

## REVIEWS

From Assoc. Prof. Milena Hristova Stefanova, Doktor Habil in Political Science

Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

The review is part of the competition procedure for associate professor in the professional field 3.3. Political Science (Regional Governance and Politics), promulgated in the State Gazette no. 93 of 26.11.2019 for the needs of the Faculty of Philosophy of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". It was elaborated on the basis of the Law for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Rules for the Terms and Conditions for Acquisition of Academic Degrees and Occupation of Academic Positions at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". One candidate is participating in the competition - Chief Assist. Prof., PhD of Political Science Elena Angelova Kalfova–Voynova.

Chief Assist. Prof. Elena Kalfova-Voynova holds a Master's Degree in Political Science from Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in 2000. In 2008 she successfully defended her PhD in Political Science and her thesis is in the thematic field of this competition. Since 2004 he has been an assistant, and since 2009 he has been an assistant professor at the Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". In 2002, she completed a course in European Public Administration and Regional and Local Government at the University of Maastricht, The Netherlands. In accordance with the requirements of Art. 24 of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, Art. 53 of the Rules for Implementation of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and Art. 105 of the Rules on the Terms and Conditions for Acquisition of Academic Degrees and Occupation of Academic Positions of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", participation in the competition of Dr. Elena Kalfova-Voynova, PhD is eligible: she holds a doctoral degree in Educational and Scientific Degree classification, has worked for more than two years as a lecture at a university, has submitted a published monograph to participate in the competition, meets the minimum national requirements for academic post of associate professor in the professional field 3.3. Political Science, no plagiarism has been identified.

## **Research and results**

To participate in the competition, Dr. Elena Kalfova-Voynova presented the habilitation work "Regional Governance and Regional Policy - Application and Evaluation", published by the IM "St. Kliment Ohridski" in 2019, as well as 7 papers and 7 studies on the subject of the competition, 5 of which are in English. One of the studies was published in a journal referenced in SCOPUS. I will not evaluate each publication standalone since all of them reflect a consistent and focused research activity that is indisputably presented in the monograph.

In her research, the candidate demonstrates sustainability, skilfully upgrades and further develops regional development and policy issues. Starting with the application of the institutional approach to the administrative structures of regional governance (the protected dissertation for the Educational and Scientific Degree „Doctor “), she succeeded in combining it with the regional development policies and the evaluation of the results of their implementation in her subsequent studies. Dr. Kalfova not only understand in detail the achievements of the international scientific community in the field of regional science, but also builds on them with his own contribution.

We can highlight at least **three important** aspects of the results of Dr. Kalfova's research.

**First**, regarding research approach applied to regional governance and policy.

I do not know of any other Bulgarian author who applies an integrated approach in the study of regional governance and policy. What distinguishes and is undoubtedly an achievement of Dr. Kalfova is precisely the integrated approach. At first glance, the approaches of institutionalism, the new institutionalism and that of public policies differ significantly from one another, but the results of the study show that they can and should be applied together, giving a new level of awareness of the nature and role of regional levels of government and policies at regional level. Applying such an integrated approach provides a sound theoretical basis for defining regional policy, as opposed to policies implemented at regional level. The integrated approach makes it possible to reflect the specifics of regional governance and policy in the overall process of changing the role of the state in public governance. The protected thesis "that a change in the governance system leads to a change in the specific content of regional policy, and the reverse of the process is also valid - a change in the objectives and instruments of regional policy can lead to a change in the institutional system" allows it to prove" the need to consider regional governance and regional policy rather as a single object

of study precisely because of their inextricable conditionality." This approach allows not only to redefine regional policy, but also to identify the factors for its development. The author proves that inevitably regional government is undergoing changes and it adequately outlines the factors that influence it.

**Secondly**, regarding the analysis of regional governance and policy.

Dr. Kalfova has achieved remarkable results by implementation of the integrated approach. The various processes are covered not only historically but also internationally. Controversy with various research schools and approaches to regional development, governance and policies skillfully leads us to conclusions that have not been postulated. Elena Kalfova does not aim to give recipes to either researchers or practitioners. In this respect, it is extremely correct. The conclusions it makes give us a chance to immerse ourselves in the vast sea of exploration of regional governance, development and policies. A sufficient contribution is the clear highlighting of the advantages and disadvantages of the approaches and results analyzed by it.

**Third**, with regard to the empirical assessment of the degree of influence of the quality of governance on the achievement of the main objective of regional policy in Bulgaria. A very convincing study has been made of the impact of various factors on regional development and the achievement of regional policy objectives. The hypotheses that the role of the quality of governance as a leading (and equal to economic) factor for the fulfilment of the regional policy objectives can and should have real practical application. Understanding the limitations of each regression analysis, Dr. Kalfova successfully defends the choice of methodology and indicators for the analysis. Of course, the concept of quality of management is subject to discussion (the author notes this). The use of a composite indicator, as represented by the index of the local integrity system, developed and implemented by Transparency International, means that Dr. Kalfova finds the methodology acceptable.

This methodology has been developed and is being implemented to assess the anti-corruption capacity of key institutions and social partners at local level: municipal council, mayor, municipal administration, business, media, political parties, civil organizations, courts and police. The index gives an idea of the state of the environment in which people work and live in terms of compliance with certain principles and standards of integrity. For Bulgaria, the survey and evaluation are done annually for the last 4 years in 27 regional centres, but accepted as municipalities. The use of the Fairness index for assessing the degree of influence of the

quality of governance on the achievement of the main objective of regional policy should be accepted with some degree of conditionality, since it does not take into account the reality in other municipalities in the respective administrative area. Unfortunately, there is no other index available in Bulgaria to measure the quality of governance more fully, which is why I accept its use for the purposes of Dr. Kalfova's research on conditionality. This does not negate the contribution of the study results.

The reference for the original scientific contributions is sufficiently detailed and fully consistent with the content of the publications submitted for participation in the competition by Dr. Elena Kalfova. She is a recognized author, as evidenced by the citations attached to the competition documents.

### **Questions and recommendations for future research.**

The problems of regional governance and regional policy are a huge challenge for any scholar who deals with it. The practices of individual democracies, even those within the EU, have been different over the last five decades, and the diversity of political, managerial and practical approaches and solutions requires a number of non-traditional research and systematic approaches. If, when G. Stoker, B. Hodwood, U. Bullmann, published their famous study of regionalism in 1995, the situation in the individual countries was accurately described, then today 25 years later, the changes in the individual countries are a prerequisite for new comparative analyzes. The authors define the UK as a centralized unitary state, but today it is rather a federal state, or as many researchers in devolution processes call it, a "quasi-federal" state. Their claims are not hampered by the absence of a written constitution for the United Kingdom to determine the form of government. They argue for the creation of the parliaments of Scotland and Northern Ireland and the definition of their powers, and the creation of regional executive bodies in these parts of the kingdom. Similar processes are taking place in Spain, Italy, despite the fact that these countries have identified themselves as unitary states in their fundamental laws. In her research, the author relies on indisputable authorities in comparative studies. Even the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's research continues to treat Britain as a unitary state. In this regard, I would recommend that the occurring changes, not on claims, but on indicators, be taken into account in a comparative context. Personally, I see a very good prospect for Dr. Kalfova's future research in the field of

comparative analysis, insofar as she has demonstrated, through her previous work, very good methodological and methodological preparation.

In her reference to contributing moments, Dr. Kalfova noted the recommendations for changing the approach to regional policy in Bulgaria. Literally, the three sentences at the end of her monograph pose numerous challenges. However, it remains unclear how all this can be achieved. For example, what institutional and governance changes would be appropriate to achieve the recommended bottom-up planning?

The submitted entries show the author as a built, conscientious, correct and consistent scientist. I would recommend more categorization in making preliminary recommendations for improvement.

The publications can be used for the purposes of the learning process and will undoubtedly support Dr. Kalfova's work in the main courses she has taken.

#### **Academic teaching experience**

From the enclosed references for the training and teaching employment of Chief Assist. Prof. Elena Kalfova, PhD, has a serious teaching activity, in which university courses in three specialties of the Faculty of Philosophy of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"- Public Administration, Political Science and European Studies, both in Bachelor's and Master's degrees. For more than 18 years, Dr. Kalfova has refined her teaching skills and introduced new forms and methods of teaching and control in her work with students. Elena Kalfova's annual auditorium employment for the last three years has been moving beyond the required by-laws and is between 593 and 730 hours. She is a principal lecturer of the Regional Policy and Impact Assessment courses, an Assistant in the Bachelor's Degree in Public Administration and an Assistant in the Local Government and Management course in the Bachelor's Degree in Political Science. Over the years, Dr. Kalfova has developed and implemented 8 Masters courses in Public Administration and European Studies, one of which is in English. In 2016, Dr. Kalfova developed the concept and syllabus for the Master's Program in Policy Evaluation and Impact Assessment, of which he is the Head. It also organizes and directs postgraduate Impact Assessment training, in partnership with the Institute of Public Administration. She has managed 32 successfully defended master thesis for students in the Master's Degrees in Public Administration and European Studies.

Chief Assist. Prof. Elena Kalfova is a highly respected lecturer for students. Her contributions to the development of the Public Administration major are indisputable and highly valued by her colleagues. She is actively involved in the activities of the Department, the Faculty and the University.

### **Personal impressions of the applicant**

I have known Elena Kalfova from her years of study in Political Science. Later, I had the obligation, but also the chance to be her scientific advisor in preparing her dissertation for the award of the Doctor of Political science (Educational and Scientific Degree). Somehow, naturally, she became an assistant in my courses in Public Administration and Political Science. It is a pleasure to work with Dr. Kalfova. She is a responsible lecturer, a conscientious and correct researcher, a helpful colleague. She is not afraid to express his own opinion, not only in scientific but also in organizational terms. Although the procedure for filling the academic position of associate professor somehow unfairly ignores the applicant's employment in scientific and practical projects, I cannot fail to note the impressive number of projects in which Dr. Kalfova has participated. In a considerable part of them we have worked together and I can confirm the scientific correctness and honesty with which she relates to her work.

### **Conclusion**

In view of the above, I strongly believe that the members of the Scientific Jury and the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philosophy should vote positively for the occupation of the academic position of Associate Professor in the Professional Field 3.3. "Political Science" to Elena Angelova Kalfova-Voynova.

03/11/2020

Sofia,

Reviewer:

Assoc. Prof. Milena Stefanova, Doctor Habil