

REVIEW

By: prof. dr. Zornitsa Dimova Stoyanova, Professional field of Economics, scientific specialty Economics and Management (Agrarian and Environmental Management), University of National and World Economy

Subject: competition for the academic position "professor"

Candidate: assoc. prof. dr. Marina Angelova Nikolova - only candidate

Field of high education: 3. Social, economic and legal sciences

Professional direction: 3.8 Economics

Scientific specialty: Economics and Management (Agrarian Economics)

High school: Academy of Economics "D. A. Tsenov", Svishtov

Faculty: Production and commercial business at AE "D. A. Tsenov"

Department: Agrarian Economics

Announcement: State Gazette, № 21/07.03.2023

Reason for writing the review: Order № 363 of 2 May, 2023 of the Rector of the AE "D. A. Tsenov" and the decision of the scientific jury from 15.05.2023 confirmed by the Order.

Requirements regarding the form and content of the review: Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (Article 2b, Paragraphs 2 and 3), Regulations for the Implementation of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (Article 1a, Paragraph 1 and 2 and application by scientific fields and professional fields), Regulations for the development of the academic staff in the AE "D. A. Tsenov" (art. 129). Structure (example) regarding the form and content of the review written by a member of the scientific jury, for the occupation of the academic position of "professor" in the AE "D. A. Tsenov".

1. Presentation of the candidate for participation in the competition, the scientific specialty and the department for the needs of which the competition is being announced

Assoc. prof. dr. Marina Nikolova is the only candidate in the announced competition for the academic position "professor" in the field of high education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional direction 3.8 Economics, scientific specialty Economics and Management (Agrarian Economics) for the needs of the Department "Agrarian Economics", Faculty of "Manufacturing and Commercial Business" at the Academy of economics "D. A. Tsenov", Svishtov.

1. Reason for writing the review

The review was prepared according to Order № 363 of 2 May 2023 of the Rector of the Academy of economics "D. A. Tsenov", the decision of the Scientific Jury confirmed by the said order dated from 15 May 2023 and based on the List of documents submitted by the candidate for the competition.

2. Personal characteristics of the candidate

Assoc. prof. dr. Marina Nikolova graduated her secondary education in 1981, Polytechnic High School "Naiden Gerov", town of Lom. In 1988, she completed her first high education at HAI "Vasil Kolarov" - Plovdiv, obtaining a master's degree, qualification "engineer - agronomist". In 2004, she graduated from AE "D. A. Tsenov" as a Master of Economics, specialty Economic and Financial Control. On the basis of a defended PhD thesis on the topic "Researches on some elements of the agrotechnics of the Albena and Super Start sunflower hybrids under the conditions of carbonate chernozem in North-Western Bulgaria", in 1999, she got the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the scientific specialty "General agriculture", professional direction 6.1. Crop production.

Assoc. prof. Nikolova has extensive professional experience. She started her working career in 1985 in the agricultural complex "Zamfir Hadjiyski", Lom, as an employee in the administration. During the period 1987-1990, Marina Nikolova worked in the Complex Brigade "G. Dimitrov" - town of Lom as a plant protection agronomist. In 1990, associate professor Nikolova's scientific and research career began. For the period 1990-1995, she successively occupied the positions of research assistant III, II and I degrees. In 2005, she received the scientific title "senior research associate second degree", specialty "General Agriculture", and in 2006 - the scientific title "associate professor", scientific specialty "Crop production". Marina Nikolova's position since 2006 is associate professor.

Confirmation of the authority of Marina Nikolova among her colleagues are the positions she holds, as from May 2007 to July 2011 she took the position of deputy head of the Department of Agrarian Economics, and from 2016 till now she is the head of the department. She speaks English and Russian. Assoc. prof. Nikolova have various certificates and licenses such as: license for expert that evaluate agricultural lands, improvements and plantings on them; training certificate in a course on "Renewable energy sources" (RE), incl. biomass; certificate of participation in the "Sustainingas" seminar - Biogas installations in organic agriculture; certificate for management of international research projects; project management certificate;

certificate for trainer in agro-ecological activities under RDP 2007-2013 at the European Alliance for Education, Samokov - 2014. Nikolova has a short-term specialization at the University of HUELVA, Spain in 2012.

3. General (quantitative and qualitative) assessment of the educational - teaching work in accordance with the requirements

For participation in the competition, the candidate for the academic position "professor" presents thirteen textbooks, four of which - Agricultural tourism, Environmentally sustainable development of the agricultural company, Basis of crop production and Agricultural ecology are independent, and the remaining 9 are co-authored.

The textbook Agrarian tourism provides valuable knowledge about the characteristics and peculiarities of rural and agrarian tourism, in accordance with the curriculum of the discipline of the same name, taught by associate professor Nikolova. The possibilities for the development of alternative tourism are considered, the issues related to the construction of a complex agrotourism product and connected with it marketing and advertising, as well as the role of state structures and local self-government bodies for the development of agrarian tourism are considered.

Of interest is the textbook Agrarian Ecology published in 2021. It is intended for distance learning students, AE "D. A. Tsenov" Svishtov. Current issues related to agroecology, the development of agrarian ecology, sustainable use of natural resources are presented in the textbook. Sustainable agriculture, good practices in crop and animal husbandry, restoration and improvement of damaged agricultural lands logically found place in it.

From the official documents presented by the candidate, it is established that assoc. prof. dr. Marina Nikolova, as a full-time teacher at the "Agrarian Economics" department, has a sufficient academic load in the Bachelor's and Master's degree. The auditorium occupancy of associate professor dr. Nikolova during the last five academic years is 2485 hours, by year respectively: 2018/2019 - 367 hours; 2019/2020 academic year - 320 academic hours; 2020/2021 - 535 hours and, respectively, during the next two academic years, Prof. Nikolova's auditorium occupancy is 424 and 839 hours. She has led lectures in more than 20 disciplines, some of which are: Introduction to agribusiness, Economics of agrarian enterprise, Basis of crop production and animal husbandry, Agrarian ecology, Rural and agrarian tourism, Rural development, Agricultural entrepreneurship, Ecological and sustainable development of the agricultural company, Agrarian management, Small and family agribusiness, etc. The analysis of the candidate's educational and teaching activities in the above mentioned disciplines shows

her academic competence in the scientific specialty of the announced competition - Economics and Management (Agrarian Economics).

As a contribution to the educational and teaching work of assoc. prof. Nikolova, her work with PhD students can be mentioned. She has 7 successfully defended PhD students, and is currently a supervisor of two full-time PhD students.

The publications: "Opportunities to increase the quality of professional training and student motivation" and "Opportunities for business participation in the training and realization of agrarian economists" show the commitment of associate professor Nikolova and her responsible position for increasing the motivation and satisfaction of students in the process of their training.

It can be summarized that assoc. prof. dr. Marina Nikolova has extensive teaching experience and a high degree of preparation for the academic position "Professor", which give me grounds to give a positive assessment of the candidate's educational and teaching work and her contribution to increase the quality of students' education. The candidate's academic competence fully corresponds to the scientific specialty "Economics and Management" (Agrarian Economics).

4. General (quantitative and qualitative) assessment of scientific research in accordance with the requirements

For participation in the competition, assoc. prof. Nikolova submitted 51 scientific publications, and the list includes:

- Monographs and separate parts of monographs – assoc. prof. dr. Marina Nikolova participated in the competition with two monographs. The first one is independent and is the main habilitation thesis for the competition. It is on the topic "Organic agriculture - state and potential for development" in a volume of 211 pages, and the second is co-authored.
- Scientific papers in publications referenced or indexed in the world databases Scopus and/or Web of Science – 5 issues, all co-authored and in English;
- Studios - 5 issues, one of them independent and 4 co-authored. The independent publication is published in English;
- Scientific conference reports: a total number of 16 issues, 15 are independent and 1 is co-authored.
- Textbooks – 13 of which 4 independent and 9 co-authored.

From the 51 publications submitted for review, 27 (53%) are independent, and the rest are co-authored. Seventeen (33%) of the publications are in English and articles published in

Skopus are in Skopus Q2 and in Web of science are in Q4. On this basis, it can be concluded that in the structure of the types of publications, slightly more than half are independent and one third of the total number of publications is in English. In thematic and content terms, assoc. prof. Nikolova groups her scientific production in the following 4 directions:

- "Sustainable development and management of agrarian business and rural areas" - 24 publications with number from the list 2, 6, 7, 10, 11, 13, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 26, 27, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 36, 37 and 38;

- "Biological agriculture - economics and management" - 13 publications with numbers 1, 9, 12, 13, 15, 22, 32, 34, 35, 37 and 38;

- Alternative tourism - 6 publications with numbers 3, 4, 18, 19, 21 and 25;

- Increasing the motivation and satisfaction of students in the process of their education with numbers 8 and 24.

From the presented information, it can be summarized that the topics dedicated to the sustainable development and management of agrarian business and rural areas occupy a major place in the candidate's work. Of these publications, the collective monographic work dedicated to the utilization of plant biomass through the production of heat and electricity deserves attention. The publications from this scientific direction are a significant part of assoc. prof. Nikolova's research activity, related to the specifics of the development of agrarian business in Bulgaria, the factors affecting the price of agricultural land and rent, the dynamics of agricultural land trade, land relations, innovative agricultural practices, the relationship between the agrarian sector and ecosystem benefits, climate change and digital solutions. In this thematic direction, analyzes related to the development of rural areas in the conditions of transformation of economic systems and the search for sustainable models are of interest.

Original in design are the publications connected with the dynamics and potential for the development of organic production, the specifics of managing a crop-growing organic farm, the market for organic products, the contribution of organic production to the sustainable development of the regional bioeconomy.

Topics related to alternative tourism occupy a suitable place in the works of assoc. prof. Nikolova. With a practical-applied aspect, the critical analysis of the state and prospects for the development of rural tourism in Bulgaria, the analysis of the entrepreneurial niches for the development of rural tourism and the assessment of the readiness of agricultural holdings and the population in rural areas for the development of rural tourism have been carried out.

The monographic work of assoc. prof. dr. Marina Nikolova entitled "Biological agriculture - state and potential for development" should be highly appreciated. It was published

in 2013 by Academic Publishing House "Tsenov" Svishtov, ISBN 978-954-23-0813-3. The monograph contains: introduction, three chapters, conclusion, references and appendices. The introduction argues the relevance of the researched problem, formulates the goal and tasks for its realization, as well as the thesis of the research. The state and potential for the development of organic agriculture in the farms that make the transition from conventional to organic production, and in those that are already certified for the production, processing and trade of organic products, are investigated. The first chapter is devoted to the characteristics and peculiarities of organic farming. A special place is given to ecological agriculture, agroecology, the peculiarities of organic agriculture and its advantages. In the second chapter, the development of bio production is presented through an overview of the new challenges to the components of the organic farming system. Emphasis is placed on the need for change in terms of impacts on soil, biodiversity in agro-ecosystems, water resources and the landscape. An analysis and evaluation of organic production on a national scale for the period 2006-2011 was carried out and strategies for increasing the sustainability of farms producing organically were substantiated. In the third chapter, entitled "Potential for the development of organic production in the Ruse region", a study was carried out with the aim of presenting a picture of the state and potential of organic production in the regional scope. The state of organic farming, trends, the structure of organic farms, distribution of land ownership in organic farms in the Ruse region, etc. have been analyzed. The assessment of the development of organic farms was carried out through a survey, outlining their problems and preparing recommendations to overcome them.

From the list submitted by the candidate with the publications or review for compliance with the minimum national requirements for area 3. "Social, economic and legal sciences", professional direction 3.8. Economics, it becomes clear that according to the National minimum requirements according to the LDASRB (Art. 2b) and the Regulations for its application (Art. 1a, para. 1), the results of the candidate assoc. prof. dr. Marina Nikolova have a total of 1256.03 points (at national minimum 550 points), of which for: Group A – 50 (50), Group B – none, Group C – 100 (100), Group D – 355 (200), Group D – 255 (100), Group E – 509.03 (100). Candidate assoc. prof. dr. Marina Nikolova has a high total score, which is about two and a half times above the required national minimum.

Group of indicators	Content	Professor	Points of assoc. prof. dr. Marina Nikolova
A	Indicator 1	50	50
B	Indicator 2	-	-
C	Indicator 3	100	100
D	Sum of indicators from 4 till 10	200	355
E	Sum of indicators from 11 till 13	100	255
F	Sum of indicators from 14 till the end	100	509.03
Total		550	1269.03

In the list of publications submitted for review for compliance with the minimum national requirements for area 3, "Social, economic and legal sciences", professional direction 3.8. Economics, Nikolova presents a scientific research project funded by the Scientific Research Fund No. KP-06-H55/1 (15.11.2021 - 15.11.2024) Development of rural areas in the conditions of an transforming economy towards sustainability, of which she is the team leader.

The candidate has a rich consulting and expert activity. She participated as an expert in the projects "Research and analysis of data on agriculture in the region of Belene NPP", "Rational system for the production of cattle production using pasture grasses in the mountain ecosystems" at IMLA - Troyan, "Production system of high-quality cattle production related to raising cattle of the Japanese Wagu cattle breed, utilizing natural and artificial grass communities in the mountainous regions of Bulgaria" etc. Nikolova was a consultant to farmers and companies operating in the agrarian sector. Some of them are AP "Tsvetan Kanchev Ivanov", Novi Pazar, "Agroned" EOOD, Chervena Voda, ZP "Diana Ivanova Trinchova", Slivo Pole, AP "Danael Stefanov Ivanov", Ruse, AP "Emiliyan Tsvetanov Kaney", Novi Pazar, "Kanevi-Agrotour" EOOD, Novi Pazar, AP "Anton Ivanov Karaivanov", Ruse, EMS Agro-EOOD, Ruse.

The publications presented by assoc. prof. Marina Nikolova for review clearly show the scientific interests of the candidate for the academic position "professor" and they are mainly focused on the development and management of agrarian business, the development of rural areas, the problems, opportunities and challenges of organic production. Prof. Nikolova shows a good knowledge of the theoretical achievements in the studied areas and has a great scientific potential for interpretations related to the areas in which her scientific interests are.

It can be concluded that the subject of assoc. prof. Nikolova's research corresponds to the scientific specialty of Economics and Management (Agrarian Economics) and the peer-

reviewed scientific production fully meets the requirements for occupying the academic position "professor". The inquiry made reveals that the scientific production of assoc. prof. dr. Marina Nikolova and the presented publications exceed the minimum national requirements for occupying the academic position "professor" in the field of Economics, scientific specialty Economics and Management (Agrarian Economics).

6. Scientific contributions and compliance with the achievements announced by the candidate

I agree with the proposed from Marina Nikolova list for the contributions, that could be found in her scientific production. She presented in detail the main theoretical-methodological, methodological and practical - applied contributions, which are contained in the publications presented for participation in the competition. The contributions are classified in scientific directions.

Theoretical - methodological scientific results that have the character of further development, enrichment and systematization of theoretical knowledge related to the sustainable development and management of agrarian business and rural areas are:

- The theoretical and methodological basis of: 1) the sustainable development of agriculture in the context of environmentally friendly production and the ecological sustainability of agricultural holdings; 2) organic farming and the market of organic products; 3) ecological entrepreneurship; have been clarified and enriched.

- The theoretical views on topics related to innovation and innovative practices, ecosystem benefits, climate change, digitalization have been expanded and further developed.

- Views on the development of rural areas in the conditions of the transforming economy towards sustainability have been further developed, looking for sustainable models for the development of the regions.

- The relationship between organic production and the sustainable development of the regions, the possibility of increasing the added value and achieving sustainable management of natural resources has been clarified.

- The opinions of the authors on the issues of rural tourism, on its significance for the diversification of the rural economy and the creation of unique tourist products, have been clarified and further developed.

The methodological contributions of assoc. prof. Nikolova are related to empirical researches, analyzes and assessments of the state and development of the agricultural sector,

organic production, rural tourism in the context of sustainable development. They can be summarized as follows:

- A methodology has been developed for researching the effects of digitization, innovations, entrepreneurial initiatives and environmentally friendly agricultural practices on the sustainable development of the agricultural sector and rural areas.

- The methodical steps of setting the price of agricultural land and the rent, the dynamics of trade with agricultural land and the specifics of land relations in Bulgaria are defined.

- An original innovative methodology is proposed for research the relations between agriculture and climate change, as well as organic farming and its role in mitigating the consequences of climate change, as well the significance of organic agriculture for the development of the bioeconomy.

- A methodical approach has been developed and applied to analyze and evaluate the dynamics and potential for the development of organic production on a regional scale by identifying the peculiarities of organic farms in an economic aspect and identifying the main problems and trends in a selected region.

- An innovative methodological framework was applied for the construction of the agritourism product on a national scale by determining the participants in the formation and implementation of this product, the target groups, the relationships between local authorities, non-governmental organizations, tourist companies and suppliers by identifying its qualities.

The scientific - applied contributions of assoc. prof. Nikolova can be outlined on the basis of original practical and applied solutions, which are contained in the candidate's scientific publications and they have practical application. They can be synthesized as follows:

- A new typology was proposed for the regions (NUTS-3) in Bulgaria, regarding the development of agriculture and the degree of use of the agricultural area, justifying the thesis that the development of agriculture depends on the level of the used agricultural area. Guidelines are given for diversifying activities in agricultural holdings and combining them with other activities in backward regions where the used agricultural area is a limited resource.

- Guidelines and recommendations for improving the measures of the supply chain of organic products in Bulgaria are proposed. They are related to strengthening the horizontal and vertical integration between the key figures in the sector and their inclusion in producer associations.

- The strategic framework for the development of organic agriculture is proposed, which covers the application of innovative approaches, strengthening the sustainability of the food

system, targeting productions that bring higher added value and lead to sustainable management of natural resources.

- A model for the sustainable development of ecotourism has been proposed, which is based on the global criteria for sustainable tourism and through which unique ecotourism products can be created in different regions.

These and other achievements and contributions give me the reason to claim that the scientific contributions and practical-applied results prove the high scientific value, relevance and significance of the scientific output of assoc. prof. dr. Marina Nikolova. She possesses all the necessary qualities of an established scientist, researcher and lecturer who is part of the Bulgarian and European scientific community.

7. Characterization of the candidate's academic reputation

The citation reference for the publications of assoc. prof. dr. Marina Nikolova in publications of periodicals and in conference proceedings, as well as the reference for citations in books, gives me the reason to conclude that the scientific interests of assoc. prof. Nikolova are the object of interest of leading specialists in the field of agrarian business management, rural development, organic agriculture, etc.

The total number of citations is 80, classified as follows:

- 122 citations in publications from periodicals and conference proceedings;
- 26 citations in books.

Prof. Nikolova has prepared an impressive number of reviews (93) and they are divided according to the type of publication:

- 71 article reviews;
- 11 reviews in studios;
- 6 reviews of research projects;
- 3 reviews of PhD thesis;
- 1 monograph review;
- 1 textbook review.

The number of points for citation presented by the candidate - 255 points exceeds more than twice the minimum requirements (100 points for group of indicators D), which are defined in the Regulations for the implementation of LDASRB for the academic position "professor" in area 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional direction 3.8 Economics.

8. Critical notes and recommendations

My recommendation is that in the future she should continue to develop and utilize her great research and teaching potential and achieve high scientific results, as well as to focus and continue to publish her scientific achievements in well-established, world-renowned publications, thus strengthening the reputation and prestige of the institution to which she belongs - AE "D.A. Tsenov".

9. General conclusion and opinion

The reference for the scientific publication of assoc. prof. dr. Marina Nikolova shows that she significantly exceeds the minimum national requirements for occupying the academic position "professor" in the field of Economics, scientific specialty Economics and Management (Agrarian Economics). The scientific production is according to the scientific profile of the competition, is up-to-date and presents her as an established scientist. All this gives me the reason to evaluate positively the activity of assoc. prof. dr. Marina Nikolova.

On the basis of the presented facts and evidence related to the teaching, research, expert, consulting and administrative activities and the achieved results, with full conviction, I propose to the respected Scientific Jury to vote positively for the occupation of the academic position "Professor", in the scientific field "Social, economic and legal sciences", scientific direction 3.8. Economics, scientific specialty Economics and Management (Agrarian Economics)" at AE "D.A. Tsenov" by assoc. prof. dr. Marina Nikolova.

27.05.2023

Reviewer:

/prof. dr. Zornitsa Stoyanova/