

**TO
THE SCIENTIFIC JURY,
determined by Order No. RD 38-177 / 30.04.2020
of the Rector of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”**

OPINION

by Prof. Rumiana Vasileva Vatsева, DSc., National Institute of Geophysics, Geodesy and Geography at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, member of the Scientific Jury in the competition for occupation of the academic position of "Professor" in a professional field 4.4. Earth Sciences (Biogeography and Geography of Soils), announced by the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" for the needs of the Faculty of Geology and Geography with candidate Assoc. Prof. Dr. Assen Assenov

This opinion has been prepared based on Order No. RD 38-177 / 30.04.2020 of the Rector of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" and a decision of a Scientific Jury at a meeting on 21.07.2020 in line with the requirements of the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act (DASRBA), as amended of 25.02.2020, the Regulations for its implementation (RDASRBA), amended and ext. from 19.02.2019, and the Regulations on the Terms and Conditions for Acquiring of Academic Degrees and Occupation of Academic Positions at the Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, amended and ext. from 27.05.2020.

1. Competition Data

The competition for occupation of the academic position of "Professor" in a professional field 4.4. Earth Sciences (Biogeography and Geography of Soils) has been announced in the State Gazette, issue 21 / 13 March.2020 from the Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” for the needs of the Faculty of Geology and Geography. Within the legal deadline for participation in the competition, one candidate has submitted documents - Assoc. Prof. Dr. Assen Ivanov Assenov.

The submitted documents of the applicant are in line with the requirements of DASRBA, RDASRBA and the Regulations on the Terms and Conditions for Acquiring of Academic Degrees and Occupation of Academic Positions at the Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, which shows that he meets the next requirements:

- he has obtained the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in 4.4. Earth Sciences (Biogeography and Soil Geography) in 2011 with a dissertation on the topic: "Biodiversity of Satovcha Municipality", entirely within the scope of the announced competition (Group A indicators)
- holds the academic position of "Associate Professor" in 4.4. Earth Sciences (Biogeography and Geography of Soils) at the Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” for more than five years (since 2012) and he is included in the Register of Academic

Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria of the National Centre for Information and Documentation

- meets the minimum national requirements under Art. 2b, para. 2 and 3, respectively to the additional requirements of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

2. Scientometric indicators and implementation of the minimum national requirements

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Assen Assenov presents for participation in the competition 54 scientific publications, including: 1 monograph, 12 scientific publications that are peer-reviewed and indexed in the worldwide scientific databases, 37 scientific publications in non-refereed, peer-reviewed journals, 3 chapters in collective monographs and 1 university textbook.

By thoroughly familiarizing myself with all scientific publications, references and documents submitted by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Assen Assenov, I can give the following assessment of the applicant's eligibility with regard to the minimum scientometric national requirements and the requirements of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

With respect to indicators Group C, a habilitation book is presented - a monograph "Biogeography", published by the University Publishing House "St. Kliment Ohridski" in 2019, 430 pages, which is evaluated with 100 points with a required minimum of 100 points.

Regarding the Group D indicators, for the indicator D-7 (scientific publications that are peer-reviewed and indexed in the worldwide scientific databases) I accept 6 publications №№ 1, 2, 5, 6, 10 and 12, which obtained a total of 53.68 points. To the indicator D-8 (scientific publications in non-refereed, peer-reviewed journals) I add 3 publications from D-7 (№№ 7, 8 and 9), i.e. I accept 40 publications with a total number of points 436.27. To the indicator D-9 (published chapters in collective monographs) I add 3 publications from D-7 (№№ 3, 4 and 11), i.e. I accept 6 publications with a total number of points 34.16. The total number of points obtained from all 52 publications in the group D indicators is 524.11 points (where a minimum of 200 points is required).

Regarding the Group E indicators, to the indicator E-10 (citations in scientific publications that are peer-reviewed and indexed in the worldwide scientific databases: Scopus, Web of Science, ERIH+) I add 5 citations from the indicator E-12 (one in the Lazarova journal № 1-7 and four in the Journal of Balkan Ecology №№ 4-3, 5-2, 6-2 and 8-1), i.e. I accept 27 citations with a total of 135 points. For the indicator E-11 (citations in peer-reviewed collective monographs) I do not accept citation № 1-2 due to the popular content of the book "Mysteries of Zoogeography", i.e. I accept 15 citations with a total of 45 points. For the indicator E-12 (citations in scientific publications in non-refereed, peer-reviewed journals) I do not accept one citation because it is a self-citation (№ 10-2) and I add to indicator E-10 five citations (№№ 1-7, 4-3, 5-2, 6-2 and 8-1), i.e. I accept 36 citations with a total of 72 points. The total number of points obtained from all 78 citations in the group E indicators is 252 points (where a minimum of 100 points is required).

In regard with group F, Dr. Assenov has 180 points (where a minimum of 150 points is required), which I accept based on his work with doctoral students (including two successfully defended in 2017 and 2019), on national and international research projects and the publication of

a university textbook "Biogeography and Natural Capital of Bulgaria" (paper and electronic edition) .

The sum of all points obtained by the applicant from all groups of indicators A, C, D, E and F is 1106.11 points, while the minimum threshold is 600 points. Thus, by individual groups of indicators, as well as by total sum of required points, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Assen Assenov fully meets the minimum national requirements for holding the academic position of "Professor" at the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" and exceeds 1.8 times the minimum scientometric indicators.

3. Evaluation of the applicant's research results and scientific contributions

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Assen Assenov is the author and co-author of 90 scientific publications, of which 54 publications are presented for participation in the competition, including: 1 monograph, 6 scientific publications that are peer-reviewed and indexed in the worldwide scientific databases, 40 scientific publications in non-refereed, peer-reviewed journals, 6 chapters in collective monographs and 1 university textbook. In these publications, he is the sole author of 14 publications (25.9%), incl. one monograph and one university textbook, first co-author of 12 publications (22.2%), second co-author of 19 publications (35.2%), third or subsequent co-author of 9 publications (16.7%).

A significant part of publications of Assoc. Prof. Dr. A. Assenov have been published in scientific journals, incl. 6 publications that are peer-reviewed and indexed in the worldwide scientific databases and 40 publications in non-refereed, peer-reviewed journals. Most of the journals are Bulgarian, 3 journals are international (One Ecosystem, European Journal of Sustainable Development and Phytocoenologia). From scientific journals in which Assoc. Prof. Dr. Assenov has publications, the highest SJR coefficient has "One ecosystem" (Q1, SJR 2019 - 0.64). Assoc. Prof. Dr. A. Assenov is the author of 2 chapters and co-author of 4 chapters of monographs.

Among the publications of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Assen Assenov, the most comprehensive and related to the topic of the competition are the monograph "Biogeography" and the university textbook "Biogeography and Natural Capital of Bulgaria", which are extended and supplemented editions of "General Biogeography" (2001) and "Biogeography of Bulgaria" (2006).

The monograph "Biogeography" is a habilitation book, published by the University Publishing House "St. Kliment Ohridski" in 2019 in a volume of 430 pages. The monograph thematically refers entirely to the field of scientific interests of the candidate, presenting historical aspects of the development of biogeography, scientific methods and approaches of biogeographical research, evolution, patterns and classifications of plant communities, biogeographical regionalization, digital models and vegetation indices.

The university textbook "Biogeography and Natural Capital of Bulgaria" was published by the University Publishing House "St. Kliment Ohridski" in 2020 in a volume of 928 pages. The main regularities in the geographical distribution of the biotic communities in Bulgaria, Bulgarian endemics and relics, invasive plant species and faunal taxa are presented. Comprehensive information about the flora and fauna of the biogeographical regions in the country has been collected and summarized. A significant contribution is the assessment of the natural capital of each biogeographical region through ecosystem services.

The research activity, the main results and the scientific contributions of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Assen Assenov show his long-term professional interests and in-depth knowledge in the field of biogeographical research, landscape and ecological research. In these areas he is recognized as an authoritative specialist. Assoc. Prof. Dr. A. Assenov applies an interdisciplinary approach and focuses on scientific and applied aspects in the research of biodiversity, natural resources, protected areas and ecosystem services. The research of Assoc. Prof. Dr. A. Assenov is based on approved methods and tools, and presents in-depth analyzes, interpretations and results.

The following scientific and scientific-applied contributions, grouped in three thematic areas, can be summarized in the presented scientific publications of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Assen Assenov:

1. Biogeographical regionalization: Data have been collected and the description and assessment of plant communities in Bulgaria have been supplemented with new information. The thesis about the need to conduct biogeographical research on a regional basis (for an individual municipality) in connection with sustainable development is defended. In this thematic area the candidate has a total of 16 publications, 3 of which are peer-reviewed and indexed in the worldwide scientific databases, 1 habilitation book - monograph and 1 international project.
2. Landscape-ecological research, protected territories and biodiversity: Landscape research with theoretical and practical orientation in connection with protected territories in Bulgaria and establishment of dependence between agriculture with high natural value, biodiversity and landscapes have been carried out. New information on biodiversity in the valley of the Mesta River is presented, floristic taxa of conservation importance in Mala Planina are identified, the diversity of habitats in the municipality of Satovcha is assessed, the floristic composition and plant structure of the forest belts in the municipality of Silistra are described. . The connection of the diversity of habitats with the land cover is argued as a criterion for the differentiation of the landscape. In this thematic area the candidate has a total of 25 publications, 2 of which are peer-reviewed and indexed in the worldwide scientific databases, 1 university textbook and 1 national project.
3. Ecosystem services: Evaluation of ecosystem services for selected administrative units in Bulgaria has been performed. Habitat types are integrated with other indicators for assessment of ecosystem services. In this thematic area the applicant has a total of 13 publications, 1 of which is peer-reviewed and indexed in the worldwide scientific databases, 4 chapters of monographs, 1 national and 1 international project

4. Assessment of the originality of the submitted publications and the reliability of the scientific data presented

The scientific publications and contributions made by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Assen Assenov are original, they confirm and enrich the existing knowledge and represent new research in the field of biogeography. Those are the result of independent and collective efforts with the active participation of Assoc. Prof. Dr. A. Assenov. In order to obtain those results, a scientifically sound methods and tools has been used, as well as reliable data sources.

In the course of preparing this opinion, I have not received any reports of plagiarism. Knowing the moral qualities of Assoc. Prof. Dr. A. Assenov, I completely exclude the possibility of such.

5. Teaching activities

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Assen Assenov is a long-term full lecturer at the Faculty of Geology and Geography at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". Its average employment for the school years from 2014 to 2019 is 1027 hours, of which 534 hours are classroom employment. Assoc. Prof. Assenov is the supervisor of 7 successfully defended graduates in the period 2012 - 2020, the supervisor of a young scientist (2019) and the supervisor of two successfully defended doctoral students (2017 and 2019) and a full-time PhD student (2020). According to these indicators, the teaching activity of Assoc. Prof. A. Assenov meets the requirements of the Regulations on the Terms and Conditions for Acquiring of Academic Degrees and Occupation of Academic Positions at the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

6. Conclusion

The scientific output presented by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Assen Assenov in terms of volume, scientific results and scientific contributions, outlines the profile of a well-established researcher and university lecturer in the research scope of this competition.

The applicant's research and teaching activities, the successful work with graduates and doctoral students, as well as the recognition in the scientific space fully meet the legal requirements for holding the academic position "Professor" at the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

This gives me a solid reason to express my positive assessment and to vote "YES" in the selection of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Assen Assenov for the occupation of the academic position of "Professor" in professional field 4.4. Earth Sciences, scientific specialty "Biogeography and Geography of Soils" at the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

Sofia, 25 August 2020

Member of the Scientific Jury:
(Prof. Rumiana Vatsева, DSc.)