

## **Review-opinion**

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About: the public defence of the dissertation thesis for the award of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” on 3.3. Political Science (Contemporary Bulgarian politics)

Doctoral candidate: **Mila Boyanova Moshelova**

Dissertation title: **Influence of the radical right-wing political discourse on the systemic political parties in Bulgaria and Great Britain (2010-2019)**

The electoral rise of radical right-wing populist parties in Europe over the past two decades has been the subject of hundreds of studies. In this sense, the topicality and significance of the topic of Mila Moshelova's dissertation is indisputable.

The presented dissertation consists of 196 pages, containing four main chapters, an introduction, a general description of the dissertation, a conclusion, a bibliography and three appendices.

The dissertation contains rich empirical material presented in 8 tables and 16 graphs.

The dissertation begins with a short introduction of one and a half pages, followed by a second part entitled "General Characteristic of the Dissertation". It presents the topicality of the topic, the basic research questions, goals, and hypotheses. The main aim of the dissertation is to trace the influence of radical right-wing populist parties in terms of issues and policies, inter-party competition and effects on the party system. Three main hypotheses are formulated that look for evidence of the impact of radical right-wing populist parties on the political process and the reactions of mainstream players in the party system, such as response and political behavior.

The main methods used in the research are also presented, as in addition to the analysis of the content of documents, speeches and statements, Mila Moshelova also analyses the data from two authoritative comparative studies - the expert study of Chapel Hill, positioning the parties in the political space and the Comparative Manifesto Project, examining the pre-election programs of the parties on certain key policies and topics. The main research questions and tasks are clearly and thoroughly defined.

The dissertation is a comparative study of two separate cases - Great Britain and Bulgaria, which represent two different party systems in character and type. The advantage of this approach, like case selection, is that it allows testing hypotheses that start from different starting positions and premises but arrive at the same result. Thus, it can be proven that the influence of the radical right-wing political discourse on the behavior of the other mainstream parties in each party system is significant, regardless of whether it is a highly institutionalized and established two-party system like the British one, or a new and weakly institutionalized multi-party system like the Bulgarian one.

The first chapter outlines the theoretical framework of the dissertation. A detailed and comprehensive review of the various theoretical models devoted to the nodal category of "inter-party competition" has been made, which serves as the starting point of the analysis. The author demonstrates a thorough knowledge of the scientific literature related to both radical right-wing populism and political parties and party systems in general. The key concepts of populism, Euroscepticism, radicalism, inter-party competition are clarified. The reasons for the emergence of new contenders challenging the traditional parties, bringing new topics to the fore, are examined in detail. The most recent research by Green Pedersen, Bonnie Meguid, Sarah Hobolt and Kathryn de Vries is also reviewed, confirming the excellent knowledge of the subject.

The second and third chapters examine separately the two cases under study. First, the Bulgarian case is analysed. The development and genesis of the radical right for the period under study are examined. To prove her basic hypotheses, the author has analysed rich empirical material from interviews, speeches, political declarations. The data from the expert research of Chapel Hill reflects the changes in the positioning of

the parties in the GAL/TAN value scale. Particular attention is paid to topics articulated noisily by the radical right, which provoke a reaction from the mainstream parties and a change in their positions. These are the topics on the Istanbul Convention, migration, the rights of the LGBTI community, relations with North Macedonia. The general conclusion is that the influence of radical right-wing populist parties has increased since they came to power in 2017.

The third chapter devoted to Great Britain follows a similar structure. Initially, a brief overview of the characteristics of the party system in the country was made, analyzing the electoral results of the national elections and the elections for the European Parliament. The following is a detailed retrospective of the historical and contemporary manifestations of the far right in the country, with a primary focus on the UKIP. The main topics of analysis are the attitude towards membership in the European Union and immigration issues. The author proves that the presence of UKIP in the European Parliament and the propagated thesis for leaving the EU played a significant role, which led to a change in the behavior and positioning of the conservatives on the subject.

In the fourth chapter, a comparative analysis of the two cases is made, where some commonalities and regularities are brought out that confirm the theory and the raised hypotheses. Here is the main contribution of the dissertation – regardless of the objective structural differences in the two studied cases, we can see a similar result from the point of view of the influence of the radical right populist parties on the mainstream parties.

In conclusion:

I fully and categorically support the awarding of the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in professional direction 3.3. Political Science (Modern Bulgarian Politics) by Mila Boyanova Moshelova.

30.10.22

Associate Prof. Milen Lyubenov