

STATEMENT

**by Professor, Doctor of Philological Science Valeri Stoilov Stefonov,
member of a scientific jury in a competition for the academic position of “Professor”
at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”
as per professional domain 2.1. Philology (Anthropology of the Bulgarians. Bulgarian
folklore), announced in State Gazette, issue 54 of 29 June 2021.**

1. Information about the competition

The competition for professor in the professional domain “Anthropology of the Bulgarians. Bulgarian folklore” is announced as per proposal of the department “Bulgarian literature” at the Faculty of Slavic Philology at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. No violations were established in the process of competition announcement.

One candidate applied for the academic position of “Professor” in the announced competition – Assoc. Prof. Nikolay Georgiev Papuchiev, D.Ph.S.

2. Information about the applicant

Associate Professor, Doctor of Science Nikolay Georgiev Papuchiev is well established Bulgarian scientist with more authoritative presence in the academic society of Sofia University. He is with rich teaching experience at various higher schools in Bulgaria and abroad.

Papuchiev is the author of successfully defended work, entitled “Relations System and Kinship of the Bulgarian Christians”, for which he acquired the scientific degree of “Doctor” in year 2007. In year 2016, he acquired the scientific degree “Doctor of Science” (code 2.1. Philology – Anthropology of the Bulgarians. Bulgarian folklore) with doctorate, entitled “Transformation of traditional culture in modern story about the nation. Anthropology of the object and symbolic forms”.

Assoc. Prof. Papuchiev is regular teacher at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, head of the Department of Bulgarian literature. He has well established authority among the students’ and teachers’ societies. He is a member of prestigious scientific associations, coordinator of the Master Program “Interpretative Anthropology”. He is an editor of the year book of the Faculty of Slavic Philologies. Scientific supervisor of two successfully defended doctor theses – of Maria Marinova – “Socialistic Civil rituals – between the ideology and tradition (based on materials of the family rituals)”, year 2018 and of Bistra Pisancheva – “The Lace: cultural technologies and social practices”, year 2021. He is a scientific supervisor of tens of diploma works. Participant in numerous scientific conferences, in scientific projects, the evidence of which is properly presented.

3. Scientific works

For the participation in the competition for a Professor, Mr. Nikolay Papuchiev presented five scientific works – two monographs and three articles and papers. All publications are within the subject and problem field of the competition.

The monography “The Museum – Possible and Impossible” is published in year 2019. It is focused on the tactics and problems of the collective memory, the role of mass culture and the modeling pressure of the market. As one of the significant institutions of the modern times, the museum is a repository of artefacts, place for memory preservation, identifies moderator, generator of human curiosity... The import question, to which the author is looking for an answer is, to what extent the museum is ready to face the various challenges in one expanding and visually attractive competitive environment. Without answering to that question, the museum may collapse, to become boring, to become museum of itself. To the mass audience, the artefacts are with low attractiveness, if not accompanied by narrative, without dramatization, plots, attractions... In that context the author describes and analyses the answers of the Museum to the pressure of mass culture and market rules – the base in new technological realities, myths...

The ideology and the market have very interesting meeting at the territory of the museum. The ideology obliges (“We must know, remember, cherish...!”), the market seduces and included (“Haven’t you seen yet...!”). The analysis of Papuchiev is valuable namely because it reveals the mechanisms through which the products with high spiritual value and the ideological messages turn into commodity, in tourist packages. The specific examples, provided in the study, are well selected and convincing.

For example, the house of Juliet in Verona utilizes the potential of the myth “Shakespeare” and of the big literature plots, but it develops its own market strategies, its own interpretative policies. The mass culture is both accessible and attractive, sentimental, transgressive... – the cultural managers are well aware of that fact and are utilizing it very well. They capitalize the curiosity, coordinate the nostalgia streams, fulfill the identification deficiencies. The effect of such behaviour is expected and is well described – weakening of large narratives, fragmentation of the large “group affiliations”, new policies of self-presentation. The museum preserves its cognitive role, but becomes less didactic, more attractive, scenic, magical. The visitor goes to the magical Verona, in order to touch the breast of bronze Juliet in order to acquire the gift of the eternal love. A gesture, representative of the mechanisms of operation of popular culture – it trivializes and successfully commercializes.

The second chapter of the study explores the remembering of the recent past – the exiting and non-existing museum of the socialism. The author very precisely presents the collision between the institutional commands and the individual attitudes. Individual citizens create their own exhibitions, they organize access to places of memory, which serve as a tool for rationalization of the past, a box of sentiments, platform for sensual access. In the material texture of the standard of deficiency of the socialism itself different plots are woven – ideological, production, design, consumers’... and their interpretation is extremely interesting. Nikolay Papuchiev makes specific and precise analyses of the ways

of operation of the discussed collections – motivation, type of organization, artefacts arrangement, searched suggestions, nostalgic reflexes etc.

The second monography, presented at the completions is entitled “Festivals. Networks. Identities”. It is published in year 2021 and is dedicated to masquerade games in Pernik. Examining the “historical roots and ideological motivations” of these holidays and based on rich archive materials, the book presents a whole spectrum of interests and stakes, motivating the participants in the games. And here is the value of that research. It starts from the matrix of the traditions, goes through ideological uses of old ritual practices, to show the ruining of policies, collisions, symbol completions, appropriations. In interesting and convincing manner the author proves, that the things, that were imbedded in the “cultural intimacy” are turning into “staged product” with various uses. The tradition cannot only be inherited but can also be imagined and invented, to construct required cultural identities, to infuse in skillfully directed ideological flows. The festival is described by Nikolay Papuchiev as a modern product, which has its own imputed functions. It successfully serves the politics of the socialist state with its taboos, ideological clean-ups and writings.

The second part of the research deals with other essential aspects of the “festival celebration”. Behind the visual attractiveness of the festival there are conflicting interpretations, strongly motivated polemical communities, omnifarious regional passions. The author examines in details the complex picture in order to make conclusions about existing tension, about innovations in the focusing of “public interest”. In such a manner, the participants in the masquerade games are presented from various points of view – through the ecstasy of the dance incarnation, through the agon with other survakari companies, through regional policies etc.

Generally, my evaluation of work is high as far as it combines effective methods with diligent empirical work and well-grounded conclusions. It confirms the thesis, that the celebration, the forms of collective ecstasy still find, even modified, their place in the visually attractive post-modern world.

The paper “The Change of Names as a Movie Scenario from the Period of Transition and Afterwards” examines the ways in which the Bulgarian cinema vocalizes the collective trauma. The precise field work is important advantage, which allows Papuchiev to be careful and impartial analyzer of the historical drama and its artistic characters.

The other two articles, presented at the completion are with titles “Surva in Pernik and the specifics of preservation of the cultural legacy in the age of PRB” and “Count Dracula and fictional images of evil: imagology, ideology, tourism“. The first article deals with the ways through which the bureaucratic socialism state tries to process the past and to re-functionalize the traditional culture in such a manner that to the serve the purposes of the government. The second work examines the modern horror spaces as a result of entanglement of characters of the literature, collective visions, tourist flows, commercial interest. The human is a being that has proven dependances on the scary, pathetic, sublimely... and the market does whatever possible to provide them to him through a selection of appropriate characters and plots.

The conclusion is, that in all of his texts, Nikolay Papuchiev shows high level of professionalism, appropriate attitude towards his sources and skills to interpret heterogeneous anthropological issues.

4. Conclusion

The candidacy of Assoc. Prof. Nikolay Papuchiev fully meets the high requirements of the academic position. It completely meets all requirements, presented by the relative normative documents – Academic Staff Development Act and etc.

The reading of the works of Associate Professor, Doctor of Science Nikolay Papuchiev provide me with all grounds for my positive vote in relation to his candidacy. I propose to the honorable Faculty Council of the Faculty of Slavic Philology to approve the candidacy of Nikolay Georgiev Papuchiev as per the announced completion for the academic position “Professor” at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” as per professional domain 2.1. Philology (Anthropology of the Bulgarians. Bulgarian folklore.

Sofia

20 October 2021

Prof. D.Ph.S. Valeri Stefanov