Вх. №ЧР-01-290/10.11.2025 г.

OPINION

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Regarding: Competition for Associate Professor in the area of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences (Socio-demographic imbalances and inequalities, methodology of sociological research) at the Institute for Population and Human Studies at Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

1. Information about the competition

The competition was announced for the needs of the section "Sociology and Social Demography" at the Institute for Population and Human Studies (IPHS) at BAS in the State Gazette No. 56 of 11.07.2025. I participate in the scientific jury for the competition in accordance with Order No. RD-6-341/10.09.2025, of the Director of the IPHS, BAS. The only candidate for this competition is the chief assistant at the same institute, Dr. Lyubomir Ivov Stoychev.

2. Fulfillment of the requirements for holding the academic position of "associate professor"

The scientific jury reviewed the documents submitted by Dr. Lyubomir Stoychev and verified the compliance of his scientific achievements with the minimum requirements of the BAS for the position of "associate professor" in accordance with Art. 26 and Art. 27 of the Regulations on the conditions and procedure for holding academic positions of "assistant", "chief assistant", "associate professor" and "professor" at the IPHS - BAS. It was established that all necessary documents have been submitted, as well as that the candidate meets the requirements for holding the academic position of "associate professor" for area 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.1. Sociology, anthropology and cultural sciences at the IPHS by number of points according to indicators from Appendix 1 of the Regulations on the conditions and procedure for holding academic positions at the IPHS – BAS, with a required 430 points, Lyubomir Stoychev has 619.58. I do not detect plagiarism - the submitted publications are independent analyses of data processed by the candidate, and there are separation protocols for the co-authored texts.

3. Brief description of the submitted scientific works/publications

The candidate for associate professor Dr. Lyubomir Stoychev submits 24 scientific publications for participation in the competition, visible from the List of publications and attached to the documents. They include, first, a habilitation work – the collective monograph: *Tomova, I., Stoychev, L., & Ivanov, M. (2020). Measures to overcome the demographic crisis in the Republic of Bulgaria. Volume V. Demographic imbalances and social inequalities between the major ethnic groups in Bulgaria. Publishing House of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences “Prof. Marin Drinov*.”, in which Lyubomir Stoychev is the author of chapters 5, 8, 9, and co-author in the last chapter, along with Prof. Ilona Tomova. The total number of pages written by the candidate in the book – excluding co-authorship – is about 90 pages, and if we add those written in co-authorship, it probably becomes about 120 pages. Considering the fact

that Lyubomir Stoychev is also the compiler of this volume and presents authorial research, I assume that these texts are sufficient for a habilitation thesis. In addition to this monograph, the competition includes 23 more articles, studies and chapters from collective monographs, as follows: 9 articles in non-refereed journals with scientific review /3 of them in co-authorship/, one study in co-authorship in a scientific journal, referenced and indexed in SCOPUS (Q1), 6 studies in non-refereed journals with scientific review /3 of them in co-authorship/ and 8 chapters from collective monographs. In presenting his scientific contributions, L. Stoychev strictly describes in the articles only his own contributions with co-authors. They are described correctly, even modestly.

In all his publications, the focus is very clear and the style is distinguishable – he correctly analyzes quantitative research on current problems of social inequalities and social policy, focused on vulnerable groups – the poor, who turned out to be mainly Roma; NEETs group; adolescent minor offenders in correctional educational institutions; and other groups; as well as attitudes and social distances towards Roma, Turks and immigrants. His research profile fully corresponds to the professional and academic field specification announced in the competition.

4. Evaluation of the main scientific contributions

In all Lyubomir Stoychev's publications submitted for the competition, his professional competence and correctness concerning the statistical processing and interpretation of the data are impressive. He carefully considers all possible factors that can "contaminate" the analyses and consciously avoids generalizations when the sample is small for a given group and the correlations are problematic. He draws attention to "how incorrectly grouped, albeit correct, but statistically incomparable data can manipulate public opinion in the absence of a critical attitude and without professional reading". This correctness and precision is not common, and therefore I want to especially note it.

This is even more significant because his ambition is to show as complex a picture as possible, including many indicators and connections, in order to outline the diversity and multifactoriality of the phenomena he studies. This is *the main scientific contribution of Dr. Stoychev*: avoiding focusing on one or another indicator describing the phenomenon and its possible causes, and searching for the complex combination and connections between various social factors and phenomena characteristic of and determining his research object; in other words - *the thesis that each socio-demographic factor should not be considered in isolation, but in the specific interaction with other factors*. Another contribution is *the constant insistence on a systematic approach in data analysis and policy making* affecting the social sphere. This approach limits the drawing of spectacular (wow!) conclusions but offers hypotheses in different directions and possible further research. And it protects against hasty decisions in social policy. I believe that this is an important theoretical contribution, even more important because it is naturally present in all the publications.

Very interesting are the reflections, although written in passing, on the question of when the context becomes a subject of study, linked to the question of the topics of scientific research /p.180/. Thus, precisely because he assesses the significance of the attitudes of the majority towards certain groups and policies, they turn from a context to the main subject of a large part of Dr. Stoychev's publications.

Careful analysis, taking into account *the diversity and multifactoriality of the studied phenomena, as well as their comparison with similar phenomena in other countries, leads to*

substantiated contributions to new knowledge, some of which break stable stereotypes, as well as to scientific and applied contributions, since the research and analysis of the data that Dr. Stoychev does are not an end in itself, but always lead to specific proposals for policies in the relevant field.

In Chapter 5 of the presented habilitation thesis, *The Housing Situation in the Republic of Bulgaria. The Housing Needs of Vulnerable Ethnic and Religious Communities*, Dr. Stoychev makes a comprehensive analysis of the housing situation from the perspective of vulnerable ethnic communities in Bulgaria and also presents public attitudes towards housing policy. Here, for me, the conclusion that "Public attitudes of people are more positive regarding policies of support than those of sanctions and coercion" /p.137/, is an important conclusion, especially since the policy follows exactly the opposite approach, and deserves special attention. I was also impressed by the hypothesis, an example of the systematic approach, that "solving (even partially) the problem of the shortage of rooms and overcrowding among families from vulnerable groups with children will contribute to achieving better and higher educational results" /p.113/, a hypothesis that is worth testing. In the next two chapters: Chapter 8 *Attitudes and distances of Bulgarians of fertile age towards Roma*; Chapter 9 *Attitudes towards immigrants*, several socio-demographic factors are again examined, interesting groups are identified and views taken for granted are refuted. For example, Dr. Stoychev's analysis shows that, unlike Western studies, higher education in our country does not lead to increased tolerance towards Roma and immigrants, a sign that tolerance is not a priority for our education. In this regard, I would like to note that the distinction that L. Stoychev makes between "quality of education" and "devaluation of education" deserves attention. The conclusion is interesting that "with increasing age, intolerance towards different people begins to increase, but especially among those groups of the population who, for various reasons, have certain deficits, in this case the lack of a child/children or partner/s" /p. 226/. It is a consequence of and an example of the very significant theoretical thesis of Stoychev that "Age is a numerical factor that is difficult to analyze. In a unique way, it simultaneously reflects and synthesizes a large number of other factors in a complex to explain interaction... when a cross-section is made in terms of age, it is most practical to consider the results as a productive starting point for searching for the reasons for certain differences, and not as a cause/factor in itself." /189 p./. In the spirit of this thesis is also Dr. Stoychev's interesting distinction between the group of "transition generations" - up to 35 years old and "generations of mature socialism and perestroika" - from 36 years old and up, but at fertile age /it is probably no coincidence that he writes "generations" and not "generation", in Chapter 9 the topic of generations continues.../ in his attempt to explain the differences in attitudes towards the Roma as due to the different type of socialization, the older generation turns out to be more tolerant this time, unlike the attitude towards immigrants...

Of the other texts, L. Stoychev's conclusions in his 2009 article *Underage Roma and Bulgarians in Correctional Institutions* were very important to me, namely that “the similarities between Bulgarian and Roma juvenile delinquents outweigh the differences" because they are mainly due to social factors such as the family status of the parents, leading to neglect of the children, as well as the poor quality of education. A difference is noted in terms of place of residence - there are more Roma children with deviant behavior living in the villages, compared to Bulgarian children, but this has its explanation in the fact that many

villages are now entirely populated by Roma. I regret that there is no data on the financial situation of the parents, but since most of the children placed in the correctional education institutions are from large families, it can be assumed that they are from poor families. These conclusions, supported by statistically valid evidence, are a clear argument against the ethnicization of deviant behavior.

These are just some of the interesting analyses and conclusions of Dr. Stoychev. Also worthy of attention is the developed socio-demographic profile of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) in Bulgaria, with an emphasis on ethnic differences and poverty, the profile of emigrants who have returned to Bulgaria, and others.

I would also note the sensitivity to the use of language and its influence on attitudes: “Gypsy ghetto”, “hovel” and so on at the expense of the “segregated neighborhood”, “poor housing conditions”; the difference between “metropolitans” and “Sofia residents”, etc.

5. **Notes and recommendations**.

With such careful analyses, it is difficult to have notes. I would rather have recommendations. It would be very interesting and useful if Dr. Stoychev will do a meta-analysis of his analyses of the used many data to find recurring significant factors, and to explain seemingly contradictory conclusions such as the higher tolerance of the older generation towards Roma, but the lower tolerance towards immigrants; the support of segregation policies towards Roma by a large part of Bulgarians, but also the more positive attitudes of people towards housing policies for support, rather than sanctions and coercion. With this analysis, I assume that the picture will become even more complicated, but it will also highlight the main important thesis of the author - that each socio-demographic factor should not be considered in isolation, but in specific interaction with other factors.

6. Conclusion

The candidate meets all the requirements of the Academic Staff Development Act of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for its implementation for occupying the academic position of "associate professor". My opinion on the election of Dr. Lyubomir Ivov Stoychev for the academic position of "associate professor" is positive and I strongly recommend that he be elected as an associate professor in professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences (Socio-demographic imbalances and inequalities, methodology of sociological research) at the Institute for Population and Human Studies at Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

09.10. 2025, Sofia Prof. Petya Kabakchieva