



## REVIEW

of the submitted works for participation in a competition for the academic position of **PROFESSOR** in professional field 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Media ecosystem), announced by Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in SJ, issue 35/18.IV. 2023 г.

**Reviewer: Prof. Nikolay Kirilov Mihailov, PhD**

**Candidate: Assoc. Prof. Simeon Ignatov Vasilev, PhD**

### **I. General characteristics of the candidates and the requirements for the competition.**

Only one candidate participated in the announced competition - Assoc. Prof. Simeon Ignatov Vasilev, PhD, lecturer at Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski", Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication. The documentation submitted by him for the competition includes all the necessary materials, which have been completed and extremely correctly systematized in accordance with the Bulgarian Law and the Regulations for its application, as well as the Regulations for the terms and conditions for acquiring scientific degrees and holding academic positions at the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

**A. Professional and academic profile of the candidate.** Associate Professor Simeon Vassilev graduated from Sofia University in 1987. He then continued his education specializing in German Studies at the University of Halle (Germany) in 1991 and then Journalism at Cardiff University (Wales, United Kingdom). In 2018, he successfully defended his thesis on "Leadership in a global media environment. Political leadership and journalistic interpretations in the first decade of the 21st century" in FJMC and acquired the educational and scientific degree "PhD/Doctor" in professional direction 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences Journalism (International Communications). Since 2020, he holds the academic position of "Associate Professor" in the Department of "Communication and Audiovisual Production" of the FJMC. As a teacher, Assoc. Prof. Simeon Vasilev is highly valued both by his colleagues and by students, for whom the theoretical lectures and practical tasks included in his programs and study disciplines are particularly important. Interest in international communication and excellent knowledge of the German language lead the candidate to professional journalism. Since 1992, he has been working at the Bulgarian National Television as an international editor, and since 1993 he has held managerial positions there. From 1995 to



2000, Assoc. Prof. Vasilev was the head of the first degree correspondent station of BNT in Bonn and Berlin, Germany, carrying out active journalistic activities in the role of correspondent and special envoy of the Bulgarian National Television. In his professional practice, he has covered EU, NATO, WEU, OSCE and UN summits, as well as dozens of intergovernmental conferences and interstate meetings of Bulgaria at the European and world level. In addition to BNT, his professional journalistic work continues in other media and media groups, in which Prof. Vasilev, in addition to journalism, holds responsible and managerial



positions, and I would like to note his activity as the creator and head of the press center of the National Palace of Culture (2014).

The candidate's experience as a lecturer and teacher is also rich and long-lasting. As a lecturer at the Institute for Public Policy, he leads training courses dedicated to public communications, media relations and institutional policies, media and civil society, state administration and the media, as well as conducts practical classes for the formation of communication skills with the listeners. Assoc. Prof. Vasilev has been engaged in FJMC as a part-time teacher since 2011, and his lecturing activity continues until now as a full-time teacher, who holds the academic position of "associate professor" since 2020. Against this background, it is also worth mentioning the topics of the courses, with the teaching of which the candidate is engaged - the disciplines "Media ecosystem", "Cultural-historical interrelationships and media content", "Leadership in Europe", "Target audience and media content", etc. The colleague also teaches the disciplines "Communication Skills", "World Media of the 20th and 21st Century", as well as "Media Convergence" in the master's program "Production and Creative Industry". As can be seen the described academic and professional profile of the candidate Associate Professor Vasilev outlines and certifies an established professional in the field of media and public communication on a national and international level, as well as an erudite and experienced teacher with sufficient experience in courses for students from bachelor's and master's degrees of higher education in the field of media ecosystem, media culture, media environment and different communication channels, as well as others related to the structuring and interaction of media as a phenomenon and as an industry in the modern world. This broad issue, in which the candidate has been working for many years and in which he has proven scientific contributions and professional achievements, fully falls within the thematic field of the announced competition.

**B. Fulfillment of Minimum National Requirements. Publication activity and scientific engagement.** In total, for participation in the announced competition, Associate Professor Vasilev has presented an impressive scientific production, including as scientometric indicators: 1 monograph (main habilitation thesis), 1 monograph that is not presented as a main habilitation thesis, 1 participation in a collective monograph, 2 studies, 11 articles and reports published in scientific periodicals, in scientific collections and continuing editions with scientific review with significant scientific results. All of them do not repeat those presented



for the occupation of the academic position "associate professor" (2020). The listed data show a high publication activity on the part of the candidate, his active commitment in scientific research and in academic activities. The fulfillment of the minimum national requirements art. 2b of the Bulgarian Law on the part of the applicant is indisputable. The provided data testify to exceeding the required number of points according to the various criteria. Impressive is the high number of points on criterion D, which actually describes the scientific impact of the author's publications. The applicant's cited author texts refer to a well-known colleague in the scientific community, whose research scholarly output is followed with interest and is often used as a reference to the experience of a proven researcher of high authority in the field of media, media environment and journalism. The candidate's participation in a variety of project activities is also proven by data, he is actively involved in national scientific or educational projects and supports their successful implementation.

The overall review of the candidate's profile, as well as the description of his academic, teaching and professional activities, as well as the fulfillment of the minimum national requirements, describe a completely relevant candidature for the needs of the announced competition of a colleague who regularly and actively participates in scientific, research and teaching activities, has a high authority in the academic community and is committed scientifically to an in-depth analysis of media communication, the interactions between media institutions and users, as well as to successful teaching of this media subject.

I unequivocally accept that, from this point of view, the candidate Associate Professor Simeon Vasilev not only fulfills, but also significantly exceeds the necessary requirements for occupying the academic position of "professor" according to the Regulations of SU "St. Kl. Ohridski" in the desired professional direction.

**II. Analysis of the candidate's scientific publications.** The general review of the candidate's scientific works and publications gives an idea of Assoc. Prof. Vasilev's significant interest in the problems of the media ecosystem, digital media transformation and its multidirectional impact on public communication, the study of social networks and their impact on the media environment and media content, and others scientific problems that are entirely within the scope of the announced competition. The significant contribution of the candidate in these areas is indisputable, as his regular publication activity is based on wide awareness, a rich bibliographic resource and critical reading of the studies of leading Bulgarian and foreign researchers and



their concepts. Particularly interesting to me is the philosophical approach to the study and explanation of the various aspects of media culture and media society. A positive addition to the approach is a good knowledge and description of "metaphilosophical realities" on the part of the candidate - language, cultural tradition, historical perspective, social system, specific mores, media environment, political atmosphere, paradigms of relevant schools in communication knowledge. I accept the self-assessment of Assoc. Prof. Vasilev that "the author's attempt to analyze not only the semantics of these concepts, but also to reach their conceptualization was successful" (14 Contributions). In the semiotic approach often used in our country to explain some communication phenomena, mainly in the field of marketing communications, but also in general, it seems that not much attention is paid to Yuri Lotman's method ("On the two models of communication in the system of culture") to sign systems (the semiotic theory of culture), in which it is precisely through the expressions of culture (cultural codes) and through the cultural meaning that interactions are carried out in the media sphere (John Hartley) and in the public sphere (Jürgen Habermas). "The media is a kind of indicator of cultural values, and their media logic is the driving force of processes in society and especially in politics," the candidate wrote (*Media ecosystem. Challenges of transformation*, p. 41). Following the logic of the exposition, journalism through the media is the one that, as a uniting of these two spheres, proclaims and "educates" in society concepts such as freedom, independence, human rights, democratic values ("There is no public sphere without media", *ibid.*, p. 21). "In every state the supreme power belongs to the whole people as a whole, the people are the true source of all legal authority, the sovereigns themselves are appointed to see to the proper administration of the laws to which they themselves are subject, their own authority rests only on the observance of the justice they are obliged to render even to the last of their subjects," wrote one of the pioneers of modern journalism, Jean Paul Marat, in "Gift to the Fatherland" in his newspaper "Friend of the People."

The main habilitation work with which the candidate participates in the competition is a monograph entitled *Media Ecosystem. Challenges of transformation., S., 2023*. It offers an original scientific interpretation of the essence of the media ecosystem and the transformation of modern media reality as a result of technological, social, economic and cultural factors. Without a doubt, this is an enrichment of the research approach to this important phenomenon for communication knowledge. Assoc. Prof. Vasilev's research presents a thoughtful and systematic method for the study of the media, which allows a broad scientific perspective



and expands communication knowledge. The candidate's scientific attention is directed to the processes of transformation in the media, among which the influence of digital technologies is the strongest. It changes not only the media, but also the social and cultural picture of the world. The world of digital (global) communication is becoming a huge user interface in which there is no hierarchy or technologically privileged place, i.e. in Friedman's words, the world is becoming "flat" (Norman Boltz's observation)<sup>1</sup>. Assoc. Prof. Vasilev describes the main concept of his work - the media ecosystem - as a set of technological innovation, social modernity and cultural phenomenon in the relationship between man and the media environment. Much of the research is devoted to a multifaceted analysis of the process of globalization and the role that digital media and the emergence of the network society play in it. The main research effort is fully relevant to the subject of the announced competition and is related to a deep interdisciplinary analysis, through which the media ecosystem is defined as a "universe" that is determined by many factors - classic and new media, computer and network, media environment of communication process and techno-evolution, journalistic principles and media standards in the social, political, moral, cultural and legal aspects of public relations. The interest of communication knowledge in describing and systematizing the media environment with concepts borrowed from other fields of science<sup>2</sup> is justified by a number of arguments, of which I can share here the one used by Assoc. Prof. Vasilev - the media ecosystem is a scientific discipline that legitimizes itself as a method by which the origin, change, functioning and general impact - political, social, moral, professional, technological - of all the elements that make up media functioning and influence are established. "The media ecosystem is both the result of pervasive implications and interconnectedness with other areas of social development. It can hardly be presented separately, because it is inextricably linked with the historical process as a whole" (p. 20). The monograph presents the media ecosystem also as an academic theory, because the research and includes the study of a wide number of academic fields - sociology, philosophy, ethics, history, media studies, media theory, political science and many others, with the analysis of which the author coped with ease and which fully correspond to the theme of the announced competition. The monograph is based on a very large number of examined authors and a wide volume of theoretical paradigms, among which the original research position

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<sup>1</sup> "From the point of view of the media, globalization is above all the ability of people to communicate and inform each other on a global scale", *The Media Ecosystem...*p. 16

<sup>2</sup> "Traditionally, ecological system or ecosystem refers to a biological system consisting of the natural physical environment and living organisms...", *The Media Ecosystem...*p. 21



of Associate Professor Simeon Vasilev is clearly traced. The conclusion of the monographic work brings under a common denominator the multifaceted but coherent research directions and refers to the structural change of the media ecosystem ("media ecosystem in evolution", p. 156) as a result of digital innovations in it and its increasing importance for public sphere. In his work, the author consistently demonstrates a very high erudition, which is evidenced by the numerous references to various authors on the subject and research originality through the various, sometimes unexpected, plots on the basis of which he arrives at his generalizations. The leading scientific idea of the monograph has an indisputable contribution due to the conceptual clarification of the concept of "media ecosystem", which the author successfully reached - "a set of technological innovation, social modernity and cultural phenomenon in the relationship between man and the media environment", I would add sociologically and an invariable part of the "life world" (that which has meaning and meaning) for modern man.

In the second monograph (which is not presented as the main habilitation thesis), with which Mr. Vasilev participated in the competition (In the spiral of sharing: Media content and social networks. S., 2022) the object of research is social networks, their importance for communication interaction and media culture as self-identification of the modern "media person" in the conditions of specific communication change. Journalism as a profession is the one which, according to Mr. Vasilev, has a major role in the creation and free dissemination of reliable information. Along with this, he notes doubts about the current validity of the classic explanatory model (agenda setting) of McCombs and Shaw regarding the role of journalism and the media due to the increasing importance and influence of social networks on public debates and also on the media themselves. The author uses the integral approach as a methodological basis in the study of the phenomenon of social networks, as well as their influence on the socio-cultural characteristics (in the broadest sense) of modern societies. The questions discussed by Assoc. Prof. Vasilev are extremely relevant - the one about the possible regulation of content in social networks and the ever-increasing influence of artificial intelligence<sup>3</sup>. The advent and adoption of Internet browsers fundamentally changed the use of the Internet and led to the platformization of the global communication process, and artificial intelligence promises to fundamentally change the way people access, expand and use knowledge, and this is again a communication process that should be investigated. The

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<sup>3</sup> In June 2023, the EP passed the Artificial Intelligence Legislation, which categorizes AI and its applications based on their potential risk.



monograph develops communication theory and outlines the possibilities and risks of deliberative communication in the spiral of sharing as a stimulus for citizen debate.

The articles and studies proposed for participation in the competition by Assoc. Prof. Vasilev are once again located as a topic and plot in the scientific field in which it was announced - media transformation, new media culture, media-audience relations, reflections on the development trends of the media ecosystem, communication in social networks (social networking service). "Social networks have changed the media environment so that it is increasingly controlled by the user, not just the content creator," notes the author at the Media Transformation studio. Social networks differ from other online forms of communication because of the high degree of interactivity, as well as because of the maximum possibility of sharing information between different communities or within their frameworks. In this way, users can use different media forms to communicate with each other – podcasts, audio and video content, images, streaming, etc. Communication on social networks is now the main source of information that society turns to, at least in most of the world. The quote from Paul Valéry that Walter Benjamin used in his famous article also applies to modern online communication networks: "we will be provided with images and a series of sounds appearing and disappearing with [a] simple movement, quite insignificant as a gesture"<sup>4</sup>.

Assoc. Prof. Vasilev investigates the question of whether social networks support or threaten the mediating role of journalism in society and whether they change professional roles in the field of public communication, especially the influence of this profession on the "collective inability to distinguish between facts and fiction". Indeed, the ever-expanding influence of social networks is changing the professional roles of reporters, PR specialists, advertisers and everyone involved in public communication. This is an important research and academic problem that is related to the media ecosystem, and Assoc. Prof. Vasilev's emphasis on it is well-argued. Effective distribution of images, texts, video content through online platforms requires insight into the nature of the latter and the context in which they are used. This task is not only set for himself, but also successfully solved by the candidate, as according to him, in the changed media environment, "the communication process will continue to be a creative process", while complying with the professional and ethical standards, especially in the face of

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<sup>4</sup> after V. Benjamin, "The work of art in the age of its technical reproducibility"





the open to all publications in the internet space, for which there is no fact-checking and no guarantee of the truth of the data at all.

The candidate is consistent in his scientific interests, and each subsequent publication deepens the analysis and proposed concepts, as well as strengthens the impression of skillful interpretation of the object of scientific interest. I consider such consistency and academic tenacity to be commendable and worthy of the position to which the candidate aspires, especially since in his research and research activity he exhibits, so to speak, scientific discipline and regularity of publications on the subject of the media ecosystem and its dynamics. If I can refer to the philosophy of St. Augustine and his dichotomy of "knowledge from curiosity" (which is superficial and of little value) and "substantial knowledge" (knowledge of things), then I certainly refer to scholarly efforts, publications, and achievements of Assoc. Vasilev to the second.

**III. Scientific contributions. Teaching activity and personal impressions.** The self-assessment of the scientific and publication activity carried out by the candidate is detailed and well-argued, and I confirm the points of contribution that he has indicated in the reference (14 Contributions). They can be arranged in several directions. First of all - the successful scientific efforts to define the content of the concept of "media ecosystem" and how it differs from "media ecology", "media environment", "media landscape", etc. Regardless of the fact that the concept is often used in scientific publications, it is understood somehow as self-evident and sometimes - with a conspiratorial flavor. It is itself occupied by another scientific field and its explanation in a media context is complicated. For the author, the media ecosystem is unthinkable outside of its interconnectedness and conditioning by socially significant systems, and it cannot be studied outside of a cultural and philosophical context. This brings theoretical significance to the concept and it acquires value as a starting point for future studies, including empirical ones in the field of media and their impact on society, for example the impact of media convergence. Like any ecosystem, the media ecosystem must be sustainable and balanced, as Mr. Vasilev proves with the idea of the joint functioning of traditional and new media, which mutually influence and compete without being in insurmountable antagonism (there is also such a concept - co-competition, from cooperation and competition).

Assoc. Prof. Vasilev original and scientifically novel thesis about the characteristic feature of the modern communication process - the spiral of sharing, an ever-increasing current media



trend with various manifestations affecting the structural change in the public sphere, is also a contribution. The colleague offers a reasoned model for this phenomenon, which consists in redefining and reconceptualizing many of the traditional parameters of the communication process through the prism of sharing and the logic of the network society.

Without exhausting the contributing moments in the publication array presented by the candidate, I would also like to highlight the analysis of the media digital transformation<sup>5</sup>, which leads to the conclusion of the need for a new theory to explain it and a new public, social and political culture to meet the challenges to the media ecosystem. A very strong impression is made by Assoc. Prof. Vasilev philosophical approach to each of the researched topics, his critical reflections on fundamental problems such as the media, technology, communication, morality, values, working with concepts, his knowledge of various theories, the logic of his arguments, with which he substantiates your own ideas. This distinguishes Associate Professor

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<sup>5</sup> In the words of the famous American journalist and publicist Andy Rooney, "Computers make many things easier, most of which should not be made easier."



Vasilev in our community of public communications researchers and gives him the authority of a thorough and consistent scientist in his pursuits.

Regarding the teaching and lecturing activities, I know Associate Professor Vasilev as a very qualified and erudite teacher in the field of media, media ecosystem, public relations, professional ethics, cultural-historical interrelationships and media content, etc. During the period of teaching activity, Associate Professor Simeon Vasilev has a total of 22 students who have successfully defended their theses - 11 scientific guides and defended bachelor's and master's theses. The active participation in graduation procedures is complemented by the preparation of over 20 reviews of diploma theses and participation in state commissions for diploma defenses, all facts that give an idea of an established and sought-after lecturer and pedagogy by students and colleagues, who has proven his skills on a reliable scientific mentor and teacher, necessary merits for the purposes of the academic position to which Assoc. Prof. Vasilev aspires. I cannot list all the attached evidence for the right choice of the candidate for the desired position, but at any cost I will mention that Assoc. Vasilev is a long-standing respected member of the Union of Bulgarian Journalists and is the winner of the "Golden Feather" of the SBJ for 2018 for research contributions to the field of contemporary journalism.

My personal impressions of the candidate as a colleague with whom I have worked and communicated in joint scientific and organizational engagements is that of a person with diverse interests, a conscientious colleague with very valuable moral qualities, a journalist and a man of his word with high authority in professional and academic circles. He is also a lecturer whose lecture hours on student testimonials are preferred because of the engaging way in which the candidate conducts his lectures and seminar classes.

**IV. Conclusion.** The review and analysis of the publication, research and teaching activities of Associate Professor Simeon Ignatov Vasilev, the only candidate in the competition, allows me to conclude that he is a candidate who has provided indisputable evidence of all the necessary requisites for occupying the desired academic position "professor". I believe that the presented evidence of the full implementation of the criteria for habilitation of the Law and the Rules for its application to the Sofia University by the candidate are indisputable both formally and in terms of content. **I unequivocally accept that the candidacy of Assoc. Prof. Simeon Ignatov Vasilev fully meets the requirements for the academic position "professor" in professional**



**direction 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Media Ecosystem), I  
vote positively and suggest the respected scientific jury to choose him for it.**

Date: 10.08. 2023.

Jury member: Prof. Nikolay Mihailov, PhD