

OPINION

By Assoc. Prof. Juliana Galabinova, PhD

New Bulgarian University, Professional field 3.7. Administration and Management

On scientific works presented by applicant in competition for occupation of academic position "Professor" in Professional field 3.3. „Political Science“ (Local Authority and Self-government), announced in SG 22/16.03.2021, with a candidate
Assoc. Prof. Milena Hristova Stefanova, Doctor Habil

I. Assessment of compliance with the minimum national requirements

For participation in the competition for the academic position "Professor" Assoc. Prof. Milena Stefanova presents self-assessment and evidence that are in full compliance with the provisions of the national legislation.

With her activity Assoc. Prof. Stefanova has fulfilled (and according to some of the indicators – exceeds) the minimum national requirements for the scientific and teaching activity for the Higher education field 3. Social, economic, and legal sciences, Professional field 3.3. Political sciences, determined by the Implementing Rules to the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act (IRDASRBA), which the candidates for the academic position "Professor" must meet.

The candidate in the competition has been awarded: scientific degree "Candidate of Sciences" (Professional field 3.3. Political Sciences, Diploma 21 013/25.04.1991, Higher Attestation Commission), scientific degree "Doctor of Science" in Professional field 3.3. Political Sciences, which is certified by the Diploma SU2019-3, issued on 25.04.2019, and is an Associate Professor since 1998 (certificate № 19 224/03.08.1998, Higher Attestation Commission).

The monograph, which Assoc. Prof. Stefanova has presented for participation in the competition – "Comparative Studies of Local Self-Government", Sofia, 2021, ISBN 978-954-07-5154-2 has a scientific editor Prof. Romyana Kolarova, reviewers: Assoc. Prof. Elena Kalfova-Voynova, Simeon Petrov, PhD, and is published by Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

II. Research activities and results

1. Assessment of the monograph work, including an assessment of the scientific and applied contributions of the author

The issues of the monograph submitted for participation in the competition are significant. My assessment of the scientific and applied contributions of the monographic work and its qualities is entirely positive. Among them stand out the following:

- Assoc. Prof. Stefanova analyzes the methodology of comparative research of local self-government as a part of comparative political science.
- An important contribution of the monograph is that its author distinguishes the approaches of research to different types of objects of comparison and through analysis of exemplary methodologies of comparative research proves the similarities and differences in the approaches to developed and emerging democracies.
- Assoc. Prof. Stefanova formulates and presents the stages of development of comparative research of local self-government in four aspects, emphasizing the historical context, institutional and post-institutional approaches, and approaches to the study of emerging democracies, successfully defending the thesis that the post-institutional approach includes elements of the institutional.
- Valuable in my opinion are the author's reflections on the role of comparative research at the municipal level in the international and national context, and the thoroughly analyzed examples from the Bulgarian practice in the field of local self-government, which is assessed by the author in view of basic democratic rights and principles.

2. Evaluation of the contributions to the other attached publications

The self-assessment and the evidence materials include publications after the appointment of the academic position "Associate Professor" by a group of indicators D, the sum of which amounts to 250 points and exceeds the required minimum from IRDASRBA (200 points).

In addition to her main monographic research, Assoc. Prof. Stefanova participates in the competition with another monograph: "Local Authority and Local Self-Government", second, revised and supplemented edition, Sofia, UPH "St. Kliment Ohridski", 2021, ISBN 978-954-07-5153-5.

The candidate for the academic position "Professor" has also developed: two chapters from collective monographs, two studies (one of which is in English) and six articles, one of which is in English and is published in a scientific publication, indexed, and referenced in the Web of Science. None of the publications was used in a previous procedure.

After getting acquainted in detail with the publications of Assoc. Prof. Milena Stefanova presented for participation in the competition for the academic position "Professor", I think that they

are in full compliance with the field of the announced competition – 3.3. Political science, with a focus on local government and municipal self-government.

My review of the research output is a reason to draw the following more general and evaluative conclusions:

- The presented publications demonstrate consistency in the scientific development of the candidate in the competition for the academic position "Professor";
- The issues analyzed by the author are very relevant and provide opportunities for in-depth research;
- All works of Assoc. Prof. Stefanova are based on representative literature and formulate and prove the author's theses;
- The publications of Assoc. Prof. Stefanova are characterized by many scientific and theoretical contributions, but also by significant practical and applied results.
- The research carried out by the candidate has become public and has been reported at numerous scientific forums.

3. Citation by other authors

Under group D "Citation in monographs and collective volumes with scientific review and in unreferenced journals with scientific review" the candidate provides in her self-assessment information and evidence for 155 points (100 required under IRDASRBA), ie. according to this indicator she exceeds the minimum national requirements for the development of the academic staff in our country.

The publications of Assoc. Prof. Stefanova presented for participation in the competition for the academic position "Professor" are cited in monographs and collective volumes with scientific review and in journals with a scientific review. I consider the citations of her works as proof of the high appreciation she receives for her research work from other authors with publications in the field of municipal development and local self-government.

III. Teaching activities

1. Lectures and extracurricular commitment, work with students and doctoral students

In the last five years, Assoc. Prof. Stefanova significantly exceeds the norm, reporting over 900 hours of teaching activities per year, most of which are lectures. Her teaching workload is formed in the Bachelor's and Master's degrees in two specialties from the Faculty of Philosophy at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" – Public Administration and Political Science, as well as in the

master's degree at the Faculty of Biology. Assoc. Prof. Stefanova is a supervisor of the master's program "European Public Administration" at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

She has supervised many graduates (over 20 students) and 5 doctoral students, successfully defended their doctoral dissertations in the period 2008-2020.

IV. Administrative and public activity

1. Participation in the academic administration of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" (in different periods)

Assoc. Prof. Milena Stefanova has held the following managerial positions at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski": Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs (Bachelor's and Master's degree) and Accreditation; Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy; Head of the Department of Public Administration.

2. Public activity

The candidate for the academic position "Professor" is a member of the following organizations: the Bulgarian Association of Political Science and the Board of BAPS, the editorial board of the magazine "Public Administration", the editorial board of the magazine "Political Studies", published by the Bulgarian Association of Political Science; the working group for elaboration of a draft Strategy for decentralization of the Republic of Bulgaria, the National Commission for awarding the label for innovations and good governance at local level to the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works.

She is secretary of the Association of Bulgarian Cities and Regions and of the Institute for Local and Regional Development.

Assoc. Prof. Stefanova has impressive professional experience, which has an extremely positive impact on her research interests and teaching. Her expertise as a project manager and professional consultant is shaped by her commitments to various international and national organizations: the World Bank, Transparency International, the Open Society Foundation and Institute, the United States Agency for International Development, and others. She has managed and participated in projects funded by the mentioned organizations and by the European Commission, HESP program, Phare program, operational programs of the Republic of Bulgaria ("Good Governance", "Human Resources Development", "Administrative Capacity"), "Active citizens" Fund, etc., as well as projects assigned by the Council of Ministers, the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, the Ministry of State Administration, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Education and Science.

V. Personal impressions of the applicant

My impressions of the scientific, teaching, and public activity of Assoc. Prof. Milena Stefanova are entirely positive. She is one of the most prominent researchers and experts in the field of local self-government, decentralization, and municipal development in Bulgaria, whose publications and competencies are sought after and valued both in our country and abroad.

Conclusion

The candidacy of Assoc. Prof. Stefanova fully meets the requirements of the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act and the regulation for its implementation. Assoc. Prof. Milena Stefanova has numerous and definitely proven contributions, as well as indisputable dignities as a researcher and lecturer.

On the basis of the aforementioned, I give a positive assessment of the scientific and academic activities of the candidate and support the occupation of the academic position "Professor" at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" by Assoc. Prof. Milena Hristova Stefanova, Doctor Habil in Professional field 3.3. Political Science (Local authority and Self-government).

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Assoc. Prof. Juliana Galabinova, PhD