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Project: *Assessing the personalization of voting behaviour in post-communist polities: under what circumstances do leaders matter more?*

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FINAL SCIENTIFIC REPORT

On the implementation of the project between May 2013 and October 2015

Description and objectives

The research project "*Assessing the personalization of voting behaviour in post-communist polities: under what circumstances do leaders matter more?*" aims at investigating *the magnitude and sources of variation in leader effects in the particular context of new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE)*. A longitudinal and comparative perspective is employed. Largely ignored in the literature on the personalization of electoral politics, CEE countries offer a particularly challenging context for the study of leader effects, given: (a) the absence of strong and stable party loyalties, rather fluid party systems, low ideological involvement, and high volatility rates; (b) the fast development of private media systems, subject to rapid tabloidization, mainly due to commercial constraints; (c) electorates with low political sophistication levels, facing an increased complexity of political issues they have to deal with and looking for shortcuts out of it, converting directly from 'subjects' to 'citizens'; (d) rather similar options in terms of political system and electoral system; (e) a tradition of almighty leaders, boosted by the communist totalitarian (or even sultanistic) experience. This particular mixture of conditions is likely to cultivate different leadership arrangements compared to Western polities, but still resulting into the same overall outcome of personalization of electoral politics. Two core directions are to be investigated: (1) the magnitude and evolution of leader effects on party vote in CEE countries during the post-communist period; (2) the variations in leader effects in relation to voter, leader, party and system characteristics, but also to campaign context.

Within the framework of this general objective, several specific research objectives are to be differentiated: (O1) to devise a region-specific theoretical and conceptual framework of analysis for the personalization of electoral politics in CEE post-communist countries; (O2) to assess the magnitude and evolution of leader effects on party vote in CEE countries during the transition and democratization period; (O3) to assess the variations in the magnitude of leader effects that are due to individual factors (both voter characteristics and leader characteristics), to party-related factors, and to system-specific factors; (O4) to investigate the mechanisms by which campaign discourse activates candidate-specific personality traits that become salient for an electoral race.

The work plan of the project is divided into seven work packages: (WP1) Theoretical and methodological substantiation of the project; (WP2) Documents analysis; (WP3) Data preparation for longitudinal statistical analysis; (WP4) Statistical analysis of large-scale data; (WP5) Data collection for qualitative analysis; (WP6) Analysis of focus group and media analysis data; (WP7) Dissemination of project's results, reports, and networking.

All activities have been fulfilled according to the plan in the project proposal and Appendix 4, under optimal conditions, both in terms of time and financial management. The following section is dedicated to the main developments in the implementation of the project on each of the working packages scheduled.

Main developments in the implementation of the project

(WP1) Theoretical and methodological substantiation of the project

This working package is structured along two dimensions: a theoretical one and a methodological one.

The first dimension is related to an extensive process of *theoretical documentation*, namely identifying, reading, and integrating the newest literature on the core concept of personalization of politics and its electoral dimension, on the conditions that mediate the manifestation of leader effects (individual factors, party-related factors, and system-specific factors), on the core actors (parties and leaders) and electoral contexts in several CEE post-communist countries, and on how media and discourse activate the perception of leader personal traits. For this purpose, I mainly made use of the documentation resources provided by two institutions: (a) Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, the host institution (library and access to electronic collections of academic journals provided within the framework of the ANELIS-plus

project) and (b) Central European University in Budapest (library and electronic resources, feedback from academic staff), where I took a documentation stage between October 28 and November 28, 2013.

On a first direction of theoretical documentation, my efforts focused on identifying and reading the most up-to-date literature on *leader effects and the conditions mediating the manifestation of leader effects*, acting as stimuli or inhibitors¹. First, the documentation efforts were focused on empirical analyses investigating the *impact of voter characteristics on the personalization of voting decision*: political involvement (Gidengil 2011; Lachat 2015; Lobo 2015), political sophistication (Catellani and Alberici 2012; Clarke, Sanders, Stewart, and Whiteley 2013; Gidengil 2011; Pierce 1993), party identification (Bittner 2011; Dinas 2008; Garzia 2013a; Gidengil 2011; Lobo 2015; Schoen 2007), ideological position (Bittner 2011; Catellani and Alberici 2012; Garzia 2013a), media consumption (Gidengil 2011; Elmelund-Præstæker and Hopmann 2012; Hayes 2009; Lenz and Lawson 2011; Mendelsohn 1994, 1996), time of voting decision (Catellani and Alberici 2012), religiousness (Bellucci, Garzia, and Lewis-Beck 2013; Dinas 2008; Garzia 2013a, 2013b), social class (Bellucci, Garzia, and Lewis-Beck 2013; Garzia 2013a), risk orientation (Clarke, Sanders, Stewart, and Whiteley 2013). A second target of focus was the literature on *how personal characteristics of leaders (genuine or perceived) do stimulate or inhibit the personalization of voting decision*: personality traits – competence, integrity, leadership, empathy, charisma (Bittner 2011; Brettschneider and Gabriel 2002; Colton 2000; Janssen and Aalberg 2006; Johnston 2002; Kinder 1986; Lewis-Beck and Nadeau 2015; Miller, Wattenberg, and Malanchuk 1986), incumbency (Barisione 2009; Carson, Engstrom and Roberts 2007; Catellani and Alberici 2012; Kriesi 2012), experience (Hayes 2009; Nadeau and Nevitte 2011), age and gender (Banducci and Karp 2000; Denmark, Ward, and Bean 2012; Johns and Shepard 2007; Kenski and Jamieson 2010; Kosiara-Pedersen and Hansen 2015; Nadeau and Nevitte 2011). Third, the newest literature on *the effects of party characteristics on the magnitude of leader effects* was covered, namely: the influence of the ideological family (Aardal and Binder 2011; Lobo 2008), organisational structure (Aardal and Binder 2011; Lobo 2008), incumbency (Semetko and Schoenbach 1994; Semetko 1996), party size (Aardal and Binder 2011; Curtice and Blais 2001), and party age (Aardal and Binder 2011). The last category of constraints on the level of personalization explored in the literature was that of *systemic characteristics*: party system (Curtice and Holmberg 2005; Curtice and Hunjan 2011), electoral system (Curtice and Holmberg 2005; Curtice and Hunjan 2011; Karvonen 2010), political system (Curtice and Hunjan 2011), type of election (Barisione 2009), and degree of polarisation within the political system (Barisione 2009). On this first direction, most of the documentation efforts were scheduled in

¹ Selective bibliographic references, they do not reflect the entire body of literature explored.

2013. The results were continuously updated during the entire period of the project.

On a second direction of theoretical documentation, the project focused on studying *the core actors (parties and leaders) and the contexts for a series of CEE countries/elections* for which survey data containing the needed personalization items are available: Belarus 2008; Croatia 2009; Czech Republic 1996, 2006, 2010; Estonia 2011; Hungary 1998; Latvia 2010; Montenegro 2012; Poland 1997, 2001, 2005, 2007; Romania 1996, 2004, 2012; Russia 1999; Serbia 2012; Slovakia 2010; Slovenia 1996, 2008; Ukraine 1998. For this purpose, the library stage at the Central European University in Budapest and the support of the Political Science Department of the same university were particularly helpful. This second direction of documentation was quasi-entirely covered in 2013.

The methodological dimension of the project substantiation was scheduled for 2014. It involved an effort to extend my skills of statistical analysis, by learning to do and interpret multilevel modelling with STATA 13 (an academic license for the SE version of the software was acquired within the project's budget for 2013). In order to achieve this goal, I registered to the course of 'Multilevel modelling' of the Summer School in Survey Methodology organised by the Research and Expertise Centre for Survey Methodology (RECSM) of University Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona. The course took place between July 9 and 11, 2014 and was taught by Professor Leonardo Grilli (University of Florence). It offered an introduction to this analysis technique, covering the most important issues needed for my research: multilevel linear models (hierarchical structures; no covariates case; a single covariate at level 1 case; a covariate at level 2 case; between, within and contextual effects; fixed effects and random effects) and basic multilevel logistic models (standard models for binary responses, random effects models for binary responses). The analytical capacities were extended during the entire length of the project by acquiring and employing new software solutions: STATA 13, HLM 7, Mplus 7.31, IBM SPSS Amos 23, IBM SPSS Statistics Standard 24, and Stat/Transfer 12.

(WP2) Documents analysis

This working package involves an extensive analysis and standardization of the information on leaders, parties, and political contexts for the CEE countries/elections for which survey data containing the needed personalization items are available. Applied on the documents collected during WP1 and additional sources, the result of WP2 combined with WP3 is the insertion of leader-level, party-level, and context-related variables into the individual-level databases. As previously mentioned, the

activities are closely linked to those included in WP3, being scheduled for 2013 and 2014.

By the end of 2013, the leader/party/context-level information has been coded for the election surveys in CEE countries included in Module 3 of the *Comparative Studies of Electoral Systems* (CSES), namely: Czech Republic 2006, 2010; Croatia 2007; Estonia 2011; Latvia 2010; Poland 2005, 2007; Slovakia 2010 and Slovenia 2008.

During 2014, the information has been coded for the remaining election studies in CSES Modules 1 and 4 and the additional studies including the needed personalization items: Czech Republic 1996; Hungary 1998; Montenegro 2012; Poland 1997, 2001; Romania 1996, 2004, 2012; Russia 1999; Serbia 2012; Slovenia 1996; Ukraine 1998. More information on the employed variables can be found on the website of the project.

(WP3) Data preparation for longitudinal statistical analyses

The working package is dedicated to the transformations in individual-level data and to their aggregation with the leader/party/context-level data collected in WP2.

Individual-level data have been subjects to extensive transformations for several main reasons. First, *data coming from election studies outside the CSES Modules 1, 3, and 4 were recoded and adapted to the structure of the CSES items*. Unfortunately, in many cases, the significant differences made those data unusable. Second, *similar but not identical items from various modules of CSES were subject to intensive recoding in order to be prepared for an aggregated overall database for CEE countries*. Particularly difficult tasks involved items of retrospective government activity evaluation and education. Third, *CEE election studies from CSES Modules 1, 3, and 4 and the additional individual-level databases were aggregated in a unique database*. Intensive cross-checks for possible mistakes were needed. The first category of transformations were started in 2013 and finished in the first half of 2014. The second and the third categories of transformations were implemented in 2014.

Additionally, leader/party/context-level data collected in WP2 need to be aggregated with the individual-level data. The aggregation of party data and context data with the individual-level data ended in early October 2014, while the aggregation of leader-level data ended in February 2015. A list of the variables employed can be found in the description of the statistical models on the website of the project.

(WP4) Statistical analysis of large-scale data

Three categories of statistical models were designed, tested, and run as part of this working package: (1) a model testing the impact of *voter characteristics* on leader effects; (2) a model testing the impact of *party characteristics* on leader effects; (3) a model testing the impact of *leader characteristics* on the magnitude of personalization.

The first model has been developed in the first months of 2014. Test analyses were run and presented in the context of two international conferences (Iași, May 2014, International Conference of the Romanian Sociological Society; Rome, July 2014, 37th Annual Scientific Meeting of the International Society of Political Psychology) in order to receive extensive feed-back. The final model is run as a series of logistic regression models predicting the party vote. The core independent variable is the leader liking score, while the moderation effect of voter characteristics is treated as statistical interaction term (product term of leader evaluation and voter characteristic). Voter characteristics tested in successive regression models are: political knowledge (0-10), subjective political information (0=not informed, 1=somehow/very informed), time of voting decision (0=early decider, 1=late decider), party identification (0=non-identifier, 1=somehow close/very close), interest in politics (1-4). Controls are introduced for: gender, age, education, region, left-right, and government retrospective evaluation. Extensive models are run for the Romanian election studies, more limited models (less voter characteristics available) are run for the entire CEE countries database. The analytical strategies involve: the Δ Pseudo R^2 strategy for estimating the magnitude of leader effects; the $\Delta\chi^2$ strategy and analysis of statistically significant $\exp(b)$'s for testing if interaction terms bring a significant contribution to the explanation of vote choice (in other words, the particular voter characteristic has a significant impact on leader effects); $\exp(b)$'s, multiplicative factors, and Johnson-Neyman method (using PROCESS by Andrew Hayes) for explaining the influence of individual moderators on leader effects.

The second model has been developed between September and November 2014 together with Professor Mircea Comșa from the Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca. Test analyses have been run and results have been presented in the context of three international conferences (Gdańsk, October 2014, European Sociological Association (ESA) RN36 Midterm Conference; Warsaw, November 2014, Conference 'What's next for democratic capitalism?'; Timișoara, December 2014, Conference 'Ideologies, Values, and Political Behaviours in Central and Eastern Europe') in order to receive extensive feed-back. The final model is run as a series of successive multilevel mixed effects logistic regressions (QR decomposition) on a pooled stacked dataset of 100,960 cases for 72 parties across 18 legislative elections in CEE countries. The dependent variable is party vote. The core independent variable is the leader

liking score, while the moderation effect of each party characteristic is treated as a statistical interaction term (product term of leader evaluation and party characteristic). Party characteristics tested in successive regression models are: party size (percent of seats in the Parliament before election), party age (years), incumbency (in office, opposition), incumbency visibility (percent of executive portfolios before election), ideology (ideological family and left-right positions provided by experts). Controls on level 1 are introduced for: age, higher education, less than secondary education, union membership, household income, government retrospective evaluation, left-right self-positioning, and party identification. Controls on level 2 are introduced for: country and election. The analytical strategy involves the assessment of $\exp(b)$'s for the interaction terms across successive models/successive party characteristics considered.

The third model was also developed together with Professor Mircea Comşa at the end of 2014 and the analyses were run during the first months of 2015. The analytical design and the initial findings were presented in two international conferences (Vienna, June 2015, 5th Annual Conference of the European Political Science Association; Prague, August 2015, 12th Conference of the European Sociological Association). Based on the excellent feed-back received during the two public presentations and further discussions with scholars in the field, the statistical model was redesigned in the following format: generalised linear mixed-effects model (*lme4* package in R) with three levels (individual, leader, country-election), on a pooled stacked dataset of 103,796 cases for 68 leaders across 17 legislative elections. The dependent variable is the vote for each of the 68 political parties considered, while the leader evaluation is the core independent variable. The investigation of the moderation effect of each leader characteristic on electoral personalization is approached in a similar manner to model 2, as a statistical interaction term (product term of leader liking score and leader characteristic). Seven leader attributes are considered across successive regression models: gender (male/female), age (years at the moment of election), incumbency (holding an executive position at the moment of election), experience in executive positions (both as yes/no and years), experience in party leadership (years), experience in an important position in the former communist regime (yes/no), and a past of public dissidence in the communist period (yes/no). Controls on level 1 (respondent) are introduced for: gender, age, higher education, less than secondary education, union membership, household income, ideological distance, and party identification. Control on level 2 (country-election) is introduced for political system (semi-presidential vs. parliamentary). The analytical strategy is focused on the assessment of regression coefficients for the interaction terms across successive models/successive leader characteristics considered.

(WP5) Data collection – qualitative analysis

As a result of the project evaluators' recommendation, the qualitative research working packages (both WP5 and WP6) were re-designed to target the 2014 Presidential elections in Romania. WP5 has two components: gathering of interview/focus group data and gathering of media content data.

On the first component, a series of interviews and focus groups were run in the pre-election period focusing on *the perceived personal traits of the main candidates and their salience*. Working with a lightly structured interview guide developed in the context of the specific list of the main presidential candidates, focus groups also targeted the perceived contrasts between candidate perceived profiles and the role of media.

On the second component, *first page journal articles during the electoral campaign on the most salient five candidates* have been archived for future analyses on how media frames leader personal traits. The journals considered are the following: *Adevărul, Evenimentul zilei, România liberă, Jurnalul național*. In addition to that, the *core content of websites of the main presidential candidates (Klaus Iohannis, Victor Ponta, Călin Popescu Tăriceanu, Elena Udrea, and Monica Macovei)* has been archived for further analyses: electoral manifestos, promotional material, press releases, interviews, etc.

All these activities have been put into practice during October-November 2014.

(WP6) Analysis of interview/focus group and media analysis data

Scheduled for 2015, this component aims at understanding how political leaders shape citizens' impressions of their personality traits. It follows a bi-directional approach to the research design for the 2014 presidential election in Romania. On the one hand, it uses an extensive analysis of media data to investigate candidates' image priming strategies, applied to *first page journal articles* (media side) and *candidate electoral manifestoes, promotional materials, press releases, interviews, and advertising* (candidate side). On the other hand, it assesses citizens' impressions of candidates' personalities based on *interviews and focus groups* during campaign, but also on *survey data* (national survey on a sample of 1,112 respondents as part of the PN-II-IDEI-PCE-2011-3-0669 research project).

Campaign management of citizens' impressions is usually developed along three components: messages from candidates, messages from opponents, and messages from news media (Fridkin and Kenney 2011). In order to investigate the latter component, coding is applied to assess all *first page journal articles published during the electoral campaign* (4+2 weeks) on the most salient five presidential candidates (Klaus Iohannis, Victor Ponta, Călin Popescu Tăriceanu, Elena Udrea, and Monica Macovei)

for a list of four journals (*Adevărul*, *Evenimentul zilei*, *România liberă*, and *Jurnalul național*). It collects measures of candidate personality traits mentioned directly or indirectly, by cues or issues (see Druckman, Jacobs, and Ostermeier 2004). The traits considered across coding, based on previous research (Bittner 2011; Brettschneider and Gabriel 2002; Colton 2000; Jenson and Aalberg 2006; Johnston 2002; Kinder 1986; Miller, Wattenberg, and Malanchuk 1986), are: *competence, integrity, leadership, and empathy/caring*. Other information coded reflect the balance of the approach (positive, negative, neutral, mixed), whether the approach is direct or indirect, framing, graphic conditions, position on page, etc. In order to assess the direct messages of the five candidates/ opponents (for the first round) and of the remaining two (for the runoff), a similar coding scheme is applied to the *campaign materials* (electoral manifestoes, press releases, interviews, ads, blog entries of the candidates).

The investigation of citizens' impressions of candidate traits is based on the assessment of *interview/focus group data*, collected before the presidential election, but also after the election (summer 2015, after six months in office). The lightly structured interview guide explicitly targets candidate traits (strong points/weak points), in relation to presidential role expectations. Answers are to be processed in connection to the data issued from media/campaign materials analysis. Complementary additional information is issued through post-election *survey data*, with an extensive battery of questions requesting respondents to rate ten personality traits of Victor Ponta and Klaus Iohannis on a 0-10 scale.

(WP7) Dissemination of project's results, reports, and networking

This working package is continuous over the entire period of the project. There are four main pillars of dissemination considered in the initial project: website, conference presentations, submission of research articles supported through the CNCS/UEFISCDI research grant, and reports.

The *website of the research project* was launched at the beginning of the project (2013) and is hosted on the institutional page of the principal investigator: <http://web.ulbsibiu.ro/andrei.gheorghita/pnii-ru-pd-2012-3-567.html>. Designed in English, it presents the main coordinates of the research project, the evolutions in its implementation, and the main outputs. It was continuously updated during the implementation of the project (2013-2015).

Within the time frame May 2013-October 2015, *11 conference presentations* benefitted from the support of the research grant. Another conference presentation is scheduled for November 2015.

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| 2015 | <i>'Leader characteristics and the personalization of electoral politics in Central and Eastern European democracies'</i> (co-author Mircea Comşa), paper presented at the 5th Annual Conference of the European Political Science Association, Vienna, June 25-27, 2015. (EN) |
| | <i>'The personalization of electoral politics and leader characteristics in the Eastern post-communist bloc'</i> (co-author Mircea Comşa), paper presented at the 12th Conference of the European Sociological Association, Prague, August 25-28, 2015. (EN) |
| | <i>'Caracteristici ale liderilor și personalizarea politicii electorale în democrațiile Europei Centrale și de Est'</i> , paper to be presented at the Annual Conference of the Romanian Sociological Society and the International Colloquium of Social Sciences and Communication Studies ACUM 2015, Braşov, November 19-21, 2015. (RO) |
| 2014 | <i>'Voter characteristics and the personalization of electoral behaviour in Romania'</i> , paper presented at the 2014 International Conference of the Romanian Sociological Society, Iași, May 9-10, 2014. (EN) |
| | <i>'The personalization of electoral decision and voter characteristics in a post-communist context'</i> , paper presented at the 37th Annual Scientific Meeting of the International Society of Political Psychology, Rome, July 4-7, 2014. (EN) |
| | <i>'Election studies in Romania: where are we now?'</i> , presentation at the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) Plenary Meeting in Berlin, October 8-11, 2014. (EN) |
| | <i>'Party characteristics and leader effects in post-communist polities'</i> (co-author Mircea Comşa), paper presented at the European Sociological Association (ESA) RN36 Midterm Conference '25 Years after the Communism: East and West of Europe in Search of Solidarity', Gdansk, October 16-18, 2014. (EN) |
| | <i>'Personalization of electoral politics and party characteristics in Central and Eastern European democracies'</i> (co-author Mircea Comşa), paper presented at the Conference 'What's next for democratic capitalism?', Warsaw, November 7-8, 2014. (EN) |
| | <i>'Candidate-centred electoral politics and party characteristics in new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe'</i> (co-author Mircea Comşa), paper presented at the Conference 'Ideologies, Values, and Political Behaviours in Central and Eastern Europe', Timișoara, December 12-13, 2014. (RO) |
| 2013 | <i>'Caracteristicile liderilor politici și personalizarea politicii electorale în România postcomunistă'</i> , paper presented at the 2013 Annual Conference of the Society of Romanian Sociologists, Iași, May 16-18, 2013. (RO) |
| | <i>'Social solidarity in distorted times: Unfolding the Romanian case'</i> (co-author Horațiu Rusu), paper presented at the 11th Conference of the |

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| European Sociological Association, Turin, August 28-31, 2013. (EN) |
| ' <i>Caracteristicile personale ale liderilor politici și impactul acestora asupra deciziei de vot: cazul României</i> ', paper presented at the Annual Conference of Research in Sociology and Social Work, Sibiu, October 11-12, 2013. (RO) |
| ' <i>Public spending and social solidarity</i> ' (co-author Horațiu Rusu), paper presented at the Annual Conference of Research in Sociology and Social Work, Sibiu, October 11-12, 2013. (EN) |

In terms of academic articles, 3 research articles supported from the research grant have been published or accepted for publications in ISI journals until the end of October 2015, two in 2014 and one in 2015:

| Title | Journal | Status |
|---|---|---|
| <i>Voter characteristics and leader effects in a post-communist context: the case of the 2012 legislative elections in Romania</i> Acknowledgement to projects: PN-II-RU-PD-2012-3-0567 and PN-II-ID-PCE-2011-3-0669 | <i>Romanian Journal of Political Science</i> ISI 2014 impact factor=0.250 | <i>Published</i> July 2015 |
| ' <i>Many</i> ', ' <i>half</i> ' or ' <i>one out of two</i> '? Assessing the effectiveness of counter-biasing techniques in reducing self-reported turnout (co-author Mircea Comșa) Acknowledgement to projects: PN-II-ID-PCE-2011-3-0669, PN-II-RU-PD-2012-3-0567, IDEI-PCE-2174/2009 | <i>Revista de cercetare și intervenție socială</i> ISI 2013 impact factor=1.141 | <i>Accepted for publication</i> September 2014 |
| <i>Transnational solidarity and public support for the EU enlargement</i> (co-author Horațiu Rusu) Acknowledgement to projects: PN-II-RU-PD-2011-3-0132, PN-II-RU-PD-2012-3-0567, PN-II-ID-PCE-2011-3-0210, PN-II-ID-PCE-2011-3-0669 | <i>Sociologia - Slovak Sociological Review</i> 46(3): 261-282. ISI 2013 impact factor=0.212 | <i>Published</i> June 2014 |

A fourth ISI journal article is in pre-submission format and is subject of circulation among scholars in the field of elections for gathering initial comments. It is planned to be submitted to **XXXXXXXX- Anonymised to avoid interfering with the reviewing process -XXXXXXXX**, by the end of 2015. The pre-submission version of the article before will be accessible on the project's website (link not public): **XXXXXXXX- Anonymised to avoid interfering with the reviewing process -XXXXXXXX**.

| Title | Journal | Status |
|---|---|--|
| <p>XXXXXXXX- Anonymised to avoid interfering with the reviewing process-XXXXXXXX</p> <p>Acknowledgement to projects: PN-II-RU-PD-2012-3-0567 and PN-II-ID-PCE-2011-3-0669</p> | <p>XXXXXXXX- Anonymised to avoid interfering with the reviewing process -XXXXXXXX</p> | <p>Submission November-December 2015</p> |

A review of one of the most seminal books in the literature on the topic of the project (Kees Aarts, André Blais, and Hermann Schmitt, eds. 2011. *Political Leaders and Democratic Elections*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.) has been published in *Social Change Review* 11(2), December 2013 (journal indexed EBSCO, CEEOL, Index Copernicus, RePEc, De Gruyter Open, DOAJ). Although part of the project dissemination, the book review does not hold a specific acknowledgement to the project due to its specificity (book review, not research article):

| Title | Journal | Status |
|---|---|------------------------------------|
| <p>Book review: Kees Aarts, André Blais, and Hermann Schmitt (eds.), <i>Political Leaders and Democratic Elections</i>.</p> | <p><i>Social Change Review</i> 11 (2): 153-155.</p> | <p>Published December 2013</p> |

A book chapter closely connected to the grant has been finally published by Oxford University Press in 2015:

| Chapter | Volume | Status |
|--|---|------------------------------------|
| <p><i>Determining the components of leader effects in a post-communist context</i> pp. 191-214</p> | <p>Marina Costa Lobo and John Curtice (eds.). 2015. <i>Personality Politics? The Role of Leader Evaluations in Democratic Elections</i>. Oxford: Oxford University Press.</p> | <p>Published December 2014</p> |

Finally, intermediate *scientific reports* have been submitted in December 2013 and December 2014 and are published on the website of the project. The final *scientific report* was issued in October 2015.

The effort of disseminating the enormous amount of information gathered during this research project is set to continue after the end of funding. A fifth article (building on results presented in the 2014 conferences in Gdańsk, Warsaw and Timișoara) is work in progress at the moment of issuing this scientific report. Given the very solid feed-back received from other scholars in the field of elections, it was re-scheduled to be submitted until March 2016 to an international peer-reviewed

journal. It provides particularly challenging findings on the relation between party characteristics and the mechanisms of personalization in CEE democracies. Also the preliminary conclusions from the qualitative analysis are planned to be developed in another research paper in the next year.

Research findings

At the moment of this final research report (October 2015), particularly interesting results were developed in relation to the impact of each of the categories of moderators considered on the personalization of legislative elections. A brief summary of the main findings is presented in the following paragraphs.

In relation to *voter characteristics*, the analyses explore the impact of political knowledge, subjective political information, general interest in politics, party identification, and time of vote decision on the personalization of voting. At this moment, extensive conclusions are formulated in relation to Romanian parliamentary elections and more limited ones (due to less detailed data available) in relation to legislative elections in CEE countries. *Political knowledge* (objectively measured) appears to stimulate the manifestation of leader effects. *Party identification* also appears to contribute to a higher level of personalization of electoral decision. This second conclusion is extremely challenging, as it comes against most of the findings in Western elections, except for Germany/1998, Netherlands/1998, Canada/2000, Spain/2000, and Italy/2006 (Brettschneider and Gabriel 2002; Brettschneider et al. 2006; Gidengil 2011; Lobo 2015). *Subjective political information*, *political engagement*, and *time of the voting decision* do not have any significant effect on the personalization of electoral decision. These findings were previously disseminated in the context of two international conferences (Iași, May 2014, International Conference of the Romanian Sociological Society; Rome, July 2014, 37th Annual Scientific Meeting of the International Society of Political Psychology) and are extensively presented in the new article published in the *Romanian Journal of Political Science*.

In relation to observable *leader characteristics*, the analyses consider gender, age, incumbency, experience in executive positions, experience in party leadership, experience in an important position in the former communist regime, and a past of public dissidence in the communist period. Their impact on the magnitude of leader effects is investigated for 17 legislative elections across 13 CEE countries and 16 years of post-communism. Particularly challenging conclusions are issued. First, *age* appears to matter: more mature leaders generate higher leader effects across many elections in the region. Second, the *experience in executive positions* stimulates the

personalization of vote choice, most likely due to the increased attention from media and hence the bonus of public visibility. However, the length of this experience appears to be insignificant in relation to leader effects. In addition to that, leader incumbency does not have a significant impact on electoral personalization. Third, *party leadership experience* facilitates the conversion of sympathy into party votes, which comes in line with the theoretical expectations. Fourth, *former communist leaders* are more likely to generate leader effects. Last, *a past of dissidence during the communist period* inhibits personalization effects. No significant effects are related to *gender*. These findings were disseminated in various stages with the occasion of two international conferences (Vienna, June 2015, 5th Annual Conference of the European Political Science Association; Prague, August 2015, 12th Conference of the European Sociological Association) and are extensively discussed in the article (co-author Mircea Comşa) to be submitted to **XXXXXXX- Anonymised to avoid interfering with the reviewing process -XXXXXXX** by the end of 2015.

In relation to *party characteristics*, the impact of party size, party age, incumbency, and ideology was tested on an aggregate database of 18 legislative elections in CEE countries, for 72 parties/leaders, and 100,960 cases. *Party size* and *left-right ideological positioning* appear to have no significant effect on the relevance of leaders for the results of elections. *Party age* does moderate the manifestation of leader effects: vote for more 'mature' parties appears to be more personalized than for newer ones. *Incumbency* stimulates a leader-centred electoral decision: holding executive positions comes with higher leader effects for the party. In coalition governments, stronger parties benefit more from their leaders than smaller coalition partners. *Ideological family of the party* appears to be related to different patterns of personalization in CEE polities: while conservative, liberal, and communist parties transfer a lot from their leaders' popularity/lack of popularity, leaders are less important in the eyes of the voters of social democrat, national, and agrarian parties. These preliminary findings have been addressed to the scientific community in the context of two international conferences (Gdansk, October 2014, European Sociological Association (ESA) RN36 Midterm Conference; Warsaw, November 2014, Conference 'What's next for democratic capitalism?') and raised extensive interest. Their dissemination through a research article (co-author Mircea Comşa) is planned for spring 2016.

Overall the magnitude of leader effects across the Central and Eastern European elections investigated appears to be comparable to the general tendency across Western democracies. Still such conclusion should be regarded with caution, given the imperfect comparability of measures. Another interesting finding suggests a general tendency to have higher leader effects in parliamentary systems than in semi-presidential ones. This comes against most of the findings for Western polities,

stating a reverse relation between the *political system* and personalization (Curtice and Hunjan 2011; Poguntke and Webb 2005).

A second category of results to be discussed here approaches *additional findings connected to the core topic* of the research project. Such research directions bring collateral benefits to the investigation efforts involved in the project.

One such topic addresses the *problem of social and political values* defining the cultural contexts (Central and Eastern Europe versus Western Europe) in which electoral competitions occur. The article published in *Sociologia - Slovak Sociological Review* (co-author Horațiu Rusu) investigates the degree to which a deficit in transnational solidarity (regarded as a social value) is reflected into anti-EU enlargement attitudes. This core hypothesis gains substantive confirmation: increased levels of transnational solidarity appear to confine anti-enlargement attitudes, with no significant differences old and new members of European Union.

Another topic of additional results addresses the issue of *measurement in election studies under the influence of social desirability effects*. The article written together with Mircea Comșa and accepted for publication by *Revista de cercetare și intervenție socială* employs a split-ballot survey experiment in an attempt to assess the effectiveness of counter-biasing techniques in compensating for the social desirability bias in electoral surveys. It compares the effects of three alternatives of 'loaded' turnout questions, providing variable information on the occurrence of non-voting behaviour (many people/around half of the people/one out of two people did not vote) and invariant face-saving response options. The analyses show that the 'half' counter-biasing formula is systematically more effective in reducing the social desirability bias than the alternatives, which perform rather similarly. When compared to externally validated turnout, it appears that, after applying the counter-biasing techniques, turnout over-reporting due to social desirability remains at approximately 6 to 9 percent.

The research project „*Assessing the personalization of voting behaviour in post-communist polities: under what circumstances do leaders matter more?*” (PN-II-RU-PD-2012-3-0567) generated a very large amount of good social data that open many pathways for further investigation. This will reflect in additional research papers on topics like leader/candidate image priming, citizens' impression formation on political leaders, etc. All further outputs on the data gathered will acknowledge the source of funding and will be disseminated via the project's website.

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