

## **REVIEW**

by Prof. Dr. Margarita Nikolova Karamihova

on the dissertation for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor",

D. thesis developed at Sofia University "St. Philosophical Faculty,

Department of Political Science

### **3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences,**

#### **3.3. Political Science, Political Science (Comparative Bulgarian Politics)**

**Author:** Anita Simeonova Stefanova,

**Topic:** „Mechanisms for controlled voting in the Roma communities in Bulgaria 1991-2021.“

#### **1. Data about the doctoral student**

Anita Simeonova Stefanova graduated with a bachelor's degree in Political Science (2012-2016) at the Faculty of Philosophy of the SU "St. Kliment Ohridski". In 2018, she defended her master's thesis on the topic "Trends in controlled voting in Bulgaria 2014-2017" in the master's program "Political Consulting" of the same faculty.

Already during her bachelor's degree studies, Anita Stefanova became a scholarship holder of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (2015), and in 2017-2018 she was vice-chairman of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation Scholars Club.

#### **2. Procedure data**

Anita Stefanova is enrolled in full-time doctoral studies at the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Philosophy of the University of St. Kliment Ohridski" (order RD-20-202/22.01.2019). She was dismissed with the right of defense by rector's order RD 20-577/7.03.2022, based on the decision of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philosophy from 2022.

The doctoral student passed the exams provided for in the individual study plan with distinction and on time. The dissertation was discussed at an extended meeting of the Department of Political Science at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of St. Kliment Ohridski" on 26.01.2023 (protocol No. 6) and is referred for defense before a specialized scientific jury in the scientific specialty "3.3. Political Sciences, Political Science (Comparative Bulgarian Politics)'. The scientific jury was determined by a decision of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philosophy dated 02/07/2023, protocol N7, Order RD-38-93/21/02/2023.

During the realization of the entire procedure up to the referral of labor for public defence, no violations were committed and all legal requirements were observed. On the basis of the submitted documents, there is every reason to conclude that the procedure for announcing and conducting the competition, as well as the implementation of the individual study plan, were carried out in full compliance with the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its Application, as well as and with the internal Regulations on the terms and conditions for acquiring scientific degrees and occupying academic positions at SU "St. Kliment Ohridski". The given further course of the procedure fully meets the requirements of the specified normative acts.

### **3. Data on the doctorate and the author's abstract**

The dissertation contains 246 pages, including an introduction, three chapters and a conclusion. The cited literature consists of 233 titles in Bulgarian and English. Three appendices are set out in a separate body of the book: I. 10 in-depth interviews conducted in 2021 with vote brokers in the cities of Sofia, Pleven, Burgas, Pazardzhik; II. Tables with results of local elections 2007-2019; III. Tables with results of the parliamentary elections 2005-2021. 16 graphs are included in the text.

Even the choice of the research object makes the topic dissertationable and contributing, fully in the traditions of the school of political science, established at SU "St. Kliment Ohridski". The importance of the topic, especially in recent years, makes it a contribution and valuable to our society. In advance, I will emphasize the need for this work to be published.

The structure of the dissertation is consistent with the set goal and its corresponding tasks. In the Introduction, the goal and tasks for its achievement are clearly defined, a working hypothesis is formulated. A serious place is devoted to a critical presentation of the interdisciplinary research methodology. The contributions and limitations of the study are outlined, which is a good approach showing the maturity of the researcher.

The first chapter is entitled "Theoretical and conceptual framework in the study of the controlled vote and bought vote". The PhD student chose the chronological approach to trace the emergence and dynamics of democratic procedures, democratic elections and electoral systems. It is important to emphasize that all the commented elements of representative democracy are refracted through the prism of the main goal of the Ph thesis.

An important part of the First Chapter is devoted to the regulation of the electoral process in Bulgaria, presented in a historical perspective. The earliest laws are commented as well as the earliest documented practices of controlled and bought vote. Anita Stefanova brings us to modern changes in legislation that create prerequisites for mistakes and violation of laws. The author not only comments on the legislative changes and the resulting potential problems. She cites specific examples from personally collected empirical material to illustrate and confirm her theses (eg preferential voting as a vote control tool).

The doctoral student critically presents the concepts of bought and controlled vote developed by modern political scientists. And in this paragraph she cites concrete empirical material to support her theses. For me, as an ethnologist, it is particularly valuable the presentation of the mechanisms for the implementation of controlled and bought votes - from direct forms to trade in addictions.

With the analysis of the political market, political culture, political parties, corruption and organized crime, clientelism, Anita Stefanova completes the dense picture of the contemporary characteristics of political processes and phenomena that create conditions for controlled and bought votes. In the tendency towards systematization and generalization characteristic of similar work, the doctoral student, following Associate Professor Stoychev, has identified two ethnic and several social groups as the most threatened by controlling or buying votes (p. 103). Academic precision requires emphasizing that only parts of these groups are subject to political trade.

The second chapter is entitled "Roma communities in Bulgaria. Implementation of controlled voting". The author demonstrates a good knowledge of contemporary academic literature that emphasizes the diversity of Roma groups within broader (to some extent – abstract) communities. She presents the social, economic, educational and political situation in a multifaceted manner, maintaining a good academic tone and a clear civic stance. Special attention is paid to the processes of evangelization and Turkification of the Roma after 1989. The author analyzes the two processes of changing religious and/or ethnic identity in the context of the main goal of the Phthesis. A model image of the Roma leaders is presented. The thesis that Roma groups are absolutely controlled by their leaders, which is why they vote homogeneously, is somewhat controversial (p. 141). The following pages refute such categoricalness. Attention is also paid to other vote brokers - grocers, moneylenders - important figures with different influence among different social strata in the Roma communities.

The merit of this chapter is the strict tracking of the dynamics of vote-buying mechanisms among Roma local communities with concrete examples.

The third chapter is entitled "Analysis of the results of the local and parliamentary elections in the period 2005-2021". It analyzes the primary elections in selected sections with a predominant Roma population. The doctoral student presents the methodology for selecting the sections and the subsequent analysis of the available data. She correctly presented the possible risks in the selection of sections with one or another type of electoral behavior. She correctly stated that the purpose of the study "is not national representativeness, but an analysis of existing trends that have varied over the years due to various factors" (p. 166).

By presenting the statistical data from consecutively tracked election results, Anita Stefanova identifies the specific patterns for each location studied. The summary of the results leads to the conclusions that "The majority of Roma neighborhoods are characterized by the high share of voter turnout, exceeding the national average" (p. 186). The author draws attention to the declining voter turnout, possibly caused by the actions of the two interim governments against the bought or controlled vote. The doctoral student comments on the reasons for the high rate of invalid votes, typical of some Roma neighborhoods or single sections (p. 187). One of the myths that the doctoral student categorically debunks is that of the fear/impossibility of the Roma to vote by machine (p. 201).

I find particularly valuable the paragraph in which expert proposals, measures and policies to minimize controlled voting are developed. The elections of 2.04.2023 categorically confirm the need for the changes proposed by Anita Stefanova.

The Conclusion presents the result of the achievement of the goal and the implementation of the set tasks.

The abstract correctly reflects the content of the doctoral thesis.

The standards for obtaining the scientific and educational degree "doctor" require that the text be written in good, academic Bulgarian language. The doctoral student shows an excellent command of the terminological apparatus in the Bulgarian language. It is in order for the future publication to correct the numerous typos, which are probably due to the successive edits the thesis student has made. For future publication, it is appropriate for the author to cite the relevant pages for all works she refers to, especially in the Second Chapter.

#### **4. Scientific contributions**

I accept as correct and adequate the scientific contributions of the doctoral student, presented in the doctorate. The work bears all the characteristics of original research and an independent creative process. I find no plagiarism.

### **5. Publications and participation in scientific forums**

The doctoral student reports four publications, the result of her participation in three doctoral academic forums, issued in the period 2020-2021. With this, it fully covers the requirements of the Law and the Regulations.

During the doctoral studies, Anita Stefanova participated in three academic projects related to the topic of the doctorate.

It is important to note that in the period 2014 - 2022, the doctoral student participated in the preparation, conduct, monitoring and reporting of the election process at the various levels of the election administration (SEC, RIC and CEC). As can be seen from the text of her doctorate, she also participated in conducting exit polls on election day in various elections.

### **6. Conclusion**

Proceeding from the objective requirements presented to dissertation works for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "doctor", as well as taking into account the dignity of the Bulgarian school in the field of political science and political anthropology, I find that the presented work "Mechanisms for controlled voting in the Roma communities in Bulgaria 1991-2021" meets all the conditions set by the Law and regulations. Therefore, I give a positive review and propose to the respected Scientific Jury to award the educational and scientific degree "doctor" to Anita Simeonova Stefanova in the field of 3.3. Political Science, Political Science (Comparative Bulgarian Politics)

23/04/2023 Prof. Margarita Karamihova