



REVIEW

on the competition for the academic position "Professor", announced by D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics - Svishtov

Reviewer: **Prof. Mariyana Varbanova Bozhinova, PhD**, D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics – Svishtov, scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Commerce)", included in the register of the academic staff of the Republic of Bulgaria in the National Centre for Information and Documentation (NACID).

1. Presentation of the candidate

In the announced competition for the academic position "Professor" in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional direction 3.8. Economics, scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Agricultural Economics)" at the Department of Agricultural Economics at D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics – Svishtov, promulgated in the State Gazette issue No 21/07.03.2023, only one candidate participated – Assoc. Prof. Marina Angelova Nikolova, PhD, lecturer in the Department of Agricultural Economics at D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics – Svishtov, who submitted the necessary documents.

2. Reason for writing the review

The review is written based on the Decision of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Industry and Commerce (Protocol No. 8/26.04.2023), Order No. 363/02.05.2023 of the Rector of D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics – Svishtov for determining the composition of the scientific jury, the Regulations for the development of the academic staff at D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics (2021) and Decision of the first meeting of the scientific jury held on 15 May 2023.

3. Personal characteristics of the candidate

The candidate, Assoc. Prof. Marina Angelova Nikolova, PhD, is a lecturer on a permanent employment contract at D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics – Svishtov from 2 October 2006 (according to employment contract No. 1525/02.10.2006). In 1999, Marina Nikolova obtained a doctorate degree (according to diploma No. 26553/21.02.2000) in the scientific specialty "General Agriculture". Marina Nikolova's professional development can be divided into *two main periods, as scientific officer and university lecturer*.

After finishing her first higher education at Higher Agricultural Institute "Vasil Kolarov" – Plovdiv, she acquired the Master's Degree, qualification "engineer – agronomist". During her studies, she worked in a practical environment, as a plant protection agronomist in the Complex Brigade "G. Dimitrov" – Lom and as a Personnel member in Agro-Industrial Complex "Zamfir Hadjiyski". She joined as a scientific officer in 1990, after winning a competition announced by the Agricultural Academy, Sofia – Agricultural Experiment Station, Lom, where she developed in successive steps: *scientific officer III, II and I degrees*,

educational and scientific degree "Doctor" (1999) and scientific title "senior scientific officer second degree", scientific specialty "General Agriculture" (2005).

The second period of Assoc. Prof. Nikolova's professional development is associated with the completion of a second higher education at D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics, Svishtov and obtaining a master's degree, specialty "Economic and Financial Control", in 2004. She is a part-time lecturer at the Department of Agricultural Economics (2004-2006), and in 2006 a competition was announced and she obtained the scientific title of "Associate Professor", scientific specialty "Plant Production" (01.04.14). In 2022, Marina Nikolova was included in the Register of the academic staff of NACID, as a habilitated person with scientometric indicators, with the current academic position "Associate Professor 3.8. Economics".

Assoc. Prof. Marina Nikolova PhD has held management positions as follows: "Deputy Head of Department" of the Department of Agricultural Economics from 19 July 2007 to 13 July 2011; "Head of Department/Group I" of the Department of Agricultural Economics from 12 April 2016 and continues to hold the position (certificate by the governing body of the Academy of Economics). According to the same certificate, as of 04/05/2023, she has total length of service of 39 years, 11 months and 5 days, including in the Academy 16 years, 6 months and 3 days – with a required minimum experience of no less than 5 academic years as an "associate professor" under Art. 129, subparagraph 2, paragraph 3.1 of the Regulations for the development of the academic staff at the D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics from 2021.

According to the submitted Reference for academic workload dated 27 April 2023, Assoc. Prof. Marina Nikolova PhD has an average annual workload for the last five academic years of 497 academic hours of in-class activity (with a required workload of a minimum of 200 academic hours according to Art. 129, subparagraph 2, paragraph 3.2 of the Regulations for the development of the academic staff at the D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics, 2021).

Since 2010, Marina Nikolova has enriched her professional skills with numerous successfully completed trainings in: "Renewable Energy Sources"; "English Level B2"; "Management of International Research Projects"; "Application of the Case Method in Teaching Students of Economics"; "Project Management"; "Trainer of Agro-ecological Activities under the 2007-2013 RDP at the European Alliance for Education"; "Training of Trainers in Eco-Entrepreneurship"; "How to Develop a Business Plan and Apply under RDP"; "Virtual Learning Environment Moodle"; "Objects of Intellectual Property – Essential Aspects and Opportunities for Generating Economic Growth"; "Publication in Referent Editions with an Impact Factor"; "Technology Transfer and Protection and Management of Intellectual Property"; "Training of Trainers – Preparation and Management of International Research Projects"; "Training of Trainers – Basic Course"; "Contemporary Dimensions of Education in the Educational and Scientific Degree "Doctor" in Economics"; "Anti-Plagiarism Training – StrikePlagiarism.com", with which she develops her organisational and communication skills, creates relations and contacts, which she effectively applies when organising the learning process and her participation in independent and team research projects. She also continuously participates in organised seminars, webinars, national and international conferences related to her professional interest. Assoc. Prof. Nikolova completed a short-term specialisation with the aim of teaching under "ERASMUS" at the University of HUELVA, Spain (2012).

The documents presented by the applicant correspond in terms of number and content to the requirements of the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, Regulations on the Implementation of the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and Art. 129 of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics:

- Application to the Rector for admission to the competition;
- Curriculum vitae (Europass);
- Reference of diplomas for higher education, scientific degree, scientific titles and registration in NACID (with attached copies);
- Employment contract for the appointment of an academic position "Associate Professor";
- Copy of the author's abstract for acquiring the educational and scientific degree "Doctor";
- List of publications submitted under the competition for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor";
- List of publications submitted for the competition for the academic title "Associate Professor";
- List of publications submitted under the competition for the academic title "Associate Professor" 3.8;
- Reference of academic workload for the last 5 academic years;
- Certificate of relevant professional experience;
- List of monographic work/s and publications submitted for peer review;
- List of publications submitted for peer review for compliance with the minimum national requirements for field 3 "Social, economic and legal sciences", indicators from 4 to 10;
- Reference to the applicant's citations and reviews in scientific publications for compliance with the minimum national requirements for field 3. "Social, economic and legal sciences", indicators from 11 to 13;
- List of scientific research, educational and/or scientific-applied projects in which the candidate has participated after defending a doctoral thesis and competition for "Associate Professor";
- Reference for scientific research, educational and/or scientific-applied projects of which the candidate was project leader;
- Declaration, signed by the candidate, that no plagiarism in scientific works has been proven, according to the law;
- List of academic textbooks submitted for peer review;
- Reference for developed and taught lecture courses;
- Reference to the scientific and scientific-applied contributions in the publications and materials submitted for peer review;
- References and evidence to them for activities related to the additional indicators under Art. 137, subparagraph 2 (if any):
 - Reference for successfully defended PhD students;
 - Reference for membership in editorial boards of economic journals from the country and abroad, in professional, social, etc. organisations;
 - Reference for consultancy and expertise activity;
 - Reference for prepared reviews;
 - Reference for received certificates;

- Abstracts of the works submitted for review under the competition, which do not repeat those submitted for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" and for the academic position "Associate Professor", on paper and in PDF-format on electronic media (in Bulgarian and in English);
- Originals and/or copies of the publications and materials submitted for peer review on the competition.

In summary, there is a candidate for the academic position "Professor" with extensive teaching, research and practical experience in the field of agrarian business, meeting the requirements of art. 29, subparagraph 1, paragraphs 1 and 2 of the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, art. 60, subparagraph 1, paragraphs 1 and 2 of Regulations on the Implementation of the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and art. 129, subparagraph 2, paragraph 3 of the Regulations for the development of the academic staff at the D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics.

4. Quantitative and qualitative evaluation (analysis) according to the criteria and indicators for the academic work and compliance with the requirements

Assoc. Prof. Marina Nikolova PhD has been teaching since 2004 (2 years as a part-time lecturer at the Department of Agricultural Economics and since October 2006 – full-time lecturer). From the Reference for developed and taught lecture courses, it is evident that the candidate has participated as a head lecturer and co-head lecturer in 15 disciplines of the Bachelor's degree programme and 6 disciplines of the Master's degree programme. A total of 4 of the mentioned lecture courses are also developed in English. At the Center for Postgraduate Studies and Continuing Education (CPSCE), Assoc. Prof. Marina Nikolova is the head of specialisation "Biological Agriculture" and "Eco-Entrepreneurship" and is a leading lecturer in 4 disciplines, with independently developed training programmes (official notice № 14/21.04.2023, CPSCE). According to official notice (№ 6/24.04.2023), prepared by the Centre for Professional Training (CPT), Assoc. Prof. Nikolova is a licensed trainer of the CPT at the National Agency for Vocational Education and Training (NAVET) and has participated as a scientific supervisor and lecturer in qualification courses for part of the profession "Farmer", "Organiser of tourist agency activity", "Economist" in the courses on: "Organisation and Management of a Farm for Aquaculture", "Organisation and Technology of Rural Tourism", "Organisation and Management of Forestry", respectively developed the educational content and curricula of 5 disciplines. All this shows great activity and at the same time is a certificate of her experience as a teacher, with an ecological orientation and interests in current issues in the field of economics and agrarian business management.

The presented autobiography shows her activity in academic work during all the years after entering into the main employment contract at the Academy of Economics (2 October 2006), through participation in the development of independent textbooks and co-authored textbooks, the development of educational curriculum and content of disciplines profiling the specialty in Bachelor's and Master's degree. The subject of the textbooks is closely related to the agricultural sector and they are used in the training of students from the specialty "Agricultural Economics", Master's Programme "Agribusiness".

According to the requirements of Art. 129, subparagraph 2, paragraph 6.1. from the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics,

the candidate should have published at least two independent academic textbooks or participate in no less than four published academic textbooks as a co-author. Assoc. Prof. Marina Nikolova PhD submitted for peer review four independent academic textbooks published in 2012, 2013, 2017 and 2021. The textbook on " Basics of Plant Production ", with a total volume of 496 pages, examines issues related to the use of the soil resource, composition and properties of the soil, agricultural production characteristics of the soil types in Bulgaria, the main agrotechnical methods for maintaining and increasing soil fertility, cultivation technologies for the main groups of agricultural crops, as a condition for high economic results. The second independent textbook is on the discipline "Environmentally Sustainable Development of Agribusinesses", with a total volume of 304 pages. It reflects the possibilities for the introduction of ecological approaches and sustainable development of agrarian companies, the need, conditions and motivation for ecological management of modern farms, the introduction and practice of good agricultural practices, the possibilities of the biological approach in the agricultural sector and environmentally friendly utilisation of crop residues, the main indicators for sustainable development of the modern agricultural enterprise. In the third independent textbook "Agricultural Tourism", with a total volume of 206 pages, issues related to the construction of a complex agro-tourism product, marketing and advertising, the role of state structures and local authorities for the development of agricultural tourism are considered. The fourth independent textbook is "Agroecology", with a volume of 126 pages. It reflects the latest achievements of agroecological science and practice. Issues related to the development of agroecology, the relationship between the environment and agriculture, the possibilities for sustainable use of natural resources and the modern ecological policy for the preservation and protection of the environment, the features of sustainable agriculture, specific practices and others are considered. The four textbooks are peer-reviewed by qualified persons, mostly professors.

In addition to the independent ones, the candidate in the competition also presents 9 co-authored textbooks. They were reviewed and published during the period 2012–2021, being closely related to the specialised nature of the disciplines studied by students in bachelor's and master's programmes, and are also of interest to business managers and entrepreneurs in agrarian business.

According to the requirements of Art. 129, subparagraph 2, paragraph 6.2. from the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics, the candidate should have developed lecture courses, independently or in co-authorship, in no less than 4 (four) academic disciplines for training students in the EQD "Bachelor" or in no less than 2 (two) study disciplines in the EQD "Master", or in 1 (one) study discipline in the educational and scientific degree "Doctor". The candidate has submitted a reference for developed 5 independent lecture courses for training students in the EQD "Bachelor" – "Basics of Plant Production", "Agroecology", "Agricultural Tourism", "Environmentally Sustainable Development of Agribusinesses", "Non-traditional Agricultural Productions" and 10 (ten) in co-authorship ("Introduction to Agribusiness", "Economics of the Agrarian Enterprise", "Rural Development", "Agricultural Entrepreneurship", "Agricultural Management", "Small and Family Agribusiness", "Regulations and Standardisation of Agricultural Production", "Environmentally Sustainable Business Development", "Ecological Tourism", "Entrepreneurship by Economic Sectors"). In the EQD "Master" 5 co-authored lecture courses are presented – "Alternative Sources of Income in Rural Areas", "Diversification – a Tool for Minimising Risk in

Agribusiness", "Localisation of alternative tourism", "Organisation and Management of Protected Natural Resources", and "Digitisation in Agribusiness".

In the References on activities related to the additional indicators under Art. 137, subparagraph 2, defined in the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics – Svishtov, the candidate has submitted a reference for the supervision of 7 (seven) successfully defended PhD students from the doctoral programme "Economics and Management (Agricultural Economics)" – according to Art. 129, subparagraph 2, paragraph 5, candidates must have been supervisors of no less than 4 (four) successfully defended PhD students.

In the Reference for membership in editorial boards of economic journals from the country and abroad, in professional, social, etc. organisations, Assoc. Prof. Nikolova's participation in scientific networks, scientific society, editorial boards and participation in social/professional organisations are presented (reference 20.2. of the document inventory). Marina Nikolova takes an active part in a number of initiatives, for instance in the establishment of the National Association for Forecasting and Planning – Bulgaria (2015), in laying the foundations of a scientific network "Eco-entrepreneurship" with participants from a project implemented between the Institute for the Study of Societies and Knowledge at BAS and the Institute for Energy and Environmental Research (IFEU), Heidelberg, Germany (2015). In COST - European Cooperation in Science and Technology she is a registered COST Expert (<https://e-services.cost.eu/user>), is involved in An International Sustainability Education & Research Network - I.S.L.E. Associate Professor Nikolova is the deputy editor-in-chief of the Annual Almanac "Scientific Research of Doctoral Students" at D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics, member of the editorial board Eastern Academy Journal, Environmental Science and Pollution Research – journal in Scopus (from 02.09.2016) and International Journal of Business and Economics Research (IJBER) – from 13 December 2021. She was a member of the editorial board at the Education and Science Library, Academic Publishing House "Tsenov" Svishtov (June 2011-December 2012), a member of the Academic Council of D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics – (2011-2015), deputy chairman and chairman of the General Assembly of the Faculty of Industry and Commerce. She is a member of the Union of Scientists in Bulgaria, owns ORCID iD (<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1930-9775>), she is registered in the European social network for scientists and researchers – ResearchGate, in Publons. From the reference on expert and consulting activities, prepared by the candidate, it is evident the participation of Assoc. Prof. Nikolova as an expert and consultant in 7 projects, including 1 – to REF (leading expert for the base organisation), 2 – to the Institute of Mountain Agriculture and Livestock, Troyan, 1 – on a programme for research and analysis of data on agriculture in the region of the Belene NPP, 3 – on projects implemented by the Academy of Economics ("Student practices", "New knowledge and skills for successful realization of students from D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics – Svishtov", "Economic education in Bulgaria 2030"). In the project "Eco-entrepreneurship education in three non-capital universities", she is a coordinator – training activities and a trainer, and in a project "Agritourism4eu: Commonalities and Challenges of Sustainable Agritourism Practices in Different Geographic Contexts" (ISLE) participated as a consultant. In addition, for the period 2011–2015, M. Nikolova also carried out consulting activities in a practical business environment, as a consultant to agricultural producers and agrarian companies. The reference for prepared reviews (20.4.) shows the activity of the candidate in the preparation of numerous

reviews in the various sections of the research and publication activity – dissertations, monographs, studies, articles, textbooks, projects. It is noteworthy that she also reviews publications in English in Environmental Science and Pollution Research (journal indexed in Scopus).

In summary, the educational and teaching activities of the candidate are in full compliance with the requirements of Art. 129, subparagraph 2, paragraph 5 and 6 of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics.

5. Quantitative and qualitative assessment (analysis) regarding the criteria and indicators for the research activity and compliance with the requirements

For the competition for the academic title "Professor", Assoc. Prof. Marina Nikolova PhD presented 38 scientific papers, including 1 habilitation thesis – monograph, 1 published chapter in a collective monograph, 26 articles and reports in non-refereed peer-reviewed journals or published in edited collective volumes, 5 articles published in scientific publications, referenced and indexed in world known research databases and 5 studies published in non-refereed peer-reviewed journals or edited collective volumes. All of them do not repeat the provided publications related to the dissertation work or those for the occupation of academic title "Associate Professor" in the scientific specialty "Plant Production" (04.01.14). or as a qualified person with a current academic title "Associate Professor 3.8. Economics", according to prepared Lists of publications, submitted in a competition for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" and for academic positions "Associate Professor" – professional fields "Plant Production" and "Economics".

The papers of Associate Professor Marina Nikolova PhD have not been proven to be plagiarism in accordance with the law, for which a Declaration of Originality has been submitted, which fulfills the requirements of Art. 29, subparagraph 1, paragraph 6 of the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, Art. 60, subparagraph 1, paragraph 6 of Regulations on the Implementation of the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and Art. 129, subparagraph 2, paragraph 2 of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics.

Table 1

**Recapitulation
of publications submitted for review for compliance with
the minimum national requirements for field 3. "Social, economic and legal sciences",
indicators from 4 to 10
of Assoc. Prof. Marina Nikolova, PhD**

Group of indicators (minimum number of points)	Indicator	Number of publications	Number of points
C	3. Habilitation thesis – monograph	1	100

(100 p.)			
Total by group of indicators C:			100 p.
D (200 p.)	6. Articles and reports published in scientific journals, referenced and indexed in world known research databases	5	62.5
	7. Articles and reports published in non-refereed peer-reviewed journals or published in edited collective volumes	26	235.0
	9. Studies published in non-refereed peer-reviewed journals or published in edited collective volumes	5	37.5
	10. Published chapter of a collective monograph	1	20.0
Total by group of indicators D:			355 p.

Of these 38 scientific works, 23 (or 60.5%) are independent, namely: 1 monograph, 21 scientific articles and reports and 1 study. Of the papers submitted for review, 16 were published in English, and 10 of them were published abroad. Of the 5 publications submitted for peer-review in scientific publications, referenced and indexed in world known research databases, 2 are in Scopus - Q1 and Q4, and 3 – in Web of Science (CABI) - Q4. One of the presented co-authored articles (2018) "Coordinating participant relations in the organization and functioning of regional farmer's markets in Bulgaria" was published in a journal abroad with a Global Impact Factor – 0.884. *According to Art. 129, subparagraph 2, paragraph 7 of Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics, the requirement is that the applicants have at least 2 (two) scientific publications in refereed editions in Scopus and/or Web of Science, i.e. there is an overachievement of this mandatory indicator.*

Of the works presented, the most significant is the habilitation work on the topic "Organic Farming – Status and Potential for Development" with a total volume of 211 pages. The work was published in the specialised and prestigious scientific edition of the D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics – Library "Education and Science" and was reviewed by two professors. The monographic work examines the problems and the potential for the development of organic production in Bulgaria, by analysing the dynamics of its development on a national and regional scale; specifying the characteristics of organic farms in an economic aspect; bringing out the main trends in organic production in the Ruse region. The author thoroughly researches the topic, demonstrating skills in skillful handling of scientific concepts, striving for critical analysis of scientific judgments and adhering to a scientific style in the summary. An empirical study was conducted through a questionnaire developed and distributed to a certain number of respondents. It is through the results of the practical research that the problems, state and potential of organic production in a regional scope are highlighted. Based on the conducted survey, recommendations for overcoming the problems and increasing the competitiveness of farms and their long-term sustainability are outlined.

In the presented collective monograph "Utilisation of Plant Biomass through Production of Heat and Power (potential and efficiency assessment)", the candidate participates in writing an independent chapter and separate other items, and includes an assessment of the available and estimated potential of biomass in Svishtov municipality with determination of the theoretical and

realistic capacity of the biomass of cereal crops in the region. On this basis, conclusions and recommendations are made. The monographic works are in accordance with the minimum national requirements in field 3. "Social, economic and legal sciences", according to Art. 2b, subparagraph 2 and 3 of the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (according to Appendix No. 1 – group of indicators C and D10) and Art.129, subparagraph 2 of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics.

The presented 26 articles and reports and 5 studies, published in non-refereed journals with scientific review and in edited collective volumes, meet the minimum national requirements in field 3. "Social, economic and legal sciences", according to Art. 2b, subparagraph 2 and 3 of the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (according to Appendix No. 1 – group of indicators D7 and D9).

Based on the scientific publications submitted for review for compliance with the minimum national requirements for field 3. "Social, economic and legal sciences", indicators from 4 to 10, the following areas in which the applicant's scientific interests are directed can be outlined:

First, on the problems related to the sustainable development and management of agricultural business and rural areas, there are 20 papers – 1 collective monograph, 2 studies (9.4. and 9.5. from Group D, indicator 9 of the List of publications submitted for peer review for compliance with the minimum national requirements for area 3. "Social, economic and legal sciences", indicators from 4 to 10) and 17 articles and reports, of which 2 were published in scientific journals, referenced and indexed in world known research databases (7.3., 7.4., 7.6., 7.9., 7.10., 6.1., 6.3., 6.4., 7.11., 7.14., 7.15., 7.16., 7.17., 7.18., 7.19., 7.21., 7.24. from Group D, indicators 6 and 7 of the List of publications submitted for peer review for compliance with the minimum national requirements for field 3. "Social, economic and legal sciences", indicators 4 to 10).

Second, on the problems related to organic agriculture, its potential on a regional and national scale, the management, the peculiarities of the market and the realization of organic products, the contribution of a sustainable organic production model as a tool for innovative and sustainable development of the territory there are 11 papers, as follows 1 self-published monograph (Group C of the List), 8 articles and reports (7.2., 7.5., 7.8., 7.20., 7.22., 7.23., 7.25., 7.26. from Group D, indicator 7 of the List of publications submitted for review for compliance with the minimum national requirements for field 3. "Social, economic and legal sciences", indicators 4 to 10), 1 independent studies (9.3. of Group D, indicator 9 of the List of publications submitted for review for compliance with the minimum national requirements for field 3. "Social, economic and legal sciences", indicators from 4 to 10) and 1 article in an indexed edition (6.5. of Group D, indicator 6 of the List of publications submitted for review for compliance with the minimum national requirements for field 3. "Social, economic and legal sciences", indicators from 4 to 10).

Third, on the problems of the rural and agrarian tourism business as an economic activity, related to the assessment of market and entrepreneurial niches for the development of rural tourism, the construction of unique tourism products, incl. ecotourism, analysis of opportunities for diversification of the local economy, through additional forms of economic activity, incl. alternative tourism with the possibility of added value in rural areas, there are 5 papers – 2 studies in co-authorship (9.1., 9.2. from Group D, indicator 9 of the List of publications

submitted for peer review for compliance with the minimum national requirements for field 3. "Social, economic and legal sciences", indicators from 4 to 10), 2 articles in journals indexed in global databases (6.2., 6.4. of Group D, indicator 6 of the List) and 1 report (7.13. of Group D, indicator 7 of the List of publications submitted for peer review for compliance with the minimum national requirements for field 3. "Social, economic and legal sciences", indicators from 4 to 10).

Fourth, on the problems of training agricultural economists there are 2 papers – article and report (7.1. and 7.12. from Group D, indicator 7 of the List of publications submitted for peer review for compliance with the minimum national requirements for field 3. "Social, economic and legal sciences", indicators from 4 to 10).

According to Art. 129, subparagraph 4, paragraph 4.3. of Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics, the candidate must have been the head of at least 2 (two) scientific research, educational, scientific-applied projects financed by the Scientific Research Fund of the Academy or 1 (one) national or 1 (one) international project. From the reference for management of research projects, it is clear that Assoc. Prof. Marina Nikolova, after joining the Department of Agricultural Economics, is the head of a total of 9 research projects at the Institute for Scientific Research (ISR), and at the moment she is the head of a three-year project KP-06-H55/ 1 of 11/15/2021 "Development of rural areas in the conditions of an economy transforming towards sustainability", financed by the Scientific Research Fund with the leading beneficiary: D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics – Svishtov" and partners: UNWE – Sofia and UE – Varna. In 5 of the projects financed with funds from the state subsidy for the scientific activity inherent to D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics, Assoc. Prof. Nikolova is a member of the teams (certificate 143/24.04.2023, ISR and reference by the candidate). She also takes an active part in national projects and programs – in 2 of the scientific research projects of the Institute of Mountain Agriculture and Livestock, Troyan, she is a member of the scientific team (official note No. K002-8/28.04.2023), Programme for additional research on a selected site for the construction of the Belene NPP (office memo – 17.01.2011), Project BG051PO001-3.3.07-0002 "Student practices" (certificate No. 93.00-28/05.04.2023), Project BG051PO001-3.1.07-0019 "New knowledge and skills for successful professional realization of students from D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics-Svishtov" (certificate No. 93.00-29/05.04.2023), Project BG05M2OP001-2.016-0004-C01 "Economic education in Bulgaria 2030" (certificate No. 93.00-29/05.04.2023). In 2015-2016, Prof. Nikolova participated as a coordinator of training activities and a trainer in the international Project N 32294/01-4 "Eco-entrepreneurship education in three non-capital universities", a joint project between the Institute for the Study of Societies and Knowledge at BAS and the Institute for Energy and Environmental Research (IFEU), Heidelberg, Germany. All this shows that Associate Professor Marina Nikolova fulfills the requirements, according to the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics, and this proves her skills for realising project ideas, organisational experience, experience in managing teams and projects, as a result of professional development in various fields: agronomist in a practical working environment, scientific officer at the Agricultural Academy and lecturer at D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics - Svishtov.

In summary, it can be claimed that the scientific production in quantitative and qualitative terms is in accordance with the minimum national requirements in field 3. "Social,

economic and legal sciences", according to Art. 2b, subparagraph 2 and 3 of the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and fully meets the conditions for occupying the academic title "Professor", according to Art. 29, subparagraph 1 of the same Act, Art. 60, subparagraph 1 of the Regulations on the Implementation of the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and Art. 129, subparagraph 2 of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics for occupying the academic title "Professor" in the scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Agricultural Economics)".

6. Correspondence of the contributions in the scientific requirements with those announced by the candidate

The publications and materials presented for peer-review by Assoc. Prof. Marina Nikolova, PhD outlined in the Reference for scientific and scientific-applied contributions, according to the requirements of Art. 60, subparagraph 3 under the Regulations on the Implementation of the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and Art. 131 of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics, correspond to achievements contained in the publications submitted for peer-review, being separated into subgroups:

First, as a result of critical analysis, summaries and recommendations regarding the sustainable development and management of agrarian business and rural areas, as the main contribution in a large part of the author's publication activity is the focus on research and application of integrated approaches to improve the management of agrarian business, based on the sustainable development paradigm, with a focus on its long-term prosperity and effectiveness in taking care of the interests of all parties interested in the activity. On this basis, contributions that can be defined as scientific-applied contributions and are related to:

1. Assessment of the available and projected potential of biomass by determining the theoretical and realistic capacity from the biomass of cereals in a specific region and establishing the most rational method of obtaining energy from agricultural biomass with proven efficiency from the utilisation of plant biomass [2];
2. Current problems accompanying the development of agriculture and the sustainable development of agribusiness in Bulgaria have been identified, analysed and evaluated, and specific proposals for their solution based on expert assessments and the needs of agrarian business have been formulated. It has been argued that the implementation of various forms of diversification is a prerequisite for reducing risk and ensuring sustainable development in agriculture and rural areas [6, 11, 16, 20, 21, 23, 26, 27, 33, 36];
3. The factors affecting the price of agricultural land and the rent, the dynamics of trade with agricultural land have been established and the land relations in Bulgaria for a long period have been characterised. Recommendations for correct and timely solutions regarding existing problems and the use of ownership of agricultural land in the Republic of Bulgaria have been formulated [17, 29, 31].

In a large part of this group of publications, contributions that can be defined as scientific contributions and are related to:

1. The specifics in the development of agrarian business in Bulgaria – theoretical aspects, external and internal organisational problems, strategies, environmental policy,

digitalisation, marketing of products, entrepreneurial initiatives, development of innovative and competitive agricultural practices, have been analysed and supplemented [6, 7, 10, 11, 13, 16, 18, 20, 21, 23, 26, 27, 30, 33, 36];

2. The foundations for identifying the theoretical and methodological basis in the management of the sustainable development of rural areas in the Republic of Bulgaria have been laid. The theoretical foundations of sustainable development, the strategic framework, the problems in defining rural territories are argued; the development of alternative tourism as a good practice for diversification in the functional use of the territory [18, 19, 20, 21];
3. It has been added knowledge in modern areas of the agricultural sector – innovative practices, ecosystem benefits, climate change, digital solutions, bio-economy, urban agriculture. The need for managing natural capital and valuing ecosystem services has been proven. The relationship between agriculture and climate change, as well as the role of organic agriculture in mitigating the consequences of climate change have been analysed. [10, 30, 32, 33, 36, 37];
4. For the first time, emphasis is placed on the development of rural territories (from the point of view of the functional use of the territory) in the conditions of transformation of economic systems and the search for sustainable models for their prosperity. An in-depth study on the contribution of a sustainable model of "organic farming" to achieve a multiplier effect for the rural area has been carried out [20, 21, 22, 38];
5. A relationship between sustainable production models in agriculture and the challenges to their development in Bulgaria has been studied and established. It is proven that integrated agriculture is a well-founded model for promoting the sustainable development of smaller farms, while organic production is already an established model and its development is an undisputed priority in Bulgarian agriculture in the future as well [7, 22, 35, 37, 38];
6. It has been proposed a new typology for the regions (NUTS-3) in Bulgaria, regarding the development of agriculture and the degree of use of the agricultural area [20];
7. Barriers and opportunities for investment activity in agrarian business in the context of the CAP and the trends and problems of investments in environmentally friendly agricultural productions have been analysed [11, 16, 23, 27, 36].

Second, in the group of papers related to the economy and management of organic agriculture, the main contribution is the overview and field studies conducted by the candidate and these studies contribute to the confirmation and development of the direction "sustainable development of agrarian business" in the preparation of highly qualified personnel in modern agriculture. The building foundations for the creation of a scientific school at the Department of Agricultural Economics in the field of organic farming, regulation and stimulation of the conditions for environmentally friendly business in the agrarian sector, ecological entrepreneurship have been laid. In part of this group of publications, contributions can be defined as:

Scientific contributions

1. During the period of absence of an official register for organic operators, the dynamics and the potential for the development of organic production on a regional scale, specifying the peculiarities of organic farms in an economic aspect are analysed, and through a

field survey, the main problems and trends in a selected region are identified, which constitutes innovation [1, 34, 35];

2. The challenges in the development of organic agriculture in Bulgaria, the appropriate conditions in our country, based on the territorial location and climate, the productive possibilities and the suitability for growing different plant species, are argued. The most important prerequisites for development and motivation for the development of the sector in our country have been specified [12];

3. Peculiarities in the management of a crop-growing organic farm, as a prerequisite for a balanced economic and social policy in relation not only to the environment, but also to regional competitive advantages and maintaining the vitality of rural areas have been clarified and analysed [9].

Scientific-applied contributions:

4. It has been established that the market of organic products in Bulgaria has enormous potential and opportunities for future development towards improving the value chain in organic production. The problems in the marketing of organic products have been synthesised. Recommendations to improve the measures of the supply chain of organic products in Bulgaria, by targeting a strong horizontal and vertical integration between the key figures in the sector, as well as their inclusion in producer associations of a territorial/regional scope have been formulated [5, 6, 15];

5. The priority of organic agriculture in European, national and local development policies is argued. Subject to in-depth analysis are the characteristics of organic production in the North-Central Planning Region and the North-Eastern Planning Region, depending on the certified activities and the number of organic operators [34, 35];

6. The strategic framework for the future development of organic agriculture and the contribution of a sustainable organic production model as a tool for innovative development of the territory are presented. It is argued the claim that sustainable farming models, as an innovative approach, are of key importance in the transition to a higher degree of sustainability of a healthy and environmentally friendly food system related to the production of products with high added value and sustainable management of natural resources [13, 22, 38].

Third, the main contribution in this group of publications is concerned with upgrading the foundations for the significance of the rural, including agrarian and ecological tourism for the diversification of the rural economy and the creation of unique tourism products, as well as the interrelationship of agriculture – tourism to increase the competitiveness of the local economy. The results are implemented in academic disciplines and current curricula and courses, which can be defined as scientific-applied contributions.

1. A critical analysis of the state and prospects for the development of rural tourism in Bulgaria, an empirical comparison of the approaches to solving problems in countries with experience in the development of rural tourism, an empirical assessment of the market and entrepreneurial niches for the development of rural tourism, an assessment of the readiness of agricultural holdings and the population in rural areas for the development of rural tourism have all been carried out [3];

2. The problems in the construction of the agro-tourism product on a national scale, the participants in the formation and realisation of this product, the target groups, the tangible and intangible qualities of the tourism product have been identified. The steps for building a complex and profitable agro-tourism product and the role of partnership among local government, non-

governmental organisations, tourism companies and suppliers in their joint efforts to provide and promote the product are systematised [4];

3. It has been proven the interrelationship and interdependence between the economic sectors (tourism and agriculture), towards searching opportunities for the development of alternative tourism with the formation of unique tourism products and the application of environmentally friendly agricultural practices, with the aim of achieving a higher standard of living and economic benefits to local communities. The possibilities for diversification of the local economy, through additional forms of economic activity incl. alternative tourism with the possibility of added value in rural areas, have been analysed [18, 19, 21].

Fourth, as the main contribution in this group of publications related to increasing the motivation and satisfaction of students – agricultural economists in the process of their training and successful professional realisation, contributions that are defined as scientific-applied have been made:

1. The necessity of linking the specialised economic training with increasing the early motivation and activity of the students in the educational process has been proven. It has been established that conducting master classes, seminars and visits to a real working environment enriches students' perception of the reality of the environment and increases their chances of successful integration into the labour market [8, 24];

2. Deepening the connection "theory - practice" and adapting the educational process to the needs of business and enriching the educational content of specialised disciplines, through leadership and participation in a number of research projects in the various Bachelor's and Master's degree programmes for the specialty "Agricultural Economics", Master's programme "Agribusiness" and some other specialties of the Academy of Economics [8, 24].

7. Characterisation of the candidate's academic reputation

On the basis of a reference prepared and signed by the Director of the Library at D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics as of 2 May 2023 for the citations in scientific publications from periodicals and in conference proceedings, for compliance with the minimum national requirements for field 3. "Social, economic and legal sciences", according to Art. 2b, subparagraph 2 and 3 of the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, more than 100 citations of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Marina Nikolova, PhD in publications of other researchers and 27 citations in monographs, textbooks and teaching aids of other authors have been identified.

The citations that are included in indicator E (sum of indicators from 11 to 13) are respectively: for indicator E11 – 7 (seven) citations in scientific publications, referenced and indexed in world known research databases, which carries 15 points, for indicator E12 – 15 (fifteen) citations in collective volumes with scientific peer-review, which carries 10 points, with which the candidate completely covers and overlaps the minimum required points under indicator E (100 points), according to Appendix 1 of Regulations on the Implementation of the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria.

8. Critical notes and suggestions

I have no major criticisms. My recommendation to Assoc. Prof. Marina Nikolova, PhD is to maintain her publication activity in refereed scientific publications with Impact Factor and Impact Rank, such as Scopus and Web of Science.

9. Summary conclusion and opinion

Assoc. Prof. Marina Angelova Nikolova, PhD participated in the competition for the academic position "Professor" with a large volume of quality scientific papers. In her research, she demonstrates thoroughness, innovation and analytical thinking, and these include scientific and scientific-applied contributions. In addition, Associate Professor Nikolova has many years of experience in research and teaching. The documents presented by her cover the necessary scientometric indicators and the indicators that reflect the measurable academic results in the teaching activity, laid down in the minimum national requirements under Art. 2b, subparagraph 2 and 3, and Art. 2b, subparagraph 5 of the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria. The candidate fully meets the conditions for occupying the academic position "Professor" in the scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Agricultural Economics)", specified in Art. 29 of the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, in Art. 60 of the Regulations on the Implementation of the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and in Art. 129 of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics.

The above gives me the reason **with full conviction** to propose to the members of the scientific jury that **Assoc. Prof. Marina Angelova Nikolova, PhD be awarded the academic position "PROFESSOR"** in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional direction 3.8. Economics, scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Agricultural Economics)" at the Department of Agricultural Economics, for which I will vote **"YES"**.

Date: 28.05.2023.
Svishtov

Reviewer:
(Prof. M. Bozhinova, PhD)