

OPINION

Regarding the evaluation of the scientific production of Assoc. Prof. DSc Albena Ilieva Nakova – the only participant in a competition for the academic position of “professor” in the Field of Higher Education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, Professional field 3.1.

Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences (Research of public opinion on the contemporary identity of Bulgarian citizens and refugees), for the needs of the “CESI” section (State Gazette, issue 105 of 13.12.2024)

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1. General characteristics of the participants in the competition.

The announced competition is attended by a single candidate – Assoc. Prof. DSc. Albena Ilieva Nakova. According to the tables submitted by the candidate on the fulfillment of the minimum national requirements under Art. 2b of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDSRB), she fully meets the requirements of the LDSRB, as well as the additional requirements of the IPS-BAS. The publications with which the esteemed colleague participates in the competition (the publications are after the election for associate professor in 2012), include two monographs, as well as 15 articles in Bulgarian, Russian and English, published in prestigious academic journals with scientific review. I can state that all of them, in terms of subject matter and issues, closely follow the subject of the announced competition and in this sense are fully relevant as scientific research evidence on it. Along with this, they outline the profile of an established and in-depth researcher in the field of such key and current concepts for sociology and social knowledge as national identity, public opinion, ethnic and social models, public attitudes and many others, which are entirely within the scope of the announced competition. Additional scientific weight to the evidence presented is given by the citation report that the candidate presents. In addition to the fact that the points collected significantly exceed the minimum required, they indicate that Assoc. Prof. Nakova is sought after as an author, clearly "visible" scientifically and as an authority in the community of researchers who often refer to the results of her research and analyses. The same, but on an even larger scale, I can note the colleague's activity in terms of project activity (section E of the table), in which she is repeatedly preferred not only as a participant, but also as a leader of national and international projects and naturally many times exceeds the required minimum of points for the academic position ("professor") to which she aspires.

2. Assessment of the main contributions and the overall scientific production of the candidate.

The general overview of the overall scientific, publication, research and expert activity of Assoc. Prof. Nakova shows the image of not only an established, but also a leading author and researcher in her chosen fields of realization. The candidate proves high publication activity in all important areas of social and sociological research, especially those related to the field in which the academic competition is announced. The publications are in Bulgarian and foreign languages, independently and in co-authorship and present the candidate as an erudite and dedicated scientist and original researcher. The same can be said about the participation of Assoc. Prof. Nakova in prestigious scientific forums and conferences, national and international, in our country and abroad, with plenary and sectional reports. All of them are described in detail in the materials provided - impressive scientific presence in the academic communication of research results, original ideas and an undisputed international reputation.

In the announced competition, the colleague has presented two monographs. The main monograph submitted for habilitation for the position of "professor" is entitled *Public Opinion about Refugees in Bulgaria* (2013-2020). (Publishing House of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences "Prof. Marin Drinov", Sofia, 2024). The complete coincidence of the chosen field of research with the topic of the announced competition is striking. The monograph successfully presents the fluctuations in the assessments of public opinion in Bulgaria about refugees from the war in Syria and from neighbouring countries in the Middle East and North Africa region. The main research vectors in it are built on the basis of studies conducted in the period 2013-2020. Assoc. Prof. Nakova analyses public opinion about refugees in four main dimensions - cognitive, emotional, evaluative and behavioural. These dimensions find expression in three socio-psychological reconstructions through which public opinion manifests itself in social reality: the image of the refugee, attitudes towards refugees, and the distances towards refugees. One of the main research ideas of Assoc. Prof. Nakova in this monograph is to present the choice of Bulgarian citizens in the contemporary situation of social, religious, ethnic and cultural pluralism today, in which Bulgarian society is also placed. Especially in the conditions of a modern nation-state, such as Republic of Bulgaria¹.

¹ According to some authors internal migration from European member states is cited as one of the main reasons why voters voted to leave the EU in the UK referendum in 2016, which led to the so-called "Brexit" (Anne-Marie Jeannet, Internal migration and public opinion about the European Union: a time series cross-sectional study, 2020)

The colleague successfully distinguishes two main forms of "difference" and "foreignness" - once, when the "other" is "other, but one's own" (given the multi-ethnic nature of Bulgarian society) and a second time, when the "other" is "other, but foreign" (given the although not large, but still increasing number of foreigners who settle in Bulgaria - migrants, refugees, etc.). The conceptualization of the main research concepts was done with a very rich bibliographic base and on the basis of influential and proven authors. The specific representative study for the settlement, on which the empirical evidence of the overall scientific concept of the work is based, was conducted in Vetovo - a small town in Bulgaria with an ethnically mixed population. Additionally, important empirical material was collected and analysed using the case study method in two more towns in Bulgaria - the town of Yambol and the town of Gotse Delchev. The research was conducted with an extremely good knowledge of empirical methods, with an excellently selected methodology and with a demonstration of high research erudition on the part of Assoc. Prof. Nakova, which leads to a reliable conceptualization of the accumulated empirical material. One of the main conclusions of the researcher is that the image of refugees in our country retains its dual character in cognitive and evaluative-emotional aspects. Another main trend in the development of the image of refugees in public consciousness, in addition to its increasing cognitive enrichment and differentiation, is the acquisition of an increasingly pronounced neutral-negative character according to the results of the research. Which, according to Assoc. Prof. Nakova, indicates a lack of xenophobia in the attitude towards refugees by our citizens towards "others", although the social distances in their various cognitive and behavioural dimensions remain high. The positive role and importance of direct contact and communication with refugees and, consequently, of getting to know them as the basis for forming a tolerant model of attitude towards them and shortening social distances has been successfully and constructively pointed out.

The construction of a national consciousness, which includes a distinction between "one's own" and "foreign", is undoubtedly a sociological process. Especially in the conditions of various types of diversity, which manifests itself in today's conditions of relatively limited resources – cultural, economic, political, educational, human, etc. And this process has a current and, in my opinion, continuous need for specific research using the sociological method. This is the indisputable and key contribution of the habilitation work of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nakova. The attitude towards the foreigner, migrant, refugee contains "simultaneous proximity and distance" (Simmel, "The Foreigner") and therefore "a degree of foreignness creeps into the closest (personal) relationships" (ibid.). This means that the analysis of such relations can be carried

out mainly with the method of sociology, with specific methodological approaches to researching public opinion and developing a reliable concept based on data and social facts, with appropriate methods, which would provide a clear idea of the development trends of this important problem. A task that Assoc. Prof. Nakova has successfully coped with and which proves to the highest degree the knowledge and research skills she has accumulated, relevant to the academic position she is striving for.

The second monograph that the colleague submitted for the competition (*Hybrid Identities. Contemporary Status and Ethnic Models in Bulgaria*, BAS, 2024) analyses the contemporary identity of Bulgarian citizens as a hybrid collective identity, combining elements of national, supranational (European and global), ethnic and local identity. The study again follows the main scientific interests of the candidate and outlines models of ethnic and national identity formation in each of the three ethnic groups to which her research effort is directed - the Bulgarian, Turkish and Roma ethnic groups. According to Assoc. Prof. Nakova, these models condition and explain the specifics of the general model of collective identification that exists today. The problem of identity is one of the most complex in social humanitarian knowledge. Derek Parfitt's philosophical thesis is well known, partly set out in his article translated into Bulgarian, which offers a different version of the importance of normative rationality (mainly moral norms) and some psychological hesitations in determining identity². The thematic focus of Assoc. Prof. Nakova's research is aimed at determining and studying the collective identity of contemporary Bulgarian citizens, which unfolds along the social axis national-supranational-ethnic-local. Without a doubt, a complex, current and ambitious scientific and research task, for which Assoc. Prof. Nakova has proven competences. The main scientific proposition of the colleague is that identity is a social construct, determined by the nature of interaction with "others" and changing over time. As a social construct, identity is the result of the bonds that bind a community together. The issues of hybrid identity are important for contemporary societies, which is why a number of studies in social and cultural terms, cited and discussed by Assoc. Prof. Nakova, are devoted to them. The data on which the author builds her analyses in her work represent the results of several sociological studies conducted, in which she has a personal and full participation. One of the main and significant conclusions of the overall study is that the identity of the Bulgarian ethnic group is distinguished by a three-component composition (national, supranational and local identity) in contrast to the four-component

² Parfitt is primarily concerned with personal identity, but he also adopts some more general principles about the difficulties of (self)identification. Oxford Philosophy Today, "Why Isn't Identity So Important?", Sofia University, 1996

structure of the identity of contemporary Bulgarian citizens (as a modern nation). Assoc. Prof. Nakova's study also carries a serious moral emphasis, related to such important concepts for contemporary society as xenophobia, tolerance, acceptance of the Other, which have deep roots in the Bulgarian national culture and which characterize Bulgarian society. Relationships and moral feelings such as fear, hatred, etc. are also evident. But along with this, our society's aspiration for good neighbourly relations and peaceful coexistence, for which there are a number of examples in Bulgarian history. Based on extremely detailed research, backed up by an analysis of an impressive amount of independently collected data on the model of collective identity, Assoc. Prof. Nakova comes to a conceptual conclusion about the social nature of the formation of ideas about its character among Bulgarian citizens - i.e. upbringing, social environment, culture of diversity, freedom of expression, etc. The researcher establishes a social fact - when refugees are not accepted by Bulgarian citizens, this is not because of their belonging to a certain ethnicity or religion. Rather, this is a consequence of the lack of certain social skills and qualities such as language proficiency or a desire to learn it, professional skills, appropriate education and other social factors that determine their inability to successfully integrate into Bulgarian society.

In view of the volume of an opinion, I will not dwell in detail on the articles submitted by the candidate. I will only note that they unconditionally prove the very high levels of awareness and knowledge of the candidate in the field of the announced competition, the credible explanation of the distances and indifference towards refugees demonstrated by Bulgarian citizens through the proven statement about the lack of knowledge and understanding of foreign culture and way of life, the specificity of national policies regarding migration, etc. The skillful selection of methodological apparatus for the purposes of each study makes a very strong impression. Assoc. Prof. Nakova very aptly includes in the discussion extensive evidentiary material, based on numerous empirical studies carried out with her personal participation and contribution. Thus, she not only significantly expands and enriches the existing scientific knowledge in the field, reaches new significant research generalizations, but also contributes to increasing the empirical information data set of Bulgarian sociology in general.

3. Personal impressions.

Since I know Assoc. Prof. Nakova as an author, researcher, and expert, I can also share some personal impressions in this regard. The colleague has always demonstrated the highest degree of competence in all scientific and research commitments in which she has participated. She skilfully combines scientific and research activities with organizational, administrative, and

professional ones. I would define her in a scientific and research sense as a colleague with almost endless energy, which enables her to successfully research, create authorial content, participate in conferences and forums, and at the same time perform all other tasks as an administrator professionally engaged in specific activities. Without having joint publications with Assoc. Prof. Nakova, I want to share my personal impressions of my work with her as a very erudite colleague, with extensive knowledge in the field of sociological knowledge, and as a person with undisputed authority among the community of scientists, far from only in the IPS -BAS.

4. Conclusion

All the proposed materials and evidence from Assoc. Prof. Nakova meet the requirements of the Law and the specific requirements of the IPS - BAS. That is why I confidently **assess** the candidacy of my esteemed colleague **highly and entirely positively. I vote unequivocally positively for the candidacy** of Assoc. Prof. DSc. Albena Ilieva Nakova to occupy the academic position of "Professor" at the IPS - BAS in the professional field 3.1. Sociology, anthropology and cultural sciences (Research of public opinion on the contemporary identity of Bulgarian citizens and refugees).

Member of the Scientific Jury

Prof. Dr. Nikolay Mihaylov,

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