

## **OPINION**

by Dr. Siika Kostadinova Kovacheva, Associate Professor at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv – Faculty of Philosophy and History, in her capacity as a member of the scientific jury of the competition

on the materials submitted for participation in a competition  
for the academic post of **Professor**  
**the Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv,**

by: area of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences,  
professional field 3.1 Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences (Historical Sociology of Inequality and Discourse),

Associate Professor Stoyka Petrova Penkova is the only participant in the competition for Professor announced in State Gazette No 96 of 11 November 2025 and on the website of the University of Plovdiv ‘Paisii Hilendarski’ for the needs of the Department of Applied and Institutional Sociology of the Faculty of Philosophy and History.

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

Associate Professor Dr. Stoyka Petrova Penkova has presented a set of paper materials in full compliance with the Rules for the Development of the Academic Staff of the University of Plovdiv. In addition to the necessary administrative materials, in order to participate in the competition, the candidate, Associate Professor Stoyka Penkova, has attached 19 publications, of which 1 monograph, which is different from her habilitation work for the award of the academic degree of associate professor; and 18 articles and studies in collective monographs and peer-reviewed journals; 7 of which are in English. In her scientific biography Stoyka Penkova has 3 more monographs and a total of 66 publications. The scientific papers accepted for examination in the competition were not used to obtain the educational and scientific degree of doctor and to hold the academic position of associate professor and are in the subject matter of the competition. The candidate has also submitted a list of 68 citations in scientific publications, as well as meaningful summaries of scientific publications. Penkova is the head of 3 national research projects and has

participated in 12 more scientific and educational projects, of which two are international. She has participated in 36 national and 11 international scientific forums.

The candidate's full set of materials also includes an application for admission to the competition, a professional CV based on a European model, higher education diplomas, a doctor's degree and an associate's degree, a general list of publications and copies of works, a reference to the original scientific contributions to the works for participation in the competition in Bulgarian and English, summaries of publications for participation in the competition in Bulgarian and English, a list of citations for participation in the competition, research reports, study activities, scientific and organizational activities and a reference to the candidate's compliance with the minimum national requirements. With the results of his/her research, the applicant exceeds the minimum scientific requirements for the award of the scientific degree "Professor".

The candidate has more than twenty years of experience in research and teaching, having started working at Paisii Hilendarski University in 2003 and passing successively through the stages of scientific growth from assistant to associate professor. Previously, Stoyka Penkova received all three degrees of her sociology education at our university – Bachelor, Master and Doctor. It is worth noting her significant administrative and organizational experience as Head of the Department of Sociology and Human Sciences, Deputy Dean and currently Dean for a second term of the Faculty of Philosophy and History at the University, member of the Academic Council of Paisii Hilendarski University, member and chair of committees organizing the activities of lecturers aimed at improving the quality of work at the Faculty. This experience shows Stoyka Penkova's skills in coordinating and managing staff, working in a team with different composition and in different situations.

Personally, I have known the candidate for more than 25 years, even as our student, who was distinguished by his aspiration, thoroughness and systematic absorption of knowledge, and then as a loyal colleague and skillful manager. I would like to highlight her conflict resolution and diplomatic skills, as well as her active citizenship, expressed in organising and participating in various public discussions, among which I would mention "Hate speech - hate speech and attitudes towards the Other", several events in cooperation with the "YES - together against violence" Foundation, and the round table with international participation "Young people in a new Europe: research and applied contexts".

The documents provided meet the national scientific-metric requirements and provide sufficient information about the application.

## **2. General characteristics of the activity of the applicant(s)**

### ***2.1. Educational and pedagogical activities***

Stoyka Penkova is a well-established lecturer at the Faculty, which leads several basic courses in the Bachelor's and Master's programmes in Sociology at the Faculty of Philosophy and History, as well as the practical activities within the summer practice of students in Sociology. She also teaches in the Bachelor's and Master's programmes in 'Civil Education' and in the 'Social Pedagogy' programme of the Faculty of Education of the Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv. Here, I should highlight Penkova's work on the continuous updating of the courses developed, for example on 'With an Ociology of Inequality and Social Stratifications' and 'Sociology of Educational Institutions', with new documents and results from national and international studies. Students studying in her lecture courses rely in their preparation on electronic readers with selected texts in the respective disciplines, among which three updated in 2025. Also, Penkova's efforts to implement the summer practice of 'Inequalities and Social Suffering' in a diverse environment over the years deserve special attention, thanks to the contacts she has established with representatives of various social institutions in Plovdiv and more widely in southern Bulgaria. Penkova is the head of a long list of bachelor's and master's diploma works, with which students successfully complete their studies at the faculty.

Stoyka Penkova leads two courses for PhD students and young scientists at the university: 'Non-classical discourse analysis' and 'Sociology of inequality and social stratifications', which provide significant support in their preparation for researchers. He is the scientific supervisor of five PhD students in sociology, of which three have already successfully defended their PhD theses and work as fellow lecturers at the Faculty of Philosophy and History and the Faculty of Biology. Her work with students also includes project management under the Young Scientists programme, in which students and doctoral students participate in scientific seminars, conferences, field research, participation with publications and in public discussions and round tables. It can be said that Penkova's teaching work throws an effective bridge between training and professional practice outside an academic environment.

### ***2.2. Scientific and applied research***

The monographic work by which the candidate participates in the competition is entitled 'Figures of distinctiveness. Figures of affectivity', published in 2025 by Paisii Hilendarski University Publishing House. It consists of an introduction, five chapters, combined in two parts, an afterword, an appendix and a summary in English in a total volume of 390 pages. In the presented book there is a rich list of used literature of 19 pages, most of them in English.

In the monograph Stoyka Penkova problematizes two main concepts: Distinctiveness and affectivity and tracking their contradictory interaction, she analyses different and by her definition "pulsing" forms of sociality. In the introduction, the author clarifies his theoretical perspective, starting from Bourdieu's socio-analysis to define his approach to life transitions in the first part of the work as a 'discursive analyst', and in the second part he justifies his goal by creating 'an unconventional understanding of inequality unfolded in everyday social interactions in the form of multiple affective experiences' (p.18). In general, labor is the study of the mechanisms of association and dissociation and their affective transformations, through which the social tissue is structured and destroyed. According to the author, the methodology of the study includes: 'historical sociology of discursive practices, discursive analysis of emotion, analysis of performativity and indices, social praxeology, ethno-methodology' (p.23). The monograph represents a successful attempt to combine the study of distinctiveness and affectivity in a transdisciplinary approach (in Kolyo Koev's understanding).

In the first part of the work, Penkova focuses on the vital transitions in the Bulgarian village and analyzes their diverse forms in a praxeological perspective. O backst and the study are archival documents from the Plovdiv State Archive and are empirical case studies that paint the distinctive figures of the 'new' ('socialist') village, the demonstratively exemplary worker, the 'hero of work' and other 'worthy pioneers of this great work of popular utility'. Here we should highlight the successful highlighting of the transformations in the Bulgarian village, in which the village becomes a farm and the farm becomes a village, in what the author calls a 'distinctive village'. It is the author's merit to follow the completion of the Book of Impressions - an affective and discursive practice that becomes a form of affective solidarity through a process of positive distinctiveness and with this reincarnation and resource of the symbolic power of the new system. In the analysis, life transitions are presented as changes in collective life, and less clarified are life transitions in individual biographies, which require an examination of the life world of individuals, their choices and ability to act (agency) in a certain life time and specific social context. As a whole, the life course perspective in which "life transitions" are a key concept is insufficiently developed.

The second part of the monograph is devoted to the development of an affective-discourse sociology of inequality. Here the objects of study are products of media they: news feeds of various television, newspapers, magazines, social media) and official documents: statements by civil servants, institutional provisions, legal provisions . They allow the author to problematise inequality as negative distinctiveness – otherness, deprivation, exclusion. The analysis reveals the subtle mechanisms of essential differences in our modern times, through which inequalities are recognized affectively and experienced as felt internally and as tangible in interpersonal encounters. In the

three chapters of this section appear the figure of the terrible refugee, of the hated ethnic other. Hate speech becomes the (Fucco) technology that affirms 'our' privilege and 'their' inferiority. Of interest is the author's emphasis on the distinction within the refugee group between 'true' and 'false', 'deserving' and 'not deserving' support, a discursive move whereby 'the collective 'we' imagines not only 'itself', but also its practices of generosity and hospitality' (p.251). Penkova also commented on another such distinctive technology - the illegal screening of Roma travellers at the airport as a practice of everyday racism, through which 'others' are perceived not just as different, but as 'incomplete', 'people without a future'.

In this part, and especially in Post-Slova, the monograph assumes a socially applied character. The author interprets inequality as a knot of severe social problems requiring the taking of an individual position, which is not limited only to compassion for the vulnerable and the injured, but also insists on rethinking our own boundaries in our self-knowledge and in our everyday practices. This "ontology of "us" should be further developed in new publications following the Book's aftermath.

The scientific production with which the candidate participates in the competition consists of 7 studios and 11 articles. Of these, 9 publications are co-authored, and in the rest Penkova is the only author. Thirteen of the publications are dedicated to the topic of monograph work and are based on the data and analyses in it. They even more clearly outline the complex relationship between people, places and times intertwined in a process of transformations from above and below in order to reveal the role of affective distinctiveness in the process of receiving/transmitting 'heritage'. Here we can also mention a study whose analyses are not included in the book, but contribute to clarifying the author's approach to interpreting the specific forms of 'inheritance' following the example of 'borderline people' – Bulgarian emigrants to Turkey and their descendants. Penkova Studios, S., Zlatkova, M. (2017). Migration, family life and cultural inheritance on the two sides of the Bulgarian-Turkish border clarifies the strategies for personal and group identification through the various forms of cultural and social capital in the new social spaces around the Bulgarian-Turkish border.

Five of the presented publications deal with a different topic - the relationship between man and the environment - and mark the beginning of a new research direction in Stoyka Penkova's work. The texts are an analytical interpretation of the relationships between humans and the environment, and in particular of the human impact on the biophysical world. These publications attempt to apply the biocultural approach and outline its potential for interdisciplinary research. In the author's interpretation, the biocultural approach takes sociological analysis beyond traditional

disciplinary boundaries and combines the heuristic potential of ecology, biology, entropology and sociology. It is important to note Penkova's achievements, especially in the article Penkova, S., Stoilova, E., Tasheva, M. (2025). Specifics of the biocultural approach and its potential for interdisciplinary studies: on the example of an anthropobiotic community for the introduction and clarification of the concept of an anthropobiotic community, defined as a form of joint interaction between a person and another living organism. Also of interest is the author's attention to the possibilities for the formation of pro-ecological behavior, especially in the post-Covid-19 context and the need to change people's attitude to nature.

### ***2.3. Assessment of contributions in attached publications***

I generally accept the candidate's formulations for the research contributions in the attached publications. From the perspective of my research experience, I would like to highlight the following main contributions of the candidate:

- Life transitions are explored as an effect and manifestation of local membership in different communities and as socially constructed and constituted through social practices, which in turn are the result of interactions in social reality. The author's merit is the justification of the life transitions as actively negotiated, as well as their problematization in the context of the mutual penetration between bodies, spaces and things.
- An unconventional sociology of inequalities has been developed, which unfolds them as a multitude of affective experiences, subordinated to their own dynamics, interpretation and evaluation, produced and reproduced in everyday social interactions.
- A biocultural approach to the interaction between humans and nature was applied, which led to the formulation of the concept of an anthropobiotic community involving human and non-human actors. This allows the author to argue the need for a new way of treating the world and a new ontology of living together.

In conclusion, the submitted works of the candidate (monograph and publications) are proof of high scientific competence and outstanding research capacity. Undoubtedly, the publications with which Stoyka Penkova participates in the competition are of a contributing nature and actually reflect her achievements in the main problem areas in which she works.

### **3. Critical remarks and recommendations**

I do not have any critical comments on the materials submitted for the application. In future life path studies, the candidate could include more biographical analysis based on narrative biographical interviews and life history interviews, thereby achieving greater completeness of the

figures present in her texts and thus giving a more complete interpretation of the intersections between individual life trajectories and collective processes of social change. I also recommend continuing her research with the biocultural approach, increasing the efforts to participate more in international publications and achieve greater recognition abroad.

## CONCLUSION

The documents and materials submitted by Associate Professor Stoyka Penkova meet **all the requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ZRASRB), the Rules for the Implementation of the ZRASRB and the Rules of the Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv. The candidate in the competition is a significant** number of scientific papers published after the materials used in the defence of the NSA ‘Doctor’ and the academic position of Associate Professor. In the works of the candidate there are original scientific and applied contributions. His theoretical works have practical applicability, some of which are directly oriented to the study work. The scientific and teaching skills are **indisputable**.

The results achieved by Stoyka Penkova in the academic and research activities **fully** comply with the minimum national and additional requirements of the Faculty of Philosophy and History (if any) adopted in connection with the Rules of Procedure of the PU for the implementation of the ZRASRB.

Having examined the materials and scientific papers presented in the competition and with a view to analysing their significance and the scientific, applied and applied contributions contained therein, I find it justified to give my **positive** assessment and **recommend that the Scientific Jury draw up a report proposing to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philosophy and History the selection of Stoyka Penkova for the academic position of Professor at the Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv on: area of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.1 Sociology, anthropology and cultural sciences (Historical sociology of inequality and discourse).**

24.2.2026

Drafted the opinion:

(Assoc. Prof. Dr. Siyka Kovacheva)