



## OPINION

on the submitted works for participation in a competition for the academic position of ASSOCIATE 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. Professor Dr. Maria Popova, Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski”, Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication

**Candidate:** Assist. Professor Dr. Ralitsa Kovacheva, Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski”, Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication

### **I. Information for the candidate – teaching experience and qualification level for the academic position in the competition**

Assist. Professor Dr. Ralitsa Kovacheva, graduated with bachelor’s and master’s degree in „Journalism” in Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski”, specialisation in „Television” and „International Journalism”. She has had significant professional experience – she has been an executive director of two different TV channels: BiT and Alma Mater, an editor and news presenter of Re:TV and Bulgarian National Television’s morning show. In 2016 she got PhD and since then she is a regular Associate Professor in the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication. In Bachelor program „Journalism” she is a lecturer of the courses „Theories of the International Affairs”, „World Policy in the Media”, „Balkans in the Contemporary International Affairs”, „TV Practice 2”. She lectures four courses in the different Master programs in the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication and she is a director of the „International Journalism” Master program.

Assist. Professor Dr. Ralitsa Kovacheva is an author of two books, chapters of two different books (one of them in English, part of an authoritative international book), 15 scientific articles (two of them in English, the first one has published in the scientific journal, which is refereed and indexed in a world database for scientific information and the second one – in an international book). She has participation in 15 national and international conferences, in 7 scientific projects. Assist. Professor Dr. Kovacheva is a member of three national and international scientific, educational and professional organisations as European Communication Research and Education Association, European Journalists Association-Bulgaria, Media Literacy Coalition.

My opinion is that Assist. Professor Dr. Ralitsa Kovacheva is an intelligent, responsible, open-minded and dedicated to her profession lecturer and scholar. She is an active and a polite member of History and Theory of Journalism Department. She works effectively with the students and PhD candidates in the department. She has been a thesis advisor of 13 excellent graduated students. She has important and interesting publications. She is an active member of the working team, which organises the series of discussions „The Future of Journalism”, where interesting and popular Bulgarian journalists have been represented to the students of the Faculty. Assist. Professor Dr. Ralitsa Kovacheva is an initiator and co-organiser of the the student competitions for essays and video clips, which have been organised by History and Theory of Journalism Department and European Parliament in Bulgaria.



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

Assist. Professor Dr. Ralitsa Kovacheva applies to this procedure with one monograph book, two book chapters (one of them in English, published in an authoritative international book), 9 scientific articles (8 of them in Bulgarian, one of them in English). The publications of Assist. Professor Dr. Kovacheva have 24 citations (13 of them are indexed in the peer review and in the non-peer review journals, 6 of them are indexed by Scopus ELSEVIER, 4 of them are indexed by Web of Science Clarivate Analytiks and one of them by CiteEs).

In the competition are presented enough publications in terms of volume, content, varieties of topics, profundity of the scientific content, which are corresponding to the scope and scientific classification of this competition for the academic position „Assoc. Professor”. The candidate has satisfied the quantity and quality of criteria of the minimum national requirements of the Regulations for the Application of the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulation on terms and conditions for acquiring scientific degrees and taking academic positions at Sofia University – 50 points for the dissertation thesis for the Doctoral degree (topic A), 100 points for the habilitation work (monograph book – topic C), 205 points for the required number of books, chapters of books and articles (topic D), 55 point for the required number of citations (topic E).

The habilitation work, which Assist. Professor Dr. Ralitsa Kovacheva applies to this procedure, is the monograph book “News of the World. On the Meaning and Value of International Journalism” (Sofia University Press, 2020). The book contains 216 pages, foreword, eight parts, conclusion and literature. It presents the interesting and current topic for the need of rethinking the international news features and meanings. The authors’ conception is that the defining news based on “origin” (at home or abroad) loses its relevance in the contemporary media situation – the foreign events are as well important as the domestic problems and conflicts for the nations around the world and their coverage requires the new reflection not only for the educated and curious audience but for the journalists.

According to the author, the main research contribution of the book is to outline the understanding of the „five factors of crucial importance in terms of current challenges and possible horizons of international journalism: the post-truth dictates, political polarisation resulting from identity politics and populism, and the replacement of journalism by propaganda”. (p.12-13)

As a structure the book includes two main interconnected topics. The first one presents the international news and their features, analysed by well-known scientific concepts (Agenda Setting, news values, news framing, the characteristics of ethnocentrism, transnationalisation and Europeanisation). The modern problems as the specifics of media truth, the stress on emotional reactions and personal evaluation, post-truth, disinformation and fake news are explained. The presented situation, in which the audience uses the information through the social media, clearly demonstrates that they not only post news, but opinions, according to which the recipients form their public opinion and personal reactions.

The second topic of the book is more vast and multi-aspectual as a content, concentrated mainly on the international policy field. It includes the important problems as the influence of ideologies, the public crisis of liberal democracy, the policy of resentment (according to Francis Fukuyama) and the rise of populism as a model of national governance and media representation (including the validation of European populism, European skepticism and Bulgarian populism). As well as the problem of political polarisation and its connection with the media use and the media system specifics (according to the model of Hallin and Mancini).

The important research contribution of the book is the analysis of the Bulgarian transition characteristics and the European integration difficulties, which are result of the Bulgarian political and economic underdevelopment, nonelective class segregation and transitional differentiation between centre and periphery, the new models of the identity policy impose. They are illustrated by the real issues as Istanbul Convention rejection in Bulgaria and the human rights universality. The significant world changes and problems and their media coverage are analysed – as terrorism, poverty, wars, religions limitations, the rise of the new world powers like India and China, the utopian concepts dominance for the new united world order, the use of religion as an instrument for political influence.



The second book, two chapters from other books and 9 articles, applied to this procedure, may be summarised in four research fields. The first field – the Europeanisation of the public shares in Bulgaria is the most detailed introduced. This is the topic of the second book – „Centre and Periphery of the Europeanised Public Spheres” (Ciela, 2017), included the dissertation thesis of Dr. Kovacheva, as well as in three articles – one of them with the similar title, and the other two with the titles „Europeanisation and peripheralisation of Bulgarian public sphere” (published in English in an authoritative international book) and “European” vs. “traditional” values in the Bulgarian media”. The author’s interpretation conversely forms two problematic positions – on one side these are the models, through which the Bulgarian integration in EU influence over the national Europeanisation of the public shares, and on the other – this is the peripheralisation of the national behaviour, which allows selectively application (or non-application) of the European media models and practices. Empirically Dr. Kovacheva compares Bulgarian and British media through factors, which have significant importance for their media influence (for example, according to the author, these are the influence of „paid coverage of party campaigns on editorial content, media ownership issues, editorial independence, self-regulation”). Assist. Professor Dr. Ralitsa Kovacheva makes some important research definitions of the terms like „centre”, „periphery”, „peripheralisation”, in addition she presents criteria for analysis of the Europeanisation process, accepted as an element of the public spheres transnationalisation.

The second research field displays the features of foreign policy behaviour of different countries as Bulgaria and the Balkans counties, the United Kingdom and its differences over Brexit, EU sanctions on Russia. It is presented in the chapter of the book with title „The Mediated Dimension of Foreign Policy” (co-author Prof. Dr. Maria Neikova, Sofia University Press, 2017), in couple of articles, published in the Annual of Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski”, Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication – „Sanctions against Russia” in 2017 election campaign – political (mis)uses”, „Brexit – Could We Have Foreseen It?”. The topic is conceptual varied, but time concentrated. On one side it treats the Bulgarian foreign policy agenda over elections campaign in 2017 and its media representation in the popular TV channels as BNT, bTV and Nova. On other side it analyses the EU sanctions on Russia as a result of Russian annexation of Crimea and Ukrainian destabilisation. And also – it explains the results of the United Kingdom referendum from 2016 for European Union membership, covered by British media.

The third research field is actively observed by Assist. Professor Dr. Ralitsa Kovacheva and it presents the problem of the hybrid war in Bulgarian media. This is the topic of the articles „Hybrid threats in Bulgarian media” (published in English in the peer review journal), „The Hybrid War: Political Use and Media Representation”, „The hybrid war in Bulgarian media” (all of them published in the Bulgarian peer review journals). In theoretical aspects they explain the modern term „hybrid war” (and its synonyms „hybrid attacks”, „hybrid threats” and etc.) in the context of the online confrontation between EU and Russia – according to the official political documents and media coverage.

The fourth research field shows the current role and meaning of the social networks in process of public opinion forming. It is introduced by the articles „The Social Media as ‘Ego Chambers’: Implications on Media and Journalism” and „The fake news about ‘fake news’”. Assist. Professor Dr. Ralitsa Kovacheva links different aspects of the audience irrational behaviour with the social media abilities to spread disinformation and fake news.

### III. Conclusion

The monograph books, book chapters, articles, citations, academical courses that are applied to this competition present the professional, scientific and academical development of Assist. Professor Dr. Ralitsa Kovacheva, her interests in the field of foreign policy and international affairs, journalism, political theory, diplomacy. Her research analysis is based on a broad scientific base and modern empirical conclusions by the observation of the different Bulgarian media practices. According the candidate’s important scientific works and teaching experience, I strongly recommend to the Honourable Scientific Jury Assist. Professor Dr. Ralitsa Kovacheva to be elected on the academic



position of „Associate Professor” in Area of Higher Education 3. Social sciences, business and law in Professional Field 3.5 Public Communication and Information Science (International Journalism).

Date: 06.03.2021

Jury member:

Assoc. Professor Dr. Maria Popova