

REVIEW

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Professional field 3.7. Administration and Management

For a competition procedure for the position of Associate Professor

In the field 3.2. Psychology, announced in Bulgarian State Gazette issue 96/19.11.2021

With candidate: Dr. Nikolay Rumenov Rachev, Major Assistant Professor

I. Biographical data about the candidate

The only candidate in the competition procedure is Dr. Nikolay Rachev, Major Assistant Professor, who graduated from Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski in 2001 with an M.Sc. in two fields: Clinical and Consultative Psychology, and Work and Organizational Psychology. During 2002 – 2006 he worked as a clinical psychologist in St. Ivan Rilsky Psychiatric Hospital in the town of Novi Iskar. In 2004 he became a part-time lecturer at Sofia University, where he was elected as Assistant Professor in 2006. He defended his doctoral dissertation in 2008 in psychology on the topic of “Dimensions of the Musical Experience”. That same year he was promoted to Major Assistant Professor, a position he holds to this day. In 2013 he founded a cognitive psychology lab at Sofia University. He has served as reviewer for three international scientific journals, among which is the acclaimed *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*.

II. Fulfillment of the minimal national requirements

Dr. Rachev has presented evidence, showing that he fully meets and exceeds the minimal national requirements published in the Bylaws (*Pravilnik*) for the implementation of the Law for Promotion of the Academics in the Republic of Bulgaria for the scientific field 3.2 Psychology. In particular: He has accumulated the necessary 150 points for Indicator1, Indicator2, and Indicator3 from group A-B-V by possessing the title Doctor (50 points) and by having presented a ‘habilitation’ monograph (100 points).

The Bylaws (State Gazette issue 56/06.07.2018, Table 1, Scientific Field 3: Social, Economic,

and Legal Sciences: 3.2 Psychology) demand that each candidate have at least 200 points from publications only (group G, Indicators I4 – I10), for the rank of Associate Professor.

According to the submitted report, this candidate has accumulated a total of 206 points for publications, related to the competition procedure. I believe the request to be fair, i.e., each publication is adequately assessed, and the sum is correctly calculated.

Next, the Bylaws – group D (I11, I12, and I13) – demand that each candidate should have at least 50 points from citations in other people’s scientific publications. The relevant Table Form submitted by Dr. Rachev shows that he has got 95 points, which exceeds the requirement almost twice.

Group E (I14 to I21) does not require any registered activity from the candidates for a future Associate Professor. Those points are given for community service of the kind expected from full Professors. Dr. Rachev, however, shows evidence that he can claim 145 points for that category. They come from participation in or management of several international and national research and educational projects.

In sum, the candidate fulfills comfortably all the minimum quantitative requirements for the position of Associate Professor, and exceeds some of them significantly.

III. Scientific research and publications

Dr. Nikolay Rachev has submitted a total of 18 scientific publications as a portfolio for the present competition procedure. These are as follows: a monograph for habilitation; seven research articles published in English in international journals, of them six in highly respected ones; 10 publications in Bulgarian, among which more substantial are three in the Bulgarian Journal of Psychology, one in the Yearbook of Sofia University, and one in Bulgarian Economic Papers.

1. Evaluation of a monograph for habilitation

Dr. Nikolay Rachev’s magnum opus in this competition procedure is the book *Rationality in Cultural Context*, ISBN 978-954-07-4477-3, Sofia University Press, Sofia, 2018. This 368 page volume summarizes some of the most essential achievements of cognitive psychology today. The

author has succeeded in a formidable attempt to write a scientific book, grounded in the primary sources – the original papers in scientific journals. He cited more than 300 sources, among them about twenty in the Bulgarian and Russian languages, and the remaining bulk in English. This is a huge effort, rarely undertaken by academics in our country. All the same, the author has also paid his respects to the most prominent Bulgarian publications in the field. Such an approach is commendable as it instills a culture of continuity among the different generations of scholars. The book may be characterized as a research monograph; however, it could also be used as a graduate-level textbook due to its approachable language.

To conduct research in contemporary cognitive psychology, one ought to command a certain minimum level of mathematical knowledge. Dr. Rachev's work demonstrates that he comfortably possesses that knowledge, a feature that sets him apart from many authors in this country. He uses it with fine skill. Writing in Bulgarian, he never imitates expert-level reasoning by excessive use of foreign-word jargon. This kind of style will influence positively the next generation of undergraduates, graduates, and doctoral candidates as they will be reading a well-written book, one full of precision, depth, and measure.

In the book are included some interesting results, obtained by the author himself. He has resisted the temptation to put himself at the centre of events and instead, presents his own achievements as an integral part of the scientific enterprise in general. Perhaps most important are his contributions in establishing a link between the dual process theories and the hypothesis of intercultural differences. The two lines of research meet in the final chapter, in which a successful attempt is made to apply the dual process theory – augmented with culture-defined variables – to explain some effects studied in the rationality/irrationality framework. The monograph fills an existing gap in this country's scientific annals and shows that its author has found a fruitful research field in a promising interdisciplinary area.

2. Evaluation of the other publications

Here I find it necessary to discuss one of the most essential lines of Dr. Rachev's research. He is the leading author (among six) of a 2021 article, published in the esteemed international journal *Plos One*. In it, the four-decade-old Asian Disease Problem by Kahneman and Tversky is revisited

and used as a workhorse. With a sample of almost 90,000 subjects from 47 countries, the researchers led by Dr. Rachev show how in the spring of 2020 in the midst of the covid pandemic, people all over the world were significantly more risk-averse, as well as more prone to manipulation by positive-negative framework formulations. A number of other interesting findings about people's reactions also emerge from that study, undertaken at a distinct historic moment. Dr. Rachev has been successful in developing this line of research in a number of other papers, such as [6], [10], and [11] from the list for the current procedure. I witnessed his convincing presentation of some of his new results at an international conference of the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration at Sofia University a couple of years ago.

I consider the candidate's formulations of his publications' scientific contributions, as shown in the relevant document, to be adequate and appropriate. Here I would like to discuss one additional aspect of his work. He is apparently successful in joining international research efforts to study some of the hottest topics of our time, as seen by items [15], [16], [17], [18] in the submitted publication list. In this way he coauthors papers, appearing in some of the top journals worldwide, e.g., *Nature Human Behaviour* and *Royal Society Open Science*. At present, Dr. Rachev is a junior contributor, yet he has made quite a beginning. In fact, he is already the lead author of the *Plos One* paper.

A very positive aspect of his publication activity is the inclusion of his students as coauthors of papers where they have had a substantial contribution. I mention this because not all of our colleagues in this country's academia live up to this criterion. Apparently, Dr. Rachev maintains not only high professional but also high ethical standards.

3. Assessment of the candidate's citations

Sofia University Library has issued a standard document showing seven of Dr. Rachev's publications to be cited 25 times in other people's publications, accessible in the Web of Science database. Scopus shows a similar number. A few citations have been discovered in other influential databases such as CEEOL, EBSCO, and the Russian РИИЦ.

4. Scientific projects and applied research

I reiterate that Dr. Rachev is the founder of a cognitive psychology laboratory in Sofia University. It appears that this is a place for solid scientific activities and for grooming students and young researchers into the methods and skills of the profession. Over the eight years of its existence, this lab has given training to dozens of young people.

The candidate has a substantial project work to his account. He has taken part in two big international projects studying important psychological effects of the covid pandemic. He was the principal investigator of two research projects funded by Sofia University, and was a team member of three other such projects.

IV. Teaching activity

Dr. Rachev has been given a number of documents by the relevant Sofia University authorities showing his extensive teaching activities. Over each of the last three years he has registered about 300 teaching hours and about 900 hours of related work with students.

He is the main lecturer in the following academic courses, taught in two bachelors' programmes: Cognitive Psychology I and II, Psycholinguistics, General and Age Psychology. He also teaches three courses in masters' programmes, two of them in English. Since 2004, as a teaching assistant he has held seminars, supporting a wide variety of academic courses. All of these activities have prepared him superbly for the teaching responsibilities of an Associate Professor at Sofia University.

V. General comments and recommendations on the candidate's work and achievements

Dr. Nikolay Rachev has already identified his primary research field. This is the area of cognitive phenomena of rationality/irrationality and the instruments with which to study them, as well as their manifestation in different cultural settings. This field offers many opportunities for intercultural research and, by extension, for developing awareness for various important facets of our lives.

I do not have comments of criticism on the candidate's research portfolio. It is really good that he is so well connected internationally, and in the best possible way for a researcher – by being part of research teams, led by distinguished foreign scientists. For a young researcher's qualities and achievements, this is an esteem already.

I have only one recommendation for Dr. Rachev. As a young Assistant Professor and Major Assistant Professor his main goal has been to develop the skills to do research and to define his own area of scientific interest. In short, he had to establish himself as a scientist, which he has achieved convincingly. When promoted to Associate Professor, however, he will have to assume an additional set of responsibilities. Unobtrusively, he will soon become a role model for the next generation of students, doctoral candidates, and younger researchers; his actions and mere opinions will have a greater impact on the academic community. I could only recommend that he actively search for and find the best form and way to do all that.

VI. Personal impressions of the candidate

I have known Dr. Nikolay Rachev for about ten years now. My impressions of him over that time are of a serious and competent researcher who actively reaches for the highest standards in contemporary science, sometimes at the expense of being misunderstood. Yet, the latter effect might be a natural consequence when one's goal is to achieve truly valuable scientific results.

VII. Conclusion

The only candidate in the competition procedure for Associate Professor of Psychology, Dr. Nikolay Rachev, Major Assistant Professor at present, fully meets all the requirements for this position. His academic achievements exceed the minimum national requirements, in some respects significantly. His candidature is strong and convincing. My overall assessment of his work is entirely positive. I propose to the esteemed Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philosophy at Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski to promote Dr. Nikolay Rachev to the rank of Associate Professor.

25 March 2022.

Signature: _____