

Opinion

Concerning a competition for professor in the field of Political Science (Comparative Political Science) with sole candidate Romyana Petrova Kolarova

Associate Professor Romyana Kolarova is a long-standing lecturer and scientist in the Political Science Department of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski ". Her scientific knowledge extends mainly to the field of comparative political science and European studies. These include studies of the party and political system, the EU institutions, the transition from a totalitarian to a democratic system in Bulgaria, the Bulgarian Constitutional Court, elections and electoral systems, and more. Particularly important among her works is the monograph *Comparative European Governance: Institutional Analysis*, Sofia, 2008.

For the needs of this competition, among other publications, she presented a habilitation work - *Democratic Institutions in Bulgaria: A Comparative Analysis (1991-2018)*, Sofia University Publishing House, 2019.

I will give my opinion at the work presented, as I believe that it most closely reflects the merits of the candidate in the professor competition.

The monograph is a large-scale comparative analysis of the major political institutions in Bulgaria in the period 1991 - 2019. Kolarova defended her position on the study period by adopting the methodology of the American political scientist Przeworski on the so-called institutionalization of "uncertainty". According to Kolarova, first, the preceding elections for the ordinary National Assembly in October 1991, the June 1990 elections to the Grand National Assembly were not "fair and free" because the losers did not recognize them, i.e. there is no ex ante uncertainty. And secondly, the 7th GNA is not a democratic institution because the BSP has retained control over the results of the political process, i.e. no irreversibility ex post. According to Kolarova, until October 3, 1991, Bulgaria was in the stage of liberalization of the authoritarian regime and was moving according to the rules of the pacted transition. Such a position can receive serious objections, because in my opinion the majority of authors, Bulgarian and foreign, consider the elections to the Grand National Assembly as the founding elections, which, despite the criticism of the electoral process, marked the institutional beginning of the democratic transition. How else would we explain the election of opposition leader Zhelyu Zhelev as president and a number of significant changes he has made to the political system? And the adoption of the Constitution in July 1991 - is it compatible with the thesis of regime liberalization, when this constitution operates to this day and is the basis of the political system?

The author has the right to defend his position, but he needs even more convincing arguments in this regard.

Kolarova consistently examines in her work the party system, governments and the National Assembly and ends with an assessment of the basic parameters of the Bulgarian model of democracy. In the study of these major institutions, Kolarova cited a huge amount of data and presented numerous original tables that, in a comparative way, highlight the political processes in the country and the evolution of the main institutions.

In her study of the party system, Kolarova uses Meyer's methodology, which emphasizes the institutionalization of the model of cross-party competition, analyzed through so-called cleavages and coalition models. On this basis, she draws the following conclusions:

First, there is a stable left-to-right cleavage in the Bulgarian party system, which persists throughout the period under review. Despite the emergence of "masking" political oppositions such as "communism-anti-communism" or the emergence of strong anti-cartel parties (the first being the NMSS), these oppositions do not remove sustainable lines of competition and opposition.

Second, the fundamental elections of 1991 carry all the characteristics of an incident (this notion is not well explained), whereby a two-party system is established instead of a multi-party system in Bulgaria. The effect of incidental bipartisanship is not only the institutionalization of left-to-right cleavage, but leads to the very strong potential for right-wing erosion and fragmentation, which is already evident in the 36th National Assembly.

Third, the 2001 election was crucial for the institutionalization of the Bulgarian party system, in which the anti-cartel party NMSS with an extremely charismatic leader managed to deinstitutionalize the two-party model that had emerged. The result of NMSS-induced destabilization is fragmentation in the right party spectrum and consolidation in the left.

The ongoing processes of re-stabilization of the Bulgarian party system, part of which is the emergence and institutionalization of GERB as the ruling party, outline the tendency for a moderately multi-party bloc.

Fourth, the institutionalization of the Bulgarian party system is accomplished through and depends on the consolidation of the left political bloc. One of the effects of the formation and stabilization of the left BSP-DPS bloc is the shift to the right of the BSP, which further weakens the polarization of the party system. The second effect is the gradual consolidation of the right-wing bloc, which, in the logic of political opposition, includes nationalist formations.

Fifth, when analyzed in the long run and, the Bulgarian party system is rated as very weakly polarized. At the same time, over the past 30 years, its strong polarization has been accepted by its researchers as well as political analysts. In my opinion, Kolarova did underestimate the fact that there are different phases and characteristics of polarization in the evolution of the Bulgarian party system.

According to Kolarova, so far there is no potential for radicalization of the party system and the sharp controversy in the 44th National Assembly does not mask the fact that the two parties that identify themselves as radical at the European level (ATTACKA and WOLYA) systematically support the ruling majority.

The main analysis in Kolarova's work is the study of executive power. I think this is the most in-depth part and with the most contributions.

For example, the typologizing of different types of governments after 1991 is such a major contribution. On the one hand, the one-party cabinets with a majority, which define themselves as "party" rule, unlike all others, which are defined as "parliamentary" government, are thoroughly analyzed.

On the other hand, Kolarova highlights five types of cabinets - one-party majority, one-party minority, minimally profitable coalition, minority coalition and ultra-majority coalition, which are considered with their specifics.

Thirdly, the cabinets are differentiated according to the number of times they have been transformed and formed as new cabinets with new composition, albeit under the leadership of the same Prime Minister / Saxe-Coburg-Gotha 1 and Saxe-Coburg-Gotha 2, within the 38th National Assembly and respectively Borisov 2 and Borisov 3 within the framework of the 43rd NA /.

Through the concept of "life cycle" of parliamentary governments, it examines the endogenous factors that determine the model of cabinet management. Namely, when forming the cabinets, managing the cabinet and completing the mandate.

In the study of these stages, she has provided a number of valuable tables pertaining to cabinet negotiations, cabinet structure and composition, cabinet models, confidence and no confidence votes, etc. The analysis of the termination of mandates has a positive character. The analysis of the electoral cost of management is particularly valuable.

An important aspect of the analysis is the follow-up of the stages in the institutionalization of parliamentary governments - preparatory stage -1990-1991, first stage - 1991-2001, second stage - 2001-2009, third stage - 2009-2017.

In the final section of this chapter, Kolarova comes to the following conclusions:

First, the "party" model of government is incidental, the "parliamentary" model has dominated from the outset;

Second, there is no single dominant format for cabinet management;

Third, coalition agreements regulate power-sharing rather than policy-making, with these governments being very ineffective in implementing strategic reforms;

Fourth, the main model of cabinet management is that of the Prime Minister;

Fifthly, restructuring within the parliamentary term is due to a change in coalition format, but never through a change of prime minister;

It is indisputable that Kolarova's study of the executive branch and the definitions she introduces, like the vast majority of empirical data, are a valuable contribution to Bulgarian political science, in which the analysis of governments and their specificities remained in the background, unlike the party system that is the object of many political studies in our country.

In the section INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF THE LEGISLATIVE, the analysis includes;

first, the parliamentary groups and their dynamics, as a valuable contribution is the study of their fragmentation, especially of the so-called extreme fragmentation (36th National Assembly and 39th National Assembly) and the end of fragmentation after changes in the Rules on the organization and activity of the National Assembly (40th NA);

second, the structure of the representation (newly elected and first-term deputies, women's representation);

third, to parliamentary committees, with the author specifically focusing on the institutionalization of standing committees while maintaining sharp political opposition. Contributing aspect is the development of an index to the transformative potential of the National Assembly;

fourth, the legislative 'product', and in particular the dynamics of the ratification-adopted bills ratio; new laws - laws for amendment.

Analyzing the President's veto is valuable by evaluating the President's activity. A contribution is the assessment of the President's role in the analysis of three selected cases in which Presidents Zhelev, Parvanov and Plevneliev act in the conditions of three different parliamentary majorities.

Also included is an analysis of the role of the Constitutional Court - through the activity of the "complainants" and the ratio between adopted and rejected requests for unconstitutionality.

In the concluding chapter, Kolarova gives her analysis of the model of Bulgarian democracy, drawing on the classical Liphart model of consensual and majoritarian democracy. According to Kolarova, Leiphart's ten criteria show that in the first area (party-executive power) Bulgarian democracy is poorly consensual, but if we analyze the period after 2001 it is in the group of significantly consensus countries.

I have a principled objection to this approach. Can the models of authors such as Leiphart, applicable to Western European democracies, be formally used in the case of Bulgaria. Kolarova also addresses this question, but does not give a sufficiently clear answer / p.216/.

For example, the concept of consensual democracy in old democracies such as Denmark and the Netherlands has a meaning too different from that of post-communist democracies, especially Bulgaria, which is in a state of unconsolidated democracy. The very concept of consensus, which has a different meaning in different democracies, must be evaluated. Formal models are therefore vulnerable when they apply unconditionally to different types of democracies, at different historical stages of political development and with specific cultural characteristics.

Kolarova's work is an original study of democratic institutions in Bulgaria, an important contribution to Bulgarian political science. Kolarova shows a very good knowledge of Western political science and authors, which we can define as "classics", as well as of the political process in European countries.

Having in mind the whole teaching and scientific activity of Rumyana Kolarova, I recommend to the scientific jury to propose to the Faculty Board of the Faculty of Philosophy to award her the scientific title of professor.

Professor Georgi Karasimeonov

Doctor of Philosophy

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