

REVIEW

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of a dissertation submitted for acquiring educational and scientific **Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)** degree in Field of Higher Education: 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences.
Professional Area: 3.3. Political Science. Doctoral Programme: Political Science.

Author of the dissertation: Veronika Georgieva Prezhdarova

Topic: Evolution of Sovereignty in the Context of Fourth Industrial Revolution

Scientific supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Stoycho Petrov Stoychev, PhD, 'St. Kliment Ohridski' Sofia University

1. General description of the presented materials

By Order No. RD 21-2133 dated December 14, 2022 of the Rector of 'Paisiy Hilendarski' Plovdiv University I have been appointed as a member of the scientific panel to ensure the procedure of dissertation *viva voce* defense on the topic "Evolution of Sovereignty in the Context of Fourth Industrial Revolution" in purpose of acquiring the educational and scientific Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree in Field of Higher Education: 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, Professional Area: 3.3. Political Science, Doctoral Programme: Political Science. Author of the dissertation is Veronika Georgieva Prezhdarova, a part-time doctoral student at the Department of Political Studies and National Security, supervised by Assoc. Prof. Stoycho Petrov Stoychev, PhD, 'St. Kliment Ohridski' Sofia University.

The set of paper materials submitted by Veronika Georgieva Prezhdarova is in compliance with the provisions of Article 36 (1) of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of Plovdiv University (PU) and includes the following documents: a request to the Rector of PU to open a procedure for dissertation defense; a CV in EU format; minutes of Department Council meeting for reporting the readiness to open the procedure and preliminary discussion of the dissertation; dissertation thesis – a total of 248 pages of which 215 pages of dissertation text and 33 pages of bibliography; abstract in Bulgarian language – 32 pages; abstract in English language – 32 pages; list of scientific publications on the dissertation topic; copies of scientific publications; list of marked quotations; declaration of originality and authenticity of the attached documents; certificate of compliance with the Minimum National Requirements for the acquisition of the educational and scientific Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree in Field of

Higher Education: 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, Professional Area: 3.3. Political Science, Doctoral Programme: Political Science. The doctoral student has also submitted two studies and four articles. I have no notes or comments on the presented documents.

2. Brief biographical data of the doctoral student

Veronika Georgieva Prezhdarova was born on October 1, 1990 in the town of Pazardzhik. After graduating from a professional high school in economics and management in her hometown she attended the University of National and World Economy (UNWE, Sofia), acquiring a bachelor degree in Political Economy (2014). In 2015 she obtained a master degree in Political Economy and Creative Economy (UNWE, Sofia). In 2016-2017 Veronika Prezhdarova continued her education at the Department of Russian Philology of 'G. V. Plekhanov' University of Economics, majoring in Russian Language. In 2021 she enrolled as a part-time doctoral student at the Department of Political Studies and National Security of 'Paisiy Hilendarski' University of Plovdiv.

3. Relevance of the topic and appropriateness of the set goals and objectives

The relevance of presented doctoral work is beyond doubt. Veronika Prezhdarova has devoted her dissertation to the Fourth Industrial Revolution, an important yet insufficiently studied and perspective from a theoretical point of view phenomenon and a process. The research goals and objectives set by the dissertation are in line with the chosen topic.

4. Knowledge of the problem

My general impression is that the doctoral student has processed a huge amount of literature on the problem, rationalizing some of the 393 sources indicated in the bibliography while trying to present her own interpretation of the issues related to the development of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Of course some parts of the dissertation text, for example those referring to such influential theorists as Fernand Braudel, Karl Marx, Michel Foucault, Hegel, etc. or the assessments of postmodern philosophy and some of its individual representatives, are dominated by a feeling of fragmentary interpretation of their theories, which seem to be deliberately subordinated to the doctoral thesis. However, the latter has only partially influenced Prezhdarova's overall understanding of these authors and their ideas. Hence my belief that the doctoral student is familiar with the researched problem to which she has dedicated her scientific work.

5. Research methodology

Writing a dissertation is the first serious creative effort of any incipient scientist. At the same time creative work, especially in the field of humanities, is strictly individual and the authors have their own unique ways of seeking answers to the theoretical and practical research problems they are trying to solve. From this perspective I find the chosen methodology largely adequate to the research goals and objectives of the dissertation. Of course other approaches are also possible in the context of modern theoretical paradigms shaped by other, more influential theoretical schools and trends. But the final choice is made always by the author and this right should not be disputed.

6. Characterization and evaluation of the dissertation

The dissertation presented by doctoral student Veronika Prezhdarova is composed of Introduction, First, Second and Third Chapters and Conclusion. The first chapter discusses the evolution and cycles of sovereignty. At the outset the doctoral student outlines the scope of the so-called cyclicity of capitalism. Sovereignty is defined as “supreme state power that ensures to the state independence, autarchy and right to conduct its own foreign policy” (Dissertation, p. 16). It is also stated that cycles of sovereignty undergo a qualitative change and “with each of the cycles sovereignty takes on new characteristics” (D., p. 16). Good impression in this regard makes the assertion that with each new cycle new social institutions are born, which in turn transforms the nature of state government. In other words, each new cycle alters ... the structure of power. As correctly stated by the author, the holistic approach introduced in the analysis is needed for analyzing “syncretically the political, economic, social and cultural processes”.

Central core of chapter one is the concept of four cycles of sovereignty as proposed by the author. These are: (1) state sovereignty; (2) popular sovereignty; (3) national sovereignty; and (4) digital sovereignty. According to Prezhdarova, after passing through state, popular and national cycles, sovereignty enters the fourth cycle, designated as digital sovereignty. Here it is important to pay attention to two key theoretical aspects. *First*, the apt assertion in the dissertation that as a concept sovereignty possesses essential features of all its cycles. “They occur concomitantly in the concept of sovereignty, altering its character at each subsequent cycle” (Abstract, p. 16). *Second*. Another element of the concept, introduced by the doctoral student in the first chapter, is actually the key thesis of the dissertation: “The cycle waves of sovereignty and capitalism are inversely proportional which means that when one of the cycles is in ascending position of its development wave, the other’s wave will be in descending position and vice versa” (D., p. 28). Further on the chapter explores the four sovereignties. Its third and closing paragraph

is focused on the analysis of sovereignty and capitalism in the conditions of globalization and the respective consequences for state and society triggered by these processes. Of interest is the analysis of non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations, the role of transnational corporations in the conditions of globalization and various influential international institutions such as NATO, IMF, UN, etc. Positive evaluation deserves the attempt to graphically present the cycles of capitalism and sovereignty and their evolution. It should be noted however that the graphs presented as a coordinate system on pages 70, 71 and 72 lack a vertical axis. Cycles are presented only horizontally, along the time axis. Thus cyclicity criteria remain largely unclear. They should be expressed on a second coordinate system axis, perpendicular to the time axis. The first chapter winds up with an extension to the initial definition of sovereignty as determined by the analysis outcomes: sovereignty, underpinned by state power, “constantly evolves in time and space, embracing within its qualitative spiral leaps of development new objects, subjects and spaces” (D., p. 72).

Chapter two is dedicated to the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Its research objective and theoretical focus is the study of sovereignty in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The first, second and third industrial revolutions are analyzed with their most important effects on society. The Fourth Industrial Revolution, which “transforms society into a digital one” (D., p. 83), is subject to special analysis. It is pointed out that main distinction of the Fourth Industrial Revolution is the synergy between technology and man which turns physical and biological data into digital (D., p. 84). The author draws heavily on the works of Klaus Schwab, Kevin Kelly’s book (‘Understanding the 12 Technological Forces That Will Shape Our Future’, 2016) and Kai-Fu Lee’s works on the nature of artificial intelligence (AI). Other key technologies of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, such as 3D printer, quantum computer, drone, autonomous cars, graphene, etc. are also briefly presented. An important element of this chapter is the definition of economic, regional and cultural indicia under which countries unite in international organizations to implement their digital sovereignty.

The third and final paragraph of this chapter explores the defense mechanisms of states in the digital space. It is known that digital sovereignty does not yet hold internationally recognized legitimacy, i. e. it’s not codified in national constitutions or international law. This boosts chaos in perceiving, defining and countering attacks in the digital space. By exploring sovereignty in the digital space, the dissertation defines four cycles of sovereignty. The first is related to the protection of citizens and their personal data, the second – to ensuring sovereignty of businesses, the third cycle is related to the “digital hegemony of the United States” (D., p. 102), whereas the fourth one is sovereignty shaped by such intergovernmental organizations as the EU, BRICS, and

NATO. Two methods of securing information sovereignty are analyzed. The first one represents the system of technical, cultural and ideological means of neutralization and is known in the literature as ‘information shield’. The doctoral student decomposes this method into seven components. The second method or the so-called ‘information sword’ is defined by Prezhdarova as an attacking as well as active transformational tool of the state. The dissertation provides a precise and well informed definition of the most important tools of the state policy of ‘information sword’. In my view it is precisely at this point that the dissertation makes an effective transition from technological to political as well as philosophical and sociological level of analysis by providing a definition of the policy instruments through which information sovereignty is practically implemented. These tools of the state may be political as well as administrative: the propaganda system and the media, the development of national culture, the spread of certain state ideologies manifestly reflecting national interests, the affirmation of positive image of the state, etc. I find this part of the analysis particularly worthwhile as it reveals the capacity of modern state to counter threats to its national security in the digital space.

The chapter concludes with deduction of an array of categories found relevant by the author to the analysis of digital space phenomena. Thus categories as digital authoritarianism, digital anarchy, digital state, digital capitalism, neosocial state, digital communism, digital left anarchism, etc. emerge on the stage. In my humble opinion these concepts, in their theoretically processed and upgraded version, could serve as a basis for developing a specific political theory of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Constructing such a theory would have a strong heuristic impact and would constitute an outstanding contribution to understanding the processes taking place in the space-time of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

The third chapter analyzes the Bulgarian and the Russian experience in developing cyber security strategies. It finds that the Russian Federation is more advanced in its policy development for digital sovereignty implementation. The analysis of US and China concludes that the two countries possess the biggest digital offensive potential and that they have harnessed it in their rivalry for imposing digital control on humankind. Overall this part of the analysis is sound and I have no serious notes or comments on the concluding chapter of the dissertation.

7. Scientific and applied contributions and significance of the dissertation

In my view there are several important contributions that should be noted. *First*, the dissertation makes an attempt to analyze a phenomenon on the world stage that is very complex and with parameters that still remain largely unclear. We have no exact idea of how globalization will unfold in the coming years which compels us to be very cautious with the conclusions we

draw on the initial stage of development of this phenomenon today. *Second*, the role of digital sovereignty in contemporaneity is explored. *Third*, an effort is made to study in parallel the digital sovereignty of Bulgaria, the Russian Federation, and the EU.

8. Assessment of publications related to the dissertation work

Having acquainted myself with Veronika Prezhdarova's publications, attached to the set of submitted documents, I can state the following: (1) they are fully aligned with the topic of the dissertation; (2) reflect the achievements of the doctoral work; (3) to a certain degree the attached publications constitute an approbation of part of the theses detailed in the dissertation; (4) there is no doubt that the publications belong to the author of the dissertation.

9. Personal involvement of the doctoral student

It is my belief that doctoral student Veronika Prezhdarova has worked independently on her dissertation. In that sense, the contributions formulated and results obtained are entirely her personal merit.

10. Abstract

The abstract is complete and accurately reflects the content of the dissertation text. It is in compliance with the requirements of the relevant regulatory documents. I have no remarks on the abstract.

11. Critical remarks and recommendations

My critical remarks can be presented in four groups. The doctoral student may or may not take them into account in her future work.

(1) Theoretical and methodological remarks

Two important theoretical errors have been made. *The first* is related to the pundits of our modern age. I will give an example with the so-called World Economic Forum in Davos. Over the recent years its president has written a bunch of voluminous popular science books, proclaiming hands down therein a whole lot of new periods in history that humanity will soon allegedly face. His books, at least to me, resemble somewhat the works of the 18th century French utopian philosophers. None of their ideas came true despite the fact that their dreams were very beautiful, highly ethical and offered to society in the best way possible. Therefore, the very purpose of political science (as a matter of fact, of every science!) is to critically make sense of reality from the position of reasoned criticism and theoretical scientific analysis. In other words, as scientists we must be very careful and absolutely accurate from theoretical perspective, so that

we won't be led astray by semi-scientific dreams, which are always good but rarely come true, in human societies at least. I personally strongly doubt most of the hypotheses regarding the near future of humanity set out in the works of this author.

Second. No theoretical trend, no matter how influential it is, should be taken as everlasting, nor the truths reflected in its ideas, theories and concepts as absolute truths. Truths and theory happen to be concrete and hold as such within accurately defined space and time (absolute can be only the most general philosophical concepts of the world, e. g. categories like 'being', 'thinking', 'space', 'time', 'matter', 'energy', etc.). In this context I cannot accede to the doctoral student's interpretation of Marx as nearly a thinker who has already given solutions to a number of challenges we are faced with today, including issues related to the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

(2) **insufficient knowledge of leading philosophical, sociological and political trends, schools, theories, concepts and authors** whose names and ideas are quoted in the analysis. The most widespread example in this regard is the frequent attribution of great French *Annaliste* historians to neo-Marxism. The *Annales* is neither a Marxist nor a neo-Marxist school. It does not belong to the left theoretical thought, on the contrary, the second and third *Annales* generations have developed completely opposite to Marxism theories on: History (Fernand Braudel), the Middle Ages and the Aesthetics of Middle Ages (Georges Duby), the Revolution (François Furet), the 16th century Man, his world and thinking (Lucien Febvre), etc. None of the great *Annales* historians have ever claimed to be Marxists. Not to mention François Furet and his works on the French Revolution. Moreover, the most brilliant of them, **Georges Duby**, who passed away only a few years ago, in one of his most important works, 'The Three Estates and the Imaginary World of Feudalism' (2007), presents a concept of feudalism perfectly different from Marx and the Marxist philosophy of history. Or take for example Fernand Braudel, whom I personally hold in high esteem and have also quoted many times, especially his analyses on civilizations (in 'The Grammar of Civilizations') or his theoretical conception of the structure of historical time, which he uses in his magnificent analyses of the so-called Mediterranean civilizations (I have in mind his work 'The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II') and his even more brilliant work 'Perspective of the World. Material Civilization, Economy and Capitalism, 15th - 18th century'. To analyze capitalism and its history Braudel developed a special approach to the study of history at the theoretical core of which is the idea of historical term or history of long duration (Braudel's concept of *Longue duree*), or otherwise the so-called 'long terms' in history during which slowly rather than explosively, nor by way of revolutions, the next stages of history are prepared and set in motion without

‘interrupting’ the term or ‘duration’ (Braudel) of history. He even admits to have partly borrowed the idea of ‘long terms’ from the ‘Structural Anthropology’ of Claude Lévi-Strauss (see: F. Braudel. *Ecrits sur L' histoire*). And Lévi-Strauss has nothing to do with Marxism or neo-Marxism.

(3) an overly loose and, in my opinion, erroneous interpretation of key philosophical concepts, categories, theses, ideas, and scientific authorities. For example I could in no way understand why the doctoral student so confidently claims that the first chapter of the dissertation is written from the positions of Hegel (D., p. 17) and the second chapter – from the positions of Marx (D., p. 18). Of course I don’t believe this is the case, but if it were, then there must be a serious methodological gap in the analysis.

The ideas of Nikolai Kondratiev, Joseph Schumpeter, even of Francis Fukuyama are presented in an overly simplified manner. For example, when Fukuyama failed as a theorist with his book ‘The End of History and the Last Man’, he quickly came to realize what he had actually done and wrote a series of articles to explain what he had actually meant in ‘The End of History’. One of these hastily written articles is quoted on page 23 of the dissertation. Discussing the ‘Future of History. Can Liberal Democracy Survive the Decline of the Middle Class?’ the doctoral student claims something untrue, notably that with this article Fukuyama, and I quote, “affirms the role of China as a leading power of the future” (Dissertation, p. 23). Without delving into details, I will point out that Fukuyama is quite far from both Marxism and neo-Marxism, as well as from the thesis on China attributed to him in Prezhdarova’s dissertation. I know Francis Fukuyama personally. Twenty years ago I had the pleasure of talking for almost an hour with him at a New York event. His assessments of China are in the spirit of American neoconservative theory and far, very far from neo-Marxism or Marxism. In his book ‘America at the Crossroads’, based on his lectures on ethics and political science at Yale University, he provides a detailed analysis of the US Republican Party genesis. His undisguised indignation is caused by the fact that all theorists of neoconservatism, which served as basis of Republicans’ modern theory, have started out as leftists. These are a group of young and promising intellectuals, among them Irving Kristol (the great ideologue of the Republican Party), Daniel Bell, Seymour Martin Lipset, Nathan Glazer, etc. All of them, Fukuyama points out, “came from poor working-class immigrant families. They were students at City College (of New York) because elite universities like Columbia and Harvard were out of reach for them.” And “City College students”, Fukuyama goes on with his assessment, “were politicized and attracted to left-wing theories” (F. Fukuyama. ‘America at Crossroads’, Yale University, 2006. pp. 30-31). In City College were established two illicit lodges preaching leftist thinking: in lodge 1 were the Trotskyists and in lodge 2 – the

Stalinists. The first generation of Republican Party theorists began their political careers as members of one of these two lodges. However, the evolution of this group of intellectuals gradually led them to severe anti-communism. As Fukuyama notes, it was precisely this anti-communism, expressed in harsh and radical criticism of Marx, Stalin and Trotsky, that proved to be the basic ideological platform for their attitude to the Marxist legacy and for the inception of Republicans' ideology.

(4) There are, in my opinion, **inaccuracies and logically contradictory statements**.

For example, when reading the text questions arise about the logic of sovereignty evolution. The thesis states that such a logic is present supported by the assertion that the development of capitalism is inversely proportional to the evolution of sovereignty. "There is", V. Prezhdarova writes in her dissertation, "an inversely proportional relationship between the cycles of sovereignty and capitalism" (Dissertation, p. 8, etc.). That is, with the rise of capitalism we have a degradation of sovereignty. Conversely, when capitalism (whatever the term 'capitalism' means) is in crisis, sovereignty is on the rise. This case renders a few unclear aspects. *First*, perhaps there are empirical (sociological, economic, or other) indicators of the crisis and rise of capitalism, and of the crisis and rise of sovereignty. Which are they? *Second*, if we accept the author's proposed definition of sovereignty as "supreme state power that has a holistic nature but over time becomes fragmented" (p. 7, Dissertation) or as "supreme state power, which ensures state independence, autarchy and right to conduct its own internal and external policy" (p. 16, Dissertation), then a question arises on the social system's crises. When a social system, for example the 19th century capitalism, is in crisis, its most logical move is to elevate the power of the state in order to overcome the crisis. Studying the stages in the development of capitalism scholars of the American school of historical sociology have found that the rise and fall of the world hegemon are always a function of the rise of power the state has at its disposal, while the "delegitimation of power" of the global leader is always associated with the delegitimation of its sovereignty. Or the stronger the state power, the stronger its sovereignty. This is one of the theses developed in the works of the American school of historical sociology: J. Modelski, J. Friedman, B. Gills, R. Denemark (See: Robert Denemark, Jonathan Friedman, Barry Gills, and George Modelski. 'World System History. The Social Science of Long-term Change'. Routledge, London and New York, 2000). Also David Wilkinson's insightful and in-depth work 'Civilizations, World Systems and Hegemonies' (David Wilkinson. 'Civilizations, World Systems and Hegemonies. Fundamentals of a civilizations-as-world-systems approach'. New York, 2000), etc. Or the 'Globalization as Evolutionary Process' of the leader of historical sociology school George Modelski, who created his own theory on the cycles of rise and fall of

a world hegemon. These highly influential and meticulously written studies were omitted by the doctoral student.

A whole series of concepts used in the dissertation, such as ‘**digital fascism**’, ‘**digital socialism**’, ‘**digital anarchism**’, etc. are not scientifically defined, hence when introducing them they need to be defined as theoretical concepts or at least to be accompanied by a brief definition of their content, since they have not yet been derived as theoretical categories in modern social sciences and humanities and are not part of any specialized scientific theoretical apparatus. There is yet another problem in this case. These are concepts which, in my view, would be very difficult to theoretically define for anyone who ventures to do so. Here is an example from the dissertation: “The state’s first model under capitalism is digital **authoritarianism**, which encompasses the concepts of digital fascism, cyber-fascism, and digital totalitarianism” (Dissertation, p. 112). Even stranger is the notion of ‘**digital post-capitalism**’. What the doctoral student tells us about the latter is that it belongs to the “group of models beyond the framework of capitalism” and represents “*a new type of social structure*” (italics mine, R.K.) that “develops after digital capitalism, which may lead to a qualitative change of society in the form of *digital primitive-municipal system*” (italics mine, R.K.) (Dissertation, p. 118). Things seem to get even more complicated in the next sentence, which states that based on the “digital primitive-municipal system”, “*digital socialism* and its subsequent phase – *digital communism*” are built (italics mine, R.K.) (Dissertation, p. 119). Thus if we start from the primitive-municipal system and climb five steps up passing through the slave-owning system, feudalism, capitalism, digital capitalism and post-capitalism, we get to the “digital primitive-municipal system” (D., p. 119). The concepts (categories) of ‘digital communism’, ‘digital left-wing anarchism’, etc. are similar to those mentioned above. Bizarre, to say at least, is the statement made on p. 121 of the dissertation regarding the so-called digital communism, under which humanity will be free: “When robots replace labor”, writes Veronika Prezhdarova, “society will be free” (Dissertation, p. 121).

Freedom is a complex philosophical as well as ethical category. There are degrees of freedom, freedom is historically, culturally, economically, etc. determined. And robots are highly unlikely to be the ones who will bring absolute freedom to society as Prezhdarova claims. Nor can I figure out what exactly robots could liberate humanity from.

12. I have known Veronika Prezhdarova very little. I however find her a well-mannered, well-informed, ambitious and peer-friendly person.

13. Recommendations for future use of dissertation’s contributions and outcomes

In case the doctoral student decides to spend some more time working on the submitted text, I believe it could well grow into a monograph. Such a monograph is really needed given the fact that there are hardly any publications by Bulgarian authors on the issues of sovereignty in the context of Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Conclusion

Weighing on the scales of scientific judgement my critical notes on some individual elements of the doctoral dissertation versus its contributions and original ideas, I could state that my overall and final assessment of the reviewed scientific work is positive. This gives me ground to also propose to the honourable members of the scientific panel to support my positive assessment so that we unanimously award to Veronika Georgieva Prezhdarova the educational and scientific degree „Doctor“ in Field of Higher Education: 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences; Professional Area: 3.3. Political Sciences.

January 26, 2023

Reviewer:

Professor Rumen Kanchev, DSc