

STATEMENT

On the evaluation of the scientific output of Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Valentina Milchova Mitkova – participant in a competition for the academic position "Associate Professor" in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Book Studies, Library Studies, Bibliography – History of the Book), announced in the State Gazette, issue 92 from 18.11.2022

By Prof. Dr. Tatyana Ivanova Kotzeva – a member of the Scientific Jury in the competition, appointed by Order No RD-38-637/09.12.2022 of the Rector of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" Prof. DSc Anastas Gerdzhikov

1. Brief biographical details of the candidate

The candidate in the competition Valentina Mitkova is Assistant Professor, PhD and teaches lecture courses and seminars in the field of "History of the Book" and "History of Women and Genders" at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" since 2018. She graduated in Cultural Studies at Sofia University (2003), Master's degree in Arts and Modernity XX-XXI century (2005) and in 2014 she defended her doctoral dissertation in the field in which she applied for this competition. She is fluent in English, and she has a good level of German, Greek and Serbian languages, and translation activity occupies an essential part of her professional biography. Along with English translations of articles in collections in the field of book history, two notable books in the field of feminist knowledge are also translated by her: Kristen Ghodsee. *Second World, Second Sex. Socialist Women's Activism and Global Solidarity during the Cold War*. S. East-West. 2020 (together with N. Afeyan) and Maria Bucur. *Gendering Modernism: A Historical Reappraisal of the Canon*. S. University "St. Kliment Ohridski" 2020. She is a member of the editorial team of the prestigious international journal in the field of women's history *Aspasia. The International Yearbook of Central, Eastern and Southeastern Women's and Gender History*. The candidate points out participation in 4 scientific projects related to the library, digitization of the library and regional cultural practices.

2. Necessary documents for the competition and scientific metrics of the presented scientific production.

For participation in the announced competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor" the candidate presents all the necessary documents and materials in accordance with the Regulations on the terms and conditions for acquiring academic degrees and occupying academic positions at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Section IV. The scientific production of the candidate includes 1 monograph "*Gender, periodicals and modernization in Bulgaria (from the end of the 19th to the 40s of the 20th century)*". S: Univ. Publ. House. "St. Kliment Ohridski", 2022. 261 pages, 9 articles/studies in English, most of which have been published in the internationally referenced journal *Aspasia* and 7 articles/studies in Bulgarian scientific journals – collections and journals such as *Literary Thought, Liternet*, etc. According to the reference of the citations, a total of 10 citations have been found, of which one – in a referenced journal, 3 – in peer-reviewed scientific journals and 6 – in scientific collections and readers. According to

the Reference for the scientific metric data of the candidate, her production covers and exceeds (by groups D and E) the necessary points for occupying the academic position of "Associate Professor" (group B – 100 points, group D – 315 points, group D – 105 points). The scientific production is original and there is no evidence of plagiarism.

3. Assessment of the main contributions and overall scientific output of the candidate.

According to the candidate's self-assessment in terms of contributions to her scientific production, three main directions/areas are outlined:

- Studies of women's periodicals from the end of the 19th to the 40s of the 20th century
- Studies of the intellectual and creative activity of women authors for the same historical period
- Focus on the continuity in research efforts (Bulgarian, Balkan and Western) to form a gender-sensitive intellectual and socio-cultural history.

I consider the research fields and focuses in which the candidate worked as completely accurately and correctly described; and the most comprehensive synthesis of these focuses could be found in the monograph *"Gender, Periodicals and Modernization in Bulgaria (from the End of the 19th to the 1940s of the 20th Century)"*, University Press "St. Kliment Ohridski", Sofia. The other publications, mostly articles, also touch on one or other aspects of the formulated areas.

There are two main perspectives through which V. Mitkova examines the women's periodicals during the period after the Liberation to the 1940s: 1. The research approaches in contemporary feminist studies in the field of socio-cultural history of women /K. Offen et al/; 2. The research approaches of Bulgarian historians, cultural scientists, literary scholars and journalists to the modernization of Bulgarian society during this historical period with an emphasis on the so-called "woman's question", "awareness" of the female gender, emancipation of women, woman's creativity and woman's writing.

The Bulgarian women's press as the main object of V. Mitkova's research quests is the field in which the discussions on the directions and means of emancipation of Bulgarian women take place. Through the women's press, a few educated and intelligent Bulgarian women come out of the narrow family sphere and meet the "challenges of publicity". Despite the existence of a number of studies of individual samples of the women's press during this historical period, correctly referenced in the publications of the candidate, she points out the need for a comprehensive study and understanding of the women's press and women's writing as communication channels for the creation and affirmation of women's collective identities and for improving women's writing and creativity in the first decades of modernization of Bulgarian society. In fact, the monographic work of V. Mitkova plays the role of such a comprehensive scientific product that is embedded into the contemporary humanitarian knowledge on the socio-cultural history of women's writing and women's awareness during this historical period, i.e. the period of origin and development of the first stage of feminism in Bulgaria.

It is through a feminist lens that V. Mitkova reveals that the women's press creates an alternative discursive space, a "parallel discursive arena" (N. Fraser), where marginalized female voices are valued and enter into dialogue with the dominant male canon. Again, based on the feminist approach of K. Offen, the candidate brings out two main typologies in the women's press: newspapers and magazines with an "individualist" (explicit) feminist profile and women's publications, recognizable as household press (also called

"relational-feminists"). In the first type of publications, the focus is on general social and political topics around the "second sex", while in the second type of publications the scope of the topics covers family, household, fashion, cooking, etc. This systematization has its cognitive assets and is an indisputable contribution to the candidate's research as she explicitly points out the intertwining of topics and rhetoric in the two types of women's publications. The conclusions about the ambivalent character of women's publications devoted to family and household are appreciated: on the one hand, women's household press provides channels for cultural modernization of the everyday life of the Bulgarian family, on the other hand, this type of publications reaffirm the traditional roles of women - mothers and wives - as guardians of Bulgarian nationality and culture.

Through the detailed analysis of the content and the topics discussed in both types of newspapers and magazines, V. Mitkova reveals the genesis, history and results in the discussions around the topics concerning women – voting rights, inheritance rights, labor rights, educational rights, family rights, etc. The initiatives for the writing of each print edition are considered in a personal-biographical aspect related to the name and the personal-familial and educational-professional development of the female editors-in-chief. These initiatives mark not only the personal profiles of a myriad of prominent Bulgarian women from that period, but their publications are contextualized in the social, economic, political and cultural climate of Bulgarian society from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of World War II. Thus, the analysis of the women's press as a photographic lens captures the main events and the prominent public figures of Bulgarian society in that period. The thematic foci in the women's press of this period follow the chronicle of the development of women's movements in the country from the era of their inception and closely document the accompanying divisions and conflicts (especially between the so-called bourgeois-feminist movement /A. Karima, D. Ivanova/ and the social-democratic movement /V. Blagoeva and others/.

Of significant importance are also the analyses of periodicals in Serbian, Greek and Turkish languages, through which cultural interactions and influences in close social contexts are revealed. Following the methodology of the intertwined histories, V. Mitkova reveals the thematic similarities in the women's press in the Balkan context, which in turn facilitates international cooperation in the field of women's studies and the creation of international women's coalitions.

Following the Western feminist approach in historical women's studies /most notably J. Scott and K. Offen/, as well as the contributions of Bulgarian researchers-historians (K. Daskalova, J. Nazarska, etc.) and feminist literary scholars (M. Kirova, M. Nikolchina and others), V. Mitkova successfully analyzes, systematizes and summarizes samples of women's writing and authorship, which are considered to have secondary significance and are outside the dominant (male) literary canon. Using the concept of the intellectual gender hierarchy, V. Mitkova shows that despite the active civil position of Bulgarian women's press and the innovation of literary creativity written by women, the women's printed speech from that period is insufficiently appreciated and even marginalized in public.

Of innovative character are also the publications /the Conclusion section in the monograph and publication 3 of the list/ about the ambivalent nature of the ideology of woman's emancipation under state socialism and the real everyday practices discussed through the pages of the influential women's magazine "Woman Today" in the rubric "Readers' Letters" / 1960-1970 /. In fact, the author makes an in-depth sociological analysis of the main topics – division of labor in the family, family relations, the role of fatherhood, intimate relationships, etc. etc., through which the amalgam of patriarchal stereotypes and modernization practices of the socialist way of life of families is reconstructed.

In summary, I believe that V. Mitkova's research enriches the feminist critical reception of female authors in Bulgarian literature and in women's journalism by contributing to the continuity in research efforts to create a gender-sensitive intellectual and socio-cultural history. The ambition to analyze the means by which Bulgarian women's voices struggle to be heard and recognized in the conditions of dominant patriarchy in the private and public sphere of Bulgarian society of the first half of the 20th century is a worthy research effort, defended through the publications of V. Mitkova. It is embedded into the historical and socio-cultural dynamics of social movements for the emancipation of the "second sex", as well as into the metamorphoses through which women's emancipation unfolds as a public-social goal and as a personal-individual choice.

Conclusion: The scientific production of Dr. Valentina Mitkova in terms of size covers and exceeds the minimum requirements for the academic position of Associate Professor. The candidate has her own original contributions to feminist socio-cultural studies and is an authoritative expert in the field of women's literary history. I confidently vote YES for awarding Dr. Valentina Milchova Mitkova an academic position of "Associate Professor" in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.5. Public Communications and Information Science (Book Studies, Library Studies, Bibliography – Book History).

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