

OPINION

by

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the National Institute of Geophysics, Geodesy and Geography of Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, professional field 4.4. Earth sciences, scientific specialty: Economic and social geography (Geography of tourism) and professional field 3.9. Tourism at the University of Veliko Tarnovo "St. St. Cyril and Methodius"

This opinion was prepared on the basis of Order № RD 38 - 197/23.04.2021 of the Rector of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Decision №5/20.04.2021 of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Geology and Geography and decision of the meeting of the Scientific Jury of 20.05.2021. It is in compliance with the requirements of the Act for the development of the academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ADASRB) and the Regulations for its application, as well as the Regulations for the conditions and the order for acquiring scientific degrees and holding academic positions in Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

I. Details about the competition

The competition for the academic position of "professor" in the professional field 3.9. Tourism at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" was published in the State Gazette no. 22 of March 16, 2021. Documents for the competition were submitted by one candidate - Assoc. Prof. Mariana Atanasova Assenova PhD. During the review of the submitted documents it was established that the requirements of ADASRB and the Regulations for its application, as well as the Regulations for application of ADASRB in Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski" have been fulfilled.

II. Short biographic information about the candidate

From the presented CV it is evident that assoc. prof. Mariana Assenova PhD is below the age limit for holding the academic position of "professor" and meets this requirement of the Regulations for the application of ADASRB at Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski". In 1985 she successfully obtained the degree of Master of Geography, specialist in territorial organization of tourism and recreation and a second specialty - English at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". In 1997 she received the qualification of specialist in marketing, advertising and business communications at the University of National and World Economy with the highest possible result of the exams. She is constantly improving her skills, undergoing training related to the global distribution system Galileo, sustainable tourism development (Travellife), management and marketing in the hospitality and the tourist destinations in leading foreign universities and certification organizations. In 2012 she defended her PhD dissertation at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" on "Methodology for monitoring sustainable tourism development (on the example of the municipality of Tsarevo)".

Her career began in 1987 as an inspector at Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski". Later she successively developed holding the positions of "assistant", "senior assistant", "chief assistant" and "associate professor". Currently she is head of Geography of Tourism Department and deputy dean of Master's and Doctoral Programs at the Faculty of Geology and Geography.

At the same time, assoc. prof. Mariana Assenova PhD has successful career in the business. She was Chairwoman of the Board of Directors of Sunny Beach Ltd (1999 - 2001), Youth Tourism Chain Orbita EAD (1998 - 2001), Bulgarian Credit Rating Agency (2004 - 2020). In 2002-2006 she was Director for Market Bulgaria of the travel agency "International travels" ltd. In 1997-2001 she was Deputy Minister of Economy, responsible for the country's tourism policy.

She speaks English, Russian and German.

III. Analysis of the research activity and the candidate's scientific contributions

In the competition for the academic position "Professor" assoc. prof. Mariana Assenova PhD has presented 46 publications required to meet the minimum national requirements under the regulations, as follows:

- one collective monograph with her own share of 170 pages according to the attached separation protocol;
- 5 co-authored publications in SCOPUS and WoS indexed editions in English. In two of them she is the first author;
- 27 publications in unrefereed journals with scientific review or in edited collective volumes, of which 4 without co-authors.
- 9 studies published in non-refereed journals with scientific review or in edited collective volumes, of which 2 without co-authors;
- 3 chapters from collective monographs, one of which is without co-authors.
- a co-authored university textbook.

A review made in the web page of the National Center for Information and Documentation shows that the submitted publications do not repeat those for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "PhD" and academic position "Associate Professor".

The main contributions of the publications presented in the competition can be divided into five groups- analysis of the state and development of tourism, sustainable development of tourism, tourism regionalization, marketing of tourist destinations and training in the field of tourism. In the first contribution there are two thematic subgroups. The first focusses on the analysis of the state and development of tourist destinations at different territorial levels, and the second is dedicated to the types of tourism.

From the attached Reference for the original scientific contributions of the candidate her contributions in the main habilitation work-monograph are visible, as the separation protocol does not indicate the chapters developed by the different authors, namely:

- On the basis of a thorough literature review, some concepts have been clarified and defined: cultural heritage and tourist attraction and the intersection between them - attractions based on cultural heritage;

- A typology of attractions based on cultural heritage has been developed and proposed. It has been tested in practice along a predetermined route in the country;
- According to a specially developed methodology and the relevant tools, a study of the tourist demand for attractions based on cultural heritage, their supply, their presentation in Internet and the qualification of those employed in this activity, is planned and carried out;
- Both the national experience and the international practice in the management, monitoring and financing of the attractions based on the cultural heritage are summarized and analyzed.

Assoc. Prof. Mariana Assenova PhD has mentioned 211 citations of her publications, 23 of them are in referenced and indexed SCOPUS and WoS editions.

She was the leader of a national research project related to the creation of a Concept for the tourism regionalization of Bulgaria (2014). She has participated in 5 national and 10 international scientific or educational projects. She was the supervisor of 4 PhD students who successfully defended their PhD theses.

At Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski" assoc. prof. Mariana Assenova PhD leads lectures and exercises in the bachelor's and master's program in "Tourism" in the disciplines "Intermediary activity in tourism", "Tour operator and travel agency activity", "World and national tourism fairs and exhibitions", "Tourism Policy", "Tourism Planning", "Tourism Marketing", "Sustainable Tourism Development" and "Tourism Destination Management". The last three of the abovementioned disciplines she teaches also in English.

IV. Critical remarks and recommendations

Assoc. Prof. Mariana Assenova PhD is the only university lecturer in "Tourism" in the country, who held the position Deputy Minister of Economy responsible for the tourism policy in Bulgaria. Its theoretical training corresponds to the specialty she teaches, speaks excellent English because of her specialized high school and higher education, has many years of experience in the tourism industry. Considering these facts, I would recommend the candidate to increase her independent publishing activity in publications indexed in the highest quarters of Scopus and WoS.

V. Conclusion

Considering the conditions in Art. 115, para. 1 and 2 and in accordance with the information from the references under art. 117, para. 1, items 12-14 of the Regulations for application of ADASRB in Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski" for holding the academic position of "professor", after a thorough review of the documents submitted by the candidate in the competition, I found that she meets all the requirements, as shown below:

1. to have been acquired the educational and scientific degree "PhD" – it is presented a copy of the diploma № 2012-43/15.05.2012, issued by Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" for educational and scientific degree "PhD" in 3.9 Tourism (Geography of recreation and tourism);
2. to have been held the academic position of "Associate Professor" at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" or in another higher school or scientific organization not less than two academic years- from the presented reference it can be seen that she has been holding the position of "associate professor" for 8 years;
3. to have been presented a published monograph, which should not repeat the ones presented for acquiring the educational and scientific degree "PhD", for the scientific degree "Doctor of

Sciences” and for holding the academic position “Associate Professor” - a collective monograph with own share of 170 pages according to the attached separation protocol: Assenova, M., V. Marinov, V. Nikolova, E. Petkova, R. Mitova, Ch. Istatkova (2021) “Between culture and tourism: tourist attractions based on cultural heritage”. University publishing house “St. Kl. Ohridski” ISBN 978-954-07-5167-2 (electronic edition) is presented;

4. to have presented other original research works, publications, inventions and other scientific and scientific-applied developments, which has to be evaluated as a whole - 46 scientific publications have been presented by the candidate;
5. to meet the minimum national requirements of the Regulations for application of ADASRB:
 - in group A of indicators there are the necessary 50 points that are required;
 - in group V (B) a monograph is presented, due to which it receives the required 100 points;
 - in group G (Г) there are 266 points, with required 200;
 - in group D (Д) there are 1795 points, with required 100;
 - in group E there are 485 points, with required 100.
6. to have not been proven by the legally established order plagiarism in the scientific works - I didn't established plagiarism in the candidate's scientific production;
7. the candidate has not been reached the age of 65 – this requirement is completed as well.

Considering the abovementioned, I propose that the members of the scientific jury support the candidacy of assoc. prof. Mariana Assenova PhD to take the academic position of “Professor” in the professional field 3.9 Tourism (Development of tourist destinations) at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”.



15.07.2021

The opinion is prepared by:

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