

## OPINION

By **Prof. DSc. Tatiana Trifonova Tomova**, SU "St. Kl. Ohridski", 3.3 Political Science (Public Administration)

to acquire the scientific degree "doctor" in professional field 3.3 Political Sciences (Comparative Political Science)

with candidate **Hristo Hristov Panchugov**

Dissertation topic: **Organizational construction and institutionalization of political parties in Bulgaria: 1990 - 2018 (Models of consolidation and fragmentation of the party system during the transition)**

The peer-reviewed dissertation contains an Introduction, three Chapters, a Conclusion, Bibliography and Appendices. The text is developed on 170 pages. The bibliography contains 116 scientific publications. The appendices present data from the author's secondary processing of data used as evidence in the development of the doctoral thesis.

The structure of the work meets the requirements for such work. The Introduction justifies the significance of the research problem and clarifies the aims, objectives and methods of the work. The First chapter introduces the main theoretical concepts related to party systems - the aim is to use them to derive the characteristics of the democratic party system in Bulgaria from the beginning of its current outline until 2018. The Second chapter lays the theoretical basis for an analysis of the organizational development of the political parties in Bulgaria in the studied period. The Third chapter presents the study of three cases of political parties in order to make, on this research basis, generalizations about the peculiarities of the organizational development of political parties in the transition. The conclusion confirms the doctoral thesis, namely that the Bulgarian party system in the studied period is characterized by statics and cartelization, by a high degree of openness and the emergence of new political subjects.

The structure is sustained and logical from research point of view. In the dissertation a transition from the general to the particular is made, and in the end, conclusions about the particular are formulated. The latter, in turn, enrich the knowledge of the general by developing and adapting the research methods used and by upgrading existing classifications and theses. The literature used includes the main authors in the field of party systems, as well as those in the field of the Bulgarian party system of transition.

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

Judging by the publications, the research problem to which the dissertation is devoted seems to be particularly relevant during the first two decades of the transition to democracy in Bulgaria, after which there is a relative lull on the subject. This initial scientific debate has a predominantly normative, evaluative character. This state of research is inevitable due to the fact that it accompanies the shaping of its own object. Due to the lack of any distance from actual processes, these studies remain more in the logic of ideal models and comparison with them. 30 and more years after the beginning of the formation of the democratic party system in Bulgaria, it is now possible to separate the random from the recurring characteristics, as well as the ideal from the real models. In this sense, the dissertation research is significant and to a large extent timely - it steps on the opportunity to draw empirically provable conclusions about the permanent characteristics in the organizational construction of the party system in Bulgaria and to distinguish the desired from the possible.

Since the problem of the parties continuously and still excites the Bulgarian society and remains at the center of the public debate, the dissertation study is important to calm the passions in it thanks to its rigorously scientific, to a large extent impartial view of the existing party system.

### **Justification of the objectives and tasks in the dissertation work.**

The aims and objectives of the dissertation are clearly stated in the Introduction. They are mainly centered on establishing the specifics in the organizational development of contemporary Bulgarian political parties and clarifying the apparent paradoxes in it: stability of the party system despite the constantly recurring appearance of new participants in it; cartelization despite openness; stability despite change; charismatic and populist at the same time. Such goals are fully justified due to the already obvious fact that the Bulgarian democracy is different from the old democracies, at least because its foundations are laid in a different historical time. It is also different from the new European democracies, due to the fact that it takes shape in a different cultural environment. This fact, however, should be clarified and considered, instead of becoming an occasion for finding fault.

There is complete correspondence between the aims and the tasks of the dissertation work. The tasks of the doctoral research are primarily related to the establishment of the real state of specific indicators for the organizational development of the party system.

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

An appropriate combination of methods was used to prove the doctoral thesis. Without this being explicitly stated, the dissertation was developed on the basis of extremely serious and thorough desk research. The author knows and freely comments and uses the main scientific concepts in the field of party systems, incl. of the Bulgarian party system since the transition. The dissertation research also contains an analysis of the political programs of the so-called effective parties (document analysis), a comparative case study, as well as a secondary processing of comprehensive data from exit polls for the period. In the dissertation text, the author states that he used the interview as a method, but the results of using this method are not highlighted enough and are rather invisible.

The methodology used is suitable mainly because of its complex nature, which is expressed in the mutual complementarity of the research methods. It is applied professionally, with the main concepts being appropriately operationalized and adapted in view of the research objectives and the peculiarities of the studied social environment. Especially valuable in this regard is the clarification of the choice of the so-called "effective parties", the adjustment of certain thresholds for the inclusion of specific political parties in the study, etc. The corrections in the applied methods are well justified and presented by the author.

**Scientific and scientific-applied contributions of the dissertation work (description and evaluation), including the presence of an original contribution in science.**

I accept and agree with the self-assessment of the contribution points of the dissertation made in its Conclusion and in the Abstract. In my opinion, the main contribution is to science, and it is related to the implicit thesis that the "paradoxes" in democratic party systems are not deviations, but natural consequences of the change (presence, absence or relative weight) in the factors that influence their formation. A similar thesis exists in science, but new facts were found in Hristo Panchugov's dissertation that prove its validity.

The peer-reviewed dissertation also contains contributions to research practice - they are related to the development and upgrading of methodologies for researching the organizational construction of party systems.

The contributions of the dissertation are significant and can influence research practices in a positive heuristic direction.

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

Hristo Panchugov participates in the current procedure with 11 articles and studies, some of which are in English. They are related to the topic of the dissertation and are dedicated to specific aspects in clarifying the research question of the dissertation study. The publications are of high scientific quality, relevant to the state-of-art political science content and methods. Moreover, they deal with issues that are part of the actual public debate. This further increases their usefulness.

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

Hristo Panchugov is actively present in the professional and media debate about the current state of the party system and political parties in Bulgaria. His analyzes greatly influence the formation of public opinion and the development of scientific research in the country.

**Opinions, recommendations and notes.**

I will allow myself to point out some relative weaknesses of the work presented for opinion, especially with a view to its future development.

In our dissertation text, there are some statements that are extremely important, but seem to "hang in the air". Since this is a scientific and not a journalistic text, such enigmatic treatment of the facts is unacceptable. It is mainly about the statement that in 2018 a new stage of the organizational construction of the party system in Bulgaria begins. Following the logic of the dissertation itself, there seems to be nothing new - a new subject(s) has appeared, but the party system perhaps remains stable?!

My other remark is more of a wish. The paradoxes in Bulgaria's party system have been proven, but not sufficiently explained. It seems to me that it would be extremely useful for research to continue and explain the factors that lead to stability and change at the same time.

And, of course, I have a question out of "healthy" curiosity: Does the thesis of "depolicitization" of public governance, which is extremely widespread in current science, affect and in what way the organizational development of party systems in general, and in Bulgaria in particular?

### **Conclusion**

Having in mind the qualities of the dissertation work, the potential for future research work embedded in it, as well as the competences of its author, I am fully convinced to support the awarding of the scientific-educational degree "doctor" in scientific field 3.3 Political sciences (Comparative political science) to Hristo Hristov Panchugov.

03. 03. 2024 г.

Signature: 

Prof. DSc Tatiana Tomova