

REVIEW

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On the scientific works submitted for participation in the competition for the academic position of Professor of Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski“

By field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional strand 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Studies, (Historical Sociology of Inequality and Discourse)

In the competition for Professor announced in the State Gazette, no. 96 of November 11, 2025, and on the website of Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski“ for the needs of the Department of Applied and Institutional Sociology at the Faculty of Philosophy and History, as a candidate participated Assoc. Prof. Dr. Stoyka Petrova Penkova from “Paisii Hilendarski“ University.

By Order No. RD-22-38 of 9 January 2026 of the Rector of the “Paisii Hilendarski“ University I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury in the competition for the academic position of Professor at the University in the field of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, professional strand 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences, (Historical Sociology of Inequality and Discourse), announced for the needs of the Department of Applied and Institutional Sociology at the Faculty of Philosophy and History.

For participation in the announced competition has submitted documents only one candidate: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Stoyka Petrova Penkova from Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski“.

The set of paper materials submitted by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Stoyka Petrova Penkova is in accordance with the Regulations for Academic Staff Development of Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski“ and includes all necessary documents:

1. Application for admission to the competition for the academic position of “Professor“
2. Curriculum Vitae in European format
3. Master's degree
4. PhD's degree
5. Diploma (certificate) for the academic position “Associate Professor”
6. List of scientific works
7. Scientific works (copies of publications)

8. Reference compliance with minimum requirements national requirements
9. Declaration of originality and authenticity of the attached documents
10. Annotations of the materials in Bulgarian and English
11. Self-assessment of contributions in Bulgarian and English
12. List of citations
13. Document (certificate) of work experience
14. Documents for academic work
15. Documents of research activity
16. Two notes on publications in print
17. Set of paper documents from item 1 to item 16 – 2 items
18. Set of documents in electronic format from item 1 to item 16 – 2 items

The candidate Assoc. Prof. Dr. Stoyka Petrova Penkova has enclosed a total of 19 scientific papers, 18 articles and studies, of which 2 in print and 8 co-authored, and 1 monograph, and a list of leadership of 3 and participation in 7 research projects.

Associate Professor, Doctor of Sociology Stoyka Penkova is the only candidate in the competition for the academic position of “Professor” in the professional field 3.1. (Historical Sociology of Inequality and Discourse). The competition is relevant to the candidate's academic and educational profile, professional achievements, teaching and research.

Stoyka Penkova was born on 26 October 1964. In 2001 she received a master's degree in sociology from “Paisii Hilendarski” University with the topic of her thesis “The Logic of Children's Thinking”. In 2010 she defended her dissertation on “Practical Logic and the Order of Discourse: Bourdieu and Foucault” and obtained the degree of Doctor of Sociology.

From 2003 to 2006 he was an assistant professor at the Department of Ethnology and Sociology of “Paisii Hilendarski” University, from 2006 to 2008 he was a senior assistant professor at the Department of Sociology, and from 2008 to 2013 – a general assistant professor at the Department of Sociology and Human Sciences. In 2013, she was the Head of the Department of Sociology and Sociology. In 2013 – 2013 she was habilitated with the thesis “Inequality, Discourse, Inheritance” and until now she holds the academic position of “Associate Professor” (in Sociology of Inequalities) in the Department of Applied and Institutional Sociology of “Paisii Hilendarski” University, where he conducts lecture courses and seminars in Sociology of Inequality and Social Stratifications, Historical Sociology of Discursive Practices, Introduction to Sociology, Sociology of Educational Institutions, Pedagogical Sociology, Discourse and Ideology, Sociological Laboratory (for Bachelors); Modern and Postmodern Theories in the Social Sciences, Inequalities and Social Suf-

fering, Inequalities and Social Stratifications, Order and Disorder of Discourse, Identity, Boundaries, Inequalities, Media Discourse (for MA students); Nonclassical Discourse Analysis and Sociology of Inequality and Social Stratification (for PhD students); and Sociology of Inequality and Social Stratification (for international students).

Along with the diverse and thematically focused teaching activities, Assoc. Prof. Penkova also has a significant research practice: she has been the leader of three scientific and educational projects and has participated as a team member in the implementation of seven national research projects as well as in the implementation of two international projects. Emphasis should also be placed on the fact that she has presented thirty-six analytical papers at national and eleven at international scientific forums.

Particularly impressive is her administrative activity, which contributed to the institutional development of the Faculty of Philosophy and History, and of “Paisii Hilendarski” University itself: Chairman of the Committee on the Quality of Training and Educational Product at the Faculty of Philosophy and History (2017 – 2021); Chairman of the Committee on the Attestation of the Faculty of Philosophy and History (2017 – 2021); Member of the University Committee on Evaluation and Accreditation (2017 – 2024); Member of the Academic Council of the University of Plovdiv “Paisii Hilendarski” (from 2015 to present); Member of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philosophy and History (from 2011 to present); Head of the Department of Sociology and Human Sciences (2014 – 2021); Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy and History (2017 – 2021); Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy and History (2021 to present).

The professional activity of Assoc. Prof. Stoyka Penkova is systematically focused on scientific activities, in which she demonstrates both committed and responsible, and impressive in its results personal presence. Her academic and public appearances reveal a critical orientation towards a thorough understanding and consistent reflection on current and relevant socio-historical issues. Her overall body of work to date (consisting of four monographs, one submitted as a habilitation thesis, ten studies, three co-authored and three in English, thirty-nine articles, twenty-four solo and fifteen co-authored, fourteen of them in English and two in Russian, as well as five contributions to collective scholarly collections plus four co-editions of academic journals, is characterized by methodological innovation and theoretical originality of personally conceived ideas combined with a developing analytical sensitivity to empirical reality.

Among the significant teaching, research, publishing, expert and administrative practice of Assoc. Prof. Penkova research and scholarly activities, of which she is the initiator, should be highlighted. The first is the creation of a scientific group of university teachers focusing their intellectual efforts on the issues of social inequalities, vulnerability and suffering through the research prism of

a non-traditional methodological perspective. Second is the creation of a new field of scholarship called “Discursive sociology of inequality” whose analytical focus is on the constitution of social inequalities in everyday interactions.

Assoc. Prof. Penkova meets all the requirements of the Law for the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, as well as the internal regulations of the “Paisii Hilendarski” University for holding the academic position of Professor: she participated in the competition with a sufficient volume, quality and results of scientific production, which exceeds these normative criteria, and which was published after her first habilitation.

Her monographic work *Figures of Distinctiveness. Figures of Affectivity. University Publishing House “Paisii Hilendarski”, Plovdiv, 2025, 391 p.* is non-immediately accompanied by eighteen studies and articles (two in print, seven in English and eight co-authored). Virtually all of the publications are not only at the necessary professional level, but they are also integrated into an overall research program whose sociological significance is unquestionable. Moreover, this program has been transformed and transformed into an educational one, because it shapes the academic profile of the lecture courses that Assoc. Prof. Penkova teaches, and through which many students from different educational levels have passed. In support of this conclusion is the fact that she is the thesis supervisor of twelve Bachelor's and three Master's students, as well as of eight PhD students in Sociology, three of whom have already successfully defended their dissertations, two of whom currently hold the academic position of Senior Assistant and one of whom is an Assistant. Translating research into academic teaching by managing the relationship between researcher and teacher through the mediating function of the scholar is a difficult task that Assoc. Prof. Penkova successfully solved by fully combining these professional roles.

The monographic work of Assoc. Prof. Penkova *Figures of Distinctiveness. Figures of Affectivity* has a number of academic merits.

Firstly, the monographic work is a actual research in terms of the everyday construction, stigmatization and experience of affective otherness in the post-narrative context of the conceptual opposition between positive and negative distastefulity. The controlled choice of a multi-layered social problem, its precise formulation in a rigorous scientific task, and the correct definition of the limits of the analytical subject are his acknowledged achievements. To understand and interpret the lived experience of affective otherness, and therefore to ask in what concrete ways social differences are constituted between “gifted people” and “people without a future” is to uncover key conditions of the (im)possibility of human agency in Bulgarian society.

Second, the monographic work represents an original research in terms of the current state of scientific reflection on the focused problem. It demonstrates a competent knowledge of the current

constellation of accumulated knowledge in the re-relevant scientific field. The paradigmatic coherence of the precisely used sociological-logical writings, united in a progressively applied praxeological perspective, generates the key preconditions for an interpretive understanding (and causal explanation) of the specific constitution of affective proximity and affective remoteness with their characteristic social types: the “heroes of socialism” versus the “dangerous refugees” or the “hateful Roma”.

Third, the monographic work is an innovative research in terms of the polyparadigmatic methodological approach used: relevant “analytics” – historical sociology of discursive practices, discursive analytics of emotions, analytics of performativity and indexicals, social praxeology, ethnomethodology, conversation analysis, etc. – that have as their generalized aim the creation and legitimation of an “affective-discursive analytics of inequality”. Hence the practical necessity of “bringing into play” a variety of empirical material: historical archival documents, empirical case studies, texts problematizing affective mechanisms, emotional repertoires, affective practices and technologies, everyday solutions through affects, discursive segments from different media and from official public discourse.

Fourth, this monographic work is a sound research because, in terms of the degree of argumentation and the level of evidence, its intermediate results, generalizations and conclusions are credible, hence, they are analytically created and empirically verified knowledge. They have been achieved through several progressively unfolding and logically interconnected moves, whose unified task is to verify the basic hypothesis that in everyday interactions “distinctiveness is affective and affectiveness is distinctive”. First, a thick description of the interactional-procedural foundation within which affective otherness, inequality, and inequity are constituted through negative qualifications and identifications. Next, an interpretive understanding of the constellation between affective, corporeal and discursive practices as a plastic organization of actors' mutually oriented expectations. Finally, a causal explanation of how the relationship between “structures of domination and affective forms” operates through the mediating role of the emotions of fear, hatred and disgust crystallising in technologies of stigmatising and marginalising affective otherness.

Fifth, this monographic work is a contribution to Bulgarian sociology in terms of the reliability of the results and the validity of the conclusions. The precise choice of a focused analytical subject, the application of a poliparadigmatic methodological approach and the selection of relevant empirical material are the key prerequisites for the formulation of questions not raised by conventional sociology, which become possible only in a praxeological perspective: How life transitions are “done” as institutional, individual and discursive praxes; what are the significant transformations in biographical trajectories as a result of the affective ontology of proximity, respectively,

of the affective ontology of distance; in what practical ways are affective difference, inequality, exclusion born and anchored in the form of social inequalities; which are and how are subordinated the different technologies of affect; how distinctive identities (forms of subjectivation) are constructed and sustained through affective otherness; what are the particular ways in which both positive and negative distinctivities are inherited; ultimately, is the suffering, vulnerability, woundedness of affectively-stigmatized others an “eternal” social destiny, passed down through inheritance and perpetuating the marginality of their offspring.

Finally, the science-policy stake of this monographic work: the construction of different forms of affective solidarity that nullify the effects of affective inequality by practicing “a new ontology of 'ourselves' in the bosom of care”.

I will make one comment and ask one question.

Comment: Irving Goffman, the first in world sociology to introduce the concept of stigma into scientific use, defined it unambiguously: “Stigma is a characteristic which is negatively loaded and which has the capacity to reduce identity to this characteristic alone, but other negative moral qualities are superimposed on the possession of the trait itself” (Goffman, 1963, p. 7). The problematization, thematization and specification of the concept of “stigma”, respectively, of the phases and levels of the process of “stigmatization” is completely absent in the monographic work, which makes it fundamentally impossible to understand the patterns of adaptation to everyday situations used by negatively affected others, as well as the forms of resistance to the ascribed unequal and vulnerable identity that marginalizes them to the periphery of social life.

Question: Michel Foucault first introduced the methodological approach he called “analytics” to the humanities as a practical critique of the concept of “theory.” “Not a theory of power”, not “what legitimates it”, “how it is divided”, or “what is a state”, but an “analytics of power”, which means analysing the methods of domination that are exercised in a given domain; the knowledge discourses that are relevant to its existence; the forms of subjectivation in which individuals recognize and acknowledge themselves. But in the monographic work, alongside the explicit claim that all the approaches constituting the research methodology are “analytics”, there are also numerous theoretical constructs, for example Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice, John Austin's theory of performatives, or Georg Simmel's theory of the “gate” and the “bridge”, and terms such as “theoretical problem”, “theoretical concept”, “theoretical context”, “theoretical presuppositions”, “theoretical arguments”, “theoretical tools”, “theoretical language”, “theory of discourse”, “theory of affect”, etc. Hence the question: what is the methodological status of theoretical concepts in the praxeological practice of “a new ontology of ‘ourselves’”?

CONCLUSION: Based on all the theses, arguments and evidence I have substantiated, I am convinced that Associate Professor Stoyka Petrova Penkova, PhD in Sociology is a humanities scholar with significant professional contributions and an outstanding university lecturer. The entire teaching, research, publication, expert and administrative activity of Assoc. Prof. Penkova is an unquestionable defence of her candidacy for the academic position of Professor in the professional strand 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences (Historical Sociology of Inequality and Discourse).

As a member of the Scientific Jury, I will vote “YES” her election.

1 march 2026 г.

Sofia

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