

EVALUATION REPORT

by Assoc. Prof. Georgina Lukanova, PhD
Member of the Scientific Jury

for the Competition for the Academic Position of Associate Professor
in Professional Field 3.9 Tourism, academic speciality “Economics and
Management (Tourism – Digital Transformations in the Hospitality
Industry)”,
announced by the University of Economics – Varna

1. General information

This review has been prepared by Assoc. Prof. Georgina Georgieva Lukanova, PhD, Department of Economics and Organization of Tourism, Faculty of Management, University of Economics – Varna, Higher Education Area 3 Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, Professional Field 3.9 Tourism.

The report is prepared based on Order No. RD-06-103/05.06.2026 issued by the Rector of the University of Economics – Varna.

2. Information about the Competition

The competition is announced in the Higher Education Area 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, Professional field 3.9 Tourism, academic speciality “Economics and Management (Tourism – Digital Transformations in the Hospitality Industry)”. It was opened to meet the staffing needs of the Department of Tourism at the College of Tourism – Varna and was promulgated in State Gazette, Issue No. 44 of 14 May 2026. This Evaluation Report has also been prepared in accordance with the decision adopted at the first meeting of the Scientific Jury, held on 16 July 2026.

3. Candidate in the Competition

The sole candidate in the competition is Chief Assistant Professor Galina Peneva Ilieva, PhD, a member of the academic staff of the Department of Tourism at the College of Tourism – Varna. She has submitted all documents required for participation in the competition, in full compliance with the Act on Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the relevant secondary legislation, and the Regulations on Academic Staff Development of the University of Economics – Varna. The candidate meets both the national

minimum requirements and the additional institutional criteria for appointment to the academic position.

4. Information about the Candidate

Chief Assistant Professor Galina Ilieva, PhD, was awarded the educational and scientific degree of Doctor (PhD) in 2017. Her professional development combines extensive practical experience in the hospitality industry with an academic career. Since 2012, she has taught on a part-time basis at the University of Economics – Varna and the College of Tourism, and since 2023, Dr Galina Ilieva has held the position of Chief Assistant Professor in the Department of Tourism at the College of Tourism – Varna. Her research interests include hospitality, intercultural communication, customer care, and specialised forms of tourism.

Galina Ilieva is a member of the Union of Scientists – Varna, the Association for Advertising and Marketing in Tourism, and the Culture and Tourism of the Bulgarian Northeast Association.

5. Evaluation of the Candidate's Research Output

Dr Ilieva has submitted 73 research publications for consideration in the competition, comprising more than 1,300 pages. This body of research output meets and substantially exceeds the quantitative requirements for appointment to the academic position of Associate Professor under the Act on Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations on Academic Staff Development of the University of Economics – Varna.

In structural terms, the publications comprise two sole-authored monographs, one of which is the habilitation monograph, while the other is related to the candidate's doctoral thesis; contributions to twelve co-authored monographs and two research studies; sixteen research articles, of which seven are sole-authored and nine co-authored; thirty-nine conference papers; and two teaching handbooks. Three of the research publications to which the candidate has contributed have appeared in academic outlets indexed in internationally recognised databases, thereby satisfying the additional institutional requirements for appointment to the academic position of Associate Professor. The conference papers have been presented at national and international conferences, reflecting the candidate's active participation in academic forums.

Thematically, the candidate's research addresses current and relevant issues that are fully aligned with the academic speciality of the competition. In terms of content, her research output is characterised by a clear research focus, analytical rigour, depth of inquiry, and a consistently high standard of academic

writing.

6. Identification of the Candidate's Research Contributions

The publications of Chief Assistant Professor Galina Ilieva, PhD, contain significant original contributions. They synthesise the results of the candidate's research output into three main categories: theoretical, methodological, and applied scientific contributions. I fully endorse the contributions identified by Dr Ilieva in the submitted statement of contributions and assess them positively as the outcome of her systematic and focused research activity.

For the purposes of the competition, Dr Galina Ilieva has reported a total of 40 citations, corresponding to 260 points under the national evaluation criteria, thereby substantially exceeding the minimum requirements for the academic position. A significant proportion of these citations appear in publications indexed in internationally recognised databases. The evidence presented indicates a good level of academic visibility and confirms the candidate's contribution to the advancement of research in the fields of tourism and hospitality.

7. Participation in Research Projects

The documentation submitted for the competition provides evidence of Dr Galina Ilieva's substantial research and consultancy activity, reflected in her participation in 14 projects, including national and international initiatives. A considerable proportion of the project results have been disseminated through research publications. These activities contribute to the further development of the candidate's research profile and strengthen her role in fostering partnerships between academia and the business sector.

8. Teaching activity

The documentation submitted for the competition demonstrates that Chief Assistant Professor Galina Ilieva, PhD, has substantial teaching experience at the University of Economics – Varna and the College of Tourism. She is actively involved in teaching students at the Professional Bachelor's and Bachelor's degree levels, delivering lectures and seminars in courses such as Hotel Management, Luxury Hospitality, Hotel Service Technology, and Service Management in Tourism, among others. She has also contributed as a co-author to the development of five course syllabi and two teaching handbooks.

Her active engagement with students beyond the classroom also deserves positive recognition. This includes the supervision of dozens of Bachelor's and Master's degree students in the Tourism and International Tourism Business

programmes at the University of Economics – Varna, academic mentoring within the Student Internships project, and mentoring students participating in student research forums.

These observations provide sufficient grounds for concluding that the teaching activities of Chief Assistant Professor Galina Ilieva, PhD, are fully aligned with the academic speciality of the competition and demonstrate her established professional standing as a university lecturer.

9. Plagiarism

No instances of plagiarism, duplication of works previously used for the award of the educational and scientific degree of Doctor (PhD), or other breaches of academic ethics have been identified in the submitted research publications.

10. Questions and Critical Remarks

I have no critical comments regarding the research and teaching activities of Chief Assistant Professor Galina Ilieva, PhD. I would, however, make a recommendation concerning her future research: to continue developing her research in her areas of academic interest and to further strengthen her publication activity in academic outlets abstracted and indexed in internationally recognised databases.

11. Conclusion

On the basis of the comprehensive analysis of the submitted documentation and research output, it can be concluded that the candidate fully meets the requirements of the national and institutional regulations governing appointment to the academic position of Associate Professor. The assessment of her research and teaching activities provides convincing evidence of her readiness to assume the academic position of Associate Professor.

In view of the above, my overall evaluation is unequivocally positive, and I confidently recommend that the esteemed Scientific Jury support the candidature of Chief Assistant Professor Galina Peneva Ilieva, PhD, for appointment to the academic position of Associate Professor in Professional Field 3.9 Tourism, academic speciality “Economics and Management (Tourism – Digital Transformations in the Hospitality Industry)”.

12 August 2026

PhD)

Respectfully,

(Assoc. Prof. Georgina Lukanova,

Заличена информация съгласно
ЗЗЛД и регламент (ЕС) 2016/ 679



STATEMENT

regarding the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor in Professional Field 3.9 Tourism, Higher Education Area 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, Scientific Specialty Economics and Management (Tourism – Digital Transformations in the Hospitality Industry)

1. General Information

Prepared by: Assoc. Prof. Ilin Dimitrov, PhD, Department of Tourism, College of Tourism, University of Economics – Varna, Higher Education Area 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, Professional Field 3.9 Tourism, Scientific Specialty Economics and Management (Tourism).

The statement has been prepared pursuant to **Order No. RD 06-99/04.06.2026** of the Rector of the University of Economics – Varna appointing the Scientific Jury, as well as the Minutes of the first meeting of the Scientific Jury, held on 16 July 2026, concerning the election of a chairman and assignment of reviewers for the competition.

The statement is prepared according to the requirements of the Law for the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), the Regulations for its implementation (RILDASRB) and the Regulations on conditions and procedures for acquiring scientific degrees and occupying academic positions at University of Economics – Varna.

2. Information about the Competition

The competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor" was announced in the State Gazette, Issue No. **44 of 14 May 2026**, in Higher Education Area 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, Professional Field 3.9 Tourism, Scientific Specialty Economics and Management (Tourism – Digital Transformations in the Hospitality Industry), for the needs of the Department of Tourism, College of Tourism, University of Economics – Varna

3. Candidate for the Competition

A single candidate, **Chief Assistant Professor Galina Peneva Ilieva, PhD**, from the Department of Tourism, College of Tourism, University of Economics – Varna, has submitted an application for participation in the competition.

The set of documents and supporting materials submitted by the candidate complies with the requirements of the Law for the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), the Regulations for its Implementation (RILDASRB), and the Regulations on the Conditions and Procedures for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and Occupying Academic Positions at the University of Economics – Varna.

Chief Assistant Professor Galina Ilieva, PhD, fulfils the minimum national requirements for the academic position of Associate Professor in the relevant field of higher education, in accordance with Article 2b, paragraphs 2 and 3 of the LDASRB. The candidate also satisfies the additional quantitative requirements of the University of Economics – Varna under Article 2b, paragraph 5 of the LDASRB, as well as the requirements set out in Article 101 of the Regulations on the Conditions and Procedures for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and Occupying Academic Positions at the University of Economics – Varna.

4. Information about the Candidate

Galina Peneva Ilieva completed her secondary education at the Hristo Kabakchiev First Language High School in Varna between 1985 and 1990. In 1995, she obtained a Master's degree in English Philology from St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo. In 2012, she earned a second Master's degree in Tourism from the University of Economics – Varna. In 2017, she successfully defended her doctoral dissertation entitled *Market Positioning of a Seaside Tourist Complex as a Destination for Gambling Tourism (A Case Study of the Golden Sands Tourist Resort)* and was awarded the PhD degree in Professional Field 3.9 Tourism“.

Her professional career is distinguished by the successful combination of practical experience in the tourism industry and academic development. She has worked as a translator and an English language teacher, held various positions within the hospitality sector, and since 2007 has worked as Front Office Manager at Hotel Astera. Alongside her professional career, she has also developed extensive teaching experience, initially as a part-time lecturer and, since 2023, as Chief Assistant Professor at the Department of Tourism, College of Tourism, University of Economics – Varna.

Her research interests include hospitality management, the digital transformation of hotel enterprises, tourism marketing, intercultural communication, communication skills, consumer behaviour, and specialised forms of tourism. She has demonstrated a strong commitment to continuous professional development through participation in specialised training programmes and professional qualification courses in areas such as digital marketing, leadership and management, conflict management, emotional intelligence, statistical data analysis (SPSS), academic writing, and the development of digital competencies in tourism.

She is proficient in English and German and has a good command of Russian.

The information presented outlines a candidate with a consistently developed academic profile, substantial professional experience in the hospitality industry, and a clear commitment to continuous professional and academic development.



5. Description of the Scientific Publications

For the purposes of the competition, Chief Assistant Professor Galina Peneva Ilieva, PhD, has submitted a substantial, thematically coherent, and well-balanced body of scholarly work comprising a total of **73 scientific publications**. These include one single-authored monograph submitted as the habilitation thesis, **15 monographs and scholarly studies, 16 research articles, 39 conference papers, and 2 textbooks**. Of these, **31 publications are single-authored**, while **42 are co-authored**, demonstrating both the candidate's ability to conduct independent research and her active participation in collaborative research teams.

The publications associated with the candidate's doctoral dissertation have been clearly separated and have not been included in the scientific output submitted for evaluation in the present competition.

The scientific works accepted for evaluation comprise a total of 1,391.41 printed pages representing the candidate's individual contribution, as presented in Table 1.

Table № 1

Types and Volume of the Scientific Publications Submitted for Evaluation

Publication Type	Number	Pages	Share of Total Volume
Monographs and scholarly studies	16	839.4	60,3%
Research articles	16	125.51	9,0%
Conference papers	39	301.9	21,7%
Textbooks	2	124.6	9,0%
Total	73	1391.41	100,0%

In terms of publication profile, monographs and scholarly studies constitute the largest share of the candidate's scientific output, accounting for 60.3% of the total volume. They are followed by conference papers, which represent 21.7% of the overall publication record and demonstrate the candidate's active participation in national and international scientific conferences. Research articles and textbooks further complement the publication profile, reflecting the candidate's consistent development in both research and teaching.

The central component of the scientific output submitted for evaluation is the candidate's single-authored habilitation monograph, *Digital Transformations in the Hospitality Industry* (Publishing House Science and Economics, University of Economics – Varna, 2026, ISBN 978-954-21-1216-7). The monograph does not duplicate publications previously submitted for the award of the PhD degree.

The monograph was reviewed and discussed at the Department of Tourism, College of Tourism, University of Economics – Varna, received positive evaluations from two habilitated scholars, and fully complies with the requirements of Article 112, paragraph 2 of the Regulations on the Conditions and Procedures for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and Occupying Academic Positions at the University of Economics – Varna.

The habilitation monograph is fully aligned with the profile of the competition and addresses one of the most significant contemporary challenges facing the hospitality industry—the digital transformation of the hotel product and its impact on managerial processes and the guest experience. The study is distinguished by a clearly articulated original conceptual framework, a comprehensive and critical review of the relevant scholarly literature, a well-founded methodological approach, and an extensive empirical investigation.

A particular strength of the monograph is the development of original conceptual models for investigating digital transformation in the hospitality industry, integrating both the managerial perspective of hotel enterprises and the perspective of tourists. The findings support the view that digitalization should be regarded as a strategic driver of competitiveness, the quality of the hotel product, and guest satisfaction, while at the same time emphasizing the importance of maintaining an appropriate balance between technological solutions and human interaction in the delivery of hospitality services.

In terms of its scholarly content, methodological rigor, and research outcomes, the monograph fully fulfils the role of a habilitation thesis and constitutes a significant contribution to the advancement of research on digital transformation in the hospitality industry.

The candidate's remaining scientific output is characterised by thematic coherence and the consistent development of her research interests. The publications address a range of contemporary issues in tourism and hospitality, with particular emphasis on the digital transformation of hotel enterprises, hospitality marketing, electronic distribution channels, consumer behaviour, intercultural communication, and sustainable development. These scholarly works combine solid theoretical foundations with a strong practical orientation and make a meaningful contribution to the advancement of knowledge in the field of tourism. A number of the publications have appeared in reputable international journals indexed in Scopus and Web of Science, demonstrating the international visibility and scholarly recognition of the candidate's research.

In terms of their quantity, structure, and scholarly content, the scientific publications fully comply with the requirements of the Law for the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), the Regulations for its Implementation (RILDASRB), as well as Article 101, paragraph 3 and Article 112, paragraph 2 of the Regulations on the Conditions and Procedures for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and Occupying Academic Positions at the University of Economics – Varna. Collectively, they demonstrate a well-



established academic profile with a clearly defined specialization in digital transformation in the hospitality industry and tourism.

6. Identification of the Candidate's Research Contributions

The research contributions of Chief Assistant Professor Galina Peneva Ilieva, PhD may be grouped into four main thematic areas.

First – Hospitality, Digital Technologies, and Innovation in the Hospitality Industry

The candidate has further developed the theoretical foundations of digital transformation and the sustainable development of the hospitality industry. She has proposed original conceptual models and methodological approaches for investigating attitudes towards digital technologies and their impact on service quality and the guest experience. In addition, she has formulated practical recommendations for the implementation of digital, robotic, and intelligent technologies, aimed at enhancing the adaptability and competitiveness of hotel enterprises.

Publications: 8.1., 17.9., 18.10., 31.8., 61.22., 66.27., 67.28., 68.29., 73.34., 75.36.

Second – Tourism Destination Management and Sustainable Tourism Development

The candidate has enriched the theoretical foundations of strategic destination management, destination competitiveness, and sustainable tourism development. She has further refined methodological approaches for developing tourism strategies and programmes, assessing destination competitiveness, and managing tourist flows. In addition, she has proposed practical solutions for the integrated management of tourism resources and the preservation of natural and cultural heritage.

Publications: 12.4., 13.5., 14.6., 15.7., 16.8., 21.13., 22.14., 23.15., 45.6., 47.8., 50.11., 51.12.

Third – Marketing, Consumer Behaviour, and Digital Communications in Tourism

The candidate has expanded scholarly knowledge of the influence of digital communications, social media, online ratings, consumer reviews, and influencer marketing on tourist behaviour. She has further advanced the methodological toolkit for investigating guest satisfaction, the guest experience, intercultural

differences, and the perceived quality of tourism services. Furthermore, she has formulated practical recommendations for improving marketing communications, market positioning, and the quality of tourism services.

Publications: 19.11., 26.3., 27.4., 28.5., 29.6., 30.7., 52.13., 53.14., 54.15., 56.17., 57.18., 62.23., 71.32.

Fourth – Contemporary Forms of Tourism and the Development of Specialised Tourism Products

The candidate has further developed the theoretical foundations of the management and market positioning of specialised forms of tourism. She has refined methodological approaches for assessing resource potential, tourism demand, the competitive environment, and the market viability of specialised tourism products. Furthermore, she has formulated practical guidelines for their development, diversification, and market positioning as a means of extending the tourism season and enhancing the competitiveness of tourism destinations.

Publications: 9.1., 10.2., 20.12., 24.1., 25.2., 32.9., 40.1., 41.2., 48.9., 49.10., 52.13., 54.15., 55.16., 59.20., 65.26., 74.35., 76.37.

The identified research contributions are original, well substantiated, and clearly evidenced in the candidate's scholarly publications. They are fully consistent with the scientific field of the competition and demonstrate the candidate's ability to independently formulate and address significant scientific and applied research problems in the fields of tourism and hospitality.

Chief Assistant Professor Galina Peneva Ilieva, PhD, has provided evidence of a total of 32 citations to 18 of her publications. Of these, 10 citations have been identified in publications indexed in Scopus, while 22 citations have been recorded in peer-reviewed monographs and edited scholarly volumes indexed in other scientific databases. These citations attest to the visibility and academic recognition of the candidate's research and demonstrate the scholarly impact of her research contributions.

7. Participation in Research Projects and Scientific Forums

Chief Assistant Professor Galina Peneva Ilieva, PhD, has participated in 14 research and applied projects of national, international, and regional significance. Her project activities have focused on the development of strategies and programmes for sustainable tourism development, the implementation of innovative technologies in the hospitality industry, intercultural communication, and the development of tourism destinations. The outcomes of many of these projects have been published in scholarly monographs and have been applied in the preparation of strategic documents and tourism policies.



The candidate has presented research papers at numerous national and international scientific conferences. She is a member of the Union of Scientists in Bulgaria – Varna Branch, the Association for Advertising and Communications in Tourism, and the Culture and Tourism of Northeastern Bulgaria Association. She also serves as a member of the Council of the College of Tourism at the University of Economics – Varna.

8. Teaching Activities

Chief Assistant Professor Galina Peneva Ilieva, PhD, has developed a diverse teaching portfolio that is fully aligned with the profile of the competition. She delivers lectures and seminar classes in the courses Hospitality, Hotel Service Operations, Luxury Hospitality, Service Management in Tourism, Gambling Tourism, as well as in a number of other subjects in the fields of tourism and hospitality. She teaches students enrolled in the Professional Bachelor's, Bachelor's, and Master's degree programmes, supervises undergraduate and graduate theses, contributes to the organisation of student scientific sessions, and serves as an academic mentor within a national project.

The candidate has completed teaching mobility assignments under the Erasmus+ Programme at universities in Slovenia, Italy, and Poland, thereby further strengthening her international teaching profile. In addition to her academic activities, Dr Ilieva has extensive professional experience as a Front Office Manager in the hospitality industry and is actively involved in the professional training of hospitality employees through specialised lectures and practical training programmes.

The course syllabi submitted for the subjects Hospitality, Hotel Service Operations, Luxury Hospitality, Practical Training in a Hotel, and Gambling Tourism provide clear evidence of the candidate's active contribution to curriculum development and her high level of competence in designing and continuously updating academic course content.

During the 2025/2026 academic year, Chief Assistant Professor Galina Peneva Ilieva, PhD, completed a full teaching workload exceeding 400 hours at the College of Tourism, University of Economics – Varna.

9. Plagiarism

No legally established evidence of plagiarism, the use of inaccurate or falsified data, or improper citation of the work of other authors has been identified in the publications submitted for evaluation.

10. Critical Remarks and Questions to the Candidate

I have known Chief Assistant Professor Galina Peneva Ilieva, PhD, since 2008, when I had the opportunity to work with her in the hospitality industry. Our professional relationship later continued as colleagues at the College of Tourism,

University of Economics – Varna. This long-standing professional acquaintance enables me to assess not only her professional competence and extensive practical experience in the hospitality industry, but also her development as a university lecturer and researcher.

Chief Assistant Professor Ilieva demonstrates a high level of professional responsibility, initiative, consistency, and integrity. My observations are of a colleague with a strong theoretical background, substantial practical experience, and sustained research interests in the fields of hospitality and tourism.

The scientific publications submitted for evaluation do not give rise to any substantial critical remarks. As a recommendation, I encourage the candidate to further increase the dissemination of her research through publications in leading international peer-reviewed journals and to expand her participation in international research projects. Such activities would further strengthen the international visibility and scholarly impact of her research achievements.

11. Conclusion

On the basis of the submitted documentation and the candidate's achievements in research, teaching, and applied academic activities, I conclude that Chief Assistant Professor Galina Peneva Ilieva, PhD, fully satisfies the requirements of the Law for the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), the Regulations for its Implementation (RILDASRB), and the Regulations on the Conditions and Procedures for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and Occupying Academic Positions at the University of Economics – Varna for appointment to the academic position of Associate Professor.

The candidate holds the academic degree of Doctor (PhD) and has served as Chief Assistant Professor for more than three years. She has maintained an active teaching portfolio in disciplines directly related to the scientific field of the competition, while successfully combining her academic responsibilities with substantial professional experience in the hospitality industry.

The habilitation monograph submitted for evaluation, the candidate's scholarly publications, the documented 32 citations, and her active participation in research projects provide compelling evidence of sustained academic development, increasing scholarly visibility, and a consistently established research profile. Moreover, the candidate not only fulfils but substantially exceeds the minimum national requirements, having documented a total of 988.62 points against the required minimum of 400 points. She also satisfies the additional quantitative requirements of the University of Economics – Varna, achieving 100 points in Group Zh (minimum required: 100), 197.5 points in Group Z (minimum required: 55), and 75 points in Group I (minimum required: 15).

No evidence of plagiarism has been identified in the scientific publications submitted for the competition.

In light of the above, I give my unequivocally positive evaluation and confidently recommend that the Scientific Jury appoint Chief Assistant Professor



Galina Peneva Ilieva, PhD, to the academic position of Associate Professor in the Department of Tourism, College of Tourism, University of Economics – Varna, in the field of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, professional field 3.9 Tourism, scientific specialty Economics and Management (Tourism – Digital Transformations in the Hospitality Industry).

04.08. 2026
Varna

Reviewer:
Associate Professor Ilin Dimitrov, PhD

Заложена информация съгласно
ЗЗЛД и регламент (ЕС) 2016/ 679



Б.х. № PN 20-1283/27.07.2026r

STATEMENT

Regarding the competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor" in the field of higher education 3. "Social, Economic and Legal Sciences", professional field 3.9 "Tourism", scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Tourism – Digital Transformations in the Hospitality)"

1. General information

The opinion was prepared by: Assoc. Prof. Genka Ivanova Rafailova, PhD, Department of Foreign Languages and Communication in Tourism at the College of Tourism – Varna at the University of Economics – Varna, field of higher education 3. "Social, Economic and Legal Sciences", professional field 3.9 "Tourism", scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Tourism)".

This statement has been prepared based on Order No **RD 06-103/04.06.2026.** of the Rector of the University of Economics-Varna for the appointment of a scientific jury and the Report of the first meeting of the scientific jury for the election of a chairman and reviewers of the competition, held on **16.07.2026.**

The Statement has been developed in accordance with the Academic Staff Development Act in the Republic of Bulgaria (ASDARB) and the Regulations for its Implementation (RIASDARB), and the Rules for Academic Growth at the University of Economics-Varna (PRAS).

2. Information about the competition

The competition was announced in the State Gazette No. 44 /14.05.2026 for the needs of the Department of Tourism at the College of Tourism – Varna at the University of Economics – Varna, in the field of higher education 3. "Social, Economic and Legal Sciences", professional field 3.9 "Tourism", scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Tourism –Digital Transformations in the Hospitality).

3. Candidate for the competition

Chief Assistant Galina Peneva Ilieva, PhD, at the Department of Tourism in the College of Tourism – Varna at the University of Economics – Varna has submitted documents for participation in the competition and is the only candidate. She participates in the competition with documents and materials in accordance with ASDARB and RIASDARB, and the Rules for Academic Growth at the University of Economics-Varna (PRAS).

The candidate fulfills the minimum national requirements for Associate Professor in the field of higher education, in which the competition has been announced according Art.2b, paragraphs 2 and 3, of ASDARB, **with a minimum threshold of 400 scores, she achieves a total 578,62 scores.** Chief Assistant Galina Ilieva, PhD, meets the requirements in Art. 101 of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the University of Economics-Varna (PRAS) and covers the additional quantitative requirements of the University of



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Economics-Varna under Art. 26. paragraph 5 of the ASDARB. The candidate must achieve a **minimum score of 170 but has reported a score of 372,5.**

- **Data about the candidate** (personal characteristics):

Chief. Assist. Prof. Galina, PhD, was born in 1971 in Varna, where she completed her secondary education at the I Foreign Language High School "Hristo Kabakchiev" with an emphasis on English. She subsequently earned the following educational degrees:

- **Master's Degree in English Philology** – St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Turnovo (1990);
- **Master's Degree in International Tourism** – University of Economics – Varna (2012);
- **Doctoral Degree (PhD) in "Economics and Management (Tourism)"** – University of Economics – Varna (2017).

- **Professional and Academic Experience:**

- **Receptionist** in hotels in Bulgaria (1998–2001);
- **Receptionist** in hotels in Germany (2002–2003);
- **Assistant Manager** at Barcelona Bed & Breakfast Hotel (2003–2007);
- **Front-Office Manager** at Astera Hotel, Golden Sands Resort (2007–present);
- **Part-time Lecturer in English** at the Department of Western European Languages, UE-Varna (2012–2014);
- **Part-time Assistant** at the College of Tourism – Varna and the Department of Economics and Organization of Tourism (EOT), UE-Varna (2013–2021);
- **Chief Assistant Professor** at the College of Tourism – Varna, UE-Varna (2023–present).

4. **Description of scientific papers**

The candidate participates in the competition with **71 scientific publications**. The presented works include: **1 monograph** (habilitation thesis, 236 pages, reviewed by two habilitated experts), **1 monograph** based on a doctoral dissertation (287 pages), **12 co-authored monographs**, **2 Studies** (co-authored; 1 in English, indexed in Scopus), **16 articles** (9 co-authored; 14 in English, 1 in Scopus, and 1 in Web of Science), **39 scientific papers/conference proceedings** (17 co-authored), all peer-reviewed.

The publications focus on topical issues surrounding the development of tourism in Bulgaria and worldwide - specifically hotel management, gambling and cultural tourism, sustainable development of tourism, tourism marketing tools, and related subjects. They present significant research and offer practical contributions. The language and style of the publications adhere to a high academic standard.

5. **Identification of contributions**

The review of the academic and publishing outputs of the candidate Galina Ilieva reveals significant contributions across the following key areas:



1. Hotel Management, Innovation, and Digital Technologies in the Hospitality Industry:

- Enriched the theory of digitalization in hospitality through a comprehensive analysis and systematization of digital transformation in the hospitality industry.
- Examined the correlation between digitalization, service quality, and competitiveness.
- Developed original conceptual and research models to analyze digital transformation in hospitality.
- Expanded the theory of sustainable hotel management by exploring the integration of digital technologies and sustainable innovations.
- Provided practical guidelines for employing digital technologies, robotic systems, artificial intelligence, and self-service technologies in hotels.

2. Sustainable Development of Tourism and Tourist Destinations:

- Enriched destination management theory by developing concepts, models, and approaches related to competitiveness, strategic management, and sustainability.
- Tested methodologies for formulating sustainable tourism strategies and programs at national, regional, and municipal levels (utilized by the Ministry of Tourism, Strandzha Nature Park, Varna Municipality, and Nessebar Municipality).
- Developed practical methodologies for managing tourist flows, including within protected areas, based on sustainability principles.

3. Marketing Tools in Tourism:

- Analyzed and systematized modern marketing tools in light of digitalization and shifting consumer behavior (e.g., digital communication, social media, online ratings, influencers, word-of-mouth advertising).
- Defined the relationship between customer experience, cross-cultural differences, satisfaction, service quality, and destination loyalty.

4. Specialized Types of Tourism:

- Investigated gambling, sports, wine, historical archaeology, culture, MICE, and eco-tourism in close connection with destination competitiveness, product diversification, and season extension.
- Formulated a methodology to assess the positioning of specialized tourism products, useful when developing new offerings.
- Outlined practical guidelines for utilizing diverse tourism resources to create and market specialized tourism products.

6. Participation in scientific projects and scientific forums

The candidate has participated in **over 25 scientific forums**, including major conferences ("Tourism in the Era of Transformation" and "Tourism Beyond Expectations" hosted by EOT Department at UE-Varna; "Responsible Tourism", "Contemporary Tourism -



Rethinking Possibilities and Directions for Its Development", and "Tourism and Innovation" hosted by the College of Tourism – Varna; "Innovative Regenerative Tourism - Theory and Good Practices" hosted by the Agricultural University – Plovdiv; "Tourism, Business, Education" hosted by BSU, among others), as well as the Black Sea Tourism Forum, round tables, and academic discussions.

Chief Assist. Prof. Galina Ilieva, PhD, has been involved in **5 research projects** funded by state subsidies allocated for scientific activities and **4 applied research projects** funded externally to UE-Varna; **expert/consultant roles** in working groups developing national, regional (Varna Municipality), and local (Nessebar Municipality) tourism development strategies and programs.

7. Teaching work

Chief Assist. Prof. Galina Ilieva, PhD, has taught at the College of Tourism – Varna (UE-Varna) since 2013—first as a part-time lecturer, and from the 2023 to 2026 academic years as a Chief Assistant Professor - accumulating a total of **907 classroom teaching hours** over the past two academic years. The main taught courses are Hotel Management, Hotel Service Technology, Luxury Hotel Management, Hotel Practical Training, Gambling Tourism, English Language (first foreign language for the "Hotel and Restaurant Management"), and others. She has also taught Hotel Service Management for the EOT Department at UE-Varna. Chief Assist. Prof. Galina Ilieva, PhD actively organizes and conducts student scientific sessions, guides students in hosting events, and oversees coursework projects. She was a reviewer for Bachelor's diploma theses and Master's dissertations in Tourism and International Tourism under the EOT Department at UE-Varna. The candidate is a co-author of two English language workbooks tailored for the "Hotel and Restaurant Management" program at the College of Tourism – Varna.

Chief Assist. Prof. Galina Ilieva, PhD has carried out Erasmus + teaching mobility in Slovenia, Italy and Poland.

8. Plagiarism

The candidate participates in the competition with publications that have passed a plagiarism check and do not demonstrate any improper use of others' works and data.

9. Questions, critical remarks

The research and teaching activity of Chief Assist. Prof. Galina Ilieva, PhD, demonstrates high academic standards and offers substantial theoretical and practical value, both quantitatively and qualitatively. However, the following critical remark can be made and a recommendation accordingly:

1. To write and publish a comprehensive textbook on "Hotel Management" to share her extensive research and industry expertise with a broader audience over the long term.

This recommendation is made solely to support her future academic career and further refine her teaching work.



10. Conclusion

The candidate, Chief Assistant Galina Ilieva, PhD, meets all regulatory requirements according to the Academic Staff Development Act in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for its Implementation, as well as the internal rules of the University of Economics-Varna according to the PRAS for occupying the academic position of "Associate Professor" in quantitative and qualitative terms. She holds a PhD, works as an Assistant and Chief Assistant at the College of Tourism - Varna at the University of Economics - Varna, and has been teaching for nearly 15 years in disciplines related to the competition, actively participates in research and applied research projects, and makes significant contributions to tourism education and research in Bulgaria.

Based on the above facts, I have every reason to propose that Chief Assistant Galina Peneva Ilieva, PhD be elected to the academic position of Associate Professor at the Department of Tourism at the College of Tourism - Varna at the University of Economics - Varna in the field of higher education 3. "Social, Economic and Legal Sciences", professional field 3.9 "Tourism", scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Tourism – Digital Transformations in the Hospitality).

Заличена информация съгласно
ЗЗЛД и регламент (ЕС) 2016/ 679

24.07.2026

Varna

Prepared Statement.....
/Assoc. Prof. Genka Rafailova, PhD/

**УНИВЕРСИТЕТ ЗА НАЦИОНАЛНО И СВЕТОВНО СТОПАНСТВО****О P I N I O N**

By: *Prof. Elenita Kirilova Velikova, PhD*
University of National and World Economy, Department of Tourism Economics
Scientific Specialty: "Economics and Management (Tourism)"

Subject: Competition for the academic position of Associate Professor in the scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Tourism – Digital Transformations in the Hotel Industry)", professional field 3.9. Tourism, area of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, at the University of Economics – Varna, announced in the State Gazette, Issue No. 44/14 May 2026, for the needs of the Department of Tourism at the College of Tourism – Varna, University of Economics – Varna.

This opinion has been prepared pursuant to Art. 4, para. 8 of the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act and Art. 107, para. 2 of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the University of Economics – Varna, in connection with the decision of the scientific jury appointed by Order No. RD 06-103/05.06.2026 of the Rector of the University of Economics – Varna for conducting a competition for the academic position of Associate Professor.

1. Information about the Competition

The competition for the academic position of Associate Professor was announced in area of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, professional field 3.9. Tourism, scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Tourism – Digital Transformations in the Hotel Industry)", with the announcement published in the State Gazette, Issue No. 44/14 May 2026.

There is one candidate participating in the competition – Chief Assistant Professor Galina Peneva Ilieva, PhD, lecturer at the Department of Tourism, College of Tourism – Varna, University of Economics – Varna. At the first meeting of the scientific jury, it was established that the candidate meets the minimum national requirements for holding the academic position of Associate Professor in the respective professional field, as well as the quantitative requirements of the University of Economics – Varna. Therefore, she was admitted to the evaluation stage of the competition.

2. Brief Information about the Candidate in the Competition

Based on the documents submitted for the competition, it may be concluded that the candidate, Chief Assistant Professor Galina Peneva Ilieva, PhD, meets the minimum national requirements for holding the academic position of Associate Professor in area of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, within the meaning of Art. 2b, paras. 2 and 3 of the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act (DASRBA), as

well as the additional quantitative requirements of the University of Economics – Varna pursuant to Art. 2b, para. 5 of the DASRBA. The submitted statements concerning the candidate's scientific output, citations, and point-based compliance demonstrate that the required minimum thresholds for the respective groups of indicators have been met and, in some cases, substantially exceeded. Under indicator group "G", the candidate reports 578.62 points against a mandatory minimum of 200 points, while under the additional University of Economics – Varna indicators in group "H", she reports 197.50 points against a required minimum of 55 points. The independently authored habilitation thesis provides the required 100 points, while under the additional group "G" she has also been awarded 100 points against a required minimum of 100 points.

Galina Ilieva holds the educational and scientific degree of Doctor (PhD) in professional field 3.9. Tourism, scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Tourism)", awarded by the University of Economics – Varna in 2017. Her doctoral dissertation is entitled "Market Positioning of a Seaside Tourism Complex as a Gambling Tourism Destination (the Case of Golden Sands Tourism Complex)", under the scientific supervision of Prof. Stoyan Marinov, PhD. Her professional development has been consistently associated with the University of Economics – Varna and the College of Tourism – Varna, where she holds the academic position of Chief Assistant Professor at the Department of Tourism.

The candidate's research interests focus on hospitality, luxury hospitality, digitalisation in hospitality, intercultural communication, communication skills, customer care, service technology, guest interaction, and specialised forms of tourism. The scientific output submitted for the competition demonstrates the consistent development of several interrelated thematic areas: digital technologies and innovation in the hospitality industry; sustainable development and tourism destination management; marketing, consumer behaviour, and digital communications in tourism; as well as the development and market positioning of specialised tourism products. Particularly evident in her more recent research is the development of issues related to the digital transformation of hospitality, technological innovation, artificial intelligence, robotic and self-service technologies, the transformation of business models, and the impact of digitalisation on service quality and the customer experience. These thematic areas correspond directly to the profile of the announced competition and are reflected both in the independently authored habilitation thesis and in the other scientific publications and applied research submitted for evaluation.

3. Description of the Scientific Works

The scientific works submitted by the candidate are characterised by quantitative, structural, and substantive completeness and reflect consistent academic development within professional field 3.9. Tourism. The overall publication activity of Chief Assistant Professor Galina Ilieva, PhD for the period 2013–2026 is substantial and includes scientific articles, conference papers, monographs and studies, as well as teaching aids. Her academic CV lists a total of 79 publications, including 20 scientific articles, 41 conference papers, two teaching aids, as well as monographic and study-based works. For the present competition, scientific output has been submitted excluding the publications used for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree of Doctor (PhD), providing a number of points significantly above the minimum required under the respective groups of indicators. Some of the scientific works have been published in international academic outlets and in journals referenced and

indexed in the international databases Scopus and Web of Science.

The principal habilitation work is the independently authored monograph "Digital Transformations in Hospitality", published in 2026 by the Science and Economics Publishing House of the University of Economics – Varna, ISBN 978-954-21-1216-7. The work is directly related to the profile of the competition and examines digitalisation not merely as the implementation of individual technological solutions, but as a process that transforms business processes, resource management, service models, and interaction with consumers. At the core of the study is the understanding of digitalisation as a strategic resource for creating value both for the hospitality enterprise and for the end consumer.

In terms of content, the scientific output submitted covers several consistently developed thematic areas. Alongside hospitality, digital technologies, and innovation in the hospitality industry, significant attention is devoted to sustainable development and tourism destination management, marketing, consumer behaviour, and digital communications in tourism, as well as specialised forms of tourism and the development and positioning of tourism products. The scientific works address issues related to gambling, wine, cultural, historical and archaeological, sports, MICE, and nature-based tourism, the competitiveness of tourism destinations, tourism flow management, and the utilisation of natural and cultural heritage. This demonstrates the breadth of the candidate's research interests within the professional field, while her more recent publications clearly reveal a specialisation in the digital transformation of hospitality.

The scientific works combine theoretical, methodological, and empirical approaches. In the habilitation thesis, the theoretical analysis is complemented by the development and testing of conceptual research models for examining the attitudes of two main groups – hotel managers and tourists – towards the implementation of digital technologies. The surveys conducted analyse both the organisational and managerial aspects of digitalisation and consumers' perceptions of technological solutions. The results indicate a more positive attitude among managers towards digitalisation, particularly with regard to the optimisation of technological and back-office processes, while tourists display a more cautious attitude and retain a preference for human interaction in situations requiring personal attention and problem solving. The research methodology employed enables the formulation of both theoretical conclusions and practical guidelines for the effective and sustainable implementation of digital solutions in hospitality practice.

The scientific works reviewed are written in appropriate academic language and employ specialised terminology relevant to the issues under investigation. Particularly noteworthy is the combination of theoretically oriented studies with research focused on specific problems of the tourism business and destination management. The presence of publications in foreign languages, in international academic journals, and in outlets referenced and indexed in international scientific databases demonstrates the candidate's ability to present the results of her research activities within the international academic community as well.

4. Synthesised Evaluation of the Main Scientific and Applied Scientific Contributions

The analysis of the scientific works submitted for participation in the competition and the accompanying evidence presents Chief Assistant Professor Galina Peneva Ilieva, PhD as a researcher whose scientific interests in the fields of tourism, hospitality, and tourism

destination management have been developed consistently and progressively over time. Several sustainable lines of research can be traced in her scientific output – digitalisation and technological innovation in hospitality; marketing, consumer behaviour, and digital communications; sustainable development and competitiveness of tourism destinations; specialised forms of tourism and the development and positioning of tourism products. This thematic breadth does not compromise the coherence of her scientific work, but rather demonstrates the development of the research agenda within professional field 3.9. Tourism, with her more recent studies showing a clearly defined specialisation in the digital transformation of the hospitality industry. On this basis, I consider the scientific and applied scientific contributions claimed by the candidate to be substantiated by the scientific output submitted and, in my opinion, they may be synthesised into the following four main areas:

- **Further development of scientific knowledge on digital transformation, technological innovation, and changing business models in hospitality.** Within this area, I consider the systematisation and critical interpretation of digitalisation processes in the hospitality industry and their relationship with organisational change, service quality, the efficiency of hotel operations, and customer value creation to be a significant contribution. The application and effects of artificial intelligence, robotic systems, automation, and self-service technologies have been examined, with digitalisation considered not merely as the introduction of individual technological tools, but as a factor transforming business processes and management models. Of particular significance is the methodological aspect of these studies – models have been developed and tested for analysing the attitudes of hotel managers and tourists towards digital technologies and for assessing their impact on service delivery and the customer experience. In the habilitation thesis, this line of research finds its most comprehensive expression through the treatment of digitalisation as a strategic resource for creating value both for the hospitality enterprise and for the consumer.
- **Expansion of research on tourism consumer behaviour, marketing communications, and the impact of the digital environment on tourist choice.** This area includes studies of tourist behaviour and attitudes, electronic marketing, electronic distribution channels, eWOM, online ratings and reviews, social media and influencer marketing, as well as the intercultural aspects of tourism services. Of particular importance is the positioning of the tourist as an active participant in the digital communication environment, in which consumer information, experiences, and evaluations provided by other tourists become factors influencing the choice of destinations and tourism services. This line of research expands traditional marketing analysis through the inclusion of new forms of digital interaction and makes it possible to formulate practical guidelines for adapting tourism products and communications to changing consumer behaviour.
- **Development and application of methodological and managerial solutions for the sustainable development, competitiveness, and management of tourism destinations.** The candidate's scientific output includes a significant body of research related to strategic tourism planning, the assessment of destination competitiveness, and the management of tourist flows. Approaches involving analysis of tourism resource potential, SWOT and PEST analysis, the formulation of strategic objectives, priorities, measures and indicators, as well as empirical assessment of the competitive positions of tourism destinations, have been further developed and tested. Of

particular practical and applied value is the candidate's participation in the development of strategic and programme documents that have found actual application at national and local level, including for the Ministry of Tourism, Varna Municipality, Nessebar Municipality, and Strandzha Nature Park. This part of the scientific output clearly demonstrates the candidate's ability to transform scientific methods and tools into specific managerial solutions for the sustainable development of tourism.

- **Enrichment of the theory and practice of specialised forms of tourism and the development and market positioning of thematic tourism products.** Galina Ilieva's research covers gambling, wine, cultural and historical-archaeological, sports, MICE, and nature-based tourism. These studies analyse resource potential, market demand, tourist motivation and preferences, and the possibilities for integrating natural and cultural heritage into competitive tourism products. Methodological solutions for assessing and market-positioning specialised tourism products have been developed and tested, based on a comprehensive analysis of resources, the competitive environment, and target markets. The practical value of this research is reflected in specific proposals for thematic tourism routes and products, diversification of tourism supply, reduction of seasonality, and more effective utilisation of natural, cultural, and historical heritage.

In my assessment, the scientific and applied scientific contributions are sufficiently clearly identifiable and traceable within the scientific output submitted. The candidate's individual contribution is particularly evident in the habilitation thesis "Digital Transformations in Hospitality," which integrates the theoretical analysis of digital transformation with the development of her own research approach and an empirical study of the attitudes of two key groups – representatives of the hospitality business and users of hotel services. This enables the results to be interpreted simultaneously from managerial and consumer perspectives and allows practical guidelines to be formulated for the implementation of digital solutions in hospitality practice.

The submitted citation report also demonstrates the scientific impact of some of the candidate's publications in the international academic literature. Particularly notable is the citation impact of the work "Robots, Artificial Intelligence, and Service Automation in Hotels," published by Emerald Publishing and indexed in Scopus and Web of Science. Research citing this work includes publications in the International Journal of Hospitality Management and other international academic outlets, indicating that the results of this part of the candidate's scientific output are recognised and used in the contemporary international academic debate on the technological transformation of tourism and hospitality.

5. Participation in Research Projects and Scientific Forums

The materials submitted demonstrate the active and sustained involvement of Chief Assistant Professor Galina Peneva Ilieva, PhD in project-based and research activities related to the main areas of her scientific profile. She has participated in projects focused on the sustainable development and management of tourism destinations, the development and positioning of tourism products, innovative technologies in hospitality, and intercultural communication. Among the more significant initiatives are "The Eastern World of the Rhodope Mountains," "Sustainable Management and Spatial Planning of Strandzha Nature Park," the updating of the National Strategy for Sustainable Tourism Development in the

Republic of Bulgaria 2014–2030, as well as the tourism development programmes of Varna Municipality and Nessebar Municipality.

Directly related to the profile of the competition is her participation in the project “Application of Innovative Technologies in Hotel Services,” within which e-tourism, online tourism consumption, and the digital consumer were examined. Her project activity also has an international dimension through participation in an initiative under the Interreg V-A Romania–Bulgaria Programme, and continues through current projects related to innovation and regenerative tourism.

The candidate’s scientific activity is further complemented by participation and publications in national and international scientific forums. There is a clear relationship between her project activities, scientific research, and the resulting applied and publication outputs, which I assess positively as an important element of the candidate’s overall scientific profile.

6. Teaching Activities – Quantitative and Qualitative Assessment

The teaching activities of Chief Assistant Professor Galina Peneva Ilieva, PhD are characterised by extensive experience in the education of students in tourism and hospitality. The candidate has delivered lectures, seminars, and practical classes in courses such as “Hospitality,” “Service Technology in Hospitality,” “Service Management in Tourism,” “Luxury Hospitality,” “Gambling Tourism,” “Tourism Management,” and others, some of which are directly related to the profile of the competition.

She has also participated in the development of course syllabi in “Hospitality,” “Service Technology in Hotels,” “Luxury Hospitality,” “Practical Training in a Base Hotel,” and “Gambling Tourism.” The candidate supervises Bachelor’s and Master’s theses and works with student teams within scientific and academic formats. Her teaching activity also has an international and practical dimension through teaching mobilities at universities in Slovenia, Italy, and Poland, as well as through the delivery of training programmes for employees in the hospitality industry.

The above provides sufficient grounds for me to assess the teaching activities of Chief Assistant Professor Galina Ilieva, PhD as consistent, professionally oriented, and to a significant extent aligned with her scientific profile and the thematic scope of the competition.

7. Plagiarism

The materials submitted reveal no circumstances that would cast doubt on compliance with the principles of academic ethics. In the case of co-authored publications, the candidate’s contribution has been certified through declarations of co-authorship, while the sources used have been properly cited. The scientific output complies with the requirements of integrity and correctness in academic research.

8. Questions and Critical Remarks to the Candidate

I have identified no substantial weaknesses in the scientific output submitted. As a direction for future work, I would recommend a clearer emphasis on the candidate’s own conceptual solutions in research on digital transformation in hospitality, as well as a more systematic assessment of the effects of implementing specific technologies on service quality, organisational efficiency, and the customer experience. Such development would

further deepen the candidate's already established specialisation and strengthen the international applicability and comparability of the results obtained.

9. Conclusion

Based on the overall assessment of the candidate's research, applied scientific, and teaching activities, the established scientific and applied scientific contributions, her participation in research and educational projects, as well as her fulfilment of the minimum national and institutional requirements, I consider that Chief Assistant Professor Galina Peneva Ilieva, PhD meets the requirements of the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act, the Regulations for its Implementation, and the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the University of Economics – Varna.

The candidate possesses the necessary qualities of a university lecturer and researcher and has demonstrated scientific and applied scientific results in the field of tourism, a substantial part of which is directly related to the scientific specialty of the competition. All of the above provides sufficient grounds for me to give my POSITIVE ASSESSMENT and to confidently support the election of Chief Assistant Professor Galina Peneva Ilieva, PhD to the academic position of Associate Professor in professional field 3.9. Tourism, scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Tourism – Digital Transformations in the Hotel Industry)", at the College of Tourism – Varna, University of Economics – Varna.

16 August 2026 / Sofia

Signature: _____

Заличена информация съгласно
ЗЗЛД и регламент (ЕС) 2016/ 679

/Prof. Elenita Velikova, PhD/

**STATEMENT
ON THE COMPETITION FOR THE ACADEMIC POSITION OF “ASSOCIATE
PROFESSOR”,
ANNOUNCED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS – VARNA**

General Information

Prepared by: Prof. Bratoy Koprinarov, PhD, Burgas State University “Prof. Dr. Assen Zlatarov” – Burgas.

Grounds for preparing the Statement: Order No. **RD 06-103/05.06.2026** of the Rector of the University of Economics – Varna and the Decision adopted at the meeting of the Scientific Jury held on **16.07.2026**

Information about the Competition

The competition was announced in the *State Gazette*, issue No. 44/14.05.2026, for the needs of the University of Economics – Varna, in Professional Field 3.9. “Tourism”, scientific specialty “Economics and Management (Tourism – Digital Transformations in the Hospitality Industry)”.

Candidate for the Competition

A single candidate, Chief Assistant Professor Galina Peneva Ilieva, PhD has been admitted to participate in the competition by a committee pursuant to Art. 105, para. 1 of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the University of Economics – Varna.

Dr Galina Ilieva obtained her Master’s degree in English Philology from St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo. In 2012, she obtained a second Master’s degree in Tourism from the University of Economics – Varna.

In 2017, she successfully defended her doctoral dissertation entitled “Market Positioning of a Seaside Tourist Complex as a Destination for Gambling Tourism (A Case Study of the Golden Sands Tourist Resort)” and was awarded the PhD degree in Professional Field 3.9. “Tourism”, scientific specialty “Economics and Management (Tourism)”.

Dr Ilieva’s professional development is characterised by a combination of extensive practical experience in the tourism industry and academic teaching. Her professional career in tourism began in 1999 and continues to the present day. During this period, she has held various positions, including receptionist, assistant manager and front office manager in high-category tourism establishments.

From 2013 to 2023, Chief Assistant Professor Ilieva was a part-time lecturer at the College of Tourism – Varna and the University of Economics – Varna. Since 2023, she has held the academic position of Chief Assistant Professor at the University of Economics – Varna. Her accumulated practical and teaching experience has shaped a professional profile in which academic expertise is closely linked to an in-depth understanding of the actual processes and challenges encountered in tourism and hospitality practice.

Description of the Scientific Publications

For participation in the competition for the academic position of “Associate Professor”, Chief Assistant Professor Galina Peneva Ilieva, PhD, has submitted a total of 73 scientific

publications. The submitted works include 1 single-authored monograph – a habilitation thesis; 15 monographs and studies; 16 scientific articles; 39 conference papers; and 2 teaching aids. Of these, 31 publications are single-authored and 42 are co-authored, demonstrating both the candidate's ability to conduct independent scientific research and her active participation in research teams.

Three of Dr Ilieva's scientific publications have been published in scientific journals and proceedings referenced and indexed in the international databases Scopus and Web of Science, contributing to the international visibility and recognition of her research results.

The single-authored habilitation thesis, *Digital Transformations in the Hospitality Industry* (Science and Economics Publishing House, University of Economics – Varna, 2026, ISBN 978-954-21-1216-7), represents the central work in the submitted scientific output. The monograph is directly related to the scientific specialty of the competition and addresses the current processes of digital transformation in the contemporary hospitality industry. It systematises and critically analyses the theoretical concepts concerning the development of hospitality in the context of digitalisation and develops original conceptual models for examining the implementation and adoption of digital technologies from the perspectives of both hotel enterprises and consumers. On this basis, the study presents findings of scientific and practical significance for management, competitiveness, service quality and guest experience in the hospitality industry.

The candidate's other scientific publications are characterised by thematic diversity and a clear focus on key issues in tourism and hospitality. The research interests of Chief Assistant Professor Galina Ilieva, as reflected in the submitted publications, can be grouped into four main thematic areas: hospitality, digital technologies and innovation in the hospitality industry; tourism destination management and sustainable tourism development; marketing, consumer behaviour and digital communications in tourism; and contemporary forms of tourism and the development of specialised tourism products. Taken as a whole, the publications combine theoretical research with a clear practical orientation and outline a scientific profile consistent with the specific scope of the announced competition. All scientific publications submitted for review were published after the defence of the doctoral dissertation and the award of the PhD degree.

The systematic overview and assessment of the scientific activity of Chief Assistant Professor Galina Ilieva, PhD, provide sufficient grounds for me to conclude that the candidate meets the requirements of Art. 24 of the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act and the relevant requirements of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the University of Economics – Varna.

Identification of the Candidate's Research Contributions

The scientific output submitted by Chief Assistant Professor Galina Ilieva, PhD, demonstrates significant achievements of a theoretical, methodological and applied nature, reflecting the consistent development of her research interests in the fields of tourism and hospitality. The most significant scientific contributions can be systematised into the following three groups:

A. Scientific and Theoretical Contributions

1. The theoretical foundations of digital transformation in the hospitality industry have been further developed through the systematisation and critical analysis of concepts, models and approaches related to the implementation of digital technologies, artificial intelligence, robotic systems, automation and smart solutions. The interrelationships between technological innovation, organisational change and the transformation of business models have been identified, together with their impact on the development and competitiveness of hotel enterprises.

2. Scientific knowledge of the sustainable development of hospitality and tourism destinations has been enriched by integrating the concepts of digital transformation, corporate social responsibility and sustainable innovation, and by analysing the role of tourism resources, the quality of tourism supply, destination image, and the preservation of natural and cultural heritage.

3. The theoretical foundations of tourism marketing and consumer behaviour have been further developed by examining the influence of digital communications, social media, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), online ratings and influencer marketing on tourist behaviour and choice.

4. Scientific knowledge of the market positioning and competitiveness of tourism products and destinations has been expanded through an analysis of the impact of pricing factors, image, communication channels and digital marketing tools on tourism demand and supply.

5. The theoretical foundations concerning the development and market positioning of specialised forms of tourism have been enriched, including gambling, wine, cultural, historical and archaeological, sports, MICE and nature-based tourism. Particular attention has been given to resource potential, market demand, consumer preferences and opportunities for integrating natural and cultural heritage into tourism products.

B. Scientific and Methodological Contributions

1. Original conceptual and research models for analysing digital transformation in the hospitality industry have been developed and tested, enabling the examination of the factors and barriers affecting the implementation of technological solutions, the attitudes of hotel enterprises, and consumers' perceptions of technology.

2. The methodological framework for analysing technological and organisational changes in hotel enterprises has been further developed, including through the development of approaches for assessing organisational restructuring, outsourcing, and enterprise adaptability in dynamic and crisis environments.

3. Methodological approaches have been developed and applied to examine tourist consumer behaviour and the effects of digital marketing, including the assessment of satisfaction, guest experience, perceived quality, intercultural differences, online ratings, consumer reviews, and social media.

4. Methodological approaches for assessing the competitiveness of tourism destinations and the market positioning of specialised tourism products have been further developed through a comprehensive analysis of tourism resources, the competitive environment, target markets, and tourist motivations.

C. Scientific and Applied Contributions

1. Practical guidelines have been formulated for the implementation of digital technologies, artificial intelligence, robotic systems and self-service technologies in hotel enterprises, aimed at optimising business processes and improving service quality.

2. Management solutions have been proposed to enhance the sustainability and adaptability of hotel enterprises through the implementation of environmental and socially responsible practices, organisational innovations, outsourcing and flexible management approaches.

3. Methodological and practical solutions have been developed for the sustainable management of tourism destinations, including the development of strategies and programme documents, competitiveness assessment, tourism flow management and monitoring, and the conservation of natural resources.

4. Strategic documents and programme frameworks for sustainable tourism development have been prepared and applied at regional and local levels, including in the municipalities of Varna and Nessebar and Strandzha Nature Park.

5. Practical recommendations have been formulated for improving marketing activities and the quality of tourism services through the use of digital communications, social media, e-WOM, influencer marketing, pricing policies and electronic distribution channels.

Chief Assistant Professor Galina Ilieva, PhD, has provided evidence of a total of 32 citations to 18 of her publications. Of these, 10 citations have been identified in scientific publications indexed in Scopus, while 22 citations are found in peer-reviewed monographs and collective volumes referenced and indexed in other scientific databases.

In summary, the identified scientific contributions, together with the documented citations of the candidate's scientific publications, demonstrate a consistently developed and recognisable research profile. The scientific output of Chief Assistant Professor Galina Ilieva reflects continuity in her research interests, a sound theoretical background, and an ability to link scientific analysis with current issues in tourism and hospitality practice. Particularly noteworthy is her commitment to conducting research with practical applicability and to seeking solutions to issues of significance for the development of the sector. Taken as a whole, the submitted works demonstrate accumulated research experience and academic independence consistent with the requirements for the academic position of "Associate Professor".

Participation in Scientific Research Projects and Scientific Forums

The research and project activities of Chief Assistant Professor Galina Ilieva, PhD, deserve high recognition. The candidate has participated in the development and implementation of **14 scientific research and applied projects** covering a wide range of topics of international, national and regional significance. Her project activities address current issues in tourism and hospitality and contribute to linking scientific research with practical challenges and solutions.

Chief Assistant Professor Ilieva also actively participates in national and international scientific forums, where she presents the results of her research. This participation contributes to the exchange of scientific ideas, the dissemination of research results, and the further development of her scientific profile in the fields of tourism and hospitality.

Teaching Activities

The teaching activities of Chief Assistant Professor Galina Ilieva, PhD, are active and diverse and are consistent with the profile of the announced competition. The candidate annually fulfils the required teaching workload of more than 400 contact hours, as evidenced by the documentation submitted.

Dr Ilieva delivers lectures and seminars in the following courses: "Hospitality Management", "Hotel Service Technology", "Luxury Hospitality", "Gambling Tourism", "Service Management in Tourism", and "Practical Training in a Hotel". The courses she teaches are directly related to her scientific specialisation and professional experience in tourism and hospitality. The candidate is also a co-author of two teaching aids designed to support students' academic preparation.

An important aspect of Chief Assistant Professor Ilieva's teaching activities is her work with students. She has served as an academic mentor in practical training under the national project of the Ministry of Education and Science "Student Placements" – Phase I and Phase II, and has also participated in the organisation and implementation of scientific and other public events at the University of Economics – Varna and the College of Tourism – Varna.

In summary, the candidate's teaching activities demonstrate substantial teaching experience, active engagement with students, and consistent participation in the academic life of the University. They are fully consistent with the profile of the competition and the requirements of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the University of Economics – Varna.

Plagiarism

No evidence of plagiarism or improper use of the scientific works of others has been identified in the documents and scientific publications submitted by Chief Assistant Professor Galina Ilieva, PhD, for participation in the competition.

Critical Remarks

I have no significant critical remarks regarding Dr Ilieva's research and teaching activities. As a recommendation for her future academic development, I would encourage the candidate to publish her research results even more actively in reputable international scientific journals indexed in Scopus and Web of Science, as well as to participate in international scientific forums. This would contribute to the broader international visibility and recognition of her research results.

Conclusion

The analysis of the qualifications, research and teaching activities of Chief Assistant Professor Galina Peneva Ilieva, PhD, her professional development and scientific achievements provides me with sufficient grounds to give a positive assessment of the candidate's overall academic activity. The submitted scientific publications, the identified scientific and applied contributions, the citations of her publications, her participation in scientific research projects, and her active teaching activities demonstrate a consistently developed scientific and professional profile corresponding to the scientific specialty of the competition.

Chief Assistant Professor Galina Ilieva, PhD, meets and significantly exceeds the minimum national requirements for the academic position of “Associate Professor”, with a total of 988.62 points, compared with the required minimum of 400 points. The additional quantitative requirements of the University of Economics – Varna have also been met and exceeded: 100 points have been achieved under Group Zh against the required 100 points, 197.5 points under Group Z against the required 55 points, and 75 points under Group I against the required 15 points. These results convincingly demonstrate that the candidate meets the statutory and institutional requirements for the academic position of “Associate Professor”.

On the basis of the above, I give my positive assessment and confidently recommend that the esteemed members of the Scientific Jury elect Chief Assistant Professor Galina Ilieva, PhD, to the academic position of “Associate Professor” in Professional Field 3.9. “Tourism”, scientific specialty “Economics and Management (Tourism – Digital Transformations in the Hospitality Industry)”, for the needs of the Department of Tourism at the College of Tourism, University of Economics – Varna.

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ЗЗЛД и регламент (ЕС) 2016/ 679

Burgas
07.08.2026

Member of the Scientific Jury:
(Prof. Bratoy Koprinarov, PhD)