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Author(s) / Autor(i): Patrik Furik – Barbora Linhartová
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INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE: TRUTH vs. POST-TRUTH: „IT IS NOT TRUE, BUT IT COULD BE”

Patrik Furik – Barbora Linhartová*

The COVID- 19 pandemic has brought many changes to the ways scientific conferences are being run. After an exhausting period, the relaxation of the COVID-19 restrictions finally arrives in 2022, and with it also a manoeuvring space for the organizing committees of a conference. It is thanks to the gradual mitigation of the pandemic that the conference in Košice was able to be organised in a physical format after a long hiatus.

In the second half of May 2022, the Department of Political Science of the Faculty of Arts of the Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice, in cooperation with the Res Publica civic association, the Department of Security Studies, the Faculty of Political Science and International Relations of the Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, the Institute of Political Science and Public Administration, Faculty of Political Science and Journalism of Marie Curie-Sklodowska University in Lublin, Institute of Social Studies, Faculty of Regional Development and International Studies, Mendel University in Brno and the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Arts, University of Miskolc held a scientific conference for students and young researchers entitled Truth vs. Post-Truth: "It's not true, but it could be". The event was held under the auspices of the Rector of UPJŠ, **prof. RNDr. Pavol Sovák**, CSc., Dean of the Faculty of Arts of UPJŠ in Košice, **prof. PhDr. Oľga Orosová**, CSc. The conference was prepared as part of the project APVV-20-0334 "It's not true, but it could be": conspiracy theories and hoaxes in the modern development of Slovakia in the European context. Despite the turbulent period associated with the organization of previous conferences in the

* Mgr. Patrik Furik is a PhD Student at the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Arts, Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice, Moyzesova 9, 040 01 Košice, Slovakia, e-mail: patrik.furik@student.upjs.sk.

* Mgr. Barbora Linhartová is a PhD Student at the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Arts, Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice, Moyzesova 9, 040 01 Košice, Slovakia, e-mail: barbora.linhartova1994@gmail.com.

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times of the pandemic, the organizers managed to continue the tradition of scientific conferences held in the framework of the XI. Košice Political Dialogues.

On 20th of May 2022, a conference was opened in the Platón building at the UPJŠ campus with a host being Mgr. **Tomáš Dvorský**, PhD. and the subsequent four panels of the conference were hosted by Mgr. **Dvorský**, PhD., doc. PhDr. **Daniel Dobiáš**, PhD., doc. Mgr. **Gabriel Eštok**, PhD. and PhDr. **Lukáš Jakobovič**, MBA. Due to the presentational format of the conference, the audience could ask questions to the panellists in person or via the Sli.do application. Subsequently, these questions were interpreted to the speakers by the moderators of the individual panels. The international aspect of the conference was also fulfilled thanks to the contributions of the participants from Hungary.

The opening ceremony was held in the presence of prof. PaedDr. **Martin Pekár**, PhD, Vice-Rector for Higher Education, Academic Traditions and Ceremonies of the UPJŠ in Košice, Dean of the Faculty of Arts of the UPJŠ in Košice prof. PhDr. **Olga Orosová**, CSc., Dr.h.c. prof. PhDr. **Marcela Gbúrová**, CSc., guarantor of the Department of Political Science at the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Arts, UPJŠ and the opening panel of four distinguished guests was concluded by the speech of Dr.h.c. prof. Ing. **Pavel Nečas**, PhD., MBA, who took part in the opening ceremony by teleconference. The speeches of all four speakers were extremely thought-provoking, discussing, for example, the threat that disinformation poses to democracy, or discussing disinformation in the context of hybrid warfare in the context of the conflict in Ukraine.

The first panel featured three speakers, students from the Department of Political Science at the UCM University, the first was Bc. **Peter Orosz**, with a presentation entitled *Clickbait- a double-edged weapon in communication*. The presentation dealt with the issue of processing headline news offered by information. Clickbait was presented as the most used and dangerous means of increasing interactions on social networks and affecting the readership of articles in the media. The second speaker was Bc. **Michal Húska** with a presentation entitled *Media Monitoring in Slovakia in the Context of the Portrayal of Minority Groups*. The presentation described, as the title implies, the monitoring of the Slovak information environment in the context of articles on minorities such as the LGBTI community, refugees, religious and national minorities. The author defined the monitoring period from February to November 2021. The trio of presenters was concluded by **Klaudia Libáková** with her presentation entitled

Disinformation in the context of Covid-19. The author analysed disinformation narratives in the context of Covid-19.

The second panel of the conference was composed of internal PhD. students of the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Arts, UPJŠ. In the home environment, the first speaker was Mgr. **Michaela Ružičková** with a presentation entitled *Environment and Climate as an Object of Disinformation*. The presentation focused on the characteristics of current disinformation trends in the context of climate and environment. It worked with the premise that these trends can negatively affect trust in climate science as well as efforts to enact responsible legislation at the political level. Among other things, the paper addressed the phenomena of climate and environmental skepticism, advertising and the impact of greenwashing on climate change awareness. On the topic of the status of *Confucius Institutes in the European space*, Mgr. **Jana Gregová** gave her expert perspective. Apart from the structure and form of functioning of the Confucius Institutes, the talk pointed out the new trends in the direction of the aforementioned institutes, namely towards the highest political circles in the state of their activities. In addition, the economic aspect of the efforts to maintain and further spread this institution in the European area was also highlighted. The trio of speakers was concluded by Mgr. **Peter Dubóczi**, who stirred up the waters of discussion on the topic *Internet - an open road to closure?* The paper dealt with the challenges and threats posed by the Internet as a 21st Century technology in the context of democratic processes. The talk was based on the premise that the free flow of information provided by the Internet can bring many positives, but given the unpreparedness of man and the post-factual nature of the times, it can also lead to the polarisation of society and reduce the effectiveness and attractiveness of democracy.

The third panel featured guests from the partner University of Miskolc. **Gergely Dózsa** was the first to present his presentation. For the purpose of the conference, he presented a paper entitled *The public media's role in the 2010 and 2022 elections*. The author dealt with comparing the changes in the system and the way of using public media. The conclusion of his talk was that over the last 12 years the Hungarian public service media have changed dramatically and are greatly assisting the ruling power. In his speech he demonstrated how different the last elections were before the Fidesz regime. **Daniel Kiss** was the second speaker. His topic was entitled *Between East and West: Hungary's uniqueness on the war in Ukraine and the reasons behind it*. In this speech, he presented the attitude of the Hungarian government and people towards the war in Ukraine and

pointed out the differences from the approach of NATO and the EU. In his contribution, he explored topics such as Hungary's relations with the East, Orbán's illiberal democracy, the power and influence of the media and the impact of disinformation and fear-mongering in Hungary's 2022 parliamentary elections, which resulted in a fourth consecutive constitutional majority for the Fidesz-KDNP coalition. The third topic addressed in the panel was entitled *Presentation of protest actions in Hungarian online newsportals*. The author of the presentation, Ms. **Virag Havasi**, presented the results of her comparison of news about the 2019 and 2020 protests found on three online news portals. She found that protest actions motivated each other, as evidenced by the fact that more strikes were organised this year than ever before. The last speaker on the panel, **Bence Máté Csabai**, highlighted the results of Hungary's 2022 parliamentary elections under the theme *The framework of Hungary's 2022 parliamentary election*. He presented the state Hungary is currently in, as well as the internal and external causes that influenced the elections themselves.

Four speakers of the fourth panel concluded the range of expert contributions in the conference. It consisted of students of different years from the hosting Department of Political Science, Faculty of Arts, Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice. The first speaker was **Martin Šoman**. His paper provided a probing exploration of the influence of ideologies on the emergence and spread of disinformation. Among other things, he discussed historical examples of the influence of ideologies on disinformation. He then moved on to the contemporary context where he analysed concrete examples of ideological disinformation. **Tamara Harčariková** presented a topic titled *Turkish Influence in the Western Balkans*, which highlighted Turkey's current influence in the Western Balkans, its involvement in the territory through various tools to assert its influence and last but not least drawing attention to the narrative of history that still influences the relations of the various Western Balkan states with Turkey. In his presentation, **Stanislav Fedorchuk** analysed the phenomenon of information warfare using the example of Russia's conflict with Ukraine, as well as the threats and methods of conducting an information campaign against the enemy. He characterized the phenomenon of hybrid operations, information warfare and Russian propaganda activities against Ukraine, which, according to the author, have an impact on the perception of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in some states. The last panel, and the whole conference, was concluded by student **Mária Denciová**, who in the last presentation, *The Impact of Disinformation on the 2020 US Presidential Election*, characterized the main disinformation narratives that influenced the

2020 US presidential election. She presented the disinformation associated with the US elections and its direct impact on the course and results of the elections in question.

The international scientific conference of students and young researchers from the series of Košice Political Dialogues has been regularly organized since 2012 by the Department of Political Science of the Faculty of Political Science of the University of UPJŠ in Košice and the Res Publica civic association together with other partner universities. So far, the topics of the conferences have been focused on research on broad social issues such as civil society, domestic and international politics or various challenges and risks of the new millennium in the field of politics. The given themes create room for interdisciplinary overlap with a view to exploring both domestic and international elements. According to the organizers of the event, we are at a moment that calls for a responsible academic approach in offering reflections and possible solutions to resonating or gradually emerging problematic issues. In this respect, the conference reflects the growing topicality of the issues at stake, which is underlined by the need for intensive debate.