

Opinion

by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Velizar Shalamanov

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regarding a dissertation for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" on
a doctoral program in SCIENTIFIC FIELD 2.3. Philosophy, Rhetoric (Political Rhetoric)

Author of the dissertation: Boris Ognyanov Tsenov

Topic of the dissertation: "Rhetorical strategies of NATO in Bulgaria", subtitle "The
information policy of the Alliance, implemented through web-based communication channels,
in the period 2016-2021."

The opinion was prepared according to order No. RD-38-104 of 19.2.2024 of the Rector
of Sofia University, by which I was appointed as a member of the scientific jury on the
procedure for the defense of the dissertation on the topic "Rhetorical strategies of NATO in
Bulgaria ", subtitle "The information policy of the Alliance, implemented through web-based
communication channels, in the period 2016-2021" for the award of the educational and
scientific degree "doctor" in the doctoral program in SCIENTIFIC FIELD 2.3. Philosophy,
Rhetoric (Political Rhetoric) by Boris Ognyanov Tsenov.

As a member of the scientific jury I have received:

1. Dissertation for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor";
2. Abstract of the dissertation;
3. Autobiography of Boris Ognyanov Tsenov;
4. Activities performed by Boris Tsenov during the doctoral program in political
rhetoric in the period 2019-2023.
5. Declaration of originality and authenticity by Boris Ognyanov Tsenov, as well as
other documents accompanying the procedure.

In the evaluation of the dissertation, the requirements of the law (ZRASB) and the Regulations
for its implementation (PPZ) are mandatory. According to Art. 6 (3) of ZRASB "The
dissertation under para. 2 must contain scientific or scientific-applied results that are an original
contribution to science". According to Art. 27 (2) "The dissertation must be presented in a form
and volume corresponding to the specific requirements of the primary unit. The dissertation
must contain: title page; content, introduction; exposition; conclusion - a summary of the
obtained results with a declaration of originality; bibliography.'

The dissertation is 144 pages long and consists of an introduction, three substantive chapters
and a conclusion. A list of the sources used (bibliography with 58 printed and 94 electronic
sources) and appendices (4 appendices – 3 NATO documents on strategic communications and
public activities and rules of the Ministry of Defense for public relations) are added to them,
there is no table of used acronyms and abbreviations. A summary of the achieved results, but
without publications on the subject of the dissertation, can be found in the abstract and in the
dissertation.

A list of found citations is not indicated, there is one participation in a project of the "Rhetoric" department entitled "Scientific Forum on Practical Rhetoric: Seminar - Rhetorical Trainings" (with a report on the topic "Rhetorical Techniques in Parliamentary Debates", 2019) and an international conference participation with a paper "Digital Application of Poster Techniques" (2021). A declaration of originality of the results is provided. In the abstract, 4 contributions (contributory moments) are indicated. On the list of publications on the dissertation with the candidate's participation, 3 are indicated in the magazines "Media and Language" and "Rhetoric Online", but there are no attached texts of the articles. There are a number of participations in conferences, simulations, discussions, media publications.

The **Goal** of the dissertation under review is to study the reasons for the low effectiveness of the applied communication models for public acceptance of NATO's mission and values, to convince of the need for Bulgaria's membership in the Alliance and to build sustainable trust in them in order to develop recommendations for improvement.

The **main tasks** are four as follows:

1. analysis of the theoretical framework of political and military rhetoric;
2. analysis of the rhetorical aspects in the documents, regulating the implementation of the communication policies of NATO and Bulgaria;
3. rhetorical analysis of the practical implementation of the regulatory documents, incl. the publications on official websites and profiles in social networks;
4. definition of conclusions and recommendations for increasing efficiency.

In the **first chapter**, the candidate analyzes the theoretical basis of political and military rhetoric as a branch of political eloquence from Antiquity to the present day. The doctoral student's position on the evolution of military-political eloquence and the need to include the communication of military and military-political subjects in peacetime as an additional area in its scope is substantiated. The differences in the theory and implementation of military-political communications in the two major military-political blocks of the Washington and Warsaw Treaties in the second half of the 20th century, with the development of argumentative discourse in the Free World after the collapse of the USSR and the Warsaw Pact at the end of the 20th century, are brought out. From a rhetorical point of view, weaknesses have been identified in the conceptual documents and the approach to their implementation in NATO and in particular in Bulgaria.

In the **second chapter**, the use of the basic theoretical models in practice is analyzed, through a study of the documents defining the communication policies of NATO and the competent Bulgarian institutions - the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defense (strategies, concepts, doctrines, directives). The analysis is based on NATO's definitions of strategic communications, of communications activities and provisions for their practical implementation. The hierarchy of activities in the Alliance and the vision for the ways in which the identified problems are addressed are presented. The lack of strategic documents on communications at the national level, respectively in the competent institutions in Bulgaria, is shown, and the normative documents dedicated to the communication activity are analyzed to identify the weaknesses in them. The factors limiting the effective communication policy in Bulgaria are formulated, resp. applying the rhetorical rules and convincing the audience of the main theses.

The **third chapter** is devoted to a rhetorical analysis of the specific application of the regulatory documents, i.e. of the communication activities carried out in Bulgaria through the web-based communication channels in the period 2016-2021, specifically the publications from the Headquarters of the Alliance related to Bulgaria and the publications of the national competent departments. The reasons for choosing a campaign approach in NATO's strategic communications and the specifics of the WeAreNATO campaign are analyzed. Communications in the modern digital environment are explored. Special attention is paid to the methods and techniques of influencing the public, known and applied until now through the classical political poster (the design of the overall publication, the peculiarities of the use of text and images), adding the new possibilities provided by the connectivity in the global network - hyperlink, interactivity and audience measurement. In chronological order (by year), the political and military-political context, the actions of the Headquarters and the competent Bulgarian departments in the most popular web-based communication channels and the sociological data on the degree of public trust in NATO are presented and illustrated. Emphasis is placed on the communication policy, through the positions of the Secretary General in his annual reports. An analysis of the similar national reports of the MoD was made to identify key weaknesses in the understanding and implementation of the communication activity, as a factor for its low efficiency.

The **conclusion** presents the findings and recommendations of the doctoral student for increasing the effectiveness of communication activities by persuading the target audiences. Historical data on the effectiveness of block campaigns and messages disseminated in Bulgaria during the Cold War are analyzed. Similarities with modern times have been established, both in public attitudes towards similar type of campaigns, and in the approaches of communicators, and factors determining the failure in persuading the public have been identified.

The thesis is defined that the main reason for ineffective communications is non-observance of rhetorical canons. Recommendations have been formulated to improve the effectiveness of communication activities through adequate application of the rhetorical techniques conceptualized in a strategic national document on communications.

I find that the set goal and thus formulated tasks are relevant, and the content proves the importance of the presented dissertation work.

From the candidate's list of publications on the topic (listed separately from the abstract/dissertation) it can be concluded that the PhD student can present his results of independent research beyond what is proposed in the text of the dissertation. No independent citations are given. Two presentations of study reports from conferences are indicated, which demonstrates the necessary publicity of the achieved results.

One participation of the doctoral student in a project is mentioned, but also participation in simulations and discussions, which testifies to the practical contributions of his work.

Formulated contributions in the dissertation can be considered as scientific (1 – contribution 1), scientific-applied (2 – contributions 2 and 3) and applied (1 – contribution 4):

1. First Bulgarian rhetorical study of NATO communications in Bulgaria through analysis of NATO and Bulgaria documents regulating public communications activities and their practical application in Bulgaria through publications in web-based channels.

2. The rhetorical interpretation and analysis of the socio-political discourse of an important moment in modern military-political history.
3. Analysis in relation to the Bulgarian historical and political context of the rhetorical specifics of the NATO communications with a focus on moments of key importance for the abilities of communicators at the Alliance and national level to convince the target audiences in the selected theses.
4. Rhetorical recommendations, directly related to the effective implementation of the communication policy of the Alliance in the Bulgarian context, which give rhetorical and argumentative prescriptions and lines for formulating messages for the realization of strategic communication goals.

The abstract in a volume of 42 pages reflects the essence and content of the dissertation work, with the sources on another 6 pages added.

The work is large in volume, covering a theoretical and applied research on the problem of rhetorical strategies of NATO in Bulgaria and their manifestation through the information policy of the Alliance, implemented through web-based communication channels, in the period 2016-2021. The formulated 4 tasks have been fulfilled.

The focus of the research is revealing the weaknesses in order to formulate recommendations for improving the effectiveness of communications based on the rhetorical models.

The education and professional experience, linguistic competences of Mr. Boris Tsenov have enabled a thorough study of an extensive and complex problem at three levels – general theory, conceptualization within NATO and implementation in practice at the level of the Alliance and Bulgaria as a member state.

Notes to Mr. Boris Tsenov:

1. Citation of publications on the topic and their relationship to the main contributions in the dissertation and abstract would improve the quality of the presented dissertation and abstract in defense of the achievements.
2. Categorization of the contributions to scientific, scientific-applied and applied is necessary for understanding the results in the context of the development of the scientific field and practical implementation. The distribution indicated in the opinion reflects my understanding, but the position of a PhD student who defends these contributions is important.
3. The topicality of the problem allows to look for practical application of the achieved results in projects, which is not presented in the dissertation, but is evident from the list of activities in doctoral training.
4. The application of a comparative method - by periods and with other countries of the Alliance would allow even more reasoned recommendations to be formulated to improve efficiency.

Conclusion

I accept that the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Rules for its Implementation have been met. After familiarizing myself with the dissertation work and the publications to it, analyzing their significance and

the contributions contained in them, I give my positive assessment and recommend that the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" be awarded to Boris Ognyanov Tsenov in SCIENTIFIC FIELD 2.3. Philosophy, Rhetoric (Political Rhetoric) with the topic of the dissertation work: "Rhetorical strategies of NATO in Bulgaria", subtitle "The information policy of the Alliance, implemented through web-based communication channels, in the period 2016-2021."

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15.05. 2024.

/Assoc. Prof. Velizar Shalamanov/