

Opinion

by Associate Professor Dr. Daniel Mihailov Smilov for the candidacy of Dr. Milen Todorov Lyubenov for the position of "Associate Professor" in Political Science (PN 3.3 Political Science - Parties and Party Systems)

In this opinion I make a brief overview of the academic qualities and contributions of Dr. Milen Lyubenov, as well as of the presented works with which he applied for the position of associate professor. Since I have known the candidate for a long time, I want to express my full support for his habilitation from the very beginning. Milen Lyubenov is an extremely well-prepared and educated colleague, a leading specialist in parties and party systems in Bulgaria. His research is original, well designed, meaningful and precisely crafted. In his work he combines excellent knowledge of the academic literature and theory in the field of parties and party systems with empirical methods (quantitative and qualitative). In his teaching activity Lyubenov is exemplary - methodical, organized and working a lot with students (including those at the doctoral level).

The documents and scientific papers provided by the candidate clearly demonstrate that he meets all the formal conditions for holding the position of "Associate Professor". Milen Lyubenov already has three monographs, as well as numerous studies and articles. He has proposed two monographs for the competition: "European Party Systems: A Comparative Analysis of 20 Democracies 1945-2020" (Sofia University Press) and "Political Parties: Institutionalization and Organizational Development" (Science and Society); three studies (one in English co-authored with Prof. Georgi Karasimenov), one chapter of a book in an edited volume in English and five articles. All scientific texts are on the issues of the competition and the specialization of Milen Lyubenov in the field of parties and party systems. These research papers are more than enough for the position of "associate professor" and are a demonstration of the high professional training of the candidate.

In terms of citations, the information provided also confirms that the applicant meets the legal requirements. A sufficient number of citations are recorded in the various scientific databases, which confirm the high quality of Lyubenov's scientific work. In particular, in the Web of Science the candidate has 6 citations, in Scopus - 2 (h-index 1) and in CEEOL - 8. Extended research (conducted by both the candidate and the author of the opinion) through Google Scholar and other databases also has produced many citations (over 24). Also, the databases of the academic library catalogues contain numerous works by Milen Lyubenov.

As a colleague of Milen Lyubenov in the Department of Political Science at Sofia University, I can not help but give an extremely high assessment of the teaching work of the candidate, as well as his participation in the administrative work of the department. Milen has always been accurate and respectful in his relations with both colleagues and students. He has participated in virtually all high-profile departmental seminars and conferences, common publications and research projects. His contribution to these common endeavors has always been valuable.

The attached reports on the teaching load of Milen Lyubenov demonstrate that he has and has always had classes that significantly exceed the standards for lecturers at Sofia University. This is another confirmation of the candidate's commitment to teaching in the Department of Political Science.

In the rest of the opinion I will present a brief assessment of the main works of the candidate, with which he participates in the competition for associate professor. Among them, the most significant are undoubtedly the two already mentioned monographs, which are complete, original and well-done research - an indisputable contribution to Bulgarian political science.

The monograph "European Party Systems: A Comparative Analysis of 20 Democracies 1945-2020" (Sofia University Publishing House) is 253 pages long and contains ten chapters and a conclusion. The study traces the development of party systems in 20 European countries, which include Western European

democracies after World War II, the democratized south of Europe (Spain, Portugal, Greece), and six Eastern European countries after the transformations of 1989.

The theoretical framework of the study is taken from the theory of new institutionalism, from which Lyubenov borrows the idea of path dependence. According to this theory, the choice of institutions (rules) at certain key moments (critical junctures) predetermines the development of the system in subsequent periods. This is because institutions have their own inertia, they have a sticky character and their change involves serious transaction costs.

Applied to party systems, this theory explains why parties that emerge at key moments in the history of a particular political community usually have a long history and remain in existence long after the original logic of their emergence has been exhausted. Lyubenov's research is valuable in that it demonstrates the validity of this thesis in different political contexts, in many different party systems.

While the theory of the chosen path (path dependence) demonstrates why parties are generally institutionalized, as well as party systems, there are still forces in this area that can lead to disintegration and de-institutionalization. One of these forces is populism in its modern form. In response to the excessive cartelization of party systems, populism relies not only on criticism of the political establishment, but also on a desire to re-establish or radically change the political system. Populism is often positioned as an enemy of partisanship in general, as well as of the resilience of party systems. Lyubenov analyzes both the inertia and the tendency of party systems to reproduce, and the influence of "destructive" forces, such as that of populism. This nuanced analysis is a significant contribution to the understanding of the development over time of party systems in Bulgarian political science.

The second monograph presented by the candidate for the purposes of the competition is "Political Parties: Institutionalization and Organizational

Development" (Science and Society). This study is a state of the art survey of the knowledge of political parties and can also be used as a textbook on the subject. Within 152 pages (four chapters, introduction and conclusion) the author explores the substantive and functional aspects of the parties; the organizational models and types of parties; the rise of the party in government and the formation of party systems. The book is an original study because it also proposes an interesting research thesis: the political party is not a static concept, but a phenomenon that changes over time and evolves. The transition from aristocratic (parliamentary) parties to mass parties and catch-all parties has generally been well studied in the literature. Lyubenov's contribution is that he adds to this familiar picture the modern aspects of the evolution of parties, in which the emphasis is more on the party's activity in government. The populist reaction to the cartelization of parties is also an element of the modern development of parties: the populist party, with its enhanced personalization and emptiness of ideological content, risks turning the party into an "empty shell." In general, the study is of interest to both those entering the study of political parties and the specialists.

Special attention should be paid to the studies and articles of Milen Lyubenov, with which he applied for the position of "associate professor". I will not analyze each of these scientific texts separately, but will summarize the important topics they address. In a 2008 study, Lyubenov made a thorough analysis of the Bulgarian party system, focusing on the transition between the party system of the 1990s (organized around differences in the assessment of the political past and the communist period) and the new party system in which this initial cleavage no longer plays a major role. According to the author, the new relevant cleavage is "center-periphery".

In an English language study from 2013 Lyubenov (co-authored with Prof. Georgi Karasimeonov) offers a case study of Bulgaria in a handbook on political change in Eastern Europe. This is a prestigious publication that is important for the overall understanding of the Bulgarian case by the international academic community.

The third presented study (2020) is an analysis of the Bulgarian constitutions with a focus on the regulation of the principles of representative democracy in it. Although not in the narrow field of parties and party systems, this publication is a key demonstration of Lyubenov's good understanding of parliamentary democracy.

The presented articles and book chapters are also of significant scientific interest and show the accuracy and ability of the candidate to understand and analyze difficult problems.

Based on these notes, as well as on the basis of my overall acquaintance with the academic work of Milen Lyubenov, I again declare my unconditional support for his candidacy for the position of "Associate Professor". I am also pleased to call on the scientific jury to vote in favor of the candidate, who will certainly be a worthy member of the community of habilitated lecturers at Sofia University.

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