

OPINION

from Assoc. Prof. Dr. Petya Ilieva-Trichkova (IPS-BAS)
regarding the materials presented by Assist. Prof. Dr. Svetlana Prodanova Alexandrova,
for her participation in a competition for the academic position “Associate Professor” in the
professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Culture Sciences, scientific specialty
“Sociology (Processual aspects of the emergence and formation of public opinion)”
for the needs of the Social Survey Research Center at IPS-BAS,
published in State Gazette, issue 61, of 29.07.2025.

By decision of the Scientific jury (taken at its first meeting on 14.10.2025, which was carried out in line with the Order of the Director of the IPS-BAS № ПД 09-366-7 from 24.09.2025) regarding the competition for acquiring the academic position “Associate Professor” in the professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Culture Sciences, scientific specialty “Sociology (Processual aspects of the emergence and formation of public opinion)” for the needs of the Social Survey Research Center at IPS-BAS, published in State Gazette, issue 61, of 29.07.2025 and Protocol № 16 from 09.09.2025 of the Scientific Council of the IPS-BAS, I was assigned to write an opinion on the participants in the competition.

1. General description of the submitted materials

Documents for participation in the competition for the academic position “Associate Professor” were submitted by only one candidate: Assist. Prof. Dr. Svetlana Prodanova Alexandrova. The candidate is a Doctor in the professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Culture Sciences (certificate No/date: 0112 / 28.05.2014) and a certificate for the position of Assistant Professor in the same field (No/date of contract: ПД-15-350 / 08.05.2019 from 08.05.2019), which makes evident that she has more than six years of service in the field in the IPS-BAS.

From the presented tables with individual scientometric indicators for “Doctor” and “Assistant Professor” it is clear that the publications with which Assist. Prof. Dr. Sv. Alexandrova applied in the competition for the academic position “Associate Professor” differ from the publications that were presented for the scientific degree “Doctor”, and also from the publications with which she applied for the academic position “Assistant Professor”.

According to the summary report of the requirements and achievements of the candidate necessary for obtaining the academic position “Assistant Professor”, Assist. Prof. Dr. Sv. Alexandrova fully meets the minimum national requirements of NACID and the IPS-BAS. Furthermore, from required 430 points, the candidate has exceeded them and has: 480 points.

Assist. Prof. Dr. Sv. Alexandrova participated in the competition with a wide range of scientific works and activities, among which are the following:

- main habilitation thesis: the monograph: Chengelova, E., **Alexandrova, Sv.**, Gerganov, A., Ivanova, Iv. (2023) *Public opinion, essence, genesis, factor determination and interpretations*. “Prof. Marin Drinov” Publishing house: Sofia. ISBN 978-619-245-337-4. (327 pages) (In Bulgarian).

- three articles published in scientific publications, referenced and indexed in world-renowned databases with scientific information;
- four articles between 20 and 99 standard pages published in non-refereed peer-reviewed journals or published in edited collective volumes;
- eight articles and reports published in non-refereed peer-reviewed journals or published in edited collective volumes;
- eight papers at international conferences, of which six of which are independent and two are co-authored; and
- ten citations, of which four are in scientific publications, referenced and indexed in world-renowned databases of scientific information or in monographs and collective volumes; two in monographs and collective volumes with scientific review and four in non-refereed journals with scientific review.

2. General characterisation of the scientific, applied-scientific and teaching activity of the candidate

From the submitted CV of Assist. Prof. Dr. Sv. Alexandrova, it can be seen that essentially all her activities since her entry into the IPS-BAS in 2019 as “Assistant Professor” have had a markedly scientific nature.

The total number of publications she has so far is 24, of which 16 were submitted for the “Associate Professor” competition. The main thematic areas in which she works and writes are: public opinion, public attitude formation, politics, quality of school education, media and science communication.

In addition to publications, the candidate’s scientific activity also includes participation in a number of international and national conferences and forums in Bulgaria and abroad, at which she presented reports to various audiences. In addition, Assist. Prof. Dr. Sv. Alexandrova has participated in a total of six research projects, including both national and international ones, four of which have been in progress since 2019. Among them, I would like to distinguish three as particularly significant in view of the current competition: the project “European Social Survey for Bulgaria (ESS)” (2019-2021), which is part of the National Roadmap for Scientific Infrastructure of Bulgaria, the intra-institutional project “Processes in the Formation of Public Opinion: Theories, Factors, Computer Models” (2019-2023) and the project funded by the Bulgarian National Science Fund: “Factor Determination of the “Shadow Economy” and Approaches to Limiting It in Bulgarian Society” (2019-2023).

Assist. Prof. Dr. Sv. Alexandrova has also performed expert and consulting activities. Specifically, in the period May-November 2020, she prepared analytical reports under a contract with the Podkrepa Trade Union, which consisted of a study of the state of the working environment and social cooperation for three economic spheres: “Light Industry”, “Construction” and “Transport”.

3. The candidate’s teaching activity since the start of her career

Although, as I mentioned in point 2, scientific activity is dominant in the work of Assist. Prof. Dr. Sv. Alexandrova, I would also like to note that she had also teaching activities. In the period 2014 and 2017, she had lecture courses as a part-time lecturer in bachelor's and

master's programs at the Faculty of Arts, Culturology at the South-West University “Neofit Rilski”, Blagoevgrad in the disciplines “Cultural Management”, “Entrepreneurship in the Sphere of Culture”, “Public Relations and Marketing”, “International Organizations in the Cultural Sector”, and “European Cultural Policies”.

4. Content analysis of the candidate’s scientific achievements

Having carefully reviewed the competition materials provided by Assist. Prof. Dr. Sv. Alexandrova, I can confirm that the candidate’s self-assessment of the contributions in the publications for participating in the competition very accurately reflect her contributions in the individual publications that she indicated under each contribution. I think that all the contributions she has made are extremely significant and undoubtedly enrich both science and practice.

In a thorough review of the candidate's publications, I identified two more contributions that contribute to the development of science and practice and deserve to be noted.

- 1) A critical assessment of the real impact of the National Strategy for Lifelong Learning (2014-2020) in one of its areas of impact was made, revealing the discrepancy between goals and results. In particular, it was found that the implemented measures are characterised by instability, partial influence on factors in the school system, inconsistency, inertia and lack of innovation. I identified this contribution in her publication:

Alexandrova, Sv. (2024). Approaches to change in the quality of school education. National Strategy for Lifelong Learning (NSLLL 2014-2020)”. *Foreign Language Learning* 51(6), 780-793. 0205–1834 (Print), 1314–8508 (Online). <https://doi.org/10.53656/for2024-06-09> Q4 (Web of Science).

- 2) Theoretically and empirically (through a specific example of recruiting respondents on the social media Facebook to participate in an online post-electoral survey in Bulgaria in the form of a questionnaire) the potential and limitations of the online environment in collecting empirical data for scientific research are highlighted. I identified this contribution in her publication:

Alexandrova, Sv. (2022). Gathering Empirical Information for Quantitative Research in an Online Environment. *Problems of Postmodernity*, 12(3), 418-440. ISSN 1314-3700. <https://doi.org/10.46324/PMP2203418> (ERIH PLUS).

To these I would add the wealth of empirical material collected through a mixedmethods approach – quantitative (representative and non-representative) and qualitative research (focus groups and in-depth interviews). The diversity of the methods of analysis used (thematic, discursive, content analysis, descriptive statistics and correlation analysis) is also impressive, which allows us to capture different aspects of the emergence and formation of public opinion in our country.

In the following analysis, I will focus on the monograph with which Assistant Professor Dr. Sv. Alexandrova participated in the competition, and in which all 8 contributing points that she indicated in her reference are woven as a thread, and which are further developed in the other publications submitted for the competition, namely:

Chengelova, E., **Alexandrova, Sv.**, Gerganov, A., Ivanova, Iv. (2023) *Public opinion, essence, genesis, factor determination and interpretations*. “Prof. Marin Drinov” Publishing house: Sofia. ISBN 978-619-245-337-4. (327 pages) (In Bulgarian).

I choose to focus on this publication also because of its exceptional relevance. Despite the criticism that public opinion is a social construct and in a strict sense “does not exist” as an objective reality (Bourdieu, 1972)¹, its study continues to be a permanently significant topic in contemporary sociology. This is because it reflects the dynamics of values, assessments and forms of social interaction through which individuals construct common ideas about social reality. In conditions of accelerated social, political and technological changes, public opinion functions as a sensitive indicator of social sentiment and the legitimacy of institutions, but at the same time it is often the subject of manipulation. The development of digital media and social networks has changed the way in which public opinion is formed and expressed, posing new challenges to its research and interpretation. Contemporary sociology seeks not only to measure public opinion, but also to explain the mechanisms of its formation, dissemination and change in the context of a globalising and information-saturated world. Therefore, public opinion research continues to be a key tool for understanding social reality and formulating effective public policies.

It is against this background that the presented monograph stands out both in theoretical and practical terms. Within its framework, a comprehensive theoretical and analytical model of the emergence and formation of public opinion has been derived, based on the systematisation of the existing scientific literature, identification of contradictions in the research field and conceptualisation of public opinion not simply as a set/collection of individual opinions, but as “a **complex multi-layered construct** that is based on the socio-psychological tendency of the individual to conformism; it includes the influence of the prerequisites of the socio-cultural context, specific personal and group characteristics and the impact of mobilising factors that control information and communication tools” (p. 68).

Within the framework of the model, the stages, psychological and social dimensions of the process, as well as the key factors and mechanisms through which they interact, are substantiated. The formation of public opinion in Bulgaria is empirically studied, identifying social representations, factors and models of influence.

5. For collective publications

Assistant Prof. Dr. Sv. Alexandrova participated in the competition with predominantly independent publications. Only one of them is collective and a separation protocol was attached to it, in which the candidate's contribution is clearly distinguished.

¹ Paper “Public Opinion Does Not Exist” by P. Bourdieu from 1972, translated into Bulgarian and published in the journal *Critique and Humanism* in 1991, Issue. 2, pp. 167-174. [CEEOL - Article Detail](#)

6. Impact of the candidate's scientific publications on Bulgarian and foreign literature

In the submitted CV, 15 citations of various publications of by Assistant Prof. Dr. Sv. Alexandrova since 2020 are listed i.e. since her appointment as Assistant Professor in 2019, as about half of them are for one of her publications from 2022, "Gathering Empirical Information for Quantitative Research in an Online Environment", which is entirely methodological and testifies to the fact that her work in this area of public opinion research has wide visibility and impact. In the table for meeting the requirements for the academic position of "Associate Professor", the candidate has indicated four citations of her publications in scientific publications, referenced and indexed in world-renowned databases of scientific information such as Scopus and Web of Sciences. Only the points she receives from them cover the minimum of 60 points required by the IPS-BAS under this criterion. In addition to these citations, the candidate participates in the competition with two more citations in monographs and collective volumes with scientific review and four citations in non-refereed journals with scientific review. This shows that the candidate's works are very recognisable and have a wide impact both abroad and in our country.

7. Critical remarks, questions and comments

I have no critical remarks on the content of the works presented by Assist. Prof. Dr. Sv. Alexandrova. From them, as well as from the literature used in them, it is evident that the candidate has a high level of literary awareness in the researched thematic areas.

I would like to ask the candidate two questions and make one comment – recommendation.

My first question is related to the terminology used in the monograph, and more specifically – to the definition and use of the concepts of "public opinion" and "attitudes". I am left with the impression that in some places in the text these concepts are equated. For example:

– p. 11: "*The research interest is directed at the process of forming public opinion at the meta-level, its stages, elements and influencing factors, and at a specific level – at the specifics of forming electoral attitudes and public opinion towards science.*"

– p. 13: "*... the formation of public opinion in pre-election situations (electoral attitudes) and the formation of public opinion towards science and scientific research.*"

– p. 17: "*... the study of public opinion in Bulgaria with regard to two specific segments of it – electoral attitudes and attitudes towards science.*"

And in this regard, what is the relationship between public opinion and attitudes. Couldn't public opinion on a given issue function as a factor that shapes positive or negative attitudes in people?

My second question is provoked by the thesis of "*bounded confidence*" mentioned in the monograph on p. 38, which upholds the notion that only people with similar opinions interact. Can the concept of "*bounded public opinion*" be derived, which is broader and goes beyond trust as a basis for studying the dynamics of public opinion, but takes into account both specifics of the context and characteristics of the individual and their interaction?

My comment concerns the formulation of the hypotheses in the monograph and the way they are verified. In their current form, the majority of the hypotheses are presented together with the research questions, which makes them too general and insufficiently

oriented towards testing specific relationships and dependencies – for example, whether they would manifest themselves differently in electoral attitudes and in attitudes towards science. I would recommend that in future studies the research questions and hypotheses be presented separately, and that statistical testing of hypotheses be applied only in the parts involving quantitative research based on representative samples.

8. Personal impressions for the candidate

I have known Assistant Prof. Dr. Sv. Alexandrova since she joined the Social Survey Research Center of the IPS-BAS as an Assistant in 2017. My impressions of her are excellent - with a particularly good and in-depth theoretical background, extremely hardworking, persistent in her research, highly focused and at the same time, inspired by the idea of developing as a researcher. Over time, she has proven her high qualities as a theorist, practitioner and analyst, which is a very good basis for her development in the field of public opinion research. In the period 2023-2025, I had the opportunity to work with her within the framework of the Skills2Capabilities project “From skills to capabilities”, which is funded by the Horizon Europe Program of the European Union, within the framework of which she showed exceptional professionalism, very quickly entered and deepened her knowledge in the field of school education research and policies aimed at the development of skills and lifelong learning.

I have no joint publications with Assist. Prof. Dr. Sv. Alexandrova among the publications with which the candidate participates in the competition and I am not in a conflict of interest.

9. 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 “Associate Professor” and, therefore, I will confidently vote “FOR” awarding to Assist. Prof. Dr. Sv. Alexandrova the academic position “Associate Professor” in Professional Field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences, scientific specialty “Sociology (Processual aspects of the emergence and formation of public opinion)” for the needs of the Social Survey Research Center at IPS-BAS; and I strongly recommend the other members of the Scientific jury to vote positively.

11.11.2025
Sofia

Signature:
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