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Report: 1st International Conference: *Neo-militant Democracies in the Post-Communist Member States of the European Union*, February 12, 2021, Poznań²

On February 12, 2021 took place the 1st International Conference: *Neo-militant Democracies in the Post-Communist Member States of the European Union*. This conference was the result of the research project *Contentious Politics and Neo-Militant Democracy*. It was financially supported by the National Science Centre, Poland, under the leadership of Joanna Rak. The conference was brought together by representatives of Lithuania, the United States of America, Slovakia, India, Hungary, Slovenia, Romania, Croatia, and Poland.

The conference was opened by Joanna Rak and Roman Bäcker, who were the main initiators of this event, which was intended to bring together scientists from different scientific centers and exchange experiences and comments on the planned publication. One of the results of this conference will be creating a book on the processes of militant democracy in the selected countries of the European Union sharing the experience of communism. During the conference, each participant had the opportunity, after the presentation,

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to hear comments from others attending the conference on their planned chapter in the monograph and thereby embrace the opportunity of developing it.

The first contributor was Joanna Rak (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poland), the grant head, who introduced a theoretical and methodological introduction to the subject of interest to scientists. She explained the main assumptions of the research undertaken and the distinction between the types of militant democracy, including the neo-militant democracy category and *quasi*-militant democracy.

Jennie Schulze (Duchesne University, United States of America), who discussed the Latvia case, was the next to appear. She described the country as a neo-militant democracy due to Russia's limited influence. It turns out that there are concerns about undermining Latvia's democracy and territorial integrity by mobilizing Russian speakers. The following presentation was given by Przemysław Osiewicz (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poland), who took a closer look at Estonia and, based on his observations and research, noted that for this country, there is a transparent process of approaching defensive democracy. He also emphasized that at the same time, the executive and legislative bodies have taken steps to strengthen democratic standards in Estonia. In my presentation (Nicolaus Copernicus University, Poland) on the Bulgarian political, legal, and social structures, I have observed that there is now a noticeable shift from semi-consolidated democracy towards *quasi*-militant democracy, which is primarily due to the high rate of corruption and oligarchy. It was followed by Martin Kovanic (Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia) and Max Steuer (O.P. Jindal Global University, India), who undertook to follow the militarization of democracy in Slovakia. Researchers have examined how Slovakia's laws and policies got increasingly accustomed to practices of militancy in response to challenges of the political regime. Jolanta Bieliauskaite (European Humanities University, Lithuania) spoke about the Lithuanian case and spoke last in this part of the conference. She and Vytautas Šlapkausk (European Humanities University, Lithuania) explained why the state is now between a type of liberal democracy and weakly militant democracy. This part of the conference was closed by a lunch break. After a short break, the second part of the conference was held, chaired by Przemysław Osiewicz. Bruna Žuber (University of Ljubljana, Slovenia) and Elżbieta Kuźelewska (The University of Białystok, Poland) were the first to pre-

sent their study on the dynamics of neo-militant democracy in Slovenia. The researchers referred to the theory and practice of militant democracy in the Republic of Slovenia to explain its inner changes.

Gábor Mészáros (University of Pécs, Hungary) and Drinóczi Tímea (University of Pécs, Hungary) drew attention to Hungary as an abusive neo-militant democracy. In this state, illiberalism became the core value that has to be defended from liberal democrats. Next, Dragos Dragoman (Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Romania) discussed Romania as an example of *quasi*-militant democracy. The study showed that Romania would once again get closer to the Hungarian and Polish cases, but strangely enough, being spared from criticism from the EU Commission and the US Department of State. Next, another researcher, Aleksandar Maršavelski (University of Zagreb, Croatia), presented the case of Croatia. The underlying research for this study addressed the functioning of the militant democracy in Croatia through the lenses of judicial procedures against political parties. Then Maciej Skrzypek (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poland) delivered a speech on the case of the Czech Republic, where the process of democratic backsliding is visible, leading to the development of flawed democracy. Joanna Rak (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poland) and Roman Bäcker (Nicolaus Copernicus University, Poland) closed the presentations of individual case studies by discussing Polish drift towards *quasi*-militant democracy. Based on their research, it can be seen that Poland has moved almost imperceptibly on the continuum between a neo-militant and *quasi*-militant democracy through its middle point since 2018. It has a shape of a saddle point. The Polish political regime after 2018 meets the essential criteria of *quasi*-militant democracy.

Each participant could also count on a comprehensive and valuable summary, comments, and guidance from Agnieszka Bień-Kacała (Nicolaus Copernicus University, Poland), who participated in both parts of the conference and shared her knowledge and insights.

The conference was closed with a roundtable, during which all participants could exchange general conclusions and remarks. It is a vital and exciting initiative because, during the coronavirus pandemic, it is much more difficult to meet other researchers and discuss views, hints, and research results. This conference allowed scientists from different academic centers from the whole world to meet at this difficult time and exchange experiences and com-

ments on the planned texts and exchange ideas, and talk about very topical case studies relating to the processes of militant democracy. The publication, which will be the aftermath of the conference, has the opportunity to make a valuable contribution to the political science on democratic processes that are currently taking place.