

REVIEW

by Prof. Dr. Emilia Aleksandrova Drumeva

regarding 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)*,

announced in the State Gazette, issue 96/2025

Dear Members of the Scientific Jury,

The competition has been announced for the needs of the Faculty of Law at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, pursuant to a decision of the Academic Council of the higher education institution. I have been included in the composition of the scientific jury by Order No. RD-22-43/09.01.2026 of the Rector of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv and, by decision of the jury, I have been assigned to prepare the present review. The sole candidate in the competition is **Assoc. Prof. Dr. Hristo Yordanov Paunov**, Department of Public Law Sciences, Faculty of Law, Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv.

On the grounds of the Academic Staff Development Act in the Republic of Bulgaria and its Implementing Regulations, I hereby present my review of the announced competition, respectively of the criteria and the scientific contributions of the works submitted by the sole candidate.

I. INFORMATION ABOUT THE CANDIDATE

Assoc. Prof. Hristo Yordanov Paunov was born in 1973. He completed his higher education in 1998 at the Faculty of Law of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv. In 1999, after winning a competition, he was appointed assistant in constitutional law at the same faculty.

Following doctoral studies in Constitutional Law at the Institute for the State and the Law of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, in 2013 he obtained the educational and scientific degree “Doctor of Law” with a dissertation entitled “Revision of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria – substantive and procedural aspects.” He was subsequently appointed to the academic position of “chief assistant” at the Faculty of Law of Paisii Hilendarski

University of Plovdiv, where he teaches public law disciplines – Constitutional Law and many others. He is the author of numerous articles and studies in specialized legal publications, as well as two monographs in the field of constitutional law: “*Revision of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria*” pub. Feneia, 2013 and “*State Symbols*” pub. TAFprint, 2016. With the second monograph he qualified for the academic position of “associate professor” at the Faculty of Law of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv.

Assoc. Prof. Paunov serves as Ombudsman of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv (since October 2020 to the present); scientific secretary of the Faculty of Law of the University (2019–2020); vice-dean of the Faculty of Law (2017–2019); head of the Master’s programme “Public Administration” at the Faculty of Law; and member of the editorial board of the journal *STUDIA IURIS* (2014–2020).

Assoc. Prof. Hristo Paunov possesses extensive teaching experience, accumulated through conscientious professional work. He has passed through all levels of academic instruction. He has conducted seminars and lecture courses (including currently) in Constitutional Law, Parliamentary Law, Legislative Drafting, and Electoral Law; as well as lectures in Fundamentals of Law, Medical Law, Higher State Administration, Constitutional Foundations of Public Administration, Constitutional Foundations of International Relations, and The Ombudsman in a United Europe.

In conclusion, I firmly express the opinion that the teaching activity and academic competence of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Hristo Yordanov Paunov fully meet the requirements of the announced competition for the academic position of “Professor” in the field of higher education: 3. *Social, Economic and Legal Sciences*, professional field 3.6. Law, scientific specialty *Constitutional Law*.

II. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SUBMITTED SCIENTIFIC WORKS AND ASSESSMENT OF THEIR SCIENTIFIC AND SCIENTIFIC-APPLIED CONTRIBUTIONS

In the announced competition, Assoc. Prof. dr. Hristo Yordanov Paunov has listed 14 works: one monograph, “Representative democracy and digitalization,” and 13 articles published in non-indexed peer-reviewed journals or edited collective volumes.

The monograph “Revision of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria,” published on the basis of a defended doctoral dissertation, the habilitation work “State Symbols,” as

well as all other works related to obtaining the degree “*doctor*” and the academic position “*associate professor*” are not included in the scientific output submitted for this competition.

The works submitted for participation in the competition for professor have been published after his habilitation as associate professor in 2016 and have not been used in previous procedures.

1. The object of review in this part is primarily the *monograph submitted for participation in the competition, “Representative democracy and digitalization”*, Plovdiv University Publishing House, 2025, 255 p., ISBN 978-619-7768-42-8, respectively the presence of contributions therein. As an **indisputable novelty**, first and foremost, the subject of the scholarly research of the monograph should be identified – the development and transformation of democratic institutions and processes under the influence of digital technologies. The topicality of the problem addressed in the dissertation, both in scientific and scientific-applied terms, is universally recognized and high.

The content is organized in a coherent logically constructed **structure**, including an Introduction, three Parts and a Conclusion. Each part contains separate chapters with subdivisions, which may also be perceived as independent studies, and together they assemble the entire scientific research in a logically substantiated sequence. Worth noting is the author’s approach in organizing the content of each chapter of the monograph – first theoretically and conceptually addressing the essence of the issue under study, then the specific manifestations, challenges and recommendations. This approach facilitates concentration on the concept, projected onto the concrete manifestations and the author’s attitude expressed through critical remarks as well as recommendations; in itself, this scientific approach constitutes a **scholarly contribution**.

PART ONE “Theoretical foundations and conceptual framework” contains two chapters, entitled *Chapter One* “Representative democracy in the contemporary constitutional order” and *Chapter Two* “Digitalization as a social and legal phenomenon.” These are the two main components, the development of which creates the basis and the framework of the research, upon which it continues in depth and detail. In the monograph, *representative democracy in the contemporary constitutional space (Chapter One)* is examined on a broad basis – not only the representative bodies, but the overall structure of the modern democratic state, built on the basis of popular representation, within which the institutions of separated powers function, constitutionally organized with a view to safeguarding the rights of citizens and their obligations. The broad scope of the examined representative democracy corresponds to the broad dimensions of the second component – *digitalization (Chapter Two)* as one of the

most significant phenomena in the contemporary world, which fundamentally transforms all spheres of human activity, examined in the monograph in the context of constitutional law. The focus is on the technological and legal aspects of the digital transformation within constitutional law, including the related challenges.

The outlining of the conceptual framework, based on constitutional legal theory, creates a stable and clear foundation for examining the specific manifestations through which digital technologies affect democratic institutions and processes; in terms of both content and approach, it represents a **scholarly contribution of innovative significance and high cognitive value. Of contributory importance** is also the study of *digital constitutionalism* as a contemporary scholarly direction, which examines the application and development of constitutional principles and rights in the digital environment and adapts the values of modern constitutionalism to the digital society.

PART TWO, entitled “Digitalization of democratic institutions and processes,” includes a scholarly study of the digital impact on the electoral process and on the functions of the three constitutionally separated branches of power as concrete manifestations of the transformation taking place in the contemporary constitutional order under the influence of digital technologies. The exposition is organized into four chapters, according to the aforementioned matrix applied in each chapter. Justifiably, Part II begins with *Chapter Three “Digitalization of the electoral process.”* This sequence is justified because elections, respectively their conduct and results, constitute the foundation upon which the democratic state and its institutions are built and function; thereafter follows the exposition on digitalization within the separated powers, rights and civic participation. *Chapter Three* begins with the essence of elections as the primary basis of any legitimate authority in democracy. The research is situated within the framework of constitutional guarantees for fair and free elections in a digital environment. The focus of the study is on electronic voting and its varieties, with a detailed analysis and commentary on the legal framework of machine voting applied in Bulgaria as a type of electronic voting in a controlled environment. Of the nature of a scholarly contribution is the exposition containing a chronological and analytical description of the stages in the development of the Programme for experimental remote electronic voting, which found legal regulation (albeit temporary) in §145 of the Transitional and Final Provisions of the Act Amending and Supplementing the Electoral Code (State Gazette, issue 39/1916) and was repealed with the subsequent amendment of the Code in december 2022; the exposition and the analytical commentary have **scholarly value as**

history, but also as lessons and a basis for future initiatives in the field of electoral technologies.

Chapter Four is devoted to *parliamentary activity* and its *digitalization* under the influence of new technologies. The study is not limited solely to the legislative function, although it, as the most important, gives the name (Legislative) to this complex of state power activities, but encompasses all substantively distinct and constitutionally assigned functions of the national representative body – the parliament. The digital tools of legislative activity are examined – electronic submission of bills and the creation of the necessary specialized technical infrastructure and its operation; a computerized voting system in parliament – the history of its introduction and the steps taken toward improving its characteristics for the rapid and accurate recording of votes cast; the publicly accessible register of bills, ensuring information, transparency and accountability of the legislative process; transcripts of parliamentary sittings; live broadcasting of the sittings of the National Assembly and its committees; possibilities for remote participation in parliamentary activity (for example during a pandemic); the digitalization of parliamentary oversight as a significant constitutionally provided activity of parliament. Following the detailed exposition, a reasoned conclusion is reached that the digitalization of parliamentary activity is not an end in itself, but a means for achieving a more effective, transparent and accessible representative democracy. The research in this Chapter four constitutes **a scholarly contribution to parliamentary theory and practice with high cognitive value, as well as a scholarly contribution with significant applicability to the development and improvement of contemporary parliamentarism.**

Chapter Five in Part II is devoted to **digitalization within the executive power**. The starting position is the nature of the executive-administrative function within this constitutionally established complex of powers (Executive) of the separated powers and its digital transformation. The focus is on the long-discussed concept in the public sphere of electronic governance as a process of using information and communication technologies by the executive power (government and public administration) for the exchange of information, administrative services, interaction with citizens, business, other institutions, etc. The exposition includes an analysis of the normative framework of digitalization in this field, of electronic administrative services and of the existing institutional structure and organization (with particular attention paid to the legal status and multitude of functions of the powerful complex “Information Services”), while providing systematization and criticism of the existing structural picture, as well as an analytical description of the creation, including the

amendment, of secondary legislation based on the Rules of Procedure of the Council of Ministers and its administration – a secondary normative act of high significance for the rule-making activity of the state, rarely falling within the focus of scholarly research. In summary, the study in this part concludes with a finding of challenges to the digitalization of the executive power, but also potential for development; recommendations are made for legislative changes – the adoption of an Artificial Intelligence Act and the updating of the Electronic Governance Act, for institutional changes, and for investments in technology and human resources. The research in this Chapter Five constitutes a **scholarly contribution with a high degree of applicability and prospects in rationalizing and increasing efficiency in public administration.**

In Chapter Six “Digitalization of the Judiciary,” the study begins with the essence and purpose of the “Third Power” as a branch within the constitutional scheme of separated powers and the special place of the Judiciary as a guarantor for the protection of human rights and freedoms, the rule of law and the fair settlement of social relations. The stages in the development of the digitalization of the judiciary in Bulgaria are traced as a necessity and an imperative. The focus is on electronic justice, and its main characteristics are analyzed: not only computers and software, but rethinking and optimization of judicial processes in view of the possibilities of new technologies; it has an integrative character and unites various technological solutions into a unified system ensuring smooth interaction between the participants in the Judiciary; it is user-oriented with the aim of making judicial services more accessible, faster and more convenient. It is substantiated that electronic justice does not aim to replace the human factor in this field, but to support it. The constitutional framework within which electronic justice in Bulgaria is situated is outlined, as well as the statutory regulation. Particularly interesting (for the first time in scholarly research) is the analysis of the secondary regulatory framework – specifically Ordinance No. 5 of 1 June 2017 on the organization and procedure for maintaining, storing and accessing electronic case files and the manner of storing evidence and evidentiary means in cases, as well as the internal circulation and storage of other information processed by the judicial administration; Ordinance No. 4 of 16 March 2017 on maintaining, storing and accessing the register of court acts; and Ordinance No. H-1 of 17 January 2022 regulating the functioning of the Information System for Judicial Enforcement in accordance with European standards for electronic justice. The guarantees for a fair trial in a digital environment are examined. The emphasis is on the right of access, digital inclusion and equality of opportunity and the related digital divide in Bulgarian society. The conclusion is convincingly argued that digitalization in the Judiciary is not

merely technological modernization, but a complex process of optimization of judicial processes in view of the possibilities of new technologies. **The study in this chapter as a whole constitutes a scholarly contribution in the application of constitutional principles and statutory constructions within the judiciary, as well as a contribution with high applicability to the proper functioning of the units within the justice system.**

PART III “Constitutional Challenges and Perspectives” contains two chapters. *Chapter Seven “Digital Rights, Freedoms and Obligations”* begins with the concept of the essence of digital rights and freedoms – an adaptation and extension of the recognized fundamental rights and freedoms to the specific conditions of the digital environment. A constitutional-legal analysis is carried out in key aspects, based on the current Bulgarian Constitution, which contains a number of constructions and provisions that may serve as a basis for the protection of digital rights – for example, freedom of opinion and expression/its dissemination through word, sound, image *or other means* and the necessary balance between freedom of expression and responsibility for what is expressed; the freedom and secrecy of correspondence and the protection of personal data in the light of digital self-determination and identity, including the so-called right to erasure, etc. The monograph also examines the *digital manifestations of the fundamental obligations of citizens* – considering that fundamental obligations are rarely the subject of scholarly research, the analytical exposition in this chapter constitutes a **scholarly contribution with an applied and cognitive character**. The exposition concludes with the finding of a need for the constitutionalization of digital rights, which would raise the level of protection of the individual in the online space. The conclusion is supported by arguments and proposals for approaches and paths through which the intended constitutionalization may be achieved, including dialogue between lawyers, IT specialists, politicians and civil society, involvement of constitutional justice, international coordination, and **constitutes a scholarly contribution with an outlined horizon**.

At the beginning of *Chapter Eight “Digital Forms of Civic Participation,”* there are conceptual notes – the author avoids the term “direct democracy” in view of the broad limits of the understanding invested in “representative democracy” (as already mentioned) and considers the concept of “civic participation” with greater flexibility and breadth, of importance for the introduction and use of digital forms. In the first place – *electronic petitions* and their correlation with the constitutional framework in force in Bulgaria regarding the right of petition (Art. 45), with attention to the constitutional dimension of electronic petitions, with the necessary interpretation regarding authenticity, security, electronic

identification, electronic signature, transparency, etc. Second, *crowdsourcing in the legislative process* as an innovative form for collecting information, ideas and proposals from numerous external participants, usually through open online platforms, and the existing challenges, for example concerning its democratic legitimacy. Third, *the procedure for proposals and signals under the Administrative Procedure Code*, which by its nature is assessed as particularly suitable for digitalization, whereby digital forms of civic participation are introduced within the framework of traditional specialized justice. Attention and space are also devoted to the digital forms applied in the *procedures before the Ombudsman* in his constitutional function to advocate for the rights and freedoms of citizens. In this Chapter Eight, the author examines various digital forms of civic participation with scholarly conscientiousness, without exceeding the limits of constitutional-legal analysis. The overall exposition constitutes a **scholarly contribution with high cognitive value**. The substantive analysis and the exposition throughout Part III justify its title “Constitutional challenges and perspectives” and constitute a **scholarly contribution with high applicability and prospects, with careful balancing between innovation and traditional democratic principles**.

Overall, the monograph represents the first scholarly study in this country on digitalization in the constitutional space, whereby it deserves recognition as a *pioneer*, paving a path toward the optimization of law-making and law-application through digital technologies, without detracting from the inherent characteristics of legal acts. The monograph submitted in the competition testifies to the high professional and scholarly level of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Hristo Paunov and constitutes a worthy continuation of his sustained scholarly pursuits, which have established him among the best authors/lecturers in the country in the field of constitutional law.

2. Articles and studies

2.1. *The Capital of Bulgaria as a state symbol* – in the collection “Law – Traditions and Perspectives,” Ciela, Sofia, 2018, ISBN 978-954-28-2625-5, pp. 376–384. A historical tracing is made and the constitutional and statutory status of the city of Sofia as the capital of the Bulgarian state is analyzed, not only as an administrative center, but also as a state symbol (Art. 169 of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria). Pursuant to the Local Self-Government and Local Administration Act and the Administrative-Territorial Structure of the Republic of Bulgaria Act, Sofia is simultaneously a municipality and a region. This dualism, according to the author, creates a specific model of governance that combines local self-government with the implementation of the state policy for the development of the capital.

The author emphasizes a gap in the legislation and makes a recommendation *de lege ferenda* – the need to adopt a special *Act on Sofia*, which would codify provisions scattered in various normative acts, since fragmentation leads to an overlap of competences between state and local authorities.

2.2. *Constitutional dimensions of bulgarian cultural identity* – in the collection “Law and Cultural Values,” Institute for State and Law at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia, 2019, ISBN 978-954-9583-37-3, pp. 222–236. The article contains a historical-legal analysis of the constitutional framework related to Bulgarian cultural identity, tracing its development from the Liberation to the present day. The thesis is advanced that cultural heritage and values are an emanation of the cultural identity of a people, and their constitutional entrenchment is an expression of respect for national identity, following the example of each of the four Bulgarian constitutions with specific approaches in the regulation of culture, education and language. It is concluded that the consistent constitutional norm-setting of “cultural” rights enriches the national legal tradition and serves as an instrument for preserving Bulgarian cultural identity. The article argues that cultural heritage is not only a resource for spiritual survival, but also an indispensable factor for sustainable development, social integration and economic growth in the conditions of globalization.

2.3. *140 Years since the creation of the Tarnovo Constitution* – in the collection “Scholarly Readings Dedicated to the 140th Anniversary of the Adoption of the Tarnovo Constitution,” Ciela, Sofia, 2019, ISBN 978-954-28-3043-6, pp. 31–37. An analysis is made of the historical context in which the Tarnovo Constitution was created and of key moments in the work of the Constituent Assembly convened in Tarnovo in 1879, as well as the role of prominent Bulgarian public figures and intellectuals in this process. The democratic and liberal principles underlying the Tarnovo Constitution are emphasized, which turned the Tarnovo Constitution into one of the most progressive fundamental laws of its time in Europe. The subsequent development of the constitutional order in Bulgaria is traced. The author emphasizes the enduring significance of the Tarnovo Constitution as a symbol of Bulgarian statehood and democracy; its role in laying the foundations of the modern parliamentary system in Bulgaria and in establishing the country as part of the European legal and political space is substantiated.

2.4. *Free economic initiative as a constitutional principle* – in a collection of reports from the scientific conference “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. A constitutional-legal analysis is made of one of the fundamental pillars of the contemporary

Bulgarian economic system – the principle of free economic initiative (Art. 19 of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria). It proceeds from the fact that although the Bulgarian Constitution does not contain a separate chapter devoted to the economic order, its body contains a number of “economic provisions” outlining the framework of the market economy; a central place among them is occupied by the principle of free economic initiative, which marks the transition from a state-centralized to a market economy. The bilateral relationship between the established constitutional order and the economic system is analyzed – the state withdraws from direct intervention in order to create space for freely organizing private entities to operate under conditions of open competition. The limits of free economic initiative, mechanisms for its implementation and protection are outlined, creating a system of equal legal conditions for all participants in economic life, while at the same time allowing the state to perform its regulatory and corrective function. The principle is examined in a European legal context.

2.5. On the need for the functioning of the institution “university ombudsman” in Bulgaria – in the 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. The article argues in a reasoned manner for the necessity of introducing and developing the institution of the “university ombudsman” in the Bulgarian academic environment as an important instrument for protecting the rights of members of the university community and for improving the quality of higher education. A historical and theoretical overview of the institution of the “ombudsman” is made, tracing its origin in Sweden and its development worldwide. The legal framework, principles and practical functioning of the institution are analyzed. The author argues that the institution of the university ombudsman is not merely an alternative mechanism for dispute resolution, but an important indicator of the democratic development of higher education institutions in Bulgaria. Its effective functioning contributes to increasing transparency, accountability and the quality of educational and administrative services, thereby assisting in the harmonization of Bulgarian higher education with European and global standards.

2.6. Exclusive state property – public-law aspects – in the collection “Property Relations in Law – Development and Perspectives,” Paisii Hilendarski University Press, Plovdiv, 2021, ISBN 978-619-202-672-1, pp. 368–381. The article constitutes a legal analysis of the institution of exclusive state property, examining one of the fundamental elements of the country’s economic system, embedded in its fundamental law. The author systematically

studies the public-law aspects of exclusive state property (Art. 18 of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria). A central place in the article is occupied by the definition of exclusive state property as a special category of public property, the objects of which are exhaustively listed in the Constitution due to their strategic importance for society, and a classification of these objects is proposed. Their key characteristic is emphasized – their inalienability and the state as their sole possible and legally permissible owner. The purpose of this special status, according to the author, is a constitutional guarantee for ensuring the common benefit from these resources and goods. The legal regime for the management and administration of the objects – exclusive state property – is examined; the legal means through which the state may grant third parties the possibility to use them – concession and permit – are analyzed; the conditions and procedure for their granting are regulated by law, which ensures the highest degree of legal protection of the public interest.

2.7. *The Grand National Assembly as a guarantor for the protection of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria* – Studia Iuris journal, No. 2, 2021, ISSN 2367-5314, pp. 75–82. The article offers a comprehensive review of the role and powers of the Grand National Assembly (GNA), positioning it not merely as a body exercising constituent power, but as a special guarantor for the stability and protection of the fundamental law. The author develops the thesis that the complicated procedure for convening the GNA and the high qualified majorities required for the adoption of its acts are not an archaic obstacle, but a consciously embedded by the constitutional legislator mechanism for safeguarding the fundamental principles of the state structure. A central place in the exposition is occupied by the analysis of the dual regime for revision of the Constitution, regulated in Chapter Nine of the fundamental law. A distinction is made between the powers of the Ordinary National Assembly to make amendments to the greater part of the constitutional provisions and the exclusive competence of the GNA, reserved for matters of fundamental importance. The author pays special attention to the interpretative practice of the Constitutional Court (in particular Decisions No. 3/2003, No. 3/2004 and No. 8/2005), which, through an extensive interpretation of the concept “form of state government,” has consolidated the status of the GNA as the only body legitimized to restructure the mechanism of state power. As a contribution to history and legal tradition, the article provides a retrospective analysis of the debates in the Seventh Grand National Assembly. Through citation of verbatim records, the diversity of ideas and concepts discussed during the creation of the current Constitution is revealed – from proposals for abolishing the GNA and replacing it with aggravated procedures within the National Assembly, to various models for its composition. This

historical reading enables the contemporary jurist to understand more deeply the motives of the constitutional legislator and to assess the relevance of the principles laid down at that time. The article also does not overlook contemporary voices that define the institution of the GNA as “superfluous” or “outdated.” In response, the author argues that the removal of this “self-protective mechanism” would open the door to easy and conjunctural changes in the foundations of statehood. It is emphasized that the GNA performs its protective function even “in absentia,” by its mere existence in the constitutional model, conferring greater stability and sustainability on the norms whose amendment falls within its competence.

2.8. *The technology for 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. The article contains a comparative analysis of the legal framework regarding the procedures for amending the fundamental laws of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria – the Constitution of 1947 and the Constitution of 1971. The author examines the “technology” for constitutional changes, placing it in the broad socio-political context of the era and tracing its evolution to the key events of the end of 1989 and the adoption of the current Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria. It is summarized that both “socialist” constitutions were created with the purpose of being easily revised by the ruling elite in order to serve political conjuncture. A separate part of the study is the analysis of constitutional changes after 10 November 1989. Under conditions of political pluralism and public pressure, the National Round Table turns into a forum for negotiating the peaceful transition to democracy. The article traces in detail the amendments to the Constitution of 1971 adopted by the last communist National Assembly.

2.9. *On Constitutional Law as a science and an academic discipline at the Faculty of Law of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv* – Studia Iuris journal, No. 2, 2022, ISSN 2367-5314, pp. 79–89. The article contains an in-depth and panoramic view of the development of constitutional law as a fundamental scientific field and academic discipline at the Faculty of Law of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv. The text represents a look at the history of legal education in Bulgaria, while at the same time paying tribute to key figures who contributed to the establishment of the Plovdiv constitutional law school. It begins with defining constitutional law as a leading branch in the national legal system; its role as the first independent discipline encountered by law students is emphasized, which determines its key importance for the formation of their legal thinking. From a historical perspective, the publication traces the establishment of the Faculty of Law at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv in 1992 – one of the first in the country after the democratic changes. Special

attention is devoted to the first years, the construction of the curriculum and the attraction of distinguished lecturers. The publication is dedicated to the 75th anniversary of Prof. Emilia Drumeva, who has been the titular lecturer of the course in constitutional law since the very founding of the faculty; her impressive biography and the fundamental scholarly work – the textbook “Constitutional Law,” which has undergone five editions and is being prepared for a sixth, establishing itself as a main teaching aid for generations of jurists – are presented. The article examines the growth of the teaching staff in the discipline, as well as the innovative teaching methods for their time, including an accredited doctoral programme in “Constitutional Law,” which is among the few in the country and contributes to the training of highly qualified specialists and researchers in the field.

2.10. *Public-law aspects in the regulation of the state monopoly under art. 18, para. 4 of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria* – in the collection “Legal, Economic and Historical Aspects of State Regulation of Economic Activity,” Publishing Complex – UNWE, Sofia, 2023, ISBN 978-619-232-703-3, pp. 85–92. The article offers a legal analysis of the institution of the state monopoly (Art. 18, para. 4 of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria), examining its nature, scope and legal consequences in the context of the contemporary market economy. The analysis is focused on the basic dichotomy in the Bulgarian constitutional model – the proclaimed (Art. 19, paras. 1 and 2 of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria) free economic initiative and the requirement for equal legal conditions for economic activity, and the possibility of establishing a state monopoly (Art. 18, para. 4 of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria) as an exception to the general principle of market freedom. The author emphasizes that the constitutional provision does not introduce an obligation, but only creates a legal possibility for the legislator to establish a monopoly when this is in the public interest. A key issue examined in the article is the object of the state monopoly; the analysis is supported by the practice of the Constitutional Court. Through an analytical reading of the normative framework and judicial practice, the author clearly outlines the legal framework of the state monopoly, distinguishing it from other legal figures and emphasizing its exceptional and strictly regulated character. The work is of essential importance for understanding the balance between free economic initiative and state regulation in the name of the public interest.

2.11. *On the change in the form of state government of the republic of Bulgaria* – in the collection “Law in the 21st Century – Challenges and Perspectives,” Vol. 2 “Public Law Sciences; Criminal Law Sciences; International Law Sciences,” Paisii Hilendarski University Press, Plovdiv, 2023, ISBN 978-619-202-904-3, pp. 35–43. The article represents an in-depth

constitutional-legal analysis of one of the fundamental issues of the Bulgarian state model – the form of state government and the mechanism for its change. The author outlines the theoretical foundations of the concept, examines its specific dimensions in the current Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria and presents in detail the complex procedure provided for the amendment of the established constitutional order. A central place in the exposition is occupied by the analysis of the current Bulgarian constitutional model. The characterization of Bulgaria as a “republic with parliamentary government” (Art. 1, para. 1 of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria) is not merely a formal declaration, but is an expression of an entire system of principles that build a democratic, rule-of-law and social state – the form of government as a complex result of the interaction of constitutional principles, norms and constructions. Of contributory significance is the detailed consideration of the key Decision No. 3 of 2003 of the Constitutional Court, by which the Court gives an extensive interpretation of the concept “form of state government.” The article provides a precise review of the procedure for convening the GNA and for amending the form of state government, with recommendations for improvement. It is concluded that the complex and aggravated procedure for changing the form of state government serves as a guarantee for the stability of the state model and protects the fundamental characteristics of the parliamentary republic from conjunctural changes dictated by momentary political majorities.

2.12. *Legal challenges in the adoption of amendments to the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria* – in the collection “Challenges to Legal Regulation in Bulgaria,” Publishing Complex – UNWE, Sofia, 2024, ISBN 978-619-232-848-1, pp. 41–54. The article offers a legal-theoretical and practical analysis of the procedure for amendment and supplementation of the Bulgarian Constitution, carried out by an ordinary National Assembly; it examines it as a “living matter,” which must evolve in accordance with socio-political realities, while maintaining the stability and predictability of the fundamental law. The individual key components of the procedure are analyzed, accompanied by recommendations for future improvement of the normative framework (*de lege ferenda*). They are aimed at overcoming the identified gaps and increasing legal certainty in the amendment of the fundamental law.

2.13. *Minors and juveniles in bulgarian constitutional legal norms* – *Studia Iuris* journal, 2024, No. 2, ISSN 2367-5314, pp. 7–16. The article offers a comparative overview of the evolution of the constitutional protection of children in Bulgaria. The material traces the development of the constitutional legal norms concerning children through key periods in Bulgarian history, analyzing the regulation in each of the four constitutions. The conclusion is

reached that although the current Bulgarian legal framework corresponds to contemporary international standards for the protection of the rights of the child, challenges continue to exist. They are primarily related to the effective implementation of legislative measures, insufficient funding of social programmes and the need for better coordination between institutions. The article makes recommendations for improving the legislation, especially in the direction of preventing violence and exploitation, and strengthening social support for children at risk.

The assessment of the submitted 13 publications and the scholarly contributions contained therein: they testify to the broad perimeter of the scholarly professional interests of Hristo Paunov in the constitutional sphere – above all the Constitutions of Bulgaria and the procedure for their amendment in different historical periods and contexts, the Grand National Assembly, state symbols as part of the essence of the state, constitutional principles in the economy, etc., as well as to the depth and precision of the scholarly analysis and synthesis. All publications submitted in the competition confirm the positive assessment substantiated above in the review of the habilitation work.

III. CONCLUSION

The documents and materials submitted by Hristo Yordanov Paunov meet all the requirements of the Academic Staff Development Act in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Implementing Regulations of the Act, and the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv.

The candidate in the competition has submitted a significant number of scholarly works, published after the materials used in the defense of the educational and scientific degree “doctor” and the academic position “associate professor.”

In the candidate’s works there are original scholarly and applied contributions which have received international recognition, a representative part of which have been published in journals and in scientific collections. His theoretical developments have practical applicability, some of them being directly oriented toward teaching activities. His scholarly and teaching qualification is at a high level.

After becoming acquainted with the materials and scholarly works submitted in the competition and in view of the analysis of their significance and the scholarly, scholarly-applied and applied contributions contained therein, I confidently give my

positive assessment and propose to the respected scientific jury to vote positively, by proposing to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Law to 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).

8 February 2026

Reviewer:

Prof. Dr. Emilia Drumeva