

REVIEW

by Zdravka Vladimirova Krasteva, PhD, associate professor of criministics at the Faculty of Law of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

Subject : competition for the academic position of "associate professor" in the scientific specialty of Criminalistics

Only candidate: chief assistant professor Iskra Vladkova Vladova-Nedkova, PhD, Department of Criminal Law Sciences, Faculty of Law of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski"

Habilitation work : monograph "Investigation of computer crimes", Sofi-R, S., 2023, ISBN 978-954-638-185-9, 232 pages

1. Information about the contest

The competition for Associate Professor of Criminalistics, field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional area 3.6 Law has been announced by the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in the State Gazette no. 24 of March 17, 2023.

By order of the Rector of the SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" No. RD-38202/26.04.23 I was appointed as a member of the scientific jury, and at its first meeting I was designated as one of the reviewers.

In the current competition, the only candidate participating is Assistant Professor Iskra Vladkova-Nedkova, PhD. For her participation, she submitted one monograph and five articles for review. The set of materials presented by the candidate is in accordance with the provisions of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for its implementation. I believe that the requirements regarding the course of the procedure and the design of the habilitation thesis have been met. I have not found any plagiarism data.

2. Information about the candidate

Ms. Iskra Vladova was born in 1982. In 2005 she graduated the legal faculty of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" with honors, and in 2017 she obtained the educational and scientific degree of PhD in law with a scientific specialty of criminalistics lty.

Dr. Vladova is an established lecturer of criminalistics. From 2011 till today, she teaches at the Faculty of Law of the University of St. Kliment Ohridski", initially as an assistant professor, and later as a chief assistant professor. She has gained considerable experience by teaching seminar classes with a workload exceeding that required at university. Her lectures enjoy extremely high interest and attendance from the students, which speaks for itself about the thoroughness and competence with which she approaches the teaching work. From 2021, Iskra Vladova also teaches a course in criminology for students at the Department of National and International Security of the New Bulgarian University.

Dr. Vladova has extensive professional and expert experience in the field of crime investigation and criminalistics, gained during the years she worked as an investigative police officer in the Metropolitan Directorate of Internal Affairs, Pre-Trial Division, Criminal Investigation Sector .

She is the author of two monographs and numerous articles in the field of criminalistics. She has presented her research to expert audiences in a number of national and international conferences. She has specialized abroad and in Bulgaria on topics related to the investigation of computer crimes and ballistics research.

3. General characteristics of the works submitted for review

As a habilitation thesis, Dr. Iskra Vladova presents the monograph "Investigation of computer crimes". It consists of an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion and a bibliography in a volume of 232 pages.

The structure of the work is logically built and follows the classic methodology for investigating crimes of a certain type.

In **the introduction** , the main characteristic features of the phenomenon of computer crime are outlined, and on this basis, the relevance of the research and the ambitious goal set by the author to contribute to overcoming the significant difficulties in the investigation of computer crimes - a goal that she convincingly achieved.

The first chapter is dedicated to the general characteristics of computer crimes, with their criminal, criminological and forensic aspects being presented in separate sections. In this chapter, also, relevant and useful explanations of the specific computer-technical terminology are made and the main moments in the development of this type of crime are traced. Reasonably, the subject of the study was limited to Chapter IXa of the Criminal Code, which allowed the detailed clarification of the specific methodology for investigating this type of crime, without entering the territory of other methods of investigation, which would have been reached if the subject included computer fraud under Art. 212a of the Criminal Code with the resulting peculiarities of the tactics of the investigative actions.

Chapter two examines methodological issues at the initial stage of the investigation – the initiation of the criminal proceedings, the construction of the investigative hypotheses and the planning of the investigation. Typical initial investigative actions such as inspection and search and seizure, as well as body search, are also appropriately addressed at this stage.

The last **chapter, the third**, is devoted to the specifics of the tactics of several methods of proof, typical for the subsequent stage of the investigation of computer crimes, namely, the interrogations of the various categories of witnesses and the accused, as well as the most frequently assigned expertise witnesses in this category of criminal cases.

In **the conclusion**, the main conclusions reached by the author in the separate parts of the essay are drawn and recommendations are formulated to increase the effectiveness of the investigation of computer crimes. Measures in this direction have been proposed, both of a more general nature, as well as specialized and organizational-technical measures, which would significantly improve efforts to counter this type of crime. Relevant and justified proposals have been made to improve the applicable procedural legislation.

In addition to the monograph, Dr. Iskra Vladova submitted 5 more scientific publications for participation in the competition. Two of these are papers presented at conferences, and the remaining three are articles in recognized legal journals. The submitted publications do not repeat the candidate's previous research that was part of her dissertation work. With them, the author has approved individual aspects of the habilitation research in front of a specialized expert audience, as well as other topics in which he shows scientific interest.

4. Assessment of works submitted for review

Among the presented scientific production of the candidate, the most important place is occupied by the presented habilitation thesis - **the monograph "Investigation of computer crimes"**. It is the first monographic study in the Bulgarian legal literature, which represents a criminalistic methodology for the investigation of computer crimes, and this is the main novelty of the work. Until now, the issue of computer crime through the lens of criminalistics has been represented only in some educational courses on criminalistics, so Dr. Vladova's monograph fills a gap in the Bulgarian legal literature. It is beyond any doubt that the issues of computer crime investigation are of very great theoretical and practical importance, and therefore emerging forensic research on this subject should be welcomed, especially when, as in the present case, it is an original work containing valuable theoretic and practical contributions.

It should be noted that the monograph is written in an accessible language, which is a credit to Dr. Vladova and her ability to present the inevitable, technical terminology of computer crimes in an understandable and logical way, without affecting the high scientific style of the work. An impressive scientific apparatus of 337 footnotes with relevant and correct references to 102 monographs, studies and articles by Bulgarian and foreign authors was used. Regardless of the marked actuality of the chosen research topic, the investigative and judicial practice in this category of cases is scarce, which makes it difficult for any researcher. These difficulties have been successfully overcome, based on in-depth historical studies, comparative legal reviews and excellent knowledge of the scientific literature, the author has not neglected any important aspect of the methodology for investigating computer crimes. That is why the book submitted for review contains a complete and comprehensive study of a certain subject, does not repeat or summarize the existing knowledge and undoubtedly has the characteristics of a monographic work in the sense of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria.

The paper contains numerous theoretical contributions. I find the contribution points presented by the candidate in the reference to be presented in good faith and correctly. Without pretending to be exhaustive, I would like to dwell on some of them.

The in-depth analysis of the reasons for the latent nature of the computer crime and the proposed argumentation of how the four types of latency known from criminological theory manifest themselves in relation to computer crimes are of a contributing nature. Developments regarding the profiles of victims and

perpetrators of this category of criminal assaults are also of practical and applied importance.

An important contributing point of the study with practical application significance is the criminalistics characterization of computer crimes proposed in the first chapter. It was approached with a scientific toolkit, on the basis of which its main elements, characteristic of the investigated type of crime, were deduced. Thus, a formal approach is avoided and a tool is proposed that allows to derive the typical patterns of the criminal activity to assist the investigating authorities in building the versions and planning of the investigation as a whole, as well as of the individual actions of the investigation. The author has managed to single out significant features of the mechanisms and means for the preparation, execution and concealment of this type of crime, the characteristic traces formed as a result of their commission, the objects of the criminal attack, the characteristics of the injured party, the time and place of the commission of the crime, the motivation of the criminal behavior and the goals pursued by the perpetrator . This knowledge has practical potential and could assist the authorities of the pre-trial proceedings in the initial stage of the investigation in which usually scarce information is available.

The proposed algorithms for planning the investigation depending on the type of investigative situation and the conclusions made on this basis about the appropriate ones methods of proof by which to be overcome the original one information deficit, characteristic of the initial stage of the investigation are of a contributing nature.

The main merit of the work is the numerous tactical recommendations regarding investigative actions that are most often used in pre-trial proceedings in computer crime cases. The author has highlighted a number of weaknesses in the tactics of preparation and execution of the inspection, search and seizure, interrogations and expert witnesses, not being satisfied with this, but has also indicated practical ways to eliminate them. In this part, the work is very rich in contributions of practical nature, which makes their enumeration by the reviewer difficult without retelling them. All the sections devoted to individual methods of proof have the potential to significantly improve investigative practice and can be successfully applied in the work of pre-trial proceedings in computer crime cases. This part of the presentation clearly shows the combination of scientific integrity and research skills with the candidate's practical experience in crime investigation. The result of the same successful combination are the proposed *de*

lege ferenda , which are convincingly argued and of high merit, both theoretically and in practical terms .

To the extent that during the reading of the work notes and recommendations occurred to me, I already had the opportunity to provide them as an editor, and they were taken into account by the author before the publication of the book.

There are also scientific contributions in the other publications submitted for participation in the competition.

In the article " **Preparation on inspections , search and seizure at an investigation on computer crimes** " issues of important theoretical and practical-applied importance were considered, such as the peculiarities of the composition of the investigative teams and the need to unify the legal framework of inspection and search from this point of view.

The publication " **The execution by creature like phase on inspected , searched and seized it _ at an investigation on computer crimes** " offers an analysis with in the high applied value of the tactically expedient approaches regarding the handling of the computer equipment and the interaction with the persons present as representatives of the territory in which the relevant action of the investigation is carried out.

The article " **Forensic characteristic on the computer crime and predictability on the investigation** " also contains contributing points related to clarifying the typical patterns of this type of crime and the practical significance of these patterns for the construction of the investigative hypotheses, and from there, the choice of appropriate methods of proof by which to verify them.

In the publication " **Expert research on drugs and expertly proving on use on narcotic substances** " of a contributing nature is the analysis of the physico-chemical forensics of narcotic substances, as well as the chemical forensics of samples of biological origin.

All cited articles are written with a skill for in-depth research and an effort to highlight new and contributing moments in the studied matter, both theoretically and practically. They confirm the conclusions that can be drawn on the basis of the habilitation thesis that Dr. Iskra Vladova is a scientist and researcher who approaches her work with high professionalism.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, I find that the habilitation thesis "Investigation of computer crimes" contains theoretical summaries and solutions to scientific and applied

scientific problems that correspond to modern achievements and represent a significant and original contribution to legal theory. It meets all the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ZRASRB), the Regulations for the Implementation of ZRASRB and the Regulations for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and Holding Scientific Positions at SU "St. Kliment Ohridski". The habilitation thesis shows that Iskra Vladova-Nedkova possesses in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional skills in the scientific specialty "Criminalistics", demonstrating qualities and skills for research that have led to significant theoretical and practical contributions. She also has a successful teaching career. Therefore, I confidently give my positive assessment of the presented habilitation thesis and suggest to the honorable jury to recommend the appointment of Ch. Assistant Professor Iskra Vladkova Vladova-Nedkova, Ph.D., in the scientific position of "associate professor" in professional area 3.6. Law (Criminalistics).

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