

# OPINION

## **For the competition for an academic position “Associate Professor” in the professional field 3.8 Economics**

### **By:**

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### **Grounds for the opinion:**

Order ПД-38-273/06.06.2022 by the Rector of SU “St. Kliment Ohridski” and Decision of the Scientific Jury for defining the roles (Protocol N1/28.06.2022)

### **Regarding:**

Competition for an academic position “Associate Professor” in the professional field 3.8 Economics (Corporate Sustainability and Responsibility – in Bulgarian and English language), announced in the State Gazette, Issue N 30 from 15.04.2022, for the needs of the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”.

There is only one candidate in this competition procedure, namely:

**Chief Assist. Prof. Marina Dimitrova Stefanova, PhD**

### **1. Short presentation of the candidate, evaluation of the professional experience**

Chief Assistant Prof. Marina Stefanova, PhD is a Master of Law, graduated from the Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” in 2001 with specializations in Administration of Justice, International Law and Public Administration.

Since 2016, she is a doctor in Social Management (doctoral program "Business Administration" in the "Business Administration" Department, code 05.02.20, now Professional field 3.7 Administration and Management) at the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski". Her additional specializations include: European and English law (Cambridge University, UK); Entrepreneurship (TOP Class Programme, (CEED Bulgaria); Social entrepreneurship (Health for All Association, FPBB, Social enterprise UK); Corporate Social Responsibility (Bulgarian Institute for Standardization, United Nations Industrial Development Organization, Austria); Clean production (SERC, Neosys, Switzerland); Project Management (Italian Institute of Foreign Trade); Alternative Dispute Resolution (Partners Bulgaria Foundation, American BAR Association), etc.

Since 2013, she has been teaching as a part-time assistant at the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", where, after a competition procedure in November 2020, she held the position of Chief Assistant in the Department of "Industrial Economics and Management", where she is currently working. She also taught as a part-time teacher at the University "Prof. Dr. Asen Zlatarov", Burgas (2018/2019), as well as at the Higher School of Insurance and Finance (2012-2014).

Her professional experience in practice includes a number of expert positions, among which I would highlight the following:

- From 2018 to the beginning of 2022, she has been a consultant to UNICEF Bulgaria under the "Benefactor" program, for the development of the partnership with small and medium-sized enterprises;
- In the period 2016-2017, she was the manager of "Sustainable Development and Corporate Social Responsibility" at "ConturGlobal Maritsa Iztok 3";
- From 2016 to 2020, she was the Director of "Sustainable Development", and in the period from 2011 to 2016, she was the executive director of the Bulgarian Network of the UN Global Compact;
- From 2003 to 2011, she was the manager of her own consulting company "Strategies";
- In the last more than 10 years, she has actively participated in the work of a number of non-governmental organizations, including the Bulgarian Association of CSR Specialists (BAKSOS); Bulgarian Food Bank; Association of Bulgarian evaluators and controllers; Causey Foundation and others.

Chief Assistant Prof. Marina Stefanova, PhD is a leading national expert on topics related to sustainable business management, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, ESG-activities and accountability of companies, corporate social responsibility, etc.

After joining as a full-time chief assistant professor at the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Dr. Marina Stefanova developed a curriculum for a new master's program "Responsible and Sustainable Governance", which started in the autumn of 2021. The new program attracted the largest number of masters for the academic year 2021/2022 (70). With the implementation of a number of projects with the support of partners from the business, Chief Assistant Prof. Marina Stefanova, PhD also developed a number of postgraduate qualifications for leading financial institutions (UniCredit Bulbank, UBB, etc.) and international companies under the brand of "ESG Academy".

As a lecture in the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Dr. Marina Stefanova also developed the following new disciplines, part of the curriculum of the MA "Responsible and Sustainable Governance", which were successfully launched during the academic year 2021/2022:

- "Ethics in Management", in MA Programs, in a team with Prof. Alexandra White, visiting lecturer under the Fulbright program;
- "Systems and standards for management of corporate sustainability and responsibility", in MA Programs;

- "Sustainable management and development", in MA Programs.

## **2. Fulfilment of the compulsory requirements and the minimum national requirements under Art. 26 from the Law for the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB)**

The compulsory requirements according to the LDASRB) are:

- 1) To have acquired an educational and scientific degree "Doctor" (PhD) or a scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences";
- 2) For no less than two years, they held the academic position of "Assistant Professor", "Chief assistant professor", or were lecturers, including part-time, in a higher school or scientific organization;
- 3) To have submitted a published monographic work or equivalent publications in specialized scientific publications, which do not repeat those submitted for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" and for the acquisition of the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences".

The candidate in the competition for "Associate Professor" – chief assistant professor Marina Stefanova, PhD, meets the legal requirements mentioned above - she has a defended dissertation, she has taught for nearly 10 years in Bulgarian higher schools and has a sufficient number of publications that do not repeat those presented for the acquisition of the "Doctor" degree.

The data submitted by the applicant in relation to the national minimum requirements show that the total mandatory volume of points required by the LDASRB for participation in a competition for the academic position "Associate Professor" are in place.

## **3. General characteristics of the candidate's scientific activity and scientific contributions**

Dr. Marina Stefanova, within her scientific career to date, has more than 20 scientific publications and more than 25 popular-scientific publications. 11 of the scientific publications have been submitted for participation in the current competition, including: one monograph, one book based on a defended dissertation for the acquisition of the "Doctor" degree; 7 articles, one of which is co-authored; and 2 chapters of collective monographs. The candidate's scientific publications are mainly on topics related to the theme of the announced competition - corporate sustainability, corporate social responsibility, strategic management, sustainability reporting and sustainable leadership.

Among the additional popular-scientific publications provided by the candidate, there are a number of articles, reports, manuals and other methodological documents that are useful for both practitioners and researchers on these topics.

Dr. Marina Stefanova's scientific publications have been cited by a number of international and Bulgarian researchers, incl. in indexed editions.

Among the scientific publications, I would highlight the most current, the monograph "Reporting the sustainability of enterprises. Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Aspects of Their Business", in which Dr. Marina Stefanova examines the environmental, social and governance performance of companies with a primary focus on their non-financial reporting. It presents an author's analysis of the understanding, content, principles and indicators used in sustainability reports, as well as the processes of their communication, verification and evaluation. A qualitative analysis methodology was prepared, with which the annual activity reports of a number of enterprises were examined.

I confirm the main part of the scientific contributions declared by the candidate. I would single out the following as the most significant among them:

- Defining specifics of research in the field of environmental, social and governance (ESG) disclosure of business organizations' activities according to various factors (organization size, industry and field of activity, expectations and attitudes of internal and external stakeholders);
- Derivation of an analytical model to allow structuring of sustainability reports as an element of transparent behavior of organizations;
- Adaptation and testing of an innovative methodology and toolkit for researching the sustainability reports of companies and institutions in Bulgaria, and by means of this model to achieve comparability with other results measured using the same methodology.

I believe that the candidate also correctly claims contributions of a practical-applied nature, and among them I would highlight the following as the most significant:

- Creation of new knowledge for strategic business leaders in Bulgaria regarding responsible corporate behavior and transparency of organizations;
- Methodological guidelines for improving the qualitative and quantitative disclosure of non-financial information by obligated legal entities;
- Supporting stakeholders in Bulgaria in the process of developing successful organizational ESG strategies and training their key personnel to develop related competencies;
- Creation and testing of a number of training materials, teaching aids, case studies, etc. related to the topics of the competition (CSR, sustainability reporting, corporate governance, sustainable leadership, etc.).

#### **4. Notes and recommendations to the candidate**

I have no specific remarks on the scientific production presented for assessment, and I would share with the candidate in operational order only some practical advice for her future academic work, which I will not concern the esteemed scientific jury with.

## 5. Conclusion

I know the candidate personally – as a doctoral student, later as a part-time assistant professor and as a full-time chief assistant professor in the department I currently lead. My impressions of her work are entirely positive and are based on her following personal qualities: high degree of self-organization; business approach; diligence; innovative way of thinking in sync with current business trends; a high degree of professional training in the subjects she teaches; with enduring scientific interests in some of the most current areas of scientific knowledge. I believe that the professional development of the candidate as part of the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" will support the implementation of the Department's strategic goals to establish itself as a leader in topics related to sustainable development and good corporate governance.

My categorical opinion is that the candidate for "associate professor" in Professional field 3.8. Economics, chief assistant prof. Marina Dimitrova Stefanova, PhD meets the express legal requirements and regulations, has the necessary publications and distinguished contributions. This allows me to express my positive opinion and to propose to my colleagues from the esteemed scientific jury that the title of "Associate Professor" in professional field 3.8 Economics (Corporate sustainability and responsibility - in Bulgarian and English) be awarded to the chief assistant prof. Marina Dimitrova Stefanova, PhD.

Sofia, 22.08.2022

Signature:

/Assoc. Prof. Atanas Dimitrov Georgiev, PhD/