

Defence Record

*under cotutelle agreement between
Faculty of Arts, Charles University and Faculty of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of Leipzig*

Title of the Ph.D. Thesis: Europeanization and the State in Central and Eastern Europe: Political Economy of European Structural Funds

Student: Daniel Šitera, M.A.

Doctoral Program: Political Science (Charles University) and Global Studies (University of Leipzig)

Language of the Ph.D. Thesis: English

Language of the Defence: English

Supervisors: Prof. Dr. Frank Hadler (University of Leipzig) and Prof. Pavel Barša, Ph.D. (Charles University)

Reviewers: Prof. Dr. Dorothee Bohle (European University Institute) and Jan Drahokoupil, Ph.D. (European Trade Union Institute)

Place of Defence: Faculty of Arts, Charles University (digital form of defence in MS Teams)

Date of Defence: 20 April 2021

Head of the Examination Board: Prof. Ondřej Císař, Ph.D. (Charles University)

Examination Board: Prof. Ondřej Císař, Ph.D. (voting member), Prof. Dr. Frank Hadler (voting member), Prof. Pavel Barša, Ph.D. (voting members), Prof. Dr. Dorothee Bohle (non-voting member), Jan Drahokoupil, Ph.D. (non-voting member)

Record preparation: Jan Daniel, Ph.D.

Present during the defence: Ondřej Císař, Frank Hadler, Pavel Barša, Dorothee Bohle, Jan Drahokoupil, Jan Daniel, Daniel Šitera.

14:00-14:05

Ondřej Císař opened the Ph.D. defence procedure (henceforth as defence). He firstly introduced and welcomed the members of the Examination Board. He identified and introduced the student and his Ph.D. Thesis (henceforth as Thesis). The reviews and their proposed grading was outlined by him.

The summary of the reviews stated: On the one side, the reviews agree that the Thesis is an important contribution to the critical political economy scholarship and the still underdeveloped research on the role of Cohesion Policy in Central and Eastern Europe. On the other, the Thesis has several shortcomings. The theoretical framework is overburdened with jargon and the specific contribution to existing literature is not clear. The theory is insufficiently connected to the empirical analysis and the main concepts are not properly operationalized.

Both supervisors and reviewers agree that the Thesis shall be evaluated as "pass" in the Czech evaluation system. In the German system, the two reviewers furthermore propose a grade "rite" and "cum laude". The two supervisors propose a grade "cum laude" and "magna cum laude".

The outline of the session was presented: The presentation by the student was to be followed by the discussion with the Examination board. In the final part, the board was to discuss the final grading in the non-public part of the defence and then share it with the student.

14:05-14:35

Daniel Šitera started his presentation by presented the main contributions of his Thesis and reacted to the critique and feedback in the reviews. He used power point presentation as well.

He outlined the structure of his Thesis: The first part highlighted the contribution to the field of Critical Political Economy, the added value of concepts such as Development Fix, and of bringing together the two dependencies on FDI and cohesion investment. The second part was concerned with the methodological operationalization, the empirical substantiation of the main arguments, and some normative and concluding concerns.

The contribution to the field of Critical Political Economy of European integration and East-Central Europe was stated. The Cohesion Policy is brought by me to the critical stream as a case study to correct its thesis on the EU as a rather exploitative order. The Thesis departs from the EU studies and political economic institutionalist literatures. It still goes beyond them to deconstruct the official discourse as a developmental ideology and explore the power asymmetries behind its formation and dissemination.

As for the conceptual added value of concepts such as development fix/spatio-temporal fix, the student agreed with the reviewers that the concepts remain inadequately operationalized to link the theory and empirical parts. According to him, they still have an added value as demonstrated by the development fix. It can explore the Cohesion Policy to make sense of the crisis-prone tendency when discussing the works on heterogeneity of Europe's capitalist diversity, theorize it as a Marshall-plan-type arrangement in the EU core-peripheral relations, and understand the complementarity between foreign direct investment (FDI) as mobile capital and cohesion policy as fixed capital.

The student then presented the last contribution on the complementarity of FDI and Cohesion Policy in East Central Europe. This can be traced by exploring the developmental ideology. In reaction to the reviews, he then presented the meaning of this ideology: neoliberal developmentalism. Then he explained how such an ideology can be regularized and how this regularization can be studied. Last, he explained how we can study hegemonic projects and strategies and claim that these strategies are hegemonic. This he did on the comparison of Czechia and Hungary before and after the global economic crisis.

He then proceeded to the second part. The methodology and operationalization were the first point. Daniel Šitera agreed with the reviewers' critique on inadequate operationalization but nevertheless tried to show the implicit methodological operationalization in the Thesis. It has a structured system of chapters and subchapters which are matched with the individual concepts. The student then showed how he methodologically proceeded when analyzing the policy reports. He identified his method as an inter-textual discourse analysis and as critical discourse and interpretative analysis.

Commenting on the empirical substation of his arguments, he claimed that his analysis went beyond the discourse analysis as he gathered extensive policy and economic data to support it which were turned into various tables and graphs and referenced to support the individual arguments such as those on polarization. He then demonstrated this by showcasing these figures in power point presentation.

In concluding remarks, he touched on the EU cohesion policy and state capture as requested by the reviews. He argued that the state capture and capture of the policy by the oligarchs is not any desirable side-effect but inherent contradiction of its stiff rules which must be identified and properly addressed in the research. He concluded that the thesis is not overly critical of the Cohesion Policy per se but rather the way it has developed.

14:35-15:28

Discussion was started by Dorothee Bohle, who asked about the complementarity between FDI and cohesion policy and for the clarification of the reaction between the two. The student explained that there is complementarity in discourse and that it is manifested in particular developmental strategies and resulting in the institutional and infrastructural development. Jan Drahoukoupil followed up and asked for clarification of how we can connect infrastructure projects with specific ideology, such as neoliberal developmentalism. Daniel Šitera reacted that such projects are based on national strategies that are anchored in certain ideologies and as such, they are embedded in developmentalist neoliberalism, while can trace it on the level of discursive justification. Particular discursive representations can hint on solidarist justifications, but in the end, state neoliberal strategies matter.

The following questions proceeded to probe the main claims of the Thesis as Dorothee Bohle asked where the border of neoliberalism is and how would Daniel Šitera's framework identify an alternative justification, e.g., in the case of the investments in public welfare projects? Daniel Šitera reacted that in that case, the justification of particular project won't be based on competitiveness, however even many public health projects are discursively connected to keeping populations as a healthy and thus productive workforce to improve competitiveness in attracting foreign investors. Jan Drahoukoupil asked about how the student proves this point methodologically and empirically. The student acknowledged that the infrastructure could be of dual use and that the Thesis could be clearer in explaining that he focuses only on representative level of discourse.

The debate then turned to the selection of a particular case when Frank Hadler asked the student to explain what he means by the Visegrád type of Capitalism and how it is a part of global competitive economy. Daniel Šitera explained that he builds on Varieties of Capitalism scholarship and that FDI and cohesion policy strengthened some historical aspects already presented in regional economies and claimed that these are different in East Central Europe than, for instance, in Baltic states. Dorothee Bohle followed up on the discussions and argued that the real comparative case would be southern Europe as there was a cohesion policy before the neoliberal turn. This would, according to her, bring into question also the complementarity of cohesion and FDI-led competitiveness. The student answered by pointing to differences between discursive representation of the South and Ireland, where the latter was promoted as a success. The so-called Irish strategy was then selected by the EU for East Central Europe.

The final part of the public part of the defence moved to specific methodological and empirical issues as Jan Drahoukoupil asked about local usage of cohesion funds. The student clarified that the discourse of competitiveness and need for foreign investments could be seen especially in his case study of South Moravian regional development. Dorothee Bohle, in reaction, inquired where is the discourse specifically located and what is the difference between the language of official documents and more mundane political strategies and practices? This led Ondřej Císař and Jan Drahoukoupil to support Daniel Šitera's focus on discursive justificatory strategies as he did not have access to additional data. Yet, they warned him not to overstate his claims and clarify his methods. Dorothee Bohle then further asked for conceptual distinction between neoliberal developmentalism as opposed to embedded neoliberalism to which the student reacted that such discursive justification and its analysis is something that is missing the present literature. The contribution of the Thesis consists in filling this missing point, according to him.

15:28 - 15:45

Ondřej Císař ended the discussion and started the non-public part of the defence. The Examination Board deliberated and voted on the grades in both Czech and German evaluation systems.

15:45-15:50

The Head presented the result of the deliberation and voting, which is the unanimous "pass" in the Czech evaluation system and grade "cum laude" in the German evaluation system for receiving the dual title of Dr. phil in Global Studies and Ph.D. in Political Science.

Prof. Ondřej Císař, Ph.D.

Head

Prof. Dr. Frank Hadler

Member

Prof. Pavel Barša, Ph.D.

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