

## OPINION

**By D.Sc. Ivka Tsakova - Associate Professor at UNWE**, Sofia, Department of Political Science,  
Faculty of International Economics and Politics.

of the dissertation thesis for the award of the educational and scientific degree "**Doctor**"

in the field of higher education: 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences,

professional field: 3.3 Political Science,

Doctoral programme: Political Science

**Author:** Veronika Georgieva Prezhdarova

**Theme:** *Evolution of Sovereignty in the Fourth Industrial Revolution*

**Scientific supervisor:** Assoc. Prof. Stoycho Petrov Stoychev, PhD

### 1. General description of the presented materials

By Order No. RD-21-21-33 of 14.12.2022 of the Rector of Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski" (PU) I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury for providing a procedure for the defense of a dissertation on "**Evolution of Sovereignty in the Conditions of the Fourth Industrial Revolution**" by Veronika Prezhdarova - a doctoral student in part-time study at the Department of Political Sciences and National Security at the Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences.

The set of paper materials presented by doctoral student is in accordance with Article 36 (1) of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of the PU includes the following documents: dissertation, autobiography, minutes of the departmental council, copies of scientific publications, and others.

Veronika Prezhdarova graduated with a bachelor's degree in "Political Economy" in 2014 at UNWE and in 2015 a master's degree in "Political Economy of the Creative Economy" at the same university. Fluent in Russian at the C1 level. Related to the topic of the dissertation is her leadership of two research groups "Homo Creabilis" (from 2020 to present) and "Digital Sovereignty: Personal Data and Intellectual Property" (from 2019 to present). V. Prezhdarova works as an expert on digitalization issues for the "We move" project from the National Program for the Implementation of Youth Activities for 2019 at the Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Bulgaria, as well as as a member of an expert group "Digitalization of political economic processes" (2018-2019).

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

The problem of the evolution of sovereignty in the conditions of the Fourth Industrial Revolution is extremely relevant at the beginning of the third decade of the XXI century and especially in connection with the crisis processes that have arisen in the world around them "COVID-19" pandemic (2020-2022) and the war in Ukraine (2022-23), which the dissertation student analyzes in his dissertation. A new and in-depth scientific study of this evolution has been proposed, highlighting both risks (dangers, threats) and chances (defense mechanisms) to the sovereignty of different countries in the context of digitalization in the modern world.

## **3. Knowing the problem**

The dissertation student has an in-depth knowledge of the researched problem, which is evidenced by the literature used, which includes nearly 400 sources (books, monographs, articles, various studies, and normative documents within the framework of national, community, and international law). Impressive in its volume is the processed information related to the implementation of technologies of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and digital sovereignty in individual countries and groups of countries: the USA, China, Russia, Bulgaria, the European Union, and others. The theoretical clarification of sovereignty (state, people, national, and digital) and its engagement with capitalism as a world system within various historical cycles (including industrial revolutions) over several centuries strongly demonstrates the enormous work that has been done by the dissertation to reach the key digital (digital) dimension of sovereignty nowadays.

## **4. Research methodology**

The selected research methods and approaches directly correspond to the formulated doctoral thesis and the resulting hypotheses and research tasks. The main method is the systemic analysis of the world, of the world capitalist system/systems (Im. Wallerstein), which provides a historical view of capitalism for more than five centuries and the distinction of cycles of capital accumulation (J. Arrighi). Through its application, the connections between different structures (capitalist world economy, interstate system, and geoculture) and units (center, semi-periphery, and periphery) of the world capitalist system that has to do with the evolution of sovereignty are explained. Other methods/approaches with particular productivity on the subject of the evolution of sovereignty in the conditions of the Fourth Industrial Revolution are: holistic, dialectical, comparative, content analysis, and others.

## **5. Characterization and evaluation of the dissertation work and contributions**

Veronika Predzarova's dissertation is 248 pages long, and its content is structured in an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, and references.

It is noteworthy that the naming of individual paragraphs within the three chapters is spared, which I find strange, but the author probably has his explanation.

**The introduction** contains a precisely defined object and the subject of research, the main objective, and the thesis of the dissertation. The thesis is concretized and substantiated by formulating three hypotheses, which are verified through the implementation of five research tasks. Corresponding restrictions have been made that accompany the development of the dissertation work.

I will single out several points that are particularly important to me from the three chapters of the dissertation.

In **the first chapter**, the key concept of sovereignty is defined. To begin with, the definition of sovereignty is "supreme state power, which ensures the independence of the state, self-reliance, and the right to conduct its own internal and external policy (p. 16). But since in practice, the sovereignty defined in this way does not apply to all countries (the author has made this provision) at the end of the chapter, justifying and illustrating in fig. 3 the inversely proportional relationship between the cycles of capitalism (Genoese, Dutch, British, and American depending on the hegemon state) and the cycles of sovereignty, Veronika Prezhdarova defines sovereignty as a "holistic and syncretic whole" that evolves in time and space in the form of a spiral in several cycles: state, people's, national and digital sovereignty. This entanglement between the cycles of capitalism and the cycles of sovereignty is at the heart of the doctoral thesis and has a significant scientific contribution. In other words, inverse dependence indicates a trend within each historical cycle – when capitalism is in decline, sovereignty is on the rise, and conversely, the rise of capitalism within the cycle leads to a crisis of sovereignty.

The third paragraph "Theoretical concepts of sovereignty in conditions of globalization" deserves special attention, which concerns on the sunset (down phase) of the American cycle of capitalism and what is happening to the sovereignty of individual countries around the world - especially about current events such as the "COVID-19" and the war in Ukraine. The US, in its capacity as a world hegemon, imposes its "absolute sovereignty" by eroding the sovereignty of other countries through various mechanisms: humanitarian interventions, color revolutions, soft and hard power, networked, hybrid, information, cyber-warfare and managed chaos (p. 52). I highly appreciate the conclusion made that despite these actions of the hegemon, the sovereignty of many countries is in decline, but they (the

countries) do not lose their power. Obviously, the theories about the "end of the state" and the "end of history" are proving to be invalid - especially after the global crisis of 2008.

The exposition of **second chapter** focuses on the Fourth Industrial Revolution and its impact on sovereignty in the form of digital sovereignty. Before that, however, the specifics of the previous three industrial revolutions have been clarified. With the development of computers and the Internet (technologies of the Third Industrial Revolution), a new space emerged, designated by epithets such as: digital, informational, cyber, virtual, and digital. V. Prezhdarova prefers digital space and respectively digital sovereignty. According to the dissertation, after the global financial crisis of 2008, the outlines of the Fourth Industrial Revolution took shape and the beginning of "the rising wave of the fourth cycle of sovereignty and the falling wave of the fourth cycle of capitalism" (p. 82). Basic digital technologies (blockchain, technological platforms, robots, drones, artificial intelligence, etc.) are clarified, through which the material aspect of people's lives, related to natural resources and manufactured goods, is dematerialized (p. 86) with all the resulting consequences. Once the digital world begins to dominate the real one, the digital sovereignty of the state becomes a factor in securing its politics, national security, economy, and culture (p. 96).

I appreciate the third paragraph's highly developed defense mechanisms of states in the digital space, which is particularly imperative today because digital sovereignty is not regulated in constitutional and international law. States should take action to protect the personal data of citizens, as well as the data of companies on their territory. The protection of citizens and businesses from the digital giants of the GAFAM group is not within the power of individual countries, which is why they must unite with other countries. The two methods of protecting the information (digital) sovereignty of the state - "information sword" and "information shield" - which contain specific mechanisms, are solidly and attractively justified and supported with examples (p. 103, 104). The dissertation has reflected the existing discussion about the two possible scenarios that the digitization process can lead to: a) to the end of capitalism as a system (I. Wallerstein) and b) transition to a new cycle of capitalism ("Capitalism 4:0", "Post-Capitalism", capitalism with a new world hegemon (possibly China), and others. Currently, there is a movement towards a multipolar world, accompanied by phenomena of deglobalization, regionalization, etc.

I positively evaluate the idea of a possible transition from "digital capitalism" (in two versions: digital authoritarianism/fascism and digital anarchism) to "digital post-capitalism" (in two versions: digital socialism and digital communism).

**The third chapter** is devoted to state policy/policies to strengthen sovereignty today through state and interstate policies, strategies, and normative regulations in relation to digitization. Two ways to enhance sovereignty are presented - the first is for Bulgaria as a member of the EU, and the second - is for the Russian Federation. Through the content analysis of normative and strategic documents of Russia and Bulgaria, a parallel has been drawn between the two countries in relation to the possibilities of protecting their sovereignty (especially the digital one) in the conditions of the Fourth Industrial Revolution for two periods: a) 2010-2020 and b) 2020-2030. It was found that the level of digital sovereignty of Bulgaria as a member of the EU is lower compared to Russia, which has stronger digital sovereignty on its territory. Specific digital dangers to the construction of digital sovereignty (according to the model of the "digital sword") and protective mechanisms ("the digital shield") are discussed.

#### **6. Evaluation of the publications and personal contribution of the doctoral student**

Veronika Prezhdarova has presented six scientific publications - one conference report (co-authored), three scientific articles, and two scientific studies, of which she is an independent author. The publications correspond to the topic of the dissertation and exceed in number the minimum national requirements.

**7. Abstract** (In a volume of 32 pages) Presents the main results of the developed dissertation work and meets the formal requirements for its preparation.

#### **8. Recommendations for future use of dissertation contributions and results**

I recommend that the presented dissertation research of Veronika Prezhdarova be published as a monograph after a certain revision, tailored to the interests of potential specific groups of readers - students, specialists, and ordinary citizens. Special consideration should be given to detailed content, including both precise wording of the chapters and their paragraphs. The multitude of prepared figures undoubtedly facilitates the perception of the complicated issues of the researched problem.

I recommend tying the issue of the sovereignty of the state/states to the existing interstate system in the relevant historical cycle of capitalism (following Arrighi, Braudel, Wallerstein). For example, during the first cycle, there was a regional subsystem of capitalist city-states in Europe - Venice, Florence, Genoa, etc. no world hegemon. During the second Dutch cycle, the Westphalian interstate system was created based on the "balance of power" principle. During the third cycle of the British Empire, the interstate system was expanded through the "supremacy of the free market". And in the last, American cycle, the United

Nations was created as a world government, followed by a "Cold War World Order" and a "New World Order" in the form of so-called globalization/Americanization.

### **CONCLUSION**

In the developed dissertation work "Evolution of Sovereignty in the conditions of the Fourth Industrial Revolution" there are indisputable author's achievements and scientific contributions. The dissertation and other accompanying documents are in full compliance with the regulatory requirements (national and of the primary scientific unit). With deep conviction, I give my positive assessment for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" to Veronika Georgieva Prezhdarova in the field of higher education: "3. Social, Economic and Law Sciences", professional direction: "3.3. Political Science", doctoral program: "Political Science".

30.01.2023

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**Assoc. Prof. Ivka Tsakova Nekova, D.Sc.**