

Scientific Review

by

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**Member of the scientific jury in the competition for the academic position of Professor
under the professional field 2.1. Philology
(Contemporary French Literature), published in the State Gazette, issue 87/19/10/2021**

1. Competition data

The competition for the academic position of Professor under the professional field 2.1. Philology (Contemporary French Literature) has been published in the State Gazette, issue 87/ 19/10/2021. The position is to be held in the Department of Romance Studies. Assoc. Prof. Rennie Ratcheva Yotova, PhD, who is a long-time lecturer in the Department, is the only applicant who has submitted a dossier of documents for participation in the competition. By order of the Rector of Sofia University No. ПД-38-538 17/11/2021 I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury in the aforementioned competition. By decision of the scientific jury from its first meeting held on 04/01/2022, I have been elected chairman of the jury and appointed to draw up a scientific review for this procedure.

2. Compliance with the minimum national requirements for taking up the academic position of Professor

With regard to the fulfilment of the minimum national requirements (MNR) under Art. 2b, paras. 2 and 3 of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ZRASRB) and under the Annex to Article 1a, paragraph 1 of the Rules for Implementation of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (PPZRASRB), I find that the **candidate fully meets the MNR for the area of higher education 2. Humanities, scientific field 2.1. Philology, for holding the academic position of Professor.**

With regard to the indicators from **Group A** (min. 50 points), in 2002 Assoc. Prof. Yotova has been awarded a PhD degree on completion of a joint doctorate at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" and at the University of Paris-Nanterre in France (Diploma No. 0096721/07/02/2002, recognized by Certificate No. 820-BAK of 16/10/2002). Her PhD thesis written in French "The Geometric Space in the Nouveau Roman" (*Jeux de construction* :

poétique de la géométrie dans le Nouveau Roman) was published as a monograph in the French publishing house L'Harmattan in 2006. With regard to the indicators from **Group C** (min. 100 points), Assoc. Prof. Rennie Yotova has presented two published monographic works in French (*La Trilogie des jumeaux d'Agota Kristof*, Infolio éditions, Genève, 2011 and *Trois pièces d'Agota Kristof*, Infolio éditions, Genève, 2016, co-authored with Sarah De Balzi). In regard to the indicators from **Group D** (min. 200 points), the candidate has presented a number of studies, articles, chapters of collective monographs and participations in dictionaries, published in refereed and peer-reviewed publications or in edited volumes of collective studies, for a total of 1195 points. With regard to the indicators from **Group E** (min. 100 points), citations in refereed and peer-reviewed publications have been presented, for a total of 370 points. With regard to the indicators from **Group F** (min. 100 points), Assoc. Prof. Yotova has indicated the number of successfully graduating PhD students, participation in national and international scientific or educational projects and published textbook, for a total of 115 points.

3. Lack of plagiarism

The thesis, monographs and publications of Assoc. Prof. Rennie Yotova are original authors' works based entirely on her own research. I certify that when evaluating the candidate in accordance with the requirements of Article 4, paragraph 1 of the ZRASRB, **I have not established plagiarism** under Article 4, paragraph 11 of the ZRASRB. The scientific jury and I, personally, as its chairman and member, **have not received any such signals**.

4. Academic curriculum vitae of the applicant in accordance with Article 29b (3) of the ZRASRB and Article 122 of the Rules of procedure for the award of scientific degrees and the holding of academic positions at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" (PURPNZADSU)

Assoc. Prof. Rennie Yotova has a rich professional and scholarly biography. She was born on June 20, 1968 in Sofia. In 1991, she graduated from Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" with a Master degree in French Philology. Since 1993, she has worked at Sofia University, The Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology, Department of Romance Studies, holding successively the positions of Assistant Professor (1993-2002), Senior Assistant Professor (2002-2008) and Associate Professor (from 2008 to the present). In 2008, the candidate won a competition for the academic position of Associate professor at Sofia University with a habilitation monograph in French (*Ecrire le viol*, Paris, Non lieu, 2007) (Certificate № 25288 BAK of 30/12/2008). Her academic work experience currently amounts

to 28 years. Throughout this period, her extensive **teaching activity** closely corresponds to the theme of the competition. She has developed and taught a lecture course in contemporary French literature for students of the second major French philology, numerous literary seminars for students of French philology, lecture courses in French literature – Enlightenment and Romanticism, etc. Assoc. Prof. Yotova is currently teaching major BA lecture courses such as "French Literature – Enlightenment and Romanticism" (French Philology) and "Literature-World" (African Studies). The candidate also teaches a number of specialized lecture courses in contemporary French and Francophone literature in various Master's programmes, including "Francophonie, Multilingualism and Intercultural Mediation", "Literature, Cinema and Visual Culture", etc., in the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology and in the Faculty of Slavic Studies. For these, she has developed and teaches original lecture courses, among which are "Contemporary Francophone Literatures", "Literature-World", "The Nouveau Roman – Cinematic Aspects and Film Adaptations", "Reception of Francophone Migrant Literatures in Central and Eastern Europe", "The Nouveau Roman and the New Wave".

Rennie Yotova is a talented and dedicated lecturer who attracts students with her responsiveness, rich erudition and modern way of teaching and is able to predispose and encourage them for research work. She has been the doctoral supervisor of two successfully graduating PhD students (in 2016), and is currently supervising the work of a third doctoral student whose defence is forthcoming. She has successfully supervised numerous MA theses on topics in the field of contemporary French and Francophone literature. Assoc. Prof. Yotova is the author of textbooks and teaching materials, among which the textbook in French 'Égalité entre les Femmes et les Hommes: la lutte contre les stéréotypes de genre' (Fiches pédagogiques: niveau B2) (2018), currently used in secondary schools in countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

Assoc. Prof. Rennie Yotova participates in various **scientific research** projects, among which I'd like to specifically mention the international Francophone project in support of training, research, successful integration and cooperation for students from sub-Saharan Africa, which she led in 2017. Over the years, she has been the inspiration and head of the Master's program "Francophone Studies" at the Department of Romance Studies, within which she has developed and taught a number of original lecture courses on various issues of Francophone literature. Assoc. Prof. Yotova has given public lectures at the universities of Geneva, Lausanne, Budapest, Paris-8 and has been a guest lecturer in the summer courses of the University of Geneva, where she has taught a cycle of lectures in French literature (2008). She actively participates in national and international conferences, presenting plenary and sectional reports, and is a member of organising committees or major organiser of a number of international conferences and high profile forums (such as the Fifth International Conference of the Central European Association for Canadian Studies in 2009 or the International conference "Writing in French" in 2019). She has a rich editorial, compilational and lexicographic activity. Her participation in the editorial board of the French scientific journal *Travaux de Didactique du français langue étrangère* and her long-standing work as editor of the publication *Fréquences Francophones*, a specialized review of the Association of Teachers of and in French in Bulgaria and a forum for didactic improvement of teachers

and lecturers, should be especially highlighted. Rennie Yotova is also an established translator of literature and humanities works from French.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Rennie Yotova has participated in multiple **artistic and creative** events dedicated to various literary and cultural topics. Among those are participations in television and radio broadcasts in Bulgaria and abroad, as well as hosting round tables, debates and literary evenings dedicated to various writers. Her activity for the organisation and long-term running of the permanent monthly Literary Café “Sofia on the Seine” at the French Institute in Sofia (2009-2011) is particularly impressive. This Literary Café has found a wide repercussion among Bulgarian readers and authors and has become one of the leading cultural events of its time.

Based on the **rich and varied teaching, research and artistic and creative activity of Assoc. Prof. Rennie Yotova**, I declare with full conviction that this activity **fully meets the criteria for holding the academic position of Professor** and should receive a high score according to the indicators specified in Article 29b, paragraph 3 of the ZRASRB and respectively, in Article 61 of the PPZRASRB.

5. Scholarly publications with which the candidate participates in the competition, and original scientific contributions

Assoc. Prof. Rennie Yotova has entered the competition with two monographs and 29 articles in scientific journals and collections dedicated to various problems of contemporary French and Francophone literature. Studies on Francophone (and not only specifically French) literature in Bulgaria being extremely scarce, the works of Assoc. Prof. Yotova fill a significant gap in the Bulgarian literary and critical landscape.

The candidate's most significant scientific contributions stem from an in-depth study of the work of one of the most bright representatives of the **contemporary Francophone "literature of exile"** – the Swiss writer of Hungarian origin Agota Kristof, in the two monographs published in French and submitted for participation in the competition : *La Trilogie des jumeaux d'Agota Kristof*, Infolio éditions, Genève, 2011 and *Trois pièces d'Agota Kristof*, Infolio éditions, Genève, 2016 (co-authored with Sarah De Balzi). The author builds in-depth analyses of Kristof's works, offering their original reading around several thematic and semantic fields: exile, the language of exile, multiple identity, violence, etc., and reaches a number of contributory results. She demonstrates how depicting the monstrousness in its various dimensions in Agota Kristof's trilogy refers to the monstrous dimensions of the Holocaust, the war and the totalitarianism. Thus, her novels and plays function as "places of memory" for the most traumatic, cruel, and violent moments in the history of the twentieth century, and the creative act of writing is shown as simultaneously excruciating and life-giving for the writers cut off from their roots. The links between Agota Kristof's prose and theatre are clearly highlighted in the second monograph (*Trois pièces d'Agota Kristof*), which again traces the thematic threads towards totalitarianism, uncertain identity, exile, violence, but also the innermost of feelings, themes now treated with

dramaturgical means. The fiction and dramatic work of the Swiss writer penetrated and enriched each other, thus reinforcing their effects. The study of characters, space and time, fabulation and speech levels in the plays structure the analysis and condition the original conclusions drawn.

Rennie Yotova establishes an innovative and contributory relation between the results of her studies and the characteristics of **writing in exile**, extending the perspective of analysing the work of one representative author to an overview of the Francophone literature of exile in Europe. In this overview, she explores and brings out the essential features of this literature through the prism of exile experience and trauma – such as the multiple identity and multiplication of writing instances, the connections and interactions between the mother tongue and the French language adopted for literary expression, as well as the literary creativity as a painfully difficult but unique possibility of survival. Beyond this already extensive research horizon, the author also discusses even more global issues such as the cultural affiliation of the literature of exile and even the place and possibilities of literature today.

In her monographs, Assoc. Prof. Rennie Yotova not only realizes a **thorough and high-quality literary study of an individual author's work** – which in itself is a serious contribution, as the works of the Swiss writer were poorly researched at the time of the publication of the monographs – but also **convincingly exceeds its limits and develops a broad perspective on the European phenomenon of the contemporary Francophone literature of exile**, created in the XX and XXI centuries by refugees from the former Eastern Europe. By bringing out its essential features, she makes original contributions to its study **and goes even beyond this expanded perspective, posing questions about the meaning and functions of world literature today.**

The theme of the exile experience, sublimated through the prism of literary creation and through the simultaneously traumatic and enriching multilingualism of the exile writer, is developed by Assoc. Prof. Rennie Yotova also in a series of articles in Bulgarian and French, in which she offers **original analyses of the works of exile writers** such as Tzvetan Todorov, Andreï Makine, Besa Myftiu, Milan Kundera and others. Several topics resonate in different contexts in these studies: mother tongue and adopted language, exile and its imprint on language, the crisis of identity of the exiled, violence, creativity. Yotova's exploratory perspective is extended to the entire globalised world, whose specific dimensions are examined through the prism of literature. In addition to examining the specifics of the work of exile writers, Yotova deepens her analyses on multilingualism and cultural and linguistic diversity, multiple identity, violence and suffering, phenomena which are experienced and managed through literary creativity. The Francophone literature thus produced, justifiably presented as global, "on five continents", makes a significant contribution to the promotion and preservation of universal humanistic values.

A second important direction in the research interests of Assoc. Prof. Rennie Yotova is once again bound to the field of Francophone literature and, more broadly, Francophone humanities, though with a different focus: the researcher undertakes **scientific research and publications with an explicit focus on the Bulgarian audience and with a view to improve the knowledge and popularization of Francophone literature and humanities in**

Bulgaria. A series of articles, other publications, a number of thematic issues of the "Literary newspaper", the organization of the Seventh edition of the Sofia International Literary Festival dedicated to Francophone literature, contribute to the presentation and promotion in Bulgaria of a series of famous Francophone writers from Europe, Africa, Asia and America, many of whom have hitherto been unknown in Bulgaria.

After working on the French Nouveau Roman in her doctoral thesis, Rennie Yotova directed her research towards other **contemporary French writers**, including Albert Camus, Marguerite Duras, Patrick Modiano, Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio. She has produced extensive critical review articles and organised various cultural and literary events on their works. Another group of scientific articles explore various **problems of the reception in Bulgaria of famous French and Francophone authors**. In these, Rennie Yotova explores, clarifies and highlights the place and impact of the work of writers such as Guillaume Apollinaire, Blaise Cendrars or Roland Barthes in Bulgarian literature and culture. A third group of publications analyse and present **Swiss francophone literature and criticism through its important aspects and most prominent authors**. All these scientific publications and organised events make a **significant contribution to the research in the field of Francophone literature that is still in its infancy in Bulgaria**.

It is also important to highlight the contribution of **publications on various pedagogical aspects**. Especially the article on teaching literature in high schools ("La place de la littérature dans les programmes d'enseignement du Français première langue étrangère dans les Lycées bilingues en Bulgarie", *Enseigner les littératures dans le souci de la langue*, 2010, pp. 277-281) highlights the place and the utility of teaching literature in the curricula of high schools with advanced French language learning in Bulgaria. On the basis of her teaching and research skills and experience, Assoc. Prof. Yotova analyses the educational landscape in Bulgaria and convincingly justifies the need for training in French-language literature in the secondary school. Thus she relates again to the global theme of the humanistic search for the place and meaning of literature in today's world, and fits it into a didactic perspective.

The scientific contributions of Assoc. Prof. Rennie Yotova are highly appreciated by the international scholarly community. Her monographs arouse a wide and steady interest in the scientific circles, have been repeatedly cited by doctoral students and researchers in Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, France and the United States, and have long been out of print. Her articles also enjoy great interest and are abundantly quoted. The scientific and critical publications and the cultural and creative events carried out by Rennie Yotova gather a wide audience and conclusively and successfully promote the modern French-language literature "on five continents" in Bulgaria.

As is clear from the above, **the research activities of Assoc. Prof. Rennie Yotova not only play an important role in the development of the Bulgarian literary research on contemporary French and Francophone literature, but are also innovative and contributory in the field of international research and teaching of contemporary French and Francophone literature.** The unquestionable value and originality of her scientific contributions and her varied activities for dissemination and promotion of contemporary

French and Francophone literature in Bulgaria make her a worthy candidate for the academic position of Professor.

6. Conclusion

Based on the documents and publications submitted in the competition, I am fully convinced that Assoc. Prof. Rennie Ratcheva Yotova is a mature scholar with her own creative approach and style, working in the field of contemporary literature in French, where she has a number of significant scholarly contributions. By her pedagogical experience and excellent work with students and doctoral students, as well as the rich spectrum of her research which has gained international recognition, Assoc. Prof. Rennie Yotova **fully meets the requirements for taking up the academic position of Professor**, as set out in the ZRASRB, the PPZRASRB and the Rules of procedure for the award of scientific degrees and the holding of academic positions at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" Kliment Ohridski".

Based on the analysis of the teaching and research activities of Assoc. Prof. Yotova, I give my positive assessment and whole-heartedly recommend to the honourable scientific jury to elect Assoc. Prof. Rennie Ratcheva Yotova for the academic position of Professor under the professional field 2.1. Philology (Contemporary French Literature).

Sofia, 25 February 2022

Reviewer:

Prof. Vessela Kirtcheva Guenova, Dr. Habil.