



## REVIEW

from **Prof. Lulivera Krusteva, PhD.**

for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional field 3.5. Social Communications and Information Sciences.

with a dissertation on the topic: **"Dynamics and Issues of Sectoral PR in the Unconventional Sector"**,

presented by **Maria Teodorova Krasteva**, full-time doctoral student in the Department „History and Theory of Journalism“ of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication

with supervisor: Prof. Dr. Sc **Lyubomir Stoykov**

### **I. Presentation of the doctoral (PhD) student / applicant on the basis of the submitted documentation**

Maria Teodorova Krasteva is a full-time doctoral student at the Department "History and Theory of Journalism", enrolled by order No. RD 20-16/07.01.2019. She has a master's degree on the subject of the dissertation - a master's degree in "Economics and Management of Energy, Infrastructure and Utilities" (2012-2015) and a bachelor's degree in "Public Relations" (2008-2012), both received at the Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski". The PhD candidate also has over 10 years of practical experience in the field of her scientific research - she was a marketing and PR specialist of the company "Public Service" OOD (2011-2015), executive director of the Association "Free Energy Market" until 2024, currently she is an external consultant of the Black Sea Research Center and executive director of the "Bulgarian Natural Gas Association". The author's personal motivation to undertake scientific research on PR issues in unconventional energy is due to the interdisciplinary education and practical observations in the two sectors analyzed in the dissertation.

### **II. Assessment of the qualities of the text of the dissertation**

#### *1. Structure and volume.*

The dissertation work in a volume of 359 pages (actual part 305 p.) is structured logically in an introduction, four chapters, equally comparable, commensurable in terms of volume and analyticalness - it has an in-depth theoretical part and a contributing scientific-applied part. The text also contains 19



tables and graphs - 4 compiled on the basis of SWOT analysis and 15 on the basis of data obtained from the conducted three in-depth interviews and the conducted author's non-representative research in the form of a questionnaire. The 9 appendices cover 54 pages and 44 graphics.

## *2. Relevance of the topic*

The dissertation is dedicated to a problem not particularly studied so far in the Bulgarian scientific literature, which determines its relevance and significance. Maria Krasteva focuses in her research on a specific PR sector - a sector dominated by strong political influence, regulations, social sensitivity, high complexity. The topic of the dissertation is particularly relevant due to the upcoming entry into Bulgaria of a new share of RES (renewable energy sources) - electricity production from wind plants in the Black Sea region, which necessitates the construction of PR strategies for the acceptance of the technology by society, as the doctoral student points out (p. 8 abstract).

## *3. Aims, Object, Subject and Content.*

The object, the subject, the goals, the research thesis and the working hypotheses, the tasks, the limitations - in terms of the scope of the scientific sources in the systematic scientific review, in terms of the time and the thematic scope of the research (p. 11) - are clearly shown as mandatory components of a similar kind of scientific work. The non-conventional energy sector was chosen as the object of the dissertation research, and the dynamics and problems of the sectoral PR as the subject. The study identifies effective PR approaches and offers solutions to improve the visibility and public acceptance of unconventional energy. The leading research thesis is that RES organizations currently do not use the full potential of PR, which creates a number of communication deficits, reflecting negatively on the development of the sector. In the course of the scientific work, several working hypotheses related to the identification of the main PR problems in the sector are verified (p. 9 dissertation).

Maria Krasteva shows that she knows the theoretical sources available in Bulgarian and in English on the topic of her research to a serious degree. Thoroughly and comprehensively she analyzes existing definitions and opportunities for improving sectoral PR, formulating her own definitions, and her own classifications. The approach chosen by the author is justified in detail in the first chapter demonstrating the ability to think scientifically. The doctoral student offers new interpretations. Formulates a new scientific field in sectoral PR.

Different (five) scientific methods - quantitative and qualitative - were used in the empirical research, which allows in-depth conclusions to be drawn. In addition to the analysis and synthesis of scientific publications on the subject from leading international databases (Google Scholar, Scopus,



ResearchGate, Academia, etc.), the collection of primary quantitative data, data analysis, comparative analysis of the obtained results was carried out. Quantitative research was done through a questionnaire to 62 Bulgarian companies operating in the sector; as well as qualitative research in the form of in-depth interviews with experts and analysis of examples from practice using the "case studies" method.

The bibliography covers 298 sources, 59 of which are in Cyrillic and 239 in Latin. There are 373 references with an index.

The structure, content and bibliography show a very serious research approach.

In the **first chapter**, which is the conceptual-theoretical and starting point for the study is a detailed analytical review of scientific and practical knowledge about communication and public relations. Various theoretical models (of Claude Shannon, Warren Weaver Schramm, Julia Wood, Del Hymes Scott Cutlip, Alan Senter and Glen Broom, Ginny Dietrich, of the representatives of the critical paradigm Kevin Moloney, Roland Burkart) and PR concepts (of Edward Bernays, Ivy Lee, Harwood Child, James Grunig and Todd Hunt) are examined. The development of the Bulgarian scientific school has also been taken into account. Basic problems facing modern PR are also highlighted - digital vs traditional channels, identification of key audiences, using PR's own resources or external agencies, communication crises, etc. The future of the profession is also commented on, as well as the specifics of sectoral PR. An author's definition of PR in unconventional energy is derived, which is definitely a theoretical contribution of the doctoral student (p. 73-74). Conclusions from the first chapter are also highlighted.

**The second chapter** is dedicated to the specifics of unconventional energy, institutions and organizations, international documents and directives related to it (p. 86). It is focused on barriers in the development of RES, on attitudes and public opinion. Maria Krasteva dwells on the complexity of the sector, on the low level of public awareness, on social barriers (p.98), on ineffective PR strategies, on the lack of media interest and expertise, on deficits in social media, on manipulation and misinformation, which requires the conduct of frequent research to provide information on the attitudes of the public towards the sector (p.103). Media narratives are also examined as valuable litmuses measuring the effectiveness of PR practitioners' work. On this basis, the PR problems and PR deficits in the sector are defined: focus on corporate news, search for a more profiled audience, underestimation of social media (p.131), work with local communities, lack of effective communication strategies, which leads to public resistance (p.147) and low social support of the



unconventional energy sector. It makes a good impression that the author demonstrates a critical approach to the commented aspects.

In the **third chapter**, entitled "Techniques and practices for effective sectoral RR", 10 communication emphases are identified, which are well justified: possible communication activities in traditional media, in social media, gamification-activities aimed at children, special events, educational events are indicated.

The **fourth chapter** presents the results of the author's empirical research, which includes a case-study from practice, in-depth semi-standardized interviews with experts and an own survey. Maria Krasteva justifies the use of the choice of each of the methods. Two cases from the practice of communication situations, which led to a serious resistance of the local community to a RES project, were examined and analyzed, one from the USA, the other from Bulgaria. The information and data were collected on the basis of publicly available information on the Internet - for the first case in the period May - August 2023, and for the second - in January 2024. The examined examples aim to illustrate the scale of negative consequences due to communication problems (p.204). The PhD student points out that companies in the field of unconventional energy can win legal battles, but in some cases lose communication battles. The advantage of this approach is that it explores real practices to complement and prove theoretical knowledge.

The conducted in-depth interviews with three experts in the field and the author's survey contribute to the analytical and good scientific qualities of the study. Their results are substantiated, some of which are presented graphically. All collected data are presented in Appendix 7 and 9. Practical schemes for overcoming communication deficits were also promoted - an author's model for identifying and classifying the target audiences of unconventional energy was presented (p.261), as well as a classifier of basic PR narratives (p.266-267), an author's model was proposed and also graphically depicted for effective interaction with local communities (p.273). This part of the work definitely provides new knowledge about the problem under consideration and outlines its indisputable scientific and applied contribution.

The author's derived and defined seven leading problems in sectoral PR in unconventional energy are subjected to empirical verification through quantitative and qualitative methods. It is valuable that the obtained data and their interpretation lead to the correction of the problems initially identified by the



author. At the end of the chapter, 8 highlights are presented as conclusions, which summarize that there is a serious PR deficit in the RES sector in Bulgaria (p.276).

Each chapter ends with summaries-conclusions, which also contributes to the author's argumentation. The main goal of the work - to study, synthesize and supplement the current scientific knowledge has been achieved by the author of the dissertation. The need for transformation of PR strategies in the unconventional energy sector has been brought out with serious arguments.

### III. Contributions to the dissertation research

The presented dissertation is an original scientific study in which, for the first time in Bulgarian research on PR, new approaches are analyzed and structured to reveal the effectiveness of sectoral PR.

**The first scientific contribution** is that a complex study and systematization of conceptual approaches has been carried out and the need for a cardinal reassessment of the existing communication tools in sector PR has been outlined.

**The second scientific contribution** concerns the substantive critical analysis and the enrichment of already existing knowledge in the field of PR.

**The third scientific contribution** concerns the precise theoretical illumination by the PhD student of some leading techniques and means of sectoral PR. For the first time, the main PR problems in unconventional energy have been critically defined and systematized.

**The fourth scientific-applied contribution** is the proposed original author's models to identify and classify target audiences in non-conventional energy, for improving the engagement of local communities, for overcoming mistrust and local criticism. This author's model is implemented by upgrading Graham Dowling's model.

**The fifth scientific-applied contribution** is a proposal for an up-to-date toolkit for the practical application of PR in the unconventional energy sector in Bulgaria as new effective techniques for managing communications in this sphere.

### IV. Notes and recommendations

I would recommend that the dissertation work be published - it would also be of interest to PR experts, regional communities, NGOs and journalists. In view of a possible future publication, it would be good to make a final stylistic revision of the text. It would be good to number the tables in it and to title them, to clean up in places inverted quotation marks, some redundancies, unnecessary doubling of prepositions or comparative degree. My recommendation to Maria Krasteva is to continue monitoring



PR issues in unconventional energy and their transformations, participating as a researcher and practitioner in them.

#### **V. Publications and participation in scientific forums**

The PhD student has four scientific publications on the topic of her dissertation (in Media and Public Communications - scientific electronic journal, in the Yearbook of SU "St. Kl. Ohridski", Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, in Newmedia21.eu - online edition for research, analysis, criticism and in a scientific collection of the FJMC). Maria Krasteva has one participation in an international conference and in a doctoral seminar in 2023. The requirements of the Regulations for the terms and conditions for acquiring scientific degrees and occupying academic positions at SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" for approving and disclosing the results of the research according to Art. 5, item 5 and the minimum national requirements under Art. 63, para. 1, item 4 and Art. 69, para. 3.

#### **VI. Conclusion**

The presented doctoral dissertation is the first scientific study of its kind in our country, dedicated to problems of sectoral PR in the non-conventional sector. The theoretical and empirical research carried out is in-depth, formulating interdisciplinary, essentially scientific and scientific-applied findings.

All this gives me reasons to vote positively for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor" to Maria Teodorova Krasteva in professional direction 3.5. Public Communication and Information Sciences (Business Communication) for her dissertation on "Dynamics and Issues of Sectoral PR in the Unconventional Sector".

Reviewer: Prof. Lulivera Krusteva, PhD

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