

Attn.

Chairman of the Scientific Jury

Prof. DSc Nikolay Iordanov

Ord. №419-PД/July 2024

By Prof. Dr Joanna Spassova-Dikova

Director of the Institute of Art Studies – BAS

Sofia

R E V I E W

By Prof. Dr. Mariana Lazarova

Professional direction 8.4 Theater and Film Art

Academic field “Film Studies, Film Art and Television”

Department of “Production and Postproduction”

NATFA “Krastyo Sarafov”

Participating as an external member of the scientific jury in the competition for the academic position of Professor in Film Studies, Film Art and Television (History of Bulgarian Cinema and Cinema Culture), professional field 8.4. Theatre and Film Art, announced in the State Gazette (issue 47 / 04.06.2024).

This review has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the LDASRB, (Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria), the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for the Conditions and Procedure for the Acquisition of Scientific Degrees and for the Occupation of Academic Positions at the Institute of Art Studies, BAS, including the requirements set out in Annex 2 of the same Regulations, item 3.4 (3.41. to 3.4.4.).

The grounds for the review are the decision of the Scientific Council of the Institute of Art Studies (Minutes No. 6, item 6/21.06.2024), Order No. 419 - RD/1 July 2024 and the protocol decision of the scientific jury from the first meeting held on 09.08.2024.

In the competition for professor, announced for the needs of the Screen Arts Department (Institute of Art Studies - BAS) as the only candidate is admitted Assoc. Professor DSc Alexander Donev.

1. Brief introduction of the candidate and general description of his scientific, expert and pedagogical activities.

According to the enclosed documents, Assoc. Prof. DSc Alexander Donev obtained with honors in 1988 a master's degree in "Film Studies, Film Criticism, History and Theory of Cinema" at NATFA "Krastyo Sarafov" and a Ph.D. according to Diploma No/date: 000794 / 03.11.2016, issued by the Institute of Art Studies at BAS. In 2020, he was habilitated as Associate Professor at the Screen Arts Department of the Institute with a habilitation thesis entitled 'The Audience Success in the Cinemas of Bulgarian Feature Films at the Beginning of the 21st Century' (certificate No. 001609/01.10.2020 is attached), and in 2023 he was awarded the degree of Doctor of Science for his dissertation "Mapping the Untamed Cinematic: Post-1989 Bulgarian Independent, Amateur and Alternative Cinema".

Assoc. Prof. DSc Alexander Donev has always shared with his students his academic interests and the results of his research in the field of screen arts during his long **teaching practice** at the NBU from 1998 to 2016 and as a guest lecturer from 2016 to the present at NATFA "Krastyo Sarafov". What is remarkable is the breadth with which he creates lecture course curricula, which present a wide range of his academic interests and solid erudition in the areas of semiotic and sociological approaches to critical analysis, the history of film theory of contemporary Bulgarian cinema, film distribution and problems of Bulgarian audiovisual production, as well as the study of reception in the screen arts along the axis of author - viewer.

The candidate has accumulated a **great deal of practical experience** and has held management positions in film production and film distribution as the manager of Bulgarian Distribution Company Ltd. and the executive director of the National Film Centre and of Audio-Video Orpheus Ltd. He has also held other managerial positions such as Planning Manager, Editor of film magazine "Kino" and Manager of *Narodna Kultura* Publishing House Ltd.

His freelance portfolio as an **expert** includes work as a marketing consultant, film critic, journalist and screenwriter. He actively collaborates with state and municipal cultural institutions and has been elected to festival juries at national and international forums. In his nearly forty years of practice **as an author in the field of film criticism and journalism** he has over 500 publications in Bulgarian and foreign publications. From March 2022 to the present, Assoc. Prof. DSc Alexander Donev

has served as Editor-in-Chief of the journal *Art Studies Quarterly* and is a member of the editorial board of the journal *Philosophical Alternatives*.

He is fluent in German, English and Russian, and was awarded by the Union of Translators in Bulgaria for his translation of Walter Benjamin's scientific text *Studies in Media Aesthetics*. He is a member of several prestigious and internationally recognized organizations: since 2009 the European Film Academy, since 1988 the Union of Bulgarian Filmmakers, and since 2017 the Union of Bulgarian Journalists. As of the date of application for the competition, he has work experience of 31 years, 2 months and 28 days.

2. Conclusions on compliance with the minimum national requirements according to the Law on the Acquisition of Scientific Degrees and For Holding Academic Positions in the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and the additional requirements in the Regulations of Acquiring Academic Degrees and academic positions in BAS.

The review of the academic and creative production submitted to the competition shows not only *compliance in quantitative terms* with the minimum national requirements, but also their exceeding. With a requirement of 500 points according to the scientific-metric indicators for the academic position of 'professor' in the field 8 Arts, professional field 8.4. Theatre and Film Arts, the candidate enters the procedure with 878.75 points. This compliance is also confirmed in a self-signed declaration dated 12.07.2024.

For participation in the competition Assoc. Prof. DSc Alexander Donev submits a published monographic work of 145 pages (total 200 with appendices) with the title "Zlatan Dudow. The Straight Path to Cinema. From Tsaribrod via Sofia to Berlin. " /Institute of Art Studies, BAS, 2023, ISBN:978-619-7619 25-6, which does not repeat the ones submitted in the previous procedures for PhD, Associate Professor and Doctor of Science. The competition dossier also includes seven authored publications: four in Bulgarian, two in English and one in German, carried out after the PhD. The candidate's *publication activity* includes six publications in refereed and indexed or international journals and as many more in international databases in fulfilment of the minimum requirements under the RILADASRB and the additional requirements for the academic position of "professor" under the Regulations on the Conditions and Procedure for the Acquisition of Scientific Degrees and for the Occupation of Academic Positions at the Institute of Art Studies, BAS.

Evaluation of participation in creative and research projects and application of the results obtained.

Assoc. Prof. DSc Al. Donev has participated in a total of ten national and international conferences since his Associate Professorship, with a minimum of seven established in the above-mentioned Regulations of BAS. At all scientific forums he has presented papers in the thematic spectrum of his academic interests, mainly in the field of historical-theoretical studies of Bulgarian cinema and film culture. As a form of realization of the results of the research conducted during this period, is the leadership and participation of the candidate in three projects, in the format of which were held conferences, exhibitions and other events of relevance to the film community.

The visibility of the scientific and creative output is evidenced by the large number of citations listed in detail in the competition documentation and again exceeding the mandatory minimums. One part of the total of 16 citations are in indexed and refereed scientific journals, and the rest in monographs and collective volumes with scientific peer review, which also fulfils the additional requirements introduced by Annex 2 of the Regulations on the conditions and procedure for the acquisition of scientific degrees and for the occupation of academic positions at the Institute of Art Studies, BAS. The numerical values of citations show a significant reflection of the results of the conducted studies in the scientific works of other authors from the academic community.

3. Content analysis of the candidate's academic and applied achievements according to the materials submitted to the competition.

The candidate's published monographic work "**Zlatan Dudow. The Straight Path to Cinema. From Tsaribrod via Sofia to Berlin**" is a historical and theoretical study focusing not only on the biography and creative path of the famous Bulgarian director in the 20th century, but also contains valuable and artistically meaningful analyses of the development of cinema and the formation of a national film culture between the two world wars of the last century. The monograph is distinguished by an original "kaleidoscopic" structure, bringing together a series of historical-biographical studies and articles in a volume of 145 pages of strictly scholarly text, with interesting documentary appendices, a summary in English, a bibliography of 49 sources used and a list of the films mentioned. For the writing of an academic work of this nature, the candidate has conducted impressive archival research in Bulgarian and foreign archives. **The method of modelling** has been successfully used to conduct a biographical study based on verified factual evidence, which not only refutes some false claims about the author of one of the first examples of a quality proletarian film, *Kuhle Wampe*, or *To Whom Does the World Belong?* (1932), but also contributes to rejecting the naive communist ideologization of his image. The text does not pretend

to be an exhaustive and chronological tracing of Zlatan Dudow's life but is written with the inspiration and ambition to recreate a fragmentary "portrait of the filmmaker as a (very) young man", and to trace the process of his life and spiritual maturation. A series of biographical studies reveal the evolution of his conceptual and creative profile: from the dream of a silent film actor to a director with an independent and notable film career. Emphasis is placed on Zlatan Dudow's vivid contribution to the development of an expressive and modern cinematic language, interpreting reality in an unconventional way in line with Sergei Tretyakov's concept of artistic factuality. The aesthetic and ideological influences on his work are explored, especially those of film directors of the rank of Lubitsch, May, and Fritz Lang. The portrait sketches of famous Bulgarian intellectuals who influenced the formation of Zlatan Dudow's views, such as: Tsvetan Radoslavov and Ivan St. Andreychin. Dudow's appearances as a correspondent of "Nashe Kino" in Berlin with an individual critical approach to the training of young talents and "The Social Responsibility of the Film Worker" are given space. It traces his interactions with famous personalities such as Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Krakauer and Theodor Adorno during his years of emigration in Paris and with Luigi Comencini and Alberto Lattuada during his wanderings in Italy. His spiritual kinship, collaboration and great friendship with Bertold Brecht is highlighted, as evidenced by their joint projects and correspondence between 1934 and 1940. As a result of the archival research conducted, the personality of Zlatan Dudow is convincingly presented, without a false ideological halo, as a progressive and free-thinking intellectual with an adventurous spirit and European flair, in love with cinema and truth, inquisitive and uncompromising, and in a more universal aspect as a seeker of "Paths to Strength and Beauty"¹. Newly discovered facts and documents, and the author's analyses in a contemporary context, overcome the cliché of ideological one-dimensionality layered by previous biographers in Dudow's image, and actualize his contributions to the GDR film industry in the post-war years and indirectly to the formation of film culture in Bulgaria. The monographic study, without undue pathos, "revives" the director's long neglected and underrated work. It thoroughly and argumentatively establishes his personality as a "cursed poet", a classic, a forerunner of neorealism, and a cinematographer with a significant contribution to world and Bulgarian cinema. I can summarize that the results of a kind of "film archaeology" have also achieved a more distant goal: to reveal to us "bits of knowledge" about the past, but also about the present.

Herein lies perhaps one of the most important *scientific and theoretical contributions of the monograph*, inextricably linked to our sense of national self-worth and identity

¹ Донеv, А. - „Златан Дудов. Правият път към киното. От Цариград през София до Берлин.//Институт за изследване на изкуствата, БАН, 2023, ISBN:978-619-7619 25-6, с.172

in the larger European family. Other achievements of the work relate to a reassessment and rethinking of political and creative processes in the light of historical retrospect and newly discovered factuality. This is achieved through a new reading of the principle of synchronicity, which gives the work a high degree of relevance and engagement with European and Bulgarian cultural values. Among the *academic and applied contributions* of the text, the volume of the archival research conducted, and the rich scientific apparatus used to reveal the objective truth in historical-theoretical discourse stand out. The documentary materials attached to the text fill information gaps and are useful sources of knowledge about cinematic processes and personalities of the period under study.

The seven publications presented in the competition stand out for the inherent for Assoc. Prof. DSc logical coherence and analytical justification of the theses defended, richness of language and unity of style. **“The emergence of film distribution in Bulgaria as a metamorphosis”** traces the trends and competition in film distribution in the country since the beginning of the last century, following a satisfactory European level and argues for its key importance as a significant segment of the vertical integration of the film industry. The article **“Reasoning and Profile of Bulgarian Socialist Blockbuster Cinema”** examines the creation of Bulgarian super-productions in the 1970s and 1980s as an emanation of the "sunset of communism" and a belated attempt to combine the hysteria of socialist rhetoric with commercial pragmatism and the attitudes of changed audiences. Important implications for the role of the socialist state in modifying historical cinematic productions along the lines of American blockbusters in an evolving and interconnected world of cross-cultural influences are theoretically substantiated. The study **“Gender Gap in the Bulgarian Film Industry”** is co-authored in English and is based on the analysis of survey data from an online survey of 132 members of the film community, 85 of whom are women. The study focuses on the Bulgarian experience of gender inequality in the film industry: causes, consequences and policies to overcome them. The article in German **“Heimat und Ausland. Slatan Dudows Wanderjahre (1919-1946)”** again is dedicated to Zlatan Dudow and more precisely to a specific period of his life of uncertainty, wanderings and forced emigration from the time he left his native town of Tsaribrod until his return to East Berlin in 1946 - a period that marked and largely predetermined his later creative search in cinema. The article interprets source information from French archives about Dudow's stay in Paris when, after *Kuhle Wampe*, he completed and attempted to promote his next film, *Soap Bubbles*. Of interest is the historical reconstruction of the creative tandem with Bertold Brecht and the contacts with leftist intellectuals and anti-fascists that led to police persecution by the French secret services. **“A Short**

Introduction to a Theatrical Memoir” is dedicated to the pioneer of Bulgarian cinema, Vasil Gendov, and is written as a preface to his memoirs. The analysis of the specifics of the autobiographical text is enriched by the interpretation of archival documents, clarifying several factual inaccuracies and details not only about Gendov's personality, but also about the work of traveling theater troupes in the country. A natural continuation of the theme is developed in the article in English **“Vasil Gendov: Towards the theatrical biography of a pioneer of Bulgarian cinema”**. The genesis of the text is again archival research, illuminating Gendov's motivation to pursue art and to seek and find the intersections between cinema and theatre. At the center of Vasil Gendov's **“Bai Ganyo" (1922) - fragment or almost completely preserved, accidentally or deliberately forgotten?”** lies an important research problem related to Gendov's fifth feature film. The hypothesis that this film is almost entirely preserved is convincingly defended, the arguments resting on an analysis of the digitized version of the film, a preserved movie poster, unknown archival documents from the state collection, and a memoir manuscript by Gendov himself. The research thesis is based on scholarly evidence and is accompanied by a critical analysis of the film that situates it in the spirit of the era while simultaneously updating it in a new cultural context. Among the summarized publication contributions, one can highlight the methodological contribution in conducting archival research and the consistent integration of the principle of historicity with scholarly analysis and synthesis. The candidate convincingly demonstrates the ability to work with archival documents, to analyze them with precision and consistency, and to derive scholarly results. Through the application of an interdisciplinary approach and a method of modeling, influences, traditions, and continuities between individuals and phenomena are analyzed, with reasoned references to the contemporary film world and its prospects.

4. Critical comments, recommendations, and personal impressions of the candidate.

The submitted competition materials conform to the generally accepted academic standard and I have no critical comments. My long-standing acquaintance with Assoc. Prof. DSc Alexander Donev and his creative appearances formed my opinion of him as an authoritative scientist with his own style and method of independent research, a smart workaholic with high goals for personal development.

5. Conclusion

From the foregoing it can be concluded that Assoc. Prof. DSc Alexander Donev possesses the skills and meets the regulatory requirements for the academic position of professor in Film Studies, Film Art and Television (History of Bulgarian Cinema

and Cinema Culture), professional field 8.4. I express my **positive assessment** of his election to this position by the Scientific Council of the Institute of Art Studies, BAS.

Date:10.10.2024

Prof. Dr. Mariana Lazarova