

# OPINION

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of the dissertation thesis of **Anita Simeonova Stefanova**, full-time doctoral student at the Department of Political Science, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, on the topic **“Mechanisms for controlled voting in the Roma communities in Bulgaria 1991-2021.”**  
Scientific supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Stoycho Petrov Stoychev, PhD, SU “St. Kliment Ohridski”

for the award of the educational and scientific degree **“Doctor”**  
Professional field: 3.3. Political Sciences  
Doctoral Program: Political Science (Contemporary Bulgarian Politics)

## **1. Main characteristics and framework of the dissertation thesis**

Doctoral student Anita Stefanova’s dissertation **“Mechanisms for controlled voting in the Roma communities in Bulgaria 1991-2021”** was prepared in accordance with the regulatory requirements and academic standards for awarding the educational and scientific degree “doctor” and was discussed and proposed for public defence at an extended meeting of the Department of Political Science at the Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, held on January 26, 2023.

The presented dissertation contains 246 pages, and structurally it consists of an introduction, three chapters and a conclusion. The literature list consists of 236 sources in Bulgarian and English. There are three appendices, printed separately. The paper also contains 16 graphs.

The framework of the research is clearly defined in the introduction, including the importance and relevance of the topic, goal, object, focus, tasks, methods, and the clear and correct formulation of the introduced limitations makes a very good impression. The latter provides an additional focus to the research and prevent it from spilling out in multiple and different directions,

as the topic has potential for such. The **relevance** of the topic is indicated at the very beginning of the study, namely the corruption in the electoral process in Bulgaria. The latter is undoubtedly one of the most current and significant topics in Bulgarian political life for many reasons. Discrediting the electoral process with corrupt practices can lead to political alienation of society and create the feeling of delegitimization of elections as a mechanism for forming representative bodies. In a peculiar way, the above can become a basis for the spread of extreme and radical ideas among society, including against the democratic legal order, social peace, and public tolerance towards certain social groups. In this sense, the detailed study of corruption in the electoral process and the identification of its foundations, which are covered in the dissertation, make it possible to formulate proposals for solutions and to develop measures to reduce it. The **main goal** of the dissertation is quite relevant for the latter, namely *“to obtain qualitative new knowledge about the trends and mechanisms related to the controlled and bought voting in the Roma communities in Bulgaria for the period 1991 – 2021”*.

The **object** of the study is specific and relevant to the main topic, namely *“Roma communities, which in the last three decades have gradually become a socially, politically and economically marginalized group”*. The **focus** of the dissertation is also correctly formulated, which is *“the mechanisms for controlled voting that are used on parts of the Roma communities in Bulgaria”*. The successful fulfilment of the research is determined by the **tasks** formulated by the author, which are completely relevant to the achievement of the set research goal:

- clarification, specification, deepening, methodological justification of the essence, nature and structure of the researched object – the controlled and bought voting in parts of the Roma communities;
- analysis of the real situation of the Roma community;
- prove or disprove the main hypothesis.

The formulation of the **hypothesis** indicates sufficient prior knowledge of the object and the focus of research. The hypothesis contains a statement not only about the association between the demand and supply of votes, but also about the mechanisms for realizing the vote-buying and the formal and informal grounds for its realization.

The **methodology** used is relevant to the formulated research objective, the set tasks and the hypothesis of the dissertation thesis. The correct description of the quantitative and qualitative methods, as well as their categorization into methods of collection and methods of information

analysis, demonstrates the excellent preparation of the doctoral student from a methodological point of view.

## **2. Content, research and analysis**

The exposition in the **first chapter** shows the solid theoretical preparation of the doctoral student on the topic of the dissertation. It presents the main processes in the development of democracy and democratic institutions, as well as the electoral process and the role of political parties as representatives of citizens' interests. The main electoral system types are examined. In this chapter, the main studied phenomena are presented, examined in detail and defined the concepts of bought and controlled vote, the distinction between collecting and receiving votes, political market and clientelism are defined.

In an excellent logical order, the **second chapter** of the dissertation is focused on the object of research, namely the Roma communities. The two main parts, namely “The Roma in the period of socialism”, which refers to the policy of the Bulgarian Communist Party towards the Roma population in the period 1944-1989, and “The Roma after 1989”, presents the different policies pursued over the years towards this community, which presuppose the current processes among these communities. The types of informal leaders in Roma communities and their role in controlled voting are also examined in detail. A significant part of the work is devoted to “Evangelization of the Roma in Bulgaria”, which turns out to be a significant factor both for the formation of a certain type of value system and for the mobilization in connection with the election process. Bringing out the role of the pastor as a religious leader and public figure and the influence on the laity, even regarding their political orientation, is of particular importance for the identification of the various factors influencing the electoral behavior of the Roma communities. In general, leadership and hierarchy among the Roma are key factors in the mechanisms for realizing the controlled and bought vote. A significant success of the doctoral student is the conducted in-depth interviews, which make it possible to establish, on the basis of primary information, both the formal and informal grounds for the success of the controlled and bought vote among the Roma, as well as the mechanisms for their realization.

The **third chapter** of the thesis, entitled “Dynamics in the controlled voting and the bought vote in Bulgaria 2005 – 2021”, presents a study that covers the trends in the results of the local and parliamentary elections in the specified period. The focus is polling stations in the Roma

neighborhoods of several large cities, namely Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna, Pazardzhik, Sliven, Haskovo, Samokov and Pleven. Of particular importance is not just the presentation of the collected data, which in itself represents a significant contribution, but also their analysis and the derivation of models according to the electoral volatility in the given polling stations. The specified models make it possible to formulate recommendations for measures that would contribute to reducing the controlled and bought vote in the given stations based on the behavior of the voters and the organization of the vote.

The **conclusion** corresponds to the fulfilment of the tasks set out in the introduction of the dissertation and correctly summarizes the main conclusions of the conducted research and analysis.

### **3. Contributions**

According to the self-assessment of the contributions presented by doctoral student Anita Stefanova, she emphasizes three leading scientific **contributions** of her research, namely:

- 1) The proven research hypothesis about the relationship between the demand and supply of votes, the mechanisms for the implementation of this process and the prerequisites for its success;
- 2) Systematization of the types of informal leadership among the Roma and their role;
- 3) Derivation of five models of the structure of the vote market.

I fully accept the doctoral student's assessment of the contributions of the dissertation, but would like to emphasize the models concerning the structure of the vote market as the contributions with the most scientific and practical significance.

The **publications** presented by the doctoral student are directly related to the topic of the dissertation work and present different approaches to the research. They fully cover the requirements for successful completion of the doctoral program. The **abstract** presents the content and all aspects of the scientific research carried out in a systematized form and gives the reader the opportunity to gain a comprehensive idea of the dissertation work.

### **4. Recommendations and questions**

The description of the three groups of electoral systems (majority/plurality, proportional and mixed) brings out basic facts related to their functioning. However, it should be borne in mind

that within the groups themselves there are nuances that affect both the stability of the formed governments (which is attributed to the advantage of majority/plurality systems) and the complexity of the voting. Since 1989 in Bulgaria the topic of changing the electoral system has been raised periodically. Thus, it is important to know the functioning mechanisms and the effects of the different types of majority/plurality, proportional and mixed systems. The mechanism of voting and calculation of the result also predetermines the mechanisms for the realization of the controlled and bought vote.

In the same part concerning the typology of electoral systems, there are facts for which there are no sources. For example, on p. 28 it is stated that “*historically, the majoritarian electoral system emerged first and to this day it finds its application in more than 90 countries*”, but it is not indicated where this information was taken from. This also applies to most of the paragraphs that follow. I assume that the following work Norris, P (2004) *Electoral Engineering: Voting Rules and Political Behavior*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press was used as a source, which is listed in the bibliography but is missing as a reference in the text.

The latter also applies to other sources that are included in the list of references, but not all of them appear in the text. In this sense, I recommend that the doctoral student review the bibliography once again so that there is consistency between it and the references in the text of the dissertation.

The recommendations made do not reduce the value and significance of the research. It has a significant scientific and practical contribution, provoking additional questions and interest in the topic. In this regard, I address the following questions to doctoral student Anita Stefanova:

1) On p. 150 of the dissertation it is stated that “*mechanisms for exerting pressure on the unemployed and indigent by money-lenders and ‘employers’ are subject to particular influence, due to the fact that it is a matter of dependence on people who do not have the resources to counteract it*”. Is it at possible at least to reduce this phenomenon? Can short-term, medium-term and long-term solutions be proposed, and what might they be?

2) On p. 223 of the dissertation it is stated that “*victims are often afraid to testify or speak up because they feel insecure about their jobs or that they will be held accountable*”. Is it possible to make a guess what part of the Roma community experiences vote trading in this way and for what part it is a preferred way of voting that is part of their source of income?

## 5. Conclusion

The autobiography of doctoral student Anita Stefanova gives me reason to conclude that, on a personal level, she possesses the necessary knowledge, skills and professional experience for successful scientific research in the field of Political science. This is also visible in the high quality of her dissertation thesis on “Mechanisms for controlled voting in the Roma communities in Bulgaria 1991-2021”. Taking into account the overall qualities of the dissertation thesis and the scientific and practical contributions to the proposed and professionally developed topic, I express my **positive opinion** and propose to the respected scientific jury to award **Anita Simeonova Stefanova** the educational and scientific degree “**Doctor**” in the professional field “3.3 . Political Sciences”, doctoral program “Political Science (Contemporary Bulgarian Politics)”.

May 2, 2023

Sofia



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