

## **OPINION**

**By Assoc.Prof. Ph.D. Stoyka Petrova Penkova**  
**The Paissiy Hilendarski University of Plovdiv**

as to the materials submitted for participation in a contest  
for the academic position of **Associate Professor**  
**of the Paissiy Hilendarski University of Plovdiv**

in: sphere of higher education: 3. Social, economic and legal sciences  
professional field 3.1. Sociology, anthropology, and sciences of culture  
(name of scientific speciality) Culture and Communication

In the competition for the position of 'Associate Professor' as announced in the State Gazette, No. 98 as of October 11, 2024, and on the webpage of the Paissiy Hilendarski University of Plovdiv for the needs of the Department of Ethnology of the Faculty of Philosophy and History, there is one candidate applying: Senior Assistant Professor Ph.D. Maria Stoyanova Petrova of the same Department.

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

I know the applicant since the very beginning of her being a B.A. student, a doctoral student and an assistant professor in the University of Plovdiv as she gradually and very successfully passed through the different degrees of her education and academic growth. I am convinced that her participation in the announced competition will be of support to the staff strengthening and development of the Department of Ethnology with which Dr. Petrova has been associated from the very beginning of her academic development.

The set of application materials submitted by Dr. Petrova includes the necessary documents as per the Regulations for the Development of Academic Staff in the Paissiy Hilendarski University of Plovdiv. The applicant participates in the announced competition with one monograph, three studies (one of them in co-authorship) and 6 articles, all of which published after the defense of her Ph.D. thesis (2008). The monograph, two studies and six articles are in Bulgarian, the study in co-authorship and one of the articles are in English. She has been a participant in 19 internal, national and international research and applied projects.

With the scientific production so described, the applicant meets the quantitative parameters of the competition and the minimal state standards for occupying the academic position of Associate Professor.

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

The scientific works of Dr. Petrova can be considered in *three thematic areas* which differently enter into the study of culture and communication in their specific modes of ascribing identities and transmitting cultural heritage, constructing images and interpreting spaces and times, research of institutions and making explicit their everyday life. The first, basic and most important line of her research endeavours is, in my view, related to the theme of *chitalishte* instituting through the empirical case of the *chitalishte* in the village of Pchelarovo. This is the theme of the monograph *Chitalishte and Time. Institutional building and social transformation. In the pages of the annal book*, two studies (Nos 2 and 3 of the list of scientific publications) and two articles (Nos 5 and 7), the monograph being a summary and conclusion of the many years of research work presented in them.

The monographic work *Chitalishte and Time. Institutional building and social transformation. In the pages of the annal book* (2024), published by the Paissiy Hilendarski Plovdiv University Publishing House, can be viewed as a habilitation work, the result of several years of profound research and fieldwork on the project 'Life transitions in the transforming village: memory, identity, inheritance', supported by the National Scientific Fund (2019–2024), in which Dr. Petrova was included as a participant. As the project's leader, I can say with satisfaction that this study is one of the good examples of the successful combination of scientific and academic resources that is characteristic of 'the Plovdiv school' of ethnology and sociology as one of the centres of social and human studies in Bulgaria.

The merits of the researcher's work in this thematic area consists in setting up a general analytic model of the processes of transformation in the institutional everyday life of a *chitalishte* as described in the Annal Book of the *chitalishte* in the village of Pchelarovo, as well as in the meticulous cartography of the many aspects of the process of transformation of the practices and mechanisms through which the models of representation of that everyday life are identified. Generated by the different institutional discourses, carefully described by the author, their articulation for the interpretation of the main speaker(s) of the annals discourse is especially important to the study of the institution of *chitalishte* according to its own measure. The actual reconstruction of the vast and heterogeneous network of discourses, institutions, actors, opens to us 'the life of a *chitalishte*, traceable throughout a relatively long period of time, according to the history created for us by the authors of the Annals Book of the institution' (p. 287). It is worth noting here that although such concepts as 'everyday life', 'discourse', 'discursive field' etc. are not used as basic for the deployment of a historical analytic of *chitalishte* life, they are implicitly assumed constantly by the author (a sign of the possible awareness of the methodological shortage and the increasing implicit need of turning to these conceptual schemes in the course of the deploying study is nevertheless the ap-

pearance of the word 'discourse' which first comes as late as on page 159 but in the end of the habilitation work it is mentioned 8 more times between pages 234 and 241 alone, along with its derivatives).

Thus the study of Maria Petrova follows several lines at once. On the one hand, she proposes an analytic model through which one can thin the concept of 'institution building' and the 'social transformation' it generates, in order to reconstruct the research object, namely the *Chitalishte* and its *Time*. On the other hand, meetings are staged and encounters are provoked of different perspectives on the Pchelarovovo chitalishte (the Annals Book and its official 'speakers', places, times, discourses, politics, strategies etc.), through which problems are unveiled and possible solutions are singled out. Especially important is the analysis that demonstrates how thinking on such oppositions as public-private, official-unofficial, institutional-non-institutional etc. to which the study constantly refers, taking data from the rich archive base with which the applicant has been working, presents stable and durable ways of perceiving things and people in this institutionally built and everyday-lived space. In this respect, it would be very interesting to trace the double determination – once at the institutional and secondly at the everyday level – of the annals' (ideological) discourse through which its speakers are interpellated into taking one or another stance in the symbolic struggles 'of' and 'for' the Chitalishte. Of course, the deployment of such an interactive move would be the result of applying a different perspective on discourse and discursive practices that inscribe time into the space of the Chitalishte and v.v., which cannot be realized in this monograph regarding the chosen research approach, but it could be a useful 'toolbox' for their further problematisation (something implied also in the monograph's finale).

The second group of publications (articles № 1 and № 4 of the presented list of scientific publications submitted for the competition) indirectly encompasses again the problem of instituting – this time that of the university institution, making explicit its social interactions and functioning in the context of preservation and transmission of the 'living memory' of the university.

The third group of publications (articles № 3 and № 6) demonstrate a careful look into the peculiarities of the Karakachan culture. They rely on empirical data of a longitudinal field research among the Karakachan community in Bulgaria and Northern Greece.

It must be specified that both groups of publications use a methodological approach that differs from what has been applied in the monographs and in the publications of the first thematic area. Here, no analytic explicitations are made whatsoever, the emphasis is put instead on the 'voice of the informer' and the 'empirical material' from the direct meetings in the field.

I can summarize that the monograph and the submitted scientific publications demonstrate not merely the skills of Dr. Maria Petrova in developing systematic academic work raising important

research questions about the nature of important cultural phenomena (in this case, the Chitalishte), but also that the applicant has achieved a degree of research maturity that is a condition of possibility of future research contributions.

As to her teaching work, a part of the main courses that Maria Petrova delivers, are directly related to her research interests, combining into one a scientific and an educational program as a part of the specifics of the education that 'the Plovdiv school' offers in the social and human sciences. The author's lecture courses are presented in a total of nine disciplines in the different degrees of education, for which Maria Petrova has prepared the respective information packages (syllabus, list of themes, bibliography, requirements for exams, exam materials etc.) which are the result of the applicant's participation in a multitude of national and international projects and scientific venues. Her work with the students of the Department of Ethnology and the high marks of the successful B.A. and M.A. theses under her supervision testifies to her abilities in transmitting her knowledge to the next generations.

## **CONCLUSION**

With regard to the above, I can conclude that the documents and materials submitted by Sen.Ass.Prof. Ph.D. Maria Stoyanova Petrova satisfy the requirements of the Academic Staff Development in the Republic of Bulgaria Act (ASDRBA), the Regulations for the Application of ASDRBA and the respective Regulations of the Paissiy Hilendarski University of Plovdiv.

The applicant has submitted a sufficient number of scientific works published after her obtaining the scientific and academic degree of 'doctor' (Ph.D.) which satisfies the requirements of the acting normative framework concerning the academic position of Associate Professor. The author's certification of scientific contributions and found quotations is correct. The scientific and teaching qualification of Maria Petrova is doubtless.

After reviewing the submitted materials and scientific works, and analyzing their importance and scientific contributions, I state my positive evaluation and I recommend to the respected Scientific Jury to produce a proposal report to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philosophy and History of the Paissiy Hilendarski University of Plovdiv for the election of Maria Stoyanova Petrova to the academic position of Associate Professor in the Paissiy Hilendarski University of Plovdiv in professional field 3.1. Sociology, anthropology, and sciences of culture, scientific speciality of Culture and Communication, for the needs of the Department of Ethnology therein.

March 10, 2025

**Author of opinion:** .....

*(signed)*

Assoc.Prof. Ph.D. Stoyka Penkova