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D. A. TSENOV ACADEMY OF ECONOMICS, SVISHTOV
DEPARTMENT OF STRATEGIC PLANNING

O P I N I O N

of a dissertation paper for acquiring the educational and scientific degree
“Doctor”

Author of the opinion: Prof. Margarita Bogdanova, PhD

Author of the dissertation paper: Izabela Filipova Yonkova

Title of the dissertation paper: **THE IMPACT OF ETHICAL
INFRASTRUCTURE UPON THE PERFORMANCE OF PUBLIC
SECTOR ORGANISATIONS**

I. A General Presentation of the Dissertation Paper

This opinion has been written in compliance with Order No. 364/28.05.2024 appointing the scientific panel for an open procedure for the defence of a PhD thesis, “The Impact of Ethical Infrastructure upon the Performance of Public Sector Organisations”, written by Izabela Filipova Yonkova for acquiring the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in professional field 3.7 “Administration and Management”, PhD Programme “Organisation and Management Outside the Sphere of Material Production (Public Administration)”.

The opinion is prepared in compliance with the requirements of the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act (DASRBA), the Regulations on the implementation of the DASRBA, and the Regulations on the Development of Academic Staff at D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics, Svishtov.

The topic of the dissertation paper is indisputably relevant as scientific research in the sphere is insufficient, especially in countries like Bulgaria where citizens give a poor score to the government for its fight with corruption. The selected topic has enormous potential mainly due to the complex nature of the factors related to ethical infrastructure that affect the quality of public sector activity.

Accordingly, the **purpose** of the PhD thesis is defined as follows: to study ethical infrastructure in general and the impact of its elements and, based on an integrated approach, to propose a conceptual model of ethical infrastructure and a methodology for self-assessment of the impact of ethical infrastructure upon the performance of public sector organisations.

The **object of the research** is ethical infrastructure in administrative structures that are part of the executive power system in the Republic of Bulgaria. The **subject of the research**

is the level to which the elements of ethical infrastructure have been developed in public sector organisations so far.

The purpose of the research is divided into six research tasks which are accomplished with the development of the PhD thesis.

The dissertation paper consists of 280 pages, of which 189 pages is the volume of the body text. The dissertation has a well-balanced structure which includes an introduction, a main body text consisting of three chapters, a conclusion, a list of references, and 6 appendices. The number of cited literary sources is 243, of which 139 are in English. The author's ideas are illustrated with 10 tables and 16 figures. Literary sources are used relevantly and cited correctly.

II. Evaluation of the Structure and the Content of the Dissertation Paper

The PhD thesis discusses major concepts related to the topic; it analyses the views existing in scientific literature about the nature, objectives, functions and significance of ethical infrastructure as a complex concept.

The introduction describes the major attributes of the dissertation: the importance of the topic; its purpose, scope, object and subject; the tasks, the research thesis, the set of research methods which the author uses and the constraints of the research.

Chapter One discusses fundamental issues related to ethics and ethical infrastructure. It provides a detailed analysis of existing literature, related terminology, different interpretations and viewpoints, the scope of related fundamental concepts and the relationships between them. The author clarifies theses proposed by quoted authors in a brilliant manner, and at the same time clearly expresses her own point of view.

The dissertation paper presents the author's definitions of ethical infrastructure and a model of ethical infrastructure. It comments on models proposed by other authors, for example, E. Kandeve, L. Georgiev, many foreign authors, opinions of experts from the OECD and the WHO.

The author presents all studied elements of ethical infrastructure in a table to systematize the most popular theoretical views on the object of the research.

A special emphasis is laid on the formal aspects of ethical infrastructure, and the need of a code of ethics is frequently stated. The dissertation paper also pays attention to the need of political engagement with ethical issues, surveillance and reporting, and professional socialization.

Researched good practices of ethical infrastructure give readers further ideas about ethics management systems as an underlying principle of fair relationships and integrity in administration performance. Reviewed practices unambiguously indicate that the issue of ethics is one that can be solved through collective streamlined effort by all members of society. The concept of integrity as a practical instrument for observance of ethical principles is introduced.

At the end of Chapter One, the author identifies and summarises some fundamental opinions and logically points out that compliance with ethical values, standards, and norms is a complex process that is not always a sufficient prerequisite for creating an adequate ethical environment. That insufficiency can be counteracted through various instruments and mechanisms depending on the contexts which different authors write about.

One of the major findings is that the issue of ethics is a fundamental principle for contemporary society that is relevant to the cultures and practices in different countries.

Chapter two studies the managerial aspects of ethical infrastructure in different organisations. It reviews the frameworks required to support and encourage ethics as a behavioural model. There is a precise description of the empirical survey which the author has conducted on the impact of ethical infrastructure upon the performance of public sector organisations. The chapter also provides a detailed presentation of the methodology of the survey, including the design of the interview card, the selection of respondents, the manner and the time periods in which the survey was conducted, etc.

The descriptive analysis summarises the major findings of the survey. Part of them are visually presented through appropriate figures and tables. A critical approach is used to comment on some obvious deficiencies like low civil involvement which is due to the fact that citizens are mere observers as there are no adequate instruments to ensure their engagement with management processes.

There are some interesting discrepancies, for example, between the high score which respondents give to the efficiency of the legal framework related to ethical infrastructure and the criticism they address to the weaknesses of that legal framework. The author identifies this contradiction shrewdly while conducting a survey of the public sector where the objective evaluation of facts may be distorted by the subjective attitudes of respondents.

The author formulates 7 research hypotheses which are verified through statistical analysis. The dissertation presents the results from studying the correlations identified in the collected feedback using Jule's coefficient of association, Pearson's contingency coefficient and Jule's coefficient of colligation.

Based on the examined correlations, the author claims that the integration of ethical infrastructure elements is correlated to administration performance. The author also points out that the direction in which each element affects work processes in administration is an issue beyond the scope of the research.

Chapter Three presents a conceptual model of ethical infrastructure that is designed on the basis of the conducted thematic and comparative analysis of scientific literature in Chapter One, and the content analysis of the normative, strategic and methodological frameworks of ethics that is presented in Chapter Two. The model consists of 8 interrelated iterations for introducing formal and informal elements. Each iteration is described in detail and logically connected to the others.

A methodology for a qualitative self-assessment of the impact of ethical infrastructure upon the performance of public sector organisations is proposed. The methodology is designed with consideration of the conditions in which administrative structures operate. The

complete content of the Qualitative Self-Assessment Framework is presented as a table in Appendix 6 to the dissertation. For each element, indicative states for three different levels of development – low, medium and high - are described, which makes them an especially appropriate and reliable instrument for self-assessment.

The end of Chapter Three gives Recommendations on improving the ethical environment in public sector organisations. As the author reasonably points out, the list of references should be approached as an open one, since new instruments are constantly designed in theory and applied in practice to contribute to the development of ethical infrastructure elements and their integration into organizational performance. The selection of an appropriate approach should therefore ultimately be a function of the attitude and competence of top executives in administration.

The conclusion summarises the accomplishment of research tasks, thus supporting the research thesis, and once again emphasizes the positive impact of ethical infrastructure upon the performance of administration.

The dissertation is written clearly with confident and appropriate use of related scientific terminology. There are no significant deviations from the theses in the main body, repetition of expressed views and conclusions, or logical inconsistencies.

The rules of scientific ethics for properly citing literary sources are observed as well.

The abstract of the dissertation presents accurately and comprehensively the PhD thesis. It is written in compliance with applicable requirements, contains all required elements, and presents exhaustively the main points of the thesis. The abstract gives full awareness of the scientific value of the research work and the practical applicability of achieved results and accomplished goals.

The list of publications shows that the author has published two co-authored conference papers; one single-authored article in a Scopus-indexed journal; and a single-authored research paper, thus exceeding the minimum national requirements for acquiring the educational and scientific degree “Doctor”. Participation in five scientific forums is also stated, which indicates that the author’s ideas have reached a wider range of readers.

III. Scientific and Scientific-applied Contribution of the Dissertation Paper

I agree with the List of Scientific contribution as formulated by the PhD student. In my opinion, it is an adequate reflection of the author’s accomplishments.

- Based on a thematic analysis of ethical infrastructure models in the public sector which are described in scientific literature, a comparative analysis is conducted of the author’s views about the contents of the models and the various interpretations of the nature of ethical infrastructure as a concept, content and the manner in which it is applied in practice, which reveals that a model of a single comprehensive and

efficiently operating ethical infrastructure has not been designed so far and there is no model to meet the demands of practice.

- The normative, strategic and methodological frameworks of ethics in the public sector are studied and issues related to their impact are analysed through an empirical survey of the level to which ethical infrastructure is developed in public sector organisations in Bulgaria by employing quantitative and qualitative methods, which provides valuable insights about the current state of ethical infrastructure and its impact upon the performance of public organisations.
- The author suggests a conceptual model of ethical infrastructure which consists of a set of formal and informal elements identified after conducting a comparative analysis of existing models of ethical infrastructure; a content analysis of the normative, strategic and methodological frameworks of ethics in the public sector and an empirical survey of the level to which ethical infrastructure has been developed so far in public sector organisations in Bulgaria. An iterative process of 8 correlated iterations for introducing ethical elements into public organisations is proposed.
- A methodology for qualitative self-assessment of the level to which ethical infrastructure is developed in public sector organisations is proposed. The methodology is based on a qualitative description of the state of each element, for three possible levels of development of ethical elements in public sector organisations – low, medium and high – and three degrees of the impact which these elements have on public organisations depending on the level of their development.
- Based on the thematic analysis of scientific publications and good practices, the author recommends guidelines for improving the ethical environment within the context of social functions in the public sector. These guidelines are of administrative, political and methodological nature. Some of them are wider in scope and relate to the improvement of the overall performance of administration, while others relate directly to the development of ethical infrastructure elements.

IV. Critical Remarks and Recommendations

As a member of the department in which Izabela Yonkova is a PhD student, I have been able to observe closely her progress in developing her PhD thesis and the conscientiousness with which she followed the recommendations she was given. I therefore have no critical comments to make.

V. Summary of the Opinion

The submitted dissertation paper is an example of relevant and significant independent scientific research work with important theoretical findings and practical contribution. The research methodology which the author has planned and employed is adequate to the researched topic, while accomplished results and findings are accurately presented. The author arrives independently at conclusions and generalisations which add to existing

knowledge in the area and increase the applicability of existing theoretical developments. The author's work on the dissertation paper fully meets the requirements of the national normative framework – DASRBA and the Regulations on the Development of Academic Staff at D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics, Svishtov.

I am therefore confident in giving a positive evaluation to the developed PhD thesis and recommend that the Scientific Panel award to Izabela Yonkova the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in Professional Field 3.7 "Administration and Management", PhD Programme "Organisation and Management Outside the Sphere of Material Production (Public Administration)".

Date: 24.06.2024

Opinion written by: ,

(Prof. Margarita Bogdanova, PhD)