



## OPINION<sup>1</sup>

from Assoc. Prof. Stella Angova, UNWE, Media and Public Communication Department  
(scientific position, academic degree, name, surname, educational / scientific institution)

for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" (PhD) / scientific degree "Doctor of Science" in professional field 3.5. Social Communications and Information Sciences.

with a dissertation on the topic: "Stigmatization in Political Discourse in the 20th and 21st Centuries: A Semantic Analysis",

presented by Lazar Shishmanov, full-time doctoral student in the Department Communication, Public Relations, and Advertising of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication

with supervisor: Prof. Diana Petkova

### I. Evaluation of the qualities of the text of dissertation

*I will use three arguments in support of the relevance and significance of the topic.*

*First, political discourse in the 20th and 21st centuries is characterized by the intensive use of stigmatizing techniques – labels, negative qualifications, and semantic frames whose aim is to undermine the authority of the opponent and to mobilize supporters. The study of such practices is relevant because it reveals the ways in which language becomes an instrument of exercising power, through which public attitudes are shaped and political polarization is created. In the context of modern media technologies and social networks, this discourse spreads even faster and reaches wider audiences, thereby amplifying the effect of stigmatization many times over.*

*Second, the topic is important because of the social and cultural consequences of stigmatization. Framing groups of people or individuals (in political speech, the creation of a specific media narrative, etc.) contributes to deepening divisions in society, fuels prejudice, and undermines democratic dialogue. In the 20th century, we see such practices under totalitarian regimes, and in the 21st century – in populist movements and hybrid regimes, which turn language into a weapon of discreditation. The analysis of the semantic mechanisms behind this process makes it possible to trace and interpret the transformation of meanings and to answer the question of how language reflects and reproduces power relations.*

*Third, the semantic analysis of stigmatization contributes not only to linguistics, but also to political science, sociology, psychology, social psychology, sociobiology, and media studies. In the context of global crises and problems with information purity, it is of critical importance to reveal the mechanisms through which language can exclude, oppose, or delegitimize. Thus, already in the formulation of the topic, the dissertation implies not only theoretical value but also practical significance – as a tool for a better understanding of communication strategies and for promoting a more ethical and responsible political discourse.*

*The doctoral candidate demonstrates an in-depth and comprehensive study of the theoretical sources. The approach is interdisciplinary, logically clarifying the essence of stigmatization by critically analyzing the existing literature. The cited authors include both recognized international scholars and established Bulgarian researchers. The presence of numerous high-quality sources indicates familiarity with the established theoretical framework and provides a solid basis for further analysis. The author has achieved comprehensiveness through the systematic presentation of different*

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<sup>1</sup> Note: The text in italics offers reference points for evaluating the research results. Recommended volume of the opinion - 2-3 standard pages



*viewpoints and definitions. In this way, a solid analytical framework of their own is built, which allows for the further development of existing concepts.*

*It is clear from the text that the research simultaneously confirms and develops existing theoretical positions, giving them new analytical depth. The approach used for searching and creating information corpora has made it possible to collect and analyze a large volume of data – 145,224 articles in two international (Associated Press and BBC) and two Bulgarian media outlets (BTV and NOVA). Such scale provides a high degree of representativeness and makes it possible to identify stable patterns and trends in language use. The summary unequivocally demonstrates the realization of political stigmatization, which, in the words of the author, “reflects not only a change in stigmatization strategies in political discourse, but also deeper cultural shifts, such as increased sensitivity to hate speech and the democratization of the communication environment.”*

*The author proposes their own definition of political stigmatization, which is convincing because it synthesizes the main mechanisms and functions of the phenomenon, emphasizing its power-related nature. In this definition, stigmatization is outlined not merely as a linguistic or rhetorical device, but as a deliberate political instrument that serves to discredit and exclude opponents, legitimize power decisions, and mobilize support. The definition provides an answer to how images of the “threat” and the “other” are constructed, which have concrete political consequences – from repression to electoral consolidation.*

*The work is conceptually and methodologically well-structured. The author clearly formulates the aim, tasks, object, subject, hypothesis, and scope of the study. This ensures logical consistency and transparency. The presence of an independent methodology demonstrates a conscious choice of approaches and argues for their applicability to the topic at hand.*

## II. Contributions of the dissertation research

*I accept the contributions defined by the doctoral candidate, as they represent an accurate description of a combination of theoretical novelty, methodological clarity, and empirical validity. In summary, the contribution of the text lies in expanding the understanding of stigmatization as a social and political instrument and in offering an applicable analytical model for future research.*

## III. Notes and recommendations

*My recommendation is that, after revision, the text should reach a wider audience by being reworked and published.*

## IV. Conclusion

*The presented dissertation stands out with a high degree of relevance, clearly formulated aims and objectives, an in-depth study of the theoretical foundations, and the application of contemporary methodological approaches. The author demonstrates the ability to enrich existing scientific knowledge through the critical differentiation of related concepts and the analysis of an extensive body of empirical material. The results obtained possess both theoretical and applied value. In view of the contributions achieved and the proven scientific competence, I will vote in favor of awarding the educational and scientific degree of “Doctor” to Lazar Shishmanov for his dissertation on the topic “Stigmatization in Political Discourse in the 20th and 21st Century: Semantic Analysis.”*

Jury member: Assoc. Prof. Stella Angova

Date: 01.09.2025