



## REVIEW

from **Assoc. Professor Dr. Sc. Maria Popova**, Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski”, Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, History and Theory of Journalism Department, Scientific field 3.5. Social Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications – Theory of Journalism and Media)

for obtaining the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in professional field 3.5. Social Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communication – Business Communication)

with a dissertation on the topic: “Dynamics and Tendencies in Sectoral PR for Nonconventional Energy Sector”

presented by **Maria Theodorova Krasteva**, doctoral student in the History and Theory of Journalism Department, Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski”

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

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

Maria Krasteva is a doctoral student at the History and Theory of Journalism Department between 2019-2024. She has graduated from the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication in Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” with bachelor’s degree in “Public Relations” and from the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration in Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” with master’s degree in “Economics and Management in Energy, Infrastructure and Utilities”. She has significant experience in the field of public communications. She worked for the “Public Services”, publishers of “Utilities” magazine, and then held the position of the Executive Director of the “Free Energy Market Association”. She is also engaged as a PR consultant for several international projects related to the energy sector and funded by EU programs.



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

### 1. *Structure and volume.*

Maria Krasteva's dissertation has a total volume of 351 pages and includes an introduction, four chapters, conclusion, bibliography, and appendices.

### 2. *Relevance of the topic.*

The dissertation is dedicated to the current and interesting topic of communication methods for influencing public opinion when evaluating complex and specific economic activities such as the development and the distribution of the renewable energy sources. The global models for decarbonization and prevention of the climate change, the European Green Deal on the refusal to extract and use traditional energy resources, require informing, preparing and educating European societies about the features of new energy technologies in order to protect the environment and to overcome technological, economic and social challenges.

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

The **main goal** is to conduct an in-depth analysis of the sectoral PR in the field of unconventional energy and specifically the electricity production from wind and solar photovoltaic power. It can assess its effectiveness and to indicate the existing communication and media deficits that do not answer to the modern communication strategies and the current needs of the audience. The **object** is the activity of the organizations, that work in the field of the unconventional energy. The **subject** is the PR models used by the sectoral PR with an indication of the positive and problematic communication practices.

**The first chapter** of the dissertation describes the development of the communication studies, the elements of the communication process, the historical and theoretical establishment of PR, its stages and professional models. Some of its current features are indicated, such as the transition from a reactive to a proactive model, its adaptation to forms of consulting and offering management analyses. Among the main challenges facing modern PR are the dependence on the technology and the multiplied number of communication channels, the influence of the Internet, social networks, mobile communications, artificial intelligence, globalization. Some of the megatrends in the PR development are clarified, such as the need to take into account the environment, the assessment of the importance of public opinion, social and cultural transformations, social movements, changes in people's lifestyle as a result of the pandemic of Covid-19, the decreasing trust in the institutions and the increasing level of empathy in people,



the need for a sense of being part of a community, etc. A separate section is dedicated to the sectoral PR essence and characteristics, which requires good knowledge of the business environment, the specifics of the relevant industry, the needs of the different groups of stakeholders, regulatory provisions and the existing restrictions, the preferred communication channels.

**The second chapter** of the dissertation includes a detailed analysis of the unconventional energy sector, by presenting the specifics of renewable energy sources and their variants – solar energy, wind energy, biomass, geothermal energy, hydropower. Various documents are described regarding climate protection, the role of the business organizations, environmental associations, national and international institutions in the implementation of the national and international policies for the promotion and technological development of the unconventional energy sector. The main PR problems are defined, which, on the one hand, are related to the increased public interest caused by the liberalization of the electricity market, the rising prices of the energy resources, the complex geopolitical relationships, the complexity of the sector, the low level of public awareness and the misunderstanding of social interest. On the other hand, they are the result of the ineffective PR strategies introduced, such as presenting one-sided, mostly positive information about the organizations in the sector, the spread of irregular, rather crisis-based communication, the failure to utilize the full potential of the public communications (including working mainly with specialized, mostly print media), the lack of media interest and expertise from the journalists, and the acceptance of the growing manipulation and disinformation on the social networks. As Maria Krasteva writes in the abstract: “Renewable energy sources have dynamic development and improvement, and today the advantages of these unconventional technologies significantly dominate the disadvantages, providing the most sustainable solution to address energy and climate challenges. PR activities play a critical role in the promotion, adoption and development of the new technologies, outlining the growing importance and responsibility of PR for the overall development of the renewable energy sources and achieving the ambitious global goals for combating climate change, green transition and decarbonization.” (pp. 18-19)

**The third chapter** describes the results of the conducted own empirical research using the method of content analysis of the communication practices of various national and global organizations in the unconventional energy sector. Positive strategies include: developing a



manual to be used by journalists in the process of work; regularly sending press releases, newsletters, organizing infotours and visiting parks, special events, conferences, exhibitions, forums, webinars, educational events, especially aimed at the children and younger citizens; using interactive, attractive and creative technologies such as social networks, podcasts, mobile applications, virtual and augmented reality, gamification; presenting appropriate information – especially stories, infographics, videos, which will attract the interest of the target audiences; using role models, influencers, citizens, opinion leaders, experts; activating relationships with local communities in order to overcome local dissatisfaction, etc.

**The fourth chapter** contains several more own empirical studies. Two cases were observed in which ineffective communication strategies were used, leading to serious resistance from the local community. Three in-depth interviews were conducted with Bulgarian PR experts who work in companies from the unconventional energy sector. The results confirm the hypotheses of the doctoral student: it is necessary to use more communication activities to overcome the fear and scepticism in the audience, caused by the low level of awareness and understanding of the topic, the spreading misinformation. There is a previous negative public image, as well as resistance from conventional producers. There is a lack of clear spokespeople on the topic from the sector associations and state institutions. And above all, it is necessary to work actively with the social media and the local audiences to build properly oriented and understandable messages that emphasize the importance of energy from renewable energy sources for the society – clean air, environment, nature conservation, energy independence of the country, low energy costs. An own non-representative study was also conducted using the online survey method with representatives of 62 Bulgarian companies. The results show that PR activities are carried out with their own internal resources due to the sector being too complicated, but also due to the lack of specialized PR agencies, prioritizing expert channels and audiences at the expense of the local communities. In addition, the communication policies of 12 leading foreign companies were studied according to their activity in the six social networks. The main conclusions again show that there is a serious PR deficit in Bulgaria – specialized PR activities are not conducted, corporate responsibility for the transparency and interaction is not realized, and own internal resources are relied on. Because of this,



organizations cannot properly present their messages to the mass audience, as well as make full use of the social networks, and there are no spokespersons for the sector.

#### *4. Used scientific literature.*

298 sources were used, of which 59 articles, and monographs in Cyrillic, 239 in Latin.

#### *5. Abstract*

The presented abstract has a volume of 39 pages and reflects the structure and content of the dissertation work.

### **III. Contributions to the dissertation research**

The scientific contributions of the dissertation relate to the overall systematization and structuring of new approaches to revealing the essence and effectiveness of the sectoral PR. The main PR narratives of the renewable energy sector are categorized: modern and progressive lifestyle, modern and high-tech sector, contribution to the local economy, carbon savings, protection of the human health, energy security, low energy prices, creation of new jobs, efficiency of the technologies, etc. For the first time, communication disadvantages have been critically reconsidered and the effective communication tools have been derived to improve the interaction with stakeholders. With this aim, an author's methodology of the main PR problems in unconventional energy has been developed to identify the main communication problems and develop effective strategies. The scientific and applied contributions relate to the presentation of an current toolkit for the PR practical application of in the unconventional energy sector in Bulgaria with optimization of the communication portfolio and improvement of relations with the society. Author's models for the classification of key groups that influence Bulgarian organizations (society, local communities and expert audience) are presented, as well as for segmenting audiences in the renewable energy sources sector, by emphasizing the



importance of the local groups (local authorities, local population, local opinion leaders, local businesses).

#### **IV. Notes and recommendations**

If possible, I would recommend that the text be published so that it could find a wider circle of readers who could benefit from its theoretical and practical qualities.

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

The doctoral student has four publications on the dissertation topic, which are presented in the prestigious scientific journals like “The Annual of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication”, the book collection “Media and Communications”, online journals “Media and Public Communication (<https://media-journal.info>) and “Media of the 21st Century” ([www.newmedia21.eu](http://www.newmedia21.eu)). All articles meet the set quality standards, fulfilling the requirements of the Regulations on the terms and conditions for acquiring scientific degrees and holding academic positions at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” for testing and disclosing the results of the study according to Art. 5, item 5, and meeting the minimum national requirements under Art. 63, para. 1, item 4 and Art. 69, para. 3.

#### **VI. Conclusion**

The dissertation is dedicated to the important, interesting and current topic of the sectoral PR essence and effectiveness in the field of unconventional energy. The dissertation is significant in volume, detailed in terms of the historical, communicational and specialized context. The theoretical description is supplemented by author's comments, with a clearly constructed and competent own position. Many and various sources of information have been used, which relate not only to the narrow sphere of PR and public communication, but also to the features of energy and the influence of the media on the society. Scientific curiosity, ability for the scientific systematization, very good knowledge of the sector and the technology of electricity generation have been demonstrated. Numerous empirical data, specific examples have been included, and the conclusions have been drawn after each chapter. Based on the presented dissertation, I strongly recommend the respected scientific jury to award MARIA THEODOROVA KRASTEVA the educational and scientific degree “doctor” in scientific filed



### 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications – Business Communication).

Date: 14.02.2025

Reviewer:

/ Assoc. Professor Dr. Sc. Maria Popova /