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Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities  
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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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## INTERMEDIATE SCIENTIFIC REPORT

On the implementation of the project between May 2013 and December 2013

### 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 to be 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.

Activities scheduled for 2013 are included in work packages WP1 to 3. All activities have been fulfilled according to the plan in the project proposal, 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 three working packages.

### **(WP1) Theoretical and methodological substantiation of the project**

It was mainly focused on the dimension of theoretical documentation, targeting the most up-to-date literature on the project's general topic. For this purpose, I used the resources of the host institution, Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu (library, access to online article databases through ANELIS project), but also of the Central European University in Budapest (documentation stage between October 28 and November 28). Two core directions of theoretical documentation were followed: (a) the literature on the personalization of electoral politics across various geographical, cultural, and political contexts; (b) the literature on political parties, party systems, electoral systems, political leaders in CEE countries.

On the first direction, documentation efforts were focused on identifying and reading the newest literature on the conditions that moderate the occurrence and magnitude of leader effects in electoral contexts, acting as stimuli or inhibitors. 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 2009; Lobo 2010), 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 2010; 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; Jenssen and Aalberg 2006; Johnston 2002; Kinder 1986; Lewis-Beck and Nadeau 2010; Miller, Wattenberg, and Malanchuk 1986), incumbency (Barisione 2009; Catellani and Alberici 2012), experience (Hayes 2009; Nadeau and Nevitte

2011), age and gender (Denemark, Ward, and Bean 2012; Lewis-Beck and Nadeau 2010; 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 the second direction, documentation efforts were focused on CEE countries for which survey data containing the needed personalization items are available: Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. The Central European University documentation stage has been most helpful for identifying and accessing this literature, thanks to an extensive library on the topic and feed-back from members of the Political Science Department.

### **(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. The activities are closely linked to those included in WP3. By the time of this intermediate report, the leader/party/context-level information has been analysed and 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. The process will continue in 2014 for the CEE countries and elections include in Module 3 of CSES.

### **(WP3) Data preparation for longitudinal statistical analyses**

The initial activities in WP3 are related to identifying CEE election survey databases containing the items relevant for the topic of the project. Apart from survey data collected through Modules 1 and 3 of CSES, other survey studies investigating electoral competitions in CEE countries were identified in the ZACAT data archive: Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Macedonia, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Unfortunately, we faced big problems in item compatibility, with consequences upon the adaptation efforts and limitations.

The second category of activities is related to transformations in individual-level data, in order to prepare them for statistical analysis. At this point of time, data transformations for countries/elections included in CSES Module 3 were performed: Croatia 2007, Czech Republic 2006 and 2010, Estonia 2011, Latvia 2010, Poland 2005 and 2007, Romania 2009, Slovakia 2010, and Slovenia 2008.

### **Dissemination, publications, and mobility**

In order to disseminate the project's result, a webpage was developed on the institutional website of the principal investigator: <http://web.ulbsibiu.ro/andrei.gheorghita/pnii-ru-pd-2012-3-567.html>. It presents the project and the main evolutions in its implementation.

The preliminary directions of investigation and strategies of analysis have been presented to the scientific community in two national conferences (Iasi, May 16-18, 2013, Annual Conference of the Romanian Sociological Society; Sibiu, October 11-12, 2013, Annual Conference of Research in Sociology and Social Work).

Connected results were disseminated in an international conference (Turin, August 28-31, 2013, 11<sup>th</sup> Conference of the European Sociological Association) and a national one (Sibiu, October 11-12, 2013, Annual Conference of Research in Sociology and Social Work). Other additional findings were consolidated in a research article, "Transnational Solidarity and Euroscepticism" (co-author Horatiu Rusu) submitted to *Sociologia – Slovak Sociological Review* (ISI 2012 impact factor 0,240) in August 2013, conditionally accepted for publication in November 2013.

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