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Opinion

By Yura Konstantinova, Assoc. Prof.

Regarding a competition for the academic position of Associate Professor
for the needs of the Modern Bulgarian History section of the Institute for Historical Studies
(IHS), BAS

A competition was announced in the *State Gazette*, No 63 of 6 August 2022 in higher education field 2. Humanities, professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology, scholarly specialty History of Bulgaria (Bulgarian Diplomacy (1879 – 1944) for the needs of the Modern Bulgarian History section of the Institute for Historical Studies (IHS), Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS). Two applicants have been admitted to participation in the competition: Voin Bozhinov, Chief Assistant Professor, PhD, and Aleka Strezova, Chief Assistant Professor, PhD, whose papers and scholarly contributions I will present and comment on in the alphabetical order of their surnames.

Voin Bozhinov, PhD, is a graduate of the Faculty of History of Sofia University, where in 2005 he defended his doctoral thesis on the topic *Andrey Lyapchev - Politician, Statesman, Public Figure* and then took up a position at the Institute for Historical Studies. He is fluent in English and Russian.

Compliance with the minimum national requirements

Dr. Bozhinov participates in the competition with six monographs and 39 articles; he has submitted data on citations exceeding by far the minimum scholarly requirements, as well as information on involvement in projects, which is not required for this procedure. Dr. Bozhinov has indicated as his principal habilitation work his monograph *The Politics of 19th of May on Power May 19, 1934 – January 22, 1935*. S., 2017. It is noteworthy that in the submitted electronic copy of Dr. Bozhinov's papers this work has no reviewers, while in the submitted hard copy, as well as in the COBISS system, the same work (with the same ISBN and without claims for a supplemented and revised edition) has acquired two reviewers. I find such an addition manipulative and improper. Nevertheless, I accept the principal habilitation thesis (without the added reviewers(!), insofar as when it was written, the requirement for reviewers did not exist.

Three other monographs by Dr. Bozhinov are: *The Republic of Macedonia in Contemporary Geopolitics*, S., 2017; *Socialist Yugoslavia in Agony 1980-1989*, S., ARKA PUBL., 2019 and *Socialist Yugoslavia in Disintegration 1989-1992*, S., 2021. These three monographs are outside the scope of the competition announced for the scholarly specialty History of Bulgaria. Obviously, the three cited monographs cannot be used to prove Dr. Bozhinov's competence in this specialty, in which considerable, varied, and significant research could be performed, so I will not comment on them in my opinion.

Two monographs coauthored by Dr. Bozhinov are also presented: *Nationally Powerful and United Bulgaria. The Formations of the Radical Right and the National*

Question. S., 2014 (Co-authored with Nikolai Poppetrov) and *The Republic of Macedonia in Contemporary Geopolitics and the Place of Bulgarian Interest There. S.*, 2018 (Co-authored with Yordanka Stoyanova-Toneva). The last two publications appear as monographs in the applicant's documents and in the abstracts of his scholarly works. However, they are included in the table of scientific metrics submitted by the applicant as chapters of collective monographs. A possible explanation in this respect could be the fact that the parts written by Dr. Bozhinov are respectively 96 pages in the first monograph and 99 pages in the second one, i.e. in order to be regarded as equivalent to monographs under the requirements of the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act (&1.10 of the Additional Provisions), the characters on each page should be counted. The applicant's disparate presentation of these works creates confusion, but I accept that they should be considered as chapters of collective monographs. Dr. Bozhinov's contribution to the first monograph is relevant to the scholarly specialty of the competition, unlike his participation in the monograph *The Republic of Macedonia in Contemporary Geopolitics and the Place of Bulgarian Interest There*". S., 2018.

The monographs *The Globe does not Stop Spinning Even If We Sleep. A Narrative of the Life of Andrey Lyapchev, S.*, 2005 and *Andrey Lyapchev, S.*, 2006 are also presented in a confusing manner. They are reported in the submitted table of scientific metrics as published books based on the defended dissertation for awarding the educational and scientific degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), but they are not included with abstracts of the publications submitted by the applicant, so they cannot be reviewed.

I accept that 31 of the submitted 39 scholarly articles are relevant to the scholarly specialty History of Bulgaria and added to the principal monographic work and the chapter of a collective monograph, constitute grounds to consider that Dr. Bozhinov meets and exceeds the minimum legal requirements and should be admitted to evaluation in the competition.

In essence

Dr. Bozhinov singles out as his main habilitation work his study *The Politics of 19th of May on Power May 19, 1934 – January 22, 1935. S.*, 2017. The work deepens and broadens the knowledge of the 19th of May government by placing it in the context of Bulgaria's political rule before the coup of 19 May 1934 and seeking its parallels beyond the country's borders. The book traces in detail the nine months in office of the 19th of May government, highlights their ideology and problematizes the consequences of their intervention in politics. This monograph deepens and adds substance to the author's exploration of the Zveno circle, which came within the scope of his interests during his work on a chapter of the monograph *Nationally Powerful and United Bulgaria. The Formations of the Radical Right and the National Question. S.*, 2014. In this publication Dr. Bozhinov elaborates the topics of several other far-right organizations active in the Bulgarian political life in the interwar period, as well as the part devoted to the Bulgarian national question in the same chronological period.

The articles submitted for participation in the competition outline Dr. Bozhinov's enduring research interests in the Bulgarian-Serbian/Yugoslav relations. Among his other publications related to the scholarly specialty History of Bulgaria one can find articles on the

Young Turk Revolution, on the declaration of Bulgaria's independence, on the Bulgarian-Ottoman relations on the eve of World War I. Dr. Bozhinov's scholarly output is readable, often targeting wider readership. An impressive feature is the extensive use of recollections and newspapers from the period under examination, which adds colour to the narrative. At the same time, there is a drift towards ideologized theses at the expense of an in-depth historical debate, which requires the introduction into circulation of new source data and a reasoned discussion with contemporary studies of Bulgarian and international fellow researchers who have worked on similar topics.

Dr. Aleka Strezova is a graduate of Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, where in addition to a Master's degree in History, she acquired a second degree in International Relations. She was a full-time PhD student at the Institute for Historical Studies, BAS where in 2013 she defended her doctoral thesis on the topic *Bulgarian Diplomats 1879-1912*. After defending her dissertation she took up a position at the Institute for Historical Studies. She is proficient in French, English, Russian and German.

Compliance with the minimum national requirements

Dr. Strezova participates in this competition with two monographs, 10 articles, four studies and a chapter in a collective monograph; she has submitted data on citations exceeding the minimum national requirements. She has indicated as her principal habilitation work her monograph *The Last of a Kind. Dr. Georgi Valkovich (1833-1892)*, V. Tarnovo, Faber, 2022. A second monographic work submitted in the competition is the book *Bulgarian Diplomacy. Institutions and Representatives. 1879-1918*, S., Avangard prima, 2017. The two monographs, as well as all the articles, studies and the chapter of the collective monograph are related to different aspects of the scholarly specialty History of Bulgaria. The total score that the submitted publications bring to the applicant exceeds by far the minimum national requirements, which warrants Dr. Strezova to be admitted for evaluation in the competition.

In essence

Dr. Strezova's principal habilitation work is her monograph *The Last of a Kind. Dr. Georgi Valkovich (1833-1892)*, V. Tarnovo, Faber, 2022. Drawing on rich source material, publications in the press, data from diaries and memoirs of contemporaries and on a historiographical base of impressive volume, it traces the biography and professional activities of the Bulgarian diplomat Dr. Georgi Valkovich. The monograph sets his personality in the context of the Bulgarian history on the border between the Ottoman and the post-liberation periods, which enables the author to demonstrate her competence on multiple and diverse topics. There is no doubt that Dr. Strezova's main habilitation work is a continuation, upgrade and deeper development of her interests in the field of diplomatic history. These are evident from the topic of her dissertation and her monograph *Bulgarian Diplomacy. Institutions and Representatives. 1879-1918*, S., Avangard prima, 2017. The latter study develops further the reader's knowledge of Bulgarian diplomacy, adding to it information on the establishment and administrative development of the Bulgarian foreign ministry, as well as background information on Bulgarian diplomats.

The articles, studies and chapter of a monograph submitted by Dr. Strezova elaborate on the extensive thematic area of Bulgarian diplomacy from the establishment of the independent Bulgarian state until the end of World War II. They are mostly devoted to personalities (Stoyan Petrov-Chomakov, Dimitar Grekov, Alexandar Malinov, Grigor Nachovich, Petar Mateev, Todor and Pancho Hadzhimishev, etc.), who linked their lives to Bulgarian diplomacy, to the opening of Bulgarian representative offices abroad, as well as to the publication and comments on newly discovered British and Ottoman diplomatic documents revealing hitherto unknown data about Bulgarian history. One is impressed by the presentation of the documentary evidence in readable language, its successful contextualization in the Bulgarian, Balkan and European history, and the excellent knowledge of the historiography on the topics under consideration. I would like to particularly highlight the evolution of Dr. Strezova, whose habilitation thesis demonstrates her visible advancement as a scholar.

Conclusion

Both applicants meet the requirements for holding the academic position of Associate Professor. I find no plagiarism or misrepresented data in the works submitted by them. After a thorough review of the competition materials, I believe that Dr. Aleka Strezova is the more suitable applicant for assuming the academic position of Associate Professor in higher education field 2. Humanities, professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology, scholarly specialty History of Bulgaria (*Bulgarian Diplomacy (1879 – 1944)*) for the needs of the Modern Bulgarian History section of the Institute for Historical Studies (IHS). Reasons: Dr. Strezova is proficient in four foreign languages; she holds a second Master's degree in International Relations; she demonstrates sustained interest and professional development in her research field – history of Bulgarian diplomacy; she has mastered the methodology of historical research (a mandatory part of which is the introduction into scholarly circulation of new source data and their successful combination with information from other sources and historiography); she works purposefully to upgrade her qualifications and to uncover new information about Bulgarian history.

I rank the applicants as follows:

1. Aleka Strezova, Chief Assistant Professor, PhD
2. Voin Bozhinov, Chief Assistant Professor, PhD

And as a member of the Scientific Jury I will vote in favour of proposing that Dr. Aleka Strezova should be selected for the academic position of Associate Professor by the Scientific Council of the Institute for Historical Studies, BAS.

Sofia, 1 December 2022

Assoc. Prof. Yura Konstantinova