

## REVIEW

by Associate Professor **Dr. Daniel Mihailov Smilov**

Department of Political Science, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" (Scientific Degree: Political Science 3.3. Political Science / EU Research) of the research and teaching activities of

**Assoc. Prof. Rумыana Kolarova**, PhD, Department of Political Science for the purposes of the competition for the occupation of the academic position of "Professor" in the professional field 3.3 "Political Science", announced by the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", the Department of Political Science in SG, issue. 81 of 10/15/2019

Associate Professor Rумыana Petrova Kolarova is the only candidate for the competition for the academic position "Professor", announced by Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". This review evaluates the scientific papers she has submitted, and in particular the monograph *Democratic Institutions in Bulgaria: A Comparative Analysis (1991-2019)*, as well as her teaching and research activities.

At the outset, I declare that Rумыana Kolarova meets all legal and professional requirements for the position of "Professor". Moreover, Associate Professor Kolarova is an established and respected researcher with internationally recognized publications - one of the authors responsible for the academic knowledge about Bulgaria in the international academic community. Her appointment as a professor would be absolutely deserved, and I am sure that she will be worthy of this responsible position.

### **1. Fulfilment of the requirements for occupation of the academic position**

The materials presented by Rумыana Kolarova in support of her application strongly demonstrate that she has enough published and cited scientific studies: they definitely go beyond the legal requirements, and in quality exceed the generally accepted standards in the Bulgarian political science community. Submitted materials that have been published since her habilitation (2010) include fourteen titles:

- a monograph (2019), which will be reviewed in detail;
- a book chapter (co-authored) published in English by Oxford University Press – a most respected publisher;
- several studies and separate works in edited volumes, as well as a series of analyzes (co-authored) published in English in the period 2010-2018 in the European Journal of Political Research and the European Journal of Political Research Political Data Yearbook, published by the European Consortium for political research.

They are all in the field of comparative political science.

Rумыana Kolarova's works have been cited not only in our country but also by representatives of the international political science community, as evidenced by her high performance in various scientific indices. It is clear from the official citations provided that Kolarova is significantly present in the main databases:

- Web of Science: 56 citations of her works, of which 5 citations of 3 indexed documents;
- Scopus - 69 citations, 12 of which cited 3 indexed documents. H-index 2, which is a relatively high index in the Bulgarian political science community;
- In more popular databases like Harzing's Publish or Perish, which are Google Scholar based, Kolarova has about 140 citations and 7 H-index.
- Citations of her texts can be found in other databases such as EBSCO, JSTOR, CEEOL, ProQuest Ebook Central, etc., as well as in numerous library catalogs in the country and abroad.

These data demonstrate not only adherence to the minimum standards for the professorship, but also a very serious contribution of Romyana Kolarova to the presence of Bulgarian universities and scientists in the world academic communication and exchange.

In addition to publications, Romyana Kolarova has extensive teaching activities. Basically, her courses are in the field of comparative politics at the Faculty of Political Science at Sofia University, but she also teaches in the European Studies Department, where she is also the head of a master's program. Prof. Kolarova's serious teaching load is also evidence that she exceeds what is required for professorship. Having a number of PhD students, who have already defended their theses, shows that her teaching and research work is at a very high level.

As a whole, Romyana Kolarova is one of the teachers and researchers in the field of Political Science, who pass brilliantly the various forms of attestation and its indicators. Both in terms of scientific activity, in teaching and administrative tasks, they have definitely contributed and contributed to the prestige of the department. .

It is worth mentioning here that Kolarova also actively participates in the administrative leadership of the department of "Political Science" (as well as in the university management units). Until recently, she was the head of the department, a member of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philosophy, a member of the General Assembly of the Sofia University and chairman of the mandate committee to it. Without being exhaustive, this list is sufficient to demonstrate Kolarova's contribution to the political science community at Sofia University and Bulgaria in general. This contribution is further enhanced by the fact that she has participated in the leadership of the Bulgarian Political Science Association and is currently its chairwoman.

## **2. Evaluation of the monograph submitted**

The main work presented by the candidate in the framework of the competition is the monograph "*Democratic Institutions in Bulgaria: A Comparative Analysis (1991-2019)*", Sofia, 2019. This monograph represents a significant contribution to the Bulgarian political science literature. It is a structured analysis of the Bulgarian democratic institutions, which uses methods of comparative political science from established international studies. The focus of the analysis is on institutionalism as an approach in political science. In her research, the author seeks to answer the big question of how important institutions are – what difference they make. From the very beginning of the work, readers are

introduced to the basic views and debates in political science: Lijphart's institutionalist approaches and his followers are opposed to behavioral concepts that emphasize the importance of political culture (inspired by Almond and Verba). In this introductory part, the monograph can also serve as a textbook that introduces readers to both classical debates and their contemporary developments in academic literature.

On the basis of this introduction, Kolarova formulates her main hypothesis: *The main hypothesis in the current analysis of the dynamics of political institutions in Bulgaria is that despite the circumstances, despite the personal and situational differences, the institutions set models and tendencies.* Pg. 19

The institutions the book deals with are the party system in Bulgaria, the government and the parliament. Based on their analysis, Kolarova ends the study with a chapter on the "Bulgarian model of democracy".

Chapter two discusses the issue of institutionalization of the Bulgarian party system. First, the text goes through the different approaches adopted in the academic literature to this issue. Kolarova uses research in this field by Peter Mair and his student Fernando Casal-Bertois, according to which: *party systems are institutionalized if: (1) the change of government is either 'total' or is not happening; (2) governing alternatives are sustainable for an extended period of time; and (3) some parties (the so-called outsiders) are always excluded from participating in national government;*

*party systems are poorly institutionalized if there are: (1) partial changes in the composition of government, (2) no sustainable government alternatives, and (3) all parties have access to participation in the executive branch (Mair 1997, 2001).* Pg. 25

On the basis of this common idea of institutionalization, Kolarova examines the Bulgarian case through the prism of two problems: the institutionalization of "cleavages" and institutionalization as models of cross-party coalition. Her main thesis is that by 2019 the Bulgarian party system has been able to institutionalize around two formative cleavages: left-right and center-periphery. With regard to inter-party coalition, Kolarova's thesis is that by 2019 left and right "blocs" have crystallized.

*The early elections of 2017 confirm the two-bloc, in which five parties are included in the 44th National Assembly, of which four have sharp and irreconcilable differences: the MRF-United Patriots couple is leading when it comes to public speaking and the GERB- BSP - when it comes to the management and distribution of power positions. Thus, the choice of GERB to make a minimal winning coalition with the United Patriots is predetermined, despite the MRF's ambition to erode coalition interaction on the right.*

*The big question after this relative stabilization of the two-bloc opposition is how far the current political formations will survive after the next parliamentary elections.* Pg. 40

These claims are illustrated and supported by a precise empirical analysis combining quantitative indicators as the effective number of parliamentary and

electorally represented parties, as well as case studies of certain key situations in cross-party competition in Bulgaria.

Kolarova's main conclusion is:

*For the period, the dynamics of the party system fully meet the criteria for Mair's institutionalization:*

*(1) three times the change of government is "total"; (2) management alternatives are sustainable for 8 years; and*

*(3) parties such as ATAKA and other outsiders are always excluded from participation in national government. Pg. 55*

Chapter three contains the main contributions of the monograph. In it, Kolarova examines the executive branch and its relations with the majority in the National Assembly. The discussion is centred around the notion of the "life cycle" of parliamentary governments. Under these terms, she understands three main phases - the formation of the government, its management and the transition to the next government. The discussion in this chapter is extremely in-depth and not only presents a thorough analysis of Bulgarian parliamentary elected governments (excluding the interim presidential governments), but also compares the Bulgarian experience with that of other democracies, with a particular focus on Central Europe. The analysis is based on numerous studies by leading international political scientists - from classic texts by Laver and Shepsle, Richard Katz, to more modern interpretations such as that of Csaba Nikolenyi et al. (pp. 66-69)

Following the theoretical rationale, the chapter offers an extremely rich empirical analysis, including detailed studies of government negotiations, the role of the president in this process, investiture votes, the structure and composition of parliamentary governments, governance programs and coalition agreements, cabinet models, no confidence votes and election results after the end of the government's term. This whole study is innovative and has no precedent in Bulgarian literature. It is also designed in such a way that it can be directly used by foreign researchers for comparative analysis.

In the last part of the chapter, Bulgaria's experience is compared to that of other European democracies, which is also a major contribution. The main conclusions reached by Kolarova are the following. First, a parliamentary rather than a party-type cabinet is institutionalized in Bulgaria (most cabinets are coalition). Second, coalition agreements are more about sharing power, not so much about governance policies. Third, a model with a dominant Prime Minister is required. (pp. 134-135).

In Chapter Four, Kolarova looks at the Bulgarian Parliament, the main question being whether it is institutionalized as a "talking" or "working / transforming parliament"

*In Talking Parliaments ("arena" in Polsby's (1975) terminology), legislation is the result of the actions of the government (cabinet) and the parliamentary majority, and the opposition simply has the opportunity to publicly state and substantiate its positions on government decisions. In the Westminster version of the arena*

*parliaments, the cabinet completely dominates the one-party parliamentary majority. In the comparative analysis of European governments, this model is called "party model" because legislative decisions are made primarily through party mechanisms - the discipline of the ruling majority is a key factor in the legislative process, and partisanship also determines the logic of constructing a cabinet. The limited activity of the parliamentary committees also predetermines the fact that in the arena parliaments, not only opposition MPs speak, but, in fact, majority MPs, more than they choose between alternative solutions. In transformative parliaments, legislation is initiated by both the government and parliamentarians, and can be substantially amended when discussing bills in parliament. The main work in the transforming parliaments is carried out by the standing parliamentary committees, which in number and line of work correspond to the structure of the cabinet, and by members, even in the largest parliaments, do not exceed 40 people. Membership of parliamentary committees implies the expertise and political experience of the Member in the relevant field. Pg. 138*

This chapter also has significant added value for the whole study. Again, it is an empirically rich analysis of the Bulgarian case and the institutionalization of parliament. This analysis is also based on approaches, indicators and variables taken by leading authors on the topic worldwide. Thus, the chapter can be read both as a state-of-the-art analysis of the literature on parliamentary institutionalization and as a case study of the Bulgarian experience, which is extremely detailed and informative.

There are mini-discoveries in this analysis about the role of certain institutional rules, such as those regarding the discipline in the parliamentary groups, which have led to their stabilisation after 2009:

*The process of institutionalization of parliamentarism in Bulgaria is related to the introduction of procedural changes in the organization of the National Assembly in 2009, which regulate in a new way the status of parliamentary factions. Pg. 151*

Kolarova also looks at the link between weak institutionalization and a high number of new MPs. The explanation for the Bulgarian case is in the high number of new parties in Bulgaria:

*the link between the high relative share of newly elected MPs and new parties in parliament is obvious. Pg. 154*

The chapter also offers an interesting discussion regarding the relatively high number of women MPs in the Bulgarian Parliament. The main factor that explains this phenomenon in our country, according to Kolarova, is that: *in all European democracies and in the National Assembly, the relative share of women in parliament has increased significantly when a large new party wins the elections. Pg. 158*

Perhaps the most significant contribution of Kolarova in this chapter is the development of an index of the "transformative" potential of parliaments. This index is based on giving numerical value to the involvement of the opposition and the supporting parties in the leadership of parliamentary committees and provides a good indication of the parliament's potential to play the role of "veto

player" against the government. On the basis of this index, Kolarova draws many interesting conclusions about Bulgarian parliamentarism. For example:  
*The extremely high index values for the 41st and 43rd National Assembly is related to GERB's unsuccessful attempt to impose governance through a minority government, rather than to the institutionalization of a "working" parliament. Only in the 44th National Assembly did GERB unsuccessfully attempt to move away from the parliamentary arena model at the beginning of his term. Pg. 175*

The chapter concludes with an analysis of the activities of other bodies in the legislative process - the President and the Constitutional Court. With regard to the presidential institution, the exercise of the legislative veto is analyzed. The conclusion is that there is no institutionalization of a single model of relations between Parliament and the President:

*We can summarize that in the absence of a unified model for interaction in the National Assembly during the presidential veto, the Bulgarian Parliament oscillates between two models: in the first one, if the presidential veto is rejected even when it is justified (errors in the legislative process are inevitable and the presidential veto is a very convenient mechanism for correcting them), then the National Assembly functions before everything as an "arena" p. 188*

In the second, the transformative model, the presidential veto is an opportunity to change legislation, but it is less common in Bulgarian practice.

The analysis of Constitutional Court practices in relations with Parliament is also informative. Kolarova's main conclusion is:

*In summary, we can conclude that the control of the constitutionality of the legislative production of the National Assembly has a stabilizing function. It is one of the main mechanisms for institutionalizing the parliament insofar as it channels and arbitrates relations between the parliamentary majority and the opposition. On the other hand, the control over the constitutionality enables other state institutions to assert their positions and assessments of the legislative product of the National Assembly. Pg. 196*

The last chapter of the book analyzes the Bulgarian model of democracy. The theoretical basis of the analysis is the question of Lijphart - whether it is a consensus or majority model of government. Kolarova begins the chapter by examining this theoretical formulation, enriching the analysis with Colomer and Tsebelis's theory of "veto players." Kolarova's conclusions are nuanced in the application of these models. The Bulgarian case comes out as a hybrid. The main veto players are the political parties, not so much the NA, as long as its transformative potential is not fully realized. In part, according to Kolarova, this deficit is offset by the Constitutional Court as a veto player (second house of parliament). Pg. 222 The president and local authorities are also weak veto players. Thus, the conclusion is that, despite some superficial similarities with the consensus forms of government, in Bulgaria the established rules of the game have a strong majoritarian charge.

### **3. Critical notes on the monograph**

Despite the indisputable contributions of the study, which have already been highlighted, there are also some weaknesses that will surely generate interesting academic debate. These include the following:

- The thesis about the institutionalized two-bloc party system - left and right blocks - in the period 2009-2019 is controversial. This thesis attaches the MRF to the BSP in order to construct a "left bloc" and does not take into account the fact that the movement is in fact governing together with GERB, especially in the period 2015-2019. Although formally there is no coalition between GERB and MRF, there are enough institutional aspects of the MRF's behavior towards GERB that do not put it as real opposition to the right-wing party. These include voting on key bills, the media support of the MRF for GERB, the appointment of MRF people in key posts, etc. Moreover, the MRF's strategy is to leave the door open to both the BSP and the GERB. In this sense, the unambiguous introduction of the movement into the "left" block is problematic;
- For the same reasons, the thesis about the crystallisation of the left-right cleavage and its successful institutionalization is controversial. As a further argument against this thesis can be cited the turn of the BSP to the right in a "patriotic" direction under the leadership of Cornelia Ninova, which created tensions between the BSP and the PES;
- The lack of a separate chapter on the presidential institution is a shortcoming of the book because the presidency is one of the key democratic institutions of Bulgaria. It is true that this shortcoming is largely offset by an analysis of the involvement of the presidential institution in the formation of governments, the legislative process, etc. However, a separate chapter would give a more complete picture of the country's democratic institutions;
- The book would also benefit from a final analysis summarizing the role of the institutions in Bulgaria. The debate between institutionalists and behaviorists, with which the book begins, would also be a great framework for its finale. Without such a conclusion, the reader is invited to draw his own conclusions, which is sometimes a risky strategy.

#### **4. Other academic production, research**

In addition to her monograph, after her habilitation, Romyana Kolarova has published other important and interesting studies. Among them are the following:

- The chapter "Bulgaria: Stable Coalitions of Unstable Parties" (co-authored) in the collective volume "Coalition Governance in Central Eastern Europe", edited by renowned political scientists, published by Oxford University Press. It examines the life cycle of the Bulgarian coalition cabinets during the period 1991-2014.
- The studies "Three Dimensions of Bulgarian Parliamentarism 1991-2018", which contain the research of Kolarova of the National Assembly in the three dimensions, which we find in the monograph for a longer period - parliamentary groups, parliamentary representation, legislative process.

Kolarova has also participated in significant research projects. Of particular importance is the project Assessment of the National Integrity System in Bulgaria: National Report 2011, headed by Assoc. Prof. Daniel Smilov. In the

context of this report, Kolarova wrote two of its most important chapters: the "Legislature and the Executive."

She is also the author of eight articles on Bulgaria in the Yearbook of political databases of the European Journal of Political Research, which have their own analytical value.

In the period since her habilitation, Romyana Kolarova has been the leader of seven academic projects. Among them are: "Europeanization of the Bulgarian Election Process" (2019), "Political Dimensions of Radicalization in Bulgaria: Contemporary Aspects" (2018), "Election Campaign and Electoral Dynamics for the 2016 Presidential Election" (2016), "Role of the Officials governments in crisis management and electoral dynamics in Bulgaria 2013 - 2014 "(2015) and others. She has also participated in other projects: for example, Governments in Europe - Bringing in the Baltic and East Central European Democracies (2011-2013) and Evidence-based Action against Corruption - The European Integrity Systems (2010-2012).

Although not directly related to her academic work, it is important to mention the fact that Romyana Kolarova is a well-known political analyst, a regular guest of the leading media in the country. In this activity, she promotes political science and elevates the prestige of Sofia University and the political science community in the country.

### **Conclusion**

Based on this evaluation of Romyana Kolarova's research and teaching activity, I firmly declare that she fulfills all the conditions for occupying the position of professor at the Sofia University. Kolarova is a renowned researcher of political processes whose achievements have been recognized not only in Bulgaria but also abroad. She is a lecturer with many years of experience and a great contribution to the education of generations of Bulgarian political scientists. The monograph presented for the competition is an original, highly informed and analytically accurate work that will become the focus of the Bulgarian academic debate. Last but not least, Kolarova has a managerial and organizational talent that she has shown not only within the University of Sofia, but also as a minister and secretary of the president. A practical perspective on political processes is something not every researcher has.

Once again, I confirm my unreserved support for Romyana Kolarova's candidacy for the position of Professor of Political Science at the Sofia University.

Sofia, March 10, 2020