

# REVIEW

by

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regarding the materials submitted for participation in a competition for the academic position of “Professor” at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, *in the field of higher education*

3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences,  
*professional field 3.6. Law (Constitutional Law)*

In the competition for the academic position of “Professor”, announced in the State Gazette, issue No. 96 of 11.11.2025, and on the website of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv for the needs of the Department of Public Law Sciences at the Faculty of Law, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Hristo Yordanov Paunov is the sole candidate.

## 1. General description of the procedure

By Order No. RD-22-43 of 09.01.2026 of the Rector of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv (PU), I was appointed a member of the scientific jury in the competition for the academic position of “Professor” at PU in the field of higher education: 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, professional field 3.6. Law (Constitutional Law), announced for the needs of the Department of Public Law Sciences at the Faculty of Law.

For participation in the announced competition, only one candidate has submitted documents – Assoc. Prof. Dr. Hristo Yordanov Paunov from the Faculty of Law of PU “Paisii Hilendarski”.

The set of materials submitted by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Hristo Yordanov Paunov complies with the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of PU and includes the following documents:

1. Application form addressed to the Rector for admission to the competition;
2. Curriculum vitae in European format;
3. Diplomas for higher education with the acquired educational and qualification degree “Master”, with supplement;
4. Diploma for the educational and scientific degree “Doctor”;
5. Diploma (certificate) for the academic position “Associate Professor”;
6. List of scientific works;
7. Scientific works (copies of publications);
8. Statement of compliance with the minimum national requirements;

9. Declaration of originality and authenticity of the submitted documents;
10. Annotations of the materials under Art. 76 of the Regulations (in Bulgarian and English);
11. Self-assessment of contributions (in Bulgarian and English);
12. List of citations;
13. Document (certificate) for work experience;
14. Document for teaching activity;
15. Document for research activity;
16. Set of documents on paper from items 1 to 15;
17. Set of documents in electronic format from items 1 to 15.

From the submitted report on scientometric indicators, it is evident that the candidate meets the national minimum requirements for the academic position of “Professor” in the field of higher education:

3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, professional field: 3.6. Law.

The candidate has submitted one monographic work as well as 13 (thirteen) publications.

## **2. Brief information about the candidate**

Hristo Yordanov Paunov completed his secondary education at the Mathematical High School “Acad. Kiril Popov” – Plovdiv. He completed his higher education in Law at the Faculty of Law of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv. He also holds a second Master’s degree in Public Administration. He defended a doctoral dissertation at the Institute for the State and the Law - Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and obtained the scientific degree “doctor of law”. He is Associate Professor of Constitutional Law at the Faculty of Law of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv.

Hristo Paunov has public activity related to his professional orientation and his academic and teaching work. He is a member of the National Council of the Bulgarian Red Cross. He has been a member of the National Ethics Committee on Transplantation (2010–2015) and Chairperson of the Bulgarian Youth Red Cross (2000–2002). He has participated in conferences, seminars, trainings and specializations in Bulgaria, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Austria, Italy and Poland. He has publications in specialized journals, collections and periodicals.

Assoc. Prof. Hristo Paunov is Ombudsman of PU “Paisii Hilendarski”, and since December 2025 he has also been Head of the Department of Public Law Sciences at the Faculty of Law of PU.

## **3. General characteristics of the candidate’s scientific output**

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Hristo Paunov participates in the competition for the academic position of “Professor” with a total of 14 scientific works, published after the defence of his doctoral dissertation for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree “doctor” and after his habilitation as “associate professor”.

These works include one monograph and thirteen articles and papers published in scientific journals and conference proceedings.

The scientific works submitted for review are in the field of constitutional law and are focused on current and significant issues of contemporary constitutionalism. Thematically, they may be grouped into several main directions: digitalization of democratic processes, constitutional history and theory, fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens, and the organization of state power.

The author's thorough and systematic approach to the researched problems is noteworthy. All submitted works are characterized by a clear structure, precise scholarly argumentation, and a rich scientific apparatus. Assoc. Prof. Paunov demonstrates excellent knowledge of Bulgarian and comparative constitutional law, as well as of the relevant judicial practice.

#### **4. Characteristics of the candidate's monographic work**

The monograph "Representative Democracy and Digitalization" constitutes a comprehensive scholarly work that examines the interaction between the processes of digitalization and the functioning of representative democracy within the contemporary constitutional order.

The author analyses how new technologies transform the traditional mechanisms of democratic representation, what opportunities and risks they create for the exercise of fundamental rights and freedoms, and in what manner the legal system may adapt to these challenges. Special emphasis is placed on the Bulgarian legal system and practice.

The work contains an introduction and a conclusion, and its main content is divided into three principal parts, as follows:

- Part One "Theoretical Foundations and Conceptual Framework", containing Chapters One and Two;
- Part Two "Digitalization of Democratic Institutions and Processes", containing Chapters Three to Six inclusive;
- Part Three "Constitutional Challenges and Perspectives", containing Chapters Seven and Eight.

Chapter One, "Representative Democracy in the Contemporary Constitutional Order", defines the main aspects, principles and mechanisms of representative government; systematizes constitutional guarantees (political pluralism, freedom of expression, separation of powers); analyses constitutional models (parliamentary, presidential and semi-presidential republic); and introduces the thesis of supplementing representative democracy with mechanisms of direct democracy and constitutional review.

"Digitalization as a Social and Legal Phenomenon" is the title of Chapter Two of the presented monographic work. In it, digitalization is defined as a complex transformational process; five key dimensions are identified (technological, economic, social, political, legal); key characteristics are

outlined: accelerated pace of change, blurring of traditional boundaries, redistribution of power; and the importance of cybersecurity and technological resilience is emphasized.

Chapter Three, “Digitalization of the Electoral Process”, analyses the transformation of electoral procedures under the influence of ICT; presents the classification of electronic voting according to International IDEA; examines the dilemma between technological progress and constitutional risks; and reviews the legal framework of machine and remote electronic voting in Bulgaria.

The fourth chapter of the monograph is devoted to the digitalization of parliamentary activity. It examines digitalization in legislation, oversight and transparency; emphasizes the principle of openness and coherence; and details the operational areas of digitalization of parliamentary activity.

Chapter Five is entitled “Digitalization of the Executive Power”. It presents the distinction between “electronic government” and “electronic governance”; analyses the transformation of the principles of separation of powers, transparency and accountability; and identifies the risk of a “digital divide” and potential concentration of power.

Chapter Six, “Digitalization of the Judiciary”, defines the conceptual framework of electronic justice (e-Justice); emphasizes the need to balance innovation with the preservation of the fundamental principles of judicial power; and derives specific requirements for electronic justice from the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria.

In Chapter Seven of the monograph, entitled “Digital Rights, Freedoms and Obligations”, the thesis is developed that digital rights represent an adaptation of certain existing fundamental rights; the international legal context is analysed; and the transformation of freedom of expression in the digital environment is examined, as well as the digital manifestations of fundamental obligations.

Chapter Eight, “Digital Forms of Civic Participation”, defines digital civic participation (DCP) and its three key characteristics (accessibility, interactivity, transparency); analyses electronic petitions, crowdsourcing in the legislative process, the procedures for proposals and signals under the Administrative Procedure Code, and the procedures before the Ombudsman of the Republic of Bulgaria.

## **5. Characteristics of the candidate’s publications**

The publications submitted by the candidate amount to 13 (thirteen), namely:

– Paunov, Hr. *The Capital of Bulgaria as a State Symbol* – In: Collection “Law – Traditions and Perspectives”, Ciela Publishing House, Sofia, 2018, ISBN 978-954-28-2625-5, pp. 376–384.

– Paunov, Hr. *Constitutional Dimensions of Bulgarian Cultural Identity* – In: Collection “Law and Cultural Values”, Institute for the State and the Law at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia, 2019, ISBN 978-954-9583-37-3, pp. 222–236.

– Paunov, Hr. *140 Years since the Establishment of the Tarnovo Constitution* – In: Collection “Scientific Readings Dedicated to the 140th Anniversary of the Adoption of the Tarnovo Constitution”, Ciela Publishing House, Sofia, 2019, ISBN 978-954-28-3043-6, pp. 31–37.

– Paunov, Hr. *Free Economic Initiative as a Constitutional Principle* – In: Collection “Tradition and Development of Legislation in the Sphere of the Economy”, Publishing Complex – UNWE, Sofia, 2020, ISBN 978-619-232-276-2, pp. 89–95.

– Paunov, Hr. *On the Need for the Functioning of the Institution of the “University Ombudsman” in Bulgaria* – In: Collection “100 Years UNWE – 100 Years of Law at UNWE”, Vol. II – “Current Issues of Public and Criminal Law. Current Issues of Historical, Economic and Social Sciences”, Publishing Complex – UNWE, Sofia, 2021, ISBN 978-619-232-438-4, pp. 46–55.

– Paunov, Hr. *Exclusive State Property – Public Law Aspects* – In: Collection “Property Relations in Law – Development and Perspectives”, University Press “Paisii Hilendarski”, Plovdiv, 2021, ISBN 978-619-202-672-1, pp. 368–381.

– Paunov, Hr. *The Grand National Assembly as a Guarantor for the Protection of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria* – *Studia Iuris*, No. 2, 2021, ISSN 2367-5314, pp. 75–82.

– Paunov, Hr. *The Technology of Constitutional Amendments in the Bulgarian Constitutions of 1947 and 1971* – *Business and Law Journal*, No. 4, 2021, ISSN (print): 2603-3437; ISSN (online): 2603-3445, pp. 5–14.

– Paunov, Hr. *On Constitutional Law as a Science and an Academic Discipline at the Faculty of Law of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv* – *Studia Iuris*, No. 2, 2022, ISSN 2367-5314, pp. 79–89.

– Paunov, Hr. *Public Law Aspects in the Regulation of the State Monopoly under Art. 18, para. 4 of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria* – In: Collection “Legal, Economic and Historical Aspects of State Regulation over Economic Activity”, Publishing Complex – UNWE, Sofia, 2023, ISBN 978-619-232-703-3, pp. 85–92.

– Paunov, Hr. *On the Change in the Form of Government of the Republic of Bulgaria* – In: Collection “Law in the 21st Century – Challenges and Perspectives”, Vol. 2 “Public Law Sciences; Criminal Law Sciences; International Law Sciences”, University Press “Paisii Hilendarski”, Plovdiv, 2023, ISBN 978-619-202-904-3, pp. 35–43.

– Paunov, Hr. *Legal Challenges in the Adoption of Amendments to the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria* – In: Collection “Challenges to Legal Regulation in Bulgaria”, Publishing Complex – UNWE, Sofia, 2024, ISBN 978-619-232-848-1, pp. 41–54.

– Paunov, Hr. *Minors and Juveniles in Bulgarian Constitutional Law Norms* – *Studia Iuris*, 2024, No. 2, ISSN 2367-5314, pp. 7–16.

The publications of Assoc. Prof. Paunov contribute to the enrichment of scholarly knowledge on a number of key topics in constitutional law. His research on constitutional history, fundamental rights, and the organization of state power is distinguished by an original approach and in-depth analysis, which makes it a valuable source for other researchers in the field.

His studies on topics such as the state monopoly, exclusive state property, and free economic initiative contribute to the proper interpretation and application of the respective constitutional provisions by the legislative and judicial authorities. The arguments in favour of introducing the institution of the university ombudsman also have clear practical applicability.

## **6. Main scientific and scientific-applied contributions**

The scientific contributions of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Hristo Paunov, presented in the competition, are significant and may be systematized as follows:

### ***Contributions of the monographic work “Representative Democracy and Digitalization”***

– Development of an overall conceptual framework: The monograph introduces and develops the modern term in global scholarship “digital constitutionalism”, through which it examines how technologies change and challenge established constitutional principles. This approach moves the issue beyond its purely technological dimensions and places it within the context of the fundamental values of the rule of law.

– Systematic and comprehensive analysis: A horizontal analysis of the processes of digitalization across all three branches of government – legislative, executive and judicial – has been carried out. This holistic approach reveals the general trends and the specific challenges facing each branch.

– Theoretical conceptualization of “digital rights”: The monograph develops and substantiates the thesis concerning the formation of a new generation of fundamental rights – digital rights and freedoms (the right to digital identity, digital self-determination and digital privacy).

– Formulation of specific legislative proposals (*de lege ferenda*): Reasoned proposals have been developed for amendments to the Constitution and the existing legislation aimed at the constitutional “strengthening” of democracy in the digital era. These include constitutional regulation of electronic voting and the constitutionalization of digital rights.

– Critical analysis of the legal framework of electronic voting: The monograph contains an in-depth and critical analysis of the legal regulation of machine voting in the Electoral Code, identifying a number of problems and proposing guidelines for improving electoral legislation.

### ***Contributions in the remaining publications***

In the field of constitutional history and theory, the following contributions may be distinguished: an in-depth analysis of the Tarnovo Constitution, the role of the Grand National Assembly as a guarantor for the protection of the Constitution, and a comparative analysis of the procedures for the revision of the fundamental laws during the period of socialism.

In the field of the constitutional status of citizens and their rights, the contributions concern studies devoted to free economic initiative as a constitutional principle and the legal status of minors and juveniles in constitutional law norms.

In the sphere of the organization of state power, the contributions consist of a critical analysis of proposals for changing the form of government, as well as an in-depth theoretical analysis of the institutions of exclusive state property and the state monopoly.

There are also scientific-applied and practical contributions. Specific proposals have been formulated for improving the procedure for amending the fundamental law, and the necessity of introducing the institution of the “university ombudsman” in Bulgaria has been substantiated.

All these contributions outline Assoc. Prof. Paunov as a researcher with a clear scientific profile, who works consistently and thoroughly on current and significant issues for constitutional legal scholarship. His research not only contributes to the development of theory but also has a clear practical orientation, namely:

The benefits and contributions to scholarship are as follows. The monographic work “Representative Democracy and Digitalization” fills a substantial gap in Bulgarian legal literature. The study is among the first in the country to offer a comprehensive and systematic analysis of the impact of digital technologies on the constitutional order. The introduction and development of the concept of “digital constitutionalism” represents a significant theoretical contribution that opens new horizons for researching the interaction between law and technology. This work will undoubtedly serve as a basis for future scholarly research in this dynamically developing field.

The benefits and contributions in the field of practice are expressed in the following directions. The scholarly works of Assoc. Prof. Paunov also have a clearly expressed practical orientation. The *de lege ferenda* proposals formulated in the monograph for amendments to the Constitution and legislation related to electronic voting and digital rights are of direct relevance to the legislative process and to the public debate on these important issues. The critical analysis of the legal regulation of machine voting has direct practical value for improving electoral legislation.

Overall, the scientific output of Assoc. Prof. Paunov is an example of the successful combination of theoretical research with practically oriented solutions, which is of exceptional importance for the development of law in contemporary society.

## **7. Critical remarks and recommendations**

The scientific works of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Hristo Paunov submitted for review are distinguished by their scholarly quality and depth. Nevertheless, several recommendations may be made that could be beneficial to the author in his future research.

In the monographic work “Representative Democracy and Digitalization”, an analysis of the Bulgarian legal framework and practice has been carried out. It would be useful if, in future studies on this topic, the comparative legal analysis were expanded by including more examples from other countries that are advanced in the process of digitalization of democratic institutions. This would make it possible to draw valuable lessons and good practices that could be adapted to the Bulgarian context.

It would also be of interest if, in the future, Assoc. Prof. Paunov directed his research efforts towards a deeper examination of the ethical aspects of digitalization, including issues related to the use of artificial intelligence in the public sector and its impact on the fundamental rights of citizens.

These remarks in no way diminish the high value of the presented works, but rather outline possible directions for future scholarly research.

## **8. Assessment of the candidate's pedagogical qualification and activity**

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Hristo Paunov is a long-standing and respected lecturer at the Faculty of Law of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv. His academic activity is closely connected with the teaching of core disciplines in the field of public law and, in particular, constitutional law. From the submitted documents, it is evident that he is engaged both in the educational process and in the supervision of doctoral students.

In his self-assessment, the candidate notes that his monographic work "Representative Democracy and Digitalization" may serve as a basis for the development of new lecture courses in law faculties. This is a clear indicator of Assoc. Prof. Paunov's intention not only to teach established legal disciplines but also to develop and modernize the educational content in accordance with contemporary challenges. His article dedicated to the teaching of constitutional law at the University of Plovdiv also testifies to his sustained interest in the development of legal education.

The candidate's overall academic and scholarly activity convincingly demonstrates that he possesses the necessary pedagogical qualification and experience, which are particularly important for holding the academic position of "professor".

## **9. Personal impressions**

I have known Assoc. Prof. Hristo Paunov through our work in the academic community and have always been impressed by his thoroughness and dedication to scholarship and teaching. The works submitted for review once again confirm these impressions.

Assoc. Prof. Paunov is a researcher who is not afraid to engage with complex and current problems, to seek new approaches, and to propose bold and well-reasoned solutions. His work is an example of how contemporary legal scholarship should develop – with a view to the future, but also with a solid foundation in classical legal principles and values.

I am convinced that, with his scholarly authority and teaching experience, Assoc. Prof. Paunov will contribute substantially to the development of the Faculty of Law at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv and to enhancing the prestige of Bulgarian constitutional legal scholarship.

## 10. Conclusion

Based on the above, I consider that the scientific works submitted by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Hristo Yordanov Paunov and his overall academic activity fully meet both the quantitative and the qualitative requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its implementation, and the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv for holding the academic position of “Professor”.

The scientific and scientific-applied contributions of the candidate are indisputable and of substantial importance for the development of constitutional legal scholarship and practice. Assoc. Prof. Hristo Paunov is an established scholar and lecturer with high authority and an unquestionable contribution to legal science. Therefore, I confidently give my positive assessment and propose that the respected scientific jury vote in favour and recommend that the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Law elect Assoc. Prof. Dr. Hristo Yordanov Paunov to the academic position of “Professor” at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv in the field of higher education: 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, professional field: 3.6. Law (Constitutional Law).

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(Prof. Dr. Martin Belov)

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Sofia