

## **OPINION**

**by Prof. Milena Georgieva Georgieva, PhD – Institute of Art Studies – BAS**

on materials submitted for participation in the competition  
concerning the academic position of "**Professor**"  
**of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv**

by: field of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Studies  
professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences (Cultural Sciences –  
Historical Anthropology of Political Culture).

In the competition for the academic position "Professor", announced in the State Gazette, issue No. 39 of 02.05.2023 and on the website of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv for the needs of the Department of Ethnology, at the Faculty of Philosophy and History, Assoc. Prof. Dobrinka Parusheva, PhD from Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv participates as the only candidate.

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

Assoc. Prof. Dobrinka Dragieva Parusheva has applied for the competition a total of 13 scientific papers – 1 monograph and 12 studies and articles. Her articles and studies are in Bulgarian and English, printed in renowned scientific journals and collections in Bucharest, London-New York, Zurich-Münster, Berlin-Boston and others. The minimum required points by groups of indicators for the different scientific degrees and academic positions (3.1.) have been correctly met and even exceeded, and in this sense the presented materials meet the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), the Rules for the Implementation of LDASRB and the relevant Rules of the Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv. For information outside the "Professor" competition, she has added a list of 22 scientific publications and 15 scientific reviews and opinions that came out after her associate professor degree in 2009.

Dobrinka Parusheva is a Doctor of History since 1990 at the Institute for Balkan Studies – BAS, where she started working as a Chief Assistant Professor. She was a part-time lecturer at the Faculty of History – Mediterranean and Asian Civilizations at Chernorizets Hrabar Varna Free University, at the Faculty of Philosophy and History at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, at the Faculty of History at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". In 2009, she was habilitated as an Associate Professor at the Institute for Balkan Studies with Centre of Thracology. Since 2010 she has been an Associate Professor of Theory and History of Culture, Department of Ethnology, Faculty of Philosophy and History at the University of Plovdiv, where she reads lecture courses in bachelor's and master's programs, leads doctoral students (incl. in the international doctoral program at the University of Plovdiv, Charles University – Prague and Eindhoven University of Technology).

## 2. General characteristic of the candidate's activity

My assessment of the *educational and pedagogical activity* and preparation of the candidate is very positive. Assoc. Prof. Dobrinka Parusheva has vast experience in teaching a variety of courses, working with numerous graduates and doctoral students who are already young scientists, experience with foreign Erasmus students at the University of Plovdiv, Osmangazi Eskişehir University, Charles University in Prague, the Universities of Ljubljana and Regensburg, and participates in and leads research student projects. The energy, enthusiasm, and desire to work with young people, who today are realized as social anthropologists and ethnologists in the same department in which she works, are impressive. This speaks of continuity and continuous contact with the scientific supervisor since their student years, of their formation and growth in science.

I will focus mainly on the assessment of the *scientific and applied science activities* of the candidate, which are more familiar to me than her publications. They are inevitably related to the interests of Dobrinka Parusheva as a scientist and are best summarized in the presented monographic work *"Down with the government! Long live the caricature!!" Politics, culture, and caricature in Bulgaria at the beginning of the twentieth century*. University of Plovdiv, 2023. It consists of an introduction, three chapters, and an afterword, a total of 264 pages. The text is interdisciplinary and theoretical. The basis for its existence is an analysis of the collective construct "politically imaginary" through a visual source from the press, such as the cartoon, which is directly related to the imaginary through its respective perception, i.e. through its role as a mediator between politics and culture. The introduction reviews the literature exploring different fields – politics, political culture, political caricature, especially the commitment, the interactions between them, as well as the various research approaches applied to this interdisciplinary topic. The analysis deals mainly with the tools of the social sciences, political communication, folk-psychological attitudes, the idea of the Other, and with the achievements of cultural anthropology, in particular the art studies which are increasingly identified with it, also looking for the meaning of the constructed image, its relation to the social context and its perception by the audience. The anthropologisation of the image, the visualization of contemporary culture in general, the interest in caricature not so much as art, but as a testimony of its time – a field not developed until recently in our country – are especially relevant lately not only for historians and cultural scientists, but also for art historians, although in Bulgaria the researchers of caricature as a special type of art are units. Therefore, one of the main contributions of the work for me personally is the complementing or more precisely the further development of these narrowly specialised activities with it, made with a much broader view, with a successful attempt to interpret the political behaviour of politicians and public domestic and international events, "far beyond the humour and satire of the caricature" (p. 17). D. Parusheva turned to the study of the context of the appearance and functioning of the caricature as its "political commentator". Here, with great erudition as well, she made detailed studies of the period from the beginning of the twentieth century, referring mainly to two main humorous newspapers "*Balgaran*" and "*Baraban*", but knowing the whole

humorous press. 230 caricatures have been subject to analysis (iconographic, semiotic, sociological), and 89 illustrate the scientific text in order to extract information about the representation of politics, the generally accepted idea of the neighbouring Other, of the Great Powers as the distant Other, about how their image developed during the wars, what is the typology of the images and why it is so in the different subperiods. They are the subject of research and conclusions in the first and second chapters. There, the historical narrative goes through the cartoon images, the images in the cartoon and the ideas of society about politics and political players, analysed by the skilled specialist on the periods until 1920 that Assoc. Parusheva is. In addition to the sustainable images of famous politicians, the Knyaz, "Grandmother Europe", of Bulgaria's neighbours, theoretical topics such as politics in caricature, propaganda and censorship, politics and media, political imaginary and visual culture, etc. are also analysed, which make up the study of the political imaginary. The author is convinced that the cartoon image, the caricature of politics can correct already formed representations and stereotypes, e.g., the relations between the governed and the ruling, between the Bulgarians and their neighbours, etc., because "the development of the imaginary is the territory of the development of representations" (p. 59). The dynamics of these characters in the second chapter was particularly interesting to me; there, the strong change of the context through the wars changes them radically, but does not change the political imaginary, which is only further developed. No one has ever studied the military cartoon in such detail, its tangible changes and the public reactions as Assoc. Prof. Parusheva did. Without the knowledge of important historical details, the messages of the caricatures would not be understood today. It seems that in this chapter, respectively in this period, the "national political" is in the background, in order for the "supranational political" to stand out through its caricature visualizations, as the author herself mentions. Because in times of war, caricature is an important means of propaganda, and as a media it has the opportunity to shape public opinion within the limits set by the national patriotic ideal. The emotional content of the cartoon is very accurately grasped when it presents the image of the Other, especially during war, but also the point of pushing back in order to construct a national identity on the basis of negativity towards the Others, already divided into allies and opponents. Chapter Three is summarizing and examines theoretically the caricature and its impact on the political culture of society. It is particularly valuable; it offers key features of political life in Bulgaria since the beginning of the twentieth century. It describes the Balkan peculiarities of parliamentary democracy in Bulgaria (the so-called party clientelism, political corruption, the lack of a social elite), of political culture with its values and dissonances between the modern institutions imported from Europe and the local patriarchal-subject environment. It focuses on the relationship of the media with publicist politicians and the mediatization of the public space, proving that the caricature image is also of great importance. This concluding chapter contains many synthesized conclusions about the caricaturists as creators of sense and meanings through images (pp. 224–225) and their binding to the "collective mental images" on which the political imagery is based, governed by socially recognized values and practices. Parusheva is interested not only in the caricaturists, but also in the activity

and reaction of the audience, treating it as their corrective, in the caricatures as a function of the political imaginary, but also in the material for its construction, i.e., from the feedback – a creative approach. Very interesting and precise definitions are given to the caricature in political discourse, which send us in its depths to reflect on whether the visual caricature image can change the course of politics. Why is it still chronicling the political and not leading public opinion, but I would add another important question – whether caricature has become art, despite its mediatization and circularity, as Aleksander Bozhinov insists, and does not only remain a visual commentator on the events. Logically and eloquently written, with correct citations by a large number of Bulgarian and foreign researchers, the book examines extremely complex cultural problems in general and promotes its own opinion on them.

Another 12 studies and articles by Assoc. Prof. D. Parusheva that she participates with in the competition outline the circle of her interests in the years after her attainment of academic rank, and they range in very broad terms, which I consider to be a very positive quality of the mature scientist – from the study of the political elites, the political culture in Bulgaria and the Balkans, the role of family and political party networks, the research of the modern Balkan city to articles in which the political imagination is traced in detail in the currents of individual magazines from the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century or until the end of the wars. Separate topics such as riots, revolutions, and wars, the presentation of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905 and the First World War in the illustrated press from the point of view of history and anthropology were touched upon. I would say that the latest topics, along with what the candidate calls "caricature articles", are especially useful for all those who explore the image and imagery in it beyond its artistic qualities, but with a particular interest in its cognitive side. Their historical and anthropological observations, ideas, and conclusions have quite reasonably entered the monograph.

I find the contributions of the presented works undoubted, as they are in undeveloped fields of research for Bulgaria, with an original point of view to them and with applied approaches that enrich them and are useful for the humanities as a whole. Assoc. Prof. Dobrinka Parusheva is a famous scientist in various scientific circles, known and respected not only in Bulgaria but also among researchers in the Balkans. This is clearly evidenced by the reference to her citations.

### **3. Critical remarks and recommendations**

Regarding the monographic work, I have small remarks – 1. I think that the *Balgaran* newspaper was stopped due to several intertwined factors – self-exhaustion, busyness of editor-in-chief Aleksandar Bozhinov with state work in the National Theatre, strong competition of the younger newspaper *Baraban* and the part of the newspaper's writers being sympathizers of the Democratic Government of Malinov, which invalidates its anti-Ferdinandian orientation. 2. Some authorships of unsigned caricatures belong to imported magazines – e.g., The twins – Monarchism and Parliamentarism (*Balgaran*, 1908, issue No. 124) are taken from the German *Simplicissimus*, and were not created by Bozhinov or Paspalev, but this is an attribution problem and does not concern the presentation.

## CONCLUSION

After getting acquainted with the completely sufficient materials and scientific works presented in the competition, an analysis of their significance and the scientific and applied science and applied contributions contained therein, I find it reasonable to give my **positive** assessment and to **recommend** with conviction the Scientific Jury to prepare a proposal report to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philosophy and History for the election of Dobrinka Dragieva Parusheva to the academic position of "Professor" at the Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv in: field of higher education<sup>3</sup>. Social, Economic and Legal Studies and professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences (Cultural Sciences – Historical Anthropology of Political Culture).

26.09.2023

Opinion prepared by:.....

(signature)

Prof. Milena Georgieva, PhD