

REVIEW

under a procedure for the protection of dissertation work on the subject:

**“THE DEMOCRATIC MASK OF POLITICAL ENGINEERING:
Amendments OF THE Selected RIGHTS IN BULGARIA (2009-2021)”**

for the acquisition of an educational and scientific degree “Doctor” by a candidate:

Dimitra Dimitrova Voeva,

Field of higher education:

3.3. Political Science, Doctoral Program “Politology” (Bulgarian Political Process)

Faculty of Philosophy

Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” (SU)

The review was prepared by: Prof. Ekaterina Ivanova Mihaylova, lecturer in the History of the State and Law Department of the NBU, in my capacity as a member of the scientific jury pursuant to Order No RD-38-411 of 14 July 2023 of the Rector of SOFYSKI UNIVERSITY. Kliment OHRIDSKI and Decision of Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philosophy of 4.7.2023

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General characteristic of the dissertation work and the materials presented

The presented dissertation paper on the subject: “The democratic mask of political engineering: amendments to the electoral rules in Bulgaria (2009-2021)” contains 196 pages of main text (introduction, three chapters and conclusion) and 146 pages of annexes. A total of 211 sources were used in both Bulgarian and English. The thesis focuses on the following topics: electoral systems and electoral reforms: theory and practice; substantive aspects of proposals for electoral reforms in Bulgaria; practical implementation of electoral changes, as well as factors for the dynamics of the preferential vote. There is also an analysis of the effect of machine and preferential voting.

The research task has covered a significant period of Bulgarian electoral legislation, which is characterised by frequent changes. The study started with the reform implemented in 2009 and continued with the codification of the electoral process in 2011. The replacement of the legislation by a new Electoral Code in 2014 and, consequently, the changes to it, in 2014-2021, was followed up by 23 amendments and additions. It has been taken into account and found that changes before elections are a well-established practice, and the absence of such changes is rather an exception. The focus of the dissertation is on the introduction of preferential voting by tracking the dynamics of the preferential vote of individual elections, including by parties. It was considered that this was one of the most significant changes in the period considered. The thesis is aimed at the parliamentary debate on majority vote and preferential voting and thus can be summarised the two subjects of study: the debate on changes in electoral rules and the effects of adopted rules.

Applicant details

Dimitra Voeva graduated in 2016 at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski as a Bachelor at the Faculty of Philosophy, Department of Political Science, Department of National Political Process. Then he became a Master in the Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski, Department of Political Science, Political Counseling Programme in 2018. Since 2020, she has been a PhD student at the Faculty of Philosophy, Doctoral Program "Politology – Bulgarian Political Process" at the Department of Political Science with a scientific leader: Prof. Dr. Stoycho Stoychev with the subject of the dissertation: The Democratic Mask of Political Engineering: amendments to the electoral rules in Bulgaria (2009-2021).

Dimitra Voeva takes part in courses, seminars and competitions: 7th Leuven-Montreal Winter School on Elections, Leuven, Belgium, Organised by the Catholic University of Leuven and the University of Montreal; "The Role of Transitional Justice in Rebuilding Human Rights and Rule of Law in Post-Conflict Societies", International Summer School of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, organised by the Association "Pravnik" and the Faculty of Law of Sarajevo University; Won a competition for an individual research project "Changes of the electoral rules in Bulgaria as a tool for providing an advantage – the majority element (2009-2021)", funded by the Sasakawa Foundation under the Sasakawa Programme at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". Kliment Ohridski"; Women in Politics and Society, Balkan Youth Forum 2017, Pristina, organised by Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Kosovo;

Balkans Perspective Towards EU, Balkan Youth Forum 2015, Pristina, organised by Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Kosovo. She was a member and assistant to election commissions. Her professional experience is at Trend Research Center – a political scientist and at ESTAT Ltd. as head of research projects in the period 08/2017-05/2021.

Analysis of the scientific and applied achievements of the candidate contained in the presented dissertation work and its publications included in the procedure.

The research done and the analysis based on it show that the political elite is instrumentalising electoral reforms, trying to realise advantages immediately before elections, which is why political players change the “rules of the game” in line with their interest and propose reforms to achieve image effect. The dissertation concludes that in essence the cross-party race is masked as a desire for more democracy and fairer electoral rules and results, but the study of the preferential vote shows that it does not affect voters’ motivation to exercise their right to vote.

Dimitra Voeva performed the following tasks to prove her hypotheses: follow-up of the parliamentary debate when discussing the majority electoral system, mixed electoral system and preferential voting; an analysis of the main motives put forward by the parties in favour of or against the introduction of a majority electoral system and preferential vote; analysis of the political context in which the changes are accepted, as well as the public sentiment on the topic; data on the use of preferential voting and its dynamics in the five parliamentary elections held between 2014 and 2021; comparative analysis of the preferential vote by party, as well as the number of preferentially elected deputies; factors leading to an increase or reduction of the preferential vote, as well as the monitoring of the size and dynamics of the use of the preferential vote between 2007 and 2019 in the European elections.

The analysis presented by the PhD student is based on both the European experience and a detailed study of the behavior and motivation of the main political players in Bulgaria during the period described. On the basis of the generalisations Dimitra Voeva concludes that the position taken by the parties corresponds to their direct political interest by realising it in two main ways – directly when the initiator of the change expects a mechanical advantage from its introduction (electoral engineering); and indirectly, when the image effect of the proposed reform is sought.

In the last chapter, “Practical implementation of electoral changes”, a detailed and detailed study of the preferential vote and machine voting is done. The survey includes data from

the five parliamentary elections with preferential vote between 2014, 2017, 4 April 2021, 11 July 2021 and 14 November 2021, presenting the number and proportion of voters with a general preference and by party. The preferential vote was calculated as a share of the votes received by the parties in the country and the survey shows that from its introduction in 2014 to the first elections in 2021, there has been an increasing trend in its use. It is emphasised that the most important component in terms of results is the number of MEPs who are preferentially elected, with almost a double increase between 2014 and 2017.

Dimitra Voeva's research also analysed machine voting and its effect on voter turnout and on the use of preference. According to the doctoral candidate, the turnout in machine voting is one of the factors behind the reduced participation in the elections.

I share the conclusions drawn in the study that the main argument of the political elite that reform is done at the will of the citizens and this will mobilise them to participate in elections is not justified and that this result is proof that electoral technology cannot compensate for the lack of political ideas, vision and strong political leadership and prove crucial for the mobilisation of voters.

We accept and share the declared contributions to the dissertation work, namely:

- A comprehensive analysis of the effect of one of the most significant changes in the electoral legislation covers the research period – the introduction of a preferential vote.
- For the first time a scientific analysis has been made and summarised data on the number and share of voters with a preference once per party and secondly the number of candidates who manage to skip the 7 % preferential quota, as well as the number of shifts in the lists.
- A comparative analysis has been carried out of the dynamics of the preferential vote by parties in the period, as the annexes with the collected full data for the respective elections are particularly valuable: number of ballot papers with and without preferences per party and constituencies; preferential quotas by parties and constituencies; ballot papers with and without preferences by parties and constituencies; candidates who have passed the quota and the number of votes they have received; proportion of voters with a preference for a party in a constituency; number of candidates who have passed the preferential quota for a

party in a constituency; and number of effective preferences (dislocations) for a party in a constituency.

- Qualitative analysis of the 2009-2021 parliamentary debate on the issues of majority vote, mixed electoral system and preferential vote.

Aprobation of results

The doctoral student Dimitra Voeva applied for the acquisition of an educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in addition to the dissertation with more publications on the topic of the dissertation, namely:

- Publication in the collection “Annual of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski, Faculty of Philosophy, Doctoral Book, Volume 5, 2020 on: “Changes in the electoral rules as a panacea for the defects of Bulgarian democracy: evidence from the parliamentary debate in the discussion of the Manolova Code (2013-2014)”
- Publication in the collection “Doctoral readings 2021” of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” Kliment Ohridski" on the subject: “The effect of machine voting on participation in the elections of 11 July 2021”
- Publication in the collection “Doctoral readings 2022” of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” Kliment Ohridski" on the subject: “The drop in the 2021 preferential vote”

The publications are related to the topic of the dissertation work and are published in authoritative Bulgarian publications.

It can be inferred from the above that the applicant meets the minimum national requirements and, accordingly, the additional requirements of the Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski" for the acquisition of educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in the scientific field of higher education: 3.3. Political Science, Doctoral Program “Politology” (Bulgarian Political Process), Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. Kliment Ohridski’ (SU)

The results presented by the candidate in the dissertation work and his/her scientific papers do not repeat such results from previous procedures for obtaining a scientific title and academic position.

There is no plagiarism proven by law in the submitted dissertation work and scientific papers under this procedure, as evidenced by the submitted data for verification and analysis in the

system for prevention against plagiarism of the originality of the dissertation.

Qualities of the autorephere

The presented authoriferate is in a volume of 37 pages and fully meets the requirements for its preparation and presents accurately and correctly the results, conclusions and content of the dissertation work. It also describes the contributions, the bibliography used, the publications on the topic of the dissertation.

Conclusion

Having examined the thesis work presented in the procedure and the accompanying scientific papers and on the basis of the analysis of their significance and the scientific and applied contributions contained therein, I confirm that the presented thesis work and the scientific publications thereto, as well as the quality and originality of the results and achievements presented in them, meet the requirements of ZRASRB, the Rules for its Application and the relevant Rules of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" for the acquisition by the candidate of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences" in the scientific field of higher education: 3.3. Political Science, Doctoral Program "Politology" (Bulgarian Political Process), Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". Kliment Ohridski' (SU).

The applicant satisfies the minimum national requirements in the professional field and no plagiarism has been established in the scientific papers submitted for the competition.

Based on the above, I recommend to the scientific jury to award the acquisition of educational and scientific degree "Doctor" to candidate Dimitra Dimitrova Voeva, District of Higher Education: 3.3. Political Science, Doctoral Program "Politology" (Bulgarian Political Process), Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". Kliment Ohridski' (SU)

13.09.2023

Author of the review:

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