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FROM FLEXIBLE ORGANIZATION TO STRESS ON THE WORKPLACE¹

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Abstract The flexibility of the workforce, which manifests itself in different forms (from lifelong learning to various types of work contracts), has made the term *precarity* current, which, in absence of a suitable term in the Macedonian language, is simply taken over from the French, as well as the English speaking countries. Precarity, above all, means a condition of temporariness, i.e. uncertainty in the domain of labor. On the other hand, plenty of sociological analyses show that, in its essence, the flexibility of the workforce means a process of adaptation of the workforce to the conditions of the enterprise, the conditions of the immediate and wider environment. The thesis we are developing in this text is: the processes of adaptation developed to the level of absurdity, besides the condition of precarity, lead to a long-term stress at the workplace. The stress at the workplace is determined as a condition of a maladaptation of the employees to the organizational conditions that are considered static, as if they were natural laws that cannot be changed, and the man, who is a natural being, is forced to change his/her own nature to keep his/her job. Through the existing analyses within sociology, we will try to get acquainted with the Macedonian society from this perspective.

Keywords: flexibility, adaptation of workforce, security, social control.

Flexibilization of the Economic System

The economic crisis that appeared in the 80s of the 20th century caused great changes in the performance of enterprises. The term flexibility started being used more and more in that period. The flexible organization of labor represented a general strategy by which the enterprises needed to maintain their

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competitiveness on the global market. The economists, and the loudest among them – the managers, emphasized that there is great competition on the global markets, and in order to survive, the companies may use all available means. In that respect, it was emphasized that: in the domain of organizations, the only thing that is constant is the change (Adizes I., 1998). The general strategies of the enterprises were explained through the sayings: instead of being devoured, we need to devour the rest; instead of disappearing, we need to decrease our scope (fragmenting), decrease our assets to be rentable; to invest in other states to be competitive (Appay B., 2005).

The new strategies increased the power of the new companies, which developed new control systems, not only related to the employees, but also related to the larger social environment. One of the processes which significantly influenced the change of the economic ambient was the externalization i.e. the famous outsourcing, which means fragmentation, i.e. a process when the companies free themselves from certain performing activities and aim towards production of final products. The enterprises from the developed countries became small cores where “knowledge workers” work, mainly oriented towards developing strategies, innovating, market researching and activities for quality improvement of products. The production of parts and other supporting activities were left to the small enterprises all over the world. Consequently, a large number of small and medium enterprises appeared in the role of suppliers to the large enterprises, which are said to have great importance in terms of creation of new jobs. Although these SME are separate legal entities and are individually responsible for their performance, their economic condition and their survival is determined by the large companies by which they are continually controlled. The analysts who with enthusiasm describe the new messiah role of the SME in terms of the possibilities for new employment, and which by their nature and their size belong to the preindustrial era, do not speak about the conditions in which they operate, about their employees and their work time and their salaries, and above all, about their illiquidity. Outsourcing led to atomization of the enterprises, and thus, to a complete individualization of the workforce. According to the analysis of Beatrice Appay, the continuous increase of the number of SME does not imply that the conditions for their functioning have improved (Appay B., 2005). The increased control by the large enterprises appears in the front plan here. According to her, the great multinational companies which are most prominent in contemporary capitalism are very dynamic. They invest in various places according to their interest i.e. according to the opportunities of creating greater profit, through forming various alliances, interstate agreements and other strategies. It is about an enormous concentration of finances and huge concentration of economic power. In the background of this process, the flexibilization and atomization of the productive system takes place, which leads

towards an increase of the number of SME whose economic power is very small. In Macedonia, 99% of the enterprises are SME and they are expected to be the driving force of the economy, employing 83% of the overall number of the employed. The key term in the economic politics is the competitiveness of the enterprises, which in essence can be achieved hard under the circumstances of a compartmentalized productive system. The active employment measures, which are mainly aimed towards the creation of new micro and small enterprises, are financed with 0.06% from the GDP (2014) which in essence means a very low economic power.³

The new technologies contribute significantly towards flexibilization of the economic system. Usually it is thought that the new information technologies give the opportunity of diffusing information, and receiving information in a fast fashion. However, they emphasize the meaning of speed in the work process. The intensity of labor, not just in the production sector, but also other sectors (administration, research, education) today, is among the most pressing problems the employed face. It is shown in the European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS, 2013)⁴ that the speed of work has increased continuously during a longer period. Namely, within EU, 63% of the employed pointed out that the speed they work with is a significant problem, and 61% fight a battle with the deadlines they need to meet. Hence, 75% from the Slovenian surveyed persons pointed out that they face great speed in executing their work, but also 85% from the Swedish workers, as well as the workers from Finland and Denmark. The principle of working fast reflects on the overall way of living introducing the so called *dictatorship of urgency*. The dynamics imposes the need for speed reaction no matter if it refers to the employees, the managers or the public servants. Thus, the information technologies become a synonym for the effect of the so called **controlled autonomy**, significantly contributing to the fast movement of information from the periphery to the center which increases centralization. We talk about information **panopticum** or a controlling technique which has initially been implemented in jails so that the inmates are supervised (Gjurovska M., 2015). The Internet provided the opportunity for an even greater centralization feeding the central system with infinite information. Hence, each personal computer becomes a potential terminal. The information technologies lead towards a greater individualization of work.

The research data (Trade Union trade survey, 2014) shows that the employees do not have influence over the autonomy of working. They influence

³ http://www.avrm.gov.mk/content/operativa_januari.pdf Министерство за труд и социјална политика: Оперативен план за активни мерки за вработување во 2014.

⁴ <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/fr/surveys/ewcs>, Enquêtes européennes sur les conditions de travail (EWCS), 8 mars, 2013,

the methods of working insignificantly (37%), -they do not have influence over the determination of the speed of work execution (30%), they do not have control over the choice of work activities (40%), and they work during breaks (53%).

Flexibility as Torture of the Workforce

In the beginning, the flexibility of the organization and the flexibilization of the workforce were considered a process which will enable the enterprises to adapt to the changing conditions avoiding great economic turbulences. In that respect it represented a concept viewed positively which was expected to increase efficacy, spur innovation, develop new forms of cooperation, as well as new forms of competitiveness which will simultaneously develop democratic processes in the enterprises. The flexibilization has been a synonym of finding new techniques for adjustment of production for the various tastes of the consumers. The analysts of the 80s were impressed by the possibilities the new technologies provided in the production of small series customized to the tastes of the various types of consumers. Therefore, the flexibility became means for improvement of the competitiveness of the enterprise, a synonym of economic development, a condition for the welfare of all and a solid context for development of democracy in the sphere of labor.

The flexibility in the labor domain has varied manifest appearances. First of all, it can be recognized in the fixed term contract. These work contracts are aimed to make the employers' strategies possible for releasing workforce easily in the periods when they do not need workforce. They give great liberties to the employers. According to the European Workplace Conditions Survey (EWCS, 2013), two thirds of the European population (62%) works with flexible contracts. One third of the employed did not want to work this way, but they complied as they could not find permanent employment. The young are especially concerned because most of them work part-time jobs, often without any form of contract. These work contracts are not individual choices of the workers, but are imposed. Greater flexibility means greater insecurity of the job. In that context, instead of one employment, we talk about contingent work. That means that one employee during the day can work at different jobs few hours each. This situation decreases the possibilities of creating more stable social relations, therefore the social relations get the character of temporariness, i.e. it is also here that we notice the presence of precarity. In the EWCS (2010) we can get the following review:

Employed according to the number of work hours per week in the EU:

	Up to 20 h/	From 21-34	From 35-38	From 39-41	From 42 - 48	Over 48 h.
2005	10,9%	10,5%	21,3%	32,5%	11%	13,8%
2010	13%	12%	17%	30%	10%	11%

Извор: EWCS, 2010, (Enquêtes européennes sur les conditions de travail), 2010,
<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/fr/surveys/ewcs> ;

The flexibilization of workforce is almost a new occurrence in Macedonia. It does not have the same characteristics that apply in the developed economies within the EU. The flexible forms of employment have not yet acquired legitimacy. A dominant form of flexible employment is temporary employment, i.e. employment with a fixed time contract. As the table below shows, the growing trend of this type of employment appears after the Law on Labor Relations was adopted in 2006.

Table 2: Temporarily employed persons in RM, % of the overall number of employed in RM

Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
%	10,9	13,2	16,3	15,0	16,2	14,4	16,0	14,6

Source: Workforce survey (2006-2014).

Table 3: Employed with shortened work time in RM, % from the overall employed population 15-74 years.

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
	5,7%	6,5%	5,8%	5,0%	6,2%	5,0%	5,7%	5,1%

The table below is given for comparison with the year 2001, when the percentage of flexible employment (2.8) in Macedonia and the other Balkan states had been very low.

Table 3 (SEESSP): Population employment status – West Balkan Countries

COUNTRY	Albania	B & H	Monte- negro	Croatia	Kosovo	Mace- donia	Serbia	Total
Employment status								
Full time employed	40.0%	35.2%	36.9%	39.6%	22.9%	23.9%	40.5%	34.4%
Part-time employed	10.3%	3.2%	1.7%	2.0%	6.1%	2.8%	2.6%	3.8%
Unemployed, actively looking for work	17.5%	16.3%	17.9%	8.4%	25.1%	25.2%	9.7%	16.6%
Unemployed, wanting a job, but not actively looking for work	5.6%	7.6%	7.7%	5.1%	4.9%	6.4%	7.7%	6.7%
Retired, pensioner	8.8%	12.8%	18.9%	28.0%	6.9%	15.0%	22.3%	15.8%
Housewife	12.9%	11.8%	10.2%	9.8%	30.4%	19.7%	9.0%	14.1%
Pupil, student	3.4%	11.6%	5.3%	6.0%	2.1%	6.0%	7.1%	7.2%
Sick, disabled	1.0%	1.0%	.9%	1.0%	1.6%	1.0%	1.1%	1.1%
Doing military or community service	.4%	.4%	.6%	.1%	.1%	.0%	.1%	.2%
Total N cases	2019	6809	1844	2476	2504	2578	3639	21869
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

However, besides the insecure jobs, the flexibility manifests itself in the flexible work time. The Surveys (EWCS, 2013) show that a significant number of workers (17%) stay after their work time, i.e. 36% work 10 hours a day. 52%

of the surveyed workers have worked during Saturdays, and 27% also work on Sundays. According to the same survey 16% of the workers have had long work day (at least five times a week), 10% have worked at night, 20% have worked on call, 53% have worked during weekends.

Flexibility as Adaptation

Should we prefer to define flexibility with only one term, the term adaptation would appear as the most suitable. To be competitive in a highly competitive environment which at the same time portrays the ambient of the labor market (great offer of workforce) and the ambient of the goods and services market, fast adaptation and acceptance of new rules is essential. At the individual level, the adaptability means utter acceptance of the conditions on the part of the employees, acceptance of the production norms, acceptance of the extended work time, acceding to the salary amounts, but also to the dismissals. According to the French sociologist Jan Spurk, the processes of adaptation were more characteristic of the individuals, than of the enterprises. The fast adaptation to changes, however, did not mean that the power and domination have disappeared. They are present, but in an anonymous form that is not reachable for the individuals. On part of the individuals, this domination is accepted as necessary and natural, i.e. as their second nature (Spurk, 2013). The marked mechanisms do not regulate only the relations between enterprises and commercial transactions. They entered deeply in the education domain, in the human health domain, natural environment and protection of the environment, sport, thus thoroughly changing the concept of individuality. In that respect, Spurk states that the market has placed an absolute hegemony over the overall society. The sociological critique of the market which has been developed at the beginnings of the development of economic sociology, mainly referred to the inability of the market to establish order in society and maintain social cohesion. When the sociologists asked the economists: what is a market? – they did not have the answer. The market was one of the terms the economists used in their analyses without it being determined. The sociologists did not have it as a goal to determine the term market, but just to show that what economists call a market (supply and demand) is related to politics, with the labor legislation, with the state, the internal organization of enterprises, class division of society, the role of the unions, the workforce, the culture, but also the families of the workers (Swedberg R., 2004). According to that, the market is an abstraction, and in reality the market is like a system where a small number of people strive to increase their profit, and a huge majority fights to survive (Spurk J., 2012). According to Spurk, the economic crisis itself comes from the ultimate adaptation of the individuals which leads to fatalism. In the big crisis the world's

echo is heard: *we faced a catastrophe and we must come out of it* (Appay B., 2005).

The contemporary societal developments point to the fact that the individuals feel revolt, although it is not always defined and not always aimed at the source of the catastrophe. Somewhere it appears in the form of huge strikes in the enterprises, somewhere it is riots at the suburbs of the big cities or riots at the universities. However, the revolt is not articulated only through open demonstrations. It is also demonstrated through the passivity of the students in the classrooms (utter unruliness during the class), total apathy of the youth (night parties-day napping), deviant behaviors (alcohol, prostitution), as well as mass migration of the youth who feel powerless to change things. The revolt, no matter the form it is demonstrated through, is one of the proactive solutions for the individual. It means defying the rigid societal rules that have the importance of natural laws. It seems that the societal rules cannot be changed, as if they have natural importance. However, the person needs to change their nature, they need to constantly change and adjust to the social environment, i.e. the conditions of the market. Hence, individuals are recommended various types of physical activities to maintain their physical fitness and endure the lengthened work day. Morning running, fitness centers, various supplements in their diet, recreation during weekends are recommended for an active and productive work week. Psychological fitness is also needed so that the ability of adaptation is increased as well. The individual is adapted then, when they become passive, sensitivity towards the problems that arise from the work process is decreased, the problems from the family or other troubles from the society.

Flexibility in the Market Domain and Stress

For the first time, it was Hans Selye who wrote about the stress at the workplace in 1930, for whom the stress represents a nonspecific response of the organism towards the requirements and pressures from the environment. Afterwards, this concept has been accepted and further developed, above all, by psychologists, and later on by sociologists, as well as professionals from other social sciences. The psychologists mainly deal with the individual consequences from the stress, and the sociologists and others are interested in the factors producing it – the so called stressors. There is a general agreement among the analysts that the stress emerges from the adaptive tendencies of the individual (ESENER, 2014). According to the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, the stress represents a situation when the requirements of the work environment overpass the ability of the workers to meet those requirements. The following are considered as especially important factors, i.e. stressors: the

deadlines for performing tasks, quantity of work, conflict of work roles, misuse of the work position, insecurity on the job, lack of opportunities for professional development, mobbing etc. Besides the consequences upon human's health (cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, chronic fatigue) it has negative consequences in relation to the enterprise itself by increasing absenteeism, performance mistakes, causing addictions (smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol and taking medicines). The data from EWCS (2013) show that within the EU the number of employed who think that the work impacts their health rises (53%), and that stress is among the most important factors. The stress is greater among the new member states (30%) while among the EU 15 member states it is 20%. Among the states with particularly high stress are: Greece 55%, Slovenia 38%, Lithuania and Poland 35%. Also, in the new member states, 41% of the employed complained of fatigue (twice more than the old member states).

The stress is one of the negative consequences of the flexibility. In one survey (1800 surveyors) conducted in the Great Britain, the stress is the first hazard the employed face. The data from the table below show what dangers the employed face and in what intensity:

Main work related problems	All
Stress	67%
Mobbing	46%
Overtime work	36%
Back pain	33%
Fatigue	32%
Chronic injuries	27%
Long work day	26%
Exhaustion from working on a computer	22%
Managing heavy loads	19%
Violence and threats	19%
Loneliness while working	19%
High temperatures	17%
Low temperatures	11%
Asbestos	10,8%
Dust	10,8%
Chemicals or solvents	9%
Noise	9 %
Traffic accidents on the road	8%
Height fall	8%
Closed space	7%
Danger from machines	6%,

Accident at the work place	6%
Infections	5%
Dermatitis/eczema	4%
Vibrations	3%
Asthma	2%
Passive smoking	2%

Source: TUC, 2013;

According to the same source, the stress is significantly present in the banking sector, where 82% of the employees emphasized that they face stress. The employed within the central state administration (87%) as well as the employed in education (84%) faced greatest amounts of stress. The analyses of the stress factors point out that the flexibility is a general frame for the occurrence of stress as well as the other consequences that were mentioned. It is emphasized that significant factors that cause stress are: overwhelming workload on the job, contradictory requirements and lack of clarity of the given tasks, increased intensity of the work, increased control, fast changes of the organization, insecurity of jobs, on the job mobbing.

Given the fact that the stress on the job becomes a mass occurrence, it is often pointed out that enterprises become places where stress is produced, and that they are places where people suffer. In that context we speak about the syndrome *fearing Monday*, i.e. fear of the experiences during the work week. According to surveys, 52% of the surveyors have insomnia the night before Monday.⁵

Flexecurity and Insecurity in the Sphere of Labor

In the conditions created by the new capitalism, it is expected from the individuals that they develop abilities for fast change of jobs, ability to survive dismissal and finding energy to look for a new job, acquire new competencies in short periods of time, be always at disposal to the enterprises. The new individual needs to have overcome all habits from the past, as well as their previous work experience. However, research from the organizational sciences show that these tendencies are not aligned with the professional and personal identity of the employed who, during their lives, tend to build one coherent professional biography which will maintain the continuity of the experience. According to Robert Castel, within the 60s from the 20th century people believed that “tomorrow will be better than today”. People believed that their salaries will be

⁵ <http://www.doctissimo.fr/html/psychologie/dossiers/developpement-personnel>

increased, that democracy in the society will be improved or that their children will be successful (Castels R., 2009). However, surveys show that people are afraid of the future.

In essence, there is a great tension between the increasing flexibilization and the aspirations of the individuals which produce a state of insecurity. The insecurity is not a new occurrence in the world of labor. The wage workers have always faced insecurity in terms of their future, with precarity (temporariness of the employment status) and various other risks. Nevertheless, today insecurity is a dominant condition which from the labor sphere extends into all domains of society. Even the people who have stable employment face insecurity and weak motivation for work. The intensity of insecurity is strengthened because it follows after a stability and security of jobs which was specific for the period after World War II (Cappelli, 1999).

The insecurity of jobs is a significant topic in the social policies of the states. According to the European surveys (EWCS-2010), the feeling that one can be fired at any moment is shared by one third of the Slovenians, Czechs, Bulgarians. For 72% of the Europeans the insecurity of the workplace is the main reason for stress.

In the past, many of the sociologists showed a significant interest for studying the perceptions on labor. Thus, in the 80s, Andre Gortz pointed out that the labor has a central meaning for the individual determining their life, that it is the main value and pillar on which every individual perspective is being built. The small number of research papers on this topic today show that the labor becomes a particular type of good that is being delivered to more employers simultaneously; it only becomes a fixed term employment. In relation to this, the question appears: what are today's expectations of the labor? Does the youth perceive insecurity the same way as the elder generations? Is the state of insecurity specific for youth as well? According to the research data, the young people expect their employment to be related to their professional capabilities acquired through education, to enrich their competencies, to acquire new friends. Does that mean that they are socialized to accept insecurity as a normal component of their lives? Data shows that such statements may be right due to the fact that there is internalized consciousness among youth about the long period of transition from education towards employment, about the possible dismissals, about the low salaries and the arrogance of the employers. The labor gets more and more of the character of instrumentality, the logic for one simple market exchange is intensified, getting used to low salaries. The analysts show that labor has lost its psychology; it is deprived of emotionality and enters the sphere of the indifferent. The labor gets a character of temporariness, we would

say precarity (Franco Fraccaroli, 2007). According to Robert Castel the precarity is no longer one fleeting period which lasts until some better employment is found, but it becomes one permanent state. Temporary employment accompanies people from their early age to their retirement. Work is accepted regardless of the work conditions, regardless of the salary. The need to work is unconditional, even when the job does not provide even a minimal economic autonomy, neither for oneself, nor for the family, Castel adds. (Castel R., 2009).

Security through Flexibility – Flexicurity

Having in mind the negative consequences of the flexibility in the domain of labor, the new social psychology introduces the term Flexicurity which denotes reaching a higher level of security of jobs amid high flexibility. It is achieved through the system of social policies of the states through which social benefits of the unemployed will be ensured, as well as monetary compensation and a developed system of trainings for finding a new job on the labor market in an easier and faster way. The insecurity in the domain of labor will be greater in the states that have no measures of this type for supporting the unemployed. This policy is a part of the corpus of developed policies of the European Social Model and it does not restrict itself to the work place only, but also to balancing work and life, career development, transition from education to employment, active policies on the labor market. The European concept for flexicurity is in essence a concept for a greater mobility of the labor market, for creating more and better jobs, for development of skills which will ensure greater security to the individuals on the labor market.

Flexibility and social control

The flexible organization, above all, means creating a new kind of social control of the workers. In the past organizational systems the control was direct and was executed at the workplace itself. In the new organization, the control is being executed over the result itself, the autonomy of the individual is being emphasized. The new organizational paradigm intends to possess the worker entirely, to get their trust, total belonging, total disposability of the worker during the work time, but also after the completion of the work time. Today, staying after work is a usual occurrence in the enterprises. A lot of employees today point out that they stay longer at work, sometimes even for few hours. The control over the result gives the opportunity to remove those employees who are not suitable for the strategic goals of the enterprise, and keep those that give their lives to obtain the expected result. Therefore, the flexibility rather means

adaptation, utter adjustment to the expectations of the employers because the sanction is by far crueler i.e. it means losing the existential resources. The proclaimed autonomy refers to the choice of methods of work and to achieve goals, continuous research of new information, innovating.

At a social level, the autonomy of the individuals is suspended. The degradation of the individual in the domain of labor implies degradation of the person whose social responsibility decreases, and the independence is conditional.

The role of teamwork and cooperation is emphasized in flexible organizations. Supervisors are no longer needed. The hierarchy gives place to autonomous work groups. Hence, the data from the European survey (EWCS, 2012) show that, in the member states, 62% of the respondents worked in teams, however, the scope of their autonomy was very small. Only 22% of the respondents who had worked in teams stated that they had worked autonomously. The flexibility in the beginning promised decrease in work control, opportunity for greater cooperation among the employees and elimination of hierarchies. That, at the same time, would mean open gates for the democratic processes in the enterprises. However, contrary to these expectations for democratization, the work process becomes tense. According to Appay, it is about a new totalitarianism which causes permanent exclusion and crisis (Appay B., 2005), or controlled autonomy.

Also, the great success of the flexible organization is due to the mass unemployment which expands to all professional categories. This condition introduces social insecurity and domination. The feeling of survival pervades, i.e. gives birth again to the economy of survival which has been specific for the lower levels of labor productivity.

In order to decrease the effects of the oversized flexibility, a special system of social protection is being developed which will remedy the consequences of the flexibility during a determined period. Its goal is to prevent social mutiny and social explosion. Among the huge social problems (high rate of unemployment) the monetary support of the vulnerable categories makes 0.44% of the GDP (2013). A massive education system is essential which will help the processes of adaptation of workforce, through which socialization of the norms for functioning in the flexible systems will be done.

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