

REVIEWER'S POSITION

Regarding a competition for an "Associate Professor" in the scientific specialty of *Economics and Management (Agriculture)*, announced in SJ № 7 from 23.01.2024 with a candidate *Chief Assistant Professor PhD Mariyana Ivanova Shishkova*

From *Associate Professor PhD Mariya Marinova Peneva*, Department of "Economics of Natural Resources", UNWE, Sofia, area of higher education: 3. Social, economic, and legal sciences, 3.8. Economics, Specialty: Economics and Management (Agricultural Economics and Policy), a member of the scientific jury in accordance with Order No. RD – 16 – 404 / 20.03.2024 to the Rector of the Agricultural University - Plovdiv

1. General data on the candidate's career and thematic development

Chief assistant professor PhD Mariyana Shishkova is a graduate of Agricultural University - Plovdiv, where: she graduated the specialties of "Agraricultural Economics" (BSc) and "Financial Management" (MSc); successfully defended a dissertation thesis on the topic: "The role of social capital for sustainable development of rural areas"; and acquired the educational and research degree of "Doctor" (PhD) in the scientific/professional field 3.8. Economy. She is fluent in English and holds the degree of professional qualification software specialist by profession "programmer". Since 2010 until 2017, she works in the non-governmental sector as a consultant and financial manager, and after 2017 she became an assistant professor. Currently she is a chief assistant professor at the Department of Economics at the Agricultural University - Plovdiv. The overall documents, presented for this competition, show an extremely serious attitude of the candidate toward the teaching activities and her individual work with students, as well as her continuous efforts to update and adapt the taught material to current studies in the field of agricultural economy and policy and to respond to the requirements of practice and business for sustainable development and European integration. On the other hand, the evidences for chief assistant professor Shishkova's participation in research projects and programs, published scientific works and citations, are indicative of her qualities for conducting successful research, consistency and conformity of her scientific interests in the years before and after the defense of her doctoral dissertation, and ability to work in a team. She is an active member of the academic community at the university since she is a member of the General Assembly and the Academic Council of the university, the General Assembly and the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Economics at the Agricultural University - Plovdiv.

2. General description of the presented materials

In the competition for the academic position "Associate Professor" chief assistant professor PhD Mariyana Shishkova participates with a total number of 28 outputs (three of which are publications related to her doctoral dissertation and after taking into account the rules of Agricultural University – Plovdiv her overall performing assessment is 373.75 points), grouped by following:

❖ *Scientific publications on the nomenclature specialty – 28 publications, of which:*

- *Publications related to the doctoral dissertation – 3, which are not subject to consideration;*
- *Publications with an impact factor – 4;*
- *Publications in peer-reviewed and refereed scientific journals – 15;*
- *Publications in conference proceedings – 5;*

❖ *Monography – 1;*

To prepare the opinion, 25 publications are subject to analysis. The personal participation of chief assistant professor Shishkova, in the scientific works mentioned and considered for the current competition is illustrated by the fact that in four of them, she is a single author, in one - she is a first author, in eight - she is a second author, and in the rest she is a third and subsequent author.

3. Main directions in the candidate's research work. Demonstrated skills or aptitude for leading scientific research (project management, attracted external funding, etc.).

Chief assistant professor PhD Mariyana Shishkova, demonstrates knowledge and skills in a range of scientific interests, which are correctly grouped into three main thematic areas, namely: social capital and sustainable development; bioeconomy; and the impact of the CAP on Bulgarian agriculture. The candidate's publications also include significant research results in the field of sustainable development of rural areas in Bulgaria, including the relationship and influence of the development of the agricultural sector, its efficiency and competitiveness, as well as structural changes in it and the place and the role of farms of different sizes. Chief assistant professor Shishkova has also presented successful studies to identify the key challenges local communities face, considering the possibilities for overcoming them through the development of local action groups in Bulgaria, supported by an analysis of the regional economic and social trends.

The candidate also presents evidence of active participation in various scientific (and not only) projects and supervision of students and teams of students, distinguishing herself with her skills for effective coordination, planning, and organization, effective communication and the ability to offer effective solutions and work successfully in a team. I believe her experience until now is a good prerequisite in the future, chief assistant professor Shishkova to lead and ensure funding for scientific and student projects at the university. The candidate's participation in scientific and other projects includes 4 projects that are related to the topics of her scientific interests and the disciplines she teaches. The state budget and international programs are main funding sources for the mentioned projects.

4. Evaluation of the pedagogical preparation and activity of the candidate. His role for the training of young scientific personnel.

From the references provided by the Agricultural University - Plovdiv, it is clear that the chief assistant professor PhD Mariyana Shishkova for the period 2018-2023, have had the amount of 4225.8 hours spent in the classroom with lectures, seminars and additional training engagements. Her teaching activities include also the supervision of students' projects, supervision and review of diploma theses and participation in conducting semester exams. In this way, for her participation in this competition, the candidate shows one of her most important roles, which, in addition to being a good scientist and researcher, is also to be an effective teacher and supervisor. Hence, I find the following main capacities and competences that she developed during that period: expertise and knowledge in her scientific field – agricultural economy and policy, which she successfully combines with teaching skills, planning teaching activities and students' assessment. In addition, she has provided support and guidance for the development of skills and careers of her students, supervised graduates (12 successfully defended theses, including from international students) and as a team leader of Haberlea in the BISC-E 2023 competition. The candidate also demonstrates high standards of professional ethics and may be an example of good scientific practices.

It should be mentioned, that part of her professional arrangements include development of

lectures/exercises and courses which she delivers in the bachelor's and master's degree classes at the university. These are relevant to the following disciplines: Agricultural Economics (also taught in English), Agricultural Policy, Business Economics, Common Agricultural Policy, Labor Economics, Sustainable Development and Circular Economy, European Economic Integration (also taught in English), Economics of Cooperatives, Economics of Animal Husbandry, etc.

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

The significance of the scientific results obtained by chief assistant professor PhD Mariyana Shishkova is visible and it is measured by her recognition from the scientific community, including:

✓ Her research, published in scientific papers and reports, has been cited 12 times (this number of citations concerns 7 of the candidate's publications) in the publications specified by her, the main part of which is in prestigious scientific papers (all of which are in foreign journals), which is evidence of their importance;

✓ The high number of points that the candidate formed from the citations of her publications (170 points) shows that her work is substantial and has its place and influence in the field of agricultural economy and policy and specifically publications on social capital and sustainable development of rural areas and the bioeconomy. This is a good prerequisite for the work of the chief assistant professor Shishkova to continue to assert herself as important and recognized by the scientific community;

✓ The candidate's publications have been accepted and published in prestigious scientific journals (including in peer-reviewed journals with an impact factor), which is a proof of her fruitful scientific activity, and confirms their importance and helps to establish her as a known scientist;

✓ For his work, chief assistant professor Shishkova has also received a number of certificates for participation in scientific forums and seminars, which is a recognition of her work, the importance of the results and her professional advancement. Her participation in international scientific forums highlights these achievements and her active place in the international scientific community.

6. Significance of contributions for science and practice. A motivated answer to the question to what extent the candidate has a clearly defined profile of research work;

Chief assistant professor PhD Mariyana Shishkova is a candidate for associate professor who has a clearly defined profile of her research work with a focus on specific thematic areas of research, which are already mentioned, and possesses the ability needed to carry out scientific research. Her scientific results are distinguished by a high degree of originality and importance, and the presented contributions relate not only to the academic community, but also have their application in practice. In my point of view, the defined by her and proven contributions to the science, include new understanding and complementing existing concepts/models that enrich our understanding of the three thematic areas: social capital and sustainable development; bioeconomy; and impact of the CAP on Bulgarian agriculture. They all are based on the original research and relate to their application and real effect in practice for the sector, economy and society as a whole.

I. ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The originality of the contributions of chief assistant professor Shishkova from her research in the three mentioned thematic areas are complex and, in my opinion, have the potential to generate

long-term effects through: 1) the developed (more often adaptation of already existing) and tested methods/models for explaining the phenomena and processes in the bioeconomy and for assessing social capital and sustainable development in Bulgarian rural areas; 2) the revealing of the relationships and dependencies between factors and variables in the bioeconomy and the evaluation of the impact of the CAP on Bulgarian agriculture; 3) collection, presentation and analysis of new data for the study of problems in all three mentioned directions; and 4) development of proposals and specific recommendations for policies and tools, opportunities to solve the identified problems.

II. METHODOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

In the work of every scientist, an important role is given to the methodological contributions that support a deeper understanding of the phenomena and processes in the respective field. Therefore, from those contributions presented by chief assistant professor Shishkova, I can distinguish the following significant methodological ones:

- ✓ the models for the assessment of: 1) the influence of various facts on the results of the local action groups; 2) the factors influencing the farmers' exit decisions from the traditional for Bulgaria production of R. Damascena; 3) the competitiveness of agricultural sector;
- ✓ the methodology for determining: 1) the theoretical, technological and bio-economic potential of Bulgaria for the production of biomass from primary arable and technical cultures; 2) combined application of two GIS softwares for analysis and description of the theoretical and technical potential of wheat, corn and sunflower for production of biomass; 3) the pressures of agricultural producers on the direct payments under CAP and its effects.

III. SCIENTIFIC CONTRIBUTIONS

The results of the work of the chief assistant professor Shishkova suggest scientific contributions with an emphasis on the innovation in applied approaches, models and proposals. I refer to following of them:

- ✓ the methodology for the assessment of social capital, applied to organizations implementing instruments for achieving sustainable development at the local level and the identified networks based on the formal and/or not formal connections between the investigated subjects;
- ✓ the presented and systematized main concepts, dimensions and sectors of the bioeconomy;
- ✓ the identification of the place and role of the "LIDER/CLLD" approach to the implementation of bioeconomic initiatives;
- ✓ the assessment of the importance and influence of the direct payments and their distribution to the development of agriculture.

IV. APPLIED CONTRIBUTIONS

From the society's point of view, the opportunities and ways in which scientific research has its practical implications and contributes to its overall development are also essential. In the field of the three already identified thematic directions, chief assistant professor Shishkova has a number of applied contributions, of which I would like to highlight:

- ✓ the analysis of the level of structural social capital, which allows to determine the potential of social farming and the challenges before it to achieve sustainable development of rural areas in Bulgaria, as well as the outlined model for support of social capital and entrepreneurship in them;
- ✓ the identified key factors for the expansion of the funded initiatives under the strategies for community-led local development and the difficulties in the overall implementation of the CLLD

approach in Bulgaria;

- ✓ the identified good practices and suggestions for improvement of the cooperation of local action groups in the implementation of projects concerning the cultural, historical and natural heritage of communities;
- ✓ the establishment of the theoretical potential of the left-overs of main grains and technical crops for the production of biomass, and an analysis of their territorial distribution in Bulgaria;
- ✓ the challenges identified and the factors that influence the decision-making process by producers whether to leave rose oil production or to remain in the sector;
- ✓ the formulated recommendations for overcoming the problems of farmers in the time after 2020 through the lens of socio-economic challenges which the regions and agricultural sector face;
- ✓ the important prospects for the place and role of small and family farms for sustainable development of rural areas, related to the opportunities for young farmers in the country and generations' change.

7. Critical notes and recommendations

In her scientific publications chief assistant professor PhD Mariyana Shishkova demonstrates erudition, the ability to analyze problems and formulate her own views and solutions on them. Therefore, I would like to make some recommendations for her further work in this field, such as: to continue her research on sustainability and the bioeconomy by broadening the scope and turning her attention to the less analyzed problems of the effects of and measures to deal with the climate change by promoting sustainable practices in all spheres of the agricultural economy and the effective use of biological resources through innovations in Bulgaria; to increase the share of her independent publications and those in journals with an impact factor; to continue her good work in team activities/developments and to seek and to participate actively in international events and scientific projects.

The main critical note, I have for the candidate, is to **deepen and increase her commitment to activities essential for the teaching profession, the most essential and currently missing is the successful development and publication of textbooks and teaching materials** necessary for her daily work with students. From the submitted documents for this competition, I am confident that she has the experience and capabilities to do so, as well as to develop and include new topics for her scientific field, offering a variety of practical examples and tasks to update with the active participation of students and her graduates.

8. Personal impressions and opinion of the reviewer

In my view, the candidate for Associate Professor submitted evidences of high quality outputs and demonstrates capacity and expertise in her areas of scientific interest, to which she exhibits an innovative approach to research and demonstrates an understanding of trends and important issues. This is also in accordance with my personal impressions, since I know chief assistant professor PhD Mariyana Shishkova and her work even as a part of the team of the "Earth - Source of Income" Foundation, as consistently during the years of her career growth we have discussed and I have provided comments on her work from my side. From this point of view, the review also takes into account the progress of the candidate, whose work deepens and expands and it is accessible to a wider audience of students and colleagues, and her activity in scientific conferences and her publications in prestigious scientific journals contribute to the development of the agricultural economy as a field of scientific knowledge. My assessment of her professional advancement is also

high for her educational activities and her encouraging attitude towards the students (as mentor and supervisor) and the development of young people. She is able to be objective, understanding and meet students' expectations in explaining complex topics and using different and creative teaching methods, which fully supports why it is suitable candidate for the academic position of associate Professor.


CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the pedagogical, scientific and scientific-applied activities of the candidate, I believe that chief assistant professor PhD Mariyana Ivanova Shishkova, meets the requirements for the academic position "Associate Professor" at Agricultural university – Plovdiv, because: 1) there is sufficient volume and quality of scientific output in several directions and work on scientific research projects with the application of relevant scientific methods and approaches; 2) there are current and substantial contributions with a theoretical-applied nature based on the three thematic areas: social capital and sustainable development; bioeconomy; and impact of CAP on Bulgarian agriculture; 3) the number of publications, their quality and their citations, are evidence of the author's recognition in the scientific community; 4) the subject areas of the publications and teaching activities correspond to the scientific field and specialty for which the competition has been announced.

Based on the above, I fully believe that the evaluation of candidate's overall achievements is **POSITIVE**.

I would like also to suggest to the honorable Scientific Jury to vote *positively*, and the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Economics at the Agricultural University - Plovdiv to elect *chief assistant professor PhD Mariyana Ivanova Shishkova* on the academic position of "*Associate Professor*" in the scientific specialty *Economics and Management (Agriculture)*.

Date: 06.05.2024
Sofia

REVIEWER: 
(Assoc.Prof. PhD Mariya Peneva)