

## OPINION

by Prof. Petya Alexandrova Alexandrova, D.Sc., Department of Cinema, Advertising and Show Business, NBU, professional field 8.4 "Theatre and Film Art", on the materials submitted for participation in the competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor" in the professional field 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Culture Science and Cultural Studies (Balkan Cinema) promulgated in State Gazette Issue 34 as of 23.4.2021 for the needs of the Institute of Balkan Studies with the Centre for Thracology "Prof. Aleksandar Fol" at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences Sofia, with the candidate Chief Assistant Dr. Gergana Doncheva.

### I. Assessment of compliance with minimum national requirements:

The attached reference shows that the applicant meets the minimum national requirements, exceeding them in paragraphs 'D' and 'E'.

### II. Monograph:

*The book "The Thessaloniki Film Festival: History, Challenges and Metamorphoses"* offers a comprehensive and academically intriguing study of the Thessaloniki Film Festival in the context of film festivals and modern Greek history, as well as the Bulgarian presence at the festival.

With professional dedication and devotion, Gergana Doncheva sets out to explore an important territory that has not yet been systematically examined in its entirety. The Thessaloniki Festival as a cultural phenomenon is explored with an analytical focus for the entire period from its inception in 1960 to the present day, as comprehensively and in depth as possible, from different perspectives presenting an interdisciplinary scholarly work that skilfully blends the traditional professional frameworks of history and Balkan studies, film studies, and media studies.

The respectable empirics on the topic are organized in a communicative structure of three main chapters. Chapter One presents the motivation for the study of the film festival as a cultural phenomenon, outlines its characteristics, genesis and evolution, and reviews the research of Bulgarian and Greek scholarship in this field. Chapter 2 traces the historical development of the Thessaloniki Film Festival in three contexts: Modern Greek history, the development of Greek cinematography, and international cinema. Chapter 3 studies in detail the Bulgarian presence at this forum during the communist period and in the post-totalitarian era. Particularly successful are the emphases placed on animation and on the diverse opportunities for participation in the various programmes of the festival.

The historiographical character of the work is emphasized, the study of the subject is thorough and presents the matter in full according to the requirements for an academic text. A merit of the work is the author's ability to recreate the full picture of the development of the Thessaloniki Film Festival, while making connections with other festivals, with the whole Greek (and Bulgarian) film production in different periods.

Gergana Doncheva's text is engaging and easy to read, despite the vast amount of information presented in it. There is an encyclopaedic precision in its comprehensiveness and in the author's desire to cover all aspects of a festival. The appendices, on the other hand, can serve as a kind of catalogue of Bulgarian participation - they are not only a comprehensive source of information for the reader, but also an overview guide.

### **III. Research and other publications:**

As mentioned in the supporting materials, over the eleven-year period (2010-2021) Gergana Doncheva has authored 2 monographs, 17 studies and articles in Collected Papers, 19 articles in specialized journals and electronic publications, 13 reviews and 4 interviews – a truly representative body of work. Some of the listed texts have been published in international journals (Serbian, Romanian, Slovenian, British) and others in prestigious refereed journals and collected papers.

In addition to the monograph, Dr. Gergana Doncheva has submitted 9 articles for the competition, which could be divided into several groups, although all of them are evidence of the systematic and purposeful research in the field of Balkan cinema and of the Bulgarian cinema in its context.

The first group takes us to phenomena, names and films of the region's production, elaborated by few film scholars, despite the considerable empirical material accumulated (for example, two sections of SFF films). These are the articles "The 'small' cinemas of Europe: the case of Slovenian cinema" (2015), "The cinematic Macedonia between exoticism and propaganda" (2015), "The Thessaloniki International Film Festival: history and politics" (2019). The second group moves in the juxtaposition between the different Balkan and Bulgarian phenomena, at once common and European, but also regionally specific in tendencies - here I include the articles "The figures of the communist power in (post-)Yugoslav and in new Bulgarian cinema" (2015), "Thessaloniki International Film Festival: History, Politics, Bulgarian Participation" (2019) and "Development and Trends in Contemporary Bulgarian and Croatian Cinema" (2021). The third proposed direction is in the specific sphere of the magical ("The Twilight Phenomenon: On the Evolution of the Image of the Vampire in World Cinema" (2016) and "Season of the Witch: A Cinematology of the

Magical" (2020). Of course, I cannot fail to mention the text "Bulgaria: Reframing Contemporary Arthouse and Mainstream Cinema", not only because it is included in a collection published by the prestigious Edinburgh University Press, but also because of the prospect it offers for the "outlet" of Bulgarian film studies for Bulgarian cinema on an international stage.

In their totality, the submitted texts also outline the author's scholarly contributions to the seemingly minimalist personal niche of analysis found here, which nevertheless looks at global social and filmic processes.

#### **IV. Personal impressions from the candidate**

Gergana Doncheva is one of those people who do not immediately catch the eye, but with continued contact reveal their depth and high professionalism. We spent two terms with her in the leadership of the Criticism Guild of the Union of Bulgarian Filmmakers (2012-2019) and she was the person among us we relied on not to forget something, not to miss, to be accurate. Her meticulous drive for completeness and perfectionism, which comes across very well in her monograph on the Thessaloniki Film Festival, was also very functional and downright relieving for her colleagues in organisational terms. At the same time, this minimalism not to miss any work or author, to pay attention to detail and minutiae, gives importance to those inconspicuous Balkan artefacts that invariably remain in the shadow of the mainstream of the film industry, and thus the personalities who produce them receive a well-deserved attention.

The same manifestations of tolerance, delicacy and respect for each work and each artist make her particularly suited in her work as a public relations specialist for various institutions, as well as an invariable presenter at press conferences and discussions at various film forums.

The opinion expressed so far about the research value of the monographic work, the scientific publications and the personal merits of Chief Assistant Dr. Gergana Doncheva make me believe that she has the necessary qualities to be awarded the academic position of Associate Professor. **And I vote "FOR".**

Sofia, 15.07.2021

With best regards:  
Prof. Petya Alexandrova, D.Sc.