

**THE TRANSITION IN BULGARIA – SPECIFIC FEATURES AND
RESULTS, PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES
(AN ATTEMPT AT A SOCIOLOGICAL CONTENT-ANALYSIS)**

UDC 316.334(497.2)

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Abstract. *The paper discusses some of the important aspects of the transition from planned-centralised to free-market economy and from totalitarian to democratic society carried out in Bulgaria. For the purpose an attempt is made to be applied in the quality content analysis – analysis of articles published from 10th December 2002 to 17th March 2003 in 100 consecutive issues of the most widely circulated and highly read Bulgarian daily newspaper – "Dneven Trud". In this way some of the most important specific features and results, problems and perspectives of the transition in Bulgaria have been shown. The analysis has been carried out in relation to two of the basic spheres of social life - economy and politics.*

Key words: *sociological method, transition, specific features, results (criteria), problems, perspectives.*

The period after the 10th of November 1989 has been a time of historical and radical transformations in and new challenges for all the main spheres of social life in Bulgaria – from economy to communications. Without exaggeration and to the same extent the same process has been valid for the sciences studying these spheres, taken as individual sciences or in interaction. As it is well known and officially publicized, the aim of all these changes has been the transition from a planned, highly centralised economy to a free, market economy and from a totalitarian to a democratic society. Therefore the purpose of my paper is to try and outline some of the most important specific features and results, problems and perspectives of the process of transition in Bulgaria from the point of view of sociology and the changes that have taken place in this fourteen-year period.

Part of the aspects of the transition that prompted the writing of this paper was the focus of attention of the round table discussion " Bulgaria after the Transition" held in Sofia on 2nd of December 2002. The Institute for Social Values and Structures "Ivan Hadjiiski"

helped by BNT and the daily newspaper "Dneven Trud" was the chief organiser. From 3rd to 9th December 2002, from issue 334 to issue 340 the column "Society" of the newspaper was given to the publication of the papers¹ not only of the direct participants in the discussion but also of the participants who joined in the discussion later on.

The recapitulation of the views expressed divides the participants into two groups. Some think that the period of transition is over, others that it is still going on. Therefore, at this point I should say that I could completely agree with part of the statements and the arguments supporting them. However, the third and the fourth part exist with which therefore I can agree only partially or I can completely disagree.

To make my initial grounds for the views expressed and the assessments just given clearer I will try to discuss briefly the requirements of the sociological method valid for the research process:

First, the study of different social components such as economy and politics should be done in their close connection with each other and their mutual dependence, in their interaction with the society as a whole and in a historical perspective.

Second, the study of each individual component, respectively of a distinct entity such as the firm in the economy should be done not only by taking into account its structure and content but also the whole variety of determining factors interacting naturally – subjective and objective, external and internal.

Third, the study of each human activity, either individual or in a group, in different social components and the distinct entities in them should be done by taking into account both the economic and sociological results achieved and the existing indicators which interact with and complement one another.

Fourth, the assessment criterion for the effectiveness of the individual component (economy, for example) and of its distinct entity (the firm, for example) should be looked for not so much in the component or the entity as in its necessary interaction with other components, entities and the society as a whole. Therefore this paper will use two types of criteria: interim or internal and final or sociological. The interim criteria are established by the specific character of the individual component or distinct entity but taken only as a relatively autonomous and independently functioning and developing system. The final criteria are established by the interaction between the individual component or entity with its likes, between it and the respective bigger social system whose part it is. It is these criteria that are strictly speaking sociological so we will have them in mind in the further discussion in this paper.

The sociological method requirements thus established represent a comparatively sound theoretical and methodological basis for the achievement of the aim of this paper – to point out specific features and results, problems and perspectives of the transition going on in Bulgaria. On the other hand as an additional analytical basis for my research I have used (more or less, and as a rule indirectly) all the other articles² published in another 93 consecutive issues of the paper from 10th December 2002 to 17th March 2003, i.e. 100 issues in all. Most of the articles were not published in the column "Society" but in

¹ The papers mentioned are the most important, though a rather limited part of the information basis for the attempt made to apply the quality content analysis rather than the quantity one.

² The limited and restricted basis of the analysis made necessary the additional explanation given in brackets in the title.

related ones, such as "Economy", "Network", "Business", "Planet", etc. If we take into account the fact that more than one relevant publication could be found in a separate issue of the newspaper in one or in different columns, it can be estimated that the size of the sample is actually about 500 items, i.e. headlines. In spite of the comparatively high statistical importance of the size and the method of selection of the sample of headlines we are much more interested in the **quality aspect of the content analysis applied** and not so much in its representativeness and quantity. Besides, with no intention to sound immodest, the author who is a contemporary of the transition finds that his own impressions and observations will be useful as additional information basis of the analysis in its stated aspects.

Without going into details, I will enumerate some of the most important specific features of the transformations in the period of transition in Bulgaria.

First, at the beginning of the period of transition the political parties made the principle of plurality in the fundamental principle of all the transformations carried out in the country. It opened the way to plurality and mobility not only of the components in the key spheres of social life, i.e. from its economy to its culture and communications but also of opinions and viewpoints, interests and types of property in these spheres. In other words, transformations of transition encompass all the spheres and fields of social life and try to penetrate their structural and content interior.

Second, without underestimating the experience gained up to now in our country and in the former socialist countries we can say that the period of transition passes through several common stages, complementing one another, following one after the other not so much logically as chronologically. The first one ends with the destruction of the closed political system of the totalitarian regime and the creation of the new pluralistic political system. The second stage covers establishment of the new democratic principles of the system of government, i.e. its institutions and laws. The third stage is the period of real transition, of economic reforms aiming to establish free market economy. Our ex president Zhelio Zhelev is the only one of all the authors who pays attention to this specific feature.

Third, the preceding feature shows that transition in our country is effected in the wrong way, i.e. first the institutions are established and only later values are changed. In other words, only after the democratic institutions have been built, civil society has been created and freedom of speech and press has been won it turns out that all these will be effective only if they have as their foundation a solid system of values clear to all or most of the people. The people should have known and shared in advance the possible differences they might come upon in relation to, for example, property, classes, status, social inequalities, lifestyle and standard of living. The analogous transition in the West is effected in the reverse order; i.e. it is made from the values to the institutions. In addition, it is thought that democratic values presuppose democratic institutions. The successful functioning of these institutions is the criterion for the completion of the process of transition. Of all the authors only Andrei Raichev and to some extent Zhivko Georgiev pay attention to these features.

Fourth, without taking into consideration the preceding features and seen in a historical perspective, the transition is unique and evolutionary. The peaceful transition called also "velvet revolution" is a result of two factors important for our conditions: the national round-table discussion and the so-called "jar economy".

Fifth, in the former socialist countries both the transition to democracy and market economy are effected through different forms and ways, means and deadlines under the influence of different objective and subjective, external and internal factors; and

Sixth, the results of the transformations carried out not only in the individual components but also in the social system as a whole acquire mixed and controversial dimensions during the transition. This means that the economy in transition will have the features both of a planned, centralized economy and of a free, market economy.

More important results achieved in the process of transition after 1989 can be outlined against the background of the specific features of the process of transition in our country already pointed out and subject to the requirements of the sociological method applied. It is these results obtained in different spheres and fields of the social system that were adopted by all of the authors mentioned as the most important criteria for the end of the process of transition in Bulgaria. It should be mentioned, however, that the individual authors in some of the cases depart from the principles of the sociological method by accentuating different social components and the results within these components, respectively criteria related to the transition and its completion. In this way the job is done "by piece" without an attempt to find more general and adequate criteria for the purpose. Both general and economic sociology offer such criteria.

Because of the complex nature of the problems they will be analyzed by using the results achieved only in two of the leading social sub-systems – economic and political.

Some of the important results in the economic system of the society are:

First, the existence of economy with a great variety of sectors, based on different types of property, where private property is the dominating one, whereas cooperative, mixed and state property are of lesser importance. All this comes as a result not so much of the measures taken in the monetary stage of the economic reform as of those taken in its structural stage; i.e. from privatization, restitution and the change of the priorities of production in different branches of economy. This result, although briefly, is mentioned by two of all of the authors – A. Raichev and Zh. Zhelev.

Second, the pluralistic economy, although in a different form and to a different extent begins to rest on its second basic foundation – market with its varieties: for industrial and consumer goods, for currency, for information resources, for labour, for securities, etc. This result of the reforms escapes the attention of all the authors mentioned.

Third, in close relation to and dependence on the sectors of the economy completely new social classes typical for the established democracies are formed in our country - low, middle and high. Besides an existing characteristic trend, which is expected to continue in the future, is the decreasing class mobility of the individuals. The sociologists Zh. Georgiev and especially A. Raichev give close attention to this result and the latter presents it as a major argument and therefore as a criterion for the end of the transition in Bulgaria; and

Fourth, undoubtedly the opinion of the European countries and America that Bulgaria has a functioning market economy has a beneficial effect on our country. This issue is often discussed in the press, by the newspaper "Trud" as well. This assessment could be accepted without any reserve unless three very important factors existed. The first one is that the World Bank and the IMF have been giving the main direction of the economic and social policy of all the governments since 1989. The second fact is the existence of the Currency Board in Bulgaria. The third fact is that traditionally and narrow-mindedly

the economy in our country is considered a separate and closed system. This contradicts, not only, but mostly the criterion used for the assessment, i.e. for the effectiveness of every individual component (as the basic requirement of the sociological method) which should be looked for not so much in the component itself as in its interaction with the other components, and with the society as a whole. Although most of the former state-owned enterprises have become private property, and those that are still state-owned are functioning more and more in compliance with market requirements, this undeniable result is not final or sociological for the present, but is only an interim criterion for effectiveness and not so much in the monetary as in the structural part of the economic reform in our country. More precisely, it is an interim criterion because it applies only to the relatively separate components within its own framework economy without considering its interaction with the other components of the society. Therefore at the moment we cannot speak of the existence of a proper market economy in Bulgaria.

Of course, it can be said that a working market economy exists if the economy of the country reaches the indicators of 1989 and registers a sustainable high growth, similar to that of the developed countries. The existence of this positive result after the implementation of the structural reform, the withdrawal of the international financial institutions and the removal of the Currency Board are an absolutely necessary condition. Something more. If the economy on a macro-,mezzo- and micro-level has a beneficial impact on all the other spheres and sections of the society and also feels their analogous impact, separately and as a whole, we can rightly say that the transition to market economy and democracy has been completed. The transformations carried out in our country, subject to the requirements of the sociological method, can be assessed more fully and more correctly and can be directed more effectively only when they are analysed in their interaction.

More important results in relation to the political system, respectively to the government of the society are:

First, structural reform of the system has gone through its transition from a one-party system to a multiparty model. The old trade unions were dissolved and replaced by new ones independent of the government professional organizations. The government women and youth organizations were dissolved. The multiparty elections for central and local government authorities have become a tradition. Zh. Zhelev gives a special place to this point and Prof. Peter-Emil Milev and Kancho Stoichev only to some extent discuss it. For the latter the end of transition is marked by destruction of the two-party model after appearance of the political center personified by the ex monarch and leader of Simeon II National Movement.

Second, there are marked changes in the content of the political activity demonstrated by the individual and group units. This means that first the people who establish and develop political relations are no longer the ordinary people, the supporters and the members of the parties but the leaders. Second, the accent in public relations changes and people devote their efforts to their everyday problems and not to making history, therefore the accent moves from the macro- to their micro-world. Third, politics becomes a separate social sphere. For Andrei Raichev and Peter-Emil Milev these results are also an important criterion for the completion of the process of transition in our country.

Third, result of the functioning of the political component is satisfactory neither as an interim or internal, nor as a final or sociological criterion for effectiveness. This means at least that on the one hand the interaction between and within the three powers – the ex-

ecutive, the judicial and the legislative is not effective enough. On the other hand the interaction between the three powers taken individually and as a whole with each of the other components of the society and the society as a whole and the interaction between the three powers and the structures of the civil society and the press are not effective either. Finally this also means that in reality the bills offered by the government, passed in Parliament and enforced by the judicial system are actually imprecise, imbalanced, awkward and contradictory. In this way neither the legislative regulations nor the rest of the statutory instruments meet contemporary requirements, including European legislation, for the effective functioning and development not only of the economy and the other basic spheres of the society but also of the social system as a whole.

It should be noted that the most important problems related to the process of transition will be illustrated in the two social spheres taken as an example, i.e. the economic and the political.

The most important problems for the economy are:

First, the slow economic growth which ranks our country last among the former socialist countries.

Second, the slow restructuring of the economy and the mistakes made in the process of privatization. This means at least two things that are closely connected: first, that our economy is and will be unable to take part in the international market competition and second, it has and will have limited importance and participation in the international division and co-operation of labour.

Third, the increasing social inequality and the poor existence of the people make them develop the tendency to retreat from society and cultivate in them the feeling and mentality of being rejected and humiliated and they ultimately consider themselves socially isolated and a marginal part of the society. The increasing emigration, especially of young people to Europe, America and even to some of our neighbouring countries demonstrates all these trends.

Fourth, relatively high per cent (about 40%) in our economy of the shadow economy, which does not pay taxes and social securities.

Fifth, relatively high tax and social security burden both common people and corporate bodies, a fact, which does not stimulate their economic and business activity.

The most important problems for the political system are:

First, lack of harmony in the relations between the institutions and the three powers.

Second, lack of independence of the institutions of the three powers, coming from shady, parallel and very often ill-intended economic, political, criminal and other internal and external groups and factors. Prof. Dragomir Draganov accentuates this problem.

Third, the national and public interests are not always dominant for the institutions in their activity and party, group, and the worst of all personal interests replace them.

Fourth, serious political cataclysms, caused by each change in power always have different negative effects, including all the other basic social components, especially economy.

Fifth, lack of a political elite, strongly supporting and defending the idea for consensus about all the problems that are important for the society and the state. Prof. Dragomir Draganov discusses this problem.

The economic and political problems that have been identified determine at the same time the most important directions to which all social powers should devote their efforts

in order to solve them in the short-, mid- and long-term perspective. On the other hand this model can be used for a possible analysis and transformation of other basic spheres of the society and the society as a whole.

In this way the principal requirements of sociological and economic-sociological method will be taken into account and practically used in the study and the change for the better of the processes and phenomena related not only to our existence now but also to our future well being.

That is why viewed and assessed in this way the transition in our country is not completed yet.

TRANZICIJA U BUGARSKOJ – SPECIFIČNE POJAVE I REZULTATI, PROBLEMI I PERSPEKTIVE

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Rad razmatra neke od bitnih aspekata tranzicije od centralno-planske ka tržišnoj ekonomiji i od totalitarnog ka demokratskom društvu u Bugarskoj. U tu svrhu izvršena je analiza članaka publikovanih u periodu 10.12.2002.-17.3.2003. u nizu od 100 radova u najprodavanijim i najčitanijim bugarskim dnevnim novinama - "Dneven Trud". Na taj način su prikazani neki od najbitnijih dostigunuća i rezultata, problema i perspektiva tranzicije u Bugarskoj.

Ključne reči: *sociološki metod, tranzicija, rezultati (kriterijumi), problemi, perspektive.*