

## OPINION

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On the dissertation of **Anita Simeonova Stefanova** entitled “**Mechanisms of Controlled Voting in the Roma Communities in Bulgaria 1991 – 2021**” for the award of the Ph.D. degree – Occupational field: 3.3 Political Science – Comparative Politics

**Introduction.** I have been appointed by Rector’s Order No. RD-38-93/21.02.2023 as a member of the scientific jury for the dissertation defense of Anita Stefanova, a Ph.D. student at the Faculty of Philosophy of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. In this capacity, I submit the following opinion.

**Biography of the Ph.D. student and Ph.D. procedures data.** Anita Simeonova Stefanova graduated with a Bachelor of Political Science in 2016 at the Faculty of Philosophy of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. In 2018, she obtained an MA degree program in Political Consulting at the same university with a thesis entitled “Trends in Controlled Voting in Bulgaria 2014-2017”. From 2019 to 2022, Stefanova was a Ph.D. student at the Department of Political Science. The colleague successfully passed the exams with excellent grades and participated in several scientific conferences. Later their papers had been published in scientific proceedings. Stefanova is a participant in three projects developing problems of the electoral process in Bulgaria. He is a scholarship

holder of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. Since 2014 he has been part of the electoral administration in Bulgaria. Anita Stefanova has shown herself to be a responsible Ph.D. student and a rising scholar with significant potential. Her activities inside and outside Sofia University are evidence of her commitment to the problems of the electoral process in Bulgaria.

**Topicality:** Vote buying has deep roots in Bulgaria. In the last twenty years, this illegal practice, which corrupts the electoral process, has been gaining momentum, especially among socially vulnerable groups. Quite naturally, this problem has also attracted the attention of Bulgarian political scientists.

**Dissertation and abstract data. Publications.** Anita Stefanova's dissertation consists of 246 standard pages and includes an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, and a bibliography. 16 graphs are implemented in the text. In addition, Stefanova has provided three appendices with 10 interviews and 16 tables with selected electoral results (16 pages in total). In the introduction, the colleague defines the aim of the study –as “to examine and conceptualize... the attempts to control the political rights” of Roma in Bulgaria. Roma communities and controlled voting are set out as an object and a subject of the research. Stefanova points out the significance of the problem in Bulgarian society. The methodology of the research and its stages, as well as the structure of the dissertation, are also presented.

The first chapter, entitled “Theoretical framework and basic concepts in the study of controlled and bought voting”, is introductory and consists of three paragraphs. In the beginning, Stefanova presents the evolution of electoral law and electoral systems in the world and in Bulgaria. The author points out the main characteristics of majoritarian, proportional, and mixed systems with their

positive and negative aspects. I fully share her view that there is no perfect electoral system because “it is practically impossible”. I disagree with the claim that single-member districts are the “classic version” of the plurality/majority system (p. 28). The opinion that majoritarian systems lead to a “highly personalized electoral competition” is also controversial. This is not the case in the UK. The single transferable vote system is placed in the group of mixed systems. The second subchapter concerns the electoral process in Bulgaria. The brief historical retrospective makes a good impression on the reviewer. The author focuses here on current electoral regulations. I fully share the conclusion of the student that frequent changes in electoral legislation produce chaos and difficulties for the voters and the administration. I would only add that they also hamper the political scientists in their analyses. The author correctly points out the main characteristics of the modern Bulgarian PR system and its basic elements. The third subchapter defines and theorizes on some basic terms for the study. The student successfully points out the similarities and differences between the bought and controlled vote and describes the main control strategies. Again, the problem is examined in a broader spatiotemporal context. The concepts of “political market”, “party”, “corruption”, “traditional society”, and “clientelism”, etc. are defined. I fully agree with Stefanova's assertion that “In societies sharing other civilizational values, democratic procedures are largely alien, which usually dooms them to certain failure” and that the “culture of corruption” is a characteristic feature of post-communist societies. I would add that it is also traditional in southern Europe in general (Pyrenees, Corsica, southern Italy, Greece).

Chapter Two, entitled “Roma Communities in Bulgaria. Exercising control over the voting of Roma voters”, examines Bulgarian Gypsies. Here, the author emphasizes the problems with Roma self-identification and presents the stereotypes that exist in Bulgarian society regarding the ethnic group. Stefanova

synthesizes the main obstacles to Roma integration during the communist regime and the negative effects of the transition on their social status. A separate subchapter is devoted to the processes of evangelization of Christians and Turkification of Muslims. The main economic strategies of the Roma (gurbet, welfare, usury, begging, theft, etc.) and the markers of leadership in their communities are presented in a very appropriate way. The student accents the mechanisms of controlling the vote. This part of the chapter is the most contributory. Here Stefanova analyses the data obtained from her interviews with Roma representatives (Appendix 1).

The third chapter is entitled “Dynamics of Controlled Voting and Bribed Voting in Bulgaria 2005-2021”. In it, the student summarizes the electoral results in 55 polling stations for parliamentary and local (mayoral) elections (turnout, share of invalid ballots, and votes for the two leading parties). The choice of chronology is well-argued. The same can be said for the selection of locations. The author focuses her narrative on polling stations in ten of the largest gypsy neighborhoods in Bulgaria. Stefanova's conclusions on the trends in the Roma vote are well argued. On the basis of the electoral results, the student successfully differentiates three types of patterns in the electoral behavior of the Gypsies. 1. “Minimally volatile with a single winner”; 2. “Minimally volatile with two winners”; 3. “Maximally volatile with different winners”. The approach is successful. In general, I agree with the proposed classification. Only the inclusion of the electoral behavior of the voters from the “Fakulteta” and “Filipovtsi” neighborhoods in the “Minimally volatile with one winner” model raises questions.

In the end, Stefanova presents the main expert proposals for minimizing controlled voting. The author points out which of them would be problematic. The measures of the caretaker government in 2021 and their consequences are also described.

Stefanova's dissertation is a complete scientific work. The author has used the sources correctly. There are no signs of plagiarism. The citation and layout of the abstract meet academic standards. The text is written in a literate, scientific, yet understandable language, without unnecessary busyness. The reference list in the bibliography is impressive. The student has used a wide range of quantitative and qualitative research methods and demonstrates impartiality and analytical skills. Most conclusions are solidly argued. Most reviewer's remarks are peripheral to the main topic. In case of publication of the dissertation, I will address a few more shortcomings. First of all, structural imperfections are noticeable, most notably the delineation of the subchapters. The narrative concerning expert proposals and government measures at the end would have been better separated into a separate chapter. In many places, the citation does not include the relevant pages. The content of two paragraphs on pp. 61-62 is repeated on pp. 64-65. On p. 35, mutually exclusive statements (on the presence and absence of qualifications) are noted regarding eligibility requirements under the Tarnovo Constitution. In several places, Stefanova uses the term "facade democracy". The author must define the term and justify its use in relation to Bulgarian reality.

Anita Stefanova also presents four published articles. All of them concern the object of research. Their content is implemented in the text of the dissertation.

**Conclusion.** Anita Stefanova meets the minimum national requirements set by the legislation of the Republic of Bulgaria for the successful completion of a Ph.D. procedure. Her dissertation is full-fledged scientific research with a contributory character to the field of political science. I declare that I will vote "Ya" for the award of a Ph.D. degree in favor of Anita Stefanova.

Sofia, May 23<sup>th</sup>, 2023

Assoc. Prof. Svetoslav Zhivkov, Ph.D.