

## OPINION

for the doctoral dissertation on "Regional Television in Bulgaria - Specifics of Media Transformation" by Blagovest Ganchev Iliev for the educational and scientific degree "Doctor", Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Department of Communication, Public Relations and Advertising.

Professional field 3.5.Public Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications - Television Journalism)

Scientific supervisor.

Author of the opinion.

Reason: a member of the scientific jury, according to the Order No. RD-38-330/24.06.2024 and the Decision of the FS at FJMK of 18.06.2024, Protocol No. 9.

### 1. Relevance of the chosen dissertation topic

The relevance of the chosen topic of this dissertation is scientifically convincing- regional media perform a very important cultural and educational function, in a time of universal digitalization of the media environment, cardinal change in the creation of media content, and the emergence of completely new types of journalism-civic, automated, etc. We are witnessing the rapid development of online journalism and the even faster entry of artificial intelligence into the field of journalism. It is no coincidence that the European law on freedom of the media introduces very strong regulation - the creation of a supranational super-regulator called the European Media Services Council, which will monitor whether the law is being respected in each individual member state, whether citizens in the EU have equal access to reliable information, whether they are getting enough news of national and regional importance.

### 2. Structure and content of the thesis

The dissertation is 249 pages long , and consists of an Introduction, four chapters, a conclusion of 154 pages, a bibliography and appendices. The main text includes 28 figures, which are diagrams with results of surveys. The bibliography contains 105 titles, of which 87 are in Cyrillic and 18 in Latin. In terms of length, structure, scientific methods, conclusions and generalizations, the dissertation fully meets the scientific requirements for a doctoral dissertation.

From the point of view of the chosen methodology, the scientific research carried out is based on the examination and presentation of authors and scientific theories, as well as the analysis of surveys conducted in 2021 and 2024, and in-depth interviews conducted according to an established sociological methodology. The PhD student presents a detailed analysis of the results obtained, which are visually illustrated by a number of tables, the necessary scientific conclusions and generalizations are made. The dissertation is very lucid in terms of content analysis, which is structured in four separate chapters. The combination of theoretical and practical-applied methods enhances the evidential part of the dissertation.

Chapter one is a general theoretical one, the PhD student Blagovest Iliev examines the processes of globalization and regionalization of TV programs, under the influence of media convergence and the significant expansion of digital TV platforms on the Web, which leads to a wide variety of TV content that is now offered to the media consumer on many different media platforms. This leads to a broadening of the very concept of "TV", to a significant

complication of the TV industry, but also to a cardinal change of the TV program and also of the basic principles of TV programming.

A second chapter is devoted to regional TV programmes. The PhD student Blagovest Iliev chooses two substantive focuses-the first is news in regional TV programs, the second concerns the problems of the Church presented through regional TV programs, which is very original. The PhD student analyzes in detail the numerous challenges that regional media face-their systematic underfunding, the absence of investigative journalism, and the strong political and economic pressure on regional journalism in general. Blagovest Iliev quotes the Center for the Study of Democracy's conclusion that "the lack of independent media in the country's major cities is a malaise that not only harms public institutions, but severely affects the economic activity of the regions."

The third chapter looks specifically at TV programmes in the city. Stara Zagora, which is three in number, to which is added the online TV "Phoenix" created in 2018. The PhD student focuses on the absence of the production principle in the regional TV programmes, due to the lack of suitable personnel with the necessary educational background for this position. And the even greater shortage of financial resources, which greatly deteriorates the media content in this region of the country. The PhD student presents in detail his own production experiment - the programme (On)meeting, in which he is the author and presenter. It features various interlocutors from the region who tell their true stories in an emotional and engaging way.

The fourth chapter is entirely devoted to the empirical research conducted by the PhD student Blagovest Iliev. The first poll, conducted in 2021, shows that the tendency of media consumers to get their information mostly from the Internet and social networks is also valid by region. But the programmes of the regional TV channels in Stara Zagora are followed by local viewers, and the focus is mainly on news. The 2024 survey shows the main directions for improving the quality of regional programmes, with the main focus on local issues and news. There is a need for integration of regional TV programmes with social networks such as Facebook and Instagram, which will attract a larger youth audience to individual regional programmes. The results of the in-depth interviews are also interesting, showing the main deficits in regional TV journalism-constant need for local news and information, underfunding, scarce programming schedule, strong centralisation of the advertising market, which is mainly directed to the big national TV programmes, alarming reduction of diversity in TV content, absence of original and entertainment programmes, which significantly reduces viewership, etc. Special mention should be made of the detailed content analysis carried out for BNT's 'Bulgaria in 60 Minutes' programme, which expresses the general policy of the public service broadcaster towards the different regions.

The abstract of the dissertation contains all the necessary scientific requisites- a summary of the dissertation, the object and subject of the scientific research, the main scientific objectives, hypotheses and scientific tasks, limitations of the research, methodology used, scientific results obtained, scientific and applied contributions, and it fully meets all the requirements.

### 3. Scientific contributions

The dissertation is an original, and of practical value scientific research, which contains several major scientific contributions:

The first scientific contribution is the comparative analysis carried out by the PhD student in the development of TV programmes by region in Germany, Italy and France. This analysis significantly enriches the possible policies regarding the future of regional TV programmes in the EU, which can be applied in our country.

The second scientific contribution is the study of the role and future development of regional TV programmes in Bulgaria. The PhD student chooses one specific region - Stara Zagora - in which he presents and analyzes the regional TV programs - their specifics, deficits, perspectives.

The third scientific and applied contribution is the content analysis of the Bulgarian National Television (BNT) program "Bulgaria in 60 minutes", which is particularly useful for the illumination of regional issues in the national TV broadcast of the public BNT.

The fourth scientific and applied contribution is the analysis of the results of the surveys and in-depth interviews conducted. They contain valuable observations and recommendations for optimizing the activities of the regional TV programs, for improving their content, funding and management.

#### 4. Publications on the dissertation topic.

The PhD student Blagovest Iliev has submitted 5 publications in scientific collections and scientific journals, which fully meet the requirements for a doctoral dissertation.

#### 5. Recommendations and questions to the PhD student.

The presented doctoral dissertation is an original scientific research, which is one of the first in this media issues. It will be very useful for media researchers who analyze TV content nationally and locally, for journalists who follow the development of TV communication in different regions, its specifics and peculiarities. This doctoral dissertation will also be useful to public relations experts, media analysts, curious and enlightened readers. Therefore, I recommend that this topical research study be published, after a thorough substantive editing.

I have the following question for the PhD student Blagovest Iliev:

1. Which regional center of BNT works really very professionally, and to the greatest extent satisfies the TV needs of its media users from regional TV content?

#### 6. Conclusion

The dissertation impresses with the comprehensive analysis and the research results obtained. The PhD student Blagovest Iliev shows systematic knowledge in the field of regional media in the EU and in Bulgaria, analyzes in detail their problems and future development perspectives. The results obtained from the theoretical analysis are also verified through empirical research and in-depth interviews, which strengthen its evidential weight. All this gives me the necessary grounds to recommend with full conviction to the esteemed members of the scientific jury to award the degree of Doctor of Education and Science to Blagovest Ganchev Iliev for his dissertation on the topic. Professional field 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications - Television Journalism)

Sofia, 23 July 2024. Signature:

Prof. Dr. Margarita Pesheva