

Review

for Denitsa Plamenova Gatsinska's dissertation on the topic

"The Covid-19 Crisis: Institutional Communication and Legitimacy."

- Bulgaria and the EU" for awarding the ONS "doctor" in PN 3.3. Political Sciences

by Professor Ph.D. Rumen Ivanov Kanchev

specialty 3.3. Political Sciences

The dissertation submitted for defense was prepared in the "Political Sciences" department of the SU "St. Kliment Ohridski", under the scientific guidance of the Doctor of Political Sciences Professor Tatiana Dronzina. The total volume of the text is 243 pages, of which 221 pages main text, and the rest - appendices. The study is organized into five chapters, an introduction and conclusion. The bibliography includes 178 titles in Bulgarian and English languages. Like "Appendix 1" contains ten "in-depth interviews".

There is no way not to immediately note the high relevance of the proposed topic, dedicated to the recently passed covid-crisis, which covered almost the whole world and put extremely serious health, social, political, moral, philosophical, economic and even geopolitical issues before the world. The crisis has practically and profoundly affected the lives of most of the planet, caused acute, and at first spontaneous and inadequate reactions. It is also important that it has not yet been fully and comprehensively explored, and in this regard the undertaking of doctoral student Gatsinska undoubtedly deserves admiration.

1. Design, main research question, starting hypothesis of the research

Doctoral student Gatsinska poses an important research question: to define the relationship between the covid crisis and the way of communication in its management, both nationally and international level. Accordingly, she relates her main research hypothesis to defining the covid crisis in the context of: national policies and the nation state on the one hand, the work of supranational institutions sustaining and generating the liberal order, democracy, civil rights and freedoms, on the other and finally, the communication of national and European institutions on a regional scale. All these elements are investigated, along with many others directly or indirectly related to the crisis, made are the relevant conclusions and, in my opinion, the research hypothesis is proven, and the research ones goals achieved.

2. Theoretical emphases and main achievements in the dissertation work

Chapter one of the dissertation provides an extensive review of crisis theories. Examined is the treatment of crisis in structural functionalism and also in Philip's works Schmitter, Randolph Stern, Leonardo Morlino, Jürgen Habermas and others. It is not missed comment also regarding the "crises of capitalism". One of their theorists, Marx, them derives from the economic base

of society, i.e. relates them to the contradictions between productive forces and relations of production. It is true stated in the dissertation text, that Marx understood capitalist crises as a permanent element of capitalist societies. Later, students of Marx, especially in the person of Lenin, defined the crisis of capitalism as a central component of ideological struggle. But, in the joke circle, if assume, highly hypothetically, that Marx and Lenin's conception of the crisis of capitalism, already more than 170 years after "German Ideology" (1845) and "Capital" (1867 d.) this capitalism is in permanent crisis and somehow continues to adapt and stay on the global economic and political scene. Also today it creates about 55 – 57 % of annual world gross product, controls between 49 – 52% of world markets, etc., for unlike some other societies that quickly appeared on the historical scene and even faster disappeared from her. This chapter is important in the proposed scientific work: it prepares theoretically, the second and third chapters of the study.

Chapter two is devoted to power, a fundamental category of political theory. Two influential theories of power - by Hannah Arendt and Jürgen Habermas - are analyzed. I did not succeed to understand precisely the PhD student's reasons for this extensive digression from the main topic of the dissertation. Hannah Arendt's major contribution is the theory of the totalitarian state with its main components: total ideology, total propaganda, total domination. However tempting her work on totalitarian society may be for the intellectual ("Sources of Totalitarianism", 1949), it cannot be used as an instrument for analysis of a crisis of the type of the covid-crisis, despite a number of concepts that have entered the public domain a space like "medical fascism", for example. Especially since the covid pandemic covered both such a one-party and in this sense close to totalitarian state as China, as well as the unconditional liberal democracies of the Western type. Arendt uses heavy theoretical (philosophical) apparatus whose categories are too powerful for the analysis of covid- the pandemic. In principle, the same applies to Habermas. The theory of communicative action is a fundamental philosophical theory with many powerful categories whose role is most elementary said to describe philosophically, i.e. to legitimize modern society. Why these two theories (Arendt's and Habermas's) are chosen as a theoretical model-tool in the analysis of such a phenomenon as the covid-crisis is not explained either in this or in the following chapters.

In general, however, the approach to the analysis of the covid-crisis is to use the philosophical ones theories of Arendt and Habermas is a good methodological achievement. This approach helps the analyzes in the following chapters and provides a theoretical basis for the empirical analysis in the following heads, solidly supporting him.

Chapter three examines the covid crisis at an empirical level, using more soon the sociological knowledge and socio-political dimensions of the crisis, the crisis resilience of various segments of modern democratic theory and other social theories. Accordingly, the focus of analysis is society, its fears, anxieties and stress (p.71), the ways in which people perceive the imposed restrictions, the reduction of certain democratic freedoms, social isolation as a personality problem, etc. Important is here to point out that D. Gatsinska concentrates on the situation in Bulgaria and the reflection of the pandemic on Bulgarian society. For me, very important in research is follow-up along the lines of the Bulgarian's skepticism regarding the pandemic. I'm not the only one who thinks this one healthy skepticism is part of the national character of the

Bulgarian, who, however "globalized" by the trends structuring modernity from the beginning of the 21st century, preserves distance and a healthy critical distrust of certain global and regional processes. In the case of the covid-crisis, it is a question of mistrust, as well as the overall strategy of WHO, as well as to a number of its decisions strongly contested by the international scientific community.

In this chapter, the analysis of: the impact of "covid-19" on work deserves a high rating of governments and institutions on a national and international scale; the readiness of the various societies around the world for protests against the way the crisis was managed; the sustainability of economic and military alliances during the crisis; have been analyzed successful crisis management strategies through leadership, effective communication and technologies. I agree with the PhD student's assessment of the "global leadership vacuum" and global unpreparedness of leaders to manage such global crises. It is in this connection her call for "integration of defense in the EU" and building strategic autonomy of the EU (p.90). EU defense integration is, of course, not yet due to the presence of NATO and efforts to strengthen it more and more. However, as shown by the developed of the Russian Federation's war against Ukraine (after February 24, 2022), the EU should not just conceived on the issue of building an independent European defense, but to begin to is building one since his story time probably isn't that much anymore big. It is within the framework of such a defense that, in my opinion, a separate one should be developed EU concept for crisis management of the covid-pandemic type.

Chapter four, entitled "The Covid-crisis through the prism of sociological theories" is dedicated to analyzing the covid pandemic through the prism of two very influential theories - "functionalism and structural functionalism" (p.124). Quite a bold approach. Even more so the structural-functional analysis (T. Parsons) differs significantly from the functional one Malinowski's and Radcliffe Brown's analysis, and they from what Durkheim did in ethnology as the science of society. In fact, those three are the most significant predecessors of structuralism, the foundations of which were developed by another brilliant theorist, Claude-Lévi-Strauss ("Structural Anthropology", "Primitive Thinking", etc.). Reading the dissertation text, you I remember the time when I was working on my Ph.D. devoted to poststructuralism (after Lévi-Strauss: Michel-Paul Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, Jean-François Lyotard and at the end of this brilliant group - the "new philosophers" led by Bernard-Henri Levy and Andre Glucksman). I do not understand why it was necessary to interfere with the analysis of the covid-crisis these theorists of great sociological and anthropological thought. Except we know that Parsons created structural-functional analysis and first defined society as a system ("The Structure of Social Action", 1937), but he did not stay long on the pedestal and the attacks against it by Nicholas Luhmann ("The System Theory") and simultaneously with that, but ideologically to the left of the then Soviet Marxism replaced the dominant one paradigm of the structural-functional analysis of society. In the late 1960s century Parsons himself partially abandoned structural functionalism.

As for the conflict theory, it is clear that it is the crisis management theory and conflicts should be at the center of the study of the covid-crisis, because although with global in scope and in this sense unique in nature, the covid-19 pandemic is a crisis in everyone meaning of the concept. In this part of the thesis, in my opinion, there is a very good hit of the doctoral student:

the analysis of vaccines as a "means of power and control" (p.139) and the "vaccine diplomacy" of China and Russia (p. 140).

The approach in the fourth chapter of D. Gatsinska is original, and her analysis is highly erudite, which can only be evaluated positively.

Chapter five analyzes the most significant problems that the covid crisis has presented nation-states, political and economic unions, and global geopolitics scene. The behavior of the Bulgarians regarding the crisis is very important for Bulgaria. In this connection, even though Bulgaria is in one of the last places in the EU for a number of health indicators, regarding the covid-crisis, the Bulgarians showed an enviable health and political culture: the majority of the Bulgarian population is not vaccinated. Why? Obviously because the Bulgarians did not believe the propaganda machine, imposing vaccination at all costs a drug that cannot be recognized as a full-fledged vaccine, since the preparation of any good vaccine is associated with experimentation of the proposed sample no less than five - ten years and more. In this regard, not the propaganda and insistence on vaccination, but the common sense of the Bulgarian made him skeptical about the effectiveness of vaccines to fight Covid-19 created in just a few months.

In the same chapter, an attempt is made to define the covid crisis in the context of such large trends on the global political scene such as multilateralism and multipolarity. The doctoral student indicates the impact of the pandemic on: US-China relations; Russia - NATO; USA – EU. I think the role of the World Health Organization (WHO) has been missed. Part of WHO's actions generated processes that were directly related to the highest values in the UN Charter such as: human rights, personal freedom, national sovereignty of individual states, the historical psychology and traditional culture of individual nations, etc.

This chapter also shows, albeit somewhat fragmentarily, the impact of covid- the pandemic on geopolitics and global rivalry. In my opinion, the demand for such influence is exaggerated, as relations between great powers always have been and always will be subject to rivalry. Even a crisis of the rank of the covid-pandemic is not able to changed this situation, for such is the very structure of the world stage which constantly generates rivalry. In fact, rivalry is the price for that a country to be a global power. And exactly in this, - if we listen to the head of the structural realism Prof. John Mearsheimer, - lies the "tragedy of world powers". They pay "too expensive" (with an ever-increasing rivalry between them) to be world powers.

3. Critical notes

Any work can be criticized in one way or another. Because it is not perfect as all our activities are imperfect. Without going deep into this area, I will I pointed out two things that could have been avoided by the PhD student.

First, too much attention in the dissertation is given to Hannah Arendt and Jürgen Habermas. In this regard, I think that doctoral student Gatsinska could more boldly and actively use the modern theory of international crisis and conflict management as carefully examines and defines the phases and levels of crisis escalation – peak – de-escalation. As well as what happens during each phase with the crisis itself, with its management by the national and supranational

elites and organizations, with the rise of influential regional unions (the EU and NATO), international coordination efforts, etc. We know that at one of the levels in the phase of Escalation relations between China and the USA, for example, have sharply worsened because of this there were serious reasons.

Second, it is impressive (not only in this dissertation) the active use of taka called interviews. D. Gatsinska even uses an "in-depth interview". The interview is key component in the theory of empirical sociological research. There is a solid a sociological theory of interviewing. In Empirical Sociological Research interviews are used in accordance with a strictly defined methodology, which includes no only the compilation of the survey card (in this case the questionnaire), but also the way of processing of the information collected by the interview method. The Ten "In-Depth Interviews" (Preposition 1, pp. 222-233) for example do not mean much, since neither is presented research methodology, neither sampling theory nor processing method of the information, there is no developed method of taking the interview itself. That is, the information collected with their help is practically not representative. Unfortunately, the present dissertation is third in a row in my practice as a reviewer that uses this "sociological" approach.

Conclusion

In the end, I can say that the presented research is a serious theoretical experience with the help of modern science to make sense of an extremely complex, almost an unexplored phenomenon with a huge impact on society, such as the covid-crisis, which shook humanity a few years ago. A huge amount of literature has been processed the question, various aspects of the crisis are presented; its influence on the behavior of the world's geopolitical players, as well as its impact on the policies of key regional organizations such as the EU and NATO and of world organizations such as the WHO; its significance for part of the leading trends on the world political scene, as well as the role and behavior of national and world leaders in managing the crisis, is understood. The publications submitted by the PhD student are relevant to certain aspects of the problematic and completely sufficient for the presentation of the text for public protection. The abstract corresponds to the content of the dissertation text.

Keeping in mind the qualities of the dissertation work, I confidently suggest to the hon members of the scientific jury to Denitsa Plamenova Gatsinska to be awarded the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in specialty 3.3. "Political Sciences" .

Professor Rumen Kanchev, Ph.D

Sofia, May 14, 2024