

R E V I E W

by

Assoc. Prof. Zhivko Angelov Lefterov, PhD (New Bulgarian University), appointed by order No. 3-PK-4 of 4 October 2024 of the rector of the New Bulgarian University as a member of a scientific jury in a competition for the academic position of Associate Professor at said University in professional field 2.2. “History and Archaeology”, science major “History of Bulgaria”, announced in the *State Gazette*, issue 69 of 16 August 2024.

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

The documentation provided by the candidate, Chief Assistant Aleka Strezova, PhD, fulfils the requirements for the academic position of Associate Professor set out in the Law for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the NBU Regulation for the Development of the Academic Staff. She is the sole candidate in the competition. She was awarded the educational and scientific degree of PhD in 2013, after successfully defending the dissertation paper entitled “Bulgarian diplomats. 1879–1912” at the Institute for Historical Studies – Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS). At the end of that same year, after she won a competition, she was appointed to the academic position of Assistant, and five years later in 2018 she was appointed as a Chief Assistant at the IHS – BAS. This review will cover her publications, activities and endeavours that date after her appointment as Chief Assistant or that have not been declared for participation in the competitions for the appointment to the above-mentioned academic positions.

II. Research (creative) activity and results

In order to participate in the competition, the candidate presented one published monograph (habilitation paper), another monograph (on a different topic compared to the habilitation paper) and a total of 12 studies and articles.

Given the nature of the competition, the greatest scientific weight is assigned to Aleka Strezova’s habilitation paper “Bulgarian Diplomacy. Institutions and

Representatives. 1879–1918”, published in 2017. The paper is 240 pages long and concerns a scientific issue which up until then had not been the subject of any special interest by Bulgarian historiography and thus there are no overall monographic studies on this topic. Using her own older texts concerning her doctoral dissertation as a starting point, Aleka Strezova logically expands the topic both thematically and chronologically. The development of the diplomatic service of the Bulgarian Principality/Tsardom during the time of its first two monarchs – Knyaz Alexander I and Tsar Ferdinand I – has been followed in full. The in-depth and consistent work with various sources, methods, and approaches is evident even on the first encounter with the text.

The overall structure and funding of the foreign representations of the country are examined and clarified, as well as the way diplomats were appointed. The most important feature of the habilitation paper, and the one to which two-thirds of the volume of the text are devoted, are the biographies of Bulgarian diplomats. Most of them not only enrich already known facts but also “bring back to life” the forgotten names of otherwise deserving Bulgarian public figures, politicians, and scientists, who contributed to the development of the country in the first decades after the state system was restored.

It is more than clear that in order to produce her habilitation paper, the candidate has worked for many years in various archives, exploring their rich funds, without which the study published would have been impossible. It also obvious from the literature quoted that the candidate is familiar with foreign-language titles on this topic. All of this has been instrumental in successfully achieving the initial objectives and coming to clear conclusions as a contribution to the field.

For point 4 of Indicator Group D, Chief Assistant Aleka Strezova, PhD, presents another monograph, which is not a main habilitation paper, and thus brings the maximum 100 points: *The Last of His Kind. Dr. Georgi Valkovich (1833–1892)*. Veliko Tarnovo: Faber, 2022, 480 p. This significant research effort reveals a high level of professionalism, skills allowing for profound scientific work and an ability for conceptual thinking. The merits of the monograph are indubitable and as such it possesses to a large extent the characteristics of a paper that is worthy of attaining the scientific degree of Doctor of Science.

For points 6–9 of Indicator Group D, the candidate presents 12 publications – articles and studies. Taken together, they bring 330 points compared to the required 200

points in line with the minimum national requirements to be appointed to the academic position. Most of them have been accepted for promulgation in prestigious scientific periodicals. The high percentage of publications in a foreign language creates a good impression. For the participation in this competition a total of four such titles were declared, two of which are in English and two in French.

Most of these publications, which were released after the candidate was appointed as a Chief Assistant, are devoted to the three major scientific areas, or rather thematic domains, comprising her scientific interest – the diplomatic history of the Bulgarian Principality/Tsardom, enriching the biographies of various representatives of the state and the historical fate of the Bulgarian community under Ottoman rule. All of those point to the existence a broader view on history and the related humanities and social sciences. An additional focus is the endeavour to introduce new, hitherto unknown, historical sources and testimonials to be used in scientific circles. This attitude towards her sources is the best attestation to how serious Aleka Strezova is in her approach towards the historical science and knowledge.

Chief Assistant Aleka Strezova, PhD, has noted and presented the necessary number of quotations of her works in line with Indicator Group E. Two of those are in scientific journals referred and indexed in databases of world renown, seven in monographs and collective tomes with scientific review, and three in journals with scientific review. Taken together, they correspond to 115 points, compared to the 50 points needed for this indicator, which also surpasses the requirements by far. It should be noted that the candidate's publications have been quoted by researchers of various scientific and educational institutions and domains in Bulgaria. This fact points to Aleka Strezova's recognizability as a researcher and to the existing interest towards the topics that comprise her research interest.

In addition to all of the above-mentioned, the candidate has been a member of several organisational committees on holding national conferences, has participated with reports tens of times at national and international scientific fora, and has given public lectures at the invitation of other universities and institutions.

Special attention should be given to the project activity of Chief Assistant Aleka Strezova, PhD. From 2017 to 2024 she was a member of the scientific team of 4 important scientific and research projects, two of which were national and two international. In

addition, she was the head of the project “Bulgarian Foreign Diplomatic Representations 1879–1918. (Organisation, Structure, Funding, Foreign Representatives)”, endorsed under the programme for funding young scientists at the BAS.

Currently, Chief Assistant Aleka Strezova, PhD, is part of the team of the ongoing five-year National Scientific Programme “Development and Promotion of Bulgarian Studies Abroad”, launched in 2022.

All of this is conducive to acquiring specific knowledge and reveals an ability for team work.

III. Lecturing and teaching activities

As of the autumn semester of the academic year 2023/2024, Aleka Strezova has been involved as a part-time lecturer in the programmes in the “History and Archaeology” field of the New Bulgarian University. In line with her research profile and professional competence, she teaches the Bachelor courses HISB718 Diplomatic History of Bulgaria and HISB811 International Relations in the 20th century. In addition, thanks to her good command of English, she also teaches a course in the Master’s programme “South-East European Studies (in English)”; the course itself is HESM101 Geography and Geopolitics of South-East Europe. With a decision of the Departmental Council of the History Department, as of the spring semester of the same academic year, she took on two more courses in the Bachelor’s programme – HISB621 Small Nations in Europe at the End of the 19th century and HISB802 The World of Megamyths: Ideas, Society, Institutions. Course HISM126 Geopolitics and Diplomacy which was developed at the same time, is offered in the Master’s programme “History, Politics, Religion (in Bulgarian)”.

High praise by students logically led to involving Chief Assistant Aleka Strezova, PhD, in courses that are part of the general university education, more specifically the course “Citizen Knowledge and Skills”.

Therefore, the candidate has secured the necessary lecturing and extracurricular workload.

IV. Administrative and public activity

Aleka Strezova’s long-standing research experience and professional qualities logically lead to her being a member of two scientific organisations: the Bulgarian Studies

Association and the Royal Historical Society. In addition, she moderates the Facebook page of the Institute for Historical Studies and is a member of the Public Communication Commission (PCC) at the same institute.

V. Personal impressions of the candidate (if any)

In the last several years when I have had the opportunity to work and interact with Aleka Strezova, I acquired a multitude of personal impressions which allow me to form my own opinion of her. Among them I should highlight those directly related to the NBU and her work both in research and publication projects, and as a part-time lecturer in Bulgarian and English programmes offered by the History Department. Based on those, I am entirely convinced in the candidate's responsibility, efficiency, working capacity and conscientiousness. I also believe that Aleka Strezova has a strong character, as well as a detached and independent thinking that is not susceptible to situational factors. Unlike other appointments, motivated not by professional qualities, experience, and personal suitability, she would be a proverbial ray of sunshine for the team of the History Department and thus for the development of historical science at the NBU.

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

The only recommendation I could give to the candidate is my best wishes that in future she take more active part in international scientific fora, which act as a venue to introduce her scientific achievements to colleagues.

Conclusion

Based on the above-mentioned, I can categorically state that the candidate not only fulfils but surpasses the necessary requirements to be awarded the academic position of Associate Professor. The wealth of scientific activity speaks of a fully formed scientist who possesses serious theoretical training and the potential to develop in the future. This will, without any doubt, contribute to promoting the History Department of the New Bulgarian University not only as an educational unit but also as a place striving for high standards and a serious attitude towards scientific research. In other words, Aleka Strezova would provide a significant "value added" to the institution and its educational

programmes. This is why I give my positive evaluation that Chief Assistant Aleka Strezova, PhD, should be appointed to the academic position of Associate Professor in professional field 2.2 History and Archaeology at the History Department of the New Bulgarian University. I also recommend to the esteemed members of the scientific jury to also give a positive vote for the candidate to be elected by the Academic Council of the NBU.

17 November 2024

Assoc. Prof. Zhivko Alferov, PhD