

INSTITUTE OF PHILOSOPHY AND SOCIOLOGY - BAS

STANDPOINT

From: Prof. Temenuga Genova Rakadjiiska, D.Sc.

UNWE.

Sociology (Economic Sociology)

Subject: dissertation for the award of the scientific degree "Doctor of Science" in the scientific specialty of Sociology at IFS - BAS

Author of the dissertation: Assoc. Prof. Vasil Nikolaev Kirov, Ph.D.

Dissertation topic: Flexibility and uncertainty. Sociological analysis of labour and employment in Bulgaria 1989 - 2019

Grounds for presenting the opinion: participation in the composition of the scientific jury for the defence of the dissertation according to Order № RD 09-348 / 27.07.2021 of the Director of IFS - BAS.

1. Information about the author

I know Assoc. Prof. Vasil Kirov, PhD primarily from our joint participation in some scientific forums, meetings of scientific juries and of course mainly from his publications. I can say that his great erudition on research problems in the field in which he works is impressive. No less impressive is his involvement in international research projects, as well as an expert in various European and national institutions. He shows creativity in the process of analysing the research concepts of established authors and good faith in their use.

The extremely rich creative and professional biography of Assoc. Prof. Vasil Kirov testifies to his established role as a researcher in the field of industrial relations, sociology of organizations and labour, both in our country and in EU countries. He also defended his educational and scientific degree PhD before a French jury in Paris in 2002 with an extended version of his dissertation on "The Privatized Enterprise in Bulgaria". He was a fellow of the French government under the Marie Curie program. He has completed four long-term specializations, two each in Luxembourg and France. This has undoubtedly helped his inclusion in the international research community on the problems of sociology of labour, which Assoc. Prof. Vasil Kirov has been dealing with for more than two decades. He reads four university lecture courses. He has given 18 academic lectures presented at various forums. He is a member of the editorial boards of foreign scientific journals and is an expert at European and national institutions. He is currently the research supervisor of three doctoral students.

2. General characteristics of the presented dissertation

The presented dissertation has a volume of 321 pages and consists of an introduction, presentation in six chapters, conclusion, bibliography, and appendices. The dissertation includes 6 figures and 22

tables in the exhibition. The list of used literature in the dissertation contains 233 literary sources (of which 52 in Cyrillic, the rest in Latin).

The dissertation presented by Assoc. Prof. Vasil Kirov is the result of long-term research interest, as well as extensive knowledge and in-depth understanding of the scientific literature, problematizing the research field in which the work is developed.

The structure of the content of the dissertation follows a coherent logic for presenting the candidate's study of the dynamics of changes in labour flexibility and employment in Bulgaria during the transition period, contributing to the good argumentation of his research thesis, formulated as: "... the flexibility and uncertainty of the labour market in Bulgaria and in Bulgarian companies increased because of privatization, globalization and digitalization. However, their specificity depends on the norms and their application by the state and the social partners, as well as on the peculiarities and context of the individual sectors and groups of the labour force" (V. Kirov, p. 10).

As required by scientific logic, the first part of the dissertation presents the research concept of the theoretical framework, which serves as a coordinate system for the analysis of empirical facts. In order to achieve the theoretical goal set before his research - "to analyse the specific development of labor flexibility and employment in Bulgaria during the post-communist period" - the author seeks answers to three main questions: 1) What are the forms of practice in the field of work flexibility and how they can be interpreted in terms of quality of work, i.e. whether and to what extent in the Bulgarian economic practice the "flexible security" proclaimed by the EC is achieved? 2) Do insufficient regulations or the possibility of "circumventing" them facilitate the use of certain forms of flexibility in work and employment? 3) Are there specific features of the impact of digitalization on the flexibility of work and employment in our country or does it follow the European social models?

The first chapter examines the theoretical discourses for elucidating the manifestations of flexibility in work and employment, in which the author derives a coherent taxonomy of the types of flexibility. (In my opinion, however, the use of the term "digital" in relation to one of the criteria for the formation of the typology is not particularly appropriate, as in the Bulgarian scientific literature, it is used primarily for phenomena related to digitalization, it is appropriate to talk about quantitative flexibility, as in some places the author does, given the substantive description of the criterion.) It follows a logical shift to consider the institutional framework and focus on the strategies of actors in the field of labour and employment.

Assoc. Prof. Vasil Kirov makes the reservation that, unlike macroeconomic and social studies of labour flexibility and employment in his analysis of the studied phenomena, he introduces the perspective at the micro and meso level, without of course ignoring the macro perspective, insofar as the analysis requires the presentation of macro regulations and the reasons for their observance or "bypass".

After the construction of the theoretical framework, in the second chapter the emphasis is placed on the panoramic retrospective on the development of the sociology of labour by the Bulgarian academic community. Here, in contrast to the demonstrated good knowledge of contemporary Western sociological literature, I think that shows a "casual" presentation of the achievements of Bulgarian sociologists who have dedicated their efforts to the study of labour problems in the 60's - 80's of the twentieth century. It is possible that the author believes that they do not deserve his

efforts, but I think that one of the reasons why modern sociology loses its probative value is the ignorance by the younger generations of theoretical achievements and the depth of Marx's thought and the depth of his logical analysis. Otherwise, the author should not characterize the launched and imposed for one or another reason concept of "society as a system" as "Marxist", as it is rather a metaphysical interpretation of society and shows that its Bulgarian authors were not well familiar neither with Marx's formulations nor with those of Parsons's structural functionalism. The third chapter describes the institutional macro framework and presents the main characteristics of industrial relations in Bulgaria during the period under review. When analysing labour issues, it is important not to ignore the adverse effects on industrial relations processes resulting from the work of Western European and American experts due to their confrontation because of their desire to impose one or another influence, especially at the beginning of the transition, but even after that. The author emphasizes the erosion of collective bargaining in the country and the inefficiency of the regulated bodies for representation. Undoubtedly, the processes related to labour in Bulgaria cannot remain unaffected by the processes of globalization of the economy and this is the subject of study of the fourth chapter of the dissertation. The summaries are illustrated by the results of the research conducted under the international project WORKS.

An important conclusion related to the fact of globalization of the economies of the two compared countries (Bulgaria and Hungary) is that from the introduced models of flexibility by MNCs or by the power centres of GVC in "all studied cases can be identified "losers" and "winning" employees" (V. Kirov). It is an honour for the author to dedicate the analysis in Chapter Five to the problems related to low-paid and vulnerable labour, which has a large share in our country, in conditions of forced flexibility and significant insecurity.

Chapter 6 addresses the "theme of the day" - the impact of the digitalization of labour on employment flexibility, mainly around the work-life balance. Here the author is again influenced by the widespread opposition in the literature between work and private life, as if it is possible to exclude work from personal life. I think it is much more adequate to look for a balance between working time and free time from work. But probably this thesis is also related to the "Marxist" concepts and is therefore neglected in the modern literature devoted to this problem.

3. Evaluation of scientific and scientific-applied contributions

The self-assessment of the contributions of theoretical and theoretical-applied nature, which Assoc. Prof. Vasil Kirov presented, corresponds to the actual achievements of the author in the dissertation. I think that about the third, formulated by him, related to the presentation of the sociology of labour in Bulgaria before 1989, there is still much to be desired.

I believe that the main characteristic of the contributions is that they are in the field of enrichment of existing knowledge. Along with those formulated by the author, as his main contribution I would define the raising of many questions related to the changes that occurred in the characteristics of work during the transition period and the attempt to give them a definite answer, as fewer and fewer sociologists in Bulgaria devote efforts precisely on the study and analysis of labour. As the author points out, most analyses are economic and at the macro level.

No signals have reached me that the dissertation is not an independent work of the author.

4. Evaluation of the dissertation publications

The author cites 23 publications on the topic of the dissertation, most of which have been published in Western editions. 10 are independent, the rest - in co-authorship. It is clear from the attached separation protocols that in them the share of Assoc. Prof. Kirov is either of a leading author or is equal to that of his co-author. The large number of publications on the topic of the dissertation shows that Assoc. Prof. Vasil Kirov has made public his scientific research on the problems developed by him and far exceeds the minimum national requirements and the requirements set in the IFS Regulations for obtaining the degree "Doctor of Sciences".

The very fact of the many citations of the author's publications according to the significant rankings - as he points out as of June 30, 2021: H-index - 11; I 10 - index - 11; Quotes according to Google Scholar - 402 - shows the great popularity of his theoretical achievements.

5. Evaluation of the abstract

The abstract is prepared correctly according to the requirements of the genre. It clearly presents the logic of the research and the content of the dissertation. Reveals the argumentation for proving the thesis advocated by the author. Synthesizes the content of the relevant parts and the main analytical results. It also contains a reference for self-assessment of scientific contributions to the dissertation.

6. Critical remarks, recommendations, and questions

My main recommendation regarding the probable future publication of the dissertation is for a very thorough editorial and proofreading work on the text. The author follows the established modern tradition of writing in Western European and American scientific literature and the text in places is more descriptive, repeating the style of the written reports on the respective projects, instead of analysing and explanatory.

My second recommendation is regarding the very clear demarcation of theoretical concepts and in particular: human activity with its two forms of labour activity and amateur activity; labour and work; productive and unproductive labour; employed, hired workers and the self-employed, because then the analysis would gain a clearer outline of the actual changes that occur in the field of wage labour, in the field of managerial labour or more precisely the work of managers, which in contrast to wage labour is work on the provision of the management service (as Ludwig von Mises claims) and the activity of the self-employed, as the differences are significant.

Only then can the logical inconsistencies in the critiques of Marx's conception of the contemporary representatives of the Austrian paradigm, George Reisman (Reisman, 1998) and Murray Rothbard (Rothbard 2009), be traced. Following Mises' claims of entrepreneurial activity as "intellectual labour in planning, managing, organizing, and controlling business," they fail to make Marx's stipulation that it is labour that provides a service and receives its income against that service as a share of profit - the income of the capitalist - in contrast to wage labour.

I understand the author's desire not to enter in this complex and deep theoretical discussion, but I think that it is very important for the objective analysis of the problems in the field of work.

Conclusion

The dissertation proposed by Assoc. Prof. Vasil Nikolaev Kirov, PhD dedicated to a problem important for the socio-economic practice is an in-depth theoretical study. It is wide in both volume and content. The sociological analysis was conducted with high professional competence and erudition. Meets the procedural requirements specified in the Law on the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations of IFS-BAS, regarding the award of the scientific degree "Doctor of Science", therefore as a member of the SJ, appointed by order № RD 09-348 /07. 27. 2021, **I will vote for the award of the scientific degree "Doctor of Science" code 05.11.01. of Assoc. Prof. Vasil Nikolaev Kirov, PhD** for the dissertation "Flexibility and insecurity. Sociological analysis of labour and employment in Bulgaria 1989 - 2019".

09. 23. 2021

Signature:

Sofia

Prof. Temenuga Rakadjiiska, D. Sn.