

OPINION

regarding a competition for the academic position of “Associate Professor” in Professional Field 3.3. Political Sciences (Political Science - International Political Relations and Conflict Management), announced by Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" for the needs of the Faculty of Philosophy, prom. State Gazette, issue 21 / 15.03.2022

Documents for participation in the competition within the statutory period have been submitted by one candidate: Assistant Professor Dr. Iskren Plamenov Ivanov. The submitted documents, as established by the commission, meet the normative requirements, and the candidate is admitted to participate. It is evident from the attached reference that Dr. Ivanov has fulfilled the minimum national requirements under Art. 26 of the Law for the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria while in the cases of Indicators G and D the requirements are substantially exceeded (under Indicator G, 270 p. when at least 200 are required; and under Indicator D, 75 p. when at least 50 are required, respectively).

Dr. Ivanov's academic biography is impressive. Over the last 3 years alone – most of them under difficult pandemic conditions - he has completed a series of specializations, including his stays at the University of Delaware, USA and the University of Paris-3 in France, the Fulbright specialization at the University of Texas in Austin, USA, and several short-term participations as a visiting researcher at universities in the United States and Spain. His scientific results have been published in leading world journals, which are indexed in the most prestigious databases. Dr. Ivanov presented a list of 10 citations of his works, most of which in articles and monographs in established publishers and journals abroad. It is noteworthy that 9 out of 10 citations have been registered since 2020. This testifies to the recently growing interest of the Bulgarian and international scientific community in the themes and contributions of Dr. Ivanov. The academic workload of the candidate, in his capacity as Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science at Sofia University, is high and significantly exceeds the minimum hours rates for an academic year. Here I want to mention his work as a supervisor of many bachelor's and master's theses, as well as his organizational role in developing and strengthening the specialization in National and International Security in the bachelor's program in Political science as well as the master's program in Political pathologies of the global world in the same university. Last but not least, I will mention Dr. Ivanov's latest book,

“Pandemics among Nations: U.S. Foreign Policy and the New Grand Chessboard”, which was published by DeGruyter this year. It does not feature in the documentation of the competition, but it is indicative of the intensively developing research enquiries of the author, who strives to define the changing characteristics of the international system as following the Covid-19 pandemic.

To participate in the competition, Dr. Iskren Ivanov has submitted 2 monographs, one chapter of a book and 18 scientific articles. All of them, without exception, correspond to the profile of the competition. The areas on which the candidate's efforts are focused cover, in general, hybrid conflicts and the roles of the United States and Russia in international security systems. Due to the specific genre of the opinion, I will refrain from reviewing the proposed scientific articles. One of the two monographs largely reflects the candidate's PhD dissertation, which is why it will also remain out of my attention. The following notes refer to the monograph “The Orthodox Geopolitics of Russia”, published by “St. Kliment Ohridski” University Press in 2019.

The study is devoted to the development of the Eurasianism doctrine and its impact on the formation of Russia's geopolitical strategy in the first decades of the 21st century. The publication's contribution is determined by several factors. First, the author abandons the traditional material conception of constructing state interest and seeks to substantiate the contemporary Russian case through ideological preconditions. Second, Eurasianism in Russia is viewed in its entirety as a set of currents, ideas, and views that are transformed in different periods but retain common elements essential to political analysis today. Third, Eurasianism allows us to most accurately understand the technology of “privatization” of Orthodoxy for the needs of state policy, which is something crucial to the interpretation of “Orthodox geopolitics.”

The three stages of the Eurasianism doctrine are considered in detail: classical Eurasianism, Gumilev's ethnogenesis and neo-Eurasianism. With the help of a discursive study of an impressive number of original works of Eurasianism thinkers, the continuity within the doctrine, subordinated to the main goal of setting the ideological framework of a new type of geopolitical identity of Russia, has been proved. Empirical methods allow the author to accurately trace the impact of the main images and messages of the Eurasianists on Russia's foreign policy vision. The author dwells in detail on two aspects of the issue. The first is related to the assertion that Eurasianism, despite its claims to a “religious-political doctrine,” is in fact

moving away from Orthodoxy and represents a political use of religion. The criticism of Nikolai Berdyaev was used, who did not find in the Eurasianists a continuity of Russian culture as he established mysticism instead of Orthodoxy. The Eurasianism focus on the state, rather than on the man and the people, according to Berdyaev, ignores the Orthodox understanding of freedom. The second aspect concerns the political relevance of Alexander Dugin's neo-Eurasianism theory. There are views in the literature that either Dugin has always had a peripheral influence on the foreign policy of the Putin regime, or his influence has only increased in recent years. Dr. Ivanov is committed to the thesis that Dugin's version of Eurasianism, perceived as a consistent manifestation of the doctrine, is inherent in the geopolitical thinking of Putin's leadership.

I will also point out a controversial point in the author's conclusions. His theoretical framework places too strong an emphasis on the continuity in the development of Eurasianism, and hence on the continuity of the connection with state policy. The popularity of Lev Gumilev's ideas in the USSR is unquestionable. At the same time, it seems to me an exaggeration to say that Gumilev's Eurasianism "ideologically dominates the period of Soviet power" (p. 117). The relationship between passionarity and the personality cult in the Soviet Union is also insufficiently substantiated. Dr. Ivanov's conclusion that the goal of the theory is "to legitimize the image of the charismatic Soviet leader" may have some justification, but it still seems exaggerated to me. More convincing, for example, are theories that the personality cult may be explained not so much by charisma and political culture as by the institutionalization of an ideological goal that requires a constant interpreter. In some passages, in my opinion, the book reveals a greater closeness between Eurasianism and legitimation practices in the Soviet Union than it actually existed. I accept, of course, that this is a matter of scientific discussion.

"The Orthodox Geopolitics of Russia" is an original and important study that draws on rarely studied material and undoubtedly enriches our knowledge of foreign policy and ideological debates in contemporary Russia, but also of the dynamics of international relations in general.

I have had personal observations of Dr. Iskren Ivanov for 15 years. For the latest few of these years we have been colleagues in the Department of Political Science at Sofia University. I can confirm his conscientiousness and activity in the initiatives of the department and in working with students.

In conclusion, and in connection with the above, I will without hesitation vote IN FAVOR OF Dr. Iskren Plamenov Ivanov taking the academic position of "Associate Professor" in

Professional Field 3.3. Political Sciences (Political Science - International Political Relations and Conflict Management).

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