

Report

for the dissertation of Tatiana Tomova "The Bulgarian path in social policy (History of the transition that does not end)" for awarding the scientific degree "Doctor of Science" in the scientific specialty 3.3. Political Sciences

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Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tatiana Tomova is an established researcher in the field of political science and public administration, as well as a longtime lecturer in the relevant disciplines at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski ". She has gained experience in her scientific work in renowned research organizations in Bulgaria and abroad, and has been invited to teach at other universities as well.

A dissertation on the topic "The Bulgarian path in social policy" is presented, which is the result of long-term and persistent research work in the field of social policy - it is in this area that Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tatiana Tomova is known among the academia. The dissertation is a logical continuation of her long-term research, materialized in published scientific monographs, studies and articles in the same field. This suggests a lasting research interest in this subject area, which for a number of reasons remains not very popular in Bulgaria. That is why the appearance of such a study is an important event in the Bulgarian political science.

The general approach of the presented research follows a logical scheme, essentially deductive, the chosen method is holistic, because the research is based on the point of view of the system (social, political) in the explanation of the specific Bulgarian model of social policy (the research uses the term "Bulgarian road"). The study presents a logical presentation of the meaning of the chosen topic: the first part considers social policy as a tool of the public administration, the second part compares in a precise comparative analysis the existing models of social policy in the Western countries, the third part is a specific reflection on the characteristics and dynamics of the Bulgarian model of social policy.

The author rightly justifies her research (and her research interest in general) with two deficits: one can be defined as a deficit of the perception of social policy as an universal tool (and not as a specific feature of the left-wing policies); the second is a deficit in the application of scientific tools in public administration (the prevailing ethos in Bulgaria seems to be based on the intuition of the government and almost completely excludes the use of established in scientific knowledge methods of public administration).

The explanatory model of the "Bulgarian path in social policy" or the process of constructing the model of social policy in post-communist Bulgaria is based on the study of two fundamental factors: one inherited from the previous regime but also dependent on the initial decisions during the democratic transition (path dependency); the other, the copying and thus the influence of the models coming from the developed democracies, reinforced by the influence of many international institutions on public policies in Bulgaria. It is this choice, which seems justified, that allows the author to draw her main conclusions, as well as to ask the many questions arising from her research.

Of course, this holistic approach has its reasons, but it limits the ability to simultaneously trace change from the point of view of the actors and their perceptions and understandings (methodological

individualism). In this case, it is not at all easy to say which of the two paradigms is more appropriate, and it is obviously a reasonable choice. In this regard, the selected methods will again note the difficulty to translate into foreign languages (mostly Latin) distinction between subject and object (in the sense of topic), it would be more appropriate to use "field" and "subject".

"The main goal of the work is to analyze the current model of social policy in Bulgaria and to outline the possibilities for its change," the author writes. This presupposes the existence of a basic research question, the formulation of which could be: what are the conditions for changing the current model of social policy in Bulgaria? Its answer requires a complex study, not only of the practices in Bulgaria, but above all of the practices in the developed societies of the West, comparisons of the accumulated experience of what we call the "welfare state" (a political term that has no generally accepted academic definition).

The study defines four types of welfare states in the "territorial aspect": American, Swedish, British and German. This classification is based on the critical analysis of the already existing classifications in the academic literature and in this sense is original because it does not accept any classification already made. In temporal aspect, the study defines three paradigms of social policy: Bismarck's imperial paradigm of the late nineteenth century, the Keynesian paradigm after the Great Depression of 1929-1932, and the neoliberal paradigm of the late 1970s. Thus, a complex classification is proposed, the ultimate goal of which is to examine the conditions of social policy in a market economy (capitalism?). This classification is one of the most significant contributions of the presented dissertation.

In the author's abstract (avtoreferat), which presents completely correctly the content of the dissertation, 13 research contributions are systematized, united in 4 groups. They are all truly existing, although they can be better formulated, in particular and, above all, summarized. In addition to the proposed complex classification, I would like to point out, in particular, the following contributions: (a) a system of criteria for the typology of social policy instruments has been developed; (b) it is argued that a path which began in the 1990s limited further policy changes; (c) the thesis has proved that the new model of social policy in Bulgaria leads to unexpected results due to the specific environment in which it is applied.

I will note that the study mobilizes a significant amount of scientific literature in several languages, which is relevant to the subject of the dissertation and undoubtedly useful in the study itself. It is used correctly and presents the theses of the authors in an understandable way and is in harmony with the academic standards.

The presented research is extensive, it concerns a significant range of research issues, so in a relatively short opinion it is not possible to cover all its aspects. I will limit my questions to a few of the proposed main theses, very conveniently systematized after each of the three chapters of the dissertation.

1. The concept of public policies is linked to behaviorism in political science and suggests that the actions taken by public authorities to achieve public objectives are linked to a range of factors, including the behavior of participants in the process...

If there is such a thesis, then, I think, a problem analysis is needed - that of the actors concerned and their resources. Then the explanation will go through the actor, not through the system, i.e. will shift to the methodological individualism. But there is no such approach in the study.

2. The social policy is the influence of the political power on the social structure of the society, which does not lead to a change in its systemic characteristics, but rather responds to identified public problems. In modern conditions, market distribution and consumption are adjusted or modified through the social policy...

Such a thesis means that the social policy is by definition conservative, i.e. maintains the basic characteristics of the system, and is part of the homeostatic mechanism of the system. Can the social policy then be an element of the social change? And under what conditions? Isn't such an understanding of the social policy intrinsic for the neoliberal paradigm - as a means only for preserving the social peace, i.e. the established social order?

3. The definition of the social policy as an instrument of the public administration has several consequences. On the one hand... it consists of many techniques that are comparable to each other only in terms of their results ... On the other hand, the choice of these tools in a real situation depends on the characteristics of the political power, as well as of the influential stakeholders and the interaction between them...

The thesis presupposes an understanding of the social policy as a technocratic issue, which can be limited to "techniques" or tools that seem to be neutral in this understanding. But if they are influenced by "stakeholders", they are no longer neutral and perhaps in principle cannot be. The broader question is, does social policy have an ethical framework and what does it depend on?

4. Due to the poor economic performance, the introduced market model of social policy has been changed many times... Moreover - in these economic conditions, it cannot exist and its maintenance requires expanding the role of the state in order to stabilize and maintain it...

The thesis means that the market model of social policy is in fact out of order, that each model is ultimately a combination of regulation and competition. But isn't social policy itself a tool for overcoming the "natural" competition between individuals in society? Like any policy - isn't it always a tool for integration, for maintaining public cohesion?

One of the most important issues addressed in this study is of a general nature - the conditions of social policy in the midst of a market economy. A number of restrictions are pointed out, which the compliance with the market principles imposes on a number of social policy instruments. But isn't it really a question of the compatibility of the social policy with the market at all? Or at all about the compatibility of the social policy with capitalism?

It is quite obvious that a study is probably of the higher quality the more fundamental questions it discovers. Therefore, I think that the presented dissertation is a proof to an undoubtedly original and a research with a significant scientific contribution, which is necessary for the Bulgarian political science. On this basis, I believe that the dissertation fully meets the requirements for the award of the scientific degree "Doctor of Science" in the scientific specialty 3.3. Political Science of Tatiana Tomova.

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