

Opinion
for dissertation
to obtain an educational and scientific degree "Doctor"
in the scientific area 3.3. "Political Science (Public Administration)"

Author of the dissertation: Vanya Ilieva

Dissertation topic: "Horizontal policies in the Bulgarian context"

Author of the review: assoc. prof. Elena Kalfova, PhD, Department of Public
Administration, Sofia University "St. Kliment. Ohridski"

1. General description of the dissertation

Vanya Ilieva's dissertation study "Horizontal policies in the Bulgarian context" meets the structural and content requirements for obtaining an educational and scientific degree PhD. The presented study has a volume of 195 pages and is organized in 3 chapters, introduction, conclusion and appendix. The dissertation content refers to representative and topic specific scientific literature in Bulgarian and English. Citation is bona fide and appropriate to achieve the objectives of the dissertation.

The structure of the dissertation conforms to the standards of scientific research. In the Introduction are defined the object and subject of the research, the main thesis, the goals, the tasks, the research methods and research limitations. The analysis framework built in this way is logical, coherent, the goals are ambitious and address some of the most essential problems currently facing public policies in the modern governance. The first one is the problem of the demographic collapse in the country and the governed or rather un-governed policy on the issue. The second research problem is related to the approaches and possibilities for implementing horizontal policies. The PhD candidate brings out and proves the thesis that coordination is one of the most important problems in the implementation of horizontal policies in Bulgaria. It is my professional opinion that the pattern of coordination, or namely the lack of it, is one of the most fundamental problems in public administration and policies in general. That is why I think that any research in this direction should be encouraged.

The structure of the dissertation, as well as the research, follows a classic deductive approach. The first chapter presents the main concepts that the author follows in the process of proving her doctoral thesis. At the theoretical level, a description of horizontal policies

has been derived. The relationship between horizontal and sectoral policies has been analysed. The possible negatives and positives of the adoption of the horizontal approach are considered. A clear research methodology was developed as well methodology selection is well-founded.

The second chapter is the most interesting in my opinion. The model of development of horizontal policies in Bulgaria is analysed. A brief retrospective of the emerging horizontal policies in Bulgaria was made. The institutional framework for conducting horizontal policies is analysed. An empirical study which addresses the problems in the development of horizontal policies in Bulgaria was conducted among employees in the administration. The research was conducted as a combination of survey and in-depth interviews.

The third chapter analyses the demographic policy in Bulgaria. From my point of view, the analytical approach used brings significant value - it examines at the same time both the strategic documents defining the framework of the policy and the institutional system for its implementation. Recommendations have been made for improving coordination in Bulgaria, which I find very useful.

2. Quality of the research qualities and applied methodology

The author sets extremely ambitious and far-reaching goals that address some of the most significant deficits in the practice of public administration in Bulgaria. They include deriving the main characteristics and factor dependencies of horizontal policies and analyse the capacity for conducting horizontal policies in Bulgaria. In addition, the dissertation aims to investigate the specific case of application of the horizontal approach in the process of planning and implementing the demographic policy in the country in the period 2001-2020, in order to define the peculiarities of national practices, as well as to derive existing deficits and suggestions for improving processes. Such wide-ranging research poses serious challenges, which Vanya Ilieva copes very well.

In the analysis of the application of the horizontal approach in Bulgaria, a combination of normative analysis and policy analysis was used. In this way, the main characteristics of the practice of horizontal government have been revealed, and the demographic policy in the country has been analysed in detail.

My overall assessment of the thesis is positive. A complete and mature text is presented, the result of systematic and purposeful work. The author has carried out a significant volume and good quality work aimed at identifying, reviewing and analysing a significant volume of information sources. The dissertation student demonstrates excellent theoretical preparation. Actual and significant questions were raised about the development of

horizontal policies and demographic policy and their importance in two directions: for government purposes and for the importance of demographic policy for the economic and social development of the country.

3. Scientific and applied contributions.

I accept the contributions formulated by the author and consider them to be the result of her own efforts. I do consider that Vanya Ilieva has succeeded to a significant extent in fulfilling the goals set in the dissertation research and in proving the defended theses.

The contributions of the dissertation are primarily related to identifying the "weak spots" in the process of horizontal policies and bringing out the factors for the formulation and implementation of this type of policies, the manifestations of the critical points of horizontal policies in Bulgarian practice are investigated, suggestions are given, which have the potential to help improve the effectiveness of demographic policy.

4. Evaluation of publications.

The doctoral student presents 8 articles related to the topic of the dissertation. This shows that the necessary publicity of the research process in relation to the issue under consideration has been ensured. Quality is at the required level and corresponds to good achievements in the research field. I recommend looking for opportunities to publish in languages other than Bulgarian. This would give additional popularity to the achieved research results.

5. Abstract.

The prepared abstract has a volume of 41 pages. It is designed appropriately so that it gives a true and accurate picture of the research work done and its results.

6. Recommendations and questions.

Any in-depth research inevitably raises questions and recommendations for future analysis. The doctoral student points out the lack of good coordination as the main problem in the implementation of horizontal policies. The problem is defined as essential in all spheres of public administration and in sectoral public policies. In this regard, I have the following question: what are the main factors for such miss-coordination?

The institutional instability of coordination mechanisms in the specific case of demographic policy is also clearly brought out in the dissertation research. Is this instability a cause or a consequence of specific characteristics of demographic policy? In other words, on the institution-policy axis, what are the factors that would guarantee a better coordination process?

If horizontal policies in Bulgaria are an intersection of sectoral policies, what is the reason for this and what approach would you propose to overcome this problem?

7. Conclusion.

The dissertation research proves that the author has the competencies to conduct scientific research: she demonstrates knowledge of theoretical paradigms, basic skills for analysing empirical data and for analysing scientific facts. Bearing in mind the advantages of the dissertation research, I strongly recommend to the members of the Scientific Jury to award Vanya Ilieva the scientific-educational degree "PhD" in scientific specialty 3.3. Political Science (Public Administration).

11.03.2024г.

Reviewer:

assoc. prof. Elena Kalfova, PhD