

STATEMENT

concerning a competition for the academic post of Associate Professor in the professional field 2.1. Philology (Classical Languages) at New Bulgarian University

by Prof. Hristo Petkov Todorov, PhD, *Philosophy and Sociology Department* at NBU

The competition for the academic position of Associate Professor in the professional field 2.1. The position of Ph.D. (Classical Languages) was advertised by New Bulgarian University in issue 50 of *State Gazette* of 9 June 2023. The only candidate for this competition is **Dr. Georgi Ivanov Gotchev**, Chief Assistant Professor of Classical Languages, Ancient Literature and Culture at the *Department of Mediterranean and Eastern Studies* of New Bulgarian University.

The candidate fulfils the minimum national requirements and meets all other requirements of the *Academic Staff Development Act in the Republic of Bulgaria* for the academic position of Associate Professor. He obtained the Doctor degree in 2010 after a successful defence (confirmed in 2019) of a dissertation entitled *Happiness and Change. Understanding Well-being in Ancient Greek Literature*. Georgi Gotchev has held the academic position of Chief Assistant Professor at the NBU since 2009. Since 2020, he has been Dean of the School of General Studies.

As a habilitation the candidate has submitted for the competition the monograph *Freedom from the Shadows. Justice and Education in Plato's Dialogues* (NBU Press, Sofia 2023, ISBN 978-619-233-242-6). The volume of the book is 475 pages. The monograph consists of eight chapters and is a study of eight of Plato's most important dialogues from different periods of his work. Among them are the two greatest dialogues, *Republic* and *Laws*. The unifying thread is the link between justice and education stated in the title. This connection is not self-evident and needs clarification. It is commonly believed that the place of the concept of justice is in the spheres of morality, law and politics, while the concept of education is the central concept of another sphere – that of pedagogy. In the preface of the book Georgi Gotchev formulates and justifies the initial claim of his research, namely that for Plato justice is as much a guiding principle of social life and political structure as it is a

guiding principle in the formation of the individual. Plato's oeuvre offers numerous strong extrinsic and substantive reasons to maintain the thesis of the closeness between the structure of the polis and the structure of the human soul. All these grounds are revealed in the course of the study.

In the dialogues *Charmides* and *Protagoras* the topic of education is explicitly set as a central topic for discussion. In the dialogue *Theaetetus*, on the other hand, the topic of knowledge is the main topic of discussion. It is logically closely linked to the one on education. The idea, as the author explains, is to see first how the process of education proceeds, finally arriving at its ultimate goal – knowledge. Separate chapters, chapters two, four and five respectively, are devoted to these three dialogues. The main theme of the two major dialogues – *Republic* and *Laws* – is justice. This naturally justifies their treatment in chapters three and eight of the book respectively. Attention to three other dialogues – the *Phaedo* (chapter one), *Symposium* (chapter six) and the *Timaeus* (chapter seven) – is justified by the raising of Plato's key question about the essential characteristics of the human form of life. Thus, Georgi Gotchev rightly seeks to clarify the relationship between justice and education, placing it within the framework of Plato's anthropology.

At the heart of this anthropology lies the view that the most precious thing in man is the immortal soul, and the most important task for him while living in the "prison" of the body is to care for the soul. In the first chapter Georgi Gotchev offers a perhaps somewhat speculative, but nevertheless interesting view of the soul. According to this view, the greatest threat to the soul is time. A prisoner of his body and of the time for living that has been allotted to him, man must constantly struggle against the imaginary values of the transitory and the perishable for the sake of the true values of the imperishable. For what, in the last analysis, do Plato's Socrates and his interlocutors seek an understanding of justice? For a life without justice is a life left to the whims of force and coercion. This may be appropriate to the animal form of life, but it is not in the measure of the human form. What is the purpose of education? Not, as we would say today, to have success in life, measuring that success solely by the possession of material goods. Rather to put such order in our desires and aspirations that we live our lives as "friends of ourselves".

For me, the most interesting chapter of the whole study is the fourth one, devoted to the dialogue *Protagoras*. I can boldly say that the author has succeeded in revealing all the intellectual and literary beauty of this both logically and dramaturgically complex dialogue. I would like to mention two things in particular which I consider valuable achievements of the

author. Georgi Gotchev has revealed the competition between two distinctly different views on the purpose of education. The question Socrates and Protagoras debate is whether it is possible to teach virtues. According to one of the two views, education is the formation of attitudes and the acquisition of patterns of behavior that would facilitate man in his interactions with others. In this sense, one benefits directly from education. According to the other view, with which Socrates enters the conversation, education is the overall formation of man through self-knowledge. The author's second accomplishment is to emphasize the difference between two patterns of speech, the long and convoluted, extremely vague speech of Protagoras and the shorter, more unambiguous speech of Socrates. These are not only two types of speech that Plato has confronted in places with admirable irony, but also two types of thinking and attitudes towards other people. In one type, the speaker is only interested in himself without caring whether others understand what he is saying. In the other, the effort is to get your speech to the listener, to let him follow the conversation and participate in it.

The monograph *Freedom from the Shadows. Justice and Education in Plato's Dialogues* is a valuable scholarly study on Plato's philosophy, not least because in it have been realized many of the results of Georgi Gotchev's many years of translation work. He has translated important works of Plato – *Laws* (2008, together with Nevena Panova), *Symposium* (2011) and *Republic* (2015). He is also the translator of a number of other important works by ancient authors – Aristotle's *Poetics*, Pseudo-Aristotle's *Rhetoric of Alexander*, Euripides' *Medea* (together with Petya Heinrich), the collection *Economics* with texts by ancient Greek authors, fragments of Archilochus. Most of Georgi Gotchev's translations are accompanied by detailed commentaries of high informative and analytical value.

I would especially like to mention the active participation of Georgi Gotchev in the university-wide seminars led at NBU by prof. His participation in the development of the scientific and journalistic forum of prof. Bogdanov, where he is one of the most active authors, and his contribution to the development of an innovative educational model for children from minority groups with the means of classical philology and socio-drama.

Georgi Gotchev is well integrated into the contemporary cultural life of our country. The two very prestigious awards he has received in recent years – the Humanities Award of the Ministry of Culture *Hristo G. Danov Award* in 2015 for his translations of Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Poetics*, and the NBU *Bogdan Bogdanov Humanities Award* (together with Snezhina Petrova) for the performance *Medea* in 2019 – are recognition of his achievements.

I have known Georgi Gotchev personally since he came to work at NBU in 2009. I have repeatedly participated with him in scientific seminars and conferences at the NBU and beyond. I am a member of the Faculty Council of the School of General Studies, of which he is the Dean. I have entirely positive impressions of his work and his personality. I perceive him as an intelligent, responsive and responsible person with independent thinking and great creative potential.

Conclusion: Dr. Georgi Ivanov Gotchev gives all the grounds to be elected to the academic position of Associate Professor in the professional field 2.1. Philology (Classical Languages) as a member of the Scientific Jury I will vote FOR his election with full conviction.

Sofia, November 23, 2023

