

Opinion

by Associate Professor Dr. **Mira Nikolaeva Markova**,

member of the academic panel in the competition for the academic position of **Associate Professor** in Professional Field 3.1. **Sociology, Anthropology and Culture Studies**, promulgated in the *State Gazette* No. 55/19 June 2020, for the needs of the Culture in the Balkans Section of the IBSCT

The promulgated competition for the needs of the Culture in the Balkans Section is topical and in line with the dynamism of our times, where the problems of the communication between the peoples in the Balkans in the context of their social, economic, socio-historical and cultural development are again on the agenda and again – I would say – are put to the test. And it is precisely the IBSCT academic community that has a key role for clarifying and discussing these issues from the perspective of their high competences and on the basis of the latest concepts in the evolution of humanitarian studies in all its complexity.

Three applicants who meet the minimum national requirements for obtaining the academic position of Associate Professor were admitted to the final phase of the competition, namely: Goran Tasev Blagoev, Iveta Kirilova Rasheva and Julia Ivanova Zlatkova. They are scholars with a clearly stated position in the sphere of ethnology, Bulgarian literature and history. I shall analyse the participation of the three candidates in alphabetical order.

Goran Blagoev participates in the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor with a monographic habilitation work *Church and Identity in the Balkans: the Bulgarian Exarchate and Vardar Macedonia until the End of World War II* and selected publications including 2 books, 1 album, 2 studies and 12 articles. The applicant's publications are distinguished by their precision, innovation, exact language and clear methodology.

Goran Blagoev's habilitation work focuses his research around the place and importance of the Bulgarian Church in defending the identity of the Bulgarians in the Vardar part of the historical-geographic area Macedonia. The activities of the Bulgarian Exarchate and its efforts to rise to the level of a unifying institution of the Bulgarian nation are a highlight in the study. The identity issues, viewed through the prism of the activities of the Bulgarian Exarchate in Vardar Macedonia until the end of World War II, push to the foreground also the problems of personal history, of family national memory, and of the link between the ordinary individual and "big" politics. This multi-layer approach reveals the author's ability to think bravely and "out of the box" and to defend theses based on strict historical truth and correctness. Although the understanding about the Exarchate is that it was Bulgarian first and only then a defender of the doctrine of Orthodoxy, the Bulgarian Exarchate did not retreat from the universal identity of the Church with its activities in Vardar Macedonia, especially during the days of World War II, which is also seen from the pages of the submitted habilitation treatise.

The inclusion of biographical notes with information on Bulgarian bishops and metropolitan bishops is an interesting approach. Most of the information is taken from B. Tsatsov, but there are also quite a number of additions by the author. The text thus acquires homogeneity and raises the issue of the importance of the individual in history.

Goran Blagoev has gained recognition as a person familiar with the specificities and identity of the Balkan peoples. His studies constitute a contribution to the new perception of the link between religiosity and Church values, to popularising the role of Mount Athos in the

Bulgarian national liberation movement, to the social reflexion of the political involvement of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and to revealing the historical tenets in the thinking and in the life of Bulgarians. The author cites predominantly field material gathered by him personally and raises a number of issues for future research in this sphere. The author has been guided by source analysis in his research, but he adduces personally collected field material as well. The skilful combining of the competences of historian and ethnologist is another reason for the social relevance of Goran Blagoev's works – naturally, placed on strict research and academic foundations.

Iveta Kirilova Rasheva participates in the competition for obtaining the academic position of Associate Professor with a monographic work *Our Renaissance Anachronic "Story" about the Christianisation Mission of St. Cyril and St. Methodius in Bulgaria* and 30 articles. The applicant demonstrates serious competences on issues connected with Old-Bulgarian literature, on the literature during the Bulgarian National Revival period, and their use for constructing the Bulgarian national idea.

By placing the issue of the interpretation of the Christianisation mission of St. Cyril and St. Methodius in the centre of her monographic study, Iveta Rasheva has undertaken the difficult task of revealing the characteristics of the cult of the Holy Brothers, compared with the ethnos-preserving function of their work. A second plan in her study is also the parallel with the evolution of the cult and narrative about the Holy Brothers in the culture of the remaining Slavic peoples. The parallels in the author's text are very successful in some places. An interesting line in the research can be seen also in the emphasis on the interpretation of the cult among the Bulgarians in Macedonia and in the Edirne region after 1878, where that cult was definitely a demonstration of Bulgarian ethnic awareness. This renders Iveta Rasheva's work particularly topical, placed in the context of recent events in the political relations between Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia, for which historical grounds and argumentation are sought. In the course of her study, the author raises the issue of morality in the Bulgarian literature during the National Revival period, seeking ethnic suggestions as well through the narrative about Cyril and Methodius.

The author has presented the variability of the mythologems as a peculiar programme for rediscovering the past and its new application in the reality of the Bulgarians from the National Revival era. The emphasis is also on the intensified interest in the national saints during the time periods in question. Religiosity is subordinated to the national idea.

Iveta Rasheva's monograph abounds in original quests. In some places the arguments are simply not enough, but questions for future studies are raised. The applied aspects of the study are valuable, highlighting again the work of the Holy Brothers Cyril and Methodius for the ethnic consolidation of the Bulgarians and for the establishing of their modern state. The proposed tables and annexes visualise the author's theses. However, the Conclusion is rather schematic. The need is felt of additional endorsing of the author's theses, which tend to be lost in the course of the presentation of the material.

Julia Ivanova Zlatkova participates in the competition for acquiring the academic position of Associate Professor with her monographic work *Konstantin Leontiev and the Balkans* and 14 articles and studies. The applicant is present in the academic domain with studies on Early Christian female monasticism, Church history and Russian diplomacy in the Balkans in the 19th century.

The monograph submitted for participation in the competition examines the political ideology and philosophy of the history of Konstantin Leontiev as a highlight in his work,

resulting from the time he had spent in the Balkan provinces of the Ottoman Empire as Consul of Russia between 1863 and 1874. The author's claim to have submitted an innovative work that would fill a gap in historical research on the issue is presented in the extensive introductory part of the book. In my opinion, it is necessary to declare a more serious distance of the author, because her declared preferences and bias hamper the objective assessment of the issues. The position declared by the author on revealing some "other aspect" of Konstantin Leontiev's views has not been materialised and has actually not been proven. The reader is left with the impression that the author wished primarily to emphasise the fact that she had written Konstantin Leontiev's work in question, not that she had subjected it to critical analysis. The permanent intertwining of Leontiev's philosophical views, the author's opinion on his being underestimated and attempts at seeking an up-to-date "ring" of Leontiev's theses complicate the objective historical situating of the phenomena and processes. In many places in the book there is substantial retelling of Leontiev's theses, without giving a critical evaluation and analysis on the part of the author.

Taking into account the advantages and shortcomings of the works submitted by the applicants for obtaining the academic position of Associate Professor in Professional Field 3.1. **Sociology, Anthropology and Culture Studies**, promulgated in the *State Gazette* No. 55/19 June 2020, for the needs of the Culture in the Balkans Section of the IBSCT, as well as the specificities of writing monographic works and the profile of the competition, I would recommend to the distinguished panel to rank the applicants as follows:

1. Goran Blagoev
2. Iveta Rasheva
3. Julia Zlatkova

/sg/ Mira Markova

Sofia, 30 October 2020