STATEMENT

on a dissertation for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the field of higher education: 3.0 "Social, economic and legal sciences", professional field: 3.8 "Economics", scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Agriculture)",

Author of the dissertation: Nataliya Yordanova Shukadarova, PhD student at the Department of Economics at the Agricultural University, Plovdiv

Topic of the PhD thesis: Sustainability of Bulgarian cereal production in the context of the European Green Deal

Reviewer: Assoc. Professor Dr. Rositsa Petrova Beluhova-Uzunova, Agricultural University-Plovdiv, Department of Economics, 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, 3.8. Economics, scientific specialty "Economics and management (Agriculture)", appointed by Order № RD16-854/ 28.06. 2024 of the Rector of the Agricultural University - Plovdiv as a member of the scientific jury.

1. Relevance of the topic

The Green Deal, an ambitious program of the EU, is significantly changing Europe's farming and food system. The transition to more sustainable production models is an essential step towards climate neutrality, but the food security of a rapidly growing world population remains challenging. In a complex international situation, Bulgarian grain production needs to adapt to the changes and achieve economic, ecological and social sustainability. In this regard, the dissertation submitted for review examines a highly relevant topic that will transform the future of European and Bulgarian agriculture. The PhD student clearly formulates her position regarding the effects of the measures implemented by the Green Deal on grain production at the European and national levels. Currently, agriculture is not only involved in producing food and products for the processing industry but is also an integral part of the ecological and socio-economic system. It must ensure sustainable and efficient use of resources and preserve biodiversity. Therefore, evaluating different policies on grain production is important in overcoming the complex challenge of achieving both sustainability and competitiveness.

2. Aim, tasks, hypotheses and research methods.

The dissertation aims to determine the possibility of achieving sustainability of Bulgarian grain production in the context of the European Green Deal by considering and covering the conflict between achieving ecological compatibility and, at the same time, preserving the economic efficiency of production and farms.

The tasks of the research are the following: 1) Determining the sustainability of Bulgarian agriculture in its three dimensions in the context of SDG from the UN Program 2030; 2) Identifying the importance of the Grain sector under Common agricultural policy support, with an example of support for an "average" grain-producing farm; 3) Study of the attitudes of Bulgarian grain producers.

The applied research methods are (1) comparative and descriptive analysis, (2) expert method, (3) survey and statistical methods.

The aim of the research is clearly formulated. The tasks and the object of the study allow the PhD student to achieve the formulated goals in a logical sequence. The research methods have been

selected correctly and provide an opportunity to formulate conclusions and recommendations.

3. Visualization and presentation of the results.

The dissertation has a total 221 pages and is structured as follows: abbreviations, introduction, and exposition in four chapters, conclusion and references. The dissertation contains 45 figures and six tables. The cited and analysed literature includes 140 sources, of which 80 are Cyrillic, and 60 are Latin.

4. Discussion of the results and theoretical background.

The dissertation includes an introduction, four chapters and a conclusion.
The introduction presents the relevance of the research.
The first chapter of the PhD thesis outlines the theoretical framework, considering the importance of grain production on a global and national scale. It reviews the policies of the United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development, the essence of the Green Deal and the philosophy and reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy, which directly impact the potential of food security. The results of various analyses regarding the impact of the Green Deal on grain production at the European level are outlined.
The second chapter presents the aim, tasks, object of the dissertation and the applied methodological framework.
In the third chapter, research is carried out in three main directions: defining sustainability in the context of the United Nations Program for Sustainable Development, definition and analysis of the conditions for support of the Grain sector in the Strategic Plan of Bulgaria; a survey of attitudes of the Bulgarian grain producers towards compliance with ecological requirements and implementation eco schemes, as well as their expectations regarding the objectives of the Green Deal.
The fourth chapter presents a model for a sustainable grain-producing farm in 2023 based on the survey results. Recommendations to the institutional and external environment have been formulated, which could improve the sustainability of the Grain sector. They are mainly aimed at ensuring the economic efficiency, resilience and competitiveness of the sector.

5. Contributions of the PhD thesis

The scientific and scientific-applied contributions of the dissertation work are the following:
1) The environmental and climate policies regarding agriculture at the global level have been monitored: – through the UN Program 2030, at the European level – the Green Deal and the Common Agricultural Policy, at the national level; – through the Strategic Plan for the Development of Agriculture and Rural Areas.
2) The essence and parameters of the mandatory conditions and support interventions in the Strategic Plan for the Development of Agriculture and Rural Areas for 2023-2027, which concern the support of the Grain Production sector within the framework of the CAP, have been clarified.
3) An example of supporting a grain-producing farm with an area of 500 ha within the framework of the direct payments of the CAP was presented. By analogy with the provided example, it is possible to determine the support of grain-producing farms of different sizes during the current programming period.
4) The internal framework of an optimal production model for 2023 of a sustainable grain-producing farm, which achieves to a significant extent the balance between the economic, social and ecological dimensions of sustainability, is defined.
5) Recommendations to the institutional and external environment have been formulated, which lead to improving the sustainability of the grain sector and are aimed at ensuring the economic efficiency, resilience, and competitiveness of the sector in the medium and long term.

6) A diagram of the interactions in the sustainable agricultural system is derived, in which farmers are at the centre of the set of relationships and in which the need for the empathy and commitment of farmers to achieve and preserve sustainable agriculture is emphasized.
The scientific and scientific-applied contributions are precisely formulated and correctly reflect the research in the dissertation. I accept them and give a positive evaluation.

6. Critical remarks and questions.

I recommend publishing the research results in journals with an impact factor to make them visible to a broader scientific community. In addition, I hope that the PhD student will continue and expand her research on this relevant topic.

7. Publications and citations.

Two publications are presented in connection with the dissertation. They are directly related to the subject of the dissertation and reflect its main parts. The articles are published in the journal Agricultural Sciences of the Agricultural University-Plovdiv. In addition, PhD students participated in two conferences related to the dissertation topics. The publications submitted for review meet the qualitative and quantitative requirements for obtaining the degree.

CONCLUSION:

Based on the different research methods applied by the PhD student, the correctly performed analysis, the formulated recommendations and conclusions, I consider that the presented dissertation meets the requirements of the Law for Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, The Regulation for the Application of the Law for Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations of the Agricultural University - Plovdiv for its application, which gives me reason to evaluate it **POSITIVE**.

I would like to propose to the Scientific Jury to vote **POSITIVELY** and award Nataliya Yordanova Shukadarova the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the scientific speciality "Economics and Management (Agriculture)"

Date: 27.08.2024
Plovdiv

Reviewer: .....
(Associated Prof. Rositsa Beluhova-Uzunova)