

Thesis Review

Author: Anna Wielander

Title: A Tale of Two Europes. How the refugee crisis reopened the dichotomies of “East” vs. “West”

Opponent: Ondřej Klípa

The master thesis of Anna Wielander deals with extremely topical issue which is the consequences of the harsh attitude of Visegrad countries towards refugees in the EU context. The high relevance of the topic for the situation in Europe today is the root for both the strong and weak points of Anna's thesis.

To the strong points surely belongs pursuing of theoretically framed approach to the problem. Although the number of popular or semi-popular articles dealing with the issue is immense, there are not yet many serious attempts to examine the issue with theoretical tools of political science. In my opinion, Anna was quite successful in this endeavor.

Since it is an ongoing issue, it is difficult to select and analyze all information sources. Some politicians in V4 countries are declaring statements and undertaking political acts in this context almost every day. At the same time, journalists are discussing the topic from every point of view possible. Hence, there is a risk that such an academic text may quickly lose its validity. Moreover, some temporal distance always helps to wrap up the accessible information and focus on something that has not been studied sufficiently. My impression is that – maybe under the influence of popular press articles – Anna came up in her analyses with something that has been already noticed by quite a lot of commentators. Her final argument “...whereas they (the V4 countries) uniformly reject the idea of compulsory relocation within the EU, in general the Group is far from homogenous” is surely not anything original.

It is only a pity that Anna did not pay more critical attention to frequently used “paradoxes” of the Eastern European attitudes towards the refugee crisis. For instance, the moral argument “how can you refuse asylum seekers even if your own people were welcomed with open arms in times of your crisis” (my rephrase) cannot be so simply used since most of the people remaining in the Communist societies did not identify with the émigré. Moreover, the migrants were often perceived with envy as people having better (richer, freer, easier) lives. That opinion to a large extent persists up until nowadays. Thus, the post-Communist societies of Eastern Europe are not at all ready to “pay” for their own refugees.

In addition to that, one has to mention a few factual shortcomings. In her argument questioning the seeming differences in xenophobia between Western and Eastern Europe, Anna focused on relative friendly attitude of East Europeans towards the Jews as „the most controversial minority group in that region“ (p. 20). However, I am quite sure without quoting any particular survey that she would have found dramatically different results, had she looked at the attitude towards Muslims and especially Roma who are in fact „the most controversial minority group in that region“.

Another insufficiencies consist of single words (some perhaps typing errors) such as “ex-Soviet federal ethnicity” (p. 21) when talking about former Yugoslavia; describing the budget of V4 Fund as eight “billion” (p. 52) euro instead of million (I'd be happy if she was correct though); talking about annexation of Crimea as a “war in Crimea” (p. 56); or naming Polish ex-prime minister “Donald Dusk” (p. 58). Overall, the text would need some proofreading to correct repeatedly used words etc.

Having said that I do appreciate that Anna was not afraid to go into this heated topic. However, some more time distance from the issue as well as more time spent on correcting the text would have made the thesis even better.

I recommend the thesis for the oral defense.

My grade suggestion: velmi dobře (very good, 2)