

OPINION

on the submitted works for participation in the competition for the academic position of PROFESSOR in the professional field 3. 5. Public Communications and Information Sciences

Author of the opinion:

Prof. Dr. Margarita Yordanova Pesheva

Candidate:

Simeon Ignatov Vassilev

1. Summary data about the candidate (research, teaching and academic activity).

The research activity of the candidate Assoc. Prof. Simeon Vassilev can be presented by the following scientific facts:

- The candidate has submitted for participation in this competition 2 scientific monographs - an original monograph/ main habilitation thesis on the topic. Challenges of Transformation. Sofia, Sofia. Kliment Ohridski, 2023, 176 pp. , peer-reviewed; Original monograph, not submitted as a major habilitation thesis, In the Spiral of Sharing. Sofia, Sofia. Kliment Ohridski, 2022, 238 pp. , peer-reviewed; and a chapter of a collective scientific monograph entitled: The Greenhouse Effect of the Media (Eco)System. In: Rhetoric and communications in the 21st century: theories, methods, practices. Sofia: Institute of Rhetoric and Communications. 2021, pp. 42-68.

- The candidate is the author of seven other peer-reviewed scholarly monographs, including Leadership and Media; Dossiers from the Chaos of Time. Media Content and the Foreign Policy Process; The Shadow Decade of Elections, Leaders, Crises, and Wars; Version International Politics, among others.

In the section "Research Papers and Publications on the Theme of the Competition", the candidate has submitted for participation in this competition: 2 research studies and 11 research articles, which, in terms of content, are located in the following research areas: new media industries, new publics; the fourth (network) power: Manifestations, Phenomena and Trends; the difficult modernity of public media; infodemia and media content; media - between diplomacy and weaponry; media- between freedom and technology; the pandemic of (meta)media; the price of media content, etc.

The candidate is also the author of the publication: 'Challenges of Media Transformation' - electronic edition of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation [https:// bulgaria fes.de](https://bulgaria.fes.de).

The candidate has participated with papers in 20 scientific conferences on: media literacy: classical and new dimensions; communication and media of the XXI century: educational and professional challenges, etc.

The main habilitation work of the candidate is the monograph:

Media Ecosystem. Challenges of Transformation. Sofia. St. Sofia University Press. Kliment Ohridski, 2023.

The candidate's scientific monograph, with professional precision, presents a number of authors and media concepts, and at the same time offers original author's solutions regarding the complex media ecosystem. It contains seven main sections that address the creation of the new global world, upgraded and recreated through digital technologies and algorithms.

The candidate explores the current media context in detail, demonstrates the media connectivity of the networked society, and offers the reader a broad panorama of scholarly

schools, researchers, and different theories of new media and digital transformation in the contemporary media ecosystem.

Therefore, the topical nature and modern research approach of this scholarly monograph can be argued through the following facts:

- the choice of an original research problem that addresses milestones of the tremendous media change of traditional media, digital media, computer technologies and algorithms on a global scale.
- the use of advanced research techniques for scientific analysis that successfully combine scientific tools and indicators taken from different scientific fields-media studies, digital marketing, network society phenomenology, philosophy of techno-evolution, artificial intelligence foresight, etc.

The teaching activity of the candidate Assoc. Prof. Dr. Simeon Vassilev has the following factual values:

-The candidate is a titular lecturer in Communication Management, where he teaches the following courses: Media Ecosystem; Cultural-Historical Interrelations and Media Content; Leadership in Europe, etc. Communication Skills; World Media; Media Convergence, etc. For the academic year 2022/2023, the candidate has 496 hours of teaching employment.

- The candidate is a speaker in an online seminar entitled: Communications in a Pandemic. Infodemic, organized for members of the German-Bulgarian Chamber of Industry and Commerce;

- The candidate participated as a lecturer in several projects of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung: a training program entitled: Forum for Social Democracy; Workshop/Training on Media Literacy in the Age of Fake News, etc. ;

- The candidate is a lecturer in training courses of the Diplomatic Institute on the formation of public attitudes in the EU member states, as well as in courses of the Institute for Public Policy, where he directs the Media and Communications programme;

- Candidate is a scientific supervisor of 3 PhD students, 9 theses of students of different specialisations, he participated in the defence of 22 theses of students of BA and MA. The candidate has more than 20 thesis reviews and numerous participations in thesis defenses.

- The candidate has expert activity and participation in examination committees for the defense of master theses. He is the director of a publishing program called The World Gambit, and he is the director of the Media and Communications Program at the Institute for Public Policy. He is an advisor to the Chair of the Board of Rectors in Public Communications and the Coordinator of Media Policy at St. John's University. He is also the Coordinator of the Media and Public Relations Committee at the University of St. Kliment Ohridski. He is also a consultant to the project on Building and Developing a European Student Network, and an advisor on foreign policy issues to the President of the 39th National Assembly.

The academic activity of the candidate Assoc. Prof. Dr. Simeon Vassilev can be presented by the following facts:

- He is member of the General Assembly of the FJMC of the University of Saint Petersburg. He is a member of the General Assembly of the University of St. Kliment Ohridski;
- Simeon Vassilev is a member of the Union of Bulgarian Journalists SBJ;

- Simeon Vassilev is a member of the editorial board of the Bulgarian Journal of Rhetoric and Communications;
- Simeon Vassilev is a member of the International Forum East-West, Switzerland.

2. Characteristics of the scientific and applied production of the candidate Assoc. Prof. Simeon Vassilev.

The presented works by the candidate fully meet the scientific requirements, therefore they can be accepted for evaluation in this competition. Scientific arguments:

- The 2 scientific monographs submitted by the candidate for participation in this competition fully cover the announced topic of the competition in the field of media studies:

- The first scientific monograph, which is the main habilitation work, is entitled: *Media Ecosystem. Challenges of Transformation*. Sofia. Mediascience in the Media, University of Sofia, Sofia. Kliment Ohridski, 2023, peer-reviewed;

As a major habilitation thesis, the monograph explores the media connectivity of the network society. It offers the reader a broad panorama of scholarly schools, researchers and different theories of new media and digital transformation in the contemporary media ecosystem. Through numerous media facts and professional arguments, the author examines the phenomenology and physiognomy, philosophy and foresight of the enormous media change in the world of traditional media, digital media, computer technology, algorithms globally. This scholarly monograph impresses not only for the high erudition and professional competence of its author, but also for his scientific courage to present to the enlightened reader the advantages and dangers facing us in the contemporary ecosystem in which traditional and new media are in a very strong competitive clash. The monograph also raises the controversial topic of the rapid development of the Chat GPT-4 algorithm, which is poised to resolve this media duel in its favor, and (perhaps) completely displace human civilization from its leading role in the development of the world. This scholarly monograph offers great added value to a series of Bulgarian studies in the field of digital communications and the new network society. It thoroughly analyses the most important advantages and dangers facing the media ecosystem today, as well as its major digital transformations and challenges.

The scholarly analysis is carried out with respectable scholarly competence - the author with professional ease and excellent journalistic language traces numerous theoretical schools, concepts and authors- across a wide time span, and far beyond the field of media analytics and new digital practices. Simeon Vassilev shares with the reader research theses from many scientific fields: literary studies and semiotics of language, social psychology and linguistics, sociology and media audience studies, digital marketing and media fusion, social networks, PR and advertising, etc.

This panoramic research view, gives the research greater scientific weight, gives the reader a sense of professional accomplishment and journalistic colour. The monograph is saturated with numerous examples from the fields of journalism, digital media, PR and advertising. This greatly enhances its scholarly value, making it very useful for a wide range of readers. It is of interest to media researchers and students, digital media experts, researchers in the fields of literary studies, media sociology and semiotics, media marketing, new digital professions, AI research, etc.

- In the *Spiral of Sharing*. Sofia. Social Media in Media, Sofia. Kliment Ohridski, 2022, peer-reviewed.

This is the first scientific monograph in the country that comprehensively analyzes sharing in social networks - as phenomenology, philosophy and prognostics. It comprehensively examines the media content that unfolds in the spiral of sharing, which is the new mediamorphosis of global digital communication of the contemporary consumer.

The candidate offers his classification of social media and social networks, arguing for their specificity. According to him: social media is a platform for broadcasting information, while social networks are a platform for communication between users. This classification, practically separates the technology- from the social communication opportunities that each social network creates.

The candidate consistently discusses sharing - in the context of the media medium- its audience- new algorithms- the network's fourth estate. His media knowledge is also thickened with a rich philosophical background that offers an original scholarly reading of the now traditional issues related to social networks.

The candidate's thesis that social networks today are embedded in a spiral of sharing, in an online environment of social networks that determine where, what and how to watch, listen and read, is well founded. Undoubtedly, the spiral of sharing creates the best possible conditions for social dialogue, one that traditional media cannot provide. The author places the term social network before the invention of the Internet. It is also found in sociology, psychology, and ethnology, and is generally used to describe the network of relationships between individuals in a group.

The candidate believes that the common existence of traditional and new media is already a fact. It is a separate question as to what proportion of the audience is spilling over from traditional media to social media, giving credit to both. It, rightly, offers no clear-cut answer to the new networked volcano of sharing that we all face with eyes wide shut. Nor does it bypass the deployment of sharing in the digital trap of algorithms. It is with the help of AI, he says, that editors detect fake news, analyse texts and images, and can predict audience attitudes.

- The candidate's chapter on The Greenhouse Effect of the Media (Eco)System is a section in the collective scientific monograph Rhetoric and Communication in the 21st Century: Theories, Methods, Practices. Sofia: Institute of Rhetoric and Communication, 2021. This section is distinguished by high professional competence of the candidate, conceptuality of the scientific analysis and excellently formulated scientific theses.

The presented scientific works of the candidate Assoc. Prof. Dr. Simeon Vassilev, by quantitative and qualitative indicators, receive an excellent evaluation. Scientific arguments for this evaluation:

- The candidate has a total of 783 points in all indicators in fulfilling the minimum national requirements under Article 2 of the RASRDA;

- The candidate, with high professional competence, addresses current issues of the challenges of transformation of the media ecosystem, media content and social networks in a total of 9 scientific monographs, 2 scientific studies and 11 scientific articles in peer-reviewed journals. He has contributed with papers and scientific presentations in 20 scientific conferences.

3. Main contributions in scientific, applied and teaching activities of the candidate Assoc. Prof. Dr. Simeon Vassilev:

The scientific activity of the candidate develops new research fields and scientific problems that justify a new theory, thesis and hypothesis related to the topic of this competition:

- The candidate, with numerous professional arguments, addresses the enormous media change in the world of traditional media, digital media, computer technology, algorithms on a global scale. He presents the advantages and disadvantages of digital transformation and the media paradigm of the networked audience.
- The candidate accurately defines the contemporary media ecosystem and its ability to simultaneously create new online narratives but also new online readers.
- The candidate comprehensively presents the techno-evolution and freedom of speech that are a natural guarantee of any media democracy. He discusses to what extent the network society, by producing fake news on a massive scale, which is now successfully extended by algorithms, does not threaten freedom of speech and the reader's right to be informed and educated rather than misled;
- The candidate, with scholarly precision, explores each of the new media possibilities associated with the near media future. In it, human beings and algorithms will (presumably) live together and in harmony, or else enter into a death grip for power and global supremacy.

The candidate Assoc. Prof. Simeon Vassilev proves with new means essential aspects of already existing theories and hypotheses, in accordance with the theme of the competition:

- The candidate professionally defines the leading messages of techno-evolution related to global culture and contemporary online civilization;
- The candidate, with professional competence, addresses the advantages and dangers that the contemporary ecosystem faces for each media user, in which traditional and new media are in a strong competitive clash;
- The candidate raises the very topical issue of the rapid development of the Chat GPT-4 algorithm, which is poised to decide this media duel in its favour, and (perhaps) universally displace human civilisation from its leading role in the development of the world.

The scientific and applied work of the candidate Assoc. Prof. Simeon Vassilev develops new research fields and scientific problems that are directly related to the topic of this competition:

- A new classification of social media and social networks has been created, which very accurately substantiates their specificity. Social media are seen as platforms that allow users to communicate with each other, and to connect online, while social networks, weblogs, microblogs, wikis and photo and video platforms are seen as typical representatives of social media. This classification, de facto, distinguishes the technology-from the social communication opportunities that each social network creates;
- Multiple scholarly arguments justify the cardinal change in the profile of the media audience-its media physiognomy, which is radically different today. An in-depth analysis of the networked audience, which has been the true engine of human communication for millennia, is provided;

- Freedom of speech is analyzed in the context of digital transformations and social networks. This freedom is mandated by citizens and shapes public opinion, which practically creates the power of journalism. According to the candidate, the media transformation puts this power to the test, because in today's conditions of communication on social networks, politics and public life in general are under the constant scrutiny of journalists, but also of citizens. Which means that at any moment, citizens can take away the power of journalism as a mediator, but also as a reference point in the vast flow of information about the world around us;

- A detailed argument is offered for the place and role of AI in contemporary networked society. A broad discussion framework is formulated in which the candidate addresses several key issues: can AI create media content that is socially relevant and protected from creating a false reality; Who, how and where will put boundaries on public information created by a machine; Will humans maintain their superiority in mass communication or will we witness a competition that will lead to the coexistence of man and machine in the creation of media content? The candidate raises with scientific acuteness this truly fundamental issue that threatens to soon collapse human civilization as we have known it for millennia. The candidate, Assoc. Prof. Simeon Vassilev, has achieved scientific, scholarly, applied and educational impact in his research and teaching, in line with the theme of this competition:

- The candidate has authored contributions to 5 research and applied projects. He is responsible for research and development projects:
- Creating a methodology for establishing media pluralism in news and current affairs programs with political and economic themes;
- Member of the research team of the project entitled: National Educational Television at the Center of Excellence. Heritage. BG;
- The New World Order and the place of Bulgaria and the EU in it;
- Reviewer of two monographs on the project RHEFINE -Retic for Innovative Education,Erasmus;
- Member of the scientific team of the project entitled: Training of central administration officials under the Good Governance Operational Programme,Diplomatic Institute of the Minister of Foreign Affairs;
- Participation in the project Student Practices as an academic mentor in practical training in a real working environment, Prof. field 3. 5. Public Communications and Information Sciences;
- Participation in the Operational Programme Good Governance, co-financed by the European Union through the European Social Fund as a lecturer in the project "Conducting specialized training for civil servants";
- Participation as a lecturer in projects of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and the Hans Seidel Foundation.

The candidate Assoc. Prof. Dr. Simeon Vassilev has made contributions to the introduction of methods, approaches, theoretical models that directly relate to the topic of this competition:

- Social Democracy Forum Training Program, Panel;
- Media and Social Democracy- Lecture Mediation of Politics. Social

interaction in the digital world;

- Media Literacy in the Era of Fake News; Workshop/Training; Lecture "Approaches to Working with Media;
- Participation as a lecturer in the training programs of the Institute for Public Policy aimed at enhancing the capacity and competencies of the public administration of the Republic of Bulgaria.

The candidate Assoc. Prof. Dr. Simeon Vassilev has made the following significant contributions to science and practice, in line with the theme of this competition:

- Media Ecosystem. Challenges of Transformation. Sofia. Kliment Ohridski, 2023, peer-reviewed;
- Media Content and Social Networks. Sofia. St. Klimichik Publishing House, Sofia. Kliment Ohridski, 2022, peer-reviewed;
- The Greenhouse Effect of the Media (Eco)System. In: Rhetoric and Communications in the 21st Century: Theories, Methods, Practices. 2021;
- Substantial part of the candidate's scientific contributions have been made in a series of his journalistic books, as well as in hundreds of publications in the press, 7 documentaries produced by BNT;
 - The candidate has also an active publishing activity, he is the publisher of 9 journalistic and scientific studies related to international journalism, media and politics;
 - The candidate has made original contributions to the analysis and illumination of the media ecosystem as a set of technological innovations, social modernity and cultural phenomenon that find expression in the relationship between humans and the media environment;
 - The candidate also demonstrates significant contributions to science and practice through citations of his/her research in peer-reviewed scholarly works - 18 citations (180 points) in peer-reviewed monographs and scholarly volumes; 11 citations (5 points) in non-peer-reviewed scholarly journals.
 - The candidate has made a significant contribution to the development of television news journalism. In the last 20 years he has held the following management positions: Programme Director of Channel 1 at BNT; Information Director at BNT, BNT correspondent in Bonn and Berlin; News Director at TV Evropa; Information Director at BBT TV; Head of External Communications at the National Palace of Culture, NPC; founder of the Facts news agency;
- Candidate has several specializations- in Journalism in Air Force; in German Studies at Martin Luther University, Germany, etc. .
- The candidate, for his research and journalistic work, has won numerous awards:
 - Jubilee sign 100 years of St. 100th anniversary of the Jubilee of St. Kliment Ohridski University;
 - Medal of Honour from Pope John-Paul II for media coverage of his visit to Bulgaria;
 - Golden Pen of the UBJ for research contribution in the field of journalism;
 - UBJ plaque for contribution to the development of political analysis and international commentary in the Bulgarian media and for success in publishing.

4. Notes and recommendations.

The presented scientific and applied scientific production of the candidate Assoc. Prof. Dr. Simeon Vassilev fully meets the necessary scientific requirements for participation in the competition for the academic position of Professor in the Department of Communication and Audiovisual Production of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication at Sofia

University. He has the required qualifications for the degree in Mass Media and Mass Communication. It meets the necessary requirements for volume, diversity and scientific quality.

5. Conclusion.

The comprehensive review of the research, teaching and academic activities of the candidate Assoc. Prof. Simeon Ignatov Vassilev, PhD, gives me the necessary scientific grounds for a fully positive assessment of his high professional qualities, which meet the requirements for the academic position of Professor.

Scientific reasons:

- Candidate Simeon Vassilev has a large volume, and respectable, in terms of professional quality, scientific production, which causes scientific respect. His research is based on national and international sources, which demonstrate his professional competence, which allows him to propose original scientific theses and definitions, arguing his original scientific predictions for the development of contemporary journalistic theory in the era of social networks and artificial intelligence. The candidate's scholarly output is of very high quality, as demonstrated by the citations of his research in university catalogues at home and abroad;

- Candidate Simeon Vassilev participates in the scientific teams of a number of national and applied research projects, which allows him to verify and explore in practice some of the author's theoretical formulations in the field of media and journalism;

- Candidate Simeon Vassilev has an active teaching career- he teaches a number of courses that are entirely within the theme of this competition such as: Media Ecosystem; Cultural-Historical Interconnections and Media Content; Leadership in Europe; Communication Skills; Global Media; Media Convergence, etc. ;

- Candidate Simeon Vassilev actively works with graduates of the Bachelor and Master programs, he participates in a number of thesis defenses and other educational initiatives at the FJMC of Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski.

- Candidate Simeon Vassilev has had a long and highly successful career as a journalist, executive and media researcher. He has an excellent career as a correspondent of BNT in Bonn and Berlin, has held high management positions in the media, has a long and active work as a journalist and publicist, is the author of many films, has a serious publishing activity. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Simeon Vassilev is a well-established and indeed undisputed figure in the field of journalism, media studies and university practices in Journalism education in the country.

Proceeding from the high professional quality of the research of the candidate Assoc. Prof. Dr. Simeon Vassilev, from his rich and varied journalistic and teaching activities, from his numerous contributions to a number of research and applied projects, from his participation with papers in national and international scientific forums, from his membership in scientific and professional organizations, I recommend with full conviction to the esteemed members of the scientific jury to award the academic position of Professor to Simeon Ignatov Vassilev, who is a sole participant in this competition.

Sofia, August 2023

Author of the opinion:

Prof. Dr. Margarita Pesheva

