

REVIEW

of the dissertation by **Martina Tsvetanova Marinova "Party System in the EU – Dynamics after the Lisbon Treaty,"** submitted for the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science**

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I. Candidate Information

Martina Marinova graduated with a bachelor's degree in political science, specializing in European Integration, from Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in 2016. In 2018, she obtained a master's degree in political management from the same university, where she enrolled in a full-time doctoral program in 2020. Throughout her education and professional career, Martina has held various positions at the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, the Bulgarian Food Safety Agency, the District Electoral Commission, and in the private sector. As part of the procedure, a list of six publications has been presented, related to European integration, electoral processes, and political transformations in the European Union, reflecting the broader interest of the candidate in the topic of the dissertation.

II. General Characteristics of the Dissertation

The dissertation comprises a total of 254 pages, including an introduction, five chapters, a conclusion, research contributions, a bibliography, as well as 39 tables and 30 figures that complement the analysis and presentation of the data.

The introduction presents the research problem, the objectives and tasks of the study, and the main research hypothesis. The methodology for achieving the set objectives is described, and three working hypotheses are formulated. These hypotheses relate to the development of a transnational party system, changes in the pattern of inter-party competition, and the specific political dimensions of the European Parliament elections.

The first chapter examines the main theoretical approaches to studying the European Union and the process of party formation at the supranational level. It is divided into four subchapters, which define the conceptual apparatus and provide a critical review of the literature. Various theories of integration processes in the EU are discussed, including neofunctionalism, the intergovernmental approach, and the model of multi-level governance.

The second chapter analyzes the impact of various crises on the European party system, such as the financial and migration crises, Brexit, and new crises within the EU. The theoretical

foundations of Euroscepticism are explored, and how these crises have influenced the European community and party formation.

The third chapter focuses on the institutionalization of European political parties and the dynamics of the processes of parliamentarization and party formation at the EU level and within the European Parliament. The existence of an effective opposition in the European Parliament and how political groups interact within this institution are examined.

The fourth chapter discusses efforts to create a unified electoral procedure for the European Parliament elections. It reviews various reports and debates at the EU level, including the Duff and Devesa reports. The attempts by the European Parliament to enhance democratic legitimacy and the legal framework of the EP elections are analyzed.

The final chapter investigates the influence of European parties during EP elections and how the manifestos of these parties reflect the Europeanization of the electoral process. Theories of second-order elections and the significance of the European project are considered, as well as the voting behavior in Bulgaria during three consecutive EP elections (2009-2019).

At the end of the dissertation, Marinova presents her conclusions regarding the dynamics of the European party system and the influence of various processes of parliamentarization and party formation on it, summarizing the specific scientific and practical contributions of the dissertation.

III. Evaluation of the Dissertation Content

The topic of the dissertation is current and significant both academically and for the practical aspects of political science and governance in the European Union. Since the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, the institutional structure and political dynamics of the EU have undergone substantial changes, profoundly influencing the functioning of European political parties and their interactions. In this context, studying the dynamics of the European party system is crucial for understanding the current processes of parliamentarization and party formation, as well as their implications for the democratic legitimacy and effectiveness of the EU.

Marinova examines the complex and multi-layered processes of the formation and development of the European party system under the influence of various crises in the EU, such as the financial crisis, the migration crisis, and Brexit, its dynamics, and the impact on the functioning of the European Parliament. This approach contributes to understanding current political trends and formulating appropriate political strategies at the EU level.

The dissertation is well-positioned within the context of contemporary scientific literature, addressing issues of integration and democratic legitimacy in the EU. Various theoretical approaches are used, including neofunctionalism, the intergovernmental approach, and the model of multi-level governance. This allows for a multi-dimensional analysis of the dynamics of the European party system. The study utilizes a rich bibliography and a critical review of existing scientific literature, which strengthens its scientific value and contribution.

The goals and tasks of the study are clearly and correctly formulated, which is key to the successful conduct of the research. The main objective of the work is to trace and analyze three key processes determining the dynamics of the European party system after the Lisbon Treaty: parliamentarization, party formation, and Europeanization of the European Parliament elections. These goals are operationalized into specific research tasks, including a literature review, an analysis of the evolution of European political parties, and an examination of the impact of various crises on party formation at the EU level.

The author clearly defines the key terms and concepts used in the study, such as "party formation," "European party system," "European political party," and "European political group," achieving conceptual clarity and consistency in the analysis. Various data sources are used, including official EU documents, election results, party manifestos, and European Parliament reports. The methodology includes both qualitative and quantitative methods, allowing for a more comprehensive and detailed understanding of the processes studied.

The research results are presented clearly and consistently, using tables and figures that aid in the visualization and understanding of the data. Marinova successfully links theoretical propositions with empirical data, contributing to the persuasiveness of her conclusions. Moreover, she compares her results with those of previous studies, enabling her to identify new trends and make original contributions to the existing literature. In this context, the dissertation considers various scenarios and hypotheses that help to better understand the complex dynamics of the European party system.

The author establishes a strong connection between theoretical propositions and empirical data, which strengthens the validity of her conclusions. She uses theoretical frameworks to interpret the results of empirical research and offers new perspectives on understanding the European party system and the processes of party formation and parliamentarization.

IV. Significance of the Results and Evaluation of Contributions

The dissertation synthesizes three theoretical approaches, managing to offer a comprehensive analysis of the political processes in the EU, which represents an independent contribution. The author proposes new conceptualizations of party formation and parliamentarization, adapted to the specific characteristics of the EU. This is a significant contribution to the theoretical literature, as it provides new tools for analyzing political changes in the EU. The analysis of the impact of crises on the European party system also contributes to the existing literature by providing new data and perspectives in this regard.

Marinova offers specific recommendations for improving the democratic legitimacy of the EU by strengthening the role of European political parties and their interaction in the European Parliament. These recommendations can be useful for EU policymakers and institutions in developing new political strategies. The research provides specific proposals for strengthening the organizational structure and effectiveness of European political parties, which is essential for enhancing their role in the EU political process.

Martina Marinova's dissertation meets the high standards for scientific research in political science. The analysis is well-founded, the methodology is reliable and diverse, and the theoretical and empirical contributions are significant. The critical analysis of existing theories and the presentation of new conceptual frameworks demonstrate a high degree of academic discipline and attention to detail. Marinova's specific recommendations for improving the functioning of European political parties and the democratic legitimacy of the EU are practically applicable and can have a real impact on political processes in the EU. This shows that the research is not only academically significant but also practically useful.

V. Evaluation of Publications Related to the Dissertation

Martina Marinova has presented six articles that address various aspects of European integration, political processes, and the dynamics of party systems in the EU. They offer interesting theoretical and empirical insights, contributing to the expansion of the existing literature. For example, the article on the securitization of public health presents new perspectives on the relationship between health crises and European integration. The publications use various methods, including qualitative and quantitative analyses, which provide reliable and valid results. This is evident in the article on European elections in Bulgaria, where empirical data are systematically presented and analyzed. The topics covered in the publications are highly relevant and pertinent to the current political situation in the EU. For instance, the study on the impact of the war in Ukraine on political cleavages in the EU provides important insights into ongoing political processes.

The presented publications are related to the overall theme of the dissertation and complement the main research questions. The article on parliamentarization and party formation in the EU, for example, directly contributes to the analysis of these processes in the dissertation. The publications provide additional empirical data that enrich and expand the scope of the research. The analysis of European elections in Bulgaria and the review of legislative changes provide specific examples and data that support the overall analysis in the dissertation.

VI. Consistency of the Abstract with the Dissertation

The abstract is logically and consistently structured, demonstrating a high degree of alignment with the main text of the dissertation. It presents a synthesized overview of the research questions, goals, and methods of the study. The main results of the work, all key conclusions, and contributions are correctly and clearly outlined, providing the reader with a comprehensive understanding of the conducted research. The main theoretical and empirical results are presented in a summarized form, which facilitates the understanding of the complex processes being examined.

VII. Critical Remarks and Recommendations

Overall, the dissertation is well-structured and provides substantial theoretical and empirical analysis. However, some aspects could be further developed and enriched to achieve a more in-depth and comprehensive study of the European party system and its dynamics. For example, the initial definitions of key concepts such as "European party system" are too general and do not provide sufficient detail for further analysis. There is a lack of a detailed description of the methodology, which may hinder the understanding of subsequent analyses and results.

In the first chapter, the main theoretical approaches to studying the EU are examined, but there is a lack of specific empirical data to support these theoretical frameworks. The analysis of some theories is uneven, with some discussed in detail and others more superficially. The second chapter contains a detailed analysis of various crises, including the financial and migration crises, and their impact on the European party system. However, the analysis of Brexit and new crises is shorter and less thorough. Quantitative data and statistical analyses supporting the theoretical claims are missing.

The third chapter addresses the institutionalization of European political parties and the dynamics of parliamentarization. However, the analysis of the opposition in the European Parliament is superficial and does not provide sufficient specific data and examples. There is a lack of a more in-depth analysis of the interaction between national and European parties. In the

fourth chapter, when discussing the political debate on transnational partisanship and the Europeanization of European Parliament elections, it would be beneficial to make comparisons with other transnational systems to better illustrate the peculiarities of the European party system. The analysis of the practical aspects of the European Parliament elections is also relatively superficial.

The final chapter, dedicated to the autonomy of the processes of party formation and Europeanization of the European Parliament elections, provides an interesting analysis of voter behavior in three consecutive European Parliament elections in Bulgaria. Data for other member states are missing, which would allow for a broader analysis. The analysis of the relationship between the media visibility of the election campaign and voter behavior is relatively limited and does not provide in-depth summaries.

The conclusion summarizes the main findings in a clear and logical manner, but there are no recommendations for future research and how they could build on the achieved results. It would be useful to consider the practical applications of the research findings as well.

Although the dissertation uses various qualitative and quantitative methods, allowing for a better understanding of the complex dynamics in the European Union, limiting the analysis of voter motivation solely to Bulgaria represents a significant methodological limitation. It reduces the possibility of generalizing the findings to other EU member states, leading to limited validity of the results in a broader geographical context.

Another methodological limitation is the use of aggregated data, which hinders the derivation of conclusions about micro-level motivation. This potentially distorts conclusions about individual voter behavior. Similarly, the empirical data used to analyze opposition behavior in the EP are limited only to debates and votes related to the adoption of the EU budget. This restricts the ability to broadly investigate opposition behavior on other significant issues and topics. Despite these shortcomings, the methodology is detailed and substantiated enough to support the main findings and hypotheses of the research.

Overall, the dissertation is characterized by numerous well-structured tables and graphs that aid in understanding the studied topics. However, in some cases, there is a lack of in-depth explanation of the data presented in them. For example, in the tables showing the percentage share of political groups in the EP (Tables 1.2 and 1.7), additional explanations and analysis are lacking, which could help the reader better understand the significance of the presented numbers and their implications for political dynamics in the EU. Similarly, some chapters of the

dissertation, such as those related to the analysis of political families and cleavages, have fewer graphs, which limits the visual representation of complex interrelations and processes. In other cases, graphs are presented without sufficient interpretation and explanation of the significance of the shown trends. There are also tables showing correlation coefficients between different variables without adequate analysis and discussion of the significance and implications of these correlations.

The results of the analysis of Brexit's impact on the European party system are presented in detail, but there is a lack of contextualization of these results within the broader framework of European integration. Discussing how these results fit into existing theories and research on European integration would enrich the analysis and provide a more complete picture of the studied processes. In the concluding part of the dissertation, the main findings are clearly presented, but there is a lack of connection with specific empirical data from previous chapters, which would reinforce the link between theoretical conclusions and empirical results.

Based on the outlined limitations, I recommend that future research expands the empirical base by including additional data sources and analyzing a broader spectrum of elections and political processes in the EU. This would contribute to a more complete understanding of the studied processes. It is also recommended to use additional methodological approaches, such as comparative analysis and case study methodology, to expand and deepen the analysis of the dynamics of party formation and parliamentarization in the EU. Improving data visualization through simplified graphs and tables and using more intuitive visual tools would facilitate the understanding of the main conclusions.

The presented critical remarks and recommendations aim solely to draw attention to specific aspects of the dissertation that could be improved or further developed in the future. They do not negate the overall conclusion that the research is significant and contributes to the expansion of knowledge in the field of the European party system and political processes in the EU. Focusing on these aspects would allow the author to further develop her research work and achieve even higher academic results.

VIII. Questions for the Doctoral Candidate

To better elaborate on her arguments in several key aspects, I would like to ask the candidate four questions regarding the dissertation:

1. What are the main mechanisms through which different crises (financial, migration, Brexit) affect party formation in the EU? Can you provide specific examples and data illustrating these mechanisms?
2. How does the European Parliament specifically contribute to the process of parliamentarization in the EU? What are the main tools and mechanisms that strengthen this process?
3. How can the proposed theoretical framework be applied in other contexts (e.g., outside the EU)? What are the main challenges and opportunities with such an approach?
4. What are the main limitations of the study, and how would you address them in future research? Are there additional methods or data you would use to expand the scope of the study?

IX. Conclusion

Martina Tsvetanova Marinova's dissertation represents a significant scientific contribution to the field of political science and European studies. The work is well-structured, methodologically sound, and offers an in-depth analysis of the dynamics of the European party system after the Lisbon Treaty. Marinova demonstrates a high level of academic competence and attention to detail. The research includes an extensive literature review, combines various theoretical approaches, and employs diverse methods for data collection and analysis. These methodological aspects contribute to the overall credibility and validity of the results.

The main findings and contributions of the dissertation are clearly articulated and supported by empirical data. The author successfully links theoretical propositions with real political processes, making her research relevant and practically applicable. Despite some methodological limitations and the need for clearer presentation of some results, the work offers valuable insights and recommendations for improving the functioning of the European party system and the processes of parliamentarization and party formation in the EU.

Based on the above, I recommend that the academic committee award Martina Tsvetanova Marinova the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science.

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