

REVIEW

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Subject: Dissertation for the award of the Education and Science Degree „Doctor” in the scientific specialty "Administration and Management (Regional Development)", professional field 3.7 Administration and Management

Author of the dissertation: Elitsa Venelinova Gramadska

Dissertation Topic: DEVELOPMENT OF REGIONALIZATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA

Scientific supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Kliment Minev Naydenov, PhD

Reason for submitting the review: participation in the composition of the scientific jury for the defense of the dissertation according to the Order No. 38-278.2021 of the Rector of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" Prof. Dr.Sc. Atanas Gerdzhikov and the decision of the first meeting of the Scientific Jury dated 29.07.2021.

The review was prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Academic Staff Development Act in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its Implementation and the Internal Rules for Academic Staff Development at Sofia University "St. K. Ohridski".

1. Information about the dissertant

The PhD candidate Elitsa Venelina Gramadska has a Master's degree in "Regional and Political Geography", acquired in 2004 at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". Since 2003 she has been working in the State Administration, Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works. Until 2006 she was a senior expert in the Directorate of Territorial Management and Decentralisation, and in the period 2006-2020 she was a senior expert in the Directorate General of Regional Development Programming. It should be noted that the professional experience of the doctoral candidate is directly related to the topic of the dissertation. She is fluent in English, French and Russian.

According to the Order № RD 20-1512/29.09.2020. of the Rector of the Sofia University "St. K. Ohridski", Elitsa Venelina Gramadska is enrolled in the PhD program "Regional Development", professional field 3.7. Administration and Management at the Department of Regional Development of the Faculty of Geology and Geography of Sofia University. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Kliment Naidenov was appointed as the scientific supervisor. According to the order RD

№ 20-1317/09.07.2021 of the Rector of the Sofia University "St. K. Ohridski" due to a positive decision of the primary unit for the readiness for the defense of the dissertation, as of 30.06.2021. the PhD student was dismissed early with the right to defend.

2. General evaluation of the submitted dissertation

2.1 Structure and scope of the dissertation

The dissertation has a classical structure - an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography and is generally logically sound and well balanced across the three chapters. The content is visualized with 16 figures and 15 tables. There are 26 appendices related to the research in the thesis. The volume of the dissertation is 247 pages, which is more than satisfactory.

In terms of content, in the introduction, the doctoral candidate presents the main research thesis, justifies the relevance of the research, the purpose of the development, the research objectives and limitations in their implementation, as well as the tools used in the research.

Chapter one of the dissertation is conceptual in nature and in it the PhD student outlines the theoretical and methodological aspects of the regionalization process. The doctoral candidate's ability to successfully identify and subsequently thoroughly investigate and analyze the problems accompanying the regionalization process in Bulgaria in the period 1990-2020 is well presented. The internal and external circumstances and factors determining the effect of regionalization are systematized. The peculiarities of the development of regionalisation in Central and Eastern Europe are highlighted, the idea being to distinguish the specificity of this process in Bulgaria. In the second chapter, the PhD student outlines the problems in the implementation of the regionalization process in the Republic of Bulgaria, systematizing them in three separate periods 2001-2005; 2006-2013 and 2014-2020. The critical study of the causes of these problems in the different periods gives the PhD student the reason to search and propose a new approach for the implementation of the regionalization process in Bulgaria, which is presented in the third chapter of the dissertation. It can be summarized that in all three substantive chapters, the PhD student Elitsa Gramadska shows a certain ability to clearly outline and argue scientifically for her views on the future development of the regionalization process in Bulgaria.

The conclusion of the dissertation summarizes the results of the realized tasks set in the introduction. It makes a good impression that on the basis of the research done the PhD candidate has identified the possibilities for further development of the ideas presented in the dissertation.

2.2 Evaluation of: the relevance of the topic; the aim; the objectives; the subject; the main thesis of the dissertation

The dissertation is devoted to a problem of relevance for the democratic development of the modern state related to the construction of effective levels of government. The doctoral

candidate justifies the relevance of the problem she is studying with two main circumstances, namely the beginning of democratic changes after 1989 and the trends in the development of the EU. According to the PhD student, all the issues arising from the requirements for close integration of sectoral priorities and objectives with those of regional development policy in the EU are relevant. The search for an effective application of the integrated territorial approach, which relies on the development potential of the territory, is topical. The development is also relevant and significant from the point of view that the existing publications on the studied issues are not sufficient to cover the current problems and future challenges related to the implementation of regional policy in the country.

The subject of study in Elitsa Gramadska's dissertation is the development of the regionalisation process and the possibilities for optimal distribution of powers between the different levels of government in Bulgaria after 1989. The doctoral candidate has focused on the interaction of the process of regionalization in Bulgaria with the processes of Europeanization, democratization, decentralization, which lead to institutional and territorial changes in the countries, as well as with the regional policy in the country. The aim that the PhD student has set herself is to investigate the dynamics of the circumstances that have led to the territorial and administrative state of the regional division (district and planning area) in Bulgaria at the present time, by tracing the main directions of the Europeanization process, the regional policy pursued, the processes and ideas of decentralization formed at the regional level in the country, the trends in terms of regionalization in the EU Member States and the implementation of the 2007 Operational Programme "Regional Development" of the It should be noted that the definition of the research objective is well substantiated with findings from publications by Professor Marcou and Eng. Djildjov, which is a testimonial to Elitsa Gramadska's ability to be critical of others' opinions and concepts when structuring her opinion. In line with the aim, the object of research in the dissertation is the process of regionalization (decentralization at the regional level) in Bulgaria. The main thesis advocated by the PhD student is that the system of governance at the regional/intermediate level in Bulgaria (supra-municipal and sub-state) needs optimization (fixing the territorial scope, reviewing and rethinking the functions and powers of the governance structures) in order to implement a more effective regional development policy to overcome the reported problems and a more concentrated and effective use of EU Structural Funds assistance for a balanced development of the Bulgarian regions. The PhD student argues her thesis by testing three hypotheses. The research tasks, through which the PhD student realises the set objective, are aimed at identifying the main concepts, notions and processes related to the implementation of the regionalisation process and defining them for the purposes of the research with a focus on: region, Europeanisation, regional policy, decentralisation, regionalisation; highlighting the main trends in

the approaches between the countries of Western and Central and Eastern Europe in the development of regionalisation ideas/processes; analysing the role and impact of Europeanisation, considered

My summary assessment is that the PhD student has correctly justified the relevance of the issues she is studying, has clearly outlined the aim and object of her dissertation research, and has correctly defined her main thesis, working hypotheses and the limiting conditions in proving them. The thesis is of significant importance for the solution of a real and complex problem related to the regionalization in Bulgaria and the effective application of the principles of regional policy in view of the development of the regions in the country.

2.3. Literature used

The dissertation is based on the study, analysis and systematization of numerous literature sources, normative acts, strategic documents and scientific publications in the studied thematic area. The presented bibliography contains a total of 194 sources in Bulgarian and English. They have been correctly used according to the accepted requirements for citation in scientific publications, which testifies to the ethics of the candidate and her good literary awareness of the problem studied in the dissertation.

2.4. Style and tools

The work on this thesis has helped the PhD candidate to acquire the scientific language and style of presentation appropriate to the topic and terminology under investigation. The methodology used in the development is varied. In order to accomplish the stated research objective, the author has demonstrated the ability to conduct preliminary analysis, systematic literature review, theoretical analysis, systematic, structural and functional analysis, as well as to successfully apply survey research, semi-structured interviews, expert evaluation and statistical methods.

2.5 Qualities of the dissertation abstract

The submitted abstract is 31 pages in length. It is well formatted and its content corresponds correctly with the main thesis. The abstract is composed in accordance with the requirements, reflecting in a synthesized form the content of the thesis, the thesis, the object and methodology of the research, as well as the final results obtained.

The abstract also includes an account of the contributions to the research. The reference is properly composed and faithfully reflects the scientific results achieved by the author.

The abstract also contains a list of publications on the topic of the dissertation - 3 pcs. (1 in Bulgarian and 2 in English), which popularize the main theses and contributing points of the PhD research. These publications show the doctoral candidate's ability to inform the scientific community, in this case the practitioners, about her research work in an appropriate way.

A declaration of originality is attached to the abstract as required.

3. Evaluation of the contributions in the dissertation

The dissertation work is interesting and memorable for the extremely precise logical presentation of the conducted research; the good skill of the author to present her attitude to the studied issues and the meaningful justification of the conclusions and recommendations. In addition to presenting European examples in terms of regionalization, the dissertation also focuses on tracing the ideas and attitudes in the country towards the introduction of regionalization, revealing the nature and problems of the Bulgarian approach. The chronological approach, combined with expert information from the interviews conducted, are the basis for identifying the problems accompanying regionalisation in Bulgaria in the distinct periods. In this way, the conclusions from the analysis of the outlined problems can be used in possible future policy discussions related to the topic. The developed dissertation is also of interest for the scientific and social practice for the number of propositions, ideas and suggestions contained in it, which can be evaluated as contributions of practical-applied character:

First: I express my positive attitude towards the work of the PhD candidate in tracing, summarizing and analyzing the ideas and proposals for regionalization in the country in the period 1990-2020, as well as towards the differentiation of the four periods in the development of the regionalization process in the country. I would define the elaboration of the specifics of the concepts of "region" and "regionalization process", as well as the systematization of the external and internal factors determining regionalization as contributions of a theoretical nature.

Second: The possible scenarios for the future development of regionalization proposed by the PhD student, the new approach for the implementation of regional policy in the next 10 years, as well as the identification of the main obstacles to the implementation of regionalization in the country are definitely of practical and applied nature.

In summary, I accept the doctoral candidate's claims of contributions, which are formulated correctly and synthesized, and reflect the results of her work on the dissertation.

4. Critical comments, recommendations and questions

I do not find any misconceptions or serious flaws in the dissertation that detract from its quality.

I have the following questions for the doctoral candidate:

- What are the doctoral student's motives for choosing to present the specifics of the regionalization process in the Czech Republic and Greece in her dissertation? In which aspects is an analogy sought with this process in Bulgaria and in this sense which good practices from the

administrative reforms in Greece and the Czech Republic have been successfully used or can be applied in the future in the regional policy in Bulgaria?

- According to the PhD student, which should be the guiding principle or principles in the regionalization of Bulgaria in order to balance the development of the different regions of the country?

5. Conclusion

The thesis has the qualities of a dissertation for the award of the scientific and educational degree "Doctor", as it presents the doctoral student's abilities to identify and research a current scientific problem, to summarize opinions, to study practice and to draw conclusions and recommendations.

The contributions contained in the thesis and my overall positive opinion of it as a scientific product, give me grounds to give my positive assessment of the dissertation on "Development of Regionalization in the Republic of Bulgaria".

On this basis, I propose the members of the Scientific Jury to award ELITSA VENELINOVA GRAMADSKA the scientific and educational degree "DOCTOR" in the scientific specialty "Administration and Management (Regional Development)" in the professional field 3.7 Administration and Management.

25.08.2020

Signature:



/Prof. Dr. Galina Kurteva/