

# STATEMENT

given by

**Assoc. Prof. Despina Mirolyubova Vasileva, PhD**

SOFIA UNIVERSITY "St. Kliment Ohridski"

on the materials submitted to the competition for the academic position of  
*Associate Professor* at Sofia University "Kliment Ohridski" in the field of higher stage of education:

1. Pedagogical Sciences; professional field: 1.3. "Pedagogy of learning in ..."

(Methodology of teaching Bulgarian language and literature at primary stage of education)

According to Order No.RD 38-453/19.07.2023 by the Rector of the Sofia University "Kliment Ohridski" I have been appointed as a member of the Scientific Jury of the competition for the academic position "*Associate Professor*" in the field of higher stage of education: 1. Pedagogical Sciences, professional field: 1.3. "Pedagogy of Education in ..." (Methodology of teaching Bulgarian language and literature at primary stage of education). **Assoc. Prof. Maya Sotirova Sotirova, PhD**, Associate Professor at the Faculty of Pedagogy of Southwestern University "Neofit Rilski" participates in this competition for "*Associate Professor*" (announced in the State Gazette No.56 of 30.06.2023). The set of materials (documents) submitted by Assoc. Prof. Maya Sotirova Sotirova for her participation in the procedure follows the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria. All documents are well prepared, formatted and arranged. The references and lists contain the necessary information, among which the most important documents are: the PhD Diploma; the Certificate of Associate Professor; the List of publications for participation in the competition; the Reference for fulfilling the minimum national requirements under Article 2b of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria; the Reference for citations with complete bibliographic description of the cited and citing publications; information on participation in scientific projects, etc.

The scientific texts, with which Assoc. Prof. Maya Sotirova Sotirova participated in the competition for the academic position of "*Associate Professor*", are distinguished by: topicality of the developed issues; diversity of the used research approaches; demonstration of the professional competence of an excellent methodologist; outlining the candidate's deep scientific interests in the field of the competition. The scientific publications submitted for participation have not been used in previous procedures.

The main habilitation work—the monograph named "Personalized Bulgarian Language Teaching at the Primary Stage of Basic Education"—is concentrated on an important topic for the effectiveness of modern education and has a clear applied orientation. The necessity of rethinking the existing methodological models (to direct them in reorientation towards the means and mechanisms of developing personalized learning) is clearly outlined.

The first chapter of the thesis traces the role of personalized learning in view of the contemporary educational situation. The author defends the thesis that the contemporary person-centered paradigm in education is associated with factors such as mastering key competences, nurturing values, developing students' abilities and talents, inclusion and educational integration. The author's broad pedagogical and cultural awareness enables her to explore the processes in education in the context of developing phenomena such as globalization, massification, and standardization of education in order to propose the approach she discusses as an alternative that counters the existing accumulated negative aspects in the educational environment. The idea of outlining an individualistic-humanistic paradigm in which the student is the agent and subject of his/her own education is at stake. Emphasis is placed on the idiographic orientation of the educational process, with nomothetic features remaining secondary. A similar tendency is sought in the educational documents examined in detail by Assoc. Prof. Sotirova. Aspects of the competence approach (nature, content, and place in the educational process, characteristics, and possibilities) are traced, and the following reasonable conclusions are reached: the competence approach is difficult to apply in a situation of subject orientation of education; there is not sufficient inter-subject integration. It is no coincidence that the author speaks of competence-oriented education, defining the competence approach, the person-oriented approach and the value-oriented approach as "the three pillars of modern education" (p. 39).

The second chapter of the monograph traces the conceptual foundations of personalization in learning. Personalization is examined from a philosophical perspective, proposing an approach that allows the individual to leave the signs of the mainstream and exist beyond standards because "values derived from the individual remain paramount" (p.44). The distinction in the terms individuation (understood as a concept of a higher rank) and individual approach is clarified, and the development of the individual approach in previous theoretical and theoretical-applied texts is traced in detail, indicating the author's in-depth attitude to the problem and her reflexive attitude to the scientific literature, not only summarizing but also setting the dialogical or confronting fields in the scientific sources. The monograph devotes a significant role to personalized learning, tracing the possible applications of the

approach in existing conditions and real educational contexts. Essential is the identification of the difference between adaptive personalized learning and transformative personalized learning.

The third and fourth chapters of the monograph make an outstanding practical-applied contribution to the construction of personalized learning. The third chapter traces the possibilities for the implementation of personalized learning in Bulgarian language at the primary stage of the basic educational level. It proposes a model in which the possibilities of implementing personalized learning in the context of the existing curriculum are explored, asking whether it is possible to implement such an approach with as few negative phenomena as possible. The model proposed by Maya Sotirova is based on the assumption that the competence approach is based on the constructivist philosophy of education (although a broader elaboration of the difference between cognitive and social constructivism is possible). In the model, the following main directions are formed: technology of personalized learning; possible learning strategies; rethinking the system of goals, learning content, methods and techniques, pedagogical means, didactic technology of personalized learning. It is pointed out that the construction of personalized learning is possible when linking the learning objectives to the individual goals of each student, when differentiating the learning objectives for a group and an individual student, changing the learning content according to the characteristics of students, establishing the learning style of each student. The model of the development of communicative competence is adopted for the teaching of Bulgarian language and literature at the primary level.

The fourth chapter of the monograph presents the planning, conducting, and analyzing of survey data to ascertain teachers' opinions regarding personalized learning. All data were properly collected, the number of respondents was sufficient to establish general trends, the selection of schools was differentiated, and data were properly analyzed. The analysis highlights teachers' attitudes towards certain innovative practices to support personalized learning; reveals a worrying trend of insufficient support for teachers when working with children with special educational needs; and establishes the extent to which teachers are actually coping by adapting their teaching to the demands of pupils and the learning environment.

The articles submitted by Assoc. Prof. Maya Sotirova for participation in the competition for "Associate Professor" outline the spectrum of the author's professional research interests in the field of topical issues for the teaching of Bulgarian language in the primary educational stage. A systematic interest in the study of communicative competence and its development in the teaching of Bulgarian language and literature is shown, as evidenced by a series of articles. Sotirova's publications, in which

she demonstrates an attitude towards the problems are related to the education of children from the Roma ethnic group, also make a significant contribution.

Assoc. Prof. Maya Sotirova has presented a sufficient number of scientific papers published after the materials used in other procedures. Their original scientific and applied contributions set a practical perspective for increasing the effectiveness of Bulgarian language teaching in the primary educational stage. The review of the presented production creates the appearance of a purposeful researcher who competently complements a number of theoretical and practical-applied aspects of the methodology of teaching Bulgarian language in the primary stage.

### ***Conclusion***

The scientific and teaching qualifications of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Maya Sotirova are unquestionable. After reading the materials and scientific works presented in the competition, analyzing their significance and scientific, scientific and applied contributions contained in them, I give my positive assessment and recommend the Scientific Jury to prepare a report-proposal for the election of **Assoc. Prof. Dr. Maya Sotirova, PhD** to the academic position of "*Associate Professor*" in the field of higher stage of education: 1. Pedagogical Sciences, professional field: 1.3. "Pedagogy of Education in ..." (Methodology of teaching Bulgarian language and literature at primary stage of education).

Oct. 23, 2023

This statement is given by:



**Assoc. Prof. Despina Vasileva, PhD**