

STATEMENT

**by Prof. Dr.Sc. Maria Antonova Schnitter, Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski",
Faculty of Philosophy and History**

(name, surname, first name - academic degree in a higher education institution or scientific organization)

regarding the materials submitted for participation in a procedure for awarding
the title of **"Associate Professor"**
at Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski"

in the field of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences
professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Studies
Folkloristics - Folklore and Religion

In the procedure for "Associate Professor," announced in the State Gazette, issue 98 from November 19, 2024, and on the website of Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski" for the needs of the Department of Ethnology within the Faculty of Philosophy and History, as the sole candidate participating is Chief Assistant Dr. Borislava Petkova Kostova from the Department of Ethnology, FPH.

With Order RD-22-432/February 18, 2025, I have been appointed as a member of the Scientific Jury for the procedure, and in accordance with the decision of the SJ (Protocol No. 1/February 27, 2025), I am providing you with the following opinion:

1. General Presentation of the Procedure and the Candidate

I have known Dr. Borislava Kostova since her early days of studying in one of the first cohorts of the newly established program in Bulgarian Philology and Ethnology. I was a witness and accomplice to her academic maturation and growth. Her candidacy in the announced competition for Associate Professor in Folklore cannot be more convincing and appropriate.

The set of materials presented by Dr. Kostova, both on paper and electronic media, fully complies with the Higher Education Act, the Law on Academic Staff Development, the Internal Rules for Academic Staff Development at Plovdiv University, and the minimum national requirements.

The candidate has submitted a total of 23 scientific works for participation in the procedure – 14 articles (two of which are under print), 3 studies, 2 monographs in the thematic area of the competition, and an additional 4 works in co-authorship (two articles and two chapters from collective monographs) outside this area but within the scope of professional direction 3.1. One of the monographs represents a revised version of her doctoral dissertation defended in 2011.

Three of the articles have been published abroad.

Eighteen research papers that are outside the dissertation are accepted for review and count towards the final grade. The monograph, based on her PhD thesis, and the four scientific papers outside the scope of the competition are not reviewed.

2. General Characteristics of the Candidate's Activities

Assessment of Teaching and Educational Activities and Preparation of the Candidate

B. Petkova Kostova is an integral part of the academic staff of the Department of Ethnology since its inception. Her inexhaustible enthusiasm combined with her precision in administrative work and ability to communicate with students and colleagues has long made her a favorite teacher for generations of our graduates. Over the years, she has accumulated significant academic experience and managed to develop and introduce original authorial lecture courses on *Folklore Culture*, *Cultural Studies*, *Mythology*, and *Ethnology of Plastic Arts*. Inheriting some of the brightest scientists and teachers from the generation of our mentors, she skillfully applied what she learned from them but also managed to incorporate the necessary elements of relevance into teaching and link them with contemporary teaching methods, societal processes, and sciences related to society. I want to specifically mention her invaluable assistance as an assistant in the course on *History and Anthropology of Religions*, where she organized and conducted various fieldwork studies, work with religious communities in urban environments, etc. I am convinced that in the future, she will continue to successfully develop and improve in this scientific field.

Assessment of the Candidate's Scientific and Applied Research Activities

The scientific works presented for review in the fields of folklore and history of religions can be examined in two thematic groups.

The first group focuses on B. Petkova's many years of engagement with the folklore devil. The result of this deep exploration of the folklore treasury is the monograph "The Devil. An Attempt at Reconstructing the Folklore Image" (Plovdiv, Paisii Hilendarski University Press, 2025), as well as the study (2.2.1) and four articles (2.3.1, 2.3.3, 2.3.4, 2.3.14). Borislava Kostova's interest in the image of the devil in Bulgarian folklore dates back almost two decades but has found its in-depth and comprehensive shaping in recent years, culminating in the formulation of the research results in the recently released book. In it, B. Petkova confidently enters the complex interdisciplinary terrain of folklore, mythology, medieval studies, and the study of religion. She skillfully combines and relates elements from diverse (temporal, typological, functional) source layers to outline the specific image of the "Bulgarian devil" and attempts to explain both its constituent components and its complex nature as an element of the triad in "an interesting dualistic-folklore Trinity, consisting of God, the devil, and man" (p. 304). By systematically and precisely studying a large corpus of texts, the author manages to extract invariant models of the physical characteristics and functions of the devil. It is in this part of the research that I see its most significant analytical contribution.

The second thematic group of publications for the competition includes two studies (2.2.2, 2.2.3) and ten articles (2.3.2, 2.3.5, 2.3.6, 2.3.7, 2.3.8, 2.3.9, 2.3.10, 2.3.11, 2.3.12, 2.3.13). Created between 2013 and 2024, they outline the trajectory of B. Petkova's scientific maturation. Dedicated to diverse problems across a wide thematic and temporal range (from "*advertising of goods and services after Liberation*" through "*the martenitsa and masculine principle*" and "*the blackberry*

in folklore legends" to "the creation of woman" and "Russian influence on contemporary Bulgarian iconography"), this group of texts testifies to the multifaceted scientific interests of the candidate, her accumulating competencies over time, and the gradual mastery of the complex terrain of folklore and the study of religions in both diachronic and synchronic aspects.

Eight of B. Kostova's scientific publications have been cited a total of 19 times (the classification and scoring of citations in the attached table is incorrect, and it is detrimental to the candidate!). The majority of citations come from Bulgarian authors, which is understandable given the language of the publications themselves.

In addition, Dr. Kostova is the compiler and editor of a total of 12 collections of scientific content, published in the period 2015-2023. Only someone who has never been involved in composition could not realize the huge amount of "invisible", but difficult, responsible and time-consuming work that is behind these publications.

Let me summarize: the scientific publications submitted for participation in the competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor" satisfy and even exceed the legal requirements both quantitatively and qualitatively. They contain significant scientific contributions and clear evidence of the suitability of the candidate, Borislava Kostova, for occupying the academic position.

Assessment of the Candidate's Personal Contribution

The scientific works submitted for review are undoubtedly original and independently created by Dr. Kostova.

When discussing her "personal contribution," I would like to highlight Borislava Kostova's exceptional activity in various non-classroom activities – projects, scientific programs, work with students under the Erasmus+ program, fieldwork, organizing summer schools, union activities – it is difficult to imagine how she managed to combine all these activities so successfully with her teaching and research work.

I cannot help but express my personal gratitude for our joint efforts in creating, organizing, and conducting seven editions of BSSRPL (Balkan Summer School on Religions and Public Life) between 2011 and 2023. Organized jointly with CEDAR, it overcame all organizational, financial, and institutional complications and became a "trademark" of Plovdiv University among participants from four continents. Borislava Kostova (then Petkova) was the tireless engine, the heart of the school, and contributed greatly to its success.

3. Critical Remarks and Recommendations

My only recommendation for the future scientific and academic development of Dr. B. Kostova is related to the need for greater publicity of her research work. I am convinced that her scientific results would find interested readers not only in Bulgaria but also throughout the Slavic world and beyond its borders (especially regarding contributions in the field of popular Christianity and its Balkan specifics). In this sense, I recommend that she orient herself towards more authoritative periodic publications, particularly those abroad.

CONCLUSION

The sole candidate in the competition has presented a significant number of scientific works published after the materials used for the defense of the PhD degree, which contain original scientific contributions and have received recognition from the academic community. The scientific, teaching, and administrative qualifications of Borislava Kostova are unquestionable.

After reviewing the materials and scientific works submitted in the competition, analyzing their significance and the scientific contributions contained therein, I find it reasonable to give my **positive assessment** and recommend to the esteemed Scientific Jury to prepare a report-proposal to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philosophy and History for the election of Chief Assistant Dr. Borislava Petkova Kostova to the academic position of "Associate Professor" in the scientific specialty Folklore – Folklore and Religion, Field of Higher Education 3. Social, Economic, and Legal Sciences, Professional Direction 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology, and Cultural Studies.

March 26, 2025

Prepared by:

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