**Opinion**

For competition for the academic position “Associate Professor” in the field of higher education 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences (Ethnology. Folk Medicine) – one, for the needs of HD (SG 48/28.06.2022)

Member of the scientific jury: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mila Mileva Maeva, IEFSEM – BAS (according to order No RD-38-445 / 23.07.2022).

**Professional experience of the candidate**

Assist. Prof. Dr. Violeta Kalinova Kotseva-Popova is the only candidate in the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor announced for the needs of the History Department. She submitted all the required documents and materials, as well as additional information on some of the activities she has carried out as a lecturer, scholar, expert and supervisor. The competition dossier is clear evidence that Dr. Kotseva-Popova meets the minimum requirements for acquiring the prestigious position of "Associate Professor", set forth in the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations thereto, and the regulations of the Sofia University on the Conditions and Procedure for the Acquisition of Scientific Degrees and for the Occupation of Academic Positions. The course of the procedure up to the time of drawing up this opinion follows the requirements of the legislation in force. I also declare that I am not a person related to the candidate within the meaning of § 1, item 5 of the additional provisions of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and I have no private interest related to the procedure or to the candidate that could affect my objectivity as a member of the scientific jury. However, I would like to note that I have been following Dr Kotseva-Popova's work for a long time and she stands out for her focused research on the topic of the competition, which makes her the strong candidate for the position.

First of all, it should be noted that Assist. Prof. Dr. Violeta Kalinova Kotseva-Popova has previous scholar experience in the field in which she is applying. She received a Master's degree in History, specialization Ethnology in 1999, and a PhD degree in Ethnology in 2010 at the Ethnographic Institute with Museum at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. From 2010 to the present moment she has been employed at the Sofia University – first as an Assistant Professor and from the following year as a senior Assistant Professor.

**Teaching experience**

In her many years of teaching experience Assist. Prof. Dr. Violeta Kalinova Kotseva-Popova leads classes and lectures in the BA and MA program in Ethnology. So far, she has also introduced a number of new lecture courses such as *Problems of European Modernization, Medical Anthropology, Balkan Ethnology, Anthropology and Age Groups, Ethnology and Modernity, Ethnology, and Dynamics of Identities Abroad*. The submitted documents indicate the high teaching and lecturing load of the candidate. She has also supervised two successful graduate students at Sofia university. Dr. Kotseva-Popova actively participates in the organization and conduction of the students` field research practices, which are necessary for the academic training and development of future ethnologists. Apart from Bulgaria, the candidate has teaching experience abroad – in Latvia and Germany.

**Research work**

Simultaneously with her lecturing activity, Assist. Prof. Dr. Violeta Kalinova Kotseva-Popova is actively engaged in research work. Over the years she has established herself as a specialist in hygiene and folk medicine. Her research is realized among different ethnic and religious communities in the country as she knows whole regions in details. Part of her research focus falls on coexistence and integration in intercultural environment. I can safely state that at the time of the competition she has built an image of a recognizable scholar in Bulgaria, a fieldworker with a huge experience and a researcher with high potential for academic growth.

The candidate participated in the competition with a scholar production which is original and which does not repeat the publications submitted for the academic position of Senior Assistant Professor. It includes two monographs – one is the main habilitation work and the other is published on the basis of the PhD dissertation, and 19 articles and chapters, some of which are in the world databases for referencing and indexing.

Among the scholar publications of the candidate should be noted her habilitation work *Healers and Healing Practices in the Early 21st Century. Ethnological Aspects, 2022, ISBN:978-954-07-5520-5; ISBN 978-954-07-5521-2.pdf, University Publishing House "St. Kl. Ohridski", Sofia.* It is the result of many years of work and presents a comprehensive study on the topic. One of the main strengths of the study is the rich field material, personally collected. Dr. Kotseva-Popova managed to cover a large part of the territory of the country and to meet even well-known healers in the public life.

The book consists of an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion and appendices. As a contribution, it should be noted that the author returns to a traditional topic of ethnology, but explores and analyzes it through a modern theoretical framework. She takes an autobiographical approach in which the individual, in this case the healer, takes centre stage with his or her life experience, but it is placed in the general and local social and community context. An important element of the study is the tracing of the intensified dynamics of healing practices and their adaptation in order to the survival of the cultural facts in modernity. It is striking that the study focuses on the practices of different categories of healers: from the traditional healers (*bayachki)*, to the fortunetellers (of coffee, of cards, or of beans), to the chiropractors (or *chakrakchi)* and herbalists, to the energy healers. Importantly, the author concludes that healers are rethinking and adapting their knowledge and practices to contemporary concepts and knowledge of health and healing. Dr. Kotseva-Popova succeeds in presenting both the health and social significance of healers and healing practices in the early 21st century. For many Bulgarians, they continue to be an important mediator in overcoming crises by facilitating both their own and their patients' lives.

In view of the growing interest in self-reflection, I would recommend that Dr Kotseva-Popova consider future publications on the place of the researcher in ethnomedicine field research. Archiving field materials would facilitate their future use. The study would be more complete if additional archival materials collected by other researchers were included. In my opinion, this would have strengthened the idea of the dynamics of healing practices. However, the topic is promising and could be expanded in the direction of the role of healers in the course of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The other monograph presented in the proceedings is *"Happy Bath!" An Ethnological Look at the Hygiene of the Bulgarians. Sofia, RAABE, ISBN: 978-954-9619-60-7.* It is the extended study of Dr Kotseva-Popova's PhD thesis, which studies the hygiene of the Bulgarians in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as part of the process of modernization of society. In addition to looking at folk traditions and practices, the research also traces state strategies and policies of public works and urban planning and the imposition of modern sanitation and hygiene requirements by the early 20th century.

Among the candidate's research, I should also mention the study of the introduction of ethnology in secondary schools. The research focuses on the necessity of such education in the context of the Strategy for Civic, Health, Environmental and Intercultural Education and its importance for building empathetic behaviour among pupils.

**Applied activities**

Assist. Prof. Dr. Violeta Kalinova Kotseva-Popova conducts a multifaceted and diverse applied activities. She participates in and manages a number of projects funded by Sofia university (6), Ministry of Education and Science (6) and national Operational development programmes (4), which enriches her multidirectional interests and activities. The candidate shows her organisational potential by managing to bring together the work of students, lecturers and researchers from other universities and research organisations. She is the editor of eight scientific and applied research collections in Bulgarian and English. Dr. Kotseva-Popova is also a member of the editorial board of the Yearbook of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, and of the new ethnological journal "Terrains". Additionally, it should be noted that she is also the author of textbooks and teaching aids both for secondary education and for additional training of pedagogical and non-pedagogical staff for working with parents from vulnerable groups and parents of children with SEND in kindergartens.

**Conclusion**

The previous thoughts presented above reflect my high opinion of the candidate and her compliance with the national standards for the academic position of Associate Professor. She stands out with her scholar and applied work as well as her teaching, administrative and organisational activities. All of this gives me reason to confidently recommend her as she possesses excellent qualities for the position. My opinion on this personnel case is POSITIVE. The foregoing entitles me to vote YES for the candidate, Assist. Prof. Dr. Violeta Kalinova Kotseva-Popova to occupy the academic position of Associate Professor in the field of higher education 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences (Ethnology. Folk Medicine) for the needs of the History Department. I also appeal the members of the Scientific Council of History Department to support the candidate in this procedure.

Sofia, October 13, 2022 Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mila Mileva Maeva