

OPINION

on

Evaluation of the scientific production of Assoc. Professor Maria Dimitrova Jeliazkova, Doctor of Sociological Sciences – the Only Participant in a Competition for the Academic Position of Professor in the Field of Higher Education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences for the Needs of the Department of Public Policies and Social Changes at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology-BAS (State Gazette, issue 58 of 09.07.2024)

By

Prof. Dr. Tatyana Ivanova Kotzeva – Institute of Population and Human Studies – BAS – Member of the Scientific Jury assigned by Order No RD-09-253.6/03.09.2024 of the Director of IPS-BAS Prof. E. Chengelova

1. Brief biographical information about the candidate

Maria Jeliazkova is an Associate Professor at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology-BAS (since 2012) and a Doctor of Sociological Sciences (since 12.06.2024). Her research interests are in the fields of social policy, public policies, poverty and social exclusion, social inequalities, social economy and sociology of economics. She is an established researcher in these fields – with 77 academic publications, of which one independent monograph was submitted for this habilitation, three independent monographs, two of which in English and the third as part of a large-length collection, 4 studies in refereed and 8 studies in non-refereed journals and collections and other publications, independent and jointly with Bulgarian and international authors. In the presented report on citations, Dr Jeliazkova mentions 152 citations, of which 129 are refereed and indexed in world databases and monographs and collections, and 23 – in non-refereed and reviewed journals and collections. She also has active teaching with courses in the listed areas, including courses taught in English in Bachelor's and Master's programs at Bulgarian universities, of which I especially note the courses in Social Policy at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" and at the National University for World Economy. Dr Jeliazkova is an esteemed expert and consultant to many national and international and European institutions, I will only mention some of them - member and Vice President of the European Anti-Poverty Network, member of advisory groups to the Council of Ministers, Ministry of Education and Science, MLSP, ESC and others. She has solid experience in working on projects – 19 projects with external funding for Bulgaria and 23 projects financed by Bulgarian sources have been noted. Dr Jeliazkova has actively participated at international and national forums – 27 plenary reports and 20 reports at international forums, 9 plenary reports at national forums with foreign participation, and 18 reports at national forums. These figures are indisputable evidence of the impressive professional career of Dr Jeliazkova as a scientist, lecturer and expert with national and international authority.

2. Required documents for the competition and scientometrics of the presented scientific production

For participation in the competition for the academic position of "Professor", the candidate has submitted all necessary documents and materials, duly classified after obtaining the degree of "Doctor of Sociological Sciences". 21 publications are indicated for participation in the competition for a professorship, of which one independent monograph declared as a habilitation work *"The Polarized Bulgarian Society: Persistent Poverty and Toxic Inequalities"* (2024), Polis Publishing House, (240 p.), three other monographs, two of which are in English, *"Social Enterprises and their Ecosystems in Europe. Country Report Bulgaria"* (2019), EC, (110 p.), *"Vulnerable Consumers Protection Framework Paper"*. (2020) ASSIST project, (120 p.), Demographic Development, Workforce and Labor Resources in Bulgaria, (2018), IPHS-BAS, In: *"Measures to Overcome the Demographic Crisis in the Republic of Bulgaria"*, Publishing House of BAS "Prof. M. Drinov", (108 p.). Separately, 4 studies are outlined in refereed world databases and 8 studies in non-refereed collections and journals, as well as 4 chapters in collective monographs and 1 article in an edited collective volume. For all co-authored publications, separation protocols are attached, with equal authors' participation noted.

Of all mentioned citations, 75 are submitted to the competition for a professorship, of which 28 are citations in scientific journals refereed in world databases, 35 are citations in monographs and reviewed collective volumes, and 12 are citations in non-refereed reviewed journals.

According to the submitted Report for the fulfillment of the minimum requirements of the Law on Academic Staff Development, Regulations on the Implementation of the Law and the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology Regulations for the acquired position of professor – Under Indicator "Other publications outside the habilitation work", the candidate has obtained 469.2 points with the required 220 points, under the "Citations" Indicator she has obtained 830 points with the required 120 points, under the Indicator "Other activities" (projects, etc.) – 145 points with the required 100 points, a total of 1594.2 points obtained with the required 590 points, which exceeds many times the specified limit for the acquirement of the academic position of professor.

3. Evaluation of the main contributions and overall candidate's scientific output

The main contributions to the work of Assoc. Prof. M. Jeliaskova are presented thematically, following the author's classification by topics and publications. I start with the topic of poverty and social exclusion – prevalence, depth, sustainability, causes, factors, consequences, traced in dynamics during the years of transition, as well as policies for dealing with poverty (publications No. 1,2,11,12,13,18). The emphasis in the analyses of poverty as a sustainable characteristic of Bulgarian society in the years after 1989 and comparatively as an EU country leading the ranking in terms of poverty levels of the population is not only on individual and structural deficits (education, professional qualification and income), but on the power relations of social actors that produce ineffective social policies and deformed regulations. Poverty in Bulgaria as a multifaceted phenomenon fits into the Bulgarian post-socialist context of permanent restrictions on the opportunities and freedoms of low-status groups in society as a result of neoliberal reforms and deformations such as institutional corruption and the "trickle

down effect". The author argues the thesis of a restrictive and minimalist vision of social policy and in particular anti-poverty policies, which have minimal effect on improving the lives of marginalized groups and ultimately fail to achieve their immanent goal – a fairer and more united society.

Thus, the topic of persistent poverty refers to another close thematic area – social inequalities (publications No. 1, 5, 11). The topic is most widely covered in the *monograph "The Polarized Bulgarian Society: Persistent Poverty and Toxic Inequalities"* (Polis, 2024). The monograph gives a large-scale picture of historical inequalities, their expansion and deepening in recent decades, related to the neoliberal transition and the decline of the welfare state. Illustrated with rich data from international databases, the author analyzes the Bulgarian case as a society with the highest polarization coefficients on a European and global scale. I will point out two original ideas that undoubtedly contribute to clarifying the production of inequalities in Bulgaria. The first is related to the so-called norms-viruses, i.e. regulations that benefit the upper stratum in society and are in dissonance with the practices in most EU countries. These are examples of institutional corruption: dividend tax, a ceiling on health insurance payment, monthly period of social security contributions and opacity of the system of bonuses upon payment. Drawing on a wide body of literature, including the influential book "The Pathology of Inequality" by R. Wilkinson and K. Pickett, the author summarizes the directions of the harmful effects of social inequalities: skipped economic growth, reduced chances for political and civic participation, decline of social progress, stagnation of life expectancy and wasted human potential. Secondly, the justification of the idea of "toxic inequalities" as economically and socially unjustified is of a contributing nature. They are expressed in increasing the distance between the richest and marginalizing the rest of the strata below them, which minimizes the "downward filtering effect" (p.160). Toxic inequalities are at the heart of Bulgaria's high and persistent poverty. The relationship between toxic inequalities and the origination of high poverty in Bulgaria is developed in some other publications besides the monograph (publications No. 11, 12, 13, 18).

Another thematic field is related to research on energy poverty and energy efficiency (publications No. 4,6,9). The depth, prevalence and health impact of energy poverty are analyzed, as well as problems with social assistance (borderline cases, quality of social services). The low internal horizontal (between different policies) and moderate vertical coherence between programs and activities leads to the conclusion that the programs for overcoming energy poverty are not highly effective. In a collaborative study (No. 6) of an international team, the social aspects of energy efficiency are analyzed. In another monograph (No. 4), again as a result of an international project to tackle energy poverty and protect vulnerable consumers, a series of policy steps for intervention in energy poverty are presented, such as structuring energy markets and prices, assessing the impact on different income groups, etc.

The social economy, represented through social enterprises and their resources for the development of employment and social engagement among vulnerable groups, is a direction for reducing poverty, an issue that is considered in a monographic work (publication No. 3). The monograph, the result of an international project, makes a historical overview of social

enterprises in Bulgaria, as well as analyzes problems with their legal regulation and develops mapping and analysis of 4 cases.

Another thematic focus in the publications of Assoc. Prof. M. Jeliaskova focuses on employment and in particular the correspondence between the quality of the workforce and the quality of jobs and public policies (publications No. 2, 14). In two extensive chapters of a book collection, the author defends the thesis that "the quality of the workforce is about a third lower than the European average, while the quality of jobs is about 4 times lower" (publication No. 2, p. 167), which presupposes policies on income, security of the labor market and the quality of the workforce. This thematic area also includes publications with a focus on youth employment (publications No. 7, 8, 16, 17, 19) and general on employment policies (publications No. 20, 21). The highly critical and reasoned approach to the ineffectiveness of public policies and in the field of employment is a distinctive feature of the overall scientific production of Assoc. Prof. M. Jeliaskova.

I have no critical comments on the presented scientific production.

Conclusion: The scientific production of Assoc. Prof. Maria Jeliaskova is huge and has undeniable contributions to the field of poverty, social exclusion, social inequalities, social economy and public policies. A considerable part of the publications of Assoc. Prof. M. Jeliaskova are internationally published, which shows that she is an established and recognizable author and expert in the wider academic community. I will confidently vote for the awarding of Assoc. Prof. Maria Jeliaskova the academic title of "Professor" in the field of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences for the needs of the Department of Public Policies and Social Changes of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology – BAS.

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