention in 2011 and the fall of Gaddafi, Libya still represents an essential source of natural resources, rich in oil and gas reserves. The mercenary presence in Libya posed another problem since the beginning of the war in Ukraine. As the fourth largest African gas exporter, Libya could have been an alternative for ensuring the energy supply in Europe. However, as the WG controlled important production sites, the trust in Libyan alternatives diminished (Belmonte 2022). The Wagner presence in the Libyan oil-rich regions and other energy sectors represented a double asset for Moscow. Firstly, the presence in Libya was regarded as an operational base for other African countries, such as Chad and Niger, as WG allied with local communities and smugglers in exchange for providing weapons and extraction technology. Secondly, Wagner's presence in the oil industry is also a way in which Moscow can put at risk the European energy security (Eljarh 2023).

In Mali, Wagner adopted the same strategy as in other African countries, involving disinformation, military presence, and resource extraction. However, the Malian case posed some difficulties. The mining activities are less profitable in Mali due to stricter internal regulations, Western sanctions, and the closer ties this country maintained with France until 2022. The Malian case uncovered some limits in resource extraction for WG, while the mineral resources were not exploitable as in other countries. Moreover, the artisanal mines are controlled by local armed groups, which opposed WG presence. Therefore, the Group could not design a transparent funding system and confronted the US and EU sanctions, imposed both on the Group itself and on the Malian regime (Parens 2022). In the same manner as in other African countries, in Mali, Wagner also offered security services in exchange for resource extraction, helping the Malian political elites to stay in power (Thompson, Doxsee & Bermudez Jr., 2022).

MILITARY INSTRUCTORS

The third component of the Wagner strategy in Africa is related to the military presence. Military instructors and mercenaries were sent to protect the weak African regimes. They provided advice and protection for the political leaders, together with guardship for mining sites and other wealth sources. The military presence in exchange for resource extraction represents a key component in the dyadic relationship between extractive elites and informal empires. Firstly, it represents an external security source for the local African leaders to maintain at the top of their authoritarian regimes. Secondly, the military presence of Wagner helped Moscow extract resources for its benefit easier and cheaper than via direct administrative and territorial control. Moreover, the Kremlin can make use of the argument of plausible deniability. Nevertheless, since the Wagner mutiny in June 2023 and the death of Prigozhin in August 2023, the WG presence in Africa, especially in military terms, is allegedly under threat.

After an arms shipment delivered by Russia in 2017, the Wagner military instructors and mercenaries came to CAR a year later. Backstage, the WG had a double mission: to protect President Touadéra, as well as to guard the leading diamond site of CAR (Kharief 2018). Since 2018, the Wagner mercenaries have assisted the CAR military, police, gendarmerie and law enforcement personnel in activities such as ensuring security for national ballots, with some voices claiming that the level of security in the country increased. Moreover, the Wagner mercenaries were involved in supporting the government to counter the rebel groups and guard critical infrastructure objectives. However, the Wagner mercenaries were accused in CAR of human rights violations and civilian casualties. After the failed mutiny of Prigozhin, the future of the WG operations in CAR is unclear, even though the Russian foreign minister Lavrov declared that the operations in CAR and Mali will continue (Khalid 2023).

In Sudan, the WG applied the same strategy of providing security services for the regime in exchange for natural resource extraction rights. The mercenaries offered security services for the president Omar al-Bashir since 2017, who was eventually ousted from power in 2019. The WG offered services such as intelligence, military training

and logistics, law enforcement officers and police forces. Later evidence suggested that the mercenaries demeaned and repressed the opposition protestors and planned to target civilians (Faulkner 2022, 31). In Sudan, the WG made a business from the country's internal problems and maintained connections with the Sudanese Armed Forces and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces. These two sides started fighting each other. Which side took Wagner needed to be clarified, but the main goal was to secure their business and position in Sudan, irrespective of the internal winner (Logan 2023).

In Libya, Wagner started its military involvement in 2019, backing the efforts of the Libyan National Army (LNA) to take Tripoli and remove the legitimate Government of National Accord (GNA). However, the non-military involvement of Wagner had already began some years before, after the start of the civil war in 2014, which divided the country after disputed parliamentary elections, which represented a good occasion for Moscow to get involved (Eljarh 2023). The Libyan case indicates clearly the Russian preference for intervening in countries with weak regimes, planning to exploit their benefit and local vulnerabilities. After arriving in Libya, Moscow's men maintained relations with all factions, but favoured the former Gaddafi regime military figures and became an essential partner for the Libyan military and political authorities (Eljarh 2023).

Mali started military cooperation with Russia in 2019, when the government in power at that time accepted a package of helicopters fully equipped for combat, which was labelled as a donation two years later, based on a bilateral military convention. In 2020, the Malian transitional government received 1,000 Wagner mercenaries with the aim of training, protecting, and running counterterrorism missions. Gradually, Wagner replaced France, which began to retreat in 2022 after a long intervention in Mali. Despite problems with the infiltration of extractive industries, detailed above, the WG continued to develop the Mali-Russia military cooperation by bringing hundreds of soldiers that confronted the Islamist forces in some cities. The Malian case is complex for Wagner, as it has to offer training and security, such as in other targeted countries, develop more troops and secure its economic gains by signing neutrality accords with some local factions. In contrast to other cases, the group has to invest massively to overcome the competition still faced in Mali (Parens 2022).

CONCLUSIONS

The influence of the Russian Federation in Africa represents a comeback to re-instate the former Soviet influence on the continent, but with novel methods and means. Even though Moscow developed and secured some formal ties with several African regimes, the primary tool used was represented by the mercenary forces of the Wagner Group. Currently, with the WG chief Prigozhin declared dead, the future of the Group's operations in Africa is unclear. This paper argued that the WG is an instrument of the informal empire used by the Russian Federation. The informal empire involves cheaper methods of domination and resource extraction. At the same time, for Russia, the Wagner involvement, illegal according to Russian legislation, provides the

Kremlin regime with the option of plausible deniability. Informal imperial domination involves resource extraction using indirect control by loyal local elites. In this instance, the institutional perspective is helpful, allowing for an insight into how the local extractive elites try to stay in power to protect their regimes.

In the African case, Wagner was an external tool for the local African leaders to stay in power, even though not all succeeded. It is also the reason for the WG preference for weak regimes, while its goal was to secure its local economic interests derived from mining concession rights in exchange for protection and security delivery. The Wagner involvement in the African countries – in this paper, CAR, Sudan, Libya, and Mali – presented three interlinked components. The disinformation campaigns sustain and cover the Wagner presence and operations in the targeted countries, involving efforts to discredit the opposition and build pro-Russian support locally. In the fashion of an informal empire, the presence in the extractive industry permits Wagner Group to obscurely extract local resources for the Russian benefit, while securing its share and, implicitly, its own survival. The military instructors and mercenary involvement have the role of protecting the local regimes and securing the commercial interests and the survival of Wagner in the targeted countries.

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IMPRESSIONS FROM CAIRO: A CAPITAL FOR THE PAST, THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE OF THE MIDDLE EAST

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This text reflects the views of the author and does not represent an official position of the Romanian MFA.

PREPARING FOR CAIRO AND THE VERY FIRST MOMENTS UPON ARRIVAL

I have landed in Cairo on the 2nd of October 2023 at dawn, to carry out the mandate, bestowed upon me by the President of Romania, as my country's Ambassador to the Arab Republic of Egypt. Although a relatively short flight, it has not been one of the easiest, and that not just because of overnight travelling, but particularly because my children were accompanying me. It was the first moment that they realised on their own that travelling as a diplomat can be very tiresome, and one of the few moments when they were fully exposed to my public persona and its implications for them: there was a protocolar welcoming from the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, at 3.30 in the night, and we all needed to act according to these very special and formal circumstances. The warm welcoming of the Embassy team present at the airport, added to the efforts of Egyptian protocol, helped each of us in the family feel and remember this moment not only as a special one for our personal history, but also as a friendly first encounter.

I had thought of my mandate for the whole summer, trying to meet as many people as possible in Romania that are involved in projects with Egypt – be they governmental, economic, cultural, scientific. As usual, I read extensively about Romanian-Egyptian bilateral relations, though as a director general for an area which included the Middle East, this amazing country was not at all foreign to me. A summer of meetings, readings and reflection helped me clarify and structure the priorities of my mandate as Romania's Ambassador in Cairo, which I intend to share with the readers of *România Occidentală.* They are as follows:

- Furthering the excellent political dialogue, at all appropriate levels and on all relevant subjects for our countries, whether bilateral, regional, or global;
- Enhancing economic relations in a pragmatic approach – this should be reflected both in the increase of the trade volume in traditional fields, as well as in opening up new fields for cooperation and new entrepreneurial projects to follow the deep economic transformations of our respective economies;
- Reaching out to the wider Egyptian society for making the Romanian culture and spirituality better known, through initiatives adapted to each generation's

cultural needs and expectations. I intend to pay a special attention to two dimensions in particular: supporting the cultural needs of the Romanians living in Egypt; encouraging new interpersonal, people-to-people projects between the young generations from Romania and Egypt.

These priorities were already outlined in my hearing in front of the joint specialised committees of the Romanian Parliament. I would like to thank the president of the Senate Committee and the members of all committees for the in-depth and inspiring discussion on the occasion. Over-summer reflection helped me identify ideas, projects, and partners for each of these lines of work.

At this point, it is also essential to acknowledge that my mandate is based on some prerequisites. Number one among them is the total commitment to dedicate my experience, my energy and my inspiration, alongside the Embassy's team, to the deepening of the historical friendship between Romania and Egypt. Our team's overarching goal is to make this bilateral friendship a strong, updated and permanently relevant one for our two nations.

FIRST DIPLOMATIC IMPRESSIONS AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF STRATEGIC FOREIGN POLICY PRIORITIES OF MY NEW HOST COUNTRY

It is certainly an adventurous undertaking to write something meaningful about Egyptian foreign policy and Egyptian diplomacy, based on only some weeks of direct experience on the ground. Yet, there are strong professional first impressions worth sharing with the readers in Romania, that I assume explicitly as such, "first impressions", and that have already marked my perceptions. Hosting the League of Arab States, the Eastmed Gas Forum, the Cairo International Center for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding as a center of excellence of the African Union, added to a traditionally consolidated and performant Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Cairo is a very intense diplomatic capital. Its reputation of providing top professional opportunities for diplomats representing any country or organisation from around the world is very well deserved.

Egypt is an essential partner within two areas of high priority for Romania and for the EU: the Middle East and Africa. Egypt is also a key-state in the Mediterranean formats of cooperation with EU. Via the Suez Canal, Egypt opens up to the Red Sea and further to the Indian Ocean, providing a critical connectivity link between the Indo-Pacific and Europe.

The EU-Egypt relations continue to develop in various fields to the mutual benefit of both sides, as proved by the endorsement by both the EU and Egypt of the Partnership Priorities Document for the period 2021-2027, under the Association Agreement which is in force since 2004. Romania is a staunch supporter of this objective. An intense drafting about a Strategic and Comprehensive Partnership is going on currently between Brussels and Cairo, with Romania giving its own input in the relevant Council formats.

Each of these dimensions require intensive diplomatic activity, but Cairo reunites all of them and many others. There are more than 120 diplomatic missions accredited to Egypt, and the quality and professionalism of diplomatic interaction is easy to observe from the outset for any experienced diplomat. As former director general in the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs managing the Middle East, Africa, Asia Pacific, and Latin America, I am glad to be able to carry on looking for more diverse and wider opportunities for Romania. This presupposes staying close to some of our key partners, via my cooperation with the euro-Atlantic ambassadors, but also with the ambassadors of Jordan, India, South Korea, Japan, and so many others.

Egypt is a prime example for any international conversation about emerging powers, or about key regional players at global level. Its interest to become a BRICS member – without drawing too much on the very concept of BRICS at this point – stands as the latest proof of the role that Egypt sees for itself and is ready to play. For decades already, Cairo has been seen as THE reference point for approaching and trying to solve Middle East-related files. This status nowadays might be subject to debates for some analysts, as there are also other emerging regional players with different type of leverage at their disposal. However, and without becoming too subjective too soon after my settling down in Cairo, I do believe that Egypt's role remains unparalleled for finding answers to fundamental Middle East-related questions, and that it will remain so for the short-to-medium run, at least.

One has only to count and follow the number of presidents, prime ministers and foreign ministers that have visited Cairo over the last weeks since the Israel/Hamas conflict broke out, and the number of high-level phone calls to have the clear proof of how much Cairo is key in the regional equation. Subjects that currently make the highlights of international media include aid inflow to Gaza, the freeing of hostages, foreign nationals outflow evacuation from Gaza, drawing the contours of the *day after* scenario for Gaza and for the solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. All these are tightly related to Egypt's role and influence, including the personal leadership of his well-known president, Abdel Fattah El-Sisi.

Apart from looking at Cairo's current high relevance and visibility, it is worth reflecting briefly on Egypt's long standing international profile and foreign policy. In as much as I have followed this country from Bucharest, in more than 10 years of my diplomatic career (without ever suspecting how closely interested I would become one day), I could attempt a personal summary as follows: protecting the availability of the Nile River and a good Nile-water international management, which is the essential lifeline for an emerging power of close to 110 million people; finding a long lasting solution to the conflict between Israel and Palestine aiming at two states living side by side in peace and security; two other priorities are interdependent with the previous one, namely bringing its own contribution to intra-Palestinian reconciliation and playing its role for securing peace and stability in the wider Middle East; promoting and expanding Egypt's connectivity role via the Suez Canal; having good neighbourly relations both with its Arab neighbours, like Jordan, the Gulf States, Iraq, but also with its African neighbours like Libya and Sudan. Egypt is an active multilateral player, starting with

the UN system, or the African Union, and hosts the League of Arab States, as well as many regional coordinators of UN agencies and institutions. Its foreign and security policy has to manage a number of significant constraints and risks, both regional and global. This represents a powerful motivation for the country to take a pragmatic look at its multilateral stances, where it plays an active and substantial role, to provide for hard security needs of the state and its people. These are both of classical type (aiming at less armed conflicts around its borders), or the new type (less migration, steady and clean water flow on the Nile River).

AN EMBASSY IN CRISIS-MANAGEMENT MODE

This firsthand correspondence on my initial diplomatic impressions would have looked differently at the beginning of October, when I had just arrived. However, with the tragic events unfolding in Israel and the Gaza Strip, Egypt's role swiftly became prominent once again on the global stage. The country's foreign and security policy is now essentially geared towards finding a solution for ending the conflict and saving lives. That encompasses and all-society approach, from collecting and providing humanitarian aid to Gaza, to mediating between the parties directly involved and to saving lives of Palestinians, as well as other nationals from Gaza. Thus, the beginning of my mandate as Romania's Ambassador to Egypt has been almost entirely related to being part of my country's efforts to bring a constructive and consistent contribution to international, including Egyptian, efforts to alleviate the suffering.

A couple of days after my arrival, the Embassy became a crisis management team, part of the greater effort of the inter-institutional crisis management cell coordinated by the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with the essential aim of safely and rapidly getting the Romanian citizens and their family members out of Gaza. Difficult times bring about great teams, and this has been the story of our Embassy for now. Literally day and night, for more than eight weeks at the moment of writing this correspondence, every member of my team has had only one primary objective: to save the lives of our citizens, to do our utmost to ensure their safe passage through Rafah, then onto Cairo, and finally onto the Romanian special flights repatriating them to Bucharest.

We have already evacuated more than 300 persons, of whom the youngest had barely 2 months, and the eldest had 93 years. We met them, ensured their travelling documents were issued, travelled with them across Sinai to Cairo, accommodated them in Cairo for a while, attended to all their basic needs, including numerous special medical cases. Supported by the Government of Romania and by the MFA, we have made the necessary arrangements for those people to travel to Bucharest safely and promptly. It is difficult to describe in a few words these days and nights of uninterrupted efforts of the whole team, in Cairo, Rafah, Ramallah with our colleagues there, and in Bucharest. They are imaginable to those who have been through crisis evacuations. This extreme challenge has not only bound our team together, but it has saved lives, given hope to hundreds of people who could not yet escape the conflict area. It gave

all of us involved the true sense of why our mission as diplomats is so needed: because at times it can be life-saving for so many Romanian citizens and their close ones.

A last thought to be passed on to the readers and the wider world, from this unforgettable diplomatic and human experience, is that the Romanian-Egyptian friendship has again stood the test of harsh times. Our cooperation with the Egyptian MFA and other relevant institutions, particularly with the Consular Affairs Department has made impossible things possible, with everybody working 24/7 with the same goal: to save lives and hopes for a better future. The bonds between our countries were thus strengthened once more, as Romania's prime-minister and minister of foreign affairs have stated on the occasions of accompanying back home the first 94 evacuees. This is the strongest foundation an ambassador can wish for at the beginning of a mandate, and I certainly will work, together with my team, to further build on this foundation in difficult times, as well as in more peaceful and stable periods.

LOOKING AT THE MANDATE BEYOND THE IMMEDIATE CRISIS-LED MOMENT

I firmly believe that the almost 120-year-old history of bilateral relations between Romania and Egypt laid down an excellent foundation for a meaningful present and future, rich in its forms of expression and projects. I am counting on all those who, just like the members of the Embassy of Romania in Cairo, are ready to join their efforts in building on past tradition, maximising present experiences and finding new perspectives for our common future. Fully confident in our common success, I know this is a goal worth striving for.

THE PROMISE AND PREMISES OF DEVELOPMENT

Nicolae Năstase
Ambassador of Romania in the Republic of Senegal

I am honored by the invitation from the editorial team to contribute to the second issue of the *România Occidentală* (Western Romania) journal of the Romanian Diplomatic Institute. In the following lines, I will attempt to depict what many journalists and analysts refer to as the "Senegalese miracle," in other words, the historical, political, economic and social circumstances that ensure stability and provide Senegal with highly promising development prospects.

In the two short years since my arrival *au pays de la teranga* as Romania's ambassador, I have travelled extensively within the country, talking with Senegalese people from various social backgrounds – evidenced by the 700 business cards distributed – and I have leaned carefully on both the colourful local press and the thematic studies and monographs published on Senegal. A good understanding of the host country and regional stakes is a mission itself for any diplomat, being an essential condition for the success of contacts and projects for developing the bilateral relations. On the other hand, it is important to note that the following lines do not represent Romania's official position and reflect only my personal perspectives.

A STRATEGIC GEOGRAPHICAL POSITION

Situated at the western extremity of the African continent, Senegal shares a border with Mauritania to the north, Mali to the east, Guinea-Bissau to the south and Guinea to the southeast. Its territory practically encompasses the state of Gambia, which largely delineates the southern region of the country, known as Casamance. The Atlantic, not always the calmest neighbour, forms the western border. With an area of nearly 197.000 square kilometers, Senegal is not counted among Africa's giants, especially when compared to its much larger neighbours Mali and Mauritania, each occupying over one million square kilometers. On the other hand, as we shall see below, its strength does not lie in its territorial extension.

A unique combination of factors, such as good interethnic and interreligious understanding, political stability based on a competitive democratic system, and prudent economic policies aimed at reducing inequalities, help achieving the objective of the Plan for an Emergent Senegal by 2035. The greatest opportunity and challenge lie in the responsible and inclusive management of the benefits resulting from the exploitation of hydrocarbon deposits discovered off the country's shores.

Senegal's relief is flat, with the highest point of five hundred meters at the border with Guinea, on the edge of the Fouta-Djalon mountainous massif. The capital city Dakar is dominated by two long-extinct twin volcanoes located on the Cabo Verde

Peninsula, so named with a visible lack of imagination by Portuguese explorers from the 15th century. With this exception, the coastline is mostly flat and sandy, interrupted by the deltas of the Senegal, Sine-Saloum and Casamance rivers. These also mark the most popular tourist areas, with a cluster of seaside resorts south of Dakar. Climatically, Senegal transitions from the Sahelian dry regions to humid tropical regions, and the contrast between the arid north of the country and the forested south always leaves a lasting impression on the traveller.

HISTORY OF A CIVILISATIONAL MELTING POT

Let us momentarily set aside the geographic details to delve into the fascinating history of the country, the origins of which are difficult to trace due to the lack of credible sources. Although archaeology has revealed the presence of human settlements in the current territory of Senegal from ancient times (between 75.000 and 350.000 years ago), the first written records come from Arab travellers from North Africa, who progressively discovered the west of the continent between the late 8th century and the 14th–15th centuries. Descriptions of the Mali Empire come from this period, made by the historian Ibn Khaldoun and the Moroccan geographer known as Ibn Battuta. Both are precious insights into the complexity, richness and ethnic diversity of the powerful state structure that dominated the region between 1200 and 1400.

As an anecdote, it is said that the legendary Mansa Moussa, Emperor of Mali (1312-1337) – which included much of present-day Senegal – was the richest man in history, with a fortune estimated at six hundred billion dollars in today's currency. The almost exclusive source of this wealth was gold mining, which continues to play a central and often dramatic role in the region's economy, especially in contemporary Mali and Burkina Faso. It is said that for his pilgrimage to Mecca, the sovereign spent so much gold that he devalued the precious metal, and had to borrow to return to Timbuktu.

We acknowledge today the existence of several medieval state structures on the territory of Senegal, among which the Djolof Empire (1200-1549) stands out. The Djolof state controlled the extended region of Dakar, and its vassal, the Cayor Kingdom, whose last sovereign, called *damel*, died in 1886 in an unequal struggle with the French coloniser.

The historical consensus is that until the 1500s, western Africa was completely free from external interference. From the mid-15th century onwards, however, enterprising Portuguese merchants appeared off the coasts. On the ground, the Moroccan armies briefly controlled the huge area between Morocco and the Senegal river. Under these circumstances, it should come as no surprise that, although maps of the coastal regions were fairly accurate, the interior of western Africa had to wait around eight hundred years between the imprecise sketches of the Arab geographer al-Idrisi (1100-1166) and the much more precise maps of the 19th century.

Thus, cardinal Richelieu founded a monopoly trading company at the mouth of the Senegal river, established the city of Saint-Louis, conquered the island of Gorée in 1677, and obtained from the natives the land on which Dakar, Senegal's future capital, would

be built. Irritated by this impetuous French expansion, the English conquer Saint-Louis and Gorée, but are driven out by the French after only a few months. What was behind these more or less bloody confrontations between European powers? It was the trade in gold, Arabic gum, ivory, wax and... ostrich feathers, along with the shameful slave trade to the new transatlantic colonies. Before returning to the colonial period, however, it is imperative to dwell on the gradual process of Islamisation, especially since Muslims make up the vast majority of the Senegalese population nowadays.

RELIGION AS AN IDENTITY BINDER AND A BALANCING FACTOR

The spread of Islam in Senegal occurred in successive waves, between the 11th and 20th centuries, initially along the trade routes linking North Africa with the medieval empires of Mali, Songhaï, and Niger. In this first wave, a relatively small number of conversions occurred, mainly among the elites and big local merchants, resulting in an "Islam reserved for the aristocracy," in the words of the Senegalese scholar Bakari Sambe. The first military invasion of "holy war" type is thought to have been launched in 1062 by an Almoravid emir. The results of this first incursion are still the subject of historical controversy today, as the stakes of introducing the Muslim faith into the little-known territories of sub-Saharan Africa are, of course, politically charged.

The following waves of Islamisation were generally peaceful but much more effective because they used trade contacts as a medium and Sufism as a doctrine. This made the process, which is spread over a long period, particularly complex, making it almost impossible to establish precise historical time frames. What we do know is that the in-depth Islamisation of the country would not have been possible without the contribution of the Senegalese Sufi *marabouts* – nicknamed the "apostles of black Islam" (Moriba 2023) – who were active between the mid-19th century and the end of the 20th century. The mission undertaken by those religious leaders, that of converting the largely animist population to Islam, coincided with both the colonial conquest and a series of radical economic and social transformations.

The undeniable success of the *marabouts* determined political leaders to approach Islam as a source of legitimacy against the recent colonial intrusion. This produced not only a religious synthesis, with Sufism taking on the garb of the local brotherhoods founded by the *marabouts*, but also a political one, as the Sufi Islam of the brotherhoods became an alternative identity to the often brutal intrusion of the French colonialists. As evidence, the same researcher points out that, "the Casamance region, where armed resistance against France lasted until the 1920s, is also the least Islamised, remaining a bastion of traditional beliefs" (Sambe 2023). Paradoxically, the more successful the pressure from the French coloniser, the more Islam's influence increased as an identity vector. It was not accidental that many of the founders of the Koranic brotherhoods and schools were also resistance militants, finding a wide audience in the four regions rapidly subdued by France, whose inhabitants were considered French citizens and not "subjects" as in the rest of the country, namely Dakar, Rufisque, Gorée and Saint-Louis.

To conclude, Senegalese Islam is "Sunni, Malekite, Sufi-oriented," according to Bamba Ndiaye. The last qualifier raises some problems because the Sufi tradition implies detachment from the world, asceticism, and contemplation, while local brotherhoods have adapted the doctrine, as we have seen, giving rise to a distinct local version. Moreover, at least in the case of the school founded by Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba, the religious teachings integrate work as part of the practice of the faith and thus, of the approach to Allah. Therefore, we are dealing with a specific version of the practice of Islam, which guarantees openness and tolerance.

Today, the Senegalese religious landscape is dominated by four major denominations, which have helped integrate religious norms into local culture. Two are of Maghrebi inspiration (*Tijâniyya* and *Qâdiriyya*) and two, *Mourîdiyya* and *Laayène*, were founded by local leaders, the Senegalese sheikhs Ahmadou Bamba and Limamou Laye. It should be noted that these structures are not only a framework for spiritual fulfilment, but also real internal economic forces through the taxes they levy, the recruitment of professional guilds, agricultural workforce, etc. In return, they preach a work ethic, provide an important social safety net for the less privileged, and are actively involved in the life of the city, continuing nowadays to play a mediating role between the main political forces.

As we have shown above, French colonisation was not only opposed by Great Britain, a matter resolved by the Treaties of Paris (1814) and Vienna (1815), but also by the active hostility of the Muslim brotherhoods and some local political leaders. This was only overcome in the latter part of the 19th century, after a difficult military campaign. Before the Berlin Conference (1884-1885), the colonial powers had only just begun to assert their presence on the West African coasts, apart from France, which had already gone deep into the interior in its struggle against the Toucouleur Empire, practically following the Senegal and Niger rivers (Ade & Crowder 1992, 128-129).

The Berlin Conference sealed the fate of the region. Despite fierce resistance, by 1903, most of West Africa had been conquered using modern European weaponry. Attempts at rebellion also occurred during the First World War, after which Africans found new ways to regain control of their countries (Ade & Crowder, *op. cit.*), as we shall see below. The abolition of the slave trade dealt a heavy blow to the profits made by the colonies, forcing the French administration to gradually abandon the strictly commercial logic and opt for intensive agriculture on the fertile banks of the Senegal, Saloum and Niger rivers. Not without some difficulty, French agronomists introduced new crops, such as sugar cane, indigo, coffee and especially groundnuts, which still account for a large percentage of contemporary Senegalese exports.

THE FIGHT FOR INDEPENDENCE

We recall that the inhabitants of the Saint-Louis, Gorée, Dakar and Rufisque regions had been granted the privilege of French citizenship, with which came the right to vote and to elect representatives to the parliament in Paris. Senegalese politicians quickly learned to use these advantages to advance the national cause, especially as their

country was the showcase of the colonial administration, the pearl of France's overseas crown, Dakar being the capital of French West Africa.[1] "Assimilate without being assimilated" is one of the watchwords of Léopold Sédar Senghor, the most famous exponent of an elite generation. He knew how to claim their cultural heritage without rejecting the progress brought by French institutions, education and entrepreneurs.

Senghor's mentor, Blaise Diagne, whose name is now also the name of the main Senegalese international airport, was the first African deputy elected by the citizens of Saint-Louis against politicians who were *métises*, or sent from the metropolis. Remarkably, Diagne's election highlighted, according to some authors, the interethnic harmony typical of Senegal, as Blaise Diagne, of mixed ancestry, was adopted by the *Wolof* majority in the then capital of the country. Senghor himself, of *Sérère* ethnicity, was sent to the National Assembly in Paris in 1945, the very year he entered politics. On his return home, he was one of the advocates of slow and progressive independence, achieved through dialogue with General de Gaulle's France. On 5 September 1960, Senghor was elected to lead the country, whose national anthem he composed: "Le Lion Rouge." Jean Foyer, an eminent French lawyer and minister rightly observed in a speech dedicated to Léopold Sédar Senghor: "At the end of November 1960, all the former overseas territories had become sovereign states, within the borders drawn by the colonizers. Paradoxically, but proving clarity, the Assembly of the United Nations transformed the maintenance of borders inherited from the colonial period into a principle of the new international law."

In 1976, Senegal became a multiparty democracy. In 1980, after Senghor's resignation, the country went through the first peaceful transfer of power in a series that continues to this day, as incumbent President Macky Sall prepares to hand over the baton after presidential elections scheduled for February 2024. In the meantime, numerous local and legislative elections have been held and, according to international observers, run smoothly, with Senegal emerging as one of the region's most stable democracies. The most recent parliamentary elections, in 2022, saw a rise of the opposition in the voters' choice, but the government was maintained following the formation of a new majority coalition. In conclusion, among the sub-Saharan countries that have initiated democratic transitions, Senegal stands out as an exception, avoiding the vicious circle of *coups d'état*. One explanation lies in the approach to political power in relation to economic performance.

THE ECONOMIC CHALLENGE AND THE PROMISE OF CHEAP ENERGY

In 2000, after an extremely complicated period marked by inflation, high prices, prolonged power cuts, etc., economic adjustment began to take effect. The fight against poverty through industrial development and foreign investment became the main goal of the government. In 2012, presidential candidate Macky Sall made the right decision by prioritising the reduction of social injustice in his economic program: family security benefits were the flagship measure. Today, 400,000 families

[1] Flexible federal organisational structure, introduced in 1902 (AN).

enjoy this form of support. At the same time, the post-2012 government has adopted measures to stimulate entrepreneurship, small and medium-sized enterprises. To this end, microcredit institutions have been set up and bureaucracy has been reduced. Unfortunately, however, the tax collection rate remains extremely low.

With more than 18 million inhabitants, 55% of whom are aged between 24 and 35, and an official unemployment rate of 24%, Senegal's GDP in 2022 was $27.5 billion. Although remarkable progress has been made in electrifying the country, only 43% of the rural population has access to electricity. The high cost of basic necessities is another, even more complicated challenge: according to the World Bank analyses, average inflation is estimated at 9.6% for 2022, compared to 2.2% in 2021, the evolution being driven by food prices rising by 15% on average in 2022, compared to 2.9% in 2021.

Nevertheless, according to an African Development Bank report[2], Senegal's economic prospects look good. Real GDP is expected to grow by 5.0% in 2023 and to approach 10% in 2024 thanks to oil production, increased agricultural production, as well as the gradual mitigation of the effects of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Inflation is projected to fall to 3.4% in 2023 and 2.6% in 2024 due to a tighter monetary policy. At the same time, rationalisation of energy subsidies and better mobilisation of domestic resources could reduce the budget deficit to 5.8% of GDP in 2023 and 4.5% in 2024.

Another possible target is to lower the external debt to below 70% of the GDP in 2024 by reducing public deficit and growth prospects. For the first time since 2020, the current account deficit is expected to fall below 10% of the GDP in 2024 as hydrocarbon exports begin. Possible risks include the prolongation of the war in Ukraine, falling hydrocarbon prices, the effects of climate change and the regional security situation.

At the same time, it is expected that oil and gas exploitation will contribute to the realisation of the "Plan for an Emerging Senegal 2035," generating significant resources for the state budget. According to estimates, the Sangomar extraction site could generate cumulative revenues of $15 billion, and the Grand Tortue Ahmeyim (GTA), jointly exploited with Mauritania, will generate $24 billion. It should be noted that taxes, duties, and state holdings in the Senegalese oil company *Petrosen* account for 60% of the revenues to be generated. In the short term, however, Senegal's external debt increased in 2022 due to loans taken out by state companies to finance hydrocarbon exploitation.

AN UNDISPUTED CENTER OF DIPLOMACY AND INVESTMENT

The fortunate synthesis of the above elements, in particular, the peaceful coexistence of different ethnicities and religious denominations, together with democratic stability, has significantly increased Senegal's attractiveness in recent years. Alongside these endogenous aspects, however, we should mention the particularly worrying political developments in several countries in the region, marked by the overthrow of civilian leadership and the seizure of power by the military. By contrast, Senegal is considered a

[2] African Development Bank Group. (2023) *Senegal: Macroeconomic outlook*. https://www.afdb.org/en/countries/west-africa/senegal/senegal-economic-outlook

regional balancing factor and a source of inspiration. In this context, it is not surprising that Dakar is home to 34 offices of UN institutions in West Africa, making it a regional diplomatic hub. The presence of embassies also reflects this reality, with more than 80 accredited bilateral missions, most of which also cover a variable number of other countries in the region.

From 2022 to 2023, Senegal's President Macky Sall held the Presidency of the African Union, with an ambitious, but realistic agenda and extremely intense diplomatic activity. This has taken the form of numerous visits abroad and participation in major international conferences, such as the European Union-Africa Summit in February 2022. The priorities of the Senegalese mandate have focused on the financial-economic dimension. Among the undoubted successes of Macky Sall's lobbying, we can mention the decision of the 20 most powerful economies in the world (G20) to grant membership in the group to the African Union.

As a confirmation of its role as an unrivalled diplomatic center, Dakar has hosted numerous visits by heads of state and government in recent years. These include the President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who will be making his fifth visit to Senegal in 2022, the President of Poland, Andrzej Duda, in September 2022, the President of Germany, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, the President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins in January 2023 and the President of the European Council, Charles Michel. The Prime Ministers of Canada, Spain and Germany, Princess Astrid of Belgium, leading a large business delegation, Grand Duke Henri of Luxembourg and the US Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken, have also recently visited Dakar. Senegal's global importance is based, as we have seen, on its central role in the regional architecture, as confirmed by the visits of and contacts with African heads of state and government.

In terms of economic partnerships, the European Union continues to be the main source of exports to Senegal, with France leading the way, but closely followed by China and India. It is worth noting that France remains the main source of foreign direct investment, which has fallen slightly in recent years, to the benefit of China and Turkey, which have strong presence in constructions and civil infrastructure. However, the difference is made by official development assistance, where Paris has a global exposure (direct aid and loans) of almost two billion dollars which, by 2021, will finance around eighty projects in a wide variety of fields.

THE CHALLENGE OF EMERGENCE AND THE TEST OF NEXT YEAR'S ELECTIONS

Under the leadership of President Macky Sall, Senegal has adopted a new development model with a view to becoming an emerging market economy in the near future. This strategy, known as the "Plan for an Emerging Senegal 2035" (PES), forms the reference framework for the country's economic and social policy in the medium and long term and focuses the bulk of external investment and contributions. To this end, the government has initiated transformations designed to boost growth potential in a sustainable way, as well as to encourage creativity and private initiative. The strategic guidelines are based on three priority pillars:

1. Structural transformation of the economy by strengthening current drivers of growth and developing new sectors that can create wealth, jobs, and social inclusion, with a focus on exports and foreign investment.
2. Promoting human capital by significantly improving living conditions and combating social inequalities, while protecting the resource base and fostering the emergence of economically viable territorial groupings.
3. Good governance, through measures to strengthen security and stability, protect rights and freedoms, strengthen the rule of law, and create a more conducive environment for social peace.

The first ten years of the PES implementation have allowed an average growth of 6% per year, which translated into a 5% reduction in the poverty rate, from 42.8% in 2011 to 37.8% in 2018. Currently, Senegal has the lowest poverty rate among the countries of the West African Monetary and Economic Union (UEMOA). Between 2019-22, the average annual growth was 4.4% and it is expected that the exploitation of hydrocarbons will allow a much higher growth rate in the future (African Business, April 2023).

From a political perspective, the key to interpreting the presidential elections, scheduled in February 2024, is to preserve the Senegalese tradition of allowing the sovereign expression of the will of the people, regardless of the names of the candidates who will remain in the presidential race. On the other hand, according to the famous saying from Bill Clinton's first election campaign in 1992, the economy will determine the outcome of the election.

It is essential that the future political leadership strengthens confidence in the country's modernisation and industrialisation project, the only one that can set a new, more inclusive, and job-creating growth trajectory. To this end, the opportunity represented by oil and gas resources must be exploited to the fullest. On the other hand, it is to be hoped that this "oil windfall" – which is already raising expectations – will be reflected in higher living standards and improved social services. Just as Senegal has been able to build interethnic harmony and avoid the vicious circle of *coups d'état*, the next test of wisdom required of it is perhaps the most difficult: fair management of its abundant natural resources. The history of other countries shows that the challenge is not an easy one.

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DAVID MITRANY, *THE FUNCTIONAL THEORY OF POLITICS*[1] AND *A WORKING PEACE SYSTEM*[2]

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The publication in Romanian of the first two volumes of David Mitrany's complete works is not only a gesture of intellectual recognition, but also a contribution to current debates about the developments and crises permeating the international arena. In recent years, it has become increasingly clear that the political order gradually built after World War II and stabilised at the end of the Cold War is in a moment of crisis. The challenges facing this order today are primarily caused by Russia's aggression against Ukraine, China's military pressures in East Asia, the emerging economic war between the United States and China, and the recent disturbances in the Middle East. These challenges could lead either to a minor adjustment, after which the international order will largely remain unchanged, or to a fundamental repositioning of power balances and alliances in the global system.

Regardless of the outcome, two aspects deserve attention: (a) that the international political order is no longer the same as it was, for instance, ten years ago – therefore, that we should be aware of the advantages and disadvantages of this situation – and (b) that the future results of these political, economic, and social mutations are not predetermined. They depend largely on the decisions and strategies adopted by the key actors in the international system.

More than ever, in times of uncertainty and change, such as the period we are going through, the practical value of works from the past is truly tested. The main reason we still read, among others, Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Kant, or, closer to our period, E.H. Carr, Hans Morgenthau, or Kenneth Waltz, is that they provide guidance in analysing the type of problems we face today. This is also the reason why we read – or should read – David Mitrany, a Romanian-born political thinker who spent most of his life in the United Kingdom and the United States, at the London School of Economics (LSE) and the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton University. Mitrany's work helps us better understand the dynamics of international relations and the social and political

[1] David Mitrany, *Teoria funcțională a politicii*, translation and footnotes by Laura Cornelia Ciutina, Vladimir Lazurca, and Marcela Țușcă, preface by Marius Lazurca, Cluj-Napoca, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2023.

[2] David Mitrany, *Un sistem de pace operativ*, with an introduction by Hans J. Morgenthau, translation and footnotes by Laura Cornelia Ciutina, Vladimir Lazurca, and Marcela Țușcă, preface by Marius Lazurca, Cluj-Napoca, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2023.

phenomena that shape interactions on the global stage, while offering a solution to restore peace in the international system. Essentially, Mitrany's works align with an institutional effort to transform the conflictual reality of the international arena into a "working system of peace."

David Mitrany (1888-1975) was not only a witness to the most significant events of the last century but also actively participated in all major international debates that shaped peace projects after the First World War and the Second World War. In the 1950s and 1960s, he contributed to discussions about the European project, being a prominent critic of the European federalist direction. After World War I, Mitrany was a fervent supporter of the League of Nations. During World War II, he published his major work in the field of International Relations, *A Working Peace System* (1943). The book represented a substantial contribution to discussions about reorganising the international order in the post-war period.

Mitrany was a liberal thinker in the modern tradition, fascinated by the New Deal experiment and closely associated with British Labour circles. His thinking is infused with a pragmatism specific to the transitional era of the first half of the 20th century, presenting itself as an anti-doctrinal solution to the governance problem of the international system and sceptical about the utility of any theoretical scheme in global politics. To better understand Mitrany's work, it is essential to remember that the Romanian-born thinker wrote in the context of the rise of administrative statehood, organisational revolution, and experiments in social and economic planning. He also wrote during the 1930s and 1940s, when protectionism, after the Great Depression, became an economic policy option for an increasing number of states.

As the author himself notes, the 20th century was marked by two opposing trends: on one hand, a resurgence of nationalism, typical of periods of nation-state building; on the other hand, there was an increase in aggregate demand for social welfare, manifesting itself in both Europe and other parts of the world. These trends were accompanied by rapid and spectacular developments in science and technology, transforming many issues associated until then with national governance into themes of *international* governance. Mitrany provides the example of the development of atomic bombs, but recent developments in artificial intelligence can be invoked as well, transcending both national borders and the traditional division into civilisational spaces. Mitrany attempts to answer the following question: how can we organise a functional international governance system in a context defined by profound divergence in values and political, moral, and religious options, historical rivalries, differences in states' natural resource endowments, and historically contingent trends that, however, create new governance challenges?

In all his writings dedicated to international relations, Mitrany addressed the issue of organising an international political system. The solution he proposed is the "functional approach," a method of transnational cooperation based on the presumption that the joint resolution of problems that transcend national borders is a necessary condition for the gradual development of an international governance structure. Over time, the multiplication of functional arrangements that the institutions create

through such transnational cooperation gives rise to a complex system of structures. This system will have secondary effects, such as the weakening of national sovereignty – considered a cause of wars in the past century – the attenuation of historical rivalries, as well as the increase in the standard of living and overall social welfare. Mitrany's functionalism can be described as the transition from the zero-sum game of political and military confrontation – essentially the basis of the balance of power doctrine – to the positive-sum game of (economic) cooperation.

Mitrany's work has today fallen into relative obscurity for reasons more related to the evolution of the international relations discipline, marked by an increasingly pronounced inclination towards a form of positivism, rather than the academic recognition it enjoyed during his lifetime. Contributions, which are more sporadic than systematic, to the debate on his work came from authors such as John Eastby, Cornelia Navari, Lucian M. Ashworth, or Gerhard Michael Ambrosi[3]. Mitrany's writings, in general, and the functional theory of politics, in particular, have not given rise to a secondary literature comparable to that dedicated to Hans Morgenthau, Norman Angell, or E. H. Carr. Unfortunately, Mitrany is as little known in the international academic space as he is in the Romanian intellectual sphere.

The recent Romanian editions of the volumes *Teoria funcțională a politicii* (*The Functional Theory of Politics*) and *Un sistem de pace operativ* (*A Working Peace System*), translated by Laura Cornelia Ciutina, Vladimir Lazurca, and Marcela Țușcă, both with a preface by Marius Lazurca, represent the first step towards better entrenching David Mitrany in the Romanian-language intellectual circuit. These works cover the gap in post-1989 Romanian political science that is difficult to explain. At the same time, the recovery of Mitrany's work – spanning multiple disciplines from modern economic history to political sociology and international relations theory – represents a necessary step in developing Mitrany's studies in the Romanian academic space (initiated by Professor Mihai Alexandrescu).

Mitrany's functionalism, no matter how profound and rooted in the primacy of practice over theoretical thinking, can be clarified and deepened conceptually and analytically if re-examined through the theoretical lenses of other research paradigms that have developed in the social sciences over the recent decades. For example, one of the criticisms that can be levelled at Mitrany is the trust and optimism he exhibits towards the role of experts in functional arrangements. With the revolution in public choice theory, it has been shown how naïve is the assumption that experts are always neutral and dedicated to "truth for truth's sake". Any contemporary interpreter of functionalism should, from this perspective, be able to answer questions regarding the epistemological foundations of the field studied: what and how much of Mitrany's functionalism remains standing after a critical examination, operated with the conceptual tools of modern social sciences? And, moreover, how can those vulnerable

[3] The last three mentioned authors are also members of the international council of the "David Mitrany" Center, established three years ago through the efforts of Professor Paul Dragoș Aligică and Ambassador Marius Lazurca, in a partnership that includes the University of Bucharest, "Babeș-Bolyai" University in Cluj, the Bucharest University of Economic Studies, as well as KPMG Romania, BCR, and the Spandugino Foundation.

parts be reconstructed so that the more general logic of the functional approach is preserved?

The texts gathered in the freshly translated volumes were written by the author at different moments in his life. However, all essays converge around the theme of the functional approach, its clarification, and its implications in various aspects. Unlike the volume *Un sistem de pace operativ* (*A Working Peace System*) prefaced in the original English edition by Hans Morgenthau, which brings together only the author's theoretical contributions, in *Teoria funcțională a politicii* (*The Functional Theory of Politics*) the reader will also find Mitrany's autobiography. This presents the author's reflection on his own life and various moments in the evolution of the functional approach. The penultimate chapter of the volume, "Retrospective and Prospective View" is a thorough analysis that Mitrany makes, at the end of his life, of functionalism and how it was received in the post-war academic and political world. The epilogue of the volume concludes with one of the few philosophical reflections that can be found in Mitrany's writings, a meditation that also captures something fundamental about his personality, namely a modesty that permeates all his writings:

> "[A]fter dethroning its gods, subduing nature, and conquering mechanical force, man is now the sole master of man – and his main enemy. What will he do? After working a lifetime, humbly striving for peace, I find that, as a researcher, I have no answer; and though I am not devout in the sense of a creed, in the end, I turn back to a simple prayer for the 'great master of all things, yet prey to all'" (p. 252).

FROM AMONG RDI'S RECENT ACTIVITIES

In the past half year, the Romanian Diplomatic Institute (RDI) has contributed to Romania's goal of supporting the EU integration process of the Republic of Moldova by organising an extensive training programme in the field of European affairs. In support of the MFA's efforts to reshape Romania's global foreign policy, the RDI has also run a training course for African diplomats. In addition, RDI has also supported the MFA by organising training programmes for Romanian diplomats and other ministry staff. The details are as follows:

- *The training programme in the field of European affairs for dignitaries, members of the diplomatic and consular corps and civil servants from the Republic of Moldova* was organised on 13-26 September 2023 in Chișinău;
- *The Professional training programme dedicated to diplomats from African countries* was organised on 22-28 October 2023, in Bucharest and Sinaia;
- *The professional training and development programme: Leadership in Diplomacy and Governance* was organised in two sessions: May-June and October-December 2023, in locations of Bucharest;
- *The Basic Diplomatic Training Programme for new members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps of Romania,* held at the RDI in May-October 2023.

Furthermore, RDI provided analyses to the MFA, published analytical papers and thematic studies, and contributed to public information and discussion on European and international relations through conferences and constant presence with expertise in the mass media. The following are the most relevant such contributions:

- "Romania-Republic of Korea Strategic Partnership" by Alexandru Drăgulin (RDI), analysis for MFA, February 2023;
- Education campaign "Xi Jinping's thinking on socialism with Chinese characteristics for the new era" by Sînziana Dumitrescu, RDI website, April 2023;
- "China's 12 points on proposals for a political solution to the war against Ukraine" by Sînziana Dumitrescu, analysis for MFA, April 2023;
- "Analysis of the presidential and parliamentary elections in Turkey" by Dragoș C. Mateescu, Director of Expert Analysis Department for MFA, May 2023;
- "Oleg Serebrian, Deputy Prime Minister for Reintegration of the Republic of Moldova, in dialogue with Ileana Racheru" (RDI), in *România Occidentală* journal, vol. 2, no. 1/2023;
- "Romania-Turkey strategic partnership and its role in Black Sea geopolitics" by Alexandru-Ionuț Drăgulin, in *România Occidentală* journal, vol. 2, no. 1/2023;

— "Challenges in the Black Sea and the American strategic vision in the region" by Valentin Nicolescu, in *România Occidentală* journal, vol. 2, no. 1/2023;

— "European Diplomatic Academy – The future of regional stability", correspondence from Brussels signed by Mihai Constantinescu, in *România Occidentală* journal, vol. 2, no. 1/2023;

— "Summit: The Three Seas Initiative in Bucharest, September 2023" by Claudiu Codreanu, in *România Occidentală* journal, vol. 2, no. 1/2023;

— "The challenges of the digital authoritarian offensive. The Russian and Chinese models. Ways to combat it" by Claudiu Codreanu, thematic study no. 34/2023, RDI website;

— "Beyond utopias and dystopias — AI's impact on cybersecurity" by Claudiu Codreanu, thematic study no. 35/2023, RDI website;

— "The European Union's Foreign Policy and Europeanisation in the Context of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine: The Case of EU — Georgia Relations" by Alexandru Drăgulin, thematic study no. 36/2023, RDI website;

— "Turkey towards the Centenary — Authoritarianism and Anomie in the 21st Century" by Dragoș C. Mateescu, in Ioana Constantin-Bercean and Matei Blănaru (editors), *Turkey at the Centenary. Quo vadis?,* Bucharest, ISPRI Publishing House, p. 173-198;

— "National securitisation against cultural diversity in Turkey and the path beyond" by Dragoș C. Mateescu, in Marian Zulean, Mălina Voicu and Ksenya Kizilova (editors), *Social Values and Identities in the Black Sea Area*, London: Lexington Books, p. 259-279;

— Dragoș C. Mateescu edited and wrote the footnotes and afterword for the Romanian translation of the biography of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk by Patrick Kinross (*Atatürk — The Rebirth of a Nation*), published by Omnium Publishing House in Bucharest (2023), under the title *Atatürk – Renașterea unei națiuni.*

Some of the RDI representatives' participation in seminars, conferences and working visits include:

— 6 July: Claudiu Codreanu participated as a speaker at the conference *Resilience to Hybrid Threats in the Eastern Partnership, in the framework of Panel II – The Eastern Partnership's current and future role in strengthening the societal resilience of its members,* organised by the Euro-Atlantic Resilience Centre;

— 12 July: Valentin Nicolescu gave the lecture "American Political Life", in the framework of the *Basic Diplomatic Training Programme for new members of the Romanian Diplomatic and Consular Corps;*

— 14 July: Valentin Nicolescu gave the lecture "Ideologies in International Relations", within the *Basic Diplomatic Training Programme for new members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps of Romania;*

— March-July: Mihai Constantinescu completed a traineeship at the European External Action Service, European Diplomatic Academy, Brussels, Belgium;

— 4-8 September: Alexandru Drăgulin attended the European Consortium for Policy Research/ ECPR General Conference, Charles University, Prague. Paper presented: "The EU Foreign Policy and Europeanisation in the Context of the Russia — Ukraine War: The case of EU — Georgia relations";

— 20-27 September: Valentin Nicolescu was part of the IDR team that organised and delivered courses in the framework of the European Affairs Training Programme for dignitaries, members of the diplomatic and consular corps, and civil servants from the Republic of Moldova. The programme took place in Chișinău and was organised by the RDI under the coordination of the Romanian MFA and at the request of the Republic of Moldova;

— 18-22 September: Alexandru Drăgulin participated in the training and professional development course "The European Union Regulatory System", organised by the European Institute of Romania, Bucharest;

— 5-8 October: Valentin Nicolescu participated in the international conference *Failed States — Boundaries, Current Cases, Practical Issues*, organised by the Faculty of Political Science of Istanbul University, where he presented the paper "Failed States or Failed Science? Critically Discussing the Assumptions behind the Failed States Theory";

— 12 October: Claudiu Codreanu participated in the academic conference *Digital Diplomacy: Trends & Features*, organised by Istanbul Ticaret University, with the paper "Beyond short-lived responses to cyber operations. The never-ending UN GGE and OEWG processes", 12 October 2023 (online);

— 7-8 November: Valentin Nicolescu represented RDI at the *Ukrainian Central European Forum in Lviv*, Ukraine. The event, organised by the Foreign Policy Council *Ukrainian Prism*, brought together experts and practitioners from Central Europe and other geographical areas of the world;

— 9-11 November: Alexandru Drăgulin participated in the international conference *20 Months After the Russian Invasion in Ukraine. What Has Been Done, What Needs to Be Done in the Near Future, What Can Be Learned from the Past?*, at the University of Bucharest. Paper presented: "Cooperation at the Black Sea: The Romania — Georgia Strategic Partnership after the Russian Invasion of Ukraine";

— 10-12 November: Sînziana Dumitrescu and Mihai Constantinescu participated with individual presentations at the national conference "Politics and Policies: History, Implementation and Strategies for the Future" (Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca);

— 17 November: Dragoș C. Mateescu represented the RDI and the Romanian MFA at the conference "Advancing cooperative security beyond NATO/EU borders: Prospects for enhanced regional cooperation among Black Sea littoral states". The conference was organised by Global Focus Romania in partnership with Sofia

Security Forum, Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, NATO Public Diplomacy Division, and the Romanian Embassy in Sofia, which also hosted the event;

— 8-25 November: Valentin Nicolescu attended the *Caspian Basin Studies Program*, organised by ADA University in Baku, Azerbaijan. The programme was also attended by 27 members of the diplomatic corps or diplomatic academies from all over the world, such as Vietnam, Mexico, Hungary, Bulgaria, Poland, Ukraine, Russia, the United States, Iran, Morocco, Egypt, or Pakistan;

— 7-8 December: Claudiu Codreanu participated in the academic conference *Smart Cities International Conference 11th Edition*, organised by SNSPA, with the paper "Securing digitalization in the age of AI. Cybersecurity for the Internet of Things", 7-8 December 2023 (Bucharest);

— 12-15 December: Dragoș C. Mateescu represented RDI at the *49th Convention of the International Forum on Diplomatic Education*, organised by the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna and hosted by Devawongse Varopakarn Institute of Foreign Affairs in Bangkok, Thailand.

Also during this period, the agenda of the Director General of RDI, Mrs Liliana Popescu-Bîrlan included participation in international events, lectures in training programmes and various conferences, meetings with Romanian and foreign ambassadors. Among the representation actions abroad, we mention:

— 26-28 June: Lecture "Romania-China-EU-CEE, a Quadrilateral Puzzle", at the international conference *Geopolitical Challenges of China – Central and Eastern Europe* organised by INIS Belgrade and Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, Belgrade, Republic of Serbia;

— 2-5 July: Working visit at the invitation of the Friedric-Ebert-Stiftung, as part of a delegation to the German Foreign Ministry, Parliamentary Foreign Policy Committees, think tanks, Berlin;

— 6 July: Lecture "Epistemological Aspects of Getting Informed on International Affairs", as part of the training programme *Building resilience to disinformation in a changing communication environment* for diplomats from sub-Saharan Africa;

— 13 September: Official opening of the European Affairs Training *Programme for Moldovan dignitaries, members of the diplomatic and consular corps, civil servants*, RDI course organised in Chișinău;

— 18-20 September: Lecture "Priorities and Challenges of Romania's Foreign Policy", held at the MFA Diplomatic School of Armenia and signing of the MOU between IDR and the MFA Diplomatic School of Armenia, Yerevan;

— 25-27 September: Lecture "Dimensions of Romania's Science Diplomacy", at the conference *The potential for development of science diplomacy on a national and European level,* 20th anniversary of the Bulgarian Diplomatic Institute, Sofia;

— 25-27 October: Presentation "The War in Ukraine: Challenges for EU-China Relations and What to do About Them", at the conference *The EU in the Era of Great Transformation and the Future of China — Europe Relations*, organised by Fudan University, Shanghai;

— 9-10 November: Moderator of the session *Zeitenwende in Germany and its impacts for a stronger Europe*, Bucharest Forum Aspen-GMF;

— 22-28 November: Participation in the meeting of the Directors of Diplomatic Institutes of the European Union — *EU Foreign Policy in action: promoting Europe's interests and values in the world*, Madrid.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

➢ **Traian Hristea** is Secretary of State for Global Affairs and Diplomatic Strategies in the MFA. A career diplomat since 1996, Traian Hristea served in the OSCE Mission to Tajikistan as a political and press officer (1998-2000). Among other positions in the MFA, he has been the political director and the director of the Wider Europe and Republic of Moldova Directorate. Traian Hristea currently holds the diplomatic rank of ambassador and represented Romania in Ukraine from this position (2005-2010). He spent a significant period of his diplomatic career within the European External Action Service, serving as head of the EU Delegation to Armenia (2011-2015), Kazakhstan (2015-2018), and Mongolia (2018-2021). Traian Hristea has been awarded the National Order "Faithful Service" in the rank of Knight, as well as the Order of "Diplomatic Merit" in the rank of Knight. Additionally, he was awarded the "Certificate of Honor" by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Traian Hristea is fluent in English, French, Russian, Mongolian, Italian, and Ukrainian.

➢ **Simona Corlan-Ioan** is a lecturer at the Faculty of History of the University of Bucharest. Since 2017, she has been the head of the Institute of African Studies at the UB. Professor Corlan-Ioan is also the holder of the Senghor Chair since 2020. She has extensive experience in the academic field, having completed numerous research internships in France between 1995 and 2019 at prestigious academic institutions, such as École des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) in Paris. In 1998, she graduated from a PhD program in History with a thesis on the *Image of Black Africa in 19th century of France*. Professor Corlan-Ioan has also pursued a diplomatic career from 2006 to 2016, serving as Romania's ambassador in countries such as Senegal, Mali, Mauritania, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and the Kingdom of Morocco.

➢ **Mihai Constantinescu** is a researcher at the Romanian Diplomatic Institute (RDI), Expert Analysis Department. His expertise is in democratic studies, being interested in the conditions and environment that facilitate the transformation of diplomacy into a democratic vector and the norms' diffusion. Mainly, Mihai's papers are focused on the African continent, he published a series of thematic articles both under the aegis of RDI and in several international academic journals. Previously, Mihai was a junior researcher at the College for Advanced Performance Studies (Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania), as well as a project assistant at the International Organization for Migration (Windhoek, Namibia) and the European External Action Service (Brussels, Belgium). Mihai graduated in Political Sciences at the Central European University (Vienna, Austria), currently being enrolled as a PhD candidate at the National School of Political and Administrative Studies (Bucharest, Romania).

➢ **Valentin Quintus Nicolescu** holds a PhD in political science from the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (NUPSPA) in Bucharest, and is an associate lecturer at the same institution. He has published academic articles and book chapters in fields such as political ideologies, political theory, and international relations theory. He is currently enrolled at the RDI as senior researcher, specialised on global and US politics.

➢ **Sînziana Dumitrescu** is a foreign policy analyst within Department of Expert Analysis at the Romanian Diplomatic Institute. Her research focuses on Asian studies, mainly on Chinese foreign policy and its relations with the European Union. She graduated from the Faculty of History of the University of Bucharest, majoring in International Relations, and she is currently a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Political Science, SNSPA.

➢ **Claudiu Codreanu** is a researcher at the Romanian Diplomatic Institute – Department of Expert Analysis, holding a PhD in Political Science from the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration. He has published journal articles in the areas of cyberspace and cybersecurity. His research activities focus on cybersecurity, internet policies and developments, digital authoritarianism, and digital democracy.

➢ **Israel Campos** is an Angolan journalist and advocate of equal rights politics. He has been a reporter and broadcaster since 2015 and works at the biggest radio station in his country, the National Radio of Angola. He is also a correspondent for the National Radio of Angola in the UK, studying Media Foundation at Bellerbys College. Israel Campos has participated in the media coverage of major national events, such as child sexual assault protests (2016), carnival celebrations (2014, 2015, 2016) and political tensions in Zimbabwe (2017). He interviewed important figures in Angolan and global society and politics. Along with his radio work, Israel Campos publishes articles, interviews and opinion articles in various Angolan newspapers and news sites.

➢ **Adrian-Eugen Preda** is a research assistant at the Research, Development and Innovation Institute within "Constantin Brâncuși" University in Târgu Jiu, Romania. He pursued undergraduate studies at the Faculty of Political Sciences, specialising in International Relations and European Studies, followed by the master's program in English "Security and Diplomacy", both at the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration in Bucharest (NUPSPA). He also completed his doctoral studies at NUPSPA and holds a doctorate in Political Science – International Relations, with a thesis on the effects of the hegemony exercised by the great powers from the perspective of Romania in the 20th century.

➢ **Olivia Toderean** is a Romanian diplomat currently serving as Romania's Ambassador to Egypt. Previously, she has been the director of policy planning (2016-2020, 2006-2010) the deputy to Romania's Ambassador

to the Kingdom of Belgium, the director general for global affairs in the Romanian MFA (2023, 2021). Before joining the Romanian MFA, she was an International Relations academic at the Faculty of Political Science and Public Administration, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj. She continues to be an IR scholar as an author or editor of books in IR and Gender Studies, and of articles on IR Theories, Theories of Development, Gender in IR, foreign policy analysis. She holds an MA degree at the University of Manchester (1999) and a PhD at the National School of Political Science and Public Administration (Bucharest, 2006). She has been a grantee of the Civic Education Project (Romania), Michigan University (US), Sussex University (UK), Central European University (Hungary) and European University Institute (Florence, Italy). She has the diplomatic rank of Ambassador by Presidential Decree on 1st of September 2022 and has been awarded two public distinctions: "Diplomatic Merit" by Decree of the President of Romania in 2007 (medal), and in 2019 (decoration in the rank of Knight).

➢ **Nicolae Năstase** is a graduate of the Political Science Faculty, French section, at the University of Bucharest. He serves currently as the Ambassador of Romania to Senegal, holding accreditation also in Burkina Faso, the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, and the Republic of Guinea-Bissau. He has served as a national expert at the Permanent Secretariat of the Community of Democracies at the Embassy of Romania in Warsaw (since 2018). He was a key collaborator at the Permanent Mission in Strasbourg (2006-2010), an advisor in the Cabinet of the Minister of Foreign Affairs (2010-2012), and the ambassador to Tunis (2012-2017).

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"Africa is the region where the most significant changes with long-term global impact are expected in the years to come, most notably in the economic, social, demographic, security, religious and cultural fields. [...] Romania's new strategy for Africa: Partnership for the Future through Peace, Development and Education is a governmental approach stemmed from the contributions accumulated over the last two years in the Romanian academic, business and civil society circles with experience on the African continent. [...] The relationship between Romania and the African continent will unite all efforts and initiatives in a 'Team Romania' approach, bringing together the actors who seek mutually beneficial, concrete, honest and long-term cooperation with African countries."

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