

О P I N I O N

From: prof . Dr. **Valentina Ljubenova Nikolova-Alexieva**,
University of Food Technologies - Plovdiv,
Professional direction 3.8 . Economy
Scientific specialty "Economics and Management"
(Business Economics, Corporate management)

Subject: competition for **associate professor** in an area on the higher education 3.
Social , economic and legal sciences, Professional direction
3.7. Administration and management (Basics on management,
Competitiveness of business organization),
announced by PU "Paisii Hilendarski" - Plovdiv

1. Information about the competition

The competition for the academic position "docent" in the field of higher education 3. "Social, economic and legal sciences", professional direction 3.7 "Administration and management (Fundamentals of management, Competitiveness of the business organization)" has been announced for the needs of the PU "Paisii Hilendarski" - Plovdiv in State Gazette, № 92 of 18.11.2022. I participate in the composition of the scientific jury for the competition, according to Order No. PD-21-54 of 16.01.2023 of the Rector of the PU.

In the competition participates only one candidate – Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Gergana Dimitrova Dimitrova from “Paisii Hilendarski” University of Plovdiv. Through 2001 the candidate obtained a bachelor's degree in Business Administration at PU "Paisiy Hilendarski", and in 2009 she obtained master's degree in Accounting and Control at the Agrarian University - Plovdiv. In the period 2016-2019, she defended her dissertation work and obtained the Educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional direction 3.8. Economics, in the doctoral program "Economics and Management (Industry)" at PU "Paisiy Hilendarski".

She started her academic career in 2017 as a part-time teacher at PU “Paisii Hilendarski”, where until 2019 she taught the disciplines " Fundamentals on management", "Management in telecommunications", "Sports management", "Placement and placement policy", " Marketing". In the period from 2019 to the present moment, she has successively held the academic positions of assistant and chief assistant professor in the Department of "Management and Quantitative Methods in Economics", at the Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences - FESN of PU "Paisiy Hilendarski", where he teaches lectures and exercises in disciplines such as “Fundamentals of management”, "Management in telecommunications", "Competitiveness of business organization", "Sports management and marketing".

For the period from 1998 to 2019, Dr. Gergana Dimitrova gained extensive experience in practice, successively occupying the positions of expert, through administrative manager to manager in various business organizations, which complements her theoretical training with practical knowledge useful *for teaching work and skills* .

Since 2016, she has been a member of the Union of Scientists - Plovdiv. She has an excellent command of the English language, which allows her to monitor foreign scientific achievements and good management practices and adapt them to modern conditions.

Even here, I must share that I know Dr. Gergana Dimitrova and observe her personal, intellectual and, in particular, her scientific and teaching evolution. I can confirm with complete conviction that she is a thorough, creative, disciplined scientist and colleague, an extremely correct, competent specialist who is distinguished by scientific dignity and professional modesty.

2. Fulfillment of the requirements for occupying the academic position.

The candidate meets all the mandatory conditions under Art. 24 of ZRASRB and the additional requirements of the PU, according to Art. 15, para. 1 of ZRASRB and Art. 53 of PPZRASRB.

Regarding the requirement for acquired ESD "Doctor" (art. 53 para. 1 of PPZRASRB) - in 2019 ch. assistant professor Dr. Dimitrova defends a dissertation at the PU on the topic: "Competitiveness on micro - and the small ones enterprises from the winery industry in a Plovdiv district". She acquired the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" (*diploma No. 1000366/20.05.2019*) in scientific direction 3.8. "Economy".

In regard to the minimum academic experience requirement (art. 53. para. 2 of PPZRASRB) - the total work experience of Dr. Dimitrova as a teacher is about 24 years and 8 months, of which 2 years and 4 months as "chief assistant professor" (*certificate No. RD-38-259 /01.12.22*). Apparently, the candidate fully meets the legal requirement of a minimum academic experience of two years.

Regarding the requirement for a published monographic work (art. 53. para. 3 of PPZRASRB) - the candidate presented a habilitation thesis on the topic " Cluster approach for competitive positioning of the Bulgarian wine industry". The work has been reviewed by two highly respected reviewers in scientific circles, it was published in 2021 in the renowned publishing house "Paisiy Hilendarski" PU - Plovdiv and has a volume of 203 pages, i.e. significantly exceeds the required minimum. The topic of the monographic work, the object, the subject and the time period to which it refers do not imply an overlap with the dissertation work of the candidate, which meets the legal requirement of art. 24, para. 1, item 3 of ZRASRB.

Regarding the requirement to meet the relevant minimum national criteria and the requirements under Art. 1a, para. 2; (art. 53. para. 4 of PPZRASRB) - the candidate achieved a total of **737.5 points** (from indicators: A- 50 points; B-100 points; D- 312.5 points; D- 275 points), which significantly exceeds the required threshold of 400 points. This is evidenced by the section "National minimum requirements according to the RASRB" from the submitted report on the fulfillment of the quantitative requirements for occupying the academic position of "associate professor" at the PU.

In regard to the requirement that there is no proven plagiarism in scientific works (art. 53. para. 5 of PPZRASRB) - at the moment no such has been established.

Gergana Dimitrova is also *a recognizable researcher* with contributions in the field of management and competitiveness. The overall pedagogical preparation and activity of Chief Assistant Professor Dimitrova shows that she is an established and respected teacher with a *national and international image*. Her repeated participation in national and international

forums is proof of her potential to develop and her desire to work to raise the image of PU "Paisiy Hilendarski".

Based on everything stated above, regarding the diverse and in-depth teaching and research work of Ch. Assistant Dr. Dimitrova, I believe that *she fully meets the quantitative and qualitative requirements* for occupying the academic position " *associate professor* " at PU "Paisiy Hilendarski".

3. Evaluation of teaching and research activities

Chief Assistant Dr. Gergana Dimitrova has a guaranteed teaching load in the following disciplines: Fundamentals of Management, Placement and Placement Policy, Sports Management and Marketing, Marketing, Management in Telecommunications, Competitiveness of the Business Organization of the Specialties in Educational Qualification Degree (OQD) "Bachelor" in four of the PU faculties. It is evident from Appendix 14 that for the academic year 2022/2023 it has classroom occupancy **of 130 hours of lectures and 225 hours** of exercises (in the scientific specialty of the current competition), which fulfills the requirement of the PRASPU (Article 64, Paragraph 2)) to occupy the academic position "associate professor". The thematic content of the disciplines is supplemented and updated annually in accordance with modern achievements in theory and practice. The developed lecture course on Competitiveness of the business organization is provided with an independent textbook. In parallel with his classroom occupation, Chief Assistant Professor Dimitrova participates in the preparation of self-assessment reports according to procedures for program accreditation in FESN, the conduct of annual surveys among staff users and the joint work with students and doctoral students from PU.

Her active participation in scientific projects makes an excellent impression. Ch. Assistant Dr. Dimitrova took part in a total of **8 scientific and educational projects** , of which 4 national, 2 domestic and 2 international projects. The high project activity gives reason to conclude that Dr. Dimitrova has acquired sufficient experience and routine and *testifies to professionalism in her teaching work*.

Teaching and learning and scientific activity of Chief Assistant Dr. Dimitrova like lecturer , author of numerous scientific publications and participant in scientific research projects, completely matches on the requirements for borrowing on the academic "associate professor" position at PU "Paisiy Hilendarski".

4. Brief description of the presented scientific works/publications

The careful familiarization with scientific production gives me reason for the following conclusions and summaries:

First, Chief Assistant Dr. Dimitrova participates in the current competition with sufficient scientific production, whose volume amounts to on *946 standard pages*. The relative share of independent publications is 43 %, and co-authored publications – 57 %, which testifies that the candidate owns not only *expressed ability for independent appearance, but also indisputable teamwork skills*.

№	Type of posts	Independent		Co-authored		Total
		Bulgarian language	English language	Bulgarian language	English language	
1	Monographs	1	-	-	-	1
2.	A book based on a dissertation	1	-	-	-	1
3	Studios	1	-	-	-	1
4	Articles	2	2	4	6	14
5	Scientific reports	4	1	7	-	12
6	Textbooks and aids	1	-	-	-	1
	Total:	10	3	11	6	30

Second, Dr. Gergana Dimitrova's publications reveal her ambition to explore current, complex and significant problems for modern science and business practice. Her interests are in the following three areas, directly related to the theme of the competition:

- Competitiveness at the meso and micro level (publications 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 16, 18, 20, 21, 23, 25, 28, 29);
- Cluster approach and increasing competitiveness (publications 1, 5, 6 , 14, 15, 17);
- The science – education – business relationship (publications 9, 13, 19, 22 , 24, 26, 27, 30).

Her independent monograph "Cluster approach for competitive positioning of the Bulgarian wine industry" is also dedicated to *competitiveness*, in which Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Dimitrova extremely conscientiously collected and processed a huge amount of information. The main emphasis is placed on the opportunities for the wine industry for competitive positioning by building regional wine clusters. It clarifies concepts such as competitiveness, competitive environment, competitive positioning, clusters and cluster approach, etc., proposes a methodology for researching the competitiveness of Bulgarian wine enterprises, presents results of conducted in-depth interviews, focus groups and a survey in connection with determination of competitive status, competitive position, competitive advantages and competitive potential in the implementation of joint/related activities, the presence of wine clusters in Bulgaria is identified. The monograph *deserves high evaluation as from theoretical, as well as from practical point of view*. It concerns a topic and problems directly related to the topic of the announced competition.

The analysis of the publications presented in the procedure shows that they are distinguished both by relevance and originality, as well as by a clear methodological framework and professional interpretation of the empirical results. They do not repeat posts related to previous contests. As a whole, these scientific works reveal a deep scientific interest of Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Dimitrova in the thematic area of the competition: fundamentals of management and competitiveness of business organization.

Third, *eight* of the presented publications are in scientific journals, referenced and indexed in the world databases *Scopus and WoS* , and *nineteen* of the presented publications are published in reputable publications, referenced and indexed in other international databases with scientific information. I positively assess the aspiration of Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Gergana Dimitrova to publish her works in international publications, as well as those in

national publications, in English (about 30% of her publications are in English). *This greatly increases the potential of her work to become recognizable in international scientific circles.*

Fourth, the active publication activity of ch. Assistant Dr. Dimitrova is combined with a high citation rate of her scientific publications. The total number of *citations is 23*, of which *nine are* in global databases *Scopus and WoS* and *fourteen are in* peer-reviewed monographs and collective volumes. This information conclusively proves that the applicant's research achievements have *found recognition and public prominence among the scientific community.*

The representatives publications and her participation in the project activity attest Chief Assistant Dr. Gergana Dimitrova as *serious, conscientious, thorough and perspective learned worker.*

5. Overview of the presented scientific papers / publications

The publications contain a number of scientific, scientific-applied and applied contributions with varying degrees of significance for management science:

➤ **Scientific contributions** include :

- systematized and conceptualized are theoretical - methodological productions for management on competitiveness on the industrial enterprise;
- a conceptual model for generating competitive advantages is proposed, based on the developed system of indicators for assessing company competitiveness and a model for assessing the competitiveness of the industrial enterprise and the possibilities for its improvement;
- the knowledge about the cluster approach for competitiveness management and its application in two aspects - formation of wine clusters and formation of educational/innovation clusters was systematized, enriched and conceptualized;
- theoretical summaries are presented and the conceptual approaches for assessing the competitiveness of higher education institutions are highlighted, which in the conditions of the knowledge economy is considered to determine the competitiveness of the national economy;
- the possibilities for competitive positioning of High Schools are highlighted, in an environment of high uncertainty resulting from the ongoing reforms in higher education, the digitalization of the economy, the Covid-19 pandemic, the increasing levels of competition between the large number of High Schools operating in the country;

➤ **Scientific - applied contributions** include:

- on the basis of the proposed conceptual model, the role and place of the theoretical and applied conceptual framework for evaluating the competitiveness of higher education institutions is highlighted, the leading competitive advantages of the universities are identified, the competitive environment in the sector is analyzed and the competitive potential is identified with a focus on the applicability of the cluster approach, considered in the context of the connection and interaction between science, education and business - the so-called "knowledge triangle";
- the proposed methodology for construction on total composed indicator for assessment on competitiveness on the industrial enterprise and attractiveness on the industry is approved in the winery industry;
- study of technology transfer as a process and the key role of research centers functioning at the High Schools as a link between science and business is highlighted, including "initiator", "innovation intermediary", "catalyst", etc.

- an author's methodology is proposed for designing new business models that, through the means of communication, satisfy customers with convenience, excellent quality and affordable prices;
 - an empirical study was conducted regarding the cluster perspectives for competitive positioning of High Schools in conditions of digital transformation of the economy;
- **Applied contributions** include:
- current programs for the development of the wine industry in Bulgaria were studied and on this basis a plan was proposed for the promotion of local varieties and wines and the realization of wine tourism in the Sakar and Eastern Rhodope regions.
 - guidelines are proposed for the development of universities as research institutions, with an equal focus on education and science, which in the context of the cluster approach is considered as a potential for the adaptation of universities to the emerging "new economic model" brought about by Industry 4.0.

In summary, the scientific achievements of Chief Assistant Professor Gergana Dimitrova, I consider it her personal work and can be attributed to the group of "*enrichment of existing knowledge*" and "*application of new scientific achievements in practice*", as well as "*obtaining new data and facts*" for studied economic objects.

6. Key critical notes and recommendations

I have no critical remarks, but at the same time I allow myself to make the following recommendations for the future work on candidate:

- In order to improve the learning process, I recommend that the candidate make efforts to develop textbooks and teaching aids for the disciplines that he will bring to the PU.
- I recommend that she focus her efforts on directing a research project whose subject matter corresponds to her enduring academic interests.

These notes should not be perceived as "criticism" and are not of such a nature as to challenge the contributions of the candidate. They are a collegial "recommendation" and "encouragement" on the occasion of the upcoming scientific events of Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Gergana Dimitrova and her growth in the academic field.

7. Conclusion

Based on the above, I can summarize that there is a convincing candidacy for the academic position of "Associate Professor" of PU "Paisiy Hilendarski". **Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Gergana Dimitrova** is a promising scientist, combining research with practical and applied activities, which has proven its achievements in teaching work.

The documents on the competition testify that all *national minimum criteria*, both *quantitative and qualitative requirements* of PU "Paisiy Hilendarski" for the occupation of the academic position of " **associate professor** " have been met.

With complete conviction, I give my POSITIVE evaluation and recommend to the other respected members of the Scientific Jury to vote FOR AWARDING the academic position of "Associate Professor" to Chief Assistant Dr. Professor Gergana Dimitrova Dimitrova in professional direction 3.7. Administration and management, scientific specialty Fundamentals of management, Competitiveness of the business organization.

15.03.2023
Plovdiv city

Prepared the opinion:
/ Prof. Dr. V. Nikolova-Alexieva /