

OPINION

Of Professor DSc Ivan Katsarski, in his capacity as member of the scientific jury of the competition for the academic position “Associate Professor”, announced in State Gazette, issue 106 of 15.12.2020, Professional Field 2.3 Philosophy (Philosophy of Politics), for the needs of the Department of Social Theories, Strategies, and Prognoses

Senior Assistant Professor Blagovesta Ilieva Nikolova, PhD, is the only candidate for the competition. She has presented a monograph in English, published by a prestigious international publishing house, and 15 scientific articles and papers, seven of which are in English; five of the articles have been published in journals with ISI impact factor and/or SJR ranking; while four others, in other peer-reviewed and indexed journals. Nikolova has pointed out 26 citations of her publications, all of these, in foreign, English-language editions. She has taken part in numerous international scientific forums. She has also participated in four scientific projects, of which three international. Nikolova is an expert for the Research Executive Agency for ethical assessment of projects in the framework of the following programs: H2020-MSCA-IF-2016, H2020-MSCA-IF-2017, H2020-MSCA-IF-2018, H2020-MSCA-IF2019, H2020-SPACE-202-LEIT, H2020-MSCA-IF-2020. She has given lecture courses in foreign countries; the courses were devoted to the integration of ethics into research projects. In view of this information, it is fully understandable that Dr. Nikolova significantly exceeds the minimal national requirements for holding the academic position of Associate Professor.

To be brief and concise in describing the problem field studied by Dr. Nikolova, I would use the following keywords: science, technologies, innovations, prognostication, future, ethics, market, management, democracy. These themes can easily be united superficially, in a “publicist” vein. Nikolova’s work, however, displays the opposite characteristics: they are in-depth, conceptually penetrating and reflective, and authentically philosophical. These features are indicators and preconditions for her high theoretical achievements, which I shall attempt to specify in my personal perspective.

First, Dr. Nikolova shows intolerance for certain simplistic but widespread views on science and technologies: scientism, technological determinism and scientific-technological optimism on the one hand, and, on the other, technological apocalypses, fervently elaborated and presented as a successful market product. Nikolova avoids these two extremes through an in-depth social-philosophical and ethically centered analysis of the actual problems of research and innovations in the modern social context.

Secondly, Nikolova identifies the main cause of the social and moral problems that mark present-day scientific-technological advances. She convincingly demonstrates that the factor in question is the broken connection between technological progress and the humanist idea of a “good life” and the self-realization of individuals. Capitalism, especially in its neo-liberal version, manifests itself as not only a purely economy-related but also normative domination that menaces authentic humanness and the social community. The market is colonizing the whole social and normative space.

Thirdly, Dr. Nikolova, in seeking the solution to this enormous problem, finds it in a sort of socialization and ethicization of research and technologies. These should no longer be controlled by experts alone (scientists, engineers, businesspeople, and politicians) but should be open to society, to the needs, values and participation of multiple social actors.

Fourthly, a very important and valuable feature of Nikolova's works is that she is not satisfied with presenting a desirable, ideal condition of things. She not only outlines a positive perspective, but also analyzes the formidable obstacles to its realization, which often completely block it. For instance, according to her, democratic participation may turn into a compromise reflecting the ratio of forces between the various participants. It can also become a screen for dishonesty and the selfish interests of some participants, etc.

Fifth, another merit of Nikolova's works is that they do not limit themselves to an academic discussion on the problem field of responsible investigations and innovations (RII). They examine in detail the attempts to implement the ideas of RII in the actual course of scientific-technological activity. In this connection, the relevant documents of the European Union are subjected to her scrutiny. Nikolova not only presents the declared vision of EU regarding RII but also discusses its contradictions and the factors that obstruct its realization

Sixth, Nikolova displays excellent knowledge on themes related to RII. This informedness is evident not by the list of texts she reviews but by her in-depth and critical appreciation of concepts, which leads her to independent theoretical conclusions.

Seventh, Dr. Nikolova's works devoted to RII are unique in Bulgarian scholarly literature. In our country, this problem field has not been presented at academic level but has hitherto merely been taken as a desirable opportunity to win projects and conduct seminars of a distinctly apologetic kind. By contrast, Nikolova's works are at the highest world level.

I would address some recommendations concerning the future work of Dr. Nikolova. My most significant remark refers to an eventual expansion, and perhaps partial reorientation, of her analyses. I mean that the high level of reflectiveness sometimes leads the author to antinomies, vicious circles and dead-ends. Some knots cannot be untied but can only be cut. Specifically, the normative hegemony of the market cannot be neutralized only by attempting

to include non-market actors, for these would simply be marginalized by the powers involved. Substantial positive changes cannot take place without a transformation of the power structures in society (in particular, by limiting the power and influence of big business, significantly reforming intellectual property, etc.)

I would also recommend a possibly more direct and accessible style of writing, aimed at a wider audience. Her messages would thereby reach a wider circle of educated readers.

Blagovesta Nikolova is a gifted young researcher who has attained professional realization at a high international level. I can only give the highest evaluation of her intellectual and moral qualities. I have no joint publications with her.

CONCLUSION: Based on the above observations, I believe Senior Assist. Prof. Blagovesta Ilieva Nikolova, PhD, possesses the necessary qualities to hold the academic position of Associate Professor. I will categorically and with full conviction vote that she be elected to this position in Professional Field 2.3 Philosophy (Philosophy of Politics), for the needs of the Department of Social Theories, Strategies, and Prognoses.

March 27, 2021

Prof. DSc. Ivan Katsarski: