

## **R E V I E W**

**Regarding:** Competition for awarding the academic position of ‘Associate Professor’ in the Professional Field 3.3. Political Sciences (Political Science – International Relations and Conflict Resolution), as announced by the Official Gazette, № 21/ 15. 03. 2022.

**By:** Professor Nikolay Jordanov Naydenov, Doctor Habil - Department of Political Science, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”.

### **1. Assessment of the candidates’ eligibility**

One candidate participates in the competition - Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Iskren Plamenov Ivanov - Lecturer in the Department of Political Science at the University of Sofia 'St. Kliment Ohridski'. He meets all the requirements for the academic position 'Associate Professor' set by Article 24, paragraph 1 of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, and the minimum national requirements under Art. 26, para. 2, 3, and 5. He has been a doctor since 2013 and a chief assistant since 2014. Only his classroom workload reaches 750 hours per year - twice as much as the required teaching workload, according to the regulations of Sofia University.

### **2. Teaching, pedagogical, scholar, and applied activities of the candidate**

Dr. Iskren Ivanov is the author of two monographs, co-author of a book, author of a chapter of a book, and twenty-one scientific articles. He applied for the position of 'associate professor' with his second monograph (Orthodox Geopolitics of Russia, 2019) and thirteen of his papers, two of which are included in the indexing database Scopus. These academic publications result in his consistent research work (he has participated in 9 scientific projects) and continuous efforts to improve his research skills. In 2016, he specialized in conflict management at the University of Granada. In 2019, he was a postdoctoral fellow of national security and international relations at the University of Delaware - a position which included three one-month specializations at Princeton, Columbia, and the US Military Academy at West Point. He has also been a visiting researcher at the University of Paris-III: New Sorbonne and a visiting lecturer at the University of Texas at Austin. This scientific and educational endeavor finds a natural continuation in his teaching and administrative

employment in the bachelor's and master's degrees of the Department of Political Science at Sofia University 'St. Kliment Ohridski'. Indicative is that between 2014 and 2022, he has been the scientific supervisor of 41 Bachelor's and Master's theses in Political Science.

## **2. Assessment of the Applicant's Scholarly Achievements**

The scientific publications with which Dr. Ivanov participates in the present competition are focused on the geopolitical strategies of the Russian Empire, the USSR, and the Russian Federation from the beginning of the 20th century to the present day. These strategies strongly influence international relations and give rise to conflicts, the resolution of which poses severe challenges to conflict resolution theory and practice. Dr. Ivanov offers an analysis of Eurasian ideas from the early 20th century to the present and their continuation and realization in Russia's hybrid attacks against Western countries, including Bulgaria. Eurasian ideas and hybrid strategies give a comprehensive picture of how today's Russian Federation is trying to erode the West and restore its position as a pole in international relations, using invisible means such as faith, identity, misinterpretation of selected historical facts, and fake news. The aim is to provoke confusion, insecurity, and fear to make the population seek "shelter" under Russia's auspices. In this sense, all of Dr. Ivanov's publications submitted for review consider a growing threat to the security of the EU and Bulgaria, in particular.

This habilitation work consists of seven chapters. The first one is the most voluminous. It presents analytically three parts: (i) the main ideas of the predecessors of Eurasians (Danilevski, Leontiev, Novgorodtsev, and Solovyov); (ii) the concepts of the founding fathers of the so-called "Inner circle" of Eurasianism (Trubetskoy, Suvchinsky, Savitsky, and Arapov); and (iii) the representatives of the so-called "outer circle" (Alexeev, Belikov, Bicilli, Bromberg, Vernadsky, Kartashev, Sadovsky, Stepanov, Florovsky, Hara-Davan Erenzhen, and Shakhmatov). The second chapter provides a critical review of the manifestos of classical Eurasianism, where the arguments of individual authors reappear in a particular combination. The third chapter presents a critique of Eurasianism by Nikolai Berdyaev, who rehabilitated the rationally thinking, pro-European part of the Russian intelligentsia. Chapter four is devoted to the concept of "Eurasian ethnogenesis" by Lev Gumilev, who occupies a particular place in the history of Eurasian ideas. The critical analysis ends with Neo-Eurasianism, which

in the person of Alexander Dugin influences the modern geopolitics of the Russian Federation.

The main reference point in Eurasian ideas is the Russia-West opposition. Its roots have been traced back to the 'Unia' of Byzantium, considered the reason for the fall of Constantinople. This opposition appears in various forms such as liberal values vs. faith in God, a society of selfish material interests vs. a society founded on the Brotherhood, the Romano-Germanic civilization vs. the Eurasian ones, the Third Rome vs. the New Carthage, the maritime vs. the land civilizations, the power of the weapon vs. the power of the ideal. Most authors, except Bicilli, Solovyov, and Florovsky, view this opposition as predestined by history. Bicilli saw Russian culture as a bridge between Europe and Asia, and Soloviev recommended the convergence of Christian denominations, and like Bicilli, saw the future threat to Russia in the Mongol tribes. The object of the Eurasian attacks is not only the direct influence of the West but also the indirect one – spread by the Russians, who are already affected by the western influence. The perception of European culture as more developed rejects as a betrayal. For this reason, Alexeev ascertains that Peter the Great is not Christian, while Suvchynski calls 'allies' both the Bolshevism and the Latinism, the International and the Vatican.

The nature of the advantages of the East (Russia) in this opposition, pointed out by the Eurasianists, is predominantly symbolic. For example, Russia declares to be the successor of Byzantium, the mythical Hyperborean civilization (Dugin), and the Golden Horde (Erenzhen). Another guiding line in asserting the advantages of the East is the emphasis on its spirituality, not materiality. Florovsky calls the Russian people "God-bearers" and summarizes Russian history in two words: Orthodoxy and Socialism. In some versions of Eurasianism, the advantage comes from the spiritual characteristics of the Asian East, where power is in the ideal, not the weapon. Vernadsky even claims that the West envies Russia for many traditions in Eurasian culture. The next type of advantage is social. It includes the spiritual brotherhood between the peoples in Eurasia (Stepanov), the unique culture of 'collective individuality', and the exclusion of selfish interests from the Russian world (Dugin). Florovsky even sees an alternative to Western individualism in the situation when the man remains alone with God in the Russian forest or steppe. Any economic progress is associated with Russia and Eurasia to a limited degree and is conditioned by some Russian specifics. Russian exclusivity has its natural spatial basis in the position of Russia between Europe and Asia, which determines its geographical independence and a proclivity to isolationism.

Eurasia is an ideological platform uniting many ethnic groups and nationalities to fight Russia's main enemy - the West. This unifying force is the aspiration of all Eurasian peoples to a common goal - the construction of a single Russian rival entity (Gumilev). Additionally, the Eurasian ideas arise the expectation that can overthrow the revolutionary wave and protect all Slavs (under the leadership of Russia). Despite its variations, the concept of Eurasia is nothing but a form that obscures Russia's territorial claims to its neighboring peoples. Dugin states this directly: a member of the Eurasian movement is anyone who puts Russia's interests above their own. In this spirit is his vision of the administrative-territorial structure of Russia: the separation from Eurasia is impossible, avoidance of large cities and controlled resettlement. For Dugin, the conservative revolution was the way to build the Great Eurasian Empire. This revolution is a lifeline for the whole world, as it will eliminate a society ruled by materialism and selfishness. The Russian culture's goal is to re-educate people in a spirit of overcoming selfish Western interests under the moral supervision of the church (Stepanov).

Religiosity plays a constitutive role in Eurasian projects. Dugin emphasizes the dialogue between the various religious communities. According to some authors, Orthodoxy is closer to Catholicism than to Islam. Others interpret Eurasia as an Orthodox belt open to other cultures. Others see Orthodoxy as a tool to combat both Western influence and communism. And according to Erenzhen, Orthodoxy is closer to Eastern religions. However, in all these cases, religious pluralism is a disguised form of the leading role of Orthodoxy - the confession of the dominant Russian nation. The functions of the bearer of Orthodoxy, the Church, are also the subject of controversy, especially over whether it has to be separated from the state, whether it has to perform supervisory functions, or whether it is the leading force, regardless of the form of government. According to Shakhmatov, the earthly form of government does not matter if it obeys the Eternal Beginning - God. Opinions related to the role of Slavdom in Eurasia are similar in nature. According to Vernadsky, the Slavic ethnic group is the basis of the Eurasian place of development. However, the ethnic diversity in the Eurasian territories also creates different and sometimes conflicting opinions.

As for power in Eurasia, it invariably leans towards the style of centralized Russian autocracy - authoritarian rule, military empire (on the Mongol model), or Orthodox legal monarchy (on the Byzantine model). Dugin envisages civil rights and freedoms not to the citizens but the elite and the people organized in collectives and societies. According to Alexeev, power has

to be in the hands of mature political citizens, not the disorganized masses. The centralized state must provide (i) high technology and (ii) strong armaments, and (iii) eliminate the class struggle (Stepanov). The only deviation from this centralized model is the so-called "rural communism" (socialist type of government, lack of external authority, universal equality guaranteed by the conciliar character of the Orthodox Church, obedience, higher goals, cooperative harmonization of relations, not Western democracy) (Florovsky).

Although Dr. Ivanov makes his critical remarks throughout the presentation, he devotes a separate (sixth) chapter to the critique of Eurasianism. His critical comments are a significant part of the academic contribution of his habilitation work. Firstly, he brings out the conflict between the values of European ideas and Eurasianism. These values fix the position of individuals in the EU, the values of the EU as a whole, and the socio-economic values embodied in the so-called European dream. The same scale of values is impossible in Russia because of its insufficient economic potential, pressure on civil society, and the dominance of exclusionary attitudes: anti-American, anti-European, nationalistic, and patriotic. There are also significant differences in the socio-economic model that determines the role of state regulation and middle-class formation. Unlike the EU integration mechanisms, the nature of the social nexuses in Eurasia are ethnocultural, religious, and regional. The standard of living is on the margin. In addition, the EU can pursue a unified foreign policy while Eurasia cannot.

The next critical section is at the heart of the habilitation thesis: the Eurasian "privatization" of Orthodoxy. The latter is instrumentalized (i) politically as a means of creating axes of "fraternal states" dependent on Moscow and (ii) ideologically as an incentive to rebuild the Eurasian Empire, supporting the Russian political elite and ethnophiletism, catalyzing Russian nationalism (Third Rome, the heiress of Byzantium, restoration of the "Russian whole"). The privatization of Orthodoxy goes through three phases: the sacralization of political elites, the instrumentalization of sacred texts, and the rejection by Orthodoxy of those who (i) do not share Russian cultural values and Orthodox traditions, and (ii) are not loyal to the Russian government. In the third stage, Orthodoxy is radicalizing. One of the lines for this is to equate "Orthodox" and "Slavic" and to project a Slavic-Orthodox state - the fig leaf of a multinational empire based on Russia.

Finally, Dr. Ivanov critically analyses the Russian hybrid warfare against Bulgaria. The goals of this warfare are to divide (i) Bulgarian society, (ii) the Bulgarian intellectual elite, and (iii)

the spiritual life. He concentrates on the hybrid attacks and their methods as follows: (i) *false conservatism* (covering up the complete dependence of the Church on the state), (ii) *pan-Slavic universalism* (through which to attract the people with nostalgia for communism), (iii) *neo-Eurasian Orthodoxy* (sympathetic to Islam and other Eastern religions as potential allies against the Western culture), (iv) *Orthodox Communism* (Communism represented as a protector to the Orthodox Church), and (v) *pagan Orthodox nationalism* (allowing for religiously motivated violence, assisting the attacks against the "sinful" West and building a bridge to Russia). The Hybrid warfare designers try to form a layer of pro-Eurasian intellectuals by constituting the "Orthodox" as a 'Russophile.' According to Dr. Ivanov, similar attacks address Bulgaria. These attacks aim to: (i) blur the distinction between Orthodoxy and the Eurasian religious-political doctrine, (ii) isolate the higher clergy from the laity, (iii) use the former as a mediator between Russia and Bulgaria, and (iv) isolate the Orthodox who do not sympathize with Russia.

The habilitation work ends with a chapter in which the author presents his empirical research using 'content analysis' of whether there is a real connection between Eurasianism and Orthodoxy. When compiling the sample of texts of the considered authors, he applies the following criteria: accessibility, validity, reliability, and objectivity. The research units are the messages in the studied texts and their relations to the Eurasian idea. To encode the textual information, the author defines semantic categories in the form of keywords. For that purpose, he uses four types of methods: textual (frequency use of words), conceptual (extracts the main topics and messages and synthesizes them into one word, thematic code, and analyzing the variety of codes in a text to determine which kind of messages dominates), semantic (capturing the relationship between the main message in individual texts) and reference (linguistic features). The author considers coding and content analysis the most valuable part of his book. For this purpose, he checks whether the keywords meet the selected criteria (systematicity, scientificity, and relevance) and hence, which are valid and which are not.

"Eurasianism" and "Orthodoxy" are among the words that meet the criterion of validity. Thus, the interaction between them is possible. The author wonders which Orthodoxy feeds the ideological core of Eurasianism. Analyzing an emblematic lecture by Dugin, Dr. Ivanov confirms the hypothesis that Eurasianism has built an artificial theory - a theory of Metaphysics of Chaos, which has nothing to do with Orthodoxy. Through this theory, Dugin aims to legitimize the Orthodox nature of neo-Eurasianism and to use the Church as an

instrument for achieving some geopolitical goals. Dr. Ivanov concludes that Eurasianism is a sign of cultural identity through which Russia seeks to emancipate itself both from the Eastern and Western cultures. The keywords distribute into two conflicting thematic groups - 'Eurasian' and 'European.' But even though this conflict is considered inevitable, it is believed that Europe can avoid losing the battle with Eurasia if it takes its side.

#### **4. Questions and Recommendations**

Eurasian ideas are such a challenging topic that they inevitably make the reviewer ask himself many questions transcending his official role. With some intellectual effort, I set aside my personal questions to ask one of the most substantial questions that hover throughout this study. Eurasian ideas seek to attract as many adherents as possible with the image of a society in which the individuals, ethnic groups, and nationalities are deprived of many civil rights and freedoms (as opposed to the political elite) and assign their life prospects to a highly centralized state power, which prioritizes the Russian interests. Giving political rights and freedoms only to the political elite and not the citizens is not compensated even by promising higher incomes and prosperity on words. The advantages of the Eurasian picture are limited to the sphere of religiosity and interpersonal relations. In this context, what does Dugin rely on to make his ideas so popular that the long-awaited conservative revolution takes place?

#### **5. Conclusion**

The works of Dr. Iskren Ivanov explore the thematic area defined by the announcement for the competition. The questions they ask are part of the most substantial conflict in the modern world - between East and West with all its manifestations and hybrid strategies, trying to impose the will of a country over a nation from another country. Bulgaria is directly affected by the symbolic and real skirmishes between the representatives of the Eurasian Russian ideal and the Western liberal visions of politics. These circumstances give the habilitation work indisputable relevance. The completeness of the presentation, the impartiality of the point of view, the depth of criticism, and the importance of the research topics give me a reason to strongly support the candidacy of Dr. Iskren Ivanov for the academic position of 'Associate Professor.'

27 June, 2022 г.

Sofia

Reviewer:

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