ACADEMIC OPINION

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: **Jon Arifi**, PhD Student, Department of Economics, Agricultural University – Plovdiv

Topic of the PhD thesis: ENVIRONMENTAL MEASURES IN THE COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

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 16-559/29.04.2026 of the Rector of the Agricultural University - Plovdiv as a member of the scientific jury.

1. Relevance of the topic

The presented dissertation addresses a relevant and significant scientific topic related to the environmental dimensions of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the European Union and its role in the sustainable development of agriculture. The subject has become particularly important in the context of accelerating climate change, biodiversity loss, degradation of natural resources, and the need for a transition toward sustainable agri-food systems.

The PhD candidate analyses the CAP as not only an instrument for supporting agricultural production, but also as a mechanism for integrating environmental and climate objectives into agricultural development. The research is relevant from both scientific and practical perspectives, as it analyzes the development, effectiveness, and impact of environmental measures within the CAP in the context of the European Green Deal, the Farm to Fork Strategy, and the Biodiversity Strategy.

2. Aim, tasks, hypotheses and research methods

The aim of the PhD thesis is clearly formulated and focused on conducting a comprehensive and critical analysis of the environmental measures and instruments introduced through the reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union, as well as assessing their role in promoting sustainable agricultural practices and environmental protection.

The research tasks are logically linked to the objective of the study and allow for a consistent development of the analysis. They include an examination of the theoretical foundations of sustainable development, a review of the historical evolution of the CAP and its environmental measures, an analysis of the relationship between the economic and environmental indicators of agriculture, an assessment of agro-

environmental indicators, and an investigation of the role of organic farming in the sustainable development of the European Union.

The methodological framework is well selected and corresponds to the nature of the research. An integrated approach combining qualitative and quantitative methods has been applied, including literature review, historical, comparative and descriptive analysis, the method of abstraction, statistical and econometric methods, correlation and regression analysis, as well as analysis of secondary data from Eurostat, OECD, EEA, FADN, and the European Commission. The methodological toolkit employed enables the achievement of reliable and well-grounded scientific results.

3. Visualization and presentation of the results.

The dissertation is logically and consistently structured. It consists of an introduction, four chapters, conclusions, recommendations, and a bibliography, total -209 pages.

The results are presented clearly and analytically through tables and figures, which contribute to a better visualization and interpretation of the examined processes and relationships. The empirical part is well structured and includes comparative analyses, statistical evaluations, and interpretations of the relationships between the economic and environmental indicators of agriculture in the European Union Member States.

4. Discussion of the results and theoretical background.

The first chapter provides a theoretical analysis of sustainable development, sustainable management of natural resources, and global environmental challenges. The author examines the various interpretations of sustainability, the principles and components of sustainable development, as well as the role of agriculture and agribusiness in the context of environmental transformation.

The second chapter traces the historical evolution of the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union and analyzes the major reforms related to the integration of environmental measures into the policy. Particular attention is devoted to the 1992 reform, Agenda 2000, the Fischler Reform, the Health Check, the "greening" of the CAP, and the new CAP 2023–2027. The transformation of environmental instruments and their role in sustainable development are thoroughly examined.

The third chapter contains an empirical analysis of the relationship between the economic and environmental indicators of agriculture in the EU Member States. The study investigates the correlations between the share of agriculture in GDP, the Environmental Performance Index (EPI), and agro-environmental indicators. It also analyzes the impact of mineral fertilizers, pesticides, and energy use on the environment, as well as the role of agro-environmental measures within the CAP framework.

The fourth chapter is related to the organic farming and its importance for sustainable development in the European Union. The author examines institutional support, the market for organic products, the EU strategies for organic production, and the relationship between the European Green Deal and support for sustainable agricultural practices.

The literature includes 230 references, scientific publications, European strategic documents, legal and regulatory acts, and reports from international

organizations, demonstrating a strong understanding of both the theoretical and practical dimensions of the research topic.

5. Contributions of the PhD thesis

I accept the PhD student contributions to the dissertation. Among the most significant contributions, the following may be highlighted:

Scientific and theoretical contributions

- Evolutionary Perspective on the Common Agricultural Policy- A novel theoretical contribution lies in the systematization of CAP reforms through the perspective of sustainability. The thesis demonstrates how successive CAP reforms reflect an evolving paradigm-from productivity-oriented support toward environmentally integrated policy instrument.
- Extension of the Environmental Performance Index (EPI) to the Agricultural Context- The study adapts and applies the EPI framework to assess agricultural sustainability across EU Member States. This represents a methodological and theoretical contribution that links macro-level environmental indicators with sectoral agricultural performance, allowing for cross-national comparability of ecological outcomes.

Scientific and applied contributions

- Empirical Evaluation of Agricultural and Environmental Performance in the EU- Based on comparative statistical analysis, the dissertation offers empirical evidence on the correlation between agricultural economic output and environmental performance among EU countries. The findings provide a quantitative foundation for policy-making, revealing that states with higher technological adoption and agroecological integration exhibit better environmental indicators without compromising productivity.
- Assessment of the Effectiveness of CAP Environmental Instruments- The research systematically evaluates agroecological measures, eco-schemes, and organic farming interventions under successive CAP programming periods (2014–2020 and 2023–2027). It identifies gaps between policy design and implementation, offering concrete recommendations for improving the effectiveness and efficiency of CAP's environmental architecture.
- Policy Recommendations for Long-Term Environmental Sustainability.- The dissertation formulates an integrated set of institutional and operational recommendations for reforming the CAP and related EU environmental policies. They include performance-based payments for ecosystem services, stronger monitoring systems, harmonization of environmental data, and improved coordination between agricultural, water, and climate legislation.

6. Critical remarks and questions.

The following recommendation may be addressed to the dissertation: in future research, it would be beneficial to develop more detailed comparative analyses regarding the effectiveness of environmental measures in the individual EU Member States and their long-term impact on the sustainable development of

agriculture.

7. Publications and citations.

The PhD candidate has presented three publications related to the topic of the dissertation, all of which are single-authored.

The presented abstract objectively reflects the structure and content of the dissertation.

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 Jon Arifi the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the scientific speciality "Economics and Management (Agriculture)"

Date: 11.05.2026
Plovdiv

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