

OPINION

by:

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professional field 3.3. Political Science, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

concerning:

competition for the academic position "Associate Professor"

in a professional field 3.3. Political Science (Political Science - Political Parties and Party Systems) at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

1. Information about the competition and the candidates

The procedure for announcing the competition has been correctly applied and is in accordance with the requirements of the legal and internal regulations of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". The competition was announced in the State Gazette No. 32 / 16.04.2021 for the needs of the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". The only participant who submitted the necessary documents within the announced deadline is Chief Assistant Milen Todorov Lyubenov, PhD. After checking the documents submitted by the applicant, it was found that they are reliable and in full. They provide all the necessary information for an objective assessment of the scientific production and teaching activities of Mr. Lyubenov. The candidate meets all the requirements for holding the aforementioned academic position, set in Art. 29 of the Law for development of the academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria. He obtained the scientific and educational degree "Doctor" in the same professional field in 2010. He currently holds the academic position of "Chief Assistant" in the Department of Political Science at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", having previously been Assistant (2006-2008) and Senior Assistant (2008-2010). In the period 2012-2017 he was Secretary for Internal Policy of the President of the Republic of Bulgaria.

2. Evaluation of the submitted scientific publications in fulfillment of the requirements for holding the academic position "Associate Professor"

In the competition thus announced, Mr. Lyubenov has presented 11 scientific publications, of which 2 monographs, 3 studies (one co-authored), 1 chapter of a collective monograph and 5 articles. Three of them are published in English.

The candidate's publications concern various aspects of the subject area of political parties and party systems and fully correspond to the profile of the announced competition. The most important in view of the current competition is the monograph *European party systems. Comparative analysis of 20 democracies (1945-2020)*. It is published in 2021 by “St. Kliment Ohridski” University Press and is submitted as a habilitation thesis. Its merits are a definite proof of the qualities of the candidate and the high scientific level at which he works; therefore, I will pay special attention to it.

The first impressions of the habilitation work are of ambition and courage. The study of 20 European party systems over a period of three quarters of a century (from the end of the Second World War practically to the present day) inevitably refers to Arendt Lijphart's classic work *Patterns of Democracy. Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries*. Mr. Lyubenov's claims are backed by a solid knowledge of the research field and reasonable attempts at originality. He is well acquainted with the main authorities on the subject field (Lipset, Rokkan, Mair, Bartolini, Kitchelt, etc.). The author takes the risk to include countries with different trajectories of political development and democratization - from the traditionally most developed democracies of Great Britain, the Netherlands, Belgium, etc. through the democratization of Spain, Portugal, and Greece in the 1970s, to the group of countries that followed the path to democracy after the collapse of communism.

The 20 countries involved represent party systems of different nature and historical development. Despite the differences that take place in its evolution, the candidate has found a common explanatory paradigm in the "theory of path dependence", part of the so-called "new institutionalism". The author explicitly formulates the thesis that the bulk of contemporary research of political parties focuses mainly on new contenders appearing everywhere in Europe. I especially like his skeptical attitude towards the increasingly popular thesis about the crisis of traditional parties. Completely "against the current" is the central argument of the text of the resilience of the old parties, which continue to be a significant political factor. A detailed overview of the development of cleavages in European democracies and their role in structuring

party systems is proposed. Changes in party systems have been examined in the light of the reasons for the weakening of traditional cleavages.

Ultimately, through appropriate methodology, a well-defended theoretical framework and skillfully selected facts, the candidate really manages to turn the focus and defend his fundamental thesis that the main parties involved in the initial institutionalization of the party system after periods of political transformation gain a significant advantage over future competitors. The quality of the monograph demonstrates the indisputable scientific qualities of the candidate, which are completely sufficient to take the academic position of "Associate Professor".

The other scientific works by the candidate only reinforce this favorable impression. The second monograph *Political Parties. Institutionalization and Organizational Development* (2021) analyses parties in a global context; many problems are addressed that did not find a place in the first monograph. The author examines the different definitions of parties, their functions and organization. A classification of "ideal types" of political parties – elitist, electoral, cartel, entrepreneurial, digital etc. - is convincingly constructed.

I will allow myself to note that while with his first monograph the candidate would impress any of his colleagues who worked on the topic of political parties, with his second he would be useful to any student interested in the same topic. It is impressive that the other studies and articles are also devoted to specific aspects of the same subject; all this testifies to a lasting interest and deep knowledge of this research field within which the candidate will undoubtedly increase his scientific achievements.

3. Evaluation of the teaching activity in fulfillment of the requirements for holding the academic position "Associate Professor"

Starting in 2006 as an assistant, Mr. Lyubenov has already accumulated 15 years of teaching experience on a basic employment contract at Sofia University. He is an established lecturer and the lecture courses and seminars developed and led by him are directly related to the thematic area of the announced competition. We should note the positive fact that he began his career under the supervision of Prof. Georgi Karasimeonov - the most influential Bulgarian political scientist within the research field of political parties. This cooperation guaranteed a "flying start"

and a high initial level of Mr. Lyubenov's teaching and research activities. As can be seen from the attached official reports for the last five academic years, the amount of his teaching and consultation hours (classroom and extracurricular) far exceeds the required threshold. In addition, the candidate is regularly invited to read political science courses at other faculties, which shows that his teaching abilities are noticed and highly appreciated.

As the current head of the Department of Political Science, I will dare to express deep personal satisfaction with my work and communication with Mr. Lyubenov. I am sincerely glad that another graduate of our department will become in such a convincing manner part of its habilitated lecturers. I strongly support the candidacy of Mr. Milen Todorov Lyubenov for holding the academic position of "Associate Professor" in the professional field 3.3. Political Science (Political Science - Political Parties and Party Systems).

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