

Name of the student:	Mariia Tepliakova
Title of the thesis:	Neo-authoritarianism and Media Systems Transformation in Central and Eastern Europe
Reviewer:	Dr hab. Jacek H. Kołodziej, JU professor

1. KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTION TO THE FIELD

(relevance of the research question, research objective, literature review):

The research problem concerns the link between neo-authoritarianism (explanatory variable) and the change of media systems in Poland and the Czech Republic (explained variable). The trend towards neo-authoritarianism is an important phenomenon and certainly deserves an in-depth analysis. However, the relationship between the above variables seems quite predictable, as any authoritarian power strives for full control of the public sphere, which raises the temptation to collect evidence to support the thesis. The author considers four paradigms of relations between the media and politics, while missing here the fundamental models classic for the knowledge of media and politics: especially those described by W. Schultz (antagonistic, dependency, instrumentalization), Jay G. Blumler and M. Gurevitch (conflict, symbiotic), Manuel Castells or Des Friedman (consensus, control, contradiction, chaos). An additional challenge is the inclusion of a complex relationship between neo-authoritarianism and populism, as much as enclosing the media systems broad comparative approach as proposed by Hallin and Mancini, which altogether makes it difficult to establish the main line of reasoning.

2. ANALYSIS

(methodology, argument, theoretical backing, appropriate work with sources):

The argumentation is based on secondary data, mainly indices of press freedom and the crisis of liberal democracy in the countries studied. To explain / describe this, the author announces process tracing, usually part of a case study project, here limited to an examination of change and transformation. The key premises are supposed to be delivered by seven semi-structured interviews, which in itself is a good idea, but it should be explained much better in the research design part. We do not get to know: the criteria for the selection of interviewees, there is no justification as to why these particular people or institutions are supposed to be representative, the structure of the interviews is not presented, and, more importantly, the author does not properly analyze the transcripts of the interviews but only describes her impressions. Given the small number of interviews and the high heterogeneity of the respondents, one may have doubts about their generalizability.

3. CONCLUSIONS

(persuasiveness, link between data and conclusions, achievement of research objectives):

Poland and Czech Republic selected for analysis are described in an interesting way, which proves the author's knowledge of political and media events in these countries. She rightly focuses on key discrepancies, which makes the described results contextually understandable. The assumptions about a strong tendency for neo-authoritarian countries to restrict media freedom are generally confirmed, but I have the impression that the adopted category of 'media system' (assuming uniformity of the media in a given country) rather blocks the possibility of a thorough examination of the topic, since one of the most important issues explaining the process of concentration of control over the media is the confrontation of the different categories of media which are: fully controlled, partially controlled, rather neutral – commercially oriented, loyal to the Church rather than political party (Polish case), symbiotic with the power in some issues only, overtly oppositional, or just well-balanced...

4. FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE

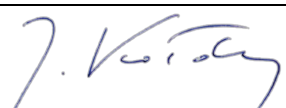
(appropriate language, adherence to academic standards, citation style, layout):

The thesis is correctly written, according to academic standards.

5. SUMMARY ASSESSMENT

(strong and weak point of the dissertation, other issues)

The strength of the thesis is the well-chosen topic and the bold juxtaposition of the concept of neo-authoritarianism in Central and Eastern Europe with the mechanisms of on-going media concentration and control. Power over media to frame social consciousness and define the image of the world is one of the important factors ensuring the maintenance of authoritarian power. The author sets herself a rather difficult task by adding the contexts of the systemic transformation in Central and Eastern Europe and the development of populism. The research questions are relevant, but they tend to be rather one-sided in this approach. The design and implementation of the research do not provide full answers, because the way the interviews were carried out does not allow for a legitimate generalization of conclusions, and the applied explanatory paradigms do not exhaust the features of the complexity of media systems and media-power relations. In conclusion, in my opinion this thesis is on the borderline between B and C.

Grade (A-F):	B (good plus, 4.5)
Date: 25.06.2021	Signature:
	

Percentile	Prague		Krakow		Leiden		Barcelona	
	91-100 %	8,5%	5	6,7%	8,5-10	5,3%	9-10	5,5 %
B (81-90)	81-90 %	16,3%	4,5	11,7%	7,5-8,4	16,4%	8-8,9	11,0 %
C (71-80)	71-80 %	16,3%	4	20%	6,5-7,4	36,2%	7-7,9	18,4 %
D (61-70)	61-70 %	24%	3,5	28,3%			6-6,9	35,2 %
E (51-60)	51-60 %	34,9%	3	33,4 %	6-6,4	42,1 %	5-5,9	30,1 %

Assessment criteria:

Excellent (A): 'Outstanding performance with only minor errors';

Very good (B): 'Above the average standard but with some errors';

Good (C): 'Generally sound work but with a number of notable errors';

Satisfactory (D): 'Fair but with significant shortcomings';

Sufficient (E): 'Performance meets the minimum criteria';

Fail: 'Some/considerable more work required before the credit can be awarded'.