

## Statement

**by Professor Petia Alexandrova, Doctor of Science, from New Bulgarian University, regarding the application for the educational and scientific degree of Doctor (PhD) in the field of 3.5 Social Communication and Information Sciences (Media and Communication - Radio and Television) for the dissertation titled 'Expert Speaking in Crises and the Critical Function of Journalism', presented by Elena Fuchedzhieva, supervised by Associate Professor Dr. Zhanna Popova.**

Elena Fuchedjjeva's dissertation is in line with the current approach of the Department of Journalism, providing an opportunity for unique and individual research. The author starts from the thesis that accurate reporting and dissemination of accurate and well-verified information at different levels of type, degree and hierarchy is essential for effective crisis management. The dissertation consists of 272 pages, of which 154 pages are devoted to research. It includes an introduction, four chapters and a conclusion, followed by a bibliography, a statement of originality and three types of appendices: media items, interviews with journalists and interviews with experts. Some parts of the applications are also integrated into the main body.

The introduction outlines the parameters of the topic, including the need to identify and apply the parameters of the concept of expertise in the work of journalists, the mechanisms for covering emerging crises and the journalistic approach to them, especially in the first hours of their emergence. Elena Fuchedjjeva's study focuses solely on the first 24 hours of the onset of two specific crises, namely Covid-19 and the war in Ukraine. The study analyzes the media approaches and selection of interlocutors, as well as the dimensions of expert knowledge in the content of three national television stations, namely BNT, BTV and NOVA. The subject of the research is expert speaking, while also examining the image of experts. The dissertation argues that during crises, the search for certainty in the interpretation of events leads to reliance on expert and institutional explanations, despite the lack of sufficient factual evidence. This confidence threatens the plurality of opinion. The public value of an expert's knowledge is determined by the intensity of their media contribution.

I will not summarize the thesis chapter by chapter, but will instead focus on the PhD student's **achievements** in various areas.

1. The text addresses the difficulties in obtaining quick and reliable information and identifying reliable spokesmen during crisis situations. The traditional approach involves contact with representatives of institutions.

2. This study investigates how journalists choose experts in crisis and non-crisis moments and whether they rely on their own knowledge or on recommendations from acquaintances.

3. It also examines how journalists authenticate the expertise of their sources

4. The various images of expertise through which journalists choose the audience to receive the necessary information during crises are presented.

5. The analysis also examines the attitude of the experts towards the journalists' understanding of the parameters of the expertise, its carriers, expectations and, above all, the desire for sensation and a well-told story.

The text outlines the following **contributions** related to the hypotheses presented at the beginning.

1. It develops views of expertise that encompass not only information, but also social, public, and power models, drawing on the works of scholarly thinkers such as Foucault, Schutz, and Gadamer.

2. It traces how journalists and the media approach expert knowledge as a resource during crisis events to mask uncertainty in their emergency reporting. Despite the lack of knowledge about the coronavirus, the media is trying to avoid an "information gap".

3. It determines the relationship between the intensity of the media contribution of the expert and the public value of his knowledge. A scientist's authority therefore depends on his image as a communicator.

4. The predominance of institutional experts who have established prior legitimacy can limit critical thinking in the media when presenting situations. Sometimes informed citizens can participate on screen, as seen in the coverage of the war in Ukraine.

5. Traditional characteristics of expert knowledge, such as reliability and credibility, are changing and even disappearing. Meanwhile, new characteristics such as recognizability, popularity and acceptability are becoming increasingly important. The authority of the person and the constructed media image often prevail over the possession of expert knowledge.

6. The desire to simplify information on the part of journalists and turn it into media genres and forms, as well as translate it into a language without terminology and scientificity, can hinder relations between journalists and experts, as well as between experts and media.

The study objectively presents the viewpoints of both experts and journalists, with critical analysis that gives credit to the author. The work includes original and well-developed observations that expand our understanding of the subject from unexpected angles. The inclusion of criminal psychologist Todor Todorov is particularly interesting.

As for the text, there are some areas that need attention. First, the explanations at the beginning of the terms "knowledge", "expert" and "crisis" are too long. Moreover, certain theses are repeated many times, albeit in different contexts. For example, the quote "Journalists aren't looking for experts, they're looking for someone to fill their time with" is repeated. These problems seem to be related to style and language. It is important to note that much is expected of journalists in this regard.

I have a question that is a natural continuation of the Ph.D. I hope this is the next logical topic for Elena Fuchedjieva's research. The question is to what extent the conclusions about the choice of experts by journalists in crisis situations in the first 24 hours are valid and how they are reflected in the following days and months. What has been preserved, what has been abandoned and what is developing and in what direction?

Despite some notes, I consider the dissertation a meaningful text with its conclusions, theses, examples, and analysis taken as a whole. That is why I propose that **Elena Fuchedjieva** be awarded the scientific degree "doctor" in the specialty 3.5 Public communications and information sciences.

Sofia, 16 February 2024

Sincerely:  
Prof. Petia Alexandrova