

OPINION

of Assoc. Prof. Dobrin Hristov Kanev, PhD, NBU, Political Science (3.3)

on the dissertation "The Bulgarian Way in Social Policy"

for awarding the scientific degree "Doctor of Science", Professional field 3.3. Political Science

to Tatiana Trifonova Tomova

The dissertation of Assoc. Prof. Tatiana Tomova, PhD, entitled "The Bulgarian Way in Social Policy" is a large-scale and comprehensive study of the formation, nature and prospects of social policy in Bulgaria after 1989. This work is obviously the result of many years of research work of its author. From the very beginning it can be said that this is a complete, in-depth and independent study with high qualities, which meets in all its aspects the high academic criteria set before a dissertation at the level of "Doctor of Science".

The problem at the center of the dissertation of the model of social policy in Bulgaria, of the way of its creation and imposition, of the factors that give rise to it, is of undoubted scientific and political-practical significance at least due to the obvious fact that it is the part of public policy that affects the lives of practically all Bulgarian citizens.

Moreover, research on this topic is relatively rare. As Tatiana Tomova rightly points out, despite the "certain movement" in this regard after the crisis of 2008, "social policy is rarely an independent research object in the current Bulgarian scientific literature. To the extent that it occurs occasionally, it is rather to justify the need to adopt certain practices or, on the contrary, to reject others as inapplicable". (p. 12) This means in practice that in this case light is shed on an important and relatively poorly studied area of Bulgarian public life, i.e. the present work has a contributing character. Here we can add the fact of a number of deficits in the previous research, noted in the dissertation author's abstract.

The questions that the author asks herself in order to draw conclusions about the essence of the model of Bulgarian social policy and its prospects (opportunities for change) are formulated by her very clearly: "What is the social policy in Bulgaria?", "Why it is as it is?" and "Is it possible to change it?" (p. 7). It is clear from them that the research will inevitably receive a broader framework than simply following only the process of conceptualization, formation and development of social policy in a democratizing Bulgaria. And indeed it is. Ultimately, the more specific research questions start from the very concept of social policy, go through the models of social policy practiced in different countries

and at different stages of development of capitalism, and lead to the formation of the Bulgarian model of social policy and attempts to its improvement, as well as the (im)possibility for its essential change.

These research questions suggest that the research will go in three steps. In the dissertation work, first, important primary and conceptual questions about social policy and the way of its research are solved. Second, the samples that could influence the creation of the Bulgarian model are presented in detail. Third, not only the Bulgarian model of social policy is analyzed, but also the overall Bulgarian transition with its economic, political, social characteristics, within which this model is born and realized. This analysis of the complex processes of transition has not become a risky endeavor for the researcher, as the author has avoided this danger by considering “the transition in public administration, the perception of new public policies as a relatively separate transition that takes place in specific conditions and under the influence of specific factors” (see p. 11).

The theses that are put forward for proof in the dissertation and that would lead to the research goal, in general, look something like this: The transition becomes a prerequisite for choosing the model of public administration that dominates the Western world at the given historical moment. However, the social policy formed on its basis ultimately turned out to be unbalanced, with a predominant protective function, at the same time realized at a very low level of individual needs and leading to public dissatisfaction. But once adopted, this model becomes a path along which only parametric changes are possible. The possible implementation of paradigm shifts needs difficult conditions. (see pp. 10, 11)

In her research, Tatiana Tomova relies on a solid methodological basis. The natural leading methodological approach for the subject of the research is policy analysis, the analysis of individual policy areas with its analytical tools, which she masters excellently. In addition, in some places (especially in the second and third chapters) in the reconstruction of theoretical debates and political actions the specific for the political sciences historical approach was used. Comparative analysis has proved appropriate in the study of different models of social policy. Some "narrower" concepts were also important for the study, such as the concept of path dependency, the thesis of policy transfer and diffusion, or John Kingdon's multidimensional model for determining the chances of changing the established model of Bulgarian social policy.

When evaluating a dissertation of this rank, it seems unnecessary to dwell on the sources used. Indeed, the expected richness and representativeness of the sources on which the author has set foot is there. However, I would like to emphasize the extremely precise and in-depth work with the academic literature, especially in the first two chapters with the analysis of a large number of authors and works covering a wide range of diverse studies of the welfare state and social policy (more than three hundred

titles in the bibliography in several languages). It is obvious that she knows the secondary sources very well, not only on her central topic (where she really researched everything important as authors and works), but also on related topics such as the topic of the transition to democracy.

The three main steps of the study mentioned above structure the whole text as separate chapters and give it logical strength and completeness.

In the first chapter, as expected, the main theoretical and conceptual problems related to the research topic are placed and solved. Its very title "Social policy as an instrument of public governance" shows the author's choice of theoretical position. She has rejected the possibility of applying so-called sociological or economic approaches, but has adopted an instrumental approach to social policy which, for analytical purposes, takes it outside the nature of political power or, in other words, distinguishes power (politics) from policies: "In fact, the analysis in terms of policies suggests that 'What is power in a political community?' and 'What policies does it make?' are two separate questions that involve specific research methods" (p. 41). From this point of view, social policy is treated as an instrument that public authorities can use and use to achieve collective goals and to form society, and for the researcher it is essential to define policies "through what can be achieved with them, for what they serve, not what social goals they achieve or what values they meet" (p. 38).

In this approach, she has seen a number of advantages from a research perspective - the ability to compare different practices in different types of societies and in different historical periods; the possibility to treat the types of social policies as equal instruments; opportunity for "de-ideologisation" of science and evaluation of the various instruments in terms of the caused social results; opportunity to develop technology of policies. Of course, there is no doubt that the use of the social policy instrument as a public policy depends on the specific political, institutional, cultural, social context.

This starting position of the author is consistently developed and substantiated in the dissertation. It begins with a definition of the key concept of public policy and the related concept which is leading to the author. Then comes the treatment of social policy as public policy. This is followed by the typical analysis of social policy as a process and as a content. It continues with its consideration in the context of modernity and the market economy and with the issues of its decomposition and institutionalization.

After defining the concept of social policy, in the second chapter the author focused on the study of different models of social policy in the Western world. Although on the surface this problem seems remote from the topic of the dissertation, this is not the case and it is not a question of any self-serving for the simple reason that the current Bulgarian social policy is born largely as a transfer of existing

ideas and practices. As the author has shown, this "borrowing" takes place in different ways - policy diffusion, policy transfer, convergence.

In order to explain and evaluate the model of social policy adopted by our country, it is necessary to present these ideas and practices and to find the factors that led to the decision taken in Bulgaria. This is exactly what the author did in this part of the dissertation, tracing the emergence and stages of development of different types of welfare state in different places, i. e. she studied them in territorial and temporal terms. This was necessary in order to clarify why such a choice was made.

In this sense, the temporal aspect turns out to be decisive, as in practice the dominant model in this historical moment is perceived in our country, and it, as the author states at the beginning of the third chapter, dedicated to the formation of the model of modern Bulgarian social policy, is the so-called market model of social policy. It is precisely this model that has "settled" in the "institutional vacuum" that emerged after the first years of the transition, in the words of Tatiana Tomova: "The social policy formed in the late 90's in Bulgaria has more the characteristics of the market model than the characteristics of the traditional models for the old members of the EU. Moreover, Bulgaria is more faithful to the market model than other Central and Eastern European countries, which change their social policies at approximately the same time, in approximately the same political context and in conditions of approximately the same dependence from global financial institutions." (p. 289)

This choice turned out to be largely predetermined due to the change of the political and economic system. This is the inevitable beginning of the "path" in this case, which has a decisive impact on the later development and future of Bulgarian social policy.

In this main part of the dissertation the author has analyzed in detail first the process of "paradigmatic change" of our social policy, and then the attempts to adapt it to the environment and to deal with its problematic aspects. The main characteristics of the model and the consequences of its application are shown - its practices rather correspond to the logic of deregulation, privatization and decentralization; it takes away rather than grants social rights, it is associated with a high degree of income and social inequality; it leads to lasting, reproducing poverty (see pp. 280, 293, 296). Tatiana Tomova shows that the internal contradictions of our model of social policy lead to the fact that "Bulgarian social policy does not contradict and does not correspond to the European social model" insofar as "it follows the definite recommendations of the EMU and does not use the freedom of formulation the public goals that the general social policy provides to it" (p. 281).

Analyzing the measures taken for change in social policy, the author convincingly claims that they are "parametric", ie. remain within the same model. She also substantiates her thesis that the probability of continuing to reproduce the adopted model, despite its shortcomings, is much higher than the probability of it being changed (p. 306).

All the above shows that the dissertation text contains a number of new ideas, supported by the necessary solid arguments, and that there are serious contributions to the study of social policy issues.

This means that we can agree with the author's self-assessment of the scientific and applied contributions of the monograph. Her high professionalism is evident in the application of the analysis of public policies to achieve the research goal, which has led to reliable results and in certain respects the public policy analysis has been concretized in view of the specific subject of research. Examples include the idea of a "policy reference framework", revealing the interrelationships between the types of social policy models (temporal, spatial) and the different ways in which they are disseminated and transmitted, as well as the specific and different content of the social policy model of the new democracies compared with the models in old democracies.

However, it is noteworthy that the author deals mainly with two of the three dimensions of the political - politics and, of course, policy, the key in her approach, but seems to underestimate polity (the form of the political), which could also be successfully included in the theoretical framework.

It is very likely that this dissertation text will become the standard work for social policy in Bulgaria, as it contains both a presentation of the new model of social policy with its essential characteristics and the factors that influenced its perception, as well as the limits of possible changes and the prospects of its development.

It should be emphasized that although the dissertation research does not set specific applied goals, it has many aspects that can help to overcome problems and deficits both in the legislation and in the practice of social policy institutions.

I would like to confirm that the work also meets the formal requirements for this type of research product, set out in the relevant legal and other regulations. The abstract adequately reflects the content of the dissertation. There are also numerous publications on the topic of the doctorate.

The written text is distinguished by its accurate and precise academic style. There are indeed in some places certain bad-sounding formulations, inaccuracies in the Bulgarian spelling of some names of authors (p. 55 , 112, 225) or of organizations (p. 226). In the bibliography, the titles in Cyrillic are usually placed at the beginning.

In the end, I will once again confirm that in the face of this dissertation we are presented with a comprehensive and rich in content study in which the author has shown the qualities of a serious researcher. Undoubtedly, it represents a contribution to the study of significant problems for the present and the future of the Bulgarian society and state. All this gives me the necessary grounds to express in my opinion unequivocal support for the award of the scientific degree "Doctor of Science" in the scientific field "Political Science" to Tatiana Trifonova Tomova.

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