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OPINION

on the competition for the academic position of **Associate Professor**
in the professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Studies,
scientific specialty Sociology (Socio-demographic imbalances and inequalities, methodology of sociological research)
Candidate: *Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Lyubomir Stoychev*
Reviewer: *Professor Dr. Anna Krasteva*

Minorities and inequalities are a timelessly relevant and significant topic that continues to attract the sustained attention of researchers both in Bulgaria and abroad. The aim of this opinion is to analyse what is new, interesting and significant that Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Lyubomir Stoychev contributes to its study.

Research activity

The assessment is structured around several areas – the individual contributions within the collective monograph, publication activity, the academic community's interest in the author's work as evidenced through citations, critical notes, and the evaluation of contributions.

Individual results in the collective monograph

"Demographic Imbalances and Social Inequalities among the Major Ethnic Groups in Bulgaria" and the chapters authored by Dr. Stoychev: *"Rule of Law and Non-discrimination," "Attitudes and Distances of Bulgarians of Fertile Age towards the Roma,"* and *"Attitudes towards Immigrants."*

Political and social relevance of the topic

Its paradoxical origin lies in the fact that the more severe the problems of minorities and inequalities become, the more ineffective policies are, and the more indifferent the public debate remains – the more urgent the need for science to intervene and attempt to break these negative vicious circles. The topic has a strong European resonance and aligns with EU priorities concerning non-discrimination, social inclusion and the integration of minorities and migrants.

Even though policies rarely rely on scientific findings, and even more rarely translate them into consistent strategies and practices, this does not diminish the theoretical and practical importance of such research.

Methodological self-reflexivity

Dr. Stoychev accurately identifies the characteristics and limitations of the empirical sample, demonstrating awareness of the research's boundaries and validity.

Interdisciplinarity

The study successfully combines demographic methods, the sociology of ethnicity and migration, media analysis, and the sociology of law. Not all are equally elaborated, but the interdisciplinary mix is productive and coherent.

For example, the author's legal analysis of anti-segregation policies is expanded through

empirical sociological research on public attitudes. In analysing institutional mechanisms of non-discrimination, he highlights that "the lack of systematic monitoring of the effectiveness of anti-discrimination measures leads to the reproduction of social distances and distrust in state institutions," a finding empirically supported by data showing that 62% of respondents prefer not to have Roma neighbours.
A broader interdisciplinary approach could have linked these findings to the mainstreaming of national populism—an issue beyond the valid scope of this study but highly relevant to the phenomenon under examination.

Complex and critical approach

A strong aspect of the study is the comparison between *formal legal equality* and *actual social practice.* Two directions of critical interpretation stand out.

First, the discrepancy between the dynamics of legislative change and the fragmented, inefficient enforcement of these laws.

Second, one of the key theses: *ethnic belonging remains a crucial risk factor for social isolation and unequal access to fundamental rights,* as mechanisms of discrimination are deeply structural.

By combining normative, empirical, and cultural-interpretative approaches, the author constructs a comprehensive analytical framework integrating both "hard" statistical indicators and "soft" attitudinal data — evidence of methodological maturity and the ability to think comprehensively about social inequalities.

From traditional to new minorities – immigrants

The chapter on attitudes towards immigrants is particularly interesting—both because of the novelty of the topic and because of its relevance to my own research interests.
Positive aspects include:

- The link between traditional minorities and new immigrant groups, which enables a deeper understanding of attitudes and a more precise assessment—through comparative perspective—of acceptance levels and the vulnerability of the new groups.
- The multi-method ambition, combining a short media analysis with survey-based attitudinal data. While the media analysis itself is not exemplary and its connection to the attitudinal data could be stronger, the author's interdisciplinary intent and methodological pluralism are commendable.
- The results confirm international and national studies showing the diversification and even polarization of attitudes towards different immigrant groups.

Among the most intriguing findings is the inverse relationship between education and tolerance: higher education does *not* increase tolerance—even at a declarative level. Conversely, respondents with basic or lower education appear more open and tolerant towards immigrants than their more educated compatriots. This unexpected result diverges from much existing research, which enhances its originality and highlights the need for further investigation and deeper qualitative interpretation.

Publication activity

The corpus of publications significantly exceeds the quantitative requirements for habilitation and clearly defines the profile of a fully developed researcher. The author's work

demonstrates systematic contributions in two interrelated domains:
(1) social-demographic inequalities and poverty, and
(2) ethnic relations, social distances, and integration.

A number of publications appear in refereed and indexed journals, including Scopus. The author could be encouraged to publish more consistently in higher-ranked international outlets. Until now, he has shown commendable academic generosity in sharing valuable findings even in mid-level venues. Importantly, the publications together delineate a coherent long-term research program, demonstrating scholarly maturity and continuity.

Citations

Citations are a key indicator of academic maturity, evidencing that Dr. Stoychev's ideas, analyses, and findings are recognized and used within the scholarly community. The list is entirely adequate for the position of Associate Professor, exceeding the formal requirements and including both Bulgarian and reputable international publications.
The citations confirm the national and international visibility and influence of Dr. Stoychev's work.

Critical comments and recommendations

No study is without limitations, and the chapters authored by Dr. Stoychev are no exception. A few points merit mention as possible directions for future research:

- A certain imbalance between the empirical and theoretical parts—the empirical dimension dominates. The reader senses a need for deeper engagement with contemporary theories of ethnicity and social distance, which could further enrich the interpretations.
- The study could integrate more Western comparative literature, useful for understanding certain "paradoxical" phenomena (e.g., that the city with the highest number of migrants displays the greatest level of tolerance).
- The observed education–tolerance relationship that diverges from other studies should be explored through additional qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews and focus groups.
- Finally, a broader and highly relevant research question arises: What anti-discrimination and integration policies can function effectively in an environment of deepening national populism and the absence of political actors willing to adopt such policies as part of their agenda?

Impressions of the candidate

I would like to commend Dr. Stoychev for his team spirit, for his collaborative authorship, and for his productive cooperation with Professor Ilona Tomova, whose intellectual leadership and mentorship have inspired and shaped a strong research school.

Contributions

The contributions are clearly defined, well-argued, and organized into two relevant categories – theoretical and applied.

Among the *theoretical contributions*, I would highlight:

- Developing a social-demographic profile of NEET youth (Not in Education, Employment, or Training);
- Establishing the relationship between income inequality, youth unemployment, and the expansion of higher education in Bulgaria;
- Creating new statistical indicators for monitoring the social inclusion dynamics of the Roma population;
- Conducting a comparative analysis of ethnic differences in delinquency, demonstrating that similarities between Bulgarian and Roma juvenile offenders outweigh differences.

Among the *applied contributions*, notable are:

- Policy recommendations for reducing NEET levels among vulnerable ethnic groups through integrated approaches that combine poverty reduction with social interventions;
- The profiling of at-risk youth and adolescents, providing practical tools for social services and NGOs.

In some applied areas, there is a degree of theoretical tension between a valid conclusion and an empirical argument that would benefit from further interpretation—e.g., the link between educational segregation and the reproduction of social inequality, based on data about dropout rates in segregated versus non-segregated schools.

Crucially, all contributions are original, empirically validated, and socially relevant, with a clear applied value for social inclusion policies.

Conclusion

The overall academic activity of the candidate—well beyond the quantitative requirements for habilitation—together with the quality and breadth of publications, the citations in national and international outlets, and the impressive list of original theoretical, empirical, and applied contributions—provide solid grounds for a confident and positive evaluation.

I therefore **strongly recommend** that the academic jury confer the academic title Associate Professor upon Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Lyubomir Stoychev in the professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Studies, scientific specialty Sociology (Socio-demographic imbalances and inequalities, methodology of sociological research).

Professor Anna Krasteva
10 November 2025