

REVIEW

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

Topic of the dissertation: " KOSOVO-SERBIA CONFLICT, FROM NEGOTIATIONS FOR FINAL STATUS RESOLUTION TO POLITICAL DIALOGUE (2006-2016)"

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 conflict between Serbia and Kosovo. Decades of insults, suspicion and numerous casualties have made the Kosovo status talks an almost insurmountable challenge. In this sense, the strategies used by negotiators and mediators in the management of the conflict are crucial. That is why the European Union's mediation effectiveness is particularly important, especially given the fact that these initiatives are complemented by UN efforts.

The scientific field in which the PhD thesis is situated is international relations, conflict studies and history, 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.

Bujar Deskaj's dissertation largely fills the gap in other research, addressing a wide range of issues related to the Kosovo-Serbia political negotiations, highlighting current and future developments that are to be raised as a priority in the foreseeable future. The dissertation examines a matter insufficiently well studied in the Bulgarian and international literature, and in this sense the PhD thesis presented for defense fills a significant gap in the research of countries and regions that are directly related to the Bulgarian foreign policy.

2. Structure and content of the dissertation

The dissertation - 171 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, and at the end of each chapter conclusions are made. The bibliography consists of academic titles in English, as well as documentary sources and interviews conducted by the PhD student.

The **main research goal** is to answer the question of whether political negotiations have an impact on relations between Kosovo and Serbia.

The **main research hypothesis**, that the EU, as a mediator, uses contractual relations with parties to the conflict to encourage them to make progress in the mediation process, while the UN relies mainly on external actors, and additional hypotheses are clearly stated in the first methodological chapter and the logic of the research clearly achieves the research goal and objectives.

The content of each of the chapters is outlined in separate paragraphs, and at the end of each chapter specific conclusions are made.

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

The second chapter convincingly presents the theoretical discourse related to the management of international conflicts and negotiations and mediation as a means of conflict resolution. The transition to the specific case - Kosovo is well outlined within this trinity.

The third chapter builds on the theoretical basis of the topic of negotiations on resolving Kosovo's final status. Good knowledge of the topic allows Mr. Deskaj to reveal the complex nature of the negotiation process reflecting strategic interests of different participants.

The fourth chapter is a logical continuation of the third chapter. It presents in great depth and analytically discussed and still unfinished dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia. The challenges faced by both countries are well outlined, as well as the specific role of the EU in this process.

The process is presented pragmatically, recommendations are also made, which if implemented would help to overcome the obstacles to this complex and politicized process.

Chapter five which is focused on the study of international factors in the negotiations between Kosovo and Serbia is of a particular interest. The role of the EU and the UN as mediators in this process are presented in detail and comprehensively. Since there is a great political dynamics, the excellent knowledge on the issue of Mr. Deskaj is a guarantee for the well-grounded conclusions presented at the end of chapter.

In conclusion, the structure of the dissertation is logical and well grounded, the scientific analysis is consistent and includes as a subject both known but unsystematically researched issues as well as and new, less researched ones.

I would also like to congratulate the PhD student for the good quality of research analysis, the academic style of presenting the issues and the bibliography used.

Mr. Deskaj also has used a wide range of research methods. A chronological-thematic approach is used, as well as the method of logical connection and interdependence of the individual subjects of analysis. The use of such an apparatus of means and approaches allows in-depth consideration of the problems, as the aim is not just to arrange facts and describe events, but to follow processes and define trends.

To the positive aspects of the compositional construction and the methodology of the dissertation the positive evaluation of the exposition could be added, which combines in logical unity facts, analyzes and conclusions. In this way, the PhD student has demonstrated in-depth 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 above-mentioned bibliographical sources and research framework are considered to be a good foundation for resolving the research objectives set by the PhD student. In each of the chapters, Mr. Deskaj has addressed a specific research objective.

3. Publications on the topic

There are 6 (six) publications related to the dissertation, one of which is under print. 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. Литературна осведоменост и компетентност на докторанта

The PhD student is well familiar with other academic writings on the topic. The bibliography contains academic titles in English - 56, which constitute the most significant part of the academic literature on the subject, 11 personal interviews with politicians, representatives of think tanks, university professors, etc., as well as 79 documentary sources.

5. 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.

6. Recommendations

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

Formal:

- The literature used in the dissertation must be numbered and arranged according to the academic requirements.

Content:

- with regard to the conclusions of the individual chapters, more could be desired, both in terms of their wording and systematization, part of which could also be combined in order to be more focused.

The above stated recommendations does not diminish the excellent quality of the thesis. I would

highly recommend to Mr. Deskaj to continue his research as my recommendations are mainly related to the undeniable research qualities possessed by the PhD student.

7. 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 Mr Bujar Deskaj, 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 him with the PhD degree.

May 12, 2021

Reviewer:

/Assoc.Prof. Ralitsa Zhekova PhD /