

OPINION

By Dr. Rusi Vladimirov Yanev, Associate Professor in the Department of Countering Severe and Transnational Organized Crime at the Academy of the Ministry of Interior, habilitated in the scientific specialty "Organization and management outside the field of material production (National security)" in the professional field "National Security", member of a scientific jury for evaluation of the materials presented by Iskren Plamenov Ivanov for participation in a competition for the academic position "Associate Professor" in the professional field "Political Science (International Political Relations and Conflict Management)"

Compliance of the quantitative results of the applicant's scientific and teaching activities with the normative and minimum national requirements for taking up the academic position "Associate Professor" in the professional field "Political science"

Mr. Iskren Plamenov Ivanov participates in the competition for associate professor, announced in the State Gazette, issue 21 from 3/15/2022 for the needs of the Faculty of Philosophy (FF) of "St. Kliment Ohridski" University of Sofia (Sofia University). The candidate holds the degree of Doctor of Political Science (International Relations) since November 2013 and he is a lecturer, assistant professor at the Department of Political Science at the Faculty of Political Science, Sofia University since April 2014.

In order to participate in the competition Dr. Iskren Ivanov has presented a published monography and other works. With the acquired doctoral degree, the teaching experience and the published independent monographic work, Chief Assistant Iskren Ivanov meets the requirements according to the Act on development of the academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ADASRB), that are important for the beginning of the assessment of the existence of minimum national requirements for the academic position of "Associate Professor" in the professional field "Political Science".

I define the following quantitative assessment of the materials presented in the competition by Dr. Iskren Ivanov, in accordance with the minimum national requirements for the academic position "Associate Professor" in the professional field "Political Science":

- indicator A: 50 points for defended dissertation on "Threats of global terrorism and US foreign policy after 9/11/2001" and a Doctorate degree awarded;

- Indicator group D.5: 75 points for published book "USA and Global Terrorism After 9/11.", Copy Print Group Publishing House 2016 , ISBN based on a defended dissertation and Doctorate degree awarded" ; D.6 45 points for published two articles, one co-authored in scientific journals, referenced and indexed in world-renowned databases of scientific information and D.7: 150 points for published articles and scientific reports in non-refereed journals with scientific review and edited collective volumes, total for indicator D 270 points;

- Indicator C: 100 points for habilitation work - published peer-reviewed independent monograph on "Orthodox Geopolitics of Russia", Sofia 2019, ISBN: 978-954-07-4574-9, University Publishing House " St. Kliment Ohridski " ;

- indicator D: 75 points in total for 10 citations in journals and collective volumes with scientific review.

The candidate for associate professor has the necessary audience employment as a lecturer occupying the academic position of "Chief Assistant".

Results of a candidate's research papers submitted

To assess the results of the associate professor candidate's work, I have looked at a monograph that has been published and also the articles and scientific reports listed by him in the publication report. The works have been created by Iskren Ivanov after acquiring the PhD degree and they do not repeat the dissertation work and they are related only to the requirements for holding the academic position of "Associate Professor" in the professional field "Political Science".

Habilitation work

Dr. Ivanov's habilitation thesis is a published peer-reviewed monograph on the topic of "Orthodox Geopolitics of Russia", with a volume of 319 pages, published by Sofia University in 2019, ISBN 978-954-07-4574-9. The topic that is presented in 7 parts (chapters) is interdisciplinary. In the structural exposition of the topic, the author has used a descriptive and explanatory approach to research an effective model of critical explanation to Eurasianism as a phenomenon. The emphasis of the monograph is the use of Orthodoxy to achieve the goals of neo-Eurasianism in geopolitical terms. Well-known, but newly interpreted theoretical statements from political science and religion have been skillfully touched upon, which has led to well-founded conclusions about the directions for the influence of Russian political doctrine on social processes. The candidate for associate professor, Dr. Ivanov, has achieved the goal of the study, after solving the tasks set at the beginning of each chapter. The author has used general scientific and empirical research methods and as a result of their combination he has defended and proposed substantiated ones for systematically manifested doctrinal inconsistency between Russia's policies and the Western world. The content of the work fills a partial gap in the specialized literature, which examines the problems of classical Eurasianism and neo-Eurasianism, statements by critics and supporters of the use of religion and the Church for political purposes, especially in the Eurasian space. Of particular importance for the protection of national security are the conclusions of Iskren Ivanov on the stages in the strategy of the political leadership of the Russian Federation to include Bulgaria in the Slavic-Orthodox Eurasian axis as part of the hybrid war on the Balkans (pp. 218 - 255).

Articles and scientific reports published in collective volumes with scientific review

In the scientific work "Church and Communism: Bulgarian Orthodoxy at Stake", Dr. Ivanov aims to analyze the links and interactions between the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (BOC) and the governments of the People's Republic of Bulgaria

(NRB) between 1944 and 1989. The first part of the article looks at how Eurasian philosophy gradually permeates Orthodoxy, and the second analyzes the increasing dependencies between BOC and the Moscow Patriarchate in the context of a political regime and how this helps to shape political attitudes in Bulgarian society.

The main goal of the article "To be or not to be: The American influence on LGBT + rights in Bulgaria " is to study the influence of the so-called liberal values in Bulgarian society with an emphasis on the approach of certain influential structures in the United States to motivate their spread. The main thesis of the author is that the United States is exerting systematic pressure for the adoption and integration of these values in Bulgaria, as a priority area are the rights of the so-called 'sexual minorities'. Using empirical methods - field experiments, programmed talks and analysis of media publications, Dr. Iskren Ivanov finds evidence to defend his thesis - through religious organizations funded by US political parties the US influence exists in Bulgaria. The author substantiates the conclusion that the attempts of the United States to influence the value framework of the Bulgarians seriously undermines their confidence in the so-called West and polarizes Bulgarian society, which in turn prevents it from defending its interests.

The article "STRATEGIES AND TOOLS FOR HYBRID CONFLICTS RESOLUTION IN THE 21ST CENTURY" *analyzes* tools and strategies in the sphere of so-called "hybrid conflicts". Dr Ivanov's thesis is based on that - in order to prevent hybrid threats, countries must mobilize all available resources at military and strategic level. Through the common scientific method of analysis, Iskren Ivanov divides the concept of hybrid warfare into threat theories, and through a system approach synthesizes the main aspects of hybrid conflicts and their influence on national security. As a contribution of the associate professor candidate, I take into account the proposed possible strategies he has identified to neutralize hybrid threats.

In the article "The Concept of Neo-Eurasianism as a Pillar of the Russian Security Doctrine " the candidate analyzes one of the main pillars of Russian foreign policy – the concept of the New Eurasianism or the *so-called Neo-Eurasianism* .

The main thesis is that the idea of "Greater Eurasia" is the political philosophy that shaped Russia's foreign policy after the end of the Cold War. The thesis is defended by providing sufficient evidence of an "intelligent approach" in Russian politics, which is the fruit of Neo-Eurasianism. The first part of the article examines the way in which Neo-Eurasianism is formed in the new geopolitical doctrines of Russia. The Second part outlines the military, political and cultural aspects of Russia's security strategies. I may point out as Dr. Ivanov's contribution that he set a forecast for the final result of the explained and motivated theoretical symbiosis between Russian geopolitical doctrines and security strategies.

The exhibition, in an article for "Reshaping U.S. Smart Power: Towards a Post-Pandemic Security Architecture" aims to analyze the role of the United States in the international system at the global level. Dr. Iskren Ivanov's main thesis is that if the US wants to maintain its role as a world leader, they need to change/update their foreign policy strategy under the so-called "Intelligent power", that combines diplomacy and the power of weapons. The author has pointed out Chinese ambition to exploit the United State's weaknesses and China's drive to dethrone the US as a global leader. And all this in the context of one of the most deadly threats to human and international security - the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper examines theories of power and its application in the context of international security, comparing the main geopolitical doctrines of the United States and China in the context of the future world order.

In the scientific report "Techniques and strategies for resolution on hybrid conflicts in international relations" Dr. Ivanov the dynamics of the system of international relations in the 21st century. The author redefines key geopolitical concepts and defends the thesis of transition from the unipolar world after the end of the Cold War to the multipolar world in the development of international relations. Iskren Ivanov argues for the emergence of completely new interpretations of war, conflict and the use of force.

The publication in the form of an article "GEOPOLITICS OF RUSSIAN ORTHODOXY AS AN INSTRUMENT IN THE HYBRID WAR ON THE

BALKANS by Dr. Iskren Ivanov aims to analyze one of the main tools that Russia uses in its strategies – the geopolitics of Orthodox christianity. The study results in a smooth transition to the author's habilitation work. The main thesis of the article is that Orthodox christianity can be used as a powerful tool for political and cultural influence in countries where society is divided in terms of so-called European values. Dr. Ivanov offers readers opportunities to apply the theory of influence of the Russian Federation in the Balkan countries.

The article "THE FOUNDING OF THE EURASIAN MOVEMENT: FROM RUSSIA TO BULGARIA" examines the classic Eurasian and its manifestations in the USSR. Dr. Ivanov defends the thesis that the ideology of the Soviet Union is strongly influenced by the work of 'white emigration' – a thesis that is widely popular in Russia to this day. It is proved by general scientific and empirical research methods that it appears and the influence of the first Eurasian people in Sofia, who are representatives of the so-called "white emigration". Well-educated and erudite intellectuals from the "white emigration" created a philosophy that gave rise to Russian political science and inspired Russian leaders for decades to come. Although the USSR gained legitimacy from Eurasia and the Russian empire, the culture and ideology of Tsarist Russia was strongly denied by Soviet power.

In the scientific work *"Eurasian Depravity of Orthodoxy as a Threat to Bulgarian Spiritual Unity"* Iskren Ivanov defends the thesis of the key importance of Russian Orthodoxy in shaping the collective Eurasian self-consciousness. The author proves the aspiration of the 'new Eurasianists' to establish the dominant role of Russia in Eurasia and their focus on the geopolitical "twinning" of "fraternal" states, incl. Bulgaria within the Slavic Orthodox axis. Thus, building the image of a unique and above all Russian Orthodoxy, they integrate it within the framework of modern neo-Eurasian doctrine and use it as a political tool.

In his work "Alexander Dugin's Neo-Eurasianism as an Instrument in the Hybrid War in the Balkans" Iskren Ivanov argues for the distortion of international relations due to the dependence of the geopolitical theory with the national interest of the state. As an example, Dr. Ivanov gives Russia, which forms strategies for

influence without taking into account geopolitical realities. As a result of the analysis of the strategy for the hybrid war, its political and ideological dimensions are clarified. The candidate for associate professor defends the thesis that the combination of these dimensions is reflected in the neo-Eurasianism of Alexander Dugin. The author concludes that the concept of hybrid warfare is based on the neo-Eurasian idea. The result of the study indicates the Balkan Peninsula as one of the priority regions, which remains the object of interest of Russia. This is a region where the neo-Eurasianism continues to be a powerful ideological tool for waging hybrid warfare.

Mr. Iskren Ivanov also demonstrated a lasting research interest in terrorism and its association with religion. In his article "THE MOTIVATION OF THE LONE WOLVES: IS RELIGION THE MAIN CAUSE OF RADICALIZATION?" In order to prove his claim, Iskren Ivanov has systematized statements from theories of radicalism and terrorism, related to the terrorist acts of 2016. It also clarifies the profile of 'lone wolves', based on origin and religious beliefs. In conclusion, Dr. Ivanov explains the way and for it does not affect religion on the motivation of terrorists .

In the article titled "THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF THE BALKANS IN THE GEOPOLITICAL CLASH BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND RUSSIA", the candidate for associate professor aims to clarify the role and importance of the Balkan region in the geopolitical confrontation between the United States and Russia. To achieve that goal, Dr. Ivanov has solved three research tasks. The first is to analyze the foreign policy doctrines of US president Barack Obama and Russian president - Vladimir Putin. The second is to analyze the foreign policy strategy of the United States and Russia towards the Balkans. The third is to compare American and Russian foreign policy strategies. The tasks have been solved by applying general scientific and empirical methods and the goal has been achieved, as well as an assessment of the effectiveness of the strategies.

The presentation of significant results of Iskren Ivanov's research activity at scientific forums, mainly at international conferences and round tables, indicates his establishment as a university lecturer.

The results of the research work of Dr. Ivanov are directly applicable in the training of students and graduates at Sofia University and other universities. The publications of the candidate for associate professor are parts of the information fund of academic disciplines, which are taught at the Faculty of Philosophy, and also some are related to the protection of national security from processes and phenomena of a negative nature. The conclusions and recommendations formulated in the publications of Dr. Ivanov can be used both in future research and in improvement of the practice of government and corporate bodies in various fields.

Scientific contributions from the works of the candidate

The topics that the candidate for associate professor develops in his works upgrades the scientific literature, mainly in the field of international relations and conflict management, motivated by the desire for supremacy of global powers. The results of the research are also significant for the protection of national and regional security. The research works of Ch. Assistant Professor Dr. Iskren Ivanov enriches political science and doctrinal productions for analysis of events and social phenomena related to the change of the unipolar model, neo-Eurasianism, religiously motivated radicalism, extremism and terrorism.

He use of a systematic approach for modern modeling of dynamic and contradictory relations, mainly between the countries that determine the agenda of societies, has led the associate professor to reasonable conclusions and recommendations for improving development policies.

The evidence and results of the evaluated works enrich the theoretical statements in political science and management science in the phases of programming, organizing, leading and controlling important political and social processes. The derived author's concepts build on established opinions about the state and development of international relations. These scientific contributions have

been proven by Dr. Iskren Ivanov with the publication of an in-depth study of the subject in which he specializes, analyzing major scientific publications, international and national strategic documents and summarized results of competent, mostly law enforcement authorities.

Originality of the presented works and reliability of the scientific data in them

The publications submitted for evaluation by the scientific jury are the personal work of the candidate for associate professor.

The methodology used in the research combines different methods and the practice of which individually or in combination leads to an assessment of the reliability of the obtained scientific data. During the acquaintance and evaluation of the works of the candidate for associate professor Dr. Iskren Ivanov, I did not find any plagiarism. The author of the works has provided written references, which largely reflect the points obtained by groups of indicators of compliance with the minimum national requirements for associate professor in the professional field "Political Science (International Political Relations and Conflict Management)". The works also contribute to the theory and the practice contained in the publications and the obtained scientific and practical results. I do accept the contributions and scientific results described and explained by the candidate in the references attached to the materials for the competition.

Critical note, questions and recommendations

According to the monograph published by the candidate - habilitation thesis, I have a critical note of a formal nature. The balance in the volume of the matter presented in the seven chapters is different. For example, the first and fifth chapters are approximately 70 pages, the sixth and seventh - 50 pages, the second and third chapters, respectively 14 and 11 pages, and the fourth - 26. The systematic approach to presenting matter in the form of a monograph requires searching and finding balance in the chapters, which I am sure that in the future Iskren Ivanov will be overcome.

I have a question for the candidate for associate professor Dr. Ivanov. On page 300 of the habilitation paper, the fourth conclusion regarding the critique of neo-Eurasian theory, you see as the main feature of any secular democratic regime the division between Church and State.... In Russia, however, these boundaries are diverging. My specific question is: "Does the secular democratic regime harm the existence and policies of public education of the Vatican as a center of Roman Catholicism and an influential state in the formation and development of religious and secular policies on a global scale in the context of criticism of blurred church-state borders in Russia?"

My recommendations for the development of the research activity of Ch. Assistant Professor Dr. Iskren Ivanov are in the field of subject matter, covering theoretical productions in academic disciplines, for the teaching of which he applied. Dr. Ivanov should continue to monitor and develop issues of global political processes and their impact, mainly on the national security of the Republic of Bulgaria and regional security in Southeast Europe.

Conclusion

The research works of Chief Assistant Dr. Iskren Plamenov Ivanov deserve a general positive assessment. He knows the main literature and other sources on the researched problems and uses them with a desire for a creative approach. The scientometric parameters of the candidate meet the legal requirements for acquiring the academic position of "Associate Professor" in the professional field of Political Science (International Political Relations and Conflict Management).

Given the above, I do propose to the scientific jury to rank the candidate for the competition and to nominate Dr. Iskren Plamenov Ivanov for election by the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philosophy at Sofia University as an associate professor in "Political Science (International Political Relations and Management conflicts) ".

Sofia, June 21, 2022.

Member of the Scientific Jury: (p)

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Rusi Yanev