

Scholars from Russia, Balkans, Central Asia and Korea in the Special issue of a Bulgarian Sociological Journal



Recently is published Special issue in English of the only Bulgarian sociological journal *Sociological Problems* (No.2/2019, vol. 51) with the topic “Post-communism: revert or reload.” This issue of the journal was compiled and edited by the Associate Professor Dr. S.E. Nikolov of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, and the Honorary Editor Professor Doo-Seung Hong of Seoul National University, ex-president of the Korean Sociological Association. The journal contains texts of 20 authors from seven countries – Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kazakhstan, Korea, Russia, North Macedonia and Uzbekistan. For the first time scholars from Central Asia have published in the only Bulgarian sociological periodical, and this is a fairly authoritative journal – it is distributed in a number of European countries, the United States, etc., and indexed in prestigious international academic databases. Something more – it has undergone a strict monitoring procedure of data-base-SCOPUS – now it is expected to receive the relevant certificate, and the special issue in question will automatically be included and published there while the articles will receive the status of “impact factor”.

The journal analyzes the acute socio-political, economic and demographic challenges faced by the Balkan and Central Asian countries, as well as Korea, such as the interaction between experts and authority, civil society and its role in policy making, ethno-populism, the dominant ethnicity, the “cursed” ethnic minority, Roma (Gypsy), terrorism, incl. the ‘ISIL’, and others.

This Special issue is dedicated to the memory of Professor Alexander Fedotov (1956-2018), the founder of a number of Eastern Studies disciplines in Bulgaria. Prof. Fedotov undoubtedly belongs to the impressive list of Russian-speaking intellectuals who have found a new homeland in Bulgaria and have worked in new fields of science for this country. The short but eventful history of the Center for Oriental Languages and Cultures at Sofia

University, forever associated with Professor Fedotov, and quite deservedly his name was recently assigned to the Center. Immediately after joining as an Assistant Professor the Faculty of Ancient and Modern Languages at the Sofia University, he began to develop completely new areas of oriental research in Bulgaria, expanding its borders far beyond the original specialties, Turkology and Arabic Studies. When a Bulgarian journalist called him “The Columbus of Oriental Studies in Bulgaria”, he did not exaggerate. Fedotov was an undeniable authority in the vast academic field, fluent in several East Asiatic languages, including their ancient and colloquial forms, and with a deep knowledge of the history, culture and society of this vast geographical region.

The special issue of the sociological journal grew from a session at the World Social Sciences Forum of in Fukuoka, Japan, in September 2018. This session included the participation of scientists from Bulgaria, Russia, N. Macedonia and Uzbekistan. Organizers provided scholarships only to young scientists at the beginning of their careers. Only 37 such scholarships were awarded (more than 800 participants took part in the forum, almost half of whom were foreign scientists), which included airfare and hotels, and two of them were awarded to scholars from N. Macedonia, Assoc. Prof. Aneta Cekik, and from Uzbekistan, N. Aslanova.

As I began to prepare the Special issue, I was determined to preserve the geographical dimensions: I invited more authors from Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina and N. Macedonia. Again, as at the initial drafting stage of the session, I approached a number of colleagues, from whom this set of authors emerged – many others were not ready to present appropriate texts, due to their busy work schedule. I believe that, despite the difficulties, we came up with an impressive team of authors from seven different countries, some of whom, through this issue of Sociological Problems, are presented for the very first time to a wide international academic audience. Prof. Dr Alexander Sungurov (Russia), who came to political science and sociology after an initial education in physics, and who even got a taste of practical politics during the 1990s – an uneasy time not only for Russia, but also for the whole of Eastern Europe. He has contributed an analysis of the models of interaction between the government and the expert functions of the Russian expert community.

- Prof. Mirjana Maleska discussed the power-sharing model as applied to post-conflict Macedonia.
- Assoc. Prof. S. E. Nikolov analyzed the prospects of the depopulation of Bulgaria, and described the likelihood that ethnic pockets of Bulgarian emigrants, detached from the Bulgarian state, may emerge in foreign countries.

- Assoc. Prof. Aneta Cekik examined civil society in the new democracies and the relationship between the state and civil society.

Two young female scholars from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Assoc. Prof. Valida Repovac-Nikšić and Assoc. Prof. Maja Savić-Bojanić from Sarajevo University, dealt with ethno-national populism in their war-torn country – a phenomenon that is characteristic for almost all Eastern European countries, but also for the “old democracies” in Western Europe.

Much more difficult was to involve colleagues from Central Asia. In the search for authors I was assisted by the Political Science professor at Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, Tatyana Dronzina, who has been a Visiting Prof. at ENU, Astana (now Nur-Sultan), Kazakhstan. Two articles, co-authored by professors and their graduate students, address one of the central risks of our time, terrorism (especially the confessions-driven). Professor, Dr. Sc. V.S. Baturin (E.A. Buketov State University, Karaganda) and S.E. Shakirov, Ph.D. from the L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Nur-Sultan city, analyzed religious terrorism from the point of view of conflictological discourse. Prof. Tatyana Dronzina and Dr. Yavor Raichev presented a study of Kosovo women involved in ISIS.

The initial absence of articles from Central Asia was eliminated after an intensive search which led to a mixed set of articles. “*Detection of power in the projection of power: the case of Uzbekistan*” was examined by Dr. Farkhod Tolipov, head of the scientific-oriented NGO Caravan of Knowledge. Associate Professors of the National University of Uzbekistan Kamola Saipova and Usmonzhan Butayev suggested a modern-day interpretation of national policy (on the example of the question of national minorities of Uzbekistan). Another important problem of our time was unfurled on the basis of an empirical study by Dr. Azamat Seitov – internet addiction among Uzbekistan's youth.

The first section of the issue ends with the article by Assoc. Prof. Petar Cholakov from the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, devoted to another important problem – the Roma minority, crime and politics in contemporary Bulgaria.

Part II of the collection of articles is vigorously shaped and distinct. It is devoted to Korea, a country that remains divided as a result of WWII (while Germany was reunited almost three decades ago). This series of articles was edited with the invaluable assistance of Prof. Doo-Seung Hong. For those who might ask whether the Korean topic fits in the “jigsaw puzzle” of this collection and matches the topic of the issue, let us recall that there are still two Koreas, North and South, separated decades ago by geopolitical maneuvering after WWII. The stark contrast between the two Koreas – one Communist, the other democratic and market oriented; one impoverished and dependent on foreign subsidy, the other, despite

its relatively small territory and population, representing the eleventh strongest world economy – is more than persuasive. Furthermore, the South Korean experience may demonstrate to the post-Communist countries that their advance to a developed and affluent status is achievable, but only under two conditions – a definitive break with the past, and the pertinent endeavors of the people. Let us not forget that the Republic of Korea is burdened with the need to maintain an expensive defense system, and that the country is currently absolutely deprived of ground access (by car or railway) to the rest of the world.

Professor Doo-Seung Hong, an internationally renowned Korean sociologist, presented the past and present of Korean sociology. Lyudmila Atanasova, a Bulgarian preparing her Ph.D thesis at Seoul National University, who also teaches Bulgarian literature at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, made a contribution on an enormously resonant topic – “The Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) as a Liminal Space and Heterotopia”. The DMZ is difficult to imagine for those who have not seen it – it is very similar to the Zone depicted in the A. Tarkovsky’s movie *Stalker*. Though it is a place seemingly outside the field and interest of sociology – as society itself is missing there – it is, nevertheless, a symbol and metaphor of the liminal that humans sometimes impose upon our planet.

The theme of a dreadful, and quite possible scenario for the future of humanity is continued by Assoc. Prof. Rumiya Tangalycheva (Russia, SPb University), who contributed a sociological analysis of the film *Train to Busan*, discussed as a scenario for the future of modern society.

Although this was not implicitly laid down from the beginning, the thematic circle of published articles confirmed that scholars are covering a wide range of topics of concern to our entire turbulent and changing global world, where there are no trends specific and typical only for separate remote corners of the world. A bitter proof was the recent terrorist attack in a faraway location such as Christchurch, New Zealand. This has proved once again that, despite different approaches, the same problems stimulate research in regions as far apart as the Balkans and Central Asia; we see that these countries share a common heritage of problems arising from their common past under the communist system. This is a serious prerequisite for future joint discussions and joint research, the basis of which was laid by our Special issue.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. (ret.) Stephan m. Nikolov,
Special issue’s Compiler and Editor, Sociological Problems (No2/2019, vol. 51)