

## HABILITATION THESIS REVIEWER'S REPORT

<b>Masaryk University</b>	
<b>Faculty</b>	Faculty of Social Studies
<b>Procedure field</b>	Political Science
<b>Applicant</b>	Mgr. Monika Brusenbauch Meislová, Ph.D.
<b>Applicant's home unit, institution</b>	Faculty of Social Studies MU
<b>Habilitation thesis</b>	Brexit Means Brexit Means What? Discursive Constructions of Brexit in the United Kingdom
<b>Reviewer</b>	Dr Benjamin Farrand, Ph.D. in Law, MSc in Political Research Methods, LL.M in Comparative, European, and International Laws, LL.M in Commercial Law, LL.B in European, International and Comparative Law
<b>Reviewer's home unit, institution</b>	School of Law, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Newcastle University, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne

This is an excellent and enlightening body of work on the topic of the discursive construction of Brexit, and the significant narrative divergences between the UK and EU (and indeed, between 'Remain' and 'Leave' within the UK). It is thoughtful and reflective, with a clear research trajectory and intellectual coherence that is a testament to the initiative and dedication of the candidate to their academic pursuit of this highly emotive subject. The publication of the works composing this thesis in respected journals and publications also speaks to the high quality of the work. The introductory section and conclusion do a very good job of linking thematically the issues tackled in the papers, which while in principle may seem somewhat disconnected from each other in terms of actors focused upon, actually have a clear thread running through them all regarding the narrative constructions taking place before, during and after the Brexit referendum. The work itself is rigorous and the empirical dimension is commendable, with strong theoretical underpinning and signposting that makes the arguments easy to follow for the reader, and convincingly evidenced. Studies II and IV in particular were very interesting to read.

One possible limitation to the work, somewhat explored in the conclusions as areas for potential future work, relate to the pre-referendum context of the UK, as well as the role of the British media. On the first point, it would be very interesting to see how the historical development of narratives regarding the EU, as well as its values and relation to the UK (despite the UK being a member), served to pre-shape the boundaries of the Brexit debate in the referendum – this would help to underscore that the referendum did not happen in a vacuum, and that many of the discursive constructions were taking place long before that referendum took place. This would allow for some further analysis of how the potential successes of the Leave campaign may not have been directly attributable to the strength of populist rhetoric, but were instead due to their embeddedness in the 'national psyche', which the referendum then **reinforced**. In comparison, the technocratic narratives of Remain could be seen as having little discursive history, meaning that there was a much larger battle to win, due to the comparative lack of any traditional framing of the benefits of EU membership. Directly related to this, and more explicitly considered in the conclusion, is the role of the British media. To what extent did the media act as an arbiter of discursive constructions, adding legitimacy to some, and delegitimising others? Can the new media (both newspaper

and broadcast forms) be considered a 'netural' party in Brexit, or did they do just as much to discursively shape narratives concerning Brexit as political actors? This would be very interesting to consider, as would a comparative approach drawing from the desire to conduct 'Brexit from the outside' research, which could be used to consider distinct national media actors in addition to the political ones. It must be stated however that this is by no means a criticism of a work, but a suggestion for how future work could be contextualised in order to reinforce the high quality of the work done thus far.

**Reviewer's questions for the habilitation thesis defence** (number of questions up to the reviewer)

1. The concept of 'self-othering' that develops through the work is very interesting; do you think it is possible to distinguish between 'self-othering' as a strategic positioning by the UK in its negotiations with the EU, and 'self-othering' as an emotive belief on the part of certain actors instrumental in facilitating Brexit?
2. Following on from this question, the corpus of work presented suggests that there is also extensive 'othering' of the EU happening at the same time, with the EU narratively constructed as both oppressor and ineffective, with values different to those of the UK. Could it be that the 'self-othering' identified is a representation of divergent values in which the UK is not 'self-othering', but instead rhetorically setting itself up as distinct from the EU and its values, in order to then reiterate the nature of the EU as an untrustworthy 'other'?
3. In Study II, you discuss the technocratic and populist frames involved in the discursive construction of Brexit during the referendum campaign. Do you think that the failures of the 'technocratic discourse' were in their technocratic nature, and an inability to present a convincing emotional reason to remain, or is there something to suggest that 'negative' campaigning is more successful than 'positive' campaigning, regardless of whether it is technocratic or populist in framing?
4. Based on your conclusions from Study IV, could it be said that one reason that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) struggled to make their voice heard on Brexit was due to the issue of populist v technocratic framings and divergent values? HEIs were very much framed as 'Europhiles' by the media throughout the referendum and immediately after – may this media framing have had an impact?

## Conclusion

The habilitation thesis entitled 'Brexit Means Brexit Means What? Discursive Constructions of Brexit in the United Kingdom' by Monika Brusenbauch Meislová **fulfils** requirements expected of a habilitation thesis in the field of Political Science

Date: 01/12/2021

Signature: