

PEER REVIEW

by Prof. Maria Schnitter, Doctor of Cultural Sciences

in connection with competition for the occupation of the academic position Associate Professor **under Professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences (Theory and History of Culture. Culture of Research Work and Communication in the Social Sciences and Humanities) on a part-time position, announced in Official Gazette, Issue**

48/28.06.2022,

with only candidate Dr. Martin Nikolaev Osikovsky

By Order of the Rector No ПД-38-457/26.07.2022, I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury for the above-described competition and by the decision of the jury I am tasked with preparing the following peer review:

Within the term stipulated by the law, the only candidate for the academic position, Dr. Martin Nikolaev Osikovsky, submitted a set of documents that includes all the required components and that was prepared in accordance with the formal requirements of Sofia University.

The candidate is excellently educated in the scientific field of the competition, has gone through training in renowned research centers in Bulgaria and abroad and has long earned his place among the young academic elite of Bulgaria.

The scientific production presented by M. Osikovsky is an indisputable testimony of achieved scientific maturity and significantly exceeds in terms of volume and quality the so-called “minimum requirements”. The candidate submitted for evaluation in the competition 3 books (published in Bulgarian academic publishing houses) and 10 articles and book chapters, published in the period 2010-2022 and not included in previous academic procedures. Two of the articles are in English, as one (from 2010) was published abroad. Four of his publications are cited in international databases, and six in peer-reviewed periodicals and collections.

I would accept without objection the division of his publications made by the candidate himself into four thematic areas, falling to varying degrees and in different ways in relation to the theme of the competition. In this sense, his contributions in the field of the study of media and communication culture (Publications No 1, 2, 4, 5, 6 and 12), as well as those devoted to the culture of research work in the social sciences and humanities, are undoubtedly the most significant and relevant (Publication No 7).

The **first group of publications** can be considered within the framework of the problem of the relationship between religion and the media. A central contribution here is the monographic study *“The Priest and the Media”*, Topoi of Faith in Foreign News, 2011-2019 (Veliko Tarnovo: Faber, 2022). It is the result of a long in-depth look at the ways in which religion (the “priest”) is present in the media environment of the (post)modern world. During the years in which he led the column “Media Review” in *Christianity and Culture Magazine* (2011-2019), M. Osikovsky actually carried out his work “on the field”, collecting and summarizing a huge volume of media publications in order to select and analyze 163 of them, distributed in three main thematic nests – the first one political, the second one related to the theme of the religious “other”, and the third one – to the “big questions of faith” (p. 26). Alarmed by the “rhetoric inside and outside of churches”, which “suggests that to be a good and true person – Russian, Bulgarian, Romanian, or Pole, one must be part of (or at least support) the national church” (p. 25), he asks whether and how it is possible for “viable media content ... to break through the insulators of the domestic-profane type of religious news” and “the conversion of local churches to nationalist sentiments”, in order to “help ennoble the way, in which in our country, faith-related topics are presented on a wide-spectrum, daily media basis” (p. 27). The precise and engaging analyzes of a series of carefully selected specific case studies outline religious news as a “small but important companion to the political-economic news core” that “ennobles this massive core as an essential specialized supplement” (p. 192) and “does not just coexist well with the political, economic or cultural [topics] ... but that can be an organic part of them, without which ... understanding them would be incomplete, inaccurate, or even impossible”. Thus, Martin Osikovsky’s book defines a little-known research territory and offers directions for future work that – I hope! – will develop further. For me, a continuation of this work, dedicated to the Bulgarian and Balkan media environment in its specific attitude and approaches to the coverage of religious issues, would be

very valuable. The presence of Orthodox “case studies”, such as Russia and Greece, is a reason to expect a thickening of the “Orthodox context”, the current development of which is extremely important and interesting to follow scientifically.

The remaining publications from this first thematic group (No 2, 4, 5, 6 and 12) are an illustration of the broad competence of Dr. Osikovsky in the field of the ongoing competition. Devoted to various aspects of the early modern idea of a free press and its manifestations since the middle of the 17th century, they are a kind of continuation of the author’s lasting and deep interest in Milton’s personality and work. In fact, it can be said that M. Osikovsky made a major contribution to the familiarization and interpretation of Milton’s ideas in our country – both with the translation and commentary of the source texts (No 3), and with placing them in a wider historical and cultural context (No 4, 9, 12).

The **second group of studies** occupies a central place in the theme of the competition – the culture of research work in the social sciences and humanities. Here I would like to point out the applied nature of the projects, in the organization and implementation of which Dr. Osikovsky has a leading role. I am referring to the national round table at which specific proposals were formulated – mostly for the differentiation of evaluation indicators in natural/technical and social/humanities sciences. These proposals have already been partially absorbed in the development of the new system of indicators for professional areas by the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency. What more can be said about the success of a scientific project? In this group of publications, it is worth praising both *Ancilla mercatus laboris* (No 7), where some of the key issues of contemporary public debates surrounding the assessment of quality in education are formulated, and the article *Freedom, Conscience, Academy. Public Speaking and Caring for the “Good Name” of Universities* (No 5). I would also like to pay particular attention to the expected publication in 2023 of a comparative map of the evaluation mechanisms of research activity in social sciences/humanities in different European countries. I admit that the methodology applied therein and the results of its validation are eagerly awaited by the “official” evaluators.

We cannot pass without comment the serious contributions of the candidate in the thematic area of the history of pre-modern political thought (Publications No 3, 13). Here he demonstrates a thorough knowledge of the great debate about canonical infallibility in the Latin 14th century, examined through the idea of the infallibility of the teaching authorities of the faith. Broadening the range of his research interests, these publications clearly outline his profile as an expert in the broad field of cultural studies. His contributions as a translator and commentator of classical texts from the European cultural tradition add to the richness and depth of this expertise.

Since a competition is being held for the academic position of “Associate Professor”, I would like to mention the rich teaching experience of the candidate – he has been teaching a dozen different lecture courses in Bulgarian and English at New Bulgarian University, University of National and World Economy and Sofia University since 2005, and since 2018 he has been a full-time associate professor, albeit in a different scientific field. This guarantees his successful (official) integration into the academic community of Sofia University, where he has long been warmly received.

Let me summarize: the only candidate, Dr. Martin Osikovsky, fully meets both the requirements for the quantity and quality of scientific production, as well as those for linking academic growth with pedagogical and methodological guidelines in modern higher education. The procedure carried out is in accordance with the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, as well as with the specific Regulations of Sofia University.

Therefore, I strongly support the awarding of the academic position of “Associate Professor” to Dr. Martin Nikolaev Osikovsky under Professional field 3.1. “Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences (Theory and History of Culture. Culture of Research Work and Communication in the Social Sciences and Humanities)”. I call on the scientific jury to prepare the relevant proposal to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philosophy.

Plovdiv, 13.10.2022

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