



OPINION¹

on the submitted works for participation in a competition for the academic position of ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR / PROFESSOR in professional field 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (International Journalism) , announced by Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” in SJ, issue 99/20.11.2020

Reviewer: Assoc. Prof. Ivo Indzhov, PhD

Candidate (s): Chief Assist. Prof. Ralitsa Kovacheva, PhD

I. Evaluation of the scientific and practical results and contributions of the scientific and educational production submitted for participation in the competition

Dr. Ralitsa Kovacheva, Chief Assistant at FJMC at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, is one of the few established researchers in the field of international journalism in Bulgaria, which is almost a white spot in the Bulgarian media studies. Characteristic of her scientific work is the combination of research distance with an accurate journalistic view of the researched problems as a result of her long-term practice as a journalist and media manager.

Dr. Kovacheva participates in the competition with 19 scientific publications and focused on 13 of them published in the last few years. Among them are two monographs and two book chapters, one of which is part of a collection published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 13 author's citations are presented. An advantage of the candidacy are the four citations of media publications in the system of Web of Science Clarivate Analytics, as well as the six in Scopus ELSEVIER. An evidence of serious scientific and applied activity is also attached, the most current of which is the participation in a research project on the significant problems with the public character of the public media in Bulgaria.

Dr. Kovacheva is the author of scientific papers on various aspects of international journalism and, as a rule, focuses her research interest also on the Bulgarian dimensions of the studied problems. In the monograph (habilitation thesis) "News from the world. On the meaning and benefits of international journalism "(Appendix 16/1), she strongly advocates the rehabilitation of the importance of “foreign” news, as opposed to the established practice in journalistic media.

As she rightly points out, the formal division of news only on the basis of "origin" (domestic or international) and the definition of "domestic" news as more important than "international" due to nationality and physical proximity to the audience, lead to distortions both in the news agenda and in their framing, which prevents the real significance of the events from being assessed and presented to the audience. Not to mention that with the development of globalization and new technologies, our notions of "near" and "far" have changed dramatically "(p. 7).

The monograph also analyzes the need to adapt established notions, concepts and theories of international journalism and international news ("Halin's spheres", agenda-setting, information values, ethnocentrism, etc.).

¹ Note: Recommended volume of the opinion - 2-3 standard pages.



The study contains the following major scientific contributions:

- highlighting the five leading factors, according to the author, for the current state of international journalism: post-truth, political polarization, identity politics, populism and propaganda.
- emphasis on the multifaceted impact of social media on media organizations and journalism, incl. through the key quality of the former as a mediator between the media and the public.
- a successful attempt to systematize the Russian and pro-Russian propaganda in Bulgaria, taking into account its multivariate and multilevel nature. The topic is covered also in other publications of the author. The book "The Mediated Dimension of Foreign Policy" (co-authored with Maria Neykova, Appendix 16/3) analyzes the main theses of pro-Russian propaganda in Bulgaria, articulated by political actors on television, on the basis of empirical data.

Dr. Kovacheva is perhaps the only representative of media studies and social sciences in Bulgaria in general who thoroughly studies the problem of European media publicity (working with the established Anglo-Saxon term "European public sphere"). Having a vital European publicity is an indispensable condition for the survival and further democratization of the EU. Part of the scientific discourse is the debate over whether this publicity should be nationally determined - similar to national public spheres with the critical and control potential of the media, or, as is modern, to look for the contours of a pan-European public sphere, but not on the model "BBC or ARD for the whole of Europe", but as separate interconnected islands of European publicity in today's globalized and networked world.

Ralitsa Kovacheva explores various aspects of the topic of Europeanization / peripheralization of public spheres and specifically the Bulgarian case in publications such as: "Center and periphery of Europeanized public spheres" (monograph based on the author's doctoral dissertation, Annex 16/2), "Europeanization and peripheralisation of Bulgarian public sphere" (Annex 16/4), "Center and periphery of the Europeanized public spheres" (Annex 16/9), "Brexit - could we have foreseen it" (Annex 16/10).

In the monograph the issues are analyzed in the paradigm of the Europeanized national public spheres, which are considered as a network in which their real manifestations are leading. The study addresses the question of how the process of differentiated integration in the EU affects the Europeanization of national public spheres (based on a rich theoretical overview within the union, a "discursive core", "discursive semi-periphery" and "discursive" periphery are distinguished). Based on an independent empirical study (see below), Bulgaria's affiliation to the so-called discursive periphery is argued - a state that corresponds to the numerous problems in the process of Bulgaria's European integration.

The author considers the process of peripheralization as the opposite of the process of Europeanization on indicators such as: "poor visibility of European topics (as a quantity, but mostly as a quality of information); low level of representation on the European agenda...; high level of representation of national institutional speakers... European representatives are presented unequally compared to national ones. Civic actors are almost non-existent; low level of internal pluralism (representation of many different perspectives, opinions, positions, including editorial in the individual media), etc. (p. 240).

Other scientific contributions in the monograph include the large-scale empirical research (content analysis): 3356 information units from eight media - four Bulgarian and four British - were registered and analyzed, as well as the highlighting based on specific data of bad media practices, which distort media coverage and apply not only to European issues.



II. Notes and recommendations

In view of the highlights in Ms. Kovacheva's research and creative pursuits, I would suggest that she consider "European" news as "domestic". Bulgaria is a member of the EU, and much of the legislation of the member states is forged in Brussels. In fact, this is a serious challenge for Bulgarian journalism - if it changes its chip and begins to perceive what is happening in European institutions also as a national policy, it will significantly increase the likelihood of complex and often incomprehensible European issues to be "translated" successfully into the native audience.

III. Conclusion

In view of the solid academic developments of Dr. Ralitsa Kovacheva, her serious scientific contributions, her desire to explore territories unknown to Bulgarian media studies and journalism, as well as her undeniable skills to bridge the gap between theory and practice, I strongly suggest to the esteemed jury to vote for the academic position of "associate professor".

Jury member: Assoc. Prof. Ivo Indzhov, PhD

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