

EROSION OF SLOVENIAN SOCIAL POLICY

SUMMARY

The paper looks into the regulation of social policy in relation to other policies in Slovenia, political parties' approach to socio-political issues, the public opinion on these issues, and present approaches to social care. The subordination of social to economic policy increasingly undermines the welfare state, one of the most important social inventions of the previous century. The concept of an autonomous social policy, without which the preservation of the welfare state is impossible, was introduced into Slovenia very early. It was first formulated during the period between the two World Wars, when Slovenia was still a part of Yugoslavia, i.e. at the time when it first appeared in Scandinavian countries. After the Second World War, the socialist system diluted social policy into an instrumental ingredient of other policies. After Slovenia gained independence in the early 1990s, it took over the European concept of social policy (»mainstreaming«) which incorporates the same blind spot that was characteristic of the former, socialist social policy. As a consequence, Slovenia has now found itself in a situation in which not even one political party's program calls for the autonomy of social policy, with socio-democratic political parties being no exception in this respect. It is

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precisely this reason – rather than the economic crisis – that brought about the current erosion of social policy in Slovenia. The submission of social policy to economic policy, which in turn is submitted to neoliberal state politics, is an introduction into the crisis of the welfare state.

INTRODUCTION

Slovenia has been facing the political, economic and social crisis. The cost of rescuing the Slovenian banking sector, which lies at the core of the economic crisis, is equal to EUR 2,000 per citizen, including newborn babies (to illustrate the proportion of the debt, let me say that every Slovenian citizen owes EUR 530 more than a citizen of Spain the banking debt of which amounts to unimaginable EUR 59.3 billion). Does a solution to the crisis lie with the national policy sector, the economy or social policy? Deliberations about this issue most frequently yield one of the following answers:

- Had parliamentary parties pursued more suitable policies, agreed on priorities and adopted right laws, it would be easier to respond to the economic challenges incurred by the crisis and consequently, there would be more resources available (and less tension) to regulate social issues.
- The above statement could be countered by an opposite argument that relativizes the importance of domestic political disputes and places emphasis on the impact of the European and the global economic crisis. The international advancement of the neoliberal agenda triggers crises at lower levels which no country can avoid,² meaning that individual responses are simply expressions of various local situations from which individual countries started when joining the globalization process.
- The third answer tends to assert the social dimension. Only when the marginalization of social groups and entire classes is reduced will it be possible to prevent the disintegration of society as a whole, which is a prerequisite for resolving all other problems and particularly the most important ones, meaning those that cannot be solved without consensual policies and the activation of social capital. This social emphasis can be pushed even further in the direction of the left-wing perspective: unless

² Europe has responded to the current crisis in two ways: with the general spending cuts and the structural reform, with the latter being more dangerous than the former. The structural reform primarily involves cutbacks on social spending, which makes way for the privatization of pension funds, the health care and the education system. In this sense, it is a typical Americanization of the European social model (Lettieri, 2012) with especially the smallest and the newest members of the EU being unable to avoid it.

social inequalities are reduced and consequently, the capitalist economy socialized, wealth will continue to be a mirror image of poverty; the more of the former, the more of the latter, meaning that every enhancement of the existing capitalist paradigm only aggravates the fundamental problem (of inequality) rather than solves it.

Which manner of thinking is more appropriate? The first, the second or the third? What is the role of the welfare state and social work within it?

SYSTEMIC REGULATION

Wrong questions suggest wrong answers. An assumption shared by both the rightist and the leftist political parties in Slovenia is that the fundamental sectors of society, i.e. the political, the economic and the social sector, are necessarily arranged in a hierarchical order. It is precisely what constitutes the blind spot in responses to the crisis mentioned above – all of them, much like wrong questions, presuppose one or another kind of hierarchy of these sectors. The classical Marxist assumption about the economic basis that supports everything else is in its essence the same as the one embraced by modern neoliberals who find inspiration in Smith's »invisible hand« of the market and the »slim« state. The Slovenian translation of Smith's *Wealth of Nations* is accompanied by a thorough study – whose author is a neoliberal economist³ – on what can be learned from Smith's classical work. The concluding point is as follows: »the road to welfare is paved with peace, the state ruled by law and low taxes, while everything else will take care of itself« (Brščič, 2010: 690). If there is no war to obstruct trade, if taxes are low and do not burden entrepreneurs and consumers, and if we have the state ruled by law that protects private property and regulates traffic rules, then welfare will come of its own accord. The problem with this assumption is the same as that embedded in classical Marxism (only the prefix is the opposite): politics is subordinated to the economy, while »everything else« including the whole social superstructure and regulation of social issues is subordinated to politics. This mistake is illustrated in Figure 1. Such a hierarchical scheme is often

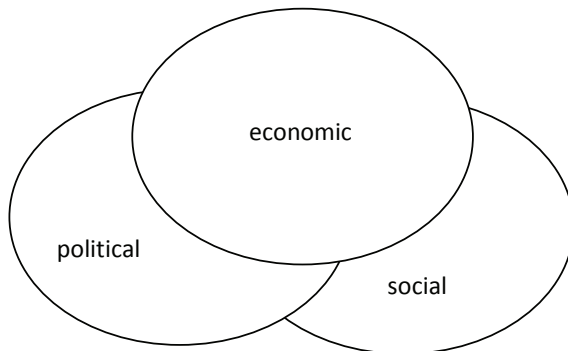
³ The same author, the economist Bernard Brščič, also clearly expressed his understanding, and rejection, of the role of the welfare state. He says the following:

the welfare state is nothing else but »an instrument of social engineering whose goal is to ensure the greatest possible equality through expressly progressive taxation. The prevailing motive has thus become envy rather than sympathy. However, free societies cannot be based on envy /.../ Any attempt at correcting market results would be strongly arbitrary and unjust in itself. Social justice is therefore a unique contradictio in adiecto, justice cannot be social, it can only be procedural, relying on the powerful framework of the state ruled by law to ensure equal opportunities for market players.

The dilemma of progressive liberals, who ponder exchanging freedom for equality (social security), is false. If we are willing to sacrifice freedom for security, we do not deserve either freedom or security. (Brščič, 2005: 8-9).

complemented with the principle of subsidiarity⁴ that, however, invariably serves to maintain sectoral hierarchy, never to oppose it.

Figure 1 Sectoral subordination



In Slovenia, this hierarchical scheme was first theoretically surpassed by Andrej Gosar's⁵ concept of modern social policy formulated immediately after the First World War, and explicitly explained later in his main work dating from the 1930s (Gosar, 1933, 1935; Dragoš, 2007). Gosar's important contribution was his emphasis on the importance of social policy autonomy from ideological and political parties' decisions and from other policies, for example, economic policy. It is not unimportant that at the same time the same thing was pointed out by Albin Ogris⁶ who focused on the parliamentary system of representative democracy. In his main work on political parties (Ogris, 1926), he emphasized the need for the autonomy of the political sector which could not be reduced to any »other social norming (normative) system«, because politics, says Ogris (1926: 218), is an »autonomous system of the rules of social conduct independent from other systems.« In other words, national politics is a system that should remain autonomous (in relation to other systems), much like social policy, as a part of it, should remain autonomous.

I use this short historical excursion to draw attention to the three points that also have some bearing on the present crisis in Slovenia:

⁴ At the beginning of the 20th century, Aleš Ušeničnik, a theologian of official Catholicism in Slovenia, disputed the demand for the social function of the state by referring to the Catholic variant of subsidiarity, first formulated by Janez E. Krek of the Catholic camp (for more, see Dragoš, 1998: 231 ss). It is very similar – as we shall see in the last chapter of this text – to the present-day argument to which the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs refers to when enforcing decentralization of the centres for social work.

⁵ Andrej Gosar, Phd. (1887 – 1970), a sociologist, economist, lawyer and for a brief period of time the Yugoslav official for social policy.

⁶ Albin Ogris, Phd. (1885 – 1959), a lawyer and economist.

- In Slovenia, qualified warnings about the urgency of having an autonomous social policy (as well as other sectoral policies) were issued soon after the end of the First World War, meaning early enough, well in time⁷ and simultaneously with the development of the Scandinavian model of the welfare state based precisely on the autonomy of social policy.
- Despite these early warnings about the urgency of preserving the autonomy of social sectors, Gosar's (as well as Ogris's) approach was completely ignored by both the Catholic right-wing and the Marxist left-wing.
- The autonomy of social sectors creates the need for connections among them that would be different from those characteristic of the hierarchical models of social regulation (shown in Chart 1); this perspective first gained currency – decades after Gosar had drawn attention to it – within the classical functional theory (Parsons, 1951), and later in the modern systems theory (Luhmann, 1981, 1995; Willke, 1993).

The autonomy of social sectors or systems, to use the jargon of the systems theory, calls for completely different approaches to the integration of modern societies than those used in the hierarchical arrangement. An important component enabling the autonomy of sectors is a »deliberate self-determination« as Willke (1993:43) named it. It is implemented through the system directing *and* self-directing but the two processes should not be regarded as equivalent. The system directing means that:

- the system itself is the most competent (authorized) to detect relevant differences between itself and the environment.⁸
- the system itself detects the differences that are relevant for it, and thematizes them (this cannot be performed by other systems external to the system in question).
- the system internally distributes relevant information forwarding it to its own units.

⁷ Gosar's and Ogris's emphasizing of the importance of the autonomy of the key sectors for the regulation of modern societies coincided with the dissatisfaction over parliamentary democracy and the emergence of contrasting, authoritarian corporate concepts oriented towards the subordination of social and economic issues and dismantling of democratic principles.

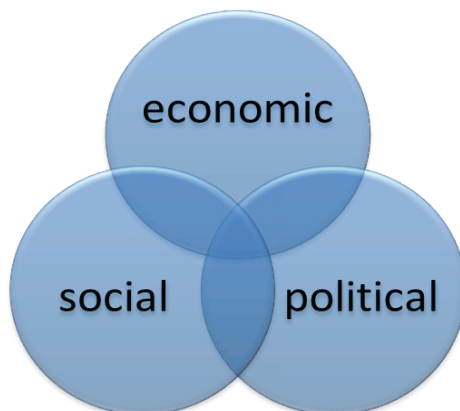
⁸ For example, there are many differences between the social policy system and its environment (the economic, the legal and other systems), with some of these differences being more important, others less important, and still others being of no consequences. Since the essence of a system operation is the regulation of the differences between the system in question and its environment, the key question is which differences are of higher and which of lower relevance for the system; related decisions should be taken by the system itself, and not by the suprasystem units that are external to the system in question. For example, viewed from the perspective of the autonomous social policy, the differences concerning the dynamics/developments on the labor force market or stock exchange indexes are less important than social support enjoyed by individuals in their informal social networks, while viewed from the perspective of the economic system, the priorities are precisely the opposite.

In contrast to the system directing, the system self-directing implies a self-referential reduction (based on a specific communication code⁹) or organization of complexity through which the system reproduces itself within its contingent, changing environment (for more on this, see Luhmann, 1995). The autonomy achieved through directing and self-directing is dissimilar to heteronomous regulation and autarchy. It enables social systems to achieve self-reference, that is to say, »it enables them not only to organize, based on the internal criteria, their own complexity but also constitute the difference between themselves and the environment« (Bernik, 1990: 753; similarly Luhmann, 1995: 437-477). Giddens, too, holds a similar view of the role of system autonomy; »social systems can be considered as **reproduced relations of autonomy and independence in interaction**« (emphasis in the original; Giddens, 1981: 50).

In the circumstances of an increasing complexity, the simple principles once employed to regulate social development have been rendered useless. The principles such as hierarchy, »l'assès faire« or the general invoking of subsidiarity¹⁰ are too rudimentary because they deliberately understate the increasingly unstable, unpredictable, risky (Franklin, 1998), irreversible and growing functional differentiation of social processes and structures whose regulation calls for complementary responses that would enable an adequate/a satisfactory integration of intricately differentiated units. Since it is not quite clear which solutions would be suitable in coping with these problems, and since ready-made »recipes« do not exist, the question is one of the most difficult within social sciences; to a certain extent, we can learn from the examples of good practices and through reflections about mistakes made in the past, one of which is the hierarchical system (shown in Figure 1) that smothers or completely obstructs the autonomy of individual sectors. An alternative to hierarchy is interfusion as shown in Figure 2.

⁹ Various systems are based on various, specific communication codes; for example, the economic system is based on money, the legal system on justice, the social system on de-marginalization, the system of professional social work on aid, and the general political (parliamentary-democratic) system on consensus.

¹⁰ For more about problems with the general invoking of the principle of subsidiarity – which is one of the fundamental European and Slovenian principles in integrating social system – see Dragoš et al 2010; McDonagh, 2009; Endo, 1994.

Figure 2 *Overlapping system scheme*

Functional differentiation and specialization as a consequence of the social division of work has shaped, within various areas (activities), special systems that are not separate but rather distinctive. Owing to their internal complexity and the specific way in which they communicate among themselves, the complexity of the external environment to which these systems respond – which viewed from the perspective of each individual system is constituted by other systems – has also been growing. The political, the economic and the legal systems represent the external environment of the social system, and vice versa. Owing to the complexity shown as the overlapping sections in Figure 2, none of these systems – and even less so all of them together – can be regulated from a single, external and superordinate centre. The strategies that are of key importance for the preservation of the whole (i.e. society as the broadest system of all), emerge from the systems interactions, meaning within the areas where they overlap (for more on this, see Luhmann, 1995: 213, 410). For example, economic policy intersects with the economic system and general national policy and in the process of development becomes structured into a distinctive, partial system (coordinated by the Ministry of the Economy). Social policy, foreign affairs policy, defence policy, tripartite negotiation system among the state, employers and employees, cultural policy – these are all examples of system overlapping, with sporadic interventions turning into independent, partial systems, or failing to do so (in Slovenia, for example, housing policy, migration policy, multicultural policy etc.). In this sense, says Willke, social policy is »needed to cover up the contradictions in constituting both autonomous politics as well as an autonomous economy.« The fundamental function of social policy as an autonomous system

»is to introduce into the operation mode of immanently limitless and unscrupulous social subsystems the restrictions that make risks within one subsystem manageable in confrontations with another complementary risk«¹¹ (Willke, 1993: 86).

To illustrate the problems occurring within these overlapping sections, let me recapitulate five abstract types of strategic conduct that a system combines in adapting to its external environment and with respect to its own, internal structure (Luhmann, 1981: 146 – 165):

1. A system can facilitate its situation with regard to the environment by exchanging an objective situation for a subjective one. The expectations of the environment are internalized by the system and turned into its own goals, thus becoming a part of the system operation through institutionalization.

2. The challenges posed by the environment can to a certain extent be immobilized through an internal focusing on consensus about subjective perspectives. As a result, the basic methods of processing experiences (the perception of the external world, the definitions of reality, routines, values etc.) are institutionalized.

3. The uncontrollable, indefinite and unpredictable challenges can also be handled by means of the environmental differentiation strategy. This approach enables the system to develop external specializations. The system delimits various areas in its environment (it first delimits itself with regard to the environment and then various areas of relevance in the environment), and then fixes transactions with the external world along these borders in order to preserve its autonomy.

4. Not only the differentiation of the environment, but also the (internal) differentiation of the system itself is one of the basic strategies that increases the system's ability to adjust to external challenges. Internal differentiation leads to the creation of subsystems, to decentralization and autonomy of individual parts of the (formerly undifferentiated) system. The result is a greater adaptability of the entire system, since harmful effects from the environment are localized in this way, which is of critical importance for the survival in instable circumstances: only certain parts of the system remain exposed to the uncontrollable influences from the outside, but these cannot penetrate the system, because the differentiated system structure prevents them from being automatically transferred to the system as a whole.

5. The next strategy is related to the degree to which the system structure is non-fixed. Every decision-making presupposes certain stability of premises, principles or recommendations, on the basis of which it is possible to select among

¹¹ For more on the autonomy of social policy, see Rus, 1990: 365 – 372; Ferge, 1980; Heilbroner, 1970; Lee & Raban, 1988.

alternatives. Stability ensures predictability which is in turn ensured by the system structure. At the same time, the structure must be open and indefinite to a certain extent, so that it can absorb as much complexity and unpredictability of external challenges as possible without (repeatedly) undergoing changes. Since the degree of definiteness and indefiniteness of the system structure is established by the system itself rather than its environment, this is a very important system strategy.

The above strategies render impossible the pinpointing of a common operation pattern that would apply to different systems within various areas of system intersecting/overlapping. What is clear, though, is that any kind of subordination would be dysfunctional, since the system environment (both external and internal) is no longer hierarchical or predictable or controllable from one point of super-representation that is located outside the system units. Similarly, any shortcut that would deny the autonomy of these systems would lead to the colonization of one system by another. The strategies mentioned above serve to preserve system autonomy in the given (overlapping) conditions, with individual systems adapting to the laws of autonomy, interests and logic of other and different systems. In accordance with the axioms of the system theory that says that there is no system without system boundaries – since a system can regulate its interactions with the environment only through its boundaries – the overlapping sections are neuralgic points of integration, because the boundaries of a system are strongly relativized precisely within the sections where it overlaps with other systems. Put differently, in the process of adapting to the environment, the autonomy of the system is relativized. A system defined by its overlapping with other systems can control another system only to the extent to which it itself is controlled by other systems; when this condition is removed, the adjustments are reduced to the zero sum play which leads to the colonization of other system(s) by mainstreaming of one system into other system(s). In Slovenia, the problems appearing in the sections where systems overlap, which are a consequence of the mainstreaming of system relations, are obvious in several areas. The most important are the tripartite neo-corporative scheme (see Stanojević, 2010), health care policy that ignores social indicators of health (Leskošek, 2012), and the welfare state.

MAINSTREAMING OF SOCIAL POLICY

In the document delineating the national strategy for social protection until 2010 (NP, 2008), the social policy program was described precisely in terms of its outflow, leakage and transmission to other policies. It was formulated as follows:

»**Inclusion of social policies in other policies:** The elements of social policy in Slovenia have been traditionally dispersed across various areas and the present

efforts are aimed at preserving these elements or incorporating them into various policies (so-called mainstreaming) (emphasis in the original, item 134).

To dispel any potential dilemma as to what is meant by this, the document proceeds with the provisional list of areas covered by other policies within which care for marginalized groups should be provided. The list includes housing, education and employment policies followed by what is called "sociala"¹², plus judiciary, fiscal, health care, family and cultural policies (the one last mentioned, for example, envisages »exemption from the payment of television licence for materially deprived and disabled persons,« *ibid.*).

The autonomy of social policy has been eliminated through its mainstreaming into other policies. It is precisely this fact that makes so frivolous the argument that social benefits cannot be raised to the subsistence level because we are in crisis, too indebted, in need of the stabilization of the banking sector and so on. It is also what stood behind these same arguments during the period when there was no crisis and when Slovenia recorded the highest growth rates. And finally, it is why the provision in the recently adopted Social Assistance Benefits Act, stipulating that »the recipient of a social benefit or social care bonus cannot be in a better social position than someone who provides the means of livelihood through work or derives it from labour-related rights« (ZSVP, 2010, Article 6), was taken as something self-evident.

If it is true that social benefits are intended for persons who »cannot ensure the minimum subsistence for reasons that are beyond their influence« (*ibid.*), why then has this right been suspended through the preceding provision which stipulates that the upper limit of social benefits must be below the minimum wage? What should be done when the minimum wage is lower than the subsistence threshold? Why should not the legislation stipulate precisely the opposite, i.e. that social benefits should by no means be lower than the subsistence threshold, particularly when income from work is lower than the subsistence threshold? The »mainstreaming« excuse in this case is far from being convincing. If the »mainstreaming« logic shatters the integrity and autonomy of social policy by dissipating it across other policies – in this case the policy of labour market flexibilization – the least one would expect is that the social legislation would include a social corrective rather than an economic condition, stipulating that the lowest income from work should not be lower than the amount of social benefits. Even before managers began to exert pressure on taxation by insisting on the »socialna kapica« principle,¹³ the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs implanted of its own accord the economic »ceiling« in the

¹² »Sociala« is a slightly pejorative term for social care.

¹³ »Socialna kapica«, literally meaning »social cap« is a populist name for the planned taxation of the highest income, according to which the income above that level would be exempt from taxes. It is populist because it has nothing to do with the regulation of the social situation of those who would qualify for this tax relief.

social legislation. »Mainstreaming« had become an integral part of social legislation even before the crisis struck, during the period of an economic boom, and the reason was not a switch to a new, modernized, »European« or »Scandinavian« social policy. The same concept – except for the boilerplate expression »streamlining« – has been around for some time, ever since the socialist times. It can be found in socialist documents in the same form as quoted above (SSUSP, 1985, Article 5). The Slovenian paradox lies in the fact that the former socialist contraction of social policy within economic policy was eventually introduced into the legislation by the political right-wing during the premiership of Janez Janša,¹⁴ and was put into practice by the left-wing under Borut Pahor.¹⁵ The »*mainstreaming*«¹⁶ eventually completely transformed social policy into an emergency exit for the armies of the unemployed who were forced to take on worthless jobs falling short of providing their livelihoods. And what was the goal behind all this? The rescuing of the capitalist economy (in Slovenia) that is unable to determine wage quotients in higher wage groups on the basis of a minimum wage that would be above the subsistence level. Since the only way to motivate people to take the worst jobs that produce the employed poor is to maintain a group which is in an even worse situation, as long as the welfare state still provides help for the unemployed poor, the aid they receive must not be so high as to pull them out from poverty. Social policy – as the most important European innovation through which capitalism was socialized more than a half-century ago while society was protected from disintegration – was diluted into an instrument used by the capitalist economy to bring down the cost of labour. In this process, trade unions, the only organized force, remain powerless. All the most important workforce motivation strategies in the capitalist system, for example, employee participation in profit, the expansion of internal ownership, co-management and industrial democracy, are lost battles in Slovenia. It seems that there is no way to reverse this trend; trade unions only manage to slow it down. Can we expect that the solution to the autonomy of social policy will be provided by political parties? Left-wing parties if not right-wing ones?

SOCIAL POLICY AND POLITICAL PARTIES

Pre-election topics and election programs can be considered the main indicators of the importance or »weight« that political protagonists attach to social

¹⁴ Janez Janša, the leader of the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS), the strongest right-wing party in Slovenia, first served as Prime Minister between 2004 and 2008.

¹⁵ Borut Pahor, the leader of the Social Democrats (SD), the strongest left-wing party, served as Prime Minister between 2008 and 2011.

¹⁶ For the criticism of the "mainstreaming" approach in social policy on the European level, see Mosher & Trubek, 2003; Rubery, 2002.

policy. Pre-election topics are the most important instruments through which political parties try to win support from voters, while political party programs written by political parties' intellectual elites represent systematic appeals to potential voters. At the 2008 parliamentary elections, when Slovenia got the left-centre government, the following themes were most prominent in public confrontations (Votive, 2008): the economic situation and inflation, the Patria scandal, economic crime, the independence and the role of the media, the construction of the Šentvid tunnel, and the future of the public education system and the health care. Social policy was not among them. A look at these seven most important issues discussed by political competitors will show that only the last mentioned topic contains socio-political subjects, but only conditionally, since the health care sector is the responsibility of the Ministry of Health, while the regulation of social policy is in the hands of the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs.

To what extent, then, is social policy present in political parties' programs? To establish how often social policy was mentioned (frequency), I surveyed all the programs. My presupposition was that whenever a political party uses the syntagm »social policy« (in the singular) in its program, it appeals, or at least alludes to a certain (relatively) consistent set of goals or measures aimed at regulating this area. By contrast, the use of »social policies« in the plural form does not express the need for a consistent social policy but rather indicates the absence of a common, consistent, planned and professional set of measures. It should not be overlooked that many measures undertaken by the state have social impacts even when they are not introduced with that purpose in mind, meaning that they cannot be considered a part of social policy – such are, for example, the flat tax rate, financial help to companies in crisis, neoliberal legislation that enforces market relations onto various areas and so on. All of these measures as a rule have significant social consequences, but do not qualify as social measures, and even less as indicators of social policies. At the same time, there are many social measures pertaining to other areas, ranging from social contributions, unemployment benefits, programs for addicts, free schooling and the basic health care, to social contributions for the clergy provided from the budget, student food coupons, national balancing schemes for underdeveloped regions; all these measures produce social impacts but they similarly are not a part of social policy. Furthermore, there are mimicking measures that are only apparent social policy measures; these are introduced by the ministry responsible for social policy and they do have certain social effects but they nevertheless cannot be taken as indicators of social policy because in reality they have nothing to do with it. One such measure is a benefit for large families, which takes the number of children (capitation) as the only criterion regardless of the social situation of the family. This means that the state finances large families

regardless of their material situation, including well-off families, and this money comes from the tax pool to which poor families also contribute. The real purpose behind this measure is to boost the birth rate rather than reduce social risks faced by materially underprivileged families. Since natality policy is conspicuously controversial and has been proved to be dysfunctional, it is legitimized through references to social policy in order to obscure the mimicry goal (viewed from the perspective of a social mimicry theory, social policy would be an imitation model, while the function of mime is performed by the official explanation of the concrete measure).¹⁷ Makeshift measures, non-harmonized interventions into the areas occasionally displaying acute needs, and the strong interests of political protagonists do not constitute social policy unless these measures are brought in line with the common goal, or introduced as a part of the common goal and evaluated on that basis. In short, measures that have social impacts are not necessarily social measures, and individual social measures do not necessarily constitute social policy. In the market economy, social policy should be a part of the planned national policy that ensures the wealth is redistributed to that part of the population that is unable to compete on the market and therefore cannot afford the basic social security and social integration.

My empirical survey included the programs of all political parties, both parliamentary and non-parliamentary, that run for the 2008 parliamentary elections, meaning 17 programs altogether.¹⁸ They comprised several hundred pages of text; some programs were over 90 pages long, with only a fraction of them being short. It should be noted that political programs are written by the intellectual elite of the party in question, that texts are well deliberated and elaborate, and that they are formulated – at least in most cases – on the basis of intra-party negotiations and strategic deliberations on what is important and how to present it.

The results of my survey were unexpected and disastrous. In 17 programs altogether, social policy was mentioned only sixteen times.¹⁹ Since in three cases the expression was obviously used as a filler or a platitude inserted only for the rhetorical effect, the above figure should be reduced to thirteen. This means that in the hundreds of pages of program texts written by the intellectual elites of 17 political parties, the syntagm »social policy« appears **only 13 times**. Its frequency is therefore lower than the random typing mistake frequency, especially if we take

¹⁷ For more on social mimicry theory see Smrke 2007.

¹⁸ Parliamentary parties: SD – Social Democrats, SDS – Slovenian Democratic Party, Zares, DeSUS – Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia, SNS – Slovenian National Party, SLS – Slovenian People's Party, LDS – Liberal Democracy of Slovenia. Non-parliamentary parties: NSi – New Slovenia, Lipa, LPR – List for Justice and Development, ZS – Greens of Slovenia, KDS – Christian Democratic Party, LZČPV – List for Clean Drinking Water, SSN – Party of the Slovenian Nation, ZK – Green Coalition, NPS – Forward Slovenia, Akacije.

¹⁹ For the distribution of the syntagm »social policy« within individual parties' programs, see Dragoš 2010a: 191.

into account the length of the analyzed texts and the number of authors. Of these 13 mentions, six were found in the programs of parliamentary parties and seven in the programs of parties that do not have a seat in the parliament. This means that in Slovenia, social policy does not exist as something that is important, desired, planned, needed or necessary, or something that the political elites consider to be important for the administration of the state and gathering of voters' support and therefore worthy of mentioning.

SOCIAL PROBLEMS AND THE PUBLIC OPINION

One of the rare advantages of Slovenia with regard to social problems is the public opinion's unabating sensitivity towards social issues, social inequalities and the state's responsibility in the area of social care (cf.: Rus & Toš, 2005, Kramberger, 1996, Dragoš, 2010a).

Table 1 contains the summary data taken from several SJM²⁰ surveys, showing the attitude of the Slovenian public towards the most important risk factors that threaten Slovenian society, while Table 2 shows the attitude of the public towards the inequality of income.

Table 1 Which factors threaten the security of Slovenia (medium + very strong)?

Risk factors	2001		2003		2005		2007		2009	
	rank	%	rank	%	rank	%	rank	%	rank	%
Economic problems	4.	67.6	4.	67.6	4.	65.6	5.	59.0	3.	77.4
Terrorism	7.	29.8	9.	20.9	9.	22.4	9.	23.3	9.	17.2
Extreme nationalism	8.	29.1	8.	28.0	8.	27.9	8.	26.4	7.	27.9
Internal political instability	6.	46.5	6.	51.8	6.	45.2	6.	48.0	8.	22.2
Conflicts in the former Yugoslavia	9.	29.0	7.	40.7	7.	35.5	7.	31.8	6.	37.0
Unemployment	1.	75.9	1.	82.2	1.	79.1	3.	69.3	1.	88.8
Suicides	5.	62.5	5.	65.0	5.	60.2	4.	61.1	4.	61.1
Poverty	2.	73.4	2.	78.8	2.	74.5	1.	72.8	2.	82.7
Declining birth rate	3.	68.5	3.	74.5	3.	74.4	2.	72.2	5.	55.6

Table 2 Income differences should be (%)

Year	1995	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2009
INCREASED	10.3	4.2	3.6	7.9	6.4	6.8	1.7
REDUCED	77.8	89.4	74.3	77.3	77.7	76.1	87.1
EQUALIZED	/	4.3	5.4	4.8	4.8	5.8	4.3

²⁰ Tables 1 and 2 show responses to the same questions asked in succeeding surveys on the Slovenian public opinion (SJM); source: Toš, 1999, 2004, 2009.

In all surveys, among the ten proposed risk factors,²¹ the respondents chose unemployment and poverty as the factors that most threaten security in Slovenia. Although the unemployment rate in Slovenia, if compared to the unemployment rates in most other European countries, is not above the average and poverty is still below the average, the Slovenian public continues to be acutely aware of the factors that most seriously threaten social integrity. Another important message sent by the public – and one that is diametrically opposite to the stance of the political, economic and other professional elites – can be derived from its attitude towards economic problems. The economic problems, including cyclic crisis, is a factor evaluated as being of high importance, regularly occupying the fourth or the fifth place, as shown in Table 1. The point is that the »economic problems« factor never occupies the first place, which is alternately taken by poverty and unemployment. This is the crux of the matter! In the opinion of the Slovenian public, poverty (along with unemployment as the main cause of poverty) is a problematic issue in the period of the economic boom as well as crisis; poverty is dangerous in three ways:

- it may lead to the lasting exclusion of groups that live below the subsistence threshold;
- it may lead to the emergence of a special (sub)culture of poverty essentially different from that of the majority population, which is reproduced across generations when a child is born into a poor family;²²
- it poses the greatest threat to political culture, because it erodes the legitimacy of the democratic system.²³

Table 2 shows that the majority of respondents thought that income differences should be reduced, since they assess the existing inequality as excessive; a tiny minority thought the opposite, and their percentage has even fallen during the past two decades from slightly more than 10 percent to only 1.7 percent. A comparison of this data with the prevalent culture²⁴ among the economic and political elites

²¹ Only one factor has been omitted from Table 1, i.e. attitude towards AIDS, because it is ascribed the smallest importance and it does not appear in all surveys.

²² The problematic aspect of the culture of poverty is that it represents the most radical form of exclusion, that as a rule it cannot be rectified through the increase of material transfers (since it involves patterns and values that are acquired through primary socialization) and that it poses an explicit risk to the integrity of the entire society, since it can transform from subculture into counterculture. A comparative advantage of Slovenia with regard to most world and European countries is that, for the time being, it has not culturally based/conditioned poverty (except for smaller groups of the Roma population in Dolenjska), but the trends are not encouraging: systematic underestimation of the poverty problem proportion on the part of the political and economic elites, based on the fact that it is still below the European average, has over the past twenty years led to the increase in poverty among the elders and created the new category of the employed poor. The risk: the time span needed for poverty to turn into the culture of poverty is two generations. Slovenia is only a few years away from it.

²³ Poor classes abstain from political participation more than others; only the radicalized minority participates in elections, while the highest classes, because they have the greatest access to various sources of power, exert the strongest influence on legislators to adjust the legislation to their own interests.

²⁴ In the sense of values, statements, interests, systemic measures, visions of the future.

again yields a diametrically opposite picture. The political and entrepreneurial circles, and surprisingly the professional ones too, mainly stigmatize all the warnings and statements about the need to reduce income differences or other inequalities, labelling them »egalitarian.«

The essence: the public opinion (in addition to trade unions) continues to be an important and strong albeit lonely bulwark against the taken-for-granted neoliberal principles, the curbing of the welfare state and the increase of social distance among groups and classes. It could be the most important source of legitimacy for the political elites if they choose to pursue a different regulation of society and strengthen the autonomy of social policy. The ignoring of this legitimacy source leads to the »Greek« scenario.

SOCIAL CARE POLICY

The poverty rate in Slovenia has been on the increase. The latest data show that the at-risk-of-poverty rate is 13.6% (this is the figure for 2011; see Intihar, 2012), meaning that 13.6% of people in Slovenia lived below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold, which translates into 273,000 individuals, while one year earlier this rate was 12.7%.²⁵ The most threatened are households without active earners (39.9% of them are below the poverty threshold), and particularly those with dependent children (74.5%), one-member households (40.0%), single parent households (30.8%), couples with three children or more (18.2%), unemployed persons (44.6%), retired women (22.3%), women over 64 (27.8%), and the category of tenants (29.8%). A similar deterioration of the situation has been observed in relation to material deprivation;²⁶ in 2011 it amounted to 17.2% rising by 1.4 percentage points in comparison with the previous year (ibid.).

It should be noted, however, that in terms of the poverty rate, social stratification and expenditure for state administration Slovenia is by no means a critical case (for the time being). According to the first mentioned criterion, it is still above the European average; the average poverty rate in the EU-27 is 23% compared to 13.6% in Slovenia. According to the income inequality criterion, Slovenia is still an exemplary country in the company of the top ranking Scandinavian countries (Eurostat/Gini, 2011): the Gini coefficient of the European (EU-27) average is 30.5 compared to the 23.8 average for Slovenia. This indicates a low level of income

²⁵ These are people who, according to the calculation of net income for one-member households, live on less than EUR 600 a month (applies to adult persons); the risk-of-poverty threshold for a two-member household (without children) is EUR 900.

²⁶ Materially deprived persons who live in a household and, as a consequence of the limited financial sources, lack at least three or four of the nine elements of material deprivation.

inequalities, positioning Slovenia immediately behind the best-ranking Norway (22.9) and Iceland (23.6) and ahead of Sweden (24.4). As regards the share of employees in the services that are of key importance for the functioning of the (welfare) state, Slovenia is modest and below the European average; as it is evident from Table 3 only Finland, Sweden, Ireland, Denmark and Lithuania are more parsimonious than Slovenia in this respect; as regards the number of employees in the health sector, Slovenia is far below the European average and ahead of only five European countries that are even »slimmer« in this respect: Bulgaria, Estonia, Cyprus, Romania and Latvia. Slovenia is above the European average only in terms of the number of employees in education.

Table 3 The share of employees in the state administration, the education and the health sector in % (Mencinger, 2012)

State	State administration	Education	Health sector
EU-27	8.48	7.95	10.46
Belgium	11.52	10.03	12.36
Bulgaria	8.39	7.58	5.16
Czech Republic	7.80	6.79	7.56
Denmark	6.37	8.29	18.86
Germany	8.57	6.27	11.63
Estonia	6.57	9.03	5.97
Ireland	6.08	7.61	11.67
Greece	13.29	10.23	6.90
Spain	7.39	6.30	6.86
France	11.26	7.51	12.44
Italy	8.09	8.87	7.84
Cyprus	10.36	7.94	4.65
Latvia	8.38	8.10	4.75
Lithuania	6.30	10.84	7.31
Luxembourg	11.90	8.18	9.88
Hungary	7.92	8.93	7.32
Malta	10.19	9.59	8.18
Netherlands	7.66	7.35	16.79
Austria	7.98	5.90	9.08
Poland	8.03	9.51	6.91
Portugal	8.30	7.64	8.18
Romania	7.56	6.44	5.86
Slovenia	6.55	8.94	6.47
Slovakia	7.82	7.89	7.15
Finland	5.36	7.52	16.42
Sweden	6.38	11.90	17.37
Great Britain	7.98	9.93	12.85

When considering the table above, it should be noted that with regard to the total expenditure on social administration costs (% of the total expenditure on social protection), Slovenia is considerably below the European average, occupying the sixteenth place among the EU-27 states (Eurostat/costs, 2010). Furthermore, it should not be overlooked that Slovenia is a very modest welfare state in terms of expenditures: according to the criterion of the total expenditure on social protection per head of population, the rate in Slovenia is less than a half of the European average, with only Malta and the countries of the former Soviet bloc trailing behind (namely Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Romania; Eurostat/expenditure, 2010). This does not mean that Slovenia could not achieve a better ranking according to the criterion of social expenditure. It is not a poor country. It has been obviously catching up with the European average in recent years (over the past 16 years, Slovenia's GDP per capita increased from 74% to 84% of the European average), but with only 24.8% of the GDP set aside for social protection it steadily remains below the European average (which is 29.4% in the EU-27). It ranks even worse if we look into individual items within total social expenditures. The unemployment benefits section is the most neglected one – only 2.8% of the total social benefits are earmarked for the unemployed, while the European average is 6.0% (according to the same criterion, the only two countries that are even more inconsiderate of their unemployed are Poland and the UK; Eurostat/protection, 2010). In short, the data show that the welfare state in Slovenia is by no means lavish, but rather the opposite, according to the key social indicators it had been quite »slim« even before the rigorous austerity measures were put in place in 2012, affecting the social sector as well.

Unfavourable trends have negative effects on the integration of marginalized social groups as well as the entire social structure. These problems, however, cannot be regulated by abdicating the state regulation within the area of social protection, which would lead to the »unleashing« of individual initiatives and the privatization of social activities that would in turn reduce the costs for the state and further encourage the flaunting of the invisible-hand-of-the-market argument. However, it is precisely what the current Minister of Finance, Janez Šušteršič, strives for. His understanding of the welfare state is as follows:

»The state budget, the redistribution of money and loans are not the resources that could enable us to ensure the welfare state /.../ Even though this may sound as an economically obsolete view, it is primarily the economic strength of the country that ensures the welfare state and conditions enabling people to live well.« This then leads him to conclude that *»it is clear that an economically weak state cannot be a welfare state«* (Svenšek & Vuković, 2012: 10).

The problem with this mental outlook is not only that it is taken as self-evident by the present Slovenian government. It was taken as self-evident by previous

governments and it is self-evident for the majority of European states because it is self-evident for the USA. The role of the welfare state should be precisely the opposite of that stated by the Minister of Finance: the welfare state is also – and especially – needed when the economy is in recession and when the burden of the cost-saving measures is largely borne by the lower classes. The social role of the state cannot be performed independently from the redistribution role of the state budget, and it is not true that the welfare state is ensured through the »economic strength,« since experience shows precisely the opposite – in the absence of (autonomous) social policy, the lowest social classes and marginalized groups get the smallest (or none at all) share of the profit even during the periods of the economic boom.²⁷ The absurdity of the pretence that during the crisis period Slovenia cannot afford the resources needed to finance the welfare state is obvious from the two tables below; Table 4 shows the comparison of the social care contributions paid by employed persons and employers; Table 5 shows the expenses of the state paid in transfers for unemployed persons and social security (excluding pensions).²⁸

Table 4 Social security contributions (BJF, 2012)

(in mio EUR)	1992	1994	1996	1998	2006	2009	2011	2012*	Total
Total	876.9	1,440.9	1,753.3	2,091.1	4,231.2	5,161.3	5,267.6	1,783.8	64,646.0
Contributions by employed persons	430.1	691.9	926.1	1,155.1	2,262.9	2,743.2	2,774.0	915.9	34,335.3
Contributions by employers	410.1	691.8	743.2	815.3	1,682.8	2,037.1	2,060.3	704.5	25,929.8

* data for 2012, until and including April

Table 5 Transfers to individuals and households – transfers for unemployed people and for ensuring social security (BJF 2012)

Expenses (in mio EUR)	1992	1994	1996	1998	2006	2009	2011	2012*	Total
Transfers to unemployed persons	54.1	72.7	52.8	82.9	96.9	150.0	243.6	77.6	1,981.2
Social security transfers	35.0	76.7	114.9	143.1	345.2	381.7	384.4	120.4	4,659.8

* data for 2012 until and including April

²⁷ The same was true of Slovenia during the highest economic boom that preceded the current crisis. Even at the time when Slovenia had one of the greatest GDP growth rates in Europe, and when the share of public sector expenses (calculated in GDP) was below the European average, social benefits and minimal wages were radically below the subsistence threshold (see Dragoš, 2010b., 2010c.).

²⁸ I was alerted to this data (in BJF, 2012) by Goran Lukič, to whom I would like to express my sincere thanks.

It is clear from Table 4 that since 1996 the social security contributions paid by Slovenian workers have increased compared to those paid by the employers. The reason is that in 1996, the contribution rate for pension and disability insurance for employers was reduced from 15.5% to 8.85%. The professed goal of unburdening the employers was to boost the economic activity and through it fill the state budget to enable it to address the needs of social security. Despite this, Slovenia has found itself in the worst economic crisis in several decades and the austerity measures taken by the state first affected the basic social benefits. The comparison of data in Tables 4 and 5 shows that during the past two decades the total paid for social contributions by the employers is by EUR 8,405.5 million lower than the total paid by employed persons (because employers' contribution rate is half that paid by the employed persons) and that the employers' savings arising from the relief granted to them by the state is as much as EUR 1,764.5 million greater than the total of transfers to the unemployed people²⁹ and social security transfers paid by the state over the past two decades. Just in passing, let me mention that in the second wave of austerity measures scheduled to be implemented in the autumn of 2012, the cash benefit for unemployed persons will be reduced for the second time (it was first reduced a few months ago), once again under the pretence that there is no money and that it is just that we all share the burden of saving.³⁰ This was the atmosphere in which the fundamental act that regulates the social security area has been drafted, the one which will in the long run influence the development of social policy in Slovenia: this document is the draft bill on the Social Security Activities (ZSVD, 2011).

The bill has many weaknesses.³¹ Three of the proposed solutions are particularly detrimental:

²⁹ *The latest innovative solution by the state related to the shortage of jobs for one of the most critical categories of the unemployed – young, highly educated first-job seekers – is the so-called volunteer traineeship, promoted on the web page of the Ministry of Justice and Public Administration. It is a typical, open and cynical exploitation of the workforce, since young job-seekers are expected to enter employment relations under the following terms: »A volunteer trainee is NOT entitled to: cash payment for the work done, reimbursement of travel expenses, reimbursement of food expenses, and annual leave pay« (MPJU, 2012). This call was published at the time when the European Commission explicitly pointed out that »One of the most worrisome points in relation to traineeships is the lack of proper social protection coverage« since »using traineeships as free labour is a growing phenomenon« (emphasis in the original; EU, 2012: 7).*

³⁰ *The opinion of the International Labour Organization (ILO) on such justice is evident from the introductory article in their latest publication stating: »If the fact that wage earners are asked to pay for the irresponsibility of financial institutions was not indecent enough, the current imposition by the European Commission, the IMF and the European Central Bank of a reduction in the minimum wage by up to a quarter in order to unblock the »aid package« to crisis-ridden European countries is not only morally corrupt but is also self-defeating in terms of economic outcomes. Moreover, this goes squarely against the spirit of ILO Convention No. 131 which calls for the minimum wage to strike a balance between »the needs of workers and their families« and »economic factors« (Cunniah, 2012.: 5).*

³¹ *For a more thorough criticism of this bill, see the thematic unit of the journal Socialno delo (Socialno delo, 2011.), featuring articles written from various perspectives (authors: B. Lešnik, V. Flaker, V. Leskošek, S. Dragoš, R. Zidar, J. Škerjanc, J. Mali).*

- planned deprofessionalization and politicization of social policy;
- planned approach to user participation;
- decentralization of the social security system.

Deprofessionalization and politicization will be the consequences of the unreasonable and unexplained transfer of the main responsibilities from the current Social Chamber of Slovenia to the newly established Quality Assurance Agency. The Agency is scheduled to operate under the auspices of the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs and to be fully subordinated to the Minister (meaning the political representative), who will also write the rule book for the Agency, supervise its work, choose its staff and so on. How could this Agency be more professional and less political than the Social Chamber which is in the present arrangement the only autonomous professional body responsible for the cooperation between the political representatives of the state and the system of social security? The same question could apply to the new Social Protection Institute of the Republic of Slovenia (as if we have not had one already) and the scheduled professional and user council with the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs. Both will be the consultation bodies whose members will be recruited by the Minister, representing some kind of the extended consulting collegium whose members – chosen by the Minister himself! – will help him defend the measures that he himself has included in his program (as a member of the current ruling coalition). The problem with this approach to user participation in social services is as follows: why should we have a user council on such an abstract level as the Ministry – i.e. under its auspices and chosen by the Minister – while the user councils within concrete organizations that actually implement services are to be facultative? What is the point of it? Why should not we take an opposite approach and establish mandatory user councils (composed of real service users) with service providers, while strengthening the currently weak supervisory role of the Ministry? I will now focus on the decentralization project that dominates the entire bill on social activities.

The bill anticipates a radical decentralization (in the sense of »municipalization«) of almost all fundamental services on which the basic, minimal concept of the welfare state in Slovenia is based. Decentralization means that financial and other responsibilities relating to the provision of social care services will be transferred from the state to local authorities, that is to say municipalities, regardless of the varying conditions of municipal budgets.³² The disproportionate transfer of the

³² *The proposed bill recognizes eight types of social care services: first social aid, counselling and assistance, planning and organization of assistance, social care at home, social care within residential units, long-term care, work under special conditions and a social service – most of these are planned to be financed by municipalities rather than the state. The municipalities should in the future also be responsible for: social prevention, the first social aid, counselling and assistance, planning and organization of assistance, at least 50% of the total expenses of social care at home, the development and experimental programs, and cooperation with NGOs.*

financial responsibilities from the state to municipalities is very problematic, since it can accelerate the erosion of the very foundations of the welfare state. The reasons are a large number of municipalities and their excessive fragmentation, with most of them not even meeting the legal requirements for the establishment, and large differences among them in terms of their financial condition rendering some of them unable to ensure at all times the required, safe and accurate financing of the social care services. The Slovenian local self-government system established during the last two decades is so obviously problematic that for several years now not one expert or politician has dared to dispute the problem or say that the existing arrangement is a suitable solution to the requirements of the local government and that the number of municipalities is justified. One example: Article 13 of the Local Government Act stipulates that in order to be established a municipality has to have the population of at least 5,000, and only exceptionally (in special circumstances) the population can be smaller but not less than 2,000 people. The fragmentation of local communities that turned the former 60 municipalities into as many as 210, led to the situation in which in the mid 2009, 52% of all municipalities had less than 5,000 inhabitants, 12% had less than 2000, while 3% of them had even less than 1,000. It is the source of absurdity which emerges when we compare Hodoš, the municipality with the smallest population (320 residents) with the City of Ljubljana, the municipality with the greatest population (278,314 residents) – the number of Hodoš residents is 870 times smaller than the number of Ljubljana residents. But the »municipal« nightmare does not end there. We should not forget that a further fragmentation of Slovenia into regions is on the way. Regionalization is a principle that is even enshrined in the Constitution, but there is still no minimal consensus on the form, authorities or the number of future regions. Moreover, Slovenia already has »development regions« (12 of them) which are, according to the Promotion of Balanced Regional Development Act, defined as functional territorial units for the implementation of regional policies. And there is more to it. Slovenia is also divided into 58 administrative units which implement national tasks on the local level. In short, Slovenian local government is so fragmented that the ramification of municipalities and the growing differences among them prevent them from implementing the tasks they are authorized for because they neither have money nor human resources to fulfil these tasks. Experts on local self-government estimate that »the majority of municipalities are already unable to execute 300 tasks within 150 areas of work«³³; only 27 municipalities (i.e. 13%) are able to survive on their own, meaning without financial aid from the state. Furthermore, viewed from the comparative European perspective, although the

³³ The estimate of Stane Vlačj, Phd. presented at the conference: »Za decentralizacijo Slovenije« (For the decentralization of Slovenia) (IFIMES, Ljubljana: 19. 10. 2010).

portion of the state budget earmarked for the needs of the local government is comparable to European budgets, sums allocated to the Slovenian municipalities from the budget are smaller than the European average.

The question that imposes itself is as follows: given the situation, why would Slovenia want to make the basic services of social care dependent on municipal budgets rather than the state budget? Less than a year ago, the representatives of the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs explained the necessity of decentralizing social care by the planned introduction of regions. The argument was to the effect that since we will obtain new regions, social work centres³⁴ should be adjusted to and harmonized with the responsibilities that these regions will have. Now, when even the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs has realized that the regionalization project has come to a deadlock, they no longer mention regions but the decentralization of social work centres is still in play, only the argument has changed: they must be adjusted to the requirements of local municipal governments. The explanation is not only lame, but also contradictory. In fact, the professed objective of decentralization is to make centres for social work better integrated into local communities by making their operation tied to municipalities and dependent on municipal authorities. However, even if we assume that this is true, the enigma that remains unsolved is why one year ago decentralization was explained by the necessity of adjusting social work centres to regions which are higher-level organizational units than municipalities and more remote from the community than municipalities (see., *Socialno delo*, 2011: 47 - 49). In other words, if social work centres' responsibilities were to be changed because of the planned division into regions, why should we still insist on the changes if it has become clear that regions will not be introduced? If the objective is to bring services closer to the community, why were social work centres pushed in the direction of regions, i.e. away from communities? Was the real intention behind decentralization perhaps different? Could it be that in this way the state planned to save some money by transferring social expenses to municipalities? Although it is probable that the neoliberal tendency towards the »slim« state was the motive, the calculation is improbable, since, as already said, the majority of municipalities are already incapable of survival, and if they cannot afford additional expenses for social care, the state is obliged to cover these expenses. How could then the state save money? There is another explanation according to which the decentralization of social care is a way to rescue (reanimate) the defunct local government project. In this scenario, the real objective is to revive municipalities, and the instrument that is used to achieve this goal is the decentralization of the welfare state, while the victims are social work centres whose operation will be

³⁴ *Social Work Centres (CSD) are the fundamental institutions of social care in Slovenia, and among other things, also the most important places for the implementation of professional social work.*

fragmented into 210 non-connected units, meaning that they will become a conduit for users' dissatisfaction. In short, it is not possible to avoid the impression that the decentralization project has least to do with the purpose offered as its legitimization, i.e. the strengthening of the community function of the centres for social work. If the strengthening of community services is the main concern, then the legislation should move in the opposite direction. The autonomy of centres should be protected on the local level, so that the dysfunctional characteristics of the fragmented local self-government are not transposed to social services of public importance, while at the same time the authorities and the responsibilities of the state for the entire system of social care should be emphasized.

CONCLUSION

The erosion, i.e. modernization of the traditional community (most) aggravates the management of life risks for those who cannot help themselves. The main question of social integration is whether risks should be transferred primarily to individuals or collectivized. The former solution moves in the direction of neoliberal models that boost freedom and (with it) the responsibility of individuals at the expense of security in the way that all related risks are delegated to the individual level. The second solution lies in the collectivization of **fundamental** risks which owing to the disappearance of traditional communities (family, relatives, neighbourhoods) are transferred to the more abstract, higher-level units. In the capitalist organization of the economy, the welfare state has become, through social policy, the most important and the only functioning answer to these contradictions. The liberal undermining of the concept of the welfare state began with the affirmation of the market sector at the expense of state's responsibilities, and this enterprising of modern organizations has on the state level succumbed to the ultraliberal dogma at the intersection of the two trends. It first happened when the market liberalization affected the fundamental subsistence needs of individuals and fundamental community goods (e.g. water, public transport, the basic health and social security), and then when the state evaded the market regulation by retreating from common matters rather than getting involved in a different manner. When a state finds itself at the point where the two trends intersect, politicians begin to use the same concepts and the same jargon as economists brandishing the argument about the "invisible hand" of the market. As a consequence, social policy becomes an instrument in the hands of economic policy (enterprising of the state), and the ministry responsible for socially vulnerable groups begins to pass legislation that works against them.

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EROZIJA SLOVENSKE SOCIJALNE POLITIKE

SAŽETAK

Članak analizira reguliranje socijalne politike u odnosu na ostale politike u Sloveniji, pristup političkih stranaka sociopolitičkim pitanjima, javno mišljenje o tim pitanjima te sadašnje pristupe socijalnoj skrbi. Podređivanje socijalne politike ekonomskoj politici sve više ugrožava socijalnu državu, jednu od najvažnijih društvenih ideja prethodnog stoljeća. Koncept neovisne socijalne politike, bez koje bi očuvanje socijalne države bilo nemoguće, u Sloveniju je uveden vrlo rano. Prvi put je formuliran u razdoblju između dva svjetska rata dok je Slovenija još bila dio Jugoslavije, tj. u vrijeme kada se po prvi put pojavio u skandinavskim zemljama. Nakon Drugog svjetskog rata, socijalni sustav razvodnio je socijalnu politiku u instrumentalni sastojak ostalih politika. Nakon što je Slovenija ranih 1990.-ih postala neovisna, preuzela je europski koncept socijalne politike (»mainstreaming«) koji uključuje istu slabu točku koja je karakteristična za prijašnje, socijalističke socijalne politike. Kao rezultat navedenog, Slovenija se našla u situaciji u kojoj program niti jedne političke stranke ne traži autonomiju socijalne politike, s tim da socijaldemokratske stranke nisu iznimka u tom pogledu. Upravo je to, a ne ekonomska kriza, uzrok erozije socijalne politike u Sloveniji. Podređivanje socijalne politike ekonomskoj politici, koja je zatim podređena neoliberalnoj državnoj politici, uvod je u krizu socijalne države.

Ključne riječi: autonomija, socijalna politika, socijalna država, neoliberalizam, socijalna skrb.