

## Review

From: Prof. Duhomir Vladimirov Minev, scientific specialty "Sociology", Institute of Philosophy and Sociology - BAS.

Subject: dissertation for the award of the scientific degree "Doctor of Science", on the topic: The Bulgarian path in social policy. (History of the transition that does not end).

Author: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tatiana Tomova

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### 1. Description of the presented work

The presented work has a volume of 312 pages, including the list of used literature, and consists of an introduction, three chapters and a conclusion.

The aim of the paper is to study the model of social policy in Bulgaria, which is formed as a result of the social transformation of Bulgarian society in the 90s of the last century.

The object of the study is this segment of the social transition in the Bulgarian state and society, within which the new models of public governance are introduced.

The subject of the study is the model of social policy, which is formed as a result of the overall social transition in the country.

Some preliminary restrictions have been introduced in the work. Perhaps the main one is that it excludes the discussion of the level of democracy, as well as the attitudes and capacity of decision-makers to formulate adequate policies, despite the importance that has recently been attached to these factors<sup>1</sup>. They have been replaced by the notion of a policy process and the notion of a "policy reference framework" (understood as "the paradigm of values and ideas for social development against which expert analysis is made, political party programs are developed and the interests of key stakeholders are identified").

The first chapter is devoted to the views on public policies, to social policy itself (SP), and introduces the instrumental approach to social policy. The second chapter discusses different models of SP. Systematization of the factors for territorial and temporal differentiation of the policies is presented. The third chapter analyzes the modern social policy of Bulgaria after the changes of the 90s of the last century, identifies the market model and looks for the factors that may change the adopted model of social policy.

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<sup>1</sup> According to a study on the Global Agenda, in 2015, about 86% of respondents indicated that there was a global leadership crisis. Central to this crisis are the weak balance between power and competence of those who exercise it, as well as the fact that power is not necessarily exercised in favor of those elected by those in power.

## 2. Highlights of the work

The conceptual framework used for public policies corresponds to the mainstream of policy research. Assoc. Prof. Tomova presents it as a concept that puts an end to Machiavellianism in the analysis of politics and political institutions, focusing on the game between many influential participants who share or exchange resources, interests, values; private actors influence the policy process because of the control over a certain resource of power, which is not political in nature, but makes them part of the policy process; policies must receive a critical mass of public support; policies and their social outcomes depend on the groups to which the policies are targeted. The policy process is based on scientifically established facts and, as a rule, pursues socially useful goals.

This notion ignores the narrow circle of participants in the process, as well as the exclusion of many of them in policy-making, does not allow the possibility of collusion and corrupt practices. There is no place in it for ruling elites, for plutocracy, for oligarchy. There is no place behind the scenes, despite P. Burger's advice that the sociologist should "look behind the formal mechanisms that are supposed to regulate power in the community .... In some cases, he may conclude that to seek real power in publicly recognized places is quite misleading."<sup>2</sup> The notion of public policy does not allow what I. Wallerstein suggests: "Bureaucracies and politicians of weak states (and even stronger ones), becoming weaker and losing legitimacy (and therefore control), tend in many cases to merge their interests with those of omnipotent mafias. In such cases, it may be useless and pointless to distinguish between these two groups."<sup>3</sup>

The dynamics and state of the social policy model are presented as follows: at the beginning of the transition under the influence of various factors (mainly transfer, diffusion of policies) a new market model of social policy was created. Despite the disapproval of the effects of the model, it does not undergo significant changes due to "dependence on the road" and "locking" (due to: political strategies for "fault finding", the growing return of established social models and the state of expertise, which is influenced by the curricula that train new specialists in the public sector and public administration).

It is believed that the state of social policy is influenced by the negative prejudice against it, caused by the ideologizing of views and judgments about this policy. One opportunity to rehabilitate social policy as a tool of governance is to clear the understanding of it from ideological layers and related representations, as a connection with certain political forces, or with the previous period of the country's development, or the thesis of a negative impact on economic development, etc.

In order to achieve de-ideologisation, one relies on the instrumental approach to politics - according to the author "this is the only way to de-ideologize politics, which, incidentally, is the original idea of its founders."

The idea is that the consideration of policies as a "tool" (of governance) focuses on the technical part of policies, on their professional development, devoid of the influence of group interests ... If

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<sup>2</sup> Burger, P. An Invitation to Sociology. Sofia: Lik.1999, p. 39

<sup>3</sup> Wallerstein, I. 1998 Utopistics or historical choices of the twenty-first century. New York: The New Press. 1998 p. 49-50

we look at politics as an instrument (what is the point of view of the author), it means that it is done to achieve a goal .... If you look at politics as a (self) goal, it means that it is done because it is right, or fair, or just like that is done, and this creates a connection with an ideology or value complex.

Another important part of the work is the review of the models of transformation (reforms) of the social policy. This review is the next logical step after the statement for the emergence of a new universal model of social policy. The review shows how the transformation process went and the different reform options

### 3. Relevance and significance of the work

The topic of the work is focused on the Bulgarian model of social policy, but the work is not closed in a specifically Bulgarian framework, but treats significant problems that have a universal character:

- An example is the criticism of linking social policy with left-wing governments and ideologies. This connection still retains some resilience in debate and literature, although it is already an anachronism. In recent years, many studies have clearly noted that party programs are becoming vague and similar, leading to some "ideological and political homogeneity" and a growing lack of political identity. (Eg Manuel Villaverde Cabral, Susana Salgado The crisis of political representation: the Portuguese case (2002-2015).

- Skepticism about the thesis of incompatibility between social policy and the market mechanism, including the negative impact of social policy on economic growth. These views gained particular influence during the period of shrinking welfare states and their debunking took a lot of time and effort of authoritative scientists and international institutions, including those who created the myths. Examples include studies that refute the claim that East Asian countries have achieved economic success because they are a "social policy-free zone" (Ha-Joon Chang, 2002, The Role of Social Policy in Economic Development Some Theoretical Reflections and Lessons from East Asia, a report prepared for the UNRISD project on Social Policy in a Development Context in the UNRISD program on Social Policy and Development November 2002 ▪ Geneva)

- The problems related to the use of scientific knowledge in policy formulation are also universal and extremely topical. These problems also raise a number of questions and Assoc. Prof. Tomova pointed out some of them: Why the expert analyzes themselves contradict each other; why science-based policy analyzes cannot (often) be applied; why, once scientifically sound measures have been implemented, do they not (often) lead to the desired and expected results? These and other similar issues are fundamental to understanding the interaction between knowledge and policies; between power and science.

One more touch can be added to the actuality of the topic - some authors believe that a change in current policies, framed by the rather compromised ideas of neoliberalism is forthcoming and there are many signs of such a change - in the EC, in the views of the IMF and WB and other. This is a turbulent period, including for science, as the supporters of the current course defend their positions

and have the resources to do so, thus slowing down the changes. Of course, research does not play a significant role in making political change, but challenging old dogmas is socially useful.

Specifically Bulgarian nuances of these universal problems of the SP are the connection of social policy with the political regime before the transition, the weakness of social policy combined with a high level of poverty and inequality.

#### 4. Contributing moments

The self-assessment of the contributions corresponds to the content of the presented work.

I would like to emphasize some components of the work, which in my opinion have a contributory nature, but it seems to me that they are not sufficiently emphasized in the report on contributions.

4.1. The idea of freeing social policy from ideological labels and ideologically based judgments and linking politics to certain political forces or periods in the past is important for policy research, as some authors find that this research is highly ideological. Although I doubt that de-ideologisation would significantly contribute to changes in the model of the SP (and even if it is possible at all), I still find it important to emphasize the problem of ideological influences and the need to bring more professionalism and limit manipulative, ideologically based views and judgments.

4.3. The critique of the thesis that a political power with a certain ideological identification makes precisely certain policies or at least limits its choice within a certain set of permissible measures. This criticism is also supported by the fact that in recent decades in the government of many countries have changed different political forces, which, however, invariably maintained the course of shrinking social policy.

4.4. In my opinion, it is also important to point out the fact that the reduction of social policy is connected with the restriction of democracy. Assoc. Prof. Tomova has given a number of opinions on this issue. "The most important aspect of pension reform is that it involves the abolition of democratic mechanisms (Pierson 1996). In most cases, citizens are not informed about the reforms and their consequences (Ney 2003). If we understand democracy as a system of political challenge (Dahl 1999), then strategies that avoid guilt destroy it (Ney 2003, p. 84).

4.5. Criticism of the market model of social policy is well-founded and supported by numerous empirical studies.

#### 5. Critical remarks

5.1. In examining the way in which knowledge is used in policy-making, no results have been used from significant research that has gained widespread notoriety and authority. I mean the findings of risk researchers (W. Beck, O. Qing, etc.) "politicization of knowledge", ie. production of partial and contradictory knowledge, which allows only certain knowledge to be used in policy formulation. Other empirical research shows that this is exactly what happens in the policy process - partial knowledge is used, which corresponds to the preliminary attitudes of decision makers. Moreover, the idea of making knowledge-based policies has failed, as much research is being done to support policies. That's why two British researchers write the following about the initiative to make evidence-based policies: "Intuitively, to base policies that affect people's lives and the

economy on solid academic research sounds rational and desirable. But such approaches are fundamentally failed due to the fact that the Government, in the broadest sense, seeks to control and control the process of knowledge production, to such an extent that this type of research can be defined as "policy-based evidence". (Rebecca Boden and Debbie Epstein (2006): Managing the research imagination? Globalization and research in higher education, Globalization, Societies and Education, 4: 2, 223-236).

In short, the results of research on the creation and use of knowledge in policy-making could support the thesis of ideologizing - de-ideologizing, but in my opinion this possibility is not sufficiently used.

5.2. There seems to be a problem with the notion (definition) of social policy. *It* seen as the influence of political power on the social structure of society, which does not lead to a change in its systemic characteristics, but rather responds to identified public problems (Author. Page 16).

Leaving aside the ambiguity about the relationship between social structure and systemic characteristics, the question arises: if social policy affects the social structure, then a strong social policy would surely collide with a fundamental change during the transition - the emergence of new components of the social structure - the group of "winners", concentrating income and wealth (owners - "appointed as capitalists") and the growth of "precariat" . In such a case, it seems logical for social policy (its influence on the social structure) to be reduced to a minimum so as not to counteract the central changes in the social structure. And this can be an important explanation for the collapse of social policy.

5.3. In my opinion, the role of ideologizing social policy as a factor of negativism towards social policy is exaggerated. It is true that ideologically based arguments are used extensively on social policy, but this rather reflects problems with the level of expertise. The real reasons for the weaknesses of the social policy are other and Assoc. Prof. Tomova pointed out some of them.

5.4. It also seems to me an exaggeration to say that looking at policies as a 'tool' will focus on their professional design, devoid of the influence of group interests. It is hardly possible that policy-making can be deprived of the influence of group interests. However, when considering public policies, such a possibility is not mentioned. The application of the instrumental approach leads to another exaggerated statement: that social policy cannot change systemic characteristics; that it is unable to change the social system. This is true, for example, in terms of the normative and institutional order, but many studies show that a prolonged expansion of social policy can change the basic proportions of the distribution of GDP; it can change income inequalities, make changes in labor behavior, and sometimes in political behavior. These changes are probably one of the reasons for the periodic changes in social policy - the consistent expansion and contraction of social policy. A senior economic adviser to Thatcher argued that the goal of monetarism was to put the working class in its place. Fluctuations in social policy could also find a theoretical basis in Habermas's theory of losing the authenticity of the social system and restoring it through increased exploitation and intensified repression.

5.5. The work has some peculiarities that seem to give it the marks of a textbook. For example:

- The theses are presented at the end of the relevant chapter and therefore, at least in some cases, seem to highlight highlights from the previous presentation. Some of these contain basic knowledge of the problem and seem quite general. For example, the thesis that “The concept of public policies is related to behaviorism in political science and suggests that the actions taken by public authorities to achieve public goals are related to a number of factors, including the behavior of participants in the process of its formulation. and implementation and the specific link and interaction between them are essential. ”

- Various authors and schools are widely presented, but sometimes their presentation seems self-serving (to acquaint the reader).

- The third chapter, which is most directly related to the topic of labor, represents about 1/6 of the total labor. Even if a first chapter is added, because it acts as a conceptual framework, it turns out that the two chapters together cover about half of the work.

Critical remarks probably need clarification, as they do not include the initial mention of segments of social realities, which often play a significant role in policy-making. This criticism has been avoided as it relates to the state of public policy research rather than to the work presented. The work should not be criticized for adhering to elements of a dominant or at least quite common notion, and its purpose is different. Another issue is that, according to some authors, ignoring segments of reality is a sign of a serious problem - that the very notion of public policy is ideologized or has even become an ideology in itself.

#### Requirements under the Academic Staff Development Act

The presented report also shows that Assoc. Prof. T. Tomova also meets the national requirements under the Academic Staff Development Act for the award of the scientific degree "Doctor of Science".

**Conclusion:** Considering the highlighted positive aspects and the critical remarks made, I believe that the work on the topic: “The Bulgarian path in social policy. (History of the transition that does not end) ”has the qualities of a dissertation for the award of the scientific degree" Doctor of Science ". Since the national minimum requirements are also met, I believe that Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tatiana Tomova meets the requirements for awarding the degree of "Doctor of Science" and I will vote for it.

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