

EVALUATION REVIEW

by Associate Professor Antonina Ivanova Habova
University of National and World Economy
Department of International Relations
Scientific field: 05.11.02. Political science (International Relations)

Re: Competition for the academic position of **Associate Professor**
at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”
in the academic field **3. Social, economic and law studies**;
professional field **3.3. Political Science (International Relations)**

1. Competition information

The competition for holding the academic position of “Associate Professor” at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, promulgated in the State Gazette, issue 61, 2 August 2022, is to meet the needs of the Faculty of Law at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” in the professional field 3.3. Political science (International Relations). I have been appointed as a member of the academic panel for the competition, pursuant to Rector’s Order № ПД-38-486/05.08.2022.

2. Information About the Candidates

It is only one applicant – Assist. Prof. Mira Zdravkova Kaneva, PhD, a university lecturer at the Faculty of Law at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” – who has submitted documents for the announced competition position. Assist. Prof. Mira Kaneva, PhD, holds a MA degree in International Relations (2007) and a MA degree in Law (2009) at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, and obtained a PhD in International Law and International Relations in 2013 at the same university, after successfully defending her dissertation thesis on the topic: “Soft power: the new dimension of power in international relations in the 21st century”.

The applicant started her teaching and research career at the Faculty of Law at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” in 2010, and has been working as a tenured Assistant Professor since 2014.

Mira Kaneva, PhD was a visiting research fellow at the Centre for Migration and Citizenship at the French Institute of International Relations in 2016, being awarded a

scholarship by the French government. She is a member of the International Studies Association and the managing board of Sofia Security Forum. The applicant is a participant in several research projects and she is the project manager of one of them, specifically “Challenges and prospects before Bulgaria’s membership in the UN: a legal-political analysis” (2019).

3. Fulfillment of the Requirements for Holding the Academic Position

The application papers, submitted for review, certify that the candidate is compliant with the legal minimum national requirements for the relevant academic position of “Associate Professor” (MA degree, PhD degree, academic position “Assistant Professor”, and a monograph). The scientometric table and the overall documentation demonstrate that all additional requirements of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” have also been fulfilled: Indicator A – 50 p.; Indicator B – 100 p.; Indicator D – 220 p.; Indicator E – 75 p., total 445 p.

4. Assessment of the Applicant’s Teaching Experience

As a full-time lecturer at the Department of International Law and International Relations at the Faculty of Law, Assist. Prof. Mira Kaneva, PhD, has been instructing students majoring in International Relations and in Law, through a series of lectures and seminars in fundamental subjects for international studies, such as ‘Theory of International Relations’ and ‘Theory of Foreign Policy’, as well as ‘Global Development’, ‘International Security Concepts’, and ‘Human Security’.

The accumulated experience as a lecturer in both BA and MA programmes, her practice as a thesis supervisor of 7 MA students in International Security (Faculty of Law) and in Cultural Liaisons and Geopolitics of the European Union (Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology), along with her active involvement with students’ extracurricular activities (in her capacity as a mentor of workshops for academic writing, organized by the Students’ Diplomatic Club and ELSA, the International Public Law Study Group and the Lawyer’s Club ‘Teodor Piperkov’) suffice the required level of preparedness and academic qualification to take up the academic position of ‘Associate Professor’ in the professional field 3.3. Political science (International Relations).

5. General Characteristics of Submitted Scientific Production/Publications

5.1. Main tendencies and scientific and/or scientific-practical outcomes from the research activity

Mira Kaneva has submitted a monograph (an edited volume), a bilingual study and 19 other scholarly publications (6 studies, 8 articles and 5 reports from national and international conferences) for the application call. The publications have been made within the years 2013-2022 and are all relevant to the academic specialization of the competition.

There is a thematic conjunction between the publications submitted for review, with three main issue areas in the candidate's research activity that can be summarized. The first research focus concerns international security and is presented in the analyses of: the evolution of three security paradigms as applied to the process of cooperation and comprehensive security in Europe; the challenges before the European Union as "a community sharing a regional culture of security"; the security politics of the EU and Bulgaria; the significance and the implementation of the international intervention norm; the human security as an element of the strategic discourse and practices of the European Union. The applicant's study which discusses the processes and security threats in the Western Balkans beyond the widely preferred research matrix of the security dilemma deserves further attention. The author refocuses the study on categories such as populism, human security, the culture of empathy, as well as the role of EU and NATO as specific "security communities" (Karl Deutsch) that can help resolve the security dilemma.

The second research focus, conditioned by the first one and predetermined by Mira Kaneva's PhD thesis, displays the essence, the contents and the toolbox of soft power, putting forward the author's original interpretation and in-depth analysis in both theoretical and pragmatic terms of the soft power concept. Dr. Kaneva's third research focus proposes an innovative study of various aspects of the issue of borders in international relations, while expounding seminal categories such as territoriality, identity, and citizenship. Topic-related is the bilingual study "Bulgarian bordering practices and discourse in the context of the European refugee crisis (2015-2017)", with undisputed contribution to the academic debate, which expands on the Bulgarian political standpoints on migration and refugee issues through the prism of the bordering discourse, including a comparative Bulgarian-French perspective. Together with these main research trends, there are still other studies dedicated to specific legal aspects of several vital international issues.

Apart from her self-realization on the theoretical field, Dr. Kaneva is devoted to the practical aspects of the issues, since part of her research has been verified within scholarly projects.

5.2. Assessment of the monograph (“Borders in international relations. Theoretical, normative and practical issues”)

Mira Kaneva’s habilitation thesis is “Borders in international relations. Theoretical, normative and practical issues”, Gutenberg Publishing House, Sofia, 2022 (ISBN 978-619-176-210-1). The book comprises 339 pages and concentrates the author’s main research interests in its core.

The monograph’s research issues, though to a certain extent underestimated in the Bulgarian research field, are of exceptional value with view to the undergoing transformations in the international system and the ensuing new challenges.

Within the setup and the fulfilment of the study, Dr. Kaneva adheres to the concept of multiple spatio-temporalities. She defines two dimensions of space. The first dimension is the traditionalist perception of space as regards its objectivization. The second dimension refers to the reconceptualization of space through the analysis of social constructs such as ideas, emotions, values, and beliefs. Mira Kaneva criticizes the binary thinking in political science (global – local, inside – outside), which frequently prevails in border research. In her view, the space should, in compliance with constructivism, be reconfigured as a dynamic domain of intersubjectivity.

The main research thesis is that “despite the presumption that borders are straight lines that intersect the space in two, throughout their ideational evolution they haven’t been following the predictable direction of the global tendencies, namely because of the sudden collapses and the durable crises, conditioned by the new threats, more precisely the migration one and the pandemic one (2015-2022)”. This statement is complemented by the author’s main argument that borders are quite often susceptible to political utilization – that is, they serve as an instrument for global governance.

The author reveals not only in-depth familiarity, rationalization and deft competences in the operationalization of multiple theories of international relations, but also possesses a solid lore about the history of international relations. This allows her to switch at ease from theorizing about borders within her own conceptual framework towards an empirical

approbation with specific references to political practical cases from the first two decades of the current century.

Albeit, as the author herself points out, the main province of the academic debate is geopolitics, the monograph stretches over a very wide scholarly terrain which encompasses different notions and conceptions in the realm of geography, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, law, economics, and even natural science. Employing the critical theoretical lens, Mira Kaneva's interpretations of the borders through different theories of international relations are actually situated across her original logical construction. This allows her to delve into the context so that she could scrutinize the essence and significance of borders in contemporary international relations with utmost precision.

The monograph is structured in three chapters and the first one unfolds the conceptual framework of the study. It follows the evolutionary changes in border studies (which, as the author argues herself, is not a one-way street) and more specifically examines the evolution of terminology within geopolitical studies. Three seminal categories of border studies in accordance with the applied theoretical approach are differentiated and concisely analyzed: classical (Realism), idealist (Liberalism) and post-positivist (transforming borders from a material-spatial notion into a discursive one). Dr. Kaneva criticizes specific theses, and points out deficits and inconsistencies in concrete propositions and concepts concerning borders in international relations in an argumentative and academically assertive way. She makes the tentative conclusion that border studies are to be viewed as a discourse between different theoretical schools in both social and political sciences. It should be also noted that the author has taken into consideration the available Bulgarian border studies (from geopolitical, sociological, culturological and legal perspective) which demonstrates a good awareness of the views of Bulgarian scholars engaged in this theoretical field.

The second chapter specifies the terminological framework of the study while Mira Kaneva further examines the indispensable cultural-anthropological upgrading of the orthodox meaning of the border. In this regard, the term 'borderlands' is the preferred one, as it combines the vertical element of dominance and submission together with the horizontal one of complex networks of interaction. A typology of borders is outlined according to their origin, functions and regulation.

After establishing the above described fundamentals, Mira Kaneva reassesses borders in a critical manner, by making deductions about the ethical dilemmas confronting their regulation. Multitudinous theoretical concepts and notions about sovereignty are being interpreted – a category that has emerged as the focal point in international studies in the last two decades. Dr. Kaneva argues that sovereignty is both a borderline category (due to its ambivalent nature) and a process, and further criticizes the neglect for the territorial differences and the evolution of sovereignty over time. She introduces the category ‘alter-sovereignty’ which depicts the contingency that borders attach to sovereignty and which further facilitates the analysis of ethical dilemmas states are faced with when trying to structure space in a particular way. This analysis proposes an interesting interpretation and thus a contribution to the rethinking of the binary opposition centre – periphery in the EU context, which is a problem with actual and notable implications for Bulgaria.

The process of stabilization and homogenization of national borders is not a linear one, as Dr. Kaneva proves while examining secessionism and irredentism being themselves movements in a direct correlation with borders. The change in the perception of borders and the way they are managed is interpreted through the concept of citizenship, implicated in other discourses and practices (self-appropriation, othering), which produce different meanings and generate several ethical dilemmas.

The systematically analyzed empirical material (related to the migration and the pandemic crises) in the last chapter of the study helps the author to prove her argument about the evolving meaning of borders, which can be deduced partially to their relativistic nature and at the same time it illustrates the evolution of international studies. The author makes the conclusion that elements from both the post-Westphalian and the traditional Westphalian state-centric order are to be found in the contemporary border regime – a conclusion which corresponds with the main research thesis.

The monographic edited volume, which encompasses a massive amount of literature (more than 550 Bulgarian, English, French and German studies), meets all the requirements for a habilitation thesis.

6. Assessment of Major Scientific and Practical Contributions

The scholarly research in its overall assessment reveals the in-depth theoretical knowledge and the high level of analytical skills of the author and marks undeniable accomplishments in terms of the subject, objectives, methodology and theoretical approaches, as well as the formation, enrichment and deepening of relevant knowledge. In this context, the statement of contributions as submitted by Dr. Kaneva accurately reflects her academic accomplishments which can be summarized as follows:

- The establishment of a holistic theoretical framework in the issue area of the study – a systemization of theories (from Realism to Critical theory), deductions about their interrelations, identification of the existing deficits and contradictions, evaluation of the evolutionary logic of the theoretical approaches.

- The author's interpretation of border typology issues in the sense of categories themselves, as well as instruments for categorization.

- The verification of fundamental conceptual propositions through specific political practices in the context of two main case studies (the pandemic and the migration crises) – here the balanced approach in terms of international regimes while ethically problematizing border management is noteworthy. The study of biopolitical and biometric borders is an original and new contribution for the Bulgarian academic debate.

- The expansion of the academic and the political discussion about the regulation of borders in a complex, dynamically evolving global context which once again emphatically poses the question about the ethical dilemmas concerning transparency, rule of law, accountability and identity.

- The correlation between Mira Kaneva's research interests and the development of the university BA and MA programmes in International Relations and in Law.

7. Critical Remarks and Recommendations

I have no substantial critical remarks concerning the scholarly publications submitted for review. As far as they, along with the convincing academic achievements, also highlight prospects for future studies, I would recommend that Mira Kaneva should proceed with their enhancement, also by stepping beyond the boundaries of the West-centric theoretical perspective.

In this regard and within the context of the diaspora study in the third chapter, for example, it is worth mentioning that the Western theoretical schools in international relations do not

convey a fairly persuasive reasoning about the strong relationship between the Chinese diaspora and the Chinese state. The specific characteristics of the Chinese diaspora ('huaqiao') make it difficult to be accommodated into the explanatory framework about the diaspora as a deterritorialized, transnational subject with a separate identity, though a few features of private authority are discernible.

The inclusion within the familiar Western theoretical framework of the conceptual views of non-Western scholars in international relations, based on fundamentally different (or differently perceived) from the Western mindset terms, categories, and principles, would allow the candidate to develop her creative capabilities to a further extent.

8. Conclusion

The only candidate for this application call, Mira Kaneva, PhD, manifests incontestable research and teaching skills. The abovementioned conclusions about Mira Kaneva's scope and level of theoretical accomplishments, practical contributions and academic competences thoroughly justify my overall assessment that she fully meets the requirements of the Law on Development of Academic Staff in relation to the competition in question. That is why, I resolutely recommend to the esteemed Academic panel to vote for appointing Assist. Prof. Mira Kaneva, PhD, an Associate Professor by virtue of the competition for this academic position in the professional field 3.3. Political science (International Relations), as promulgated by Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in the State Gazette, issue 61, 2 August 2022.

23.11.2022 / Sofia

Signature:

/Assoc.Prof. Antonina Habova, PhD/