

REVIEW

on the works of Assistant Professor Milen Todorov Lyubenov, PhD
the only participant in a competition for full-time associate professor at Sofia University „St.
Kliment Ohridski "

by professional field 3.3 Political Science (Political Science - Political Parties and Party
Systems), SG no. 32 / 16.04.2021
by Prof. Romyana Kolarova

1. COMPETITION DATA

Assistant Professor Milen Lyubenov, PhD, is the only participant in a competition for an associate professor in the professional field 3.3 Political Science (Political Science - Political Parties and Party Systems). I am not aware of any violations of the procedure.

2. CANDIDATE DATA

I have known Milen Lyubenov as a colleague, lecturer and researcher, and a recognised expert in comparative analysis of parties and party systems since he defended his Ph.D. thesis. From the student bench Milen Lyubenov has subsequently and systematically worked in this thematic field, applying innovative research approaches and publishing texts that substantially contribute (both conceptually and empirically) to the development of Bulgarian political science.

For my colleagues and for me, Milen Lyubenov's professional biography impresses mostly with the combination of thoroughness, diligence and erudition on the one hand and healthy scepticism on the other. In his research and teaching work, as well as in his administrative commitments, Milen always shows maturity and balance, combined with comprehensiveness and consistency. It should be noted that Milen Lyubenov has served as Senior Advisor on Domestic Policy of the President of Bulgaria (2012-2017).

3. DESCRIPTION OF SCIENTIFIC WORKS SELECTED FOR THE COMPETITION

For participation in the competition Milen Lyubenov has submitted nineteen publications, of which two monographs, three studies, one chapter of a collective monograph and five articles. Of the 11 titles included in the list, three are in English and the rest are in Bulgarian.

Although thematically linked, the publications have their own importance. As an example I would mention the two monographs "European party systems. Comparative Analysis of 20 Democracies (1945-2020)" and "Political Parties: Institutionalization and Organizational

Development”, which complement each other, analysing both party organisations and models of inter-party competition. The other publications of Milen Lyubenov are in the same thematic field, but focus on the dynamics and specifics of Bulgarian parties and party system.

Main publication of Assoc. Prof. Lyubenov, the monograph "European party systems. Comparative Analysis of 20 Democracies (1945-2020) ", St. Kliment Ohridski Publishing House is 253 pages long and includes an introduction, nine chapters (analyses cleavages, ideological positioning of classical and new parties on the one hand, and the origin and party familiesq dynamics of party systems in European democracies on the other) and a conclusion. The monograph is a systematic analysis of European party systems, which is based on current empirical data and the use of both standard and the cutting-edge models for theoretical analysis.

4. SCIENTIFIC CONTRIBUTIONS

Milen Lyubenov's publications give evidence of systematic and comprehensive research interest in parties and party systems, which are analysed in comparative terms, with regard to two key processes - institutionalization and the deinstitutionalization effects of fragmentation, populism and the emergence of radical anti-cartel parties.

The main contributions of Ass. Prof. Lyubenov address two major questions - what is the explanatory power of the classical cleavage theory, both in interpreting the developments in the European democracies and in the Bulgarian case. The second issue concerns the nature of the fragmentation and deinstitutionalization of party systems, and more specifically the emergence of new parties and their organizations and programmes. Undoubtedly, phenomena such as populism, radicalization, and cartelization are of key importance for answering these issues.

In the main monograph "European party systems. Comparative Analysis of 20 Democracies (1945-2020)" Dr. Lyubenov's uses path dependency (“historical trajectories”) approach to interpret the diverging models of party systems and their dynamics in 20 European democracies for a period of 75 years. The text is well "backed" with empirical data, making joint compensation for improving traditional mechanisms and fundamental political attitudes, such and new resources and new topics and issues that facilitate the emergence of new parties and changed in the ideological spectrum of the start. Undoubtedly, this research will have a key role in the Bulgarian political science literature dedicated to party systems in European democracies.

The publications of Assistant Professor Lyubenov dedicated to the Bulgarian party system deserve special attention. Although they are not formed in a separate monograph, they are characterized by organic unity and interconnectedness, in which he analyses the same topics and problems that set the structure of his main monograph. In these publications, Milen Lyubenov specified and further developed the concept of "cleavages", which plays a key role in all his research, and especially in analysing the dynamics of the Bulgarian party system. He defined and operationalized the concept of "cleavage potential". The analysis of the deinstitutionalization of the Bulgarian party system through the concept of "extra-system volatility", which Dr. Lyubenov operationalizes in the analysis of the Bulgarian party system, is also of a contributory nature. The assessment of the dynamics of the Bulgarian party system through the analysis of the attitudes of Bulgarian voters through the classical dichotomy "left-right" is also of a contributory nature.

In the spirit of the academic debate, I would question one of the key concepts in Lyubenov's monograph "European party systems. Comparative Analysis of 20 Democracies (1945-2020)", according to which the formation and dynamics of party systems depend on the "chosen path ". When we use the term path dependency ('historical trajectories'), we have to take into account that it includes both the political choice and the circumstances, which in individual cases (when effect of circumstances exceeds substantially the effect of the strategic choice made by the main parties) play a decisive role. In his monograph, Milen Lyubenov also draws attention to the circumstances, but the term "chosen path" conceptually limits and downplays this aspect of his analysis. I am convinced that the refinement of the Bulgarian term will be important for the accuracy of the analysis.

5. TEACHING WORK

Milen Lyubenov is a highly valued lecturer in two main disciplines - "Political Parties and Movements", "The Party System in Bulgaria", and the discipline "European Parties and Party Systems". He teaches in the specialty "Political Science" at the Faculty of Philosophy, as well as in two other faculties of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski "- Geological-geographical and Historical. I highly appreciate his work with students, commitment to the problems of academic life and especially the high quality of his teaching.

Milen Lyubenov is both a respected lecturer, recognised expert and political analyst. I would especially like to emphasize his role in the initiation of two important resources for

Bulgarian political science and the Bulgarian political process, which unfortunately were not institutionalized - the Yearbook of the President of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Presidential Library.

6. CONCLUSION

Having in mind the scientific-theoretical, research and applied significance of the works of Assistant Professor Milen Todorov Lyubenov PhD, the high academic standards met by his teaching, I will confidently vote "for" him to take the academic position of associate professor.

MEMBER OF THE SCIENTIFIC JURY:

29.08.2021

Prof. Dr. Romyana Kolarova