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REVIEW

By Prof. DSc. Maria Dimitrova Jeliazkova-Pekanova,
Institute of Philosophy and Sociology– BAS,
Scientific field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences
on the scientific papers for participation in the competition
for the academic position of associate professor,
in the professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences,
announced in the State Gazette No. 56 of 11.07.2025.
with the sole candidate Chief Asst. Dr. Lyubomir Ivov Stoytchev

I. Research activity and results.

Dr. Stoytchev works consistently and purposefully in the field of integration of vulnerable groups, most often in relation to the Roma. He analyzes the state and problems in various spheres of public life and offers recommendations for improvements. His scientific research activity has a clear focus, a consistent methodological approach and a purposeful search for scientific and applied scientific results.

A monograph and 24 other publications are submitted for the competition. Specifically: 9 articles in non-refereed journals with scientific review (3 of which in co-authorship), 1 paper in co-authorship in a scientific journal referenced and indexed in SCOPUS (Q1), 6 papers in non-refereed journals with scientific review (3 of which in co-authorship) and 8 chapters of a collective monographs. Separation protocols are included.

1. Evaluation of the monographic work

The presented monographic work represents a clearly distinct part of a collective monograph and includes three author's chapters: housing situation of vulnerable ethnic and religious communities; attitudes and distances of Bulgarians towards Roma; attitudes towards immigrants. In co-authorship, Dr. Stoytchev participated in the introduction and conclusion.

All three chapters discuss important aspects of the respective field, use available data and analyses of empirical research, outline key problems and formulate essential questions.

The analysis of the housing situation of the Roma is woven into a more general overview of the state of the housing stock, the system of property rights, characteristics of state and municipal property, comparisons between different countries, regions and localities, as well as the formulation of social protection needs given the very high levels of poverty and inequalities in Bulgaria. Fundamental and structural problems with the housing stock and their connection with a

series of other problems are identified /p. 110/. Discussing the problem in this broad context attempts to maintain balances between the two contradictory understandings of social work since its classical emergence in England towards the end of the 19th century in connection with social housing: people should be adapted to the circumstances of their lives or they should be provided with resources to change the social situations that disprivilege them. This can also be traced in the 7 measures for improving housing conditions proposed at the end of the monograph /p. 339-342/.

It also seems very important to me to raise the issue of indicators. In fact, in many different areas of social policy (poverty, energy poverty, social rights, minimum standards, etc.) a clear process of "indicatorization" is underway, of replacing declared goals with politically convenient indicators that lose touch with realities.

A third important aspect that connects this chapter with the author's next two is the analysis of public attitudes towards housing measures and policies and the importance of the media /incl. official media/ in this regard.

The two chapters - attitudes and distances of Bulgarians towards Roma and attitudes towards immigrants are in a certain sense mirrored, in particular on the common indicator "Do you agree to your child/grandchild studying in a class with several children of Roma/immigrants?"

Both chapters are aimed at analyzing attitudes towards openness, open-mindedness, tolerance, desire for inclusion and joint development and the influence of key socio-demographic factors on these attitudes is analyzed in detail. Both chapters outline distances and socially constructed images, respectively of Roma and immigrants. Various aspects of manipulating public antipathy, of turning victims into culprits (as widespread today, according to Nobel laureate A. Sen, as during the time of the Poor Laws in the United Kingdom in the 19th century.), of deliberate attempts at polarization, of abandoning otherwise declared ideas of solidarity, welfare and social cohesion, of the classic expansion of the scale and fragmentation of conflicts in order to reduce their intensity (Vic George, V. & Wilding, P. 1984, “The Impact of Social Policy”).

Such developments are largely due to fragmented and fragmenting policies and expertise (widely presented in the media, including official ones) and the corresponding lack of integrative policies. The invention of weak groups with “cultural” and “civilizational” differences is a well-known mechanism for stabilizing the status quo, while intensive production of risks and insecurity (both for the majority and for various minorities) generates similar and correspondingly hostile attitudes from different sides.

Overall, the proposed monographic work, the three chapters outline social distances and existing attitudes. They discuss in detail different aspects of the respective analyzed areas and

contribute to a better cognitive and analytical basis for possible actions. In this regard, conclusions and recommendations for adequate approaches and necessary inclusive measures and policies are made in the conclusion.

2. Assessment of the contributions in the other attached publications

In the report prepared by Dr. Stoytchev on the original scientific contributions in his works, the contributions in the other publications are differentiated into theoretical and applied.

I find the seven theoretical contributions mentioned to be very important and more specifically: poverty as a structural barrier and the subsequent reduction in the number of NEETs if poverty among the Roma drops to the level of general poverty; the conclusions about attracting people, primarily with secondary education, to return to the country; aspects of hopes for social mobility related to higher education; similarities in juvenile offenders, regardless of their ethnicity; the differentiation of classic and latent forms of racism; attempts to formulate new statistical indicators for tracking the dynamics of social inclusion/exclusion.

Six applied contributions are formulated separately, which, if detailed, could turn out to be even more, since they concern various generalized aspects. For example, the first formulated applied contribution summarizes the need for social interventions against poverty with economic losses from the exclusion of young people from the labor market. Also essential are the search for profiles of risk groups; efforts to adapt indicators; emphasis on local and national programs; attention to discriminatory practices in various fields, in particular labor, education, healthcare and social services.

Dr. Stoytchev's publications are distinguished by numerous proposals that deserve attention and scientific discussions from both a theoretical and an applied perspective.

Some of these publications precede the presented monographic work and create a basis for it; others are later and further develop established ideas. Thus, the overall scientific research work of Dr. Stoytchev is characterized by a clear and consistent center of his interests and accumulating expertise.

3. Citations by other authors.

24 citations are listed in various categories (in scientific publications, referenced and indexed in world-renowned databases, in monographs and collective volumes, and in non-referenced journals). The citations total 220 points and significantly exceed the required minimum of 60 points. The citations identify Dr. Stoytchev as a scientist with a recognizable place in the research field.

4. Evaluation of the results of participation in research projects and application of the obtained results in practice.

In the CV of Dr. Stoytchev, since 2010, participation in 15 projects (6 of which are international) is indicated. Almost all of them are related to the Roma and the possibilities for their integration and have a series of possible applied results. Based on these projects, as well as his expert work at the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, the World Bank and UNICEF Bulgaria, Dr. Stoytchev consistently develops his scientific works with the accumulation of expertise and experience.

5. Scientific contribution, originality of the presented works and reliability of the presented scientific data.

Dr. Stoytchev very carefully and conscientiously presents scientific data, including their limitations. He uses a wide range of statistical and sociological research. At the same time, he has significant research experience in terms of developing tools, fieldwork, etc. This further contributes to accuracy and precision.

The scientific contribution enriches the existing knowledge with a series of analyses in different areas of the dis/integration of various vulnerable groups, with a detailed look at different aspects and creates opportunities for taking adequate political measures. It also introduces a series of aspects of reasoned expansion and refinement of analytical and interpretative approaches.

Consistent and long-term analysis with a clear focus on data, problems, and perspectives in the researched areas outlines a specific authorial approach and, I believe, leaves no doubt about the author's own contribution and originality.

II. Fulfillment of the requirements for holding the academic position

Dr. Stoytchev meets and exceeds the minimum requirements for holding the academic position of associate professor.

Regarding publications, the points exceed the minimum requirements, even if two of them are reduced because they appear to have been published in Bulgarian and English. (7.4. and 7.6. from the list of publications: Tomova, I., & Stoytchev, L. (2013). Roma Representations in the District of Razgrad. Nasselenie Review, 5–6, 175–186. ISSN 0205-0617 https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14101105 and https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14100748; 7.7 and 7.8 from the list of publications: Stoytchev, L. (2012). Movement of Prices, Unemployment Rate and the Roma Content in the Dailies, August 2010 – February 2011. Nasselenie Review, 3-4, 128-140. ISSN 0205-0617 https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14099716 and https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14099191).

Regarding the citations, as I have already indicated, they significantly exceed the minimum requirements.

III. Personal impressions of the candidate (if any).

I do not know personally the Chief Assistant Dr. L. Stoytchev, I have not worked with him and I have no personal impressions.

I was a reviewer of the published collective monograph "Demographic imbalances and social inequalities between major ethnic groups in Bulgaria" (2020) and I have very good impressions of both the entire monograph and the chapters developed by Dr. Stoytchev.

IV. Opinion, recommendations and notes on the candidate's activities and achievements.

I believe that the candidate's overall scientific work is consistent, well-thought-out, well-argued and with a clear scientific contribution. I also think that the proposed focus on different areas and different aspects of the lives of vulnerable groups is extremely useful for analyzing reality and making recommendations for adequate policies.

At the same time, based on my assumption that Dr. L. Stoytchev will continue to be involved with the topic as an associate professor and due to the fact that his analyses contain enough implied outlines of necessary research, I have recommendations for his future scientific activity:

1. Placing poverty and inequalities at the heart of the situation and opportunities of vulnerable groups in our country is related to a very specific normative structuring of Bulgarian society – non-European (for the 21st century) and anti-developmental. The specificity is the result of norms (laws and by-laws) regarding the primary distribution of income (Gini index before social transfers), the tax system and the social security system (Gini index after social transfers), as well as the connections between the three. The specificity of these normative rules (actually, quite widespread in Europe at the end of the 19th century) leads to extremely high inequalities and invariably marginalizes groups in our country. If it is not the Roma and immigrants from specific regions, it will be, for example, children and the elderly, or other groups in a similar situation will be invented. These rules, i.e. normative order, throw groups to the border and outside of social exchange. They also consistently assign a very narrow and residual place to social policy. I think that these rules are to a significant extent the basis of segregation and discrimination, and in this regard, without changing them, partial measures in various areas can mitigate, but can hardly solve, the problems.

2. Along with the above-mentioned specifics of Bulgaria, more general processes are taking place that cast doubt on formulated conclusions from short-term observations. Here I have in mind

the statement of scientists that “age is the new division in politics” (e.g., American political scientist Pippa Norris, member of the World Values Survey team). Dr. Stoytchev analyzes the situation in Bulgaria and outlines a specific feature. However, it is not very certain that this is a national specificity. For example, the authors of “Atlas of European Values: Change and Continuity in Turbulent Times” (Halman et al., 2022) found that the most trusting European is “an older … Danish citizen. The most distrustful European is a young … Albanian” (p. 125). The authors do not explain what accounts for the difference between young and old, but it is more likely that it is not about clear-cut political patterns of socialization, but about times of uplift and progress and times of decline, or as other scholars call them “good and bad times”. The same may apply to the USA, since desegregation, as Dr. Stoytchev shows, began slowly and gradually from 1958, i.e. while the so-called welfare states still existed and developed and before their serious erosion and decline. Recently, there is more evidence of a change in the trend in USA also, as well as in that of other developed countries.

I think that analyses of basic aspects of norms, policies and their agendas, as well as long waves in socio-economic processes could further contribute to analytical approaches.

V. Conclusion: with a clearly formulated positive or negative assessment

Considering the quality of the scientific publications submitted under this competition, the coverage and exceeding of the requirements under the ZRASRB and the Regulations thereto, the obvious scientific contributions in the works of Dr. Stoytchev, the distributed and cited publications in our country and abroad, as a member of the Scientific Jury I will vote with conviction for awarding the academic title of "associate professor" to Chief Assistant Dr. Lyubomir Stoytchev.

I recommend to the Scientific Council of the Institute for Population and Human Research at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences to elect Chief Assistant Dr. Lyubomir Stoytchev to occupy the academic position of "associate professor".

Date: 10.11.2025

Signature: ……

(M. Jeliazkova)