

FROM FEEDBACK LOOP TO VICIOUS CIRCLE: THE INTERPLAY OF SCIENCE, ECONOMICS AND POLITICS IN THE AGE OF "PERMACRISIS"

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Abstract: *Science, economy, and politics are fundamental pillars of Western civilization, contributing to societal progress through the development of democracy, technology, and capital accumulation. Yuval Noah Harari (2015) describes their interaction as the "feedback loop of the Scientific Revolution", a virtuous but fragile circle that transform itself into a vicious circle: democracy becomes a form without substance, science loses its independence, and capitalism, influenced by technology and corporate interests, captures the state, deepening inequalities and reshaping the essence of social contract. This potential degeneration has been theorized by authors like Chrystia Freeland (2012), who linked it to the rise of global "plutocrats", and Noam Chomsky (2018), who described the concentration of economic wealth and political power taking over the democratic state. The fundamental question is: to what extent has this loop maintained its virtuous quality, and to what extent has it been transformed into a vicious circle, especially in recent crises? What are the causes and consequences of this transformation? This paper analyses the dynamics of transformation on two levels: normative and descriptive, with a case study on Romania in the era of "polycrisis" (Tooze, 2022) and "permacrisis" (Koukakis, 2023).*

Key words: *science, economy, politics, feedback loop, vicious circle, crisis*

Introduction

Science, economy, and politics are fundamental pillars of Western civilization, contributing to societal progress through the development of democracy, technology, and capital accumulation. Yuval Noah Harari (2015) describes their interaction as the "feedback loop of the Scientific Revolution": political and economic institutions provide resources for research, which in turn offers new powers used to obtain new resources, partially reinvested in research. However, this balance is fragile and the "virtuous" loop can easily transform into a vicious circle: democracy becomes form without substance, science loses its independence (rationality and the quest for truth are abandoned), and capitalism, influenced by technology and corporate interests, degenerates, deepening polarization and inequalities.

This potential degeneration has been observed by authors like Chrystia Freeland (2012), who linked it to the rise of global super-rich elite, the "plutocrats", and Noam Chomsky (2017), who described a similar vicious circle where the concentration of economic wealth and political power captures the democratic state transforming it into its opposite, post-democracy (Crouch, 2004). The fundamental question is: to what extent has this loop maintained its virtuous quality, and to what extent has it transformed into a vicious circle, especially in recent crises? What are the causes and consequences of this involution?

This paper will analyze this dynamic on two levels: normative - how the relationship should function and descriptive - how it functions in reality, with a case study on Romania in the era of "polycrisis" and "permacrisis" (2020 -2025).

2. Conceptual Clarifications

To understand the dynamics between science, economy, and politics, clarification of certain concepts is necessary. A "feedback loop" is a cyclical process where the outcome of an action influences future actions (Stermann, 2000). There is "positive" feedback that amplifies change and has a destabilizing potential, and "negative" feedback that promotes stability (Meadows, 2008). These terms describe

effects (self-reinforcing vs. self-correcting), not value judgments (Ford, 2010). The concept is linked to circular causality and homeostasis, which are useful in analyzing complex socio-political systems (Richardson, 1991; Axelrod & Cohen, 2000).

The "feedback loop of the Scientific Revolution" as described by Harari (2015) consists of a self-amplifying positive dynamic of knowledge, resources, and power. Their interaction generates mutually beneficial results. "To progress, science needs more than research. It depends on the mutual reinforcement of science, politics, and economics. Political and economic institutions provide the resources without which scientific research is almost impossible. In return, scientific research provides new powers that are used, among other things, to obtain new resources, some of which are reinvested in research" (Harari, 2015, p. 278). This would be the "virtuous circle".

In contrast, a "vicious circle" is a self-perpetuating negative feedback loop where cause and effect reinforce each other destructively, blocking correction. In politics, it can explain, for example, democratic degradation: weakening control leads to corruption, generating mistrust, reducing participation, and allowing corruption to intensify (Diamond, 2008; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). Concepts like "defective democracy" (Merkel, 2004) capture this dynamic.

The concepts of "permacrisis" (Tooze, 2022) and "polycrisis" (Koukakis, 2023) have emerged relatively recently in the literature. Analytically, they capture different dimensions of contemporary global challenges, reflecting both the duration and interconnectedness of the crises faced by political regimes and governments in a world portrayed as increasingly volatile and insecure.

The term "permacrisis" has been documented since the 1970s (in the context of French social policy), but only entered common parlance in 2022, after the COVID-19 pandemic, when it was chosen by Collins Dictionary as the word of the year. It is defined as "a prolonged period of instability and insecurity", reflecting post-pandemic societal anxiety. It is derived from "permanent crisis", describing a prolonged state of instability in which crises are continuous, creating a "new normal" of almost endless disruption. The key characteristic of "permacrisis" is its chronic nature. Societies face consecutive crises without being able to return to the stability previously experienced. For example, immediately after the COVID-19 'crisis', it was prolonged by the geopolitical turmoil caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, superimposed on top of the energy, climate, and public debt crises and various political upheavals.

The concept of "polycrisis" has its roots in the complexity theory of Edgar Morin and Anne Brigitte Kern (1999). They have used it to argue that the contemporary world is not confronted with just "one vital problem, but with many vital problems, and this complex inter-solidarity of problems, antagonisms, crises, uncontrolled processes and the planet's general crisis constitutes the number one vital problem" (Morin & Kern, 1999: 74). Following this line, "polycrisis" refers to multiple interconnected crises that interact synergistically and thus create complex effects greater than the sum of their parts.

In a critical theory interpretation, "permacrisis" and "polycrisis" can be viewed as hegemonic nodes in late neoliberal discourse. In this perspective, political discourse is a hegemonic field of articulation of meaning (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). Crises, far from being brute facts, are effects of hegemonic articulation, which can either coagulate an opposition (through chains of equivalence) or fragment it. "Permactrisis" discursively fixes a perpetual urgency that delegitimizes opposition, while "polycrisis" pluralizes and fragments the field of conflict, dissolving antagonistic potential into a complex of technical problems. These narratives thus provide discursive coherence to a system that seems incoherent, for example, justifying austerity, deregulation, securitization, or top-down decisions, even some abusive measures. Living in a "polycrisis" or "permactrisis" leaves no room for structural change, with the establishment trying to block policy alternatives and build consensus around the status quo. "Better to keep the current system (stability) than risk chaos" is a familiar slogan used by governments all around the world. In this sense, "crisis" is not necessarily a rupture or change of

paradigm, but a form of hegemonic continuity, a self-preserving function of the post-democratic neoliberal order.

The narratives of "permacrisis" and "polycrisis" operate at cognitive and affective levels. They construct a specific emotional climate, a combination of anxiety, political fatigue, and resignation, all characteristics of "post-democracy" (Crouch, 2004). Their usage is meant to generate an "*affective attrition*" of the citizen and a state of mind characterized by the normalization of fear. The continuing crisis becomes a hegemonic narrative framework by invalidating alternative options and labeling them as "unrealistic" or even "dangerous" to social stability, a.k.a. the *status quo*.

By stabilizing a narrative of instability, these two concepts tend to delegitimize demands for democratic transformation in the name of a perpetual emergency, described by Giorgio Agamben (2005) as the "state of exception". This "state of exception" increasingly tends to present itself as the dominant paradigm of governance of contemporary politics. The same author interprets the measures taken by governments during the coronavirus pandemic in the same vein:

"A society that lives in a continuous state of exception cannot be free. We actually live in a society that has sacrificed freedom to so-called 'reasons of security' and has thus condemned itself to live in a permanent state of fear and insecurity" (Agamben, 2020: 20-21). The formal declaration of a "state of exception" is avoided and increasingly replaced by an unprecedented generalization of the security paradigm as a normal technique of governance" (Agamben, 2020: 18).

At the political discourse level, "permacrisis" is a prolonged state of exception. It describes but also creates political reality, so it can be considered a "performative" discourse of power. In the philosophy of language and speech acts theory, *performative utterances* are sentences that describe a given reality, and also change the social reality they are describing (Austin, 1962).

Lauren Berlant (2011) talks about the "chronicization of crisis" as a form of biopolitics. She introduces the notion of crisis ordinariness. This concept describes how the state of crisis becomes an everyday condition, profoundly affecting the perception and subjective experience of individuals in the context of neoliberal capitalism. When everything becomes non-transparent, and governance is produced under the rule of emergencies, democracy is in great suffering. When "everything is interdependent", political failure can be shifted to the systemic level, and political and administrative responsibility is diffused. These affective states produce a post-democratic subject: adaptive, cautious, passive, rather than rebellious or vindictive.

This ongoing governance of crisis is the essence of "post-democracy" as described by Colin Crouch (2004). Formal democratic institutions remain intact, but the political process is stripped of popular content, dominated by political elites and technocratic discourses. There is always a "crisis" at hand to be used by the government to gain more power and impose order. The new normality of "state of exception" suspends democratic normative for security: biological security (like during the pandemic), geopolitical (during a war), or even ideological security (during electoral campaigns). The logic of these genuine or constructed "crises" is to reinforce a "post-democracy", in which citizens are transformed into spectators of perpetual emergency government.

I. NORMATIVE PLAN: IDEAL INTERACTIONS AND INHERENT TENSIONS

This section explores the interactions in practice between science, economy, and politics for a virtuous feedback loop, while also examining the inherent tensions. It shows how this feedback loop turns into a "vicious circle" when the relationship between knowledge, resources, and power becomes asymmetrical, instrumentalized, and normatively opaque. Instead of a system of mutual correction and deliberation, a regime of circular self-validation is formed, in which decisions, but especially errors, are perpetuated and consolidated in the form of "objective necessities".

The "vicious circle" actually means the fusion of science, economics, and politics, in the sense of the concentration of power. This can be understood as a process of functional and institutional convergence, in which the traditional boundaries between these spheres become permeable, and the

logic of one (in most cases, the logic of capitalism) comes to dominate the whole. This convergence does not imply simple collaboration, but a reconfiguration of the field of power, in which the autonomy of each sphere is eroded, and decision-making is centralized in a hybrid, opaque, and difficult-to-account-for complex.

3. The Feedback Loop of Science, Economy, and Politics

3.1. Science and Economy: Knowledge as Power and the Risk of Corruption

The prestige of modern science derives not only from the pursuit of rationality and the quest for truth, but from the power and benefits it offers, with the value of knowledge often judged by its capacity to generate power, utility, and profit. This instrumentalist view, though not universally accepted (the value of knowledge for its own sake also exists), remains extremely influential nowadays. It has consolidated the link between science and technology, often perceived as interdependent (Harari, 2015). Capitalism and the Industrial Revolution cemented this symbiosis, transforming the modern world.

However, this symbiosis implies critical dependence: science is costly and relies on external funding (governments as well, not only private corporations). Without massive investment, modern progress would be inconceivable (Harari, 2015). Paradoxically, funding, while a catalyst, is also a major vulnerability. Resources attract economic and political interests that can shape or influence research directions. Funders invest conditionally, pursuing their own objectives. Power funds science to gain more power, but "power tends to corrupt" (Lord Acton, 1887).

Although counter-mechanisms exist (peer review, conflict of interest policies, scientific ethos - Merton, 1973), the patronage of governments and corporations is obvious and rarely disinterested. This relationship can corrupt research by subordinating the scientific agenda to external interests. The ideal of "pure science" is hard to achieve, as priorities are often dictated by financial flows, reflecting funders' interests, often presented and framed as public goods, rather than real social needs.

At a more general level, as Neil Postman (1993) noticed in "Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology", technology has come to dominate culture. His main argument is that humanity has transformed from a tool-using culture into what he calls a "technopoly" or a society where technology is deified and culture seeks its authorization, satisfaction, and direction from technology. It is no longer merely a human tool but has become the dominant force that shapes cultural values, social structures, and human thinking. What makes Postman's arguments particularly striking is that he formulated them in the early 1990s, way before the internet became ubiquitous. His concerns about television have proven even more relevant nowadays in the age of smartphones and social media.

3.2. Science and Politics: Tensions Between Expertise and Democracy

The science-politics interaction is fundamental but tense. Complex policy decisions require scientific information, yet political logic (values, interests, or democratic legitimacy) differs from scientific logic (evidence and objectivity). The ideal of technocracy is also problematic: science informs about "what is", but politics decides "what should be", involving value judgments beyond expertise (Pamuk, 2021; Lentsch & Weingart, 2011). Moreover, science isn't monolithic: disagreements and provisional knowledge exist. Still, science can establish factual boundaries and combat lying in politics, but also "post-truth". Maintaining science's autonomy and legitimate advisory mechanisms are constant challenges, requiring robust institutions and a culture of truth and dialogue.

The ideal relationship would be "co-production" of knowledge (Jasanoff, 2004), through transparent collaboration between experts, policymakers, and the public, recognizing the value and limits of expertise, with the primacy of democratic decision-making. In practice, the relationship is marked by instrumentalization: political leaders cherry-pick evidence, ignore consensus, or attack science (Resnik, 2009). Conversely, experts risk imposing "technical" solutions on political problems ("scientism" or "expertocracy"). Both erode public trust (Nichols, 2017). For example, debates on COVID-19 vaccination illustrate the clash between technical arguments and legitimate ethical-social concerns.

3.3. Politics and Economy: Interdependence and the Risk of State Capture

The interdependence between politics and the economy is a constant historical paradigm. The two spheres are interlinked and influencing each other, although they are functioning according to a totally different philosophy: capitalism is driven by private profit, while democracy has in its center the general will and the need of common good. In liberal democracies, the role of the state is to set market rules, like property rights, fair competition and correcting market failures, but also redistribution. In a democratic political regime the role of the market is to generate resources (Merkel, 2018; Iversen & Soskice, 2019).

This ideal separation of politics and economics is undermined by capital's natural tendency to influence politics, and to capture entirely the social and political realm. Conversely, politics can distort the economy through excessive interventionism, clientelism, and arbitrary regulations, all these negative stifling private initiative (Ciupitu, 2015; Stavre, 2017).

In the most advanced phase of capitalism, "late capitalism" - a concept first coined by Werner Sombart in 1902 in his book "Der Moderne Kapitalismus" - the traditional definition of the economic system is no longer accurate. Instead of a free market that calibrates itself without state intervention, "late capitalism" functions with close links with government, monopolies and oligopolies. The 2008 economic crisis explicitly demonstrated the fusion of the seemingly free market and the political sphere when governments pumped taxpayers' billions into bailing out banks deemed "too big to fail". The idea that there are private companies that has grown to a size that their failure would trigger global chaos shows how trapped is humanity in the global financial system. Whereas under communism the market was dictated by the state, we are now experiencing a situation in which the state is dictated by the market.

Wealth concentration provides disproportionate resources to shape policies via lobbying, campaign finance, media control, "revolving doors" (Hacker & Pierson, 2010; Streeck, 2011), and other mechanisms. "State capture" subordinates public interest to private interest, rendering formal political equality illusory (Chomsky, 2017; Wolin, 2008). While economic influence isn't necessarily illegitimate, it becomes problematic when disproportionate and non-transparent. History proved that the belief that profit always brings societal benefits is false (Magnuson, 2022).

Globalization has heightened the tension between politics or democracy and money. Capital mobility increased corporate power relative to states, limiting the capacity to regulate, tax, and maintain the welfare state (Rodrik, 2011; Streeck, 2011). "Rodrik's trilemma" (globalization, sovereignty, democracy - only two can coexist) suggests democracy has often been sacrificed for hyper-globalization (Martin & Schumann, 1997; Hertz, 2001), through austerity and deregulation policies that deepened inequalities.

4. Globalization and the Tension Between Democracy, Sovereignty, and the Market

As Harrari argued, history's "chief engine" for the past 500 years has probably been the "feedback loop" between science, capital, and empire, or the armed hand of capital. Capitalism has driven European expansionism over the past few centuries, and capitalism has been closely related to empire-building, as European countries stepped in militarily to advance the interests of their investors. After the end of the imperial era and colonialism, globalization might be considered as the new form of capital expansionism. The intensification of cross-border flows has reshaped the interactions between science, economy, and politics. While bringing benefits (economic growth, innovation), it has generated tensions with democracy and national sovereignty ("Rodrik's trilemma" 2011).

4.1. Science and Technology in a Global Context

Globalization facilitated international scientific collaboration (e.g., COVID-19) but intensified competition for talent, resources, and technological supremacy. New technologies (AI, biotechnology) raise ethical and regulatory issues often exceeding the capacity of nation-states, requiring difficult

international coordination (e.g., regulating GAFAM - Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, Microsoft). In addition, global corporations tend to escape control and always try to "weaken" political power.

4.2. The Globalized Economy and Pressures on Democracy

The main argument of globalization highlights its capacity for lifting many out of poverty and the need for national redistribution policies, not rejecting globalization itself. On the other side, capital mobility has limited the autonomy of national economic policies. Pressure for international competitiveness often led to deregulation, labor market flexibility, and capital tax cuts, negatively affecting inequality and the state's capacity to fund public goods (Streeck, 2011; Hickel, 2017). International financial institutions and trade agreements often promoted a neoliberal model (globalization's "straitjacket" as described by Rodrik, 2011), generating radical populist and nationalist reactions.

4.3. National Sovereignty in the Global Era

Globalization has eroded traditional national sovereignty. This is a fact. Global problems require collective solutions, involving competence transfer to international organizations ("shared sovereignty" or "multi-level governance"). This is often perceived, legitimately, as a loss of democratic control (Hooghe & Marks, 2009), creating tensions between supranational integration and national autonomy. Proponents of global governance argue that absolute sovereignty is illusory, and international cooperation is necessary.

In conclusion, globalized capitalism has created an interconnected but more tense world. The feedback loop operates globally, influenced by actors and norms beyond the nation-state. In this globalized world, the merger of power, resources, and knowledge does not generate a classic dictatorship, but an informal regime of asymmetrically distributed power, in which the decision is produced by a techno-scientific-economic complex. The classic categories of politicians, scientists, and tycoons are no longer distinct. They merge into networks of interests and influence. Power is no longer held, but managed jointly, outside of democratic control.

II. DESCRIPTIVE PLAN: CASE STUDY - ROMANIA IN THE ERA OF "POLYCRISIS"

5. The Dynamics of the Science-Politics-Economy Relationship in the Romanian Pandemic Context: An Unbalanced Loop

In this part, we explore the interplay among science, economy and politics in Romania amidst the challenges posed by the COVID-19 crisis within the larger framework of multiple crises (polycrisis) and enduring crises (permacrisis). This timeframe sheds light on how the mechanism of "feedback loop" failed to operate. When faced with crisis induced stressors it was showcasing its susceptibility to descending into a recurring pattern.

In the context of the pandemic, the relationship between science, politics and the economy seemed to be imbalanced and interconnected in various ways. This period has vividly shown how science and politics are intertwined with the economy, how science clashed with political influences and urgent actions tested the relationships between the government and businesses as well, as citizens.

5.1. The Unclear Importance of Expertise

Scientific and medical expertise was invoked to underpin government action (e.g., Raed Arafat, head of the Department for Emergency Situations - DSU). Experts communicated the virus's complexity and the need for measures. However, this centrality of expertise was ambiguous. Epistemic authority was eroded by accusations of politicization and poor and contradictory communication, doubled by a massive wave of disinformation ("infodemic"). All of them are fueled by chronic mistrust in authorities (Bargaoanu et. al, 2021; Mosila, 2023). Contradictory messages of authorities and "fake news" eroded trust, leading to contestation, polarization, and the dismantling of the social fabric.

5.2. Technocratic Governance and the Legitimacy Crisis

The crisis management bypassed democratic processes, being criticized for lacking transparency and raising concerns of potential misuse (Neblo & Wallace, 2021). The credibility of the government was undermined by poor rule of law that underlined the tension between the need for swift action and respect for constitutional guarantees (Lentsch & Weingart, 2011). Additionally, a lack of transparency in decision-making and poor communication added to the chaos.

5.3. Politicization and the Paradox of Scientific Advice

Invoking "science" was used as a religious ritual because the state response was marked by political calculations. President Klaus Werner Iohannis and the leaders of the National Liberal Party (PNL), who were at the same time heads of the Romanian Government (Ludovic Orban - 2020; Florin Cîțu - 2021), were caught between the efficacy of the restrictive measures and their political survival. Their crisis management was described as "politicized and militarized" (Poenaru, 2021). This illustrates the "paradox of scientific advice" (Pamuk, 2021): the more scientific expertise became relevant and necessary for legitimizing policy decisions (utility), the more suspicion grew that it is being instrumentalized or 'bent' to serve pre-existing political agendas, thus undermining its perceived neutrality and, ultimately, epistemic authority. The widespread perception of the politicization of health decisions and the chronic public distrust of the political class and state institutions (Bargaoanu et. al, 2021), has created fertile ground for skepticism, conspiracy theories and dramatically undermined governmental efforts to build the social consensus necessary for compliance and, subsequently, for the success of the vaccination campaign.

5.4. Economic Impact and the Capitalism vs. Democracy Tension

Lockdowns and restrictions had severe economic consequences (economic decline, unemployment, business difficulties) (Velica et al., 2022). This exacerbated the tension between market logic and public health/social protection imperatives (Merkel, 2018). The government attempted a dual discourse (protecting lives vs. economic support), implementing measures (technical unemployment, loan deferrals, SME guarantees). However, the impact was considerable (economic contraction, budget deficit), raising questions about aid distribution equity, efficiency, and potential state capture (Chomsky, 2017).

5.5. The hastening pace of technology and the risks it brings about

The spread of the pandemic triggered a shift towards digitalization, encompassing work setups and online learning platforms, as well as the surge of e-commerce activities (Moldovan et. al, 2022). This swift transformation has brought to light existing disparities regarding access and usage, which may worsen over time. As society increasingly depends on platforms and engages in data gathering practices that include tracking and digital certifications, concerns about the rise of "surveillance capitalism" as discussed by Zuboff (2019) have resurfaced, along with fears about the potential emergence of "techno-feudalism" (Varoufakis, 2023). These developments are anticipated to have direct implications on democratic processes.

6. Emergence of Negative Feedback Loops and Vicious Circles

The analysis reveals not just an unbalanced feedback loop, but also subsequent "vicious circles" that undermined the collective response.

6.1. The Destructive Cycle of Distrust and Politicization

Chronic mistrust facilitated politicization. Health decisions were interpreted politically, fueling suspicion and contestation, further eroding trust. Politicians adopted populist discourses or instrumentalized expertise, reinforcing the perception of politicization. Result: social fragmentation, difficulty implementing measures, failure of the vaccination campaign (the second lowest rate in the European Union) (Toró et al., 2024).

6.2. The Vicious Circle of Corruption and Inefficiency

The pandemic created opportunities for corruption (emergency public procurement, reduced transparency). Scandals (like Unifarm, Lețcani Hospital, or PCR machines) involved suspicious purchases and high-ranking officials. Corruption diverted resources, contributing to health response inefficiency and fueling public cynicism and mistrust, making anti-corruption efforts harder (Uslamer, 2006). The rule of law was undermined: military ordinances, unconstitutional fines (CCR Decision 152/2020), hindered judicial review, and marginalized Parliament. The "checks and balances" principle was ignored, leading to the "rule by law" instead of "rule of law".

6.3. The Vicious Circle of Disinformation and Ignorance

Disinformation, malinformation (Wardle & Derakshan, 2017), and conspiracy theories proliferated, exploiting vulnerabilities (functional illiteracy and polarization) and amplified by algorithms and interested actors. The "infodemic" fueled skepticism towards scientific recommendations and health measures, generating risky behaviors. Skepticism increased vulnerability to further disinformation. Anti-disinformation efforts were ineffective, undermined by lack of trust and "willful ignorance" (Mihali, 2023).

6.4. The Vicious Circle of Disinformation, Protests, and Radicalization

Disinformation and mistrust fueled anti-restriction and anti-vaccination protests, providing a platform for radical groups. Street protests coalesced discontent about economic hardship, mistrust, conspiracies, anti-science populism, etc., and were used by *political entrepreneurs* like the representatives of the Alliance for the Union of Romanians Party (AUR) for political gains. The party managed to obtain more than 9% of the popular vote in December 2020, becoming the fourth largest political group in the Romanian Parliament. Its nationalist and anti-system rhetoric normalized radical positions and attracted large segments of frustrated population: those left behind by capitalist and European "progress", those who distrusted governmental crisis management, etc.. Radicalization hindered dialogue and deepened polarization, so the result in 2024 and 2025 was not surprising: the rise of the populist's parties and their presidential candidates. Combined, AUR, S.O.S Romania, The Party of Young People (POT) are the largest political movement with up to 35% of the seats of the newly elected parliament and their two presidential candidates - Călin Georgescu and George Simion - managed to convince more than 5.3 milion of voters.

6.5. The Loop of Economic Precarity and Health Vulnerability

The economic shock of the governmental measures taken during the COVID-19 pandemic impacted living standards, especially for the vulnerable categories, because the government support failed to fully compensate for all the losses (Velica et al., 2022). Poor conditions exposed disadvantaged groups to higher health risks and created a negative poverty - poor health loop. It highlighted existing inequalities, with costs socialized in a very similar way to the financial crisis of 2008: the health system failure was transferred to patients. In the same time, increased precarity and failed social and health systems generated anxiety and social stress which fuelled distrust in government, perceived as inefficient. The shift of balance between rights and obligations towards the latest deepened the breakdown of the social fabric and the perception of a non-democratic governance, call it soft-authoritarianism.

6.6. Conclusions on the Romanian Case Study

The Romanian case illustrates the fragility of science-politics-economy interactions in crisis. The "feedback loop" manifested as unbalanced loops and vicious circles. Appeal to expertise was undermined by politicization and mistrust. Crisis governance undermined democracy. Economic impact was severe, and state support was insufficient. Disinformation proliferated, fueling social and

political radicalization. Simply invoking science was not enough. In the absence of an integrated approach - building trust through transparency, strengthening democratic institutions, combating corruption and disinformation, focusing on social equity - the failure of crisis management was almost inevitable, leading to irreversible erosion of the social contract and democracy.

The discourse of "fear" and the logic of "crisis" were used not merely to describe, but also for performative purposes: they produced the reality they named, building consensus around exceptional measures and not based on mutual trust.

There were at least four dimensions along which „permacrisis" and „polycrisis" have functioned, ideologically and affectively, as post-democratic discursive instruments of governance (Brown, 2015). First, the „permacrisis" scenario suspended deliberation (the temporality of the exception). Second, the "polycrisis" justified the evacuation of politics and the technocratic approach (systemic complexity). Third, they both generated anxiety, civic fatigue, resignation, in other words, non-democratic affects (affective regime). Fourth, they blocked political alternatives and maintained the status quo (hegemonic function).

With decreased citizen participation and the de-politicization of decision-making processes, the idea of "permacrisis" legitimized, on the one hand, the expansion of executive power and technocratic bureaucracy, on the other hand, the temporary (but prolonged) retreat from democratic deliberation. In this post-democratic context, the fusion of power, resources, and knowledge reflected a concentration of power in an "iron triangle" system, in which scientists legitimize decisions, corporations provide infrastructure and resources, and politicians provide the legal framework and public acceptability. For example, during 2020 and 2021, large pharmaceutical companies and digital distribution networks cooperated with the state to organize vaccination campaigns. At the same time, public discourse was strictly calibrated on expertocratic recommendations, marginalizing critical or hesitant voices, even from within the academic world. A post-democratic governance regime was thus taking shape, in which citizen participation was replaced by induced consensual risk management. "Permacrisis" normalized the exceptional, so the crisis became the new norm even after the end of the pandemic. Since then, citizens function under permanent anxiety and, consequently, submission. "Permacrisis" and "polycrisis" functioned not only as analytical descriptions of the unstable contemporary global environment but also as narrative devices that served political hegemony. They were used as powerful discursive devices to justify "permanent states of exception" and measures that bypass democratic control, block political alternatives, and emphasize technocratic tendencies.

7. General Conclusion: Before the Circle is Closing Down

This paper argued that the "feedback loop of the Scientific Revolution" (Harari, 2015) has degenerated into a "vicious circle" (Freeland, 2012; Chomsky, 2017) in the contemporary "crisis" context, marking a potential civilizational drift. Science, subordinated to political and corporate interests, partially lost neutrality, becoming instrumentalized (oriented towards utility and profit, not truth and common good). The COVID-19 crisis exacerbated embedded tensions: "official science" generated paradoxes and mistrust, abuse of epistemic authority, lack of transparency, and censorship undermined trust.

Simultaneously, the political sphere degraded towards "post-democracy" (de-politicization, technocratization, evacuation of ideological conflict, citizen viewed as consumer). Democratic forms persist, but politics is captured by techno-economic elites. Ideological conflict is replaced by fabricated technocratic consensus and political marketing. State communication relies on submission, overexposure, and routine, immersing individuals in a constructed "reality" (Teodorescu, 2007). The discourse of "permacrisis" justifies and consolidates "the state of exception", governmental measures bypassing democratic control. By this, a techno-political regime based on anxiety and fear is consolidated.

Democratic backsliding is linked to the rise of a new "tech" plutocracy, where economic power translates into political influence. The fusion of capital, technology, and politics generates a "capitalist

dictatorship" (Zafirovski, 2022), emphasized by globalization. The current imbalance, dominated by the logic of capital and technology detached from democratic control and guided by radical ideologies ("accelerationism"), threatens democracy.

The feedback loop has turned into a vicious circle that, like a reflexive system (Soros, 2014), reinforces itself based on transfigured concepts. Initial optimism about technology's impact (*e-democracy*) turned to pessimistic. The intertwining of technology and politics raises the specter of extended social control and a potential post-human drift, where decisions are made by algorithms and non-transparent interests.

Democracy, science, and a capitalist economy that have served society for so long are not givens, but are under continuous construction, exposed to the vicissitudes of the *zeitgeist* that they are created. These "idols" of the past already seem to be in twilight, so their future and that of humanity depends on the collective ability to renegotiate the terms of their interaction before the vicious circle is closed for good.

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