

OPINION

by Associate Prof. Dr. Milen Todorov Lyubenov, Sofia University "St. Kliment
Ohridski", Political Sciences (3.3.)

About: the public defence of the dissertation thesis for the award of the educational
and scientific degree "Doctor" on 3.3. Political Science (Political Science –
Bulgarian political process)

Doctoral candidate: **Dimitra Dimitrova Voeva**

Dissertation title:

**"The Democratic Mask of Political Engineering: Amendments to the Electoral
Rules in Bulgaria (2009-2021)**

General characteristics of the dissertation work

The presented dissertation examines a current and significant topic - the amendments to the electoral rules in Bulgaria in the period 2009-2021. This topic is the subject of a continual political debate, usually charged with high public expectations and populism.

The dissertation is a thorough and complete study meeting all formal and academic meeting all formal and academic criteria. It consists of 195 pages of main text, including an introduction, three chapters and a conclusion, and five appendices totaling 145 pages. The subject of research are the reforms in the electoral legislation and the effects of these changes. There is a clearly formulated hypothesis which states that the political elite instrumentalise electoral reforms to realize comparative advantages before the elections. Research tasks are clearly defined and operationalized, which gives the text a good structure.

Structure, content, and results of the dissertation

The first chapter presents the theoretical part of the dissertation. Major theoretical issues related to electoral reforms as a means of political engineering are thoroughly and competently addressed. The types of electoral systems and their relationship with party systems are reviewed. A brief substantive retrospective of the Bulgarian electoral systems is included.

Through a qualitative analysis, the second chapter examines the parliamentary debates with the reasons for one or another position. This makes it possible to trace whether a political party changes its position on a given issue over time and why it does so - purely opportunistically, to derive perceived benefits for itself before the election, or following a consistent strategy and principles.

The third chapter analyzes the practical results of the electoral reforms. Here the doctoral candidate is to be congratulated for the research effort to summarize and group under certain categories a huge amount of data. This analysis makes it possible to fulfill the set tasks and defend the derived hypotheses.

One of the main conclusions of the dissertation is that electoral reforms cannot be a panacea for solving various problems such as voter turnout or trust in politicians. The quality of the political elite depends on political parties, but also on civil society, which stands at the entrance of the political process.

Dissertation Contributions

The dissertation has two main contributions. First, an in-depth study of preferential voting in Bulgaria has been done. For this purpose, the doctoral candidate has summarized the data from the preferential voting by different categories, which make it possible to analyze in depth the effects of its introduction. The collected database is a valuable contribution and source of information that can be used for another research on the topic.

Recommendations

The dissertation would benefit from examining other legislative changes affecting the operation and financing of parties that also fall under the heading of "political

engineering", such as amendments to the Political Parties Act, which have a direct impact on parties' participation in the electoral process and their performance. In 2019, immediately before the local elections, the ruling majority changed the law, drastically reducing state subsidies to 1 BGN per vote received and giving parties the possibility of unlimited financing from companies and individuals. This triggered a serious political and expert debate regarding the standards and good practices for financing political parties. Some of these changes were later revised.

In conclusion:

The dissertation presents serious and thorough research with undisputed contributions and should be highly valued. Therefore, I strongly support and will "for" the awarding of the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in professional direction 3.3. Political Science (Political Science – Bulgarian political process) by Dimitra Dimitrova Voeva.

16.10.2023

Sofia

Signature:

