

OPINION

by

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regarding

the competition for holding the academic position “Associate Professor”

at University of Sofia “St. Kliment Ohridski”

in academic field 3. Social, economic and legal studies;

professional field 3.3. Political science (International relations)

1. Information about the competition

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. I have been assigned to submit an opinion.

2. Information about the applicants

There is only one candidate applying in the competition. It is Assist. Prof. Mira Zdravkova Kaneva, PhD. Mira Kaneva is a full-time lecturer at the Faculty of Law at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. She has graduated as an MA student both in International Relations (2007) and in Law (2009) from Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. In 2013 she obtained a doctoral degree in Law at Alma Mater. The

topic of her PhD thesis is “Soft power: the new dimension of power in international relations in the 21st century”. Dr. Kaneva has been working as a teaching Assistant at the Faculty of Law at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” since 2010. In 2014 she was appointed after a competition on an academic position as a tenured Assistant Professor.

Mira Kaneva is a member of the academic team of several research projects. She is the manager of the project “Challenges and prospects before Bulgaria’s membership in the UN: a legal-political analysis”.

3. Fulfilment of the requirements for holding the academic position

As regards the papers submitted by the applicant for participation in the competition one can infer that Dr. Mira Kaneva meets the relevant legal requirements for holding the academic position “Associate Professor”. She holds the required educational degree (MA) and the educational-scientific degree (PhD), she has the tenure of “Assistant Professor” and has published a monograph. The submitted evidence confirms that the additional requirements of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” are also fulfilled. More specifically, the candidate summates the following points according to the respective indicators:

- Indicator A – 50 p.;
- Indicator C – 100 p.;
- Indicator D – 220 p.;
- Indicator E – 75 p.;
- Total 445 p.

4. Assessment of the applicant’s teaching experience

Assist. Prof. Mira Kaneva, PhD, is a full-time lecturer at the Department of International Law and International Relations at the Faculty of Law, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. She teaches courses and seminars for BA students in International Relations and MA students in Law in fundamental subjects for international studies. These subjects are ‘Theory of International Relations’ and ‘Theory of Foreign Policy’, as well as ‘Global Development’, ‘International Security Concepts’, and ‘Human Security’. Dr. Kaneva also teaches the course “International and Global Affairs” in English for incoming Erasmus+ students at the Faculty of Law, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. Along with that this Mira Kaneva

is a thesis supervisor of 7 MA students in different MA programmes, and is an active participant at a series of scholarly and academic fora and initiatives.

All this attests positively the candidate's competence and eligibility for holding the academic position "Associate Professor" in professional field 3.3. Political science (International relations). It is apparent that Dr. Kaneva is a widely recognized lecturer in the full capacity to teach both in Bulgarian and English language on a high academic level.

5. General outline of the submitted academic publications

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

Dr. Mira Kaneva is applying for the academic position by submitting a monograph, 7 studies, 8 articles, and reports from national and international scientific conferences. The publications have been produced in the time span between 2013 and 2022. They are relevant for the competition. The submitted publications testify for a high academic level. They represent an accomplishment and novelty in the academic field in which Dr. Kaneva is working and is currently applying for the position of Associate Professor. This is the reason why they are a compelling argument in favour of her election as an Associate Professor. The submitted literature makes it evident that Dr. Kaneva's research interests can be differentiated into two issue areas – soft power in international law and international relations, and the problems of territoriality and spatiality in international relations.

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

The habilitation thesis, submitted for the competition call for Associate Professor by Assist. Prof. Mira Kaneva, PhD, covers the topic "Borders in international relations. Theoretical, normative and practical

issues". The habilitation thesis, published in 2022, consists of 339 pages. It encompasses 564 bibliographical units in English and Bulgarian.

The chosen topic is of key importance for the theory of international relations. At the same time, it is a significant issue in the realm of social sciences, anthropology, geography, and has a noteworthy, though not fully recognized, meaning for legal science as well. It tackles an interdisciplinary problem which has been sufficiently theorized about in the international academic debate, stays at the focus of multitudinous analytical discourse, concerns a multi-faceted subject, and possesses a stabilized conceptual apparatus. Along with all this, the research area, chosen by Dr. Kaneva, abounds with new challenges and problems. They are spanning across critical territorial studies, spatial approaches in anthropology, and the theory of territoriality and spatiality, all of which are the focal point of legal, socio-legal, anthropological, sociological, political, geographical, economic and philosophical discourse.

Borders are a classical problem which nonetheless is the subject of a serious reconceptualization through the prism of contemporary normative, theoretical and practical challenges towards territory and space. Dr. Kaneva outlines the seminal theories about borders in a clear, coherent and systematic manner, thus relating them to the fundamental conceptual paradigms about territoriality and spatiality. Consequently, her publication constitutes an asset for allowing the Bulgarian readers to become more informed and knowledgeable thereof.

Within the Bulgarian academic discourse, this topic has been researched through the prism of the crisis of territoriality, the concept about spaces of flows, the deconstruction of the orthodox models of legal orders, the crisis of hierarchy, the transitions from Westphalian to post-Westphalian and neo-Westphalian explanatory and ordering paradigms, the rise of global financial capitalism, the pandemic territoriality, among others.

At the same time, the study submitted by Dr. Kaneva is of great use to the Bulgarian theoretical discourse, since it is the first ever authored edited volume, dedicated to the topic. It lays the groundwork for the initiation of a more mature and comprehensive debate concerning territoriality and spatiality in Bulgarian legal theory and international studies. The study is, of course, not a legal analysis in its essence, but it still can be situated within the broader context of socio-legal studies, specifically those related to international law and international relations.

The habilitation thesis has an excellent structure in accordance with the announced topic in its title. The first chapter displays the fundamental theoretical concepts about borders in a concise way. The author presents, in a detailed and to a great extent unbiased manner, the elemental paradigms not only concerning borders, but also territory and space. The review of the basic analytical matrixes about territoriality and

spatiality as normative-theoretical representations of material reality is instructive, intelligible and methodical. It is quite intriguing for the expert reader, and at the same time it gives the neophyte the opportunity to get the whole picture about the past and up-to-date debates on borders, territory, territoriality, space and spatiality.

The second chapter tackles the issue of borders as a norm. The author depicts the normative models of defining, forming, formatting, institutionalization and regulation of borders. Specific attention should be paid to the functional approach which the author makes use of in the fourth section of the second chapter. The analysis of the border forms and border symbols is also noteworthy. In sum, the study of the border as a symbol, process and practice should be deduced as a salient conceptual and methodological accomplishment of the book, because, in my opinion, it constitutes a successful attempt at a post-positivist theory of borders.

The third chapter provides a study of different border regimes. The author examines a series of contemporary transformations and meanings of borders in the context of exceptionality as the new normalcy, the processes of othering, and the borders as an instrument of biopolitics. A specific attention provokes the analysis of immunopolitical borders of the pandemic kind, as well the biometric “smart borders”. It deals with issues that are widely contested in a lot of academic publications and during several European academic fora in the last few years, and the inclusion of Dr. Kaneva in this very topical discourse is worth critical approval.

6. Assessment of the academic theoretical and empirical contributions

The overall review of the candidate’s publications submitted for the competition implies the following conclusions. Mira Kaneva, PhD, has a reflective and motivated academic interest in the field of the interdisciplinary post-positivist international studies. She is familiar with the fundamental scholarly polemic in the European and global discourse. The author’s key contributions worth highlighting are: the critical analysis of soft and hard power in international relations, the focus on the rule of law problem in the context of global and regional migration, the conclusions about the permutations of sovereignty in the context of the deconstruction of its conventional manifestations, forms and contexts, as well as the study of contemporary issues of territoriality and spatiality in international relations.

7. Critical remarks and recommendations

I would recommend that the candidate should use the Bulgarian transliteration of foreign authors' names when referring to them in the text, i.e. to cite them in the Cyrillic alphabet, or in the original Latin version but accompanied with a bracketed Cyrillic translation of the name. This bears importance due to a few reasons. First, it enriches the Bulgarian doctrine and the Bulgarian academic language. Second, it facilitates the reader to get oriented in the pronunciation of the foreign author's name. Third, it brings homogeneity to the text.

Apart from this, the author incorrectly refers to “the imperial politics of the Third Reich at the turn of the century” (p. 43). Actually it concerns the Second (Bismarck, Wilhelmine) Reich, while the Third Reich is the National-socialist regime of the 1930s and the 1940s.

The abovementioned recommendations and critical comments should in no way call into doubt the contribution and the academic prominence of the habilitation thesis. Rather, they are suggestions for improvement in a future, second edition of the volume, which I sincerely wish for Dr. Kaneva to come true.

8. Conclusion

The applicant in the competition, Mira Kaneva, PhD, has ostensible and certified qualities. These concern both her research and teaching competences. Her habilitation thesis is an incontestable contribution in the Bulgarian theory and constitutes an interest for the international academic debate. Therefore, I would recommend that the author should translate it into English so that it can become part of the greater European and global discourse on the topic. I believe that Mira Kaneva meets the requirements of the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria. That is why, I recommend with firm conviction that the academic panel elect and promote Assist. Prof. Mira Kaneva, PhD, for holding the academic position of an Associate Professor by virtue of the announced call 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.

Sofia

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