

Review

by Prof. Dr. Petya Lyubomirova Kabakchieva,

Department of Sociology at the Faculty of Philosophy of the SU "St. Kliment Ohridski", regarding a competition for the occupation of the academic position of "professor" in the professional field 3.1. Sociology, anthropology and cultural sciences (05.11.01. Sociology - Sociology of inequalities and sustainable development. The role of the EU in reducing socio-economic inequalities) at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the BAS.

1. Information about the competition.

The competition was announced in issue 104 of the State Gazette of 15.12.2023 for the needs of the Section "Stratification, Inequalities and Mobility" at the IFS of the BAS. I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury by decision of the SC of IFS – BAS (Minutes of 06.02.2024 of the SC of IFS – BAS).

2. Brief information about the candidates in the competition.

Documents for participation in the competition were submitted by only one candidate - Rumyana Ruseva Zheleva, Ph.D., Associate Professor in the "Stratification, Inequalities and Mobility" Department at the IFS at the BAS. The decision of the appointed by Order RD-09-49 of 21.02.2024 of the Director of IFS-BAS Technical Commission for checking the regularity of the applicant's documents is, that Assoc. Prof. Rumyana Zheleva meets the minimum national requirements for holding the position of "professor", in accordance with Art. 2/b of the ZRASRB.

Associate Professor Zheleva has a stable professional path covering all career steps of a serious academic sociologist. She graduated with a degree in Sociology from the University of St. Kl. Ohridski" and defended her doctoral dissertation in sociology on the topic "Social-interpretive models of entrepreneurs in a period of transition" at the Otto von Guericke University in Magdeburg, Germany. She has several specializations abroad, was a senior assistant and associate professor at the Institute of Philosophy and sociology. In 2023, she successfully defended a major doctoral dissertation on "Sustainable Development in Times of Uncertainty".

Associate Professor Zheleva works in several research fields: Sociology of work; Organizational Sociology; Development Studies, including Sustainable development; Social inequalities; Sociology of Europe. She was tutor of two PhD students. Her publications are a

total of 58 (I have not included 9 research reports at scientific forums), of which six are monographs, two published abroad - one in English and one in German. She indicated 83 citations. Dr. Zheleva participated as a researcher in 24 projects, being the head of significant European projects, too. She delivered reports in over 60 scientific forums, being the organizer of some of the forums.

Her overall activity outlines her significant presence in scientific and public life.

3. General description of the presented materials.

For her participation in the competition, associate professor Rumyana Zheleva presented 16 publications, of which two monographs and 14 articles - 9 in English and 5 in Bulgarian languages. The monographs are:

Rumyana Zheleva /2024/. Dimensions of integration in the EU. Sofia: Publishing House of BAS "Prof. Marin Drinov", 203 pages.

Rumyana Zheleva /2024/. The conditions of sustainable development. Burgas: Ed. Informa Print, 161 pages.

4. Analysis of the candidate's scientific achievements.

All the publications of associate professor Zheleva, presented for the competition, are not just dedicated to very current topics, but cover newly emerging promising sociological fields such as Sociology of sustainable development and Sociology of the European integration. The main problem to which she seeks an answer in her texts is how social change is possible in the contemporary global society, what are the factors for it and the directions for development. This is the key question in her major dissertation and in the monograph published on it. In both texts she shows how a non-revolutionary bureaucratic mechanism such as the non-financial reporting of companies can change the logic of development of the contemporary capitalism and to force companies not only to seek profit, but to comply with sustainable development. The defense of dual education in three of the presented publications is again the result of a search for a more adequate model of matching education to the labor market. In what direction the EU should be changed and how to enhance the European integration, whether its expansion to the Western Balkans is necessary and how it is related to reforms in the EU - these are the questions in the presented for the professorship book.

Associate Professor Zheleva's subjects of interest - sustainable development, the European Union, regional configurations such as the Western Balkans and the Danube region - require overcoming methodological nationalism as the processes she studies are not limited to the borders of the nation state, her focus is on transnational relations. The other characteristic feature of her texts is the application of interdisciplinarity approach and middle-range

sociological theories grounded in data from sociological empirical research. These characteristics of the methodological approach in the texts of Associate Professor Zheleva are evidence of her modern way of thinking, high professionalism and belonging to the global sociological community.

Now I will dwell in more detail on the presented for the professorship monograph "Dimensions of integration in the EU". The book includes three chapters, a preface, conclusion and appendices. I will not present the contents of the chapters, I will only mark the noteworthy theoretical findings and theses of the book.

The first two chapters "The project of the European Union: origin and development" and "European integration and differentiation: theories, basic concepts and current studies" set both the theoretical framework for understanding the process of European integration and the author's main views on the direction of this process. Here I will note the series of theoretical levels of distinction and clarification of concepts that set the hypotheses of Associate Professor Zheleva's research.

The first and basic distinction is David Lockwood's distinction of systemic and social integration. It is important for Associate Professor Zheleva because she claims that the social integration is the key to achieving overall European integration - transnational practices and "bottom-up" relations are the most significant for overcoming differences and achieving European identification. This hypothesis is tested in the third chapter of the book.

The next distinction is between the processes of integration and differentiation: "Integration provides the general framework in which differentiation develops, while differentiation proposes paths of integration that take into account the differences between member countries." (47 p.). The focus on differentiation seems to me very significant because the EU crisis has shown the problematic nature of both the federative approach to a united Europe and of the "Europe of nation states" thesis. Following a more flexible differentiated approach while unconditionally maintaining the set of values of a united Europe is the most adequate in the contemporary situation, and this adequacy is very well argued by associate professor Zheleva. I consider the substantiation of the dialectical connection between integration and differentiation to be one of the significant achievements of the book.

Another important distinction is between differentiation and disintegration: "Differentiation allows the EU to be more flexible and adapt to the differences between member states, which can facilitate further integration, while respecting national interests and circumstances.

Disintegration, on the other hand, refers to the process by which existing ties and integration between EU member states break down or weaken. ...differentiation can be seen as a strategic

approach to deal with differences and strengthen the EU, while disintegration is a negative process that undermines the foundations of European integration and cooperation"(p.50).

The focus on differentiation is related to the main, very important thesis of associate professor Zheleva - that a single and homogeneous process of Europeanization is impossible (p. 61).

Horizontal Europeanization, writes the author, "is seen as multi-speed, multi-level and multi-dimensional, offering a model of social integration that reflects the diversity and complexity of modern Europe" (p.60). If I must link this thesis with the conceptualization of

modernization processes, I consider that the adequate model for explanation is the approach of "entangled modernities" (Randeria 2002, Therborn 2003), which introduces the idea of different speeds of modernization of different spheres and groups of society, as well as the possibility of re-traditionalization. Sociological research within the international DIOSCURI project confirms this thesis (Avramov and Kabakchieva 2004).

I also consider the use of the concept of "frame" based on the conceptualization made by E. Goffman (1974) to be a successful finding, because it allows a push away from the strictly institutional normative approach to integration and provides an opportunity to look into "hidden social influences and past experiences that shape individuals' values, attitudes, and beliefs, and determine their understanding of new experiences" (p. 51). In this regard, I find the following hypothesis of associate professor Zheleva very interesting: "European integration creates a frame of reference (Goffman, 1974) that allows differentiation of modern nationalisms, which can never return to their previous (ugly) forms from the past"(p. 95).

Unfortunately, as the author herself notes, this strong hypothesis has not been further developed and needs further and in-depth empirical studies. I hope that Dr. Zheleva will continue her research in this direction.

Including the issue of the sociological studies of the EU and Europeanization processes is also a significant contribution. The author asks herself whether it is possible to outline the field of Sociology of Europe, a field that arose in German-language literature. She shares the view of Bach & Hoening (2018) that "Sociology of Europe" is not subject to any theoretical dogmatism, but rather expresses a multi-paradigmatic search and is not a question of a crystallized new research direction, but rather a "field for scientific experiments". This is an important thesis, the proof of which is worth continuing in further research.

I think that an analysis of the report of the "Group of Twelve" (Report of the Franco-German working group on the EU institutional reform 68 "Sailing in high seas: Reforming and Enlarging the EU for the 21st century") is presented for the first time to our academic community. This analysis is very important and interesting.

A significant thesis of the author is that integration in the EU should be considered and studied in four axes (dimensions): political, value-cultural, "top-down" and "bottom-up" (p. 67). This hypothesis is tested in the third chapter "Key issues of the European integration on the example of the accession of the Western Balkans" based on public opinion surveys of respondents from the Western Balkans. Before commenting on the results, I would like to point out that the very focus on the Western Balkans and its prospects and possibilities for European integration is significant, as it is still insufficiently seriously researched. The problematization of the question whether the enlargement should go hand in hand with EU reforms, or whether reforms should precede the enlargement, is itself extremely important. Let me return to the above hypothesis about the four axes of European integration. In the analysis of the research results it is concretized in the assumption "that even if the political and the "top-down" dimensions turn out to be inapplicable, only the cultural dimension and the "bottom-up" dimension would lead European integration on a new, higher level, as they add value to the individual's sense of belonging and wholeness." That is why, the author claims, the "biographical work" on European integration is a key issue. This is a very important and productive thesis. I fully agree with the idea of the importance of biographical approach and the so-called "bottom-up" dimension, but I think that the thesis about the cultural dimension - the value and cultural axis, requires greater concretization. And so, I come to the next section.

5. Remarks and recommendations.

In my opinion at least three books are "hidden" in the monograph, awaiting their further development. First, an analysis of the future of the European project through the perspective of integration and differentiation. Second, research on the sociological studies of European integration, looking for an answer to the question is there a Sociology of Europe. Those studies are already a lot, even a specific field of "Europeanization studies" had appeared, and precisely because of the polyparadigmatic nature of the research it will be very interesting and important to make a typology of the different sociological approaches to European integration processes and their pros and cons. Third, an extensive study of the prospects for the European integration of the Western Balkans. I specify this precisely because the monograph outlines very well those three research fields, puts very important questions, and it is normal for one monograph not to have the opportunity to delve more deeply into the answers. Outlining these three fields and putting the important questions is in itself a very important achievement and contribution. But I very much hope, and sincerely recommend, that associate professor and

future professor Zheleva goes even deeper into at least one of these three fields, perhaps starting with the Western Balkans.

I am impressed by the great competence of Associate Professor Zheleva on the problems of the Western Balkans, but I have the feeling that this last chapter was written the fastest. It is important to show in more detail the differences between Western Balkans countries as well as the similarities, to go beyond percentages and look for interdependencies. The data from the Balkan Barometer call into question one of the dimensions of the above hypothesis - the cultural one. These data show that the strongest supporters of the European integration are the inhabitants of Albania and Kosovo, whose cultural identity is hardly the closest to the European one. The answers related to the "bottom-up" dimension mainly include the desire for a better standard, or to put it another way – the desire for economic prosperity, related also to opportunities to travel, study and work abroad. These are rather pragmatic goals, although they are related to the value of rights and freedoms in the EU. But it is questionable whether they concern equal inclusion by gender, for example, the values of political participation, the recognition of democratic governance. Therefore, I think there should be more reflection on the cultural dimension, as well as on the so-called "bottom-up" one - what they include, how they are perceived. The prestige of being in Europe probably matters too.

I am not convinced of the accuracy of the title of one of the parts of Chapter Three "Europe without borders". "The Return of Geopolitics". It is necessary to specify what is meant by geopolitics, in this case it is primarily about regional cooperation. What is meant by "return" - is it meant to overcome the conflicts - but this should be explicitly stated. The more distant geopolitical orientations are not commented on, and they are very important in view of European integration. Associate Professor Zheleva mentions the influence of Russia and China, but it is increasing and should be subject to analysis. The logic of chapter's structure is perplexing - it starts with data on regional cooperation, moves to another topic, and then returns to regional cooperation. There is a problem with the graphs: in graph 9, page 137, the answers to the question are not clear, it would be good if the question itself was given. In the graph 10 it is good to indicate percentages, although they are given in the previous paragraph. In graph 11, I do not find the answer "Freedom to travel", which is indicated in the text as the dominant answer. It is precisely the significance of the intellectual challenges in the monograph that requires a more precise interpretation in the data analysis.

6. Conclusion

Everything written so far emphasizes the significant sociological presence of Associate Professor Romyana Zheleva works. There is no ego in her academic pursuits, she is doing

public sociology - posing important questions for our time and looking for their answers, a work worthy of respect. That is why I fully support and vote positively for the occupation of the academic position "Professor" of associate professor Rumyana Ruseva Zheleva in the professional field 3.1. Sociology, anthropology and cultural sciences (05.11.01. Sociology - Sociology of inequalities and sustainable development. The role of the EU in reducing socio-economic inequalities) in IFS at BAS.

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