

G. Dimitrov. An Empirical Reconstruction of the Political Interactions in the History of Bulgarian Integration into the European Union (A Study on the Recollections of Participants in the Process)

Dissertation for the award of the degree of Doctor in Political Science (professional area 3.3. Political Science - European Integration Studies)

(Review by **Prof. Ivan Elenkov, D.Sc.**)

The dissertation is a thorough, meticulously circumstantial scholarly study, organized in intricately structured ten chapters with many unavoidable internal subdivisions, a "Bibliography" and appendices.

Its subject matter and aims are revealed in comprehensively grounded, rigorously systematic understandings of the modern world, conceptually deployed in a wide-ranging network of notions rationalizing the emergent time in the 20th century and the early decades of the present century: modernity, capitalism, modernization, geopolitical context, Europe, Europeanization, European integration, society, modern societies, national societies, civilizations and civilizational values; the topics are connected in the core structure of the work. The dynamic element that derives from and fuses the above unfolds in a trinity of *polity*, *politics* and *policy* as an energy of tense, active and impetuous social forces reflected in institutional structures, personalities and personal acts aimed at providing solutions to the human situation in modernity. Georgi Dimitrov's study traces in a very thorough and in-depth way their particularly "characteristic manifestation" (p. 20) along the Bulgarian integration process into Europe.

The sources and selection of empirics, the methodological issues raised and brilliantly resolved, the stated stance towards the available academic and expert literature, and the author's self-assessment deserve special attention in an attempt to evaluate the work discussed in these pages. At the heart of the research are dozens of richly informative interviews with decision-makers in various high-level government and expert positions, spanning to more than 1200 pages. From these, Dimitrov reconstructs the thread and builds the fabric of his narrative - the combination of expert and public discourses. The expert discourse is recreated along the analytical line of unravelling and assessing its meaningful significance regarding the Bulgarian integration process into the EU (p. 59). Along this line the author notes on p.120 the amount of recognized 8638 (eight thousand six hundred and thirty-eight) "...distinct emphases of meaning, containing diametrically opposed viewpoints on several hundred private matters, and in no small proportion of cases on internally contradictory views in individual opinions." As he arrives at another, no less respectable number on p. 302: "The analysis of the entire information array has made it possible to recognize 2693 referrals to specific facts (about integration interaction and relations, within the limits of, as the author himself points out - "the integration galaxy with giant stars and dwarf stars", *note by I. E.*), in which in some way the corresponding country or its representatives is marked".

Additionally, he raises and resolves several methodological issues concerning the collection and use of specific empirics. For example, the demonstrated analysis of the conceptual schemes on pp. 149 ff. in which the author gives status of his way of work as a methodological model for future studies in the field. What is very important for the methodology of the work is the framework content stipulations and methodological assumptions of Dimitrov on the researched subject. They are not set once, at the beginning, as it is common but are amended and

supplemented until the very end of the dissertation according to ever revealing new and new research complications in the course of the exposition.

The powerful empiricism of his research on the structure of the total of discourses on the European integration process comprises the persuasive, tightly delineated discursive space and the leading discursive figures standing in it, identified through the reconstructive procedure presented above, to be thought of in their rapidly shifting and incessantly changing dispositions. On these methodological and source bases run the natural coherence and sober, distant, not seldom and sharply critical, distinction from the numerous authorities in today's and more distant philosophical, historical, political sciences and specialized expert literature on European studies and European issues, to which, on top of that, the author shows in depth knowledge. His judgements and analyses of the above bring the work we are currently discussing into the centre of the debate on contemporary Europe, among which Dimitrov's voice undoubtedly acquires not only an important but also a formative and defining significance. As a very important conclusion in this regard, and as the author's self-understanding of it, I point to the paragraph in the final pages of the work entitled 'The Significance of the Research Conducted for Political Science' (pp. 791 ff.).

It is clear from what has been said so far why he is irreconcilable to the perception of the European Union's enlargement policy as a natural development, embellished by the leadership of equally and naturally ascendant instances, as well as the grounds for this policy in his dissertation to be considered as an expression of a human, too human, act. The research process develops page by page, unravelling illusions, discovering intuitive value attitudes, passions, hopes, not infrequently manipulateness, pressure, power, weakness, inertia, sloth, dislike and sympathy, overpowering, misunderstanding and true understanding with high expertise..., all, to

quote his words from p. 141 - invariably accompanied by "...strong positive or negative emotions". A very significant critical line thus emerges in the book - the critique of 'formal rationality' and the rational institutionalism that dominates the academic literature in explaining the Eastern enlargement of the European Union. It is this critical line that leads to the remarkable 'Conclusion on the Lessons of Knowledge about EU Integration for its Future and the Future of Europeanization Science', and what the author finds with bitter ambiguity as a justification and rationale for the existence of the social sciences as providing a 'better understanding' of the issues we are interested in...' (p. 769).

The characteristics of the civilizational models and views regarding their development and interactions presented in the dissertation come out in many semantic and conceptual varieties - their multitude is not accidental. The most exciting micro-plots, the individual brilliant sociological studies illuminating the brightest pages of the book relate to: the "labour ethos" (on p. 80), community and partnership, friendship and cooperation, civilizational and political importance of competition (pp. 698 ff.), to "taking", "giving", "help" and the legitimacy of the concept of "benefit", as well as the justified categorical differentiation between help and benefit on pp. 492-493. In the same fashion the decisions of the key cases with direct cognitive relevance to our EU accession process are presented, such as the Kozloduy Atomic power station case, the Corporate Commercial Bank AD case, the Kremikovtzi case, the incalculable symbolic-mandatory dimensions of buying and selling land to foreigners (p. 691), the extremely important significance of the "visa issue" in the course of the development of the process. The author gives a rational status and analyses insightfully dozens of clichés from the current media narrative and from the public in general. A subdued but constant undercurrent in the book is the question of European values which represent the drive towards the "normalisation of life" in Bulgaria, in

nature "nothing special", but an essential form of freedom as "an obviousness of everyday experience" (p. 7 and many others).

Last, but not least, in direct relation to all this comes his analysis of the huge number of specific instances on corruption. Utterly important in the same connection is the book's extremely detailed and penetrating discussion of the rule of law as "a fundamental value of the whole of social life, as a protection of human dignity and the sanctity of life and private property against all encroachments, including by state institutions" (on p. 82 and many others).

Finally, reaching the end of my review, I would summarize thus:

The book covers dozens and hundreds of research problems to which the author, in summarizing his entire research and life experience, has provided a worthy, highly valuable scholarly response. Highlighting the high results of the scientific research conducted, its empirical diversity, its theoretical, methodological, and interpretative merits; being aware of the visible projections in it of the author's overall life work, teaching practice and undisputed authority in the collegial community, I accept with full conviction his capital work discussed here as worthy of the award of Prof. Georgi Dimitrov the degree of Doctor of Political Science.

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