



OPINION

in a competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor" in the field of higher education 4. Natural sciences, mathematics and informatics; professional direction 4.4. Earth Sciences; scientific specialty Ecology and ecosystem protection, announced in State Gazette No. 102 of 23.12.2022 with candidates from the Department of Agroecology and Environmental Protection at the Agricultural University - Plovdiv:

1. Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Plamen Ivanov Zorovski
2. Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Maria Krasimirova Chunchukova

by Prof. Dr. Violina Angelova Rizova appointed in accordance with Order No. RD 16-245/22.02.2023 of the Rector of the Agricultural University - Plovdiv as Chair of the Scientific Jury

1. Brief presentation of the candidates.

Dr. Plamen Zorovski was born on 22.03.1981. In 2004 Dr. Zorovski obtained his Bachelor's degree in General Agronomy (Agronomy - Field Production) at the Agricultural University - Plovdiv, and in 2005 he graduated as Master's degree in Crop Production at the same university. In 2013, he defended thesis on "Study on the biological and economic qualities of oat varieties in relation to their use as a healthy food for humans" and obtained PhD. He also obtained a qualification in Professional Pedagogy (2004) at the Additional Training Centre of the AU-Plovdiv. He started working in 2009 at the Scientific Research Centre (SRC) of the Agricultural University - Plovdiv, successively holding the positions of junior expert and senior expert. In 2011 he joined the Department of Agroecology and Protection of Agroecosystems and Population at the Faculty of Plant Protection and Agroecology of the Agricultural University - Plovdiv. Since 2013 he has been a senior assistant professor in the same department. Dr. Zorovski is fluent in English and Russian and has good computer literacy. The professional path of the candidate is related to the improvement of qualification through participation in courses and trainings for "Improving the competence of teachers of state higher education institutions preparing future teachers", "Training of trainers in innovative educational technologies" (2022), training under the Erasmus+ program in the Netherlands (2014), etc. Member of the Regional Scientific and Technical Union - Plovdiv.

Dr. Maria Chunchukova was born on 11.11.1981. In 2006. Chunchukova obtained her Bachelor's degree in General Agronomy (Agronomy - Field Husbandry) at the Agricultural University - Plovdiv, and in 2007 she graduated as Master's degree in Landscaping - Outdoor and Indoor Design at the same university. In 2017 she defended her dissertation on "Study on the biological and economic qualities of oat varieties in relation to their use as a healthy food for humans" and obtained her PhD in Agrarian University - Plovdiv. During her working activity she held successively the following positions: technical assistant at "Felikon 97" AD (2008-2011), technical assistant at "Intertorgo" Ltd (2013), assistant at Agrarian University (2013-2017), junior and senior expert at AU (2017-2018), chief assistant - AU-Plovdiv (June 2018 - until now). Dr. Chunchukova is fluent in English and Russian and has good computer literacy

2. General description of the scientific output.

In the competition for "Associate Professor" **Dr. Plamen Zorovski** participated with a total output of 42 works, grouped as follows: Scientific-publications in the nomenclatural specialty - 42 pieces, of which:

- Publications related to the doctoral dissertation - 7, which are not under consideration;
- Publications in journals that are refereed and indexed in world-renowned databases of scientific information - 10
- Publications with impact factor - 2
- Publications in peer-reviewed and refereed scientific journals - 8;
- Publications in non-refereed peer-reviewed scientific journals or edited collective volumes - 13;
- Published book on the basis of defended dissertation for the award of educational and scientific degree "Doctor" - 1.

The personal participation of head. as. Dr. Plamen Zorovski in the above 35 works is illustrated by the fact that 2 are self-study, in 8 - is the first, in 9 - is the second, and in the remaining 16 - is the third and subsequent author.

For the preparation of the opinion **35** works are subject to analysis.

The scientific works of the head as. Dr. Zorovski's papers in indicator groups (B) and (G) exceed the minimum requirements in the professional direction 4.4 Earth Sciences.

In the competition for "Associate Professor" **Dr. Maria Chunchukova** participated with a total output of 34. works, grouped as follows: Scientific-publications on the nomenclatural specialty - 34, of them:

- Publications related to the doctoral dissertation - 2(3), which are not under consideration;
- Publications in publications that are refereed and indexed in world-known databases of scientific information - 10 (9)
- Publications with impact factor - 2
- Publications in refereed and indexed databases with scientific information - 22.

The submitted reference for the list of publications with which the head. as. Dr. Maria Chunchukova participated in the competition for associate professor is incorrectly prepared. The publication "Ecological studies on circulation of nickel in Abramis brama and Pomphorhynchus tereticollis from freshwater ecosystem of the Danube River, Bulgaria" with authors Kirin D., Chunchukova M., published in J. Agrarni Nauki in 2017 is in the list of publications submitted for the degree of Doctor of Education and Science. The same publication is listed under number B1 to the publications of group B. I do not accept the inclusion of the publication (B1) in the documents for the current competition, as it is contrary to Article 24, paragraph 1, item 3 of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff of the Republic of Bulgaria (2018), and respectively Article 78, paragraph 1, item 3 of the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff at the Agrarian University - Plovdiv ("...which do not repeat those submitted for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"). As a result, the number of publications in the group of indicators (B) from 10 is reduced to 9 and the candidate *Dr Chunchukova does not meet the minimum national requirements for this group of indicators (B). The scientific papers in indicator group (D) exceed the minimum requirements in professional direction 4.4 Earth Sciences.*

For the opinion **31** papers are subject to analysis. The personal participation of the principal as. Dr. Maria Chunchukova in these 31 works is illustrated by the fact that 3 are independent, in 14 - is the first, in 13 - is the second, in 1 - is the third author.

3. Teaching activities of the candidates

Dr. Plamen Zorovski is a senior assistant professor at the Department of Agroecology and Environmental Protection at the Faculty of Plant Protection and Agroecology of the Agricultural University - Plovdiv with over 12 years of experience. The submitted reference on the candidate's teaching employment shows that for the last 5 years (2018-2023) he has an employment of 2463.8 hours, of which 184 hours of lectures and 1829.5 hours of exercises. Principal asst. Dr. Plamen Zorovski has given lectures with students of the MSc "Ecology of settlement systems" on the discipline "Healthy and safe working conditions", with students of the B.Sc. "Bachelor" specialty "Agricultural Economics" on the discipline "Ecological farming", with students of the specialty "Ecology and environmental protection" on the disciplines "Healthy and safe working conditions", and "Pollution, water protection and impact on ecosystems". Dr. Zorovski is co-author of the curriculum for the discipline "Healthy and Safe Working Conditions" and author of the curriculum for the discipline "Environment and Tourism". Apart from direct teaching workload, Dr. Zorovski is involved in many other teaching and public activities: lecturer in training courses for farmers under the RDP (2022-present), academic mentor in the project "Student Practices" (2017-2018), mentor of a student team from Faculty of Plant protection and agroecology in the competition "Challenge labs 2021" on the topic "Nitrates in food - a problem for human health", participant in the working group on the preparation of a self-assessment report for programmatic accreditation of the professional direction 4.4. Earth Sciences, member and secretary of the Ecologist Club at the Regional Scientific and Technical Union - Plovdiv, etc. Teaching activity is complemented by the supervision of 7 successfully defended graduates (4 in B.Sc. and 3 in M.Sc.) in the last 5 years.

Dr. Maria Chunchukova is a senior assistant at the Department of Agroecology and Environmental Protection at the Faculty of Plant Protection and Agroecology of the Agricultural University - Plovdiv with over 8 years of experience. The submitted reference on the candidate's teaching employment shows that for the last 5 years (2018-2023) he has an employment of 3494.3 hours, of which 1114 hours of lectures and 1958.5 hours of exercises. Principal asst. Dr. Maria Chunchukova has conducted lectures, seminars, exercises and practices in 15 disciplines - 9 disciplines (Invasion Ecology, Ecological Parasitology, Ecology, Biocenology and Global Ecology, Biodiversity and Bioresources, Ecological Monitoring, Biomonitoring and Bioindication, Ecology and Environmental Protection, Fundamentals of Ecology), with students of the Bachelor of Science in Ecology and Environmental Protection, Agronomy-Forestry, Agronomy-Tropical and Agriculture, "Plant Protection" and "Agricultural Engineering", and 6 disciplines ("Green System", "Biodiversity, Ecology and Conservation of Freshwater Ecosystems", "Biodiversity and Environmental Risk", "Aquatic Ecosystems and Sustainable Nature Use", "Protected Species in Tourist Areas", "Ex-situ Conservation and Tourism") with students in the Master's degree programmes of the courses "Ecology of Settlement Systems", "Biodiversity Conservation" and "Sustainable Nature Use and Ecotourism". Lectures in the above courses are taught according to syllabi developed by the candidate. The teaching activity is complemented by the supervision of 15 (6 in the Bachelor's degree and 9 in the Master's degree) successfully defended graduates. She has also been an academic mentor of students under the OP "Science and Education for Smart Growth" (2012-2014; 2016-2017). It is noteworthy the extremely high number of courses taken by the Head of the Department Dr. Chunchukova (15) and the teaching load in the last 5 years (2018-2023). Both the candidates Dr. Zorovski and Dr. Chunchukova meet the requirement for a minimum teaching experience of 2 years according to the Academic Staff Development Act in the Republic of Bulgaria (ASDA) and the Regulations for its implementation (RASDA) at AU-Plovdiv.

4. Research activity of the candidates.

Areas of publication

Dr. Plamen Zorovski participated in the competition for associate professor with 35 scientific works (34 publications and 1 book based on a defended dissertation). All works are in the scientific specialty of the competition and are subject to analysis. The main directions in the research work of chief asc Dr. Plamen Zorovski are in the field of organic farming and quality of the obtained production, agroecology and chemical protection of agricultural crops. Two of the scientific publications were published in journals with impact rank and impact factor - publication B1 (Journal of Central European Agriculture, Q3, SJR 0.23) and publication B2 (Bulgarian Journal of Agricultural Science, Q3, IF 0.54, SJR 0.248). I accept the author's report of prof. as. Zorovski's contributions to the scientific problems under development, but I believe that they can be formulated in a more summarized form. All the researches of Dr. Zorovski are in the priority areas for the AU.

The main directions in the research work of **Dr. Chunchukova** are related to the study of water pollution of the river. Danube with some heavy metals and metalloids (Pb, Ni, As, Cd), accumulation in sediments and organs of different fish species and their parasites and 2) Biodiversity in selected sections of freshwater ecosystems - fish, parasites and parasite communities of different fish species (Luda Yana River, Maritsa River, Osm River, Luda Yana River, Luda Yana River, Osm River, Osm River. Topolnitsa River; Yana River; Yana River; Stryama River; Topolnitsa River. Ogosta; Chepelaarskaya; Riv. Tamrashka; Tundja; Jez. Srebarna; ez. Bezbog; Batak Reservoir; Srebr. Panicheri). Two of the scientific publications of Dr. Chunchukova are in journals with impact rank - publication B8 (Helminthologia, Q4) and publication B9 (Bulgarian Journal of Veterinary Medicine, Q4). I do not accept the summary of contributions to scientific works prepared in this way (18 p. summary with 132 contributions from 31 publications on 16 "scientific problems"), which shows insufficient experience in summarizing information by the candidate.

Citation and referencing of scientific output.

The citations listed in the competition documents are an assessment of the candidate's recognition in the scientific community. According to the reference submitted by **Dr. Zorovski**, 21 citations of 12 publications were noted, of which: in scientific journals, refereed and indexed in world-known databases with scientific information or in monographs and collective volumes (E10) - 14 pcs.; in monographs and collective volumes with scientific peer review (E11) - 1 pcs.; and in non-refereed journals with scientific peer review (E12) - 6 pcs. Citation #15 is in a dissertation and is not under consideration. The number of citations is reduced from 20 to 11 scientific publications, which are cited as follows - 3 pcs. in Bulgarian journals and 17 pcs. in Bulgarian journals with impact factor and in foreign journals. The majority of citations are in scientific journals, refereed and indexed in world-known databases.

A reference from the candidate is presented. **Dr. Maria Chunchukova** for 69 citations, of which 46 in Bulgarian journals with impact factor and in foreign publications and 23 in dissertations. Citations in dissertations are excluded from the list of citations and the number of citations is reduced to 46. Formally, the number of citations of head as. Chunchukova meets the requirements, but the significant number of citations (29 pcs.) by the team with which the candidate works is remarkable.

Both candidates exceed the minimum requirements for this indicator.

Participation in research projects.

Dr. Plamen Zorovski participated in the competition in a total of 10 scientific (1 international ERA-NET, 5 national to the National Research Fund and 4 internal institutional), 6 educational projects, 2 infrastructure and 3 implementation contracts with companies. He is the

leader of 1 scientific and 1 infrastructure project funded by the University Fund of AU- Plovdiv and 1 of the implementation contracts.

Dr. Maria Chunchukova participated in the competition in a total of 8 projects, of which 3 research and applied projects (1 international project, 2 internal university research projects) and 4 educational projects (as an academic mentor of 2 student internships (2012-2014 and 2016-2017), and as a postdoctoral fellow under the NSP "Young Scientists and Postdoctoral Fellows" (2020 and 2021). She is the operational supervisor of one of the projects at the AU Science Fund. Dr. Chunchukova also participates in 1 contract with the Pirin National Park (2019-2021), as an expert on the study of the composition and age structure of the fish fauna, and risk assessment of the ichthyofauna as a result of eutrophication.

Both candidates exceed the minimum requirements for this indicator.

5. Remarks and recommendations.

Teaching activity of **Dr. Chunchukova** is impressive (15 disciplines, 3494 hours) and provokes questions how it is combined with an extremely active publishing activity (34 publications in 5 years). I would recommend **Dr. Chunchukova** to concentrate on improving the quality of her scientific publications and publishing them in journals with greater scientific weight. This will attract more readers and a greater number of citations from researchers outside of AU.

I also recommend to **Dr. Zorovski** to publish in more reputable journals.

6. Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the pedagogical, scientific and applied activities of the candidates, I consider that:

1. **Dr. Plamen Ivanov Zorovski** meets and exceeds the minimum national requirements in all groups of indicators for the acquisition of the academic position "associate professor", has pedagogical and teaching experience and fully meets the requirements of the Law on Academic Staff Development at the Agrarian University.

2. In connection with the violation of Article 24, Paragraph 1, Item 3 of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff of the Republic of Bulgaria (2018), and Article 78, Paragraph 1, Item 3 of the Regulations on the Implementation of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff at the Agricultural University, **Dr. Maria Krasimirova Chunchukova** does not meet the requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff at the Agrarian University.

On the basis of the conclusion made, the only candidate who meets the requirements of the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff at the Agrarian University is the principal as **Dr. Plamen Ivanov Zorovski**. This gives me a reason to evaluate **POSITIVE** the overall activity of **Dr. Plamen Ivanov Zorovski**.

I take the liberty to propose to the honorable Scientific Jury to also vote positively, and the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Plant Protection and Agroecology at the Agricultural University - Plovdiv to elect **Dr. Plamen Ivanov Zorovski** as "Associate Professor" in the scientific specialty "Ecology and Conservation of Ecosystems", professional direction 4.4. Earth Sciences.

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Plovdiv

Prepared the opinion:

(Prof. PhD Violina Angelova Rizova)