

OPINION

By Assoc. Prof. Konstantin Hristov Poudin, PhD, professional field 3.8 Economics, scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Defence and Security Management, Foundations of Security Policy)", Department "National and Regional Security", UNWE, about scientific papers, teaching, research and public activity for participation in a competition for awarding the academic position "Associate Professor", professional field 9.1. National Security, SG No. 84/21.10.2022, with candidate Chief Assistant Professor Michael Minev Dimitrov, PhD

I. Assessment of compliance with the minimum national requirements and the requirements of the New Bulgarian University

It is evident from the materials submitted for this competition that the candidate Chief Assistant Professor Michael Dimitrov, PhD, has met the minimum national requirements and the requirements of the New Bulgarian University (NBU). Something more. The required minimum for holding the academic position "Associate Professor" in professional field 9.1. National Security at the NBU is 570 points. The candidate has presented a total score of 700 points.

II. Research activity and results

The list of publications submitted for participation in the current competition (25 publications in total, including 4 publications in English), includes: a published monograph, which is the candidate's habilitation thesis, a book based on an already defended PhD thesis, 20 articles and scientific reports published in non-refereed peer-reviewed journals or published in edited collective volumes, or in specialized publications for classified information and 3 other publications, which were not presented within the procedure for acquiring PhD degree.

The publications, as it is specified by the candidate himself, can be divided into three thematic groups, with reasoned research contributions, as follows:

1. Theory of regional security (publications 2.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.16, 3.18 of the Report for the Implementation of the Minimum National Requirements and the Summary of Scientific Papers);

2. Political processes in the countries of the Western Balkans (publications 1.1, 3.1, 3.4, 3.5, 3.7, 3.9, 3.10, 3.13, 3.14, 3.15, 3.19, 3.20 of the Report for the Implementation of the Minimum National Requirements and the Summary of Scientific Papers);

3. Energy security of the countries of the "Three Seas" region (publications 3.6, 3.8, 3.11, 3.12, 3.17 of the Report for the Implementation of the Minimum National Requirements and the Summary of Scientific Papers).

The main contributions that the publications contain can be divided into three groups:

1. A methodology for deriving the structure of regional spaces has been developed. It includes:

- an approach, based on a combined analysis of phenomena and processes that goes beyond the substantive view within the concept of "region", is proposed;
- the military-political situation in the Western Balkans is analysed and sustainable roles, recurring in the region within different paradigms, were defined;
- a classification of regional spaces, with a view to deriving regularities in the foreign policy of the leading so called "Centres of power", is developed;

2. The main mechanisms through which external actors exert influence in the Western Balkans countries have been identified and analysed. It includes:

- showing the changes in the relative weight of the ways, means and forms aimed at vulnerable areas in the states, which are object of interventions;
 - formulation of stimulating and restraining factors for the development of internal political dynamics, caused by the external impact.;
3. The directions of use of the various forms of natural gas transmission in the Russian energy strategy are systematized. It includes:
- determination of the approach of the Russian state leadership to create contradictions in the EU through natural gas pricing that does not correspond to market logic and uses the available transmission capacities as a way of influence;
 - clarifying the place of the low-tonnage infrastructure for liquefaction of natural gas in the general line of development of the Russian oil and gas complex.

The monograph submitted, which I had the opportunity and the pleasure to review in early 2022, has a number of positive characteristics. It is a completed and an original scientific paper, which is a result of a systematic and thorough research activity, conducted during the last several years. It is dedicated to a very topical and significant problem of the international security, impartially presented and analysed by the author, namely the problem of the present and future of the security of the countries of the Western Balkans, the factors on which it depends, the ongoing processes and outstanding trends, the place and the role of the geopolitical centres, which have their interests in this region.

An appropriate set of methods has been selected and applied for the identification and analysis of the relationships between the main actors whose behaviours are found to be decisive for the security of the subregion.

The monograph is well structured. The style is clear, logical and markedly scientific.

The monograph undoubtedly enriches the literature on this scientific topic, which has been published so far in our country. It also supports the learning process within the disciplines, which are taught by the author and his colleagues within the curriculum of the Department “National and International Security” of the NBU.

The candidate's publications are known to the scientific community, which is engaged in the study of different security issues. This is evident from the list of citations, which he has submitted, including 9 citations - 8 citations in peer-reviewed monographs and collective volumes and 1 citation in non-refereed peer-reviewed journal.

III. Teaching Activity

The candidate Chief Assistant Professor Michael Dimitrov, PhD, carries out active teaching activities. He teaches several courses at the Department “National and International Security”, such as: NISM222 USA, NATO and Russia, NISM224 Geopolitics and Security, NISM118 Organization of the Police and Intelligence Services of Leading Countries, NISM131 Corporate Intelligence etc. His courses are provided with the appropriate author's materials in printed form or in "Moodle NBU". Chief Assistant Professor Michael Dimitrov, PhD, was a supervisor of graduate students and a reviewer of master's thesis theses.

IV. Administrative and public activity

Chief Assistant Professor Michael Dimitrov, PhD, has been a member of the Council of the National and International Security Department since 2018, when he was appointed at the NBU. He has administrative experience, gained in performing various activities at the university. E.g. he was a program consultant to the Department "National and International Security", October 2016-March 2017. He has been a member of the Organizing Committees for various scientific forums. He has also actively participated in the preparation process for publication of the scientific papers from these forums. He is the chairman of the "Bulgarian

Hub for the United Balkans" association. He has also experience with project management under EU, NATO and Rockefeller Brothers Fund programs.

V. Personal impressions of the candidate (if any)

I have known Chief Assistant Professor Michael Dimitrov, PhD, since the time when he was a student in the "Civil and Corporate Security" bachelor's degree program and the "National and International Security" master's degree program of the Department "National and International Security" at the NBU. He regularly attended Prof. Dr. Tilcho Ivanov's courses on SECB010 Security and Defence Management and NISM211D Economy and Security, in which I participated as a second lecturer. All this gave me the opportunity to observe closely the quality of his work and to become familiar with his personality.

As a student Chief Assistant Professor Michael Dimitrov, PhD, demonstrated strong interest in the field of security. At that time, he also demonstrated thorough knowledge regarding various security-related topics, which was a result of his solid academic training, conducted by leading researchers, and due to his continuous independent work. Logically for me, after obtaining a master's degree, he chose to study at the doctoral program of the Department "National and International Security" at the NBU, which was successfully completed in 2018. After that he continued his development as a lecturer and researcher at the same department.

VI. Opinions, recommendations and notes on the candidate's activity and achievements

The candidate could broaden the scope of his research. E.g. he could focus his attention to security issues in the Aegean region. I wish him many new publications, including monographs, textbooks, articles in refereed journals etc.

VII. Conclusions

Taking into consideration the submitted materials for participation in this competition and the results get from the objective assessment of the candidate's research, teaching and public activity, it can be concluded that he has met the requirements for the academic position "Associate Professor" at the NBU. By all appearances, he is an erudite lecturer and conscientious researcher, whose authority in the future will be established both in the country and abroad. All this gives me reason to positively evaluate his overall work and to vote for Chief Assistant Professor Michael Minev Dimitrov, PhD, to be awarded the academic position "Associate Professor" in the field of higher education 9. Security and Defence, professional field 9.1. National Security at the Department "National and International Security" at the NBU.

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Signature

/Assoc. Prof. Konstantin Poudin, PhD/