

Opinion

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on the academic production of Chief Assistant Professor **Dr. Vanya Ivanova Georgieva**, the only candidate in the academic competition for the position of **Associate Professor**, promulgated in the *State Gazette* No. 57/9 July 2021, by the Institute of Balkan Studies with *Professor Alexander Fol* Centre of Thracology (IBSCT), Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Professional Field 2.2. History and Archaeology, for the needs of the Regional Museum of History – Montana

1. Information about the candidate

Dr. Vanya Ivanova Georgieva obtained her MA in Bulgarian Language and History in 1999 from the Paissiy of Hilendar University of Plovdiv and in 2005 – PhD in Modern History from the Faculty of History of the University of Sofia, which then comprised Balkan studies as well. She has worked as curator at the museum in Chiprovtsi and at the Regional Museum of History – Montana, becoming its Director since 2018. In the meantime, she also taught different disciplines (as Assistant Professor and Chief Assistant Professor), but invariably also history of the Balkan peoples and modern Bulgarian history at the Kardjali subsidiary of the University of Plovdiv.

The candidate's professional path suggests that she has acquired valuable knowledge in the sphere of the Bulgarian language, Balkan and Bulgarian history, and museum practice, as well as the drive in her academic career. Therefore, her candidacy for the next level – the academic position of **Associate Professor** – seems perfectly logical.

2. Information about the documentation

The documentation submitted by the candidate for participation in the competition is complete and perfectly presented. Dr. Vanya Ivanova Georgieva meets all mandatory conditions both under the Law on the Promotion of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LPASRB) and of the IBSCT Regulations. She has the PhD educational and academic degree in history since 2005; she is taking part in the competition with an autonomous monograph that does not repeat the topic of her PhD dissertation; the automated information on the academic contribution reflects it adequately; she has met the minimum national requirements for the academic position of **Associate Professor** under Article 2b, Paragraphs 2, 3 and 5 of LPASRB.

3. General characteristics of the academic publications

The candidate has submitted two monographs for her participation in the competition, one of which is a rather extended version of her PhD dissertation *Yugoslavianism in Yugoslavia. Principal Viewpoints of the Federal Centre (1945– 1974)*. Faber Publishers, Veliko Tarnovo, 2013, 532 p.) and the habilitation work *Images of the “Others” in the Bulgarian Northwest*. Faber Publishers, Veliko Tarnovo, 2016, 236 p.), which was reviewed by Prof. Dr. Lyudmil Spasov and Assoc. Prof. Maria Schnitter.

The first monograph is one of the rare studies of the proper Yugoslav issues in the Bulgarian historical literature. Interest in Bulgarian historiography in the history of Tito's Yugoslavia is dominated to a greater or lesser extent either by the Macedonian issue or by Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations. Recently Mariyana Stamova gained recognition as specialist in the history of post-war federal Yugoslavia. Therefore, the dissertation of Dr. Vanya Ivanova, complemented with contemporary Serbian and Croatian studies, makes a very good impression and deserves academic admiration. It addresses important issues of the policies of

the federal authorities on integration of the nations making up Tito's Yugoslavia, as well as of the counteraction encountered. The author demonstrates in her book excellent knowledge of the history of the Yugoslav idea and of the socialist Yugoslavianism as its continuation in 1950-1974, as well as of the reasons for its non-materialisation (the famous film director Emir Kusturica with his declaration that he is Yugoslavian is among the rare exceptions). Dr. Vanya Ivanova has mastered the principal research toolbox of a historian: the historical method and the problem-chronological approach, which she has also enriched with a linguist's semantic-linguistic analysis. Her academic skills have become her "trademark" and have been applied in her other works as well. The annexes and the schemes are also very characteristic of the candidate's specialised texts, and they testify to good knowledge of the research material.

The cited merits of the research qualities of Dr. Vanya Ivanova are also demonstrated in her habilitation work. The semantic-linguistic analysis in it is dedicated to the purely Bulgarian issues in the sphere of imagology and anthropology, of the politics of the memory, but nevertheless in the vast field of the identity construction. The terrain for this study is particularly aptly selected: the Bulgarian Northwest as a border region in which Bulgarians form their notions about the others with a view to different strategies depending on the historical context. In my opinion, the case study method chosen is very appropriate in view of the topic of the monograph. Using the cited toolbox, applied on the basis of many sources, some of which are introduced in academic circulation for the first time, the author has conducted her study, reached interesting conclusions and made her contribution. The ethnically "other" is endowed with markedly negative connotations among the Bulgarians during their transition from archaic imagery to a secondary one, defined as Bulgarian national mythology. Conversely, the confessionally "other" – the Catholics – are not perceived negatively, being incorporated in the invention of the local tradition of "place of memory." The ethnographic group of the *Torlaks* prove to have complex characteristics that are directly dependent on the historical context, defined by the author at that moment (2016) as "cross-border regional phenomenon" that developed under the conditions of the globalisation in the beginning of the 21st century. That also changed the image of the *Torlaks* from negative to positive.

The remaining 21 studies and articles are a natural continuation of the author's academic quests in her two monographs. They can be grouped in several thematic circles in which the research results attained are repeated and superimposed, and new results are derived:

- Socialist Yugoslavianism (Annexes 19, 18, 17 and 9);
- Cultural-historical heritage, museology and museum work (Annexes 3, 7, 11 and 23);
- Regional history (Annexes 15, 16, 13, 8, 6 and 3);
- Choiprovtsi and its cultural history (Annexes 22, 21, 20, 12, 10 and 6).

My personal evaluation of Dr. Vanya Ivanova's research works is that they present her as an accomplished researcher whose professional skills have found very good materialisation in studies on regional history and museology. This makes the candidate extremely eligible for assuming the academic position of **Associate Professor** for the needs of the Regional Museum of History – Montana.

4. Evaluation of the academic contribution

I fully subscribe to the candidate's self-assessment of her research contribution, described extremely well, even with excessive detail, but convincingly. If I need to summarise, her contribution consists in the broadening and deepening of the knowledge in Bulgarian historiography on various aspects of the memory policies in the Bulgarian Northwest, of identity in Bulgarian and Yugoslav context, of museology and regional history.

5. Critical notes and recommendations

Critical comments and questions can be addressed to Dr. Ivanova's publications, as to any other work, and recommendations can be made. I shall cite here my impressions after I became familiar with the two monographs. One such remark and recommendation is not to omit the comparison of "Yugoslavianism" as a multinational and multicultural phenomenon with other similar phenomena, e.g., the attempts to create the "Soviet man." My other comment is that the candidate had got rather carried away and has accumulated abundant information and detailed footnotes in which the reader tends to get lost, at the expense of avoiding conclusions. The absence of a conclusion in the habilitation work is indicative in this respect, which is puzzling.

6. Other academic activities

In her capacity of Chief Assistant Professor and museum worker, Dr. Vanya Ivanova has been actively involved in the work of the University of Plovdiv, in the Municipal Museum in Chiprovtsi and in the Regional Museum of History – Montana. It was there that she shared the results of her research, drew inspiration and research themes, and thus contributed to promoting museum work and regional history. It is interesting to note her participation in 21 national and regional conferences, two international events, and the fact that the candidate has not submitted papers based on the reports she had delivered. However, they – together with the citing of her works – testify to the fact that she is sufficiently recognisable in the Bulgarian academic space. The candidate has also used successfully her academic knowledge and skills in six applied research projects, two of which are under her guidance, and four are international.

7. Conclusion

The research of Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Vanya Ivanova constitutes a contribution to Bulgarian historiography on the issues of regional history, museology and cultural-historical heritage, and they comply with all requirements under the law for assuming the academic position of **Associate Professor**. Therefore, I suggest with full conviction to the Academic Panel to vote in favour of conferring the academic title of **Associate Professor** to **Dr. Vanya Ivanova Georgieva**, Professional Field 2.2. History and Archaeology, for the needs of the Regional Museum of History – Montana.

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