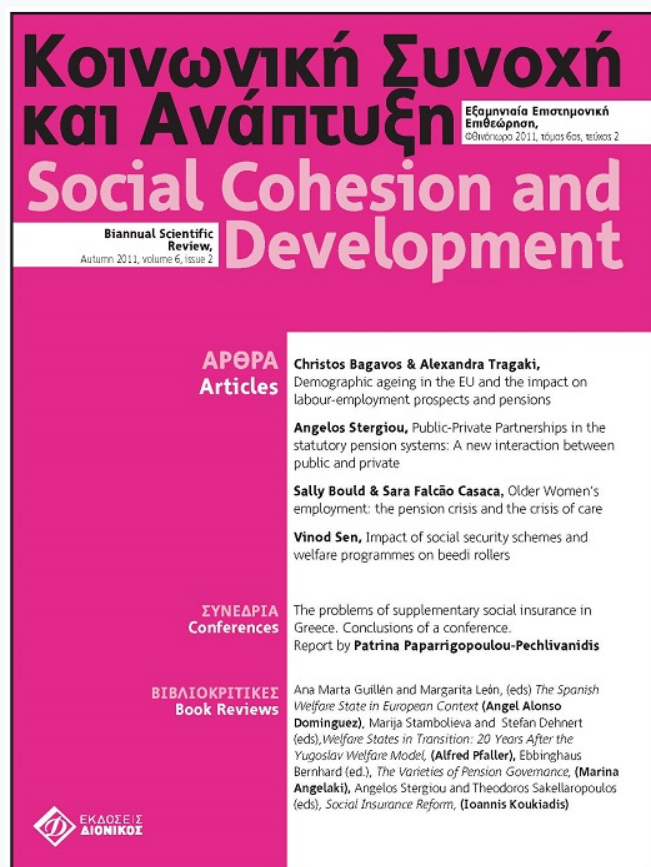


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Marija Stambolieva, Stefan Dehnert (eds), *Welfare States in Transition: 20 Years After the Yugoslav Welfare Model*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Sofia 2011

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In short, the volume is a strong X-ray of the SWS literature, offering an overview of its transformations, but also dealt with in a coherent and detailed way, which makes it a support manual for academics who want to include the Spanish case in comparative analyses. This was one of the objectives marked by the editors in the introduction of the book and amply fulfilled, because it fills a gap in the literature on the subject by the absence to date of a volume in English dealing with the Spanish case.

It is not clear, however, if the book persuades the readers to accept that the classification of the SWS within the Mediterranean model may be disputable, for the book itself is inconclusive in this respect. This is undoubtedly an important issue proposed, but the arguments presented in some chapters by the contributors on reminiscent familistic patterns in the SWS may address to a more intense debate on the subject in the future.

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Marija Stambolieva, Stefan Dehnert (eds),
Welfare States in Transition: 20 Years After the Yugoslav Welfare Model,
Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Sofia 2011

When the countries of Eastern and East Central Europe abandoned socialism and introduced a market economy based on private enterprise they eliminated the fundament of the system of social protection prevailing until then. Neither was it possible any longer to maintain full employment so to speak “by decree”, overstaffing state enterprises and public institutions, nor was the state able any longer to allocate national resources and assign entitlements at will, according to politically set priorities, restricting the consumption level of the active population (by determining wages and setting prices) in order to “finance” pensioners’ consumption and public goods, such as high-quality universal health care, free university education, scientific research and well-equipped armed forces.

A capitalist market economy demands explicit transfers of incomes acquired by entrepreneurs, capital investors, free-lancers and employed workers in the products, capital and labor markets to the state and other agencies of redistribution. The state is able to afford entitlements (to income subsidies and to public goods and services) only to the extent it is able and willing to tax market incomes, market transactions and wealth. Contrary to the socialist control economy of the times before 1989, solidarity has a visible price tag in the capitalist market economy.

The post-communist states of Eastern and East Central Europe faced the task of reorganizing the solidarity their democratically emancipated citizens were expecting and demanding under highly unfavorable conditions, unfavorable in several respects:

- Citizens, socialized into an anonymous, uncontrollable and rather irresponsible system that had obscured relations between social benefits and costs, hesitated to endorse high taxes in order to finance effective social protection.
- Predatory elites, often from the technical nomenclatura of the previous regime, seized state power for the purpose of self-enrichment and put the development of a competent public administration at the service of its citizens on the back burner. As the enforcement of efficiency and integrity was neglected, the delivery of public services, including social services, deteriorated.

- The transition from a planned economy, highly sheltered from foreign competition, to an open capitalist economy made large parts of the work-force redundant and gave rise to a sizable informal, low-wage labor market segment. The need for economic support increased as dramatically as the contribution base to finance self-sustained pension and health-care systems shrank.

One could add a fourth adversity: the range of choices for the post-communist governments to set up a new system of social protection was strongly biased (a) by the then dominant belief within the international advisors' community that the economic weight of the state should be kept small in order not to stifle capitalist accumulation and (b) by the orientation at the Western paradigm of the formal-work-contract economy and the misleading notion of informality as a temporary deviation from this norm rather than a structural element of the post-transition economy. This twin orientation, that guided reforms notwithstanding plenty of ad-hoc improvisation, tended to consolidate social polarization and exclusion rather than setting up effective new structures of social inclusion.

The successor states of former Yugoslavia were latecomers to the transformation process that followed the demise of socialism. The wars that accompanied the emergence of the new states between Austria and Greece retarded and burdened the build-up of a new social order. But being late with re-organizing society also provided the chance to learn from the experience of other transition countries and to take a more critical look at the recommendations that were formulated during the heydays of the Washington Consensus.

This is the background to those processes of policy development in the Yugoslavian successor states which are described in great detail in "Welfare States in Transition – 20 Years After the Yugoslav Welfare Model", a compendium produced by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. The volume does not aim at normative statements on how best to reduce poverty and social exclusion in circumstances shaped by the twin shocks of abrupt system change and secession wars. Neither does it aim at a theory of welfare state transformation in transition societies. Its central purpose is to present an account of what happened in each of the Yugoslavian successor states, with the exception of Kosovo, with regard to social and labor market policies from national independence until 2010. Each chapter (two on each country) addresses the policy areas of health-care, pensions, social assistance to the various categories of people in need, unemployment protection and active labor market measures. Systematic information in form of tables on benefits, coverage, eligibilities, expenditure, institutions, administrative responsibilities and other things supplement the narrative.

The wealth of descriptive information makes "Welfare States in Transition – 20 Years After the Yugoslav Welfare Model" a unique document of reference for all those who study the development of the post-Yugoslavian societies, but also for those whose focus of interest is the transition from authoritarian socialism to capitalism cum democracy from a more general perspective, which transcends the Balkans.

But the compendium is more than a quarry of facts. Even though they stay away from political theory and do not leave the reporting mode of presenting social-policy decisions the country studies convey an understanding of the forces that have been shaping this decision-making process. The narrative on welfare-state policies is embedded in a description of the new countries' overall political development. When you read the country reports you realize very soon that the development of the post-transition welfare state has often followed a logic of short-term political convenience rather than a logic of long-term institution building. Only to a small – from country

to country varying – degree was it guided by the objective of setting up a new structure of social protection and social inclusion that would be robust under the new conditions and would be up to the new challenges of wide-spread poverty and exclusion.

The narratives show that successive governments largely lacked the capability of setting up a strategy of welfare-state development. Much of their limited capability of strategic governance was absorbed by other priorities, in part related to nation-building and in part to the struggle for political power. Under these conditions, foreign advisors linked to the large international institutions of economic support – and their prevailing ideology – had considerable influence. It was mostly them who brought some strategic orientation into the patchwork of ad hoc attempts to honor entitlements of socialist times (e.g. with regard to pensions) to respond to the dramatical increase in poverty and displacement and to save political key groups from social degradation. The country reports also get you a feeling of the governments' limited capacity to turn laws on entitlements into a well-functioning reality. Co-editor Marija Stambolieva's concluding chapter offers a concise analytical summary of the political processes that transformed the welfare states in the post-Yugoslavian states and of the forces that have influenced these processes.

The policy-making described in "Welfare States in Transition – 20 Years After the Yugoslav Welfare Model", incoherent as it may have been, has eventually created a new architecture of social protection that will not be fundamentally changed again in the foreseeable future. But it is to be expected that this architecture will be confronted with plenty of demands for adjustment, extension and trimming as social and economic problems feed into political pressure. And it is also to be expected that welfare-state reform will remain a salient issue – from the policy advisor's as well as from the comparative observer's perspective – in the Balkan social-science community. "Welfare States in Transition – 20 Years After the Yugoslav Welfare Model" will be an indispensable volume of reference in the debate.

Alfred Pfaller
Editorial Board,
International Politics and Society

Ebbinghaus Bernhard (ed.),
The Varieties of Pension Governance,
Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011

Pension privatisation, entailing a shift away from pay-as-you-go (PAYG) public pension systems to private prefunded pensions has been justified by reference to economic and demographic factors. In the European Union (EU) privatisation has been predominantly associated with the developments that took place in Central and Eastern Europe in the 1990s and 2000s. Nonetheless, pension fund capitalism should not be seen as a recent trend in the European continent as some countries have a long tradition of multi-pillar systems with pension fund capitalism. The global financial crisis and its negative impact on pension fund assets seems to have halted (at least temporarily) this trend, while raising important questions regarding the governance and supervision of private pensions and the adequacy of future benefits.

Against this background, the volume entitled 'The Varieties of Pension Governance' edited by Bernhard Ebbinghaus, Professor of Sociology at the University of Mannheim and including contributions from a number of renowned scholars in the field aims at providing an in-depth