

STANDPOINT

Prepared by: Prof Aneta Georgieva Deneva, PhD,
D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics, Svishtov,
Field of higher education: 3. Social, economic and legal sciences
Professional direction: 3.8. Economics
Scientific specialty: Economics and Management (Industry)"

Regarding: Competition for the occupation of the academic position "professor" by professional direction: 3.8. Economics, scientific specialty: "Economics and management (agrarian economy)"

1. Introduction of the candidate

In the competition for the academic position of "professor" by field of higher education: 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional direction: 3.8. Economics, scientific specialty: "Economics and management (agrarian economy)" (promulgated in the "State Gazette", issue 21/07.03.2023), announced by SA "D. A. Tsenov" - Svishtov, for the needs of the Agricultural Economic department, only Associate Professor Marina Angelova Nikolova, PhD, who is a full-time teacher in the same department, participated.

2. Reason for writing the opinion

The opinion was drawn up on the basis of the Decision of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Industry and Commerce, protocol No. 8/26.04.2023 and in implementation of Order No. 363 /02.05.2023 of the Rector of the SA "D. A. Tsenov" - Svishtov for the appointment of the composition of the Scientific Jury, which is based on Art. 5, para. 1-4 and Art. 134, para. 1 and 2 of the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in SA "D. A. Tsenov" - Svishtov and decision of the First Meeting of the Scientific Jury held on 15.05.2023.

3. Personal characteristic of the applicant

Associate Professor Marina Angelova Nikolova, PhD, was born on 02.05.1964. In 1981 she graduated from Polytechnic High School "Naiden Gerov" - town of Lom. He completed his bachelor's and master's degrees at the "Vasil Kolarov" VSI - Plovdiv, qualification "agronomist" - 1983-1988 (Diploma Series A88 No. 014017, registration No. 13718 dated 07.25.1989). In 2004, he graduated with a master's degree at the "D. A. Tsenov" - Svishtov, specialty "Economic and Financial Control" (Diploma Series SA - 2005, Registration No. 54453/11.03.2005) From October 2006 until now he has been a full-time teacher in the Department of "Agrarian Economics".

In accordance with the requirements of the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in CA "D. A. Tsenov" Assoc. Prof. Marina Nikolova, PhD, has declared the following career development:

- 1990 - third degree research assistant - Agricultural Academy - Sofia;
- 1992 - second degree research assistant - Agricultural Academy - Sofia;
- 1995 - research assistant first degree - Agricultural Academy - Sofia;

- 1999 - educational and scientific degree "doctor" in the scientific specialty 04.01.01 "General Agriculture", Diploma of the State Academy of Sciences No. 26533 of 21.02.2000;
- 2005 - "senior research assistant second degree" - scientific specialty "General Agriculture" 04.01.01.- Agricultural Academy - Sofia, Certificate of Scientific Title of the State Academy of Sciences No. 23055 dated 20.06.2005;
- 2006 - associate professor, scientific specialty "Plant breeding" code 04.01.14. - Academy of Agriculture - Sofia, Certificate of Scientific Title of VAK No. 23825 dated 31.07.2006;
- October 2006 - until now - full-time associate professor at the "D. A. Tsenov", Department of Agricultural Economic.

The work of Associate Professor Dr. Marina Nikolova began in 1985 at the APC, FZHB "G. Dimitrov" - town of Lom - personnel. From 1987 to 1990, she was a plant protection agronomist in the Complex Brigade "G. Dimitrov" - town of Lom. In January 1990, Marina Nikolova started working at the Agricultural Academy - Sofia as Research Associate III degree.

Associate Professor Dr. Marina Angelova Nikolova has a total of 39 years, 11 months and 5 days of work experience as of 04/05/2023, of which 16 years, 6 months and 3 days at the "D. A. Tsenov". From 12.04.2016 until now, she is the Head of the Department of "Agrarian Economics". From 19.07.2007 to 13.07.2011 - Deputy Head of the Department of Agrarian Economics. From May 2011 to February 2020 - Chairman of the General Assembly of the Faculty of "Manufacturing and Commercial Business". Prof. Marina Nikolova participates in the editorial boards of various publications - deputy. editor-in-chief of the Annual Almanac "Scientific Research of Doctoral Students" at the SA "D. A. Tsenov" - Svishtov, member of the editorial board of the Eastern Academy Journal, Environmental Science and Pollution Research - Scopus, International Journal of Business and Economics Research (IJBER).

Associate Professor Dr. Marina Nikolova is a member of several professional organizations - Union of Scientists in Bulgaria, National Rural Network, National Trade Union "VON" - KNSB - Bulgaria. She has indicated participation in the following scientific networks - I.S.L.E Education for Sustainability Network. An International Sustainability Education & Research Network, COST Association - registered COST Expert, <https://e-services.cost.eu/user>, COST - European Cooperation in Science and Technology. COST is a funding organization for science and technology research networks, a Scientific Network on Eco-Entrepreneurship, the result of a joint project between the IIOZ and the Institute for Energy and Environmental Research Heidelberg – Germany.

The applicant is a licensed agricultural land appraiser and is included in the list of experts under Art. 19a, para. / from the Law on the Ownership and Use of Agricultural Lands - Certificate No. 553/2004.

In order to improve her qualifications and skills, Associate Professor Dr. Marina Nikolova participated in a number of trainings and specializations. According to the attached certificate, she holds numerous certificates.

The candidate has good knowledge of English and Russian languages.

4. General assessment of the teaching and learning work

It is clear from the submitted report on the candidate's academic employment that it exceeds the established norms and only for the last academic year 2022/2023 the planned classroom employment amounts to 839 hours. The diversity of the taught disciplines is impressive - 28, of which 15 in the bachelor's degree, 16 - in the master's degree and 7 - at CPO and CSFO.

Associate Professor Dr. Marina Nikolova has indicated participation in the development and teaching of 28 lecture courses in bachelor's and master's degree disciplines, of which 4 are in Bulgarian and in English.

Associate Professor Dr. Marina Nikolova has published 4 independent textbooks on the disciplines Agrarian Ecology - Agrarian Ecology. (2021). Textbook for distance learning, AI "Tsenov" Svishtov, Basics of plant breeding - Basics of plant breeding. (2012). Textbook, AI "Tsenov" Svishtov, ISBN 978-954-23-0806-5.; Ecologically sustainable development of the agricultural company - Ecologically sustainable development of the agricultural company. (2013). Textbook, "Education and Science" Library, No. 56. AI "Tsenov" Svishtov, ISBN 978-954-23-0880-5. and Agricultural tourism - Agricultural tourism. (2017). Textbook, AI "Tsenov" - Svishtov, ISBN 978-954-23-1963-4., and 7 co-authored textbooks on master's and bachelor's degree disciplines.

Currently, Associate Professor Dr. Marina Nikolova has been the supervisor of 7 successfully defended doctoral students, and is currently the supervisor of 2 full-time doctoral students.

The specified parameters - quantitative and qualitative, of the educational and teaching work of the candidate for the academic position of "professor" are grounds for a very good assessment of his professional level.

5. General assessment of scientific research and research activity

According to the announced competition, Associate Professor Dr. Marina Nikolova submitted for review:

- monographic works – 2 pcs. (one in co-authorship);
- studios – 5 pcs. (four in co-authorship);
- articles – 10 pcs. (4 in co-authorship);
- scientific reports – 16 nos. (1 in co-authorship);
- independent textbooks – 4 pcs.;
- co-authored textbooks – 9 nos.
- scientific publications in publications referenced or indexed in Scopus and/or Web of Science global databases - 5 pcs. co-authored.

The total number of scientific publications submitted for review is 51, of which 17 are in a foreign language.

Of the publications presented, more than 50% were published in co-authorship.

The scientific research of the candidate is mainly in the field of sustainable development and management of agrarian business and rural areas and the search for opportunities for sustainable development models - ecological practices, organic farming, ecological entrepreneurship, innovative practices in agriculture, external and internal organizational problem

In his monograph "Biological agriculture - state and potential for development." Library "Education and Science", no. 31, page 211. Academic publishing house "Tsenov" Svishtov. ISBN 978-954-23-0813-3., the author has carried out a comprehensive and in-depth study of the

origin and development of organic agriculture in Bulgaria. It applies a systematic analysis of the main features of organic agriculture and brings out its essential characteristics through the prism of agroecology as a sustainable approach to the development of ecological agriculture. Justifies the essential differences between organic and conventional farming systems.

On the basis of conducted and presented empirical studies in various planning areas (publications no. 1, 34 and 35), the author substantiates organic production as a model for sustainable nature use in modern agriculture (publication no. 12).

Publications Nos. 5, 6, 9, 13, 15, 22, 32, 37 and 38 are also directly related to the issue of organic agricultural production.

The second direction of the author's scientific research, related to the problems of sustainable development and management of agrarian business and rural areas, finds its main expression in the two studies submitted for review - "Problems and prospects in the sustainable development of agribusiness in Bulgaria.", Scientific Almanac Research, Volume 21, pp. 414-443, ISSN 1312-3815. AI "Tsenov" Svishtov and "Possibilities and problems of integrated production in the agricultural sector. Scientific research almanac, volume 23, pages 327-357, ISSN 1312-3815. AI "Tsenov" Svishtov. They examine part of the problems of sustainable development in the Republic of Bulgaria and the prospects for sustainable development of business structures in rural areas, specifying the models and forms for sustainable development of business structures. In direct connection with them, approaches to reduce the risks and impact of the use of pesticides on human health, the stability of agro-ecosystems and environmental pollution through long-term sustainable development of agribusiness and increasing the viability of the rural economy have been prepared, and an alternative model for sustainable development of agriculture based on the integrated production of plants and plant products. Publications Nos. 6, 7, 10, 11, 13, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 23, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33, 36, 38 are also related to this direction.

The third direction of the candidate's scientific research is alternative tourism and is presented in publications No. 3, 4, 18, 19, 21, 25. In this area, the importance of rural, including agrarian and ecological tourism for the diversification of the rural economy and the creation of unique tourist products, as well as the interrelationship of agriculture - tourism to increase the competitiveness of the local economy. A critical analysis of the state and prospects for the development of rural tourism in Bulgaria has been made and a model for the sustainable development of ecotourism has been proposed, as an opportunity for implementation on a local or regional scale.

The fourth direction, which is related to increasing the motivation and satisfaction of students in the learning process, finds its manifestation in the publications under No. 8 and 24. The emphasis here is on deepening the connection "theory - practice" and adapting the learning process to the needs of business.

Associate Professor Dr. Marina Nikolova registered participation as part of the team of 5 research projects, she is the head of 8 projects at the National Institute of Natural Sciences (certificate No. 143/24.04.2023, National Institute of Natural Sciences). In addition, she declared participation in 6 national projects and programs and in one international project. Associate Professor Marina Nikolova is the head of a research project KP-06-H55/1 "Development of rural areas in the conditions of a transforming economy towards sustainability", financed by the "Scientific Research" Fund. Leading beneficiary: Business Academy "D. A. Tsenov"-Svishtov" and partners: UNSS - Sofia and IU - Varna (official note, ex. No. FNI 1599/24.04-2023), financed by the Fund "Scientific Research

The rest of the scientific publications from the attached list of the competition are again on the subject of sustainable development, organic farming and alternative tourism. They also consider current theoretical-applied problems of the economic development of the agricultural sector. The publications of Assoc. Dr. Marina Nikolova have a versatile character and strive to focus on essential and important problems for agribusiness. They are distinguished by their eruditeness, topicality, empiricism and fully satisfy the legal requirements for occupying the academic position of "professor".

6. Characterization of scientific contributions

Acquaintance with the content of the scientific publications of associate professor Dr. Marina Nikolova allows to point out contributing moments and original statements in the field of the announced competition in three main directions:

Biological agriculture

✓ The dynamics and the potential for the development of organic production on a regional scale were analyzed, specifying the peculiarities of organic farms in an economic aspect, and through a field survey, the main problems and trends in a selected region were identified. Posts #1, 34 & 35.

✓ The challenges to the development of organic agriculture in Bulgaria are argued and the most important prerequisites for development and motivation for the development of the sector are specified. Recommendations are formulated 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. Publications No. 5,6,12, 15.

✓ The priority place of organic agriculture in European, national and local development policies is argued. The characteristics of organic production in the North Central Planning Region (NCRP) and the North-Eastern Planning Region (NORP) are subject to in-depth analysis, depending on the certified activities and the number of organic operators. Publications No. 34, 35

✓ The strategic framework for the future development of organic agriculture and the contribution of a sustainable model of "biological production" as a tool for innovative development of the territory are presented. The contribution of organic production to the sustainable development of the regional bioeconomy and its role in mitigating the consequences of climate change are clarified. Posts #13, 22, 32, 37, 3

Sustainable development and management of agribusiness and rural areas

✓ The specifics in the development of agrarian business in Bulgaria have been analyzed and supplemented. The trends and challenges regarding the state and development of Bulgarian agriculture for a long period (after Bulgaria's accession to the EU - in the conditions of a financial and pandemic crisis) have been summarized by following the dynamics of the main economic indicators. The need for sustainable development of agriculture, environmentally friendly production, ecological sustainability of agricultural holdings, development of organic agriculture, ecological entrepreneurship is justified. Posts #6, 7, 10, 11, 13, 16, 18, 20, 21, 23, 26, 27, 30,33, 36

✓ The factors affecting the price of agricultural land and the rent, the dynamics of trade in agricultural land have been established and the land relations in Bulgaria have been

characterized for a long period. Recommendations were formulated for correct and timely solutions regarding existing problems and the use of ownership of agricultural land in the Republic of Bulgaria. A lack of investor interest from outside investors has been proven due to fragmented land ownership, frequent changes in specific legislation, as well as the lack of a long-term strategy and vision for the development of the sector. The dynamics in land relations during the years of a free market economy are traced and the increase in concentration and consolidation of use is substantiated, regardless of the fragmented number of agricultural properties. Publications No. 17, 29, 31

✓ The species composition of the plant resource in a wide area around the town of Svishtov was studied in the context of the potential of the waste biomass for use in ecological technology for the production of electricity and heat. An assessment of the available and projected potential of biomass was made with the determination of the theoretical and realistic capacity from the biomass of cereal crops in the indicated region and the establishment of the most rational method of obtaining energy from agricultural biomass. The effectiveness of utilization of plant biomass through the production of heat and electricity at the level of a specific area has been proven. Publication #2

✓ An in-depth study was carried out on the contribution of a sustainable model of "biological agriculture" to achieve a multiplier effect for the rural area, as well as the interrelationship of biological agriculture - alternative tourism. Publications #20, 21, 22, 38

✓ 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. The claim that the management of sustainable development is based on the collaboration between the authorities, local communities and businesses for diversification in the functional use of the territory and optimal utilization of the available resources is investigated. Posts #18, 19, 20, 21

✓ Current problems accompanying the development of agriculture and the sustainable development of agribusiness in Bulgaria have been identified, analyzed and evaluated, and concrete proposals have been formulated for their solution based on expert assessments and the needs of agrarian business. The idea is argued that the implementation of various forms of diversification is a prerequisite for reducing risk and ensuring sustainable development in agriculture and rural areas. Posts #6, 11, 16, 20, 21, 23, 26, 27, 33, 36

✓ A relationship between sustainable production models in agriculture and the challenges facing 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 (for example, for the production of fruits and vegetables), while organic production is already an established model and its development is an undisputed priority in Bulgarian agriculture in the future. Posts #7, 22, 35, 37,

✓ The administrative-legal limitations to the organization of farmers' markets in Bulgaria have been identified and the role of the main participants in the process of their creation and effective functioning has been defined. Publication No. 28

✓ A new typology is proposed for the regions (NUTS-3) in Bulgaria, regarding the development of agriculture and the degree of use of the agricultural area. The claim that the development of agriculture largely depends on the level of the agricultural area used is substantiated. In the lagging regions, where the used agricultural area is limited as a resource,

alternatives should be sought, including diversifying and combining with other activities to increase the added value created by them. Publication #20

✓ Current problems characteristic of the study period are systematized, emphasizing that in the conditions of economic crisis, agriculture is not doomed and should be considered as a continuously developing sector. The idea of success is confirmed for those who manage to find their profitable niche and are open to the idea of association, following the example of successful European models. The barriers and opportunities for investment activity in agrarian business in the context of CAP and the trends and problems of investments in environmentally friendly agricultural productions are analyzed. Posts #11, 16, 23, 27, 36

Alternate tourism

✓ A critical analysis of the state and prospects for the development of rural tourism in Bulgaria was carried out, an empirical comparison of the approaches to solving problems in countries with experience in the development of rural tourism and an assessment of the readiness of agricultural holdings and the population in rural areas for the development of rural tourism. The problems in the construction of the agro-tourism product on a national scale, the participants in the formation and implementation of this product, the target groups, the tangible and intangible qualities of the tourist product have been identified. Posts #3 and #4

✓ The steps for building a complex and profitable agro-tourism product and the role of partnership between local government, non-governmental organizations, tourism companies and suppliers in their joint efforts to provide and promote the product are systematized. Publications #4

✓ The interrelationship and interdependence between the economic sectors (tourism and agriculture) has been proven in the direction of the search for opportunities for the development of alternative tourism with the formation of unique tourist products and the application of environmentally friendly agricultural practices, with the aim of achieving a greater standard of living and economic benefits for 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. [18, 19, 21]

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We accept the highlighted contributions as author's and evaluate them as real and significant for economic science and practice.

7. Academic prominence

In the reference submitted by the candidate for the citations of his works, it is evident that there are a total of 93, including joint publications with other authors. Of the total number of citations, 73 are in periodicals and conference proceedings, and 20 in books. According to the attached reference, 7 of the citations are in scientific publications, referenced and indexed in world-famous databases with scientific information or in monographs and collective volumes, and 15 are in monographs and collective volumes with scientific review. This is an indication that

the results of the scientific research of Associate Professor Dr. Marina Nikolova arouse interest in other colleagues and they refer to them.

8. Admitted weaknesses, critical remarks, recommendations

Emphasizing the candidate's high competence in the issues of the announced competition, I believe that in his future research work, he could make efforts to diversify and enrich the researched topic and cover different countries and aspects of economic theory and business practice. In addition, a good testimony of his work would be the increase in the share of independent publications.

9. Summary assessment

The presented arguments and findings prove in a categorical and unequivocal way that Assoc. Dr. Marina Nikolova has achieved the unconditionally necessary teaching, research, methodological and theoretical-applied results in order to be awarded the academic position of "professor". The candidate fully meets the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the SA "D. A. Tsenov" – Svishtov.

Given the scientific merits, the high professionalism and the overall evaluation of the teaching and research work of the candidate, I declare my **positive assessment** and with conviction recommend to the respected Scientific Jury, appointed by Order No. 363 of 02.05.2023 of the Rector of the SA "D. A. Tsenov" – Svishtov to propose Associate Professor Dr. Marina Angelova Nikolova to occupy the academic position of "**Professor**" by professional direction: 3.8. Economics, scientific specialty: "Economics and management (agrarian economy

Svishtov,
25.05.2023

Prepared the opinion:
(Prof. Aneta Deneva, PhD)