New Europe College Yearbook 2022-2023

Volume 1

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ISSN 1584-0298

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EMPLOYERS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INTERWAR ROMANIAN WELFARE STATE*

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Abstract

The present paper offers an exploratory case study of employer-centric approaches to welfare state development in interwar Romania. By focusing on ideational debates rather than macro-structural conditions, I argue that, similarly to the well-researched cases of developed countries, employers also played key roles in the historical creation of welfare institutions in late developing countries. Focusing on the nuances of historical contingencies, I show when, why and how Romanian employers acted as consenters, supporters or dissenters of an emerging welfare state, envisaged by policymakers as a key tool for catch-up development.

Keywords: Policy transfers, International Labor Office, interwar Romania, welfare state development, varieties of capitalism, power resource approach, employers and the welfare state

1. Introduction

Replying to Minister of Labor Grigore Trancu-Iasi's passionate speech on the state's duty to protect worker rights, Stefan Cerkez, former president of the Association of Industrialists from Romania (UGIR) and current Senator for industries, noted: "employers are happy to *consent* [to new welfare taxes], as long as we are not subjected to random terror by petty bureaucrats" (DS, 8th Febr 1927).[1] Emphasizing that employers recognize the needs of workers better than the socially disconnected state (DS, 8th Febr 1927), Cerkez (re)strengthened UGIR's long-standing position that

* *This work was supported by a grant of the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitization, CNCS – UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P1-1.1-BSO-2016-0003, within PNCDI III*

it was in fact the state's overbearing desire for control that damaged worker-employer relationships, more than the latter's putative "malintent" (1922, 1-3). At the same time however, Romanian employers' nuanced approach seems to contradict conventional social policy studies which posit that the dominant profit-seeking logic should prompt business representatives to strive and block forms of worker compensation. This raises significant research questions regarding why, when and how employers support or block social policy construction.

The aim of this paper is to investigate the role of business associations in the construction of the Romanian interwar welfare state. Following Mares (2003) and Korpi (2006), I break down the umbrella of a "welfare state" and proceed to argue that employers play differential roles across the social policy spectrum as protagonists, consenters and antagonists. Concretely, I show that employer participation or lack thereof varies between policies based on *both* political contingencies (Paster 2013) *and* the mix between risk redistribution and firms' control (Mares 2003, 17). While conventional employer-centric approaches focus on differences in welfare support between high-skill and low-skill industries and firms (Paster 2013 for in depth review), I analyze the way in which business associations operate with both intrinsic and instrumental logics of action (du Gay and Pryke 2002). This allows integrating the individual political salience of respective social policies into a more detailed account of employer preferences. The paper thus builds specifically on political science studies which seek to reconcile the power resources approach (PRA) on social policy development (Korpi 2006) with the influential varieties of capitalism (VoC) literature (Hall and Soskice 2001; Iversen 2005).

In order to compress the empirical diversity of social policies (Mares 2003, 14), this paper zooms in on two crucial welfare state expansions: firstly, the process of creating a unified insurance system in Greater Romania; secondly, key transfers from the International Labor Office (ILO; 8 Hour Work Day Convention – henceforth 8WDC, Unemployment Convention – henceforth UC), which played an intricate political role in the minds of Romanian policymakers. Creating an insurance unification law was a winding process, constantly debated and postponed since the 1920s, with a crucial developmental role – creating the economic-institutional scaffolding that would in turn help to replicate the social basis of advanced industrial capitalism. This cross-cutting role implies that debates on the unification law should perfectly illustrate the central theme of risk redistribution and benefit control as drivers of employer preferences (Mares 2003). On the surface, transfers from the ILO typically unfolded in more marginal social policy areas, with less political salience (van Daele 2008, Kott 2013). At the same time however, interwar Romanian policymakers theorized that for a small state such as Romania, the ILO could function as a unique gateway for diplomatic opportunities. This specific conceptualization fundamentally revamped the power relationships between policymakers and direct stakeholders such as employers. The dual selection opens up space to show how employers reacted both to structural shifts, as analyzed in the conventional literature, as well as more contingently-defined political reconfigurations (Paster 2013).

Thus far, employer-centric approaches have only been superficially applied to Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), with most studies focusing on post-socialist "dependent market capitalism" (Nolke and Vliegenthart 2009) or "FDI-lead growth" (Ban 2022). While such studies do include isolated reflections on historical developments, they do not offer a fully-fledged explanation of employers' role(s) in the early creation of welfare states. This is typically justified by a stereotypical view of late development, wherein state-lead industrialization distorts power relationships by granting employers more-or-less stable markets and protection from oscillations of global capitalism. Yet, as will be shown throughout the paper, the Romanian state's relationship with local industries was far from linear, leaning more often than not towards neglect than overprotection (Busila 1931, 371). While undoubtedly Romanian employers did greatly benefit from state-led industrialization, they were not fully isolated from the ebb and flow of capitalist markets, including the type of institutional intervention observed in advanced capitalist economies. As such, although conceptual refining is clearly mandatory, the analytical toolkit used to dissect employers' welfare preferences in developed economies can be a useful starting point for studying social policy development in late industrializing CEE.

Typically under-explored in the broader welfare state literature,[2] interwar Romania thus serves as an exploratory case for a broader conceptual scaffolding (George and Bennett 2005; Delcea 2021). On a first level, "Greater Romania" embodies the common structural features of CEE late industrialization (Murgescu 2010). On a second level, Romania also displays the typical political debates of a "semi-peripheral society" seeking to deal with the ebb and flow of global capitalist markets (Chirot 1978). As such, similar to other late modernizing cases, replicating the institutional structure that balanced power resources in developed countries became a key political desiderate (Leisering 2018). This brought employers, employees and policymakers into open conflict, above and beyond local nuances of delayed industrialization. The case-study starts from 1922, with the inaugural meeting of the enlarged UGIR, and ends in 1938, with the abolition of formal democratic policymaking.

Echoing recent trends in the broader welfare state literature, I start the analysis from a complete review of the 1919-1938 plenum proceedings of the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies, to capture the entire ideational space where social policymaking unfolded (Singh 2015). This overarching focus allows analyzing discrete welfare reforms within the broader societal debate on social policymaking, wherein ideas of order from multiple spheres (Leisering 2018) have differential impact on power resources (Korpi 2006, Paster 2013). Because institutional structures and historical legacies rendered partisanship secondary (Sdrobis 2015), I analyze discrete debates in diachronic fashion, as integral to long-running stances on development (see also Delcea 2021). Secondly, I rely on the journal of UGIR published between 1922 and 1938 to fully illustrate the proactive strategy of employers regarding welfare development. Lastly, I further analyze Governmental sources (journals, reports, policy proposals) to illustrate when and how the open ideational debates from Parliament integrated employer voices into institutional creation. The paper proceeds as follows – a general overview of the employer-centric literature, the Romanian case-study and a set of conclusions.

2. Literature review

At their core, comparative social policy studies typically argue that as welfare states seek to "decommodify labor" (Esping-Andersen 1990), they raise direct opposition from "capital", which inherently takes labor as a commodity (Iversen 2005, 6-7). The key tension is that "the cost of social policy for employers do not always outweigh the benefits provided to firms" (Mares 2003, 24). As such, welfare intervention (to use the terminology of Kaufmann 2013) is essentially a form of compensation offered to workers (Mares 2003), given the asymmetric power of capital forcing them to face new life risks, or given the state's own attempt at forcefully engendering social integration (Vis and van Kersbergen 2014 for summary).

On closer scrutiny however, a "neat antagonism" between labor and capital is neither historically documented (Swenson 1991), nor "theoretically" discernible in the shape and functioning of modern welfare arrangements (Iversen 2005, 6-12). In fact, starting with Swenson (1991) a consistent research tradition unearthed that, historically, labor power is built *with* rather than *against* employer power. For instance, building on Katzenstein's "small state argument" (1985), Swenson (1992) shows that in the topical Swedish and Danish cases, since employers lacked markets, they could only withstand the ebb and flow of global capitalism by "forcing" labor centralization, which in turn coerced the state towards organizing markets to increase efficiency. In his sweeping historical analysis encompassing both small and large Western European cases, Lindert (2004) further showed that the link between public spending, investment and national income is far too weak to justify any argument that welfare states are a limit to growth and as such could only have been developed against employer interests (for a broader summary Iversen 2005, 6-12).

In this line of thought, a range of studies show that while employees seek welfare protection against sickness, injury and old-age as new risks specific to industrial life-course employment, employers themselves also seek to minimize the risk of losing the skill-sets that generate added value and profits (Iversen 2005, 9). At its broadest, Mares (2004) thus argues that there is a generally positive correlation between economic insecurity and the level of social protection. The more specific crux of the issue is that conventional accounts of welfare state development neglect the differential impact of differentiated skills on employer preferences (Iversen 2005, 9, 77-111). On a basic level, as Mares (2003) shows, high risk industries were in fact proactive in supporting welfare benefits, as a way to lower their own cost (specifically on accident insurance, see also Moses 2018). On a more refined level, economic insecurity deepens sectoral cleavages over the scope and design of social insurance (Mares 2003). Essentially, whether and how employers support welfare intervention thus becomes a function of balancing their own cost in employees' skills investment with the cost of insurance (Mares 2003). The topical case is unemployment insurance where, as Mares (2003) shows building on both Swenson (1991) and the emerging VoC tradition (Hall & Soskice 2001), partisanship and trade union strength are statistically negligible, while the size of the high-risk industrial sector is key. An additional key variable that may prompt employers to become proactive supporters of welfare state development is the level of retained control (Mares 2003). Control is particularly important during uncertain times, as it allows firms both a tight coupling between insurance benefits and wage hierarchies, *and,* perhaps more importantly, the ability to use welfare benefits as an incentive (Mares 2003).

Pushing the argument forward, Iversen (2005) focuses on the *politics of markets* rather than the traditional politics against markets, to argue that welfare state development should be seen simultaneously as an arena for distributive struggles *and* a source of comparative advantage. Focusing on a welfare state's insurance function, rather than its purely distributive mechanisms, Iversen (2005) essentially argues that employers do not just acquiesce to welfare intervention, but actually form the basis for a clear supporting constituency. This in turn better explains specific gaps in power resource approaches regarding democracy and inequality – because the dominant skill profile of industries[3] dictate employer preferences, unequal democracies do not *ipso facto* generate more generous welfare states. In this sense, employers are not only proactively involved in welfare state development, but they are in fact integral to the political game that previous scholars saw as decisive for social insurance creation and/or expansion (Esping-Andersen 1990).

For Paster (2013), employers are also involved in welfare state development, but within a broader perspective that transcends the immediate "business interest hypothesis" (Mares 2003). Building on Iversen's idea of welfare as competitive advantage, Paster (2013, 417) argues that employer support for welfare is essentially a response to the political challenges that business confronts. In this view, employers proactively support welfare creation or expansion when faced with a system-disruptive challenge, while advocating for limits on redistribution when faced with conventional attempts at economic policy reforms (Paster 2013, 418-419). This occurs because business elites can always resort to occupational social policy to settle their skill-investment requirements, without necessarily having to take a position on a politically contentious public system (Paster 2013, 421). This adds an important nuance to previous models – not only is employer preference not static, but it also varies according to considerations that may not always be linked with macro-structural economic change, affecting the dominant skill profile of a given market.

By analyzing short-term shifts alongside long-term structural change, Paster (2013) effectively opens up space to analyze welfare state development as a layering of multiple interests, rather than abrupt change during highly specific windows of opportunity (in the sense of Streeck and Thelen 2005). This in turn, highlights that understanding employers' welfare preferences requires focusing on microfoundations of political behavior, rather than macro-structural economic profiles (see also Korpi 2006). Specifically, as Korpi (2006) shows, differences in "logics of the situation" generate "asymmetric effects of expanded citizenship rights" that aim above and beyond the "efficacy of economic resources". As such, while cross-cutting coalitions between employers and employees are sometimes affected by structural factors, more often than not "distributive strife is also focused on influencing the relative importance of competing lines of cleavage" ranging from ethnicity, to religion, to occupation (Korpi 2006). Similarly, different logics of the situation also imply that timing matters to the point that employer preferences are not set *a priori*, but may even change across the states of policy-making (Paster 2013). Essentially, not only are "employers" not a fully homogenous group, with a unitary welfare preference, but they also oscillate between consent, proactive support, proactive neglect and contingently-defined combinations of preferences, depending on specific social insurance policies.

In this line of thought, the present article offers an exploratory case-study, applying the microfoundations approach to interwar Romania. On a first level, the article seeks to offer a broad historical overview of the understudied phenomenon of employer involvement in welfare state development in late industrializing Romania. On a more advanced level, by going beyond a macro-structural approach, the article seeks to outline potential conceptual building blocks and research hypotheses for a broader study of the role of employers in social policy in late industrializing economies.

3. Employers and the welfare state in interwar Romania

3.1 The winding road to an insurance unification law

On the surface, early 1920s Romanian welfare politics took on the appearance of "emergency policymaking" (Inglot 2008) because of the sheer breadth of existing challenges (Halippa, DCD, 28th Nov 1924). The crux of the issue was the realization that the formal creation of "Greater Romania" was not in and of itself sufficient to solve late development – despite gaining a larger population and better resources, the country was a "small economy" and a "middle-tier state in world politics" (Ionescu, DCD, 9th Jul 1921). In fact, the aftermath of World War I had unleashed such a dire situation that simply adjusting salaries and welfare benefits to inflation was not enough (DS, 15th Jul 1920), for either state-employees (DS, 17th Febr 1920), or private-sector workers (Inculeț, DCD, 10th Feb 1920). The cost of forging a unitary state was so high that employers themselves proposed solutions involving mixed worker-owner associations, wherein the latter would buy essential goods for supporting workers' livelihoods, as a more efficient economic intervention than just raising salaries (Lorenti 1922, 34). This was part of a broader narrative, wherein business representatives constantly claimed not just awareness of the need for joint action, but in fact willingness to co-operate and be involved in policymaking (Lorenti 1922, 34). On a deeper level therefore, the common denominator across the political and the business arenas was that crisis-management measures, such as the formal extension of the seemingly generous 1912 Nenițescu Insurance Law over provincial systems inherited from Austria-Hungary and/or imperial Russia, would not suffice. What was needed was the creation of an integrative framework, with state-wide economic and social policies acting in concert as a safety net against the ebb and flow of post-war capitalism.

However, creating a coherent welfare intervention was not at all straightforward. On the one hand, political elites seemed to overwhelmingly agree that economic recovery and modernization needed to start from state-building, to the detriment of the private sector (Delcea 2021). On the other hand, the few measures that did aim above and beyond crisis-management (Florea, DCD, 27th Mar 1928), were unilaterally designed, embodying the paternalistic view that tight state-control would preclude fights and radicalization (Sandor, DS, 11th Febr 1927). For instance, in the construction of the Chambers of Labor and the High Council of Labor, the underlying idea was two-fold – firstly, the state sought to protect against Bolshevik-style worker radicalization; secondly, by rendering the impression that the state imposed worker rights to otherwise reluctant employers, policymakers wanted to leave room for potentially instrumentalizing worker grievances against business representatives (Report, DS, 10th Febr 1927). This essentially forced employers, who were in fact only opposed to the randomness of over-bureaucratized state institutions rather than to welfare intervention as such,[4] to espouse their own brand of strategic pro-worker narrative (Cerkez, DS, 8th Febr 1927).

In this line of thought, employer MPs abandoned passive consent for an apparent proactive support, in the guise of promoting "exclusive worker leadership" rather than mixed employer-employee committee (Cerkez, DS, 8th Febr 1927).

At the same time however, because the state also constantly intervened in forceful fashion to preempt worker radicalization, this particular narrative remained secondary to the more dominant cleavage surrounding institutional autonomy and funding. On the surface, Romanian employers seem to validate in full Mares' (2003) hypothesis regarding control, as they pledged consent to welfare intervention if either full institutional autonomy was granted *or* the state took on the costly financing of the social insurance bureaucracy (*Memorii* 1922, 100). While the former may have been necessary but not sufficient, the latter was in fact absolutely vital, as business representatives cited cases from "developed states" where the cost of managing a welfare system eventually bankrupted the whole system (*Memorii* 1922, 97-100). The crux of the issue was that policymakers' theorization of catch-up modernization involved a top-down intervention designed not just to respond to real worker grievances, but also to attempt and pre-empt potential ones that may in fact never unfold (Mircea 1924, 274 (a)). This would in turn create overgrown institutions with a fiscally unsustainable bureaucracy and an artificial separation between welfare policies that should act in concert (Penescu-Kertesch 1924, 171). To avoid such a scenario, Romanian employers even became proactive proponents of welfare intervention, rather than just passive consenters, seeking to ensure that the emerging centralized system would be created from the ground-up rather than vice versa (Lorenti 1922 (b), 162). On a deeper level however, things were not fully clear, as employer support may have in fact been less about the long-term economic benefits of welfare intervention and more about ensuring the benevolence of a state which had failed to live up to its financial obligations towards businesses (Busila 1931, 371).

Such multi-faceted cleavages running in the background became even more obvious in the debates building towards an insurance unification law. On a first level, the 1923 Chirculescu project was redacted and compiled essentially without any stakeholder input (Dimitriu 1922, 208). In fact, even after failing to pass from the technical committees to the Parliamentary plenum, the project continued to be debated in mostly political fashion for virtually the entire decade, with only UGIR representatives to Parliament and ad hoc industry MPs being consulted. This prompted employers to craft a double-layered critique. On a very broad level, given UGIR's national representation (Cerkez 1922), employers argued that their own debates on the project should precede the public parliamentary sessions (*Adresa* 1926, 8 (a)). The issue was more than one of democratic representation, as employers claimed that the state lacked vital actuarial data regarding the nature of specific social insurances. In this line of thought, the state's commitment in front of the ILO regarding an overhaul of invalidity insurance and its inclusion in a comprehensive welfare net was purely rhetorical, as it would be simply unaffordable, even with employer contributions, which were nigh impossible to actually acquire (*Contra-propuneri* 1926, 63). This feeds into the more discrete criticism that, since a unified insurance legislation would not survive without employers' "material sacrifices", business representatives needed to be involved in the framing of the law (*Adresa* 1926, 7 (a)). In fact, employers argued that irrespective of their contribution, the type of comprehensive insurance system envisaged under the Chirculescu draft would raise the costs of production and in turn workers' cost of life beyond anything the emerging welfare net could cover (Mircea 1926 (b)).

At the same time however, UGIR's narrative also reached beyond the issue of payment and control (Mares 2003). Concretely, employers also sought to insure against potential worker radicalization, which in turn would attract harsh political clampdown (Paster 2013) – "what worries us [more than material sacrifices] is to find a way to make it publicly known that these [welfare] measures are the result of [employer] consent, and not pure political imposition." (*Adresa* 1926, 7 (a)) This was crucial for "social peace" understood as worker quiescence (*Adresa* 1926, 7 (a)) because, as employers argued, without their involvement, any purely political unification law would be unsustainable, hence quickly unpopular, resulting in potential worker radicalization (Mircea 1926 (b)). The key stake was to show that a unified insurance system was not a "political gift" but rather a case of "leeching off" employers' own sustainable development plan (Lorenti 1929, 3). It is precisely in this line of thought that employers argued for diluting state control – a sustainable co-operation between employers and employees could be orchestrated from the ground-up, but was difficult to maintain in an artificial, top-down institutional framework (Mircea 1926, 100 (a)). While the state quite clearly needed to have some control on the actual implementation of laws, the functioning of the bureaucracy and the real allocation of funds, the Central Insurance House should retain otherwise full autonomy in defining the nature and scope of the unified insurance system (*Contra-propuneri* 1926, 63).

Exactly how potent was UGIR's critique is difficult to discern. By 1933 and the passing of the Ioanițescu Unification Law, business representatives had successively claimed to both have "had some success in blocking the ongoing project in the relevant parliamentary committees" (*Adresa* 1926, 172 (b)), but also to have "found out only from ministry journals that such a project was coming to Parliament" (*Adresa* 1926, 182 (b)). The version of the draft that did find its way to UGIR by 1930 embodied virtually all of the previous points of contention – overbureaucratization, political control, unclear funding etc., prompting business representatives to note that the project had not passed due to sheer incompetency and political turmoil rather than attempts at including stake-holder input (Raport 1930, 320). In fact, neither of the successive iterations that seemed to have reached employers (Pennescu-Kertesch 1931, 112), nor the final Ioanițescu Law itself, fully solved the issue of overbureaucratization (Manoilescu, DS, 18Th Mar 1933). On paper, the Ioanițescu Law seemed to have streamlined the welfare bureaucracy by creating a management system that placed employers and employees on equal footing (Ioanițescu, DS, 21st Mar 1933). In practice, collapsing the budget of the Central Insurance House into the general state budget stripped away all institutional autonomy, to the point that employers even offered to take on some of the costs if that would retain some degree of institutional freedom (Samoil, DS, 26th June 1934).

Superficially, the Ioanițescu Law seemed to include an important employer request – a unitary and homogenous system of contributions (Banu, DCD, 24th Mar 1934). While the actuarial calculations were poor (Banu, DCD, 24th Mar 1934), it was immediately obvious that this inclusion sought to secure at least passive consent from employers (Ioanițescu, DS, 6th Apr 1933). Over the short term, lowering taxes achieved the purported aim of having "employers embrace social reforms" (Ioanițescu, DS, 21st Mar 1933), with the clear caveat that this may disappear if taxation would rise abruptly (Mircea, DS, 21st Mar 1933). In fact, policymakers made it quite clear that a relatively low level of taxation was a political concession *vis-à-vis* employers, going in the face of much higher worker demands (Ioanițescu, DS, 6th Apr 1933). Over the long term however, the aforementioned shallowness of the actuarial calculations and the self-admitted "experimental nature of the Ioanițescu Law" (Banu, DCD, 24th Mar 1934) quickly made it clear to employers that virtually all subsequent reforms would raise expenses (Herzog, DCD, 27th Febr 1935). For instance, already by 1934 the inclusion of employers' duty to fully cover an employee's costs during the first 7 days of illness raised huge concerns and vociferous criticisms (*Necesitatea* 1934, 5-8). Similarly, despite having labelled the Ioanițescu Law as an attempt at reducing overbureaucratization (Ioanițescu, DS, 21st Mar 1933), policymakers soon continued to swell the welfare bureaucracy entirely on the employers' costs (*Necesitatea* 1934, 5-8). Not only was the emerging insurance system essentially neglecting all previous employer criticisms, but policymakers even continued to reduce employer representation (Raport 1935, 7-8), claiming in parallel that state control was needed to shield business from a putative worker radicalization (Deleanu, DCD, 3rd Mar 1934).

On the whole, the trajectory of the insurance unification law in interwar Romania highlights that employers were highly interested in the emerging welfare intervention, but were forced by various political contingencies to constantly alter their narratives, strategy and purported interest. While classical issues such as the balance between costs and control were of key importance, the awareness that employers lacked power resources, due to dependency on state funding and market protection, created a multi-layered narrative. Essentially, employers tried to balance at least a modicum of influence with an overt political recognition of their consent, if not proactive involvement, that would allow for potential cross-class coalition with labor, to offset political power.

3.2 Employers and policy transfers – the case of ILO Conventions

The realization that the formal creation of Greater Romania did not solve late development prompted many political elites to argue that learning from abroad could act as a shortcut (Coltor, DCD, 3rd Aug 1920) for a country lacking both adequate capital and political experience with a complex capitalist economy (Popovici, DS, 15th Dec 1922). This was not however straightforward because the profound changed unleashed by World War I had blurred categorizations of "advanced" countries and respective "best practices" that could be adopted (Constantinescu, DS, 11th Febr 1927). In addition, the unification had also yielded at best a "strong middling player" in a political-military sense, highly susceptible to revisionism which meant that internationalization, in the guise of a complex system of alliances, also needed to seek international guarantees (Ionescu, DCD, 9th Jul 1921), The emergence of large International Organizations (IOs) only partly solved the problem. On one level, IOs did function as overarching knowledge-actors, pooling enough technical resources to potentially help a late developing country cut across multiple new uncertainties. On a different level, IOs varied greatly in terms of both capacity and intentionality. For instance, the International Labor Office had few formal means of enforcement, but at least under Albert Thomas' presidency had created an integrative forum for global co-operation (Hughes and Haworth 2013). Conversely, while the League of Nations formally had enforcement capabilities, it quickly came to lack actual political thrust (Roman 1935, 5-6).

Such imbalances prompted Romanian political elites to carve out a holistic strategy – by co-operating in fashionable international fora such as the ILO or in the area of minority protection, Romania could craft an image of a modern state (Weyland 2006) which allowed networking with Great Powers and attracting the security guarantees that the League of Nations qua direct forum could not offer. This was most visible in the case of the ILO which went from an initial perception of "imposition" (Madgearu, DCD, 20th Dec 1919) to earning the unanimous support of the international community (Hristu 1935, 11) and the "exclusive role to preempt wars by keeping nations quiescent" (Roman 1935, 5-6). Such a specific ideational construction was layered on top of the theorization on ILO best practices as a solution to late development (Filliti, DS, Mar 1920), prompting policymakers to at least rhetorically embrace a "highest responsiveness" to ILO policies (Setlacec 1930, 108). For instance, this meant that during the 1920s Romania ratified 13 out of 16 ILO conventions (NAC 1038, 27/1930). In addition, the layering of multiple considerations meant that even if any opposition were to congeal, within the political spectrum, or, more importantly, from relevant stakeholders, it could immediately be overcome within the broad understanding that ILO templates embodied the "national interest" for modernization and development (Ghiulea 1934, 3).

The recognition by employers that legislation such as the ILO Convention on the 8 Hour Work Day (8WDC) was not "economic policymaking" (Mircea (b) 1928, 200), but part of a broader "political-diplomatic logic" (Mircea 1930, 6), prompts a reconsideration of their various positions as passive consenters, proactive supporters or dissenters. On the surface, similarly with the case of the insurance unification law, employers qua stake-holders were virtually not at all consulted (Mircea 1924, 531 (b)). In fact, because policymakers agreed on full compliance with ILO policies, at least over the short term, they simply ignored employers' rights to participate in delegations (Mircea 1924, 461 (b)). On a deeper level however, once this covert strategy (Botez 1934, 16) no longer became tenable, employers gained new avenues for critique and even influence. For instance, employers could highlight to the ILO how Romanian governments were either misusing or in fact ratifying conventions without implementing them (Mircea 1930, 6). This would greatly hamper policymaker's efforts towards creating the image of a modern state and it explains why employers specifically focused on the 8WDC or the Unemployment Convention (UC), which were crucial to the ILO's own strategy for bolstering its power (van Daele 2008, Kott 2018). In addition, Romanian employers could also use the ILO to network with fellow business representatives (Kott 2013) and thus hamper policymakers' abilities to access international credit and/or markets. This was also predicated on the way in which policymakers intended to use the 8WDC for instance as cheap and readily available competitive signaling for foreign investment (Appel and Orenstein 2018).

In this line of thought, employers adopted a strategy similar to the case of the unification law – passive consent offered for being involved in the debates and the framing of ILO conventions (Mircea 1924, 459 (b)). Recognizing that they lacked power resources, employers sought to peg their own narrative on the trope of ILO conventions as developmental tools, claiming that they do not oppose the substance of the policy transfers, requesting exclusively the possibility to offer input regarding timing (Mircea 1924, 459 (b)). Over the short term, employers thus limited their critique to the unilateral, top-down application of transfers (Mircea 1924, 461 (b)). This was visible both regarding the 8WDC in the 1920s when Romanian governments were vocal regarding ratification, albeit shallow or hap-hazard *vis-à-vis* implementation (Lupu, DCD, 24-25th Mar 1928) and subsequently *vis-à-vis* the UC during the 1930s, when it became a key topic at the ILO and as such for Romanian policymakers' quest for the image of a modern state. The minimal aim of such a critique was to potentially trade passive consent for either a modicum of predictability or at least some form of being included in the policymaking process (Mircea 1924, 461 (b)).

Over the long turn however, since this type of strategy only achieved a modicum of success *vis-à-vis* conventions that policymakers deemed secondary, but virtually no success over more structural reforms (*Adresa* 1925, 144-145), employers resorted to a more substantive strategy. For instance, the 8WDC was criticized as being particularly costly for a late industrializing country where low-skill workers constituted the bulk of the workforce, as it increased production costs (Mircea 1928, 93-94 (a)).

Raising production costs would in turn negatively affect workers' income and in a broader guise, the development of a national market (Mircea 1928, 93-94 (a)). Similar concerns were raised regarding unemployment insurance, seen by employers as an incentive for free-riding in an economy where low-skilled workers naturally reverted to agriculture, which, while not desirable, was at least some form of productivity. Given this specific structural feature of the Romanian economy, employers argued that if ILO conventions were to have any developmental role, they needed to include the type of local data that the state lacked, but UGIR could provide if properly consulted (Mircea 1924, 553 (b)). This could be achieved by granting UGIR equal rights within Romanian delegations to ILO (Mircea 1924, 459 (b)), including the liberty to properly carry out ILO inquiries and use them to provide policy input (Mircea 1924, 553-555 (b)). *Mutatis mutandis,* Romanian employers were at least in part concerned about insuring and/or putting premiums on highly transferable skills, similarly to arguments found in the varieties of capitalism literature (Hall & Soskice 2001). In context however, what Romanian employers seemed to have sought was, similar with the case of insurance unification, the public recognition that their input was neglected by policymakers, so that if the transfers proved to be an economic deadweight, business representatives would appear to workers as allies rather than enemies (*Adresa* 1927, 71-73).

As employers increasingly noticed that policymakers used foreign policy language rather than economic or social policy concepts to debate ILO conventions, they also crafted a corresponding critical narrative. On a first level, Romanian employers sought to signal that since the 8WDC was drafted mostly considering the experience of advanced capitalism, it was at the very least improper for a late developing industry (Mircea 1935, 3-5) and at worst an actual instrument of economic domination (Lărgeanu 1935, 11). While it was true that other late-comers did see some intrinsic developmental potential in such a social policy, employers were quick to point out that these were not the fore-runners of semi-peripheries that Romania sought to compare itself with (Poland, Czechoslovakia – Mircea 1928, 93-94 (a)), but rather countries considered laggards even by Romanian standards (Greece, India, Bulgaria – Mircea 1924, 529 (b)). Although by the 1930s some perceived laggards had "leaped ahead" by using ILO practices, this did not seem to be inextricably tied to specific conventions, but rather to a concerted use of industrial and labor policies (Casetti 1929, 120). In fact, UGIR specifically pointed out that employees in developed countries had protested quite vigorously precisely because the shorter working day raised production costs, thus signaling that the 8WDC may have originally been more of a political tool than an actual developmental policy (Mircea 1926 (a)). If such a shallow approach may have worked in developed countries which had sufficient resources for policy experimentation, in late developing Romania simply copying the law with no stake-holder input and no contextual amendments only engendered confusion and economically costly strikes (Mircea 1928, 92-93 (a)).

In addition, employers further pointed out that while Romanian policymakers correctly observed that powerful global actors such as France, Germany and England were indeed engaged in negotiations and networking on the 8WDC or subsequently the UC (UGIR 1928, 100), they were mostly seeking ways to use it against each other (Godeanu 1934, 25-36). In fact, employers highlighted that "Great Powers" also resorted to token-ratification, conditioned by a range of mutually-binding agreements that they knew would never be passed by economic rivals (Mircea 1935, 14-15). In this line of thought, employers tried to peg themselves on a narrative originating in the 1920s and subsequently growing exponentially in the specific global context of the 1930s, claiming that while international organizations may formally bring together small and large states, they essentially provide templates that virtually exclusively embody the geopolitical interests of Great Powers (Lărgeanu 1935, 11). Such a critique aimed to dilute the perceived diplomatic value of ILO conventions, particularly in the autarkic climate emerging after the 1929-1933 Global Crisis.

On a superficial level, the huge variations in actually applying and/or enforcing ILO conventions in interwar Romania suggest that employer dissent had at least some partial effect. Particularly in large industries, where organized labor had the possibility to organize protests (Lupu, DCD, 24-25th Mar 1928), employer critique is likely to have at least been taken into consideration if not fully successful in prompting policy change. Similar to the case of insurance unification, it is difficult to fully disentangle when, why and how employer dissent mattered because faulty implementation was also often due to lack of state capacity, in the form of infrastructure and trained personnel (*Probleme* 1936, 17). In addition, while employer critique was constant (*Dare de seamă* 1931, 211), ILO conventions went through multiple moments of intense Governmental clamp down, suggesting that the foreign policy logic, defined as "national interest" typically overcame any stake-holder opposition. It is precisely in this line of thought that business representatives nonetheless opted to voice discontent – despite realizing they lacked power resources, by making their opposition public, they could portray any putative employer-employee as a political construction, rather than a class conflict, in the classical sense.

4. Conclusions

On the whole, the present article has shown that above and beyond structural specificities of state-led modernization (Gerschenkron 1962) and the creation of a dependent-market economy (Ban 2022), employers in late developing interwar Romania were not at all passive, but proactive agents in the debate on creating social insurances. For instance, Romanian business representatives sought balancing the weight of their economic contribution with retaining a sufficient degree of control. While they were not interested in coupling insurance benefits with wage hierarches as had been the case in developed countries (Mares 2003), Romanian employers were clearly seeking to limit state interference and over-bureaucratization so as to create a predictable legal-institutional framework. This in turn was argued to be beneficial for long-term growth and allowed employers to leverage their specific power resources (Korpi 2006). Similarly, given that huge economic fluctuations often prompted workers to oscillate between engaging in industries and reverting back to agriculture, Romanian employers were clearly interested in a type of welfare network that protected skills investment. To a high degree, the in-between-ness of mostly unskilled Romanian workers prompted employers to adopt the type of vocal dissent that underpinned the creation of liberal market capitalism in developed countries (Hall & Soskice 2001; Iversen 2005). Quite clearly, the fact that both employers and policymakers sought the rapid construction of Western-style capitalism (Delcea 2021) meant that, at least at a discursive level, some *topoi* were common with developments from early industrializers.

Yet, while the article highlights the existence of a stable basis for expanding employer-centric approaches outside the narrow universe of industrialized states, it also clearly shows the need for conceptual reconsiderations. For instance, the lateness of unemployment insurance in interwar Romania seems less a function of a predominantly low-skill industrial profile and more a function of policymakers' lack of resources for implementation. As the article has shown, although the narrative of using ILO conventions as diplomatic liaisons conferred policymakers enough power resources to overcome employer dissent, this did not equate with actual policy intervention. In this line of thought, while employer dissent may have played into policymakers' intent to ratify but not implement policies such as the 8WDC or the UC, it did not constitute the conceptual driver of delayed welfare construction. Rather, the way in which UGIR sought to make public both their dissent and their inability to sway a political elite that essentially dominated the modernization project (Delcea 2021) suggests that, as predicted by Paster (2013), employers react to changes in the political spectrum. This can be seen for instance in that Romanian employers constantly supported the perspective of a costly unification law seeking to create a stable institutional framework, wherein spurious political decision-making could be avoided. To no small degree, this was also visible in employer dissent regarding ILO conventions – above and beyond immediate economic costs, UGIR essentially feared the banalization of a purely top-down ethos regarding policymaking, which gave political elites enough room for potentially revolutionary change (in the sense of Paster 2013).

A similar consideration should be given to the causal order of policy development – while VoC and power resources approach have varying degrees of validity in explaining the individual logics of social policies, neither approach is fully relevant regarding the causal order of welfare intervention in interwar Romania. The case of insurance unification is particularly telling for the specificity of late industrialization – as political elites faced simultaneously challenges which had been tackled in developed countries in a gradual and layered fashion, they sought a cross-cutting solution (Delcea *forthcoming*). Similarly, the layering of various ILO conventions followed their ebb and flow as fashionable international norms, more than as welfare intervention, in the sense predicted by conventional employer-centric models. This also explains why it is virtually impossible to measure in a late industrializing state if, why and how extensions of social citizenship have asymmetric effects on power resources (Korpi 2006). Recognizing that radical mobilizations of labor were unlikely due to deep histories of political repression, employers supported the expansion of social rights as long as their opinion was publicized, so they could potentially ally with labor and dilute policymakers' control.

Consequently, extending employer-centric models to the multiple universes of late industrializing states will require a more complex analysis of late development, factoring in multiple ideational stakes, rather than macro-structural conditions. This opens up space for a much broader study on the microfoundations of class, which, as Korpi (2006) shows, do not produce the same outcomes over time and space, but are likely to offer tangible hypotheses regarding the probability of some outcomes over others. By analyzing late development as open-ended ideational contestation (Delcea *forthcoming*), future research can shed new light on the specific ideational stakes that constitute the basis for welfare intervention (Leisering 2018).

NOTES

1 For editorial purposes throughout the dissertation I use the following acronyms for archival references – *DS* – Debates of the Senate; *DCD* – Debates of the Chamber of Deputies; In text reference style – Speaker, Chamber, Date of session; *NAC* – National Archives Collection; in text reference style - NAC, Collection Number, Folder number / year; Archival journal and/or book sources are quoted as regular citations. The list of references contains the entirety of the archival references with summoning numbers for the particular collections.

2 Missing from the landmark Inglot 2008; shallow analysis in Cerami and Stanescu 2009 or Haggard and Kaufman 2008.

3 Predominantly low-skill industrial profile implying interchangeable workers, requiring little social protection as a safeguard for skills investment and as such a *liberal market economy,* whereas high-skill profile puts a premium on social investment, leading to a generous welfare state within a *coordinated market economy* – see further Hall & Soskice 2001.

4 For a deep historical analysis of over-bureaucratization see further Sorescu, A. (2017) "Funcționarism: la rhétorique de la corruption morale et institutionnelle au XIXe siècle en Roumanie", in O. Dard, S. Marton and F. Monier (eds) *Moralité du pouvoir et corruption en France et en Roumanie, XVIIIe-XXe siècles*, pp. 83–97, Paris: Presses universitaires de Paris-Sorbonne.

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