

R E V I E W

by Professor Yordan Atanasov Hristoskov PhD, Plovdiv University *Paisii Hilendarski*

on the materials submitted for participation in a competition for appointment in the academic office of **Associate Professor at the Plovdiv University *Paisii Hilendarski***

in the field of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, professional field 3.8. Economics (Scientific Specialty: Political Economy - Public Sector Economics and Social Policy).

In the competitive procedure for the position of *Associate Professor*, announced in the State Gazette, iss. 94 of 12.11.2021 and on the website of Plovdiv University *Paisii Hilendarski*, according to the requirements of the Department of Economic Sciences at the Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences (FESS), Blaga Madzhurova Ph.D. and Chief Assistant at the Plovdiv University (PU) *Paisii Hilendarski*, has applied as a candidate.

1. Overview of the materials submitted

Grounds:

By order № РД -21-43 of 11.01.2022 of the Rector, I am appointed a member of the scientific jury for the competitive procedure for the academic position of **Associate Professor** at PU in the field of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, professional field 3.8 Economics (scientific specialty Political Economy - Public Sector Economics and Social Policy), **announced for the needs** of the Department of Economic Sciences at FESS.

The **only candidate**, Ch. Assistant Blaga Petrova Madzhurova PhD from PU *Paisii Hilendarski*, Department of Economic Sciences at FESS has submitted materials for participation in the announced competition.

The set of paper materials presented by Blaga Madzhurova PhD **is** in accordance with the Regulations for Development of the Academic Staff of the University of Plovdiv and includes the following documents: Application to the Rector of the University (a blank); European format CV; Master's degree diploma; diploma for Doctoral degree; a list of research papers; protocols of division proving the authorship of the candidate in the submitted collective publications; a list of citations; a reference of the minimum national and faculty requirements covered for the acquisition of the academic position of *Associate Professor*; annotations of the materials under Art. 65 of Regulations of the Development of the Academic Staff at PU, including self-assessment of the contributions; declaration of originality and authenticity of the enclosed

documents; certificate of professional experience; documents for academic activity; research documents; other documents: 2 *ERASMUS* + scientific mobility certificates, a prove of membership in the Union of Scientists in Bulgaria, a prove of membership in the Union of Mediators.

2. Brief biographical data of the candidate

Blaga Madzhurova acquired a Bachelor's degree in Marketing at the University of National and World Economy and a Master's degree in Health Management at the Medical University of Plovdiv. She enrolled in a full-time doctorate at the Department of Economic Sciences at FESS in 2014 and defended her doctoral dissertation entitled *Social Transfers - Fiscal Pressure and Social Tolerance*, by which she earned the academic degree of PhD of Political Economy. In 2017 she was appointed Chief Assistant at the Department of Economic Sciences at FESS.

Blaga Madzhurova counts with practical experience in the public, private and non-governmental sectors, and most of her activities are related to her research interests and teaching. After graduation she held the following positions - junior and chief expert in the municipality of Plovdiv, senior expert in the Ministry of Economy and Energy, head of the political office of the Deputy Prime Minister in the Council of Ministers, sales representative of PT Holding JSC, expert at the Foundation *Plovdiv - European Capital of Culture* and others.

As a doctoral student and academic lecturer, Blaga Madzhurova PhD actively participates in the scientific and organizational life of the department and the faculty. As an assistant and chief assistant, she possesses a well-established authority and enjoys great respect among her peers and students.

3. Overview of the candidate's activity

3.1. Compliance with the minimum national requirements under Art.2 from the Academic Staff Development Act in the R. of Bulgaria and the Regulations for their implementation (Art.1a, p.1), and the additional requirements for Associate Professor, acc. to FC of FESS.

The details in the submitted report prove that the candidacy of Ch. Assistant Blaga Madzhurova PhD covers entirely the National Minimum Requirements according to the ASDA (Art. 2b) and the Regulations for their implementation (Art.1a, p.1). The quantitative assessment of Dr. Blaga Madzhurova of 528.9 points exceeds the required threshold of 400 points. According to the Additional Indicators for evaluation of the candidates for the academic position Associate Professor, and to the Decision of the FC of FESS, Ch. Assistant Professor Blaga Madzhurova PhD received another 353.25 points. Thus, the total sum of points from the mandatory and

additional requirements is 882.15 points. Blaga Madzhurova PhD also covers the Additional Requirements for the academic position of Associate Professor.

3.2. Assessment of the educational and pedagogical activity of the candidate.

The presented documentation for the lecturing activity of Ch. Assistant Professor Blaga Madzhurova PhD indicates that she has 1366 hours of lectures and tutorials for the period 2017 - 2021, as well as 450 hours of other teaching practice (semester exams, consultations and papers assessment). She lectures the Bachelor's students in Social Policy, Social Policy and Social Programs, Public Service Management, Microeconomics, Macroeconomics and Economics. Ch. Assistant Blaga Madzhurova PhD was a guest lecturer in the *ERASMUS +* program for faculty mobility at the Universidad de Valladolid, Kingdom of Spain, and Universitata Degli 'Studio di Torino, Italy. She has developed curricula in two academic disciplines (Economics and Public Sector Economics) and currently lectures on them. The candidate is a co-author of the textbook *Social Policy*.

The teaching activity of the chief assistant Blaga Madzhurova PhD complies with the announced competition for the academic position of Associate Professor in the scientific specialty Political Economy - Public Sector Economics and Social Policy.

3.3. Evaluation of the scientific and applied activities of the candidate

The candidate Blaga Madzhurova PhD has offered a total of 22 scientific papers, of which: 1 independent monograph and participation as author in 3 collective monographs, 16 scientific articles and conference reports, 1 book (based on a defended dissertation), 1 textbook and a list of participation in 9 research projects. Of those, 16 scientific papers, 1 textbook and 9 research papers are accepted for review and are taken into account in the final evaluation, whereas 4 research papers on the doctoral dissertation (including 3 scientific articles and a book) and 2 research papers from the competition for Chief Assistant are not reviewed. The distribution of the peer-reviewed 16 research papers by relevant sections, in the country and abroad, is as follows - 12 of them were published in the country and 4 scientific articles and reports - in foreign publications. Of the 11 scientific articles and reports published, 8 are in English, which makes them accessible to a wider audience. One of the publications in English has an impact factor - it was published in the journal *Economic Studies (Ikonicheski Izsledvania)*. Peer-reviewed publications (excluding monographs, monograph participation and the textbook) include 6 research articles in scientific journals and 5 reports in collections from international scientific conferences, two of which - abroad.

The total volume of peer-reviewed publications is 519 pages, of which 370 pages in monographs, 65 pages in scientific studies, articles and reports and 84 pages in a textbook. The publications are the personal work of the candidate Dr. Blaga Madzhurova, as her participation in collective publications is reflected in the presented protocols of division.

The monographic habilitation paper of Chief Assistant Blaga Madzhurova PhD Social Evils - Links with Macroeconomic Determinants and Policies to Overcome Them (publication 1 of the list of monographs) is dedicated to the relationship between key macroeconomic parameters and the most acute social problems such as poverty, inequality and social exclusion, aptly called by the author "social evils". The monograph consists of 136 pages. The work is structured in an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion and a list of references.

The author's thesis in the monograph paper holds that the dichotomy economic growth - wealth should be studied in two directions. Growth leads to lower levels of poverty, inequality and social exclusion, but the reverse is also valid - when social evils are above the threshold of social tolerance, they limit the economic development. It is on the basis of this thesis that the paper itself is structured.

The **aim** is to study the social policy and the state of the socio-economic system in its macroeconomic dimensions - state - labor market - social evils. This goal is achieved through three clearly formulated and implemented research tasks in the developed paper.

The research methodology is based on the tools of economic statistics such as descriptive analysis, correlation and regression analysis, time series analysis, econometric analysis, etc. The software used to process the statistics is IBM SPSS.

PhD Blaga Madzhurova's other scientific publications are in the following areas: social cohesion in the EU, including the accession of the Western Balkans; the fiscal consolidation of the new EU Member States; the impact of globalization and innovation on the economic growth, employment and the nature of jobs; the role of education and lifelong learning for the social cohesion in Bulgaria and the Western Balkans; the problem of the working poor; social entrepreneurship as an element of the social policy.

The research activity of Blaga Madzhurova PhD is also expressed in her participation as an expert contractor in 9 projects implemented within the Fund Scientific Research of the *Paisii Hilendarski* University of Plovdiv and the Bulgarian National Science Fund at the MES. Some of the scientific results from her participation in research projects have found a place in her publications or are used in the educational process.

3.4. Contributions (scientific, scientific-applied and applied) and citations

The scientific and scientific-applied contributions of the chief assistant Blaga Madzhurova PhD can be generally divided into contributions to the individual habilitation research paper *Social Evils - Links with Macroeconomic Determinants and Policies to Overcome Them* and contributions to the rest of the publications.

In general, **Blaga Madzhurova's scientific contributions to the habilitation monographic study** are expressed in the systematization of scientific knowledge, clarification of concepts, development of adequate tools for solving research tasks and making general recommendations regarding the public administration.

In more detailed terms, the following more significant scientific and applied scientific contributions in the monographic work of Blaga Madzhurova PhD can be listed:

- 1) An extensive chronological review and critical analysis of the main theoretical and methodological issues of: the relationship between activity, growth, inequality and macroeconomic determinants; the relationship activity, growth, poverty, inequality. The tendencies and theoretical interpretations of these connections in the direction from unilateral to complex assessments are presented, including new processes and phenomena such as globalization, innovation and the transition to smart and inclusive growth, the Covid 19 pandemic and others.
- 2) An empirical analysis of the dynamics of the main macroeconomic parameters, the labor market and the dimensions of the social sphere for the period 2000 - 2020 in the context of Bulgaria – EU is developed. In each of these areas of analysis, the most appropriate indicators are selected and the same statistical techniques are applied - descriptive analysis, statistical averages and scattering dimensions, correlation coefficients, trend and regression analysis. The results obtained from the empirical analysis are presented in tables and graphs and the relevant conclusions and summaries are drawn.
- 3) Based on empirical analysis, key parameters of social evils related to socio-economic reality are derived. It is concluded that the complex and multi-layered structure of social evils and the desire to overcome them lead to the need to restructure the policies of the EU and Bulgaria.
- 4) Well-grounded recommendations for reforms and specific policies in the field of economic development, labor market, poverty, inequality and social inclusion are issued.

Scientific and scientific-applied contributions in the other publications (apart from the habilitation scientific study) of Blaga Madzhurova PhD can be summarized in the following several points:

- 1) Systematization of the methodological basis of social cohesion and its measurement indicators is performed. Empirical analysis of the national and regional dimensions of the social cohesion, including social cohesion along the EU - Bulgaria - Western Balkans axis is done. The contribution of the research is the conclusion about the role of public policies, which at this stage fail to contribute to the rapprochement of Bulgaria and the EU turning into a signal for their rethinking (publication 1 of the list of monographs).
- 2) The need for fiscal consolidation of the new EU member states, on the one hand, and the social price that society pays for it are studied. It is reported that Bulgaria mainly relies on indirect taxes in the revenue side of the budget, and that budget revenues are highly dependent on the effects of the economic cycle, which in the presence of constant or difficult to change government expenditures may hinder the achievement of budget targets. (№ 4 from the list of publications)
- 3) The impact of globalization on employment and the nature of jobs is assessed, interpreting the different countries and mechanisms of the studied relationship - globalization/ innovation - employment. A detailed analysis of the tools for evaluating innovation on the structure of employment and the future of professions is offered. (publication 2 of the list of monographs and № 9 of the list of publications).
- 4) The role of education is highlighted as a factor in achieving cohesion and reducing imbalances between the EU and the Western Balkans and as a prerequisite for social cohesion. It is proposed to implement a new type of policy and innovative measures in the field of education as a factor in overcoming the differences between Bulgaria and the Western Balkans on the one hand and the average levels of socio-economic development in the EU on the other. In the same context, some priority policies for lifelong learning are seen as a means of guiding young people from education to employment and achieving general well-being. The positive and negative effects in some European countries are identified and the best practices of lifelong learning are presented. (a collective monograph chapter, publications №2, №5, №7 and №8 of the list of publications).
- 5) The macroeconomic dimensions of the "*working poor*" phenomenon are analyzed, explained not only by the low minimum wage, but also by the low amount of aggregate income distributed among household members, low education, lack of employment qualification and low labor intensity. (№ 1 from the list of publications)

6) An interesting hypothesis is formulated about the risks for Bulgaria from the hasty accession of the Western Balkans countries to the EU. It is noted that factors such as inequality in market incomes, poverty, high unemployment, the informal economy, corruption, abuse of office, emigration of skilled workers may lead to the formation of a group of these countries (including Bulgaria), integrating at second or third speed within the EU. (№ 4 from the list of publications)

7) The possibilities of social entrepreneurship and social enterprises for protection of the most vulnerable groups of the population by generating jobs and by distributing the profit for development and social purposes are revealed. (№ 6 from the list of publications)

The candidate in the competition, Chief Assistant Blaga Madzhurova PhD presented a reference for **7 citations in scientific journals** in the country and abroad (including referenced and indexed in world-known and national databases with scientific information), as well as in monographs and collective volumes with scientific review. The presented citations establish the candidate as a recognizable scientist with her contribution to the specific topics of the competition (Political Economy - Public Sector Economics and Social Policy).

4. Assessment of the personal contribution of the candidate

The presented habilitation work, the scientific publications and the distinguished scientific and scientific-applied contributions of Ch. Assistant Blaga Madzhurova PhD are her personal achievement and a product of her research in accordance with the norm of scientific ethics under the procedure regulated in the ASDA and the relevant Regulations of the University of Plovdiv.

5. Critical remarks and recommendations

I have no critical remarks regarding the presented materials and the application of Ch. Assistant Blaga Madzhurova PhD in the competition for the academic position of *Associate Professor*.

I recommend that Blaga Madzhurova PhD, as a future Associate Professor, concentrate her efforts on publishing independent articles and studies, the result of her research, in foreign scientific journals with impact factor, which will naturally increase the citation frequency of her scientific papers.

6. Personal impressions

I am acquainted with Blaga Madzhurova personally, first as her research supervisor in her doctoral program, and later as a colleague - a lecturer in the Department of Economic Sciences. She is an extremely hard-working, ambitious and demanding young scientist with a potential for a very successful scientific career.

CONCLUSION

The documents and papers submitted by the candidate Ch. Assistant Blaga Madzhurova PhD **meet all** the requirements of the Academic Staff Development Act in the Republic of Bulgaria (ASDA), the Regulations for the implementation of ASDA and the relevant Regulations of PU *Paisii Hilendarski*. The candidate in the competition has offered a **significant** number (exceeding the minimum requirements) of scientific papers published posterior to the materials used in the defense of the academic degree Doctor and for the position of Chief Assistant. There are original scientific and scientific-applied contributions in the works of the candidate, which have received recognition among the scientific community at home and abroad. Her theoretical work is useful for decision-makers in the field of social policy and practice, and some of them are directly focused on the educational activities.

The achieved by Ch. Assistant Blaga Madzhurova PhD results in lecturing and research activities **fully** comply with the specific requirements of FESS, adopted in relation to the Regulations of the University of Plovdiv for the implementation of ASDA.

After reviewing the materials and scientific papers presented in the competition, and analysing their importance and the scientific and scientific-applied contributions contained in them, I find it grounded to give my **positive** assessment and **recommend** the Scientific Jury to issue a report-proposal to the FC of FESS to award Ch. Assistant Blaga Petrova Madzhurova PhD the academic position of *Associate Professor* at *P. Hilendarski* University of Plovdiv in professional field 3.8. Economics (scientific specialty Political Economy - Public Sector Economics and Social Policy).

February 22, 2022.

Reviewer: ...

(Prof. Yordan Hristoskov PhD)