

REVIEW

From: Prof. DSc. Julia Markova Doitchinova, Professional Field of Economics, Scientific Specialty in Economics and Management (Agricultural Economics), University of National and World Economy

Subject: Competition for the academic position of "Professor"

Candidate: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Marina Angelova Nikolova - the only candidate

Field of higher education: 3. Social, Economic, and Legal Sciences

Professional field: 3.8 Economics

Scientific specialty: Economics and Management (Agricultural Economics)

Higher education institution: Economic Academy "D. A. Tsenov" - Svishtov

Faculty: Production and Trade Business at "D. A. Tsenov" Economic Academy

Department: Agricultural Economics

Announcement: State Gazette, issue 21/07.03.2023

Basis for writing the review: Order No. 363 dated May 2, 2023, by the Rector of "D. A. Tsenov" Economic Academy, and decision of the approved scientific jury as per the mentioned order, dated May 15, 2023.

Requirements regarding the format and content of the review: Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (Art. 2b, para. 2 and 3), Regulation for the Implementation of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (Art. 1a, para. 1 and 2, and appendix by scientific fields and professional fields), Regulation on the Development of the Academic Staff at "D. A. Tsenov" Economic Academy (Art. 129), Structure (exemplary) regarding the format and content of the review, written by a member of the scientific jury, for the appointment to the academic position of "Professor" at "D. A. Tsenov" Economic Academy.

1. Presentation of the candidate's participation in the competition

Marina Angelova Nikolova has obtained two master's degrees - from the Higher Agricultural Institute in Plovdiv and from the Economic Academy "D. A. Tsenov" in Svishtov. In 1988, she acquired the qualification of "Agricultural Engineer," and in 2004, she obtained a degree in Economics with a specialization in "Financial and Economic Control."

At the beginning of April 2023, Assoc. Prof. Nikolova had 39 years and 11 months of experience, including 16 years and 6 months within the Department of Agricultural Economics at the Economic Academy "D. A. Tsenov" in Svishtov.

2. Basis for writing the review

Prof. Dr. Julia Doitchinova, is included in the composition of the scientific jury for the announced competition for the academic position of "Professor" in the Department of Agricultural Economics, based on the order of the Rector of "D. A. Tsenov" Economic Academy, No. 363 dated March 7, 2023. Prof. Doitchinova was chosen as the reviewer during the first meeting of the scientific jury on May 15, 2023.

3. Personal characteristics of the candidate

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Marina Nikolova presents documents for:

- Obtained educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" with a dissertation on the topic "Studies on Some Elements of the Agronomy of Sunflower Hybrids Albena and Super Start under the Conditions of the Carbonate Chernozem in Northwestern Bulgaria," and has a diploma for a Doctor of Science (D.Sc.) issued by the Higher Attestation Commission (HAC) No. 26533 dated February 21, 1999.
- Academic title (scientific position) of "Senior Research Associate, Second Degree" in the scientific specialty 04.01.01 "General Agriculture," Certificate No. 23055 dated June 20, 2005, issued by the HAC.
- Academic title (scientific position) of "Associate Professor" in the scientific specialty 04.01.14 "Crop Science," Certificate No. 23825 dated July 31, 2006, issued by the HAC.
- Additional qualifications as: appraiser of agricultural lands and improvements thereon; Certificate in "Project Management"; Certificate in "Management of International Research Projects"; Certificate in "Application of the Case Method in Economics Student Training"; Certificate in "Publishing Refereed Publications with Impact Factor"; Certificate in "Train the Trainer"; Certificate in conducting courses on "Agroecological Activities" - Measure 214 and non-traditional agricultural activities; Certificate in "Developing a Business Plan and Applying for RDP"; Certificate in "Renewable Energy Sources"; Certificate in "Biogas Installations in Agriculture"; Certificate in "Technology Transfer and Intellectual Property Management"; Certificate of English language training and proficiency, and others.
- Full academic workload with approximately 500 hours per year of classroom teaching in both bachelor's and master's degree programs.

- The academic profile of Assoc. Prof. Nikolova on the website of the "D. A. Tsenov" Economic Academy reflects an impressive number of authored publications: 8 monographs, 14 studies, 62 articles, and 28 textbooks. (<https://www.unisvishtov.bg/bg/profile/m.nikolova/research>)

4. Quantitative and qualitative evaluation (analysis) based on criteria and indicators for educational work and compliance with requirements

4.1. Quantitative evaluation of educational work

Classroom teaching: Throughout each academic year during her employment at the Economic Academy, Assoc. Prof. Nikolova has surpassed the required academic workload by conducting lectures with students in regular and distance learning formats. According to the submitted statement, in the last five consecutive academic years, the candidate has accumulated a total of 2,485 academic hours of classroom teaching. The breakdown is as follows: 2018/2019 - 367 hours; 2019/2020 - 320 hours; 2020/2021 - 535 hours; 2021/2022 - 424 hours; and 2022/2023 - 839 hours or an average of 497 hours of annual classroom teaching in academic education.

Supervision of doctoral students: Assoc. Prof. Nikolova has successfully supervised seven doctoral students who have completed their defenses. Currently, she serves as the academic supervisor for two doctoral students. In some of her research and publications, Assoc. Prof. Nikolova involves doctoral students, supports the development of their research skills, and contributes to their participation in scientific forums.

4.2. Qualitative evaluation of educational work:

The candidate is the author and co-author of 28 educational programs, including 4 in English. The majority of these programs are designed for bachelor's and master's degree programs.

Assoc. Prof. Nikolova is the author and titular of several academic disciplines in which she successfully combines her broad academic background, research activities, and teaching skills. Among the educational disciplines included in the curricula of Agricultural Economics at both the bachelor's and master's degree levels, the following deserve special attention: Introduction to Agribusiness, Economics of Agricultural Enterprises, Fundamentals of Crop and Livestock Farming, Agricultural Ecology, Rural and Agrarian Tourism, Rural Development, Agricultural Entrepreneurship, Ecological and Sustainable Development of Agricultural Enterprises, Agricultural Management, Small and Family Agribusiness,

Digitization of Agribusiness, Non-traditional Agricultural Productions, Regulations and Standardization of Agricultural Production, and more.

The candidate actively participates in the activities of the Center for Postgraduate and Continuing Education at SA "D.A.Tsenov" as a leader of specializations in "Eco-Entrepreneurship" and "Organic Agriculture," and as a lecturer in "Sustainable Development and Eco-Entrepreneurship," "Business Ideas and Business Models in Eco-Entrepreneurship," "Organization and Production of Organic Products," and "Management of Organic Farms."

Assoc. Prof. Nikolova is a licensed trainer at the Vocational Training Center of the Business Academy. She has developed training content and participated as a research supervisor and lecturer in qualification courses for the profession of "Farmer" with a specialization in "Agriculture," the profession of "Tourist Agency Organizer" with a specialization in "Rural Tourism," and the profession of "Economist" with a specialization in "Forestry." These are the courses in the disciplines of "Organization and Management of Aquaculture Farms," "Tour Operator, Agency, and Transportation Activities in Tourism," "Rural Tourism," "Characteristics and Organization of Forestry," and "Technology and Mechanisms of Forestry."

Impressive is the volume of textbooks authored by Assoc. Prof. Nikolova. Out of a total of thirteen published textbooks, she is the sole author of four ("Ecologically Sustainable Development of Agribusiness," "Fundamentals of Crop Production," "Agricultural Ecology," and "Agricultural Tourism").

Conclusion: The documentation provided by the candidate is correct, meets the regulatory requirements, and allows for an informed review for the competition for the academic position of "Professor." Based on the above, I can conclude that there is a candidate with broad and in-depth general economic and specialized preparation and extensive experience as a teacher in the field of agricultural economics, eco-entrepreneurship, and natural resource utilization, who employs a rich arsenal of teaching methodologies and tools.

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

5.1. Quantitative assessment of research activity

Assoc. Prof. Nikolova's scientific interests lie in the field of sustainable management of agricultural business and rural areas, organic agriculture, and alternative tourism. Specifically, she conducts theoretical and empirical research on current issues in contemporary agricultural business, with a focus on sustainable development and management, the development and

transformations in rural areas, environmentally friendly agricultural practices, innovative business models, and more.

The candidate participates in the competition for the academic position of "Professor" with a total of 51 titles that meet the requirements of the current academic standards in the country and the higher education institution.

The scope of scientific publications is structured as follows:

- Monographs: one individual and one collective monograph.
- Articles and papers published in scientific journals, referenced and indexed in globally renowned databases with scientific information: 5 collective articles, with 4 of them as the first author.
- Articles and papers published in non-referenced journals with scientific review or published in edited collective volumes: 26 in total, including 22 individual articles, with 4 of them as the first author.
- Studies published in non-referenced journals with scientific review or published in edited collective volumes: 5, including 2 individual studies and 3 as the first author.
- Published chapter from a collective monograph.
- Academic textbooks and aids: 13 in total, including 4 individual and 9 collective.

A total of 17 publications are presented in English (15 articles and 2 papers).

The presented scientific publications - criteria (group indicators) G amount to 605 points, which represents an overfulfillment of the minimum legal requirements by 300%.

5.2. Qualitative assessment of research activity

Thematically, the candidate's publications are grouped in the field of sustainable management of agricultural business and rural areas, organic agriculture, alternative tourism, and more.

The monographic work "Organic Agriculture - Status and Development Potential" with ISBN 978-954-23-0813-3, Library "Education and Science," 31, Academic Publishing House "Tsenov," Svishtov, 2013, has a volume of 212 publisher pages. The monograph includes an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, references in Bulgarian and English, and internet sources.

The introduction clarifies the relevance of the research, its object and subject. The main goal is defined as the study and assessment of the development possibilities of organic production.

This shapes the role of research - to help improve the competitive advantages of organic farming and outline the opportunities for successful business in a market economy. The three sub-goals and tasks that have predetermined the structure of the monograph are also defined.

The main research thesis connects the development of organic agriculture with the support of the EU for the production of quality and internationally competitive food products, as well as the improvement of efficiency and competitiveness of agricultural farms.

The scientific and applied research results in the monograph are found in the following several directions:

- The monograph is the first comprehensive study of the dynamics and potential for the development of organic production. It was conducted before the establishment of the National Register of Organic Producers. Based on a rich literature review and comparative analysis of organic and conventional agricultural systems, the main reasons for the lack of interest in the development of organic production in Bulgaria during the first program period are systematized.
- The professional training of Assoc. Nikolova has allowed for the skillful combination of biological, technological, economic, and other characteristics and aspects of organic production and the challenges facing the components of the organic agricultural production system. The emphasis is placed on natural resources - soil, water resources, landscape biodiversity, etc., establishing agroecology as a sustainable approach to the development of environmentally friendly agriculture.
- In the last part of the monograph, the potential for the development of agriculture in the Ruse region is presented, analyzed, and evaluated. The state of development of organic production is examined against the background of the general characteristics of agriculture and the development policy in the Ruse region. Based on a questionnaire survey, the advantages of the region for the development of organic farming, the problems, and the possibilities for overcoming them are assessed.

The second presented monograph is collective. The author's participation in Chapter One (1.1.3., 1.1.4., and 1.2., 1.2.1., 1.2.2.) is related to the first goal of the research, namely, the study of the species composition of the plant resource in a wide area around the town of Svishtov in the context of the potential of waste biomass for use in an environmentally friendly

technology for the production of electricity and heat energy. In this context, theoretical aspects of the nature of biomass and its use for energy production, as well as the reasons for the increased interest in this resource, are presented. The focus is placed on the advantages and disadvantages of using biomass as an energy source.

Chapter Two includes an assessment of the existing and projected potential of biomass in the Svishtov municipality, with the determination of the theoretical and realistic capacity of biomass from cereal crops in the specific region. Based on this, significant practical conclusions and recommendations have been made.

The author's participation in Chapter Three is reflected in the analysis of technologies for the production of electricity and thermal energy from waste biomass, as well as the summarized conclusions from the study.

Based on this, it has been proven that it is economically efficient to build power plants with smaller capacities (3-5 MW) and transport the biomass to the plant within a radius of 50 km. Combined production of energy (thermal and electric) from agricultural biomass has been recommended for the research area. In this case, the efficiency is higher, and practical heat losses are minimal.

The main focus of the candidate's scientific work is on the issues of sustainable development of agricultural businesses and rural areas. In this regard, special attention should be given to the obtained results and contributions related to:

1. Justifying the need for sustainable development of agriculture, environmentally friendly production, environmental sustainability of agricultural farms, the development of organic farming, and ecological entrepreneurship. Economic uncertainty and the impact of agriculture on the environment are presented as prerequisites for supporting farmers, as well as for the coordinated efforts of all stakeholders for the future development of the sector. [Publications No. 6, 7, 10, 11, 13, 16, 18, 20, 21, 23, 26, 27, 30, 33, 36 from the candidate's publication list]
2. Studying and establishing the link between sustainable production models in agriculture and the challenges they face in their development in Bulgaria. It is proven that integrated agriculture is a well-justified model for promoting sustainable development in smaller farms, while organic production is an established model, and its development is a priority in Bulgarian agriculture. [7, 22, 35, 37, 38]
3. Identifying the factors influencing the price of agricultural land, rent, and the dynamics of land trade. "The dynamics in land relations during the years of a free market economy have been established and analyzed, and the increase in concentration

and consolidation of land use is justified, regardless of the fragmented number of agricultural properties. [17, 29, 31]"

4. Further development and enrichment of the theoretical and methodological foundations for managing sustainable development in rural areas in Bulgaria. Based on the problems in defining rural territories and diversification in their functional land use, it is argued that sustainable development management is based on collaboration between government authorities, local communities, and businesses to diversify the functional land use and optimize the utilization of available resources. [18, 19, 20, 21]

5. The development of rural areas (in terms of functional land use) is interpreted in the context of economic system transformations and the search for sustainable models for their prosperity. In this regard, the contribution of the sustainable model of "organic farming" is evaluated for achieving a multiplier effect for the rural area, as well as the interconnection between organic farming and alternative tourism. [20, 21, 22, 38]

6. Development and proposal of a new typology for regions (NUTS-3) in Bulgaria regarding the development of agriculture and the extent of agricultural land use. [20]

7. Identification, analysis, and assessment of various diversification forms as a prerequisite for risk reduction and ensuring sustainable development in agriculture and rural areas. [6, 11, 16, 20, 21, 23, 26, 27, 33, 36]

8. Analysis and assessment of the development of farmers' markets and identification of administrative and legal constraints on the organization of farmers' markets in Bulgaria. These findings can be used to improve the organization of farmers' market activities. [28]

9. Evaluation of the activity of local communities and the role of local government in promoting entrepreneurial initiatives aimed at territorial development and the preservation and popularization of local identity. [26]

10. Further development and enrichment of knowledge about the need for natural capital management and the valuation of ecosystem services. Based on this, the relationship between agriculture and climate change is analyzed, as well as the role of organic farming in mitigating the consequences of climate change. [10, 32, 37]

11. Evaluation of best practices for successful digital solutions in the implementation of agricultural products, land management, and the use of modern agricultural software systems. [33]

12. Demonstrating the potential of urban agriculture in urbanized areas through the utilization of available rooftop spaces, suitable indoor environments in buildings, and the use of areas in suburban and abandoned zones. [30]

It can be summarized that the candidate's predominant publication activity in the first scientific field is focused on researching and implementing integrated approaches to improve agricultural business management based on the paradigm of sustainable development, with a focus on its long-term prosperity and effectiveness in caring for the interests of all stakeholders involved in the activity.

The second thematic field is economics and management of organic farming. The following results have contributed to the scientific significance:

1. Dynamics and development potential of organic production on a regional scale have been analyzed and assessed. The main reasons for the relatively low prevalence of organic farms in the early years of EU membership have been systematized. [1, 34, 35]

2. Organic production is justified as a model for sustainable land use in contemporary agriculture. Challenges in the development of organic farming in Bulgaria, considering the territorial location and climate, productive possibilities, and suitability for cultivating different plant species, have been evaluated. Based on this, the main prerequisites for the sector's development and motivation for its growth in our country have been specified. [12]

3. The potential of the organic products market in Bulgaria and the possibilities for future development in improving the value chain in organic production have been demonstrated. Recommendations for improving measures in the supply chain of organic products in Bulgaria have been formulated based on synthesized problems encountered in the implementation of organic products, including horizontal and vertical integration among key stakeholders in the sector and their involvement in territorial/regional producer associations. [5, 6, 15]

4. The priority position of organic farming in European and national development policies is argued, clarifying its contribution to the sustainable development of regional bioeconomy and its role in mitigating the consequences of climate change. [32, 37]

5. The strategic framework for the development of organic farming and the contribution of the sustainable model of "organic production" as a tool for innovative territorial development has been developed. These developments can be utilized in shaping regional policies. [13, 22, 38]

In conclusion, the candidate's conducted review and field studies, published results, dissemination of findings in scientific forums, creation of new educational programs, development of courses, scientific guidance for successfully defended doctoral students contribute to the establishment and development of the "sustainable development of agricultural business" field in the preparation of highly qualified personnel in modern agriculture. The foundations for creating a scientific school within the "Agricultural Economics" department in the field of organic farming and ecologically sound business in the agricultural sector have been practically laid.

The third group of publications is dedicated to alternative tourism. The author's achievements can be evaluated as further development and enrichment of knowledge regarding the significance of rural, including agricultural and ecological tourism, for diversifying the rural economy and creating unique tourism products. Specifically:

1. A critical analysis of the state and prospects of rural tourism in Bulgaria has been conducted, empirical evaluation of market and entrepreneurial niches for rural tourism development, assessment of readiness of agricultural farms and rural populations for rural tourism development. [3]

2. Problems in constructing agrotourism products on a national scale, participants in the formation and implementation of such products, target groups, etc., have been identified. The steps for developing a complex and successful agrotourism product and the role of partnership relationships between local authorities, non-governmental organizations, tourism companies, and suppliers in their joint efforts to provide and promote the product have been systematized. [4]

3. The interconnection and interdependence between the economic sectors of tourism and agriculture in seeking opportunities for alternative tourism development and achieving a higher standard of living and economic benefits for local communities have been demonstrated. Based on this, the possibilities for diversifying the local economy through additional forms of economic activity, including alternative tourism with potential added value in rural areas, have been assessed. [18, 19, 21]

4. A model for sustainable development of ecotourism has been developed, based on established global criteria for sustainable tourism. The inclusion and

implementation of individual indicators could lead to the creation of unique ecotourism products in specific regions. [25].

The fourth research direction includes publications on the issues of student motivation and satisfaction in the process of their education. They have demonstrated the need to link specialized economic training with increasing early motivation and student activity in the educational process. It has been found that conducting workshops, seminar sessions, and visits to real work environments enriches students' understanding of the reality of the field and enhances their chances of successful integration into the labor market. [8, 24]. In this regard, the deepening of the "theory-practice" relationship and the adaptation of the educational process to the needs of the business through enriching the curriculum of specialized disciplines and participation in numerous research projects in different Bachelor's and Master's degree programs in the field of Agricultural Economics, Agricultural Business, and other related specialties at the Faculty of Agriculture are of crucial importance. [8, 24].

The application documents also include information about the candidate's participation in national, international, and university projects. Some of the more significant ones are: "Study and Analysis of Data on Agriculture in the Belene NPP Region"; Project "Agritourism4eu: Commonalities and Challenges of Sustainable Agritourism Practices in Different Geographic Contexts," ISLE; Project J 164 "Rational System for Livestock Production Using Pasture Vegetation in Mountain Ecosystems," IPZH - Troyan; Project "System for the Production of High-Quality Beef Linked to Raising Cattle of the Introduced Japanese Wagyu Breed, Utilizing Natural and Artificial Grass Communities in Mountain Regions of Bulgaria"; Project BG051RO001-3.3.07-0002 "Student Internships"; Project "Education in Ecopreneurship in Three Extramural Universities," SA "D. A. Tsenov"; Project BG051PO001-3.1.07-0019 "New Knowledge and Skills for Successful Implementation of Students from SA 'D. A. Tsenov' - Svishtov"; Project BG05M2OP001-2.016-0004-C01 "Economic Education in Bulgaria 2030".

Assoc. Prof. Nikolova is the project leader of "Development of Rural Areas in the Context of a Transforming Towards Sustainable Economy," funded by the "Scientific Research Fund." It is the first national project in the field of rural development, developed by the respective specialized departments in the three higher economic institutions, as well as eight university projects.

The candidate is the author of 93 reviews of monographs, dissertations, studies, articles, and scientific reports. Among them, 11 are in English for authoritative scientific journals.

Assoc. Prof. Nikolova has extensive consulting experience, as evidenced by a reference for advising farmers and agricultural companies from the Ruse and Shumen regions.

6. Administrative and Public Activities

Assoc. Prof. Nikolova actively participates in the organizational life of the higher education institution, holding various managerial and leadership positions. The administrative positions at "D.A. Tsenov" Academy of Economics that she has held and currently holds are: Deputy Director (May 2007 - July 2011) and Head of the Department of Agricultural Economics at "D.A. Tsenov" Academy of Economics (since 2016); Deputy Chief Editor of the Annual Almanac "Scientific Research of Doctoral Students" at "D.A. Tsenov" Academy of Economics; Member of the Editorial Board of the Library "Education and Science," AI "Tsenov" Svishtov (from June 2011 to December 2012); Member of the Academic Council of "D.A. Tsenov" Academy of Economics (2011 to 2015); Deputy Chairman and Chairman of the General Assembly of the Faculty of Agriculture and Food Industry; Member of the Master's Council, and more.

7. Professional Engagement in Practice outside Academic Work

The candidate is a member of three editorial boards of scientific journals - Eastern Academy Journal (since December 2015), Environmental Science and Pollution Research - Scopus (since September 2, 2016), and International Journal of Business and Economics Research (IJBER) - since December 13, 2021.

Participation as a member (professional organization): National Rural Network - Bulgaria - since 2014; Union of Scientists - Bulgaria since 2013; National Branch Union "VON" - KNSB - Bulgaria; I.S.L.E Education for Sustainability Network. An International Sustainability Education & Research Network - since 2021.

Assoc. Prof. Nikolova is the initiator and organizer of various celebrations in the Department of Agricultural Economics: Exhibition "Autumn Farmer's Market" - Svishtov; Professional holiday of those working in the field of agricultural science; International Earth Day, and other joint initiatives.

8. Compliance of the contributions of scientific research with the announced competition and the candidate's academic reputation

The contributions mentioned by the candidate accurately and objectively reflect the most significant results of her research work. All of them fall within the scope of the announced competition for a professorship in agricultural economics.

The application documents include seven citations in scientific publications, referenced and indexed in world-renowned scientific databases or in monographs and collective volumes, as well as 15 citations in monographs and collective volumes with scientific reviews.

9. Fulfillment of the minimum national scientometric requirements and the requirements of the Rules of the Economic Academy for publications and scientific activities for the position of "Professor"

Assoc. Prof. Marina Nikolova significantly exceeds the minimum national requirements for the position of "Professor." The information in the table demonstrates a substantial surpassing of the requirements for indicators E and G, related to doctoral supervision, project activities, textbooks, and publications.

Indicator Group	Minimum Requirements (points)	Candidate's Results (points)	%
A	50	50	100
B	100	100	100
Г	200	355	177
Д	100	255	255
E	100	509.3	509.3
Total		1269.3	230,7

10. Critical Notes and Suggestions

I have no significant remarks regarding the scientific production provided by the candidate for review. My recommendation is to expand the publication activity with articles indexed in SCOPUS/WoS, which will increase their visibility and citations.

Conclusion

The scientific results in Assoc. Prof. Nikolova's research demonstrate scientific originality, depth, and research maturity. The submitted scientific works for the competition significantly exceed the requirements of the regulatory framework. Their qualitative characteristics, the contributions they contain, and their potential for practical application prove the candidate's unquestionable research, teaching, and consulting skills. Considering all of the above, in my capacity as a member of the scientific jury, I urge my colleagues on the jury to give our positive vote and propose to the Faculty Council of the "Production and Trade Business" Faculty at "D.A. Tsenov" Academy of Economics to appoint Assoc. Prof. Dr. Marina

Angelova Nikolova to the academic position of "Professor" in professional field 3.8 Economics, scientific specialty: Economics and Management (Agricultural Economics).

May 25, 2023

Sofia

Reviewer:

(Prof. DSc. Julia Doitchinova)