

OPINION

by Professor DSc Karamfil Manolov, Member of the Scientific Jury, according to Order №
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for the competition announced in State Gazette, issue no.58 of 9.07.2024 to occupy the academic position "Professor" in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, Professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences for the needs of the Department "Public policies and social changes" at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

Candidate for the competition: Associate Professor DSc. Maria Jeliaskova

1. General description of the applicant and the documents provided

One candidate is participating in the competition to occupy the academic position "Professor" in Professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences - Assoc. Prof. DSc. Maria Jeliaskova. The documents are submitted in due time and in accordance with the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria. The review of the applicant's tables on the minimum national requirements for Professor in Professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences shows that Maria Jeliaskova not only meets the minimum national requirements and the requirements of BAS but exceeds them many times over - the indicators of sections G, D and E.

Assoc. Prof. DSc. Maria Jeliaskova participated in the competition for Professor with a total of 21 publications including: 1 individual monograph, presented as a habilitation thesis; 3 other monographs, two of which are individual, in English, and the third is part of a collective monograph in Bulgarian, within which Maria Jeliaskova has an individual text of over 100 pages, with a specific thematic focus - job quality and workforce quality; 4 chapters of collective monographs: - one individual and three co-authored, two of them in English and two in Bulgarian; 4 articles (co-authored) published in scientific journals, refereed and indexed in world-renowned databases of scientific information in English; 8 articles published in non-indexed peer-reviewed journals or in edited collective volumes, five of them in English and three in Bulgarian, four of them are individual and four co-authored; and 1 individual article published in an edited collective volume. All the publications submitted by Maria Jeliaskova in the competition for the academic

position of "Professor" do not repeat those submitted for the academic position of "Associate Professor". The publications are in prestigious international publishers such as Springer Nature, Routledge, Bristol University Press, Tallinn University, Publications Office of the European Union, Academic Publishing House of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences "Prof. Marin Drinov", etc., in journals indexed and refereed in world databases, most of the publications are open access and in English, which testifies to the author's aspiration to achieve international visibility of her work and its promotion not only in Bulgaria, but also abroad and among the wider academic community.

Maria Jeliaskova's entire work experience, as well as her professional experience are entirely in the field of competition.

2. General characteristics of the applicant's scientific, applied and pedagogical activities

The scientific work of Assoc. Prof. Maria Jeliaskova impresses with its volume and theoretical focus. It can be said that the framework that sets the overall scientific specificity of the research interests and work of Assoc. Prof. Jeliaskova in recent years is defined by the research on the axis of **inequalities - poverty - social exclusion**, to which she has devoted numerous articles and studies and which receives its fullest and most comprehensive conclusion in her latest and most mature scientific work "The Polarized Bulgarian Society: Persistent Poverty and Toxic Inequalities". Through the prism of the three-dimensionality of the **relationship inequalities - poverty - social exclusion** Maria Jeliaskova puts in the focus of her research work such important and topical contemporary issues as: dimensions of poverty and poverty monitoring in Bulgaria; energy poverty and support measures for vulnerable consumers; problems of youth unemployment, inequalities and social exclusion; polarization of employment, the working poor; inequalities, social cohesion and solidarity in society; quality of the workforce and quality of jobs; social purpose enterprises in Bulgaria; social policy; youth employment policies; erosion of social policy; necessary changes in policies and in particular in labour market and income policies, energy policies, employment policies and youth employment policies, policies against poverty and social exclusion. Undoubtedly, we have a candidate with in-depth and systematic research on issues, the interest in which develops over time in new theoretical fields, and the approach to it becomes more and more complex and multidisciplinary. As an undoubted merit of Assoc. Prof. Jeliaskova's work can be deduced her ability to penetrate below the superficial visibility of the

obvious and to reach those deep connections and interactions that outline the systematic and regular. And the other very important merit of her work is that besides being devoted to structurally defining for the society and at the same time extremely topical and of great practical relevance topics and problems, she also always proposes as a final result ideas for changes in the existing policies, which outlines the exceptional not only scientific-theoretical, but also practical-applied and innovative value of the achieved scientific results.

On the other hand, a specific feature of the analyses and the author's theses is that they are all supported by the use of extensive field material. All publications of Assoc. Prof. Jeliazkova, all theoretical analyses are based on numerous empirical studies, which, although focused on Bulgaria, cover many other countries - Italy, Greece, Estonia, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, USA, which allows comparability of data and results. Additionally, she supports her theses with numerous historical sources, data from economic statistics and theoretical literature, which ensures the reliability of the analyses and the generalizations drawn.

In the overall scientific activity of Assoc. Prof. Jeliazkova has kept a balance between theoretical and empirical/field work, as well as between theoretical and applied scientific activity. The theoretical scientific activity of Maria Jeliazkova is very successfully complemented by her **applied scientific activity**. After her promotion to Associate Professor in 2012, Maria Jeliazkova has participated in 8 international projects funded by the European Commission, including 3 of them she is the head of the Bulgarian team and in 8 national projects funded by the National Research Fund, the Council of Ministers, Sofia Municipality and the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, including 2 of them she is the head of the team. In terms of content, the projects in which Maria Jeliazkova participates or leads are closely linked to the specifics of her scientific and theoretical research activity and contribute to its practical validation. On the other hand, they make possible the transfer of the scientific and applied results of the projects to various institutions and organizations at home and abroad and to students, to whom Assoc. Prof. Jeliazkova has lectured, PhD students to whom she has been a supervisor, and young scientists to whom she has been a consultant.

Maria Jeliazkova has demonstrated her successful participation in scientific conferences and other scientific events - she has presented 32 plenary papers at various international and national scientific events in Greece, Belgium, Portugal, Romania, Estonia, Italy, the UK and Bulgaria and has participated in 8 other international and national scientific forums in Belgium,

China, Slovakia and Bulgaria, where she has presented papers, which is undeniable evidence of her aspiration for international visibility and at the same time for the international recognition of her scientific work.

Assoc. Prof. Jeliaskova is a compiler and editor (in collaboration with other colleagues) of 2 collective scientific publications - conference proceedings and collective monograph.

Maria Jeliaskova is a member of the European Anti-Poverty Network and the Executive Committee of the European Anti-Poverty Network. She is also a member of the Consultative Council for Social Inclusion at the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria. Over the years she has provided expert and consultancy support to a number of other expert bodies at the EC, MLSP, MES, Commission for Protection against Discrimination, Economic and Social Council of the Republic of Bulgaria.

The candidate's pedagogical activity is entirely related to her research work. Maria Jeliaskova is currently lecturing on "Social Policy" at the Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski" and at the UNWE (in English) and on "Economic Sociology" at the UNWE. She has been lecturing until 2016 at Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski" on "European Social Policy", "Reforming Social Policy in Bulgaria" and "Social Work". Maria Jeliaskova was a supervisor of one successfully graduated PhD student at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology and is currently a supervisor of one part-time PhD student at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology. She was also a scientific consultant to a young researcher at the IPS.

In general, it can be said that the balance between the candidate's scientific-theoretical, scientific-applied and pedagogical/teaching activities is fully respected, and they are also in full synchrony in terms of content.

3. Assessment of the candidate's publications' contributions

First of all I would like to note that I accept the self-assessment of the scientific contributions made by the candidate - it corresponds to the content of the scientific publications submitted for review, as the outlined by Assoc. Prof. Jeliaskova's contributions reflect the patterns and meaning matrix through which she interprets the subject of her research. In Maria Jeliaskova's publications, a number of contributory aspects stand out, which give her research work originality and heuristic. I would point out several of them as having a fundamental character - in terms of society and sociology:

- The introduction into use of new scientific concepts such as 'toxic inequalities' and the conceptualised distinction in this connection between two types of inequalities: *normal ones*, insofar as they are an inevitable consequence of the existing structuring of society and the determination of the power-hierarchy-inequality relationship, and *toxic ones*, which are neither economically nor socially determined and justified and which lead to persistent poverty, the erosion of democracy and social regression. The introduction of such a concept is extremely valuable from the point of view that it makes it possible to identify the fundamental reasons for the generation of this type of persistent inequalities that are associated with the existing normative framework. This points to the next two very important, in my opinion, contributions of Maria Jeliaskova's work.
- The new approach applied to infer the causes of poverty and social exclusion, which are linked not so much to individual deficits, as is usually argued in research on these issues, but to existing normative frameworks, implemented policies and the behaviour of the social actors involved.
- The established existence of a direct link and correlation between levels of income inequality and the state of poverty and social exclusion, which research on income inequality does not usually explore. The notion of "toxic inequalities" allows identifying precisely how certain types of inequalities produce persistent poverty and social exclusion that social policy cannot address.
- I would also note as a very important contribution the focus of sociology on social problems, in this case on the links and relationships between income inequality, poverty, social exclusion, power, public policies, the normative framework, etc., thus broadening and enriching its subject field.

Of course, I accept, as I said, all the other contributions made by Assoc. Prof. Jeliaskova, but I would say that even these alone are sufficient to point out her place and role in the development of the subject field of Bulgarian sociology.

4. Determining the candidate's contribution to collective publications

In the collective publications the texts of Assoc. Prof. Maria Jeliaskova are identified by her own name, and separation protocols for the contribution of each co-author are attached.

5. Impact of the candidate's scientific publications in our and foreign literature

The reference for citations of Assoc. Prof. Maria Jeliaskova is proof of her visibility and representation as a researcher in the international scientific network - she participated in the competition with 75 citations, of which 28 are citations in scientific journals, refereed and indexed in world-renowned databases of scientific information; 35 are citations in monographs and collective volumes with scientific peer review and 12 are citations in non-refereed journals with scientific peer review. For her citations Assoc. Prof. Jeliaskova collects 830 points, which significantly exceeds the minimum national requirements for the citation rate for the academic position "Professor".

6. Critical remarks

I have no critical comments to make on the papers presented. I think they are at a very high level and fully meet the requirements for the academic position "Professor".

7. Personal impressions

I have known Maria Jeliaskova since my student years and then from our many years of working together first at the Institute of Sociology and then at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. I have very good impressions of her as a serious, conscientious and responsible researcher who has an excellent professional reputation and the respect of her colleagues.

8. Conclusion

Taking into account the requirements of the Academic Staff Development Act of the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its implementation and based on the stated so far evaluations of the work of Assoc. Prof. DSc.Maria Jeliaskova, I believe that she **meets all the requirements for holding the academic position "Professor" in the professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Studies and I vote with conviction that she be awarded the academic position "Professor"**.

24.10.2024

Member of the Scientific Jury:

/Prof. DSc Karamfil Manolov/