STATEMENT

By assoc. prof. Kaloyan Valentinov Haralampiev, PhD, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Faculty of Philosophy, Department of "Sociology"

for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in a scientific field 3.3. Political Science (European Studies – Economic Studies of the EU)
with a dissertation on the topic: " Monitoring and ex-post assessment of the impact of EU cohesion policy in Bulgaria",
presented by Mariela Ivanova Savkova, a free PhD student in the Department of European Studies of the Faculty of Philosophy
with a scientific consultant: assoc. prof., Dr. Kaloyan Simeonov

I. Evaluation of the quality of the dissertation text
  – *Relevance and significance of the problem developed in the dissertation work*
  The topic of the dissertation is relevant because it concerns the ex-post evaluation of the penultimate multiannual financial framework of the EU. The last multiannual financial framework has not yet been completed and in this sense, it is still too early to be assessed. Practically the last complete financial framework is evaluated in the dissertation work.
  The significance of the dissertation work results from the discovery of the doctoral student that "After its membership in the EU in 2007, due to a low level of cohesion, Bulgaria received access to a serious financial resource from the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund, the main objective of which is the development of a poorer regions. Instead of being invested in growth and employment precisely in the regions affected by persistent structural and social problems, cohesion funds were distributed without a clear method and concentrated in the more developed regions, leading to a further deepening of inequalities and other negative impacts such as the centralization of the national economy, violation of the rules of the common market and free competition in the economy" (p. 9). For me, the proof of this statement is the most significant contribution of the dissertation.

  – *Depth and comprehensiveness of the study of theoretical sources*
  The study of theoretical sources is thorough. It is done in several directions:
  - Evolutionary theories of growth and optimal spatial (territorial) development are examined, including: theories of growth, research on regional inequalities, the concept of "Europe of regions" and the statements of regional science;
  - The evolution of European cohesion policy is examined, including: the development of cohesion policy from the mid-1950s to the 1980s, the "rebirth" of European cohesion policy in 1986, and cohesion policy as goal number one from the 90s of the XX century to today;
  - The essence of the European cohesion policy is examined, including: the related and basic concepts of cohesion in the EU (monitoring, evaluation, indicator, POLC, cohesion, convergence, coherence, European integration, Europeanization and EU enlargement), the poorer regions as goal of European cohesion policy, types of cohesion and cohesion policy in the EU and the "Berlin" method of European cohesion policy ("cohesion border" in the European Union and regional poverty line in the European Union);
  - The process of enlargement as a catalyst of cohesion in the EU is examined;
  - The six multiannual financial frameworks of the EU have been examined, including: the first MFF of the EU for Bulgaria (2007-2013) and the second MFF of the EU for Bulgaria (2014-2020).

– *Suggesting new interpretations, definitions, etc. of a current and already analyzed object of scientific research*

The enlargement of the EU in general and the Bulgarian membership in particular are a current and much analyzed object of scientific research. However, in contrast to the overwhelmingly positive assessments of Bulgaria's membership in the EU, the PhD student raises a new hypothesis that "regional inequalities in Bulgaria increased after the country's membership in the EU in 2007 due to the incorrect planning and implementation of the EU's first multiannual financial framework for Bulgaria. As a result, the cohesion funds have been distributed unbalanced and have thus contributed to the deepening of territorial imbalances in the country, instead of achieving the goal of territorial cohesion of Bulgaria with the EU" (p. 10) and accordingly the main research question is "do European funds have a role in deepening inequalities in Bulgaria after 2007" (p. 10).

– *Operability of the chosen research methods*

There are two research methods: tracking the dynamics of the selected indicators and comparative analysis between the statistical regions or districts in Bulgaria. Changes, indices and growth rates are used for the analysis in dynamics (although not named as such in the text). The coefficient of variation was mainly used for the comparative analysis. Simpson and Gini-Simpson indices are also mentioned but not used in the text.

– *Creation of new classifications, methods, technologies, etc.*

In the dissertation, a new model for ex-post evaluation of structural and cohesion funds was created. In the introduction of the second chapter, the logic matrix of the model is shown in a synthesized way, and in Appendix 1 the matrix itself is presented. This model includes 30 horizontal and 22 vertical indicators. The horizontal indicators measure the economic (11 indicators), social (10 indicators) and territorial (9 indicators) cohesion of Bulgaria with the EU. Vertical indicators measure the implementation of national priorities in the areas of infrastructure (7 indicators), human resources (6 indicators), business environment and entrepreneurship (5 indicators) and balanced territorial development (4 indicators).

– *Correctness in the collection, processing and analysis of empirical data*

The collection and processing of the empirical data is extremely correct. For each data table, the source and the date the data was last checked are indicated.

– *Credibility of the material on which the contributions are built*

The material on which the contributions are based is reliable, as the main data providers are the National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria and Eurostat.

– *Obtaining and proving new facts*

All the analyzes in the dissertation are aimed at proving the main hypothesis, namely that cohesion funds have increased regional inequalities instead of reducing them.

– *Bibliographic awareness*

The bibliographic reference contains 194 titles, of which 17 publications in Bulgarian, 67 publications in English, 63 other Internet sources and 47 normative documents. This shows good bibliographic awareness.

– *Compliance with the compositional requirements for the dissertation text*

The dissertation text contains an introduction, three chapters, main recommendations, conclusion, bibliographical reference and two appendices. Although it contains three chapters, in my opinion, the text deviates from the compositional requirements. From my point of view, a dissertation text should contain three chapters – theory, methodology and empirics. The dissertation text proposed for evaluation contains one chapter of theory and two chapters of empirics. In practice, there is no separate chapter dedicated to methodology. The whole methodology is concentrated in the introduction of the second chapter. For me, this is a major deficiency of the text.

- *Assessment of the linguistic and stylistic quality of the presentation and the degree of deviation from the literary grammar, spelling and punctuation norms*

Regarding the grammar and spelling norms, there are no significant deviations. The main deviations are in relation to punctuation norms.

- *Evaluation of the correspondence of the text of the abstract with the text of the dissertation*

The abstract accurately presents the structure and content of the dissertation work.

II. Dissertation Research Contributions

- *Nature of contributions: novelty for science (new theories, hypotheses, methods, etc.); enrichment and critical analysis of existing knowledge; application of scientific achievements in practice, realized effect;*

Seven contributions are formulated in the abstract. Three of them can be classified as scientific (1, 2 and 4), and the remaining four – as scientific-applied. From my point of view, the most important is contribution No. 4 "A method for monitoring of the cohesion of Bulgaria has been developed".

- *Evaluation of the author's participation in the obtaining of the contributions in the dissertation work and the publications on it;*

All cited contributions are the sole authorship of the PhD student.

- *Evaluation of the possibilities of using the obtained results.*

A good impression is made by the presence of a main structural part of the dissertation text entitled "Main Recommendations of the Dissertation Research". It contains recommendations for three groups of addressees – the state administration at the national level, municipal administrations and businesses.

III. Notes and recommendations

- *A motivated proposal for the directions of the PhD student's further work in order to improve the presented work.*

I would make the following recommendations to the PhD student in case of a possible future publication of the dissertation:

1. From my point of view, the third chapter is redundant. For two reasons:
   a. The PhD student's thesis has been proved convincingly enough without it;
   b. This analysis has already been published in the form of studies.
2. I strongly recommend that the methodological part be strengthened. In three ways:
   a. By developing the methodology part and separating it into a separate chapter;
   b. By applying the methods in the analysis of all the data. Currently, for some time series metrics of dynamics are applied, for other time series are not. And it is completely unclear and seemingly arbitrary why some time series are preferred over others. Similarly, in the comparison between statistical regions and districts, measures of diversity are used for some indicators, for others they are not, and again it is not clear and seems arbitrary why some indicators are preferred over others. In my opinion, the same methods of analysis should be applied to all data of the same kind;
   c. By adding new methods for analysis. For example, trend models can be used for time series analysis.

- *Motivated notes, accompanied by an assessment of their influence on the quality of the presented scientific (applied) production.*

I have no specific comments on the text, other than the general recommendations above.

IV. Publications and participation in scientific forums
Conclusion whether the requirements of the Regulations for the conditions and procedures for acquiring scientific degrees and occupying academic positions at SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" for approving and announcement the results of the research according to Art. 5, item 5 and whether the minimum national requirements under Art. 63, para. 1, item 4 and art. 69, para. 3.

Seven publications on the topic of the dissertation are presented in the abstract, as follows:
- Four author reports at scientific conferences in Bulgarian;
- Three author reports at scientific conferences in English.

According to the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, 10 points are awarded for each of these reports or a total of 70 points, which is more than the minimum required 30 points.

V. Conclusion
The conclusion of the statement must contain a motivated, clear and unequivocal positive or negative opinion on whether the doctoral student should be awarded the educational and scientific degree "doctor".

Based on everything said above, I propose to the members of the esteemed scientific jury to award Mariela Ivanova Savkova the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the field of science 3.3. Political Science (European Studies - Economic Studies of the EU).

Date: 19.12.2022   Reviewer: