Lilleker, D., Coman, I. A., Gregor, M. and Novelli, E. eds. (2021). *Political Communication and Covid-19. Governance and Rhetoric in Times of Crisis***. London: Routledge. 372 pp. ISBN 978-0-367-63679-1.**

Following the outbreak of a global pandemic caused by a virus SARS-CoV-2 also known as Covid-19, a great attention has been devoted to academic literature, primarily in the fields of hard sciences such as medicine or biology. Nevertheless, due to a global spread of the virus into everyday life, interfering not only with health issues but also with psychological, emotional and well-being issues, it has also attracted attention of other scientists. On the other hand, the global pandemic caused radical change in governance and challenged democratic values and standards. Governments all over the world adopted measures that restricted the freedom of movement and assembly, and the inevitable state of emergency took place. To put this briefly, we have witnessed multitude of approaches to prevent the spread of virus across the globe during such unprecedented situation.

From a political science point of view, it is essential to provide insights into governance measures, political communication of authorities in managing the state of emergency related to Covid-19 pandemic. This edited book, review of which is offered here, is one of the most robust contributions for the academia as that addresses exactly the issues of political communication, Covid-19, governance, rhetoric and times of crisis, which may also function as not only a title, but also keywords and headlines.

I have inquired and received an inspection copy of this publication based on my personal interest in this title in March 2022. It was precisely due to putting together a rather comprehensive literature review on political communication in times of crisis and hence, an edited volume focusing on this particular issue has emerged.

The book itself has four editors, and forty-four authors have contributed to its contents. The geographical composition of the authors covers almost all continents and is thus a viable option when seeking comprehensive and geographically robust case studies devoted to political communication and Covid-19 pandemic management with governance impacts. As the editors state in their Foreword, the book does not provide information about health issues related to pandemic, but on a contrary, it focuses on communication

of the authorities, media, and public discourse related to Covid-19 measures. While the editors claim that the selection of case studies is imperfect, there are twenty-seven national case studies dominantly from European states, supplemented by chapters devoted to WHO and EU as supra-national actors in pandemic management, communication and governance. Considering the case studies involved it is revealed that the case study of Slovakia stays omitted, however the pandemic caused a failure and dissolution of the Slovak government, as indicated by the title of the book itself: political communication, Covid-19, governance and rhetoric in times of crisis. It would be an ideal comparative case study to the rest of the V4 contributions.

Each chapter is devoted to a rather similar structure; essentially, they provide insights into a general political context followed by the reactions and measures taken to diminish the effects of a pandemic on society relevant to political communication of the leaders. The chapters contain both positive and negative examples of such communication and its impacts. However, the content only reflects the first wave of the epidemic after the global outbreak in 2020, and again without mentioning the management and communication of the crisis in Slovakia, which was a positive pioneer in the first wave. It would be an impossible mission to review and compare the contents of all chapters and case studies in this book. Rather than that, I will focus more on particular issues as implied after review. Foremost, the editors provide a rather solid introductory chapter, albeit not exhaustive, related to the scope of the publication. Literature review on crisis communication using the three main concepts of political crisis communication and political psychology needs to be appreciated as well structured. Nevertheless, one essential part should have been elaborated a bit more, specifically the hybrid media information campaigns. Today, it has become more than ever a standard that social networks play a huge role in information spread. It is no wonder that conspiracy theories, hoaxes and disinformation campaigns are well funded and established in the information space. Thus, when discussing the hybrid media and crisis management, a closer look at such aspect appears crucial compared to older, yet relevant communication strategies. On the other hand, in spite of coherence, the particular chapters have detailed some arguments over the role of social media. It is also surprising that authors have not quoted nor used any of Joseph S. Nye´s ideas or arguments in this chapter related to political leadership and crisis communication.

The first chapter captures the position and role of WHO as an international organisation, which practically ought to be a watchdog and overseer of universal healthcare. The authors concluded its inability to set

effective measures and consistency in managing the pandemic, including the fake news and disinformation campaigns that traumatized the societies. In a similar manner, mentioning the other supra-national organization, the EU, author declares its actions as insufficient, incompetent and lacking proper leadership. The subtitle of the chapter (The story of a tragic hero and the 27 dwarfs) suggests that the EU failed miserably in the management of the pandemic and crisis communication. Nevertheless, it was not due to EU leadership but mostly because of the inability of a collective action by member states, the media influence, and inconsistency of the EU project across many member states. As the author states: *'The EU, thus, failed to exploit the pandemic to overcome its legitimation crisis'* (p. 85). Therefore, the failing nature of supra-national organization lies in its (dis)ability to provide for unified crisis management.

However, some positive cases have been found in Turkey, partly South Africa and Ghana, Iceland, Nordic countries, Japan when compared to other EU Member States (such as France, Spain, Central European countries such as Hungary, the Czech Republic, Poland, and many other countries) and the United Kingdom (where pandemic communication and management issues were addressed, resulting from inadequate leadership and crisis management plans). To make it clear, the authors did not assess the positive management of the pandemic, such as low mortality rates and economic and social consequences. Quite the opposite, the research topic dealt predominantly how the elites and leadership navigated the nations and societies throughout the unprecedented situation via communication styles, information campaigns, and providing uniform measures that require solid managerial and communicative skills in order to tackle the crisis. The surveys assessing the citizens´ opinions about the crisis management and trust towards the country leadership during pandemic supplement most of the case studies.

Bearing in mind the date of publication (2021) and the data the authors had before publication, this book captures only the first wave of pandemic. Despite that fact, it gives a rather clear picture from twenty-nine case studies about the nature of communication of the leaders, local and national media and the ability of collective action on the international level towards managing the pandemic from a political communication perspective. It would be influential if we could have compared these cases from the first wave until the year 2022 simply because there have been multiple changes in leadership after elections or other challenges that some states faced. Similarly, the second and third waves of the pandemic

brought significantly different measures not only in crisis management, but also in the communication styles of leaders in particular states. Therefore, the results of the research could have been varied on a large scale. I am consistent with one of the main arguments of the publication: *'The first wave of COVID-19 was a global test of political leadership and a time when it was crucial for clear, consistent, and empathetic political communication'* (p. 332). Nevertheless, these case studies demonstrate the patterns of successful stories and failed communication narratives, which would have been even more concise if published a year later. As the authors had rather randomly selected case studies might not be concise and truly comparative, therefore applying a set of indicators to coherently map the political communication, measures would be suggested alongside with the tools for crisis management that could have had more scientific nature and statistical datasets for future academic application. Citing the major conclusions leads me to legitimacy issues of state leaders and, more importantly, the international organizations, which should possess even higher degree of trust in case of national or local discrepancies. The authors conclude: *'The major failure the crisis exposes is the absence of global or even regional leadership. The WHO failed to recognise the threat and promote early measures to reduce the spread of the virus. The EU failed to bring member states together and develop a co-ordinated approach. Hence national leaders, some beset by internal instability, were left to manage the crisis as best they could'* (p. 349). Given the results of the second and third wave of epidemics (implied in political communication, media information, and the great influence of social networks), a great space for further research in this very important area has been already opened as it rises a fundamental questions on the legitimacy of international organizations, the need for stability, the fight against conspiracies and the populist era, as we witness in the current global (not exclusively pandemic) crisis.

Based on the robustness of the case studies and the selection of countries, I conclude that I find the publication useful for lecturing in the field of political communication, political leadership and managerial studies despite already mentioned limitations that are more of a natural than intentional reasons.

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