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## **Youth Participation in Eastern Europe in the Age of Austerity**

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Since the latest global financial crisis emerged in 2008, many governments all over Europe have adopted austerity policies. Austerity - the neoliberal doctrine that promotes cutting public spending in order to restore competitiveness (Blyth, 2013, p. 12) – is often framed as ‘common sense’ and only rational in the given circumstances, but it is often supported with reductionist arguments without seeking to understand its impact on different societal groups. Thus, until recently, due to a lack of reliable data, the human cost of austerity policies was largely invisible (McKee et al. 2012). Despite the growing literature on the negative effects of austerity on various aspects of society, there are still gaps that seek to be filled in regard to the impact of austerity measures. One of these gaps is the impact of austerity politics on patterns of political participation among young people. Europe is today facing unusually high rates of youth unemployment, which peaked at 23.8 % in 2013 (Eurostat, 2016d); as well as declining youth involvement in conventional political participation such as voting in parliamentary elections. Though it is true that European democracies are overall facing a crisis of representation (Mair, 2013), research on youth reveals significant differences between older and younger generations in their political behaviour (Dalton, 2011). Notwithstanding these broad trends, it is also well established that both the economic crisis and the subsequent repertoire of austerity policies have unevenly affected European societies, with differences particularly pronounced along the lines of centre-periphery (Epstein, 2014; Hanzl-Weiss, Landesmann, 2013; Jacoby, 2014; Vachudova, 2014). Southern and Eastern European states have been worse hit by austerity measures, in contrast to Northern European states, Germany and Austria, where these impacts have been less pronounced.

How does the age of austerity affect modalities of youth political participation? Garrido and Requena (1996) argue that the youth population is characterised by simultaneous processes of autonomy and integration. Young people, as the argument goes, levitate between their desire to be creative, innovative and different from the other generations but, at the same time, due to societal pressure, are being channelled into the existing patterns of societal norms and values. Therefore, we first expect that austerity policies have aggravated social welfare in the direction of increasing the proportion of youth population that remain living with their parents late into their 20s. Secondly, we expect that their prolonged economic dependence thwarts their process of gaining autonomy, which should be reflected in the modes of their political participation. Therefore, our main research question is how do austerity policies, mediated through a prolonged life in the family home, translate into the patterns and repertoires of youth political activism and participation? Should we expect an “infantilization”, marked by political apathy and nonparticipation, or is it more plausible to expect that a retreat from conventional political participation is accompanied by an increase in contentious repertoires of political action?

In addressing these questions, this chapter relates the impact of austerity policies on patterns of conventional and unconventional types of youth political activism and participation across Europe, embedding it within the distinction between the core and peripheral regions of Europe. Given that effects of austerity on youth participation in Eastern Europe have been least explored in contemporary literature, our focus in this analysis is on the core-periphery dynamic between Western and Eastern European member states of the EU. Comparing these two regions, we analyse indicators that tap

into economic and social effects of austerity policies in the post-2008 period and we attempt to relate these two factors, core-periphery status in Europe and the impact of austerity, to the differences in youth political participation across the two regions.

## **1. Theoretical Framework**

Even though the process of European integration is premised on the idea that everyone will converge towards the liberal democratic model of development, a growing body of literature has shown that instead of that, we have witnessed a clustering of European economies into distinctive varieties of capitalism (e.g., Bohle, Greskovits, 2012; King, 2007; Nölke, Vliegenthart, 2009). The East–West division of Europe during democratic transformations of the 1990s has taken second place to the core–periphery divide. Eastern European countries have developed into liberal dependent economies, characterised by the unhappy marriage of declining welfare standards and liberalised economies that depend on foreign investment (Bohle and Greskovits 2012; King, 2007; Nölke, Vliegenthart, 2009).

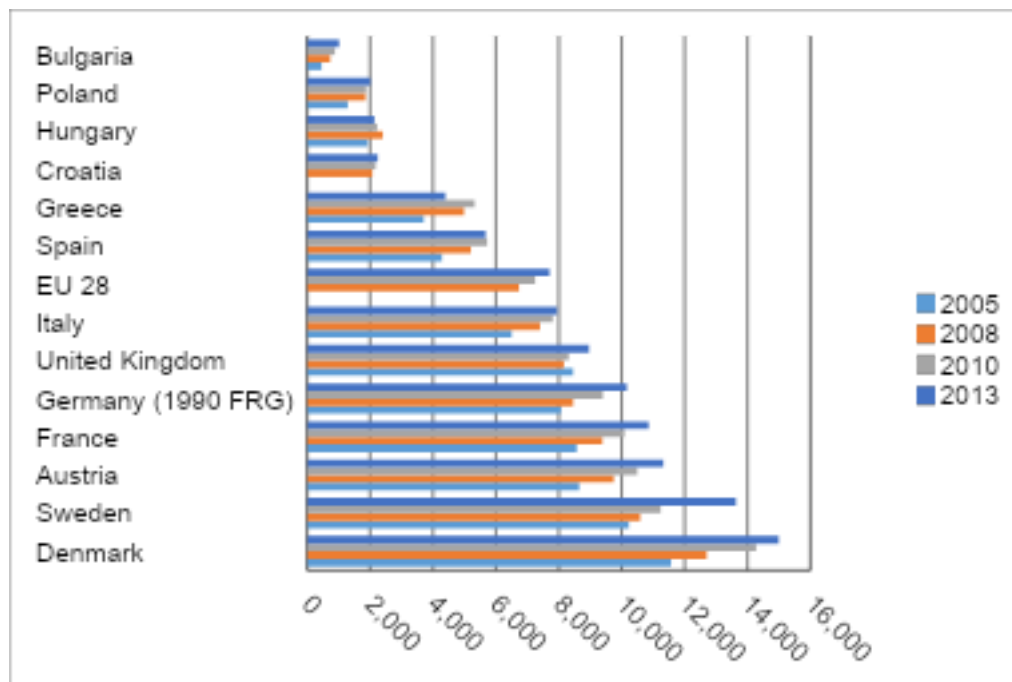
Centre-periphery models, which emerged from dependence theory and global political economy approach in the 1970s, help explain contemporary social and economic inequality and “the dynamics of underdevelopment and regional inequalities on the global level” (Naustdalslid, 1977, p. 203). In Wallerstein’s original formulation, the world system encapsulates countries of Africa, South America, and parts of Asia (periphery) being economically dependent on Northern America and Western Europe (centre). Developed in opposition to modernization theory which assumed that all countries were moving along a linear path towards the superior development model of the US, dependency theory drew attention to the fact that poor and wealthy countries are part of the same whole, global capitalist system, rather than similar entities at different stages of development. More importantly, this literature argued that underdevelopment in the periphery was the direct result of development in the centre. Given the fact that the 2008 financial crisis drew attention to diverging trajectories among EU member states, aspects of dependency theory have re-emerged in contemporary analysis. Authors such as Schweiger and Magone (2014), de la Porte and Pochet (2014) or Busch et al. (2013) argue that global financial crisis and the subsequent Eurozone sovereign debt crisis, together with the existing democratic deficit of the EU, have accentuated the internal divisions within the EU. According to Schweiger and Magone (2014, p. 259), the EU is divided “in terms of the level of vertical integration between the Eurozone core group and differentiated peripheries amongst the outsiders”.

While the financial crisis of 2008 and the ensuing austerity politics may have aggravated the differences among European countries, it is also important to keep in mind that they represented a logical extension of the longer-term trend of economic liberalism in EU’s policy orientation. Neoliberal economic policies were taken up by the European Union in its reforms during the 1990s (Judt, 2010). As Peter Hall put it in a recent lecture, the guiding principle of the EU, which used to be ‘peace for Europe’, was with the 1987 Single European Act reformulated into ‘prosperity for everyone via the Single Market’. The 1992 Maastricht criteria and the 1998 Stability and Growth Pact effectively closed a number of policy options available for pursuing social objectives (Esping-Andersen, 2002; Green Cowels, Smith, 2000). As a result, the EU’s policy prescriptions since the 1990s started to increasingly resemble those of international financial organisations such as the IMF and the World Bank (Guillen, Palier, 2004). In a deliberate emulation of the US model of development, the Washington consensus on deregulation, the minimal state and low taxation travelled to Europe (Judt 2010).

Austerity as a concept stands for economic measures implemented by national governments with the aim of reducing public expenditure and controlling public sector debt. Their principal aim is to restore the trust of financial markets and investors, thereby restoring competitiveness, but their principal effects have been on the social fabric of European states. As several analysis show (e.g. Blyth, 2013; Busch et al., 2013) in the attempt to consolidate public finances, austerity measures created negative consequences for the European social model, resulting in significant cuts in welfare in Greece, Italy, Hungary, Latvia, Slovenia, Portugal, Cyprus and other Southern European countries that jeopardized the “very foundation of social and economic development” (Lehndorff, 2012, p. 15). In contrast to that, Euro Western European countries like Austria, France, Germany, and Sweden appear to be performing much better (ibid).

Figure 1.1 below shows levels of investment into social protection for a selection of European states in order to illustrate some of the dynamic described here. The annual data, ranging between 2005 and 2013, has been selected so as to capture changes in the level of social protection before and after the financial crisis of 2008.

Figure 1.1: Total expenditure on social protection, per inhabitant (in EUR)



Source: Eurostat, 2016

The first thing that is observable from Figure 1.1 are considerable differences among member states of the European Union with respect to overall levels of social welfare: while in Denmark the total level of expenditure on social protection per inhabitant ranges between EUR 11,500 and EUR 15,000 in the observed period, in Bulgaria the range is between EUR 450 and EUR 1,000. Secondly, Figure 1.1 also shows that while the core European countries reacted to the economic crisis by substantially increasing investment into social protection, the same cannot be said of the peripheral states. Peripheral members of the EU both entered the crisis with much lower levels of social protection, and they have not been able to substantially increase it since 2008. In the case of Hungary for instance, the levels of investment in social protection per inhabitant are actually lower post-2008.

Summing up, we could say that austerity measures implemented post-2008 aggravated already existing differences in the extent of social protection among core and peripheral states of the EU. Austerity measures have had a stronger impact in peripheral regions of Europe, with consequences for various social groups. In this chapter we focus on youth, and in particular on the possible effects of austerity on youth participation in Eastern Europe. Young people are expected to be particularly vulnerable since their quest for identity and social integration is occurring in unstable and risky circumstances (France, 2007; Furlong, Cartmel, 2007).

The relevance of exploring political behaviour of young people is primarily in the fact that their political and social experiences shape their political behaviour in adulthood, which means that learning more about them reveals important features of the social and political reality of our future (Kimberlee, 2010; Mannheim, 1970). Given the intimidating entrenchment of austerity effects that we describe, many are now talking of a »lost generation« (ILO, 2012), and we expect this to be particularly pertinent for young people in the periphery of Europe. In the post-socialist context, not only do young people transition from childhood to adulthood, but this also takes place in a changing context of countries undergoing political and economic transformation into liberal democracies (Ilišin et al., 2013). On top of that, research on Southern European countries has shown that austerity policies, together with high youth unemployment rates, pushes young people in the state of frustration and anger against disturbed job market, in response to which they initiate various contentious activities (Cairnes et al, 2016; Williamson, 2014). Additionally, important for discussing the impact of austerity policies, key life events such as marriage or parenthood are being postponed, a phenomenon characteristic for Southern and Eastern Europe. Analysing countries of the Balkan region, Radoja (2014) argues that longer periods of education and internships keep young people out of the labor market, rendering them dependent either on their families or on state support (2014, p. 4). This phenomenon, known as “extended youth”, characteristic for the Mediterranean pool countries, means that integration of young people into society is being prolonged (Ule 1988). Social and economic dependence of young people on their families being the case, the question rises – how does this prolonged life with parents translate into patterns and repertoires of political activism and participation? Given the findings for Southern European societies, which suggest that austerity pushes young people into contentious forms of political activism (Cairnes et al., 2016; Williamson, 2014), in our analysis of Eastern European societies we aim to establish whether similar mechanism are at work.

As is the case with general political participation, empirically investigating youth political participation includes activities aimed at “attempting to influence the activity of government and the selection of officials, trying to affect the values and preferences which guide the political decision-making process, and seeking to include new issues on the agenda” (Morales, 2009, p. 57). Political participation is closely related to democratic and economic performance of a country, and, as Dalton (1988) argues, the success of democracy is measured by the extent of citizens’ participation in the decision-making process. It is assumed that better consolidated democracies have higher participation rates due to more developed democratic political culture (Putnam, 2000).

In order to avoid conceptual stretching (Sartori, 1970) and to avoid that the study of political participation is a study of everything (Van Deth, 2001, p. 2), in this chapter youth political participation is understood as attempts of young people to influence decision-making process and put their issues on the political agenda. Perhaps the most important feature relevant for this study is Barnes and Kaase’s (1979) differentiation

between conventional and unconventional political participation, later elaborated by Inglehart (1990). This is a distinction between *elite-directed activities* (voting, party membership, union membership) in opposed to *elite directing activities*<sup>1</sup> (political discussion, participation in new social movements and protest activities).

Building on their argument, Grasso (2016, p. 17) operationalizes conventional political participation in terms of voting, contacting a politician, donating money, joining a party, doing unpaid voluntary work for a political party, while unconventional political participation is captured by indicators such as signing a petition, joining a boycott, joining an environmental organization, attending a demonstration and occupying public spaces. Taking this into account, a vast number of recent empirical studies focusing on youth confirm that young people prefer unconventional political participation over conventional (Dalton, 2011; Grasso, 2016; Ilišin et al., 2013). As Kovacheva points out, youth research in principle deals with three fundamental forms of political participation: “involvement in institutional politics (elections, campaigns and membership); protest activities (demonstrations and new social movements); and civic engagement (associative life, community participation, voluntary work).” (2005, p. 25) However, despite these focuses, there is very limited number of empirical research regarding unconventional youth participation (Amna, Ekman 2014; Dalton, 2011; Kovacheva, 2005). Out of these three clusters, protest activities and civic engagements are least explored phenomena, particularly in a comparative manner. In this sense, our comparative analysis of forms of youth political participation addresses an important gap in the literature.

## **2. What about us? Empirical evidence from the Eastern periphery**

In this section we empirically explore the relationship between the effects of austerity and youth political participation among core and peripheral European states. Following similar analyses (Müller, 2014, Busch et al., 2013), austerity measures are initially operationalized into four indicators: unemployment rate, social expenditure on the GDP, risk of poverty and material deprivation. In addition to that, given our focus on youth, we added two more indicators: youth unemployment rate and average age of youth leaving home. These indicators show not only how many young people cannot find a job, but also how depended they are on their families, capturing important social dimensions. All data shown in Table 2.1. are for the year 2014 and retrieved from Eurostat, apart from the indicator social expenditure of the GDP, which was retrieved from the OECD database. In the following section we present this data and the main findings, while after that we relate the effects of austerity measures to patterns of youth political participation. Data for these analyses are obtained from the ISSP programme, the 2014 module on citizenship.

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<sup>1</sup> In 2002 Inglehart upgraded his conceptualization (he excluded political discussion from this category) and changed the name of the second category into *elite-challenging activities* (Inglehart, Cattenberg, 2002). Elite-challenging activities served as a platform for Isin (2009) to develop the concept of *activist citizenship*.

Table 2.1 – Austerity in the core and peripheral EU member states, 2014

Country	Unemployment (%)	Social expenditure % of GDP	Risk of poverty (%)	Material deprivation (%)	Youth unemployment (%)	Youth leaving home (average age)
Czech Republic	6,1	19,1	14,8	6,7	15,9	26,7
Croatia	17,3	n. a.	29,3	13,9	45,5	31
Lithuania	10,7	n. a.	27,3	13,6	19,3	26,1
Hungary	7,7	21,4	31,8	24,0	20,4	27,7
Poland	9	19,5	24,7	10,4	23,9	28,3
Slovenia	9,7	21,5	0,4	6,6	20,2	28,6
Slovakia	13,2	17,4	18,4	9,9	29,7	30,8
Bulgaria	11,4	n.a	40,1	33,1	23,8	29,1
Romania	6,8	n.a	40,3	26,3	24,0	28,5
Estonia	7,4	16,0	26,0	6,2	15,0	24,2
Latvia	10,8	14,2	32,7	19,2	19,6	28,0
Greece	26,5	26,1	36,0	21,5	52,4	29,3
Portugal	14,1	24,5	24,7	10,6	34,7	28,8
Spain	24,5	26,1	29,2	7,1	53,2	29,1
Italy	12,7	29,0	28,3	11,6	42,7	30,1
Cyprus	16,1	n.a	27,4	15,3	36	28,4
Malta	5,8	n.a	23,8	10,2	11,7	30,6
<b>Periphery, average</b>	<b>12,34</b>	<b>21,35</b>	<b>26,78</b>	<b>14,48</b>	<b>28,71</b>	<b>28,55</b>
Belgium	8,5	29,2	21,6	5,9	23,2	25,1
Denmark	6,6	29,0	17,9	3,2	12,6	21,2
France	10,3	31,9	18,5	6,7	24,2	23,7
Austria	5,6	27,9	19,2	4,0	10,3	25,4
Finland	8,2	30,0	17,3	2,8	20,5	21,9
Sweden	7,9	27,1	16,9	0,7	22,9	20,9
United Kingdom	6,1	21,6	24,1	7,3	16,9	24,3
Germany	5,0	24,9	20,6	5,0	7,7	23,8
Ireland	11,3	19,2	27,6	8,4	23,9	25,8
the Netherlands	7,4	n.a	16,5	3,2	12,7	23,6
Luxembourg	6,0	23,0	19,0	1,4	22,3	26,7
<b>Core, average</b>	<b>7,53</b>	<b>26,38</b>	<b>19,93</b>	<b>4,43</b>	<b>17,93</b>	<b>23,85</b>

Sources: OECD, 2016; Eurostat, 2016a; Eurostat, 2016b; Eurostat, 2016c; Eurostat, 2016d; Eurostat, 2016e; Eurostat, 2016f

Previously we argued that core EU countries were characterised by higher overall economic development, and that this contrast was particularly strong with respect to Eastern and Southern Europe, regions most severely hit by austerity measures. In that sense, austerity measures may be seen as amplifying already strong core-periphery differences within Europe. Table 2.1 shows that overall core EU countries are performing

better all selected indicators. For instance, material deprivation, an indicator capturing the extent to which people have access to goods necessary for a decent life, is three times higher in the periphery than in the core of Europe. In addition, peripheral countries are marked by comparatively higher risk of poverty rates, demonstrating aggravated social welfare in the aftermath of austerity.

Regarding youth, data in Table 2.1. shows that young people from peripheral Europe leave their parents home later (average age is 28,55) in comparison to their peers from the West (average age 23,85). Though other research suggests that cultural factors play a role here as well (Ule, Kuhar, 2008; Wallace, Kovatcheva, 1998), when taken together with the indicator we use to show the social impact of austerity, the average age of youth leaving home does seem to be related primarily to economic factors. Furthermore, youth unemployment is substantially lower in the core, where the average rate is 17,93%, while the average youth unemployment rate for peripheral countries is 28,71%. This is in line with other studies that have established that peripheral European counties are registering higher rates of youth unemployment (O'Reilly et al., 2015). Along the same lines, Table 2.1. shows that general unemployment levels are almost double in the periphery when compared to the core of Europe.

These findings suggest that life prospects of youth in the periphery of Europe are considerably more adverse than the youth of the core countries. In the following sections we are curious to learn about the possible relationships that austerity has had on patterns of conventional and unconventional youth political participation, particularly focusing on Eastern Europe.

We cluster political participation in two categories, relying in Grasso's (2016) conceptualization of conventional and unconventional participation. Unconventional political participation is captured by relying on the following survey items: signing a petition, boycotting certain products, taking part in protests, contact media, choosing products for political or environmental reasons, and expressing political views on the Internet. Our measurement of conventional political participation includes the following survey items: voting in election, contacting a politician, attending political meeting or rally, donate money, and party membership. Regarding the definition of youth, we follow the one most commonly used: based on mode value for EU-28 (Eapyouth, 2015), and encapsulating the age group between 18 to 30.

Table 2.2 shows data on conventional youth participation for countries of the core and of the Eastern periphery. The selection of countries classified as core and Eastern periphery is determined by those countries that participated in the ISSP survey. The first two columns in Table 2.2 shows percentages of young people who agreed with the statement that voting in elections was important, while the remaining columns in Table 2.2 show the percentage of young people who report participating in the given activity, like contacting a politician or being member of a political party. The last two rows show results of chi-square test, used to establish whether there was a statistically significant difference in youth conventional participation rates between two core and the peripheral regions of Europe.

Table 2.2 – Conventional youth participation

	Voting in elections (%)		Contacting politician (%)	Rally participation (%)	Donations to politicians (%)	Party membership (%)
	Not important	Important				



Austria	5,4	35,65	14,8	19	40,4	6,2
Belgium	8,75	35,15	10,1	19,1	54,6	4,5
Denmark	3,9	41,05	10,7	28,2	54,9	4
Finland	12,35	30,8	6,8	17,3	38,3	3,2
France	4,3	40,95	7,5	20,7	43,7	2,4
UK	8,9	34,9	8,8	9,8	44,2	9,8
Sweden	2,2	41,3	17	29,8	53,8	5,3
<b>Core</b>	<b>6,54</b>	<b>37,11</b>	<b>10,81</b>	<b>20,56</b>	<b>47,12</b>	<b>5,1</b>
Croatia	11,15	33,35	5,7	8,2	26,4	9,5
Czech Republic	11,7	32,05	12,1	23,4	16,6	2,1
Hungary	9	34,2	2,6	6	3,5	2,5
Lithuania	5,4	39,25	7,7	13,4	38,7	6,5
Poland	7,4	35	3,2	7,8	20,2	1,2
Slovakia	14,85	27,05	5	6,2	6,3	n. a.
Slovenia	17,2	68,9	12,1	12	26,5	4,3
<b>Eastern Europe</b>	<b>10,92</b>	<b>38,54</b>	<b>6,9</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>19,74</b>	<b>4,35</b>
$\chi^2 (1;2)$	2,52		2,629	1,097	34,644	1,64
<b>p</b>	.110		.000	.000	.000	.200

Source: ISSP, 2014

Table 2.2 shows that the core countries are marked by higher rates of youth conventional participation in comparison to peripheral countries; in other words, in the Eastern periphery fewer young people use available options for influencing decision-making process within the democratic system. Regarding differences on the level of regions, results of the chi square test suggest that for two dimensions - voting in elections and party memberships - differences among youth in the core and in the Eastern periphery are not statistically significant. In the case of the remaining three dimensions - contacting a politician, rally participation and donation to a politician - statistically significant difference exist between youth in the core and in the periphery, with youth in the core showing much higher levels of activity.

Next we look at unconventional modes of youth political participation, shown in Table 2.3.

The first two columns in Table 2.3. show the percentage of young people who agree that choosing products for political or environmental reasons is important, while the remaining five columns show the percentage of young people who stated that participating in certain activity is presented.

Table 2.3 – Unconventional youth political participation

	<b>Choosing products for political or environmental reasons</b>		<b>Signing petitions (%)</b>	<b>Boycott (%)</b>	<b>Contacting media (%)</b>	<b>Participating in protests (%)</b>	<b>Expressing views on internet (%)</b>
	Not Important	Important					
Austria	14,1	30,6	57,5	54,2	11,8	25,9	25,1
Belgium	18,2	23,15	69,9	36,5	8,2	27,8	21,7

Denmark	15,45	23,4	65	46,7	9	32,4	31,6
Finland	24,4	26,25	48,9	51,3	10,1	8,3	22,8
France	14,65	24,35	72,1	48,3	4,2	49,2	21,2
UK	17,1	22,95	50,8	32,1	7,3	18,7	21,2
Sweden	7,65	37,5	75,5	70,8	10,8	33,3	40,2
<b>Core</b>	<b>15,93</b>	<b>26,89</b>	<b>62,81</b>	<b>48,56</b>	<b>8,77</b>	<b>27,94</b>	<b>26,26</b>
Croatia	14,7	22	48,1	13,6	3,9	6,2	16,2
Czech Republic	20,9	20,9	54,8	25,7	11,8	13,3	27
Hungary	11,15	18,7	4,7	4,4	0,9	5,1	4,3
Lithuania	26,2	14,45	28,3	12,3	3,1	9,4	12,5
Poland	23,1	18	18,6	13,4	2,7	7,9	12,3
Slovakia	20,9	15,8	43,8	12,7	3,8	11,2	14,4
Slovenia	14,65	25,45	24,5	33,3	9,4	31,6	24,4
<b>Eastern Europe</b>	<b>18,8</b>	<b>19,33</b>	<b>31,83</b>	<b>16,49</b>	<b>5,1</b>	<b>12,1</b>	<b>15,87</b>
<b><math>\chi^2</math></b>	<b>41,56</b>	<b>3,02</b>	<b>37,07</b>	<b>37,229</b>	<b>1,858</b>	<b>47,364</b>	
<b>p</b>	<b>.000</b>	<b>.000</b>	<b>.000</b>	<b>.000</b>	<b>.000</b>	<b>.000</b>	<b>.000</b>

Source ISSP, 2014

As was the case with conventional political participation, data from Table 2.3. show that youth in the Eastern periphery are marked by significantly lower levels of unconventional political participation. Comparing regional averages between youth in the core and in the periphery of Europe shows substantial differences. While for instance 27,94% of young people in the core of Europe report participation in protests, only 12,1% of youth in the Eastern periphery report this type of participation. Chi square test results return statistically significant differences among the two regions on all the presented indicators, further strengthening the finding that youth in the core is much more active in unconventional modes of political participation.

Taken together, results on patterns of youth political participation in conventional and unconventional activities show a very clear picture that distinguishes youth in the core from youth in the Eastern periphery of Europe. These findings are also in line with studies that have shown the levels of political competence among young people to be lower in Eastern compared to Western Europe (Spajic-Vrkas, Cehulic, 2016). In addition to that, our findings also show youth unconventional political participation in the peripheral countries is considerably lower than conventional modes. This finding indicates lower contentious potential of youth in the periphery. In contrast to findings from Southern Europe, where research showed significant levels of contentious activities and youth participation in general (Cairnes et al, 2016; Hooghe, 2012; Williamson, 2014), young people in the Eastern Europe exhibit an overall retreat from participation, and in particular unconventional political participation. In addition to the effects of austerity that we analyse in this chapter, another factor influencing this phenomenon might be the shorter democratic experience of Eastern European countries (Spajic-Vrkas, Cehulic, 2016).

### 3. Discussion and Conclusion

The goal of this chapter was two-folded. On the one hand we wanted to explore how austerity policies have aggravated social welfare in the core and periphery of Europe. On

the other hand, our objective was also to analyse how the social effects of austerity might be related to patterns of political participation.

Our analysis showed that, despite the negative effects of austerity policies across Europe, they impacted the Eastern periphery more than the core EU countries. By contrasting the European core and the periphery, we advanced the argument that young people's political participation is influenced by the wider socio-economic context. We show important differences among core and peripheral states with respect to impact of austerity measures, which are translated into statistically significant differences in the levels of youth political participation, both conventional and unconventional, between the European core and its Eastern periphery. Young people in the periphery, due to aggravating social living conditions, instead of using their creativity and innovation to explore various unconventional types of political participation, often refrain from participation at all. This seems particularly true for young people in Eastern Europe, who leave their parents' home at a relatively late age, which aggravates their quest for autonomy (Ilišin, 2013; Wallace, Kovatcheva, 1998).

What are the implications of this analysis? Following Gurr's (1970) thesis, our analysis also suggests that relative deprivation is a necessary but not sufficient condition for large-scale contentious activities. Aggravating socioeconomic conditions in Eastern Europe have not resulted in the rise of contentious action among the youth population. On the contrary, our findings show a political passivization of youth that cuts across the distinction between conventional and unconventional modes of political participation. When this is further corroborated with lower level of political interest, knowledge and trust, as claimed by Henn et al. (2007), a rather gloomy picture emerges of youth political potential in Europe's Eastern periphery. Notwithstanding that, in further research we intend to further explore this finding, both in terms of more systematically exploring the differences among youth political participation in the Southern and Eastern periphery, and in relying on a broader array of empirical sources apart from international surveys in order to assess youth potential for contentious action.

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