

## REVIEW

**from: Georgi Ivanov Shopov, PhD**

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**Guest Professor at Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski"**

(High Education Field "3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences";

Professional Field: 3.8. Economics (national economy)

**on the materials submitted for the participation in the competition  
for the academic position "professor" in Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski"**

The only candidate in the competition, published in State Gazet #92/18.11.2022 and on the web-page of the Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski", is Associate Professor Ludmila Pavlova Vekova, PhD, from Plovdiv University, Faculty of Pedagogy (FP), Department "Social Activities".

### **1. General Overview of the Presented Materials**

By Order No. RD - 21 - 67 of 18.01.2023 of the Rector of the University of Plovdiv "Paisii Hilendarski" (PU) I have been appointed a member of the scientific jury of a competition for the academic position "professor" in PU - High Education Field "3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences", Professional Field "3.4. Social Activities (Social Protection and Social Work)", announced for the needs of the Social Activities Department.

The submitted by Assoc. Dr. Lyudmila Vekova's set of materials on paper and electronic files is in accordance with the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of PU and includes the following documents: Application to the Rector of the University (as per the template); CV in European format; Master's degree; Doctor's degree; certificate of holding the academic position of Associate Professor; list of scientific works; annotations of scientific works; list of citations; reports on the fulfilment of the minimum national requirements and the additional requirements of the FP for holding the academic position of "Professor"; self-assessment of contributions; declaration of originality and authenticity of the attached documents; certificate of work experience; documents on teaching work; documents on research work.

The candidate has submitted 33 scientific works, without co-authorship: 1 independent monograph, 30 scientific articles (5 in English and 25 - in Bulgarian), 2 textbooks for students (in Bulgarian). All publications are subject to present peer review.

In addition, she has indicated 9 participations in research projects, for which she has attached the relevant evidences. A list of other 25 publications is also given – from the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor (held in 2011), publications after year 2011 but not included in the competition list, and 5 articles on topics outside the present competition.

*In their totality, the provided materials illustrate sufficiently well the scientific development and achievements of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Lyudmila Vekova as a candidate for the academic position of Professor, and allow the preparation of a review in accordance with the relevant criteria and requirements.*

### **2. Brief Biographical Data for the Applicant**

#### A. Education and Qualifications:

- Master's degree in Economics - HSE "K. Marx" (now UNWE) in 1983, specialty "Economics of Labour";
- PhD - Institute of Social Management in 1991;
- Certificates for acquired knowledge and skills in: pension fund management (after training at the OECD Education Center in 1994 and the USAID Pension Reform Project Education Center); human resource management (from Delaware Center - Sofia). She has also undergone short-term specializations and trainings in social policy, social and pension insurance, income policies, tax policy, investment policy, development of documents on accreditation procedures.

#### B. Experience as university teacher and researcher:

- from September 2011 to present: associate professor at the Department of Social Activities of the PU "P.Hilendarsky", teaching students in Bachelor's programs (5 disciplines) and Master's programs (12 disciplines) - a total of 17 academic disciplines;
- since November 2015 to present: head of the Department of Social Activities of the PU "P.Hilendarsky";
- Honorary Assistant Professor and Associate Professor at Varna Free University (1995-2001), Sofia University (1997-2015 and since 2020), UNWE (2006-2011) and NBU (2006-2012);
- participation in 9 projects funded by different national OPs or by the FNI of PU.

#### C. Non-academic professional experience:

- April 2008 - September 2011: Secretary-General of the Economic and Social Council;
- in the period August 1996 - July 2021: held various management positions (CEO, member of the Supervisory Board) in a number of pension insurance companies, including NN Pension Insurance Company (PIC), Pension Insurance Institute PIC, DSK-Rodina PIC, Saglassie PIC, Doverie PIC;
- Expert activity: at the General Directorate "Social Insurance" (GUSO) from March 1994 - until May 1995 (whose successor since 1996 is the NSSI); at the Scientific Centre for Social Insurance and Social Assistance at the MLSP - in 1993; at the Institute of State and Economic Management at the Council of Ministers (1988-1992); member of the Board of the State Fund for Guaranteeing the Financial Sustainability of the State Pension System (2017-2018). ); Member of the Commission on Insurance Relations at the National Social Security Council; Member of the Board of the Bulgarian Association of Supplementary Pension Insurance Companies, Chairman of the Board of the Bulgarian Association for Social Work Education.

This brief synthesis of the main highlights in the professional biography of Assoc. Prof. Vekova, even from a formal point of view, shows that *she possesses a varied and rich experience in the profiles of the present competition*. This experience combines expert knowledge and skills (especially in the field of public and private social security); academic and research activity (in the field of labour economics, industrial relations, social protection and social security); university teaching on social issues (at several universities).

### **3. General description of the applicant's activities**

*Fulfilment of the minimum national requirements under Article 2 b of the Academic Staff Development Act of the Republic of Bulgaria (ASDARB), the Regulation for its implementation (Article 1 a, paragraph 1) and the Supplementary Requirements for "Professor" of the Pedagogical Faculty of PU.*

The relevant reference shows that Assoc. Prof. Dr. Lyudmila Vekova fully meets the National minimum requirements according to the ASDARB (Art. 2b) and the Regulation for its application

(Art. 1a, para. 1). The candidate's quantitative assessment of 1,105 points exceeds twice the minimum of 550 points required for the academic position "professor". She also covers the Additional requirements of the PF of the PU for this academic position - with the required 80 additional points on 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- notorious databases with scientific information (Scopus and/or Web of Science) in the relevant scientific specialty, she has 5 publications; with a required minimum of 30 additional points on the indicators from group D, Ms. Vekova has an additional 235 points; when requesting 1 university textbook, she has published 2 textbooks; with the required scientific supervision of at least one PhD student who has successfully defended a dissertation, the candidate has one successfully defended doctoral student and one - with a defence scheduled for May 19, 2023.

Dr. Vekova successfully meets the additional requirements for the presence of administrative and organizational experience, as well as the requirement for registration in the list of habilitated persons with scientometric indicators of NACID. 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, she has 131 points.

*Teaching and pedagogical activity.* According to the work experience reference list, the candidate has almost 31 years of teaching experience, of which more than 11 years as Associate Professor at the PU.

Her academic engagement (420 hours/year) far exceeds the norm of 280 hours/year. All the 17 disciplines on which she teaches, are in the socio-economic and management field: social activities, social protection, social policy, management of social organizations, HRM, etc. Along with this, as a Head of Social Activities Department, she was the author of the curricula for OCS "Bachelor" - "Social Activities" and OCS "Master" - "Management of Social Organizations" and "Social Management and Social Entrepreneurship" in different years after 2014, requiring the development of new curricula or its update. In 2016, Assoc. Prof. Vekova also developed the curriculum and documentation for the doctoral program "Social Policies and Social Work", under which PhD students are currently being trained in the department (with several successful defences in total so far).

In connection with her teaching activities at the University, Prof. Vekova has written and published a two textbooks on pension insurance. The textbooks are used by students both at PU and other Universities in the country, studying social protection and social security. This is an *important channel for the dissemination of professional knowledge in this field, accumulated by colleague L. Vekova.*

As part of the teaching and pedagogical work of Assoc. Prof. Vekova should be added the scientific guidance of more than 40 successfully graduated bachelors and masters from the Faculty of Pedagogy of PU. She is also a scientific supervisor of three PhD students of the Department.

*The conclusion* is that Assoc. Prof. Dr. L. Vekova has a hard and successful educational and pedagogical activity, incl. as head of the Department of Social Activities, which she created, developed and consolidated. This activity fully corresponds to the theme of the announced competition for the occupation of the academic position "professor" in professional direction "3.4. Social activities (Social protection and social work)".

*Scientific and applied activities.* The list of references on the candidate's scientific and research activities shows the following:

1. Successful participation in 9 projects financed by national OPs or by FNI of PU, as well as 3 academic mentorships within 3 projects "Student Practices", financed by OP "Science and Education for Intelligent Growth". All projects were carried out after the successful competition for Ass. Prof. Academic Position in 2011. Participation in them is a way of practical realization of professional knowledge, but also of gaining additional practical experience.

2. Participation with reports in 18 international and national scientific forums in the period after 2011 - these participations are a form of dissemination and discussion of the results of the candidate's scientific research.

3. Compiler and scientific editor of 1 book of scientific reports, published by the University Publishing House of PU, as well as a reviewer of a textbook on social policy with authors Prof. J. Hristoskov and Assoc. Prof. Bl. Madjurova from PU.

4. The scientific production presented by Associate Professor L. Vekova for review in the present competition is a result of her individual efforts (i.e. - without co-authors) and includes 1 monograph, 30 articles and 2 textbooks. These 33 academic works were published after her election as an associate professor at the PU, which is *a certificate of high scientific activity during this period of "developing professional maturity"*. 26 scientific works on the dissertation and the competition for associate professor and 5 scientific works outside the competition's issues are not reviewed here.

Structurally by type, the reviewed papers are as follows:

- 1 monograph reviewed by two academic professors;
- 2 articles (No. 2 and 3) are in a Bulgarian journal with an impact factor;
- 5 publications are in English (No. 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 (No. 27-29);
- 1 report (No. 4) in proceedings of an international scientific conference in Bulgaria;
- 5 articles in national academic journals (No. 2, 3, 6, 8, 17);
- 19 publications in scientific works and collections of universities (No. 5, 7, 9-26).

The quantitative and structural dimensions of the publications show that the candidate sought and found diverse forms for sharing and discussing the results of her research. This makes her recognizable in the scientific community, as evidenced by the **citations** of her works. These citations are a total of 34, of which 5 are in scientific publications, referenced and indexed in world- notorious databases with scientific information, 4 - in monographs and collective volumes with scientific peer review, 25 - in non-refereed publications with scientific peer review; significant part of the citations are in the last 5 years.

5. The scientific research and the practical-applied orientation in the peer-reviewed here publications can be structured in the following ***main directions***, related to the profile of the professional direction of the competition:

(1) General issues of social protection - No. 1, 11, 17, 21.

(2) Specific areas of social protection - social insurance, social assistance, social work:

2.1. Social protection of the unemployed people (social insurance, social assistance and social work)  
- No. 1,2,4,5.

2.2. Mandatory and additional pension insurance - No. 6, 8, 10, 12, 22, 23.

2.3. Social work (organization, management, competences) - No. 14, 16, 20, 26, 27, 30, 31.

2.4. Social innovations, social entrepreneurship and social enterprises - No. 3, 7, 19.

2.5. Education and professional training on social work for students from the professional direction "Social activities" (practical-applied focus) - No. 2, 9, 13, 15, 18, 24, 28, 29, 32, 33.

In a synthesized way, the contributions can be presented and characterized as follows:

*1. Enriching the terminological apparatus in the field of social protection:*

- Proposed author's views on the nature and importance of the social protection system and its components - definition of the essence, goals, structure, functions and distinctive characteristics of social protection and its elements (social insurance, social assistance, active measures on the market of labor) – No.1, 5, 11, 17, 21;
- Developed (on this basis) a theoretical view of social protection for the unemployed as a system and characterized its "passive" and "active" elements (social insurance in case of unemployment and social support for the unemployed, plus active measures on the labor market) - No. 1, 5.
- Clarified link and interaction between the social protection system and social work - No. 1.

*2. Upgrading and developing scientific knowledge:*

- Systematized main views on the nature, structure, scope, commonalities and differences between the elements of the social protection system, as well as their interconnection and complementarity, leading to a synergy effect and complexity of social protection (No. 1, 11, 17, 21).
- Analysis and synthesis of confirmatory facts regarding economic and social dimensions of processes and problems related to social protection (quantitative and qualitative - structural characteristics of unemployment, of insured persons in risks such as "Old Age" and "Unemployment", of insurance payments - benefits, pensions, allowances, aids and social services) - No. 1, 4, 5, 10, 16, 17, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25.
- Systematized problems and challenges facing the unemployment protection system and its components, incl. Assessed measures taken to limit the negative impact on the labor market of the health crisis caused by COVID 19 - No. 1, 4.
- Analytical review of the Bulgarian pension insurance system and assessment of its specifics (Nos. 32, 33), as well as the design of its capital elements (second and third pillars) - N. 22, 23.
- Analysis and evaluation of the processes and factors influencing the organization and management of social work in Bulgaria - No. 20, 26.
- Systematized and clarified characteristics of social innovations, social entrepreneurship and social enterprises as preconditions for the development of the social economy and support of social inclusion (No. 3, 7, 19).

*3. Scientific and practical achievements:*

- Regarding the social protection - identification of socio-economic challenges and deficits in social protection (as a whole and in its subsystems), as well as formulation of proposals for solutions by optimizing this protection and its components (social security, assistance, services and social work) - No. 1, 11, 16, 20, 21.
- With regard to social work and related competences – (a) systematization of the main challenges facing social work and the practical activity of personnel involved in the social protection system (No. 30); (b) analytical review and evaluation of the legal regulation of social services (No. 16, 27); (c) systematization of key competencies for successful social work and professional realization of social workers in the context of the external determining socio-economic factors (No. 14, 26, 31).

- Regarding social innovations and social entrepreneurship - proposed guidelines and opportunities for their development in Bulgaria as prerequisites for educational and social inclusion - especially of the vulnerable groups of the population (No. 3, 19).
- Regarding university education on social work - (a) evaluation and systematization of problems in this education related to the functioning of the social protection system (No. 9, 15); (b) identification of basic requirements for the content of training in the professional direction "Social activities" as a whole (No. 15, 18, 24, 27) and in connection with the preparation of students for social work with unemployed persons (No. 2); (c) assessment of the opportunities for employment of the students from the professional field "Social Activities" with respective recommendations (No. 13).

Emphasising here on **the habilitation monographic work "Social protection in case of unemployment (Social work with unemployed persons)"**, I would highlight, in addition to the above, the following merits and **scientific contributions**:

- Application of a *multipart research approach* to the consideration of social protection of a specific group of vulnerable persons with a "horizontal" incorporation of social work with the unemployed in all elements of this protection. It is an original approach that distinguishes this monography from the many publications on the subject.
- Giving one's own arguments in the support of *a broader view of the essence of the social protection system* as a "comprehensive approach to providing material support...through the systems of social security, social assistance and market interventions labor..." (No. 1, p. 29). This understanding fits into the concept of a three-pillar organization of social protection, including the integration or at least the coordination of social assistance, social security and labor market programs (see e.g. OECD (2018), "Social Protection System Review: A Toolkit", OECD Development Policy Tools, OECD Publishing, Paris. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264310070-en>, p. 15).
- The development and implementation of a *reliable scientific toolkit* for the study of the selected object and subject with a view to solving the research tasks related to the clarification of concepts, analysis and evaluation of socio-economic processes and policies related to social protection and social work with unemployed persons, as well as - giving recommendations for solving specific problems and improving policies regarding the social protection of the unemployed persons and social work with them. In this way, the monographic study follows the classic triad "description - analysis - prescription", which is a prerequisite for its complex nature.
- Bearing in mind the subtitle of the monograph, which is closely related to the professional direction of the present competition, in my opinion, for the first time in our scientific literature: *a conceptual framework of the content and characteristics of social work with unemployed persons is proposed*; social activities in each subsystem of social protection in case of unemployment (insurance, assistance to unemployed persons, active measures on the labor market) are *systematically* examined; a *productive vision* for improving social work with unemployed persons and alternative forms of providing employment for risk groups with an emphasis on social entrepreneurship is proposed.

As merits of the **two textbooks on pension insurance** I would point out that they summarize the basic provisions of the theory of pension insurance as an element of the social security system, which are complemented by the presentation of a wide range of practical issues related to the construction and functioning of the Bulgarian pension model. Thus, the content of the course material combines the theory and practice of the pension insurance system. The main conceptual issues of the nature and content of pension insurance, the particularities of the existing models and systems are clarified, while at the same time emphasis is placed on the examination of the pension insurance system in Bulgaria on the basis of the adopted model.

The textbooks have a classical structure. The language used in the text is accessible and the speech is clear. The topics are developed precisely and comprehensively, presenting different points of view regarding the issues under consideration. Questions for independent work by the students are foreseen. All this allows their successful use both by students studying this issue (not only at PU), but also by a wider range of specialists.

#### **4. Personal Contribution of the Candidate**

The submitted by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Vekova habilitation monography, as well as the other scientific publications, with their scientific and applied contributions, are **entirely** results of her long-lasting thorough and conscientious research, teaching and overall professional activity, and have been achieved in compliance with the scientific ethics.

#### **5. Critical Remarks and Recommendations**

I have no critical notes. The recommendations to the candidate are mainly wishes for a further fruitful career development.

#### **6. Personal Impressions**

My collaboration with Assoc. Prof. L. Vekova in the Department of Social Activities at the Varna Free University, as well as my role as a reviewer of some of her papers, have convinced me that she admits responsibly all constructive comments and recommendations aimed at improving the quality of her scientific results and her teaching.

### **CONCLUSION**

The documents and materials presented by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Lyudmila Vekova meet all the requirements of the ASDARB, the Regulations for the implementation of the ASDARB and the relevant Regulations of the PU "Paisiy Hilendarski".

The candidate has submitted a sufficient number of scientific works published after the materials used in the competition for the academic position " Associate Professor". In the works presented at the present competition, there are many original scientific and applied contributions that have received national and international recognition, and a representative part of them have been published in monographic works, in refereed publications with an impact factor, in scientific compendiums and by academic publishing houses. The submitted works have a scientific-theoretical and scientific-practical nature, and some of them are directly aimed at improving and modernizing the educational process in the professional field of "Social Activities". The scientific and teaching qualification and abilities of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Vekova are indisputable.

After getting acquainted with the materials and scientific works submitted for the competition, after the analysis of their significance and contributions, **I give my positive assessment and I suggest to the honourable members of the Scientific Jury to support this application and to submit a proposal to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Pedagogy, for the election of Assoc. Prof. Dr. LUDMILA PAVLOVA VEKOVA for the academic position "Professor" in the PU in the field of higher education "3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences", professional field "3.4. Social Activities (Social Protection and Social Work)".**

11.03.2023

Reviewer:

prof. Georgi Shopov, PhD