

SCIENTIFIC OPINION

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Subject: dissertation thesis for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences" in professional direction 3.8 Economics with candidate Associate Professor Dr. Eduard Vasilev Marinov, Doctoral program "World economy. International Economic Relations", Master's Faculty, Department of Economics, New Bulgarian University

Dissertation topic: ON SOME CHANGES IN THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF REGIONAL ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

1. Significance of the researched problem in scientific and scientific-applied terms

The significance of the researched problem is well realised by Associate Professor Dr. Eduard Marinov, and he justifiably connects it with its relevance given today's state and development of international economic relations. The author realizes that in our time of vital importance is the geopolitical tension in the world, technological progress and changing patterns of world trade, which must be a prerequisite for security and prosperity. The author takes into account the circumstances that (I quote) "the recent resurgence of protectionist measures, the 'disruptive' effects of technological innovation, multiple crises and ongoing uncertainty resulting from geopolitical tensions further complicate the understanding of integration processes and require them to be viewed in a new perspective ". This topic is of extreme importance today on a global scale, as it is said for such cases "the topic of topics" for the further existence of people and societies on a global scale.

2. Justification of the objectives and tasks in the dissertation work

The author's research interest stems from his desire to explore (I quote) "...the reasons behind countries' participation in these communities and agreements and the various effects having on their economic development, well-being and strategic positioning in the world economy ". The beginning of this scientific activity of his is related to the study of the experience of the economies in Africa and Bulgaria. The topic of his PhD dissertation was "Regional Economic Integration in Africa" (2012-2015), and then he continued to work on issues of the world economy and international economic relations and regional economic integration.

The main objective of the dissertation work is (I quote) "to systematize, critically analyze and determine from a scientific point of view the changes in the theory and in the practice of regional economic integration, identifying the main factors driving these changes and evaluating their effects on participating economies to offer a new approach to the study and evaluation of integration processes'. Several aspects are involved in the goal formulated in this way.

To achieve the main goal, several *research tasks* are appropriately set: research on structural changes in world trade; a general and critical review of the theoretical literature concerning the problems of regional economic integration; analysis of empirical data and case studies to assess the practical consequences of economic integration processes; developing a new conceptual

framework that brings together ideas from the theoretical literature, empirical evidence and case studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the multidimensional nature of economic integration today. The aim is to use this new conceptual framework to propose a structured approach to analyze and interpret the complexity of regional economic integration in the contemporary global context.

The main thesis of the dissertation is that the dynamic structural changes in the global economy observed in the last few decades, driven by institutional, market-oriented and geopolitical factors, require a reassessment of traditional theories of economic integration. In accordance with the main thesis of the dissertation, 4 hypotheses are presented, and in my opinion, the first and third sound more independent, while the second and fourth are a little mixed with each other. The research is said to use a multidisciplinary approach that is based mostly on economic ideas, concepts and tools, but also integrates some methods from political science and international relations.

The scientific and applied nature of the research are skillfully combined in the dissertation work. The logic and consistency of the statements in the introduction are reflected in the successful arrangement of the four chapters that present the structure of the dissertation, namely: from the observed structural changes and uncertainty in global trade to the theory of economic integration as the main form of integration and analysis of some of its limitations and shortcomings and, as a result, a transition to a three-dimensional assessment is proposed as a new understanding of economic integration. The concluding remarks to each chapter deserve a positive assessment.

3. Correspondence between the chosen methodology and research methodology and the set goal and tasks of the dissertation work

The research methodology corresponds to the design and objectives of the dissertation thesis. It includes the mandatory elements - literature review, theoretical analysis supplemented by empirical data. An important component of the methodology is the analysis of case studies representing different regions and integration initiatives. A key application of the methodology is described in chapter four, where (I quote) "a new conceptual framework for understanding economic integration in the contemporary global context is proposed, including a three-dimensional assessment of integration processes and a new typology of integration agreements". The potential implications of this new framework for economic policy and international relations are commented on, emphasizing its importance for small, open and less developed economies.

In the desire to present more full and true picture of regional economic integration the doctoral student also notes some imposed limitations, the main of which are the following: the research is directed in the field of international trade, examining regional economic integration between countries and does not affect domestic aspects of regional development; although monetary and exchange policies are part of the integration processes, the dissertation thesis mainly focuses on the trade aspects of integration, etc.

4. Scientific and scientific-applied contributions of the dissertation thesis (description and evaluation), including the presence of an original contribution in science

I accept the five contributions to the dissertation presented by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Eduard Marinov. My note is that in this form they look like a short summary, and should be developed in substance with a volume of up to 1-2 pages. The work contains a comprehensive and complete study of the modern complex and multi-layered processes of regional economic integration on a global scale. Structural changes and sources of uncertainty in contemporary international economic relations have been analyzed on the basis of abundant information. The concept of a new type of

international specialization is derived. A comprehensive analysis of regional economic integration is presented and recommendations for improving and expanding integration theory are made, and a critical assessment of the applicability and relevance of conventional integration theories in response to contemporary changes in the world economy is also offered. Of particular interest is the new framework developed with a three-dimensional approach for analysis and evaluation of integration processes. A new methodological approach to research and evaluation of integration processes has been proposed (but unfortunately not tested), which includes a set of specific qualitative and quantitative indicators.

5. Evaluation of the publications on the dissertation thesis: number, nature of the editions in which they were published

The scientific publications related to the doctoral studies presented by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Eduard Marinov are sufficient in number (13), and almost all are independent and one is co-authored. Three of the publications are in English in foreign editions; three were published in the journal "Economic Thought" of the Economic Research Institute at the BAS, and the rest were published in other journals, anthologies or yearbooks of universities. The publications are related to the topic of the dissertation work and well represent the long-term work of the doctoral student on it. My formal note is that, according to the standard, the description of the publications is carried out first in the Bulgarian language (Cyrillic) and then in foreign languages, and here it is in the opposite order. I believe that it would be more convincing if there was a monograph on the subject, and also if there were more voluminous and serious publications that would reflect and prove the thesis more comprehensively accepted. I recommend that he now take advantage of the comprehensive research in the dissertation, further develop and test the approach and publish it as a monograph.

6. Citation by other authors, reviews in the scientific press, etc.

Citation of the publications of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Eduard Marinov is his strong point. In his autobiography, he shares a total of over 220 citations, including as recommended reading in university courses in the Netherlands, Spain, Great Britain, Republic of South Africa. In connection with the dissertation thesis, they are of course less in number, but sufficient and reflect the wide spread of the author's scientific ideas.

7. Opinions, recommendations and notes

- At an earlier stage, I shared my notes with Associate Professor Dr. Eduard Marinov about the dissertation work. To my satisfaction, I see that some important things are reflected in the present format of the work. I am aware that for certain reasons, some of them may not be accepted, and some of them cannot be reflected - for example, for the topic of the dissertation work.

- I think that the topic of the dissertation was unsuccessfully chosen as "On some changes in the theory and practice of regional economic integration". This is how scientific products are titled, in which the authors want to briefly share some of their fragmentary points of view in the meantime. In addition, it does not show the scope of the studied regional economic integration - is it national or international (global), and this is very important in this case.

- The decision to give conclusions at the end of each chapter deserves positive evaluation. The PhD student has a very good presentation style – coherent, clear, convincing. At the same time, the style is a little more narrative, especially in the case studies, and more analyticity is needed in the presentation of the abundant data.

- As the doctoral student himself notes, the main limitation of the study concerns the proposed new approach, which includes a three-dimensional assessment of integration processes and introduces a new conceptual typology of integration agreements. Although the theoretical and methodological framework for this approach has been developed, its application has not been empirically evaluated or tested here. The first chapter is the longest, and the fourth, presenting the approach, is the shortest (100 and 25 pages, respectively), which is not relevant.

- The view and analysis of the doctoral student on economic integration is only in the direction to better and positive development. In fact, in the first chapter, he shows an understanding of the complex and contradictory processes that are taking place in the world and that seriously threaten the peaceful and constructive world development so far, both politically and economically, but this aspect is not developed.

8. Conclusion

The dissertation thesis shows that the Assoc. Prof. Dr. Eduard Vasilev Marinov worked for years on the topic of regional economic integration in various aspects, in order to form in his mind the overall research that we are considering today. The PhD candidate demonstrates extensive knowledge in the field of economic integration theory and its regional application in the contemporary global context. The dissertation contains scientific and applied results that represent a contribution to science.

The dissertation thesis and its defense are in full compliance with the requirements of the existing Law on the Development of the Academic Staff, the Rules for its Application and the Ordinance on the Development of the Academic Staff of the NBU. I give my positive assessment of the discussed dissertation work and propose to the honorable scientific jury to award the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences" to Associate Professor Dr. Eduard Vasilev Marinov in professional direction 3.8. Economy.

11 October 2024, Sofia

Signature:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Eduard Vasilev Marinov', written over a light blue grid background.