OPINION
on a doctoral thesis
for the award of the academic and scientific degree of "Doctor"
in the professional field 1.3. Pedagogy of Teaching ..., doctoral programme "Methodology of Teaching Philosophical Disciplines" ,

The opinion was prepared by: Assoc. prof. PhD Iliana Ognyanova Petkova, Faculty of Pedagogy of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", member of the academic jury pursuant to Order No. RD 38 – 188 of 17 April 2026 of the Rector of Sofia University.

Thesis topic: "Pupils' expectations of the philosophy and civic education teacher as a determinant of their 'professional self-image' (Years 8–12)**"**

Author of the thesis: Katya Rosenova Dimitrova
Supervisor: Prof. Yanka Rasheva Merdzhanova, DrH

I. Opinion on the procedure and the candidate

1. Opinion on the procedure and the documents submitted

Katya Dimitrova is a self-funded PhD student, as she was appointed to a research position at the Faculty of Education following a successful competition for the post of assistant lecturer. Having fulfilled the requirements under Article 24 of *the Regulations on the Procedure for the Award of Doctoral Degrees*, she was enrolled for the period 01.02. 2024 to 01.02 2027. She was granted early discharge with the right to defend her thesis by a decision of the Faculty Council in March 2026.

In accordance with the procedure, PhD candidate Katya Dimitrova has submitted the following documents: 1) a thesis, 2) an abstract in Bulgarian, 3) a curriculum vitae, 4) a Master's degree certificate in the specialisation 'Head (Manager) of Educational Institutions', 5) a statement of compliance with the minimum educational requirements, 6) publications, 7) an order appointing the academic jury.

<u>Conclusion</u>: *The documents submitted by the candidate for the defence comply with Article 67(5) of the Regulations on the Conditions and Procedure for the Award of Academic Degrees and the Holding of Academic Posts at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" (PURPNSZADSU). The doctoral candidate meets the national minimum requirements for the award of the academic degree of 'Doctor'.*

2. Information about the doctoral candidate

Katya Dimitrova graduated with a degree in Pedagogy. With the support and cooperation of colleagues from the Faculty of Philosophy, the Faculty of Pedagogy is authorised to train students specialising in Pedagogy to obtain the additional qualification of 'Teacher of Philosophy and Civic Education'. Assistant Professor Katya Dimitrova expressed an interest and successfully graduated, acquiring this additional qualification. For a year, she worked as a primary school teacher at 112th Primary School 'Stoyan Zaimov'. Her desire to pursue an academic career prompted her to apply for the advertised post of assistant lecturer, which she won.

II. Assessment of the thesis – it comprises 182 pages and is structured into two parts: a theoretical section and an empirical section, a conclusion, a bibliography of 135 sources (of which 35 are online links) and six appendices. The theoretical part contains three main points, one of which is a description of the author's conceptual model for researching the self-image of teachers of Philosophy and Civic Education (PCE).

The thesis is devoted to a topical yet challenging research problem related to the formation of the teacher's professional profile. It is valuable in that it aims to outline the professional self-image of teachers in specific academic disciplines – Philosophy and Civic Education (PhCE}. The specific nature of the subject matter taught inevitably influences their professional self-image.

The study examines teacher identity as a dynamic system, shaped not only by professional training and institutional requirements, but also through genuine dialogue with pupils. Today, when the learner is placed at the centre of the educational process, seeking students' opinions and examining their expectations provides a different perspective on the teacher's profile. In this context, the analysis of students' expectations of the teacher of philosophy and citizenship education takes on particular significance, as these subjects are directly linked to the development of civic awareness, critical thinking and value orientations.

Teacher professionalism is also examined through the lens of the challenges arising from the transformations of the education system in the 21st century. It is precisely philosophical paradigms that underpin these changes and set the direction for the development of education.

The search for points of convergence in the views of pupils and teachers makes the research difficult and challenging.

Three issues intersect within the research topic, each of which could be the subject of a separate study, namely students' expectations, the teacher's professional self-image according to the FGO, and the future of education.

The theoretical section develops the idea of the education of the future, based on an analysis of Jan Amos Comenius's class-lesson system and a description of the pedagogical ideas of Maria Montessori, Rudolf Steiner, Alexander Neill and Janusz Korczak, as well as various ideas and educational models that were progressive for their time, albeit presented briefly. Quite rightly, greater emphasis is placed on the teaching of Philosophy and Civic education. The curricula for Philosophy for Years 8, 9 and 10 and for Civic Education for Years 11 and 12 are examined. As stated on p. 27, based on an analysis of 'thematic cores and topics, classroom and out-of-classroom activities, interdisciplinary links and social partners', the doctoral candidate identifies seven essential competences and qualities required of a teacher of Philosophy and Civic Education. A separate section is devoted to psychological theories of the self-image of the personality and the key concepts associated with this term, such as self-image, self-concept and the structure of the self-image. I would describe this perspective by PhD student Katya Dimitrova as a significant contribution, moving from the classical image of the teacher-philosopher to the contemporary teacher of Philosophy and Civic Education. The transformation of the teacher's professional roles in general, the synergistic approach in education, and the distinct philosophical curriculum content form the basis of the more specific professional profile of the philosophy teacher. This is described in detail, with the characteristics being derived, on the one hand, from the key competences that must be developed in pupils, and on the other, from the regulatory framework. The final section of the first chapter describes the two conceptual models proposed by the author. The first, as defined by the PhD candidate, is content-based and includes a description of the professional self-image of the PhCE teacher. It comprises four interrelated levels: at the core is the teacher's personal identity; at the second level are the so-called psychological competences; at the third – professional competences; and at the fourth – professional-personal qualities. The second conceptual model developed by the author is defined as functional and focuses on pupils' expectations and opinions regarding the teacher's 'professional self-image', as perceived through pupils' opinions and expectations.

The second part of the thesis is devoted to the empirical study. It is two-pronged. On the one hand, it examines 'the students' expectations that influence the construction of the teacher's Professional Self-Image in Foreign Language Teaching, and on the other – those factors that influence its formation and development. Philosophy and Ethics teachers and their students were surveyed; for this purpose, three questionnaires were designed, as the professional self-image of the teacher was examined across two subjects – Philosophy and Ethics. To this end, pupils in Years 8 to 10 studying Philosophy and pupils in Years 11 and 12 studying Civic Education were surveyed. The total number of respondents is impressive for a doctoral study – 2,184, comprising 75 Philosophy and Civic Education teachers and 2,109 students (1,355 from Years 8–10 and 754 from Years 11–12). The analyses are: sequential – i.e. of pupils and teachers – and comparative – between the responses of teachers and pupils. A content analysis of the open-ended questions and a descriptive analysis were also carried out. In analysing the individual questions, the PhD candidate also emphasises the acceptance or rejection of the formulated hypotheses. Based on the empirical study, K. Dimitrova constructs a 'Model of the PhCE teacher as a teacher in the "School of the Future"'. To me, this is more of a professional self-image of the PhCE teacher as a Teacher of the Future, because it presents those key qualities that they must possess as an educator of the children of the future. The so-called comparative conclusions formulated form the basis for deriving theoretical and practical guidelines for future research.

I accept the contributions as formulated. The abstract fully reflects the content of the thesis. The publications presented are on the topic of the thesis.

Question: What are the characteristics of the four distinct levels of the professional self-image of the modern teacher of foreign languages that need to be developed in the teacher of the future?

Conclusion: The topicality and breadth of the subject, which seeks to combine the professional self-image of the teacher, pupils' expectations and the education of the future, presents a challenge at both theoretical and empirical levels. I consider that the doctoral candidate has met this challenge, and I therefore propose that the members of the distinguished academic jury award the academic degree of 'Doctor' to Katya Rosenova Dimitrova in the professional field 1.3. Pedagogy of Teaching in… (Methodology of Teaching in Philosophical Disciplines).

Date: 20 May 2026 Author of the opinion: .....

(Assoc. Prof. PhD I. Petkova)