

## POSITION

**From:** Prof. Dr. Albena Todorova Kraeva-Miteva, Professional Field Economics, Scientific Specialty Economics and Management (Environmental Management), University of National and World Economy

**Subject:** Competition for the academic position of "Professor"

**Candidate:** Assoc. Prof. Dr. Marina Angelova Nikolova - sole candidate

**Higher Education Field:** 3. Social, Economic, and Legal Sciences

**Professional Field:** 3.8 Economics

**Scientific Specialty:** Economics and Management (Agricultural Economics)

**Higher Education Institution:** University of Economics - Varna "D. A. Tsenov"

**Faculty:** Production and Trade Business at UENW

**Department:** Agricultural Economics

**Announcement:** State Gazette, issue 21/07.03.2023

**Reason for writing the review:** Order No. 363 dated May 2, 2023, by the Rector of UENW, and decision of the approved scientific jury, as per the mentioned order, dated May 15, 2023.

### 1. Presentation of the candidate for participation in the competition

Marina Angelova Nikolova has completed two master's degrees - the first one at the Higher Institute of Agriculture, Plovdiv, with a qualification of "Agricultural Engineer," and the second one at the University of Economics - Varna "D. A. Tsenov," as an economist with a specialization in "Financial and Economic Control." As of the beginning of April 2023, Assoc. Prof. Nikolova has 39 years and 11 months of work experience, including 16 years and 6 months as a member of the Department of Agricultural Economics at the University of Economics - Varna "D. A. Tsenov."

### 2. Basis for writing the review

Prof. Albena Miteva is included in the composition of the scientific jury for the announced competition for the academic position of "Professor" at the Department of Agricultural Economics based on the order of the Rector of the University of Economics - Varna "D. A. Tsenov," No. 363 dated March 7, 2023. She was chosen to present her opinion at the first meeting of the scientific jury on May 15, 2023.

### **3. Personal characteristics of the candidate**

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Marina Nikolova holds an educational and scientific degree of "Doctor," for which she has been awarded a diploma for the academic degree "Doctor" by the Higher Attestation Commission (VAK) with registration number 26533, dated February 21, 1999. She is a Senior Research Associate, second degree, in the scientific specialty 04.01.01 "General Agriculture," with Certificate No. 23055 issued by VAK on June 20, 2005. She also holds the title of "Associate Professor" in the scientific specialty 04.01.14 "Crop Production," with Certificate No. 23825 issued by VAK on July 31, 2006.

She has additional qualifications and certificates related to the assessment of agricultural lands and improvements on them, "Management of International Research Projects," "Train the Trainers," conducting courses on "Agroecological Activities" - measure 214 and non-traditional agricultural activities, a certificate for "How to Develop a Business Plan and Apply for Rural Development Programs," and others.

She has academic employment with approximately 500 hours of annual teaching workload in both levels of education - Bachelor's and Master's degrees. She is the author and co-author of a significant number of publications, including 8 monographs, 14 studies, 62 articles, and 28 textbooks listed on the university's website. (<https://www.uni-svishtov.bg/bg/profile/m.nikolova/research>)

### **4. General (quantitative and qualitative) evaluation based on criteria and indicators for teaching work and compliance with requirements**

Assoc. Prof. Marina Nikolova exceeds the required academic norm for teaching workload both in the classroom and outside it during her employment at the University of Economics - Varna. She delivers lectures to students in regular, part-time, and distance learning formats. Assoc. Prof. Nikolova has successfully supervised seven doctoral students and is currently the supervisor of two doctoral candidates.

The candidate is the author and co-author of 28 educational programs, including four in English. The majority of these programs are for Bachelor's and Master's degrees. The main disciplines she lectures on include Introduction to Agribusiness, Economics of Agricultural Enterprises, Fundamentals of Crop Production and Animal Husbandry, Agricultural Ecology, Rural and Agricultural Tourism, Rural Development, Agricultural Entrepreneurship, Ecological and Sustainable Development of Agrofirms, Agricultural Management, Small and Family Agribusiness, Digitalization of Agribusiness, Non-traditional Agricultural Productions,

Regulations and Standardization in Agricultural Production, and others. The textbooks she has presented for these disciplines deserve a positive evaluation. She is the sole author of four textbooks (Ecologically Sustainable Development of Agrofirms, Fundamentals of Crop Production, Agricultural Ecology, and Rural Tourism) and co-author of nine more.

Assoc. Prof. Nikolova is the supervisor of specializations in "Ecopreneurship" and "Organic Agriculture" and is a lecturer in "Sustainable Development and Ecopreneurship," "Business Ideas and Business Models in Ecopreneurship," and "Organization and Production of Organic Products" at the Center for Postgraduate and Optional Education at the D.A. Tsenov Academy of Economics.

Assoc. Prof. Nikolova is a licensed trainer at the Vocational Training Center of the D.A. Tsenov Academy of Economics. She has developed educational content and has participated as a research supervisor and lecturer in qualification courses for the profession of "Farmer" with a specialization in "Agriculture," the profession of "Organizer of Tourist Agency Activities" with a specialization in "Rural Tourism," and the profession of "Economist" with a specialization in "Forestry."

It can be concluded that the documentation presented by the candidate meets the regulatory requirements and allows for a well-founded review for the competition for the academic position of "Professor." Based on the above, it can be concluded that there is a candidate in the competition with broad and in-depth general economic and specialized training and rich experience as a lecturer in agricultural economics, ecopreneurship, and natural resource utilization, who uses a diverse range of teaching methods and resources.

##### **5. Overall (quantitative and qualitative) evaluation based on criteria and indicators for research activity and compliance with requirements**

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 university.

- Monographs: one independent and one collective monograph;
- Articles and papers published in scientific journals, referenced and indexed in globally recognized databases of scientific information - 5 collective papers, with 4 as the first author;
- Articles and papers published in non-refereed journals or edited collective volumes - 26 papers, including 22 as independent author and 4 as the first author;

- Studies published in non-refereed journals or edited collective volumes - 5 studies, including 2 as independent author and 3 as the first author;
- Published chapter from a collective monograph;
- Academic textbooks and teaching aids - 13 publications, including 4 as independent author and 9 as co-author.

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

Assoc. Prof. Marina Nikolova significantly exceeds the minimum national requirements for the position of "professor." Most notably, she surpasses the requirements in categories D and E, which include supervising doctoral students, 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                          | 177,5  |
| Д               | 100                           | 255                          | 255    |
| E               | 100                           | 509,03                       | 509,03 |
| <b>Total</b>    |                               | 1269,03                      | 230,73 |

Assoc. Prof. Nikolova's research interests lie in the field of sustainable management of agricultural business and rural areas, organic farming, and alternative tourism. Her monograph, titled "Organic Farming – State and Development Potential," aims to study and assess the possibilities for developing organic production to enhance the competitive advantages of organic farms in a market economy. The main research thesis connects the development of organic farming with the support of the EU for producing high-quality and internationally competitive food products, as well as improving the efficiency and competitiveness of agricultural farms.

The monograph is the first comprehensive study of the dynamics and potential for the development of organic production even before the establishment of the national registry of organic producers, which demonstrates its clear scientific and applied research results. The main reasons for the lack of interest in the development of organic production in Bulgaria during the first programming period are revealed. Assoc. Prof. Nikolova's in-depth professional



training allows for a thorough examination of the biological, technological, economic, and other characteristics of organic production and the challenges faced by components of the organic agricultural production system. The final part of the monograph presents an analysis and evaluation of the agricultural development potential in the Rousse region.

The second presented monograph is a collective work. Assoc. Prof. Nikolova has contributed to the research on the species composition of the plant resource in a wide area around the town of Svishtov, focusing on the potential of biomass waste for use in environmentally friendly technology for electricity and heat production. The theoretical aspects of biomass and its utilization for energy production are explored, as well as the reasons for the increased interest in this resource. The author provides important practical conclusions and recommendations, including an assessment of the available and projected biomass potential in the Svishtov municipality, with a determination of the theoretical and realistic capacity of biomass from cereal crops in the specific region. The third chapter analyzes the technologies for electricity and heat production from biomass waste and summarizes the findings of the study. Combined energy production (thermal and electrical) is recommended for obtaining energy from agricultural biomass in the researched area, as it offers higher efficiency and minimal heat losses.

A leading direction in Assoc. Prof. Nikolova's research is focused on the issues of sustainable development of agricultural business and rural areas. The candidate justifies the need for sustainable development of agriculture, environmentally friendly production, ecological sustainability of farms, the development of organic farming, and ecological entrepreneurship. In the development of rural territories, sustainable models for their prosperity are sought, and "organic farming" is considered as a sustainable model leading to a multiplier effect for the rural area, as well as the interconnection between organic production and alternative tourism. The relationship between agriculture and climate change is analyzed, as well as the role of organic farming in mitigating the consequences of climate change. Various forms of diversification are identified and evaluated as prerequisites for risk reduction and ensuring sustainable development in agriculture and rural areas. A new typology for the regions (NUTS-3) in Bulgaria is proposed regarding the development of agriculture and the extent of agricultural land use. Publications focusing on the role of local community activity in fostering entrepreneurial initiatives for territorial development and preserving local identity are of interest.

The second group of publications addresses the economy and management of organic farming, with organic production being justified as a model for sustainable natural resource

utilization in modern agriculture. The potential of the organic product market in Bulgaria and possibilities for future development in improving the value chain in organic production are demonstrated.

The third thematic group of publications is dedicated to alternative tourism, highlighting the importance of agrarian and ecological tourism for diversifying rural economies and creating unique tourist products. A model for sustainable development of ecotourism has been developed based on established global criteria for sustainable tourism. The inclusion and implementation of specific indicators could lead to the creation of unique ecotourism products in different regions.

The fourth group of publications addresses the issues of student motivation and satisfaction in the process of their education. It demonstrates the need to connect specialized economic training with increasing early motivation and student activity in the educational process, as well as deepening the "theory-practice" relationship.

The candidate has submitted documents for participation in various national, international, and university projects. Associate Professor Nikolova is the head of the project "Development of Rural Areas in the Context of Transforming to a Sustainable Economy," funded by the Fund for Scientific Research. 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.

She is the author of 93 reviews of monographs, dissertations, studies, articles, and scientific reports. Among them, 11 are in English for reputable scientific journals. Associate Professor Nikolova has extensive consultancy activity for agricultural companies in the Ruse and Shumen regions.

## **6. Administrative and Public Activities**

Associate Professor Nikolova actively participates in the organizational life of the higher education institution, holding various managerial and leadership positions such as Deputy Head and Head of the Department of Agricultural Economics at the SA "D. A. Tsenov" (from 2016 until now); Deputy Editor-in-Chief of the Annual Almanac "Scientific Research by Doctoral Students" at SA "D. A. Tsenov"; Member of the Academic Council of SA "D. A. Tsenov" - (2011 to 2015), and more.

## **7. Professional Engagement in Practice outside Academic Work**

Associate Professor Nikolova 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.

She is a member of the National Rural Network - Bulgaria - since 2014; Union of Scientists - Bulgaria since 2013; National Branch Trade Union "VON" - KNSB - Bulgaria; I.S.L.E Education for Sustainability Network. An International Sustainability Education & Research Network - since 2021.

#### **8. Correspondence between the contributions in scientific research for the announced competition and the academic reputation of the candidate**

I accept the candidate's stated contributions, which accurately and objectively cover the most essential results of her research work. All of them fall within the scope of the announced competition for a professorship in agricultural economics.

In the field of sustainable development and management of agricultural business and rural areas, justified integrated approaches for improving the management of agricultural business have been established based on the concept of sustainable development.

In the field of organic farming, the candidate's conducted review and field studies, published results, creation of new educational programs, and development of courses lay the foundations for the establishment of a scientific school within the Department of Agricultural Economics in the field of organic farming, regulation and promotion of environmentally friendly business conditions in the agricultural sector, and ecological entrepreneurship.

The significance of rural, including agricultural and ecological tourism for diversification of the rural economy and the creation of unique tourist products, as well as the interconnection of agriculture and tourism for enhancing the competitiveness of the local economy, has been revealed. The results have been implemented in educational disciplines and current educational programs and courses.

The necessity of linking specialized economic education with enhancing early motivation and student activity in the educational process is demonstrated, specifically to prepare highly qualified specialists - experts in the field of economics, organization, and management of the agricultural sector, and to deepen the connection between theory and practice.

#### **9. Critical remarks and suggestions**

I have no significant remarks regarding the candidate's scientific production provided for review. My recommendation is related to expanding the publication activity with articles indexed in SCOPUS / WoS.

## 10. Conclusion

The presented scientific works and the overall teaching, research, and public activities of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Marina Nikolova demonstrate her qualities as a thorough and highly professional university lecturer. The qualitative characteristics and contributions contained in the developments, along with their potential application in practice, prove the undeniable teaching and practical consulting experience of the candidate for the competition. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Marina Nikolova fully meets the requirements to hold the academic position of "professor," given her overall contributions to teaching, research, and educational activities of SA "D.A. Tsenov". As a member of the scientific jury, this gives me grounds to call on the other jury members to cast their positive votes and propose to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Production and Trade Business at SA "D.A. Tsenov" to appoint Assoc. Prof. Dr. Marina Angelova Nikolova as a "professor" in the professional field 3.8 Economics, scientific specialty: Economics and Management (Agricultural Economics).

May 28, 2023

Sofia

Reviewer: \_\_\_\_\_