

## **Opinion**

**from DSc Svetla Yovcheva Koleva,**

**Professor at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, BAS,**

regarding the materials submitted for the competition

for the academic position of **Associate Professor**

**at Plovdiv University Paisiy Hilendarski**

in the field of Higher Education **3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences,**

professional field **3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Culture Sciences,**

scientific specialty **Sociology (Sociology of the Body)**

In the competition announced in State Gazette, issue 57/26.06.2020, and on the Internet page of PU Paisiy Hilendarski, for the needs of the Department of Sociology and Human Sciences at the Faculty of Philosophy and History, the only competing candidate is Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Nina Vasileva Nikolova, from the Department of Sociology and Human Sciences at the Faculty of Philosophy and History of PU Paisiy Hilendarski. The documents and materials submitted by the candidate **meet all requirements** of the Academic Staff Development Act in the Republic of Bulgaria (ASDARB), the Regulation for its application, and the Regulation for the Development of the Academic Staff of PU Paisiy Hilendarski.

### **1. General presentation of the procedure and the candidate**

Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Nina Nikolova is competing on the basis of 17 publications, of which two are independently written monographs, and 15 are articles (of which 10 independent ones, 5 as co-author, and 3 at the printers, as certified by the boards of editors). The monographs were published by the prestigious Bulgarian editor KX – Critique and Humanism Publishing House, and the major part of the articles have appeared in the reputed scientific journals *Sociological Problems*, *Critique and Humanism* and *Heterodoxy*. The works submitted for the competition were published after the defense of the candidate's PhD thesis in 2000, while the monograph *Political Anatomy of the Modern Man. The Live Body as a Challenge to Sociology* (2001) is based on her defended dissertation thesis.

The documents with which the candidate is competing are presented precisely and correctly, fully in accordance with the Regulation for the Development of the Academic Staff of of PU Paisiy Hilendarski. The *Report on Meeting the Minimal National Requirements* (document 7) clearly shows

that Dr. Nikolova's teaching, research, and publication activities exceed the quantitative values of the required indicators for holding the academic position of Associate Professor. In order to highlight the candidate's personal achievements, it would have been well to add distributive protocols for publications written in co-authorship.

## **2. General characteristics of the candidate's activities**

Sociology of the body is a research field that covers in unity the entire scientific, publication and teaching activities of Dr. Nina Nikolova. Starting with her diploma work and up to her latest monograph, presented as a habilitation work (*Excrementum, Senses of Proximity*, 2020), and passing through her lecture courses and participations in scientific projects and conferences, Dr. Nikolova has developed the field in such a way that she has expanded the subject (from corporeality to sensitivity), she has deepened the problematization ("the body as a lived body" and individuals seem to melt into a kind of "body dough"; "the hand as a nexus of the tactile sense" and "the hand as a threat"; "the touching as breaking"; "homo hapticus vs. homo hygienicus"; the opposition "habitus vs. habitat") and has condensed the methodology (by searching for the intersection between sociological paradigms, psychoanalytic methods and phenomenological perspectives).

Dr. Nikolova's entire scientific research activity may be described as a challenge to sociology and, more generally, to the social and human sciences. This challenge is defined by the chosen and systematically elaborated research topic, i.e., modern corporeality, through the "unconventional understanding" of sociology as a field open to human sensitivity, through a research approach that she is continuously enriching by drawing resources from history, philosophy, social sciences, and literature. If the challenge is in itself a potential for achievement, this potential is fully realized in the research strategy and proposed sociological solutions she offers. It is them that I would single out as the most important scientific contributions of the candidate. All of Dr. Nikolova's publications represent a process of filigree construction and analytical overturning of the research subject. Thanks to her subtle knowledge of the legacy of Simmel, Elias, Bourdieu, Freud, Foucault, Merleau-Pont, Heidegger and modern sociological, cultural, psychoanalytical research on sensitivity and body practices, Nina Nikolova has been able to draw strands of thought from the separate authors, entwine them, and, within the area of intersecting ideas, to reveal the shortcomings in the current sociological approaches to the topic but also the manifestations of the topic that have remained hitherto unobserved. Thus, her argued theses become original and valuable contributions. The theses in question include the idea of the need for a psychoanalytical and phenomenological perspective on the body in the sociological analysis of sensitivity, the idea of olfactory experience as a research approach, the

affective structure of individual experience, suffering as a condition of compassion, etc. (*Excrementum, Senses of Proximity*, publications 3, 5, 10 from the *Annotation and Self-assessment of Contributions*).

### 3. Critical remarks and recommendations

Nina Nikolova's many-year-long research activity, which is exceptionally relevant to the current pandemic crisis, provokes reflection in several directions.

First, assuming, as the author does, that the culture of distancing is a distinguishing feature of modern societies, why do distance measures introduced as means of protection against Covid-19 provoke opposition and painful experiences?

Second, assuming that the Covid crisis is aggravating the imbalance between the constitutive function of sensitivity for individual development and the taboo on touch in interpersonal relations, is it possible that other 'human modes (for instance, that of the aggressive man or the apathetic one) may appear, besides homo empathicus? What are the conditions of possibility to increase the chances of the appearance of homo empathicus?

### CONCLUSION

In consideration of the above-mentioned achievements in the research and publication activity of the candidate, and in view of her qualities as a responsible teacher and accomplished scholar, I give a **positive assessment** and will categorically and with full conviction recommend that the Scientific Jury prepare a report and recommendation to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philosophy and History of Plovdiv University, that Dr. Nina Nikolova be awarded the academic position of Associate Professor at Plovdiv University Paisiy Hilendarski in professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Culture Sciences , scientific specialty Sociology (Sociology of the Body).

Sofia, November 18, 2020

**Author of the Opinion:** .....

Svetla Koleva, Prof., DSc