

# **SCIENTIFIC OPINION**

on the thesis for the award of an educational and scientific degree "Doctor",

written by **Kristina Nenova Nenova**,

PhD student in professional field 3.5. Social communications and information sciences

Higher Education Area 3. Social, business and legal sciences

Scientific supervisor **Prof. Dr.Sc. Tolya Stoitsova**

Theme of the dissertation: **"Hate speech in politics, reflected in the Bulgarian media"**

Reviewer: **Prof. Dessislava Boshnakova, PhD**

Department of Media and Communication, NBU

## **1. Scientific and scientific-applied contributions of the dissertation (description and evaluation)**

At present, after nearly two years of living with the Covid-19 virus, the topic of hate speech is more than relevant and necessary. Faced with a serious problem around the world, people have split up instead of uniting, and the division has raised to new levels the use of hate speech in traditional media, online media and social media. And most likely, if Kristina Nenova had to choose a topic for her dissertation today, it would again be related to hate speech, but, at least in my opinion, it would not be limited to the field of politics.

Freedom comes with responsibility, but free online spaces are filled with content that is not always created with respect to all responsibilities. The problem of hate speech is becoming one of the leading issues we have to deal with. At the beginning of the introduction, Kristina Nenova clearly points out "the need for more research in European contexts" (p. 7) and undoubtedly this dissertation is a response to this need.

Based on a review of the scientific literature and research on the subject, Kristina Nenova identified "new research searches that call into question residence in only one position" (p. 8). The problem of hate speech in politics is considered from various aspects: legislative, psychological, media and others.

On the foundation of the dissertation is the clearly formulated statement (p. 8), namely: "Hate speech is a preferred tool for communication between politicians and citizens in the online media in the elections in Bulgaria in 2019." I would sincerely like to say that the statement is not

true, it is impossible to prove and contradicts the political practice in communications in our country. Unfortunately, the thesis is based on preliminary observations, within the dissertation it has been proven and it turns out to be not only true, but also working in the political campaigns in our country. I would very much like to see in Kristina Nenova's next research comparisons between hate speech-based campaigns and those based on positive messages, which I would like to believe we have as an example from the last election. At the end of the introduction, the main goal (p. 9) is clearly presented and with the help of what research it will be achieved in order to prove the thesis.

Chapter One introduces the topic and begins with a historical overview of the reasons for the emergence of hate speech. Examples are considered in which hate speech is used as a strategy to encourage supporters of political parties in campaigns in Poland, Kenya, Germany, America. In terms of scientific precision, it would be a plus for the work if criteria were set for selecting specific campaigns in these countries.

Significant attention is paid to the definitions of hate speech according to various criteria. And, as it turns out, there is currently no single point of view, no single definition that can be accepted. The definition of the concept is also considered in the context of such an important topic of freedom of speech. The influence of hate speech through the prism of society, political elites and the media in Bulgaria is considered. The last part of Chapter One draws our attention to ways of overcoming hate speech. Kristina Nenova's good knowledge of strategies for dealing with the problem, which will most likely be part of our agenda for many years to come, is clear.

The Second Chapter is devoted to the interdisciplinary approach to the problem of hate speech. This interdisciplinary approach begins with an exploration of the legal aspects of hate speech. The following are analyzes of the research and the psychological peculiarities of media production. Then we turn our attention to the psychology of hate speech, to get to the last part of the chapter that deals with politics and hate speech in the media. In view of the better structure of Chapter Two, it would be somewhat more logical for the research and psychological peculiarities of media production to be after the part about the psychology of hate speech.

Chapter Three is devoted to research on hate speech in Bulgaria. The precision in the work and dedication of Kristina Nenova is evidenced by the fact that for the purposes of this chapter the results of three studies are presented:

- (1) In the survey of citizens' perceptions of comments of politicians who contain hate speech on Facebook, the goals are clearly stated. The methods for collecting media content in hate speech, as well as the methods for preparing the questionnaire are precisely presented. The representativeness of the results is guaranteed by the number of respondents. The findings of

this study should help communication professionals to plan politicians' campaigns more effectively, and more. It is interesting to note that one of the most common reasons for making comments that contain hate speech is: "neutralizing a political opponent" (p. 150). For me personally, the second leading reason is worrying, and should not be present in the arsenal of politicians.

(2) The second study focuses our attention on the perceptions of experts about the comments of politicians who contain hate speech in the online media. In the context of the discussed gesture of a Bulgarian MEP, this view of the problem is interesting and important. I strongly agree with the conclusion of p. 175 that "Hate speech turns out to be the preferred tool used against opponents - when there is a lack of arguments, communication skills, vision."

(3) The third part of the study is devoted to the preparation (preliminary phase) of a network model for identifying hate speech in online media through the use of latent semantic analysis (LAS). Undoubtedly, the development, adoption and use of such a model would be extremely beneficial for all those affected by hate speech, and especially for online media, communication professionals and participants in political communication.

The **abstract** meets the requirements. The content presents in representative for the content of the dissertation. The most significant contribution of the dissertation is the third chapter of the dissertation, which presents the results of three different studies - a survey, interviews with experts and a preliminary phase of the network model.

## **2. Evaluation of the publications on the dissertation: number, nature of the publications in which they are published**

Seven publications have been submitted for review, of which almost half (three) have been printed yet, and the rest have been submitted and are in print. From the presented articles - all seven - it can be seen that they are part of the dissertation or connected with the topic. All three already published articles by Kristina Nenova are in publications (collections and yearbook), which are subject to scientific review and thus meet the requirements to have collected 30 points from publications.

## **3. Opinions, recommendations and remarks**

First of all, I would like to make the reservation that the notes do not reduce the value of the dissertation in any way. Rather, they are recommendations for future research and related publications:

- Greater attention to spelling details.

- On page 105 there is an internal subtitle "Hate speech during a political crisis", there are subheadings to it, one of which is again "Hate speech during a political crisis" on p. 107. I am convinced that this is an oversight .

- I am convinced that a better way could be found to present the results of the research - graphs such as those of fig. 34 (p. 133), FIG. 38 (135), etc.

I am sure that in order to deal with hate speech, we need research on the subject. I sincerely believe that in addition to politics, such 4 studies should be done in many other areas. I hope this dissertation is a serious start.

#### **4. Conclusion with clearly formulated positive or negative assessment of the dissertation**

Based on the read dissertation, the read abstract and the attached publications, I give my high positive assessment. I strongly propose to the esteemed colleagues of the scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional field 3.5. Social communications and information sciences of Kristina Nenova Nenova for her dissertation on "**Hate speech in politics, reflected in the Bulgarian media**".

Date 22.02.2022

Signature.....

prof. Dessislava Boshnakova, PhD