БЪЛГАРСКА АКАДЕМИЯ НА НАУКИТЕ
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OPINION

by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Fotiny Christakoudi-Konstantinidou, Department of General, Indo-European and Balkan Linguistics, FSS, SU "St. Kl. Ohridski" for a competition for a "professor" in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional field 2.2. History and archeology (Bulgarian-Greek relations in the 19th – 20th centuries) for the needs of the "Modern Balkans" section, IBCT-BAS, announced in the Newspaper of the State no. 55/ 15.07.2022 with a single candidate Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sc. Yura Toteva Konstantinova.

1. Data about the candidate and personal impressions in connection with this competition

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sc. Yura Toteva Konstantinova is among the well-established names of scholars engaged in the field of research on Bulgarian-Greek historical and cultural relations in the period of New and Modern History. I have personally known and followed her work from the period of writing her PhD thesis, studying the Balkan policy of Greece in the late 19th and early 20th centuries *("The Balkan Policy of Greece in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries"*, Faber, 2008) to her latest monograph entitled *"Bulgaria and Greece in a Labyrinth of Monologues"* (Bulgarian Academy of Sciences-Institute of Balkan Studies with Center for Trachology Sofia, 2022).

As a scientist, I deeply respect and value her scientific opinion, which is always based on an in-depth study of archival, bibliographic and other data sources, which Yura Konstantinova interprets in an original, well-argued and strongly supported manner. I dare to assert that in the field of modern Bulgarian historical science the name of Yura Konstantinova, through her works, has established itself as one of the leading ones in the study of Bulgarian-Greek historical relations, setting the matrix of new reserch methods, attracting data apart from the sphere of pure historical science, as well as from the field of social and cultural anthropology, the history of literature and arts, etc. Yura Konstantinova has distinguished herself with her honest research viewpoint, identifying new fields of cultural-historical interaction, with her interpretations of theses about the historical development of the Balkan peoples that were ideologized in the recent past, and this attitude of hers makes her especially valuable for specialists from other scientific fields including literary studies, cultural studies, art studies.

In the system of modern scientific life in Bulgaria the works of Yura Konstantinova are a reference point for the study of the historical processes that took place in the relations between Bulgaria and Greece, between their peoples, cultures, and literatures. Her attempts to expand the parameters of imagological studies in a historical context, continuing the work of her colleagues (N. Danova, S. Velkova, etc.) are also crowned with success in her latest work - *"Bulgaria and Greece in a labyrinth of monologues"*. The study of the image of the Other is a promising field both in modern historiography and in modern literary studies, which in recent decades has given the opportunity, by naming the stereotypes of the Other, to go deeper into the conceptual perceptions of the image of the neighbor in the history of the Balkan peoples. Such a view necessarily extrapolates deep psychological structures and provides an opportunity for structural upgrading and for overcoming the accumulated negative stereotypes during the years of coexistence of Bulgarians and Greeks in the Balkans.

Yura Konstantinova is guided by scientifically based and humane goals in her wide-ranging activity of compiling scientific volumes in coauthorship (one such example is the volume *"Greeks and Bulgarians: parallels and intersections in history and culture*", Bulgarian Academy of Sciences - Institute of Balkan Studies with the Center for Trachology Sofia, 2021). Among the targets of her scientific production is always the aspiration to strengthen the academic ties between the Greek and Bulgarian nations, as well as to encourage the scientific discussion on the development of Greek-Bulgarian historical and cultural relations by offering new research data, points of view, interpretations. The introduction to the above-mentioned volume summarizes the ideals that inspire her as a scientist; we find them developed as theses in the monograph *"Bulgaria and Greece in a Labyrinth of Monologues"* as well. In her latest monograph, the author states that: „Driven by the hope that if I recall the consequences of monologues in politics, I will contribute to the awareness of the importance of dialogue, I decided to present a general view of the development of Bulgarian-Greek relations in the period from their official establishment (1880) until their interruption during the Second World War (1941)“ (p. 7). She rightly notes that "as a result of their maximalist national programs, Bulgarians and Greeks actually stop discussing the problems that divide them. Blinded by the pursued national goals, politicians refuse to solve all other issues of interstate relations, using them only as a means of pressure and extracting advantages in the name of creating a large and strong state"(p.8).

Once again Konstantinova's work is fundamental in terms of the historical, archival and source material under consideration. Structured in four chapters with three appendices, the monograph *"Bulgaria and Greece in a Labyrinth of Monologues"* provides an insight into the end of the 19th and the first four decades of the 20th century from various aspects, combining the historical and conceptual pursuits of Konstantinova up to that point. Her precise insight of an informed scholar-historian is combined with reference to unexplored materials that make the work a must-have handbook for any diplomat. A large amount of chronological and biographical data on the historical figures who shaped the appearance of the Bulgarian-Greek interstate relations in the examined period are presented in detail and in an accessible manner. I would especially like to draw attention to the records collected in chapter 4 of the monograph ("Public sentiments between propaganda and knowledge"), which for one more time present Konstantinova as a specialist in cultural history. The outlined information on the translation reception of Bulgarian literature in Greece and of Greek authors in Bulgaria in the first decades of the 20th century complement with new rich numbers the research of authors in that field such as M. Zecev, M. Nihoriti, etc. Konstantinova deepens the knowledge of the two peoples about their mutual interest in the national literary production by bringing out valuable and little-known data from an early period of the literary reception processes between Bulgaria and Greece.

A dedicated and devoted seeker of historical truth, Konstantinova always searches for, with persistence and perseverence, the undiscovered truths about the past in the state archives, identifying and presenting new archival material to the general public. Because of these efforts, she was deservedly awarded a diploma from the BAS for "Current research with a significant contribution to the benefit of society". She knows how to surprise with her discoveries, to involve large teams in large-scale scientific work, as in the project, she headed, dedicated to the study of the past and present of the city of Thessaloniki (https://www.solunbg.org/bg/). The results of the project are widely disseminated through the published scientific literature, but also through the maintained website. They both make us empathetic to the past and historical memory through a macro analysis of the official history of the "great" personalities, but also through a micro view of the life of the "small" people through their own retold stories. I find that the aspects of the socio-political, religious, and ethno-cultural conjuncture, forming the Greek-Bulgarian relations over the last two centuries, are always richly, insightfully, and intriguingly presented in Konstantinova's scientific works, so that they serve to academic, but also to broader educational and societal goals.

2. Conclusion

In conclusion, I believe that the documents and materials presented by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sc. Yura Toteva Konstantinova meet the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB) and the Rules for the Implementation of LDASRB. The candidate in the competition has presented enough scientific works, different from the materials used in previous competitions and defenses. Due to what has been stated so far, I confidently give my positive assessment and support the election of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sc. Yura Toteva Konstantinova to the academic position of "professor" in professional direction 2. Humanities, professional direction 2.2. History and archeology (Bulgarian-Greek relations in the XIX – XX centuries)