

R E V I E W

Regarding: Competition for awarding the academic position of ‘Professor’ in the Professional Field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology, and Sciences about Culture, as announced by the Official Gazette, № 65/ 16. 08. 2019.

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1. Assessment of the candidates’ eligibility

The Act for the *Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria* (art. 29) provisions strict requirements for the admission of a candidate to the selection procedure for the position of “professor”. A sole candidate takes part in the competition. This is the associate professor Vesselin Ivanov Tepavicharov – lecturer in the Department of Ethnology at the University of Sofia. Given his academic credentials, relevant are the following legal requirements: holding a PhD in the field, holding the academic position of “Associate Professor” at the same university for at least two academic years; presenting a monograph which has not been used for achieving of academic degrees or taking other academic positions; presenting other published papers; covering the so-called “minimal national requirements” (art. 26, par. 2, 3 and 5), as well as lack of any legal proofs for plagiarism. The candidature of Prof. Tepavicharov meets all these requirements and exceeds considerably these minimal requirements. For instance, he has occupied the academic position of “Associate Professor” of Ethnology since 2001, holds his Ph.D. since 1989, and his professorial Doctor Habil since 2016.

2. Teaching, pedagogical, scholar, and applied activities of the candidate

Prof. Tepavicharov has been teaching in the Faculty of History at the Sofia University for 38 years now. At present, he is lecturing *Ethnology* (Bachelor's Degree Programmes of History, History and Philosophy, and Archives and Document Studies), *Non-European Ethnology* and *Anthropology of Socialism* (Bachelor's Degree Programme of Ethnology), *Ethnology and Politics* (Bachelor's Degree Programme of Past and Present of Southeast Europe), *Ethnological models in Cultural Anthropology, National Ideologies and National*

Security on the Balkans, National Security in Socialist Bulgaria, and National Peace-making and State Politics (all of them in the Master's Degree Programme of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology). The number of his lecturing hours amounts to 780 which twice as much as what is necessary to occupy the academic position of “Professor”. These intensive lecturing activities are complemented by the supervision of four Ph.D. holders.

Assoc. Prof. Tepavicharov has published three monographs, a monograph together with another author, twelve studies one of which in English, twenty-five academic papers, six of which are published in peer-reviewed journals and four of them are in English. He has presented forty-two papers at twenty international and eighteen national conferences. Fifteen of his publications have been quoted in academic publications.

This considerable academic production is based on serious research work. Assoc. Professor Tepavicharov has directed six national research projects, two research projects with the participation of entire research sections from the university, and a research module of a huge applied project in which more than seventy faculties have taken part. Besides, he participated in the research team of two other research projects. All these are indicative of research and pedagogical potential which not only meets the recently adopted minimal national requirements for the academic positions but exceeds considerably the requirements from the group G, D, and E.

Prof. Tepavicharov applies for the academic position of “professor” with nineteen academic publications: a monograph (*Nostalgia for the Socialism in Bulgaria: An Ethnological Research*, Sofia University Press, 2019), three papers published in peer-reviewed journals, six papers published in nonrefereed journals or edited volumes, and nine studies published in nonrefereed or edited volumes.

4. Assessment of the Applicant’s Scholarly Achievements

I will begin with a brief analytical review of the articles and studies that support Assoc. Prof. Tepavicharov's application and then I will assess the contributing moments in his habilitation work. The first thing which strikes most is the complete academic focus of Assoc. Prof. Tepavicharov on the thematic fields of his teaching activity.

Most of the papers are grouped around the issues to which his rehabilitation work is devoted. These publications highlight some politically acute issues such as: the pernicious

influence on the Bulgarian democratic process of the power stereotypes developed during the time of T. Zhivkov; the control of the post-communist elites over the democratization in Bulgaria after 1989, as well as some negative aspects of the modernization of Bulgarian society during the years of totalitarian socialism. As a result of his field research, the author formulates a new version of the concept of "political subcultural communities" and develops the new concept "level of identity intensity" that refines the interpretation of identities and their political significance.

The next group of articles treat topics which exceed the problematic circle of his habilitation work and outlines additional research areas: the political subculture of the Bulgarian Turks and their fear of repeating the Revival process from 1985-1989; the remains of the Bulgarian ethnic presence in South Strandzha; the cultural aspects of the refugee crisis in Bulgaria after 2011; and the ways leading to a modern mythology.

Two of the articles raise general problems for the field of political anthropology, such as variations in theories that explain the state's origin or the ways of imposing the straight-line evolutionary theory of the American anthropologist Louis Henry Morgan in Bulgarian medieval studies.

The wide scope of the ethnological work of Assoc. Prof. Tepavicharov also includes an article with pedagogical orientation, substantiating the usefulness of the tools of ethnology and ethnopsychology in the Bulgarian high school. Another article of that kind explores one of the topical problems of hermeneutical anthropology, namely, how field research affects both the people who have carried it out and those who have been investigated.

The application of Assoc. Prof. Tepavicharov is centered on his monumental monographic work '*Nostalgia for Socialism in Bulgaria*'. Having published in 2016 a monograph on the political community of the "Sedesars" (the adherents of the Union of Democratic Forces), now Assoc. Prof. Tepavicharov analyses their main opponents - those who initially opposed the democratic changes and today are experiencing nostalgia for the socialist regime in Bulgaria. With these two works, Assoc. Prof. Tepavicharov fills a huge gap in the scientific literature on the Bulgarian transition, left by both politicians who focus on prominent figures of the transition with their decisions and actions and by sociological agencies that tend to bypass the deep political orientations and processes in transition Bulgaria at the expense of the public image and rating of those in authority. This unique "bottom-up" view of the major

political dilemma in Bulgaria after the fall of the Iron Curtain is a unique academic contribution by Assoc. Prof. Tepavicharov, whose significance and scale cannot be qualified other than as “historical”.

Next, the nostalgia for socialism on a national scale is examined for the first time. This problem is only affected by the study of sentiments among expatriates after the so-called ‘Revival Process’. The research value of nostalgia does not limit to the role of an item that fills a gap in the Bulgarian transition’s classifier. Its importance is determined by the scale of nostalgia for socialism and its serious political implications.

From the very beginning, the attention of Assoc. Prof. Tepavicharov has been attracted by the duality in many nostalgic attitudes toward socialism: they confidently acknowledge the creative potential of the socialist period and equally confidently state that this social system will not return. Faced with this contradictory and mythologized attitude towards the near past, the author demonstrates his genuine objectivity and does not omit that some rational arguments in favour of the creative potential of socialism may exist. All these facts evidence that his study does not pursue any career goals but represents a serious attempt to rationalize the explanation of the Bulgarian transition by taking it out of the realm of mythological and ideological.

Assoc. Prof. Tepavicharov’s large-scale research task was accomplished by applying an appropriate research methodology. The basic information is gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews, supported by sociological inquiries and constant participatory observation. Indicative of the study’s scale is also its sample. The multidimensional selection of nests of respondents makes the survey representative for the country. All key characteristics of the settlements in which these nests are located have been taken in consideration: town or village, large or small town, mountainous or lowland settlements, prosperous settlements or settlements with dying functions, settlements with different ethnic and religious profiles, and settlements dominated by BSP supporters or opponents. Representativeness criteria were also applied on individual levels. The total number of the interviewed is 1063 people selected by gender, age, education, ethnic and religious background, profession, party orientation, and attitude towards totalitarian socialism. Each person was interviewed 1 to 4 times and the interviews were repeated over significant periods to record the changes in their attitudes. For example, 707 respondents were interviewed for more than 10 years. All the empirical information has been gathered for 26 years - an unusually long period not only for the standards of modern research.

The analysis of the ethnological data is preceded by a concise review of memory theories as a preliminary step toward the understanding of nostalgia. I will distinguish some key points of these theories: memories form an identity (Bergson); memory throws away what is considered useless (Grimaldi); by processing the past facts memory defines strategies for the future, and hence its manipulation mobilizes collective memory (Cando); individual memory grows from group memory (Harbwaix); the individual independently makes choices between different collective memories (Israel) and in this sense exhibits subjectivism (Baddelay); memory is a function of forgetting (Asman); memories exercise power (Mizov); places of memory, with their real and symbolic dimensions, have special significance for man and society (Nora), and the cultural baggage of the individual, his way of experiencing and presenting a "slice" of time leads to the coexistence of different modes of historicity (Artog).

Memory concepts open the door to understanding nostalgia. Lowenthal explains the emergence of a "misleading mythology" with a lack of knowledge in memory. Rosenblum views nostalgia as a reaction in the context of radical changes. Dray considers nostalgia as a lesson from the past, which, according to Davis, is generationally determined. Cohen defines nostalgia as "a metaphor for something that has passed and is dead, but continues to exist as a symbol in people's memory."

The theoretical framework of the study is complemented by an analysis of the concept of 'generation'. In defining it, Assoc. Prof. Tepavicharov uses not only time limits but also applies one qualitative indicator: the presence of similarity in political orientations about everyday life and the past. The pieces of time from 1934 to the beginning of the Second World War and from the beginning of this war to the beginning of the communist transformations in Bulgaria is used as a test for belonging to a generation. It is the memories and the mythmaking of "the time of Tsar Boris" that becomes the clear distinguishing criterion of the so-called "brigade generation."

The author finds empirically that the memory of the brigade generation of "fascist times" is dominated by daily events and facts and not by the Great War narrative. The most memorable are the memories of "lost childhood", "extreme poverty" and "excessive work", which are opposed to the achieved comfort of everyday life under socialism. It is this socialist standard of living which has become a criterion for the assessment of both the "fascist times" and the post-1989 changes.

The author explores the nostalgia for socialism against the backdrop of the different versions of the post-1989 transition offered by historians, economists, sociologists, and supporters of democratization. The people from the "brigade generation" refer selectively to these versions, influenced by the notions formed during the time of socialism and the "taming" of its problems. This has found expression in several clichéd phrases: "everyone had a job", "everything was cheap", "there was peace and security, although there was no freedom," "life was good," "Russia is our big brother." Against this backdrop, the ruling Communist Party acquires the halo of a sacred organization that must be kept clean and purified by everything that tarnishes it.

Another contribution to the study is the analysis of the nostalgia of the people born and educated in socialism. This generation differs from the "brigadier" with its higher educational status, the higher percentage of people living in the city and greater involvement in the "non-productive" spheres, which also entails differences in their daily culture and lifestyle, and determines their more liberal attitudes towards Western influence, etc. This category consists of the following subgroups: experiencing the electoral impact of the BSP; expecting a Saviour to rectify the situation; standing in the "political province" but have fixed their negative views on current political life in communist times; sharing a nationalist orientation, predominantly represented by former Interior Ministry and National Defence Ministry officials who long for a "healthy hand".

The dissection of the groups of nostalgics, based on generational, value and worldview criteria, is one of the greatest contributions of this monograph, which situates the chaos of the transition into a clear coordinate system.

This study concludes with the presentation of the heaviest consequences of the nostalgia: resistance to privatization, corruption, the preservation of deformation in work habits inherited from socialism, and the perseverance of the demographic crisis provoked by the early socialist transformation of society. By all these means, nostalgia exerts an integral destructive influence on the democratic process and undermines its rationality.

5. Questions and Recommendations

Given that the deadly (sometimes literally) criticism of the cult of Stalin's personality remains an implicit position of the BCP until the fall of the Iron Curtain, the question arises of

how the nostalgia for Stalin-era socialism coexists with the nostalgia for the post-Stalin socialism which destroyed every remnant of Stalin's legacy? I would be glad to hear the opinion of Assoc. Prof. Tepavicharov on this issue in the discussion and especially in an article devoted to it.

Large-scale research often makes the reader feel co-authored with the author. Under the influence of this effect, I allow myself the following suggestion. As Assoc. Prof. Tepavicharov has explored the two major political communities that determine the transition in Bulgaria, it seems reasonable to take another step: to examine the factors and mechanisms that drive people with similar material interests and social status, to take antagonistic political positions. This would not be a mechanical unification of the last two monographs by Assoc. Prof. Tepavicharov, but a thorough exploration of the splitting of a nation. This, I think, would be of great importance, both for the "domestication" of our memory of the socialist past and for the understanding of nature, purposes, and mechanisms of the modern hybrid war.

6. Conclusion

Assoc. Prof. Tepavicharov's writings extend far beyond the scope of the usual academic criteria. They are part of the real history of modern Bulgaria because they do not allow the dreams, illusions, and disappointments of ordinary people who carry on their shoulders and suffer the transition to sink into oblivion. These writings do not allow the idea of this period to be determined solely by the memories of politicians and experts from that time, with their subjectivity and vanity that such profound social change can engender. These works draw an indestructible bridge between the real life of people and their academic image - a bridge that Professor Tepavicharov has consistently built throughout his academic career. All of the above gives me the necessary reasons to support wholeheartedly the candidacy of Assoc. Prof. Veselin Tepavicharov for the highest academic position of "Professor".

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