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BOOK REVIEW

Tsvetelina Marinova, *Economie sociale et solidaire dans les pays des Balkans - Bulgarie, Roumanie, Serbie : quels enseignements*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 2021, 174 p.p., ISBN : 978-2-343-23771-8

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The book by Tsvetelina Marinova entitled *Économie sociale et solidaire dans les pays des Balkans - Bulgarie, Roumanie, Serbie : quels enseignements ?* is a timely, necessary and appealing study on the emerging concepts, institutions and public policies on social and solidarity economy (SSE) in the Balkans which is still a rarely explored sector. Nevertheless, the growing interest of economists and policy makers in the SSE is due to the persistent economic and social problems in the Balkan countries as well as their EU integration and commitments. Moreover, the SSE has centuries-long traditions in the region. Undoubtedly, during the transition to market economy, Bulgaria, Romania and Serbia have faced serious economic and social challenges, and the global economic crisis of 2008 and the Covid-19 crisis have further exacerbated and deepened the socioeconomic problems in the three Balkan countries and in Europe as well. Government measures and actions have been insufficient and ineffective in tackling unemployment, poverty and inequality. The crises have evoked new for alternative and innovative solutions coming from the civil society and its organizations.

The book presents the results of the author's several years of research on the historical, contemporary and institutional issues of the SSE in Bulgaria, Romania and Serbia. She has published numerous papers related to the problematic of the study in European journals such as: *Revue internationale de l'économie sociale*, *History of economics and economic thought of Ukraine*, *Sociological problems journal*, etc. A co-authored chapter on the emergence, ecosystem and challenges to the social enterprises in Bulgaria has recently appeared in the book "*Social enterprise in Central and Eastern Europe*" published by Routledge.

I will dwell on the following main ideas and contributions of the book:

First, the book presents and reconstructs the historical and institutional evolution of the SSE (particularly financial cooperatives) in the Balkans from the end of 19th century till nowadays. The author is interested in the major ideas, institutions and public policies on cooperatives in Bulgaria, Romania and Serbia in a historical and long-term perspective. She studies the national political, economic and cultural prerequisites and conditions in which the major concepts and institutions evolved as well as the influence from the developed European countries during different periods of their socioeconomic development: Ottoman/ capitalist period (1878-1944), socialist period (1945-1989) and post-socialist period (after 1989). The author outlines the specificities, the internal and external driving forces and constraints during each period.

The modern SSE in the Balkans has emerged since 1990s when a radical change in the political and economic system has been made. In the first part of the book Tsvetelina Marinova argues that the contemporary development of the SSE has resulted both from exogenous factors (new geopolitical orientation and EU accession during the transition) and endogenous factors such as the quality and effectiveness of national institutions, as well as by past experience (path dependence). This thesis the author supported by its analyses of the effects of the economic and financial crises (in the 1990s, the crisis from 2008, Covid-19 crisis), the fiscal and budgetary constraints (for example the role of monetary regime especially in Bulgaria), the poor institutional capacity of the state and the ineffective social policies as well as the commitments (euro adoption, convergence) deriving from the EU accession of Bulgaria and Romania. It is noteworthy that she claims that the Covid-19 crisis provides promising opportunities for the SSE organizations in the region despite the big challenges to the sector.

Second, Tsvetelina Marinova discusses the dominant role of the state in the development of the cooperative movement in the Balkans and in the process of

reshaping and modification of cooperatives from inclusive and democratic in the beginning of 20th century into extractive and nondemocratic organisations after WWII. It is interesting to find out the various stages of centralization, regulation and control of the cooperatives in the first half of 20th century and their transformation into *forms without substance*

¹ during the socialist period when the Soviet cooperative model was “imported”, “copied” and implemented in Bulgaria, Romania and Serbia. In my view the author should have focused more on the inappropriateness and deficiencies of that economic and cooperative model and its long-term consequences.

Third, closely related to the previous point, the book focuses on the transfer and adoption of ideas and institutions from Western Europe and Russia which have always played a crucial role in the development of the Balkan countries in the past as well as today. The author presents cooperative ideas and the role of cooperatives in the economy in the framework of the dominant ideologies (capitalism, socialism, agrarianism, dirigisme) in Western Europe, Russia which penetrated the region. Furthermore, she discusses the views and the ideas of the Balkan agrarian leaders (A. Stambolyiski, Mihail Genovsky, Gromoslav Mladenatz, Virgil Madgearu, etc.) who were original and much more radical from those in Europe.

One of the most intriguing part of the book is the chapter on the influence of the French, Italian, German and Russian scholars and practitioners on the formation of cooperative ideas and institutions in the Balkans. Tsvetelina Marinova dwells on the works and contributions of the famous theorists and practitioners of the cooperative movement in Bulgaria, Romania and Serbia such as Iliya Palazov, Hristo Ganev², Gromoslav Mladenatz, Mihailo Avramovic who closely studied the various cooperative schools and worked together with Charles Gide, Vahan Totomianz and other European intellectuals but whose studies are little known today. The book reveals slightly known facts about the role and contribution of Gide and Totomianz to the development of the cooperative movement and literature in Bulgaria and Romania. For example, the author discusses the introduction written by Gide³ to one of his translations into Bulgarian in which he showed a good knowledge of the cooperatives in the country. Quite interesting appears the contribution of Totomianz who taught courses on cooperative theory

¹ The debates on the transfer of Western European models on the Balkans began at the end of 19th century primarily in Romania, developed by the [Junimea](#) Society and T. Maiorescu. They discussed the inappropriateness of the imported institutions and norms to the national social, economic and cultural conditions and peculiarities (See Daskalov, Mishkova, 2014)

² Some of the works of Palazov and Ganev cited in the book are found in the State Archives and have never been published.

³ See Gide (1925)

and wrote his memoirs in Sofia. He was inspired by the solidarity spirit and mutual aid among the Bulgarians during the Ottoman empire and the specific Slavic community (*zadruga*). Totomianz authored a paper on the evolution of the Bulgarian cooperative movement (different types of cooperatives, the role of the popular banks and agricultural credit cooperatives, the state cooperative banks) which was published in the *Revue des études cooperatives*, in Paris ⁴.

Although Tsvetelina Marinova provides a bibliography of the works of the leading European scholars translated into Bulgarian, I consider that she should have developed more this very important part of her study⁵.

The author argues that after the fall of communism, the transfer of concepts and institutions from the EU has begun. New institutions and models of social enterprises have developed in the Balkans which are presented in the book and which merit further exploration.

Fourth, the author explores the similarities and differences among the three Balkan countries in the institutional trajectories of credit cooperatives from the Ottoman period till present. It starts with the oldest known and widely spread forms of mutual aid and cooperative labour - *zadruga*, which emerged in a natural, non-market economy which due to the national specificities and the transfer of the European ideas and practices evolved into modern credit cooperatives after the Liberation (1878). The financial cooperatives have played an important role in the financial system and in the modernization and advance of the countries before WWII. Tsvetelina Marinova studies the reasons for the disappearance of credit cooperatives in the Balkans.

In conclusion, I can say that the book is a rich source of information and ideas, a valuable contribution to the discussion about the historical and institutional evolution of SSE in the Balkans, its current challenges and opportunities. It provides several important guidelines for the development of SEE theory and institutions in the region in the course of comparative and institutional analyses.

⁴ See Totomianz (1935)

⁵ See for example the book on the Bulgarian cooperative literature by Dimchevska (1931) which offers a detailed bibliographical review of not only on the works of the Bulgarian economists and statesmen but on the translations of the French, Italian, Russian, German scholars at the end of 19th and in the beginning of 20th century.

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