

## **REVIEW**

By Assoc.Prof. Dr. Evelina Christova

New Bulgarian University, Department of Media and Communication

for acquiring the educational and scientific degree "doctor" 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications – Image in Strategic Communications)

with a dissertation on the topic: "**Strategic aspects of the media images of the Bulgarian chief prosecutors (2006-2020)**".

presented by **Borislav Radoslavov Georgiev** - PhD student in the Department of "Communication and Audiovisual Production" of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication with supervisor: **Prof. D.Sc. Milko Petrov**

### **I. Evaluation of the qualities of the dissertation text**

The topic chosen by doctoral student Georgiev is current, interdisciplinary and related to highly uncomfortable issues of high public interest. With these characteristics, the research has all the prerequisites for a strong subjectivity and tottering towards proving one-sided hypotheses, and I want to start this review with congratulations to the PhD student and his supervisor, who have kept the dissertation in the field of the objective and professional academic field.

The doctoral research of Borislav Radoslavov Georgiev fully corresponds to the scientific specialty, constructing the necessary research, media and communicative valences in the communication intersection of various key areas, maintaining a high level of academicism.

The topic is particularly relevant in the public life of the country, but it is poorly researched, which predetermines its almost pioneering character. It is also likely to evolve in terms of what is happening on the ground, given the long-awaited reforms to the judicial system, which are being publicly discussed too broadly and without specifics. The highly hierarchical structure of the prosecutor's office, on the one hand, does not suggest speaking and building an image of the institution itself, separate from the image of the chief prosecutor, and on the other hand, it does not allow critics to raise their voices, deterred by potential bad practices. In all cases,

when it comes to the image of the Prosecutor General, it is about the collaboration between the judiciary and the media.

The research is aimed at the analysis of the specifics and features of three specific media images of three Bulgarian prosecutors in office in the period 2006-2020 and the strategic aspects of their media image construction.

The theoretical sources have been comprehensively selected and studied in the criteria framework of academic research - significance in the field of building the media image, contribution to the various areas in the broad media and public register between propaganda and manipulation, etc.

The object and subject of the research are correctly and clearly defined - through the media images of the three chief prosecutors Boris Velchev, Sotir Tsatsarov and Ivan Geshev, in the context constructed in the fields of journalism and public relations and related directly, indirectly, officially or unofficially activities in the field of propaganda and manipulation.

In the first chapter of the study "Image, media and (auto)censorship", PhD student Georgiev examines the concept of image in detail, placing emphasis on the manipulative nature of the image against the background of Bulgarian folk psychology and analysis of journalism in Bulgaria in the totalitarian and post-totalitarian period. Pays attention to denials of access to public information and the ethical norms of journalism, with a focus on the propaganda and manipulative aspects, as well as the problems surrounding the difficulties of controlling the Prosecutor General.

In the second chapter, "Prosecution and chief prosecutors - history and key cases. Media images, aspects and projections" examines in detail all the concepts contained in its name. An overview of the historical development of the state prosecution is made. The activities and public images of the three chief prosecutors, the subject of the study, are examined in detail, as well as key cases from their practice, which received strong public publicity.

"Quantitative and qualitative research of the media images of Boris Velchev, Sotir Tsatsarov and Ivan Geshev. Public and expert views and perceptions" is the title of the third chapter in the dissertation. The doctoral student appropriately chose to conduct one quantitative and one qualitative study and compare the results obtained. The quantitative research is an online survey

on public perceptions of the media images of the Bulgarian Prosecutor General, conducted in the period February 2023 - May 2023 among 603 respondents.

I would like to point out that on p. 166 the survey is defined as "through an online survey for a representative circle of the audience mainly in the fields of journalism, public relations and the judiciary, but at the same time open as a broad platform also to non-professionals in the field, following the media events surrounding the state accusation and forming their views and assessments through the presented media images of both the institution and its leaders in the different periods", while it is correct to point out that the survey sample is not representative in the sense of the term "representative" from a sociological point of view. This is correctly stated on page 169: "A total of 603 responses from respondents were received on the online Google Forms platform for the survey, which is non-representative in nature.", but it would still be good if the non-representative nature was clearly stated in the first place by -forward in this chapter.

The results of the study are with no doubt the most important part of the work - very interesting and confirming preliminary intuitive expectations. It would be interesting to repeat the study after another three full terms and compare the results. The question of whether a single person (if hypothetically one appears) could overcome the superimposed negative image of the institution through the person-institution phenomenon would also be interesting for research.

I would like to point out that in the demographic part of the questionnaire several questions could have been asked regarding the work of the respondents and its connection with the prosecutor's office and other institutions of the state.

I consider the qualitative research through in-depth interviews conducted with specialists in the period September 2022 - May 2023 to be the most serious contribution of doctoral student Georgiev. He manages to gather serious multidisciplinary expertise in several professional fields and extract and synthesize an impressive amount of knowledge. Three groups of specialists (15 people in total) were interviewed - magistrates and lawyers, who, with their direct activity in the field of the judicial system, have a direct view and vision of the structure, peculiarities, specifics, communication, legal framework and dependencies in it; media-politics and forensic-criminal experts, distinguished by in-depth studies of the processes and characteristics of the judicial system; and the journalists working during the researched period in the judicial-criminal department. At the end of each of the three chapters, Borislav Georgiev

draws main conclusions, through which he manages to maintain the focus of the work in relation to the hypotheses set.

I evaluate the operability of the chosen methods for researching the dissertation as fully adequate and applicable, and I would like to emphasize the presence of academic correctness in the collection, processing and analysis of the various data in the work process.

In the conclusion, the doctoral student confirms the proof of his five hypotheses, as well as the achievement of the goal of the dissertation: "the goal of the dissertation - to derive, analyze and prove the main bipolar media projections of existing political-economic circles, on the basis of which an attempt is made to media manipulation of public opinion and construction of a specific media image of the figure of the Prosecutor General (2006-2020), forming a strategic framework of expert proposals for changes regarding the figure of the Prosecutor General and the overall work of the state prosecution, aimed at quality and effective judicial reform, leading to greater public trust and a more positive media image for the public prosecution and their leaders".

The bibliographic awareness is high and the sources used are adequate. The dissertation text complies with the compositional requirements, and the linguistic and stylistic qualities of the presentation are high. Literary grammar, spelling and punctuation norms are respected. The text of the abstract and the text of the dissertation have appropriate text correspondence.

I would like to draw attention to the work with data that the doctoral student demonstrated - all empirical data were collected and processed in detail and transparently, and their analysis was in accordance with academic requirements. In this way, I can give a positive assessment of the credibility of the material on which the contributions are based.

## **II. Dissertation Research Contributions**

The PhD student points out five main contributions of the dissertation research, with which I agree and accept. I would like to draw attention to the bipolar media model, developed by PhD student Georgiev, directly related to the construction of media images in Bulgaria - not only to the figure of the General prosecutor. I consider the model particularly suitable for application in analyzing the image of people occupying other public positions over the years.

I would like to place a high value on the possibilities of using the obtained results in a practical-applied plan and I hope that the dissertation work and in particular the strategic framework with expert proposals will be publicized and provided to representatives of the legislative power in the hope that they will be used in future legislative changes in the area.

I would like to thank my colleagues from FJMK for the invitation to review this dissertation, as the research and its results are in-depth, interesting and on an important public topic, and I would not have had the opportunity to get to know them if I had not been included in the current jury. I recommend that the PhD student take advantage of the good practice of publishing a book based on a dissertation. I recommend that after some revisions aimed at making the work more popular, as well as possibly protecting the respondents from the qualitative research, it should be published.

### **III. Notes and recommendations**

I would like to make the following observations - there is some discrepancy between the indicated page numbers in the table of contents and in the dissertation itself, which makes it difficult to read.

Too much "street language" and slang expressions are used in places. This is, of course, inevitable, given the nature of the researched materials and subject matter, but their presence in the titles of the main points of the first and second chapters takes away from its otherwise high academic value.

The title of the dissertation clearly defines that the research is focused on media images, therefore my expectations were to find in it a content analysis of media content.

I would like to ask the PhD student if she intends to continue working on research on this topic and if she finds it applicable to study the image of the General prosecutors in social networks?

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

The presented publications related to the dissertation work are eight in number, all with a focus on the researched topic and published in well-established scientific journals in Bulgaria. They meet the requirements of the Regulations for the terms and conditions for the acquisition of scientific degrees and titles of academic positions of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" and meet the

national requirements specified in Art. 5, item 5. The minimum national requirements under Art. 63, para. 1, item 4 and art. 69, para. 3.

## **V. Conclusion**

In conclusion, I would like to express my opinion that the presented dissertation work, the abstract and the materials of the procedure meet the requirements of ZRAS and the Regulations for the conditions and procedures for acquiring the educational and scientific degree of doctor and give me the full reason to declare before the esteemed members of the jury , that I will vote "for" Borislav Radoslavov Georgiev to be awarded a doctorate for his dissertation work on the topic "Strategic aspects of the media images of the Bulgarian chief prosecutors (2006-2020)".

**February 11, 2024**

**Assoc. Prof. Dr. Evelina Christova**