OPINION

by Assoc. Prof. Penka Hristova, PhD

New Bulgarian University, Professional Field 3.2. Psychology,

regarding the doctoral dissertation of

Plamen Iliyanov Petkov

entitled

"***Socio-Psychological Determinants of Interpersonal Trust Development in Friendship and Workplace Contexts*"**

submitted in connection with the procedure for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"

in Professional Field 3.2. Psychology

The dissertation by Plamen Petkov provides a comprehensive synthesis of existing concepts of trust in interpersonal relationships from a social-psychological perspective. The study aims to identify similarities and differences in the social-psychological determinants of trust within the contexts of friendship relationships and workplace contexts, and to examine these empirically in a Bulgarian sample. A theoretical model of factors associated with trust is proposed and empirically tested using multiple self-report instruments. The results of the regression analyses necessitated modifications to the initial model of interrelated constructs in accordance with the empirical data obtained.

The principal expectation—that trust would relate to different constructs depending on the context of workplace or friendship relationships—is supported by the findings. Predictors within the "sociocultural environment" group were associated exclusively with trust in friendship relationships, whereas predictors within the "interpersonal relations" and "group relations" groups exhibited context-dependent differences. For instance, in friendship relationships, trust was associated with group-related characteristics such as "spontaneity" and "avoidance of confrontation," whereas in workplace contexts, trust was linked to "need for inclusion" and "conformity" toward charismatic or assertive colleagues. Similarly, the "interpersonal relations" predictor group included "perceived political insecurity" when evaluating trust toward friends and "reliability" when assessing trust in a professional context. These distinct trust profiles confirm that trust is a context-sensitive phenomenon.

Nevertheless, it remains debatable whether these variables can be interpreted as causal factors influencing trust development, as the research design and applied statistical methods do not permit causal inference.

Furthermore, the operationalization of the theoretical model variables - namely, "influence of the sociocultural environment," "influence of interpersonal relations," and "influence of social groups" - through specific scales and subscales is not entirely clarified. For example, the scale for "perceived political insecurity," developed by the author, is assigned to the "interpersonal relations" predictor group, despite being discussed in the theoretical review as related to "the broader social context of the present" (p. 41), as

an indicator of power functioning (p. 46), and as an “environmental factor” (p. 86). This discrepancy requires further clarification and justification. Similarly, the rationale for the selection of other instruments measuring trust predictors is insufficiently elaborated.

It is also unclear whether hierarchical cluster analysis was applied to raw scale scores or to correlation coefficients. While the text refers to similarity in scores on the “political insecurity” and “conformity” scales, it also states that “motivation toward reward/avoidance of punishment is the most distant factor,” implying a latent-level interpretation.

A fundamental methodological concern in the dissertation is the use of causal language, which is not appropriate for a correlational study in which neither the temporal sequence of potential causes and effects nor the influence of external variables can be controlled. The applied statistical analyses likewise do not permit causal conclusions. Accordingly, it would be methodologically sound to refine the aims, hypotheses, tasks, conclusions, and contributions to align with the research design employed.

The author’s abstract accurately reflects the structure and content of the dissertation. Particularly commendable are the comparative analyses of trustworthiness (Tables 1, 2, and 3) and the comparison of theoretically expected and empirically observed results (Table 14). Three articles related to the dissertation topic have been published, including one in the *Bulgarian Journal of Psychology*. The theoretical review is extensive, presented in accessible language, and, despite occasional inconsistencies, provides a coherent overview of social-psychological approaches to trust.

In conclusion, I consider that the candidate meets the requirements for awarding the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in Professional Field 3.2. Psychology, as stipulated by the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and its implementing regulations. This provides me with grounds to recommend that the educational and scientific degree of Doctor be awarded to Plamen Petkov, if my comments and recommendations are taken into consideration.

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Sofia assoc. prof P. Hristova