

THE "VOTE TRADING" PHENOMENON IN BULGARIA

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Abstract. *The current article looks at the "vote trading" phenomenon in the context of Bulgarian elections and election processes. The historical implementations of this phenomenon are analyzed for the period from the liberation from Turkish rule (1878) up until now. A special attention is paid to the genesis of this occurrence in the period between 1878 and 1944 when its initial implementations for gaining political power begin to appear. There is an emphasis on the first judicial regulations (a law in 1882) that aimed at limiting the spread of "vote trading" in post-liberation Bulgaria. A theoretical analysis is performed on the basic roots and premises of "vote trading" for unveiling the scheme of the basic action axis for implementation of this phenomenon in Bulgaria. In this context it is very important to note the structure of the "vote trading" notion, which consists of three elements: "money seller", consumer of the "service" and "trade" of electoral committees. There is a detailed study of the contemporary "democratic" (after the 1989 political transition) forms, means and tools for vote trading in Bulgaria, while outlining some ways of overcoming this detrimental political phenomenon in our country.*

Key Words: *elections, election process, vote trading, buying voters, selling and buying votes.*

INTRODUCTION

It is known from history that the "vote trading" phenomenon is not new for the political reality of Bulgaria because it starts and develops right after the liberation from the Ottoman slavery. This has been noticed throughout the whole span of the Third Bulgarian Kingdom (from 1878 to our days), because "vote trading" has gradually become set as one of the brightest and negative features of the political stage in Bulgaria. In this sense, the current article focuses on two major theoretical issues: origin and evolution of "vote trading" in Bulgarian elections after 1878 and especially its main implications after the introduction of democratic changes in Bulgaria (10.XI.1989). In connection with this, some conclusions, generalizations and recommendations are made for eliminating this process.

1. HISTORICAL ROOTS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE "VOTE TRADING" PHENOMENON

In 1906 researchers note that ways of "stimulating" voters could vary on their subtleness and greed and thus some politicians would provide only alcohol and sausages while others would rely on small amounts of money. Inspectors and municipal councilors would use more money since they would have access to more people and therefore the ability to influence them by giving them money.

The process of "vote trading" continues to develop in the 1920s when its size and forms develop. According to the Bulgarian politician P. Peshev who lived and took part in the Bulgarian political reality during this period, the forestry and tax authorities had an incredibly effective pre-election work which included drawing up more statements and fines right before elections. "Forestry and excise guards would keep statements for themselves and tell violators that they will not proceed with them and that they would tear them only if the violators vote for the government. No matter that the voting papers were put in envelopes in the "secret room", authorities always knew who you vote for because they used to put signs on voting papers or write the names of the voters on them..." [5, 7], etc. So the government was totally devoted to unconventional activities such as blackmailing voters.

The tradition of "vote trading" in Bulgaria has spread all over the political parties, mostly in the right political formations. This is shown in the documents of the Party Council of the Bulgarian Communist Party. According to these documents, during the elections for municipal councilors a lot of illegal methods have been used against them, including "a big amount of money for elections and bribes".

In other words, there is a variety of ways to "buy votes" apart from simply giving away money.

Along with the "deals" seen till the parliamentary elections in 1920 (consisting of the traditional alcohol treats mainly given away by the Democratic party; small material bribes from the Bulgarian National Landowner's Union, etc.) we can also include a new method: **directly paying cash depending on the voter's choice. In the North of Bulgaria this was usually about 50 BGN [2].** This way of corruption was practiced by a lot of parties, the most active of which were the Democratic Party, the National Liberal Party and the Bulgarian National Landowner's Union.

During the next twenty years of the XX century (the twenties and the thirties) the political situation in the country was not much different from the previous period with regard to pre-election corruption practices. Further development of the different ways and means of this corruption continues to proceed. Different privileges, such as cutting down wooden material from municipal or state woods (at the elections in 1927), manipulative change in colours of the parties so that it could be more easily "sold" to voters (at the elections in 1931), etc., are provided to voters. In other words, spending tens of millions of levas for direct or indirect "purchase" of elections was considered completely natural and common.

It may be remarked that **the Bulgarian government reacts adequately in 1882 to this corruption processes by submitting two basic levels of punishment:** the first one is for threatening, giving or taking bribes, "double voting", etc., which lead to 6 days to 1 month prison and a 25 to 300 BGN fine; the other level is for change in voting papers and fake counting which leads up to two years in prison [4] – something which would hardly happen nowadays even when the country has been a democratic republic for over 20 years.

So our entire period after-liberation period of the so called "capitalistic period" in the development of the political market was a crafty set of different forms of "vote trading", which the modern political reality could not avoid.

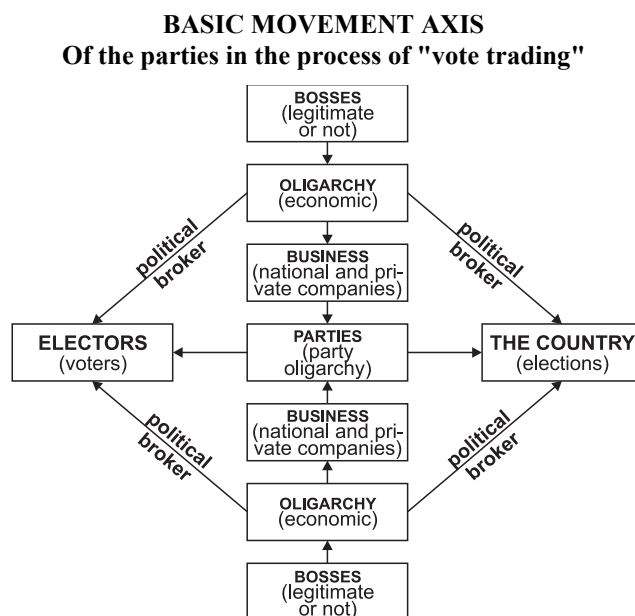
As it has been cleared out until now, the "vote trading" phenomenon has a **long history (and serious reasons to appear)** in our social life. Therefore, this issue has not found its solution till the present moment. Apart from that there are a lot of other reasons (for the mass spreading of the phenomenon), the most important of which are the following three groups: **economic**, i.e. **all the negative economic results** (vicious restitution, greedy privatization, agriculture that has fallen apart, etc.), which are a natural product of the delayed and, in a way, ruined economic transformation, which has turned entirely into an "oligarch – dynastic" one with oligarch structure and sections; **political** which means reasons entirely caused by the privileged part of the authority who make the "agenda" of the Bulgarian politics in the name of their political and personal interests which makes "vote trading" a style of behavior for a lot of political "actors"... [8] during all kinds of elections in the country; **and social reasons**, which are a result of an unfortunate twenty years transition (poverty, social marginalization, social layers which turn out to be more and more ignorant, etc.) and which are basically the objective reason for citizens (and voters) to take bribes.

Or in other words, the role of **the engine that drives the Bulgarian "vote trading" is played by the close bond between the parties and business and between politics and economics, which fuel the Bulgarian political and economical oligarchy.**

2. DEFINITION AND STRUCTURE OF THE TERM "VOTE TRADING"

In this train of thoughts the so called **"vote trading" phenomenon**, which has been something common since the early days following Bulgaria's Liberation, **can be defined as a simple practice of buying votes (directly or indirectly). In that corruption practice money or goods are given to ordinary citizens in order to ensure that their votes are going for the support of a certain political party or person.** The "vote trading" phenomenon plays an important role in the so called "shady political market" and it has its own internal structure, kinds, forms, etc.

In the conditions set by the current state of oligarchic rule, the "vote trading" phenomenon is being put into practice on the following axis: voters–parties–state (elections), with the sponsorship of large Bulgarian business companies who are mainly private.



From the scheme one can see that the basic dependences for putting money into "vote trading" are as follows: 1) from the parties through the oligarchy to the voters; 2) from the government through the parties to the voters; and 3) from the government through the oligarchy to the voters. This is the money movement in the so called **first "horizontal" level** at which enormous amounts of money for the "purchase" of voters are invested "plainly", as their basic source has a legitimate origin (state and private money) no matter that they are spent for illegitimate aims i.e. paying in hidden "vote deals" (by false reports, false contracts, false invoices, etc.).

There is also **another, "vertical level"**, at which the money that has already been put into the "vote trading" system is being realized in two important stages: **the first one** is the so called "the direct ratio stage", at which the only movement of this kind of "political money" is the movement directly to the business of the voters, so this is something like "the boss' system" in a Bulgarian version; **the other** stage is in counter ration because it develops backwards or upside down which means the money provided for "purchase" of votes move from the voters to the business. This means the voter himself asks for money from the party and business leaders to vote for a certain party, certain leader, certain businessman, and so on and so forth. This is a classic form of the famous Bulgarian type of behavior which shows how we would like to earn more, play the wise guy and never have less than the other one does.

On the other hand some important questions are being arisen, for example:

Does everything that we have analyzed up to this moment affect the voters' motivation, if they accept money in exchange for their votes so easily?

It is not easy to come up with comprehensive answers to these questions, so we are going to display, in an orderly manner, the main view points on these questions. For example, after examining **the motives of the common Bulgarian citizens** to vote, J. Georgiev, a Bulgarian sociologist, divides them in 4 main groups [9]:

1. **Donating votes** to a certain political party (quite common for the regular voters of the Bulgarian Socialist Party).

2. **Crediting votes** which consists of giving one's vote to a certain political party and in return receiving a certain "credit of trust" from the people, belonging to that party.

3. The so called **"vote investing"** – something like nurturing future votes like you nurture a crop, which means after some time passes, people who are being "pampered" by a political party will give their vote in return to everything that has been done for them up to the moment.

4. **"Vote trading"** (see econ.bg) – In that corrupt practice, as we already mentioned, money and gifts are being given away to people in order to ensure that their votes are going for the support of a certain political party. This motivation is right but, as it is known, when it comes to the Bulgarian reality the first three elements of it constantly "lose grip" in the country, of course, benefiting the "vote trading" phenomenon.

It must be noted that **the structure of the "vote trading" phenomenon** includes three basic elements which we believe are:

1) **"Money seller"** for votes (for parties) where everybody wins: the "seller" himself as a commissioner, the party wins the elections and the voters earn money.

2) **The consumer** of the service is the voter i.e. hundreds of voters who are easy to persuade in such illegal trade deals.

3) **"Trade" of election boards** (in the government), where entire election boards or just members of them are being hand out bribes.

This structure is absolutely rational (and working), because Bulgarian parties still think that they have more rights than the state (and break the laws with their behavior in the commissions, etc.). This is a formal application of the democratic separation of the authorities in Bulgaria. Here are two examples of what we just discussed.

In Bulgarian politics life "vote trading" has always had its reasons to appear. It is a purposeful party politic for gaining voters. This is the natural reason for the variety of different **types of "vote trading"**.

The **natural type of "vote trading"** usually consists of "purchasing votes" by giving away different objects, food, goods for everyday use and many more. Here the variety of different ways of "purchasing votes" is unbelievably wide: jar lids, sugar, oil, rice, beans, meat, meatballs, free beer, wine, construction material, briquettes, wooden material for fire, free transport, loans coverage, toys, dippers for adults, parties, dinners, etc., etc. Everything one can think of! In the end of the nineties one candidate mayor even gave each of the people who lived in the village one left shoe and gave them the right one after they vote for him. The poor people were barefooted in the end because this candidate was never chosen for a mayor. So the case is this – you eat, you drink, you have fun... and you vote for the one who gave you more!

The most new and fashionable method of "vote trading" is mass natural purchase of votes where parties pay people's credits in small village shops so that these people could vote for them.

When it comes to exchanging votes for **money** everything seems pretty clear: business companies and political parties illegally pay people (mostly minorities) to vote for one or another candidate or party. However this is just how it looks like because an entire market pre-election mechanism works for the party brokers to do their job. Moreover, in "vote trading" there is an incredibly modern system called "multilevel marketing" where vote distributors receive double payment – once for their personal vote and once for each person they convince to vote for the same candidate. The other method that does a perfect job in "vote trading" is "the earnest method" where the voter is given a part of the money which the party has promised to him and then he receives the rest after voting for the candidate. In this way the circle is closed because the party brokers and the voters are absolutely sure that they'll receive what they have been promised.

3. SYSTEMS, MECHANISMS AND PRICES OF "VOTE TRADING" IN BULGARIA

In time these mechanisms and schemes for money "vote trading" are being constantly improved into **systems of illegal gaining of votes for parties**. This is why we have to consider the most effective and the most popular of them which are used in Bulgaria.

a) System of the tenth

This system for "vote purchasing" is genially simple because it doesn't require a lot of agitation and other efforts if you have a lot of financial resources, of course.

Here is how it goes: person X is for instance a "hundred" and person Y is a "thousand". Each of them has to find 10–15 people who are going to be "tenths" of the boss of the system – the party broker who guarantees for the vote of each of the people in the system. Tens have to find 10–15 people who would vote for the "right" party or candidate. The difference from other methods is that the lower levels communicate with the higher ones because the hundreds are used as a buffer between them so that none of the big party leaders get into trouble. So everyone gets money depending on the quantity of the voters he had bought. The minimum gains are 2000 BGN each, plus the state post depending on the quantity of the voters he had bought (the more you buy, the more percentage you receive and you can also become a high position state officer).

In the technology of the system of "purchasing votes" the control mechanisms are very strict so nobody can run away nor lie. The first of them is called "train" which means the corrupted voters have to vote one after another at a pre-arranged time. The second is the one who guarantees strict voting for a certain party because the corrupted voters have received voting papers which are already marked with numbers. This makes them easily found in the ballot-box because the party member of the section commission controls the marked voting papers (signs on voting papers are not against the law).

The third control mechanism is that there are 5 different ways to mark voting papers (for instance special folding), apart from all the corrupted voters being already put into the computer system of the party.

It must be noted that the current system has a complex character as her realization requires applying all elements of the "vote trading". Therefore the members of the election commissions (SIC) have an important role in the system. Their job is also illegal and includes corruption which is confirmed by Maria Nikolaeva – a member of SIC who admits without any worries that she took part in such dishonorable schemes to earn more money as a member of NMSS. She also claims that a lot of other parties – BSP, UDF, etc. – used these methods too at the elections in 2005.

This banal system is a perfect work of art made by the Bulgarian degradation talent and a thorough manual for cheating at elections which seem to be used in each election since the democratic changes. Its climax are the parliament elections in 2005 when according to Ognian Minchev NMSS did a mass purchase of votes for which they gave approximately 120-140 million BGN because of which the party's percentage rapidly changed from 8 to 18 (at the elections). Here the king's manipulators turned out real experts in pre-election processes because building up such a system requires being smart and greedy enough as to do your own country down.

b) System of the fifty

This unfair system for "purchasing votes" has more simplistic operations because it is a matter of one single pre-election trick. It is related to signing contracts for agitation activity for the price of 150 BGN which is widely spread practice in different kinds of elections.

By virtue of this contract, the contracting authority (the party) gives 150 BGN to the people who would be responsible for the agitation job during the pre-election campaign (advertising, discussions with voters, etc). This is the classical scheme of "vote trading" through the so called "fifties". The procedure is as follows: firstly, the person who has to

spread advertising material and to lead discussions with the electors, in exchange for 150 BGN, creates a list of 50 people whom he is going to convince to support the "right" party or coalition; then, once received their confirmation (of the people), the contracting authority gives them the money which would guarantee the votes of the 50 electors; and then, the control functions are being realized immediately after counting the voting papers when they can tell if the job is done right. Furthermore there are additional money bonuses depending on the number of corrupted municipal councilors: 30 BGN for 1 to 3 of them; 60 BGN for 4 to 7; and 90 for more than 7.

That's how the local elections in Kazanlak in 2008 worked. The most active in signing such contracts was the new party "Federation for active civil society" (FACS).

A lot of parties and politicians deny such public display of "vote trading" at the Bulgarian politic market but shouldn't forget that this phenomenon is a pale copy of what we know from the affairs "Filesa" (in Spain) and "Urba" (in France) and because if here it is all about 100–150 BGN, in the above affairs it was about millions of dollars.

c) The system "Indian file"

This is one of the oldest systems of "vote purchasing" in Bulgaria which is permanently applied since the first democratic elections in the country in 1990. Its mechanisms are really simple: the elector is given a filled out voting paper with a sign on it which he puts into the ballot-box and then he gets out one empty one for an evidence of voting "the right way". The empty voting paper is being put a sign too and then it goes to the next voter. In that way this "pre-election manufacture" is being repeated over and over again which entirely guarantees that the vote goes to the "right" candidate. Of course, the vote is not cheap and its price is between 20 to 50 BGN depending on the city/town/village, standard of life, electors' will, etc.

The above systems of "vote trading" in Bulgaria clearly show that a negative tendency of ruining our young democracy is being rapidly developed during the last twenty years. This is quite clear according to the **data of the prosecutor's office for "vote trading" from the last municipal elections in 2007: there were 179 signals for "electors purchasing" and 13 of them were submitted to court; there was a mass "purchasing" in Pernik, Varna, Stara Zagora, Berkovitsa [6].**

It gets more and more grave if we add the fact that according to police in Pernik there were 4 million BGN spent for "vote trading" only in the town which means that the same activity might have cost politicians more than 60 million for the entire country. This shows that **Bulgarian politics have turned into mafia structures; there is a modern feudalism developing in smaller towns; and the only laws that matter are the laws of money.**

With all this mass purchasing of votes in the country it would be interesting to compare the real value of one vote (as a price) and the one which is given for the pre-election campaign. This comparison is not easy to be made because of the lack of criteria on the matter. Therefore we are going to consider the money put into the pre-election advertising for the parliamentary elections in 2005.

According to a research of the socialist agency "Market links" political parties spent over 9.2 million BGN for the Campaign 2005 for media adverts on the basis of which the "price" of a vote can be calculated (*see the table*).

PRICES
for a vote at the parliamentary elections in 2005

| Parliamentary elections in 2005 | | |
|--|------|-----------------|
| Political parties which entered the parliament | | |
| Prices for an elector (BGN) | | Number of votes |
| UDF | 4.4 | 280,323 |
| BPU | 3.7 | 189,268 |
| DSB | 2.6 | 234,788 |
| NMSS | 1.7 | 725,314 |
| Coalition for Bulgaria | 1.2 | 1,129,196 |
| MRF | 1.2 | 467,400 |
| Attack | 0.2 | 296,848 |
| Political parties which could not enter the parliament | | |
| Federation for a free choice | 14.3 | 12,196 |
| The new times | 11.5 | 107,758 |
| Coalition of the rose | 11.2 | 47,410 |
| FACS | 10.6 | 18,326 |
| Euroroma | 0.2 | 45,637 |

Source: "Market Links", 2005

According to the above data Coalition for Bulgaria has realized one of the most effective campaigns because the price of a vote was about 1.20 BGN (the same for MRF). Second place goes to NMSS – 1.70 BGN, DSB – 2.60 BGN, etc. On the other hand the worst campaign was the one of UDF – 4.40 BGN for a vote, BPU – 3.70 BGN, etc. At the same time, Attack's votes were the cheapest – 0.20 BGN and the most expensive campaign was the one of "Federation for a free choice" – 14.3 BGN and "The new times" – 11.50 BGN although they couldn't enter the parliament. **The approximate price of a vote has risen 7 times during the years – from 0.40 in 2001 to 2.24 BGN [3] in 2005.**

Having in mind the facts mentioned above it is clear that **in the dynamic modern world electors can still be "bought" directly or indirectly** as it has happened in the past. Therefore, even if the election process is democratic, it is already "sold" before the elections to the one who are willing to give away more money for the cause of being an authority in the country. This is not a twist of truth because indirect illegal subsidizing of campaigns has been realized in a lot of countries especially ones like Bulgaria. This is absolutely obvious from the constantly growing illegal subsidizing of parties (and electors) which is becoming frighteningly enormous, endangering democracy itself. An evidence of the above statement is the huge increase of the **price of one deputy position in the Bulgarian parliament which in the "shadow" market in 1994 cost about 20–35 hundreds of German marks while in 2005 it cost approximately 200 thousand BGN [3]** which is about ten times more. Moreover, such high amounts of money are usually given by corrupted politicians who organize and participate in complicated trade nets which ensure their political protection.

However, we can say that Bulgaria was highly influenced by Italia's experience where **"clients and corruption are united in one as a coil with one thing depending on the**

other. The money for one political action are raised by buying votes (connected with clients) which makes politics search for material sources to invest in their climbing on the stairs of authority" [1] (*the underline text is mine – G. M.*). Or directly said, "vote trading" is an essential part of the client nets and corruption at upper levels of authority, without which most political subjects wouldn't have any powers (this question will be considered in the next lines).

A clear evidence of the above statement is the **total publicity of the pre-election "vote adding"** which makes state institutions powerless because there is not a single Bulgarian politic party that doesn't cheat at elections. Another evidence is the variety of types of "vote trading" – starting from small goods and ending with enormous amounts of money (*see the table*).

"PRICE LIST"
of the "vote trading business" in Bulgaria

| Number | Year | Type of elections | Type of "vote purchasing" |
|--------|------|---|--|
| 1. | 1990 | Parliamentary (GPM) | Deficit goods – jar lids, goods, etc. |
| 2. | 1991 | Parliamentary (RPM) | Food – oil, sugar, rice, etc. |
| 3. | 1994 | Parliamentary (RPM) | Dinners and treats – beer, meatballs, etc. |
| 4. | 1997 | Parliamentary (RPM) | Cash (for one vote) – 20 BGN + different treats |
| 5. | 2001 | Parliamentary (RPM) | Cash – 80–100 BGN + different kinds of treats |
| 6. | 2005 | Parliamentary (RPM) | Cash – 100–120 BGN + different kinds of treats |
| 7. | 2007 | Local | Cash – 150–200 BGN + different kinds of treats |
| 8. | 2008 | Local (elections in Sandanski) | Cash – 200–400 BGN + different kinds of treats |
| 9. | 2009 | Parliamentary (RPM) Approximate values | Cash – 300–500 BGN + different kinds of treats |

It is impossible to be positive when looking at such a "price list" for the "vote purchasing" in our country. This is why we should consider some important things in general: **first of all**, the development of democracy in Bulgaria where "vote trading" in its initial phase is concentrated only in deficit goods and mostly in the minorities; **second**, the width of the "purchases" is growing due to the increase of the variety of the products, which then include food too, and corrupting other poor social layers; **the third one** gets us away from democratic laws because the last few types of elections are connected with a lot of cash for a single vote given away to so many people that the lines of the social politic laws and realities are crossed; **the fourth one** is very important because it is connected with the lack of control over these illegal actions which leads to the establishment of such "prices" of reaching the authority levels" (Ant. Galabov); **the fifth one** may be one of the most grave ones because absolutely all Bulgarian politic parties use the "vote trading" method of political impact to win one or another pre-election campaign. Moreover, nowadays it is done completely purposeful; **sixth** is not very pleasant itself either because it is connected with the actions of different party bosses and the people related to them who earn a lot of money and positions and in return do certain services usually coming from authority; **and finally**, the result of all is the so called "passage" which is related to the social tendencies towards the "vote trading" phenomenon because according to the

researches about 10 % of the people are willing to "sell" their vote without even thinking about it, if they're going to earn money from that!

CONCLUSION

Obviously the so called "vote trading" phenomenon during elections is not only totally illegal but, along with the corruption, it has already become a political way of life and a huge problem for the democratic way of election process in Bulgaria.

This problem is not easy to resolve at all, because it needs a complex approach and drastic measures. In this sense the whole Bulgarian political system should be consistently reformed: the Constitution, political parties, electoral legislation, etc. Of course, this has to be a deep and meaningful process, which should lead to a new dimension of our political system and should limit to a reasonable level the so-called "vote trading" process via reformative actions.

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FENOMEN "TRGOVINE GLASOVIMA" U BUGARSKOJ

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Ovaj rad razmatra fenomen "trgovine glasovima" u kontekstu izbora i izbornih procesa u Bugarskoj. Analizirane su istorijske implementacije ovog fenomena u periodu od oslobođenja od Turaka (1878) do danas. Posebna pažnja posvećena je nastanku ove pojave u periodu od 1878 i 1944 kada se javljaju početne implementacije za osvajanje političke moći. Akcenat je stavljen na prve pravne regulative (zakon iz 1882) čiji cilj je bio ograničavanje širenja "trgovine glasovima" u Bugarskoj posle oslobođenja. Teorijska analiza je izvršena na osnovu korena i premisa "trgovine glasovima" radi otkrivanja šeme osnovnih radnji za implementaciju ovog fenomena u Bugarskoj. U ovom kontekstu veoma je važno naglasiti strukturu pojma "trgovina glasovima", koja se sastoji iz tri elementa: "prodavac novca", korisnik "usluge" i "trgovina" izbornih odbora. Data je detaljna studija savremenih "demokratskih" (nakon političke tranzicije 1989. godine) oblika, sredstava i alata za trgovinu glasovima u Bugarskoj, kao i neki načini prevazilaženja ovog štetnog političkog fenomena u našoj državi.

Ključne reči: izbori, izborni proces, trgovina glasovima, kupovina glasača, kupovina i prodaja glasova.