



OPINION

from **Assoc. Prof. DSc Vyara Angelova**, Radio and Television Department, Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”

for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" (PhD) in professional field 3.5. Social Communications and Information Sciences - Radio and Television.

with a dissertation on the topic: **“Experts speaking in media during crises and the critical function of journalism”**,

presented by **Elena Georgieva Fuchedzhieva**, full-time doctoral student in the Department “Radio and Television” of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication

with supervisor: **Assoc. Prof. Zhana Popova, PhD**

The structure of the presented dissertation contains four chapters, Introduction, Conclusion, and Bibliography with a total volume of 163 pages. The appendices with the results of the author's research are added to them. The dissertation is written fascinatingly and is sustained in terms of language and style.

The abstract correctly reflects the spirit and conclusions of the dissertation.

The topic of the dissertation is extremely important, current, and timely - the presence *in* and use *by* the media of experts and their expert knowledge. In the information ocean, fundamental differences between the professional and the amateur, between the specialist and the profane, and between the enlightened and the illiterate, are increasingly being erased. In this swampy world, it is important to have islands of safety, which should be those inhabited by experts. Fuchedzhieva's research shows the impossibility of this being done convincingly - both because of the media centrifugation of expertise and because of processes of delegitimization in the expert circles themselves.

The Ph.D. student has managed to build dense theoretical corpora for the clarification of the main concepts: expert, intellectual, scientific, and informed citizens. A fair review of previous studies regarding knowledge and information and journalistic functions and activities has been conducted. Separate theoretical parts are formed around the definition of crises and the critical function of journalism. Fuchedzhieva has demonstrated competence in working with scientific sources. The author has shown correctness in citation and conscientiousness in working with theories.

The Ph.D. student has conducted a three-part empirical study, which includes: monitoring media content on three televisions within 24 h of the crisis (Covid-19 in Bulgaria - 03/08/2020 and the start of the war in Ukraine - 02/24/2022); analysis of interviews with journalists; and analysis of interviews with experts. The chosen multi-vector research method seems to be appropriate to illuminate the subject as best as possible. The time frame—24 hours from the start of the crisis—proves to be productive in terms of results. Fuchedzhieva shows that the reactions and, accordingly, the media expert presence depend both on the specifics of the specific crisis and on the state’s commitment, which influences journalistic



decisions and actions. During the "crucifixion" of the crisis in time, other factors begin to influence, which the doctoral student could comment on in her next research activities.

Fuchedzhieva explores an important problem of journalism and publicity - turning ordinary people into some kind of experts ("well-informed citizens" who may be neither well-informed nor citizens) and at the same time closing the media into a circle of specialists who start to lose their expert authority because of their overexposure. The conclusion about the institutional reliance of journalists when choosing a suitable interlocutor expert is well argued. On the other hand, the doctoral student has discovered a detail that deserves attention - why political figures who held high institutional positions, after time, are accepted as experts. The former institutional affiliation is accepted by the media as if it were an unquestionable guarantee of competence and a pass for publicity. At the same time, profound experts remain "invisible", and rejected for subjective journalistic reasons (non-telegenic, insufficient attractiveness for the audience, not sharing democratic values, etc.). The author has aptly singled out the conflation of political messages and expert knowledge, of political and expert roles, as a problem that is both caused by the media and also a problem that the media suffers from.

I find Fuchedzhieva's research on the mutual expectations and realizations of expert–journalist relations during a crisis to be very helpful. This crisis unites two groups whose vocation is to benefit society. Therefore, the quality and comprehensibility of expert knowledge should be understood as a common interest for the journalists–experts–society triad.

Ph.D. student Fuchedzhieva has presented three scientific publications on the topic of her dissertation and participated in scientific conferences, projects, and events, which I believe fully meet the requirements of the Regulations on the terms and conditions for acquiring scientific degrees and holding academic positions at SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" for approving and disclosing the results of the research according to Art. 5, item 5 and covering the minimum national requirements under Art. 63, p. 1, item 4 and art. 69, p. 3.

Based on the impressions and conclusions presented by me above, I find that the presented dissertation on the topic "Experts speaking in media during crises and the critical function of journalism" of Elena Fuchedzhieva represents an independent and contributing scientific development, and I will vote with conviction that the doctoral student be awarded the educational and scientific degree "Doctor".

Jury member:

Date: