

## STATEMENT

concerning a competition for the academic post of Associate Professor in the professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Studies at New Bulgarian University

by Prof. Dr. Hristo Petkov Todorov, Department of Philosophy and Sociology, NBU

The competition for the academic position of Associate Professor in the professional field 3.1. The only candidate for this competition is **Dr. Teodora Karamelska**, Senior Assistant Professor of Sociology at the Department of Philosophy and Sociology of New Bulgarian University.

The candidate meets the minimum national requirements and meets all other requirements of the Academic Staff Development Act in the Republic of Bulgaria and the NBU Academic Staff Development Ordinance for holding the academic position of Associate Professor. She obtained the degree of Doctor of Education and Science in 2005 after successful defence of her dissertation on "Historicism as a Scientific Paradigm and Worldview in Germany in the 19th and the First Quarter of the 20th Century". Teodora Karamelska has been a full-time lecturer in Sociology at New Bulgarian University since October 1, 2011.

The candidate has submitted for the competition the monograph "Believing but not Religious. Bulgarian Contexts of Holistic Spirituality" (New Bulgarian University Press, Sofia 2023, ISBN 978-619-233-259-4) and 22 other articles and studies published in scientific journals and collections. Two of these articles are in English and one in German. The volume of the habilitation thesis is 235 pages. It consists of a preface, introduction, three chapters, conclusion, list of respondents and bibliography.

The book is devoted to an essential aspect of contemporary religious life in our country – so-called "holistic spirituality" as a manifestation of religious individualism. The historical roots of this individualism in a Christian context should be traced back to the Reformation era, when the division between subjective individual faith and the objective institutional and ritual side of the public presence of religion emerged. This process of the individualization of religion as a feature of the modern world has been investigated by the classics of sociology Georg Simmel, Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch. The first chapter of Teodora Karamelska's habilitation thesis is devoted to the studies of these three authors on

the sociology of religion. The most important result of this chapter is the highlighting of the distinctions between religion and spirituality on the one hand, and between church, sect and mysticism on the other. These distinctions have important methodological significance. At the end of the chapter, the author offers an ideal-typical characterization of "holistic spirituality," highlighting its essential features such as pluralism of ideas and values, syncretism, loose external organization, concern for physical and mental health, etc. The next chapter discusses the forms of presence of "holistic spirituality" in the life of contemporary societies. The initial claim here is that 'holistic spirituality' is of interest primarily to modern urban, highly educated women with good professions and high material status. The author conveys fascinating and compelling analyses of this group's motives for joining communities that practice various forms of "holistic spirituality." Against the background of the general picture of fragmentation of religion, Teodora Karamelska uses biographical methods to outline the specific situation of highly educated women in contemporary post-communist Bulgaria. In the third chapter of the book, the author first discusses the theoretical foundations of biographical research, then presents the structure of the narrative interview as a specific research tool, and finally offers analyses of biographical case reconstructions. On the basis of representative sociological research and her in-depth biographical interviews with Bulgarians who practice some form of "holistic spirituality," Teodora Karamelska builds a complex, multifaceted, and concrete picture of religious experience and the worldview based on it that lies behind the general term "holistic spirituality."

Some of the articles and studies with which Teodora Karamelska participated in the competition are substantively related to the monographic work. These are the articles on Weber, Simmel and Trölsch as well as the articles on biographical studies and on the religious experience of women and youth in contemporary Bulgaria. The author's publications on contemporary funerary practices and on the care of the demented are thoroughly commendable. In them she demonstrates both excellent research skills as a sociologist and great social sensitivity.

Theodora Karamelska has made remarkable contributions to Bulgarian scholarship not only with her research but also with her translations. She has translated from German 11 books by important authors, among whom are the names of Georg Simmel, Ernst Troeltsch, Max Weber, Sigmund Freud, Hans-Georg Gadamer, etc. She has also translated several dozen articles by contemporary authors published in the journals *Sociological Problems*. "Critique and Humanism and Christianity and Culture. Her translations of the texts of the Bulgarian philosopher Asen Ignatov written in Germany in the 1990s, recently published in the

collection “Waiting for Putin”, also deserve high praise. To this should be added the compilations of 7 scholarly collections.

Teodora Karamelska is well integrated in the international and Bulgarian scientific community. This is evidenced by her numerous participation in scientific forums in Bulgaria and abroad, as well as the impressive number of international and national research projects in which she has participated. Teodora Karamelska's long-standing work as the responsible secretary of the Journal of Sociology in Bulgaria also makes a serious contribution to the sociological community in Bulgaria. "Sociological Problems". Teodora Karamelska has received 4 academic awards for her work as a researcher and translator.

Prior to joining the NBU, Teodora Karamelska was a lecturer at the Department of History and Theory of Culture at St. Kliment Ohridski" as well as in the international master's program "Matilda". Since 2010 she has taught and continues to teach numerous courses in the undergraduate Sociology and Philosophy and the graduate programs Social Entrepreneurship and Language and Publicity at NBU as well as several general education knowledge courses. Along with this, for several years Teodora Karamelska administered all general education courses at NBU with success. She is also the Director of the Program Council of the Department of Philosophy and Sociology.

I have known Teodora Karamelska personally since the time of her studies at the University of Sofia, where I was teaching at the time. In my eyes she is an unusually conscientious, honest, intelligent and hardworking person with a highly developed sense of duty and responsibility.

**Conclusion:** The overall research, teaching and public activity of Dr. Teodora Karamelska gives every reason to elect her to the academic position of Associate Professor in the professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Studies at New Bulgarian University. As a member of the Scientific Jury, I vote FOR her election.

Signature:

Prof. Hristo P. Todorov, PhD

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