

STATEMENT

by Prof. DSc. Vasil Kirov,

Department “Knowledge Society: Science, Education, and Innovations”

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Concerning the academic works and contributions of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Romyana Ruseva Zheleva, candidate for the competition for professorship in professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology, and Cultural Sciences, 05.11.01. Sociology (Sociology - Sociology of Inequalities and Sustainable Development. The Role of the European Union in Reducing Socio-Economic Inequalities), for the needs of the 'Stratification, Inequalities, and Mobility' Department, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences - Sofia, published in the 'State Gazette', issue 104 dated December 15, 2023)."

Only one candidate is participating in the competition, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Romyana Ruseva Zheleva

Assessment for admitting the candidate for evaluation

According to the information provided by the candidate, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Romyana Ruseva Zheleva, the report on meeting the minimum national requirements under Article 2b of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), and the decision of the Commission for Verification for participation in the competition, she not only meets the requirements of LDASRB but also exceeds the minimum requirements of IFIs-BAS. There is an overfulfillment of requirements in three indicators – groups G, D, and E (namely publications, citations, and participation in scientific and educational projects). This means that Assoc. Prof. Zheleva should be admitted for evaluation.

1. General Description of the Submitted Materials

The candidate, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Romyana Ruseva Zheleva, has submitted a total of 16 academic works, including two monographs (one prepared specifically for this

competition, and the other based on her dissertation for obtaining the academic degree of "Doctor of Sciences") and authored or co-authored articles and book chapters published in Bulgarian or English.

Rumyana Zheleva's monograph, "Dimensions of Integration in the EU," published in 2024 by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences Publishing House "Prof. Marin Drinov," aims to address the question of what the contribution of sociology to the study of the EU, European integration, and the future of Europe can and should be. The main thesis of the book is that, paradoxically, differentiation will assert itself as an increasingly compelling principle of governance (Pirozzi & Bonomi, 2022), including for further internal EU integration and territorial expansion of the EU.

The review of the remaining publications for participation in the competition clearly outlines a thematic field within which Assoc. Prof. Zheleva is a leading researcher in Bulgaria. This is the role of the European Union in addressing sustainable development and economic inequalities. The individual publications focus not only on aspects of European integration in Bulgaria but also on the prospects for the integration of the Western Balkans and the specific problems of societies in this region. I would like to note that in recent years, the attention of Bulgarian sociologists has rarely been directed towards analysing processes that occur beyond the Bulgarian context, and in this sense, we should congratulate Rumyana Zheleva for her ambition to conduct research in a comparative manner.

2. General characteristics of the candidate's scientific activity

Assoc. Prof. Zheleva obtained her master's degree in sociology in Bulgaria, after which she prepared and successfully defended her doctorate at Otto-von-Guericke University in Magdeburg, Germany, on the topic "Social-interpretive models of entrepreneurs in transition periods". After working at German universities, since 2005 Rumyana Zheleva has been a researcher at the Institute of Sociology (renamed to Institute for the Study of Societies and Knowledge and then to Institute of Philosophy and Sociology) at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. In 2013, she became an Associate professor. In 2023, Assoc. Prof. Zheleva defended her dissertation for the acquisition of a Doctor of Sciences degree on the topic "Sustainable development in times of uncertainty".

In her scientific autobiography, attached to the competition documents, Assoc. Prof. Zheleva lists 71 publications, which is evidence of active publishing activity. Among them are two monographs published abroad and four in Bulgaria, as well as numerous studies, articles, and chapters from edited volumes and collections. It can be observed that over the years, she has developed several, often interconnected research topics. Her scientific interests are directed towards the transformation of Bulgarian society and certain aspects related to entrepreneurship, public policies, and organizational development in the context of European integration and EU membership. It seems that there are two leading themes in Romyana Zheleva's work, namely the questions of responsibility and sustainability, which are placed in the context of diverse empirical realities.

The strong scientific engagement of Assoc. Prof. Zheleva is eloquently evidenced by the multitude of forms of her activity, including:

- Presentations at numerous conferences in various European countries;
- Presentations and lectures at prestigious universities in Bulgaria and Germany, as well as presentations in other countries;
- Editing of collections and special issues of sociological journals;
- Organization of conferences on important topics for Bulgarian society in collaboration with leading European non-governmental organizations;
- Expertise for international organizations and Bulgarian institutions;
- Participation in scientific juries in Bulgaria and abroad.

3. Educational activities

At various periods since 2003, Assoc. Prof. Zheleva has taught at several higher education institutions and has delivered individual lectures at prestigious universities in Bulgaria, Germany, and universities in Central Asia. She has supervised the preparation of doctoral and master's students, including currently supervising two doctoral students at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences."

Assoc. Prof. Zheleva's teaching experience reflects her research interests in the field of the sociology of work and organizations, sustainable development, and the study of inequalities. Romyana Zheleva has organized both international and national summer schools, including within the COST program. All of this represents an impressive contribution, especially in the context of working at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, where scientific research is a priority.

4. Character of scientific achievements and contributions

Assoc. Prof. Zheleva's scientific work, as evidenced by the presented publications as a whole, contributes to the development of contemporary sociology of sustainability and inequalities. Here, I would like to emphasize the consistent efforts to develop the field of sustainable development, which is even more important in the Bulgarian context, as contemporary studies in this area are rare in our country. At the same time, sustainability and just transition are becoming some of the most significant topics both in academic research and in the context of European Union policies. Romyana Zheleva is certainly a pioneer in the development of this field in Bulgaria, and it definitely has the potential to unfold, as the transformation affects multiple spheres: labour, energy, regional development, corporate policies, consumption patterns, and societal attitudes. In summary, the publications provided for review, in my opinion, have unquestionable cognitive and practical value. The empirical data presented in them are a valuable source of information and theoretical reflection and can support current and future researchers in the issues of European integration and sustainable development.

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

In her reference, Assoc. Prof. Zheleva indicates a total of 83 citations as of February 2, 2024. It is impressive that her works are cited in both Bulgarian publications and international journals, including those indexed and referenced in globally renowned databases of scientific information.

6. Critical notes

Alongside the numerous positive assessments, the publications proposed for review naturally provoke a series of questions and remarks that cannot be fully addressed here.

I would like to limit myself to two questions regarding the monograph "Dimensions of Integration in the EU". On page 183, Assoc. Prof. Zheleva states: "In studying them [Europe and the European Union] from a sociological perspective more than any other issue, it is a matter of whether the collected data and obtained results can find the corresponding application in the practice of political decisions and as social implementation." In this regard, I would kindly ask her to elaborate on this intention and provide specific examples of how this could happen in the Bulgarian context. Secondly, the issue of low levels of trust between citizens and institutions in Bulgarian society is discussed in the book. In this sense, the inclusive approach is considered as a possible way to overcome this distrust. But I would like to understand if Assoc. Prof. Zheleva can propose any practical steps to demonstrate how this approach could be implemented. And to what extent would institutions be convinced to undertake them?

7. Personal impressions

I have excellent direct impressions of Assoc. Prof. Zheleva's work as a researcher at the IPS-BAS. Assoc. Prof. Zheleva is a colleague distinguished by high professionalism, admirable productivity, and serious self-criticism. She successfully combines consistency regarding the themes of her scientific research with openness and curiosity towards new issues. Her achievements and efforts are recognized both nationally and internationally.

8. Conclusion

Based on everything mentioned above regarding Assoc. Prof. Zheleva's contributions presented in the attached documents and materials, as a member of the Scientific Jury, I have unequivocal grounds to vote for the appointment to the academic position of "professor" for Assoc. Prof. Dr. Romyana Ruseva Zheleva."

22.04.2024 г.

Signature:

Prof. DSc. Vassil Kirov