OPINION

by Associate Professor Dr. Elena Stoyanova Sabeva,
Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv

on the materials submitted for participation in a competition
for the academic position of Associate Professor
at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv,
in the field of higher education **1. Educational Sciences**,
professional field **1.2. Pedagogy (Preschool Pedagogy)**

The competition for the academic position of Associate Professor**,** announced in the State Gazette of the Republic of Bulgaria, Issue No. 96 of 11 November 2025, as well as on the official website of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, for the needs of the Department of Preschool Pedagogy at the Faculty of Education, includes as a candidate Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Elena Angelova Kamenova from the Department of Preschool Pedagogy, Faculty of Education, at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv.

1. General Presentation of the Procedure and the Candidate

By Order No. RD-22-33 of 9 January 2026, issued by the Rector of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, I was appointed as a member of the academic jury in a competition for the academic position of Associate Professor in the field of higher education **1**. Educational Sciences, professional field 1.2. Pedagogy (Preschool Pedagogy). The competition was announced to meet the needs of the Department of Preschool Pedagogy within the Faculty of Education.

Within the statutory deadline, a complete set of materials was submitted in full compliance with the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of the University. All procedural requirements were duly observed, from the announcement of the competition in the State Gazette to the constitution of the academic jury.

Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Elena Kamenova is a graduate of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, where she obtained her Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral degrees in the professional field of Pedagogy (Preschool Pedagogy), as specified in the competition announcement. In addition, she holds a Master's degree with a professional qualification as a Teacher of English for Grades 1–12.

She began her academic career at the University in 2019 as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Preschool Pedagogy within the Faculty of Education. A significant milestone in her academic development is the successful defense, in 2019, of her doctoral dissertation entitled *"An Innovative Pedagogical Model for Foreign Language Acquisition in Early Childhood"*, upon which she was awarded the Doctoral degree (PhD). On the basis of her demonstrated teaching competencies and relevant scholarly output, in 2023 Dr. Kamenova was promoted to the academic position of Chief Assistant Professor.

2. General Overview of the Candidate's Professional Activity

Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Kamenova has a teaching workload—both in-class and extracurricular—that exceeds the established annual norm by more than twofold. Her teaching activities encompass lectures, seminars, and practical classes, as well as the full range of pedagogical practicum components. Dr. Kamenova's professional development is evidenced by the approved lecture courses she delivers in General Preschool Pedagogy and Specialized Preschool Pedagogy across the degree programmes *Pedagogy*, *Preschool Pedagogy*, and *Preschool and Primary School Pedagogy*, in both full-time and part-time modes of study. She has developed a total of ten syllabi for compulsory, elective, and optional courses.

Particularly noteworthy is the extensive range of additional academic and administrative activities in which she is actively involved, including participation as a member of accreditation committees, service on the committee for quality assurance of the educational product, and coordination of the degree programmes in Preschool Pedagogy and Preschool Pedagogy with a Foreign Language. Of significance for her successful positioning within the academic community is also her work with students as a supervisor of bachelor's and master's thesis projects and as a mentor of the *Young Pedagogue Club* at the Faculty of Education of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv. The candidate's high level of engagement reflects the trust placed in her by the academic leadership and her colleagues within the department.

In the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor, Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Elena Kamenova participates with one monograph**,** one book based on her defended doctoral dissertation**,** five articles published in refereed and indexed journals included in internationally recognized scientific databases **(**two of which are co-authored), and seven single-authored articles published in non-refereed outlets**.** The body of scholarly output submitted by Dr. Kamenova meets the minimum scientometric requirements for appointment

to the academic position of Associate Professor, achieving a total of 615 points. Particularly impressive is the result under Indicator "D", where the accumulated score exceeds the required minimum by more than threefold. The increased number of citations constitutes indisputable evidence of the author's visibility and recognition within pedagogical research circles.

The candidate's research is primarily focused on key issues in the theory of preschool education, with an emphasis on identifying effective organizational frameworks and methodologies for supporting the physical, cognitive, and emotional–volitional development of children aged 6–7.

The articles authored by Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Kamenova address, at a substantive level, core themes related to children's health and motor activity, as well as moral and work-related education aimed at fostering valuable personal qualities. Of particular interest is her exploration of alternative approaches—such as the concept of salutogenesis—which, in combination with traditional child-centered methods such as play, enrich the system of pedagogical interaction technologies.

The habilitation thesis with which Dr. Kamenova participates in the competition is focused on the emotional–volitional preparation of children aged 6–7 for school. Undoubtedly, the topic is highly relevant, as it addresses the issue of emotional intelligence in contemporary society. In this formulation, the study represents a timely response both to the demands of modern education for the development of transversal competences and to the expectations of the labour market. By selecting the emotional–volitional preparation of the child for school as the subject of her research, Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Kamenova seeks to overcome the existing imbalance between specialized and general psychological—predominantly personal—school readiness, while also reaffirming established claims regarding the relationship between emotional–volitional skills and adaptation processes.

The content of the monograph is logically and coherently structured into four chapters. In the first two chapters, the key concepts—*emotional–volitional preparation* and the essential characteristics of organized activities in kindergarten—are theoretically clarified. In accordance with the requirements of a monographic study that integrates theory and empirical research, the third chapter focuses on the technology for the practical application of children's emotional–volitional skills across different types of activities. A significant contribution to pedagogical practice is the proposed system of organized activities, the structural steps of which can be adapted to specific contextual conditions. Three main groups of activities with different orientations are described: work-related and practical, play-based and adventure-oriented, and creative and productive activities. Their implementation integrates innovative approaches

aimed at stimulating the development of emotional–volitional skills. From a research perspective, the significance of the study is further evident in the fourth chapter, which proposes criteria for the observation and assessment of children's emotional–volitional preparation for school.

I concur with the contribution claims outlined by the candidate, which may be summarized as an effort to explore new perspectives on key issues in preschool education within the context of the contemporary socio-pedagogical environment. By placing emphasis on the social and volitional preparation of the child for school, Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Kamenova foregrounds the perspective of the child's holistic personal development.

3. Critical Remarks and Recommendations

While recognizing the criterion-based system for assessing children's emotional–volitional preparation as a contribution with clear scientific and applied value, my *critical perspective* is directed precisely at this part of the monograph. It would be advisable for the formulation of the criteria to reflect a single personality trait**,** rather than combined characteristics as currently presented (e.g., *"decisiveness and perseverance"*, *"socio-emotional resilience"*, etc.). Such an approach would necessitate a corresponding refinement of certain descriptions in the column specifying the scoring points**.**

QUESTION:

Based on your research findings, could you indicate which of the organized activities has the strongest impact on the emotional–volitional preparation of children aged 6–7 for school**,** and what are the reasons for this effect**?**

CONCLUSION

The candidate in the competition, Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Elena Kamenova**,** has presented a sufficient number of scholarly works published after those used in the defense of the Doctoral degree (PhD)**.** The candidate's publications demonstrate significant scientific and applied contributions**,** disseminated in academic edited volumes. Her theoretical developments possess clear practical applicability in the field of preschool education**.**

The results achieved by Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Elena Kamenova in both teaching and research activities fully comply with the minimum national requirements, as well as with the

additional criteria of the Faculty of Education, adopted in accordance with the Regulations of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv for the implementation of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria.

Having reviewed the materials and scholarly works submitted for the competition, and taking into account an analysis of their significance and the scientific and applied contributions they contain, I find it well grounded to give my positive evaluation and affirmative recommendation. I therefore recommend that the Academic Jury prepare a proposal report to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Education for the appointment of Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Elena Kamenova to the academic position of Associate Professor at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv in the field of higher education 1. Educational Sciences, professional field 1.2. Pedagogy (Preschool Pedagogy).

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Plovdiv

Prepared by: .....
(signature)

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Elena Sabeva