

Name of the student:	Bianca Mihailov
Title of the thesis:	The Polarizing Effect of Russian Disinformation in the European Parliament
Reviewer:	Dr hab. Magdalena Góra, prof. UJ

1. KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTION TO THE FIELD

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

The topic of the thesis is relevant and tackles the growing polarisation in Europe and its impact on functioning of European institutions namely the European Parliament. Bianca presented a very limited and shallow literature overview. The literature review does not cover key aspects such as polarisation. Some of the aspects such as illiberal tendencies were not logically linked to the polarisation, party dynamics in the EP. As regards the MEPs the literature review only covers very few works on voting behaviours. There is no literature discussed concerning such important issues in the context as voting patterns on for instance issues related to Russia. There is no literature reviewed concerning MEPs discourse as well as the thesis lacks reflection on how the EP works and how this has an impact on measuring polarisation.

The hypotheses are not correctly formulated and are not derived from the literature review. Furthermore, the analysis presented is not designed to answer such hypothesis. It seems as the analysis focuses on a very simple and descriptive research question pointing to how the left-right divide determines the position of MEPs on specific issue of disinformation. The author does not really differentiate between left and right (using CHES, ParlGov or any other available measurement of the position of the L-R scale) in any other way than belonging to EPG (this is the only variable selected in this thesis!). But then how is EPP located on such scale? Is it right or left? In conclusions author states that in H1 she counted only members of ECR and ID. This is all very questionable and certainly oversimplified.

There is not a theoretical frame detected in the thesis. The title and abstract suggest that the key perspective will focus on polarisation but the vast literature on this topic is not really presented. Even if this is only on L-R divide – she does not bring relevant literature on such divide (as seen at how the hypotheses were drafted). There is no conceptualisation present in the thesis. There is no operationalisation for analysis of the empirical data – voting and statements. Therefore, the research questions and analysis are very descriptive and unoriginal.

2. ANALYSIS

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

The student also used very limited means to answer her hypotheses – providing descriptive analysis of selected debates as well as some (without any justification on the selection) voting in the EP.

It seems based on what is presented in the analysis section that two votings were presented. In the first case the author did some (questionable: see below) analysis. The second voting is just presented – no analysis.

The thesis is based on a limited empirical basis. The author does not really provide a crucial information on the basic characteristic of the empirical material. There is no information how many debates were selected in the chapter “Research Design”. There is no information on how many statements were analysed and how and what variables were attached. The Annex provides the transcripts of the selected speeches and only there one finds an information on what debates were

analysed. It seems it is five debates, but no details are provided by the author. On critical discourse analysis – since there was no operationalisation offered, the analysis became just reporting of what is in the debates.

The figure no 2 presented in analysis section is improperly described. There is no information on what the percentage is referring to (% of all group members OR those voting??). Author refers to ideological coherence in the paragraph following the charts (no page numbers so hard to indicate where that is) but she does not provide the reference to or information on how this is understood. It is important to state that it is not discussed in the theoretical part. It seems that author understands the ideological coherence simply by calculating the % of votes within EPG in a given vote. That is very simplistic and does not really reflect the state of the art (see Crum 2020).

The following part of analysis is basically describing what was said in the debates by the speakers. There is no analytical value to this since there is no operationalisation of the research as stated above. There are also statements in the thesis that are unclear. The thesis hypotheses are about the MEPs and the author states that the speech by T. Breton – the commissioner of trade is “particularly relevant to analyse” (no page number). It may be as well that the statements by the speakers of the EC are relevant but maybe it shall be indicated in the analysis that these are different actors as per author’s own research design.

The analysis of the MEPs statements is also very descriptive and essentially reports what is in debates. There are some random numbers of words provided such as “To promote the DSA in the European Parliament, the theme of “responsibility” is found to be recurrent in MEPs’ discourses. In the debate of the 19th of January 2022, the word “responsibility” was used twelve times in the speeches of MEPs from supportive EPGs, and its adjective, “responsible”, was used four times” (no page number). There is no nuanced analysis of statements and contextualisation of the analysis, it seems difficult to understand what part of this analysis is in line with CDA.

The analysis of further debates such as “Kalniete Report” and electoral interference are similarly shallow and descriptive.

3. CONCLUSIONS

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

The conclusions are combined with the discussion of the results. They are repetitive and does not engage in any meaningful way with the hypotheses stated in the research design part of the thesis. The author stated in conclusions: “A major finding of this research directly refers to the formation of coalitions on the topic of Russian disinformation within the European Parliament”. It seems to me that this thesis do not engage with coalitions in the EP.

Despite the strong statements on support of hypotheses I do not see much of such support in presented analysis, specifically on the left-right divide.

4. FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE

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

The language of the thesis is correct and at the proper register. The layout of the thesis is proper and clear. There are no page numbers inserted. Citations, use of sources and bibliography is correctly applied.

5. SUMMARY ASSESSMENT

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

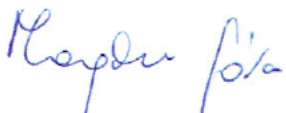
This thesis is not properly researched, developed and empirically substantiated. The literature review is very limited, the author is using concepts such as polarisation that are not properly researched. The understanding of the EP and its modes of operation seems to be very limited.

The research design and presentation of empirical material is problematic. It is not anchored in sufficient theoretical reflection. There is no conceptualisation offered and no operationalisation.

There is lack of description of the empirical material.

The analysis is superficial and very descriptive. The conclusions are not really anchored in analysis.

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Grade:	5 in scale 1-10 (3 (dostateczny) in Polish system)
Date:	
	Signature:
01/07/2024	Magdalena Góra

classification scheme

Percentile	Prague		Krakow		Leiden		Barcelona	
	Range	%	Grade	%	Range	%	Grade	%
A (91-100)	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'.