

OPINION

by

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under a competition for holding the academic post “Associate Professor” in the field of higher education 3. Social Science, Economic Science and Law, professional field

3.3. Political Science, scientific specialty “International Relations”,

promulgated in State Gazette No. 61/2.08.2022,

on the candidate: Chief Assistant Professor Mira Zdravkova Kuneva, PhD

1. Data on the competition

The competition for holding the academic post of associate professor in the professional field 3.3. Political Science, scientific specialty “International Relations” was announced in State Gazette No. 61 dated 2.08.2022 for the needs of the Faculty of Law of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. By Order No. RD-38-486/05.08.2022 of the Rector of SU “St. Kliment Ohridski”, I was designated as an internal member of the academic board under the competition. Pursuant to Protocol No. 1/10.10.2022 of the first meeting of the academic board, I was entrusted to draw up an opinion.

Only one candidate – Chief Assist. Prof. Mira Zdravkova Kuneva, PhD – has submitted documents for participation in the competition. In the course of the procedure or prior to its initiation, no plagiarism reports have been filed and no plagiarism has been established in the academic works of the candidate who has been registered in the public Register of Academic Staff and Defended Dissertations of the National Centre for Information and Documentation (NACID). Dr. Kuneva has enclosed the necessary references (to the fulfilment of the minimum national requirements for the respective scientific area; to the citations; to the original contributions to science), according to which, pursuant to the Rules on the Conditions and Procedure for Acquiring Science Degrees and Holding Academic Positions at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, the academic board assesses the candidates.

2. Brief introduction of the participant in the competition

The candidate, Dr. Mira Kuneva, graduated from the Faculty of Law of SU “St. Kliment Ohridski” obtaining a Master’s degree in International Relations in 2007 and in Law in 2009.

She was enrolled as an independent-study doctoral student at the same Faculty under the scientific supervision by Prof. Dr. Plamen Pantev with a topic of her dissertation thesis: “Soft power: the new dimension of power in international relations in the 21st century”, which she defended in 2013. Since 2010, she has held the position of an assistant professor, and since 2014 – of a chief assistant professor in international relations. In 2016, she specialized as a visiting researcher at the Center for Migration and Citizenship at the French Institute of International Relations in Paris. She is a member of the board of directors of the Sofia Security Forum.

My personal impressions of the participant in the competition, particularly in relation to her scholarly interests and research pursuits, date back to her Master’s thesis dedicated to the new dimension of power in international relations in the 21st century, an excellent review of which I presented in 2007 with a recommendation for the development of the master’s thesis into a dissertation one.

3. Assessment of the teaching and other activities of the participant in the competition

In the overall assessment under a competition for holding the academic post of associate professor at a university, the candidate’s teaching experience is of essential importance, and it is serious and exceeds the required teaching standards. The reference to Mira Kuneva’s teaching activities for the last three academic years reveals that, at the Faculty of Law of Sofia University, she has conducted seminar classes in international relations, theory of international relations, theory of foreign policy; lectures in theory of international relations and of foreign policy, including within Master’s programmes. She has prepared and reads lectures in “Theories of International Relations” and “Global Development” to students in the International Relations, as well as in “Theoretical Concepts of Security” and “Human Security” in the International Security Master’s programme.

In her capacity as an academic supervisor, Dr. Kuneva has trained several graduates in international security at the Faculty of Law and in European cultural diplomacy and geopolitics at the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology, who have successfully defended their Master’s theses in a variety of fields.

As evident from the enclosed official certificate and from the scientific activities database of Sofia University (“The Authors”), Chief Assist. Prof. Mira Kuneva has participated in a number of conferences with panel reports, as well as in scientific university projects related to the field of her research interests, such as the rule of law and the effective implementation of European Union law in Bulgaria, the challenges and prospects for the Bulgarian participation in the UN, the problem of “soft” power and centres of power in international relations.

The academic development of Chief Assist. Prof. Mira Kuneva has so far revealed her qualities as a capable lecturer with considerable teaching experience, as well as a researcher with a wide range of scholarly interests who has been upgrading her professional training. The candidate is completely suitable for the teaching position for which the competition has been announced.

4. General assessment of the scholarly output presented for participation in the competition

For participation in the competition, the candidate Mira Zdravkova Kuneva has indicated the monograph entitled “*Borders in international relations. Theoretical, normative and practical issues*”, Sofia: Gutenberg Publishing House, 2022, 339 pages, ISBN 978-619-176-210-1; one study research of 94 pages; 6 studies and 13 articles published in collections, series and journals. Four of the publications are in English, and two were published abroad in collective volumes under Bulgarian editorship.

Four of the scientific publications submitted for participation in the competition (2 studies and 2 articles) repeat publications presented for the acquisition of the higher education and academic degree of Doctor of Philosophy. They cannot be subject to assessment in this opinion. Furthermore, in a written statement of hers, addressed to the members of the academic board on 10.12.2022, the candidate identifies the inclusion of these publications as a “mistake”. They are as follows:

- Soft power in international relations and its role in the philosophy and praxis of EU security policy – In: Pantev, Pl. (Ed.). European Union security policy, based on soft power: actual implications and manifestations, potential opportunities and contingencies. Sofia: ‘St. Kliment Ohridski’ University Press, 2013, pp. 9-78, ISBN: 978-954-07-3433-0;

- Public diplomacy – disguised or dismantled propaganda? – International Relations Journal, no. 3, 2013, pp. 73-92, ISSN (print): 0324-1092;

- The dichotomous essence of the international agreement in view of international negotiations theory. – Norm Journal, no. 10, 2012, pp. 29-44, ISSN (print): 1314-5126;

- The bounds of the use of force in the ambivalent term ‘international intervention’. – Contemporary Law Journal, no. 2, 2013, pp. 74-90, ISSN (print): 0861-1815.

The rest of the candidate’s scientific publications may generally be systematized in four interrelated thematic areas:

- The problem of borders in the theory of international relations, analyzed through the perspective of the school of political realism, territoriality, identity and morality, sovereignty, freedom of movement, the European refugee crisis (1 study research, 1 study and 4 articles).
- The problem of soft power in international relations (1 study and 1 article).

- Security problems in the system of international relations, examined from the perspective of the Helsinki process, the Western Balkans, human security, and the European Union as a community of insecurities (1 study and 3 articles).

- Miscellaneous problems of the state of exception in times of crisis, the rule of law from the English School perspective, the global regulatory role of religion, the foreign policy role of Bulgaria after 1989.

The reviewed works serve as evidence of the continuation and further development of Dr. Kuneva's research pursuits, of the consistency, systematic approach and broadness of her scholarly activities, of her good positioning in the Bulgarian scientific debate on the issues of the theoretical understanding of borders, power and security. All publications fall within the scope of theory of international relations, security and foreign policy, for which the competition has been announced.

5. Assessment of the content of and the achievements in the monographic work

In view of the shorter format of the opinion and the fact that the presented monograph serves as a habilitation work, the emphasis in the assessment of the scholarly output will be put, in particular, on Dr. Kuneva's book.

The monograph submitted for review constitutes an original work making a significant contribution to theory, as far as I am not aware of any other comprehensive study in the Bulgarian scientific literature of the problem of borders.

The monographic work consists of 301 pages of actual text with a rich critical apparatus in the form of 631 footnotes and has been written on the basis of 564 sources. This information in itself reveals the author's good faith, thoroughness and thoughtful approach to the problem under consideration. The subject of research in the monograph are the theoretical, normative and practical aspects of borders in international relations. The structure of Dr. Mira Kuneva's habilitation thesis is logical and subordinate to the problematic approach, the first chapter analyzing borders as a concept, the second one examining them as a norm, and the third one dedicated to border regimes with a focus on biopolitical, biometric and immunopolitical dividing lines in the context of the migration and pandemic crises, which focus may certainly be considered an original author's contribution.

I accept the reference submitted by the candidate to the contributions to science in her publications. Specifically, with regard to the monograph, I believe that she has successfully defended her thesis concerning the ideological development of the concept of borders, the new ethical dilemmas they pose, and their relation to the management of security-relevant processes from a theoretical, normative and empirical point of view. I do not accept contribution No. 2 in

the reference that “the author avoids both rehabilitating the traditional meaning of borders and rendering absolute the post-structuralist understanding of them”, as this is understandable and expected in the pursuit of scientific unbiasedness and a balanced scientific approach.

Without having critical remarks on the content of the monographic work, which meets the requirements for a habilitation thesis, I can point out some interesting interpretations included therein – defining an international intergovernmental organization such as the Council of Europe as a wider integration framework (p. 178); defining the differentiated integration proposed by Leo Tindemans back in 1976 as “binary (centre - periphery)” (p. 174); placing the different models for facilitating and enhancing the development of the integration process (à la carte integration, “two/multi-speed Europe”, the concentric circles and “variable geometry Europe”) in the context of regionalism as a factor complicating the governance processes in the EU (p. 173) and in the context of the development at different rates of the separate regions (spaces) in the EU from a temporal perspective (p. 176). The author defines regionalism as a policy inherent to prosperous competitive regions having aspirations for secession from the central government.

6. Conclusion

By way of conclusion, I can draw the inference that, in terms of thematic areas, content, scholarly contributions, the presented and reviewed publications, as well as the candidate’s teaching activities fall within the scope of the scientific specialty of the announced competition and meet the criteria for habilitation set out in the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act and the Rules for its implementation.

On the grounds of Article 26, Paragraph 3 of the DASRBA, I hereby make a positive assessment of the candidature of Chief Assist. Prof. Mira Zdravkova Kuneva, PhD, for holding the academic post ‘Associate Professor’ under this competition in the field of higher education 3. Social Science, Economic Science and Law, professional field 3.3. Political Science (International Relations) for the needs of the Faculty of Law of SU “St. Kliment Ohridski”.

Sofia,
22.12.2022

Assessor:
(Assoc. Prof. Dr. Marieta Rabohchiyska)