

## **STANDPOINT**

by prof. Valeri Velkov Ivanov, PhD

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Regarding the materials submitted for participation in the contest to occupy the academic position of "associate professor" at Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski" field of higher education 9. Security and defence, professional field 9.1 National security (Security of the Balkans, foreign policy and diplomacy)

In the contest for the academic position "associate professor", promulgated in the State Gazette, no. 32 of 09.04.2024 r. and on the website of Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski" for the needs of the Department of "Political Sciences and National Security" of the Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences (FESS), as candidates are DSc Plamen Atanasov Atanasov and Goran Vladimirov Stojkovski, PhD.

### **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 "Paisii Hilendarski" (PU) I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury of a contest for the academic position of "associate professor" in the PU in the field of higher education 9. Security and defence, professional area 9.1 National security (Security of the Balkans, foreign policy and diplomacy), announced for the needs of the Department "Political Sciences and National Security" of the Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences.

The following candidates submitted documents for participation in the announced contest:

- DSc Plamen Atanasov Atanasov, Chief mechanic at "Oliva" AD - Knezha;
- Goran Vladimirov Stojkovski, PhD, Chief Assistant in the Department of "Political Sciences and National Security", Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences of the PU.

From the submitted documents, it is clear that the two candidates have submitted a complete set of the necessary documents and materials within the deadline, in accordance with the requirements of the Law for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), the Regulations for the Implementation of the LDASRB, the Regulations of PU "Paisii" Hilendarski for development of the academic staff, as well as with the additional requirements of the Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences. The procedural requirements were met from the announcement of the contest in the State Gazette to the determination of the composition of the Scientific Jury and its first meeting, in which I participated.

**Candidate No. 1** - DSc Plamen Atanasov Atanasov, born in 1970 in the city of Pleven and graduated from the Free Faculty of the Higher Mechanical and Electrical Engineering Institute - Sofia, specialty "Journalism" in 1994 and the Faculty of Automation of the Technical University - Sofia, having acquired the "Master's" degree with the qualification "Biotechnical Engineer" in 1995. Later, he developed and defended a dissertation on the topic: "Role of computer-mediated communication in causing and controlling reputational and managerial crises." Research of the content of blogs, corporate and information sites, discussion and thematic forums and social networks, related to reputational and management crises" for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "doctor" at the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication of Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski" in the period 2014-2017. In 2023, he successfully defended his dissertation on the topic: "Security and Communication" for the acquisition of the "Doctor of Science" degree at the Department of National and International Security of the New Bulgarian University, Sofia.

Following his career development, one can observe the occupation of various expert, administrative and research positions in private enterprises, financial institutions and government structures, starting with "engineer", who organizes and is responsible for planning, maintenance, repair, etc. of machinery and equipment in a baby food enterprise, "procurator" with responsibilities trade, repair and maintenance of dental equipment, "engineer" for hardware maintenance of stations and networks, IT specialist for system administration and database maintenance, to "system administrator" and Information Security Officer, PR expert and "chief mechanic". Despite his rich work career, he has not yet performed teaching activities on a full time job employment in a university.

**Candidate No. 2** - Goran Vladimirov Stojkovski, PhD, born in 1969 in the town of Kumanovo, Republic of North Macedonia and graduated in 2002 from the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of "St. Kliment Ohridski", Sofia with a master's degree in "Political Science". In 2008, he obtained an educational and scientific degree "doctor" from the National Academy of Sciences in the scientific specialty 05.11.02 "Political Science" after a successfully defended doctoral dissertation on the topic: "The perspective of inter-ethnic relations and the state system in the Republic of Macedonia".

His working career began as an "associate" at the Protocol and Ceremonial Service at the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia, Skopje in 1998, he went through a "consultant" at "National Centre for Public Opinion Research" at the National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria, Sofia in 2001 - 2002, through the position of "expert" at the Institute for Social and Humanistic Studies "Euro-Balkan" in Skopje, Republic of Macedonia from 2002 to 2005, and also "associate" and "expert-consultant" at the same time at the Institute for social values and structures "Ivan Hadjiyski", Sofia, to the Institute for Regional and International Studies, Sofia, Bulgaria and to the Open Society Institute Foundation - Macedonia, in the period 2003-2009. After 2010, he worked at the Institute for Economic Strategies and International Relations "Ohrid" in the Republic of Macedonia and the Institute for Regional and International Studies, Sofia, and in the period 2014-2017 he was an "advisor" to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria.

The impressive working, expert and above all consulting career of the candidate Dr. Goran Stojkovski is complemented by scientific and teaching activities in the period from 2012 to 2021 as an "assistant" and qualified teacher "associate professor" of political science at the Polytechnic "Paisii" Hilendarski", Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences, Department of "Political Sciences and National Security" and at the same time as "chief assistant" at Veliko Tarnovo University "St. St. Cyril and Methodius", Faculty of Philosophy, Department of "Political Sciences" ("Political Science, Sociology and Cultural Studies"), Veliko Tarnovo, in the period 2012-2024. He is currently a "chief assistant" in the Department of "Political Sciences and National Security" at the Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences, Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski".

## **2. General Characteristics of the Candidates' Activities**

In the current contest, **candidate No. 1** – DSc Plamen Atanasov, participates with **one published monograph** in the relevant scientific field, presented as a habilitation thesis, **one monograph** that was not presented as the main habilitation thesis under a previous or current procedure and was not presented during the acquiring of the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences", **3 independent chapters** in a collective monograph, **27 articles and reports, one of which** is a report published in a scientific publication, referenced and indexed in world-famous databases with scientific information, **two issues** are co-authored.

In addition, 9 articles and reports are presented as an appendix to the dissertation work for the acquisition of the "Doctor of Science" degree, as well as 15 scientific publications included as an appendix to the dissertation work for the acquisition of the Doctor of Science degree, **which are not subject to the present analysis and I do not accept it for review**, but they provide an opportunity for a general idea of the scientific development of the candidate. In general, the scientific production with which DSc Plamen Atanasov participated in the contest significantly exceeded the minimum national requirements, and with the minimum required points by groups of indicators for occupying the academic position "associate professor" of 400, he collected 920 points, which is double more than the required number (without indicator "E" which is not mandatory - 780 points), evident from document 8.1. According to the attached certificate of compliance with the Criteria for the evaluation of candidates participating in a contest for the academic position of "associate professor" at the Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences of the Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski" (document 8.3), with the additional evaluation indicators by Groups of 1 to 4 points of the candidate are significantly more - 1181.5, which shows formal compliance with Additional indicators for the evaluation of candidates for academic positions in the FEES at the PU.

The presented scientific output of candidate DSc Plamen Atanasov shows that a very small part of his scientific interests are in the field of foreign policy and international relations (in particular, Bulgarian-Macedonian relations), where he studies the role, place and tasks of public diplomacy in the modern, information-dominated world, and traditionally his science interests have been concerned with crisis communication and reputation crisis management, with viruses, trolls and hackers, with network relations in the global web, with the role of the media in terms of

impact of mass communication and others. Which **in general does not correspond** to the scientific specialty of the contest, namely - "Security of the Balkans, foreign policy and diplomacy".

A leading research work is the monograph "Issues of Public Diplomacy and Security. A look at the Bulgarian-Macedonian relations in 1991-2024", where the author thoroughly and multi-layeredly reveals the subject of diplomacy, with the main emphasis being placed on public diplomacy, the new public diplomacy and digital diplomacy. By examining the negative effects such as hate speech, replacement of the historical past, physical violence against the right to national self-awareness and the resulting collisions in foreign policy relations, DSc Atanasov brings out the essential characteristics and peculiarities of such a challenge to security as a precedent in international relations and bets of the communication dimensions of diplomacy, understood as a basic tool both in foreign policy and in socio-political relations. It can be argued that **this is a work that falls within the scope of the scientific specialty of the contest.**

Following thematically the rest of the publications (published monograph that is not presented as a main habilitation work, independent chapters, articles and reports), it can be argued that they definitely correspond to topics such as social psychology, the science of mass and interpersonal communication, reputation crisis management, the media, artificial intelligence and the impact of mass communication, fake news and trust in networks, communication and crises, database security management, public and state security, leadership and communication, etc. Unfortunately, I should point out that **these papers are largely unrelated to the required scientific specialty of the contest, as well as the relevant field of higher education and professional area** (with the exception of paper 22 from the List of scientific production, document 6.). In addition, the requirement of the Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences, to have at least one publication in scientific journals, referenced and indexed in international databases with scientific information (Scopus or Web of Science) in the scientific specialty of the contest, has not been met (publication 1.1., from Group 1 of section II of document 8.3.), **because the topic and its content are in another scientific field and professional area.**

From the submitted documents and references, it is clear that the candidate has a significant number (15 in total) of citations from the scientific community, which, in my opinion, is evidence of a balance between practical and theoretical results. In addition, it should be noted that the candidate participates in the educational process in higher education institutions with a certain number of lectures and exercises (50 hours in total), participates in the development of study programs - 4, as well as participation in two scientific projects - national and international. I accept as well-founded the stated claims for scientific and scientific-applied contributions in document 10.1 and consider that the contributions are the personal work of the candidate. He is a member of the Union of Scientists in Bulgaria, the Union of Bulgarian Journalists.

**Candidate No. 2** - Dr. Goran Vladimirov Stojkovski participated in the contest with **one published monograph** in the relevant scientific field, presented as a habilitation thesis, **one monograph** that was not presented as the main habilitation thesis, **3 studies** published in non-refereed peer-reviewed journals and **10 scientific articles and reports**, of which **two articles** have

been published in scientific journals, referenced and indexed in international databases with scientific information. The list of scientific production also includes 20 articles and reports of the candidate, which have not been presented and **I do not accept for review**, but give a general idea of the scientific interests and his scientific development.

The scientific production with which Dr. Goran Stojkovski participated in the contest meets the minimum national requirements, and with a minimum required number of 400 points by groups of indicators for occupying the academic position "associate professor", **he collects 592 points**, according to document 8. And the reference for compliance with the Criteria for the evaluation of candidates participating in a contest for the academic position of "associate professor" at the Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences of the Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski" (document 8.1) shows that according to the additional indicators for the evaluation of the candidates, the points of the candidate increase significantly - 907.35, which shows **full compliance with Additional indicators for the evaluation of candidates for academic positions in the FESS at the PU.**

The analysis of the presented scientific output of the candidate shows that his scientific interests are in the field of political science and national and regional security, with a main focus on the study of international relations, regional policies and strategies in 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. Which gives me reason to claim that **the candidate's works are in accordance with the required scientific specialty, as well as the relevant field of higher education and the professional area of the contest.**

In the monograph "The Great Change of the Macedonian Republic" a systematic and comprehensive analysis of events that changed the essence of the Macedonian state after the proclamation of its independence was made. An analysis of an extremely topical problem related to the systemic and structural change of the country from the point of view of the international and regional security. And in the monograph "The Rise of the White Crescent - Prospects for a New Turkish Century in the Balkans" a systematic and comprehensive analysis of Turkish strategic thinking, tactics, foreign policy goals and the global geopolitical vision of the Republic of Turkey after the end of the Cold War was made. Issues related to the international, regional and national security of the countries in the Western Balkans, the contemporary specifics of the geopolitical strategies of the Turkish political elite, the main goals of the Republic of Turkey after the end of the Cold War in three key geopolitical regions are analysed: Balkans, the South Caucasus and the Middle East, the new national doctrine for Turkey, the changing redistribution of power in the race to establish global geopolitical influence after the end of the Cold War, and in particular, the change occurring in the system of international relations after the reorientation of the United States to the Asia-Pacific region.

The studies, articles and reports are dedicated to research related to the foreign policy moves and tactics of the countries of the collective West, the countries of the Balkans, as well as

the significant players from the East: Russia and China. The European integration processes have been studied and some of the weaknesses that can cause strategic losses for the foreign policy goals of the West have been revealed. The approaches taken in the international relations of the main Western countries and the extent to which some revealed weaknesses threaten global and regional security in a strategic plan are analysed, by tracking the state of diplomatic relations and the strategic moves made by countries from geopolitically significant regions, in the context of the current global change and the emerging multipolar world, and with a view to clarifying the impact of geopolitical strategies and ideologies on the global international situation and regional security in the Balkans. Therefore, I definitely consider that **the scientific works of the candidate completely fall within the scope of the scientific specialty of the contest.**

The teaching activity of candidate Dr. Goran Stojkovski began in 2012 at the PU "P. Hilendarski", and later at the University of Veliko Tarnovo "St. St. Cyril and Methodius", where he develops and teaches various academic disciplines from nine different specialties: "Political Science", "National Security", "International Politics and Business Diplomacy", "Marketing", "Finance", "Business Management", "Accounting", "Sociology", "Psychology". He is currently teaching in Bachelor's and Master's programs in "Political Science", "National Security", "International Politics and Business Diplomacy" at the PU.

He has developed and published 3 university textbooks, leads one national and participates in one university scientific project. He was the supervisor of four doctoral students, one of whom successfully defended his doctoral dissertation. I accept the mentioned points of contribution for the candidate's personal file (document 10), evidence of which is the number of citations - a total of 14 in Bulgarian and foreign scientific publications. He is a member of the Bulgarian Association of Political Sciences.

### **3. Critical Remarks and Recommendations**

Regarding **Candidate No. 1** - DSc Plamen Atanasov, my main remark is that, despite the impressive scientific output, there is a lack of publications in the relevant field of higher education, professional area and scientific specialty announced in the current contest, as well as the necessary textbooks for a teacher, teaching aids and educational methodical developments. I recommend that he emphasize this side of his activity in his future work.

And regarding **Candidate No. 2** - Dr. Goran Stojkovski, I have remarks on a purely technical level - in the future he should clearly and unequivocally indicate which scientific works he offers for review and which ones he does not (document 6), to correctly fill out his CV (in it, document 2, where, in my opinion, he deliberately did not indicate his nationality and mother language), to describe his contributions by scientific fields and areas, and not by the list of his scientific production, and I also recommend that in the future he expands the scope of his research outside the Republic of North Macedonia and the Republic of Turkiye.

## CONCLUSION

The documents and materials presented by Dr. Goran Stojkovski **meet all the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Rules for its Implementation and the relevant Rules of the "Paisii Hilendarski" University.** Unfortunately, I should point out that **the scientific output of DSc Plamen Atanasov does not comply with the requirements of the Regulations of the PU "Paisii Hilendarski"** and the Criteria for the evaluation of candidates participating in a competition for the academic position of "associate professor" at the Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences. I have no doubt of plagiarism for both of them and I am not aware of any reports so far.

**The candidate DSc Plamen Atanasov** has presented a significant number of scientific works published after the materials used in the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "doctor" and the "Doctor of Science" degree. The candidate's works contain original scientific and scientific-applied contributions that have received international recognition, a representative part of which has been published in journals and scientific collections issued by international scientific publishing houses. **However, their subject matter and direction do not correspond to the field of higher education and professional area, as well as the relevant scientific specialty, announced in the contest.** His theoretical developments with practical applicability are relatively limited, and the teaching and methodical materials directly oriented to the teaching work, as well as the teaching and teaching-methodical activity, are insufficient.

The results achieved in the scientific research activity do not correspond to the additional requirements of the Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences, adopted in connection with the Regulations of the PU for the application of the LDASRB.

That is why **I do not give a positive assessment** to the candidate DSc Plamen Atanasov, as my main arguments are non-compliance of the presented scientific production with the requirements of the scientific specialty in the announced contest, with the additional requirements of the Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences and the insufficient teaching and learning methodological activity.

**The candidate Goran Stojkovski, Phd** has submitted a sufficient number of scientific works published after the materials used in the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "doctor". The candidate's works contain original scientific and scientific-applied contributions that have received international recognition, a significant part of which has been published in journals and scientific collections issued by international scientific publishing houses. His theoretical developments have practical applicability, and some of them are directly oriented to academic work. Dr. Goran Stojkovski's scientific qualification, teaching and teaching-methodical training are beyond any doubt and fully correspond to the field of higher education, professional direction and scientific qualification in the announced contest.

The results achieved in the academic and research activities 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 getting acquainted with the materials and scientific works presented in the contest, analysing their significance and the scientific, scientific-applied and applied contributions contained in them, **I find it reasonable to give my positive assessment to the candidate Dr. Goran Stojkovski**, in view of his significant educational background and educational and methodological activity, as well as teaching experience in the last 12 years.

I recommend that the Scientific Jury prepare a report-proposal to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences **for the election of Dr. Goran Stojkovski to the academic position of "associate professor"** at PU "Paisii Hilendarski" in the field of higher education 9. Security and Defence, professional area 9.1. National Security (Security of the Balkans, Foreign Policy and Diplomacy).

09.08.2024

The standpoint was compiled by: .....

/prof. Valeri Ivanov, PhD/