

Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski”

OPINION

on the competition for holding the academic position of “Professor” in the professional field 3.4. “Social Activities (Social Protection and Social Work)” for the needs of Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski” (PU), Faculty of Pedagogy, Department of Social Activities, announced in State Gazette Issue No. 92/18.11.2022 and on the website of PU

The opinion has been prepared by: Prof. Neno Pavlov, PhD in Economics, International Higher Business School, professional field 3.8. “Economics (Economics of Non-production Sphere)“, as a member of the Scientific Jury for the competition, appointed by Order No. RD-21-67/18.01.2023 of the Rector of Plovdiv University and the Founding Meeting of the Scientific Jury.

The only candidate, who submitted documents for participation in the competition, is: *Associate Professor Lyudmila Pavlova Vekova, PhD*, Department of Social Activities at the Faculty of Pedagogy of Plovdiv University.

I. General description of the materials submitted in the competition (For each candidate, information is provided on Items 1 to 8)

1. Information about the candidature

The set of evidentiary materials submitted by the candidate for the competition corresponds to the requirements of the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act (DASRBA), the Regulations on the Implementation of the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act (RIDASRBA) and the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of PU “Paisii Hilendarski”.

Assoc. Prof. Lyudmila Pavlova Vekova, PhD has submitted a list of totally 33 publications from various genres in Bulgarian and foreign scientific publications and forums. In terms of structure, the scientific products include: monographs – 1, consisting of totally 396 pages, with 2 reviewers, (3%); scientific articles published in scientific publications, referenced and indexed in SCOPUS and/ or Web of Science – 5 (15%); scientific articles published in non-referenced journals with scientific review or in edited collective volumes – 17 (52%), scientific reports published in collections from international scientific conferences with editorial boards – 8 (24%); textbooks and teaching aids – 2 (6%). All of them are not included in the procedures for acquiring the educational and scientific degree of “Doctor” and holding the academic position of “Associate Professor”. In terms of themes, the publications correspond to the themes of the announced competition, the current academic standards in the country and the University. 25 scientific works related to the habilitation for “Associated Professor” and 5 scientific articles outside the themes of the competition have not been reviewed.

I believe that the monograph “*Social Protection for Unemployment (Social Work with Unemployed Persons)*“, S., Publishing House DIOMIRA, 2022, p. 396, as an in-depth study of a current, socially significant, socio-economic problem, with scientific and scientific-applied relevance, has the qualities of a completed habilitation work.

All scientific publications are independently developed. About 15% (5 pieces) of them are in English and 85% (28 pieces) in Bulgarian. The monographs and the scientific articles are published in

academic publishing houses and specialized scientific journals of repute, and the scientific reports - in reviewed thematic collections of international scientific conferences with editorial boards in the country and abroad.

The thematically evaluated publications cover the scientific-theoretical and practical-applied aspects of the professional field within the scientific specialty of the competition - Social Protection and Social Work, in particular the policies and practices in the field of social protection for unemployment, the mandatory and supplementary pension insurance, the problems of organization and management of social work, the series of publications in the field of education, training and employment of graduates in institutions of social activities, the specifics, adequacy and effectiveness of the development of social entrepreneurship and social innovations.

The deposited scientific products and the precisely compiled package of competition materials evidencing the candidate's achievements fully satisfy the requirements of the process of evaluation and decision-making for the selection of a candidate to be appointed to the academic position of "Professor" by employment contract. I have not found any formal omissions and administrative irregularities in the announced procedure.

2. Brief information of the candidate in the competition

Assoc. Prof. Vekova, PhD completed secondary education with extensive learning of German language at the Unified Secondary Polytechnic School in Elin Pelin (1978) and higher education at the University of National and World Economy (1983) in the specialty of "Labor Economics", and was awarded the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor of Economics" in 1988.

The beginning of the candidate's academic career is associated with taking the position of "Assistant" at the Institute of State Economic Management at the Council of Ministers in 1988, and from 2011 to the present time the position of "Associate Professor" (Rector's Order No. R34-371/22.07.2011) and Head of the Department of Social Activities at Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski". In the course of her career growth Assoc. Prof. Vekova successfully upgraded her rich academic, scientific-applied and management profile through her long-standing involvement as a member of the Supervisory Board and Chief Executive Officer of five Pension Insurance and one Life Insurance companies, Secretary General of the Economic and Social Council, Head of Department at a Commercial Bank and Chief Expert in the General Directorate of Social Insurance, member of scientific juries at higher schools, short-term specializations and trainings in prestigious Bulgarian and foreign institutions. She was involved in Erasmus+ Academic Program in the teaching mobility component, chaired the Management Board of the Bulgaria Association of Social Work Education, etc.

She has specialized computer skills for the use of work general-purpose software products, organizational and communication skills, foreign language training in English, German and Russian, expertise and competence for management and consulting activities in the pension business and social activities. The brief biographical reference presents the candidate as **a proven, career-built, recognized academic teacher and expert with extensive experience, clearly expressed scientific and practical orientations and competences in the professional field of the announced competition procedure for "Professor"**.

3. General description of the candidate's scientific works and achievements

The scientific research activity of Assoc. Prof. Luydmila Vekova, PhD and the themes of the submitted scientific works are entirely within the scope of the competition. She participates in the procedure with 33 publications, which are outside her participation in the previous procedures for acquiring the

Educational and Scientific Degree of “Doctor” and for holding the academic position of “Associate Professor”. Thematically, the publications cover the areas of social protection and social activities, in particular research related to the theoretical-conceptual aspects of the social protection system, social protection at the risk of “unemployment” and its components, the problems of mandatory and supplementary social insurance with an emphasis on pension insurance, organization and management of social work, education for the acquisition of professional skills and competencies in the field of social activities, social entrepreneurship and social innovation.

All scientific works submitted for participation in the competition are independent. Taking into consideration the themes, content and style of the publications, there is no doubt that they are authorship of the candidate. There is no proven plagiarism in the scientific works submitted for participation in the competition.

According to Article 1a, Paragraph 1 of the RIDASRBA, the candidate for holding the academic position of “Professor” in the professional field 3.4. “Social activities” must have accumulated: 50 points - by group of indicators A; at least 100 points - by group of indicators B; not less than 200 points - by group of indicators D; not less than 100 points - by group of indicators D; at least 100 points - by group indicators E.

The report in the submitted documents certifies that the candidate in the competition covers: 50 points - by group of indicators A; 100 points - by group of indicators B; 400 points - by group of indicators D; 340 points - by group of indicators D; 215 points - by group of indicators E.

The total number of points achieved by Assoc. Prof. Vekova is 1105 points, with a normatively required 550 points, which exceeds twice the minimum national requirements for holding the academic position of “Professor” in the professional field 3.4. “Social activities”.

The scientific works fully meet the minimum national requirements (according to Article 2b, Paragraphs 2 and 3 of the DASRBA), with the total number of points for the groups of indicators being significantly exceeded. They also correspond to the additional requirements of Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski” for holding the academic position of “Professor” in the scientific area and the professional field of the competition, given that the additional requirements of PU are not higher than the additional requirements of the RIDASRBA.

4. Assessment of the candidate’s educational and teaching activities

As an academic teacher, Assoc. Prof. Vekova has a total of 38 years and 6 months of work experience, including 30 years and 7 months of teaching experience, of which over 11 years as an “Associate Professor” at the Plovdiv University (with two academic years required). She has a sufficient volume of auditory and extra-auditory teaching employment in the full-time and part-time form of education in the educational and qualification degree of Bachelor and educational and qualification degree of Master, including a wide range of academic courses: “Social Protection System”, “Social Insurance”, “Management of Social Organizations”, “Social Entrepreneurship”, “Social Management and Social Marketing”, “Social Policies of People with Disabilities”, “Human Resource Management in the Social Sphere” and others.

According to the submitted report, the candidate’s total auditory employment in the last 2021-2022 academic year amounts to 420 hours of auditory employment, 380 hours of non-auditory employment and participation in the development of 14 study programs for academic training in the specialty at Plovdiv University. In recent years, scientific supervision of a significant number of graduate students and three doctoral students, one of whom is in public defense procedure and the second one in internal

defense procedure, has been reported. The candidate for “Professor” is the author of two reviewed fundamental, academic textbooks on the “Pension Insurance System”, PU Publishing House, Plovdiv, 2021, p. 259 and p. 303, as well as the lecture courses and curricula on the themes of the specialty and the announced competition. Since the establishment of the Department of Social Activities in 2014 until now, Assoc. Prof. Vekova has been its head. In her academic career, she was a teacher at the University of National and World Economy, Varna Free University, New Bulgarian University and Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”.

My general assessment is that the proven professional competence, rich academic experience and scientific training of the candidate, as a modern university teacher, author of textbooks, lecture courses and curricula, *fully meet the specifics and regulatory requirements of the scientific specialty of the competition for the position of “Professor”* in terms of quantity, quality and structure.

5. Content analysis of the candidate’s scientific and scientific-applied achievements in the materials submitted for participation in the competition

I accept the submitted Statement of Research Contributions as realistic, correctly and objectively indicating the research results. I agree with the thematic grouping of the candidate’s contributions by fields, with two minor corrections (to unite fields 6 and 7 and to eliminate field 8, since textbooks are not reviewed in the procedure, but are indicated in the general assessment), which are respectively:

- Field 1: Study, further development and enrichment of the methodological toolkit for assessing the characteristics, effects, long-term development and active impact of the *Social Protection System* on the security and adequacy of the standard of living of the risk groups of beneficiaries, its interaction with the social work in an environment of social cohesion, social convergence and integration in the EU;
- Field 2: Recognition, understanding and identification of the concept, trends of development (2004-2021) and problematic aspects of the *System of Social Protection for Unemployment*, with its three subsystems, in the context of the intrinsic characteristics of the covered social risk, the organization and financial sustainability of insurance, the social assistance and the active policies on the labour market, with the aim of risk prevention, as well as the proposals for upgrading the legal framework with new changes;
- Field 3: Proposed methodological solutions and toolkit for analysis and identification of the various modern problems and challenges facing the solidarity and capital pillars of the *Pension Insurance System*, argued with evidentiary facts about the strengths and weaknesses of the functioning pension model (including of specific persons from certain categories of persons in certain sectors);
- Field 4: Extensive and in-depth critical analysis of the problematic aspects in the modern development and prospects for the organization and management of *Social Work*, as a conceptual phenomenon and meaningful process, directly related to legal changes and regulations, staffing, staff labour motivation and new challenges facing the subsystems of social protection in the country;
- Field 5: Study and justification of the significance and possibilities of using the potential of *Social Innovations, Social Entrepreneurship and Social Enterprises* to promote the social inclusion of risk groups in the country, in the context of the catch-up development of the social economy, increase in employment and efficiency of the economic activity of persons at risk;

- Field 6: Systematic study and analysis of the state and objective changes in the career profile and job requirements for key competencies, the hard and soft skills in the field of social work in an environment of a deteriorating demographic structure, as well as the assessments of the adequacy of quality of the *university education in professional field "Social Activity"*, in relation to the new standards for successful job performance of graduates of the specialty, taking into account the job classifier.

Based on the analysis of the submitted competition materials, my conclusion is that the applicant's scientific and scientific-applied contributions are relevant and socially significant in the identified fields, leading to the addition of some new knowledge, the completion and expansion of existing knowledge in the scientific specialty.

According to the provided statement and based on the thirty-three scientific publications, the candidate reports a total of **34 citations**, of which: 5 citations in scientific articles, referenced and indexed in Scopus and/ or Web of Science, 4 citations in monographs and collective volumes with scientific review and 25 citations in scientific articles published in non-referenced journals with scientific review. The achieved rate of citation is an indisputable assessment of the recognition of the significance of Assoc. Prof. Vekova's research results among the scientific circles in the country and abroad.

The candidate has registered involvement as an expert and academic mentor in the implementation of 9 scientific-research and educational projects, with national and European funding.

I believe that the submitted analytical information about the scientific research activity, including a variety of scientific and scientific-applied works, research results in the specialty of the competition publicly disclosed to the scientific community in the country and abroad, having the nature of scientific and scientific-applied contributions, as well as the indicated citations of authors in other publications, in their entirety, confirm the fulfilment of all requirements of the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act and the Regulations on the Implementation of the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act for holding the academic position of "Professor" according to the competition profile.

6. Critical remarks and recommendations

I have not found any significant weaknesses in the scientific and scientific-applied works submitted for participation in the competition. I have no critical comments that would change my final opinion regarding the participation in the competition. I recommend that Assoc. Prof. L. Vekova, PhD should continue even more deeply to apply her knowledge of the scientific specialty in new interdisciplinary studies, directly related to the application of the interdisciplinary and competence approach in the modern training of specialists with higher education in social activities.

7. Personal impressions on the candidate

I have known Assoc. Prof. Vekova, PhD for many years and I have direct impressions of her undeniable professional, academic and personal qualities. She deservedly enjoys authority and respect, not only in the academic circles, but also in the business circles of the non-banking financial sector in the country.

8. Conclusion on the candidature

My detailed familiarization with the materials and scientific publications submitted in the competition, the analysis of their **relevance, content, significance and contribution achievements** of a scientific

and scientific-applied nature, give me reason to confirm their compliance with the requirements of the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act, the Regulations on its implementation and the relevant Regulations of PU “Paisii Hilendarski” for holding the academic position of “Professor” in the scientific area and professional field of the competition by the candidate. Assoc. Prof. Lyudmila Vekova, PhD satisfies the minimum national requirements in the professional field and no plagiarism has been found in the scientific works submitted in the competition.

II. General conclusion

Based on the confirmed positive assessment of the candidature, I propose the honorable members of the Scientific Jury to elect *Assoc. Prof. Lyudmila Pavlova Vekova, PhD* to hold the academic position of “Professor” in the professional field 3.4. “Social Activities (Social Protection and Social Work)“, scientific area “Social, Economic and Legal Sciences” for the needs of Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski”.

20. 02. 2023

The opinion has been prepared by: _____

(Prof. Neno Pavlov, PhD in Economics)