

Review

By Prof. Trendafil Atanasov Mitev, D.Sc.

In regards to: The participation of Assoc. Prof. Maria Andonova Pirgova, D.Sc. in the competition for professorship, announced by the Faculty of Philosophy at the Sophia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”

There can be no doubt that in a modern “History of Bulgarian Political Science” Assoc. Prof. Maria Pirgova, D.Sc. will have a front place among the creators of this new branch of humanities in our country. This is a position which she deserves on the basis of her well-planned and successfully realized academic career. After finishing her high school education, Maria Pirgova studied in the Moscow State University – Faculty of Philosophy with “Specific Social Studies” as her educational profile. In the year 1977 she began work in the Faculty of Philosophy at the Sophia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. In the first three years she worked as a specialist and after 1980 she gained a full-time assistant position. In 1990 she defended her doctoral thesis on the connections between politics and the trade union movement. In the year 1998 was habilitated and hired as an “associate professor” in the same faculty. There the same place in 2018 she defended her next doctoral thesis and received the highest scientific degree: “Doctor of Political Sciences”.

In order to expand her scientific research and teaching capacity Assoc. Prof. Pirgova has completed a series of useful specializations, in reputable European universities. In 1992-93 she specialized at the Tübingen University on the problems of the “welfare state”. In 1996 she was a guest lecturer in the university of Saarbrücken on the problems of the “Bulgarian political system during the transition”. These science-qualification initiatives have allowed Assoc. Prof. Maria Pirgova to familiarize herself with the achievements of the Russian, Bulgarian and German political science. This contributes greatly to her final development as an independent scholar with a wide range of research in the study, analysis and explanation of the realities of the political process.

The accumulated expertise allowed Assoc. Prof. Maria Pirgova to carry out fruitful scientific and research activity. Her publications solidify her position as a leading expert in the field of parliamentary processes, the welfare state, the role of national interests in the political process, the problems of globalization, democratic political systems under conditions of transition, foreign policy,

themes related to the efficiency of the juridical state, theoretical problems, research methodologies in the field of Political science etc.

Her research in these areas contain considerable scientific contributions. As a result, she was discovered by leading politicians of the democratic political process in Bulgaria and was invited to assume responsible positions as an expert in the institutions run by them: in 1990-1991 she was appointed as an advisor of the President of the Republic of Bulgaria during the problems in connection to the creation of a new constitution for the country; in 1993-1994 she served as a parliamentary secretary of the Council of Ministers and as head of relations between the government and the National Assembly; from 2006 to 2009 she worked in the Department for Parliamentary Research and Analysis in the Bulgarian parliament.

This is the highest possible expert activity in politics to which Assoc. Prof. Maria Pirgova applies in practice her scientific potential for the immediate solution of the ongoing political process. This is a factor which further expands her outlook as a scholar and university lecturer.

In her real-world practice she directly encountered actual and oftentimes unforeseeable dilemmas associated with the narrow ideological and, in particular, the party interests of the participants in the work of the institutions of question. The reaching of a consensus and the formulation of a rational solution to the relevant case studies allows the scientist to stabilize even more categorically her knowledge and her expert activity in the area of politics and power.

Her ever-increasing experience allows Assoc. Prof. Pirgova to realize a large-scale and effective lecturing activity, as a full-time lecturer in "Political Science" in the Sophia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". Over the years she sequentially develops and reads general lecture courses on the subjects connected to modern political institutions; the foundations of political science; the Bulgarian political system after 1989; political theory; political consulting; the technology of political decisions; the foreign policy of Germany; she leads workshops around the creation and leadership of political institutions, etc. Apart from the Philosophy faculty of the University of Sophia "St. Kliment Ohridski" Assoc. Prof. Pirgova has also been invited as a guest lecturer in the New Bulgarian University, the University of Plovdiv "P. Hilendarski", etc. In this way, the academic knowledge in her possession has played an important role for more than 4 decades in the preparation of young experts in Political

Science. In order for them to realize their dreams as team leaders, working in the sphere of real public relations.

As a result of her systematic and consistent research activity, at the time of the current professorship competition, Assoc. Prof. Maria Pirgova presents herself as a scholar with a rich academic biography. She is the author of three scientific monographs /one of which has two editions/; she has published two titles, which the author describes as “books”, but which also have the length of monographs; she is the author of one university Political Science textbook; she has written over 40 scientific studies and articles, published in reputable magazines and collections. Her writings include hundreds of publications dealing with relevant political questions. She has worked in seven national and international science projects – including as a team leader. Her works have been published in Bulgarian, Russian, French and English.

Assoc. Prof. Maria Pirgova is also actively present as a respected professional in a delicate sphere of public life such as electronic journalism. She is often invited as an analyst of relevant topics of the contemporary political process in all the most influential national televisions – BNT, BTV, Nova TV, TV-Evropa, Channel 3 etc. For four years she has worked as a presenter in a journalistic-analytical broadcast on Eurocom channel. As a whole, this information presents Assoc. Prof. Maria Pirgova as a scholar with unquestionable contributions in the general development of modern political sciences in Bulgaria. She is one of the representatives of the political science community of our country, who has also given the most significant contribution to the timely orientation of the civic society in the essence of the everyday political process. Because of this she has a personal role for the formation of what is called the democratic political culture of the nation.

Assoc. Prof. Pirgova's high responsibility to her professional development is the reason for her to create a new independent scientific work as well as six new scientific articles for the occasion of her participation in the professorship competition. These have not been used in any other competition related to her academic career. The monograph “Problematic fields of Political Science” possesses all the qualities of a serious habilitational work, which gives the grounds for awarding the highest university degree to the author – professor.

What are the reasons for such an assessment? Firstly, the thematic reach of the monograph. With regards to its content, this scholarly work is a serious attempt by the author to enter in the most large-scale way possible into the

specific subject fields of Political science. Her goal is to look for what is complex, contradictory, appreciated or underappreciated by the scholars up to the moment. The author has separated 16 of these fields in their quality as chapters in the monographic structure. Starting with power, the functions of politics and the problems associated with the political values and interests, passing through the democratic state, the specific characteristics of the judicial and welfare state, political institutions and organizations and going into questions of ideology, the meaning of globalization and the specificity of the Bulgarian constitutional model. These are, in practice, the leading thematic fields of what could be defined as the subject of serious academic political knowledge. The author, however, does not analyze the particular smaller questions “one by one”, that is to say, to explain each of the subsections for itself. After finishing the writing of a given chapter, she does not put “full stop” around it.

Obviously, Assoc. Prof. Pirgova explains in great detail the questions which might be classified as central, in particular the scientific questions of the separate monographic chapters. At the same time, she carefully discovers and formulates the “problem fields” existing there. That which is complex as material, a topic of discussion and interpreted differently by scholars. This is precisely why it needs to be qualified. While doing this, she also creates an interconnection between the different subtopics of the monograph. In this way the emergence, evolution and accomplishments of the democratic political system become possible to explain through a complex multi-aspect, but also logical unity. This allows for early phases, specifics, the modern achievements and the discussion – in other words, what is typical for the development of particular political realities, to be observed clearly in the study of the thematic fields. The clarification in the earlier chapters is a prerequisite for the explanation and understanding of the problems expressed in the latter parts of the work. Thus, the author creates a deep and interesting picture – a kind of modern reading of what is important for democratic policy and its derivative – statehood. She focuses on the specific functions, autonomy, complementarity, but also real problems that exist around every object of scientific analysis, that await new explanations. Because they are connected with the possibility to guarantee the effective functioning of the democratic political system of the modern society.

Secondly, this monograph is impressive for its perfect analysis of the history of the European political process – from ancient times to the current

day. In a convincing way, it rests confidently on empiricism and completely independently follows the reasons and logic behind which from the body of the old feudal state-political realities, the variants of modern democratic system, in all its studied dimensions, slowly /but confidently/ emerge, mature and begin to conquer an ever wider social terrain.

On a significant informational background, Assoc. Prof. Pirgova has demonstrated how each one of the studied institutions rests on the characteristic of its specific pre-modern forms. But she also shows how it has evolved in accordance with the national particularities as a reality during the Modern Age, carrying its appearance and specifics. In other words: the professional, critical and very elegant discussion of the leading thematic fields of Political Science is possible with Assoc. Prof. Pirgova due to her deep understanding of the European political process. Especially that of the last 2000 years from where all, that is most beneficial for discovering /or filling/ the gaps which the author marks, comments on and evaluates in her scholarly work, derives.

Thirdly, I would point out the mature research approach which Assoc. Prof. Pirgova applies during the development of each one of the thematic fields of Political Science. In the beginning of every chapter she formulates shortly and clearly the specific topic. Then she divides it up in the most detailed way possible into its main components which outline its structural composition, determined by the subquestions existing there. During the analysis of each of them the author achieves a maximal level of depth in terms of explanation. /As an illustration of this I can only mention the pages dedicated to the state, the legal state, the democratic state and the welfare state!/ Doing so, she manages to outline what is essential and most-important in the problem field of Political Science and after that she marks the question-segments which deserve non-standard academic thinking and evaluation.

During this complex labyrinth-like analytical process, Assoc. Prof. Pirgova always formulates her own clear personal position on the “problemness” of the thematic subsections of political knowledge. For the respectable members of the scientific jury, it is not necessary to specifically name each of these, since they are well noted in the text. What is significant for us is the fact that Assoc. Prof. Pirgova gives a positive evaluation with the explicitness of an earnest scholar. She believes in the objectivity of her academic frame, because it is based on undeniable facts. In the same way, the author of the habilitational

work asks logical, thought-provoking questions, which are a good foundation for every reader to also think on the problematic fields of Political Science.

Following from this, the reading of this monograph achieves the most important effect that is expected of a professional work: the reader is served multiple new arguments and conclusions, but through the text he is provoked to look for the answers of more than a few questions as well! The reason is that these are usually fields of Political Science with relevant problems. It follows that they are the subject of the discussion and presuppose further and further academic studies, a good example of which is the present scientific monograph. This is particularly important to note, since it is one of the goals of mature science. The latter is expected to give answers, but also to ask questions, the others – that is, the readers, must also look for the explanations of everything related to the rights and obligations of the free man – the citizen of the democratic state. Because the ability to think clearly is a constant necessity in a democracy. The simple reason for this is that during its course, surely, newer and newer evermore complex problem fields of political knowledge will emerge. This is a way of thinking which is particularly important for the kind of students which Assoc. Prof. Pirgova is teaching. Because they are the future continuation of the deed known as: critical and effective analytical thinking in favour of democracy.

Fourthly, I believe it is unnecessary to speak in detail about the fact that for Assoc. Prof. Pirgova there are no secrets in the field of political theory. She is perfectly acquainted with everything in this field of humanities. This is true for all that was composed in Antiquity as well as everything offered by the representatives of modernity. As a scholar, the author freely operates with the theoretical achievements of the classical thinkers, of which she clearly prioritizes those who applaud democracy and who have given the greatest contributions to the development of the questions in this sphere of scholarship.

The significance of her conclusions can also be attributed to the fact that the author of the habilitational work knows the achievements of philosophy, sociology, culturology, law, anthropology and a whole series of other notable sciences. This allows her to freely and optimally explain the achievements of democracy as a conquest of the forward-marching human civilization. A similar level of contemporary political analysis in Bulgaria is rarely seen among the

pages of the specialized literature. It is also an obvious benefit for the reviewed work.

In the last place, though not in importance, I must state that in her scientific work Assoc. Prof. Pirgova presents herself as a socially engaged scholar. Her positive evaluations are in favour of political processes, institutions and authors, that do not favour the market juggernaut of industrial society. On the contrary, she categorically states her belief in the benefit of the regulatory function of the state in society as well as in international relations. Assoc. Prof. Pirgova upholds her position with iron logic, because: on the market, the free people – the citizens of the democratic society “are not” and cannot be equal. In social and political life, on the other hand, they “are” and should be equal. This complex harmony between economically different subjects and individuals equal in their rights can, according to Assoc. Prof. Pirgova, be guaranteed only by an effectively functioning, democratic state. This general direction of her analytical thinking does not in any way engage her with any far left political ideologies which have not been supported by the natural logic of life under the Modern Age. Assoc. Prof. Pirgova is a supporter of a mature, tolerant democracy. This leads to the conclusion that such academic thinking is maximally compatible with Bulgarian social reality /and is healthiest for it/ both today and in perspective.

In this context, it is worth also pointing out that even though it is not mentioned explicitly, the whole text undoubtedly considers the state of democracy in the Republic of Bulgaria. During the analysis of specific scientific questions, Assoc. Prof. Pirgova finds the way and the correct measure to look for a particular projection of the problem in question on the Bulgarian political landscape. In the places where our achievements are complexly contradictory and unsatisfactory, she formulates concrete and sharply critical and scientific evaluations. /A typical example is the answer to the question which the author asks herself: “Can we label Bulgaria a legal state?”/ This is followed by an in-depth analysis which proves the frightening role of traditional thinking, the instinct for survival and self-preservation, which oftentimes highlight the interests and possibilities of power. The latter with its actions devaluates the constitutionally described processes in the borders of contemporary Bulgaria. The reviewed monograph is, therefore, an exceptionally useful scholarly work for educating specialists in the problem fields of democracy in general, and in those specific projections of theirs which can be observed in the “Bulgarian case” specifically. As an especially important personal contribution of Assoc.

Prof. Pirgova in this area, I will point to her discussion on “reduced democracy””

The detailed papers in our possession on the general work of Assoc. Prof. Maria Pirgova give the opportunity to state a number of things in her favour which stem from the legal requirements and process regulations imposed by the Law of Higher Education: The reference for covering the minimum national requirements for the scientific and teaching activity of professors shows that the participant in this competition has enough point to fulfill all the necessary requirements, according to the Law of Academic Staff. In some criteria she scores twice as high as is necessary; The works of Assoc. Prof. Pirgova are often quoted in the studies of other authors: 51 citations are found in the traditional way, and 35 through the use of Google Science. /This is without counting the citations in dissertations/; Assoc. Prof. Pirgova is a member of the Bulgarian Association of Political Sciences; She is a member of the editorial staff of “Politicheski Izsledvaniya” magazine and has worked /and is still working/ in several structures of the civil society dealing with scholarly research and practical activity. To her documentation the competitor in the current competition has attached a summarized self-evaluation of her scholarly contribution, which I accept as objective with no criticism.

SUMMARY: The summary of the information presented here demonstrates that a mature scholar with undeniable contributions to the subject of Political Science is taking part in the professorship competition initiated by Faculty of Philosophy of the Sophia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. She is actively involved in civil life and works hard for the professional preparation of young scholars interested in political knowledge. Assoc. Prof. Maria Pirgova has created a unique style of productive and analytical thinking which allows her to develop the scientific problems studied by her in an original and memorable, but most importantly effective, way. Because of this, her academic work gives answers to some essential problems in the area of politics, power and the modern state, but also puts forth questions which are a powerful thought stimulator for anyone who touches her scientific works.

Taking all of this into consideration, without any doubts, I state that Assoc. Prof. Maria Andonova Pirgova, D.Sc. meets all the legal requirements and because of this I propose that the Honourable Members of the Scientific Jury VOTE for the award of the right to take up the full-time position of

PROFESSOR, in the specialty "Political Science", at the Faculty of Philosophy of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". Personally, I will vote in favor, because I am convinced that Assoc. Prof. Pirgova, D.Sc. will uphold the authority of this highest university position, in the most honourable way.

Sofia

10th of July, 2019

REVIEWER:

Prof. Trendafil Mitev, D.Sc.