

OPINION

Assoc. Prof. Daniel Stoyanov Berchev, PhD

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of the materials submitted for participation in a competition
for the academic position of **“associate professor”**
at the Plovdiv University “Paisiy Hilendarski”
in the field of higher education 9. Security and Defense, professional direction 9.1. National Security (Security in the Balkans, Foreign Policy and Diplomacy)

In the “associate professor” competition, announced in the State Gazette, no. 32 of 09.04.2024 and on the website of Plovdiv University “Paisiy Hilendarski” for the needs of the Department of “Political Sciences and National Security” at the Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences, participate as candidates Plamen Atanasov Atanasov, DSc, from “Oliva” JSC – Knezha and Goran Vladimirov Stoykovski, PhD, from Plovdiv University “Paisiy Hilendarski”.

1. General presentation of the procedure and the candidates

By order No. RD-21-1184 dated 07.06.2024 of the Rector of Plovdiv University “Paisiy Hilendarski” (PU), I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury of a competition for the academic position of **“associate professor” in the PU** in the field of higher education 9. Security and Defense, professional direction 9.1 National Security (Security in the Balkans, Foreign Policy and Diplomacy), **announced for the needs** of the Department of “Political Sciences and National Security” at the Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences.

The following candidates have submitted documents to participate in the announced competition:

1. Plamen Atanasov **Atanasov**, DSc, from “Oliva” JSC – Knezha;
2. Chief Assistant Goran Vladimirov Stoykovski, PhD, from Plovdiv University “Paisiy Hilendarski”.

1.1. The biographical data of **the candidate, Plamen Atanasov Atanasov, DSc**, testify to a desire to increase his educational and scientific level, although in different professional fields – Master of Engineering in Biotechnology, specialty “Biotechnics” from the Technical University – Sofia, additional qualification in the specialty “Journalism” from the Higher Institute of Mechanical and Electrical Engineering – Sofia and acquired in 2017 the educational and scientific degree “doctor” in professional direction 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Journalism – Crisis Public Relations) from Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. In 2020, he acquired an additional specialization in “Evolutionary Psychology and Psychiatry” from the Medical University – Plovdiv. In 2023, he acquired the scientific degree “Doctor of Sciences” in professional direction 9.1. “National Security” and scientific specialty “Strategies and Security Policies” from New Bulgarian University.

The candidate did not hold academic positions, but worked for more than two years as a research assistant at the Institute of Viticulture and Winemaking, Pleven.

The set of materials presented by Plamen Atanasov, DSc, on paper and electronic is in accordance with the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), the Rules for the Implementation of the LDASRB, as well as the Rules for the Development of the Academic Staff of the PU.

From the data, documents and references submitted by the candidate, Plamen Atanasov, DSc, it can be seen that he covers both the minimum national requirements of the LDASRB and the Rules for the Implementation of the LDASRB – a total of 780 points (out of the required 400), as well as the additional requirements specified in the Rules for the Development of the Academic Staff of the PU for occupying an academic position “associate professor” (total 401.5 points, at a certain minimum threshold – 105).

The candidate, Plamen Atanasov, DSc, has submitted a total of **33** scientific works, of which **2** monographs (1 as a habilitation thesis), **3** published chapters (author's) from a collective monograph, **1** textbook and a list of **27** research works (articles/reports). The distribution of scientific works by relevant headings, in the country and abroad, is as follows: **30** scientific works in the country and **3** scientific works abroad. **9** scientific papers (publications III.1; IV.2.4, 2.7, 2.14, 2.20, 2.22, 2.24, 2.25, 2.26) are accepted for review, which are outside the dissertations and are counted in the final assessment, and **2** research projects. **23** scientific works and **1** textbook, which fall outside the subject area of the competition, are not reviewed.

The reasons in support of the above are dictated by several facts. First, the general characteristic of publications that are not accepted for review is that in them the author's research and scientific pursuits are in the fields of social psychology, mass and interpersonal communication science, media, PR, journalism, etc. Second, in the non-peer-reviewed publications, there is no indication that the issue under consideration in one way or another affects or is related to issues related to national security, security in the Balkans, foreign policy and diplomacy. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, in the additional requirements for occupying the academic position “associate professor”, approved by protocol No. 144/19.06.2020 by the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences at the PU, it is stated that the candidate must participate in the competition with publications in specialized scientific publications in the scientific specialty of the competition, which in this case is “Security in the Balkans, Foreign Policy and Diplomacy”. All of this supports the view that a large part of the candidate's scientific interests and publications are not directly oriented to the subject area of the competition and the needs of the teaching process of the Department of “Political Sciences and National Security”.

1.2. The biographical data of **the candidate, Goran Vladimirov Stoykovski, PhD**, testify to a desire to increase his educational and scientific level in the professional direction “Political Sciences” – Master of Political Science, specialization “Foreign Policy and National Security” from Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” and acquired educational and scientific degree “doctor” in the scientific specialty 05.11.02 “Political science”, given by the Higher Attestation Commission of the Council of Ministers.

The presented data on the professional training of the candidate, as well as the rich experience as a teacher, are in harmony with the announced competition. As proof of the rich teaching experience, it should be emphasized on the fact that the candidate, Goran Stoykovski, PhD, in the period 2012-2024, held academic positions in two universities – Veliko Tarnovo University “St. St. Cyril and Methodius” and PU “Paisiy Hilendarski”, where he taught academic disciplines, both in bachelor's and master's programs. Last but not least, his analyst-expert and consulting activity, which the candidate carried out for various state institutions and research organizations, should be highlighted.

The set of materials presented by Goran Stoykovski, PhD, on paper and electronic is in accordance with the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), the Rules for the Implementation of the LDASRB, as well as the Rules for the Development of the Academic Staff of the PU.

From the data, documents and references submitted by the candidate, Goran Stoykovski, PhD, it can be seen that he covers both the minimum national requirements of the LDASRB and the Rules for the Implementation of the LDASRB – a total of 542,5 points (out of the required 400), as well as the additional requirements specified in the Rules for the Development of the Academic

Staff of the PU for occupying an academic position “associate professor” (total 484,85 points, at a certain minimum threshold – 105).

The candidate, **Goran Stoykovski, PhD**, submitted a total of **36** scientific works, of which **3** monographs (1 as a habilitation thesis), **5** studies, **3** textbooks (1 co-authored) and a list of **25** research works. The distribution of scientific works by relevant headings, in the country and abroad, is as follows: **21** scientific works in the country and **15** scientific works abroad. **14** scientific works are accepted for review, which are outside the dissertation and are counted in the final evaluation, **2** textbooks and **2** research projects. **1** monograph (publication I.A.3), which was not presented (lacking full-text content), **17** scientific works (publications II.B.2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20), which are not presented (full-text content missing), as well as **1** textbook (publication I.A.3, which is both a monograph and a textbook) are not reviewed. **1** publication (I.B.4) that repeats another (I.B.1) in the list of scientific works (appendix 6) is not reviewed. Of the scientific works accepted for review, the points of a publication I.B.2 are reduced from 30 to 10, which is indicated as published in scientific publications, referenced and indexed in world-renowned databases with scientific information. Scopus and Web of Science are generally considered to be such in scientific circles, which is also indicated in the additional requirements for occupying the academic position “associate professor”, approved by protocol No. 144/19.06.2020 by the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences at PU “Paisiy Hilendarski”. It is clear from the submitted reference for the fulfillment of the additional faculty requirements regarding participation in a scientific or educational project that for one project (Group 1, item 1.3) the candidate states that he was the head of the project, and at the same time he himself states that participated in an expert position. This requires that what the candidate stated in Group 1, item 1.3 be referred to Group 1, item 1.4 and the points be reduced accordingly.

The scientific interests and publications of the candidate are directly oriented to the subject area of the competition and the needs of the educational process of the Department of “Political Science and National Security”.

2. General characteristics of the candidates' activities

2.1. Evaluation of educational and pedagogical activity of the candidates

2.1.1. From the data presented on the educational and pedagogical activity of **the candidate Plamen Atanasov, DSc**, it is clear that he has some experience as a research assistant and also as a teacher, but outside the subject area of the announced competition. The candidate Plamen Atanasov, DSc, has presented evidence that he has prepared and delivered/conducted: 15 hours of classroom course “Institutional Transmedia Image and Brand” and 30 hours of exercises in the discipline “Persuasive Communication” (during his studies in doctoral studies) at the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”; 6 hours of lectures on the topic “Publicity of the 21st century - the doctor as a communicator” and 4 hours of lectures on the topic “Doctor and society facing the challenges of the 21st century. Thinking about security in the context of public health” at Medical University – Pleven.

The candidate Plamen Atanasov, PhD, has developed and participated in the development of 4 study programs in the fields of information security, information-analytical activity, cyber defense and transmedia image. They are intended for study in bachelor's and master's programs, and are distributed as follows: 1 in the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” and 3 in the Rakovski National Defence College. The candidate does not provide evidence of work with graduates and doctoral students.

2.1.2. The candidate Goran Stoykovski, PhD, has extensive educational and pedagogical activities. In his work as a university lecturer at two universities – Veliko Tarnovo University “St. St. Cyril and Methodius” and PU “Paisii Hilendarski”, the candidate has prepared, delivered and continues to read lecture courses and lead exercises for students in 9 different specialties, studying for the acquisition of the Bachelor's degree and the Master's degree. Currently, the disciplines he teaches are: Theory of International Security; Foreign Policy and Diplomacy; State policies and

strategies in Southeast Europe; History of International Relations and Introduction to Political Science. It is clear from the documents submitted by the candidate that he has developed 11 study programs.

In addition to working with students, the candidate presents evidence of scientific supervision of 4 doctoral students, and in his capacity as a scientific supervisor there is 1 doctoral student who successfully defended his dissertation work for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor”.

2.2. Evaluation of the scientific and scientific-applied activity of the candidates

My evaluation of the scientific and scientific-applied activity of both candidates is based on the main scientific results and the contributions in the scientific works and publications that have been accepted for peer review.

2.2.1. In the presented scientific production of **the candidate Plamen Atanasov, DSc**, the leading scientific research work is the monograph presented as a habilitation thesis, entitled “Issues of Public Diplomacy and Security. A Look at the Bulgarian-Macedonian Relations in 1991-2024”. Foreign policy and international relations fall into the object of scientific research formulated by the author in the monograph. In it, the author defines traditional (professional) diplomacy as a subject of in-depth research, with the main emphasis being placed on public diplomacy, new public diplomacy and digital diplomacy. The author examines and explores them in the perspective of security. In addition, the monograph examines the foreign policy relations of the Balkans, including the countries of the Republic of Bulgaria, the Republic of North Macedonia, the Republic of Serbia, the Republic of Greece and the Republic of Albania. Emphasis is placed on Bulgarian-Macedonian relations in the context of public diplomacy. In relation to the latter, Plamen Atanasov, DSc, defines the negative effects of the language of hate, the replacement of the historical past, physical violence against the right to national self-awareness and the resulting collisions in foreign policy relations as a challenge to security.

It can certainly be argued that this is the work that to the greatest extent falls within the scope of the scientific specialty of the competition, and most of the scientific and scientific-applied contributions made by the author are attributed to the habilitation work.

Among the scientific and scientific-applied contributions formulated by the author, I highlight:

- on the basis of a critical rethinking of basic theories, an original point of view is developed, according to which security is diversified as ideal, sought and achieved – publications III.1; IV.2.22, 2.25;

- the theoretical knowledge in the field of security has been enriched, by linking the concept of security with the natural complication of social systems (including society), which leads to the complication of communication within them and between them (including public diplomacy) – publications III.1 ; IV.2.22, 2.25, 2.26;

- a Model was created, based on Niklas Luhmann's Theory of Communication and modern, socially oriented theories of security, in which recurring dependencies are presented, showing a relationship between security, public diplomacy and public communication – publications III.1; IV.2.7., 2.22, 2.25, 2.26;

- a dependence was established between the conditions (the population of a historical-geographical area) and the prerequisites that provoke the occurrence of negative effects when synthesizing nations – publication III.1;

- it has been proven that the new public diplomacy and digital diplomacy are essential tools for eliminating negative effects in the building and development of nations and in advancing interests in foreign policy relations – publication III.1;

- the application of communication in cyberspace as part of the toolkit of the new public diplomacy, information and hybrid warfare is argued – publications III.1; IV.2.7.

For the peer-reviewed joint publications, the author does not submit separation protocols, for which I assume that the contributions of the authors are equal.

It can be reasonably assumed that the formulated contributions and obtained results are the personal merit of the candidate, and evidence of their importance is the citations of the candidate's scientific publications in other scientific works. The attached reference indicates: 1 citation in a publication in a scientific publication referenced and indexed in Web of Science – per 1 publication; 7 citations of 4 publications in peer-reviewed monographs and collective volumes, 1 citation of 1 publication in non-refereed peer-reviewed journals.

At the time of review, I am not aware of receiving a non-anonymous and motivated written report of plagiarism in the candidate's publications.

2.2.2. In the presented scientific output of **the candidate, Goran Stoykovski, PhD**, one notices the consistency and logic of the candidate's scientific research, which is mainly focused on the study of international relations, regional policies and strategies of the Balkans, the peculiarities and concepts applied in foreign policy, policies and strategies for the protection of the national interest and national security, diplomacy and international security, foreign policy and national security, ethnic minority and ethnocultural issues, regional policies, including the geopolitical development of the Balkans.

The leading research work is the monograph presented as a habilitation work entitled “The Great Change of the Macedonian Republic”. In the monographic work, the author Goran Stoykovski, PhD, analyzes the events leading up to the beginning of the great change and the new legal and political order in the former Yugoslav republic. Bearing in mind that the great transformation continues at the present time, transforming the Macedonian society and state, the author aims to explore the Macedonian experience and practice in organizing and institutionalizing a multicultural and multi-ethnic society. In this regard, in the scientific work, the author conducts a systematic and comprehensive analysis of: the Macedonian ethnic conflict that broke out at the beginning of January 2001; the subsequent framework agreement of August 2001, which is the compromise framework in which the peaceful and harmonious coexistence of the communities is possible; the referendum on the territorial organization of the local self-government of the Macedonian state and the early parliamentary elections of 2008. All the mentioned events are considered in the light of international and regional security, and more specifically in the context of the prospect of European and transatlantic integration of the state.

In the monograph, which is not presented as a habilitation thesis, entitled "The Rise of the White Crescent – Prospects for a New Turkish Century in the Balkans", the author analyzes the changing redistribution of power in the global race to establish global geopolitical influence after the end of the Cold War and, in particular, the change that is taking place in the system of international relations and in general in international politics after the reorientation of the USA towards the Asia-Pacific region; the changing geopolitical positions of global players in the Balkans, including Turkey, clarifying the situation in and around the Balkan states in the Western Balkans area, as well as their function in the strategies of both Turkey itself and in the context of the Russian-Turkish rivalry in the region.

The analysis of the scientific research activity and the scientific works presented by the candidate Goran Stoykovski, PhD, shows that they are closely related to political science and security science, and in particular to: international relations, diplomacy and international security, regional security in the Balkans, foreign policy and national security, ethnic minority and ethnocultural issues, regional policies, including the geopolitical development of the Balkans. All this gives me reason to assert that the scientific works of the candidate are within the scope of the scientific specialty, as well as the relevant field of higher education and the professional direction of the competition.

As more significant achievements in the candidate's scientific works, mainly because of their scientific and scientific-applied character, I evaluate:

- a systematic and comprehensive analysis of the events that changed the essence of the Macedonian state after the proclamation of its independence was carried out – publication I.A.1;

- the conflict of 2001, which significantly and strategically changed the ethno-religious and political relations in the Republic of Macedonia, is thoroughly and analytically examined – publication I.A.1;

- a systematic and comprehensive analysis was made of Turkish strategic thinking, tactics, the nature of foreign policy goals and the overall global geopolitical vision of the Republic of Turkey after the end of the Cold War in three key geopolitical regions: the Balkans, the South Caucasus and the Middle East – publication I.A.2;

- strategic issues related to national, international and regional security in the area of the Western Balkans are analyzed – publication I.A.2;

- based on a systematic multi-aspect analysis, an approach is proposed to compare different types of foreign policy moves and tactics both of the collective West and some of the countries of the Balkans, as well as of the significant players from the East: Russia and China – publication I.B.1;

- the state of diplomatic relations and strategic moves between countries from geopolitically significant regions were analyzed in the context of current global change and an emerging multipolar world – publications I.B.2, 3, 6, 8, 9;

- the current interweaving of geopolitical strategies and ideologies and their impact on international global and regional security (in the Balkans) is clarified – publications I.B.2, 3, 6, 8, 9;

- causal links between the stability and security of Macedonia and the regional stability of the Balkans were revealed – publications I.B.5, 7, 10; II.B.1.

For the peer-reviewed joint publication, the author submits a separation protocol that shows that the authors' contributions are equal.

It can be reasonably assumed that the formulated contributions and obtained results are the personal merit of the candidate, and evidence of their importance is the citations of the candidate's scientific publications in other scientific works. The attached reference indicates: 12 citations of 5 publications in peer-reviewed monographs and collective volumes, 2 citations of 2 publications in non-refereed peer-reviewed journals.

At the time of review, I am not aware of receiving a non-anonymous and motivated written report of plagiarism in the candidate's publications.

3. Critical notes and recommendations

3.1. The candidate Plamen Atanasov, DSc, has presented a significant number of scientific papers, which have their significance and scientific value, but my main remark is that a large part of the publications are not in the relevant field of higher education, professional direction and scientific specialty according to the announced competition. In addition, it is clear from the presented reference for educational and pedagogical activities that the candidate does not have sufficient experience as a teacher. I recommend that in his future work, the candidate should link national security issues to one degree or another in his scientific research, similar to the publications presented in the procedure for obtaining the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences".

3.2. Regarding the candidate Goran Stoykovski, PhD, my remarks are purely technical. It is noteworthy that the presentation of one's scientific production both in the list of scientific works (appendices 6) and in the report on contributions (appendix 8) lacks systematicity and orderliness, which leads to difficulties in the evaluation of scientific and scientific-applied activity of the candidate. The contributions should be presented by scientific fields and directions, with a clear indication of which are scientific and which are of a scientific-applied nature, and the same should be linked to the numbering of the publications in the list of scientific works. I recommend the candidate in his future scientific work to go outside his comfort zone – the Republic of North Macedonia.

CONCLUSION

The documents and materials presented by **Plamen Atanasov Atanasov, DSc**, do not meet all the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), the Regulations for the Implementation of LDASRB and the relevant Regulations of PU "Paisiy Hilendarski". The additional requirements for occupying the academic position "associate professor", confirmed by protocol No. 144/19.06.2020 by the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences at the PU, where it is stated that the candidate must participate in the competition with publications in specialized scientific publications on the scientific specialty of a competition, which in this case is "Security in the Balkans, Foreign Policy and Diplomacy". In this regard, a reduction of the candidate's scientific works was made, after which it was determined that the candidate **did not submit a sufficient number** of scientific works in the competition, published after the materials used in the defense of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" and scientific degree "Doctor of Science". The candidate's works contain original scientific and applied contributions that have received international recognition, a representative part of which has been published in journals and scientific collections issued by international academic publishing houses. The results achieved by **Plamen Atanasov Atanasov, DSc**, in the educational and research activities **do not correspond** to the minimum national and additional requirements of the Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences, adopted in connection with the Regulations of the PU for the application of LDASRB.

After familiarizing myself with the materials and scientific works presented by **the candidate Plamen Atanasov Atanasov, DSc**, in the competition, the analysis of their significance and the scientific, scientific-applied and applied contributions contained in them, I find it justified to give my **negative assessment** of the candidate in the competition.

The documents and materials presented by **Goran Vladimirov Stoykovski, PhD**, meet the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), the Regulations for the Implementation of the LDASRB and the relevant Regulations of PU "Paisiy Hilendarski". Despite the reduction of the candidate's scientific works, it is determined that the candidate submitted a sufficient number of scientific works in the competition, published after the materials used in the defense of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor". The candidate's works contain original scientific and applied contributions that have received international recognition, a representative part of which has been published in journals and scientific collections issued by international academic publishing houses. The results achieved by **Goran Vladimirov Stoykovski, PhD**, in the educational and research activities **fully correspond** to the minimum national and additional requirements of the Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences, adopted in connection with the Regulations of the PU for the application of LDASRB.

After familiarizing myself with the materials and scientific works presented by **the candidate Goran Vladimirov Stoykovski, PhD**, in the competition, the analysis of their significance and the scientific, scientific-applied and applied contributions contained in them, I find it reasonable to give my **positive assessment** of the candidate in the competition.

Guided by the above findings, I propose to the scientific jury **to rank** the candidate Goran Vladimirov Stoykovski, PhD, and to prepare a report-proposal to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences **for the election** of Goran Vladimirov Stoykovski, PhD, to the academic position of "associate professor" at PU "Paisiy Hilendarski" in: field of higher education 9. Security and Defense, professional direction 9.1. National Security (Security in the Balkans, Foreign Policy and Diplomacy).

August 9, 2024

Opinion made by:

Assoc. Prof. Daniel Berchev, PhD