

OPINION

**for the dissertation "The Bulgarian Path in Social Policy"
for awarding the scientific degree "Doctor of Science", Professional field 3.3. Political
Science ((Political Science - Public and Social Policies)
to Tatyana Trifonova Tomova**

from Prof. Petya Lyubomirova Kabakchieva, PhD, SU, Department of Sociology, P.F. 3.1.
Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Studies

1. Presentation of the dissertation. Scientific contributions.

Usually the beginning of opinions and reviews has the most boring but necessary part, concerning the formal characteristics of the dissertation. The text is 328 pages, includes three chapters, the bibliography is impressive, especially the publications in foreign languages, and it is clear from the text that this literature is not just included in the bibliography, but carefully read. The presented scientific publications on the topic of the dissertation are more than sufficient, in renowned scientific journals, and are a testament to the professional prestige of Associate Professor Tomova among her colleagues. So from the formal point of view all the necessary requirements for a Doctor of Science dissertation are in place.

More important, of course, is the content of the dissertation. I will not dwell on the specifics of the three chapters, but I will comment on them through the approach that is followed, because it is undoubtedly the merit of the dissertation.

There is no need to justify the importance of the researched problem - the formation of the model of social policy in Bulgaria during the so-called "Transition", as this significance is very well motivated by Assoc. Prof. Tomova. As she notes, on the one hand this problem is constantly relevant and seems to be periodically discussed, but as the dissertation convincingly proves - there are essentially no alternative debates to the market-oriented model of social policy adopted in the late 1990s, moreover, apart from the alternative, there is no depth in the discussions. Usually the publications in the field of social policy present different social policies, discussing specific pressing problems and their specific solutions.

The present dissertation differs from this type of texts. It, as the title shows, has a very ambitious goal - to present the Bulgarian model of social policy, crystallized during the transition and seeks answers to the following questions: "What type is the social policy in Bulgaria?", "Why is it as it is?" and "Is it possible to change it?" (p. 7). I define as a main

achievement of the dissertation the research approach used to answer these questions. This approach fully deserves the high academic criteria referring to a doctorate.

What do I mean?

Associate Professor Tomova applies a multifactorial, multidimensional, comparative (in historical - temporal in the Dr. Tomova's terminology and spatial (territorial) perspective) approach to explain the reasons for imposing this particular model of social policy in Bulgaria, taking into account the transfer of knowledge and policies, random factors, as well as the dependence on the already imposed model (defended as a "path dependence"). Simultaneously an attempt is made to monitor both the actors in this process and the reproduction/change of the referent frameworks in social policy, which are also realized at the institutional level. This research (not analysis, as explicitly noted by Associate Professor Tomova) is an extremely ambitious endeavor, by the power of a few, involving great erudition, courage, deep mind, which is not satisfied with empirical explanations and superficial analyzes piece by piece. Associate Professor Tomova traces how the "Bulgarian path in social policy" and the model generated by it became possible, placing it in the general historical and specific spatial trajectories of the development of social policy on a global scale. Thus, Dr. Tomova, without self-showing, overcomes the characteristic, alas, for many Bulgarian studies, methodological nationalism, and places the Bulgarian model as a specific variety on the world stage. The dissertation is an excellent example of a serious sociological study (my apologies to political science and public administration) of the genesis and specificity of the social policy in the so-called "transition" period in Bulgaria in a broad historical and spatial context and this study is unique in Bulgaria. The applied approach is adequate to understanding not only social policy, public policies, politics in Bulgaria, but to understanding what is happening in Bulgarian society as a whole. And I can not emphasize the use of this approach as a very serious achievement of the dissertation in the analysis of social processes.

This approach makes it possible to explain some characteristics of social policy in Bulgaria that seem incompatible. I could give as an example the very interesting thesis that "Bulgarian social policy does not contradict but does not correspond to the European social model" /p.281/, which is in itself a scientific contribution; but there are a lot of examples of discrepancies, motivated in the dissertation and listed on p. 310.

I will note some of the interesting conclusions that this approach leads to, and which I also consider as contributions.

The specific interpretation of the thesis of "path dependency" and diffusion of policies. Usually the path dependency is associated with a longer historical path, but in this case Assoc. Prof. Tomova claims that the path is determined not by the historical heritage of state socialism, but by the adoption of a Western paradigm of market-oriented social policy; i.e. the "path dependency" of social policy in the last 20 years is not historically determined, but is the result of the diffusion of policy models and transfer of knowledge in the late 1990s. A prerequisite for this is the insufficient expertise of the Bulgarians. This thesis proves the importance of the transfer of knowledge and policies in the modern world, especially in the field of social policy in Bulgaria, and fits into the not very popular paradigm of "entangled modernities" and I consider it also as a contribution.

Another very interesting thesis, which is definitely an original scientific contribution, is that one of the problems of the transition in general and of social policy in particular is the constantly reproducing political strategies of the "fault-finding" transition, which block constructive solutions, as well as a serious debate on the policies pursued. This is one of the factors for the constant reproduction of the market-oriented model of social policy adopted in the late 1990s.

The distinction between content and process of social policies is a significant methodological contribution, which provides great opportunities for serious empirical analysis of social policy making referring to the interaction of different social actors, as well as to the genesis, clash and intertwining of the ideas the actors offer.

The dissertation is theoretical, but the serious explanations it gives to what is happening in Bulgaria could open the "concluded" model of social policy in Bulgaria and give a chance to proposals of new policies. In this sense, it is a prerequisite for future contributions regarding application of different social policies..

There are other contributions that can be mentioned, some are listed in the abstract, but I think that what is written here is more than enough to convince readers that the dissertation is a serious scientific work that fully meets the high academic requirements for awarding "Doctor of science" degree to Tatyana Tomova. The abstract fully corresponds to the theses defended in the dissertation.

2. Comments and questions.

The author explicitly notes the instrumental approach she uses, which she considers as a contribution. I am personally skeptical of this approach (it is not a critique, but a personal opinion). I do not see how social policy will be defined as "an instrument of public authorities for an achievement of collective goals structuring society" (p.19) and the models of social

policy are determined by their reference framework; and at the same time one could argue that policies are defined “by what can be achieved with them, what they serve, and not by the social goals they pursue or by the values they meet (p. 38), and that “ the power instruments are independent of its political nature ”/p.41/. In my opinion the results, more or less, are determined by the goals. I am also skeptical to the thesis that "policies are not democratic or totalitarian. They are effective or not, fair or not, etc.··· “/p.40/. The Nazi totalitarian regime probably set up concentration camps as a social policy, in which the slogan "Arbeit Macht Frei" is a specific tool for solving the problem of employment, and Stalin's concentration camps serve similar goals. I think that the given examples of convergence are for the later stages of state socialism, which I would define as an authoritarian rather than a totalitarian regime.

Another remark: the use of the term “globalization” is more correct than the term “internationalization” on p. 246.

I think that the analysis of more books by Bulgarian authors and a more detailed presentation of the Bulgarian case would have been a plus, precisely through the methodological prism of the "process and content" in the development of social policy. But this will probably remain for the second volume of a future publication on the subject. For the future publication, the work should be edited more carefully from the point of view of more precise citations, indication of the specific periods, more precise spelling in Bulgarian of the names of some authors / p.55, p. 225 /, but these are quickly correctable things.

3. Conclusion

I believe that it is very clear from what has been written so far that I am voting in favor of awarding the scientific degree "Doctor of Science" in the professional field 3.3. Political Science (Political Science - Public and Social Policies) to Associate Professor Dr. Tatyana Trifonova Tomova.

09/10/2020

Prof. Petya Kabakchieva