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REVIEW

of th PhD Thesis:

“Party Politics in Post-Independence Kosovo:
Implications for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding”

presented by Mr Bardh Lipa,

supervised by dr hab. Łukasz Zweifel, prof. PSW

and associate supervision by dr Adem Beha, prof. asoc.

Legal basis for preparing the review

The basis for preparing the review is the Resolution of the Council of Discipline (Political Sciences and Administration) at the University of the National Education Commission in Krakow of June 3, 2024, appointing me as a reviewer of the PhD dissertation presented by M.A. Bardha Lipa. It is entitled: “Party Politics in Post-Independence Kosovo: Implications for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding”. The thesis was prepared under supervision of dr hab. Łukasz Zweifel, prof. PSW and associate supervision by dr Adem Beha, prof. asoc.

In accordance with the regulations contained in Chapter 2, Section 1 of the Act of July 20, 2018 - Law on Higher Education and Science (Journal of Laws 2018, item 1668), the degree of doctor is awarded to a person who meets the formal criteria specified in art.

186 sec. 1. One of them is the obligation to present a doctoral dissertation that "presents the general theoretical knowledge of the candidate in the discipline or disciplines and the ability to independently conduct scientific or artistic research." (art. 187 sec. 1). In addition, "The subject of the doctoral dissertation is an original solution to a scientific problem, an original solution in the scope of applying the results of own scientific research in the economic or social sphere or an original artistic achievement." (art. 187 sec. 2). "A doctoral dissertation may be a written work, including a scientific monograph, a collection of published and thematically related scientific articles, a design, construction, technological, implementation or artistic work, as well as an independent and separate part of a collective work." (Art. 187, section 3).

In the absence of more detailed regulations, I assume that the assessment of a doctoral thesis submitted for assessment should focus on the following elements:

- 1) justification for the choice of the topic and scope of the work, and also its originality;
- 2) the theoretical framework;
- 3) the methodological aspect;
- 4) the structure of the work and its substantive content;
- 5) the linguistic and technical aspect.

Presented PhD dissertation counts 251 pages, divided into list of abbreviations, 6 chapters and the reference list.

Justification for the choice of topic and scope of work

The first chapter has an introductory and partly also the methodological role. It contains all elements that an introduction to the PhD thesis should contain. The first one is the justification of the choice of the research topic and its originality. The author points to the need to research the post-conflict areas, choosing as the study case the post-independence Kosovo. Looking at the political realities of contemporary Europe, such an indication seems particularly important in the context of the ongoing war in

Ukraine. Solid research that maps out the problems in such areas is therefore particularly important. Additional justification for the choice of topic can be found on p. 13 of the thesis. The author underlines that „Historical attempts at peacebuilding by international actors in post-conflict scenarios often exhibit a problematic tendency to marginalize local leadership in favor of international expertise (Chesterman, 2004; 236-25).“ In the context of the war trials currently taking place in Europe, this is a very important remark. Comprehensive support for states in war by entities that are much stronger in political, economic and military terms should take into account the needs and political will of their citizens. On the other hand very often in post-war realities enhancing the rule of law and cultivation a solid and accountable institutions must compete with local social and historical heritage. From this point of view, the work submitted for evaluation is of particular importance. In this context, the choice of the Kosovo case is very apt. It still faces ongoing challenges in state formation and peacebuilding processes. I agree with the author that „Focusing on Vetëvendosje as a governing entity brings an innovative perspective to hybrid peace research, exposing flaws in liberal frameworks and revealing the agential capacity of influential local actors to forge context-specific peacebuilding pathways.“ I also agree that the dissertation makes significant theoretical and practical contributions to the field of peacebuilding and statebuilding. I regard as right the choice of Mac Ginty's hybrid peace model, discussion on its construction and proposals for improvement.

Without a doubt, the author has taken up an original and politically important topic. He correctly identified the research gap and properly constructed research questions and hypotheses. In the scope of justification for the choice of topic the dissertation meets the legal requirements for doctoral theses.

The theoretical framework

The dissertation theoretical framework is based on the critical peacebuilding theories and the concept of hybrid peace, understood as a dynamic interplay between global norms and local agencies, presented in literature by Oliver P. Richmond and Roger Mac Ginty. Its central point is the concept of hybridization. It refers to the process by which diverse actors, practices, ideas, and norms are combined, blended, or adapted to create specific forms of peace. Its ultimate form depends on the interaction of global and local forces. The study involves analysis of dynamics at play in enforcing liberal peace agendas, articulating the multifaceted interactions between international peacebuilding efforts and local responses.

Proposed theoretical framework refers to the Roger Mac Ginty's four-part model. Its first dimension is the compliance. It examines the strategies that international actors use to enforce their preferred vision of post-conflict reconstruction. Its main "arguments" are economic, political, and military factors. The second one is the incentive. It examines the use of incentives, such as financial aid, political support, and the prospect of international integration, to encourage local cooperation with the liberal peace agenda. The third one is resistance that is mainly concerned with local actors aligning their own priorities and interests with proposed solutions. And finally the fourth dimension is alternative. It emphasizes the ability of local actors to formulate and pursue their own visions of peace and development, which may differ from or challenge the dominant liberal peace paradigm.

The proposed theoretical framework is very well chosen, especially in the context of the experiences of Central Europe. The democratic breakthrough of the 1990s was not always associated with critical introduction of liberal solutions by the states of this region. This not only resulted in development benefits, but also involved very high social costs. It also led to the introduction of extremely centralized political and

administrative systems, which were not always resistant to undemocratic phenomena. Drawing attention to the role of domestic actors in shaping the principles of peace and reconstruction is a significant contribution to the development of the discipline of political and administrative sciences. It is also important practical information for active politicians who may decide the future of post-war Ukraine in the near future. However I agree with author's remark, presented at page 138 that „the specific historical, political, and social circumstances of Kosovo may not be directly comparable to other cases, and the findings should be interpreted with caution when considering their applicability to different settings. However, the study aimed to generate transferable insights and theoretical propositions that can inform future research and practice in the field of hybrid peacebuilding.”

The methodological aspect

The author decided to adopt a qualitative research approach. The research was based on the combination of methods and techniques allowing the structured, focused comparisons across carefully selected case studies, in-depth document analysis, and process tracing. The case study approach allows for a comprehensive examination of Vetëvendosje's role in shaping peacebuilding trajectories within the unique context of postindependence Kosovo, while the document analysis and process tracing techniques enable a fine-grained investigation of the party's evolving discourse, strategies, and impacts over time. The selected and described in detail theoretical framework is a very good starting point, which at the same time structures the research process.

The methodology is well chosen and clearly indicates that the research is placed in the discipline of political and administrative sciences. The comparative method, clearly emphasized by the author, deserves special attention here. It may be a bit of a shame that the methods, techniques and tools are not described more precisely and clear.

When reading the methodology description one can get lost in what the planned research activities actually were. If the author were planning to publish a dissertation, I would advise tidying up this part of the work. In particular part 4.3 (*Research Design*) requires a bit of improvement.

I would like to underline that the words of particular praise deserves carefully selected source base. The analysis drew upon over 100 media sources, 30 government and international organization reports, as well as civil society publications, as well as over 40 academic sources.

I also positively asses the thematic analysis method that allowed the systematic identification, organization, and interpretation of patterns of meaning (themes) across the dataset.

The structure of the work and its substantive content

The dissertation has a correct structure. It reflects the most important research stages: from the analysis of the research field, the state of the literature and theoretical concepts, through defining the research gap, selecting sources and defining research methods and techniques, to conducting the research itself and drawing conclusions.

The first chapter has the introductory character. As mentioned above, it includes almost all the most important elements. It lacks only one of them: a precise description and justification of the time caesuras of research. If they were clearly distinguished, the work would gain significantly in its scientific value.

The second chapter provides a background to the Kosovo conflict. International intervention and the post-independence peace and state-building processes are its important elements. The chapter is also introductory, especially for the reader who is

not very familiar with the history of the conflict. However, it is well-prepared: very synthetic. It contains only the most important information, creating a background for further considerations.

The third chapter is an extension of the theoretical framework of the dissertation. The author provides a detailed, critical review of the concepts of peacebuilding. It provides a comprehensive overview of the evolution of different approaches, from liberal concepts to hybrid models that emphasize both the role of local and international actors. A special place in the discussion is reserved for Mac Ginty's hybrid model of peace. However, it also contains the author's critical comments on it, which brings new elements to the literature.

Chapter four is a detailed description of the research methodology. It is prepared in details and justifies the choice of a qualitative approach. However, as already noted above, the considerations could have been presented in a slightly clearer way. Especially in terms of a more detailed description of the methods, techniques and research tools.

Chapter fifth is the the most extensive part of dissertation. It contains the analysis illustrating the research process. Following Mac Ginty's model, it shows Vetëvendosje's political strategy of establishing post-conflict conditions for the functioning of the state. Without a doubt the chapter offers the theoretically-informed and empirically-grounded analysis of the role of local actors in shaping Kosovo's post-independence trajectory.

Chapter sixth is not actually a chapter but a section that should be called "Conclusions". In principle, it should contain the content found in sections 5.9.1 (page 206) till 5.10.4 (page 211). This is the righth place for conclusions, summary of the key findings and insights from the analysis, reflection on the research questions and

verification of hypotheses, contributions to the understanding of hybrid peace dynamics in Kosovo and beyond, as well as for discussion on the limitations of the study and recommendations for future research. If the author intended to publish the work I would recommend such a change in structure.

The linguistic and technical aspect

Linguistically and technically, the dissertation was prepared with a great care. Very good English allows for enjoyable reading without losing the high quality of scientific language. The technical side of the theses also raises no objections.

Conclusion

The main aim of this dissertation was to explore the complex role of local political actors in shaping the trajectories of post-conflict societies. Focusing on the case of Vetëvendosje, the author shows how local actors interacted with, challenged and reshaped international peace- and state-building efforts in Kosovo. Without a doubt, this goal has been achieved. The author has answered the research questions and verified the hypotheses.

In conclusion, it should be stated that Mr Bardh Lipa presents a very good level of general theoretical knowledge in the discipline of political and administrative sciences. He is also excellently prepared to conduct independent research work. Without a doubt, the subject of the doctoral dissertation submitted for evaluation is an original solution to a scientific problem. So, submitted to evaluation dissertation satisfies all requirements placed for the PhD thesis.

I express my positive opinion on the dissertation entitled: "Party Politics in Post-Independence Kosovo: Implications for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding" presented

by Mr Bardh Lipa, supervised by dr hab. Łukasz Zweiffel, prof. PSW and associate supervision by dr Adem Beha, prof. asoc. I request that Mr Bardh Lipa should be admitted to further stages of the doctoral proceedings.

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