

REVIEW

for the competition for the academic position of “Professor”, Professional Field 2.3 Philosophy, for the needs of the Department of Social Theories, Strategies, and Prognoses at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology – BAS (announced in State Gazette, issue 89 of 12 November 2019)

The only candidate in the competition is Assoc. Prof. DSc Borislav Nikolov Gradinarov. He has submitted two monographs and 35 studies and article, one of which is in English. Most of the publications are interdisciplinary. The main thematic focuses are in the field of social philosophy, law and ethics. There is an important economic aspect in the approach to the problems.

Among his colleagues, Assoc. Prof. Gradinarov is known largely for his scientific research. The list of his publications includes 8 monographs and 100 studies and articles. From the end of November 2012 to November 2019, he has taken part in 18 scientific forums. Since 2008 and until now, Gradinarov has worked on 8 scientific projects, three of which were headed by him.

At the same time, he has ample experience as a lecturer in various higher education institutions. Since 1996 until now, he has read 61 lecture courses. Some of his monographs are directly linked to his teaching activity. He has been the scientific supervisor of two doctoral students. He has edited and compiled five collections of scientific articles.

His expert activity includes legal consultancy at the Council of Electronic Media (2001-2003 and 2007-2010) and participation in scientific juries.

The assessment of the works of Assoc. Prof. Gradinarov is based on his competence in social philosophy. I am not able to assess the specifically legal questions treated in his works. Given this limitation, I would formulate Gradinarov's main scientific achievements thus:

First, he convincingly argues in support of the basic thesis regarding the fundamental indeterminateness and the risky aspect of the world, especially in living nature and society. The author logically concludes, "[T]here is something hazardous in history, which we cannot fully analyze and manipulate" (*Risk and Anti-risk Strategies*, 2020, p. 19). Many arguments are brought forth in support of this thesis. Among them, I would point out the assertions regarding the "double functionality" of every tool or invention (Ibid p. 63-64); the obsessive force of technology (Ibid p. 65); the risk built into the very institutions of modern society (the market, the stock market, etc.) (Ibid p. 52).

Second, the convincing definitions of risk, in which the subjective element of the concept (attitudes, goals, values) is stressed (Ibid p. 30, 67, 74, 80-81, 87).

Third, he proposes an original classification of risks, situated in four quadrants of a coordinate system defined by two axis of risk: the distributive and transitive dimension. This scheme is flexible and can be applied in practice (Ibid p. 99-105).

Four, he presents an analysis of various anti-risk strategies. Salient among these is the author's original interpretation of social capital (in my opinion, it would be more precise to refer to moral capital) as an anti-risk strategy. He has treated in an interesting and original way Bulgaria's membership in the EU as an anti-risk strategy (Ibid p. 149ff).

Five, Gradinarov deserves praise for his ability to present critical and at the same time well-balanced analyses of modern social trends and phenomena, while remaining aloof from media commotion and one-sided propaganda. Notable in this respect is how his positive assessment of the European Union, and Bulgaria's membership in it, are combined with an analysis of the serious problems facing the Union and our country. (*Risk and Anti-risk Strategies* p. 204-205). Another example: Gradinarov adduces facts that convincingly debunk the myth of the Greek debt as supposedly due to the inclination of Greeks to live on credit (Ibid p. 199). In the same spirit is his analysis of the economic failures of Spain, Portugal, Italy and Greece: their faults are not rooted in some common features of "Southern countries" but have different causes specific to each of the countries (Ibid p. 194-202). He also justly criticizes the ideologically colored attitude of the West to Russia, pointing out the Cold War stereotypes should be abandoned ("Russia's Return to the Global Geopolitical Game" 2016). Likewise, it is well to remember the "pitfalls of inequalities", how small and accidental inequalities may grow into large ones in social pathology ("The Hidden Pitfalls of Inequality"). He draws a valuable distinction between freedom of speech and free speech: while the former is primarily a basis for pretensions, the latter has a deep moral meaning ("Media Law" p. 175-178). We can point out many other examples, in Gradinarov's works, of successful and valuable analyses of various social processes and phenomena. We will indicate one more: his in-depth analysis of the strong and weak points in social movements that reject the power of party-linked clienteles ("Civic Movements against the Party Status Quo", 2017).

Assoc. Prof. Gradinarov's works have had an appreciable resonance in the Bulgarian scholarly community. Eight reviews of his works have been published, and the data on citations contains 51 points.

In his publications, he has examined more than a few questions that represent very complex issues of debate. Therefore, it is only natural his line of thought and mine might not coincide. I hope such differences can be a basis for fruitful discussion.

First of all, I would refer to his treatment of the issue of determinism. Gradinarov distinguishes three kinds: classical, non-classical, and neo-classical. But his own view on the topic seems not to have been clarified. I believe a discussion on the problem of determinism would be significantly incomplete if not linked to modern cosmological theories (especially the Big Bang theory). A quite logical hypothesis is that indeterminateness is an epistemological, not an ontological, question: some processes are too complex to be known fully, although they are in principle knowable and hence predictable. Gradinarov emphasizes characteristics of social systems like “spontaneity”, “self-organization”, “self-movement” (Ibid p. 226). But he more than once asserts that the growing complexity of an organization might pass into disorganization, into breakdown of the system. Moreover, “self-organization” is a relative thing because it is always restricted by factors external to the system. I believe it would be useful to interpret the new scientific theories in the light of concepts from classical dialectics (quality, quantity, measure, etc.).

I would like to caution against the danger of excessive emphasis on “indeterminateness” and “risk”. For instance, referring to digital technologies, Gradinarov concludes that the “most important feature” of the new situation, especially in the sphere of economy, is “that the issues coming to the fore are the lack of order in our world, the insecurity, unpredictability of the trends and the shrinking importance of established hierarchies not only in the lives of individuals but also in those of communities and states” (“Challenges and Risks of Network Society”, 2007). But if the situation is so unstable and unpredictable, social critique of today’s world order becomes almost impossible. “Indeterminateness” removes or waters down the question of responsibility. But modern societies suffer more from the concrete and

defined form of modern life (in particular, from the growing and fully predictable scope of modern inequality) than from indeterminateness. Moreover, the groups and circles that benefit by, and those who lose from, the “risks” are “definite” enough (elsewhere, Gradinarov himself points this out).

I cannot refrain from being critical of his basic assertions in the article “Will Ethnic Conflicts Replace the Clash of Classes?” (2012), specifically, to the thesis that “*the elimination of the conditions for their [of social contradictions and conflicts] growing intensity would be tantamount to eliminating the species Homo Sapiens*” (p. 63, italics in the original). It would thus seem that the striving and rational efforts to overcome conflict-producing factors is unhealthy. Marx’s and Weber’s ideas are “criticized” and rejected without being analyzed (p. 65). Class conflicts (which the authors considers to be transient and of waning importance) are presented in contrast with ethnic conflicts (p. 65ff). Gradinarov refutes his own reasoning in other places. See for instance the articles “Bulgarian Post-totalitarian Capitalism as a Cause of Bulgarian Poverty” (2008), “The Unconditional Base Income” (2014) etc., in which it becomes clear how important the social-class aspect of modern societies actually is.

I have personally known Gradinarov since the start of his scientific career. Among his positive qualities, I would point out his communicative and organizational skills. I have no shared publications with him.

Assoc. Prof. Gradinarov meets the minimal national requirements for the academic position of “Professor”.

Conclusion: My general impression of Assoc. Prof. Gradinarov’s activity and scientific achievements is definitely positive. My critical remarks are largely a matter for discussion and emphasize some additional aspects of the problems. It is with conviction that I vote for the election of Assoc. Prof. DSc Borislav Nikolov Gradinarov to the position of “Professor” in

Scientific Field 2.3. Philosophy, for the needs of the Department of Social Theories,
Strategies and Prognoses at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology – BAS.

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REVIEWER:

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