

REVIEW

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of dissertation on the following topic **“Political Representation of the Bulgarian Muslim minority after Year 2005”**

for acquiring the educational and science degree of “Ph.D.”

in the professional field 3.3. “Political Sciences”; Major Area of Specialization: Political Science by
Milen Jurnalov

In the dissertation presented for review of the applicant Milen Jurnalov, a topic of indisputable significance from a scientific and applied science point of view has been investigated. This topic is of contemporary significance and originality because in the Bulgarian scientific research literature, there is not such an in-depth and versatile analysis of the specific characteristics, motivation and career evolution of the Bulgarian Muslims amid the political dynamics of the post-Communist transition in Bulgaria. The investigation of this topic by the Ph.D. candidate is a very successful attempt at comprehensive examination of the factors – both historic and contemporary – which motivate or restrict the policies towards the Bulgarian Muslim population as a subject or object of political representation. The practical and applied value of this dissertation is indisputable because this topic has not been precisely thought through in the public domain and in the political dialogue. Political evaluations and poor knowledge of the specific nature of the political representation of the Bulgarian Muslim population are predominant in this field in most of the cases. In most cases, this boils down to an examination which ignores the internal diversity of this community and inappropriately merges it with the other Muslim communities in Bulgaria.

The objectives, tasks and methodology of the study have been successfully deduced in accordance with the academic requirements. The purpose of the study is to check whether and to what extent the belonging of the Bulgarian Muslims to this community affects their political representation on the national and local level and whether and to what extent their two-fold marginalization from the majorities (from the Bulgarian Christians – from the point of view of their religious denomination and from the Bulgarian Turks – from the point of view of their ethnicity) incentivizes them to create their own political projects; whether and to what extent they remain in their traditional role of object of various policies or they succeed in becoming a subject of such various policies, and this purpose has been successfully implemented. The very formulation of the purpose allows the Ph.D. candidate Milen Jurnalov to conduct an in-depth and original study encompassing considerable factual evidence processed and to arrive at consistent and convincing conclusion and summaries.

The investigative tasks have been formulated very successfully and have been well researched in the different chapters: The theoretical chapter provides a convincing answer to the question of how the diverse communal identification of the Bulgarian Muslims and their various theories of origin affect their political choice. The subsequent chapters of the study clarify convincingly to what extent the Bulgarian Muslims have been converted from an object of the government policies to a subject of such policies both on a regional and on a national level. Comprehensive analysis has been conducted of the extent to which the attitude of the political parties to the Bulgarian Muslims is identical with the attitude to this specific community as a whole or is transformed into an attitude towards specific citizens who are valued highly or poorly because of their personal traits instead of because of belonging to the specific community. The part of the study that shows how the strategies of the nationally-represented political parties for inclusion of the Bulgarian Muslims in the government of the country change over time is especially profound and convincing. The Ph.D. applicant Milen Jurnalov has investigated in a very interesting and original manner both the attempts of the Bulgarian Muslims at implementation of their own political party projects and their motivations and realization of their political choice as members of parliament, mayors, municipal councilors and senior government officials in the state administration.

The investigative thesis that the gradually-expanding political representation of the Bulgarian Muslims happens above all through the traditional political parties instead of through their own projects and that, nevertheless, the attitude towards their representatives remains to a great extent the same as the attitude to the marginalized community, has been successfully derived and proven by means of the structure and content of the dissertation.

In his dissertation, Milen Jurnalov has made a comprehensive overview of the studies tracing various aspects of the policies towards and by Bulgarian Muslims. The main authors on the topic examined have been mentioned on an analytical and differentiated basis. The various interpretations of the theoretically thinking through of the policies towards the Bulgarian Muslims in a historical, cultural and contemporary context have been covered. The number of authors used is convincing and representative as a sample. The main bibliography sources have been thoroughly examined, as well as a multitude of studies, reports and scientific papers of renowned specialists in this field. The study contains a very well organized scientific apparatus. The authors used have been cited correctly and entirely compatibly with the academic requirements. The bibliography referenced has been drafted accurately and meets the requirements as well.

The chronological framework of the study has been successfully and consistently defended – year 2005 to year 2020. The lower boundary has been appropriately chosen for political considerations selected as the beginning of the active nationalist rhetoric in the Bulgarian public sphere. The upper boundary has also been convincingly chosen and defended but this time for technical considerations, which have their valid grounds – the last local elections in year 2019 and the political crisis of the subsequent three years.

The structure of the dissertation of Milen Jurnalov is well-balanced in four chapters which have a logical connection with each other and consistently derive the various emphases of the study. There is an analytical first chapter which is focused on the specific definition of concepts related to the ethnicity identification of the Bulgarian Muslims which is subject to discussion not only in the academia circles but also in the public domain. It is definitely worth it in this chapter to set out one of the major contributions of this study because the author of the dissertation has provided a specific response to the assertion that the ethnicity identification of the Bulgarian Muslims is postulated “from outside” and “from above” as Bulgarian through the language. The arguments for asserting the concept used – Bulgarian Muslims – have been accumulated through critical analysis of the studies of various authors (Bulgarian ones and foreign ones; historical ones and contemporary ones) with an emphasis on an evaluation component by the author of the dissertation.

The methodology chosen is appropriate and enables the achievement of a convincing political science analysis. The methods used by Milen Jurnalov are appropriate and have been successfully applied to achieve the goal set and to solve the scientific research tasks undertaken. By means of the historical analysis, the processes of treatment of the Bulgarian Muslims as an object of policies have been traced: policies of the state (The Revival Process), the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the Rodina Organization, an impressive volume of relevant information has been collected about these processes. The political science approach has also been defended successfully because the various chapters have been organized on the topical principle and they deduce consistent aspects for the thorough elucidation of the topic examined in the dissertation. By means of these aspects which have been organized in separate chapters, there is a convincing accumulation of arguments through detailed and comprehensive information about the processes unfolding for inclusion or rejection of the Bulgarian Muslims into or from the political life of the parties and the country.

A very potent political science analysis has been applied to the derivation of the policies towards this community by the political subjects in Bulgaria. The dissertation has examined considerable factual evidence balanced successfully with summaries and conclusions. The policies of inclusion or rejection of the Bulgarian Muslims into or from the activities of the nationally-represented parties such as Union of Democratic Forces, Bulgarian Socialist Party, Movement for Rights and Freedoms, GERB, Simeon the II nd National Movement in the period from 2005 to 2020 have been examined in detail. The motivation not only of the various parties, but also of the representatives of the community under investigation – the Bulgarian Muslims – has been successfully analyzed when it comes to national and local elections. The consistent and well-grounded conclusions and inferences on the various strategies of the parties towards the Bulgarian Muslims contribute to this analysis.

The successful careers of people from the circles of the Bulgarian Muslims on various political levels have also been deduced as a convincing emphasis in the investigation of Milen Jurnalov. The factors which facilitate or hinder the political representation at the local and national level have been successfully structured and the effectiveness of the activities of the political representation on

the local and national level has been evaluated. This perspective has elucidated the expectations and disappointments of the Bulgarian Muslims with their representatives in the authorities at the various political levels. Thus a very consistent connection has been drawn between attitude, motivation, strategies and results of the involvement of Bulgarian Muslims in various families from the ruling parties participating vigorously in national and local elections.

Statistics on the results from various elections have been presented and well-processed to a considerable extent, which means that the study by Milen Jurnalov has made other major contributions as well.

The analysis of the separate party projects of the Bulgarian Muslims, such as the party of Professor Palov “Progress and Prosperity” and the party of Efrem Mollov “POMAK” is also an interesting and well-investigated emphasis.

The emphases deduced (through the separate parts of the whole structure) are the first argument to be pointed out to defend the assertion that a clearly-distinguishable, well-investigated and well-grounded theoretical model underpins the study of Milen Jurnalov. These very emphases enable him to get profound insights into the topic, which were convincingly made in the dissertation. The successful theoretical model is reinforced by the clearly-deduced comparative perspective on the policies towards the Bulgarian Muslims, which have been presented in a synthesized and analytical manner in the historical context (in Chapter Two) and in a comprehensive and compelling manner in the period of investigation of the topic covered (2005-2020) (in Chapter Three and Four). The dissertation also has derived a comparative analysis of the activities of the various representatives of the Bulgarian Muslims in several dimensions: where are they more active – at the national level or at the local level; where are they more popular; what is their feedback to the electorate; what is their reputation and contribution to the said community that has chosen them. This multi-layered comparative perspective definitely makes the perception of the dissertation more profound as a compelling scientific research product of its author. The theoretical model of the study stands out also in the appropriately structured conclusions and inferences in each chapter. On the one hand, they are distinguishable in the text itself and, on the other hand, they are skillfully structured and underscored.

The assessments made so far of the dissertation work of Milen Jurnalov make it easier to appreciate the contributions made by him himself in the auto-reference – they are 5. Yes, we can definitely state that the study has major contributions by virtue of examining a specific case – the political representation of the Bulgarian Muslims after year 2005. This is a topic which is barely covered in the analyses of the contemporary scientists. In addition to the academic adviser of the Ph.D. candidate, Evgeniya Ivanova, at least other 4-5 colleagues have demonstrated interest in this topic but none of them has examined in such a detailed and multi-layered manner the inclusion of the Bulgarian Muslims into the political dynamics after year 2005.

I also fully acknowledge the second contributions because even in the narrow research and expert environment there are no universal concepts of ethnicity identification of the examined community. First, because amongst its representatives there is genuine diversity in terms of self-identification – Bulgarians, Turks, Pomaks and even Muslims as an ethnicity identification. Second, because this aspect is investigated through the various sciences such as History, Ethnology and Political Science and in the case of each one of them the emphasis of research is different – origin or self-identification.

I also fully acknowledge the third contribution: the presentation of the results from the participation of the Bulgarian Muslims in the national and local elections is truly original, detailed and systematically designed all at the same time in the text. And this is what makes the study of Milen Jurnalov a source of information and statistics which can be used also by other researchers and political analysts.

The high-quality research performed by the Ph.D. candidate on the field and its integration in the analysis is definitely a major contribution as well, because the said community itself is closed and the contacts of outside world with its representatives are complicated by various considerations. The advantage of the author is that he is a part of the said community itself but in certain specific cases this can also create difficulties.

The fifth contribution made by Milen Jurnalov – the fluid nature of the motivations behind the political choice of the Bulgarian Muslims – is to be expected and it is a convincing achievement of the author of the dissertation. Only a genuinely deep knowledge of the examined community can enable someone to draw such an original inference which provides a lot of explanations of the state of political representation of the Bulgarian Muslims and which has not been absorbed, especially at the level of the public interpretations of this topic.

The auto reference has been drafted in accordance with the academic requirement and is consistent with the necessary structure and volume. It presents in a convincing manner the dissertation work of the candidate and contains the contributions made by the author, which I already had the pleasure of assessing, as well as his publications on this topic. The publications themselves – three of them altogether – are sufficient as quantity, according to the academic requirement, and they are related to the topic of the dissertation and are published in reputable published sources.

As a question or rather as an opinion, I will express my doubt as to what extent the identification of the community examined is precise as “Bulgarian Muslims” in the political science sense. If the criterion is the self-identification of its representatives, such a designation is not suitable because only part of them do self-identify as such. In practice, we are again importing an identity from outside (from the point of the view of the researcher) and this identity is not desired or accepted by all of them. Yes, when we are investigating the origin of the said group of people, this designation is suitable but this is a research criterion for the historians and partly for the anthropologists.

Conclusion: I very confidently give a positive assessment of the dissertation work of Milen Jurnalov on the topic of “Political Representation of the Bulgarian Muslims after Year 2005” and I recommend to the Well-Respected Commission to award him the educational and scientific degree of Ph.D. in the major area of specialization 3.3 “Political Science”.

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Signature:

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