

OPINION

by PhD Valentina Georgieva Ganeva-Raicheva, Associate Professor at
Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with the Ethnographic Museum – the Bulgarian
Academy of Sciences,
on the materials submitted for participation in the competition
for the academic position of Professor
at the *Paisiy Hilendarski* University of Plovdiv

Field of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal sciences

Professional field 3.1. *Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences (Historical sociology of inequality and discourse)*

In the competition for the academic position of Professor, announced in the State Gazette, No. 96 of 11.11.2025 and in the internet page of Paisiy Hilendarski University of Plovdiv for the needs of the Department of Applied and Institutional Sociology at the Faculty of Philosophy and History, as a candidate participated Assoc. Prof. Stoyka Petrova Penkova, PhD, from the same department.

General presentation of the procedure and the candidate

By Order No. RD-22-432 of 18.02.2025 of the Rector of *Paisiy Hilendarski* University of Plovdiv I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury in connection with the competition for the academic position of Professor. Assoc. Prof. Stoyka Petrova Penkova, PhD, on a basic employment contract at *Paisiy Hilendarski* University of Plovdiv, Faculty of Philosophy and History, Department of Applied and Institutional Sociology, is the only candidate in the competition. The set of materials submitted by her is in accordance with the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of *Paisiy Hilendarski* University of Plovdiv and includes all required documents.

St. Penkova is a graduate of the Plovdiv University “Paisiy Hilendarski” - Master of Sociology (2001). In 2010, after successfully defending a dissertation on the topic “Practical Logic and the Order of Discourse: Bourdieu and Foucault”, she received the educational and scientific degree “Doctor of Sociology”. In 2013 she was elected Associate Professor in Sociology of Inequalities. In the period 2008–2021 she was Deputy Director of the Institute for Critical Social Studies. In the period 2014–2021 she was Head of the Department of Sociology and Human Sciences. In the period 2017–2021 she was Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy and History, and since 2021 she is currently Dean of this faculty. She has been a member of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philosophy and History since 2011 and currently. She has been a member of the Academic Council of the Paisii Hilendarski University since 2015. The candidate has participated in various faculty and academic committees related to the development of regulations and rules for academic activity. At the university level, she has participated in the creation of standardized university surveys for monitoring the quality of the educational process, as well as the Regulations for the attestation of university lecturers. At the faculty level, she has participated in the creation of all regulations and rules for the activities of faculty units. She has participated in accreditation procedures for bachelor's, master's and doctoral programs, in the development of the self-

assessment report for the institutional accreditation of Plovdiv University, etc. St. Penkova has a total work experience of 30 years at the university, of which 23 years - teaching.

Evaluation of the candidate's activities and contributions

St. Penkova has many years of teaching experience in the field of sociology of inequality and sociology of discourse and discursive practices. The enduring interest in this issue is expressed in various basic courses in the bachelor's and master's programs in sociology, in the training in civic education at the Faculty of Philosophy and History, as well as in the practical classes within the framework of the summer internship "Inequalities and Social Suffering". For the needs of the training, the candidate also prepares profiling courses. She is a lecturer in the following courses in bachelor's programs: *Sociology of inequality and social stratifications*, *Historical sociology of discursive practices*, *Discourse and ideology*, *Introduction to sociology 2 (non-classical problems)*, *Sociological laboratory*, *Sociology of educational institutions*, *Pedagogical sociology*, *Modernity and postmodernity (philosophical and ideological discourses)*, *Practical skills in the humanities*.

St. Penkova is a lecturer of 7 courses in master's programs: *Order and Disorder of Discourse*, *Inequalities and Social Suffering*, *Inequalities and Social Stratifications*, *Modern and Postmodern Theories in Social Sciences*, *Paradigmatic Problems in Social Sciences and Humanities*, *Media Discourse*, *Identity, Borders, Inequalities*. In the doctoral program "Sociology", the candidate is a lecturer of 2 courses: *Non-classical Discursive Analysis* and *Sociology of Inequality and Social Stratifications*. For foreign students under the Erasmus program at PU "Paisiy Hilendarski" she is a lecturer of the course *Sociology of inequality and social stratification*. The candidate declares that the programs of all current courses are updated every year.

For the purposes of the training, the candidate has prepared 3 anthologies (electronic readers) with texts, last updated in 2025: *Social Inequalities and Stratifications: A Critical Perspective on Social Suffering and Vulnerability* for the discipline "Sociology of Inequality and Social Stratifications"; *Discourse Analytics: Theory, Methodology, Empirical Research* for the discipline "Historical Sociology of Discursive Practices", *Discourse, Power, Ideology* for the disciplines "Discourse and Ideology", "Power and Ideology", "Order and Disorder of Discursive Practices", "Media Discourse".

I especially highlight the significance of the summer internships organized and conducted by St. Penkova on the topic of "Inequalities and Social Suffering". The goal is to identify and analyze various forms of social "vulnerability" in order to understand the mechanisms for its formation and the possibilities for overcoming it. The focus is on locally produced and subjectively experienced social suffering, in which and through which forms of social inequalities are affirmed and recognized. The object of research by the teams over the years is the social vulnerability of the homeless, Roma, homosexuals, the elderly, children at risk, victims of domestic violence, etc. The studies are carried out according to a methodology developed by St. Penkova for collecting empirical data through the keeping of so-called discursive protocols (see Penkova et al., 2018). The detailed information reveals St. Penkova's active work with students and doctoral candidates and convincingly shows that they function as laboratories for experimental work. The report on the topics of the last 5 scientific sessions with students and doctoral candidates shows the social significance of the problems on which young people are working, the linking of their academic training with research and practical work.

St. Penkova is the supervisor of 12 bachelor's and 3 master's theses, successfully defended. She is the scientific supervisor of 5 doctoral students in the doctoral program "Sociology", two of whom have successfully defended dissertations, the second scientific supervisor is of 1 doctoral student in the doctoral program "Ecology and Ecosystem Protection", who has successfully

defended, she is also the scientific supervisor of 2 doctoral students in two of the 4 project doctoral studies opened in 2025 at the Faculty of Philosophy and History. All three successfully defended doctoral students work as teachers and researchers in three different faculties of Plovdiv University "Paisiy Hilendarski". The candidate presents information about joint publications with her three doctoral students, as well as about joint projects. All this shows that Associate Professor St. Penkova works purposefully and actively with students and doctoral students, preparing them to be good specialists. Interaction is ensured with the "YES - Together Against Violence" Foundation, with the "Social Assistance" Directorate, "Bulgarian Red Cross", "State Archives – Plovdiv", etc., where students conduct practical training, summer internships, consultations with experts, and participate in joint project activities. In the projects led by the candidate under the "Young Scientists" program, students and doctoral students participate in scientific events, field research, and prepare publications. These activities contribute to the formation of practical skills in students and doctoral students, as well as to the direction of their future professional interests.

In the period 2015–2025, the candidate is the head of 3 research and educational projects (1 under the program "Competition for Funding of Fundamental Scientific Research – 2019" at the National Science Fund and 2 under the program "Young Scientists" at the Scientific Research Fund of the University of Plovdiv). In the period 2010–2025, she is part of the research team of 10 projects funded by the National Science Foundation, the Scientific Research Fund at Plovdiv University "Paisiy Hilendarski", the National Science Fund "Cultur" or the National Research Fund at the university. She is a member of the team of 2 international projects. Situations of inequality are studied in projects led by St. Penkova: "Hate Speech - Hateful Discourse and the Attitude to the "Other" and "Social Vulnerability as an Object of Research. Training of Educators in Sociology: Towards a More Efficient Integration of Educational and Research Practices."

The candidate declares membership in 5 professional organizations, 2 of which she is a founder. Since 2018, she has been a member of the editorial board of the journal "Caucasian Science Bridge", a publication of the Institute of Sociology and Regional Studies at the Southern Federal University, Rostov-on-Don.

In the period 2014–2025, the researcher has 36 independent participations with reports at national forums, 11 participations together with other colleagues at international forums (of which 10 abroad).

St. Penkova presents a list of publications: 4 books (3 monographs and 1 collection of studies), 5 collective thematic collections; 4 compilations of scientific publications (1 independent, 3 joint), 10 studies (4 co-authored; 7 in Bulgarian, 3 in English); 39 articles (22 in Bulgarian, 15 in English, 2 in Russian; 25 independent and 14 co-authored). She also has a good expert activity, which includes book reviews, participation in scientific juries for scientific and academic growth, etc.

In this competition, the candidate participates with 1 monograph (*Figures of Distinctiveness. Figures of Affectivity*. Plovdiv: Paisiy Hilendarski Publishing House. 388 p. ISBN 978-619-281-110-5) and with 18 studies and articles (11 independent, published in Bulgarian, and 7 co-authored, published in English). Three of the co-authored articles and 1 study, also co-authored, have been published in scientific publications, referenced and indexed in world-renowned databases of scientific information: the articles – in the journal "Ecologia Balkanica" (WoS), and the study – in the thematic collection "The New Diversity of Family Life in Europe. Mobile Ethnic Groups and Flexible Boundaries" (SCOPUS). The remaining publications are in non-refereed journals with scientific review (e.g. "Sociological Problems", "Criticism and Humanism") or in peer-reviewed collective volumes.

Stoyka Penkova is a representative of the Bulgarian sociological school, which applies and develops the methodological possibilities of the theory of practical logic, phenomenology, ethnomethodology, reflective anthropology, analytical psychology, analytical philosophy and discourse theory in order to explore the social world and its structure through the "small worlds", through meanings important to the social actor, which directs the focus to everyday interactions, everyday discourses and relationships.¹ Tracing the research optics in the candidate's scientific work, we can say that it is in the spirit of this understanding sociology, which relies on looking into the details, looking behind the details, also on the special interconnectedness of theoretical concepts and praxeological problematization of empirical data.

The objects of study in the texts submitted for the competition are forms of mobility, borderlineity and contradictions of inheritance (for example, No. 11), figures of distinctiveness and affective otherness (the monograph and publications related to the problems examined in it), pro-ecological behavior (publications No. 1, 2, 7, 12, 16²).

I highly appreciate the contribution and innovative spirit of the monograph "Figures of Distinctiveness. Figures of Affectivity". It is distinguished by a clear and logical structure, with gradual "movement", development of analyses and retention of the praxeological perspective. The reflections unfold in 5 chapters, separated into 2 parts – the first part "The Distinctive Village", the second part "Affective Otherness". In the conclusion of the book, the author in a peculiar way joins the debate about contemporaries and our society. She uses G. Simmel's reflections on the border as a door and a bridge as a kind of summary of the reflections related to the figures of distinctiveness and affectivity, in order to develop her ideas for a deeper look into "ourselves as borderline beings", for the need for "a practiced affective ontology of ourselves, unfolding as an ontology of concern in the bosom of care".

I accept the contributions formulated in the candidate's self-assessment (contributions 1–15).

Starting from Bourdieu's understanding of distinction, St. Penkova outlines the opposition between "positive distinctiveness as the "having" of a world, as the "gift" of distinctive people and places, and negative distinctiveness as the deprivation of "people without a future", as the exclusion of "affective others". This opposition builds the conceptual framework of the book.

The monograph presents, problematizes and rethinks for the purposes of the study concepts, ideas and theories of leading scholars (foreign and Bulgarian) from the human sciences. In order to problematize the ways in which distinctiveness is affective and affectivity is distinctive, St. Penkova crosses the disciplinary boundaries of the sciences and uses a transdisciplinary key (according to K. Koev). She applies various research methods and approaches: "sociology of discursive practices, discursive analytics of emotion (St. Penkova), analytics of performativity and indexicals (D. Deyanov, M. Tasheva), social praxeology (P. Bourdieu), ethnomethodology (H. Garfinkel)", etc. (see contribution 15).

The empiricism that the author relies on to reveal manifestations of distinctiveness with a positive sign includes the "Book of Impressions", written by Bulgarian and foreign visitors to the cooperative farm "G. Dimitrov", village of Razhevo Konare, Plovdiv region, in the period 1948–1971, archival documents and interviews (in the first part), publications in the media (including on

¹ See, for example, studies by Kolyo Koev, Deyan Deyanov, Andrey Bundzhulov, Lilyana Deyanova, Svetlana Sabeva, etc.

² The publication numbers are in the order in which they are presented. There is a slight discrepancy in the annotation of the materials: publication No. 7 is in eighth place, and publication No. 12 is in fifteenth place.

social networks) in order to examine the “language of hate” towards refugees/illegal migrants and the “invisible everyday racism” towards Roma (in the second part of the book).

St. Penkova convincingly shows us the discursive possibilities of everyday life for constructing a specific life world and its transformations through bodies, places, discourses, through the mechanisms of association and realized affective exchanges. She examines affective-discursive practices "as arising from the peculiar "double reality" between the affects emitted by the specific external environment, and the immanent body and context-relevant reaction", "as part of the process of explication of the flows of embodied activities", through which the "praxeologically oriented thematization of the fragments of the "world" and "life" in the distinctive village is possible (first part). The everyday manifestations of the modes of affective otherness are examined in a similar way in the second part.

Special attention is paid to life transitions as a theoretical, methodological and analytical concept in the study of the Bulgarian village (first chapter). They are analyzed in the context of the ways in which social actors talk about them – through discursive, institutional and everyday practices. It is convincingly shown that the history of life is realized through life transitions, “which are an effect and manifestation of local membership and categorizations and are socially constructed and constituted, the result of interactions in social reality”. This is achieved through a socioanalytic study of subjectivity.

The book of impressions in the village of Razhevo Konare is interpreted as “as a discursive heterotopia through which identities are maintained, socialist ideology is represented” through the everyday work space, the model farm, the family, the home. The “ontological complicity” between biographical and social *illudisio* is analyzed.

Inequality is considered as a social phenomenon in a praxeological perspective. St. Penkova convincingly leads us to the disclosure of the ways in which inequality manifests itself in practice as an “embodied experience”, social difference becomes a significant social difference, a distinctiveness with a negative sign is constructed, which manifests itself affectively, emotionally and performatively and forms boundaries between “us” and “them”. The detailed analysis highlights the ways in which hatred, fear, disgust act performatively, challenge the experience of living together, appear as forms of injury, deform the sense of “self” and lead to forms of social suffering and affective inequality. In the fifth chapter, the author focuses on the problem of deprivation and social vulnerability. It shows how hate discourses are “a mechanism for (re)producing unequally distributed relations of power and domination towards Bulgarian Roma”, and in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic “intensify their social vulnerability, marginalization and stigmatization”.

An undoubted contribution is the analysis of the interrelation and interdependence between affective, bodily and discursive interactions, in order to highlight the ways in which structures of domination exist in affective forms, negative distinctiveness and vulnerability are inherited, and wounding and suffering become the social fate of affective others and their heirs.

A number of publications (No. 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14, 15) examine problems that find their development in the monograph (on distinctiveness, inequality, discourse, otherness, affectivity) or touch on other topics developed in the spirit of the sociology of discursive practices (No. 17, 18).

In her monograph, studies and articles, St. Penkova skillfully crosses different thought styles. The theoretical depth and empirical sensitivity of the research, the ability to place socioanalytic data under a methodological microscope, are impressive. The candidate's research not only enriches our knowledge of socially significant processes from the socialist past and our present, but also provides us with reliable analytical tools for a deeper understanding of them.

I would especially like to note five co-authored publications (No. 1, 2, 7, 12, 16), which I highly appreciate, the result of research interest in the field of a sociology of ecology. In publications No. 1 and 2, new concepts are introduced and substantiated (contribution 16). Pro-ecological behavior is revealed as a specific way of thinking and living. The ecological practices of people engaged in beekeeping (No. 1 and 2) are interpreted through the concept of “green habitus” (from Bourdieu’s concept of “habitus”) in order to show the natural pro-ecological behavior of beekeepers and their active relationship with non-human “co-actors (bees)”, the creation of a special form of community, including human and non-human beings. The concept of “anthropobiotic community” is introduced, which represents “a new way of relating to the world and a new ontology of living together in the bosom of care”. Publications No. 7, 12 and 16 examine the pro-ecological dispositions of young people towards water and food (contribution 17). For the study in publication No. 7, a special qualitative methodology was developed, which allows the study of the pre-reflective predispositions of young people towards water. Publications No. 12 and 16 examine for the first time the problem of food waste and the pro-ecological attitudes of young people towards it.

Notes and questions

I have two notes and two questions for the candidate, which in no way question or belittle her research contributions. One note is related to the monograph. I believe that some of the reasoning in paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 of the third chapter “Affective practices and discourse” could be presented less extensively, because they tear apart the overall fabric of the study. The detailed presentation of the debate affect or emotions, emotions – discourse, affect or discourse is not essential to the adopted author’s thesis and to some extent diverts, “distracts” the reader from the main thread, does not contribute significantly to the analysis carried out. Yes, it is true that it educates the reader, but in the monograph the methodology adopted by the author, the terminological apparatus and the analysis carried out are more important. My second note concerns co-authored publications. I believe that it is good to include written consent of the co-authors of joint publications in the materials submitted for the competition. I am convinced that the candidate has their verbal consent to be included in the competition procedure. From familiarization with all the texts, the methodological and theoretical contributions of St. Penkova are clearly evident. Moreover, more than once in the monograph, also in the documentation of scientific research and educational activities, the candidate repeatedly thanks her colleagues for the joint work, notes the role of the common debates in which ideas are born, a certain research perspective is formed, concepts are discussed, and ideas of St. Penkova are verified. Nevertheless, for complete correctness, it is not superfluous to have the written consent of the co-authors of the joint publications. In the report on the fulfillment of the minimum national requirements for each joint publication, the candidate has divided the points equally by the number of authors, by which she herself underestimated her contribution.

One of my questions is related to whether, when studying inequality and deprivation of care, the scientific focus is intended to include elderly people in small settlements with declining functions and almost depopulated, distant from the city center, or such social realities in settlements in which ethnic Bulgarians, the predominant population within the state, find themselves in a minority position - in terms of numerical composition, non-representation in power structures, etc. etc. That is, social vulnerability and deprivation should relate to other specific agents and have specific manifestations.

Undoubtedly, the chosen methodology allows for fine analyses when studying inequality and social vulnerability. The results achieved enrich scientific knowledge, have an important role

in training young people to develop sensitivity to social suffering, but my question is how the candidate sees the steps for their exit from the academic environment and their opportunities for changing society (stereotypes, attitudes, behavior, etc.), the subjects and objects of hate speech themselves? This is not a provocative question about the broader applied value of a study – I have often asked myself this about my own research.

Conclusion

The research with which Assoc. Prof. Dr. Stoyka Petrova Penkova participates in the competition for the academic position of professor has been published in peer-reviewed and refereed international and national publications. The reference for the searched citations of her research includes 68 citations from Bulgarian and foreign researchers. The list of citations does not include citations used in previous procedures for scientific and academic growth. The object of citations are monographs of the candidate, her studies and articles (independent or co-authored), thematic collections, the compiler of which is St. Penkova or in whose compilation she participates. The predominant part of the cited citations are in monographs or in collective volumes with scientific review. The reference shows that the candidate is a recognizable scientist.

The research results reflected in the publications of Assoc. Prof. St. Penkova represent her personal contribution. The formulated contributions are her personal merit. No plagiarism is detected.

The publications of Assoc. Prof. St. Petrova Penkova reveal depth and analyticity, introducing a new research approach to the study of inequality and distinctive identity and heritage, developing new issues and enriching knowledge through transdisciplinary analysis. Her works contain original scientific contributions in the field of historical sociology, in the development of an adequate methodology for the study of figures of distinctiveness and affectivity, in the substantiation and affirmation of the discursive sociology of inequality.

The unconventional sociological perspective on inequality was applied in the summer internships organized by St. Penkova on the topic "Inequalities and Social Suffering". Situations of inequality as living local practices, which unfold as an event in discourse and discursive practices, are investigated in projects led by the candidate. PhD students and lecturers are involved in the ideas, who apply them in their research. As evidence of creating followers and forming a scientific group, the candidate presents publications of scientists in this aspect. The research perspective proposed by St. Penkova finds implementation and like-minded people in the methodology and results of collective research projects of the Faculty of Philosophy and History, including the "DUEcoS" project of Plovdiv University "Paisiy Hilendarski". The candidate presents information about the established inter-institutional research network. All this shows the activity, dedication and professionalism with which Assoc. Prof. Penkova approaches teaching and research work, in preparing followers and involving like-minded people in the implementation of the methodology proposed by her. The linking of the academic training of students and doctoral students with research and practical work is very impressive.

The documents and materials submitted by the candidate meet all the requirements of the Law on career opportunities for academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ZRASRB), the Regulations for the implementation of ZRASRB and the relevant Regulations of the *Paisiy Hilendarski* University of Plovdiv. The achievements of Assoc. Prof. St. Petrova Penkova's results in teaching and research activities fully comply with the requirements of the law and the Regulations of the University of Plovdiv for the implementation of the ZRASRB.

Based on the above, I give my positive assessment and recommend to the scientific jury to prepare a proposal to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philosophy and History for the election

of Associate Professor Stoyka Petrova Penkova, PhD, to the academic position of Professor at the *Paisiy Hilendarski* University of Plovdiv in the professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences (Historical sociology of inequality and discourse)

26.02.2026

Opinion drawn up by:
(Assoc. Prof. Valentina Ganeva-Raycheva, PhD)