

REVIEW

by Blaga Petrova Madzhurova, PhD
Associate Professor, University of Plovdiv Paisii Hilendarski
Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences

of a dissertation thesis for the awarding of the educational and scientific degree **Doctor**

in: field of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences

in professional field 3.8. Economics

Doctoral Program: Political Economy

Author: Yuliyane Elinov Mollov

Topic: Decentralized Regional Policy - Opportunity for Sustainable Development of the Regions in Bulgaria

Research Supervisor: Professor Yordan Atanasov Hristoskov, PhD - University of Plovdiv Paisii Hilendarski

1. General description of the presented materials

By order No RD-21-1440 dated of 03.07.2023 of the Rector of the University of Plovdiv Paisii Hilendarski, I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury to ensure a procedure for the defense of a dissertation thesis on the topic Decentralized Regional Policy - Opportunity for Sustainable Development of the Regions in Bulgaria for obtaining the educational and scientific degree Ph.D in field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional direction 3.8. Economics, Ph.D. program Political Economy.

The author of the dissertation thesis is Yuliyane Elinov Mollov - a full-time Ph.D. student at the Department of Economic Science, with scientific supervisor Professor Yordan Atanasov Hristoskov, PhD - University of Plovdiv Paisii Hilendarski

The set of materials presented by Yuliyen Mollov on paper is in accordance with Art. 36 (1) of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of the Plovdiv University and includes the following documents:

- an application to the Rector of the Plovdiv University to open the procedure for the defense of a dissertation thesis;
- CV in European format;
- protocol from the departmental council related to reporting the readiness to open the procedure and preliminary discussion of the dissertation thesis;
- dissertation thesis;
- abstract in Bulgarian and English languages;
- a list of scientific publications on the topic of the dissertation;
- copies of scientific publications on the subject of the dissertation thesis;
- declaration of originality and authenticity of the attached documents;
- certificate of compliance with the specific requirements of the relevant faculty;

The PhD student has attached 4 (four) publications.

The submitted materials for the competition comply with the requirements and provide an opportunity for the overall evaluation of the dissertation work and the candidate.

2. Brief biographical data of the Ph.D. student

Yuliyen Mollov obtained a bachelor's degree from Plovdiv University "Paisiy Hilendarski" in "Political Science" and a master's degree from SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" in "Economics". In 2019, he was enrolled as a doctoral student in the Department of Economic Sciences. He has extensive practical experience in the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works, where he holds various expert positions and is currently the Head of the "South Central Region" Department, General Directorate "Strategic Planning and Programs for Regional Development". He speaks English and German.

During the period of the doctoral studies, the candidate fulfilled his annual, as well as had a lecture in two faculties and led exercises on social policy and social policies and programs. He is actively involved in all areas of activity of the "Economic Sciences" department, including conferences, scientific projects, candidate student campaigns, meetings, the development of new curricula and programs, publishing and social activities. The dissertation student is a highly respected member of the department.

3. Actuality of the topic and appropriateness of the set goals and tasks

The relevance of the topic is undeniable. Regional policy is increasingly central to EU governance, even more so in the context of the green transition, Industry 4.0 and digitalization. Along with the positive sides, some problems are increasingly coming to the fore, which are already embedded in the various conceptual economic models. Even more important is the question for Bulgaria regarding the decentralized policy as an EU member country, but still far from cohesive, despite the significant amount of funds absorbed under the European structural and social funds. Decentralization is central to sustainable development. Bulgaria still suffers serious criticism in this regard. Regional differences are too great.

The researcher has set himself realistic tasks for which he has selected appropriate research tools. What's more, the dissertation sets even more ambitious goals, since the topic considers, in addition to cohesion, a key factor for socio-economic development of the regions, but the issue is also studied from a fiscal point of view, and regional differences are examined through macroeconomic indicators. The doctoral student has formulated the purpose, tasks and hypotheses of the dissertation research in accordance with the scientific problem that he sets himself.

4. Knowing the problem

The analysis of the literature on the issue, as well as the overall presentation of the dissertation work and achieved results clearly show that the dissertation student is oriented and is aware of the issues on the subject. From the literature used, as well as in places his personal opinion on the theoretical aspects, one can see his deep knowledge and willingness to work with different theories.

5. Research methodology

The methodology used is adequate to the tasks that the doctoral student sets for himself. An opportunity to prove or reject the hypothesis is sought through appropriate instrumentation. The chosen research methodology allows achieving the set goal and obtaining an adequate answer to the tasks solved in the dissertation work. Analysis and synthesis of scientific theoretical statements and research on the topic of the dissertation related to regional development, regional policy of the EU, decentralization and sustainable and balanced development were used. The statistical methods of comparative analysis of the social progress of the NUTS2 level regions in the EU and its relationship with the degree of decentralization of the member countries are well chosen. Classical correlation, regression and cluster analysis of dependencies were used. It is additionally investigated through a qualitative analysis of the institutional system of regional development and the regional policy implemented since Bulgaria's accession to the EU. The study of a specific case, which enriches the dissertation work, is also of interest. The author makes good use of the Regional Power

Index (RAI) and the Local Autonomy Index (LAI) and explores them in depth, and his analysis includes regional and national indicators modeled using Python. The cluster analysis confirms that Bulgaria is in the group of a low percentage of the share of municipal expenses in the total public expenses and a high scope in the social indicator (highly expressed regional inequalities).

6. Characterization and evaluation of the dissertation thesis

The dissertation consists of 218 pages. It is divided into an introduction, three chapters and a conclusion. There are no appendices and 76 Bulgarian and 235 foreign sources were used. In logical terms, the thesis is passed according to modern standards. The three heads constructed are balanced and interconnected.

The first chapter traces the development of the theory of regional politics. The connection between regional politics, in particular decentralization and economic development, is particularly important. A major place is devoted to fiscal decentralization, as well as the models of Thibault, Oyets, Musgrave, Buchanan, Samuelson. Buchanan's theory of club goods is interestingly implemented. A central place is given to fiscal decentralization, which is an integral part of the overall process. The issue of the multi-level management of regional policy was considered, as well as the integrated territorial approach to regional development.

Quite correctly, he drew attention to one of the major problems that decentralization presents, namely the influence of externalities.

The second chapter focuses on multifaceted research opportunities. It starts logically with the EU's cohesion policy through a historical overview. The social progress of the European regions of the NUTS2 level and the degree of decentralization of the countries in the European Union have been studied in detail. Also, the relationship between sustainable urban development and decentralized governance is examined and explored. Current trends and problems in regional decentralization and development are indicated. The author has clearly distinguished the deconcentration of institutions from decentralization.

The third chapter presents the policies of regional decentralization in Bulgaria. The peculiarities of Bulgaria's regional policy after its accession to the EU are particularly important, as they put our country in front of new economic and social realities. The problem of unfulfilled decentralization was also not spared.

Interesting in the example of Plovdiv in its overall features. Moreover, it is one of the three municipalities closed within the city, bordering two others and together forming the economic region itself, but with separate regional policies at the level of municipalities.

Brief conclusions are indicated after each chapter, which serves as a kind of semantic bridge.

The conclusion shows the most important conclusions of the dissertation research, it is comprehensive and follows as a logical conclusion of the entire work.

The scientific style of the dissertation research and publications is high, but at the same time extremely understandable, which shows the knowledge of the problem in depth.

7. Contributions and significance of the development for science and practice

I believe that Yuliyana Mollova's dissertation work has theoretical and theoretical-applied contributions of high scientific value, which can be outlined in the following:

- An author's definition of decentralized regional policy is given.
- Conceptual concepts of foreign authors in the field of regional politics are presented.
- The study brings to the fore the role of decentralization as the basis of future, modern regional policy.
- The relationship between the degree of decentralization of the member states, social progress and sustainable development of the regions in the EU has been adequately studied.
- Appropriate measures for future decentralization policies are indicated, highlighting the positive aspects of the process, but at the same time some negative trends are also highlighted.
- The problem has been examined through new means of analysis, namely through a specific methodological toolkit, and appropriate statistical indicators have been selected to study the relationship between the degree of decentralization and the economic and social progress of European regions at the NUTS2 level.

Through the comprehensive research, corroborating facts for the thesis in the dissertation research were obtained.

8. Evaluation of publications on the dissertation thesis

The presented publications are 4 (four) reports, of which 3 (three) are independent and 1 (one) is co-authored. The papers were presented at the Sixth Scientific Conference of the Department of Economics dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the University of National and World Economy: "Economic Challenges: Crisis, Shocks, Restructuring, Policies"; "Economic challenges facing Bulgaria (2021-2023) - sustainability and risks", Higher School of Insurance and Finance; conference "Economic, regional and social challenges in the transition to a green economy" at PU "Paisii Hilendarski" and the International scientific conference 2022 "Economic development and policies:

realities and perspectives. Challenges and risks in the conditions of superimposed crises" in the BAS /under seal, but according to the requirements an official note is presented/.

The number of publications as required points exceeds the required, according to the requirements. All of them are related to the subject of the dissertation work and enrich the problem with additional examined questions.

9. Personal participation of the Ph.D. student

My acquaintance with the dissertation and the publications gives me reason to confirm the personal participation of doctoral student Yuliyana Mollov in the conducted research, as well as the formulated contributions and obtained results, are his personal merit. I find no plagiarism.

10. Abstract

The abstract is 32 pages long and contains all the necessary details. Correctly reflects the main results, conclusions, contributions and recommendations achieved in the dissertation work.

11. Critical remarks and recommendations

Critical notes do not detract from the contributions of the dissertation research. I believe that some points deserve a deeper consideration:

- Decentralization is a prerequisite for an increase in public spending, thereby increasing fiscal pressure if it is not accompanied by appropriate public policies, which is not clearly stated.

- Inequality and decentralization, even more poverty and decentralization, are in a two-way relationship, as they are both cause and effect, and to a large extent the European pillar of social rights suffers serious criticism in this regard, as it does not take fully into account the regional differences, and in the end all policies are aimed as a result at increasing people's well-being, which also goes through social cohesion.

- A question that can be considered is whether, in this way, the Law on Public Finance does not hinder fiscal decentralization, since the burden of financing public goods (more precisely: the burden of financing their delivery, or production) should be on those who derive the benefits from their consumption, as long as there is spatial segmentation. Such an approach, according to which the burden of financing should be borne by local residents, has been argued to such an extent. This predetermines the need for the relevant tools to be provided to the municipality in order to be able to accumulate the necessary financial resources. This also predetermines the respective powers of the municipality to determine taxes and fees, whose taxable persons are local residents.

12. Personal impressions

I know the PhD student personally, I had the opportunity to work with him in lecture courses, as well as on our joint publication. My impressions are excellent. He is an organized, precise and intriguing lecturer to the students. As a researcher, he is a constant, searching for solutions to problems in the scientific field with a wide capacity.

13. Recommendations for future use of dissertation contributions and results

I recommend that the dissertation be published. It would be good if the achieved scientific and scientific-applied results were made available to more scientists by publishing them in indexed scientific publications.

CONCLUSION

The dissertation contains scientific-applied results that are a contribution to science and meet everyone's needs requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ZRASRB), the Regulations for the Implementation of the ZRASRB and the relevant Regulations of Plovdiv University Paisiy Hilendarski.

The dissertation work shows that the doctoral student Yuliyana Mollova possesses in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional skills in the scientific specialty Political Economy, demonstrating qualities and skills for independent conduct of scientific research.

Due to the above, I confidently give my positive assessment of the conducted research, presented by the above-reviewed dissertation work, abstract, achieved results and contributions, and I propose to the honorable scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree "doctor" to Yuliyana Elinova Mollova in the field of higher education: 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional direction 3.8 Economics, doctoral program in Political Economy.

24.08. 2023 г.

Reviewer:

Assoc. Prof. Blaga Madzhurova, PhD