**OPINION**

*by Associate Prof. Dr. Daniel Mihailov Smilov, SU "St. Kliment Ohridski"*

*on the competition for “docent” (Associate Professor), announced by SU "SV. Kliment Ohridski" by professional direction 2.2. History and Archeology (New Bulgarian History 1878–1944 - Electoral regulations and elections in Bulgaria (the first half of the 20th century)), published in the State Gazette, no. 48 of 28.06.2022*

Ch. Assistant Professor Dr. Svetoslav Mihailov Zhivkov is the only candidate announced in the Official Gazette, no. 48/ June 28, 2022 competition for the academic post of Associate Professor and in this opinion I examine his contributions and the quality of the presented habilitation thesis. At the very beginning, I state that Svetoslav Zhivkov is a competent young scientist who meets all the legal and professional requirements for appointment to the position of "associate professor". The presented monograph is a significant contribution to Bulgarian science, and my assessment is mainly reduced to its political science aspects. However, I dare to state that the monograph "Proportional representation. Elections and Electoral Legislation on the Eve of the First World War" is a serious and in-depth interdisciplinary work with undeniable elements of significant contribution to science, which I will dwell upon in more detail.

As for the legal requirements for holding the position of "associate professor", Svetoslav Zhivkov undoubtedly meets and exceeds the set minimum criteria. This is evident from the lists of publications and citations he has attached, the author’s sumaries (avtoreferat), official notes on held lectures and exercises, etc., which show that he fulfills the provisions of Art. 2b from the ZRASRB (the relevant law) for scientific field Humanities, professional direction 2.2. History and archaeology. At its first meeting, the Scientific Jury found that by groups of indicators (dissertation work; habilitation work - monograph; published book based on defended dissertation work; other publications; citations, etc.) the candidate for the academic position of associate professor presented evidence for 465 points with the necessary 400 and thus covers the minimum national requirements under Art. 2b of ZRASRB.

The scientific jury must evaluate the presented 2 monographs and 13 studies and articles, which do not repeat those used to acquire the educational and scientific degree "doctor". The candidate has presented 23 studies and articles, participation in the writing of 4 textbooks and study aids, participation in editorial boards of collections, book reviews, etc. Apart from that, Svetoslav Zhivkov has 150 media appearances, which contribute to popularizing his academic achievements. Zhivkov has participated in three projects with external funding: under the FNI at the Ministry of Education and Culture (2009); under the Operational Program "Development of Human Resources" (2010-2011), under KINNPOR (2019-2020), as well as under projects organized by the SU. He is a co-organizer of five scientific conferences.

The main habilitation work is the already mentioned monograph "Proportional representation. Elections and electoral legislation in Bulgaria on the eve of the First World War". Sofia: "St. Kliment Ohridski", 2022 ISBN: 978-954-07-5490-1 ISBN (pdf): 978-954-07-5495-6. The monograph is a detailed and professional, interdisciplinary study of the introduction of the proportional electoral system in Bulgaria on the eve of the First World War. In it, the author demonstrates his knowledge and training as both a historian and a political scientist, and the result is a truly impressive synthesis of the methods of both scientific fields.

The monograph begins with a description of the early proportional electoral systems, and in it Zhivkov provides a detailed and useful overview of all attempts from the late 19th and early 20th centuries to introduce proportional formulae in Australia and Europe. The author also introduces the various variants of proportional systems – single transferrable vote, systems with party lists, etc. The main debates in the various societies where this issue was discussed are also presented, which provides a good theoretical basis for the subsequent historical study of the Bulgarian case.

The second chapter of the habilitation thesis provides an overview of the Bulgarian majoritarian system and the attempts to abolish it until 1908. The chapter makes a thorough analysis of the electoral system of the Principality from 1893 and presents the public debates about its replacement with a proportional one - from the academic, to the journalistic and political .

The next three chapters analyze the electoral reforms of Alexander Malinov’s government (1908-1909), the change of legislation by the government of Ivan Ev. Geshov, as well as the 1913 and 1914 elections held under the new rules. The research in this part of it is undeniably innovative and represents a significant contribution to Bulgarian science. Along with the historical work with sources, it also combines an evaluation of the effects of the discussed electoral reforms with the methods of political science and thus creates not only a dense narrative, but also enables a structural comparison of the Bulgarian case with other systems and countries.

Analytical overview of the introduction of a proportional system makes it possible for Zhivkov to draw important conclusions that confirm a number of standard hypotheses in political science. First of all, the research demonstrates that in a fragmented political system - such as the system in Bulgaria at the beginning of the 20th century, the first-past-the-post majoritarian electoral system produces very serious levels of disproportionality in the election result. This leads to a strong sense of lack of representation and pressure to change the system, which largely explains the first reform of Malinov's government in 1909. Secondly, the study demonstrates that a mixed system with a mechanical combination of proportional and majoritarian elements is not a solution to the problem of disproportionality – its levels remain severe in the first more timid attempts to introduce a proportional part in elections in Bulgaria. This ultimately led to the reforms of 1912, when a fully proportional system for elections of representative bodies was introduced in the country. The third important conclusion is that this system does fulfill a large part of its promises – it creates a fairly accurate representative picture in the National Assembly, but with a fragmented party system, this starts to create problems with governability and the composition of parliamentary majorities. The two parliamentary elections held under the new rules confirm this thesis - after the first, a majority was not created, and after the second, Radoslavov managed to assemble a relatively fragile government. This development is a harbinger of the dramatic events of the post-war period, when parliamentarism in many countries of Europe fell victim to the combination of party fragmentation, the presence of radical anti-establishment parties and proportional electoral systems.

Zhivkov's study is a valuable work in itself, but it must be continued for two reasons. First, from a political science perspective, the effects of electoral systems often take longer to manifest. The application of an electoral system in two elections gives enough information for reflection and analysis, but still the assessment of more serious systemic effects on representation, and above all on the efficiency of parliamentary governance (majority, governments) needs longer periods of time. Second, it would be interesting to measure the weight of the character of the electoral system against other factors - such as the presence of strong anti-system parties (communists, the agrarians, etc.). The post-war period in Europe is the time when attempts were made to save parliamentarism through its "rationalization" or through the exclusion from the political race of anti-democratic and radical parties (the "militant democracy" conception of Karl Loewenstein). The electoral formula and the electoral legislation were part of these debates, and it would be extremely interesting if Zhivkov's research was continued during this period as well. At the very least, the conclusions drawn in this work would have gained even more solid argumentation and weight (and maybe nuances in certain cases).

Among the presented other works of Zhivkov in this field, the book "The Progressive Liberal Party in Bulgaria: We do not do politics with Russia!" should be briefly mentioned. (1899 – 1920)'. Sofia: "St. Kliment Ohridski", 2014 ISBN: 978-954-07-3733-1. The monograph is basically a revised and expanded version of a dissertation for obtaining the degree "doctor". It is a comprehensive scientific study dedicated to the formation, history and ideology of the Progressive Liberal Party in Bulgaria (PLP), as well as its participation in elections for eleven members of the Parliament - from the X to the XIX National Assembly including the V National Assembly. The book demonstrates the author's enduring professional interest in the field of party representation and electoral processes. It also represents a major contribution to historical scholarship and is useful for students and researchers in other socio-political disciplines.

The research papers and the books of Dr. Zhivkov have not a small number of citations. The book on the Progressive Liberal Party, as well as the articles on the proportional system, are already attracting the attention of the scientific community. The current habilitation thesis will accumulate citations and will certainly become a classic study of the early attempts to introduce the proportional system in Bulgaria.

The author, of course, knows very well the state of Bulgarian and foreign political science literature on the topics of his research and precisely cites and uses a wide range of studies. There is no evidence of any plagiarism. The scientific contributions in the author’s summaries are well defined and substantiated. The books are well and interestingly written and can be of interest not only to a professional audience. The presented photographic and illustrative material also contributes to the quality of the scientific product.

Based on this brief analysis, I strongly believe that Ch. assistant professor Dr. Svetoslav Zhivkov meets all the requirements in order to be elected to the academic position of "associate professor" for the needs of the Faculty of History of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", as announced in the Official Gazette, no. 48 of 28.06.2022 competition. I also congratulate him for the very good book he has written, which, I hope, will become the first part of an even larger-scale study of elections and electoral systems in Bulgaria.

Sofia, 10.10. 2022. Author of opinion: Assoc. Dr. D. Smilov