

## Report on the outcomes of a presentation and participation - Inclusiveness Target Countries Conference<sup>1</sup>

Action number: CA21129

Grantee name: Edlira Gugu

### **Conference Details**

Conference title: ECREA **Political Communication Section Interim Conference**

Conference web-page: <https://www.uibk.ac.at/de/congress/ecreapolcomm25/>

Conference venue<sup>2</sup>: University of Innsbruck - [Faculty of Social and Political Sciences](#) | Universitätsstraße 15 | AT-6020 Innsbruck

Conference start and end date: 04 September 2025 - 05 September 2025

### **Accepted contribution details**

Title of the presentation: **Cringe as a Political Weapon: Albanian Politician Discourse during Parliamentary Election - Edlira Gugu (University "Aleksandër Xhuvani")**

10.30m – 12.00 pm: Panel I, Session D | Cringe Culture in Politics: Exploring Humour, Vulnerability, and Ridicule in the Digital Age (full panel submission); Seminar Room 5

- **Session Chairs:** Gabriella Szabó (HUN-REN Centre for Social Sciences, Budapest) & Lenka Vochocová (Charles University)
- **Presentation Order:** 5th in the session.
- **Respondents:** Jonáš Syrovátka (Charles University) & Lenka Vochocová (Charles University)

### **Summary of the Research:**

The presentation focuses on a new phenomenon in Albanian politics, "cringe politics," which is the deliberate and strategic use of awkward, embarrassing, and socially uncomfortable content by politicians to gain political power. The study analyzes the 2025 Albanian parliamentary election campaign and finds a strong correlation between a politician's "cringe level" and their electoral success.

### **Key Points from the Research:**

- **Shift in Communication:** The research reveals a significant shift in political discourse from 2021 to 2025. Policy discussion dropped dramatically from 65% to just 11% of content, while "cringe content" exploded from 10% to 73%.

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<sup>1</sup> This report is submitted by the grantee to the Action MC for approval and for claiming payment of the awarded grant. The Grant Awarding Coordinator coordinates the evaluation of this report on behalf of the Action MC and instructs the GH for payment of the Grant.

<sup>2</sup> For an online conference, specify virtual participation; for hybrid conferences, specify whether it is an in-person or virtual participation.

- **Generational Divide:** The study highlights a clear generational split in how this content is received. Young voters (18-30) found the cringe content "entertaining" and reported that it influenced their voting decisions based on "entertainment value," not policy. In contrast, voters over 50 had a much less positive reaction.
- **Methodology:** The research uses a mixed-methods approach, combining computational analysis of social media content (over 3,000 posts and videos) with qualitative discourse analysis.
- **Purpose:** The study argues that this phenomenon represents a fundamental shift in political communication, moving away from traditional norms of projecting competence and dignity. Instead, it deliberately breaks these norms to capture attention and manipulate emotions for political gain.

### **Outcome of the conference participation**

At the recent European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA) interim conference at the University of Innsbruck, I contributed to the panel "*Cringe culture in politics: Exploring Humour, Vulnerability, and Ridicule in the Digital Age*," an interdisciplinary examination of political communication transformations across Central and Eastern Europe.

My presentation, a culmination of months of meticulous data analysis, focused on the phenomenon of "cringe politics" in Albania. I presented a comprehensive analysis of 3,247 social media posts and 1,856 political videos, coupled with a sentiment analysis of 127,000 comments from five social platforms monitored over six months.

The most compelling and startling finding I presented was the perfect correlation ( $r=1.000$ ) between a politician's "cringe factor" and their electoral success. This discovery underscores a fundamental transformation of democratic discourse, where approximately 73% of political content is deliberately designed to provoke discomfort rather than to inform the public. The development of our "Cringe Intensity Index" (CII) not only provided a robust tool for this research but also sparked a critical question among peers: *How is this phenomenon systematically affecting the quality of regional democracy?*

The conference provided an invaluable platform for visibility and the establishment of new contacts. My participation as a presenter and a respondent on a presentation about Serbian authoritarian regimes fostered rich discussions with colleagues from Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Czech Republic, and Hungary. These conversations revealed that the "cringe" phenomenon is manifesting systematically across the region, validating the broader implications of my research beyond the Albanian context. The networking was pivotal for laying the groundwork for future collaborations, particularly in the context of the COST Action "What are Opinions? Integrating Theory and Methods for Automatically Analyzing Opinionated Communication" (OPINION).

This COST Action, designated as CA21129, is highly relevant as it aims to establish the field of textual opinion research and integrate cutting-edge expertise from various disciplines, including communication science, computational linguistics, and IT. The OPINION Action directly addresses challenges that my research encountered: a lack of shared conceptualizations of opinions, limitations in existing computational tools, and the need for gold standards in data management. By bringing together researchers from 30 European countries, it seeks to develop a united conceptual foundation and a multilingual, culturally

sensitive field of computational text analysis. Engaging with this network presents a perfect opportunity for me to contribute to a collaborative effort that aims to provide robust tools for analyzing digital text and inform policymakers about the impact of algorithmic affordances on public deliberation and democracy. The relationships forged at the conference will undoubtedly facilitate my future involvement in this initiative, turning my individual research into a building block for a broader, interconnected European research agenda.

**Acknowledgement of inclusion of necessary supporting documents to claim the grant**

I confirm that the following documents have been uploaded on e-COST as an integral part of this report:

- the certificate of conference attendance.
- the programme of the conference or book of abstracts / proceedings indicating the presentation (oral) of the grantee.
- copy of the given presentation (oral).