



OPINION¹

on the submitted works for participation in a competition for the academic position of a PROFESSOR in professional field 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Intercultural communication), announced by Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in State Gazette, issue 55/28.06.2024.

Reviewer: associate professor Hristina Atanasova Hristova, PhD (author of an opinion)

Candidate: associate professor Diyana Petkova Petkova, PhD

I. Evaluation of the scientific and practical results and contributions of the scientific and educational production submitted for participation in the competition

All the requirements of the application procedure for the competition to take the academic position of a "professor" have been met. The documents and scientific works, submitted by the sole candidate, comply with the minimum national requirements, outlined in the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, as well as with the requirements set by the Regulations of "St. Kliment Ohridski" Sofia University for the development of the academic staff.

The indicators "publications" and "citations" exceed the requirements. The candidate participates in the competition with twenty-two publications: one monograph, two publications, refereed and indexed in SCOPUS and Web of Science, eighteen publications – articles and reports, published in non-refereed journals with scientific peer review or in edited collective volumes and with one chapter in a collective monograph. Ten of the publications are in English and one is in Russian.

The publications of associate professor Petkova are cited in some of the most prestigious databases – SCOPUS and Web of Science, as well as in CEEOL and RSCI eLibrary.

Regarding group E indicators, which are related to the supervision of PhD students and graduates, as well as with the participation in national and international research projects, the required minimum has been exceeded. Associate professor Petkova has participated in five international and two national research projects. Over the years, she has supervised two PhD students and eighty graduates, all of whom have successfully defended their theses.

The scientific work, submitted for participation in the competition, is indicative of a significant scientific field. The research focuses on different thematic areas:

1. Cultural and religious identity in the postmodern era;
2. Psychology of communication and media culture. Manifestations of communication phenomena such as rumours, fake news, conspiracy theories, and disinformation;
3. Communication transformations under the influence of artificial intelligence;
4. Imageology. Aspects of the national image.

A large-scale study in the first thematic area, to which most of the candidate's publications are dedicated, is presented in the monograph *Religiosity, Identity and Postmodernity. Studies in Intercultural Communication and Comparative National Psychology*, published in 2024. A key aspect of the research context is the comparative analysis of religiosity in Bulgaria, Ecuador, India, and Japan – countries from different continents that develop under diverse socio-cultural conditions.

The distinctive merits of the monograph are related to the functions of religiosity, outlined in the first chapter, the in-depth examination of universal archetypes and mythological structures, shared by all peoples and cultures, the defined semantic dimensions of the opposing traditions in the study of religion in the fields

¹ Забележка: Препоръчителен обем на становището – 2-3 стандартни страници.



of philosophy and sociology – the materialist school and the school that defines religion as a “pillar of morality and ethics for human beings”. It also highlights the differentiated approaches to the study of identity in the social sciences (characterological, value-based, constructivist, essentialist, and discourse analysis approaches) and offers an analytical perspective on the large-scale processes of secularization and desecularization in the postmodern era.

The theoretical foundation of the monograph is precisely outlined, emphasizing the role of interactionist discourse analysis and the social constructivist approach.

The study of the relationship between civilization and religiosity is a notable strength of the monograph.

Research contributions are evident in the extensive comparative study of religiosity in Bulgaria, Ecuador, and India, presented in the third chapter, and of religiosity in Japan, discussed in the fourth chapter. These chapters provide well-founded conclusions on the different models of perceiving the higher transcendental reality in these countries. The results of the study are integrated into the convincing argument supporting the hypothesis of a correlation between religious sentiment and the strength of collectivism in various world regions.

The monograph presents a new interpretation of religiosity in the postmodern era, characterized by a process of religious diversification that does not necessarily lead to civilizational conflicts.

Intercultural comparative analyses on the topic of religiosity in the postmodern era are also featured in articles published over different years: the publication “Death, After-Life, and Rebirth: Cultural Transfusion of Ideas” (2018), which examines the ideas of death and reincarnation in India and Bulgaria; the article “Encountering the East: Cultural Distance, Clashes of Perceptions and Conversations about Religions in Japan” (2016), which explores the differences between Japanese and Western concepts of religion; the publication “Ecuador: Cultural Identity, Collective Self-Image, and Religious Beliefs” (2016), which focuses on Ecuadorians' national identity and self-perception; “A Cross-Cultural Comparison between Finnish Quietude and Japanese Tranquillity” (2015), which explores silence in Japanese and Finnish cultures and outlines a new and not yet well-developed scientific field; and “Models of Religious Identities in Postmodernity” (2020), which examines the phenomenon of postmodern religiosity as an intricate complex of interdependencies.

Two articles from 2019 are also related to the theme of identity transformations and the influence of religiosity in the postmodern era: “Religiosity and Perceptions of Life and Death among Bulgarians and Indians: A Cross-Cultural Study”, which presents a well-founded argument for the four main models of religiosity in the postmodern era, and “Religiosity and Transculturalization in Postmodernity”, which examines the process of transculturalization in religion and its influence on European cultures.

These publications highlight the intersections and differences between various cultural identities and demonstrate key strengths in the candidate’s research activities—precise attention to facts, effective application of well-selected research methods, and a convincing justification of research hypotheses. The monograph and the articles published in various academic journals represent valuable contributions to intercultural studies between two or more cultures, previously unexplored from a comparative perspective.

An achievement in Associate Professor Petkova’s research is her study of communication phenomena such as rumours, conspiracy theories, fake news, and disinformation. Her identification of the factors that determine the generation and influence of rumours and disinformation in the social environment, as well as their tangible manifestations in specific socio-cultural contexts, mark the contributions of the articles: “Rumours and Conspiracy Theories in Bulgarian Social Media during the Pandemic” (2024), “Populism and Conspiracy Theories: Rethinking Rumour Theories in the Eastern European Context” (2024), and “Rumours and Pandemic: Rethinking Old and New Theories of Rumours and Disinformation” (2022).

A significant aspect of associate professor Petkova's publications is her exploration of the communication phenomenon of silence through intercultural comparative analyses. Among the texts on this



topic, the article “Silenced Voices and Speaking Up: A Case Study of Romani People in Europe”, published in the *Journal of Silence Studies in Education* (2021), stands out. It contributes to the understanding of the ambiguous interpretation of silence in the cultures of Bulgarian and Finnish Roma—either as synonymous with marginalization and discrimination or as a strategy for coping with unwanted situations and a model for self-preservation.

Contributions are also evident in publications related to other thematic areas in associate professor Petkova’s work, including imageology and communication transformations influenced by artificial intelligence. The transformations of the classical communication models under the influence of AI and the well-articulated thesis of the beginning of a new era in the digital storytelling are the key advantages and contributions of the article “Artificial Intelligence and Chatbots in Copywriting: From Communication Revolution to the Folklorization of Digital Postmodernity”, published in 2023.

The thematic area of imageology is explored in publications which examine the national image in times of crisis, particularly in the context of the global COVID-19 pandemic, and analyse the factors affecting Bulgaria’s national image. The managerial approach, focusing on effective strategies for building a positive national image, underscores the contributions of articles like “The Bulgarian National Image in the Digital Age. The 2016 Presidential Elections in the International Press” (2017) and “The Bulgarian National Image in India” (2014).

All the publications submitted for the competition demonstrate profound research interests which are also evident in the candidate’s teaching activities. Associate Professor Diana Petkova has been a lecturer at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" for 23 years. She started as an assistant in the university on November 13, 2001, and since January 9, 2014, she has held the position of an "Associate Professor" in the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, Department of Communication, Public Relations, and Advertising. Petkova's research in cultural identity and religiosity, communications, imageology, and the interaction between social processes and cultural values corresponds with the lecture courses “National Psychology” and “Psychology of Communication” which she leads.

As an established researcher, Associate Professor Petkova is also actively involved in editorial work. She has compiled and edited four collections: *Cultural Identity in an Intercultural Context*, published in 2005; *Communication, Sport, and Culture*, published in 2007; *Religious Identities in the Postmodern World: Intercultural and Communication Aspects*, published in 2020; and *The Creative City: Media Narratives and Communication Policies*, published in 2022. Additionally, Associate Professor Petkova serves on the editorial boards of three prestigious academic journals: *Journal of Silence Studies in Communication*, *Geopolitics*, and *Media and Language*.

II. Notes and recommendations

I have no notes or recommendations for the candidate.

III. Conclusion

The presented academic work, the identified research contributions, and the demonstrated professionalism in Associate Professor PhD Diana Petkova’s overall research, teaching, editorial, and compilation activities give me sufficient grounds to vote in favour of her appointment to the academic position of "Professor" in the field of higher education 3. Social, Economic, and Information Sciences, professional area 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences, with the scientific specialty "Intercultural Communication."

1. 10.2024
Veliko Tarnovo

Jury member: Assoc. Prof. Hristina Hristova, PhD



СОФИЙСКИ УНИВЕРСИТЕТ "СВ. КЛИМЕНТ ОХРИДСКИ"

ФАКУЛТЕТ ПО ЖУРНАЛИСТИКА И МАСОВА КОМУНИКАЦИЯ