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Review article

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SERBIA'S SOCIAL POLICY THROUGH THE EPOCHS: INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND IDENTITY PATTERNS***

Abstract

The paper analyzes the historical development of Serbia's social policy through the institutional phases and identity dimensions of its formation. Starting from the assumption that social policy reflects broader social, political, and value-based transformations, the paper identifies the key epochs of its development: the premodern period, the charitable-humanitarian epoch, the state-institutional phase, the socialist-universalist model, the crisis-transition epoch, and the reform-European period. Special attention is devoted to the institutional development of social policy, as well as to the changes in the value-based and identity patterns that shaped the relationship between society and the state toward social risks, poverty, and vulnerable social groups. The paper proceeds from the thesis that Serbia's social policy developed through a dynamic relationship between continuity and discontinuity, whereby traditional values of solidarity, charity, and family responsibility were gradually transformed into contemporary principles of social justice, human rights, and social inclusion. The methodological approach is based on historical and comparative analysis. The results of the analysis indicate that the contemporary model of Serbia's social policy represents a mixed system in which the state, local communities, and civil society have complementary roles. The paper concludes that the further development of Serbia's social policy implies linking identity-based traditions of solidarity with institutionally sustainable responses to contemporary social challenges.

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INTRODUCTION

Social policy is an applied social and academic scholarly discipline, as well as a field of political science and practical policy, concerned with the ways in which society recognizes, conceptualizes, and responds to social needs, while improving care and support for members of the community. It includes a set of activities carried out with the aim of improving people's standard of living, especially for those who are in a less favorable social position. The universal goals of social policy are the reduction of poverty and social inequalities, the satisfaction of human needs, the improvement of the quality of life, and the promotion of social justice. In its historical continuity, social policy has relied on four groups of instruments: laws and regulations, for example, those concerning social protection and the family; public programs, such as social assistance and pensions; public services, such as homes for the elderly and centers for social work; and the activities of charitable, humanitarian, and non-governmental organizations in providing social services to vulnerable groups.

This field of policy has always been influenced by value-based and institutional factors. Viewed from a historical perspective, the factors of its development include the development of the state and social rights, the modernization of society, industrialization and urbanization, the struggle of vulnerable populations, especially the poor and the unemployed, for their social position, as well as the influence of the church and religious values (Jugović i Gavrilović 2020). Historically, social policy was more a reactive activity of society and the state, aimed at preserving social peace, than a systematically organized one. More significant institutional development began only in the first half of the twentieth century. Since then, social policy has developed as part of the conceptions of the so-called social state and public policies, through the expansion of social programs and reforms.

Naturally, every society has had its own specific features in the development of social policy, which must be observed through historical, ideological, value-based, political, cultural, social, and legal factors of influence. In the theoretical understanding of the development of social policy, an important contribution is made by approaches that link social rights with the development of citizenship and contemporary social transformations. Marshall indicates that the development of civil, political, and social rights represents a key process in the modernization of society and the formation of the social state (Marshall [1950] 1992). Building on this perspective, Titmuss emphasizes that social policy is not merely a set of institutional

measures, but also an expression of social solidarity and collective responsibility (Titmuss 1974). In the contemporary context of the transformation of the social state, Giddens points to the need to redefine social policy through the concept of the “Third Way,” which connects traditional values with new social risks and responsibilities (Giddens 1998).

These approaches provide an important framework for understanding the historical development of Serbia’s social policy, especially in the context of the relationship between identity-based values, institutional changes, and contemporary social challenges. Social policy reflects the social values, political ideologies, and institutional capacities of the state. Its development in Serbia was not linear, but marked by discontinuities and transformations conditioned by historical circumstances. At the same time, despite various political and social changes, certain continuities of values can be observed in the development of Serbia’s social policy, particularly in terms of solidarity, care for vulnerable social groups, and collective responsibility for social security.

Serbia’s social policy can be viewed not only as a set of institutional arrangements, but also as an expression of specific identity patterns formed through the historical development of the state and society. In this paper, identity patterns are understood as relatively stable value-based and cultural ways of understanding solidarity, charity, family responsibility, state care, and social justice.

The subject of this paper is an analysis of the historical development of Serbia’s social policy through two mutually connected dimensions – the institutional phases and the identity dimensions of its formation. The aim of the paper is to identify the key epochs in the development of Serbia’s social policy, as well as to point out the continuities and discontinuities in its value foundations. The paper applies the historical and comparative methods.

INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF SERBIA’S SOCIAL POLICY

In contemporary literature, the development of social policy is most often analyzed through different models of the welfare state, such as the liberal, conservative-corporatist, and social-democratic models (Esping-Andersen 1990). In addition, transitional societies have also developed hybrid models of social policy, which combine elements of different systems in accordance with historical, political, and social specificities.

Serbia’s social policy passed through different epochs. In each of them, there was a specific understanding of the content and scope of social policy, dependent on social conditions in the state, the value system, the dominant ideology, the political order, and the economic capacities of society. The development of social policy in Serbia moved from a humanitarian model, through socialist universalism, toward a contemporary mixed model in which the state,

local self-governments, civil society, and international organizations play significant roles. If observed from the Middle Ages to the present, the following key epochs in the development of Serbia's social policy can be distinguished:

1. The premodern period, from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century;
2. The charitable-humanitarian epoch, from the nineteenth century to 1918;
3. The state-institutional epoch, from 1918 to 1941;
4. The socialist-universalist epoch, from 1945 to 1990;
5. The crisis-transition epoch, from 1990 to 2000;
6. The reform-European epoch and contemporary trends, from 2000 to the present.

The Premodern Period (the Middle Ages – the Nineteenth Century)

During the Middle Ages, and especially up to the fifteenth century, care for people who were poor, ill, or elderly was carried out primarily through the activities of churches and monasteries. In this sense, the clergy and monastic communities represented important precursors of organized forms of social care. In the Ottoman period, from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries, social assistance developed through waqfs, that is, endowments, charitable funds, and religious institutions (Lakićević 1991). In the Middle Ages, Serbian rulers, noblemen, and religious dignitaries, drawing on Christian ideals and Byzantine customs, built and restored churches, monasteries, and hospitals, while also providing assistance to people living in poverty.

The Hilandar and Studenica Typika of 1199 contain provisions concerning the protection of those who were regarded as helpless, poor, and ill (Anđelković 2024, 108). The Zakonopravilo of Saint Sava, or the Nomocanon, which was compiled in the early thirteenth century as a collection of ecclesiastical and civil rules, is of particular importance for understanding the premodern foundations of social care (Zakonopravilo Svetog Save 2019, V). In addition to norms regulating church and legal life, it also contains rules concerning the protection of the poor, the disenfranchised, widows, vulnerable children, and other socially vulnerable groups. In this respect, the Zakonopravilo can be regarded as one of the important normative sources of premodern forms of social care in Serbian medieval society (Petrović 1983).

In 1348, Emperor Dušan founded a hospital at Hilandar and in the Monastery of the Holy Archangels near Prizren, where various protective activities were carried out, including a public kitchen for the poor (Katić 1990, 96). Helen of Anjou, the wife of King Uroš I, founded the first women's school, which had a social, educational, and pedagogical character (Jugović 2010, 55). With the restoration of the Serbian state in the nineteenth century, during the

uprisings and through the process of expanding and gaining Serbian statehood, social policy was reflected in the adoption of the first regulations concerning care for children without parental care, persons with disabilities, and the poor. An example of such institutional development was the Law on Municipalities of 1839 (Ljuboja 2013, 13). During this period, the first hospitals, homes, and institutions for children and adults living in social hardship were established. Humanitarian societies also began to operate, among which the Serbian Red Cross, founded in 1876, held a particularly important place (Crveni krst Srbije [CKS], n.d.). The focus of this epoch was on charity and philanthropy, while the state was only beginning to develop its social roles and institutions.

The Charitable-Humanitarian Epoch (the Nineteenth Century – 1918)

The context of the development of social policy in this period was linked to the social, economic, and political circumstances of Serbia at the time. The nineteenth century was an era of struggle for freedom and the acquisition of the political independence of the Serbian state. As Antić points out, in the nineteenth century, Serbia was one of the poorest and least educated European states, with the constant political hostility of the Great Powers and neighboring Balkan states (Antić 2013). The population lived in very poor hygienic, sanitary, and health conditions, with a small number of physicians. The Faculty of Medicine was established only in 1920. Nevertheless, with the exception of large and significantly wealthier states, such as Germany, the population of Serbia during the nineteenth century did not live substantially differently from most of the population of other European states at that time. Moreover, Serbia of that period did not experience a mass famine of the kind that was occasionally present in Russia or Great Britain (Antić 2013).

In this period, social care was not a universal right, but an act of solidarity, mercy, and charity. It was based on charitable, ecclesiastical, and humanitarian forms of assistance. At the end of the nineteenth century, the patriarchal family played a particularly important role in ensuring social security in Serbia, serving as the primary source of support, understanding, and solidarity (Marjanović 2023a). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the activities of church and humanitarian organizations, associations, and foundations were dominant, among which the Circle of Serbian Sisters stood out. The state did not yet have universal systems of social security, but it was beginning to develop the legal foundations of social policy. Its role was limited and was mainly reflected in various regulations and measures directed toward the poor, war invalids, and other particularly vulnerable groups. The Balkan Wars and the First World War created a great need for care for the wounded, children without parental

care, widows, military and civilian invalids, and displaced persons. In this way, the first stronger incentives for a more organized social policy emerged.

The State-Institutional Epoch – the Period of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes / Yugoslavia (1918–1941)

This epoch began after the end of the First World War. According to official statistics, Serbia lost between 1,100,000 and 1,300,000 inhabitants in this war as a result of combat, hunger, or disease (Antić 2013, 251). This represented approximately 28% of the total population. It was the greatest demographic catastrophe in the country's history, in which around 275,000 soldiers and 150,000 civilians died in military operations, while around 300,000 people died from disease and epidemics (Antić 2013, 251). In addition, nearly 287,000 members of the Serbian people in Austria-Hungary and around 50,000 inhabitants of Montenegro, or approximately 19% of its population, were killed or died during the war (Antić 2013, 251).

The socio-political context of this epoch was linked to the economic and demographic characteristics of the population. For example, during this period, between 75% and 80% of the population was engaged in agriculture, while only about 10% worked in industry (Lakićević 1991, 284). Such an economic structure influenced social policy to a great extent, making it reliant on the solidarity of rural households and the patriarchal family, while the role of the state was directed toward the extremely poor and toward the initial development of concern for the position of workers. The poverty of the rural population, workers, and the urban population was the key social problem of this period (Lakićević 1991).

During this period, the first state institutions of social protection were established, along with the Ministry of Social Policy of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Homes for children, associations of disabled persons, and workers' funds were established. Laws in the field of social policy were also adopted, such as the Law on the Protection of the Poor, the Elderly, and the Helpless of 1922, the Law on Workers' Insurance of 1922, and the Law on the Protection of Children and Youth of 1922 (Lakićević 1991, 301, 308, 310). Nevertheless, protection remained limited and selective, mainly directed toward industrial workers, while the majority of the population, especially the peasantry, remained outside the system of social assistance and support. This was a consequence of the prevailing doctrine of that time in Serbia, that is, in the then Yugoslavia, concerning the mismatch between economic and social development. Social policy was understood as a counterbalance to economic policy (Lakićević 1991).

The rare scholarly and professional works in the field of social policy during this period dealt with issues of labor legislation (Adžija 1961), social diseases and the protection of public health (Štampar 1925), the motives of social policy under capitalism (Jovanović 1931), social rights (Perić 1931), and the position of workers' and poor children (Vidaković 1932; 1937). The value of these authors' works lies in their attempts to explain the importance and role of social policy in the humanization of society.

The Socialist-Universalist Epoch (1945–1990)

After the Second World War, Serbia, in political terms, assumed the constitutional position of one of the six republics of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. This state emerged from the Second World War with devastating demographic and economic consequences. Above all, it lost around 1,700,000 inhabitants; one fifth of all houses were destroyed, along with more than one third of its industrial potential, more than half of its schools, and around 40% of its livestock (Lakićević 1991, 341). The social development of the SFRY was characterized by population growth resulting from positive natural increase, longer life expectancy, a mass transfer of the population from rural to urban areas, the reduction of illiteracy, and the transformation of the family model (Lakićević 1991).

In the newly established Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (1945–1963), preserving the revolutionary tradition and the achievements of the National Liberation War constituted key ideological and value priorities. Accordingly, the social protection of war veterans, disabled war veterans, and the families of fallen fighters occupied a prominent place in the social policy of this period (Marković Savić i Vukotić Lazar 2021, 329).

After the Second World War, a socialist model of social policy was introduced through the one-party system. According to Lakićević, the basic goal of social policy in this epoch was the satisfaction of human needs within the system of socialist self-management (Lakićević 1991). The state became the main bearer of social policy, that is, the ruling party, the League of Communists of Yugoslavia. The principles of universality and social rights for all citizens were introduced. The emphasis was placed on citizens' right to social security, rather than on voluntary and humanitarian foundations of social care.

During this period, a broad network of health and social protection developed, encompassing general health protection and universal health insurance, mandatory pension and disability insurance for workers, the development of a network of centers for social work from the 1960s onward, as well as the development of social institutions such as homes for children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities (Lakićević 1991, 357). This epoch was marked by strong etatization and state centralization, with a significantly smaller role for civil society in

social policy. Numerous economic, political, and ethnic contradictions led to the collapse of socialist Yugoslavia and of the model of society that had been in place since the end of the Second World War.

The Crisis-Transition Epoch and the Dissolution of the SFRY (1990–2000)

This epoch began with the crisis and dissolution of socialist Yugoslavia, wars, sanctions imposed by the international community on Serbia, and a severe economic crisis, including hyperinflation, all of which led to a serious deterioration of the population's social security. During this period, Serbia received more than 550,000 refugees from the former Yugoslav republics (Marjanović 2023b, 122). During this period, poverty and unemployment increased sharply. Social policy increasingly relied on minimal cash benefits and on enabling broad segments of the population to survive through the informal economy. Social services came under great pressure as a result of the refugee and internally displaced persons crisis. There were also major delays in the payment of child allowances and other social benefits.

The end of this epoch was marked by the aggression of the NATO pact against Serbia, the placing of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija under the jurisdiction of the United Nations, and numerous negative social, economic, and psychological consequences that arose after the end of the bombing. From the perspective of social policy, the consequences of this epoch were reflected primarily in the displacement of part of the Serbian and other non-Albanian population from Kosovo and Metohija, human casualties, additional pressure on social protection systems, the deepening of poverty, and the weakening of the state's economic capacities. Numerous difficulties also emerged in the implementation of support measures for disabled war veterans concerning the protection of their rights and the social status of this social group (Marković Savić 2023).

According to UNHCR data, after 1999, around 200,000 persons were internally displaced from Kosovo and Metohija to central Serbia (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR] n.d.). The Office for Kosovo and Metohija of the Government of the Republic of Serbia states that the consequences of the NATO aggression are also associated with more than 2,500 civilian deaths, including 89 children, as well as with more than 1,000 killed members of the army and police (Kancelarija za Kosovo i Metohiju 2025). The economic consequences were pronounced, since, according to a report of the International Monetary Fund, the bombing led to a sharp decline in production and a reduction of real GDP in 1999 by approximately 20% (International Monetary Fund [IMF] 2001).

The Reform-European Epoch and Contemporary Trends (2000–Present)

After the political changes of 2000, a process of social policy reform and alignment with European Union standards began (Vuković i Čekerevac 2006). Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, policies in the fields of employment, social protection, and education in Serbia have developed on a number of assumptions of global neoliberal ideology, such as the ideas of individualization, privatization, and marketization (Vuković i Babović 2022).

The process of social policy reform in the field of the social protection system was directed toward the regular payment of social benefits, such as financial social assistance and child allowance, the strengthening of the civil sector and non-governmental organizations in the provision of social services, the introduction of local social protection services, such as day care centers and personal assistance, the deinstitutionalization of residential care, and the promotion of foster care for children without parental care. Emphasis was also placed on partnership between the state and civil society, empowering beneficiaries for independent and productive life in the community, decentralizing the financing of rights and services, and introducing the case management model into centers for social work (Jugović, Žunić-Pavlović i Brkić 2009; Jugović i Brkić 2013; Gavrilović and Jugović 2012; Perišić 2016).

During this period, the new and currently applicable Law on Social Protection was adopted in 2011 (ZSZ 2011). The concept of active inclusion was developed through a focus on empowering users of social support services. Social innovations were encouraged through the development of social enterprises and digital platforms for certain social services. The focus was placed on the protection of vulnerable groups, such as children, persons with disabilities, Roma, elderly persons, victims of domestic violence, and other socially vulnerable groups. According to Vuković and Babović, Serbia has a hybrid model of social development based on exogenous investment capitalism and reactive social protection through ad hoc measures intended to quickly correct emerging problems (Vuković i Babović 2022). Recent research on the post-Yugoslav transformations of social policy and social work in Serbia further indicate that the past three decades have been marked by unfinished reforms, institutional limitations, and continuous efforts to adapt the social protection system to new social risks, market pressures, and European reform requirements (Perišić and Pavlović 2024).

Contemporary challenges for Serbia's social policy include risks of poverty, population aging, the emigration of parts of the working-age population, regional socio-economic inequalities, the improvement of public health, the digitalization of social services, the financial sustainability of the social security system, and the fairness of various areas of social policy. Perišić identifies as one of the key reform challenges the orientation of the social protection system more toward benefits than toward services, while the benefits themselves are often

inadequate for overcoming poverty (Perišić 2016). The COVID-19 pandemic revealed the vulnerability of the system and the need for faster digital and organizational changes. The key problems that emerged during this period were insufficient financial resources for social protection services, as well as regional and social differences in the quality and availability of health and social services (Matković and Stubbs 2020).

Pierson argues that the development of the welfare state in the contemporary period is characterized by the “new politics of the welfare state,” marked by the constraints of fiscal sustainability, demographic changes, and the restructuring of social rights (Pierson 2001). Within the European context, Ferrera identifies a specific “Southern European model” of the welfare state, characterized by the strong role of the family, fragmented protection systems, and the significant influence of historical institutional patterns (Ferrera 1996). At the same time, Deacon emphasizes the growing influence of global processes and international institutions on the shaping of national social policies (Deacon 2007), while Cerami and Vanhuyse point to the specific developmental paths of social policy in post-socialist societies, marked by hybrid institutional arrangements and the combination of traditional and contemporary models of social protection (Cerami and Vanhuyse 2009).

These approaches provide an important analytical framework for understanding the transformations of Serbia’s social policy in the context of transition, European integration, and identity specificities. The analysis of contemporary social policies in Southeast Europe indicates the significant influence of international actors, institutional reforms, and the specific historical circumstances of the region. Stubbs and Zrinščak emphasize that social policies in the countries of Southeast Europe have been shaped through a complex relationship between domestic institutional traditions and international interventions, especially during the period of transition and European integration (Stubbs and Zrinščak 2015). More broadly, comparative analyses of welfare states point to different developmental paths of social policies, emphasizing the importance of historical, political, and cultural factors in shaping national models of social protection (Castles *et al.* 2010).

The broader regional framework shows that post-Yugoslav transformations of social policy were not marked only by changes in normative models, but also by the legacy of wars, economic transition, institutional fragmentation, and external reform influences. An analysis of the social protection system in the Republic of Srpska indicates a slow and rudimentary course of reforms, as well as the importance of intervention-based and fragmentary measures conditioned by practical needs, limited resources, and the influence of international organizations (Gajić, Rakanović Radonjić and Šućur-Janjetović 2024). This regional parallel

is significant for understanding the broader post-socialist and post-Yugoslav environment in which contemporary models of social policy in the Serbian national and institutional space were shaped.

DEVELOPMENT OF VALUES AND IDENTITY PATTERNS IN SERBIA'S SOCIAL POLICY

Social policy reflects the value system of a society and the way in which that society relates to social risks, poverty, and inequalities. In Serbia, as in other European societies, the development of social policy has passed through several epochs, from the premodern period, in which religious and humanitarian values predominated, to the contemporary period, in which social protection forms part of human rights and the system of social justice (Table 1).

In the premodern period, from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century, social policy did not exist as an institutionalized system, but was based on the moral-religious norms and customs of the community. According to Lakićević, the Orthodox Church remained faithful to the early Christian teaching that it was the duty of believers to perform acts of mercy, while the role of the Church was to initiate social actions (Lakićević 1991). At the same time, in this period, the Church advocated the view that the social-protective function was primarily the obligation of the state, in accordance with the principle “render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s.” Social care in Serbia was organized through religious, patriarchal, and humanitarian values, rather than through a developed state system. Christian ethics of mercy implied that care for the poor and the sick was a moral and religious duty. Monasteries represented the first forms of social institutions, providing shelter, food, and medical care. Almsgiving was understood as an act of salvation for the soul of the giver, rather than as a right of the recipient.

Charity and endowment also played an important role, as rulers and wealthy individuals founded endowments, monasteries, hospitals, and schools, thereby emphasizing personal honor and contribution to the community. In this sense, philanthropy had both a religious and a socio-political dimension. An important part of the premodern identity pattern was also patriarchal family care. The family was the primary bearer of social security, and care for the elderly, the sick, and the helpless was considered a duty of relatives. Neglecting family members had the character of a moral transgression. In addition, in rural communities, there were customs of mutual assistance and collective responsibility, which mitigated social risks.

In the Ottoman period, waqfs and religious endowments also contributed to social security by offering assistance to the poor, widows, travelers, and the sick. These values had a pronounced moral-religious foundation. Their common feature was that social assistance did

not represent a universal right of citizens, but rather a form of mercy, privilege, or support dependent on the goodwill of the community, authorities, or wealthy individuals.

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Serbia's social policy developed in accordance with European and socialist ideas of the welfare state, and after 2000 also in the direction of European integration. As Vuković and Babović point out, contemporary welfare-state social policies are social investment policies, particularly in the fields of education, health, employment, migrant integration programs, and human resource development, and not only policies of insurance and protection against social risks (Vuković i Babović 2022). The contemporary values of Serbia's social policy are grounded in human rights, social justice, institutional solidarity, social inclusion, and the legal foundation of the system. Social rights are understood as part of internationally recognized human rights, with every citizen regarded as a bearer of the right to social security and a dignified life. Material benefits and social protection services are based on the principles of fairness and redistribution, with the aim of reducing social differences. Responsibility for caring for vulnerable groups is no longer only familial or religious, but predominantly institutional, involving the state, local self-governments, and the civil sector. Policies are directed toward vulnerable groups, such as children at risk, Roma, persons with disabilities, elderly persons, and victims of violence, in order to enable their full participation in society. The contemporary system is legally grounded, secular, and based on legal guarantees, although there remains space for philanthropy and the activities of religious and humanitarian organizations.

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of Premodern and Contemporary Values of Serbia's Social Policy

Premodern period, Middle Ages – nineteenth century	Contemporary period, twentieth–twenty-first century
Mercy and Christian ethics – helping the poor as a moral and religious duty.	Human rights – social protection as a universal right of every citizen.
Charity and endowment – wealthy individuals support the community for the sake of salvation, honor, and social responsibility.	Social justice and equality – the state ensures redistribution and equal opportunities.
Family care and patriarchal morality – the family is the basic unit of social security.	Solidarity of society and the state – responsibility shifts to institutions and the community as a whole.
Community solidarity in rural communities – collective responsibility and assistance at the local level.	Social cohesion – modern society strengthens the integration and inclusion of vulnerable groups.
Waqfs and religious endowments – religious institutions are important bearers of social assistance.	Secular system of social policy – the state, local self-governments, the civil sector, and international funds play significant roles.
Assistance as a privilege – it is received by those who are extremely vulnerable and depends on the goodwill of others.	Assistance as a right – legally guaranteed social benefits and services for vulnerable citizens.

Source: Authors.

Although the value foundations of the premodern and contemporary periods differ significantly, certain continuities nevertheless exist. Solidarity has remained a central value: in the past, it was expressed through family and village-based assistance, whereas today it is expressed through taxes, public funds, and institutional programs. Charity is still present, but it now has a supplementary role in relation to the state system. Care for the helpless remains a constant, although its understanding has changed – from a moral obligation to a legal right. The greatest discontinuity is reflected in the shift from the concept of social assistance as almsgiving and privilege to the concept of social protection as a universal right and an obligation of the state. In the premodern period, social policy was based on moral and religious values. In the contemporary period, it is based on citizens' rights, social justice, and institutional solidarity.

The preceding comparative analysis clearly shows that the historical development of Serbia's social policy reflects a broader transformation of social values. In the premodern period, it was based on religion, tradition, and moral norms, while in the contemporary period, it is based on human rights, social justice, and inclusion. Despite these differences, continuities in the values of solidarity and care for persons facing social hardship testify to a deeply rooted tradition of community.

The contemporary challenge for Serbia is to connect traditional elements with modern European standards and to ensure a sustainable, just, and inclusive system of social policy. The development of Serbia's social policy also shows certain similarities with other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, which went through the socialist model and transitional reforms. However, Serbia's specificity lies in the stronger influence of historical discontinuities, wars, and prolonged economic crisis, which additionally shaped the identity dimensions of social policy.

CONCLUSION

The development of Serbia's social policy shows that this field of public policy emerged in close connection with broader social, political, and value-based changes. Viewed through historical epochs, Serbia's social policy passed from religiously and morally based care for vulnerable members of the community, through charitable-humanitarian and selective forms of assistance, and through the universalist socialist model, to the contemporary mixed system that combines state responsibility, local initiatives, the activities of civil society, and the influence of international actors. This development points to the gradual institutionalization of social policy, but also to changes in its value foundations.

The analysis of institutional development shows that Serbia's social policy was conditioned by historical circumstances, particularly wars, economic crises, political transformations, and processes of modernization. In the premodern period, religious and patriarchal forms of social care predominated, while in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the first forms of state regulation and institutional protection appeared. The period of socialist development was marked by the expansion of universal social rights and the strong role of the state, while the transition period of the 1990s brought a crisis of social security and a reduction of the state's social functions. After 2000, reforms were introduced that were directed toward European standards, the development of local services, deinstitutionalization, active inclusion, and the strengthening of partnerships between the state, local communities, and civil society.

The comparative methodological approach made it possible to systematically examine continuities and discontinuities in the values of Serbia's social policy across different historical epochs. The transformation of traditional norms of solidarity, charity, and family responsibility into contemporary principles of social justice, human rights, and institutional solidarity is particularly evident. Nevertheless, despite these transformations, certain value continuities have remained present, especially in the emphasis on solidarity and care for vulnerable social

groups. These continuities indicate the existence of a specific identity pattern of Serbia's social policy, one that connects traditional and contemporary approaches.

The contribution of this paper lies in the fact that it does not view the development of Serbia's social policy only as a sequence of institutional changes, but also as a process of shaping value-based and identity patterns. In this way, the paper shows that social policy is not merely a technical-administrative field of public policy, but also an expression of the way in which society understands solidarity, responsibility, justice, and its relationship toward vulnerable groups.

The results of the analysis indicate that the contemporary model of Serbia's social policy is developing as a mixed system. At the same time, this model faces numerous challenges, including demographic aging, poverty, regional inequalities, migration, increased risks of social exclusion among certain social groups, the financial sustainability of the system, and the need for the digital transformation of social services. These challenges require further improvement of institutional capacities and the development of sustainable, just, and accessible models of social policy.

The contemporary development of Serbia's social policy implies connecting traditional values of solidarity, community, family responsibility, and humanitarianism with modern principles of social justice, human rights, and social inclusion. The historical development of Serbia's social policy shows that tradition and modern European standards do not have to be opposed, but can coexist in the shaping of a sustainable and inclusive system of social policy.

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СОЦИЈАЛНА ПОЛИТИКА СРБИЈЕ КРОЗ ЕПОХЕ: ИНСТИТУЦИОНАЛНИ РАЗВОЈ И ИДЕНТИТЕТСКИ ОБРАСЦИ***

Резиме

У раду се анализира историјски развој социјалне политике Србије кроз институционалне фазе и идентитетске димензије њеног обликовања. Полазећи од претпоставке да социјална политика одражава шире друштвене, политичке и вредносне трансформације, у раду се идентификују кључне епохе њеног развоја: предмодерни период, добротворно-хуманитарна епоха, државно-институционална фаза, социјалистичко-универзалистички модел, кризно-транзициона епоха и реформско-европски период. Посебна пажња посвећена је институционалном развоју социјалне политике, као и променама у вредносним и идентитетским обрасцима који су обликовали однос друштва и државе према социјалним ризицима, сиромаштву и рањивим друштвеним групама. Рад полази од тезе да се социјална политика Србије развијала кроз динамичан однос континуитета и дисконтинуитета, при чему су традиционалне вредности солидарности, добротворности и породичне одговорности постепено трансформисане у савремене принципе социјалне правде, људских права и социјалне инклузије. Методолошки приступ заснива се на историјској и компаративној анализи. Резултати анализе указују да савремени модел социјалне политике Србије представља мешовити систем, у коме држава, локалне заједнице и цивилно друштво имају комплементарне улоге. Закључује се да даљи развој социјалне политике Србије подразумева повезивање идентитетских традиција солидарности са институционално одрживим одговорима на савремене социјалне изазове.

Кључне речи: социјална политика, Србија, историјски развој, институционалне фазе, идентитетски обрасци, солидарност, социјална инклузија

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