

EXAMINER'S ASSESSMENT

of the dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the educational and research degree of *Doctor of Philosophy*

area of higher education 3.5. PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION SCIENCES (Media and Communications – Mass Culture)

Dissertation topic:

Prospects for the Magazine as a Media Platform in a Time of Transformation of the Printed Press. Strategies of Quality Bulgarian-Language Magazines at the Beginning of the 21st Century

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Examiner: **Professor Cleo Protokhristova, DHabil, PhD**
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The dissertation submitted by Panayot Stefanov is an ambitious and purposeful research project, aware of its own usefulness. The choice of topic concerning the future of magazines in the context of radical cultural transformations demonstrates an enviable flair for relevance and it fills in some of the existing gaps in the media platform studies available to date. What is more, the thesis is mindful of the subjective and objective factors that make the timeliness of the issues (caused by the so-called digital turn) a critical emergency. There is no doubt about the doctoral student's competence in the field of research, acquired through his considerable practice in the media sector, as well as his reliable theoretical background duly showcased by the impressive number of titles referenced in this study. Panayot Stefanov's dissertation deserves additional credits for his professional involvement in the research area in his capacity of a long-standing magazine publisher and editor-in-chief. His preferred methods of research correspond to the chosen goals and guarantee the positive outcome of the research that he has carried out.

The dissertation is logically structured, in accordance with and in the service of its main emphases of meaning. This contributes to its conceptual and discursive coherence. The different parts follow a clearly outlined plan, tailor-made for the main goals that the thesis sets for itself: drawing upon a study of the magazines published in Bulgaria in the

first two decades of the twenty-first century, to identify the current problems of publishing and the compensatory mechanisms (in terms of favourable perspectives) that give the chance for a strategy backed up by science that would support and further develop these editions.

In order to accomplish its goals, the dissertation lists a series of the specific undertakings in store; those begin with defining and typologising the object of research, go through the choice of methods (theoretical overview, direct observation and discourse analysis), through the identification of basic indicators of quality when it comes to journalistic writing, followed by the historical contextualising of the problems thus identified, and proposing two preliminary hypotheses – all this leading to the ultimate emphasis in the dissertational content: an empirical study directed towards establishing and analysing “the Bulgarian case” in parallel with the general outlines stabilised by theory, and instrumentalising the results of the research.

An apparent merit of the thesis is the skilful execution of the analytical observations of the empirical samples chosen to work with. The doctoral student deserves praise for the efficacy of the interviews he has conducted, choosing experienced publishers who have authority, as well as editors-in-chief and journalists with active and representative public presence within the chosen period. Submitted as an appendix to the dissertation, these interviews possess their own documentary value. Still, I would have to point out a certain imbalance between the conclusions based on the evidence, hypotheses and evaluations of the respondents, which seem to dominate, and the conclusions based on the independently carried out analyses that, by default, should meet higher expectations.

Somewhat separate from the proper scholarly merits of the dissertation, two of its traits appeal to the reader: its positive pathos (one cannot help noticing that the identified strategic perspectives for the magazines outnumber the problems, even if it is ever so slightly) and the palpable presence of an unapologetic personal and professional stance.

My impressions of the thesis abstract are entirely positive; its effective conciseness spells out clarity and testifies to the doctoral student’s conviction with regard to the research he has carried out. Similarly, the enclosed overview of the contributions in this

dissertation commands respect with its succinctness and accuracy. As a welcome achievement I would also like to draw attention to the good public effectiveness of this dissertation, guaranteed by the author's participation in national and international forums (presenting different aspects of his research) and by the publications on the topic of inquiry made in academic editions.

With these overall positive impressions of the work done in the dissertation, I would like to voice several criticisms with regard to the text. There is no doubt that the doctoral student possesses the necessary articulatory skills but still there are examples of problematic clarity of discourse, of (to an extent) dubious wording, and of vocabulary deficiency. A number of typographic and spelling mistakes occur in the text. As I can see the potential of the thesis to be published as a monograph, which would facilitate the future utilization of its informational value and its results, I would recommend that the text be carefully edited and proofread.

In conclusion to the observations and assessments made so far, I would like to reiterate my positive appreciation of the work done and the results achieved in the dissertation submitted for this defence. With its choice of topic, with its methodological inviolability, with the quality of the analytical observations carried out, and most importantly with the significance of its conclusions, this research meets the established requirements for a doctoral thesis. In accordance with all this and as a reflection of my assessment of the achievements of the dissertation as a valuable contribution to Bulgarian media studies, I recommend that Panayot Krassimirov Stefanov be awarded the educational and research degree of *Doctor of Philosophy* in the 3.5. PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION SCIENCES area of higher education, PhD programme *Media and Communications – Mass Culture*, and would be glad to vote in support of this suggestion.

August 2024

Examiner:

Prof. Cleo Protokhristova