



МЕЃУНАРОДНО СПИСАНИЕ ЗА  
ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ, ИСТРАЖУВАЊЕ И ОБУКА  
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR EDUCATION,  
RESEARCH AND TRAINING  
(IJERT)

## HIGH EDUCATION IN THE BALKANS AND THE INCLUSION OF WOMEN

### Dalibor Jovanovski

University "Ss. Cyril and Methodius", Faculty of Philosophy – Skopje,  
Institute of History, Republic of Macedonia  
dalibor@fzf.ukim.edu.mk

### Suzana Simonovska

University "St. Cyril and Methodius", Faculty of Philosophy – Skopje,  
Institute of Gender studies, Republic of Macedonia  
suzanas@fzf.ukim.edu.mk

UDK: 378 – 055.2(497)

### Abstract

There is no doubt that education is undergoing series of changing during the last decade. However, one of its functions or missions remain unchanged – learning and literacy. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, new independent and autonomous states appeared in the Balkans. Most of citizens of the newborn countries were uneducated. There was a great need of the new states for the educated people who would help in the further development of the countries. Thus, the need for the well-educated people imposed a necessity for creation of high education institutions in the Balkans. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, first high educational institutions were formed in the Balkans. However, there was no room for acceptance of female at the newly formed universities. The reason was very simple. The societies in the Balkans were traditional and conservative. The role and the place of the women in such societies were connected with the house and the upbringing of the children. Thus, only young boys were admitted at the universities. Only the men were professors, as well. However, the process of modernization of the societies became unavoidable, even in the Balkans. At the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, first girls were accepted as students at the universities in the region.

The aim of our presentation is to show the historical path of the development and the changes that have happened in high education in the Balkans and the inclusion women in the process.

**Key words:** *high education, Balkans, universities, emancipation of women, social progress.*

### 1. Introduction

The formation of independent and autonomous states in the Balkans in the 19th century also meant the formation of institutions in these countries, without which they could not function. In that process, the new countries devoted special attention to education. The reason was very simple. The vast majority of the population was illiterate, and with an illiterate population, the countries couldn't thrive and advance economically. The need for educated people, educated on home ground, imposed the need for the development of a higher education. Thus, the first university in the region was opened in Athens in 1837. This university had four faculties, with male students from other parts of the Balkans. In Serbia, with the opening of the Lyceum in 1836, which later became a higher education school and later, the Belgrade University, the first steps were made in the field of higher education. Bulgaria, which later

gained its statehood, followed the steps of its neighboring countries. In Sofia in 1888, the Sofia higher education school was founded, which later developed into the Sofia University.

In the first decades after the formation of these higher education institutions, students and teachers were only male. The reason, of course, is the traditional patriarchal environment in which the main role of the woman was caring for home and family, especially the children. However modernization processes and the process of the emancipation of women penetrated even in the Balkans. A growing number of girls, though far less than boys, was educated and received at least an elementary education. Soon there arose the need for enrolling young girls into higher education institutions in the region. Despite persistent resistance in the late 19th and early 20th century, the first girl students were accepted in the Balkans higher education institutions. In this regard, the purpose of this paper is to show how and when girls in three Balkan countries were first admitted into higher education institutions in their respective countries.

## **2. Inclusion of women in higher education in Greece**

Greece was the first independent country in the region that managed to free itself from the Ottoman rule, so it's not surprising that the first higher education institution was founded there. In Athens, in 1837 the first university in Greece was founded, which was also the first higher education institution in the Balkans. However, at the beginning of the formation of the Athens University there was no place for girls, despite the fact that since 1825 Adamantios Korais, one of the greatest Greek renaissance men, urged the need for education of both men and women (Βασιλης, 2012: 14).

Greece, like other parts of the Balkans, did not have a sufficient number of literate people. According to certain studies, a few years after the creation of the Greek state, 91% of the men and almost the entire female population were illiterate (Doxiadis, 2016: 23). In order to overcome this situation, in 1834 the first regulations for the education of young people, especially children were brought forth. Thus, primary education became compulsory for boys and girls up to 12 years, and they were punished for every lost class (Doxiadis, 2016: 24). Despite the positive effects of such a move, it reflected poorly on the female population. Fifty years later, 69% of the male population was still illiterate and the number of literate women did not exceed 10%. But compared with other countries in Europe, it can be concluded that Greece was a step ahead in terms of women's education. As noted by Evdoksios Doksiadis, unlike Greece, compulsory education for girls in France and Germany was introduced almost a century later (Doxiadis, 2016: 27).

Having fewer literate girls and women was not accidental. Greece, as well as the rest of the Balkans in the 19th century, was a conservative and traditional country, with predominantly patriarchal notions of the place and the role of women in society. The home and raising children was the main place and occupation of the Greek woman, hence the notion that women do not need education. Even those girls who were allowed to go to school did not have equal status as the boys. In the middle of the 19th century, instead of improving, the situation worsened. In 1853 mixed schools were banned and the Greek State gave a priority to establishing schools for boys. (Doxiadis, 2016: 24).

The attitude towards the education of girls was reflected in higher education. The issue of their inclusion into the Athens University has long been taboo. But that does not mean that Greek

intellectuals didn't consider the need for higher education for women. In 1864, the famous Greek intellectual and politician Nikolaos Saripolos states in one of his reports that one of the reasons for the weakness of Greek society is the backwardness of women in Greece. Hence, he urged the need to pay particular attention to the education of the Greek woman who is the foundation of the family (Tzanaki, 2009: 37-38). Fifteen years later began the fight for the inclusion of young Greek women in higher education.

In 1879 the first attempt was made to enroll a girl in the Athens University. She was rejected on the grounds that the school where she completed his education was not appropriate for university enrollment. Specifically, the so called Arsakios School was not recognized as a high school (Tzanaki, 2009: 147). However, this attempt did not remain without an echo among the politicians with positive views on the inclusion of girls in higher education. Theodoros Zervos, a member of the Greek Parliament, suggested the girl school Arsakios obtain the status of a girls' high school, but his proposal did not pass in parliament.

The failed attempt to enroll in the only higher education institution in the country did not stop girls in realizing their ambitions, especially those who had the financial ability to continue their education outside Greece. For example, Maria Kalopotaki and Sevasti Kalisperi instead of Athens University, continued their education at the Sorbonne University in Paris. In 1887 a second attempt was made to enroll a girl at Athens University, but that attempt ended without success. The reason was that programs of the Arsakios School were not compatible with those of male schools. But Demetra Tzanaki gives a different interpretation of this case. According to her, the incompatibility of the programs was only a pretext to refuse girls. She sees the real reason in the patriarchal fears of possible immoral behavior of girls, because they would be together with male listeners. (Tzanaki, 2009: 147)

The resistance to enroll girls at the Athens University increased the pressure for their enrollment into this single higher education institutions in Greece. The pressure came not only from female activists such as Kalliroi Parren, but also from top Greek intellectuals and journalists, such as Kostis Palamas, Spyridon Lambros, Vlassis Gavriliadis and others.

Finally, in the last decade of the 19th century, the Athens University opened its gates to girls. In 1890, the Philology Department of the faculty of Philosophy at the University admitted the first girl - Joanna Stefanopoli. She also was the first woman in Greece to be admitted in the highest educational institution in the country (Tzanaki, 2009: 147). Two years later Angeliki Panayotatu, together with her sister Alexandra, were admitted in the Medical School of Athens (Πουλακου-Ρεμπελακου, 2008: 677), which marks the beginning of the unending process of enrolling girls at the University of Athens.

Of course, the penetration of women in higher education, their involvement in current events and career advancement did not pass without resistance and objections. In 1895 student protest were held at the University of Athens in which a girl student took part. On this occasion, one of the leading figures who advocated for women's rights, Caliroe Paren, in her newspaper *Efimeris ton Kirion*, appeals to girl students to be especially careful, because their reputation at the University would be ruined if they forget the basic moral qualities of a woman - modesty and demure. (Tzanaki, 2009: 147).

In 1908 and 1911 the first two women lecturers were elected at the University of Athens, Angeliki Panajotatu and Anna Kacigra. When Panajotatu showed up as a lecturer at the faculty of Medicine, the resistance from both students and much of the public opinion was evident. Hence the explanation of the management of the University that women can be lecturers, but

with some limitations. Namely, they could not be professors. (Πουλακου - Ρεμπελακου, 2008: 32)

### 3. Inclusion of women in higher education in Serbia

The creation of the modern Serbian state imposed the need for the creation of educational institutions. It is interesting to note that the first Serbian monarch - Prince Miloš Obrenovich, although an illiterate man, had a huge contribution to the promotion of education in his country. He and his successors devoted special attention to the education of young people. However, because of tradition and lifestyle, we can notice a huge difference in the education of girls and boys. As indicated by Neda Božinović, even though girls were allowed to be educated within the state educational institutions, in 1857 it was prescribed that girls in primary schools be separated from the boys (Božinović, 1996: 52). Be that as it may, girls, though not in large numbers, were educated in Serbia.

The need for educated female staff for teaching in schools where there were girls, initiated the formation of a two-year female higher education school in Belgrade, which in 1863 was the first female three-class higher education school in the country. This opened the path for the girls to get a higher education.

The beginnings of the inclusion of women in higher education in Serbia can be found in 1871, when Draga Locić attended one semester of lectures at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade (Trgovčević, 2011: 9). Most probably the conditions for studying at the Belgrade higher education school, the only higher educational institution in Serbia at that time (which included the Faculty of Philosophy) were not suitable for girls, so Locić continued her studies in Switzerland.

Girls were finally accepted as students at the Belgrade higher education school in 1887, when Leposava Bosković and Kruna Dragojlović were admitted into the Faculty of Philosophy (Božinović, 1996: 58). These two girl students graduated in 1891 (Trgovčević, 2011: 9). In a decade, the number of girls enrolled in the higher education school rose from 2, 74% to 15% in 1892 and 40% in 1905/1906. Trgovčević, drawing comparisons between the enrolled girls at the Belgrade higher education school (which in 1905 turned into a university) and European universities, noted that the number of enrolled girl students in Serbia had exceeded the number of girls studying at European universities (Trgovčević, 2011: 9).

However, it should be noted that due to the unequal status, girls had limited access to this unique higher education institution. Even though, according to the educational law, anyone who graduated high school, regardless of sex, could enroll in this educational institution, girls had always trouble enrolling. (Grujić, 1997: 129) Also, some structures in the Serbian state, due to political needs, tried to intervene in the right for education for girls, and for some boys. In 1899, the Serbian government requested the opinion of three faculties of the Belgrade higher education school about the need for enrolling girls in regular and part time studies. The answer from the faculties was unfavorable for the orderers. Namely, the faculties defended the girls' right to study, and the Faculty of Philosophy even proposed measures to increase the number of female students (Božinović, 1996: 59).

In Serbia, as well as in other parts of the Balkans, patriarchal attitudes prevailed, especially when it came to girls' morals. So, the students of Belgrade higher education school had to avoid socializing with male colleagues because people would say they go to the higher

education school just to have fun, not to learn. Also, for each activity and out of school obligation, they had to receive special permits from their patrons. For example, a girl who was a relative of Jovan Bosković, a professor at the higher education school, and one time minister of education, could not accept the invitation to enroll in the student singers association, because she did not get permission from her patron (Božinović, 1996: 59).

#### **4. Involving women in higher education in Bulgaria**

Like the other newly formed Balkan states, which formed as a result of uprisings and intervention from European powers, the new Bulgarian state was also faced with a serious problem - lack of a literate and educated staff that would developed the educational process in the country. In order to overcome this situation, which was necessary for the development of literature, the Bulgarian state took certain steps. From the very beginning, the country proclaimed free and compulsory primary education (Kaychev, 2006: 43-44). In 1880 an educational law was adopted, with which mandatory primary education, lasted 4 years (Kaychev, 2006: 44).

Such measures of the Bulgarian education authorities were fruitful. According to the Bulgarian historian Martin Ivanov, from 1878 to 1910, the literacy of the population had grown from 0.3% to 35% (Ivanov, 2006: 199), which was undoubtedly a great success for the government in Sofia. Of course, the state benefited from the increase of the number of literate citizens, especially economically.

Even though until the creation of the state in 1878, the literacy of the Bulgarian population was not high, it should be emphasized that there were women among the literate population. At that time, as stated by researchers of feminism in Bulgaria, the only intellectual profession available to women was teaching (Daskalova, Nazarska, 2006: 7).

In the late 19th and early 20th century a campaign for the admission of girls in the Sofia higher education school began in Bulgaria. According to Krasimira Daskalova, that was a major request of the bourgeois women's movement in the country, which emerged in the 1890's. A partial success was achieved in 1896, when some university professors accepted women as listeners at their lectures. (Daskalova, 2004: 92) Actually, that was not by chance. There had already been a debate in the country about the necessity of educating women. In this respect, in 1897 a law was passed which equalized the number of boys and girls grades in high school - fixing them on seven grades, after completing four years in primary school (Daskalova, Nazarska, 2006: 11). But that did not mean that the road to higher education was fully open for girls. In Bulgaria, as in other Balkan countries, they were especially mindful of the morals of women and society in general. That's why it was no surprise that the state decided to pass a law in 1899 which didn't allow women teachers to work after getting married. Indeed, this law was annulled in 1904, but it is indicative of the obstacles faced by women on the road to their education and career, especially if we consider that the teaching profession was the only field of work available to women (Daskalova, 2004: 93 ).

In order to improve the status of women's education and to allow girls to enroll in the only higher education institution in Bulgaria at the time, hundreds of young women signed and submitted a petition to the Parliament (Lalkov, Mitev, 1988: 21). The request was also supported by the Bulgarian intellectuals. After some years of efforts, in 1901, at the time when the famous Bulgarian philologist Ljubomir Miletić, originating from Macedonia, was rector of the Sofia

higher education school, women were finally allowed to study. Miletić with his strong commitment had a special contribution to the resolving of this issue (Murdarov, 1987: 84). When we speak of his commitment, it is interesting to follow the protocol of the meeting of the Academic Council of 12 June 1901, where it states: "On the proposal of the rector (L. Miletić) it is decided that the female persons that conform to the conditions required by law, may to be admitted to the higher education school " ... "( Арнаудовъ, 1939: 170). In the winter semester of the 1901/1902 academic year, the first girl students were admitted in the Sofia higher education school.<sup>105</sup> Commenting on the new situation, certainly in a positive connotation, Professor Alexandar Theodorov Balan noted that the Bulgarian higher education school was already at the same level as universities in Europe and America (Lalkov, Mitev, 1988: 21).

## 5. Conclusion

Following the process of the inclusion of women in higher education institutions in the Balkans (Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria), we can conclude that the girls struggle for the right to education was long lasting and full of ups and downs. The girls' right to study opposed the deeply rooted traditional attitudes about the position of women in the Balkan societies, but modernization dictated the need for a higher educated staff, which was necessary for further development of the states. Women could not be excluded from this process, no matter how much it was opposite of the traditions. In that same spirit is the statement of Paulina Lebl, a student from the first generation of girls at the University of Belgrade: "Overall, in our country, there was a general belief that women should be excluded from higher education and we didn't even think it could change in the near future. Generally, we see our feminist movement as a movement for higher education of girls "(Trgovčević, 2011: 10). In fact, in emancipatory movements for women's rights and realization of gender equality, the fight for the right to education was among the top priorities.

---

<sup>105</sup> 12 students were enrolled in Faculty of History and Philology of and 4 in the Faculty of Physics and Mathematics. (Arnaudovъ, 1939: 170)

## References

1. Арнаудовъ, Михаил. (1939). История на Софийския университетъ Св. Климентъ Охридски 1888-1938. София: Придворна печатница.
2. Božinović, Neda. (1996). Žensko pitanje u Srbiji u XIX I XX veku. Beograd: Pinkpress.
3. Βασιλης, Ζενζεφυλης. (2012). Εισοδος και η εξελιξης των γυναικων μελων ΔΕΠ στο πανεπιστημιακο πεδιο: Η μελετη περιπτωσης του Πανεπιστημιου Πατρων. Πατρας: Πανεπιστημιο Πατρων.
4. Daskalova, Krasimira. (2004). „The Women's Movement in Bulgaria in a Life story“. In: Women's History Review. Vol. 13, Number 1.
5. Doxiadis, Evdoxios. (2016). „Women, Wealth and the State in Greece (1750-1860)“. In: Davidova, Evguenia (ed.). Wealth in the Ottoman and Post - Ottoman Balkans. A socio - Economic History. I.B. Tauris.
6. Даскалова, Красимира, Назърска, Жоржета. (2006). Женското движение и феминизми в България. София: Българска асоциация на университетските жени.
7. Грујић, Владимир. (1987). Лицеј и Велика школа. Споменик, СХХVIII. Београд: Одделење друштвених наука, 25, САНУ.
8. Иванов, Мартин. (2006). „Какво би станала, ако... Конструирание на хипотезата „развитие без освобождение““. В: Диана Мишкова. Балканският XIX век. Други прочити. София: Рива.
9. Кайчев, Наум. (2006). Македонийо възжелаена. Армията, училището и градежът на нацията в Сьбия и България 1878-1912. София: Парадигма.
10. Lalkov, Milcho, Mitev, Trendafil. (1988). 100 years Sofia university. History and present day. Sofia: Kliment Ohridski University Press.
11. Мурдаров, Владко. (1987). Любомир Милетич. София: Университетско издателство Климент Охридски.
12. Πουλακου-Ρεμπελακου, Ε. (2008). „Υπαρκτοι και μυθιστορηματικοι φοιτητες της Ιατρικης στις σελιδες της αστικης λογοτεχνιας (1850-1910)“. Αρχεια Ελληνικης ιατρικης, 25(5).
13. Trgovčević, Ljubinka. (2011). „The Professional emancipation of women in 19th century Serbia“. U: Serbian Studies, v. 25-1. North American Society for Serbian Studies.
14. Tzanaki, Demetra. (2009). Women and Nationalism in the Making of Modern Greece. The founding of the Kingdom to the Greco - Turkish war. Palgrave – Macmillan.