

## REVIEW

**By:** Assoc. Prof. Dr. Veneta Krasteva, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, department “Public Policies and Social Changes“

**Regarding:** A competition for the academic position „associate professor“ in scientific specialty 05.11.01. „Sociology“ (Procedural aspects in the emergence and formation of public opinion), professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Culture Sciences, higher education area: 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences

### 1. Information about the competition

The competition is announced in State Gazette issue 61/29.07.2025 for the needs of the department Social Survey Research Center at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (IPS-BAS). I was assigned as a member of the Scientific jury by decision of the Scientific council of IPS-BAS with protocol №16/09.09.2025 and Order № ПД 09-366.7/24.09.2025 by the Director of IPS-BAS. At the first meeting of the scientific jury I was appointed as a reviewer. Documents in the competition were submitted by only one candidate – chief assistant professor dr. Svetlana Prodanova Alexandrova.

### 2. General description of the submitted materials

Dr. Svetlana Alexandrova has submitted a complete set of documents required for participation in a competition for the academic position „associate professor ” according to Art. 35 of the Regulations of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology - BAS on the conditions and procedures for acquiring scientific degrees and holding academic positions.

At the first meeting, the scientific jury discussed the quantitative report on the implementation of the minimum national requirements in accordance to the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act (DASRBA) and of the additional requirements of IPS-BAS. It became clear from it that with a total required score of 430 points, the candidate participates in the competition with 480 points. Dr. Alexandrova holds a PhD in Sociology since 2014, has 8 years and 5 months of experience in the specialty (with a required minimum of 5 years), presents a published monographic work and original research works and publications, a list of participation in international forums, a list of citations. The publications with which the candidate participates in the competition for "associate professor" do not repeat publications used in other competitions. This gave grounds for the scientific jury to unanimously decide to admit dr. Alexandrova to evaluation in compliance with the minimum national requirements and those of the BAS and IPS.

In the competition for the academic position of "associate professor", dr. Alexandrova participates with 16 out of a total of 30 publications from her scientific biography. In addition to the monograph, she presents 3 articles indexed in world-renowned databases of scientific information (two of them in quartile Q3 and one in Q4); 6 articles in journals indexed in Erih Plus, 2 publications in edited collective volumes. These publications correspond to 230 points. with 220 points required in IPS-BAS. According to the next category E: Citations or reviews, the candidate appears in the competition with citations that correspond to 100 points when

required a score of 60 points. All publications, including those for which citations are indicated, were published after 2020.

### **3. General characteristics of the candidate's scientific and scientific-applied activity**

Dr. Alexandrova's scientific biography includes all three forms of activity - scientific, applied science and pedagogical. Her scientific career is dominated by research work, skillfully combined with expert activity and several years of teaching experience in bachelor's and master's programs. Dr. Alexandrova's academic achievements are a good example of the positive role of scientists' participation in research projects (both national and international), in which experience and skills are accumulated from working in interdisciplinary teams, from conducting comparative studies and applying different research approaches to collect empirical information, as well as knowledge from applying new theoretical concepts. This undoubtedly contributes to the high quality of the scientific output submitted for the competition.

Particularly impressive is Dr. Alexandrova's participation in a significant project such as the European Social Survey (ESS), part of the National Roadmap for Scientific Infrastructure of the Republic of Bulgaria, as well as her work within the framework of an international project funded under the Horizon Europe program. In this way, Dr. Alexandrova has the opportunity not only to use the empirical data obtained, but also to see in practice how high academic standards are followed, which she skillfully applies in her work. The scientific and applied work of Dr. Alexandrova on the study of the state of the working environment and social cooperation in 10 economic spheres and the development of a social package for those working in them should also be highly appreciated. Through this activity, she contributes to the establishment of the scientists of IPS-BAS as experts with experience and knowledge that can serve as practical solutions to important social and economic issues.

### **4. Educational activity of the candidate**

In the period 2014-2017, Dr. Alexandrova was a part-time lecturer at the Faculty of Arts at the Southwestern University "Neofit Rilski", Blagoevgrad. There she has been teaching courses in bachelor's and master's programs in the disciplines of "Cultural Management", "Entrepreneurship in the Field of Culture", "Public Relations and Marketing", "International Organizations in the Cultural Sector", "European Cultural Policies". This activity is evidence of the candidate's high level of preparation in the field of the competition's professional field.

### **5. Assessment of the scientific achievements of the candidate**

The publications with which Dr. Alexandrova is applying to the competition can be divided into two categories. One focuses on the sociological interpretation of public attitudes and public discourse on various significant issues in Bulgarian society. Public perceptions of science and the shift in public discourse toward it are examined here, as well as Bulgarians' attitudes toward grey economic practices and psychological readiness to engage in them, the tendency to bribe, attitudes toward politics, communication in the online space, the characteristics of publicity in Bulgaria, public relations, and public opinion.

The second thematic field in Dr. Alexandrova's publications is focused on the methodological aspects of research work - the possibilities of the online environment for obtaining empirical data and for recruiting respondents on the Internet are discussed.

In addition to these thematic areas, dr. Alexandrova also presents a publication dedicated to the educational sphere. This is the result of her active work in an international project exploring various aspects of skill creation systems and challenges related to the emerging need for new skills and knowledge. The article contributes with an analysis of the effectiveness of the measures implemented in terms of improving the quality of school education and implementing the concept of lifelong learning.

All works demonstrate an amazing blend of theoretical understanding and practical data interpretation. The latter are studied utilizing tools from diverse theoretical concepts, providing a strong foundation for Dr. Alexandrova's arguments and hypotheses to be tested.

The review of the list with scientific contributions, presented by dr. Alexandrova, shows that they correctly correspond to the content of the submitted publications and are truly significant, both in theoretical and scientifically applied terms. I even think that some achievements of the candidate have been omitted, which also deserve to be mentioned and will become clear later in my assessment.

Dr. Alexandrova's habilitation thesis focuses on public opinion, a topic that Bulgarian experts rarely study scientifically. Politicians, media, and citizens utilize the term on a daily basis, yet it is rarely questioned. At the same time, it has a significant impact on societal processes and how particular events occur. As a result, I believe the questions addressed in the monograph, to which dr. Alexandrova seeks and provides solutions based on a sound theoretical framework and objectively and expertly interpreted empirical evidence, are very important. Through analysis of information obtained through qualitative methods (focus groups and in-depth interviews), supplemented with statistical data from other studies, the author analyzes the processes of emergence and formation of public opinion and presents the phenomenon as a dynamic, complex and factor-driven communication process. An important result of dr. Alexandrova's work is the discovery of three main ways in which public opinion can manifest itself - an effort by a given social group to present, defend and impose its position in society; an artificially imposed process in which public opinion is activated by external factors that control the public space; public opinion as a result of compromise and consensus between social groups in society with different positions and interests. This third approach appears to me to be the most valuable for a society's democratic functioning; however, the findings of dr. Alexandrova's research show that in Bulgaria, this is precisely the least visible, and public opinion is most often manifested as a reaction to various interests. The internal and external elements influencing public opinion development are critically important. This makes it possible to identify the mechanisms used to influence people's perceptions of given issues and the role played in this process by the media, political elites, and opinion leaders. It is also highlighted how important the communication environment and access to publicity are in shaping specific public opinions. Dr. Alexandrova's investigation demonstrates an extreme lack of trust in Bulgarian society, which influences perceptions of information provided by traditional media and political actors. The growing importance of the Internet and social networks for searching for information, for expanding the public space and expressing opinions, but also for forming opinions on given issues is noted. An important observation is the identification of the role of three types of opinion leaders: authorities in the close social circle; opinion leaders on Facebook; leaders with charisma.

The observation of the fragmentation of society into separate groups, not only with different interests, but also with opposing values, which are closed "in communication bubbles" (p. 113), accepting only opinions similar to theirs, is argued. This gives importance to the characteristics of different social groups and erases the importance of common and valid values and moral norms. In this way, differences are exacerbated to the point where it becomes impossible to coexist with diverse points of view and form a common position on issues significant to society.

A contribution of dr. Alexandrova's publications, while not stated, I believe is significant and should be noted: she demonstrates the peripheral position that science plays in connections with the media, politics, and society. This peripheral role is the result of replacing traditional concepts of truth and rationality and creating a reality in which relativity rather than scientific objectivity reigns. This leads to the replacement of values that previously maintained some moral order. This increases the possibility of societal disorder and fragmentation into groups with disparate interests, beliefs, and understandings that are unable to achieve an agreement and construct a single vision for development and coexistence. The inability to form public opinion stemming from shared values and based on reliable, objective and scientifically proven information, the result of public debates and compromises, is actually a symptom of highly fragmented modern societies.

## **6. The candidate's contribution in collective publications**

The habilitation thesis with which dr. Alexandrova participates in the competition is co-authored. A division protocol has been presented for it, there is a clear thematic division, which makes its evaluation problem-free. The candidate has independently developed 238 standard pages, which present a comprehensive study of the problem of understanding, forming and influencing public opinion. The work is related to the theoretical conceptualization of the research problem and analysis of empirical research results. All other publications in the competition were independently developed, which is a good testament to the candidate's ability to present results of scientific work, following academic standards for publication in reputable journals. This allows us to confidently conclude that all contributions indicated by the candidate have been published both in the parts of the collective monograph prepared by the candidate and in independent publications.

## **7. Reflection of the candidate's scientific publications in our and foreign literature**

Dr. Alexandrova participated in the competition with ten citations, half of which are in scientific publications, referenced and indexed in world-renowned databases of scientific information. The majority of the cited publications are in English, which shows that the author is recognizable in the European research space. The participation of dr. Svetlana Alexandrova as a member of the Bulgarian team in an international project funded under the Horizon Europe program is also an indicator of the candidate's presence in international scientific circles.

## **8. Critical remarks on the submitted works, including on the candidate's knowledge of the literature**

The candidate's literary awareness is broad and includes a good knowledge of publications and research on the topics of public opinion, publicity, the communication environment and

online research. The publications use both established authors, as well as the latest sources in Bulgarian and English.

One of the goals of scientific research is to seek answers to socially significant questions. In the publications with which she participates in the competition, dr. Alexandrova fulfills this task at a high professional level. This does not exclude the emergence of questions that could lead to new research and further exploration of the topic of public opinion, as well as the possibilities of using the Internet to collect empirical information. In this regard, I have two questions, which should not be interpreted as criticism of the candidate's work, but rather as directions for further research.

In her work, dr. Alexandrova talks about the fragmentation of Bulgarian society and the fact that public opinion is least often thought of as a consensus and the result of public discussion, i.e. in Bulgaria it manifests itself either as imposed by external factors or representing the position of a small group of people. In this sense, the question arises as to what extent it can be used in the decision-making process on significant public issues? If public opinion is formed in an environment with limited access to reliable information or one that is manipulated by groups with certain interests, can we assume that it becomes a tool for legitimizing the position of precisely these groups, whose interests are often far from socially just decisions?

My second question is related to dr. Alexandrova's observation about the displacement of traditional channels for the dissemination of information by the use of the Internet and social networks. This raises the question: How can the reliability of this information be guaranteed and whether social networks are becoming a much more effective tool for rapid and mass influence on people?

I would make a recommendation that I think will be beneficial for dr. Alexandrova's future professional development - to continue her efforts for comparative European and regional research on the issues studied at the national level, both in terms of public opinion and the various aspects related to it, and problems in the field of education. This will further expand the visibility of her work and strengthen her position in the international research space.

## **9. The reviewer's personal impressions of the candidate and other information not presented in the points above**

I have had the opportunity to work with Dr. Svetlana Alexandrova and I can confidently testify to her exceptional professional commitment and integrity. She approaches every task with responsibility, integrity and professionalism. Thanks to this, she manages to develop her research potential and establish herself as a scientist who possesses all the necessary qualities to occupy the position of "associate professor" and to continue a fruitful scientific career. I am convinced that her precision, strict adherence to ethical and academic standards of work and striving for self-improvement will be beneficial for the development of IPS-BAS.

Although we have worked together, I do not have any joint publications with dr. Alexandrova among the publications presented in the competition, which allows me to make an objective assessment of her works.

## **10. Reasoned and clearly worded conclusion**

After reviewing the materials and scientific works of chief assistant prof. dr. Svetlana Prodanova Alexandrova presented in the competition, her scientific achievements and scientific and applied contributions, as well as my personal impressions, I confidently give a positive assessment and recommend to the members of the esteemed Scientific Jury and the Scientific Council of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences to vote unanimously in support of her election to the academic position of "associate professor" at the Social Survey Research Center at the IPS-BAS.

11.11.2025

Sofia

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