

OPINION

By: Prof. Aleksandar Ivanov Marinov, PhD,
Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski”, Department of Public Administration,
member of scientific jury, appointed by the Rector of PU „P. Hilendarski”,
Order ПД-21-1184 - 07.06.2024

Regarding: Competition for awarding the Academic Position “Associate Professor” in
Professional Field 9.1. National Security (Security on the Balkans, Foreign Policy and
Diplomacy)

In the competition for “Associate Professor”, announced in the State Gazette, Issue No. 32/09.04.2024 for the needs of the University of Plovdiv’s Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences, take part two candidates (in alphabetical order) - Senior Assistant Professor Goran Vladimirov Stoikovski PhD from the Department of Political Sciences and National Security and DSc Plamen Atanasov Atanasov from Oliva JSC - Knezha.

1. General Presentation of the Received Materials

By Order No. ПД-21-1184 - 07.06.2024 of the Rector of Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski” (PU), I have been appointed as a member of the Scientific Jury presiding over a competition for acquiring the academic position of “Associate Professor” at PU. Chief Assistant Professor Goran Vladimirov Stoikovski PhD and DSc Plamen Atanasov Atanasov had submitted documents to participate in the announced competition.

The sets of materials presented by both candidates are in formal accordance with the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act (DASRBA) and the corresponding Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of PU.

The candidate Chief Assistant Professor, Goran Stoikovski submitted a total of 13 scientific works, including two monographs (one of which monographical habilitation thesis), and 11 articles, reports and other papers. For reviewing are accepted all the 13 scientific works following the PhD Thesis, and clearly connected to the Associate Professor competition's subject-matter. Five papers are published in English.

The candidate DSc Plamen Atanasov submitted a total of 28 scientific works, including two monographs (one of which monographical habilitation thesis), and 26 chapters in books, articles, reports and other papers. **For review are accepted only 2 scientific works (one monographic study and one article), since the rest 26 works are not connected to the Associate Professor competition's subject-matter.** Those two works are published in Bulgarian.

Some remarks about the materials submitted by DSc Plamen Atanasov: because of lack of relevant documents it is impossible to establish the exact duration and formal arrangement of the teaching activity of the candidate at Sofia University and his participation in other teaching activities, mentioned in the self-assessment file. Also, it is not clear what exactly means “participation in developing university curricula” and especially what’s the personal contribution of the candidate in those cases.

2. Brief biographical information about the candidates

The candidate Chief Assistant Professor Goran Stoikovski PhD graduated with Master's degree in Politology at Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski” in 2002. In 2008 he was awarded the PhD degree in Politology at the same university, presenting a thesis on interethnic relations and institutional development in Republic of Macedonia. Her academic career developed since 2012 as a Chief Assistant Professor and from 2016 to 2021 as an Associate Professor at the University of Plovdiv’s Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences. From 2012 to 2024 he was a Chief Assistant Professor in Political Sciences at the Veliko Tarnovo University. Since 2002 till now Stoikovski takes research and expert positions at different scientific units in Bulgaria and Macedonia. From 2014 to 2017 he’s a policy adviser to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria.

The candidate DSc Plamen Atanasov graduated in Biotechnology Engineering at the Technical University of Sofia in 1995 and in Journalism at the Free Faculty of the same university in 1994. In 2017 he was awarded a PhD degree in Public communications and informational sciences at Sofia University, presenting a thesis on the role of computer mediated communication in managing reputational crises. In 2023 Plamen Atanasov is awarded the scientific degree DSc in the field of National Security presenting a thesis on the topic of Security and Communication at the New Bulgarian University. From 1997 to 2000 he holds a scientific researcher position at the Institute of Viticulture and Enology – Pleven. Since 1997 until now Atanasov holds multiple (mainly engineering) positions in business

companies; from 2004 to 2014 he works as IT expert in state administrations and banking institutions.

3. Overview of the teaching and pedagogical activity of the candidates

The teaching activity of Chief Professor Goran Stoikovski PhD ranges over 12 years at Plovdiv and Veliko Tarnovo Universities. He has developed curricula, taught and at the present teaches several courses in the bachelor and master programs of both Universities, which fall entirely in the field of the competition. In PU should be mentioned: International Security Theory, State Policies and Strategies in South-East Europe, History and Theory of International Relations, Foreign Policy Doctrines on the Balkans, International Organizations and Security Systems, Strategic Analysis of Regional Security and others. At Veliko Tarnovo relevant courses are: Ethnopolitics on the Balkans, Globalism and Anti-Globalism, Crisis Management, and others.

Chief Professor Goran Stoikovski is well known and has good reputation among his students and colleagues. His teaching and pedagogical activity fits entirely the subject-matter of the present competition (Security on the Balkans, foreign Policy and Diplomacy).

The record of the teaching activity of DSc Plamen Atanasov consists of four courses: “Institutional transmedia image and brand”, “Persuasive communication” (conducting seminars only) – both at the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communications at Sofia University, and two courses at the Medical University of Pleven (although with very restricted horarium not suiting the curricula standards of Bulgarian higher education). Another report mentions 3 courses at the Military Academy, but there the candidate declares “participation at the curricula development” whatever this means.

The available information on teaching activity of DSc Plamen Atanasov shows two problems. First, it’s impossible to assess his real teaching and pedagogical practice, though it is obviously very limited. Second, the reported courses and curricula in fact do not fit the subject-matter of the present competition (Security on the Balkans, foreign Policy and Diplomacy).

4. Evaluation of the scholar and applied activity of the candidates

In the competition for associate professor position, Chief Professor Goran Stoikovski applies with one habilitation monographic work of considerable volume and quality, one additional monographic study and 11 articles, reports and other papers.. The publications

proposed by the candidate fully meet the formal and scientific requirements of the competition. **The overall evaluation of the research and publication activity of Goran Stoikovski is definitely positive; especially relevant is the conclusion that it fits entirely the curricula and development vision of the Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences and the Department of Political sciences and National Security.**

In the competition for associate professor position DSc Plamen Atanasov submitted a total of 28 scientific works, including two monographs (one of which monographical habilitation thesis), and 26 chapters in books, articles, reports and other papers. But, as already mentioned, **for reviewing are accepted only 2 scientific works (the habilitation monographic study and one article), since the rest 26 works are not connected to the Associate Professor competition's subject-matter.** Those two works are published in Bulgarian.

The overall evaluation of the research and publication activity of Plamen Atanasov shows high level of productivity and sustainable framing of several research problems and themes. But it's of primordial importance to note, that **it lays almost entirely in other scientific directions (although included in the general field of Security Studies) and does not match the subject-matter of the competition. The one and only clear exception is the habilitation monographic study (more detailed review to follow).**

5. Scientific (theoretical and applied) contributions of the candidates

In the scientific works, presented by Chief Professor Goran Stoikovski, I may outline several groups of contributions; among others, the following contributions seem to me of particular significance, both theoretically and in applied context, as developing the knowledge in the field of Balkan security, foreign policy and diplomacy.

First, the systematic and profound analysis and explanation of basic changes in the essence of the (North) Macedonia state after the proclamation of its independence; several important conclusions follow concerning the relationships of Macedonia with its neighboring countries and the country's internal ethnopolitical and party politics processes. This is an important contribution not only for Bulgarian foreign policy, but for better understanding of the "Macedonian problem" in our society. These contributions are concentrated mainly in the monographical study *The Great Change of the Macedonian Republic*; one of its valuable

applied aspects is the clarification of key causal connections between the stability and security of Macedonia and the regional stability on the Balkans.

Second, Goran Stoikovski is the first (in Bulgarian political science) to offer a systematic theoretical and applied analysis of Turkish strategic thinking and of the geopolitical vision of Turkish political elite after the end of the Cold War, especially in the context of the doctrine of Muslim-Islam consensus. Thus, the author develops several important suggestions about the Bulgarian positions, concerning national and regional security on the Balkans and especially in the Western Balkans. These contributions are revealed mainly (but not only) in the second monographical study, presented by Stoikovski - *The Rise of the White Crescent: Prospects for a New Turkish Century in the Balkans*.

The third group of contributions reflects the theoretical clarification and applied conclusions regarding the interconnection of geopolitical strategies and ideologies and its effects on the global and regional (Balkan) security. Here it's important to mention the comparative analysis of several foreign policy initiatives of the collective West, some Balkan countries (especially Serbia), Russia and China. In this direction two articles deserve special attention: *Exploratory reading of Arabia strategy „VISION 2030“ and its effect on the Serbian geopolitical worldview* and *Open Balkans before the (semi-)closed doors of the EU*, the second focusing on some strategic deficits in the process of EU integration of the West Balkans.

It should be mentioned that Goran Stoikovski's ideas are well known as relevant and have been cited (mostly after 2016) by several researchers in the field – **the registered citations amount to 16, including 5 in works published in foreign language**. An interesting fact is, that we can find two citations, not mentioned in the record, in the monographical study of the other candidate. The self-evaluation of the contributions is as a whole adequate, though it could be more detailed and grounded.

The assessment of the scientific contributions of DSc Plamen Atanasov meets several difficulties, because of the already mentioned exclusion of most of his presented works from reviewing due to non-correspondence to the subject-matter of the competition. Therefore, the review encompasses exclusively the presented monographical habilitation work *“Matters of Public Diplomacy and Security. A view of Bulgarian-Macedonian relations between 1991 and 2004”*.

As a scientific contribution – though with some reserves – I may accept the author's effort to clarify and apply the concepts of “new public diplomacy” and “digital diplomacy” to some

aspects of Bulgarian-Macedonian relations. In the same time, the theoretical and applied value of these potential contributions may be contested, having in mind the modest volume of the relevant (third) chapter of the book (appr. 70 pages), treating very briefly multiple complex events and processes over more than a century. At several points the text has purely informational and even popular character, the theoretical and empirical analysis is limited.

Other problem in evaluating DSc Plamen Atanasov contributions arises from the fact that two thirds of the study (including of the third chapter) consist of citations and other use of other authors ideas. Though it's done according to the academic standards, this fact contests the level of the personal contribution of the candidate, especially in the case of such a habilitation work. In this context I have to mention the overstated quality of the contributions' self-assessment, especially having in mind the before-mentioned extended use of other authors ideas.

The citations report mentions 7 citations of Plamen Atanasov works, but none of them connected to the presented monographical habilitation paper. In fact this is normal as the publication of the study took place some months ago.

6. Evaluation of the personal contribution and authorship

The personal contribution of Chief Professor Goran Stoikovski is evident and the corresponding theoretical and applied results are with no doubt personal work of the candidate.

The personal contribution of DSc Plamen Atanasov (in the presented and reviewed works) is clearly manifested, but it's difficult to assess the degree of his personal merit for the corresponding theoretical and applied results, because of the high proportion of other scholars' citations.

7. Personal impressions

I know Chief Professor Goran Stoikovski PhD for more than 15 years, including working together at PU. I have respect for his high personal standards as researcher and teacher.

I do not know DSc Plamen Atanasov and do not have any personal impression on him.

8. Critical remarks and recommendations

My general critique of both candidates is connected to the contributions self-evaluation (not detailed enough for Goran Stoikovski and over-estimated for Plamen Atanasov). I consider as a major weakness of DCs Atanasov's participation in the competition the

presentation of large number of work, apparently not matching the subject-matter of the competition.

CONCLUSION

The sets of materials presented by both candidates **are in formal accordance** with the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act (DASRBA) and the corresponding Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of PU.

The scholar production and contributions and the teaching and pedagogical record of the candidate **Chief Professor Goran Stoikovski PhD** are entirely in line with the requirements of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act (DASRBA) and other corresponding regulations, incl. the additional requirements of PU and Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences. The qualification of the candidate is solid and well proven.

The candidate **DSc Plamen Atanasov** has presented a large number of scientific papers, but most of it do not match the subject-matter of the competition therefore were not accepted for evaluation. Although the candidate has some scientific contributions the degree of its use in teaching in the field of the competition is not proven. The scientific qualification of DSc Plamen Atanasov deserves a positive evaluation, but his teaching and pedagogical experience is limited and occasional.

After getting acquainted with the materials and scientific works submitted during the competition, analysing their significance as well as the scientific, scientific-applied and applied contribution points contained in them, I find it reasonable **to give my positive assessment and to recommend that the Scientific Jury should prepare a report-proposal to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences at PU “Paisii Hilendarski” for the appointment of Senior Assistant Professor Goran Vladimirov PhD at the academic position of “Associate Professor” at PU “Paisii Hilendarski” in the higher education field 9. Security and defence, Professional Field 9.1. National Security (Security on the Balkans, Foreign Policy and Diplomacy).**

08.08. 2024

Prepared and signed by:

(prof. Aleksandar Marinov, PhD)