

Review

By: Professor (Professor Emeritus and Senator of NBU) Georgi Fotev Georgiev, Doctor of Sciences.

Subject: The academic and teaching achievements of Assoc. Prof. Stefan Ivanov Dechev, D.Sc., a candidate in the competition for the position of Professor in Professional Field 3.1 "Sociology, Anthropology, and Cultural Studies" at the Department of Anthropology, announced in the *State Gazette* (DV), Issue 51/05.06.2026. A single candidate—Assoc. Prof. Stefan Ivanov Dechev, D.Sc.—submitted documents meeting the requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ZRASRB) for participation in the competition following the expiration of the statutory deadline.

Stefan Dechev holds a Master's degree from the Faculty of History at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski," with a minor in Philosophy. He later supplemented his qualifications with an intensive course at Leiden University (the Netherlands) titled "History and Computers: New Media and Advanced Methods for Historians and Archivists." At the Central European University in Budapest, Stefan Dechev attended a summer course titled "Global Mapping: Revising Symbolic Geographies." His professional development and academic growth have been significantly shaped by his status as a researcher at the Institute for Advanced Study in Budapest and other similar institutions, as well as his visiting lectureships at the University of Graz (Austria), Complutense University (Madrid), the University of Amsterdam (the Netherlands), the University of Texas at Austin (USA), and others. Assoc. Prof. Stefan Dechev has successfully presented papers at prestigious academic events in Brussels, Madrid, Budapest, Germany, and the USA. He is a member of distinguished scholarly associations and has received fellowships for advanced study as well as awards abroad for his academic achievements. The candidate for the position of professor is a successful supervisor of doctoral students—facts documented by name in the submitted materials. Assoc. Prof. Dechev is proficient in English, Russian, French, Spanish, and Serbo-Croatian. As an intellectual, Stefan Dechev is highly active in the public sphere of contemporary Bulgarian society; this engagement defines him as an intellectual—at least according to my own definition of the term. I have grounds, within this academic procedure for the selection of a professor, to draw attention to a matter that might appear to lie outside the realm of academia. My friend Michael Burawoy—a professor at Stanford University and a past president of both the American Sociological Association and the International Sociological Association (who tragically passed away following an accident in Los Angeles)—launched the new sociological sub-discipline of "public sociology" in a presidential address. I was deeply puzzled—if not scandalized—by his innovation, but I happened upon a thought by John Maynard Keynes that prompted me to radically change my opinion. Keynes stated that every science ultimately yields a direct benefit to society. Take chemistry, for instance: you go to the pharmacy and buy pills for a headache. What, however, is the situation regarding the humanities

and social sciences? These disciplines tend to remain confined within academia, relying on their established conceptual toolkits and focusing on academic career advancement. Popular science is not the solution to this problem. Popularization compromises scientific rigor. Public sociology involves a process of translation—or a specific form of conceptual transformation—to communicate effectively with the general public (society). It is not possible to go into detail here. Public sociology poses a challenge to anthropology and to all other social sciences and humanities. On these grounds, I highly value the participation of Assoc. Prof. Stefan Dechev in the competition for the rank of professor at the Department of Anthropology at New Bulgarian University (NBU). Unfortunately, a misunderstanding regarding the distinction between an associate professor and a professor persists within local academic circles—an issue that cannot be resolved merely by formal written procedural regulations. The major transition in a university scholar's career is the move from the status of associate professor to that of professor. An associate professor possesses the competence to master and teach established, current, and forward-looking knowledge, methods, and so forth, within a specific scientific field. In outlining and evaluating Assoc. Prof. Stefan Dechev's multifaceted research and teaching activities in my review, one can see this work as a process of development and accumulation that justifies his candidacy for the university rank and position of Professor of Anthropology. Beyond what has already been stated, there are other, even more distinct and significant grounds to be highlighted. It is evident from the preceding discussion that Assoc. Prof. Dechev does not remain within the conventional confines of historical scholarship but seeks out and discovers research opportunities inherent in the disciplinary form of scientific knowledge. The form of scientific knowledge is disciplinary (not in the Foucaultian sense), and it cannot be otherwise. Sciences are monodisciplinary, interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and transdisciplinary. Assoc. Prof. Dechev does not limit himself to history but productively enters the field of anthropology—a fact confirmed by the works he has submitted for the professorship competition. One further fundamental point requires clarification at the outset. Anthropology, like any other science, develops and takes shape through a process of specialization and differentiation. There is no other path of scientific development, and it is impossible for one to exist. Modern anthropology differs even from the discipline associated with figures such as Radcliffe-Brown, Bronisław Malinowski, and others from the early and mid-20th century. Radcliffe-Brown gives the impression of using the terms "anthropology" and "sociology" interchangeably. In the second half of the 20th century, Claude Lévi-Strauss's structural anthropology revealed the deep structures of human culture within myths, kinship, food, classifications, taboos, and so forth. When speaking of modern anthropology, I refer to the multidisciplinary field associated with scholars such as Clifford Geertz, Marc Augé, James Clifford, George Marcus, and others. It is not possible to go into detail here. Major works by Assoc. Prof. Dechev—such as **Between Common Folk Dishes and the Cuisine of Constantinople: Food and Cooking in Ottoman Bulgaria and Neighboring Lands (from the 1830s to 1878)** and **From the Rice of Asia to the Peppers of the Americas: An Interwoven History of Food and Cooking in Ottoman Bulgaria and Neighboring Lands (from the Late 14th to the Early 19th Century)**—offer a historical perspective focused on food, cuisine, daily life, cultural interactions, and the formation of

national identity. These and numerous other publications represent *par excellence* historical anthropology—a sub-discipline of modern anthropology that shares a "kinship" (to use the term employed by Goethe and later interpreted by Wittgenstein) with history. In his book *The Hidden History: Polemics*, Assoc. Prof. Stefan Dechev challenges—with his characteristic nonconformism—the most influential paradigm in contemporary Bulgarian historical scholarship. A particularly outstanding scholarly achievement is his book *The Unification versus the 'Behind-the-Scenes': Politics and Memory (1885–1998)*, which, shortly after its publication, was awarded the Felczak-Wereszycki Prize by Jagiellonian University and the Polish Historical Society. Academic regulations require the official reviewer to explicitly and unequivocally address the scholarly contributions associated with the competition for an academic degree and university position. Naturally, the process begins with the mandatory self-assessment of the scholarly contributions found in the works submitted for the competition. Dechev's self-assessment encompasses all significant scholarly contributions, specifying exactly which works contain them. The scholarly contributions found in the author's monographs, studies, and articles are presented in detail and with sound justification; they are both genuine and original. As all documentation—including the self-assessment—is publicly available, there is no need to restate the details here. Incidentally, claims often found in reviews and official statements—characterizing a scholar as either modest or immodest when discussing their own scientific contributions—are absurd and foolish. Goethe's famous dictum applies here: it is beggars and ragamuffins who are modest. Anyone engaged in science deals with arguments, and these alone are valid. This lies at the heart of the supreme scientific virtue—intellectual honesty—as highlighted by Max Weber. I would like to draw attention to some of the particularly significant values found in the works of Assoc. Prof. Stefan Dechev. Assoc. Prof. Stefan Dechev is the author of the educational resource *The Hidden History: Polemics*. He breaks the mold of the standard textbook—typically a mere systematization of established knowledge in a given field—by subjecting traditional national narratives, as well as categories and frameworks shaped by tendentious indoctrination, to critical re-evaluation. The book is designated an "educational resource" rather than a "textbook" because it aims to foster critical thinking. It represents a bid by the Associate Professor to establish the independent scholarly and pedagogical standing of a full professor. Assoc. Prof. Dechev's university courses—exhaustively listed in the documentation—serve as a strong statement in this same direction; among them, I would particularly highlight "Anthropology of Europe" and "Anthropology of Bulgaria." As noted at the outset, Assoc. Prof. Stefan Dechev, D.Sc. He is the sole participant in the announced competition for the position of professor, and there is reasonable ground to assume that other potential candidates may have withdrawn upon learning of the candidacy of such a formidable contender. The scholarly achievements and contributions of Assoc. Prof. Stefan Dechev—as previously outlined—are indisputable and impressive. The manner in which these contributions are articulated in the self-assessment statement offers advantages but also presents limitations—or, more precisely, a somewhat insufficient level of explication—though I do not consider this a significant flaw. Certain key contributions are not anchored in a single seminal work. One such contribution is the anthropologically and historiographically heuristic, vital interconnection of

nation → identity → memory → intimacy → gender → food → everyday life → cultural meanings. Here, it is appropriate to draw special attention to the intellectual and institutional establishment of historical anthropology in Bulgaria within the broader context of contemporary anthropology—a topic I have deliberately addressed in this official review. The historical anthropology developed by Dechev involves an intellectual shift from the history of events and ideas toward the history of lived forms of life. Such is my interpretation, and any scientific contributions in the form of new facts are precluded in formal sciences, normative (dogmatic) sciences, and philosophy as a discipline. Scientific contributions in these disciplines take the form of posing a new problem, solving an existing problem, creating a new conceptual framework (coordinate system), developing an existing theory, or formulating a new theory. These types of scientific contributions naturally belong to the empirical social sciences and humanities that concern us—specifically history and historical anthropology. The discovery of new facts presupposes a conceptual framework and a theoretical model (or theory). These types of scientific contributions have a place in the empirical sciences—the specific category of disciplines that interests us here. More specifically, I would highlight that Assoc. Prof. Stefan Dechev has made scientific contributions that address issues raised within Bulgarian historical scholarship. He poses new problems, which constitutes a significant scientific contribution in its own right. The discovery of new facts, the resolution of existing problems, and the formulation of new problems within history and historical anthropology all represent significant scientific contributions. Discovering new facts is impossible without a coordinate system and a relevant theoretical model (or theory). I look forward to Dechev's response to my comment regarding the need to explicitly specify the types of scientific contributions I have mentioned. To reiterate: these contributions are real, but—like the discovery of new facts—they need to be highlighted. I am not asking for an exhaustive list, but rather for a specific example. I met Assoc. Prof. Stefan Dechev in person not long ago. We have had several valuable and pleasant collegial conversations. My impressions of him are excellent. I share Max Weber's insightful view that a person is defined by their work—and a scholar, by their books and publications. It is in this context that I offer my assessment of him as an intellectual. Assoc. Prof. Stefan Ivanov Dechev's scholarly achievements and contributions give me every reason to recommend, without hesitation, that the members of the jury vote in favor of his appointment to the academic rank of Professor. This is a well-deserved recognition. It represents symbolic capital for NBU. I am convinced that the news of the candidate's success in the competition for the professorship will be welcomed by the NBU academic community, as well as by academic circles both in Bulgaria and abroad.

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Signature: Prof. Georgy Fotev