OPINION

by Assoc. Prof. Bilyana Velikova-Tsonkova, PhD
Burgas State University "Prof. Dr. Assen Zlatarov"

regarding a dissertation for awarding the educational and scientific degree **"Doctor"** in the aria of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.2 Psychology, doctoral program "Social psychology"

Dissertation title: "Social-psychological determinants of the development of interpersonal trust in friendship and business relationships"

Author: Plamen Iliyanov Petkov, a PhD student and assistant at "Social and Counselling Psychology" Unit, Department of Psychology, Institute for Population and Human Studies – BAS

Research supervisor: Prof. Yolanda Zografova, PhD

General impression of the dissertation

The present dissertation is dedicated to a significant, perennially relevant, and compelling problem from both a scientific and applied perspective – trust in social relationships. The focus of the scientific interest lies in the socio-psychological determinants that influence the building, maintenance, and erosion of trust within the context of both friendships and professional relationships. The model structured and verified by the PhD candidate is highly timely and necessary, given the lack of systematic research within the Bulgarian context regarding the interaction between personality and social factors influencing trust in informal and formal relationships, a fact that makes it worthy of high praise.

The dissertation has been developed in accordance with the regulatory requirements and academic standards for the award of the educational and scientific degree of 'Doctor' (PhD).

The structure of the thesis is classical and meets the requirements for this type of research. The total volume of the work is 191 pages. The number of cited literary sources is impressive – 316 in total, of which 302 are in Latin script and 14 are in Bulgarian. The theoretical part of the dissertation is developed in comprehensive detail, testifying to Plamen Petkov 's profound knowledge of classical and contemporary research in this scientific field. The conceptual foundations and the connectivity between the analyzed constructs are discussed comprehensively

and precisely, which provides a scientifically grounded theoretical framework for the author's research. The aims, objectives, and raised hypotheses are clearly and correctly formulated, which demonstrates the doctoral candidate's excellent research orientation. The selected research toolkit (a test battery of 126 items) is adequately structured for the operationalization of the constructs embedded in the theoretical model and demonstrates very good psychometric characteristics. The total number of respondents who participated in the study (423 people) is impressive. In chapter three, the in-depth and precise analysis of the common and differentiating factors influencing trust in friendship and organizational contexts is a fact that makes it worthy of high praise. The study convincingly proves that the nature of cultural internalization and early social experiences within the family and among peers act as key factors in building trust in friendships. In contrast, within a professional context, the mechanism of trust-building is more rational and normatively oriented. At the end of the work, the research findings are precisely summarized and formulated, clearly demonstrating that interpersonal trust is a multi-layered socio-psychological phenomenon whose structure and determinants vary depending on the relational context – whether personal or professional. The limitations of the study are correctly acknowledged.

Significance and persuasiveness of the results and contributions

The presented work represents a comprehensive and complete theoretical and empirical study with undeniable scientific and applied contributions. Among them, the validated model exploring the interactions between socio-psychological and socio-cultural factors on trust deserves recognition, especially given its potential for application in specialized programs within the public, non-govermental, and private sectors. Particularly significant for practice are the tools adapted for Bulgarian conditions regarding trust in community group relations, as well as for organizational context. Two new original scales have also been developed – the “Childhood and adolescence experience scale” and a the “Political insecurity scale” – which can be successfully used in future research. I fully accept the described contributions of the dissertation.

Quality of the scientific publications

Three independent publications, two reports, and one article have been presented on the dissertation topic. A list of 14 participations with presentations or reports at national and international scientific forums is also presented.

Conclusion

The presented dissertation is a complete research work with significant scientific and applied contributions and meet the requirements of the Law on Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (IRASRB) and the Rules of Application of the IARB. The dissertation proves the author's abilities to plan, organize and conduct scientific research, the results of which to analyze and interpret in an appropriate way. Everything stated up to this point gives me a reason to suggest to the respected members of the Scientific Jury that they evaluate the scientific work positively and to vote "Yes" for the awarding of the educational and scientific degree "**Doctor"** to **Plamen Iliyanov Petkov.**

10 January 2026 Prepared the opinion:

(Assoc. Prof. Dr. Bilyana Velikova-Tsonkova, PhD)