

HABILITATION THESIS REVIEWER'S REPORT

Masaryk University

Faculty

Faculty of Social Studies

Applicant

Alena Kluknavská, PhD.

Habilitation thesis

Populist communication: content, actors, opportunities, and impacts in times of crisis

Reviewer

doc. PhDr. Vladimír Naxera, Ph.D.

**Reviewer's home unit,
institution**

The Department of Politics and International Relations,
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To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing this reviewer's report from the position of someone who have been familiar with Dr. Kluknavská's work for a long time, and not only with the texts that are part of this habilitation thesis. In this regard, Dr. Kluknavská has been an author who has continuously contributed to the debate on the nature of populist communication.

Populism and populist communication based on the "us versus them" principle have been a very prominent topic in the world comparative political science for at least the last fifteen years and, as a result, one of the best researched fields. Given the success of populist politicians, which can be observed not only across Europe during this period, research is increasingly focusing on populist communication in power. The importance of research on populist communication is also growing in the context of the crises that not only Europe has been facing in recent years.

Also in this context, this collection of texts presenting theoretically and methodologically well-founded empirical research enriching contemporary debates should be appreciated. The

contribution of the individual studies is evident in several respects, or rather sub-debates. Firstly, the thesis contributes to the very conceptualization of populist communication (especially with regard to its content and stylistic features), i.e. the supply side of populism; and also to the discussions on the role of the populist leader, the impact of the context (especially various crises), and also the reaction of society to the communication in question.

Despite (or perhaps because of) the fact that populism is a very prominent topic in contemporary political science, there is a certain conceptual confusion around this phenomenon, and populism is thus viewed from completely different perspectives. I therefore consider it important that Dr. Kluknavská has placed a robust conceptual section at the beginning of her thesis on the conceptualization of populist communication, focusing primarily on the role of populist politicians in the spread of this communication, the context (of the crisis), and the impact of the communication in question.

The thesis consists of a total of ten studies published between 2016 and 2023 mainly in prestigious international journals including high-IF journals such as *Information, Communication & Society*. The rigorous peer review process in those journals easily guarantees the quality of the individual papers. In all cases, the texts are co-authored (always 2 to 4 co-authors), with Dr. Kluknavská's authorship share varying from 45% to 90%. In this respect, it is perhaps slightly unfortunate that the set of texts does not include a single solo-authored paper (which, however, may not exceed the standards of Masaryk University).

Overall, the set of studies represents a comprehensive view of populist communication and focuses not only on "who says what/how/why/to whom" but also with what effect they do it, i.e. what are the public responses and reactions to populist communication.

The individual studies differ in terms of methodology, but also in terms of the actors studied, the context and the specific topic or subject of the analysed communication. The articles focus not only on the Czech and/or Slovak environment (e.g. study I, III, IV, V, VI, VIII, and IX), but also on the broader European perspective (study VII and X) and on the USA as exemplified by Donald Trump's communication (study II). Similarly, the individual topics differ, whether it is identity issues or communication in times of (e.g. pandemic) crisis. The diversity of methods and approaches shows a certain multiperspective to the study of populist communication. Despite some thematic, contextual and methodological fragmentation, the individual studies are (more or less) linked by the overarching theme of populist communication, its form, context and consequences.

In conclusion, let me repeat that I consider this thesis to be in all respects a useful empirical and theoretical contribution to the debate on populist communication, which in its significance exceeds the Czech environment. The set of texts, supplemented by the theoretical delimitation and conclusion of the thesis, easily meets the standards of the habilitation procedure.

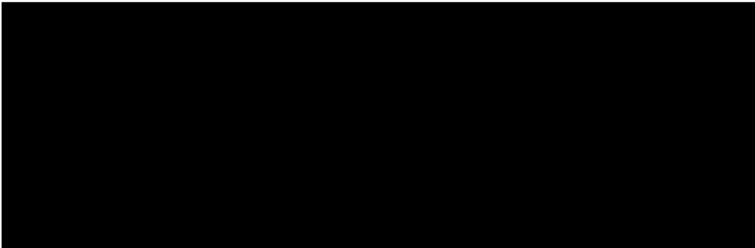
Reviewer's questions for the habilitation thesis defence:

In several places in the work, emotionality and negativity instead of facts and knowledge are mentioned as characteristic elements of populist communication, which contributes to a significant polarisation. But if we look at the communication of actors who are non populist (or even anti-populist), can we really say that emotionality and negativity instead of facts and knowledge are the special privilege of populists and their communication? If we look at a number of Czech "anti populist" parties and their communication on various issues, we find similar principles, including increasing polarisation as a result of that communication.

Conclusion

The habilitation thesis entitled "Populist communication: content, actors, opportunities, and impacts in times of crisis" by Dr. Alena Kluknavská **fulfils** requirements expected of a habilitation thesis in the field of Political Science.

Date: 15 August 2024



Signature: Vladimír Naxera