

OPINION

by Assoc. Prof. Mariana Draganova, Ph.D., Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at BAS,
regarding the works of Assoc. Prof. DS, Rumiana Ruseva Jeleva,
for the competition for the academic position "professor"
in Professional Field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences, scientific specialty
"Sociology", for the needs of the Department of Stratification, Inequalities and Mobility at
IPS-BAS, published in State Gazette, issue 104, of 15.12.2023.

The present opinion has been prepared based on a decision of the SC for selection of a Scientific Jury on a competition for the academic position "professor" in accordance with Order No. 06.02.2024 of the Director of the IPS at BAS. The author of the Opinion is a member of the Scientific Jury.

1. General description of the presented materials

Documents for participation in the competition for the academic position "professor" were submitted by only one candidate, Assoc. Prof. Rumiana Ruseva Jeleva, DSc; the regularity of the documents was checked by a technical commission determined by the Order of the Director of IFS-BAS No. RD-09-49/21.02.2024. The candidate holds a diploma for Doctor of Science, No. 001590/05.12.2023, and a certificate for the position of Associate Professor, No. 000544/29.01.2014. According to the summary report on the requirements and achievements of the candidate necessary for obtaining the academic position "professor", Assoc. Prof. Rumiana Ruseva Jeleva, DSc, fully meets the minimum national requirements under Art. 2 b of the DASRBA. The candidate exceeds the minimum number of required points (550 points), having collected a total of 737.83 points on the indicators; this indisputably confirms her right to participate in the present competition for acquiring the academic position "professor".

The more important scientific works and activities with which with which Assoc. Prof. R. Jeleva has applied for this competition are as follows:

- Main habilitation thesis: the monograph Jeleva, R. *Dimensions of Integration into the EU*. Prof. Marin Drinov Publishing House of BAS, 2024, ISBN 978-619-245-392-3 (print) ISBN 978-619-245-393-0 (e-book) (203 pages);
- A published book based on a dissertation thesis defended for obtaining the scientific degree Doctor of Sciences: Jeleva, R. *The Conditions for Sustainable Development*. "Informa Print" Publishing House - Burgas, 2024. ISBN: 978-619-7725-15-5 (161 pages);
- 16 articles and reports in Bulgarian and foreign languages, published in non-peer-reviewed journals or in edited collective volumes;
- 15 citations of R. Jeleva in Bulgarian and foreign scientific publications, references

in international scientific databases or in monographs and collective volumes (in Bulgarian or in foreign languages);

- Participation and leadership of national and international scientific or educational projects;
- Participation in 31 scientific conferences and forums (I number only those held since 2015).

2. General characteristics of the candidate's scientific and scientific-applied research activities

Assoc. Prof. R. Jeleva is participating in the competition with publications of diverse scope and content, which can be classified under several thematic fields.

Her governance experience in national and European organizational structures has stimulated her research interest in EU management and integration policies, EU development policies and strategies, and sustainable development; these topics of research are the focus in a number of works submitted by the candidate and have been among her main fields of research in recent years (see mainly monographs 1 and 2).

The articles and studies submitted for participation in the competition can be grouped thematically in several research fields: **youth and Europe** (education, labor market and employment); the **labor market and the place of the elderly** in it; the **Balkans and regions** in Europe; **employment and poverty** in rural areas, **social and digital inequalities**, etc. The general impression is that Assoc. Prof. Jeleva has a particular scientific interest in and affinity for issues related to the EU and European integration in the perspective of sociology and other social sciences.

In addition to publications, the candidate's scientific activity also includes participation in several research, expert and educational projects in the above-mentioned or related thematic areas, as well as participation in international congresses, conferences, seminars and forums, where she has delivered reports and other presentations.

Here I should also mention the scientific and organizational activity of Assoc. Prof. Jeleva, who was the main organizer of the scientific conferences held by IFS-BAN with the financial support of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Sofia, as well as the main compiler and editor of the published proceedings of these conferences.

3. Teaching activity of the candidate

Assoc. Prof. Jeleva is supervisor of two doctoral students and reviewer of doctoral and master's theses in foreign countries. At present she is teaching a course on "EU Foreign Policy Facing New Challenges" at the BAS Training Center.

Assoc. Prof. Jeleva has published a study in the form of a practical guide on the topic of "Transparent Economies - Sustainable Societies", based on the German Sustainability Code, which is a ready-made practical aid and tool for supporting Bulgarian companies to create their own strategies for sustainable business and social entrepreneurship. Her work on the translation, adaptation, synthesis, analysis and interpretation of this manual can be

considered a training activity as well as a scientific-theoretical and scientific-applied contribution.

Assoc. Prof. Jeleva's participation as the head of the national team and member of the steering committee of the European TALENT project under the Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Higher Education program (2018-2023) can also be considered an educational contribution in her scientific biography.

4. Content analysis of the candidate's scientific achievements

Since, in her list of publications, Assoc. Prof. Jeleva has indicated some that she has co-authored with the author of this opinion, I declare that these joint publications are not subject to evaluation and no opinion on them is contained in this analysis.

In the candidate's self-assessment of her scientific contributions contained in the main works with which she is participating in the competition, she has indicated 2 theoretical and 4 practical-applied contributions, as well as the publications in which they are contained. These contributions are theoretically grounded or empirically verified in specific materials in a correct manner.

In my analysis, I will mainly focus on the monograph with which Assoc. Prof. Jeleva is participating in the competition, namely: Jeleva, R. (2024). *Dimensions of Integration into the EU*. Prof. Marin Drinov Publishing House of BAS. Sofia. ISBN 978-619-245-392-3 (print) ISBN 978-619-245-393-0 (e-book) (203 pages).

The general objective of the book is to present a synthesized conceptual-theoretical and empirical study on European integration.

The monograph also devotes attention to the question of the various speeds of European integration, focusing on the accession of the Western Balkans, but also on the dimensions of Europeanization in Bulgarian society; the author thus delineated the south-eastern periphery of the EU as a territorial, but above all a cultural, socio-economic and political region (p. 8).

Throughout the book, the author applies a sociological approach in her analysis, combining theoretical understanding and empirical research and verification based on data for the main pillars that the EU protects and manages, such as cooperation, solidarity, values (respect for freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, human dignity and rights, etc.), European identity, integration, differentiation, disintegration and derived concepts that emerge in the course of the Union's development and enlargement.

In the work's theoretical aspect, the author examines the concept of "integration" from a sociological perspective, referring to the distinction, introduced by David Lockwood (1964), between the system and social integration of Europe; later in the text, she also presents the interdisciplinary debate between scholars regarding the definition of this overused term.

Prof. Jeleva argues the sociological understanding of **European integration** by applying two classical theoretical perspectives: that of Max Weber, whereby she defines the EU as "a structure of meanings, including the understanding of the expansion of the logic of free markets and capitalism, which must be tamed through state intervention and the consolidation of the legal order, i.e., the simultaneous implementation of deregulation and regulation" (p. 63); and that of Durkheim, based on which she points out that "the EU

simultaneously integrates and differentiates European society, from which the emergence of new dimensions of diversity and unity follows" (ibid.).

The other main concept the text deals with is **European differentiation**, which the author defines as a process in which different EU member states or other European states follow different paths or speeds of integration in some areas (p. 16). One of the main characteristics of differentiation is "Europe at different speeds", a term that has become popular in the socio-political debate in Europe and Bulgaria.

The main line in the monograph is the elaboration of and research on the concepts of integration and differentiation and their respective dimensions; this focus is important for the analysis of current trends and of the future development of the European Union, its relations with the various member states as well as countries and citizens outside the EU.

The author presents an interesting sociological mapping of the "unity in diversity" of Europe (according to Trezn 2016:21), in which integration and differentiation are operationalized through linear and structural criteria (table 1, p. 62).

Ultimately, by analyzing the concepts of integration and differentiation, the author is appealing for support for differentiated integration "on the part of large social groups of citizens and the political-ideological segments of European societies, in order for the political choice to be viable and, hence, for the possibility of governance to be legitimate, effective and sustainable" (p. 14).

In chapter 3, the theoretical knowledge of European integration is verified through specific data and the results of the candidate's own field work related to empirical research and secondary analysis of existing databases as well as data from previous research. She provides an analysis of the attitudes and perspectives of the Western Balkan countries aspiring to EU membership.

The author has empirically verified that citizens of the Western Balkans remain pro-European oriented, that regional cooperation between them exists and brings benefits, and that support for it is growing (albeit slowly and in small amounts). Positive integration effects (in the sense of cooperation, dialogue, understanding and implementation of common projects) have been observed, achieved through clear differentiation and regionalization within Europe (p. 128-131).

In conclusion, the author, as a serious sociologist, asks how sociology can contribute to the study of the current dimensions of European integration. She sees the role of sociology as consisting in a more general approach applied in interdisciplinary cooperation with other social and political sciences, and in "taking a more holistic and multifaceted view of the complex challenges facing Europe and the EU today".

The interdisciplinary approach could include examining the historical and cultural roots of European integration, analyzing the social and economic impacts of EU policies on various phenomena and communities, researching the role of the media, digital technologies and communications in shaping public perceptions and debates about the EU (pp. 182-183).

5. Reflection of the candidate's scientific publications in Bulgarian and foreign scientific literature

Assoc. Prof. Jeleva is participating in the competition with 15 citations in Bulgarian and foreign scientific publications, referenced and indexed in international scientific databases or in monographs and collective volumes (in Bulgarian and foreign languages), but in the general list of citations, the candidate indicates a total of 83 citations (in publications by Bulgarian and foreign authors), while in her CV she has selected only 43 of these. Regrettably, the candidate still has no publications and citations in publications with an impact factor; I warmly wish and hope that she will soon accomplish this.

6. Personal remarks by the reviewer about the candidate

I am very well acquainted with Assoc. Prof. R. Jeleva as my colleague at the institute in which I have worked; I have had the opportunity to work with her on international projects under EU programs as well as projects of other organizations. She is an exceptionally well-trained professional sociologist who skillfully combines her theoretical and methodological competence with practical application of sociological knowledge. She has very good organizational skills, volunteer commitment, knows how to lead and work in a team, takes responsibility for every undertaking, possesses a German style of discipline and scientific rigor, and is exacting in her work.

As can be seen from the CV, Assoc. Prof. R. Jeleva has considerable accumulated experience in and in-depth knowledge of the legislative and executive activities of the European Union; more specifically, its integration policies and mechanisms related to the Union as a whole and particularly those related to the Balkans.

Her acquired competencies, combined with her qualities of a highly trained sociological researcher, have facilitated her in the task of adapting these tools to concrete practices in various public sectors at national and European level. And conversely, as a professional sociologist participating in international projects, she is able to offer her theoretical, methodological and practical expertise to politicians and decision-makers at various levels.

7. Motivated conclusion

In conclusion, considering the review and analysis of the works and activities with which the candidate is participating in the competition, I believe that they fully meet all the procedural requirements laid down in the DASRBA for awarding the academic position "professor" and, therefore, I will confidently vote "FOR" awarding to Assoc. Prof. DS Rumyana Ruseva Jeleva the academic position "professor" in Professional Field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences, for the needs of the Department of Stratification, Inequalities and Mobility at IFS-BAS; I also urge the other members of the scientific jury to likewise vote positively.

Signature:

(Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mariana Draganova)

19.04.2024, Sofia