

## DISSERTATION REVIEW

**From:** Assoc. Prof. Dr. Plamen Marinov Ralchev

UNWE, Department of International Relations;

Research field: 3.3. Political Science, Political Science (Foreign Policy and International Relations)

**Regarding** reviewed doctoral dissertation in research field 3.3 Political Science (Political Science – Comparative Politics) at Sofia University, Faculty of Philosophy, Department of Political Science

**Reason for submitting the review:** participation in the scientific jury for the defense of the dissertation in accordance with the Order No. 38-110/ 21.02.2024 of the Rector of Sofia University, on the basis of Article 4 of the Academic Staff Development Act in the Republic of Bulgaria and Protocol No. 7 of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philosophy of 06.02.2024.

**Author of the dissertation:** ALEXANDAR IVANOV DRAGANOV

**Topic of the doctoral dissertation:** The Political Parties of the United States and Canada in the Context of the Opposition between Liberals and Conservatives (2016-2019)

### 1. Information about the PhD candidate

The PhD candidate Alexandar Ivanov Draganov completed the PhD program at the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University in professional field 3.3. Political Science (Political Science - Comparative Politics). Previously he received a Bachelor's degree in Cultural Studies and a Master's degree

in Political Management from Sofia University "St. Kliment Kliment". His professional experience as a translator of fiction and popular science literature has helped to form a broad intellectual profile in which the scholarly aspirations of this dissertation research seem to be meaningful and realized. Undoubtedly, from both his secondary education at the National High School for Ancient Languages and Culture and his higher education, the doctoral student has received an exceptionally high educational background. Against this backdrop, his training in the doctoral program of the Department of Political Science represents a holistic upgrade.

The candidate has fulfilled all the obligations stipulated in his individual study plan, including passing examinations and publications. He has been granted the right to defend his dissertation and has been referred to a scientific jury in accordance with the relevant decisions of the departmental and faculty councils and the order of the Rector of the University of Sofia No. RD 38-110/21.02.2024.

The PhD candidate meets the minimum national requirements for the award of the PhD degree. The submitted dissertation has been checked with specialized software and no plagiarism has been detected.

## **2. General Overview of the Dissertation**

The dissertation volume is 212 pages, divided into an introduction, four main chapters, a conclusion and a bibliography. The research has a clearly delineated time interval from 2016 to 2019. In chapter one, the author has provided an impressive theoretical overview of the topic. It begins by examining the phenomenon of ideological opposition and political polarization observed in the United States. The PhD candidate then focuses on political parties in Canada and what he terms their

"unsuccessful flirting with populism." At the end of chapter one, a brief review of analyses by Bulgarian authors on the topic is presented.

Chapters two and three examine, each separately, the structure of political actors in the United States and Canada, with the major parties examined in retrospect for their history and positions in the Liberal-Conservative axis dispute. Attention is also paid to the smaller players, tracing the effect they have had on elections in the time period examined in the dissertation. If chapters two and three are characterized by a retrospective, informative-descriptive study, chapter four is dominated by a problem-analytic approach. A critical comparative analysis is made between the two political systems and the various reasons for the differences observed between the two neighbouring states - cultural, institutional, demographic, social policies, party systems - with the main weight falling on the media.

It makes a good impression that at the end of each chapter the main points are highlighted, and a summary is made, which on the one hand facilitates the reader, and on the other - makes a connection and transition to the following chapters. The bibliography is adequate, relevant to the topic, comprehensive and well presented, divided according to the type of sources cited - scientific and popular literature, journals, official and popular sources, grouped respectively in English and Bulgarian languages.

### **3. Evaluation of conducted research**

The topic of the study is extremely significant but poorly developed in the Bulgarian political science literature. The subject and topic of the research are clearly defined. The subject of the study is political parties in the USA and Canada. The main political actors and the way they have come to their contemporary opposition

are examined. The topic of the study is the opposition between the parties in the two political systems.

The main point of the dissertation is that Canadian voters reject extreme currents in contemporary politics, while US voters, heavily influenced by the country's media climate, are more likely to vote for extreme candidates, especially on the right. This is the result of a societal polarization in which one extreme viewpoint is imposed over the others. To prove his point, the PhD candidate analyzes recent election results in both countries and reviews major media sources to illustrate the different climates in the two countries - the strident opposition in the United States and the tendency toward consensus in Canada.

This dissertation compares the party systems of the United States and Canada. Several research tasks are completed:

- A theoretical review of the academic debate on the topic is conducted. The phenomenon of polarization is examined;
- The structure of the major political parties in the United States and Canada is analyzed;
- The common and different aspects of the two political systems are outlined.

The dissertation shows the contrast between the political culture in the two countries and the way voters react in the new political situation. It looks for the reasons for the differences, cultural, institutional, social, the nature in the party systems. It concludes that the main difference stems from the different media climates in the US and Canada - the US has seen a media boom that stimulates the extreme emotions of citizens who make extreme decisions under its influence. In Canada, there is a more relaxed atmosphere, the result of a public media that enjoys a high level of trust.

Overall, the dissertation fully realizes the research intentions, the structure is appropriate and logical, the research methods, sources and scholarly literature used are relevant and well chosen.

#### **4. Evaluation of scholarly contributions**

Alexander Draganov's dissertation work is undoubtedly of a contributory nature. The author has formulated four claims for scientific contributions.

1. Systematizing and reviewing the existing theories on the subject of the opposition between liberals and conservatives in the USA and Canada.
2. A comparative analysis of party cleavages in the United States and Canada.
3. A comparative analysis of the mechanisms and instruments influencing the electorate.
4. Comparison of political actors in the U.S. and Canada along "liberal-conservative" lines.

We can assume that the claims for contributions in the dissertation are substantially justified.

#### **5. Evaluation of published work in relation with the dissertation thesis**

The PhD candidate has three publications related to the dissertation topic, which demonstrates the consistency of his research interests.

1. *To Be or Not To Be: American Influence on LGBT+ Rights in Bulgaria*, Published in Balkan Social Science Review (BSSR), 2021 (in co-authorship with Assoc. Prof. Dr. Iskren Ivanov).

2. "Third in a Game for Two: the Role of Small Parties in the 2016 and 2020 U.S. Presidential Elections," published in the Journal of Political Studies, Issues 1-2/2022.

3. "The New (Un)Normal - Covid and Maxim Bernier's Right-Wing Populism in Canada," presented at Doctoral Readings 2022.

## **6. Evaluation of the Dissertation Abstract**

The presented dissertation abstract in a volume of 31 pages correctly and to a significant extent reflects the content and all important highlights, findings, conclusions and summaries of the dissertation work.

## **7. Critical notes, recommendations and questions**

The dissertation research impresses with its thoroughness. However, for the purposes of discussion during the public defense, it would be of interest to hear the author's views on whether and under what conditions economic liberalization fuels political conservatism, how political cleavages in the U.S. and Canada are influenced by educational attainment, and how new immigrant communities position themselves along the "liberal-conservative" axis once they have established and obtained legal status in the U.S. and Canada, respectively.

## **Conclusion**

This scientific jury reviews a complete, independently realized dissertation research, which demonstrates the PhD candidate's skills in formulating and researching scientific problems.

In my opinion, the dissertation is sufficiently developed and satisfies the basic requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for its implementation. On the basis of the above mentioned in the review, I give a positive opinion for the award of the degree of Ph.D. in the Professional field 3.3. Political Science (Political Science – Comparative Politics) to Alexandar Ivanov Draganov.

20.05.2024/ Sofia

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Assoc. Prof. PLAMEN RALCHEV, PhD