

OPINION

From: Prof. Margarita Nikolova Karamihova, Dr. Habill, Honorary Professor at the Faculty of History, St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo (retired); habilitated in Professional Field 3.1: Sociology, Anthropology, and Cultural Studies.

Regarding the scholarly works submitted for the competition to fill the academic position of Professor in Professional Field 3.1: Sociology, Anthropology, and Cultural Studies—announced in the “State Gazette” (Issue 51/05.06.2026)—with Assoc. Prof. Stefan Ivanov Dechev, Dr. Habill., as the sole candidate.

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

This assessment is based on data provided by the candidate as well as on personal observations and judgments I have formed over the years. The submitted documents demonstrate that the candidate’s professional achievements far exceed both the minimum national requirements and the specific requirements for the position of Professor at New Bulgarian University. In accordance with the application procedures, a dossier documenting the candidate’s academic career has been submitted, including relevant research publications, citations, and lecture courses developed and taught. Based on the submitted documentation, there are ample grounds to conclude that the procedure for announcing and conducting the competition was carried out in full compliance with the „Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria“, the „Regulations for the Application of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria“, and the „Higher Education Act“, as well as the current „Ordinance on the Development of the Academic Staff at New Bulgarian University“. The subsequent conduct of the procedure fully adheres to the requirements of the aforementioned regulatory acts.

II. Research (creative) activity and results

As the work required for his academic habilitation, the candidate presents the monograph “Between Common Folk Dishes and the Cuisine of Constantinople: Diet and Cooking in Ottoman Bulgaria and Neighboring Lands (from the 1830s to 1878)” (Sofia: RIVA, 2025). Across an impressive 575 pages, he traces and analyzes a highly dynamic period of change regarding food

and dietary habits in Europe and on the Balkans. He draws upon available documents and offers a critical re-examination of previously published texts. The work represents a significant original contribution to the field.

St. Dechev has also included the monograph “The Unification versus the 'Behind-the-Scenes': Politics and Memory (1885–1998)” (Plovdiv: Janet 45, 2025). This in-depth study, along with the six research papers and thirteen articles submitted for the competition, directly aligns with the lecture courses taught by the candidate. The submitted habilitation thesis and the published monograph convey messages of great significance. They foster a sense of belonging and a stable identity among readers, offering vital geopolitical reference points—all without unnecessary pathos or dangerous romanticism. These messages are particularly important for students.

It is important to highlight the original nature of all the texts. The author has correctly cited all publications and sources used. I find no evidence of the use of artificial intelligence or plagiarism.

The submitted documents demonstrate an impressive number of citations of candidate’s papers in scholarly publications—indexed in world-renowned scientific databases—as well as in monographs and edited volumes spanning the period from 2007 to the present. The list of Bulgarian and international scholars who draw upon St. Dechev’s work commands respect.

The geographical scope and subject matter of the academic projects in which the candidate has participated are impressive. Each of these projects—situated within the academic landscapes of both Europe and the United States—aligns with his scholarly output and is integrated into his lecture courses.

III. Educational and teaching activities

Despite the short period during which Assoc. Prof. Stefan Dechev has held a primary employment contract at New Bulgarian University (NBU)—and the resulting limitations—it is appropriate to comment on his work there. In accordance with the law and its implementing regulations, the esteemed Jury takes into account his extensive teaching experience at the South-West University (SWU). His experience as a visiting lecturer at prestigious European universities is also noteworthy.

As a candidate in the competition for the position of Professor at NBU, he taught the following courses as an adjunct lecturer during the 2022/2023 academic year: “Power and Domination in a

Global Perspective” and “Working with Archives, Catalogs, and Statistical Materials.” Since his appointment as an Associate Professor at NBU (2023–2026), he has taught seven inherited courses, five original courses, and two practical training modules.

Given the candidate’s research scope and oratorical prowess, as well as his fluency in foreign languages—bolstered by his active engagement within the European academic sphere, I am firmly convinced that the established academic disciplines have been enriched with contemporary methodological insights that will greatly benefit NBU students. Students also have access to the study aid “The Hidden History: Polemics” (Sofia: Paradox, 2019). The candidate has successfully supervised three doctoral students, a fact that attests to his aptitude as an academic supervisor.

IV. Administrative and Public Activities

The name and academic presence of Assoc. Prof. Dechev are sufficient to attract students to NBU. His impressive media appearances and engaging writings guarantee the maintenance of the University's image.

V. Personal impressions of the candidate

I know Associate Professor Dechev from academic forums, where he has consistently impressed us with new and unexplored research fields—or fields viewed through a fresh lens—that have long been subject to systematic ideological manipulation. I have incorporated his writings into my teaching and continue to recommend them to students at St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo. His masterful command of a wide array of methods and methodologies sets an example that ought to reach the next generation of researchers.

VI. Opinions, recommendations, and comments regarding the candidate's activities and achievements

For this competition, it is essential to highlight the candidate's exceptional theoretical grounding and broadly defined research scope, which transcend the narrow, outdated frameworks of the academic disciplines within Professional Fields 3.1 and 2.2.

The proven qualities of Assoc. Prof. Stefan Dechev—demonstrated both in Bulgaria and abroad—as well as his track record as a supervisor of doctoral students, are pivotal to his

assessment as a social/cultural anthropologist. Through his original lecture courses, he has decisively introduced international educational standards at NBU.

During the relatively short time he has held a full-time faculty position at NBU, Assoc. Prof. Dechev has achieved a high level of integration within the Department of Anthropology and actively participates in the University's academic life.

Conclusion:

The candidate's scientometric data not only fully meets the requirements for the academic position of Professor set out in the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff and its implementing regulations but actually exceed them impressively. The candidate possesses significant teaching experience and a proven ability to successfully supervise Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral theses. The candidate's scholarly output is of a substantial, contributory nature. His research is directly linked to practical application within the educational system and aligns with the strategy for research and teaching development at New Bulgarian University. The candidate's research interests fully correspond to the University's plans and the courses envisaged for the Professor to be selected through this competition. The research fields cultivated by the candidate and the competencies he possesses would offer young people the opportunity to acquire both theoretical knowledge—aligned with contemporary scientific advancements—and practical skills relevant to their future professional careers.

All of this provides grounds for me to give a fully positive assessment and to recommend that Assoc. Prof. Stefan Dechev, Dr.Habill., be elected Professor at New Bulgarian University in this competition. I believe that the full set of criteria and indicators for attaining the rank of Professor has been met, in accordance with the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for the Application of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Higher Education Act, and the Ordinance on the Development of the Academic Staff at New Bulgarian University. I propose that the Scientific Jury vote in favor and that Assoc. Prof. Stefan Ivanov Dechev, D.Sc., be admitted to the selection process for the position of Professor by the Academic Council.

Date 23.09.2026

Signature

Prof. M. Karamihova, Dr. Habill.