

## THE INFLUENCE OF TRANSNATIONAL CORPORATIONS ON POLITICAL PROCESSES IN EUROPE IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY GEOPOLITICAL STRUGGLE

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*The main goal of this research is to determine the degree of influence of transnational corporations on political processes in Europe. The author realized a theoretical study, compiled and presented the main concepts and approaches related to TNCs. The author also conducted four case studies. The case studies allowed the author to demonstrate the various means through which TNCs achieve their political goals and make applicative recommendations.*

Due to the nature of the current economic system of the world, each year that passes by more and more financial resources end up at the disposal of big corporations, thus increasing their influence and empowering them to exercise it. It became extremely obvious especially during the last decade that transnational enterprises may be used as powerful tools by states or use states as tools for their own benefit.

The role and place of transnational corporations as actors of international relations had been investigated from various angles by Western authors, like S. P. Huntington [1]. L.Jakobeit [2] provides deep and comprehensive assessment of the role of TNCs in the modern world in correlation with the existing political and economic international order. A very impressive number of works dedicated to the topic of TNCs may be found in the scientific literature written in Russia. Among Russian scholars who researched this topic very profoundly are Abildin A.G., Sembinov M.K. [3]. The academia of the Republic of Moldova unfortunately has very little scientific research to offer in this regard. One can mention the work by Sarco A. [4]. Overall, the historiographical basis of studying TNCs and the surrounding subjects is relatively well developed, although some other non-state actors do receive much more attention.

There are two almost diametrically opposed perceptions of TNCs. TNCs play a crucial role in contemporary international relations, being used and influenced by states while also being semi-independent actors who can exercise their own influence both in the country of residence and in the country of origin. Their role in a particular state or region can be beneficial but is often very detrimental as well.

There is also a crucial interconnection and co-dependance of the concepts of globalization, neoliberalism and TNC, which all together create a framework in which modern economic and political relations develop. The UN, for instance, defines TNC as

an enterprise that controls assets, such as offices and factories, in more than one country [5, p.11]. According to Chelischev, any ideology always has a certain link, and in liberalism this link is the fundamental demand for individual freedom and the principles that derive from it. [6, p.157] Classical liberalism emphasized liberty from government regulation. Neoliberalism seeks to revive the core principles of classical liberalism [7]. Neoliberalism sees competition as the defining characteristic of human interactions, redefining citizens as consumers, whose democratic choices are best exercised by buying and selling, a process that rewards merit and punishes any inefficiency. Neoliberal adherents claim that the market delivers benefits that could never be achieved by state planning. In a neoliberal system tax and regulation should be minimized and public services should be privatized. Thus, one of the fundamental ideas of neoliberalism is that market ensures that everyone gets what they deserve. Neoliberalism is a silent ideology at the core of most modern political and economic systems.

Summarizing all the information that was provided above we can see that TNCs should be perceived in a broader framework of the modern system of international relations, conditioned by globalization and neoliberal policies. It is the system precisely that makes this discussion relevant in the first place. Through lobbying, TNCs continue to interact with states, and states continue to influence TNCs through various legal, political, economic and other mechanisms. This creates a very complex structure of interactions in this area.

Our case studies start with Gazprom. While researching it, we found out that Gazprom may be regarded as one of Russia's main tools of projecting its power and defending its interests abroad. It is done through: Gazprom-affiliated people and organizations engaging in lobbying activities on the European and national levels, mainly in Germany [8], and the use of Gazprom's supply chains and EU's reliance on its main commodity (natural gas) by Russian government as a means of applying pressure on Europe [9]. One country which is especially susceptible to the cut of Russian natural gas supplies is the Republic of Moldova, which is very dependent on it. The crisis in Ukraine led to the development of a crisis situation in the field of energy in Moldova as well.

Shell is, in general terms, a private company. Such entity would inevitably have to protect the interests of its stakeholders, thus making it engage more proactively in domestic political struggles. At the same time, as will be demonstrated in this paper on concrete examples, private-owned TNCs do in fact work for the interests of their home country as well as for their own. The company protected its own interests on numerous occasions in Europe, through lobbying or exercising direct and indirect pressure on governments, like the Dutch Government [10, p.50], and EU institutions. At the same time, in Nigeria it basically acts as a neo-imperialist institution, for both its own profit and the interest of the collective West [11, p.8-9].

The past two decades have seen a rise in companies offering digital services. Big Tech firms have become ubiquitous, playing critical roles in our social interactions, how we access information, and how we consume. We took a good look at Meta and

its flagship properties – Facebook and Instagram, not only to showcase how this company meddles in politics in a classical way, through lobbying and similar means [12, p.5-34], but also to demonstrate how it exercises influence on a level only available for technology companies – by abusing their access to personal information of users and by manipulating public opinion through its social media platforms [13]. We can conclude here, that such manipulations indeed take place and are of concern to the public.

We dived deeper into the last type of influence while examining Twitter. Social networks like Twitter can be a stimulus for tumultuous political communication, especially when faced with evidence of microblogging practices based on fake news, shocking but unfounded rumors in unverified tweets, statements that are grandiose but doubtful, if not clearly untrue, but that take shape as reality and truth as they appear and circulate widely online. We demonstrated how it is being done with the implication of a company owning a popular platform through various means, primarily traditional and soft censorship, but also described alleged cases of government interference in the matter [14]. The author considered it necessary to examine tech companies specifically, since the more digitalized the world becomes, the more influence they get.

Transnational corporations are becoming discussed more often with each passing year, still, as actors of international relations in our globalized and neoliberal world, they are not getting nearly as much attention as they deserve. Analyzing so many forms of TNCs' implications in political processes, both directly and indirectly, has proven to be a challenge. Nonetheless, in the author's opinion, the end result is concise enough to keep the reader invested and detailed enough to allow us to make some scientifically sound and useful general conclusions and recommendations.

Transnational corporations have a very significant direct and indirect influence on political processes in Europe. The said influence is being projected differently, depending on the type of TNC we are talking about, by more traditional means such as lobbying and pressure, and also, in the case of tech companies, by manipulating public opinion and abusing access to personal data to influence the discourse on social and political issues. In both cases a state's interests may be implicated as well.

The author's recommendations are as follows: the political scientists, should in their scientific activity pay more attention to TNCs as actors of international relations; TNCs should be perceived and studied as an integral part of modern system of international relations, with emphasis on their link to and co-dependance on the concepts of globalization and neoliberalism; the activity of TNCs should be regulated more strictly on governmental and international levels to limit their leverage on important issues.

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