

## REVIEW



concerning the competition for the post of Associate Professor in the scientific speciality "Economics and Management (Agriculture)", field of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, professional field 3.8. Economics, announced in State Gazette no. 7 of 23.01.2024 with candidate Mariana Ivanova Shishkova

from the AGRICULTURAL UNIVERSITY - PLOVDIV appointed according to the Order No. RD 16-404/20.03.2024 of the Rector of the Agricultural University - Plovdiv as the chair/member of the scientific jury

**Reviewer.** PROF. DR. DARINA GEORGIEVA ZAIMOVA

*Professor of Economics and Management (Economics and Business, Entrepreneurship), field of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, professional field 3.8. Economics, Department of Industrial Business and Entrepreneurship, Faculty of Economics, University of Thrace*

*appointed as a member of the scientific jury by Order No. RD 16-404/20.03.2024 of the Rector of the Agrarian University.*

### **1. General data on the applicant's career and thematic development;**

Dr. Mariana Shishkova is a senior assistant professor at the Department of Economics and Management at the Agricultural University - Plovdiv. She teaches classes in the disciplines "Agricultural Economics"; "Business Economics"; "European Agricultural Policy"; "Labour Economics"; "Sustainable Development and Circular Economy", "European Economic Integration". In addition to her academic career, her professional development is complemented by her experience as a financial manager in an NGO.

Dr. Shishkova is a graduate of the Agricultural University - Plovdiv, where she received her PhD in Economics and Management and her BA in Agricultural Economics. At Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski" Dr. Shishkova received a Master's degree in "Financial Management", professional qualification "Economist".

The candidate possesses solid skills and experience of working in a multidisciplinary and multinational team, has expertise and competencies in project development, implementation and management, and has a third level professional qualification as a Software Developer.

### **2. General description of the submitted materials.**

In the competition for "Associate Professor" Dr. Mariana Shishkova participated with a total output of 28 works, grouped as follows:

❖ *Scientific publications in the nomenclature specialty - 28, including:*

- *Publications related to the doctoral dissertation* - 3 issues, not subject to review;
- *Publications with impact factor (IF) and/or impact rank (SJR)* - 4;
- *Other publications in peer-reviewed and refereed scientific journals (indexed in Web of Science)* - 15;
- *Publications with scientific peer review, refereed in other databases* - 5;
- *Monograph "Potential and prerequisites for development of bioeconomy in Bulgaria"* - 1 issue.

The personal participation of Dr. Mariana Shishkova in these 25 works is illustrated by the fact that 4 scientific publications are independent, and of the works in co-authorship: in 1 - is the first, in 10 - is the second, in the remaining 10 - is the third and subsequent author.

- ❖ *Textbooks* - not applicable
- ❖ *Study guides* - not applicable

**24 publications and 1 monograph** are subject to analysis for the review.

Mariana Ivanova Shishkova has a total of 658,75 points, with the required 400 points (258,75 points above the minimum national and additional requirements of the Agricultural University - Plovdiv). Therefore, the candidate presents scientific production and materials exceeding the minimum national and additional requirements of the Agricultural University - Plovdiv.

From the analysis of the presented works it can be concluded that Dr. Mariana Shishkova has sufficient publications that fully comply with the requirements of the announced competition for the academic position of Associate Professor in PH 3.8 Economics.



**3. Main areas of the candidate's research work. Demonstrated skills or aptitudes in conducting research (project leadership, attracting external funding, etc.).**

Dr. Mariana Shishkova works in the field of: social capital and sustainable development; bioeconomics; impact of the Common Agricultural Policy on Bulgarian agriculture. The realization of joint scientific publications with prominent scientists in academia has been decisive for the formation of Dr. Shishkova as an insightful analyst, innovator and researcher of a new type, who forms her science simultaneously on the basis of good theoretical knowledge and adaptive practical structuring.

The candidate has active participation in research projects that refer to the above thematic areas, and in practice reflect the theoretical and practical-applied contributions of Dr. Shishkova to add value to science and research related to the concepts of sustainability, green transition, the transformation of the regional business model to new market realities.

The above contributions are in line with the professional field of the competition and with the teaching activity of Dr. Mariana Shishkova. They represent valuable and significant for science and practice research. All this gives me grounds for a high evaluation of her scientific research work and the works with which she participated in the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor.

**4. Evaluation of the candidate's pedagogical training and activity. His/her role in the training of young researchers.**

As a senior assistant, Dr. Shishkova teaches the following main disciplines: agricultural economics; business economics; European agricultural policy; labour economics; sustainable development and circular economy, European economic integration; and has experience in the disciplines of agricultural policy; economics of cooperatives; economics of animal husbandry; EU economics, etc. The conducted review and empirical research, the published results, their promotion at scientific forums, reflect on the quality and innovativeness of the disciplines and teaching material brought out by Dr. Shishkova.

Dr. Šišková has completed mobility stays at the Czech University of Natural Sciences and the Portalegre Polytechnic Institute for teaching purposes, and at the University of Almeria for training purposes.

The applicant's teaching load for the period 2018 - 2023 is 4225.8 hours, balanced between lectures and exercises. Dr. Shishkova has experience lecturing to international students from Moldova and Italy.

**5. Significance of the obtained results, proven by citations, publications in prestigious journals, awards, membership in international and national scientific bodies, etc.;**

The development of the bioeconomy, Dr Shishkova explores against a number of challenges that affect many stakeholders: consumers gaining access to new sustainable products based on renewable biological resources; bio-based industries taking technological and sustainability leadership and thereby building long-term competitive advantages; enhanced economic growth and new jobs in rural, coastal and industrial areas; and new revenue streams for the EU-27 in the rural and forestry



sectors with Socio-cultural characteristics and fundamental societal transformations are also analysed in relation to sustainable development.

The candidate Dr. Shishkova has submitted for review the following citations:

Citations or reviews in scientific publications, refereed and indexed in world-known databases with scientific information or in monographs and collective volumes - 11 issues;

Citations or reviews in non-refereed peer-reviewed journals - 1 issue.

Mariana Shishkova's publications are cited primarily by foreign authors. As a result, the candidate received 170 points, with the required 50 points from the minimum national requirements and those of the Agrarian University - Plovdiv.

The foregoing gives me grounds to conclude that the chief asst. Dr. Mariana Shishkova is an established author-researcher on the scientific scene.

**6. Significance of contributions to science and practice. A reasoned response to the question of the extent to which the candidate has a clear research profile;**

Dr. Shishkova's research pursuits and realization follow trends in societal needs and urgencies, namely the development of social capital in the context of the sustainable development paradigm; the application and opportunities of bioeconomics to industry and labor market development; and the institutional support and framework related to the application and impact of the Common Agricultural Policy.

## **I. ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTIONS**

I systematize the originality of the candidate's contributions in accordance with the scientific contributions reference submitted for the purposes of the competition.

Regarding the original contributions in the field of "Social Capital and Sustainable Development", I confirm the importance of the methodology for assessing the level of social capital, as well as the formation of network models based on the identified formal and/or informal links between the studied objects for achieving sustainable development at the local level.

Another original contribution is the exploratory analysis of spatial data on the territorial distribution of the different categories of initiatives. Areas that emerge as key in the implementation of projects in a given category are identified. An analysis is also applied in relation to the distribution of bioeconomy initiatives in terms of their financial resources, and in terms of the combined contribution of the three variables: project category, resource and area.

## **II. METHODOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTIONS**

In the methodological contributions, the model's position in assessing the influence of factors on the implementation of local initiative groups is worthy.

The applied categorization of projects in the agri-food sector for the development of the local bio-economy also allows for the mapping of initiatives by category, by financial resource, and by group of indicators. A classification of the categories of projects in the field of the actual bioeconomy supported at local level has



also been carried out.

A methodology is adapted to assess farmers' attitudes towards the Common Agricultural Policy and the effects it has on their activities.

### **III. SCIENTIFIC CONTRIBUTIONS**

The methodology for assessing the level of social capital presents a combined focus on transformation in traditional sectors and the evolution of traditional terms, and as such we define social capital.

The development of Dr. Shishkova's scientific search in the context of defining, systematizing and developing the ideas and theories of "sustainable development", "bioeconomy", "social farming", "social capital" deserves attention. The research addresses the wide range of factors - economic parameters and interdependencies, social relations and societal influence, technological progress and ecosystem patterns, which in turn enrich the "cause-effect" model.

A logistic model was constructed to assess the factors influencing farmers' decision to leave traditional R production. damascena, on the basis of which the possibilities of stimulating farmers to remain in the subsector are identified.

Dr. Shishkova's research operationalizes the concept of bioeconomics along the parallel of two main groups of global meta-discourse: the environmental meta-discourses: discourse on modernity, discourse on the limits to growth, discourse on ecological modernization, and discourse on sustainable development, and the discourses on neoliberalism, citizen participation, and global governance are in the group of economic and governance meta-discourses.

### **IV. APPLIED CONTRIBUTIONS**

The candidate makes a comparative analysis between Bulgaria and the EU-28 in terms of indicators set out in the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the results of which reveal the opportunities for achieving sustainable economic growth and productive employment in rural areas of Bulgaria.

In the context of this category of contributions, the combined application of two GIS software is also significant, through which the mapping of initiatives in the field of the actual bioeconomy for the period 2016-2021 has been carried out.

The LAGs were analyzed in the context of factors related to (1) the experience of the LAG, (2) the type of strategy (single or multi-fund support), and (3) ongoing communication with relevant government agencies.

Dr. Shishkova looks in depth at three sets of indicators for assessing competitive advantages in sunflower production, with a direct opportunity for value addition in the sector.

In summary, the contributions of Dr. Mariana Shishkova presented for review share the vision of high scientific level and originality in theoretical and practical aspects. The mentioned contributions are in accordance with the professional field of the competition and with the teaching activity of the head as. Dr. Mariana Shishkova, and are definitely valuable for science and practice research. All this gives me grounds for a high evaluation of the candidate's scientific research work and works, with which she participated in the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor.

## **7. Critical comments and recommendations**

Principal asst. Dr. Mariana Shishkova is a very well-prepared researcher and lecturer, with worthy experience in national and international level. Participation in international scientific and educational projects, which will further shape her as an excellent academic representative, will reveal serious potential for her.

## 8. Personal impressions and opinion of the reviewer

My joint work and direct observation of Dr. Shishkova gives me the absolute reason to define her as a promising, ambitious, consistent and extremely organized professional who is guided by the standards of high science and ethics.

Mariana Shishkova is precise and very responsible, a team player with the potential for leadership positions, far-sighted in her decisions and structured in the plan for their implementation.

I am convinced that Dr. Shishkova is a valuable person and a scientist of significant achievements, who successfully fits in and contributes adequately to the development and improvement of the academic process at the Agricultural University - Plovdiv.

## CONCLUSION

On the basis of the analysis of the pedagogical, scientific and scientific-applied activity of the candidate, I believe that prof. asc. Dr. Mariana Shishkova meets the requirements of the Law on Agricultural and Rural Development, the Regulations of the Agrarian University for its application, taking into account the above mentioned by me positives, merits and prospects for development in academic terms.

All of this gives me reason to rate **positively** her overall work.

I take the liberty to propose to the Honorable Scientific Jury also to vote positively, and the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Economics at the Agricultural University - Plovdiv to elect **Assoc. Dr. Mariana Shishkova** as "**Associate Professor**" in the scientific specialty of **Economics and Management (Agriculture)**.

April 29, 2024

**RESPONSE:** .....

Prof. Dr. Darina Zaimova

Plovdiv