REVIEW

By: Professor, Doctor of Sociological Sciences
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Institute of Philosophy and Sociology - BAS
Professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Culture Sciences,
Specialty: Sociology

Regarding: Dissertation for awarding the educational and scientific degree
"Doctor" in the **scientific specialty Sociology**
in the Institute for Population and Human Studies

I am a member of the scientific jury for dissertation defense in accordance with Order № РД-6-265/23.05.2023 of the Director of IPHS.

Author of the dissertation: **Irena Sashova Georgieva**
Topic of the dissertation: "**Attitudes to Parenthood in the Focus of Family Policies and Changing Gender Relations in the Family. An International Comparative Analysis**"

1. Information about the author of the dissertation

The doctoral student Irena Georgieva holds a master's degree from Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich / University of Vienna. As regards the dissertation, it should be noted that during her training for the master's degree, the doctoral student acquired knowledge and skills in the field of sociology of the family and life stages, sociology of work, psychology and communication sciences. This specifically chosen set of disciplines indicates a very high level of academic training, but also defines the primarily sociological professional profile of the doctoral student, whose fields of interest are mainly the family, work and the relations that arise in connection with these.

During the period 2018 – 2021, Irena Georgieva demonstrated exceptionally high activity as regards assimilating additional knowledge and skills meant to facilitate the writing of the dissertation and also to enhance her capacity as researcher and scholar. She has taken part in 12 lecture courses and seminars covering a wide area of disciplines; as a whole, these training activities indicate her conscious efforts

to develop as a researcher in sociology of the family and sociology of work. She has attended specialized courses under the Stata program, which shows her enduring interest in independent work with large databases of empirical social surveys.

During her doctoral training, Irena Georgieva has taken part in four scientific conferences, at which she has presented her research findings related to this dissertation.

During this period of training, Irena Georgieva completely fulfilled her study plan as an extramural doctoral student; based on this, she was stricken off the list of doctoral students and given the right to dissertation defense. Through the fulfillment of her educational program and the approbation of the fulfillment of her scientific program, the doctoral student collected 250 credit points, meaning that she has entirely covered the requirements of the BAS credit system.

2. General characteristics of the submitted dissertation

The dissertation under review is 207 pages long. The work has an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, a list of literature, and self-appraisal of contributions. The dissertation contains six graphs. It should be emphasized that the graphs are constructed with professional skill and their content and design indicate the use of modern programs to generate graphic material based on empirical data.

The dissertation theme is definitely of high topical importance. I see its importance in at least two aspects. On the one hand, the topic of family relations and attitudes to parenthood is socially significant as it directly refers to models of cohabitation and attitudes to reproductive and parenting behavior. On the other hand, the topic is important in the economic aspect as it is closely related to the labor market behavior of different generations – behavior viewed holistically, which includes a reflection on the subjective assessments on achieving a balance between professional career and reproductive attitudes. At first glance it may seem these problems have already been sufficiently elucidated. It is true that attitudes to parenthood have been the subject of many publications, but the work under review here offers a different perspective. In focusing on attitudes to parenthood, the dissertation provides an in-depth comparative analysis of two national contexts: Bulgaria and Germany. The choice of these two countries has been very successful. Germany, as a typical example of a conservative model of social policies, has unique experience in implementing policies that stimulate and support parenthood with regard to childbirth

and raising children. On the other hand, Bulgaria, as a typical post-Socialist country, has accumulated historical influences that impact on the current design of policies and on stereotypes and attitudes to parenthood.

The goal and tasks of the dissertation study are very clearly formulated. This indicates that the author and her scientific supervisor have made a careful preliminary analysis of the problem field; it also shows that the thematic focuses of the research have been very clearly defined. Anticipating my discussion of the results, I will note that the author has fully succeeded in achieving the goals and fulfilling the tasks she set for herself. A reading of the dissertation convinces us that the author has strictly adhered to the basic focuses of research. The separate dissertation chapters provide answers to the various aspects of the initially formulated goals and tasks. This indicates the strong discipline and skill with which the author has concentrated on this initially defined circle of research problems.

The way in which the **object and theme of the study have been formulated** also deserves to be commended. According to the author, the object of the study are attitudes to parenthood as a focus of family policies and the changing gender relations within the family. The subjects are also adequately defined: these are men and women in Bulgaria and Germany, and in particular, the way in which they combine work with family relations, and the impact of this balance (or misbalance) on their attitudes to parenthood.

The author has found a very precise way of formulating her **basic thesis and basic research problems.** Quite properly, these questions are formulated at the start, in the introduction, which shows the problem field has been very well understood and the clarity of perspective on the goals of research, on the thesis the author sets out to prove and on the basic directions of research.

The dissertation research is aimed to test **eight basic hypotheses,** which have been precisely and adequately formulated by the author. Although it is pointed out in the introduction that these are simply hypotheses that guide the processing of empirical data, these assumptions in fact appear throughout the whole dissertation; the author has consistently provided arguments in support of one or another of them.

In elaborating her dissertation, Irena Georgieva leans on a wide range of literary sources. These include abundant English-language and German, as well as Bulgarian, sources. Judging by the list of literature, the author is very familiar with current publications on the family and family relations, attitudes to parenthood, social

policies and the legislation on which they are based. The general assessment is that she has cited adequate and sufficient in number literary sources, which has allowed her to make a valuable and comprehensive study of the problem field. This quality is very visible in the first two chapters of the dissertation, first, in the overview of theories related to family relations, work/life balance, satisfaction with family life, attitudes to parenthood; and then in the analysis of the national contexts of and the social policies applied in Bulgaria and Germany to stimulating and develop attitudes to parenthood and family relations, including policies for employment and provision of childcare.

3. Assessment of the contents of the dissertation study

The first chapter is devoted entirely to the theoretical models that interpret the division of household and professional obligations between men and women, and the related balance, or lack of balance, between work and family. The author has very aptly chosen to first examine the conceptions related to the welfare state, the market and the family in terms of the possibilities of parenting children. This analysis is very well done, the emphases are clearly highlighted, which indicates good knowledge and understanding of the theories in question. The next focus of analysis in Chapter One is gender-neutral theories. Here the author has proposed interesting interpretations of the theories, basing her discussion on the economic justification of the marital partners' behavior. Special attention is devoted to education as a factor of the marital identity of the two partners. Special focus is put on gender-sensitive theories, which take into consideration the relations of inequality between men and women, and the consequences of this inequality. Here again, the analysis is at a high academic level, with very well chosen examples of gender-sensitive theories. A significant result of this discussion is the comparison between the past situation in Germany, when the nation was divided into two independent republics, and present-day Germany. The author explains very cogently the emergence of the so-called adult worker model, which appeared in Germany as a natural consequence of social-economic relations developed in the course of history. Another substantial achievement in the first chapter is the presentation of studies on paid employment and domestic labor in Bulgaria up to the year 1990. The examples given are emblematic and illustrate very well the situation during that period. The author's study logically leads to theories of work/family balance. The author has justifiably chosen these conceptions as a basis

for her dissertation study. The critical analysis in this part is penetrating and convincing; the basic points are clearly defined and the possible direction of empirical study of work/family balance are highlighted. The first chapter concludes with the presentation of the basic findings of previous studies. The studies in question are very well chosen, their main conclusions are discussed properly in a way that generally reflects the author's views on these problems.

The second chapter aims to examine in a comparative perspective the basic elements of family policy in Bulgaria and Germany. These elements are correctly defined, after which the regulatory mechanisms used in Bulgaria and Germany are presented. The specificities and emphases of family policies in the two countries are very well revealed. We see the author's thorough knowledge of the normative base and content of the proposed policies. In the cognitive sense, the second chapter is very valuable, as it is comprehensive and may serve as a manual for any reader interested in family policy in Bulgaria and Germany. In this connection, a very strong point of the analysis in this chapter is the examination of the basic demographic indicators for Bulgaria and Germany, such as maritality, divorce and birthrate. The data refer to one decade (2010-2019/2020), which represents a sufficiently long dynamic series and permits drawing conclusions about the tendencies of the indicators in question. We will note that the chosen demographic indicators are quite relevant to the research topic and provide the necessary national context of objectively realized national trends. The data are illustrated with professional skill, which I also assess to be a valuable achievement of the dissertation research. In this respect, the presentation of basic indicators of employment in Bulgaria and Germany also merit praise. I consider very appropriate the author's choice of the employment coefficient (in general and for men and women separately), the differences in remuneration of men and women, and the share of part-time employment. This analysis was conducted masterfully and obviously enabled the author to penetrate the national contexts that form the institutional environment in which family relations and attitudes to parenthood arise. Another strong point in the second chapter is the discussion on childcare in the two countries. Inasmuch as the availability of childcare, its accessibility and quality, are among the factors that determine attitudes to parenthood, this analysis is also a very successful step, which fully corresponds to the goals and tasks of the dissertation study. The second chapter ends with an analysis of the basic indicators of economic development in Bulgaria and Germany; the author

conducts this analysis with the assumption that there is a direct connection between economic prosperity and family relations and attitudes to parenthood.

The third chapter contains a comparative analysis entirely based on the data of the European Quality of Life Survey (2016). This chapter is very well structured and reveals the qualities of Irena Georgieva as an independent researcher. Although this is essentially a secondary analysis of data, the author has made a rational selection of empirical variables that allow her to test the basic hypotheses and justify her basic thesis. In addition to the rich set of indicators used, the reader is impressed by the high quality of the presentation of empirical data. What contributes to the quality of the analysis is the pertinent graphic illustration of the statistical analyses. It should be specially pointed out that, in addition to the univariate and two-dimensional distributions, the author has presented the results of logistic regressions, which are built properly and purposively. Through them, the author traces the influence of basic demographic characteristics and of some basic statements about satisfaction with family life, as well as the existence of work/family conflict. The strongest factors are highlighted, and explanations of the registered influences are given. The basic emphases of the analyses are work/life balance, satisfaction with family life by gender, income inequalities and work/family balance, the distribution of time devoted to domestic duties and to work among women and men, the use and quality of childcare. In all sections of the third chapter, we find a consistent line of comparative analysis that clearly reveals the difference and similarities in the manifestation of these indicators in Bulgaria and Germany.

The general assessment of the dissertation study is that it is conducted at a very high academic level, that it corresponds in content to the set goals and tasks, contains ample and relevant argumentation, and offers an impressive amount of data used for comparative analysis of family relations, attitudes to parenthood and family policies in Bulgaria and Germany. The conclusion of the dissertation is concise and presents all the aspects discussed, highlighting the basis findings and results.

4. Assessment of the scientific and applied-scientific contributions

The submitted dissertation is an in-depth scholarly work that comprehensively presents the dissertation research conducted by Irena Georgieva. In connection with the current procedure, it is important that we highlight the more important

contributions of the author. I would point out two types of contributions: scientific and those related to applied science.

A. Scientific contributions:

- One contribution is the author's systematic overview of gender-neutral and gender-sensitive theories on family relations and distribution of work within the family, as well as the investment of various resources that define the social significance of the two marital partners;
- Another contribution is the in-depth analysis of theories of work/life balance. These theories are examined very precisely, the author having brought into relief their content and basic messages. In this sense, the analysis may serve as a matrix for subsequent research on family relations and attitudes to parenthood;
- Another scientific contribution is the defining of three factors that reduce the conflict between work and family: flexible working hours, active participation of fathers in the upraising of children, and the availability of alternative childcare provided by the state;
- A strong contribution of the dissertation study is the integrated theoretical model for analysis of the work/family balance and satisfaction with family life. The merit of this model is that it aims to identify the relation to the national context, the cultural models of parenthood and the practices of division of family duties between the two partners;
- The comparative analysis that outlines similarities and differences between work/life balances and satisfaction with family life. This analysis is of high cognitive and research value as it is based on a very large set of indicators.

B. Contributions related to applied science:

- The foremost contribution is the construction of a system of empirical indicators through which the work/family balance and satisfaction with marital life are studied. The examination of three basic types of conflict arising in this respect is also a very good methodological solution, which may be used in further research;
- We should not overlook the importance of the way in which the EQLS data are presented, analyzed and compared. This may serve as a model for other young

researchers who will be entering the field of empirical data analysis and seeking optimal approaches to this specific research task;

- I find the comparative study of the national contexts to be effective in terms of applied science. Although this analysis has some theoretical elements to it, it falls primarily in the category of applied science and may be successfully used by other researchers working in this problem area;
- Also of value for applied science is the comparison between family policies that stimulate marital relations and attitudes to parenthood in particular. Also of value in this category of contributions is the author's emphasis on "the new fathers", where her discussion suggests some concrete steps to the formation of relations of equality within the family and the development of attitudes favorable to parenting and parenthood.

5. Assessment of the publications related to the dissertation

The author of the doctoral dissertation has three publications on the dissertation topic. These publications present some key results relevant to attitudes to parenthood and the changing gender relations in the family, the "new fathers" in Bulgaria and Germany, the influence of gender and income inequalities on satisfaction with family life. The publications are of high academic quality, contain all the required basic elements, and are written vividly and convincingly, presenting relevant arguments and properly drawn conclusions and observations.

The three publications are quite sufficient for an entry level in Irena Georgieva's post-graduate training. They are promising with regard to future publications and we may hope that the author will continue her work in the field of family studies and attitudes to parenthood, including further comparisons with other countries and societies.

6. Assessment of the dissertation abstract

The dissertation abstract presented by Irena Georgieva is very concise, focused and correctly reflects the content of the dissertation study.

7. Critical remarks, recommendations and questions

I have no critical remarks to make.

I would recommend that Irena Georgieva continues her research on family relations in the context of work/family balance and satisfaction with marital life; that she go even deeper into the factors influencing satisfaction with marital life, and that she study the connection between this satisfaction and the desire for giving birth to more children. The submitted dissertation traces the influence of number of children on satisfaction with marital life and parenting. But the question may be reversed: whether higher satisfaction with marital life is a factor of the desire to have a greater number of children. This type of analysis is already present in the separate sections, but is not focused enough and is lost among the many conclusions. It could be concentrated in a separate publication that would give a clear answer to the question as to what factors lead to higher birthrates, which of these factors are rooted in cultural models, and which of them may be managed by the state.

8. Conclusion

In my opinion, the presented dissertation, developed by the doctoral student Irena Georgieva, is characterized by high relevance, academic heuristics and social significance. The researched topic is dissertable, and the realized research is distinguished by high professionalism, thoroughness, internal consistency and clearly distinguished own contributions. She knows the researched issues very well, she freely handles theoretical concepts and paradigms, she has worked correctly with empirical data, and in their analysis, both traditional and modern statistical and mathematical methods have been applied. All this gave the doctoral student the opportunity to cover the issue in depth, comprehensively and logically connected, which allowed her to achieve dissertation goals, including the reasoned testing of the research hypotheses.

In view of the evaluation I have made in this review, **I recommend that the honorable jury vote IN FAVOR of awarding the doctoral student Irena Sashova Georgieva with the educational and academic degree "Doctor" in the specialty Sociology, professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Culture Sciences. I myself will vote IN FAVOR with full conviction.**

14.06.2023 Reviewer:
Sofia Prof. DSc Emilia Chengelova