

## OPINION

by Assoc. Prof. Evgenia Troeva,

member of the scientific jury in a competition (SG 34/23.04.2021)

for the academic position of Associate Professor,

professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences,

The theme of the competition is 'Balkan Cinema',

announced by the Institute of Balkan Studies with the Centre of Thracology "Prof. Alexander Fol"

for the needs of the section "Culture of the Balkans"

Under the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor in the professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences documents for participation have been submitted by Dr. Gergana Georgieva Doncheva. The candidate has been holding an academic position at the Institute of Balkan Studies with the Centre of Thracology since 2011, thus fulfilling the requirements for the post of Associate Professor related to academic seniority. The scholarly publications with which Gergana Doncheva participated in the competition show a well-established specialist in the field of Balkan cinema. This is evidenced both by her published dissertation "The Image of the Balkans in Balkan and Western Films: Strategies for Representation" (Veliko Tarnovo, 2010) and her habilitation thesis "Thessaloniki Film Festival: History, Challenges and Metamorphoses" (Sofia, 2021), as well as by her numerous articles in academic journals, some of which are submitted to the current competition. Most of them are dedicated to the development and trends in contemporary Balkan cinema.

In accordance with the requirement of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria for the position Gergana Doncheva has published a monograph on a topic different from that of the dissertation. The author's second monograph is devoted to the Thessaloniki Film Festival, but it goes far beyond this case, offering a wealth of information on the emergence and development of the global film festival network, as well as on research achievements in film studies, which testifies to the author's good historiographical awareness. Gergana Doncheva presents the emergence and evolution of the Thessaloniki Forum from 1960

onwards, showing the close interrelationship between the festival and the social and political situation in Greece. A detailed study of Bulgarian participation (features, documentaries, animation, and short films) in the festival over the past six decades is a useful contribution. I would also highlight the introduction into scholarly circulation of archival data and personal interviews with cultural actors, which shed light on the motivations, strategies and evaluations of various social actors with a commitment to Bulgarian cinema and its international representation. A merit of the work is the delineation of the Thessaloniki Festival as an arena in which different creative approaches, political oppositions and biases, as well as certain stereotypical attitudes, are brought in contact. The international forum serves not only for (self-)promotion and legitimisation, for the creation of professional partnerships and for mutual knowledge, it is instrumentalised for the implementation of cultural policies at local, regional, and European level.

It is evident from the materials submitted for the competition that Gergana Doncheva's main scholarly contributions are in the study of the Balkan cinematographies in a comparative perspective, contextualizing the new trends in cinema with the social processes and transformations in popular culture, highlighting the specificities and the general directions in the development of the national cinematographies in the Balkans. This approach has been consistently applied in the analyses of Bulgarian cinematography. The candidate's research is distinguished by attention to film interpretations of significant themes such as the image of the Other, migrations, memory of the past, military conflicts. It highlights the transformations that took place in Balkan cinema after the 1989 changes in the former socialist countries, the directors and filmmakers who attracted the attention of critics and audiences, as well as the differences in the reception of certain films in different (national) environments. A merit of the author's research is that it highlights the role of cinema in the formation of communal notions, in the maintenance of national identity, and in the (non-)negotiation of traumatic themes for individual Balkan peoples. The author's approach of a continuous comparison between phenomena at the local, regional and transnational level, of a critical look at the exoticization of the Balkans in cinema is also fruitful. Cultural phenomena, and festivals in particular, are examined as part of large-scale leisure industries, concentrating political, symbolic and financial resources and uses. At the same time, the author's research focused on the creation, dissemination and reception of film art highlights the role of the visual not only in the creation of virtual worlds, but also in better understanding the reality that gives rise to them.

We should also mention the expert activity of Gergana Doncheva in the field of film art and criticism, her participation in projects funded by the Scientific Research Fund and the National Culture Fund, in national and international conferences. The candidate has also teaching experience at Plovdiv Paisii Hilendarski University. The scientific production of Gergana Doncheva is of a contributory nature, no evidence of plagiarism can be found in it, and the authors used are cited correctly. The habilitation thesis covers the thematic profile of the competition - "Balkan Cinema". The outlined scientific research activity meets the requirements set by the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the regulations for its implementation for the candidate for the academic position of Associate Professor.

The above gives me reasons to confidently support the choice of the Chief Assistant Dr. Gergana Doncheva to the academic position of Associate Professor, professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences, under the competition announced by the Institute of Balkan Studies with the Centre of Thracology for the needs of the section "Culture of the Balkans".

Sofia

02.08.2021

Assoc. Prof. Evgenia Troeva