

OPINION STATEMENT

By

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On scientific papers and scientific contributions

of Assoc. Prof., D Habil Milena Hristova Stefanova,

**Candidate in a competition for a professor in scientific field of 3.3.Political sciences (Local
government and Local self-government)**

1. On the procedure

I am not aware of any violations within the procedure for the competition, announced by Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in SG no. 22 /16.03.2021, for a Professor in Political Science (Local Government and Local Self-Government). For participation in the competition, documents were submitted by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Habil Milena Hristova Stefanova, who is also the only candidate.

2. Information Details on the candidate

The candidate Milena Hristova Stefanova graduated Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" - Sofia, Faculty of Philosophy, major Sociology. In the same faculty, in the Department of Political Science, the candidate defended her doctoral degree in 1991. (The Role of the Bulgarian chorbadjii in the Political life during the Revival). The candidate started work at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", first as a specialist in the Laboratory for the Political Life of Bulgarians, Faculty of Philosophy; then chief assistant and Associate professor since 1997 until now. It has to be emphasized that Milena Stefanova has remarkable professional experience and practice, consistently working and cooperating in Sofia Municipal Council, and in the mandate 2003-2007 she has been also a municipal councilor. As a municipal councilor, Stefanova headed the Standing Committee on Local Self-Government and Legislation and had been member of several municipal commissions. Stefanova's active academic involvement is also very impressive, as after 2003 she is Head of the Department of Public Administration, Deputy Dean and Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy and in mandate 2011-2015 - Vice Rector

of Sofia University, responsible for Academic Affairs and Accreditation. For her active work at all levels of governance at Sofia University, in 2019 she was awarded the Badge of Honor "St. Kliment Ohridski" with a blue ribbon.

Milena Stefanova is a member of the Bulgarian Association of Political Science, and since 201 she is member of the Management Board. She has been Secretary of the Association of Bulgarian Cities and Regions and of the Institute for Local and Regional Development since 2010. Stefanova is a member of the National Commission for awarding the label for innovation and good governance at the local level at the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works. Stefanova is on the editorial boards of the scientific journals "Public Administration" and journal "Political Studies".

Milena Stefanova has managed a significant number of projects funded by the PHARE program, the EC Delegation, the EC Representation, TEMPUS, structural funds and programs of the European Commission.

3. General description of the presented scientific works

Assoc. Prof. Milena Stefanova participated in the competition for "professor" with selected publications, 12 in number, formed in a list of 2 monographs, 2 chapters from collective monographs, 2 studies and 6 articles. The selected publications, presented by the candidate, were published after the period of obtaining the scientific title "Associate Professor" and are directly related to the professional field of the announced competition for "Professor". The reference in NACID testifies that the candidate meets the minimum scientific metric requirements (795 points, as of 14.04.2020).

In terms of their content, structure, scope, the publications are fully oriented in the field of local politics and local self-government, covering several areas, namely: local government, local self-government, European policies for decentralization, regionalism, public policies. The publications are of scientific value, have a strong practical character. The publications are presented in a list with a short annotation in Bulgarian and English. The language used is professional and readable, the publications demonstrate high professional competence and analytical culture, balanced handling of history, documents and facts, on which serious analyzes and forecasts for the development of local government and the decentralization process are based.

At the very beginning, I would like to group in two thematic groups the research and publications, proposed by Milena Stefanova.

The first one, these are the theoretical and methodological issues of local government and local self-government, which it raises in proposed publications, and should immediately separate two main independent monographies.

The first was published in 2021 - "Comparative studies of local government", 116 pages, of which 107 pages main text, bibliography and summary in English. The monography is in the field of comparative political science, presents the variety of opportunities for comparative research on local government and examines the main aspects of comparative research on local government. The consistent introduction of the methodology and research methods, the review of the development of comparative research of local self-government allow the author to defend the direct connection of comparative research of local self-government and real practice at local level, which is presented by research of international organizations (Council of Europe - CLRAE, EU, World Bank) and the impact on local self-government. The Bulgarian experience is presented in detail. The author successfully defends the thesis that there is no and cannot be a universal methodology of comparative research of local self-government.

The second monography is "Local Government and Local Self-Government", 2021, 234 pages, of which 222 pages main text, bibliography and summary in English, second edition. The book presents the main parameters of the local government, analyzes and evaluates the model of local government in Bulgaria after 1989 and analyzes the problems and prospects for the development of local democracy. The author consistently presents the concepts of the role of the municipality in the modern state. Logically follow the division of powers and competencies representative - executive power, central - local government; municipal administration, municipal budgets and financial decentralization; models of urban decentralization; the participation of citizens in local self-government. Through the proposed monography, the candidate seeks and analyzes the effectiveness of local policy and the elements for the effective functioning of local government as an essential prerequisite for achieving optimal local policy.

In this thematic group, I include also the study "Methodology for assessing the activities of local authorities to protect the public interest", published in PUBLIC POLICIES.bg, 2019. The study is based on the concept of good governance and analyzes the work of local authorities to protect the public interest.

In the second group I would separate the proposed publications, related to the analysis of the history, development and practice of local government and local self-government in Bulgaria.

First to be mentioned is the study "Local Self-government in Bulgaria", published in the collection "Local Self-Government in Europe", 2021, Slovenia. The author is among the expert team that analyzes 13 local government systems in EU member states in the context of the application of the standards of the Charter of Local Self-Government. Stefanova dissects the Bulgarian local self-government, analyzing it through the standards of the Charter and in the context of the complex Bulgarian transition.

In this thematic group I would also include the article "Challenges of the Implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Bulgarian Legislation", published in LEX LOCALIS - JOURNAL OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT, volume: Vol. 16, 2018. The author examines the application of the legal texts of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and defends the thesis of full application of the principle of subsidiarity and consistent implementation of the decentralization process. Guided by both theoretical knowledge and her direct work and experience in local government, the author offers practical ideas for increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of public administration in Bulgaria.

The result of many years of research, systematic supplementation and enrichment of the study of local government in Bulgaria, Stefanova has included in the list of publications a series of articles that cover and analyze the specific issues of the Bulgarian transition - "Decentralization of Public Administration" (2019); "The Strategic Approach in Management and Disposal of Municipal Property, Where Are We Going?" (2018); "The Strategic Approach in Management and Disposal of Municipal Property" (2018); "Criteria for democratization of local government" (1993); "Trust in Public Systems" (2018) and two chapters "Ombudsman" and "Public Sector" in a collective monograph.

4. Scientific contributions

Milena Stefanova's scientific contributions can be synthesized as:

- Systematic research work for presentation in comparative terms the policies of local government and self-government within the European Union and Bulgaria, considered in their historical dynamic development, outlining their specifics and practical dimensions;
- In-depth knowledge and presentation of the impact of the European Charter for local self-government on the Bulgarian local government in an interdisciplinary reading and environment, which enriches the available research base and substantiated the need for a new Law on Local Self-Government in Bulgaria;

- Analyzed methodology of comparative research of the local self-government as a part of comparative political science. Derivation of rules and principles of comparative analysis, which must be followed when creating a methodology and choosing a methodology for conducting comparative studies of local government;
- The Bulgarian system of local self-government has been studied comprehensively, theoretically and from practical point of view. The main characteristics, features and problems of the decentralization process in Bulgaria in the period 1991 - 2015 are presented.
- A clear category-conceptual apparatus that is handled and the clarification of basic concepts and categories needed in the process of training students and politicians at the local level;
- The interdisciplinary practical direction of the proposed scientific publications that represent the intersections of the modern researcher, practitioner, politician, which is a significant contribution to policy making at the local level. The publications are characterized by a strong practical application;
- I believe that the candidate has a significant contribution to the formation of literacy and competence in the field of local government and local self-government among local authorities themselves by working in the field with representatives of local self-government in Bulgaria (NAMRB).

Milena Stefanova is widely cited, proven by her own list of 94 citations in Bulgarian and English. She has mentored five doctoral students who successfully defended their dissertations.

5. Teaching work

Milena Stefanova is a correct and preferred lecturer, with high motivation and self-criticism, looking for and adapting new pedagogical teaching methods. Stefanova has been a lecturer at Sofia University for 39 years. She presented a report on intensive lecture activities both with students from the Faculty of Philosophy at Sofia University, but also with experts and practitioners at international, national and local forums and conferences, practitioners and members of the public authorities in Bulgaria. She is active, committed and has an active civil position.

6. Personal impressions

I could share my impressions of my work with Milena Stefanova in two qualities.

As a colleague and member of the Bulgarian Association of Political Science, in which I have been since 2003. Our colleague Stefanova has always been an active member of the association, with an active position and in search of opportunities to strengthen the professional community. Stefanova is a member of the Board in the current mandate, she actively and constantly works for the development of the association, actively contribute on winning project.

As the head of the Representation of the Council of Europe in Bulgaria (2007-2010) I know Stefanova's work as a researcher and field practitioner. She has repeatedly participated in organized events of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, both as a participant and as a speaker, always with a position and in-depth analysis and perspective.

Conclusion

The scientific contributions of Milena Hristova Stefanova, candidate in a competition for a professor in scientific field 3.3. Political Science (Local Government and Local Self-Government), are presented in the proposed publications. An excellent lecturer, communicator and practitioner, Stefanova has been working with students, colleagues, experts, researchers, practitioners, politicians for many years, thus influencing the development of the entire Bulgarian political life.

After getting acquainted with the scientific publications presented in the competition, after the analysis of the scientific, applied, scientific-applied contributions contained in them, I give a positive assessment for Milena Hristova Stefanova. This gives me grounds to propose to the members of the scientific jury to make a proposal to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philosophy at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" Milena Hristova Stefanova to be elected to hold the academic position "Professor" in Political science (Local government and local self-government) in the context of the competition, announced by Sofia University " St. Kliment Ohridski ", SG, issue 22 /16.03.2021.

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Veliko Tarnovo

/Teodora Kaleynska, PhD/