

OPINION

by Assoc. Prof. Ilia Iliev, PhD, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

of the materials submitted for participation in a competition
for the academic position of "associate professor"
of the Plovdiv University "Paisij Hilendarski"

in: field of higher education ..3. Social, economic and legal sciences

professional field .3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences (Culture and Communication)

In the competition for "associate professor", announced in the State Gazette, issue 98 of 19.11.2024 and on the website of Plovdiv University "Paisij Hilendarski" for the needs of the Department of Ethnology at the Faculty of Philosophy and History, as the only candidate participating is Chief Assistant Professor Maria Stoyanova Petrova, PhD from the same department

1. General presentation of the procedure and the candidate

By order No. RD 22-436 of 18.02.2025, I am appointed as a member of the scientific jury in the above-described competition, in which Dr. Maria Petrova is the only candidate.

Within the deadline established by law, Dr. Petrova submitted a set of documents that meet the formal requirements. For the competition, she submitted a monograph, three studies and seven articles, all of which were published after the defense of her doctoral dissertation (2009). The texts were published under the surname Kisikova and since she is present with it in the academic space, and I also know her under this name, I will use it further in this opinion. One of the studies and one article are in English, the rest in Bulgarian. The foreign-language study was published in a journal referenced in SCOPUS. The rest are in Bulgarian academic publications. In addition, Dr. Kisikova has participated in 12 scientific projects, three of which are international (funded by Erasmus +). A list of 14 citations is provided, two of which in English-language publications. Directly related to the topic of the publications are two university courses developed by Dr. Kisikova for the needs of the specialties "Cultural Tourism" and "Cultural and Social Anthropology" at Plovdiv University, and in addition to them she leads four more training disciplines and two practices (summer field practice and internship in institutions). Also attached are bachelor's and master's degree diplomas, as well as a diploma for the educational and scientific degree "doctor". There is also a certificate of identity of names from the Plovdiv Municipality, confirming that Kisikova and Petrova are the same person.

Dr. Kisikova's scientific output far exceeds the minimum standards for holding an academic position and complies with both the Academic Staff Development Act and the Regulations of the University of Plovdiv for its implementation.

2. General characteristics of the candidate's activities

In essence, Dr. Kisikova's scientific works can be organized into three sub-fields. The first is related to the village of Pchelarovo, with the monograph submitted for the competition "Chitalishte and Time. Institutional Construction and Social Transformation. From the Pages of the Chronicle Book" occupying a central place. As the title suggests, the monograph is constructed around the "chitalishte" (community center) chronicle book of a village in the Eastern Rhodopes. The book has been kept since 1928 by ten different authors and is an extremely interesting document in itself. Thanks to it, Dr. Kisikova offers both a fascinating (there is no reason why scientific literature should not be interesting reading) and convincing reconstruction of the life of the village with its key figures in the 1930s and 1980s. Other archival sources for the settlement and memories of its inhabitants, stored in the State Archives - Kardzhali, as well as regulatory documents, which give greater density to the narrative, were also used. The monograph can be situated at the intersection of historiography and anthropology, as the author manages to maintain conceptual and thematic integrity. Thanks to this, we can see how an institution functions, which is much more closely embedded in local realities and better responds to local needs than the later popular non-governmental organizations.

The article "Official Holidays – Realizations and Transformations. From the Archives of a Rural Community Center" is also related to Pchelarova's community center (chitalishte). A contributing element there is the analysis of the mechanisms through which the official holidays reach small settlements and the inevitable transformations they undergo. It is particularly interesting to trace the role of specific people, employees of the community center, on whose personal ambitions and energy the imposition of official policy largely depends, but who also introduce their own changes. The studies "On Memory and Inheritance – Perspectives on Identity. Following the Example of the Village of Pchelarovo" and "Rethinking and Renegotiating Community Identity. The Case of Pchelarovo" also fit into the theme of Pchelarovo and the importance of the individual actor. In them we see the interaction between institutions (including withdrawn institutions, symbolized by the crumbling museum), the

local community and the individual actor. Here, the ethnologist's perspective, not the historian's, is at the forefront, with the author demonstrating a respectable command of various methodological and theoretical approaches.

Similarly, the interaction between active individuals and the institution is at the center of a second problem circle related to the university and the people working in it. The articles “Let’s talk about the university. On the ethnological approach in the study of an institution” and “Self-Identification and collective Identity – personal Hierarchy and social Reflections (examples from biographical interviews with University Professors)” examine the multi-layered interactions between the institution and the people in it, who base not only their professional identity, but also a large part of their social connections, consumption and overall self-identification on working at the university, build the institution and at every moment are themselves built by it. The article “Challenges to the teaching of ethnology. Theoretical and practical dimensions. (based on examples from the academic disciplines Intercultural communication and Stereotypes and prejudices)” also belongs to this block, as well as the co-authored “Creative traditions and cultural projects: re-thinking heritage through experience”. There, the ethnologist is both subject and object of the study, using his professional tools on himself.

The texts dedicated to the university and the work of the ethnologist are marked by the necessary dose of self-reflexivity, while “The Song of the Road” and “Spatial Outlining of One’s Own (Based on Examples from the Karakachan Community)” are dedicated to a community to which Dr. Kiskinova does not belong. These articles are dialogical, insofar as the author seeks to show the unique view of the Karakachans, whose until recently semi-nomadic lifestyle has shaped a specific attitude towards space. And again, institutions are present, obviously an enduring interest of Dr. Kisikova, this time referring to the Karakachan cultural and educational societies.

The scientific publications submitted for the competition cover a variety of topics and subjects, but they clearly highlight one enduring interest of Dr. Kisikova: the interaction between institutions and individual actors. Institutions can be cultural and educational, of varying scale (a community center, an amateur cultural and educational society, or a university), emerging, triumphant, or retreating (like the half-ruined museum), but they are always a field of complex games of power and identity and always, which in my opinion is the author's main contribution, allow individual actors to leave their mark.

3. Critical remarks and recommendations

I don't have any.

CONCLUSION

The presented documents and publications show a mature author who consistently returns to the same important problems for her, trying out different methods and finding new research objects. The contributions are undeniable. I did not find any plagiarism in the texts. The scientific qualification of Dr. Kisikova meets the high requirements of the University of Plovdiv, and her teaching activity is impressive. That is why I give a positive assessment to the candidate and without hesitation I recommend to the esteemed jury to propose to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philosophy and History to elect her for the academic position of "associate professor" in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences; professional field 3.1. Sociology, anthropology and cultural sciences (Culture and communication).

Sofia, April 8, 2025

Prepared the opinion:.....

(signature)

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(ac. dl., n. st., name, surname)