

REVIEW

For the dissertation: Dora Stoynova, PhD student at the doctoral programme Political Science of the Faculty of Philosophy, Professional Field 3.3. –Political Science

Topic of the dissertation: "Radicalization and deradicalization of foreign fighters in ISIS (2013-2019)"

Review by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ralitsa Zhekova, Varna Free University, Associate Professor of 3.3 Political Science

Scientific adviser: Prof. Dr.Sc. Tatyana Dronzina

1. Relevance of the thesis

The presented PhD thesis is dedicated to an important issue related to the processes of radicalization and deradicalization. The big amount of terrorist attacks in different European countries bring the topic into the spotlight and make it attractive to theoreticians as well as practitioners. Therefore the theorizing of these processes is a of utmost importance for elaboration of counterterrorism strategies.

The scientific field in which the PhD thesis is situated is political science and national and international security studies, which predetermines its multidisciplinary nature. An attempt was made for a comprehensive analysis of the topic, which is based on partial scientific achievements of other authors, statistics and individual opinions expressed in interviews, as well as the knowledge and information acquired by the doctoral student in the process of conducting his research.

Dora Stoynova 's dissertation largely fills the gap in other research, addressing a wide range of research issues related to the process of radicalization and how they can be classified and systemized through a specific behavioral model that can ease the processes of deradicalization.

2. Structure and content of the dissertation

The dissertation - 159 pages, consists of an introduction, five chapters, including the research methodology, a conclusion and a bibliography. The content of each of the chapters is divided into separate paragraphs. The bibliography consists of academic titles and articles in Bulgarian and English, as well as documentary sources.

The **main research goal** is to answer the question of what are the main factors that determine the process of deradicalization and how they can be classified and systemized.

The **main research hypothesis**, namely that the two processes – radicalization and deradicalization are in constant dependency and the second one is impossible to exist without the first one and the additional hypothesis that in order to have sufficient level of effectiveness in the process of deradicalization it is necessary to view it in all its stages are clearly stated in the introduction and the research clearly achieves the research goal and objectives.

The content of each of the chapters is outlined in separate paragraphs.

The first chapter presents the research methodology, which clearly outlines the framework in which the PhD student places his research.

In the second chapter a review of the scientific models presenting the process of radicalization is made and thus the framework in which the PhD student places her research is outlined. On this chapter the main research contribution of the PhD student, who develops an own model for the process of radicalization.

Third chapter convincingly presents the deradicalization and deengagement. In this unity the transition to the specific case – Islamic state, that is the main topic for chapter four, is well outlined.

Chapter five is a logical continuation of the chapter four in which the empirical study of the cases of radicalized persons in Bulgaria is presented, based on minutes and court rulings.

To the positive aspects of the PhD the positive evaluation of the exposition could be added and demonstration of knowledge of the object and subject of research. The style of presentation is sustained, the text of the dissertation correctly limits the author's conclusions from the texts of other authors.

The bibliographical sources and research framework are considered to be a good foundation for resolving the research objectives set by the PhD student.

3. Publications on the topic

There are 4 publications related to the dissertation. They reflect essential parts of the research and the research results, corresponding to the requirements of the Law for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria.

4. Assessment of the self-review

The self review addresses the main arguments and scientific contributions of the PhD thesis and it corresponds to formal requirements of Law for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria.

5. Recommendations

Together with all the positive aspects of the PhD thesis there are some recommendations that can help Ms.Stoynova improve her future research work. They can be divided into two: formal and content wise.

In a future publication of his research, the doctoral student could look for a balance between the individual parts of the research - chapter one is 36 pages, chapter two is 30 pages, and chapter three is only 6 pages. In this sense, she can build on the second chapter, drawing on her research on deradicalization performed in chapter three. I believe that the dissertation would have benefited if the fourth and fifth chapters were grouped together, thus making the study more compact, but still this recommendation concerns the structuring of the study, which is a matter of the personal choice of the author.

Also, the work would definitely benefit if, after each chapter, conclusions were highlighted in the context of their relationship to the main conclusions of the research.

The above stated recommendations do not diminish the excellent quality of the thesis. I would highly recommend to Ms. Stoynova to continue her research as my recommendations are mainly related to the undeniable research qualities possessed by the PhD student.

6. Conclusion

1. The PhD thesis is a completed academic research. The author has certain scientific contributions to the field of political science that gives me the right to consider that the PhD thesis corresponds with the requirements of the Law for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Rules of Procedure.

2. After all that has been said so far I confirm my positive evaluation of the PhD thesis of Ms Dora Stoynova, PhD student at the doctoral programme Political Science of the Faculty of Philosophy, Department of Political Science and I recommend to the distinguished members of the Scientific Jury to award her with the PhD degree.

April 20, 2024

Reviewer:

/Assoc.Prof. Ralitsa Zhekova PhD /