

REVIEW
of the dissertation of Assoc. Prof. Tatyana Trifonova Tomova
entitled "The Bulgarian Path in Social Policy"
scientific area of 3.3 Political sciences (Public and Social Policies)
for awarding the Doctor Habil. degree

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1. Overall review of the procedure

Associate Prof. Tatyana Tomova is well known to the Bulgarian scientific community both in public administration and political studies. The reason for this is her long experience as an active researcher, a lecturer on several fundamental disciplines, and most of all as an author of few monographs, articles and reports throughout more than three decades. Thus, the procedure for awarding the Doctor of Science degree in her case is a natural step ahead.

From a formal point of view the dissertation presented fulfills all quantitative (325 pages) and qualitative criteria for a Doctor Habil. thesis (structure, thesis, balanced theoretical and empirical analysis). The theses, hypotheses, objectives and methods of analysis are well outlined. The scientific apparatus of more than 320 titles in English and Bulgarian is carefully selected and effectively used in the text.

The scientific publications on the topic of dissertation research are of sufficient volume and are closely related to its subject. Of these, few are devoted on the topic of the thesis in accordance with the requirements of the scientific legislation that a significant part of the dissertation being defended should be published in advance.

I find the self-report about the contributions to the dissertation work accurate and consistent with the analytical efforts. The procedure until the last moment is correct and the discussion at the meeting of the Department of Public Administration – very fruitful. The dissertation is in line with the requirements of the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act (DASRBA).

2. Overall assessment of the dissertation

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tatyana Tomova's Doctor Habil. thesis possesses all qualities of form and content required for a dissertation: (1) formal - there is a real thesis, a complete system of its elements (object, subject, hypotheses, goals); (2) content - a review of leading complementary theories, a large amount of clear and meaningful own opinion, reasonable scientific polemic, effective exit to management practice by creating an in-depth and toolbox to measure the path dependency phenomena throughout the controversial Bulgarian transition.

I accept the arguments of Tatyana Tomova about the relevance of her research, as my main points are about the tendency of (mis)understanding social policy as an obstacle for global market adjustment. To that, I add the undeniable importance of a new approach to governance which would be irrelevant without new social development instruments.

The whole dissertation manifests the self-confidence of its author. It reveals the relationship of many years of research and teaching experience with the experience of a practitioner. Professor Tatyana Tomova convincingly demonstrates a multifaceted understanding of the modern problems of the social policy and her willingness to help by highlighting innovative conclusions. At the same time she does not forget another target group - the political and governance researchers and students. For them, she shows a leading position in the knowledge of her long-standing object – the evolution of social policy models and instruments.

I find it most important in the general assessment of the dissertation to pay attention to the following interrelated structural features:

Chapter One lays a solid foundation on the overall study with the definition of social policy as governance instrument. Tatyana Tomova offers a perspective to social policy, based on concepts as a starting point, with models as next step and practice as a final “destination”. The use of social policy as a governance instrument depends on the specific political, institutional and social context.

Then Tomova moves to – at least – two important propositions for the following investigation. First, that social policy does not change the societal system features, but only aims at resolving some public problems. Second that the choice of specific social policy instruments depends on political power characteristics and on the relations of multiple policy stakeholders. Finally policies transform to institutions and the past relations continue to influence future developments.

Chapter Two outlines a distinction between different types of social policy, using the convergence/divergence dichotomy. I find justifiable, necessary and related to the further analysis the definition of an own interpretation of the path dependency theory. Tatyana Tomova concludes that – because of multiple circumstances interplay – the path dependency interruption is possible only in presence of a powerful exogenous factor. This idea is very important for understanding the Bulgarian path in social policy.

An important theoretical and pragmatic role is played by the conclusion that other way possible policies, contradicting the path dependency, are in fact impossible. The change becomes realistic only if new ideas and new political and social conditions arise.

The third chapter is devoted to the analysis of the Bulgarian modern social policy model. The main propositions are: Bulgaria reforms the inherited social policy by importing the market model, but without taking into account the specific national context. Furthermore, because of economic policies failure the introduced model undergoes constant change. Its maintenance is impossible without a massive and increasing state (budget) support. The most important is that 20 years later the vast majority of Bulgarians feel they are not favored by this reform.

Despite this, according to Tomova, the social policy market model is hard to change because of the lack of alternative ideas, insufficient expertise and powerful corporative interests. Such possibility would arise only if new frame of reference and new political strategies show up.

3. Evaluation of contributions

The scientific contributions of the Doctor Habil. thesis lay entirely in the declared subject matter of the study and are clearly oriented toward the conceptual and pragmatic development of Bulgarian social policy model and its evolution.

Contributions could be structured in *four main dimensions*:

First. Elaboration and successful application of public policies understanding, as well as the importance of parallel study of policy content and process. Hence, the development of an instrumental approach to policies and of a system of criteria for social policy instruments typology.

Second. Contributions in the field of social policy models study, including the framework of space and temporal models and the development of main features of the market social policy model.

Third. An important contribution includes the clarification of Bulgarian transition in the 90s as a process of path dependency and the role of “blame seeking” political strategies (although the last idea is somewhat dubious).

Four. Last but maybe of primordial importance is the contribution to clarify the institutionalization of modern social policy in Bulgaria and the resulting model “locked” because of the transition frame of reference.

The four dimensions of author’s contributions lead to the conclusion that the Doctor Habil. thesis offers several major scientific and applied results contributing to the development of the field of political science. Thus the requirements of the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act (DASRBA) are entirely met.

4. Critical remarks, questions and recommendations

In my opinion the thesis is highly valuable exactly because it provokes several questions and reflections. I could mention only three.

First, about the wider interpretation of contemporary path dependency theory – in more probabilistic and strictly causal direction.

Second, while accepting the idea that policies' process and content are interrelated I'm not convinced that the process is always the cause and the context – the result. The content of goals and instruments in several instances has an important influence on the interaction.

Third, I do not totally agree that social policy has not a purpose of its own because this purpose could be the human potential development.

5. Personal impressions of the applicant

I am the witness of the fact that Asoc. Prof. Tatyana Tomova is not only a highly competent lecturer, researcher and trainer, but also a living example of academic integrity over 35 years of work.

CONCLUSION:

Considering the undisputed competence of Tatyana Tomova in an important and relatively under researched field, her theoretical and practical expertise in the wide area of the dissertation research, the achievements of nearly three decades of activity well known to the scientific community, the direct significance of the conclusions for the development of political and administrative theory and practice in our country, as well as the act of reviving a whole branch of the political studies in Bulgaria, and above all evaluating the contributions made in the dissertation,

I propose to the honorable scientific jury to offer convincingly awarding of the scientific degree "Doctor of Science" (Doctor Habil.) in scientific field 3.3 Political Sciences to Assoc. Prof. Tatyana Trifonova Tomova for her dissertation thesis "The Bulgarian Path in Social Policy".

01.09.2020

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