Eibl, O. – Gregor, M. (eds.): **Thirty Years of Political Campaigning in Central Eastern Europe**, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, 426p., ISBN 978-3-030-27693-5

Populists and social media are the culmination of the most recent trends in studies of political communication. Some argue that there would not be some populists without social media – or at least not that successful. Moreover, some sociological and political science theories see populism primarily as a communicative style. Therefore, it makes sense to review a book that presents the recent history of political communication in part of Europe. Not coincidentally, many chapters end with a few critical remarks on social media roles in political marketing and related foreign interferences.

This useful and large (over 420 pages) edited volume offers, in a nutshell, a historical overview of national electoral campaigning in 18 countries of Central and Eastern Europe. It is divided into broader geographical historical regions such as Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), Central Europe (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia), the Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, North Macedonia (currently this is actually the official name, just a few years ago it was Macedonia or, internationally, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), Romania, Slovenia and Serbia (Montenegro is missing), Eastern Europe (Moldova, Ukraine, Russia (a tiny Pridnestrovian Moldovan Republic is missing, as well as perhaps more important and more interesting case of Belarus). There are some other countries that could claim to belong to Eastern Europe, such as Armenia or Georgia. However, it is clear that 18 political entities is quite sufficient to cover in a single volume.

Yet it is arguable whether a short introductory (and summarising) chapters that familiarize the reader with these (a bit artificially drawn) regions were really necessary. At the end, there are apparently no visible „regional" specifics regarding political marketing in these groups of countries. Therefore, I further prefer to focus my attention here to the country case studies rather than to „regional" overviews. Furthermore, a short overview of the legal framework for campaigns is certainly useful, and unfortunately not so often present in publications of this type.

A Proper Definition is Key

An introductory chapter „A Brief Historical Overview of Political Campaigning: Theories, Concepts, and Approaches" written by the editors is both a useful and necessary introductory note. However, it is questionable how editors applied the definition of political marketing: „*Generally, it can be understood in two ways. First, it is a philosophy, an attitude, and a perspective. Second, it is a set of activities used to implement that philosophy (Crompton and Lamb 1986).*" (p.1).

This definition is further a bit updated, referring to 1996 source, but I still think that there are newer, better, more specific and simpler definitions, for example one cited in Menon (2009, p.3) „*According to Harrop political marketing is not just about political advertising, party political broadcasts and electoral speeches but it covers the whole area of party positioning in the electoral market. In the words of Kavanagh, political marketing is a set of strategies and tools to*

trace and study public opinion before and during an election campaign, to develop campaign communications and to assess their impact." or, according to Bigi (2016, p.21, 23-24): *"....a set of activities, processes, or political institutions used by political organizations, candidates, and individuals to create, communicate, deliver, and exchange promises of value with voter-consumers, political party stakeholders, and society at large‖(Hughes & Dann, 2009, p. 359)…"…..the process of applying tools developed for the commercial marketplace into the political field…"* In the next sub-chapter (Campaigning Throughout the Twentieth Century: a Historical Overview) of the first chapter, the editors wrote: "*Until the mid-twentieth century, the party systems in Western countries were stable,...*". It is not clear to me why they did not review the party system in the regions they focused at. Of course, an argument can be made that political marketing, or, in general, political campaign strategies have (more) developed in the other part of Europe, but this should be clearly stated. In any case, a reader would be more interested in the party system in Central and Eastern Europe (at least during the interwar period, and then again after the Cold War). It can also be said that at least much of what the editors cite or review about interwar political campaigning in Western Europe can be applied to Central and Eastern Europe, perhaps with more nuances such as, arguably, the higher level of electoral corruption present in Central and Eastern Europe then and, in some cases, possibly still today.

Comments on Selected Country Case Studies

It is impossible to review all the case studies. Therefore, with the aim to highlight the most interesting text, as well as to suggest possible ways of improvement for the next edition, I selected rather randomly some countries for a more in-depth analysis from different perspectives.

It should be mentioned that each country case study has multiple tables that mark stages of political campaigning in each country. This is an excellent idea. These tables include year(s) of elections, (basic) electoral system characteristics, basic campaign characteristics, campaign focus (either issues or candidates), main campaign topics, presence of external (either international or domestic) advisors (spin doctors) and type of communication (ads and media). Maybe also the overall structure of individual chapters could follow this outline.

Yet it is questionable that one can collect all such details back to the past, and with sufficient reliability. Indeed, in some tables one can find „N/A" notes. On the positive side, this highlights the importance of such publishing endeavours for keeping the historical record.

A Small Can be Inspirational

Estonia is an example that being small can be an advantage – there is an online voting in national elections possible as of 2005 (with first relevant e-elections held in 2007). In 2019, 43.8 percent of voters used online voting. This factor is one of three „socio-political" characteristics according to authors that may impact campaigns and elections in this country, the two other things being - positively, free press and, negatively, or at least seen as a complication, unresol-

ved ethnic divide from the times of occupation. Referring to free press, it is perhaps strange to find that: „Estonia is ...the only country where free airtime (for ads) in public media is not granted to contestants."(p.84). Yet, as suggested, dual regulation of elections (electoral system rules and of electoral campaigns rules, including party and campaign financing and time allowed for campaigning in legacy media) are also important in each country. Although in some countries these two key factors may undergo only limited changes in thirty years, in other countries both electoral campaign rules and electoral system rules have certainly experienced quite many changes. Thus, next studies may decide whether to consider to include an overview of such changes throughout decades – or just to focus on political marketing as executed by political parties.

If we come back to Estonia, it is noteworthy to mention a strange merger of a very old and a very modern tool: „By the 2019 parliamentary elections, social media had become the main campaign platform for the majority of Estonian political parties. However, door-to-door campaigning also reached new heights (p.34 - interestingly, this „return to basics" has also been noted for the 2016 national elections in Lithuania, p.72, and in the 2017 general elections as face-to-face meetings in Czechia, p.106).

It is also interesting to observe how – especially populist leaders/parties or challengers - find inspiration abroad and in new ways of communicating: "...before the 2019 election, *EKRE* attracted young protest voters on social media with meme campaigns inspired by the visual aesthetic of video games" (p.35). Moreover, it is an important observation that: "...journalists in both traditional and online media in Estonia have stepped up their critical coverage of the campaign." (p.35).

A Concise Style is Usually Better Style

Latvia case study suggests opportunities for editing. For example, there is this a bit of redundant text: *„Latvia is a democratic and parliamentary republic which was established in 1918, occupied by the USSR in 1940, and regained its independence in 1991. According to the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia (Satversme), legislative power belongs to parliament (Saeima), which is the central state authority. The Saeima is 'composed of one hundred representatives of the people' and 'elected in general, equal, and direct elections, and by secret ballot based on proportional representation' (The Constitution of the Republic of Latvia 1922). The Saeima is elected for a period of four years.......A proportional electoral system was used in Latvia before the Soviet occupation and it was restored after the renewal of independence with several amendments, such as a lowered voting age, prohibition against electing persons who have cooperated with the security services of the USSR or were members of the Communist Party after 13 January 1991, a four per cent and later five per cent threshold to reduce the fragmentation of parliament."*

I would suggest re-writing this section as follows: „The Latvian Parliament (Saeima) has 100 MPs who can be elected for four years term in a proportional electoral system based on five regions with a five percent threshold for a party." Isn't it sufficiently crystal-clear for an international reader? Similarly, also the following text (p.52) is perhaps too detailed: *„The Law on*

Financing of Political Organizations (Parties) sets restrictions on the amount of election expenses. They are calculated from the monthly average gross work remuneration for the year before last published by the Central Statistical Bureau which is approximated in euros; a coefficient of 0.0004 for the Saeima (in case of dismissal, the coefficient is 0.0003) and local government council elections, and a coefficient of 0.0003 for European Parliament elections; and the number of voters in the previous Saeima elections, electoral district, or local government council (The Law on Financing of Political Organizations (Parties)1995). For example, the expenses of parties and party unions should not have exceeded EUR 533,347.95 for the campaign across Latvia during the 2018 Saeima elections (The Corruption Prevention and Combating Bureau 2017). " Perhaps, it would be enough to state that: „The law sets restrictions on the costs of election campaigning. For the 2018 national elections, the allowed amount was about a half million EUR per party.“

Similarly, terminology or language style could be unified, such in case of *„Voters.....have the opportunity to express their attitude toward individual candidates by using plus and minus signs."* (p.51). Wouldn't it be perhaps better to write that: „There is a preferential voting for up to X candidates..“ And so on....For example, consider this sentence (p.54): *"Nevertheless, the use of foreign political campaigning approaches in Latvia is limited due to the specific features of Latvia's political campaiging environment which is characterised by weak political parties, limited understanding of political processes in society in general, and the low quality of political journalism* (Bērziņa 2016)."

I would argue that this claim could be made quite universally across the region and perhaps throughout the world. Anyway, such a claim may not be seen as a limitation for using political marketing - on the contrary, as the author actually mentions right in the following sentence.

Such examples when some additional editing would be beneficial can be found in other parts. For example, (p.105):"*Early elections in 2013 were called because of a political crisis caused by police intervention at the Office of the Government due to suspicion the head of this office and Prime Minister Nečas' future-wife, Jana Nagyová, had influenced the intelligence service."* This sentence could be shortened radically, stating only: "There were early elections in 2013.“ All details of crisis are irrelevant within political marketing context in general, and for foreign audiences in particular.

Controversial Generalisations

I compiled some claims that seem to me to be too general, thus, probably too imprecise – and possibly incorrect.

For example (p.55): „*One of the differences between campaigning in Latvia and the West is that political parties tend to lose their connection with voters right after the elections, whereas in the West, parties tend to use the principle of permanent campaigning*.“ Is this really true?

Another example (p.55*): "However, in terms of customer relationship management, which is common sense in European political parties, Latvia's political parties are still far behind other European countries'" (Dmitričenko 2011, 145).*" One can wonder – how relevant is this obser-

vation for Latvia almost ten year later? And is there really „customer relationship management... among European political parties"? Finally, how is this concept or method different from „keeping connections with voters"?

To write that some subject: „*...was not terribly active...*" (p.74) may be difficult to imagine empirically, and certainly is subject to different interpretations.

The following claim is almost certainly correct: „*After the 2018 election campaign, it was claimed that public media had by and large met the requirements to cover all candidates in the special campaign bloc, but the overall news programmes were clearly biased towards governmental forces.*" (p.117). However, there are missing any sources for either positions (who claimed bias and who claimed that everything was just fine).

Never Heard / Read Before

There is information that probably most experts never read or heard before. I have selected some of the most interesting examples:

Diaspora´s impact on national elections - Latvia (pp.56-67): „*During the 2018 parliamentary elections, the representatives of twelve Latvian political parties went to Leicester, United Kingdom for election debates. For the first time in history, Latvian Television provided live media broadcasts of election debates in the United Kingdom.*"

This is a rarely explored aspect of diaspora impact on national elections.

State co-sponsored party propaganda - Lithuania (p.69): „*The CEC was obliged to print the election manifestos of parties free of charge*" as well as, perhaps contrary to the previous approach: „*...advertisements shorter than thirty seconds cannot be used to present political programmes and speak about actual public issues...*"

This suggests a high value placed by Lithuanian authorities on educating voters.

An early (2010) special negative online trolling in Czechia: „*Both parties attacked each other through specialised micro-webpages: 'Blue Disease' attacking ODS, and 'Paroubek Against You' attacking ČSSD.*" (p.104).

This highlights often ignored negative campaigning, often executed through third-party actors.

Ethnically-based party funding that does not help in transparency in Hungary: „*...only natural persons with Hungarian nationality are allowed to donate*",...while at the same „*Experts say that the lack of transparency in campaign finances jeopardises the public audit safety process*" (p.117).

This suggests both importance and specifics of campaign regulations.

Being the first in innovation locally: „*Ferenc Gyurcsány has been the first to try new ways: In 2005, he launched an online political game for young people; in 2014, one could communicate with him via a mobile application*" (p.122).

Social media, Internet and Campaigns – Lesson Learned

Lithuanian chapter nicely summarises the importance of online communication (called, perhaps in an old-fashioned way, „the Internet") not only for Lithuania. Be that called either way, online communication and social media in particular, are seen as: „*important in shaping public discourse, agenda setting, and maintaining a politician's image. ...it also compliments other means of communication but it is not of great importance,.... Political parties were using Facebook only to provide the information from their websites and to spread this information (a complimentary function of social media); politicians were using Facebook more interactively and were likely to post their messages and opinions and attempt to reply to the comments of followers and keep relationships with citizens* " (p.73). Furthermore, „*The ...three central motives for using social media....: The first is marketing, meaning that the candidates used it to increase the visibility of their candidacies and parties in the public sphere. Social media was yet another place to promote their politics and one in which they could reach voter groups outside traditional media—young people, for example. Moreover, marketing in social media is more personal than in mainstream media. Second, mobilisation was a key motive for being present on Facebook, from inviting people to meetings with politicians to getting out the vote. Third, social media represented new opportunities to connect with voters, get feedback on political issues, discuss politics more continuously, and engage more voters than through older media*" (pp.74-75).

Conclusion

Overall, in spite of all criticism, this is a great book. There is always a trade-off – either one goes into depth, or in extensive coverage. I would have difficulty writing such a chapter within an allocated slot. This book, by necessity of its extensive comparative approach, offers an interesting, but rather general overview of campaigning in selected countries. In that sense, its expected readership are more likely students of political marketing, and, first, political sciences, rather than experts in political marketing. In any case, perhaps it would be wise to think about the next volume that could define a clear and in-depth structure that would be followed for each country study. A good example can be found in the book in the chapter on Hungary. The authors suggested the following parameters: *"market segmentation, positioning, strategy, messages, candidates, campaign staff and organisation, the use of media, and other means"* (p.117). Maybe this is what was originally suggested by the editors, but it was more or less produced by other contributors only in a table format. Ideally, an alternative approach would also mean to cover just a single election – be that elections to the European Parliament, or national elections. I fully understand that this is a challenge, but at the same time, there are already quite many individual or comparative studies that cover campaigns to the European Parliament (see Boicu, Branea, Stefanel 2017). Moreover, scientists and activists in virtually every EU country produce studies or books that cover national elections.

Finally, there is a message that is highly relevant for this special issue: „*How to cultivate and sustain respectful and reasonable political debates in the face of widespread emotional 'trolling'*

and dishonest algorithmic manipulation for electoral gain on the Internet remains one of the biggest challenges for political communication in Estonian as well as in other modern democracies." (p.36).

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