

REVIEW

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 **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: “National Economy (incl. Regional Economy and History of National Economy)”

In the competitive procedure for the position of *Professor*, announced in the State Gazette, iss. 92 of 18.11.2022 and on the website of Plovdiv University *Paisii Hilendarski*, according to the requirements of the Department „Social activity” at the Faculty of Pedagogy, PhD Ludmila Pavlova Vekova, Ass. professor at the Plovdiv University (PU) *Paisii Hilendarski*, has applied as a candidate.

1. General presentation of the received materials

Subject:

By order № ПД -21-67 of the Rector, I am appointed as a member of the scientific jury for the competitive procedure for the academic position of **Professor** at PU in the field of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, professional field 3.4 Social activities (Social protection and social work), **announced for the needs** of Department of “Social activities” at Faculty of Pedagogy.

The only candidate, Associate Professor Ludmila Vekova PhD from PU *Paisii Hilendarski*, Department of Social activities at Faculty of Pedagogy has submitted materials for participation in the announced competition. The set of paper materials presented by Ludmila Vekova 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; diploma for Associate Professor; a list of research papers; annotations of the publications; a list of citations; a reference of the minimum national and faculty requirements covered for the acquisition of the academic position of *Professor*; official notice for work experience and teaching; self-assessment of the contributions; declaration of originality and authenticity of the enclosed.

The candidate Ludmila Vekova submitted 33 scientific works for the competition – all of them are personal works, without co-authorship: 1 monograph, 30 scientific articles (5 in English and 25 in Bulgarian), 2 textbooks for students (in Bulgarian). In addition, she has indicated 9 participations in scientific research projects, for which service notes are attached. Also attached is a list of 25 publications - presented on the competition for the academic

position "Associate professor" (held in 2011) and publications after 2011, but not included in the competition list, as well as 5 articles on topics that are outside the competition .

The submitted documents for the competition illuminate sufficiently well the scientific development and achievements of Assoc. Professor Dr. Lyudmila Vekova as a candidate for the academic position "Professor" and allow an objective review to be prepared.

2. Brief biographical data of the applicant

Lyudmila Vekova is a graduate of the Higher Institute of Economics "K. Marx" (now UNSS) in 1983, majoring in Labor Economics. She obtained a PhD degree by defending a dissertation on the topic "Mechanism for stimulating the use of labor potential (territorial aspects)" in 1998 at the Institute of Social Management. He holds certificates for acquired knowledge and skills in: pension fund management (after training at the Educational Center at the OECD in 1994 and the Educational Center at the "Pension Reform" project at USAID); human resources management (training at the Delaware Center - Sofia). D-r Vekova underwent short-term specializations and trainings in social policy, social and pension insurance, income policies, tax policy, investment policy, development of documents for accreditation procedures.

Associated Prof. Ludmila Vekova PhD has a relatively long career. She has accumulated extensive expert and management experience in the field of social policy and social work at the Institute for State and Economic Management under the Council of Ministers, at the Research Center for Social Security and Social Assistance, at the General Directorate of Social Security and at the Economic and Social Council of the Republic of Bulgaria. Her work history also includes holding senior management positions (executive director, chairperson of the board of directors and others) in large insurance and pension insurance companies.

Ludmila Vekova, PhD, began her scientific career as an assistant at the Institute of State and Economic Management, Department of Economic Mechanism. Accumulated extensive teaching experience in the field of organization and management of social protection systems as a part-time lecturer at Varna Free University (1995 - 2001), Sofia University (1997 - 2015 and from 2020), UNSS (2006 - 2011) and NBU (2006 – 2012). Dr. Ludmila Vekova started working at the Faculty of Pedagogy of the PU, Department of Social Activities in 2011. After a successful habilitation competitive procedure, she held the academic position of Associate

Professor in the Department of Social Activities at the Faculty of Pedagogy of the PU, and from 2015, she become the head of the department.

Assoc. professor Lyudmila Vekova also has a significant presence in various scientific and professional communities at the national level: chairman of the board of the association "Bulgarian Association for Education in Social Work"; member of the Board of the State Fund for Guaranteeing the Financial Sustainability of the State Pension System (2017-2018); member of the Insurance Relations Commission of the National Council for Tripartite Cooperation, member of the Board of the Bulgarian Association of Supplimentary Pension Insurance Companies.

3. General characteristics of the applicant's activity

3.1. Compliance with the minimum national requirements under Art.2 b from the Academic Staff Development Act in the R. of Bulgaria and under the Additional requirements for "professor" of the Faculty of Pedagogy of the PU

The information in the submitted completed reference shows that the candidacy of Assoc. professor Lyudmila Vekova fully meets the National Minimum Requirements according to the Academic Staff Development Act (Art. 2b) and the Regulations for its application (Art. 1a, para. 1). Prof. Vekova's quantitative assessment of 1105 points exceeds twice the threshold of 550 points required for the academic position of professor. It also covers the Additional requirements of the Faculty of Pedagogy at PU for the academic position "Professor" as follows: if 80 additional points are required for the indicators from group D, the candidate has an additional 200 points; if at least 2 publications are required in scientific publications, referenced and indexed in world-famous databases with scientific information (Scopus and/or Web of Science) in the relevant scientific specialty, the candidate has 5 publications; with a required minimum of 30 additional points on the indicators from group D, the candidate has an additional 235 points; when requesting 1 university textbook, the candidate has published 2 textbooks; under the scientific supervision of at least one doctoral student who has successfully defended a dissertation, the candidate has two successfully defended doctoral students. (on one, the defense is on March 31, and on the other - on May 19, this year).

Assoc. Dr. Ludmila Vekova successfully meets the additional requirements for administrative and organizational experience, as well as the requirement for registration in the list of habilitated persons with scientometric indicators of National Center for Information and

Documentation. The additional requirements for the number of points for teaching experience during the last academic year have also been met - with a minimum threshold of 30 points, the candidate has 131 points.

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

The presented documentation for the educational and teaching activities of Assoc. professor Lyudmila Vekova shows that she has over 30 years of teaching experience, of which 11 years and 2 months as an associate professor at the Faculty of Pedagogy of the PU. She has completed an annual classroom occupancy of 420 hours at a standard of 280 hours. She gives lectures at the bachelor's degree in the academic disciplines: "Social Protection System - Social Insurance", "Management of Social Organizations", "Social Entrepreneurship", "Public Administration" and "Social Policies for People with Disabilities". In the Master's College of Higher Education, Prof. Vekova conducts lectures and practical classes on the disciplines "Fundamentals of the Management of Social Organizations", "Social Management and Social Marketing", "Social Competence", "Social Protection System", "Management of Human Resources in Social Activities" ", "Organizational Development Management".

The curricula for the taught disciplines were personally developed by Prof. Vekova and are periodically updated. Some of them are included in the curricula of other specialties from the Faculty of Pedagogy of the PU. Assoc. Prof. Vekova is the author of the updated (2019) curricula for the "Social Activities" major in the Bachelor's College of Economics and Business Administration and for the "Management of Social Organizations" and "Social Management and Social Entrepreneurship" in the Master's College of Economics. Prof. Vekova is the author of the curriculum and all the documentation for the accreditation of the doctoral program "Social Policy and Social Work" at the Department of "Social Activities".

As a habilitated teacher, Ludmila Vekova is the supervisor of three doctoral students - two of them have an open defense procedure (respectively on March 31 and May 19 this year), and one has been dismissed with the right to defense. She also works actively with undergraduate and graduate students, having supervised more than 40 students who have successfully completed their higher education.

Prof. Vekova is the author of two textbooks in the field of social insurance and pension policy, which are used not only for teaching students from the Faculty of Pedagogy, but also from other faculties of the PU, as well as in other universities and higher schools .

In conclusion, it can be stated that the overall educational and teaching activity of Assoc. Dr. Ludmila Vekova fully corresponds to the subject of the announced competition for the occupation of the academic position "Professor" in professional direction 3.4. Social activities (Social protection and social work).

3.3. Evaluation of the candidate's scientific and scientific-applied activity

The object of review are 33 scientific works - 1 monograph, 30 scientific articles and 2 textbooks for students. They are not subject to present review 26 scientific works on the dissertation and on the competition for Associate professor, as well as 5 scientific works outside the competition's issues. By type, language and place of publication, the reviewed works are as follows: 1 monograph (reviewed by two qualified scientists); 2 articles (№№ 2 and 3) in a Bulgarian journal with an impact factor; 5 publications in English (№№ 27-31), 4 of which are reports from international conferences abroad and 1 - from a national scientific forum; 3 of the reports on the international conferences are in publications referenced and indexed in Web of Science (№№ 27-29); 1 report (№ 4) in proceedings of an international scientific conference in Bulgaria; 5 articles in national magazines (№№ 2,3,6,8,17); 19 publications in scientific works and collections of universities (№№ 5, 7, 9, 26).

The monographic habilitation work of Assoc. Dr. Lyudmila Vekova "Social protection in case of unemployment. /Social work with the unemployed/" (publication 1 from the list of scientific works in appendix 6.1) is in a volume of 398 pages.

The work is structured in a preface, six parts with separate chapters, a conclusion and an appendix. Each of the separate parts of the exposition contains a separate aspect of unemployment protection policy. The first part has an emphasized theoretical and methodological purpose and considers unemployment protection as an element of general social protection. Emphasis is placed on the conceptual foundations of social protection in case of unemployment - as a unity of the subsystems of social security in case of unemployment, social assistance to the unemployed and policies and measures to promote employment. The second part of the monograph is devoted to social insurance for unemployed women as a short-term insurance risk, caused by the economic cycle and structural changes in the demand and supply of labor. What is valuable in this part is the presentation of the additional voluntary insurance for unemployment and professional qualification as an opportunity for better protection against this risk. The third part examines the package of social benefits and services provided to the unemployed - mainly the long-term

unemployed and those who have exhausted their right to compensation from the social insurance system. In the fourth part of the monograph, a critical analysis is made of the strategies for active policy on the labor market, as well as the priorities and content of individual policies aimed at certain specific groups of the population. As a response to this critical analysis, the fifth honor of the monographic work appears, where alternative forms of employment are offered through social entrepreneurship and social enterprises, sheltered employment centers and centers for social assistance and services. In the sixth part, social work with the unemployed is presented as a sequence of social activities and a variety of social interventions implemented in the unemployment protection policies mentioned in the previous parts.

Against the background of numerous publications on the topic of unemployment, the originality of Assoc. professor Vekova's monographic work is expressed in the fact that unemployment protection is placed on a broad basis - as a complex system, including insurance and benefits for the risk of unemployment, social support of the unemployed and active policies to promote employment. A special emphasis in the monograph is the theoretical-methodological aspects of social work with the unemployed. The theoretical analysis and statements throughout the work are complemented by a rich empirical analysis of unemployment for the period 2004-2021. The analysis of the normative base in Bulgaria and the author's proposals for the improvement of legislation and policies in this area also deserve attention. All this makes the habilitation work of Assoc. Dr. Lyudmila Vekova distinguished among the many publications on the topic of unemployment and significant for its theoretical-methodological and practical merits.

Regardless of the fact that all the publications of Assoc. Dr. Ludmila Vekova are united around one topic - social protection and social work, with some conditionality they can be divided into the following thematic areas:

First, the social security system and its specifics, both in terms of the protection of vulnerable groups of the population, and the challenges before it - especially in crisis periods. (publications 11, 21) The social security system is analyzed in the context of the social protection of the population and from its position as a factor in national security. The characteristics of the first and second safety nets in Bulgaria are presented and the requirements for their coordination with the social security systems within the EU are emphasized. (publications 17) Social protection in case of unemployment, including through passive and active measures on the labor market (publication 5), as well as unemployment

insurance in conditions of crises, including the Covid 19 pandemic (publication 21) are subject to critical analysis and proposals for improving the legislation in the direction of higher benefits under more favorable conditions. Social insurance for pregnancy and maternity is seen as an important factor in supporting children and opportunities to limit negative demographic trends. (post 25)

Second, social work and the key competencies of social workers are the subject of another group of publications by Prof. Vekova. The theoretical propositions related to the definition of basic categories such as competences, key competences as a basic structural element in the organization of social work are derived. (publication 14) The challenges facing social work in Bulgaria in the context of the new legal changes and the requirements for their implementation are examined. (publication 20) Defined the main demographic, economic and social processes, as well as the need for social inclusion, which pose new challenges to professional competences in social work. (publications 26, 30) Social competences are considered as a condition for the successful realization of personnel in the field of social work. (publication 31) The problems of motivation and adaptation in practical training in social work in the conditions of a pandemic are the subject of a separate analysis. (publication 29) With some conditionality, the analysis of the new legislation in the field of social services and the problems with its implementation and development opportunities can also be referred to this group of publications (publications 16 and 27)

Third, special attention in the scientific work and publications of Prof. Vekova is devoted to social work education and the employment of graduating students. The main requirements for the content of the training in the professional direction "Social Activities" have been systematized, with an emphasis on the requirements for social work with the unemployed. (publication 2) Through quantitative and qualitative criteria, an analysis of the realization of social work students in various higher schools in our country was carried out and the problems in education in this professional field were systematized. (publication 9) The need for a better legal regulation for the employment of students who have completed social activities was considered, and specific proposals were also made (publication 13) The introduction of innovative solutions in education, lifelong learning, including the training of adults, are seen as important factors for improving the educational process in the "Social Activities" professional field. (publications 3, 15, 18, 24, 28).

Fourth, social innovation and social entrepreneurship are the subject of another group of publications by Prof. Vekova. It considers the development of social entrepreneurship and

social enterprises as an unused opportunity to solve the problems of employment and social inclusion of vulnerable groups of the population through the combination of social and market principles and mechanisms. Weaknesses in this area are indicated and proposals are made for a better regulatory base and resource provision (publications 7, 19)

Fifth, on the basis of her rich theoretical background and practical experience, Prof. Vekova has several publications in the field of pension insurance and pension benefits. First of all, it examines competently and in detail the pension insurance and the types of pensions, as part of the social security system. The strengths and weaknesses of the legal regulation of pension insurance are analyzed. (publications 6 and 8) Pension insurance in the education system and the role of the Teachers' Pension Fund are the subject of a separate analysis with suggestions for improvement (publication 8) The sustainable development and problems of supplementary pension insurance funds in the period 2000-2016. are considered in the context of a changing market, regulatory and political environment. (publication 19). In the same context, the trends in the development of pension insurance companies in Bulgaria and the challenges they face are examined (publication 22). The regulation of the payment phase in the additional fully funded pension insurance in Bulgaria and the approved types of pension products are the subject of a detailed analysis. (publication 12).

In the field of pension provision are the two textbooks of Prof. Vekova, from which students receive rich information and knowledge about the theory, practice and social work in this system of social protection.

The scientific research activity of Assoc. Dr. Lyudmila Vekova is also expressed in her participation as an expert-executor in 6 projects, as follows: within the framework of the "Scientific Research" fund of PU "Paisiy Hilendarski" - 2 projects, in OP "Development of human resources" - 1 project, in the OP "Competitiveness" - 2 projects and in the "Erasmus +" program - 1 project. Some of the scientific results of her participation in research projects have found a place in her publications or are used in the educational process. Assoc. Dr. Lyudmila Vekova was an academic mentor in three student practice projects (2014-2020) funded by the OP "Science and Education for Intelligent Growth".

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

The scientific and scientific-applied contributions of Assoc. Dr. Lyudmila Vekova can conditionally be divided into contributions in the individual habilitation scientific work

"Social protection in case of unemployment. /Social work with the unemployed/" and contributions in other publications.

In a more general plan, the scientific contributions of Dr. Vekova in the habilitation monographic work are expressed in the systematization of scientific knowledge, the clarification of concepts, the development of an adequate toolkit for solving the set research tasks, giving recommendations of a general and more specific nature for improvement of management and legislation in the field of unemployment protection and social work with the unemployed.

In a more concrete way, the following more significant scientific and scientific-applied contributions can be listed in the monographic work of Assoc. Dr. Lyudmila Vekova:

- 1) The conceptual foundations of unemployment protection in the social protection system and its content as a unity of social insurance for the risk of unemployment, social assistance, active employment measures and social work with the unemployed are derived.
- 2) A theoretical analysis of social security policies for the risk of unemployment, its financial basis, access criteria and benefit amounts was carried out, supported by an analysis of the normative basis and analysis of empirical data for the period 2004-2021.
- 3) The normative basis of supplementary unemployment insurance and/or professional qualification is presented. The institutional structure, the rights and arrears of the insured persons and the insurers, the investment policy and the regulatory regime for the management of the borrowed funds have been analyzed. On this basis, the possibilities and reservations for the introduction of this form of supplementary social insurance for unemployment in Bulgaria are presented.
- 4) Social benefits and social services are presented as a complementary element of the unemployment protection system. The role of these forms of social protection in case of unemployment in the conditions of the Covid 19 crisis is analyzed.
- 5) A critical analysis of programs and measures to promote employment as legal regulations and as real policies, including in conditions of cyclical crises and pandemics, was carried out. The role of alternative forms of promoting the employment of disadvantaged groups of the population through social entrepreneurship and innovative social enterprises combining social and economic principles has been revealed.
- 6) The conceptual foundations were examined and proposals were made for improving social work with the unemployed within the entire "life cycle" of the state of unemployment -

registration, application and receipt of benefits, psychological support, inclusion in active employment measures, motivation to search and start a new job.

7) Well-argued recommendations for reforms and concrete policies in the field of unemployment insurance, social assistance, social work with the unemployed in normal mode and in crisis situations have been formulated.

The scientific and scientific-applied contributions in the other publications (outside the habilitation scientific work) of Assoc. Dr. Lyudmila Vekova can be summarized in the following few points:

1) Theoretical and pragmatic conclusions and conclusions from the analysis of the social security system, as part of the national security system - its content, specifics, behavior during a crisis, interconnection of its elements are clarified; proposals for legal changes and improvement of the organization of provided transfer payments and services.

2) Theoretical statements on basic categories of social work, such as competences, key competences, their role in the organization of social work and the challenges of economic, health and humanitarian crises for social institutions and their personnel.

3) Conclusions and conclusions from the analysis of education in social work; motivation in the study of students in the magazine "Social activities", the work realization of graduating students and proposals for improving the educational process, including in distance form.

4) Conclusions from the analysis and recommendations for the development and improvement of the pension model in Bulgaria. Conclusions and proposals for legal changes to the management and regulation of supplementary mandatory and voluntary pension insurance, pension insurance of employees in the "Security" sector and in the "School Education" sector.

5) Conclusions and assessments from the analysis of legislation and practice of social entrepreneurship and social innovation. Proposals for the development of social enterprises as alternative forms of employment for disadvantaged people.

The candidate in the competition, Associate professor Ludmila Vekova, Ph.D., submitted a reference for 34 citations, of which: 5 citations in scientific publications, referenced and indexed in world-famous databases with scientific information; 4 citations in monographs and peer-reviewed collective volumes; 25 citations or reviews in non-refereed peer-reviewed journals. The presented citations reveal the candidate as a recognizable scientist with a contribution to the specific theme of the competition (Social protection and social work).

4. Assessment of the candidate's personal contribution

The presented habilitation thesis, scientific publications and distinguished scientific and scientific-applied contributions of Assoc. Dr. Ludmila Vekova are her personal achievement and are the product of her scientific research in accordance with the norm of scientific ethics according to the procedure regulated in the Academic Staff Development Act and the Rules for the Development of the Academic Staff of the PU.

5. Critical remarks and recommendations

I have no critical remarks on the presented materials and on the candidacy of Assoc. Dr. Lyudmila Vekova in the competition for the academic position "Professor".

6. Personal impressions

I personally know Dr. Lyudmila Vekova initially as a member of the working group on pension reform, and later as head of the "Social Activities" department. She is an extremely hard-working, ambitious and well-rounded scientist with the potential for a continued successful scientific career, including as a scientific supervisor of PhD students.

CONCLUSION

The documents and materials presented by the candidate, Associate Professor Lyudmila Vekova, PhD, meet all the requirements of the Academic Staff Development Act in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for the Implementation of the this act and the relevant Regulations of PU "Paisiy Hilendarski". The candidate in the competition has submitted a significant number (above the minimum requirements) of scientific works, published after the materials used in the defense of the PhD degree and after occupying the academic position of "Associate Professor". The candidate's works contain original scientific and scientific-applied contributions that have received recognition among the scientific community at home and abroad. Her theoretical developments are useful for decision-makers in the field of social protection and social work, and some of them are directly oriented to improving and modernizing the educational process in the professional field of "Social Activities".

After getting acquainted with the materials and scientific works presented in the competition, analyzing their significance and the scientific and scientific-applied contributions contained in them, I find it reasonable to give my positive assessment and recommend the Scientific Jury to prepare a report-proposal to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Pedagogy for the election

of Assoc. professor, PhD Lyudmila Vekova to the academic position of 'Professor' at PU "P. Hilendarski" by professional direction 3.4. Social activities (Social protection and social work).

16.02.2023

Reviewer:

(Prof. Dr. Yordan Hristoskov)