

## **OPINION**

from Prof. DSc. Pepka Boyadjieva, department “Knowledge Society: Science, Education and Innovation”, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, BAS

concerning the publications of Associate Professor DSc. Martin Ivanov, participant in the competition for the academic position “Professor”, announced by Sofia University “St. Kl. Ohridski”, for the needs of the Faculty of Philosophy in professional field 3.1 Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences (Sociology – Historical Sociology), State Gazette no. 32  
/ 09.04.2024

### **1. General characteristics of the candidate's scientific, applied scientific and pedagogical activities**

Assoc. Prof. Dsc. Martin Ivanov is the only candidate in the announced competition for the academic position of "Professor" for the needs of the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Sofia in professional field 3.1 Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences (Sociology – Historical Sociology). The competition fully corresponds to the candidate's educational and scientific profile, his scientific achievements, teaching and expert activities.

The documents for participation in the competition have been prepared in accordance with the law, correctly and precisely. For his participation in the competition for the academic position of "Professor", Assoc. Prof. Martin Ivanov presents a habilitation thesis – the monograph "Former people" of concentration camp Bulgaria", published in 2023 by "Siela" publishing house in a volume of 374 pages, part of a monograph in co-authorship and 13 articles in Bulgarian and English, 5 of which are written only by him. The submitted publications, as well as the other documents of the competition, comply with the national requirements for the academic position "Professor".

I would like to especially emphasised that in 2021 Assoc. Professor Ivanov successfully defended his dissertation work "Swimming against the tide: Bulgarian textile occupations and their development into a factory industry, 1800-1912" and obtained the scientific degree "Doctor of Sociological Sciences".

Assoc. Prof. Ivanov well combines sincere dedication to his pedagogical responsibilities with constant commitment to serious and theoretically thoughtful scientific research, as well as active expert and civic activity. His academic and public appearances impress with the upholding of high professional criteria and clearly expressed and solidly argued positions.

## **2. Analysis of the candidate's scientific achievements**

According to Fernand Braudel, unlike historians, on whose thought "time sticks ... like dirt to a gardener's spade", sociologists almost always manage to escape from the time of history – "they seek refuge in the moment, which is always present, as if hanging over time, or in the recurring phenomena that have no age" (Braudel, *History and social sciences. The long-term period*. In: *Historians about History*, vol. 1. S., 1985: 198, 202). Norbert Elias also accuses sociologists of being disinterested in the past through his article "The Accommodation of sociology in the present" and assesses this orientation not only as too far from the "lessons" of the classics of sociology (e.g. Weber), but also as ignoring the historicity of the social (Elias, 1987).

I took the liberty of quoting these great thinkers in order to highlight as clearly as possible the main – in my opinion – scientific contribution of Assoc. Prof. Ivanov's publications and overall academic activity – not just the development of historical sociology, but the confirmation of the key importance of the question of the relationship between sociology and history and the constant need to critically consider not only the foundations, methods and empirical basis of each one, but also the possibilities for the complementary use of different empirical sources.

I particularly value Assoc. Prof. Ivanov's ability to make seriously reasoned critical analyses of events and processes from our nearer and more distant past, his refusal of hasty and obvious explanations and generalisations, his "taste" for detail and understanding of complexity and the multifaceted determination of the studied social phenomena, as well as his heightened sensitivity to acute – and even crisis – problems in our society.

In the publications of Assoc. Prof. Ivanov, the fundamental historicity of social processes and phenomena is not postulated, but revealed through specific analyses that show how the past "settles" in the present and how past images, voices and actions are "superimposed" on and model subsequent events.

Among the publications of Assoc. Prof. Ivanov submitted for participation in the current competition, the monograph "Former People" of concentration camp Bulgaria, published in 2023 by "Siela" publishing house, undoubtedly stands out.

The monograph is an original scientific study, both in terms of its subject and the implemented approach. It is the first systematic study of the victims of political repression during the 45 years of communist regime that "gives them a say", tries to "hear their voices" and make sense of what was said, what was left unsaid and what was silenced in the context of both the wider social environment, as well as the specific personal biographical trajectories.

As an independent contribution of Assoc. Prof. Ivanov's monograph, I will highlight his well-argued and applied approach to the empirical material on which the analysis is based. I define this approach as both complex and critical. On the one hand, Assoc. Prof. Ivanov created a huge database – 309 interviews and memoirs, 62 ex-post biographical reconstructions, numerous testimonies from the so-called Dossier Commission, trying to follow both the biographical approach and the official testimonies at the same time. On the other hand, however, Assoc. Prof. Ivanov problematises the advantages and risks of each of these sources, and especially of their independent use.

An important contribution of Associate Professor Ivanov is that with his analyses he not only studies and systematises a huge source material, but also succeeds in analytically distinguishing and empirically describing key phenomena which characterise the way the communist regime functions and the life trajectories of the pre-revolutionary elites. such as: 1) the different forms of discrimination used by the political power against the "former people" – physical repression; property repression and discrimination, and 2) the variety of life strategies through which the representatives of the pre-revolutionary elites tried to adapt to the new political and social reality.

I highly appreciate the aspiration of Assoc. Prof. Martin Ivanov to formulate and defend positions on current and "charged with public tension" topics. For example, he gets involved in the very sensitive, both politically and morally, debate about the archives and State Security agents. Taking into account the specifics of the communist regime, the massive and uncontrolled destruction of documents of the political police in the period immediately after November 10, 1989, as well as the numerous cases of forced declarations of "voluntary" cooperation, Assoc. Prof. Martin Ivanov problematises the consideration of archival testimonies from the communist regime as primary and trustworthy documents. He highlights the risks of uncritically referring to the State Security documents, characterising them as "one-dimensional" and of problematic impartiality (p. 32), insofar as they reproduce the point of

view of only one of the parties involved in the political repressions, and that one, which is a reflection and extension of official political power.

Assoc. Prof. Martin Ivanov's monograph also contains some more specific theses, which I consider as important and contributing. For example:

- The thesis that the elimination of the "former classes" is of key importance and therefore a goal for the communist regime "not so much because of their capitalist and exploitative nature, but because of the desire to eliminate any potential competition for power" (p. 19);

- The understanding that the "elite" in a predominantly agrarian society which is at the beginning of its modernisation, "distinguishes itself not so much by its economic, social and cultural capital as by the symbolic capital it possesses", by such "symbols of "difference" as ancestral memory, genealogy, family home, lifestyle..., openness to the world" (pp. 23-24);

- The thesis that the significant "subjectivism in the selection of the victims and their distribution inside the concentration camp Bulgaria aims to increase fear, terror and hence – albeit paradoxically – total control over the "former people"" (p. 46).

I would also like to draw attention to the intellectual honesty of Assoc. Prof. Martin Ivanov. An important characteristic of Assoc. Prof. Martin Ivanov's scientific style is the rejection of one-sided and simplistic schemes and explanatory models. At the same time, he does not try to "rape" the empirical material to substantiate his theses and conclusions, but frankly recognises its limitations, in cases where there is no convincing and reliable data and evidence to make a generalisation or formulate a thesis, for example : "[t]he memories and interviews collected here do not give an exact answer to what extent the breakthroughs to any of the more intellectual professions are the result of qualities, happy coincidence, connections, "good people", or what Stefan Bochev calls "economically useful bourgeois" (p. 123).

I appreciate the self-assessment of the contributions by Assoc. Prof. Ivanov as well-argued and reflecting real theoretical achievements.

### **3. Comments to the applicant's publications**

I would like to suggest a proposal for a future article to Assoc. Prof. Martin Ivanov. The basis for this is the fact that he has a historical education, and at the same time a serious interest and publications in the field of historical sociology, and in his latest monograph he uses a variety of empirical material – both archival sources and biographical interviews, and data from a large-scale sociological research.

In the early 1990s, the *British Journal of Sociology* published several highly polemical articles on the relationship between history and sociology. The discussion was provoked by an article by the famous English sociologist John Goldthorpe (Goldthorpe, J. H. 1991. The uses of history in sociology: Reflections on some recent tendencies. *British Journal of Sociology*, 42, 2: 211-30). One of Goldthorpe's theses is that there is a major difference between history and sociology, which is often overlooked, and which concerns the nature of the data that both disciplines use, specifically, the way that data is created". According to the English sociologist, for the study of the past, history can rely only on historical relics, which are limited and incomplete. In contrast to historians, sociologists can create their own empirical data. In this, Goldthorpe insists, is their great advantage, and so they should not turn to history rashly, but only do so with sufficient grounds and with a full awareness of the limitations they will encounter. The discussion that followed (see for example: Bryant, J. M., 1994. Evidence and explanation in history and sociology: Critical reflections on Goldthorpe's critique of historical sociology. *British Journal of Sociology*, 45, 1; Mann, M. 1994. In praise of macro-sociology: A Reply to Goldthorpe. *British Journal of Sociology*, 45, 1; Goldthorpe, J. H. 1994. The uses of history in sociology: A reply. *British Journal of Sociology* 45, 1) highlighted advantages and disadvantages of both historical data and data from sociological surveys. My invitation to Assoc. Prof. Martin Ivanov is to include in his future scientific plans the preparation of an article in which he will consider this problem, based on his own experience,

#### **4. Personal impressions from the applicant**

With his scientific research and public appearances, Assoc. Prof. Martin Ivanov has established himself as one of the most prominent Bulgarian social scientists who manages to build "bridges" between the academic community and the general public. I am convinced that in his future professional development he will continue to successfully combine rigorous academic research with committed teaching and a responsible and active public activities.

#### **2. Reasoned and clearly formulated conclusion**

On the basis of everything said above about the high scientific achievements, rich research and teaching experience and active expert activity of Assoc. Prof. DSc. Martin Ivanov, I strongly recommend the members of the esteemed jury and the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philosophy at Sofia University to vote unanimously in support of the election of DSc. Martin Ivanov at the academic position "Professor", professional field 3.1. Sociology,

Anthropology and Cultural Sciences (Sociology - Historical Sociology). The election of Associate Professor Ivanov to the academic position of "Professor" will be a well-deserved recognition of his academic achievements and will contribute to the future development of the Faculty of Philosophy and the Department of Sociology as leading educational and scientific center in the field of social sciences.

Prof. Pepka Boyadjieva

15.08.2024