O P I N I O N

by Valeri Stoilov Stoyanov, Doctor of Sciences, Professor in Professional Field 3.2. Psychology,

regarding the dissertation titled:

"Mediation and Reaching an Agreement in the Process of Psychologically Overcoming Conflicts"

authored by Maria-Stefka Dimitrova Dimitrova,

for the award of the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" in Professional Field 3.2. "Psychology," Doctoral Program "General Psychology"

Academic Supervisor: Prof. Mayyana Mitevska, D.Sc. (Psychology)

The topic of the dissertation research conducted by Maria-Stefka Dimitrova is undoubtedly timely and holds significant practical value. In the modern organizational environment, the management and constructive resolution of interpersonal and intergroup conflicts are key factors in maintaining a healthy psychological climate and organizational effectiveness.

The relevance of the topic stems from the fact that conflict—beyond being an organizational or legal issue—is primarily a process (a socio-psychological one) in which the perceptions, emotional regulation, communication, and personality dispositions of those involved influence the way the conflict escalates and the possibility of reaching a sustainable agreement.

The doctoral candidate cogently draws attention to the lack of in-depth psychological research regarding mediation within the Bulgarian context. To date, scholarly interest

in the role of mediation for conflict resolution in Bulgaria has remained primarily focused on legal and procedural aspects, while the psychological component of the process has largely escaped the attention of researchers. It is precisely here that the doctoral candidate identifies a "niche" for an original academic contribution: elucidating the phenomenon in depth and scope by addressing the essential factors underlying the behavior and experiences of the parties involved in conflicts.

In this context, the doctoral candidate’s fundamental idea is to examine mediation as a potential tool for transforming interaction, rather than merely as a formal procedure for concluding a dispute.

The dissertation is logically structured and comprises an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, a list of references, and an appendix. The introduction clearly outlines the object and subject of the study, the primary objective, specific tasks, research hypotheses, as well as the methodological framework and study limitations.

The first chapter is dedicated to the general characteristics, genesis, and classification of conflicts, as well as to mediation as a process and method for resolving disputes in labor relations. A critical theoretical analysis of classical and contemporary models of conflict behavior (Thomas-Kilmann, Pondy, Glasl, et al.) is presented.

Logically, emphasis is placed on restorative mediation, the essence of which lies in dialogue between the parties aimed at mutual acquaintance and a better understanding of each other's perspectives, opinions, and emotions. The mediator creates the conditions for this by helping each person express themselves and listen to the other. This leads to a shift in relationships—moving away from confrontation, prejudice, and aggression toward more positive and constructive attitudes.

The second chapter presents the methodological framework of the doctoral candidate's empirical study. It describes the theoretical model, the formulated hypotheses, the research instruments, and the sample characteristics.

The research design is well-conceived and aligns with the stated objectives. The study encompasses 115 employees, comprising 70 men and 45 women.

To collect empirical data, the author employed a custom-designed questionnaire for assessing conflictual relationships and the established method developed by Velichkov and Radoslavova for measuring locus of control. The chapter presents the pilot psychometric validation of the conflict relationship questionnaire, conducted with 150 employees from a state organization. The analysis reveals that 16 of the items form a homogeneous scale with very high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.91$). I consider this validation adequate, ensuring the scale's validity and psychometric quality.

Data processing involved a series of statistical analyses: descriptive statistics, t-tests, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), correlation analysis, multiple regression, and Cronbach's alpha.

The third chapter presents an in-depth quantitative and qualitative analysis of the empirical results obtained. Reliable statistical procedures are used to examine the influence of locus of control and demographic variables on conflict levels. Differentiated mediation strategies have been derived, and the study's limitations have been outlined.

The results confirm the primary hypothesis regarding the existence of a significant positive correlation between an external locus of control (externality) and the level of perceived conflict. Multiple regression analysis indicates that locus of control is the

only significant predictor of conflict within the model, whereas demographic factors such as gender and education do not exert a significant independent influence.

I consider the following achievements of the doctoral candidate to be significant contributions:

1. The systematization and critical analysis of contemporary concepts regarding organizational conflict and the nature of mediation, as well as the development of specific criteria for diagnosing conflict-prone environments within organizations.

2. The enhanced understanding of the role of individual personality dispositions (locus of control) in the genesis of organizational conflict, alongside the formulation of differentiated mediation strategies tailored to the participants' psychological profiles and locus of control.

3. The outlined approaches for application by mediators, organizational psychologists, HR specialists, and managers when dealing with conflicts in an organizational setting.

The results of the dissertation have been presented to the scientific community and interested parties through three articles published in the university's academic journal; thereby, the doctoral candidate meets the minimum requirements set forth by the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and its implementing regulations. The content of the abstract corresponds to the presentation in the dissertation.

I have found no evidence of plagiarism. Sources have been cited correctly.

The following constructive ***recommendations and questions*** for the defense may be addressed to the author:

I recommend that future research expand the sample to include employees from various sectors and organizations in order to verify the validity of the derived models within a broader context (as correctly noted in the study's limitations).

I have the following *question* for the doctoral candidate: How can the differentiated mediation strategies—tailored to the locus of control—be practically integrated into the standard training program for mediator certification in our country?

Conclusion

The doctoral dissertation by Maria-Stefka Dimitrova Dimitrova, titled "Mediation and Reaching Agreement in the Process of Psychologically Resolving Conflicts," constitutes a complete, independent, and scientifically sound study. The results achieved and the contributions formulated fully comply with the requirements of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for its application.

Based on the foregoing, I provide a POSITIVE ASSESSMENT and confidently recommend that the esteemed Scientific Jury award Maria-Stefka Dimitrova Dimitrova the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" in professional field 3.2 "Psychology," doctoral program "General Psychology."

October 15, 2026

Varna

Opinion prepared by:

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