

STATEMENT

by Dr Nadezhda Angelova Stoyanova, Associate Professor at Sofia University “St Kliment Ohridski”

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

in: Higher Education Area 2. Humanities, Professional Field **2.1. Philology (Bulgarian Literature –Literature of the National Revival and Folklore)**

In the competition for the position of *Associate Professor*, announced in the *State Gazette*, **issue no. 96 of 11 November 2025**, and on the website of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, for the needs of the Department of History of Literature and Comparative Literary Studies at the Faculty of Philology, the single candidate is Senior Assistant Professor **Dr Zdravko Trifonov Dechev** of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv.

1. General presentation of the procedure and the candidate

By **Order No. RD-22-47 of 9 January 2026**, issued by the Rector of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv (PU), I was appointed as a member of the academic jury in the competition for the academic position of *Associate Professor at PU* in Higher Education Area **2. Humanities, Professional Field 2.1. Philology (Bulgarian Literature –Literature of the National Revival and Folklore)**, announced for the needs of the Department of History of Literature and Comparative Literary Studies at the Faculty of Philology.

A **single** candidate has submitted documents for participation in the announced competition:

Senior Assistant Professor Dr Zdravko Trifonov Dechev of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv.

The set of materials submitted by Senior Assistant Professor Dr Zdravko Trifonov Dechev in hard copy complies with the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of PU and includes the following documents:

- Curriculum vitae
- List of scholarly publications
- Statement of compliance with the minimum national requirements under Art. 2b of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria for Academic Area 2. Humanities, Professional Field 2.1. Philology (Bulgarian Literature – Literature of the National Revival and Folklore)
- Annotations of the materials under Art. 65 of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of PU
- Self-assessment of scholarly contributions
- Report on research activity
- Report on teaching activity.

The candidate, Senior Assistant Professor Dr Zdravko Dechev, has submitted a total of 17 scholarly works: 2 monographs and 15 articles. All 17 scholarly works, which are different from

the doctoral dissertation, are accepted for review and are taken into account in the final evaluation.

Brief biographical data (of the candidate)

The candidate has been teaching Literature of Bulgarian National Revival at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv since 2004. In 2013, he was appointed as a full-time Assistant Professor, and in 2015 as Senior Assistant Professor at the Department of History of Literature and Comparative Literary Studies at the same university. He delivers lecture courses and conducts seminar classes in Literature of Bulgarian National Revival and has also developed a lecture course entitled Bulgarian Criticism (the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century) within the Master's programme Contemporary Bulgarian Studies. He has supervised three students who have successfully defended their diploma theses.

Following the defence of his doctoral dissertation in 2013, Senior Assistant Professor Dr Zdravko Dechev has presented seven scholarly papers on issues of Literature of Bulgarian National Revival at the Days of Science sessions in Plovdiv. He participates in national scholarly and educational projects and is involved in academic life through editorial and compiling work on both jubilee volumes and the *Verba iuvenum* series, in which are published articles by undergraduate and doctoral students from the traditionally held Conference for BA, MA and PhD students in Philology organised by Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, of which Dr Dechev is one of the main organisers. Since 2016, the candidate has been a member of the Union of Scientists in Bulgaria.

2. General characterisation of the candidate's activity

The documentation provided demonstrates that Senior Assistant Professor Dr Zdravko Dechev has long-standing and substantial experience as a lecturer in Literature of Bulgarian National Revival, while also directing his research training towards new and particularly topical fields in contemporary literary studies, such as literary criticism of the last several decades. The high evaluations awarded to the theses of his diploma students testify to his committed and purpose-driven academic supervision.

At this point, it is also appropriate to note Dr Dechev's role as one of the organisers of the annual National Conference for BA, MA, and PhD students held in Plovdiv. He is also a member of national academic juries in literary studies, and an organiser and moderator of scholarly and literary discussions conducted during the event. I cannot but share my impressions of the dedication, activity, and sense of responsibility consistently demonstrated by Dr Dechev on an annual basis (including during the restrictive measures of 2020 – 2021) in the organisation of the diverse scholarly and literary events within the conference, as well as of the high level of professionalism, precision, and also the goodwill and care with which he invariably approaches the papers of the BA, MA and PhD students during the discussions, and subsequently their publications. I write this also in my capacity as editor of a scholarly journal in which former students of Dr Dechev have published their work, having successfully undergone a double-blind peer review process.

The principal scholarly work submitted in the present competition is the monograph *Around the Dead Body: Plots from Bulgarian National Revival* (2026). The title points to death as the central problem; however, the study does not deal per se with the “experience” and existential paradoxes of dying, but rather with the transitions towards death, the events following it, and with trauma. It may further be stated that this is a book in which various cultural-historical modifications of the understanding of the dead body are interpreted, diverse literary languages and discursive strategies towards the problem are explored, and intriguing research perspectives are articulated concerning the changes in the symbolic orders of the Bulgarian National Revival and the reflection of these changes on the understanding of the body and of suffering of/around the body.

The monograph consists of eleven chapters devoted to literary interpretations of the dead body and of suffering, beginning with Nayden Gerov’s poem *Stoyan and Rada* (1845) and finishing in Neda Antonova’s novel *The First after God – The Love and Death of Vasil Levski* (2017). The book has an introduction and concluding remarks. The work focuses on the problem of the body as pain and trauma, but above all on attempts to transcend corporeality and its physical limitations.

The thesis of the observations on Nayden Gerov’s poem is the idea of death not as deprivation, but as the only form of possession and freedom in a situation of hyper-aggressive violence inflicted upon the subject and of the opponent’s dominance. Thus, already in the opening chapter of the monograph, death is proposed to be conceived – following Barthes – as “liberated from dying” (see the reference on p. 20). A further elaboration of this idea is found in the second chapter of the monograph, where the primary object of observation is Petko R. Slaveykov’s poetic work. It becomes apparent how, in the pages devoted to the author’s love poetry, the metaphorical scope within which the question of death is posed expands in the direction of the emotionally intimate experience of the loss of the beloved and the loss of the self. The attentive reader would also notice the elegantly presented and powerful conceptual emphases both in this chapter and in the others throughout the monograph, among which, for example, is the following: “To fade away in unreciprocated love is like fading away in death – the flesh ‘dries out’, and thereby the body becomes palpably no one’s in its naturalised unattractiveness” (p. 41). *Home – road* is the next metaphorical core through which the death of the body is interpreted, in this case through the specific autobiographical mode of *Life and Sufferings of Sinful Sophronius*, with the argumentation skilfully navigating between the genre’s specifics and the new value frameworks of the National Revival.

I would allow myself to suggest that in this and the following four chapters – *The Sacrificial Child: an Excess according to Vasil Drumev (“An Unfortunate Family”)*; *Among the Shadows (First Digression Provoked by Lyuben Karavelov)*; *Violence and Trauma. The “Handwriting” of Trauma (Second, Even More Serious Digression Provoked by Lyuben Karavelov)*; and *Around the Dead Body (An Approach to the Culmination)* – the theme of death begins to be interpreted indirectly through the idea of time in its personal and collective experiences, with the child and the letter serving as the concrete figures for its interpretation. The violent deprivation of the future is transformed into trauma, kept in the collective memory of the nation, yet preserved in the letter and the book, which become a kind of body of the voice. Here, too, the argumentation is supported by observations on the genre-specific features of the works and by commentary on the literary- and cultural-historical context of the works (as well as of their audience—particularly with regard to Karavelov’s Russian-language collection *Pages from the*

Book of the Sufferings of the Bulgarian Tribe, 1868, and its unrealised translation). From the titles cited above, it is evident that they contain metatextual specifications functioning as compositional cues and metatextual stipulations, revealing above all the author's attentiveness to the structure of the text as a whole and his conscious handling of cross-generic digressions. Beyond this reflexive sensitivity and methodological caution on the part of Dr Dechev – or precisely because of their presence – the logic of the monographic text and its thematic “culminations” emerge with greater clarity for the reader, linked to observations on the naturalistic image of the body deprived of vitality and its symbolic reduction to an object for the demonstration of power: “It is precisely the desecrated/dismembered dead body that seals ontological hopelessness, intensifies the conviction of the fragility of the living, and foregrounds trauma in its physical cynicism” (p. 114); see also: “Death allows the corporeal to be used as testimony to the perverted exercise of power...” (p. 120).

I would characterise as particularly interesting the observations in the chapter *The Shirt and Death*, in which the existential “homeliness” of clothing is argued through extensive references to folkloric images and their literary interpretations during the Bulgarian National Revival. Likewise, the observations in the subsequent chapter, devoted to the dramatic “illumination” of the subject placed in the boundary situation of love and/or death in Hristo Botev's *Pristanala* and *To My First Love*, are grounded to a high degree in in-depth cultural-historical motivation and in careful attention to the literary details.

Through various contextual linkages and through precise analysis, Dr Dechev seeks to elucidate the literary effect of excessive and traumatic images of death in the poetry and prose of the Bulgarian National Revival. Implicitly, the observations point towards the question of the horizon of readers' expectation and its modification. I would further suggest that this idea becomes clearly discernible through the horizon of a contemporary perspective on images of death from nineteenth-century culture, towards which Neda Antonova's early twenty-first-century book directs attention. The observations on this work add a new analytical nuance to the thesis concerning the liberation of death from dying (p. 169), while also entering into dialogue with current texts by scholars of the Bulgarian National Revival who, over the past decade or so, have increasingly turned their attention to the 20th and 21st cultural reflections on the 18th and 19th centuries.

The monograph, *Around the Dead Body: Plots of the Bulgarian National Revival*, is characterised by observations that constitute a genuine contribution to Bulgarian scholarship, realised through disciplined engagement with the literary works, through rich cultural- and literary-historical contextualisation, and through a systematic study of primary and secondary sources. Among its particularly valuable contributions, I would single out the dialogues between folkloric and literary representations of the dead body, the careful tracing of the various modifications in the interpretations of this image, as well as the delineation of a broad range of metaphorical images, genre-related aspects, and stylistic choices through which the question of overcoming corporeal dying is posed.

Conceptual density, a precise reading of primary literature, and scholarly integrity are qualities characteristic not only of *Around the Dead Body: Plots of Bulgarian National Revival*, but also of the author's first monograph, *Orality and Literacy in the Culture of Bulgarian National Revival (A Phenomenology of the Bulgarian Voice)* (2015). These qualities are likewise evident in the articles included in the competition materials. I would like to draw particular attention to the studies *Bulgarian Lyric Poetry in 2008* (2009), *On Bulgarian Fiction in the Literary Year 2012 – Accents and Critical Postscripts* (2012), and *Bulgarian Fiction in 2013 – Additional*

Nuances (2014). The three studies present a somewhat neglected yet particularly valuable, from a literary-historical perspective, genre of Bulgarian criticism. In these annual overviews, Dr Dechev comments with insight and artistic sensitivity on trends in contemporary Bulgarian poetry and prose, as well as on the thematic, narrative, and character-related features of the texts, placing emphasis on works of particular significance for contemporary Bulgarian literature by authors such as Georgi Gospodinov, Alek Popov, and others.

Assessment of the candidate's personal contribution

The research work submitted by Senior Assistant Professor Dr Zdravko Dechev testifies to a thorough command of the scholarly field and to consistency in his research interests, to an original authorial input and a contribution-oriented approach, as well as to many years of conscientious and ethical work in literary studies.

CONCLUSION

The in-depth knowledge of the analysed literary texts, the intriguing engagement with the research problems, the original perspective, and the contribution-bearing conclusions contained in the submitted materials – two monographs and fifteen articles – attest to the high level of professionalism of Dr Zdravko Trifonov Dechev as a scholar and researcher of the Literature of Bulgarian National Revival and Bulgarian folklore, as well as as an experienced literary critic of contemporary Bulgarian literature. His overall scholarly and teaching activity and his active involvement in various initiatives encouraging the development of young authors merit high appraisal and recognition.

The documents and materials submitted by **Senior Assistant Professor Dr Zdravko Trifonov Dechev meet all the requirements of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria**, the Regulations for its implementation, and the relevant regulations of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv.

The candidate in the competition has presented a **substantial** number of scholarly works published after the materials used in the defence of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor”. The candidate’s works contain original scholarly contributions, presented in two authoritative scholarly monographs and fifteen articles published in journals and volumes included in the National Reference List of the National Centre for Information and Documentation. The submitted scholarly studies, together with the documentation evidencing the significant number of courses (lecture-based and seminar-based) delivered by the candidate, his work as a research supervisor, and his editorial activity on scholarly articles (including articles by undergraduate and doctoral students), testify to a high level of professionalism and qualification, which is beyond doubt.

The results achieved by Senior Assistant Professor Dr Zdravko Trifonov Dechev in teaching and research activities **fully correspond** to the minimum national and additional requirements adopted in accordance with the Regulations of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv for the implementation of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria.

Having familiarised myself with the materials and scholarly works submitted in the competition, and in view of the analysis of their significance and of the scholarly, scholarly-applied, and applied contributions contained therein, I find it well grounded to give my **positive** assessment and, with full conviction, to recommend that the Academic Jury prepare a proposal report to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philology for the election of **Senior Assistant Professor Dr Zdravko Trifonov Dechev** to the academic position of *Associate Professor* at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv in: Higher Education Area 2. Humanities, Professional Field 2.1. Philology (Bulgarian Literature – Literature of National Revival and Folklore).

Prepared by:

/Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nadezhda Stoyanova/

15 February 2026

Sofia