

OPPONENT REPORT

Habilitation Thesis

Title: Institutional Regulation of Non-Standard Work: Challenges of Social Protection, Pay Adequacy and Collective Bargaining

Submitted by: Ing. Marta Kahancová, M.A., PhD.

Institution: Comenius University in Bratislava, Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences

Field: Political Sciences

Year: 2026

The undersigned, prof. univ. dr. habil. Popescu Irina Alina, member of the Department of International Business & Economics within the Bucharest University of Economics Romania, appointed Opponent for the analysis and public defence of the thesis "*Institutional Regulation of Non-Standard Work: Challenges of Social Protection, Pay Adequacy and Collective Bargaining*", submitted by Ing. Marta Kahancová, M.A., PhD. in order to obtain the habilitation title in Political Science, I formulate the following assessment:

The habilitation thesis addresses a highly topical and socio-economically relevant issue, namely the institutional regulation of non-standard work, especially digital platform work, temporary agency work and own-account work. The subject is at the heart of European public policy debates, especially in the context of the adoption of the EU Platform Work Directive (2024) and the challenges posed by the digitalization of the labour market. The topicality of the topic is also proven by the thesis' anchoring in active international projects, such as TransEuroWorks (Horizon Europe, 2022–2026).

The conceptual framework of the thesis is solidly constructed. The introductory chapter operates with clear distinctions between non-standard work, precarious work and vulnerability, and coherently integrates complementary theoretical perspectives: Power Resource Theory, Multi-Level Governance and Stakeholder Theory. The multidisciplinary approach, combining industrial relations, labor law, political economy, and sociology of labor- gives the analysis remarkable depth and places the thesis at the intersection of several research traditions, which is a significant merit of the work.

The structure of the thesis is clear and coherent. Each empirical chapter follows its own logic, and Chapter 6 synthesizes the conclusions of all studies and proposes a credible and well-articulated research agenda.

The thesis is solidly anchored in the international specialized literature, with a comprehensive and up-to-date bibliography — including references from 2025–2026 — which demonstrates that the author is carefully following the frontier of knowledge in the field.

The thesis impresses with its methodological diversity: semi-structured qualitative interviews (17 in the study in Chapter 2 and 36 in the study in Chapter 4), cross-national comparative analysis, document coding (33 collective agreements in Chapter 5), and quantitative descriptive modeling (Chapter 3). This combination of methods allows for the examination of non-standard work from multiple angles and at different levels of analysis, demonstrating the author's methodological maturity.

The most original contribution of the thesis, in my opinion, lies in the concept of “Living Tariff” (Chapter 3), proposed as a methodology for calculating an adequate minimum level of

remuneration for self-employed workers. This is a tool absent from the specialized literature so far. Also, Chapter 5 introduces an original typology of the relationship between legislation and collective bargaining (“definitional” effects versus “inspirational” effects), with proven theoretical and practical value.

The geographical and comparative scope of the thesis is extensive and well-selected: Sweden, Denmark, Austria, the United Kingdom, Poland and Slovakia cover contrasting industrial regimes- Nordic corporatist, social partnership, liberal and embedded neoliberal. This diversity allows for nuanced conclusions regarding the role of national institutions in regulating non-standard work.

The author's direct and sustained involvement in large-scale international research projects such as TransEuroWorks (Horizon Europe), the NAWA Poland-funded project, the work within CELSI Bratislava, demonstrates a proven capacity for research leadership and international collaboration.

In the spirit of constructive academic dialogue, the following directions may bring additional value to the presented research and would further enrich the scientific contribution.

I. Systematic statistical data. The high-quality qualitative analysis in the thesis would gain even more argumentative force if it were complemented by systematic quantitative data on the extent of non-standard work in the studied countries. Such a quantitative anchoring would significantly strengthen the comparative conclusions.

II. Transferability of conclusions. The thesis offers valuable contributions based on case studies from Central and Eastern Europe and North-Western Europe. Future works could discuss more explicitly the conditions under which the conclusions can be transferred to other European contexts or to countries outside Europe, thus contributing to a more general theory of the regulation of non-standard work.

III. Public policy implications. Given the obvious practical relevance of the topic, a section dedicated to public policy recommendations addressed to decision-makers, social partners or European institutions would group existing policy recommendations together.

Overall, the habilitation thesis of Dr. Marta Kahancová represents a solid and original scientific contribution to the literature dedicated to the institutional regulation of non-standard work. The author demonstrates analytical capacity, methodological maturity and strategic orientation in research. The recommendations formulated above are offered in a constructive spirit and reflect the author's high scientific potential. The work meets the academic standards specific to the habilitation procedure, and the opponent favourably recommends granting the habilitation title in the field of Political Science.

Opponent

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