

REVIEW

of the works and scientific activity of Assoc. Prof. Bogdana Yordanova Todorova, PhD, candidate in the competition for the academic position of “Professor”, for the requirements of the Department of Social Theories, Strategies, and Prognoses at the Institute for the Study of Societies and Knowledge – BAS (State Gazette, issue 5 of 15 January 2019)

The only candidate in the competition is Assoc. Prof. Bogdana Yordanova Todorova, PhD. In applying for the competition, she has presented two separate monographs of which she is the sole author, one monograph of which she is a co-author, one chapter in a collective monograph and 29 studies and article, of which 4 are scientific publication, peer-reviewed and indexed in the world databases Web of Science and Scopus, and 5 in other world databases. One of the monographs and 17 of the studies and articles are in English.

The works she has presented – with one exception – deal with, or are essentially connected with, a vast and practically inexhaustible topic: Islam as a social phenomenon. The doctrinal aspect proper of Islam is examined primarily insofar as it is relevant for the present-day situation at the global and regional level (the Middle East, Europe, the Balkans, Central Asia), and for the situation in separate countries (Bulgaria, Rumania, Iran, Syria, etc.) and separate regions in those countries (the Rhodope Mountain region). The topic of political Islam is developed in detail, including its major and particular tendencies; the various technological, economic and civilizational challenges to Islam and its doctrinal and practical responses to those challenges. Based on her analyses, the author has endeavored to trace the variants for the future of the world, of regions and countries, with an emphasis on the perspectives for Europe, the Balkans and Bulgaria.

Two of the articles are devoted to moral dilemmas arising from the technological developments in modern medicine. The first of these deals with the possibilities for the manipulation of the human genome; and the latter, with body donation. Typically, the latter problem is discussed in connection with Islamic doctrine and tradition.

The main scientific contributions in the works of Assoc. Prof. Todorova I would formulate as follows:

First, her publications are essentially parts of a large monograph work the subject of which is contemporary Islamic civilization. It is rare to see an author's works comprising such a variety of topics united by a single over-arching theme. Islamic civilization is presented as an extremely complex whole that is inexhaustible in its details, internally contradictory, changeable, and developing.

Second, the profound ambiguity of Islamic civilization is revealed. The author has shown the historical preconditions for the modern emergence of contradictory tendencies. She has highlighted the positive elements and ideas in Islam, which are valuable not only for Islamic societies but also for our capacity to rethink the values and practices of Western civilization. In this respect, I would point out relevant economic ideas and practices (particularly Islamic banks). These are based on a more correct, holistic conceptual basis compared with the methodologically unfounded attempt of neoclassical economics to separate and distinguish the contribution of capital from the contribution of labor in the newly created product. Another interesting element is the ideas and practices of Shiite theo-democracy. Knowledge of these may stimulate reflection as to whether a certain religious (not only Islamic) activism might not help overcome the crisis of values, relativism, consumerism, the reduction of human relations in society to purely formal procedures. It is also worth mentioning the Sufi idea regarding the borderlines that, instead of dividing and setting in opposition, indicate a need for

complementarity. Thus, Islamic mysticism might be useful for promoting a better understanding between countries, nations, religions and civilizations, and bringing them closer together. Yet Todorova also shows how these positive aspects may serve the contrary goals and political projects. Islamic banks, for instance, provide possibilities for financing terrorism; the very idea of a separate Islamic economy may serve to isolate and capsule the Muslim minorities living in European societies. Sufism, as Todorova indicates, may be used for the purposes of jihadism and terrorism as well.

Third, I would specially emphasize that the works reviewed here, display a perspective that is open to the future and contain a significant prognostic element. Assoc. Prof. Todorova persistently looks for the positive features and preconditions for a better future of Muslim, European, and Balkan societies and for humankind in general. Her works specifically present the embeddedness of Muslims in the Balkan societies, their good adaptation to the realities of these societies, the tradition of good neighborly relations between ethno-religious groups in Bulgaria and specifically in the Rhodope Mountains region. Despite these positive preconditions, the prevailing tone in Assoc. Prof. Todorova's works is one of concern: she identifies dangers that lie, on the one hand, in the expansion of neo-liberal capitalism and the clash between the interests of global and regional forces; on the other hand, in the response of Islamic jihadism and terrorism. The reasons for optimism are indeed fragile. For instance, Assoc. Prof. Todorova notes, "Since 2011, the Arabic world is in a transition that promises to be bloody and cruel. ("Objectifying Islam, 2018, p. 92). The prognosis: "Extremism will disappear when the geopolitical conditions stop providing a favorable nourishing environment for its existence" (Ibid, p. 180). "Dialogue and tolerance" is the formula the author proposes with conviction: "We must offer openness and tolerance for others, regardless of the culture and tradition from which they come" ("Balkans as Reality", 2018, 127). However, there are powerful forces opposing this humane attitude.

Four, I should specially highlight the merits of her monograph devoted to the ideas of Imam Khomeini and the Islamic revolution in Iran. Significantly, the author looks at the century-old tradition of Shiism – the tradition of protest of the poor and oppressed, of revolt against despotism and autocracy – and sees it as the key to understanding the modern concepts of Shiism, the political processes taking place in Iran and in Shiite communities in the Middle East, the legal and political system of contemporary Iran. The connection between tradition and contemporary tendencies is shown very convincingly (“The Position of ‘Unity’ in the Political Thought of Imam Khomeini”, 2017).

Five, I should emphasize the special attention given to the mutual relations of ethno-religious groups in the Balkans and in Bulgaria. The author has traced the historical traditions and the regional differences in these relations, the mistakes of governments, the implementation of a Neo-Ottomanist strategy, the penetration of Islamic extremist elements. She correctly notes the tendency of social and cultural regress in the Muslim communities in Bulgaria (see for instance, “Bulgarian Mohammedans (Pomaks) in the Eastern and Central Rhodope Mountains: the Problem of Identity”, 2015). She proposes measures for neutralizing the destructive tendencies.

Sixth, the works of Assoc. Prof. Todorova are interdisciplinary to a high degree. They naturally and smoothly combine philosophy, history, sociology, political science, psychology, prognostics and other disciplines.

Seven, a significant achievement is the combining of theoretical analysis with empirical studies that is typical for some of Assoc. Prof. Todorova’s monograph books and articles.

I will state a critical note, albeit a minor one. In one of the articles, she claims that “Erdogan’s policy is part of a long-term strategy of the USA” (“Turkey’s Role in the Functioning of the Islamic Religious Confession in Bulgaria as an Element of Its Neo-Ottomanist Strategy”, 2018, p. 223). The context shows the article was written after the failed coup against Erdogan and the

regime's response – the attack against the Gülenists. Since then, Turkey's relations with the US have continuously worsened. It is increasingly clear that Turkey wants to lead an independent policy and not to comply with the interests of its leading partner in NATO. In my opinion, this tendency has been underestimated in the above-mentioned article. In fact, the developments in question give no cause for reassurance, but are a source of even greater tension and insecurity in the Balkans

The scientific works of Assoc. Prof. Todorova have been the subject of 4 reviews and have been quoted in 23 scientific publications (foreign and Bulgarian). Since October 2009, she has taken part in 35 international and 21 national scientific forums. No less impressive is her participation in projects (since 2008 until now): 1 European project, 5 projects with national funding by institutions other than BAS, 6 projects with budget funding and 6 projects under the free equivalent exchange system. She is head of 9 projects, including all the mentioned ones under the equivalent exchange system.

Assoc. Prof. Todorova's activities as teacher and organizer of scientific research are also remarkable. She has prepared two new lecture courses at the Training Centre of BAS; she has also conducted 5 other lecture courses in universities and scientific organizations, some of them in English. She has acted as supervisor for two post-graduate students and one undergraduate student preparing a diploma thesis. She has been a member of 12 organizational or program committees. She is the compiler and/or editor of 7 scholarly collections.

Assoc. Prof. Todorova is equally known as an expert. She is a consultant of the Directorate of Religious Confessions at the Council of Ministers. She is a member of the editorial boards of 3 scientific journals, two of which are published in English. She has written 8 reviews and opinions for procedures for scientific degrees and academic positions. She has also written 10 reviews of articles and books. She is a member of 4 NGOs.

Assoc. Prof. Todorova has a broad competency in foreign languages: she has an excellent command of English and French, a good level of Russian, and working proficiency in Farsi.

Since February 2019, Assoc. Prof. Todorova is a member of the Scientific Council of ISSK – BAS. Last March, she was elected to a second mandate as head of the Department of Social Theories, Strategies, and Prognoses.

CONCLUSION: In view of all that was said, I am convinced that Assoc. Prof. Todorova far exceeds the minimal requirements of the National Centre for Information and Documentation regarding the acquirement of the academic position “professor”. I call upon the members of the Scientific Jury to unanimously elect Assoc. Prof. Bogdana Yordanova Todorova, PhD, to this position, and that they recommend to the Scientific Council of ISSK – BAS to confirm the election.

17 April 2019

Prof. DSc Ivan Katsarski: