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THE DESTABILISATION OF YOUTH EMPLOYMENT MECHANISMS IN EU COUNTRIES: THE ETHNOPOLITICAL DIMENSION

The article analyzes young people's political responses to the destabilization of employment mechanisms in EU countries from an ethnopolitical perspective. It substantiates that labor precarization, the spread of non-standard forms of employment, the growing share of NEET youth, and significant structural barriers to entering the labor market extend beyond a purely economic discourse, becoming a powerful trigger of ethnopolitical polarization. The concept of "political reflection" is conceptualized as a cognitive, emotional, and behavioral response of youth groups to institutional uncertainty. It is demonstrated that this reflection is channeled into a broad range of actions – from electoral support for radical political forces and mass street protests to emigration, passive absenteeism, and destructive social alienation. The study demonstrates that the ethnocultural context and the integration model of a particular state determine how young people interpret the subjective "culprits" of an economic crisis. Among precarious indigenous (titular) youth, destabilization fuels right-wing radical populism, generates status anxiety, and articulates demands for "national priority" in the labor market. By contrast, for youth with a migrant background, systemic discrimination and spatial segregation contribute to the phenomenon of ethnic ghettoization, resulting in reactive alienation from state institutions or spontaneous urban riots. Based on the comparative method, the article proposes an original typology of four regional models within the EU: Scandinavian, Continental, Southern European, and Central and Eastern European. It demonstrates that economic shocks of a similar nature produce fundamentally different trajectories and forms of youth political mobilization depending on the specific characteristics of national social protection systems and ethnopolitical frameworks of civic integration.

Prospects for further research include examining the specific features of the sociocultural and electoral responses of young Ukrainian refugees and labor migrants in EU countries, as well as the transformation of ethnopolitical discourses in host European societies on this basis.

Key words: ethnopolitical studies, cross-cultural analysis, political reflection, employment destabilization, youth, labor precarization, right-wing populism, ethnic ghettoization, EU regional models.

Problem statement. Contemporary development is taking place amid profound structural transformations of labor markets across European countries, accompanied by increasing socio-economic instability. Young people constitute one of the demographic groups most vulnerable to these challenges. Processes of labor precarization, the spread of non-standard forms of employment (including the platform economy and zero-hours contracts), as well as high rates of youth unemployment and the proportion of young people not in employment, education, or training (NEET), are significantly undermining traditional mechanisms of social mobility.

However, the destabilization of youth employment mechanisms has long transcended the boundaries of a purely economic problem, becoming a powerful catalyst for political and ethno-social transformations. The results of a representative panel survey conducted within the framework of the large-scale EURYKA research project, which covered seven EU countries (France,

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Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Spain, and Sweden), as well as Switzerland and the United Kingdom, demonstrated that political engagement and party affiliation are becoming increasingly unstable [1]. Political campaigns are increasingly dependent on short-term discursive "windows of opportunity" that emerge through dynamic debates on issues such as migration, climate change, employment, and economic policy.

It should be noted that young people's responses to economic uncertainty are heterogeneous and largely depend on the ethnocultural and ethnopolitical context of individual states. In some regions, economic pressure leads to the growth of right-wing radical ethnonationalism and demands for "national priority" in the labor market; in others, it mobilizes left-wing radical movements, while among young people with a migrant background, it may result in ghettoization, social alienation, or radicalization.

Under these conditions, there is an urgent need for a cross-cultural analysis of young people's political responses. Understanding how different ethnopolitical models and cultural matrices of European countries shape the political behavior of young citizens in response to economic shocks is crucial for maintaining institutional stability and social cohesion both within the EU and across the European continent as a whole.

Analysis of recent studies and publications. The transformation of traditional employment systems and their social and political consequences have been comprehensively addressed in the works of Guy Standing [2–3], who is considered the founder of the concept of the "precariat" as a new social class. His research reveals the mechanisms through which employment destabilization contributes to the erosion of traditional social and labor contracts, pushing workers, with young people representing a particularly significant segment, toward political extremism and populism. In the context of understanding the subject of our study, it is also important to highlight the contributions of A. Kloskowska [4] and C. Deming [5], who have examined the transformation of European welfare-state models established during previous decades and the sociocultural and political consequences of these changes. Their studies provide an in-depth examination of how different types of EU social systems adapt – or fail to adapt – to the risks associated with youth employment. Of particular relevance are also the studies by B. Bacevic and M. Dahlstedt [6], I. Shun and J. Biner [7], and A. Syniuchenko [8], in which researchers of non-standard and insecure employment, from a comparative perspective, reveal the mechanisms through which precarization contributes to the disruption of young people's life trajectories.

Despite the substantial body of publications devoted to the problem of youth precarity, we believe that the ethnopolitical dimension of these processes requires more in-depth analysis. In particular, within the political environment of the EU, the key contradiction, in our view, lies in the gap between the EU's unified supranational strategies aimed at promoting youth employment (e.g., the *Youth Guarantee*) and nationally specific, ethnoculturally conditioned forms of political responses to labor-market destabilization. Economic challenges that are similar in nature can produce fundamentally different political consequences depending on the ethnopolitical model within which they emerge.

The aim of the study is to conceptualize and comparatively analyze the cross-cultural characteristics of young people's political responses to the destabilization of employment mechanisms through the lens of the ethnopolitical context in the countries of the European Union.

The following **methods** were used in the study: elements of cross-cultural analysis, approaches of ethnopolitical comparative analysis, political discourse assessment, and analysis of data from the EURYKA research project.

Results of the study. In contemporary political science, the concept of "political reflection" is traditionally understood as an individual's comprehension of their position within power

relations, critical assessment of the functioning of state institutions, and the formation of corresponding behavioral orientations [9]. However, from an ethnopolitical perspective, this category acquires a specific meaning, since perceptions of political and socioeconomic processes are shaped through the lens of ethnic identity, cultural values, and group status ("indigenous populations" vs. "migrants/ethnic minorities"). In the ethnopolitical context, we propose defining *young people's political reflection* as a cognitive, emotional, and behavioral response of youth groups to the transformation of social institutions, whereby the comprehension of their socioeconomic position is channeled into political demands, shaping the trajectory of ethnopolitical mobilization.

Depending on the depth of the crisis and the ethnocultural environment, political reflection in this context materializes in a sufficiently diverse range of forms, among which the following can be distinguished:

– *electoral behavior*: voting for mainstream parties, as well as support for conservative, right-wing or left-wing radical populist forces;

– *non-institutionalized protest*: participation in street demonstrations, strikes, alter-globalist or nationalist movements;

– *destructive and alternative forms*: self-isolation, political apathy, absenteeism, emigration ("brain drain"), or radicalization on an ethnoreligious basis.

The ethnopolitical dimension of political reflection determines the response to the fundamental question: "Who is responsible for my socioeconomic instability?" In monoethnic or assimilationist societies, responsibility is often attributed to the incumbent government or transnational corporations, whereas in complex ethnocultural environments, blame is frequently externalized toward the "Other" – migrants, ethnic minorities, or, conversely, the "discriminatory majority" [10].

How, and under what conditions, does the destabilization of youth employment mechanisms become a trigger for ethnopolitical mobilization?

First and foremost, it should be recognized that the labor market is not merely an economic institution but also a key arena of social integration and primary socialization for young people. The destabilization of employment mechanisms, manifested in the spread of precarious (insecure) employment, underemployment, structural unemployment, and the mismatch between education and labor-market requirements, undermines the traditional "social contract" between the state and the new generation. For young people, this process becomes both a manifestation and, to some extent, a driver of ethnopolitical unrest through several key mechanisms.

One of these mechanisms is described by the *theory of relative deprivation and ethnic competition* [11]. A decline in the number of quality jobs intensifies competition for resources. Under conditions of scarcity, majority-group youth may be inclined to perceive migrant workers as contributing to wage dumping and thereby reducing the value of labor. This creates a favorable environment for right-wing radical discourses advocating "national preference." In this context, Cas Mudde [12], a leading scholar of radical right-wing populism in Europe, argues that economic anxiety among indigenous populations can be transformed into ethnonationalist demands for "national priority."

Another channel is *structural discrimination and social alienation*. Young people with a migrant background or belonging to ethnic minorities increasingly face employment barriers resulting from covert discrimination, language barriers, or the non-recognition of educational qualifications. Persistent exclusion from the formal labor market can contribute to the formation of "parallel societies," processes of criminalization, and the emergence of protest-oriented ethnopolitical responses directed against state institutions. Numerous studies provide empirical support for this phenomenon.

Loïc Wacquant, the author of the concept of *advanced marginality*, compares American ghettos with the French *banlieues* and argues that spatial segregation contributes significantly to the alienation of young people from the labor market [13]. French sociologist Didier Fassin, drawing on research into institutional discrimination, identifies intensive policing and structural barriers as important factors affecting young people from second– and third-generation immigrant backgrounds [14].

Against the backdrop of the disruption of ethnic minority young people's life trajectories, which is manifested in increasing difficulties – and often the inability – to achieve financial independence, the transition to adulthood is delayed, including family formation and homeownership. This generates existential frustration that can easily be channeled into political radicalism or ethnic revivalist movements as a means of expressing grievances and seeking alternative forms of identity and belonging.

For a meaningful cross-cultural analysis, it is necessary to systematize the space of the European Union. The hypothesis of this study is that the nature of young people's political responses is determined by the interaction between the type of socioeconomic labor-market model and the national ethnopolitical model (integration model). The key regional clusters of the EU are presented in *Table 1*.

Table 1

The focus and nature of young people's political reflections, broken down by EU regional clusters

EU regional cluster	Economic context of the labor market	Ethnopolitical context and integration model	Key trajectories and forms of young people's political responses
Scandinavian *(Sweden, Denmark)*	**Social-democratic model.** High level of social protection and active state labor-market policies, alongside growing precarization among young workers.	Multicultural model. Historically strong institutional support for equality, combined with relatively high levels of immigrant segregation.	Young people belonging to the ethnic majority: growing support for radical right-wing forces driven by perceptions of a threat to the universal welfare model. Migrant youth: localized protest and high levels of labor and social isolation in socioeconomically deprived areas.
Continental *(France, Germany)*	**Corporatist model.** Strict labor-market regulation, high barriers to entry into first employment, and a significant share of NEET youth.	**Assimilation/integration-oriented model.** The French model of republican universalism and the German system of managed integration, historically associated with the *Gastarbeiter* model and citizenship reforms.	**High polarization. Migrant youth in suburban areas (***banlieues***):** peripheral ethnic ghettoization, destructive urban unrest, and alienation. Y**outh from the titular national population:** electoral shift toward radical right-wing populism.
Southern European *(e.g., Spain, Greece, Italy)*	**Paternalistic model.** Critically high youth unemployment, a high share of informal and seasonal employment, and strong dependence on family support.	**"Transitional" model. Weakly coordinated migration governance and comparatively limited institutional mechanisms for migrant integration.**	**Left-wing radical and anti-establishment protest:** mass social movements such as *Indignados*, *Podemos*, and *Syriza*, directed against austerity policies and EU institutions. Slower development of ethnonationalist mobilization compared with Northern and Continental Europe.
Central and Eastern European *(e.g., Poland, Hungary, Slovakia)*	**Transformational model.** Lower wage levels compared with Western Europe, high labor-market flexibility, and strong dependence on external economic conditions.	**Ethnoconservative model.** Relatively high levels of ethnic homogeneity and opposition to EU-level migration quotas and supranational migration policies.	**"Passive" political response:** large-scale labor migration of young people to Western Europe ("brain drain"). **Electoral orientations:** support for conservative and ethnonationalist discourses aimed at protecting national sovereignty.

Source: compiled by the author based on [1, 15–16].

The complexity and heterogeneity of young people's political responses to employment-market destabilization in the European Union stem from the specific interaction between labor-market institutions and national ethnopolitical matrices. Comparative analysis has shown that the key differences between the clusters concern several aspects, most importantly: who young people perceive as responsible for the crisis and what form their protest takes.

In Southern Europe, supranational bureaucracies and financial capital are primarily perceived as the sources of the crisis, whereas in Northern and Central Europe, migration processes and the perceived threat of losing national or cultural identity are more prominent. *The Continental model* generates spontaneous urban unrest and support for radical right-wing parties; *the Southern European model* is associated with mass left-wing political movements; while the *Central and Eastern European model* is characterized by emigration as a form of adaptation beyond the domestic political system and by conservative electoral preferences.

How, then, does the ethnocultural factor modify young people's political responses across different parts of Europe? It should be emphasized that the destabilization of employment mechanisms in European Union countries has manifested itself not only in an overall increase in the share of precarious contracts but also in deep structural segmentation of the labor market along ethnic lines. For young people of second– and third-generation migrant backgrounds, particularly those originating from the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia, the combination of limited social capital, covert discrimination, and spatial isolation has contributed to the emergence of the phenomenon of ethnic ghettoization.

Despite differences in approaches and definitions [17, 18], ethnic ghettoization in the context of labor sociology and ethnopolitical studies can generally be understood as a process of spatial, socioeconomic, and cultural localization of ethnic minorities in peripheral or socioeconomically deprived urban areas (for example, French-speaking *banlieues* or Swedish *särskilt utsatta områden*), accompanied by the reproduction of concentrated poverty and exclusion from the formal labor market.

The destabilization of youth employment in these areas unfolds along three main dimensions. First, there is institutional and informal discrimination in recruitment. Studies using *testing/resume audit* methods regularly demonstrate that CVs with identical levels of education and experience, but bearing "non-European" names or addresses from socioeconomically deprived suburbs, receive significantly fewer responses from employers. This creates a sense of a "glass ceiling" and the futility of educational efforts [19]. Second, the formation of shadow and deviant economic niches has become increasingly widespread. The inability to obtain legal, stable, and adequately paid employment pushes young people toward alternative survival mechanisms, including undeclared work, exploitative platform-based gig employment, and informal networks (including drug trafficking and smuggling). Suburban subcultures may begin to romanticize the informal economy as the only viable path to material success. Third, the erosion of trust in state institutions has become increasingly evident. Employment ceases to perform its function as the primary instrument of social integration. As the state is perceived by young people in ghettoized areas not as a guarantor of social rights but primarily through its coercive apparatus (police and bureaucratic control agencies), political reflection acquires characteristics of profound alienation.

The political consequences of this process manifest themselves in two extreme forms. On the one hand, there is explosive affective protest – mass unrest in response to specific triggering events, as observed in France during the suburban riots of 2005 and 2023, or in the Rinkeby district of Sweden. On the other hand, there is political absenteeism and the search for alternative identities, which can create favorable conditions for radical religious-political ideologies that offer a compensatory sense of dignity and community in place of a diminished sense of civic belonging.

Alongside the marginalization of young people with migrant backgrounds, the destabilization of employment mechanisms also produces profound transformations in the political consciousness of young members of the indigenous (titular) populations of EU countries. Faced with chronic socioeconomic uncertainty – in which the traditional guarantees enjoyed by previous generations, such as stable employment, homeownership, and secure retirement prospects, are increasingly unavailable – some indigenous young people demonstrate a shift toward radical right-wing and ethnonationalist populism.

At the center of this dynamic lies the mechanism of the ethnic interpretation of economic threats. Under the influence of macroeconomic transformations and deindustrialization, youth from the titular national population tend to explain their precarization not in terms of complex technological or globalization processes, but rather through the actions of external factors, particularly EU supranational bureaucracies and migration inflows.

Of course, the channeling of economic frustration among youth into ethnopolitical populism is shaped by a broad range of factors and preconditions. Nevertheless, several key concepts and theories that reflect and generalize existing empirical practices can already be identified. These include the following.

The concept of *"national priority."* Labor-market destabilization transforms socioeconomic demands into ethnic ones. Right-wing populist discourses effectively persuade young people that the state should restrict migrants' access to social assistance, housing, and employment while giving absolute priority to "its own" citizens. Moreover, Marine Le Pen's far-right party, the National Rally (RN), has repeatedly sought to normalize the principle of differentiating between citizens and foreign nationals in access to social rights at the national level [20].

The phenomenon of "cultural replacement" and status anxiety represents another interpretation of the relationship between economic, ethnopolitical, and sociocultural processes [21]. For young members of titular ethnic groups, poverty or insecurity is perceived not merely as material deprivation but also as a loss of relative social status. The growing visibility and activity of migrant communities can generate among precarious young people belonging to the ethnic majority a perception of being "strangers in their own country," making them more receptive to ideas aimed at protecting national identity from perceived "decline."

Scholars also emphasize the phenomenon of *realignment of electoral preferences* [22]. Youth voting patterns demonstrate clear polarization. Assessing their economic prospects pessimistically, a significant proportion of working-class and rural youth of indigenous origin are turning away from traditional centrist and social-democratic parties in favor of right-wing populist forces, such as *Rassemblement National* in France, *Alternative für Deutschland* in Germany, Sverigedemokraterna in Sweden, and *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* in Austria.

Thus, the destabilization of youth employment mechanisms acts as a two-sided catalyst of ethnopolitical polarization. On the one hand, it deepens ethnic ghettoization and social alienation among young people from migrant backgrounds; on the other, it fuels radical right-wing populism among young members of titular ethnic groups, creating systemic challenges to the social stability of European states.

To mitigate the destabilizing effects and ethnopolitical tensions associated with these processes, the EU is pursuing reforms of existing youth-policy instruments. A key problem with the current strategy, particularly the *Youth Guarantee* program [23], is its excessive standardization and predominant focus on purely economic indicators, without adequately considering the ethnocultural specificities of regions and institutional barriers at the local level.

The optimization of EU policy, in our view, can be pursued along the following directions:

– Transformation of the Youth Guarantee program in the context of inclusion, in particular through the introduction of mechanisms for monitoring hidden discrimination in recruitment

and supporting social entrepreneurship in socioeconomically deprived urban areas (suburbs); a shift from nationwide programs toward targeted investments in ghettoized areas in order to overcome the spatial and social isolation of young people with migrant backgrounds;

– Addressing the underlying conditions that fuel radical right-wing populism, which requires ensuring genuine social guarantees and opportunities for skills development for young workers in deindustrialized and rural regions. This would reduce status anxiety and the sense of being "forgotten" by centrist political elites;

– Expanding cross-cultural adaptation and intercultural dialogue programs. This can be achieved by combining educational programs with intercultural mediation and updating civic and citizenship integration courses to strengthen a shared European identity.

Conclusions. As a result of the study, the following conclusions have been formulated:

1. The destabilization of youth employment mechanisms in EU countries is not merely a combination of macroeconomic problems – such as the spread of precarious employment, the growing share of NEET youth, or the expansion of the gig economy – but also acts as a direct catalyst for ethnopolitical polarization. It transforms socioeconomic anxiety into political responses that are channeled into radicalism, electoral populism, ethnic ghettoization, or emigration.

2. The analysis demonstrates the two-sided nature of ethnopolitical responses. Among youth, economic uncertainty generates a sense of relative deprivation, which is channeled into support for radical right-wing forces, demands for "national priority" (*préférence nationale*) in the labor market, and growing Euroscepticism. Among young people with migrant backgrounds, the combination of covert discrimination, informal employment, and spatial segregation contributes to ethnic ghettoization, generating reactive alienation from state institutions, absenteeism, or destructive urban unrest.

3. The cross-cultural typology of regional EU models is based on the recognition that economic shocks of a similar nature produce different trajectories of youth political mobilization depending on national social-protection systems and ethnopolitical matrices. In particular, the *Scandinavian model* accumulates tensions between the crisis of multiculturalism and the growth of right-wing populist orientations among indigenous populations; the *Continental model* generates deep polarization between marginalized suburban communities and consolidated support for radical right-wing forces; the *Southern European model* channels discontent into mass left-wing radical and anti-establishment protests against austerity policies; while the *Central and Eastern European model* is characterized by passive political responses in the form of labor emigration ("brain drain") and support for a conservative ethnonationalist course centered on the protection of national sovereignty.

Prospects for further study include examining the specific features of the sociocultural and electoral responses of young Ukrainian refugees and labor migrants in EU countries, as well as the transformation of ethnopolitical discourses in host European societies resulting from these processes.

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ДЕСТАБІЛІЗАЦІЯ МЕХАНІЗМІВ ЗАЙНЯТОСТІ МОЛОДІ В КРАЇНАХ ЄС: ЕТНОПОЛІТИЧНИЙ ВИМІР

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У статті здійснено аналіз політичних рефлексій молоді на дестабілізацію механізмів зайнятості в країнах ЄС в етнополітичному вимірі. Обґрунтовано, що прекаризація праці, поширення нестандартних форм зайнятості, зростання частки NEET-молоді та суттєві структурні бар'єри входження на ринок праці виходять за межі суто економічного дискурсу, перетворюючись на потужний тригер етнополітичної поляризації. Концептуалізовано поняття «політичної рефлексії» як когнітивного, емоційного та поведінкового відгуку молодіжних груп на інституційну невизначеність. Показано, що ця рефлексія каналізується у широку палітру дій – від електоральної підтримки радикальних політичних сил і масового вуличного протесту до еміграції, пасивного абсентеїзму та деструктивного соціального відчуження. Доведено, що етнокультурний контекст та модель інтеграції конкретної держави детермінують інтерпретацію суб'єктивних «винуватців» економічної кризи у свідомості молоді. У середовищі прекарної автохтонної (титульної) молоді дестабілізація живить праворадикальний популізм, формує статусний страх та артикулює вимоги «національного пріоритету» на ринку праці. Натомість для молоді з мігрантським бекграундом системна дискримінація та просторова сегрегація спричиняють феномен етнічного геттогенезу, формуючи реактивне відчуження від державних інститутів або спонтанні міські бунти. На основі компаративного методу запропоновано авторську типологізацію чотирьох регіональних моделей ЄС (скандинавської, континентальної, південноєвропейської та центрально-східноєвропейської). Доведено, що однакові за своєю природою економічні шоки породжують принципово відмінні вектори та форми політичної мобілізації молоді залежно від специфіки національних систем соціального захисту та етнополітичних матриць громадянської інтеграції.

Перспективами подальших розвідок є дослідження специфіки соціокультурної та електоральної рефлексії молодих українських біженців і трудових мігрантів у країнах ЄС, а також трансформації на цьому пігрунті етнополітичних дискурсів у приймаючих європейських суспільствах

Ключові слова: етнополітологія, кроскультурний аналіз, політична рефлексія, дестабілізація зайнятості, молодь, прекаризація праці, праворадикальний популізм, етнічний геттогенез, регіональні моделі ЄС.

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