

OPINION
on the works of
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR DR. SONYA YORDANOVA STEFANOVA
participant in a competition for "associate professor" in the professional field
3.2. PSYCHOLOGY /SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY/, area of higher education
3. Social, economic and legal sciences and national security,
announced by the Department of "Nervous Diseases, Psychiatry and Psychology"
at the Faculty of Medicine of the University "Prof. Dr. Asen Zlatarov" - Burgas, announced
in the State Gazette, issue 91 from 29.10.2024.

Prepared the opinion: Prof. DSc Krasimira PETROVA Koleva-Mineva – VTU "St. St. Cyril and Methodius"

1. Information about the competition.

The competition is announced by the Faculty of Medicine of the University "Prof. Dr. Asen Zlatarov" - Burgas, with the course schedule provided by the department indicating the academic disciplines that meet the needs of the department in the specified professional field.

When preparing the review of the competition, the main documents corresponding to the requirements of the normative base for the development of the academic staff of the Republic of Bulgaria and the University "Prof. Dr. Asen Zlatarov" - Burgas were taken into account. There are no violations in the competition procedure. One candidate participates in the competition - Associate Professor Dr. Sonya Yordanova Stefanova, a lecturer at the Department of "Nervous Diseases, Psychiatry and Psychology" at the Faculty of Medicine.

2. Information about the candidate.

The candidate for associate professor, Associate Professor Dr. Sonya Stefanova, graduated in 1999 with a Bachelor's degree from Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski". Specialty: Primary School Pedagogy. Specialization: Defectology (Special Education) with a 4-month internship at the Center for Mental Health, Burgas, later also completing a master's program at the University "Prof. Dr. Asen Zlatarov" - Burgas. Specialty: Preschool and Primary School Pedagogy. Specialization: Alternative Didactic-Methodological Technologies in the Educational Process. Since 2007, she has obtained a PhD in Theory of Education and Didactics under code 05.07.01. Since 2016, she has been an associate professor in Tourism Management Ethics and Psychology in Tourism (3.9), and in 2023, she also obtained a PhD in Psychology. She has worked as a teacher, assistant, guest lecturer, and since 2010, she has been a lecturer at the University "Prof. Dr. Asen Zlatarov." She holds numerous certificates in various fields, mainly related to psychology.

We can identify two trends in the candidate's development – one is related to consistency and advancement in the field of helping professions, and the other is combining practical work with sustained scientific interest, which guarantees her successful academic career.

3. Description and evaluation of scientific works.

Associate Professor Dr. Sonya Stefanova presents a list of scientific works in several genres in the competition for associate professor, including one monograph, which is habilitational, 3 textbooks and teaching aids, and 16 other publications (articles and reports)

published in prestigious journals and correctly distributed as co-authorship. The candidate also has many other publications not included in the list. Although participation and leadership in projects are not required for awarding the scientific title of "associate professor," we do not calculate their points, but it should be noted that Associate Professor Dr. Stefanova has participated in national and university projects, mostly with a social focus, and she is a recognizable author regarding the cited references.

In the habilitation thesis "Attitudes and Behavior of Consumers in Choosing a Tourist Destination. Socio-psychological Aspects." Published by "EX-PRESS", Gabrovo, 2024, the title itself sets the focus of Assoc. Prof. Sonya Stefanova's research intentions - the attitudes of consumers and their behavior when choosing a tourist destination.

The monograph is consistent with the good traditions of such scientific publications - a very good theoretical foundation presented with understanding and care, structured and sequential exposition, independently conducted research with an authorial methodology, clarified categorical array supported by sufficient respondents, measured analysis of the obtained data that provide a basis for conclusions, generalizations, and recommendations useful for practice. The data from the study can be used to develop a typology of tourists related to their personal characteristics, classify them into different target groups, and codify tourist resources.

In conclusion, I can say that the work stands out with its relevance, social significance, applicability, and scientific validity. Other works defined as books have a more overview character, as they fall under the sections of textbooks and teaching aids, without losing their informative, educational, and scientific value. In "Psychology of Personality," numerous theories about personality are presented, the main constructs of personality are defined, and a successful attempt at typologizing personality is made. It is extremely useful both for specialists and students and trainees.

In the book "Social Psychology," structured in four chapters, historical and contemporary aspects of social psychology as a science are highlighted, clarifying phenomena such as communication and the resulting socio-psychological mechanisms, and small groups as essence, manifestations, and classification. A logical continuation of the previous book is "Social Psychology in Tourism," which examines familiar and less analyzed aspects of human behavior related to tourism, namely the behavior of tourists depending on their national characteristics, the psychology of tourist behavior, and ethical relations in tourism. A distinctive feature of the work is its practical orientation towards real interpreted phenomena.

The articles and reports submitted for review fall within the field of Social Psychology and complement the analyzed publications in various directions - organizational, socio-psychological aspects of the studied phenomena, analysis of various factors influencing human behavior, attitudes, needs. Most of the works are published in English, which leads to their popularization among a wide range of readers.

Summary: The reviewed works of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sonya Stefanova present her in a positive, consistent direction of professional maturity, with strong engagement, competence, depth, perspective for development, and ambition to prove herself, discover novelties for others, and leave her mark in science.

4. Scientometric Indicators.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sonya Stefanova exceeds the required points in scientometric indicators - 845 points, including publications relevant to higher academic positions.

5. Scientific and Applied Contributions.

I fully accept the contributions of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sonya Stefanova and comment on them as follows:

Scientific Contributions:

1. Known theories and lesser-known ones regarding attitudes, needs, tourist behavior, and socio-psychological factors defining it have been rethought and presented in a new way.
2. Based on paradigms in social psychology and personality psychology, significant constructs in the field of scientific research have been identified and given a current reading.
3. An original approach to researching personality and small groups, communication, and relationships through the prism of tourist behavior has been found and scientifically justified.
4. The importance of socio-psychological factors determining human interactions in a specific social reality, such as tourism, has been emphasized.

Applied Contributions:

1. A program for researching self-efficacy has been created, and the empirical results obtained allow for enriching existing models concerning consumer attitudes.
2. The need to create a consumer profile of tourists from different nationalities to optimize tourism services has been proven.
3. The candidate's comprehensive publications aim to enrich the knowledge of professionals and students engaged in tourism work.
4. The necessity of knowing some new elements of social psychology and tourist behavior, such as communication styles, active listening and questioning, identifying and dealing with objections and dissatisfied customers, managing emotions, etc., has been demonstrated.

5. Teaching Work.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sonya Stefanova's teaching work is focused at the University "Prof. Dr. Asen Zlatarov" (for over 25 years), where she teaches lectures and exercises in the fields of tourism and psychology, counseling, and organizational psychology. The competition's provision fully corresponds to Assoc. Prof. Stefanova's professional experience and qualifications, as evidenced by the provided report on the teaching workload for the associate professor position.

7. Notes and Recommendations.

I have no remarks regarding the candidate's works. My acquaintance with Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sonya Stefanova's overall scientific and academic activity allows me to make the following recommendations - further developing her ideas in the field of social psychology and her rapid advancement to a higher teaching position, as she has the necessary potential.

8. Conclusion.

Expressing my impressions and analyses of the candidate's overall scientific, expert, teaching, and applied achievements, evaluating the relevance and significance of her work, I give my POSITIVE VOTE for Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sonya Stefanova and recommend that the Scientific Jury propose to the Faculty Council to award her the academic position of "Associate Professor" in professional field 3.2. Psychology (SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY), area of higher education 3. Social, Economic, and Legal Sciences and National Security.

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City of Veliko Tarnovo

Signature: /...../
/Prof. DSc. Kr. Petrova/