

STATEMENT

by Assoc. Prof. Elitza Rumenova Stoilova, PhD Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski”
regarding the materials submitted for participation in a competition for the academic position
of Professor at Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski”

in: Field of Higher Education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences Professional Field 3.1.
Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Studies (Historical Sociology of Inequality and
Discourse)

1. General Presentation of the Procedure and the Candidate

By Order No. RD-22-2569 of 16.12.2025 issued by the Rector of Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski,” I was appointed as a member of the Academic Jury for the competition announced in the State Gazette for the academic position of Professor for the needs of the Department of Applied and Institutional Sociology, Faculty of Philosophy and History.

I have carefully reviewed the documents submitted by the sole candidate in the competition, Assoc. Prof. Stoyka Petrova Penkova, PhD, which provide a clear and unequivocal picture of the scope and quality of her scientific, teaching, and research activities. The submitted scientometric indicators demonstrate that the candidate meets the national minimum requirements under the Academic Staff Development Act (ASDA), the Regulations for its implementation, and the internal rules of Plovdiv University for the academic position of Professor, as well as the specific requirements of the Faculty of Philosophy and History.

In this competition, Assoc. Prof. Stoyka Petrova Penkova participates with a total of 19 scholarly works, including:

- 1 single-author monograph,
- 9 articles in peer-reviewed academic journals,
- 6 chapters in collective monographs and scientific volumes,
- 2 publications in proceedings of international scientific forums,
- and 1 collective scholarly volume with her editorial participation.

2. General Characteristics of the Candidate’s Activity

Assoc. Prof. Penkova has carried out long-standing and systematic teaching activity at all three levels of higher education – Bachelor’s, Master’s, and Doctoral.

At the Bachelor’s level, she teaches foundational and specialized courses in sociology of inequality, historical sociology of discursive practices, discourse and ideology, sociology of education, as well as practical training formats (Sociological Laboratory, summer field practice “Inequalities and Social Suffering”).

At the Master's level, she delivers specialized courses related to the order of discourse, modern and postmodern theories in the social sciences, media discourse, identity and inequalities, as well as advanced courses in sociology of stratification and social suffering.

At the Doctoral level, she teaches specialized courses in non-classical discourse analysis and sociology of inequality, actively participating in doctoral supervision and academic mentoring.

In addition to her classroom activity, the candidate has contributed to the development and revision of curricula, the creation of new academic disciplines, the organization of practical and research-oriented training formats, and the building of an academic research environment through her work with doctoral students, young scholars, and assistants.

The candidate also presents evidence of sustained project activity, both as a principal investigator and as a member of research teams in national and international projects funded by the National Science Fund, national development programs, and other institutional sources. A consistently developed research program is evident, demonstrating conceptual coherence, methodological reflexivity, and a clearly recognizable authorial position.

In summary, the overall academic profile of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Stoyka Penkova demonstrates high scholarly productivity, conceptual consistency, and institutional engagement corresponding to the requirements for the academic position of Professor.

Research Trajectory and Thematic Coherence

The competition materials outline a clearly structured, thematically consistent, and methodologically recognizable research trajectory. Assoc. Prof. Penkova's academic career has developed steadily in the fields of historical sociology, praxeological studies of inequality, and discursive analysis of affects.

Her body of research demonstrates thematic coherence, including:

a praxeological perspective on inequality,
historical sociology of socialist and post-socialist discourse,
analysis of affective practices and hate speech,
studies on the transforming Bulgarian village and life transitions,
biocultural and anthropobiotic communities.

A clearly identifiable authorial style integrates Bourdieu, Garfinkel, Foucault, Massumi, Tomkins, Wetherell, and others into a non-classical, praxeologically oriented methodological framework.

Monograph: Figures of Distinctiveness. Figures of Affectivity In the competition, Assoc. Prof. Penkova participates with her monograph Figures of Distinctiveness. Figures of

Affectivity, a theoretically ambitious and conceptually dense work structured in two parts: *The Distinctive Village and Affective Otherness*.

Conceptual Framework in the introductory section (pp. 9–12), the author problematizes distinctiveness through Bourdieu, developing the opposition between positive and negative distinctiveness. One of the central theses is formulated here: distinctiveness functions simultaneously as “possession” of a world and as deprivation – as positive exceptionality and as affective exclusion. This conceptual move allows an analytical linkage between symbolic capital and habitus, affective inclusion/exclusion, and social vulnerability.

The monograph is particularly strong in its synthetic capacity to connect the historical sociology of the village of Růzhevo Konare with the discursive analysis of hate toward Roma during COVID-19 (Chapter V).

Part I: The Distinctive Village In the first part, the author constructs a comprehensive socio-analytical reading of the socialist “model village” as a heterotopic formation in which positive distinctiveness is institutionalized and legitimized. The “Book of Impressions” (1948–1971) is interpreted as a discursive heterotopia where temporalities, identities, and regimes of recognition intersect.

A major contribution of this section lies in introducing and elaborating the concept of life transitions as a praxeological analytical category. Social transformations are understood not as abstract macro-structural processes but as practically “performed” transitions. The author develops a productive synthesis between habituality and habitat-ness, linking embodied dispositions with material and spatial forms.

Part II: Affective Otherness The second part builds upon the first by shifting the focus from institutionalized positive distinctiveness to mechanisms of affective exclusion.

Three major contributions are formulated:

Conceptual integration of the “affective turn” within praxeological sociology;

Analysis of hate as a performative technology of social action;

Development of the concept of affective inequality as an extension of classical stratification theory.

Hate is examined not merely as a moral deviation but as a performative mechanism that “does things” through emotives and discursive repetitions. Particularly productive is the analysis of Roma otherness during COVID-19, where the pandemic is interpreted as a catalyst reactivating historically sedimented inequalities.

Affective inequality is conceptualized as unequal access to recognition, legitimacy, and the “right to affect.” Thus, the notion of distinctiveness from the first part expands into its negative form – affective exclusion.

3. Critical Remarks and Recommendations

Although there is a conceptual line from positive distinctiveness to affective exclusion, this connection could be more explicitly systematized in the conclusion. The transition from “The Distinctive Village” to “Affective Otherness” is logically coherent, yet at times appears as thematic expansion rather than a fully articulated structural dialectic.

The empirical focus on a single case (Rüzhevo Konare) is in-depth and convincing, yet a more explicit comparative perspective with other socialist localities could strengthen structural generalization.

Furthermore, while the analysis of hate as a “technology of affect” is compelling, hate at times appears overly coherent and strategically organized. A clearer differentiation between institutionalized and spontaneous forms of affective aggression would enrich the analytical framework.

Conclusion

After reviewing the materials submitted in the competition and analyzing their scholarly significance and contributions, I find it justified to give my positive evaluation and to recommend that the Academic Jury prepare a report-proposal to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philosophy and History for the election of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Stoyka Penkova to the academic position of Professor at Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski” in Field 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, Professional Field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Studies (Historical Sociology of Inequality and Discourse).

27 February 2025

Prepared by:

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Elitza Stoilova