

OPINION

By Prof. Kristian Krastinov Bankov, NBU, 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences, on the scientific works for participation in the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor, professional field 3.8. Economics (Marketing - Brand Management), announced by the New Bulgarian University in Official Gazette 56/02.07.2024, with candidate Assistant Professor Dr. Dimitar Ivanov Trendafilov.

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

The candidate, Dr Dimitar Ivanov Trendafilov, meets the minimum requirements for the position of Associate Professor. His publishing, research, project and administrative activities at New Bulgarian University since his appointment in 2015 to the academic position of "Assistant Professor" are rich, visible to the university community and with a high level of impact on the positive development of the institution since then.

II. Research (creative) activities and results

1. Dr. Dimitar Trendafilov's work is characterized by inter- and even multidisciplinary, which is not often seen. He has so far managed to contribute to the creation of teaching materials with a clear field of knowledge through "Retail Marketing and Management" and "Brand Building and Marketing", as well as far more diverse in content articles and studies on consumer culture, brand management and commercial communication, offering the broader picture of the issues ("Semiotic Studies of the Brand"). Although the list of his contributions shows that most of the published materials are more in the field of semiotic research, still the majority of them are devoted to applied semiotics and marketing, which have been gaining interest and recognition only in the last two decades (e.g. his work on IKEA). Presented as a habilitation dissertation, entitled *The Mobile Consumer*, is a testament to how a text in marketing can be equally useful and interesting to audiences from different, often distant, professional backgrounds, as it naturally connects research on lifestyles, economic and technological change, commercial communication, and practical approaches from managerial work in marketing and branding.
2. The palette of the candidate's publications can be described as broad and rich. He has addressed topics of strategic nature for modern marketing (holistic approach, experience economy), specific practices and trends worthy of attention (knowledge management, intellectual property protection), and also specific case studies from the world of branding and brand management. Arguably, this diversity brings benefits both in the teaching activities of their author and in the accumulation of knowledge and expertise leading also to future developments.
3. The citations of the candidate's publications are not a large number, taken as an absolute number, but it is clearly visible that his international ones are recognizable to colleagues from the field of applied semiotics, while the purely marketing ones - rather by colleagues from the domestic environment. This is determined by both the language of publication and the specificity of the content. Very often it is the interdisciplinarity that prevents the merits of certain texts from being appreciated, but either way, working on a topic from

different perspectives is the future of research and problem-solving-oriented activity design, so Dr. Trendafilov is moving in exactly the right direction.

4. I can easily evaluate the candidate's work as we have conducted most of the projects together. Thanks to his efforts, two chapters of a handbook intended for secondary education institutions were produced under the project "Culture and Communication of Taste" (2019), and on the occasion of the same project, Dr. Trendafilov conducted trainings and involved students from the MP of the NBU to participate in field research. A team of students also worked on a research project on the communication of fashion products in the country 10 years ago, and each year the candidate authors research for the "Laboratory for Brand Research", the results of which are often presented and commented on at international forums, and publications are prepared whenever possible. In practice, almost all of his research efforts are intended to be both useful and enriching to students' knowledge and skills, and to gain visibility to audiences external to NBU. Moreover, it is not insignificant that over the years Dr. Trendafilov has authored research projects for companies operating in our country in various fields - telecommunications, tobacco, pharmaceuticals and cosmetics. His fieldwork has strengthened his expertise and increased the applied aspect of his knowledge within the courses he leads and the content provided within them.

II. Teaching and learning activities

1. From the very beginning of the candidate's work (first as an assistant) he has been actively contributing to the Moodle platform. He has independently built content in dozens of courses already and has maintained the information associated with them neatly. From the references attached to the application, it is clear that he is frequently selected as a thesis advisor by students in various programs, but often advises such students on the standards for thesis preparation outside of the advisor role.
2. Dr. Trendafilov's contribution to the work with Erasmus students is also a distinctive aspect of his performance over the years, insofar as every year visiting students attend his courses conducted in English (marketing and brand management), including individual consultations of some of them.
3. The evaluations from the surveys among the NBU students eloquently indicate the candidate's qualities and achievements as a teacher. They are among the highest possible at the university and given the large number of students in the courses he has taught during the year, the results seem even more significant.

IV. Administrative and public activities

1. In fact, for most of his presence at the NBU, the candidate has been part of its administrative staff and has contributed to a high degree to the development of the institution. In addition to being the representative of the PhD students in the AC for a year, he was also its member as Vice-Rector for International Affairs for a period of 6 years. In this role, his responsibilities included the implementation of the joint programmes with the U. Sheffield and NBU's joining the international university networks supported by the EC, which has become a flagship project for the whole university community and opened new horizons for the institution. At the same time, Dr. Trendafilov headed the Commission for the Recognition of Higher Education Diplomas Acquired Abroad, and joined as a member of the Council of the School of Professional and Continuing Education of the NBU.

Already, between 2015 and 2017, he was a program consultant for the full-time marketing programs (undergraduate and the newly formed master's at that time), which still exist

successfully and are even among the most stable in terms of enrollment in the university catalog. In addition, if only as a detail, it is important to note that the candidate regularly carries out teaching mobilities under the Erasmus programme on behalf of the NBU and contributes to putting the University on the map of Europe as an institution open to cooperation.

2. The candidate works actively with students in extracurricular activities (most often and most significantly in the Early Fall School of Semiotics and the National Marketing Olympiad with numerous awards for NBU students), and has several appearances at forums and trainings outside the university, where he has explicitly represented NBU as a modern educational institution. Over the years, Dr. Trendafilov has facilitated contacts with business organizations and individual experts from practice, whose presence and presentations have contributed to a high degree to improving the quality of training in the programs in which he participates.
3. The candidate has been a part of the recruitment teams for NBU since 2009. His most direct contribution has been to the programmes at MF - Advertising and Brand Management, Brand Management (in English) and Marketing Management, and to the dual degree programmes offered jointly with U Sheffield and later U York since 2018. Dr. Trendafilov is also a repeated participant in activities at the NBU Open Days, as well as at student recruitment events at schools and educational forums abroad (Finland, Italy, Azerbaijan, China).

V. Personal impressions of the candidate (if any)

My collaboration with Dr. Trendafilov dates back to the fall of 2008. In that time he has shown enthusiasm, motivation and responsibility to work both in developing modern, attractive and useful content for specific courses, and in terms of developing the entire curriculum of NBU and the institution in general. Over time, the quality of his research, language and presentation skills has increased and last but not least, no matter the occasion or venue, he has championed the cause and values of higher education and NBU in particular. Not only has he become a respected expert in his field of research among both students and colleagues, but he has also maintained a level of interdisciplinarity in his work that opens new horizons and attracts interest.

VI. Opinions, recommendations and comments on the activities and achievements of the candidate

In conclusion, based on the above, I would like to strongly support the candidacy of Dr. Dimitar Ivanov Trendafilov for the academic position of Associate Professor at New Bulgarian University. Without questioning his professional qualities, potential and authority, as well as the contributions registered so far for the University, I would recommend more active publishing activity in the future and the development of more projects with the participation of students, so that the institution can take its deserved place as a knowledge-producing and meeting the modern standards of quality education at European level. In this respect, it is particularly important that the results of its research work appear mainly in prestigious international publications.

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Sincerely