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**Review of *Populist Political Communication in Europe*
by T. Aalberg, F. Esser, C. Reinemann, J. Strömbäck &
C. de Vreese (eds.), Routledge, 2016, 402 p.**

This edited volume explores a topic that is generally under-investigated inside the broader field of research on populism, namely its communicative aspects. The book originates from a research project funded by the European Cooperation in Scientific and Technology (COST), and includes examinations of 24 European countries, by focusing on three thematic areas: populist actors as communicators, the media and populism, and citizens and populism. The relevance of the topic for both scholars and the general public is constantly increasing, since in recent years populist leaders, political parties and movements have gained significant momentum in Europe. A frequent assumption is that communication (especially through mass media) plays an important role in the amplification of populism. However, the study of populist political communication lacks conceptual clarification, as well as systematic empirical support. It is the aim of the volume to advance knowledge and research in the field.

The editors are reputed scholars with a strong academic background. Toril Aalberg is Professor at the Department of Sociology and Political Science at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology. Frank Esser is Professor of International and Comparative Media Research at the University of Zurich, Switzerland. Carsten Reinemann is Professor of Political Communication at Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich, Germany. Jesper Strömbäck is Professor of Journalism at University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Lastly, Claes de Vreese is Professor and Chair of Political Communication in The Amsterdam School of Communication Research, University of Amsterdam, Netherlands.

The book is structured in six parts. In Part 1, "Introduction and Conceptual Challenges", the editors acknowledge the growing need to explain and dissect the phenomenon of populist political communication. They argue in favor of the books' objective to offer the first systematic, large scale, comparative review of existent research on populist political communication in Europe. Furthermore, an introduction to the central debates related to the topic is provided. Previous studies are centered around three actors: the political parties/candidates/movements, the media, and the citizens (which are both voters and audience). The main insight in this respect is that the media may amplify populism under certain conditions. However, the authors emphasize in the introductory section that scholars failed to look at all the key ele-

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ments in an integrated way. Three challenges are associated with this endeavor: to define populist political actors and communication and to determine communication success; to establish the media's role in the promotion of populist politics; and to understand the effects of populist messages on citizens.

The second chapter of the first section outlines some major theoretical lines of thought and proposes a working definition of populism and populist communication. More precisely, populism, as understood for the purposes of the book, is a form of political communication whose main elements are the people (the in-group), as opposed to the others (the elites and the out-groups). The editors present a preliminary model of the causes, forms, and effects of populist political communication to be used as a heuristic for the national literature investigations for the rest of the book. The four key elements of the model are: a). structural and situational contexts on the macro level, b). parties, movements, and their representatives at the meso-level, c). journalistic and social media on the meso-level, and d). individual citizens in the micro-level. The model is explicitly depicted in a graphic form (see p. 22).

The amplest part of the book (Part II-V) is dedicated to individual country chapters, organized geographically around four main areas: Northern, Western, Southern, and Eastern Europe. All chapters follow a similar structure, beginning with the overview of the country-specific literature on populism and the related pillars (populist actors as communicators and populist communication by political actors; the media and populism; and citizens and the effects of populist messages). Each national contribution ends with a summary of recent developments that are not yet included in the literature. The 24 countries taking part in the study are: Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Austria, Belgium, Germany, Ireland, The Netherlands, Switzerland, The United Kingdom, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Slovenia.

The sixth and last part of the book draws cross-national conclusions related to the aforementioned pillars of populism. The three concluding chapters ("Populist Actors as Communicators or Political Actors as Populist Communicators", "Populism and the Media", and "Citizens and Populist Political Communication") place emphasis on the key national findings, the current state of research, and the new directions of investigation that open up. Similarities and differences between countries and geographical regions are discussed.

In what populist actors are concerned, it is concluded that a wide variety of populist actors and political parties are entering the mainstream, in some occasions even becoming part of the government coalition. The facilitating factors include: real world events (such as immigration or the economic crisis), particular national circumstances, and the populist parties' ability to exploit people's fears, antagonisms between the in-group and the out-groups, and anti-establishment feelings.

Chapter 28 focuses on three perspectives on media populism that result from the literature: populism by the media, populism through the media and populist citizen journalism. Additionally, five factors that favor the media dissemination of populist messages are deducted from the national chapters: media logic, politically motivated media ownership, commercially motivated media ownership, party issue ownership, and event environment and national issue culture.

Findings related to the relationship between citizens and populist communication are systematized in the last chapter. Its authors emphasize that more is known about the characteristics of populist party voters than about communication effects. The scarcest information on voters can be found in some eastern and southern states, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina,

Croatia, Czech Republic, Portugal and Slovenia. In order to clarify the areas that are less investigated, an individual-level model of uses and effects of populist political communication is proposed (p. 386). Some points in need of thorough investigation are identified: the role of certain predispositions, the effects of direct versus mediated populist communication, the effects of media coverage of populism versus coverage-fostering populism, the part played by different message elements, the role of factors moderating message reception, and contextual factors. Lastly, the authors signal the great need for studies investigating such effects in a comparative manner, possibly through cross-national experimental studies well suited for improving the general picture.

Since this review is to be included in a Romanian journal, we would like to provide additional details regarding the chapter “Romania. Populist Ideology Without Teeth”, authored by Nicoleta Corbu, Delia Balaban-Bălaș, and Elena Negrea-Busuioc. The study begins by outlining the distinct features of post-communist countries, including relative instability, as well as “the radicalization of the left-right divide”, and “the rise of populism [...] at the electoral expense of traditional parties” (p. 326). In what Romania is concerned, research on populism multiplied after 2000, prompted by the populist party’s leader Corneliu Vadim Tudor relative success in the presidential race.

Scholars focusing on the phenomenon position themselves within two main conceptualizations of populism as “a «thin»-centered ideology, or as a communication style” (p.327). The authors of the Romanian chapter identify the key elements of populism in the country, such as people-centrism, anti-elitism, anti-establishment, reactionary attitude, and absence of the classic left-right ideological cleavage. Furthermore, the populist rhetoric in Romania is centered around several myths, such as “the myth of the savior”, “the nation under siege”, or “the country’s modernization” (p. 332).

The authors note a few significant conclusions on the profile of Romanian populism in comparison with other European counterparts. For instance, Romanian populism and Western populism are both people-centric, anti-elite, and anti-establishment. Nevertheless, the former preserves its uniqueness by largely ignoring ideological differences between the right and left extremes of the spectrum, and by refraining from anti-Islamic attitudes and Euroscepticism.

Overall, the volume *Populist Political Communication in Europe* is remarkable in more than one respect. Firstly, it successfully manages to depict the past and current evolutions of the populist movements and parties across Europe, in a condensed and systematic manner appropriate for both experts and novices in the field. Secondly, it provides a broad and comprehensive overview of the state of research on populism and populist communication. The comparative approach provides insights of what is common and what is different for each cluster of states. As the editors conclude, in Northern Europe, the focus has been on typical right-wing, neo-populist parties, whereas the southern part of Europe has a strong focus on left-wing populism and prominent leaders. Western Europe is characterized by a strong influence of populist parties on the mainstream ones. In eastern and central Europe, populism is less focused on immigration and more on ethnic and religious minorities. Thirdly, the cross-national structure of the book allows the identification of research gaps that are relevant for both individual countries and regions, and the European continent as a whole. Such research gaps include, but are not limited to: the investigation of populist actors as communicators and on political actors as populist communicators, the existence of systematic empirical research, the existence of comparative studies in which various actors are compared (not only the ones openly deemed as populist), the multiplication of theory-driven studies with the aim of identifying

the strategies, tactics, styles and rhetoric of populist political communication. Lastly, the volume expands theoretical knowledge in the field by: providing useful conceptual clarifications on populism as a form of political communication, proposing a heuristic model for the analysis of populist political communication and an individual-level model of the uses and effects of populist communication, by discussing the three pillars (political actors, the media and the citizens), by identifying factors favoring the symbiosis between populist discourse and the media, and many more.

To conclude, we welcome this in-depth incursion into what can be considered a difficult topic, through consistent and rigorous national analyses. We expect the volume *Populist Political Communication in Europe* to inspire and urge scholars in the field to fill in the gaps in knowledge the contributors successfully identified in the pages of this book.