

OPINION

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For the dissertation "Organizational Building and Institutionalization of Political Parties in Bulgaria: 1990 – 2018. Patterns of consolidation and fragmentation of the party system in transition", submitted by Hristo Hristov Panchugov for the award of PhD in 3.3. Political Science

1. Significance of the researched problem in scientific and scientific-applied terms

Hristo Panchugov's dissertation is dedicated to a relatively poorly researched problem in Bulgarian political science, namely to what extent can the party system in a post-communist society be relatively autonomous in relation to the framework in which it exists. The author disputes with arguments the approach imposed in Bulgarian political science for the supremacy of the party system - from the ideological scale or depending on the cleavages in society. According to the author, the consolidation and fragmentation of the party system (to which a solid scientific review is devoted in the first chapter) are less important than examining it along the axis of "stability – change", where its eventual uniqueness can be highlighted.

The author makes thorough analysis of theories and models that focus on the relatively autonomous nature of parties as the main actors of the system capable of "limiting" the choice of the voters, not just depending on it (chapter two). The genesis and context of newly emerging significant parties in Bulgaria at the beginning of the new century after the end of the "bipolar model" in 2001 (chapter three) are examined in these framework.

The solid nature of the scientific work is confirmed not only by its structure and volume (183 pages, i.e. 226 standard pages), but also by the literature used - a total of 117 sources. The dissertation was prepared at the New Bulgarian University under the scientific supervision of Prof. Dr. Evgeni Dainov. The author Hristo Panchugov is a respected university lecturer and has professional political experience.

2. Justification of the goals and tasks in the dissertation

The purpose of the scientific text is "to point out, summarize and analyze the characteristics of the Bulgarian party system, beyond existing summaries, which assume that as challenges, dynamics and mechanics, it is the same as the larger group of post-communist systems" (p. 7). This purpose is well justified in the dissertation.

Pursuant to the first more specific task-to analyze the degree of polarization of the Bulgarian party system, the author deals well with the theory-how applicable to post-communist party

systems is the concept of Mair (1996) for an open and closed system. The author eventually positions himself clearly in the concept of Sartori (1990) (see also the upgrading theory of Wolinetz (2004)), "which looks at both the number of parties in the system and its mechanics - the structure of the competition."

The second task - to investigate the problem of the relationship between the organizational development of individual party organizations, focusing mainly on the typology of Panebianco (1988) for the organizational development of parties, was also successfully completed. The dissertation focuses on the factors "stability - change" of party systems, with an emphasis on the organizational model of the "new" and "relevant" political formations in Bulgaria, paying special attention to the additional criterion for selection - the charismatic leadership (pp. 7-8).

3. Correspondence between the chosen methodology and research methodology and the set goal and tasks of the dissertation work

The chosen methodology is suitable in view of the aim and tasks of the dissertation. Two methodological frameworks can be distinguished. The first one is for empirical observation of the leading indicators, allowing to track the main orientations of the political parties relevant to the study (p. 111). The second framework was also set on the basis of the existing models, i.e. evaluating the main trends in the organizational construction of the parties (p. 137).

4. Scientific and scientific-applied contributions of the dissertation work (description and evaluation)

The dissertation has clearly traceable contributions. Here are some of them:

- The scientific overview of the main approaches to the analysis of party systems and their explanatory typologies allows to derive the basic criteria for analysis the Bulgarian party system (according to Sartori (1990) and Wolinetz (2004).
- A new approach to the examination of the Bulgarian party system along the axis of „stability – change“ is proposed and defended. Although the degree of party fragmentation changed significantly in the period 2001-2018, the system remained in a stable state of polarization (pp. 165-168). At the same time, the paradox highlighted by the author is impressive: "static and cartelization of the party system, but a high degree of openness and emergence of new political entities" (p. 169). It has also been proven that specifics of the system, such as the lack of structured "cleavages" (with the exception of the deeper rift along the axis of „communism - anti-communism“) dull the ideological and programmatic development of the parties, which leads to an increase in the importance of factors such as charismatic leadership, used to achieve political goals (p. 165).
- In this regard, the contribution with the systematization of the concept of "charismatic party" and the operationalization of criteria for their assessment by adapting the methodology of Enyedi and Linek (2008) can be mentioned.

- By building on already available research, the dissertation enriches the empirical base for the study of the Bulgarian party system by using secondary data from existing databases, as well as from quantitative empirical studies conducted in Bulgaria.
- As a special contribution point, I would single out the author's analysis of some similarities, but mostly of the significant differences in the leadership, organizational models and relations with voters of the three "charismatic" parties of the beginning of the 21st century, operating partly in the field of populism - NDSV, "Ataka" and GERB.

5. Evaluation of the publications on the dissertation work: number, nature of the editions in which they were published

The author has presented a sufficient number of scientific publications that illustrate key points and scientific contributions of the dissertation. A total of 11 publications on the subject of the dissertation are indicated in the abstract of the dissertation: two in Bulgarian and nine in English. Four of the publications are co-authored in English and published in international scientific collective works in refereed and peer-reviewed editions. Five publications are articles in the Dictionary of Political Concepts (NBU edition in English).

6. Citation by other authors, reviews in the scientific press, etc.

At this stage, I have no information on whether and how the publications referred to above have been cited and interpreted by other authors. At the same time, I should note that the four texts in authoritative English-language editions were published very soon - in 2022 and 2023.

7. Opinions, recommendations and notes

As a more serious deficiency of the scientific work, I consider the presence of only one expert interview (with the secretary general of GERB). The dissertation suffers from the lack of "narratives" from key figures in party building. I state this without in the least underestimating the personal observations of an actively engaged former party professional such as Hristo Panchugov.

I would make the following two recommendations to the author:

1. He notes that the party system in Bulgaria in the period 1991-2001 can be characterized by Sartori's concept of "moderate pluralism", but that this type of pluralism does not contribute to the institutionalization of the main parties and a strengthened relationship with their voters because it remains at the programmatic level, as noted by Panchugov himself. I suggest to think about whether in the future it is not more appropriate to consider the Bulgarian party system in the "gray zone between moderate and polarized pluralism", characteristic of post-communist countries in Europe, as noted by Tiemann (see Tiemann (2011), 134-135; Kanev (2014), in: Todorov 2018, 46). Moreover, "moderate pluralism" goes in a "package" with other features of more developed liberal democracies - early democratization, highly developed rational-legal authority (rule of law) - as opposed to political clientelism, etc. (Hallin and Mancini 2004, 46-65). 2. When building on the dissertation work, to investigate

two trends neglected in it - the oligarchization of parties and the deepening liberal-conservative rift in Bulgarian society as a factor influencing the party system.

8. Conclusion with a clearly formulated positive or negative assessment of the dissertation work

In view of all the strengths of the dissertation, its contributing moments and despite some noted weaknesses, I strongly recommend to the esteemed jury to vote "for" awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional direction 3.3. "Political Sciences" by candidate Hristo Panchugov.

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