

EXAMINER'S ASSESSMENT

by Prof. Elka Dobрева, DSc
on dissertation for the award of a *Doctor of Science* degree
Professional field 3.5. Social Communications and Information Sciences –
Media and Communications,
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Topic: Bulgarian Radio During Socialism (1944–1989)

The question of the **relevance of the research topic** is clarified in the introduction to the dissertation. There it is stated that the activities with the socialist past of Bulgaria are abundant and diverse, but the role of the media is rarely an independent subject of inquiry, so “the degree of scrutiny of the topic is not high”, and the history of socialist radio remains “unwritten”. However, this history “has the potential to show us more fully what happened before and after 1989 in the area of broadcasting”, and the reconstruction of the mechanisms by which the “radio machine” worked would give “a clearer picture of the whole ideological landscape” and “of the spirit of time”. The way in which these beliefs are substantiated and defended is, for me, a main reference point in the evaluation of the dissertation.

In connection with the **object of study** – the “third life” of Bulgarian Radio – a refusal of internal periodizations was claimed. It is preferred to highlight *thematic emphases*, enabling to detect “contextual links beyond chronological frameworks”. Attention is focused on various aspects of radio institution building, professional priorities, heterogeneous influences on program policies, etc. I find **the selective approach** to be appropriate and logically embodied in the sequence of sections presenting data from documentary archives, content analysis of specialized periodicals, and evidence from in-depth interviews with radio broadcasters during the period.

The study was conducted with a **clear individual responsibility** and **well-defined research specificity**. For me, there was no occasion for questions like “why this way” or “why this thing”. All choices and assumptions are explicitly referred to as the author's own decisions: from the terminological preferences through the specially motivated choice of each individual thematic perspective and the explicitly formulated guiding ideas to the summaries and conclusions made in the “I consider” model. The excellent sense of selection of research materials is accompanied by the constant influx of personal evaluations on the importance of certain phenomena, processes and trends, which clearly distinguishes the foreground and background in the work. The development was carried out on a broad empirical basis with the support of the minimum necessary, even I would say inevitable, theoretical minimum. The

external references are well-dosed and selected with respect to what other researchers have already done. Black and white outlines were explicitly declared inadmissible. Instead, academic caution, multivariate analysis, and evaluation of data from different angles were demonstrated (the main problems in the study were examined, as far as possible, “from above”, “from the side” and “from the inside” in the three consecutive chapters). Another hallmark is the effort to show the context relevant in each case and to paint the largest possible picture.

The aforementioned features of the study also determine the specifics in the construction of his **academic contribution**. I tend to describe it in general terms as a *successful reconstruction of traits, factors and practices, fundamental to the Bulgarian socialist radio, the illumination of which shows that the history of this media through socialism cannot be considered as an irreversible past, from which no consequences any longer follow*. Without aiming at completeness and without attempting to surpass my own competence, in this general framework I would place *the outline of the socialist profile of Bulgarian Radio, the disclosure of details of its role in the formation of the socialist nation, the analysis of the visible and invisible interactions with the Bulgarian Communist Party, the attempt to unravel the complex mechanisms of managerial and creative decision making and the incarnations of censorship, obedience and disobedience*.

Bulgarian radio from the period of socialism is considered in its socialist, European and world environment, in the circle and in the competition of other types of media. His socialist character is defined by many indicators. It is a “special case of a socialist institution before the socialist state”, but it shares basic organizational characteristics with its “European brothers” – both socialist and capitalist. It develops in a context of continuous cultural exchange, cross-border listening, and in an ideological context mirrored by that beyond the Iron Curtain, where radio is also engaged in affirming the state and its policies and exhibiting patronage ambitions for the audience. The most preferred role models are USSR and France. Inside, Bulgarian radio is a field of “dual philosophy” – professionalization is unthinkable without ideology, but ideology relies on professionalization and on its self-regulatory mechanisms (by the formula “you know it yourself”), that actually reproduce the system. The role of the party elite is twofold – it is a conduit of ideology, but also of renewal processes due to easier access to specialized literature and foreign radio practice, and its proximity to the central power gives it greater space for bold action.

The general characteristics of socialist radio also include many specific elements, such as the position of the editorial office Broadcast abroad, the facade and the real

multiprogramming, the stereometry of attitudes towards live broadcasts, the transformation of Horizon into a radio station closer to its English and French than to its Russian or Romanian analogues, the functions of journalists and speakers, the interaction with the audience, the inevitable collection of signatures for broadcast material, et al. Regular comparisons with the present day and the purposeful marking of phenomena and trends that persist, modify, or decline after 1989 are very important. It is worth noting that the problems encountered under the research magnifier are presented factually and commentarily, in some cases in great detail (for example, in terms of programmatic dynamics, free and orchestrated music selection, listening and jamming to foreign stations etc.), but without allowing any evaluation qualifications unpaid with arguments. Also interesting are the evidences of some individual nationally specific endeavors (the broadcasts in Macedonian or Esperanto, the supply of Western “music plays”, the Ognyan Velkov hoax, etc.), which are seemingly simply curious or simply cunning. In addition, all fragments of the complete picture are easily verifiable on the basis of the information sources indicated, which also inspires confidence in the formulated final summaries and conclusions.

The highlights of the research are adequately presented in the **abstract** of the dissertation work. Some important aspects of the general topic are covered in **4 articles and 2 large-scale studies**. I am convinced that the whole dissertation will be interesting, useful and very instructive reading for people of the generations who listened to radio-spots, but who have no idea about the state, political, professional and purely human mechanisms that provided the throughput of the communication channel or caused technical and semantic noise in it. Even more informative and instructive will be the content of the dissertation for younger people, for many of whom radio-spot, the Iron Curtain, and even socialism are already obsolete verbal units, the significance of which is being asked by Google. For future radio researchers, the published text will be a rich source of data, explanations and ideas. This is how I see the **high practical value of the dissertation**.

Questions and hesitations regarding specific interpretations or claims for more details on a given problem can always arise. This is also the case here, but I do not consider my subjective views of possible slight improvements in the study and its presentation to be worthy of mention.

The complete documentation of the procedure proves that the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria are unconditionally fulfilled.

Conclusion:

In view of the clearly visible research contributions and practical perspectives of the dissertation, as well as on the basis of my overall high appreciation for its sociocultural value, I am convinced that Assoc. Prof. Dr. Vyara Angelova should be awarded the Doctor of Science degree in professional field 3.5. Social Communications and Information Sciences – Media and Communications.

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