



## Populist Political Communication in Europe

# COST Action IS1308



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# Newsletter

No. 2, July 2016

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## Second year achievements

By the second year of COST Action IS1308, we have achieved a lot. In fact, in the progress review conducted by the Action Rapporteur it was concluded that: "This Cost Action has done everything it promised, and is even a bit ahead of schedule". In other words, we are making sufficient progress on the MoU objectives and deliverables.

The key objective of our action is to *produce up-to-date knowledge on mediated political populism via a coordinated, comparative and comprehensive scientific effort*. This objective is already partially achieved, by the establishment of this action and our strategic and proven recruitment of dedicated scholars into our network. Among the first outputs which help achieve this objective is the review of existing relevant material and literature, which in year two has resulted in our first action book. In this book, based on the effort of 60 dedicated academics, we offer reviews of current research and discussion of populist political communication in 24 countries. The three working groups have also provided a concluding chapter each, which provide an overview of the current state of affairs related to the processes of populist political communication including political actors, media and citizens. We have started to prepare meetings with stakeholders to disseminate the insight the book has provided.

In year two of the action we have also come a long way in defining an agenda and direction for future research. At the two main events of year two, first in Odense in August of 2015, then in Cracow in April of 2016, we have worked on research designs and methods to study the shortcomings identified in the literature. Based on this work, we have prepared templates for research which will be carried out in year three. We have however, already made a good start with integrating new research findings to produce coherent

knowledge and to revitalize research. In this regard, the input provided by the early stage researcher think tank, in continuing the work towards a special issue and proposing a pre-conference at the 2016 ICA meeting <http://www.icahdq.org/conf/2016/PopulismCFP.asp>, has been very valuable. New and interesting research findings were also presented and discussed at the Action Workshop in Cracow.

Due to organizational changes in COST, year two was reduced by two months. This had some implications for the amount of Short Term Scientific Missions which was completed in our second year, but we are confident that most of these missions will be carried out in year three instead.

## Overall report from the Cracow meeting

The Cracow event on April 7-9, 2016 attracted more participants than ever. Over three very intense days 60 academics from 27 European countries discussed ongoing and future research on populist political communication at the new campus of the Jagiellonian University. Some of these participants were invited as experts to provide insight into the specific Polish context, and to discuss how the governing Law & Justice Party, identified as a populist party by some Polish scholars, recently had influenced Polish communication and media structure. In addition to the regular MC meeting and WG meetings, we also organized our first Action Workshop. The first part of this workshop was dedicated to the discussion of design and methods, which proved to be very useful and constructive for the later discussions in the working groups. The second half of the day was spent discussing ongoing research. In

this section, a total of 11 papers were presented, many authored by early career investigators. We are very grateful for all the hard work the local organizers Agnieszka Stępińska and Agnieszka Hess had put into preparing and running this event. We all felt extremely welcome.



5th COST meeting at Jagiellonian University in Cracow, April 2016

## News from the Working Groups

### Working Group 1

WG1 on Political Actors as Populist Communicators made excellent progress on the detailed codebook for all countries as well as collecting feedback on the collection of material and the coding instrument. This codebook in large parts adapted from the codebook developed by Sven Engesser, Frank Esser and Sina Blassnig. The general idea is to be able to compare the political actors strategies with their presence in the media, analysed by WG2. The content analysis will include Facebook-posts and Tweets from the official and national party accounts of all parties in the country that have an official Facebook- and Twitter-account and official national press releases from all parties in the country. The Cracow meeting Post-Cracow, the work on coordinating the content analyses and the set up for the coder training will be a top priority and the Prague meeting will be an important meeting to begin the concrete research. Some members of the WG1 aim to conduct a qualitative interview research; meeting actors to better understand their strategies.

### Working Group 2

WG2 on The Media and Populism made excellent progress on the detailed codebook for all countries as well as collecting feedback on the collection of material and the coding instrument. The next step will be a meeting with Jesper about a potential WG1/WG2 cooperation and about potential solutions to the feasibility problems raised. We are confident to work out an arrangement that will make

Prague an even more productive meeting. We will keep you updated!

### Working Group 3

WG3, Citizens and Populism, has spent the second year of the Action preparing a cross-country experiment. Following up on a brainstorm session in Odense, the WG split up into three task forces that designed a survey as well as stimuli, collected a list of country characteristics that could be used as contextual data in the analysis of the experimental data, and contacted survey companies for offers. An additional *task force* looked at the success of populist parties across Europe and linked that to several variables indicating a country's economic situation. In Cracow we had a very productive meeting in which we discussed the input of the task forces, and decided to move on with the data collection. Moreover, many of the countries participating in the COST action have indicated their willingness to take part in the experiment, even those that are not member of WG3. The summer of 2016 will be used to conduct pilot studies in two countries, and translate the survey experiment, after which the experiment will field by the end of the year.



Jörg Matthes illustrates the design of the experiment

## Summary from presentations at the Cracow workshop

### Best practice in comparative research

In this plenary presentation, Frank Esser discussed the opportunities and challenges of comparative communication research. He started off by explicating the foundations and basic logic of comparative research as well as its key scientific goals. With regard to practical research steps, he discussed the relevance of country selection,

both in small and large N studies, and the fundamental choice between most similar and most different systems designs. Another key issue in conducting comparative empirical research is to ensure equivalence, i.e., the ability to validly collect data that are indeed comparable between different contexts and to avoid biases in measurement, instruments and sampling. Frank went on to introduce a typology of different types of research questions that can be addressed with comparative research, as well as the most common statistical techniques associated with those research questions. Finally, he discussed how trends such as globalization alter our understanding and practice of conducting comparative research. The talk concluded with suggestions as to how comparative designs need to expand to account for these trends. The manuscript can be found here: [http://www.nccr.democracy.uzh.ch/publications/workingpaper/pdf/wp\\_86.pdf](http://www.nccr.democracy.uzh.ch/publications/workingpaper/pdf/wp_86.pdf)



*Audience at workshop*

## Comparative survey research

In his plenary lecture, Claes de Vreese gave an overview of developments in public opinion and survey research. He used the example of attitudes of citizens towards the EU to illustrate comparative survey based research. He also provided an overview of key challenges of comparative survey research, across contexts, time, and modes of data collection. He finally addressed the specific challenge for political communication research on tapping exposure to political information in a changing information environment. Two resources are available to students and scholar: the <http://mediaexposuremeasures.org> website is a free and interactive platform to consult existing ways of tapping exposure and a new special issue of Communication Methods and Measures addresses this challenge specifically: <http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/hcms20/current>

## Paper presentations

The afternoon of the workshop was spent discussing ongoing research. In the first round of paper presentations Ioannis Andreadis presented a paper, written together with Yannis Stavrakakis and Giorgos Katsambekis, on how academics may use surveys to measure the populist attitudes of political elites. To illustrate this, the authors included findings from a Greek pilot study. The next two

papers in this session presented to two case studies. Cristina Cremonesi discussed the controversial case of the Five Star Movement, and whether it can be placed to the left, to the right or if it does not have any ideology, while Peter Csígó presented a paper titled “The suicidal populism of Viktor Orbán in 2002”.

The second round of paper presentations started with a presentation by Giuliano Bobba on “Social media populism. The rise of populism in Italy and the role of social media”. Looking at the presence of four pillars – the people, elites, democracy, and others – his study showed that Italy only discerns soft and hard populist parties, no non populist ones, or potential populists. Bente Kalsnes also looked at social media, but focused on use of social media instead of content produced on social media. In her paper, “The power of viral shares: Strategic use of social media in two populist political parties”, she shows that both the Norwegian Progress Party (PP) and the Sweden Democrats (SD) have a realistic social media strategy. However, whereas the PP interact with voters, the SD uses social media to get normalized. Ov Cristian Norocel presented the study he conducted with Gabriella Szabó on “Mapping the populist radical right media in public spheres: the case of Hungary and Romania”. Their study shows that in Hungary the radical right media are peripheral to the mainstream media network, and the debate is polarised along ideological lines. In Romania, however, the radical right media are completely outside of the mainstream media network, and also part of different frame networks. Finally, Michael Hameleers presented the study he conducted with Linda Bos and Claes de Vreese called “On media populism: Exploring the link between media preferences and citizens’ populist attitudes”. In the study they showed that populist attitudes of citizens are in sync with their populist media preferences. Voters with anti-establishment attitudes prefer media content in which the people are central, and there is less attention for elites and experts. Voters with exclusionist attitudes also prefer media content in which the people are central, as well as monocultural media.



*Paper presentation by Bente Kalsnes*

The third round of paper presentations started with a presentation by Nayla Fawzi on “The media lie! Are populist citizens more sceptical towards the media than their fellow citizens ?” Looking at German citizens attitude, her study

confirmed the connection between populist attitudes and negative attitudes toward the media. But this cross-sectional and explorative study is not able to explain the causal direction of the relation, so that more research is needed to understand populist attitudes. Among the same line, Ondřej Cisař and Václav Štětka presented their study on “Dissatisfied citizens? Searching for determinants of electoral support for populist parties in the Czech Republic”. They’ve showed that there are three roads to political populism in the Czech Republic: illegitimacy, political dissatisfaction and alienation from politics. To conclude this panel, Christian Schemer presented his team methodological paper on “validation of a populist attitudes measure for public opinion surveys”, providing evidence of construct and convergent validity of a second-order model of populist attitudes that is made up of three subdimensions: anti-establishment attitudes, demand for unrestricted sovereignty of the people, and the belief in the homogeneity of the people. They also demonstrated that populist attitudes are best conceived as a multi-dimensional construct.

## First Action book: *Populist Political Communication in Europe*



First Action book

**Editors: Toril Aalberg, Frank Esser, Carsten Reinemann, Jesper Strömbäck & Claes de Vreese**

The first book produced by this action will be published in the summer of 2016 as part of the series [Routledge Research in Communication Studies](#). Working with this book has helped us advance conceptual clarity in research on populist communication (our Action's

second objective). Despite a great variety of definitions and definitional criteria in the literature on populism, we conclude that there seem to be a growing consensus that the communicative construction of “the people” should be regarded as the key component of populist messages, with anti-elitism and anti-outgroup stances serving as additional elements. An important contribution is therefore not only that we develop coherent definitions and theoretical conceptualizations of the structures and dynamics of populist political communication in Europe, but also that we have started to provide state of the art knowledge and understanding of the patterns and mechanisms of populist political communication in European societies. There is however, tremendous

variation in the type and nature of populist actors, as well as the role of the media. The preliminary evidence does suggest however, that media often are critical towards populist actors out of concern for democracy, but that populist actors per se do not seem to suffer from negative news coverage. One of the important contributions for academics is that the book clearly identifies current gaps in the research literature, perhaps particularly related to the effects of populist messages on citizens' attitudes.

## COST Training School in Bucharest

**“Disentangling populism: Reception and effects of populist communication”**



Credit photo: <https://unknownbucharest.com/the-romanian-athenaeum/>

On May 8-12, 2017, the Training School on “Disentangling populism: Reception and effects of populist communication” will be organized in Bucharest (Romania) by the National University of Political and Administrative Studies. As a part of the COST Action IS1308 *Populist Political Communication in Europe*, this Training School seeks to further advance theoretical and methodological knowledge in the field of populism research, particularly with respect to reception and effects of populism communication.

The Training School comprises 5-day long lectures and a workshop combined, which will give the participants the opportunity to attend talks on different topics relevant to populism research and to take part in an intensive workshop. Renowned scholars will deliver lectures on topics related to *the conceptualization of populist communication, populism and the media, effects of populist communication*.

The School targets mainly young researchers across Europe (PhD students, post-docs, Early Stage Researchers), interested in intensive training in populist-related topics and research methodologies.

The Call for papers containing more information will soon be made available on the website of the COST Action.  
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## A short report from an STSM visit

Nicoleta Corbu benefited last year from a Short Time Scientific Mission at Ludwig-Maximilian Universität in Munich. During her 3-week stay, she had several discussions with the colleagues from LMU, Carsten Reinemann, Magdalena Obermaier and Benjamin Krämer. Several ideas of future research emerged during these meetings, such as a joint research related to media populism, building scales for measuring issue specific populist frames in media messages, new ways of measuring effects of media populism. At the same time, Nicoleta learnt how to use an online platform called Sosci Survey tool, developed by a researcher at LMU, which helps conducting online experiments. Other plans for the future concerned the need to identify funding sources for research in various countries, particularly in Romania and Germany. The STSM was a great opportunity to develop the network of dedicated scholars studying populist political communication in Europe, by means of working and exchanging ideas with the colleagues from Ludwig-Maximilian Universität.

## The Odense meeting, August 2015

The day ahead of the 2015 Political Communication conference organized by the ECREA Political Communication Section in Odense, Denmark, we had our 4th Joint MC Meeting and Working Group Meetings of our COST Action IS1308, also in Odense, Denmark.

Forty-five participants had signed up for the meetings that took place at the Centre for Journalism at the University of Southern Denmark in Odense. After the MC Meeting in the morning, we had both joint and separate working group meetings throughout the day. A very productive day ended in the afternoon at 1700. Later in the evening, those participants who had signed up for it had a joint dinner at a restaurant in downtown Odense. All in all the meetings in Odense were a great success for all participants.

We are grateful for the financial and administrative support by the hosting institution, the Centre for Journalism at the Dept. of Political Science, University of Southern Denmark. Without this support we could not have held the meetings in Denmark.



4th COST meeting at The University of Southern Denmark, August 2015

## ICA-preconference “Populism in, by, and against the media”

Three members of our Early Stage Researcher Think Tank Benjamin Krämer, Nayla Fawzi and Sven Engesser, organized a preconference at this year's ICA Annual Conference in Fukuoka. 25 scholars from around the world attended the one-day conference which included 14 presentations. In the first panel, participants of the COST-Action presented the results of a literature review on populist communication in 24 European countries. The second panel dealt with populism in the media. In the third panel, studies focused on populism by the media and political actors. And the presentations in the fourth panel showed how populist actors use social media, for instance to criticize the mainstream media. The conference ended with a very fruitful discussion on the future of research on populist communication. We want to thank the University of Zurich which sponsored the conference.



ICA-preconference in Japan. From left: Carsten Reinemann, Frank Esser and Benjamin Krämer

## Panel on populism at the 2016 ECPR Conference in Prague

Nicoleta Corbu and Agnieszka Hess, representing Romania and Poland in the COST Action, will co-chair a panel on "Populism and the Europeanization of Political Competition" at this year's ECPR Conference in Prague, as part of a Section called "What Europe? Researching Consequences of a Diverse Europeanization of National Public Spheres". The panel aims at answering challenging questions related to the topic of populist communication, such as: What makes populism appealing to Europeans and why? How are populist themes covered by the media? Do media support or hinder populism? Why have some of Europe's most renowned populist parties been more successful than others? The authors who will present papers come from Romania, Poland, Italy, Germany and Austria. Cristina Cremonesi, who has recently joined the COST Action and Elena Negrea-Busuioc, also a member of the COST team, will contribute papers to the panel.

## Future meetings – date and place

### Third year

WG meetings, Prague, 8-9 November 2016  
MC and WG meetings/Action workshop, Paris, 23-25 March 2017

### Fourth year

Training School, Bucharest, 8-12 May 2017  
WG meetings, Sarajevo, Bosnia Herzegovina, Autumn 2017  
MC and WG meetings/Action conference, Madrid, Spring 2018

## Social media/contact

<https://twitter.com/populistcomm>  
<https://www.facebook.com/populistcommunication>  
<http://www.ntnu.edu/web/populistcommunication/contact>

### Action Communication Group

Jane Suiter (Chair)  
Nicolas Hubé (Vice-Chair)  
Linda Bos  
Nayla Fawzi

### Action Core Group

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Jesper Strömbäck (WG1 Chair)  
Frank Esser (WG2 Chair)  
Carsten Reinemann (WG3 Chair)

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