

## **OPINION**

**by Prof. Dr. Yury Prodanov –**

**Shumen University "Bishop Konstantin Preslavski"**

appointed to prepare an opinion on a dissertation work for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in a professional direction: 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences - Media and Communications - Television Journalism

**Author: BLAGOVEST GANCHEV ILIEV**

**Topic: Regional TV stations in Bulgaria - specifics of media transformation**

**Scientific supervisor: Prof. Dr. Teodora Petrova,**

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Blagovest Iliev's dissertation is dedicated to an up-to-date field of analysis, determined by the fact that the development, functioning, problems and challenges facing regional journalism (in all its manifestations) is a process extremely important in relation to the global crisis in the forms and dynamics of communication. A crisis also manifested in the disintegration of human communities, regardless of the scale of their existence (nations, professions, local communities, social groups, classes, etc.)

On the other hand, beyond the purely theoretical aspect of the research, the dissertation represents a necessary contribution to the accumulation of a meaningful factual record regarding the processes in Bulgarian journalism after 1989. The systematized to scrupulous historical account of the national journalism from 1844 to 1989 is followed for three and a half decades, which are unlikely to be descriptively "ordered" soon (despite serious and successful separate attempts in this regard) - the media democratic "explosion" is practically waiting for its dedicated and scientifically tireless Magno Stoyanov. This dissertation, however, is a necessary gesture in a similar direction.

The dissertation contains 236 pages and is structured as follows: introduction, four chapters, conclusion, references and eight appendices. The bibliography covers 77 titles, of which 70 are in Bulgarian, 7 in English. The internet (online) sources are described and more specifically 28 used internet links with portals and sites.

**Already in the introduction** to his research, Blagovest Iliev notes that in the context of the modern situation: "academic research and public debate about the state and development of regional media are extremely important for civil society and the democratic process." This is undoubtedly true - the combination of the concepts "local community" and "media" (regional) can be understood metaphorically through the connection of the two atoms of hydrogen and one of oxygen in the water that guarantees the existence of life. If local communities are the foundation of any state formation (regardless of national or supranational), then their manifestation and existence through their mediation guarantees the stability of the social structure. The doctoral student researches only one of the manifestations of regional journalism - regional television - and in a precisely defined region. This (absolutely mandatory) self-limitation and delineation of the research field enables more specific and accurate observations - both in a pragmatic aspect, but also in a theoretical plan. The other self-limitations are stated in good faith - the temporal scope and the specific region (Stara Zagora).

**In the first chapter**, the doctoral student directs his attention to the theoretical aspects of the problem - the clarification of globalization and globalization processes is done by reviewing the main theoretical statements on the issue. In relation to the processes taking place in the regional media, an approach was correctly and logically chosen, combining the normative regulation of the media environment resulting from the actions of the relevant bodies in the EU (the argument was made that such legislation dominates the national legal framework). This clearly outlines the possible development paths for Bulgarian regional televisions.

The review of the situation with regional television in three of the leading countries in the EU – Germany, Italy and France is extremely important. It first of all makes it clear how important the legal framework and thoughtful state participation and support in the preservation and development of regional media (media markets) are for such a process. In this sense, it would be interesting and important if one of the countries from the former Eastern Bloc,

now a member of the EU (Czech Republic or Poland, for example) were present in the review. On the other hand, the natural comparisons that are imposed here lead to the unhappy conclusion of how archaic the normative base is in relation to the media and the media environment in our country, as well as how inadequate the state policy is in relation to regional media (televisions).

In the chapter, serious attention is also paid to media convergence - the theoretical statements on the issue are preparation for the analysis of the manifestations of media convergence in the regional televisions in our country.

The fourth internal part in this chapter is 'The Television Industry' - phrased in this way the part is respectful in its potential comprehensiveness. I would recommend the clarifying "Television Industry - Key Aspects" or something similar. Here, the doctoral student shows good theoretical knowledge, undoubtedly supported by his serious practical experience in this direction. The issue of television production, as well as non-systematic forms of application in our country - especially in regional televisions - is well explained.

**In the second chapter**, the doctoral student directs his attention to the development of the regional television system. Naturally, back in time this began to happen through regionalization with the use of the resources (financial and personnel) of the state television with the construction of the regional centers of BNT. The second stage in this process is related to the opportunities brought by the socio-economic changes after 1989 - the appearance of cable and broadcast private or mixed-ownership televisions is one of the most interesting and not described in depth process related to the dynamic changes in Bulgarian society. The text of the dissertation traces and describes indicative and important facts from this already historic time. The peculiarities of programming, news broadcasts, the structure of media organizations and teams are very well systematized and described. In the always specific system of organization of each regional television, an important place is occupied by financing - regional advertising markets will prove to be the basis of the prosperity, as well as the rapid sunset of regional televisions.

In this chapter of the dissertation, a good impression is made by the doctoral student's excellent knowledge and application of theoretical concepts in relation to television broadcasting - editing, the organization of program content, the structure of television editing, etc., which is understood through the essential practical manifestation of these indicators in the specific regional television.

Special attention is also given to the place of the Christian church and religion in regional television programs. At first sight, targeting this particular problem implies to some extent its mechanical inclusion in the overall structure of the work, predetermined by a purely personal choice and motivation of the doctoral student. On the other hand, the theme of the church and religion of the regional televisions (Plovdiv and Stara Zagora) presents an unusual perspective for research of an initiative of a local community (institution) in the pursuit of overcoming a deficit neglected by the state (or BOC). In this part, the research concludes that the topic of the Orthodox Christian religion in regional television is sporadically present, unsystematically defended, often personally argued, with an unclear future and an amorphous audience. The PhD student knows and refers to existing research in this direction. One gets the feeling that this issue is to some extent peripheral and mechanically attached to the overall composition of the dissertation

**In the third chapter**, a positive and successful attempt is made for a historical and empirical overview of the regional televisions in the region of Stara Zagora. As I already noted at the beginning of this text, such studies are very important from the point of view of forming a comprehensive view (and such is undoubtedly still lacking) regarding the development of the media in Bulgaria after 1989. In sequence, here is presented the history of the existing according to the public register of CEM televisions in Stara Zagora - "STZ" television (successor of "Stara Zagora" television, received a national license and later sold to create 7/8 TV), "Zagora" television and "Stoychev" television, as well as the "Fenix" online television, which has only been in existence for 3 years.

In practice, the description of these media phenomena represent specific case studies that provide grounds for supporting or making sense of specific conclusions already made in the structure of the dissertation.

**In the Conclusion** of the dissertation, the conclusions and observations made in the individual chapters are summarized and a synthetic reading of the conclusions regarding the validity of the hypotheses made and proven is proposed.

The dissertation shows the expected theoretical and factual preparation and culture of the doctoral student for such research. From the point of view of the contribution part of the dissertation, in my opinion, the practical-applied part is more important, where, based on the collected data and analyses, specific recommendations are offered to improve the content, management and

financial sustainability of the regional televisions in Bulgaria. Of interest are the conclusions drawn from the surveys and in-depth interviews, which can be examples of good practices. As for the so-called "production experiment" with a proposal for a model that can be implemented in the programs of regional televisions, it can be assumed with great reason that it would be practically inapplicable from the point of view of the specific forms of management, financing and functioning of each of the regional television stations.


The abstract is structured correctly and reflects the content and conclusions of the dissertation work. The required number of scientific publications on the subject of the dissertation are available.

I can make some non-essential recommendations to the doctoral student's work. First of all, I think that the number of respondents in most of the surveys does not give grounds for definitiveness of the conclusions. Secondly, fragments of the answers in the in-depth interviews could be more seriously present in the main part of the dissertation in the form of quotations confirming a given conclusion with bibliographic reference to the appendix. Thirdly, in the bibliographic formatting of some of the Internet sources, programs for editing and shortening the links should be used.

**In conclusion, bearing in mind the contemporary sound of this work, its cognitive and theoretical value and its contribution, I recommend to the respected scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree "doctor" to Blagovest Ganchev Iliev for his dissertation work on the topic: "Regional televisions in Bulgaria - specifics of media transformation" in professional direction 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications – Television Journalism).**

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Signature:



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