

Opinion

by **Prof. Georgi Mateev Karasimeonov, Doctor Habil**

on scientific papers for participation in a competition for the academic position of "professor" in the professional field 3.3. Political Science (Local Government and Self-Government), SG no. 22, March 16, 2021

with the only candidate **Assoc. Prof. Milena Hristova Stefanova, Doctor Habil**

1. Compliance with the requirements of ZRASRB

From the attached documents for participation in the competition (including Information on the implementation of the minimum requirements) it is clear that the candidate Assoc. Prof. Milena Hristova Stefanova meets the minimum / mandatory requirements under Article 2b of the Law on Academic Affairs professor ". Milena Stefanova participated in the competition with 12 scientific papers, of which 1 habilitation thesis (Comparative Studies of Local Government, University of Sofia "St. Kliment Ohridski", 2021), another monograph, which is not presented as a major habilitation thesis (Local Government, second revised and supplemented edition, University of Sofia "St. Kliment Ohridski", 2021), 1 article in English indexed in world-famous databases (SCOPUS), 2 studies in English, 5 articles in Bulgarian language and 2 chapters from collective monographs. The publications have not been used in previous procedures for holding academic positions or obtaining a scientific degree. They are the personal work of the author and there is no doubt that there is no trace of plagiarism.

All publications are at a very high scientific level. They characterize the candidate as an established and leading researcher in national and international academic circles.

Impressive is the fact that in her teaching Assoc. Prof. Milena Stefanova has supervised 5 successfully defended doctoral students. This is an extremely high proof of her qualities as a lecturer and her contribution to the formation of the scientific community in the field of political science and management sciences.

Associate Professor Milena Stefanova is an established long-term scientist and lecturer in the Department of Public Administration at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski ". Her research is based mainly in the field of local self-government, local democracy and comparative local self-government. Among them are the studies of the processes of democratization of local

self-government in Bulgaria, the models of civic participation in local self-government, the application of European models and practices in Bulgarian conditions, research on models for protection of public interest at the local level and others. The monographs “The Public Interest in Local Government Management”, Sofia 2019 and Local Government and “Local Self-Government”, Sofia 2003 occupy a particularly important place among her works.

2. Main characteristics and contributions of the habilitation work

As already noted, for the needs of this competition, among other publications, she has presented a habilitation thesis: Comparative Studies of Local Government, IM "SU St. Kliment Ohridski ", 2021. I will consider mostly the presented work, as I believe that it shows to the greatest extent the merits of the candidate in the competition for professor.

The monograph is an in-depth study and analysis of the methodology, methodologies and practical application of results from comparative studies of local government. Stefanova consistently considers the comparative research of local self-government as part of the overall concept of comparative political science. The author has reviewed, analyzed and summarized an impressive amount of data on comparative studies of local government, which highlight the methodological features, as well as their theoretical and practical significance for the development of political science, local democracy and public administration practices.

Stefanova has developed a clear concept for conducting comparative research in the field of local self-government and local democracy. The importance of this kind of research for the creation of classifications and new theories in political science has been proven. Criteria for the formulation of subject and object, goals and their operationalization and choice of methodology for comparative study of local self-government have been developed.

In the first chapter of her habilitation thesis, the candidate discusses in detail the individual elements of the methodology of comparative political science research of local self-government. Rules and principles of the comparative analysis are derived, which must be followed when creating a methodology and choosing a methodology for conducting comparative research of local self-government. The connection between the types of research objects and the choice of research methodology is analyzed.

In the second chapter of the habilitation work the historical development of the comparative researches of the local self-government is considered. Two main stages of their development are identified - application of the institutional approach and post-institutional approaches, as well as the development of specific approaches to the analysis of emerging democracies. The thesis that comparative studies of this type of democracy lead to clear theoretical progress has been successfully defended.

Stefanova systematizes the classifications of the systems of local self-government known in science, and on the basis of a comparative analysis the advantages and disadvantages of the separate approaches are derived. The theoretical problems related to the need for a classification to be functional, therefore to summarize according to the main criteria, and on the other hand not to ignore the specifics, especially typical of local government systems, are also thoroughly discussed.

The third chapter analyzes the importance of comparative research of local self-government for the practice of public administration. The candidate applies the method - case analysis - to a significant amount of empirical information. Thoroughly analyzing the methodological features of each study, and the environment that gave rise to it, it proves that comparative studies of local government are an essential factor for the implementation of local government reforms. Comparative research conducted at the initiative of international organizations such as the Council of Europe, the Committee of the Regions, the World Bank and others is at the heart of the reforms carried out in a number of countries in Europe. They are also essential for the choice of a specific model of institutional organization of local government and support the development of local democracy.

In the habilitation work there are significant contributions prone to the development of political science and management science in Bulgaria in several directions. Developed at the next level is the theoretical concept of the importance of comparative research as a branch of political science, and the contribution of comparative research of local government to create classifications and new theories in political science. The developed rules and principles of the comparative analysis for creation of methodology and choice of methodology for conducting comparative researches of the local self-government have both theoretical and practical significance. On the one hand, they lay a theoretical basis for future research in the field, on the other - have a scientifically applied nature and in content represent the development of specific mechanisms for the development of practices in the field of local self-government.

Proving the thesis of the leading importance of the institutional approach in the implementation of comparative research of local self-government is also key for the future development of research. The author successfully proves the explanatory possibilities of the approach for deriving trends in the development of local democracy for the creation of typologies, classifications and delineation of dependencies. This, in combination with the developed rules and principles for organizing and conducting comparative research of local self-government, represent a qualitatively new level of development of a comprehensive theoretical concept.

3. Evaluation of the contributions in the other attached publications submitted for participation in the competition

The monograph "Local Government and Local Self-Government" is devoted to the main issues of the theory of local government and local self-government. In this paper, Stefanova comprehensively analyzes in theoretical and practical terms the Bulgarian system of local self-government. One of the most significant theoretical contributions here is the combination of institutional and functional approach in the analysis of local self-government. Theses related to the Bulgarian practice are also essential. The proposed definition of the term "problem / issue of local importance" can be used to build a more adequate and more effective system of defining the powers of local self-government and a more effective system of distribution of powers between levels of government. The analyzed cases of distortion of practice and application of legal norms in combination with the assessment of the quality of legislation governing relations at local level and the application of the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government lead to conclusions that can be important for Bulgarian practice. Using an interdisciplinary approach, Assoc. Prof. Stefanova successfully develops the thesis that the lack of coalition culture in local government is a significant shortcoming and hinders the development of local democracy. The theoretical approach here significantly expands the scope of local government research.

The articles, studies and chapters of collective monographs submitted for participation in the competition are published in peer-reviewed and refereed editions. Three of them are in foreign languages. All are devoted to specific problems in the theory of political science and public administration. They are developed on the basis of representative and relevant scientific literature and formulate and prove innovative those that have both scientific and practical contributions and public relevance.

The report on the contributions, prepared and submitted by the candidate, fully reflects the achievements of her in her scientific work, with which she participates in this competition.

Conclusion

Given the high quality of scientific publications, as well as her many years of work as a lecturer, I fully support Assoc. Prof. Milena Hristova Stefanova for the academic position of Professor 3.3. Political Science (Local Government and Self-Government) for the needs of the Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

Sofia Prof. Georgi Karasimeonov, Doctor Habil

June 20, 2021