# OPINION

**by Dr. Daniela Dobreva Pastarmadzhieva,**
**Associate Professor at the University of Plovdiv Paisii Hilendarski**

of the dissertation thesis for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"
Area of higher education: **3. Social, Economic and Law Sciences**
Professional field: **3.3. Political Science**
Doctoral Program: **Political Sciences**

**Author:** Veronika Georgieva Prezhdarova
**Theme:** Evolution of Sovereignty in the Fourth Industrial Revolution
**Scientific supervisor**: Assoc. Prof. Stoycho Petrov Stoychev, PhD,
Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

## 1. General presentation of the procedure and the candidate

By order № RD-21-2133 of 14.12.2022 of the Rector of the University of Plovdiv Paisii Hilendarski (UP) I have been appointed 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"** for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the area of higher education: 3. Social, Economic and Law Sciences, professional field 3.3 Political Science, doctoral program Political Sciences. The author of the dissertation is Veronika Georgieva Prezhdarova - doctoral student in part-time study at the Department of "Political Sciences and National Security", Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences, with scientific supervisor Assoc. Prof. Stoycho Petrov Stoychev, PhD from Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

The set of print materials presented by Veronika Prezhdarova is in accordance with art. 36 (1) of the Regulations for development of the academic staff of the UP (RDASUP), and consists of the following documents:

- application form to the Rector to initiate the procedure for the defense of a dissertation thesis;
- protocol from the department council related to reporting the readiness to open the procedure and preliminary discussion of the dissertation work;
- dissertation work;
- abstract;
- a list of scientific publications on the subject of the dissertation;
- copies of scientific publications;
- declaration of originality and authenticity of the attached documents;
- certificate of compliance with the specific requirements of the relevant faculty (only for doctoral students enrolled until 05/04/2018);
- other documents

The doctoral student has submitted a dissertation along with 6 scientific publications on the topic of the dissertation - 1 scientific report, 3 scientific articles, and 2 scientific studies.

Veronika Prezhdarova graduated with a bachelor's degree in "Political Economy" in 2014 at the University of National and World Economy (UNWE), Sofia. In 2015, she graduated with a

master's degree in "Political Economy of the Creative Economy" again at UNWE. She has a C1 level in the Russian language.

From the attached CV in European format, it is clear that the doctoral student's research activity on the topic of the dissertation is not limited only to her work on the dissertation. Since 2020, Prezhdarova has been the head of the research group "Homo Creabilis", which is engaged in conducting a number of studies, including sociological, experiments, expert studies and others, organizing conferences, round tables, and other forums. Closely related to the topic of her dissertation is the leadership she has been carrying out of the research group "Digital Sovereignty: Personal Data and Intellectual Property" since 2019. In 2019, she was an expert on digitization and biometric data in the socio-political sphere for the "We move" project of the National Program for the Implementation of Youth Activities for 2019 at the Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Bulgaria. In the period 2018-2019, she was a senior member of the "Digitalization of Political Economy Processes" expert group. All these demonstrate consistency in her interest in the processes of digitization of public processes.

During the period of work on the dissertation research, doctoral student Veronika Prezhdarova distinguished herself with a clear focus for work on the chosen topic, as before starting her doctoral program she studied issues related to sovereignty and digitalization. While working as part of her doctoral studies, Prezhdarova demonstrated hard work, dedication, and purposefulness in the preparation of her dissertation work. Despite being part-time, she demonstrated a high degree of commitment to departmental activities, which she continues to support.

## 2. Relevance of the topic

The relevance of the problem developed in the dissertation work has both purely scientific and scientific-applied dimensions. From a purely scientific point of view, it is relevant to discuss the issues concerning sovereignty and the digital space, since the latter is already an invariable part of public and socio-political relations. In theory and practice, the dimensions of state and national sovereignty are clearly defined and there is a unified understanding of their characteristics. When we talk about the digital space, the scientific and practical aspects are closely related. The increasingly rapid and comprehensive development of the new digital environment, both in the lives of individuals and in the political, economic, cultural, and social spheres, is indisputable. The level of development of these technologies is growing exponentially. Thus, there is a need for a quick reaction from the point of view not only of scientific knowledge but also especially regarding normative regulation.

The topicality of digital sovereignty is visible in the debates at the level of the European Union and in individual member states. In 2019, then-German Chancellor Angela Merkel said the EU should claim "digital sovereignty" by developing its own data management platforms and reducing its reliance on US-based cloud services run by Amazon, Microsoft, and Google. Digital sovereignty (Digitale Souveränität) has also been intensively discussed in Germany, and characteristic of the German approach is the understanding of sovereignty as the ability of citizens, organizations, and the state to act independently in a digital environment. In France, President Emmanuel Macron raises the issue of digital sovereignty in relation to the implementation and application of the state's and the EU's own artificial intelligence and cloud technologies. Creating digital sovereignty is one of the priority areas of the current president of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen.

I believe that the tasks formulated by the doctoral student are relevant to the topic and its significance. It traces the evolution of sovereignty in a historical context, reaching its digital dimensions. Along with the above, I also find relevant the comparative analysis between Bulgaria as

part of the European Union and the Russian Federation. After 1989, Bulgaria chose a development path different from that of the Russian Federation despite the shared political and economic model until the fall of the Berlin Wall.

### 3. Knowing the problem

In the dissertation study, Veronika Prezhdarova makes a comprehensive literature review, referring to nearly 400 sources, including both classical scientific works on the issues considered in the dissertation work, as well as current studies, analyses, and normative documents. She traces the problem of weakening the sovereignty of the state in depth, touching on its manifestations in the field of political philosophy, where she actually sees its roots, which subsequently show their manifestations in the theory and practice of political science.

### 4. Research methodology

The methodology used in the dissertation corresponds to the goal and the tasks of the study. Systematic and historical methods are used to trace the evolution of sovereignty in the context of the four industrial revolutions. The comparative approach was correctly chosen in solving the fifth task, alongside with the content analysis of the normative documents for two decades (2010-2020 and 2020-2030) of Bulgaria as part of the European Union and the Russian Federation. The chosen research methodology in the dissertation is in accordance with the wide temporal and spatial scope of the study.

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

Veronika Prezhdarova's dissertation consists of 248 pages. They include an introduction, three chapters with three paragraphs each, a conclusion, a self-assessment of scientific contributions, main conclusions, and a list of used literature in a volume of 393 sources.

The dissertation follows the standard research logic, with the first and second chapters examining the studied phenomena from a conceptual point of view, and the third chapter unfolding the analysis of the subject of research, namely "the evolution of sovereignty from its origin to the Fourth Industrial Revolution".

The main framework components of the dissertation research are correctly formulated in the **introduction**, namely – the main goal; object and focus of the research; main thesis and hypotheses; research tasks; the research approaches and methods, as well as the pre-set limitations of the research. The correct wording of the latter is particularly significant in the context of the selected topic. It allows the use of multiple and diverse perspectives, interesting points of view, methods, theoretical statements, even to a certain extent ideological discourses. The doctoral student has managed to clearly set the boundaries of her research and she manages to stick to them in the text that follows.

In the **first chapter** of her dissertation, Veronika Prezhdarova lays the foundations of her research by defining the key concept in her work, namely sovereignty. At the beginning of the chapter, she brings out the fundamental understanding of sovereignty in political science, namely "supreme state power, which ensures the independence of the state, independence and the right to conduct its own internal and external policy" (p. 16). After a consistent and detailed argument, at the end of the chapter Prezhdarova offers a more holistic view of the concept of sovereignty, which allows the latter to be defined as "the supreme state power, which constantly evolves in time and space, encompassing within its qualitative spiral jumps of development of new objects, subjects, and spaces" (p. 72). The latter definition offers a dynamic view of sovereignty.

The first chapter also traces the long cycles of sovereignty based on the cycles of capitalism using the systems approach of F. Braudel, G. Arrighi, and I. Wallerstein. An inversely proportional

relationship is established between the derived cycles of sovereignty and capitalism, which, according to the doctoral student, facilitates the establishment of a qualitative jump in each cycle of the development of sovereignty and confirms the dialectical nature of the cycles of sovereignty.

It should be noted that the schematic presentation of the ideas formulated by Prezhdarova makes a very good impression, which helps to visualize and correctly perceive concepts that have a high degree of abstraction.

The focus of the **second chapter** is the Fourth Industrial Revolution. It derives the average cycles of sovereignty versus the average cycles of capitalism, which are mapped to the four industrial revolutions. The doctoral student argues for the presence of an inversely proportional relationship between the average cycles of sovereignty and capitalism, and the relationship with the development of industrial revolutions is also presented.

The chapter presents the most important technologies that help the development and consolidation of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, bringing to a theoretical level the last phase of sovereignty development in the form of digital sovereignty.

The **third chapter** examines specific country policies, objectified in their strategic documents, regarding protection in the digital space. In the chapter, the so-called by the author short cycle of digital sovereignty versus the short cycle of digital capitalism indicates that there is an inverse relationship between them. The short cycles are derived based on the analyzed strategic and normative documents of Bulgaria as part of the European Union, the European Union, and the Russian Federation for two decades (2010-2020 and 2020-2030), within which the author draws attention to two trends. According to her, the first trend (2010-2020) is the implementation of the technologies of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and the second (2020-2030) is the implementation of digital sovereignty on the territory of the considered countries.

In the **Conclusion**, a summary of the conducted research was performed, and the main conclusions about the obtained results, it is supplemented with a self-assessment of the contributions of the dissertation work. From the synthesized conclusions, it is clear that the doctoral student has achieved the set goal. All three chapters of the study are subordinated to this goal, namely the establishment of the dynamics in the evolution of sovereignty from its origin to the affirmation of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. I believe that the Ph.D. student has provided sufficient arguments in support of her main thesis, namely that "the evolution of sovereignty is linked to the cycles of capitalism" and that "its most significant change is under the conditions of the Fourth Industrial Revolution". The research objective was achieved precisely by solving the research tasks formulated in the introduction. In the conclusion, Prezhdarova also comments on phenomena and dependencies that are not part of the original set goals and tasks of the research.

I support the self-assessment of the contributions that Veronika Prezhdarova made. I believe that the main contribution of Prezhdarova's work is drawing the attention of the academic community in the field of political science to the need to examine the role of the state in the digital space. The concept of digital sovereignty is already in circulation in the political rhetoric of the world and the EU, and researchers should respond to this new trend. The work represents a significant contribution in this direction in Bulgarian political science.

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

Veronika Prezhdarova has produced six scientific publications on the topic of her dissertation research - one conference report, three scientific articles, and two scientific studies. Only the conference report is co-authored. In the remaining publications, the personal contribution of the PhD

student is 100%. This exceeds many times the minimum national requirements. The presented scientific publications are of a scientific-applied and applied nature and correspond to the topic of the dissertation without repeating texts from it.

**7. Abstract**

The abstract contains 32 pages and presents the main results obtained in the dissertation. It correctly reflects the content of the dissertation, the main conclusions, contributions, and their approbation in scientific journals and conferences. The abstract gives a good idea of the research and the results obtained from it. It meets the formal requirements for creating an abstract of a dissertation.

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

The results of the scientific research carried out by Veronika Prezhdarova can be **developed and applied in the following directions**:

1) The derived qualitative measure of the degree of implementation of national policies for the protection of the digital space (instead of digital sovereignty) to be presented to scholars and researchers to be refined from a conceptual and methodological point of view. A quantitative measure (index) could then be developed for the degree of implementation of such policies.

2) The conclusions obtained and the derived forecasts and plans are to be synthesized and then shared with representatives of the central and local authorities so that governmental and intergovernmental strategies for the protection of the digital space can be built on their basis and forecasts can be made.

I have **one recommendation** and **one question** for the doctoral student:

1) In the process of working on the main focus of her research, Veronika Prezhdarova has established many phenomena that have some relation to the purpose of her research. She believed that some of these phenomena should be commented on and developed, such as digital capitalism, digital oligarchy, digital communism, digital socialism, digital sword, digital shield, and a number of others. These are interesting, but I believe that mentioning them as an opportunity for future analysis is enough. I would advise her in the future research to stick to the main subject of research, leaving what was discovered during the research process for subsequent studies. Otherwise, the research focus is lost and the main meaning is blurred.

2) State sovereignty is an undisputed international legal category, and it is clear what this means in substantive terms. The category has no axiological dimension but is a legal construct. As for the notion of digital sovereignty such a conceptualization is lacking. The dissertation gives reason to look at the concept as an unacceptable approach of the states, contrary to established democratic norms. It states that "in countries with a stronger government like China, there is a strong digital sovereignty built up that relies entirely on the filtration of state-owned corporations" (p. 169). The next sentence uses the term "with more authoritarian governments" for this type of country. In this sense, my question to Veronika Prezhdarova is if China is an example of "strong digital sovereignty", isn't this sovereignty actually the so-called "China's Great Firewall", which in its essence is a limitation of the freedom of citizens? Doesn't this make digital sovereignty (especially when it comes to the digital sovereignty of a state) a value-laden category contrary to democratic values, making it incompatible with the classical definition of sovereignty having specific dimensions?

**CONCLUSION**

The dissertation ***contains scientific, scientific-applied, and applied results, which represent an original contribution to science and meets all the requirements*** of the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act (DASRBA), the Regulations for its Implementation, and the relevant Regulations of the University of Plovdiv Paisii Hilendarski.

The dissertation shows that the doctoral student Veronika Georgieva Prezhdarova ***possesses*** in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional skills in the professional field of "Political Sciences" by ***demonstrating*** qualities and skills for the independent conduct of scientific research.

Due to the above, I confidently give my ***positive assessment*** of the conducted research, presented by the above-reviewed dissertation, abstract, achieved results, and contributions, and I ***propose to the honorable scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" to Veronika Georgieva Prezhdarova*** in the area of higher education "3. Social, Economic and Law Sciences", professional field "3.3. Political Science", doctoral program "Political Sciences".


26.01.2023                                                    …………………………………..
                                                             *Assoc. Prof. Daniela Pastarmadzhieva, PhD*