

STATEMENT

by **Prof. Dr.Sc. Maria Antonova Schnitter, Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski"**,

(name, surname, first name - academic degree in a higher education institution or scientific organization)

regarding the materials submitted for participation in a procedure for awarding

the title of "**Associate Professor**"

at Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski"

in the field of higher education 2. Humanities

professional field 2.1. Philology

Bulgarian literature – Renaissance literature and folklore

In the procedure for "Associate Professor," announced in the State Gazette, issue 96 from November 11, 2025, and on the website of Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski" for the needs of the Department of *History of Literature and Comparative Literary Studies* within the Faculty of Philology, as the sole candidate participating is Chief Assistant Dr. Zdravko Trifonov Dechev from the same Department.

With Order RD-22-47/January 18, 2026, I have been appointed as a member of the Scientific Jury for the procedure, and in accordance with the decision of the SJ (Protocol No. 1/January 23, 2026), I am providing you with the following opinion:

1. General Presentation of the Procedure and the Candidate

I have known Dr. Zdravko Dechev since the distant days of his doctoral candidate examination, and even then I appreciated his high academic culture and his innate ability for analytical insight into literary tradition. Over the past decades, I have witnessed his maturation as a researcher, and I am convinced that the procedure for his habilitation is timely and solidly argued.

The set of materials presented by Dr. Dechev in paper and electronic form is in full compliance with the Higher Education Act, the Research and Academic Staff Development Act, the PU Research and Academic Staff Development Regulations, and the minimum national requirements.

The candidate has submitted a total of 17 scientific papers for participation in the competition – 7 articles (one of which is reflected in WoS) in the thematic area of the competition and 8 on more general philological topics, and 2 monographs in the thematic area of the competition. One of the monographs is a revised version of his doctoral dissertation, defended in 2007.

All scientific works have been published in Bulgaria, more precisely (with one exception) in Plovdiv, which makes Z. Dechev an indisputable "voice of Plovdiv" in contemporary humanities.

All 17 scientific works outside the dissertation are accepted for review and are taken into account in the final assessment.

2. General description of the candidate's activities

Assessment of the candidate's teaching and training activities

For two decades now, Zdravko Dechev has been an indispensable part of the academic staff of the Department of *History of Literature and Comparative Literary Studies*. He lectures and conducts seminars on Folklore and Bulgarian Renaissance literature in all philological specialties, thereby contributing significantly to building the necessary foundation for the future scientific growth of his students. His "teaching asceticism" is impressive—unlike the recent trend of everyone claiming to be competent in everything and taking on all kinds of feasible and impossible commitments, Dechev strictly limits his presence to his chosen field of research, which gives him the opportunity to develop and deepen his insight into it.

Assessment of the candidate's scientific and applied scientific activity

Among the scientific works submitted for review in the field of Renaissance literature and folklore studies, the newly published monograph "Around the Dead Body (Plots from the Renaissance)" – Plovdiv, 2026, takes first place. In it, the candidate summarizes the results of his many years of in-depth study of the theme of the (dead) body in the Renaissance literary tradition. His contributions here are beyond doubt, as the chosen perspective allows for original and unexpected analytical results. The skillful handling of the textual material across a broad chronological range (from Paisii

and Sofronii to Botev) gives the impression of a masterful literary-historical approach, enriched by a precise knowledge of folklore, which, unfortunately, is not fully exploited. I would describe the end result as "anthropology of literature" rather than "folklore studies" (and this is by no means a criticism!). The word "folklore" appears about 30 times throughout the text, mostly as a means of contrasting and distinguishing the literary text. A more focused look at the folklore tradition would lead to even more interesting conclusions, especially with regard to the motif of heroic death¹. Overall (probably intentionally), the vast research tradition on the subject of death and dying (partially available in Bulgarian) is ignored—I suppose that if Zdravko Dechev's "morbid" tendencies continue, this would be a possible next step.

The articles submitted for review largely precede the summaries made in the book (the first seven in the list of competition materials) and the above applies to them. I would add to them the *Renaissance act of recording folk oral tradition*, which was unjustly excluded from this list and is the only one with a narrower folkloristic focus. The three review articles devoted to contemporary literature (published in the journal *Stranitsa*) testify to Dr. Dechev's wide range of interests and expertise and complement his profile as an established connoisseur of Bulgarian literary language.

Assessment of the candidate's personal contribution

The scientific works submitted for review are undoubtedly original and created independently by Dr. Dechev.

It is striking that, at least for now, the most "visible" (and therefore cited) are not the candidate's own scientific texts, but rather his literary-critical reviews. I expect that in the future, readers' attention will shift toward his more "difficult to digest" contributions—although it is clear to all of us that it sometimes takes years to fully "utilize" such texts.

3. Critical remarks and recommendations

My only recommendation for the future scientific and academic development of Dr. Z. Dechev is related to the need for greater publicity of his research work. As I have already mentioned, he is one of the most convincing "Plovdiv" voices in our young humanities, but this raises the question of his "audibility." I am convinced that his scientific results would find interested readers not only

¹ Here I would like to draw attention to the two-volume work by T. Mollov, *Bolen Doichin*. (Veliko Tarnovo, 2012)

in a broader national context, but also throughout the Slavic world and beyond (especially with regard to his contributions in the field of literary anthropology). In this sense, I recommend that he focus on more authoritative periodicals, both in Bulgaria and especially abroad.

CONCLUSION

The only candidate in the competition has presented a significant number of scientific works published after the materials used in the defense of the doctoral thesis, which contain original scientific contributions and have received the recognition of the academic community. The scientific, teaching, and administrative qualifications of Zdravko Dechev are beyond doubt.

After reviewing the materials and scientific papers submitted to the competition, and analyzing their significance and scientific contributions, I find it reasonable to give my positive assessment and recommend that the esteemed Scientific Jury prepare a report-proposal to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philology for the election of Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Zdravko Trifonov Dechev for the academic position of 'associate professor' in the scientific specialty *Bulgarian literature – Renaissance literature and folklore*, professional field 2.1. Philology, in the field of higher education 2. Humanities.

Prepared by:

17.02.2026.

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