

Review

From: Professor Georgy Fotev Georgiev, Doctor of Science: New Bulgarian University

On: the dissertation on Public Interest in Local Government for awarding a Doctor of Science degree in a professional field 3.3. Political Science (Public Administration) requested by Assoc. Prof. MILENA HRISTOVA STEFANOVA, Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

The dissertation of Assoc. Prof. Milena Stefanova is accompanied, as required by the scientific legislator, with the Autoreferat and other documents required by the academic legislator, which are correct. All procedural requirements are met.

Assoc. Prof. Milena Stefanova is a well-known and respected scientist and university lecturer among the researchers in the field of public administration, among some academic circles abroad, among other professional fields such as sociology, political science and administrative law. She is known in the wider university community and among the public administration experts. Milena Stefanova graduated in Sociology at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". She was a student who was distinguished among her colleagues and I was confident that there would be a fruitful future in science. Milena Stefanova started her career in the new discipline of public administration at that time in our country. She was in our country one of the pioneers in the scientific and university institutionalization of this multidisciplinary science.

"Public administration", like "history", is a dual name - the subject and the science of this subject. In such cases, there is no other solution to the problem because these sciences are multidisciplinary. It is an internal unity of sociology, political science, (administrative) law, psychology (individual and social), ethics, management technology, etc. The problem is not limited to background knowledge. The multidisciplinary perspective is integrated. Assoc. Prof. M. Stefanova has the specialized invaluable practical experience as a municipal councilor in a metropolitan municipality. As a municipal councilor, she has experience of working with EU institutions. She was Deputy Rector of Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski". She was also Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy at Sofia University and Head of the Department of Public Administration. It is not possible to discuss this in more detail. For science such as public administration, the relevant practical experience is very important.

The subject "Public interest in local government" of the thesis of Assoc. Prof. Milena Stefanova is theoretically undeveloped in our country and the subject has not been empirically researched on the basis of a deliberate theoretical model. Partial drilling studies are of a structural nature. The topic is relevant in two ways: in scientific terms and in view of specified management practices. Also, the main problem of the dissertation is whether the public interest is defended in local government. The choice of the subject is not a question of a feeling, which is not uncommon for dilettants. Unlike the dilettant, the serious scientist brings the valuable idea to the end (Weber). The dissertation of Assoc. Prof. M. Stefanova is an exemplary example. She is a scientist with enviable lore in the field, distinguished by analytical, precise details and creative thinking. Public administration is a positive (empirical) science, although as a multidisciplinary one it includes in its conclusions and prescriptions, but it is a frontier topic. Prof. Stefanova has an impressive sensitivity to the empirical fact. This is a remarkable quality. Probably it has been cultivated in her practical experience in public administration.

The dissertation is composed in an exquisite conceptual way. In the introduction, the character, the subject and the theoretical framework of research are outlined, the main problem of the study, the final goal, the tasks to be solved, the methods, the hypotheses to be verified or falsify. The main thesis of the dissertation is formulated, which is naturally highlighted in the Autoreferat and does not need to be quoted. Any competent side observer will recognize the academic canon, which, unfortunately, in today's scientific circles is often ignorant or lightly overlooked with a hidden motif to blur the scientific discourse, creating the illusion of deeper thought and originality. The approach of Assoc. Prof. Milena Stefanova is also a question of intellectual honesty, which I consider to be a superior virtue of science. The connections between theory, method and subject are internal, which is explicitly mentioned in the dissertation and is established by the analytical reading of labor. Qualitative and quantitative methods have been used and, in particular, what is referred to as a descash survey as opposed to field or terrain methods, cluster analysis, and benchmarking. Content analysis is important, but it wonders why it is called "trivial". This is inappropriate.

Key concepts of the theoretical scheme or of the conceptual scheme or of the coordinate system, which I have emphasized in my works, are the following: public interest (interests), local authorities,

central government, institutions / local government, public benefit, public good, local community, structured social environment, protection of public interest, etc. In the first chapter of the dissertation thesis special attention is paid to the concept of public interest with emphasis on the contemporary treatment of this concept. This attention is reasonable because the language of social and human sciences originates mostly from natural language, which is not accidental (the issue is special), but this is related in some respects to very serious problems that Emil Durkheim in his classical work "The Rules of the Sociological Method". The theoretical clarification of the notion of public interest is an essential issue in the design of the coordinate system for one reason, and it is the claim of modern psychology that obsessed with this concept. There is inertia in the scientific practices of a number of social sciences to serve the psychological notion of interest. The multidisciplinary public administration science, as each mature science and rigorous science is a theory of reality. Public administration is a multidimensional social reality. I have often pointed out that people see what they know, and that is why I attach particular importance to the first chapter of the reviewed work devoted to the theoretical elucidation of the fundamental notion of public interest. Assoc. Prof. Milena Stefanova uses the phrase "recognition of public interest", which is very appropriate but also beautiful.

The constructed theoretically designed coordinate system is loaded with descriptive, explanatory and heuristic possibilities and for this reason the subject reality is clearly revealed in the course of the study. The author of the dissertation distinguishes two circles of competences of the local government. Of course, the focus of the research interest is the sphere of local self-government, which naturally has connections, relationships and interactions with the central government. The relations of these authorities, incl. In hierarchical and subsidiary sense are legally regulated.

In modern public administration, political science and other sciences of this family, the notion of good governance, which has a normative nuance, is rarely used, and therefore it is necessary to use it carefully in positive science. This concept has an appropriate place in the analytical toolbox of the dissertation discussed. For Ass. Milena Stefanova good governance at the local level is connected with the balance of the various interests, which are naturally in tension, latent or manifested contradictions

and conflicts. In everyday language there is often used the expression "conflict of interest" which has a specific meaning in terms of the rule of law and the social environment in which the rule of law is not called into question by the collective consciousness. The dissertation distinguishes between the two different meanings of the expression. In the one case, the conflicts of public interests of members of the local community are natural discontinued harmony, otherwise the conflict of interest is in contrary to public morality and is not infrequently in violation of the legal norms governing social action. In the public space, the subject of corruption is invariably present, and because of superficial treatment and playfulness with sensationalism, banalization is taking place. The development of the problem's thesis highlights the negative phenomenon and thus provides effective tools to both the local community and the authorities and individuals who are prepared to effectively counter corruption.

A powerful wave of evaluative research has been deployed in recent decades. I wrote about the topic and I was trying to attract research interests to the academic community in Bulgaria. The third chapter of the dissertation is essentially devoted to the methodological side of Evaluation Research on the issue. Prof. Stefanova's achievements deserve high praise and I am convinced that there will be challenges for researchers and experts in the field of public administration. Employees in local government, as well as the local public, are interested in evaluating, but this is about something different, that is the word for scientific problem and topicing.

The dissertation "Public interest in local government" is a significant scientific achievement of Ass. Prof. Milena Stefanova, but the achievement is not only of a mature scientist, but of national public administration as a cognitive and socially institutionalized scientific discipline. Self-assessment of scientific contributions is reasonable. These contributions are contained in the dissertation. A significant contribution to the dissertation thesis is the original conceptual scheme (coordinate system) in which the concept of public interest and other key concepts that have already been mentioned are of fundamental importance. On the basis of and in the horizon of the coordinate system, a medium-range theory was developed on the protection in the sense of the productive functioning of the local

authority in view of the public interest. With this major scientific contribution there are also a number of contributions that prove the explanatory possibilities of the theory in question, on the one hand, and at the same time they have a self-importance. These contributions are based on new facts, tabulated in a tabular and not just tabular form, in the disclosure and definition of empirical laws with regard to the places of power and its vocation to protect the public interest within the boundaries of its territory.

Significant scientific contributions are the developed systems of indicators, whose descriptive and heuristic value has been demonstrated in the conducted empirical studies. The indicators in question can also be used by other researchers who would turn to an assessment of local government activities.

Special attention needs to be paid to the identified and clearly defined problems in the exercise of local authority in the service of public interest and especially to what the author calls "legislative deficits". This is a very substantial and multivalent scientific contribution.

I do not have to note on a number of other scientific contributions which Prof. Milena Stefanova has systematised and formulated convincingly in the Self-Assessment. There is sufficient reason to summarize that the scientific contributions of the dissertation meet the high standards for awarding the required degree.

When evaluating the dissertation, parts of the subject are required to be published, which is quite reasonable. The monograph "Public Interest in Local Government Management" by the authoritative IM "St. Kliment Ohridski "and seven articles and studies, some of which co-authored. A reference is made to the quoted publications of Assoc. Prof. Stefanova on the subject of the dissertation. These positive assessments support the assessments in this review.

Public administration is taught in many Bulgarian universities, including Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski "is a leader thanks to the Department of Public Administration, where Prof. Milena Stefanova has a leading role in the development of the university discipline and the preparation of experts. Public administration faces ever-new challenges in the face of constant social changes and growing complexity of society. Instead of critical remarks in the discussion of a dissertation, an

academic tradition that I do not question, I would ask assistant Professor Stefanova to address the most urgent reforms according to her in the functioning of the local government, the protection of the public interest, and the development of critical publicity, especially at the local level, which I consider to be a painful issue in our society, although we have witnessed protest actions lately.

The thesis of Assoc. Prof. Milena Stefanova "The Public Interest in Local Government „, has a high scientific value and responds to the acute public needs of the local authorities and communities in our country. That is why my unambiguous conclusion and recommendation is the honorable members of the scientific jury to vote unanimously for awarding the scientific degree Doctor of Sciences to Prof. Milena Stefanova. This is a well-deserved recognition of a scientist who already has his place in our national science. The arguments are in front of the specialized scientific community and all the experts on the problems of the dissertation. But to all this I will add something extremely important when it comes to science. Milena Stefanova holds as I have already emphasized the highest scientific virtue - intellectual honesty.

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