

OPINION

Вх. № PA20-902/26.05.2026г.

on a dissertation thesis: „Social responsibility of business: concepts, institutional mechanisms, and impact evaluation“

for the award of the scientific degree of “Doctor of science”

in the professional field 3.7 “Administration and management”

Doctoral program “Social management” at the University of Economics-Varna

1. General information

Opinion prepared by: prof. Violeta Yaneva Dimitrova, PhD, academic specialty “Economics and management (commerce)”, Department of Economics and management of commerce and services at the University of Economics-Varna (UE-Varna);

Basis for preparing the opinion: Order of the Rector of the UE-Varna RD-06-66/09.03.2026 and decision of the first meeting of the scientific jury on 11.05.2026;

Author of the dissertation: Svitlana Anatoliivna Bilan, PhD, associate professor in the department of humanities and social sciences, Rzeszów University of Technology, Poland. By Decision №. RD26-6/May 4, 2026, of the Rector of the UE-Varna, Svitlana Bilan’s academic and scientific degree of “Doctor” in Education is recognized.;

Topic of the dissertation: Social responsibility of business: concepts, institutional mechanisms, and impact evaluation.

2. General overview of the dissertation (in accordance with the requirements of the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria – RILDASRB)

The dissertation is devoted to an undeniably topical and significant issue, examining the theoretical foundations of corporate social responsibility as a concept, the institutional mechanisms, assessment methodologies, strategic tools for implementation and monitoring, and their impact on competitiveness and sustainable development.

The dissertation is 311 pages long and includes 288 pages of text (introduction – 15 pages, main text (3 chapters, each with 3 sections) – 266 pages, and conclusion – 7 pages, a list of the studied and used literature sources – 183 in English, including scientific publications, statistical databases, materials from international organizations, corporate sustainability reports, etc. The candidate has submitted an abstract (47 pages) accompanying the dissertation, which outlines the scientific-theoretical and scientific-applied contributions, along with a list of 12 scientific publications related to the dissertation.

The dissertation and the abstract were discussed at a meeting of the Department of management and administration at the UE-Varna, and the department decided to initiate the dissertation defense procedure.

3. Evaluation of the structure and content of the dissertation

The individual chapters of this monograph are logically interconnected, a result of the stated objective and the research tasks set forth; their lengths (the first chapter is 130 pages, the second is 74 pages, and the third is 62 pages) are determined by the focus on clarifying the corporate social responsibility (CSR) concept and the mechanisms for its application.

In the first chapter, the author examines the essence of CSR and, through historical analysis, its development, its cultural and institutional aspects, and its connection to sustainable development. The author provides a summary and critical analysis of approaches and models for implementing CSR in the management of business organizations (Carroll's pyramid, Elkington's triple bottom line, etc.). A neo-institutional approach is applied to the theoretical study of CSR, and its development is viewed as the result of interactions between formal institutions (legislation, standards, regulations) and informal institutions (culture, ethics, public opinion, and expectations regarding legitimate corporate behavior). The choice of approach is determined by the results of an in-depth bibliometric analysis of publications indexed in Scopus and Web of Science for the period 1982–2023, demonstrating that after 2000, the concept of CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility)/ BSR (Business for Social Responsibility) became institutionalized in academic and business practice. The focus of this study is the relationship between social responsibility and economic efficiency and competitiveness at the micro and macro levels.

The author's in-depth knowledge of the specialized academic literature in the field under study is evident in the theoretical analysis, generalizations, and critical examination of CSR. The author demonstrates both the ability to draw his own conclusions and formulate his own propositions, as well as the ability to creatively evaluate, develop, and argue ideas in the field under study, including the justification of CSR as a "dynamic institutional construct" that evolves under the influence of factors both external and internal to the business organization.

Chapter Two examines the methodology for developing institutional mechanisms and tools for implementing CSR and its impact on the development and competitiveness of national economies. The author applies a systems approach to the study of CSR implementation in business practice, viewing it as a "system of corporate social responsibility" – an aggregate of approaches, policies, practices, and mechanisms through which the social, environmental, and ethical dimensions of sustainable business development are integrated into the enterprise's operations. In this way, the author substantiates the idea that the quality of the institutional environment and the existence of mechanisms to sanction the opportunistic use of the CSR concept determine the effectiveness of its application. Corporate social responsibility is viewed not as a peripheral function of corporate governance, but as a systemic factor for creating long-term value, organizational sustainability, and legitimacy in modern organizations.

In Section 3 of Chapter 2, the author tests several hypotheses, the central one being that integrated systems for sustainable and socially responsible development are

positively correlated with the competitiveness of the national economy and create a favorable context for CSR development. The paper justifies the idea of an integrated CSR assessment, which allows the synthesis of diverse indicators into a summary analytical measure (via regression coefficients) at the macro level – national economies – using composite global indices. The empirical study, using econometric models, correlation, and regression analyses, is based on statistical data from 27 European Union member states, with a focus on post-transition economies. Based on the results of the quantitative and qualitative analyses, European countries are grouped into several clusters according to their profiles of sustainable development and competitiveness, with specific CSR development priorities outlined for each cluster.

Chapter Three is devoted to evaluating the effectiveness of social responsibility programs and measures using a system of quantitative and qualitative indicators across economic, social, environmental, and reputational dimensions. The sequence of hypotheses selected by the author and tested presents the logic of the dissertation's theoretical model and the interrelationships among institutional conditions, organizational mechanisms, and business outcomes within the study's overall analytical framework. Special focus is placed on the study of reputation as both a key outcome and a factor in corporate social responsibility. Non-financial reporting is analyzed as a driver of CSR development, tracing the evolution from voluntary, individually selected indicators to voluntarily applied standards and regulations.

The results obtained from the theoretical and empirical analyses are economically sound, thoroughly considered, and interpreted, thereby determining their usefulness at the micro and macro levels for improving economic policies to support socially responsible business.

The abstract of the dissertation realistically presents the author's achievements.

4. Identification and evaluation of the theoretical and applied scientific contributions in the dissertation

The doctoral candidate has identified 5 scientific-theoretical and 3 scientific-applied contributions achieved in the dissertation, which I accept.

The scientific-theoretical contributions consist of the synthesis, enrichment, and further development of existing knowledge in the field of social responsibility of business, which the candidate has achieved by applying a systematic approach to the theoretical, methodological, and applied understanding of corporate social responsibility as a strategic institutional mechanism, by integrating its economic, social, environmental, institutional, and cultural dimensions into a unified analytical framework. In this way, the scientific and theoretical contributions are summarized in the formulation of the candidate's first contribution toward the award of the academic degree of "Doctor of science." The remaining four key contributions identified represent distinct areas in which the theory of corporate social responsibility is further developed, namely: - the methodological toolkit for assessing the effectiveness of a company's socially responsible activities has been refined through a system of quantitative and

qualitative indicators covering economic, social, environmental, and reputational parameters; - the relationship between the quality of the national institutional environment, sustainable development, and the competitiveness of national economies has been examined; - the scientific understanding of non-financial reporting as a tool for institutionalizing corporate social responsibility has been deepened; - the thesis regarding the contextual nature of corporate social responsibility models has been further developed; these models are not universal but constantly change and adapt depending on the specific environment or context in which the business operates.

The scientific and applied objectives are related to: - proposing various approaches for integrating the concept of corporate social responsibility into the activities of business entities; - developing recommendations for improving economic policy and institutional mechanisms to support socially responsible business; - assessing the impact of corporate governance, accountability, reputation, and the institutional environment on long-term business sustainability, which can be utilized by investors, analysts, auditors, and rating agencies.

The foregoing provides grounds for considering the contributions valid, appropriate, and objective.

5. Publications related to the topic of the dissertation thesis

The candidate for the degree of "Doctor of science" has submitted a list of 12 scientific publications on the topic of the dissertation, 10 of which are attached to the documents, while the remaining 2 are available online. In terms of structure, 11 of the publications are scientific articles and 1 is a chapter from a collective monograph. All 12 publications are co-authored, with Svitlana Bilan listed as the first author on one of them. The subject area of the publications corresponds to the subject of the dissertation.

The candidate has a total of 55 publications, 54 of which are included in the internationally recognized citation and indexing databases Scopus and Web of Science (I could not find a match for the author's name in the article "Motivation mechanisms of youth behavior on the Ukrainian labor market," Svitlana Vdovtsova), which is evidence of the recognition of Svitlana Bilan's publications in the international scientific community. The total number of declared points (351,04) from the candidate's participation in the preparation of scientific publications exceeds 3,5 times the minimum requirements for Group "G" under the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (RILDASRB).

The dissertation builds upon the author's previous publications. Svitlana Bilan's publications reflect the evolution of her research and her recognition as a researcher, as evidenced by her participation in research teams and her publications in prestigious international journals. The publications have been peer-reviewed by established tenured faculty members and researchers. The publications demonstrate the author's exploration and application of both classical and new approaches, models, and methods of analysis.

6. Citation analysis

In her citation report, Dr. Svitlana Bilan lists 368 citations of scientific publications in which she has participated, as recorded in the internationally recognized citation and indexing database Scopus, which amount to 5 520 points, with the publications declared in the dissertation alone accounting for 251 citations (3 765 points), or more than 55 times the national minimum requirements for obtaining the academic degree of “Doctor of science” under the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (RILDASRB).

Svitlana Bilan’s Scopus profile shows 55 publications, 899 citations excluding self-citations, and an h-index of 18. The Web of Science citation and indexing database includes 37 publications with the candidate’s participation, 543 citations excluding self-citations, and an h-index of 13.

The above demonstrates the exceptionally high visibility and dissemination of the candidate’s publications, as well as their recognition by researchers worldwide.

7. Detected or undetected plagiarism in the dissertation and the abstract

Upon reviewing and analyzing Svitlana Bilan’s dissertation, as well as the related publications, I have found no instances of plagiarism, inaccurate data, or improper citation of other scholarly works. The sources used are properly cited.

8. Critical comments and recommendations

The above describes the merits of the dissertation. The following comments are intended as recommendations for improving its presentation and exploring opportunities for future research: - The limitations of the study note the existence of potential endogeneity when applying an integrated coefficient to assess the relationship between the Global Competitiveness Index (GCI) as a dependent variable and composite indices assessing the institutional environment in the field of corporate social responsibility. This distinction between cause and effect should be further substantiated, as the GCI itself (International Institute for Management Development, Lausanne, Switzerland, after 2018) is itself a composite index comprising 98 indicators across 12 categories, including institutions, innovation capacity, health, skills, the labor market, and others—or indicators that are measured by the specialized indices used as factor indicators (e.g., skilled workforce in the GCI and the education index in the HDI). It should be noted that the essence of the GCI is presented in the collective publication “The Main Drivers of Competitiveness in the EU-28 Countries”, based on the dissertation, which tests the hypothesis that foreign direct investment, innovation, and human capital contribute to the growth of competitiveness; - The econometric analysis of the relationship between CSR and competitiveness at the macro level could be expanded to include a micro-level study—at the firm level—as the author also points out; - The translation of the dissertation and the abstract into Bulgarian could be stylistically improved, and certain

technical errors could be avoided (in the abstract, the definition of the central hypothesis is repeated twice on pages 32 and 34).

9. Questions for the candidate

What is the candidate's view on the comparative applicability, in assessing the relationship between CSR and competitiveness, of individual indicators and the relationships between them, as well as the rates of their development, on the one hand, and the use of summary composite indicators, on the other?

10. Conclusion

The dissertation of Svitlana Anatoliivna Bilan, PhD, complies with Article 12, Paragraph 4 of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria – it constitutes an original, comprehensive, and complete independent research study, containing theoretical generalizations and proposed solutions to a significant and timely scientific and applied problem in business management. Svitlana Anatoliivna Bilan, PhD, meets the minimum national requirements for the award of the academic degree of “Doctor of science” in accordance with the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for the Implementation of Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria. Based on the foregoing, I recommend to the members of the academic jury that, following the successful defense of the dissertation, they award the academic degree of “Doctor of science” in professional field 3.7 “Administration and management,” doctoral program “Social management,” to Svitlana Anatoliivna Bilan, PhD.

23.05.2026 г.
Varna

Prepared by:

(prof. Violeta Dimitrova, PhD)

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



OPINION

Вх. № PA20-903/26.05.2026г.

Regarding: Dissertation defense on the acquisition of the scientific degree "Doctor of Science", Scientific specialty: 05.02.20. "Social Management" (Professional field "3.7 Administration and Management"), Department of Management and Administration, according to the procedure announced by the University of Economics – Varna

By: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Radka Petrova Ivanova, University of Economics – Varna, Management Faculty, Department of Management and Administration, Professional field "3.7 Administration and Management", Scientific specialty: 05.02.20. "Social Management".

Argumentation for the evaluation: The requirements of Art. 41, para. 1 of the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, and the Rector's Order of University of Economics – Varna No. RD-06-92/05.05.2026 for appointing the Academic Jury, and the decision from the first meeting of the Academic Jury, held on 11.05.2026.

Author of the dissertation: Svilana Bilan

Topic of the dissertation: *"Social Responsibility of Business: Concepts, Institutional Mechanisms, and Impact Evaluation"*

I. General Information

1.1. Subject Matter

The dissertation examines and analyses the processes of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Business Social Responsibility (BSR) within contemporary business ecosystems developing under the influence of global challenges and institutional transformations, with a particular focus on post-transitional economies and business environments in the EU shaped by ESG regulation and the implementation of the CSRD. Eight research tasks are formulated, specifying the stated objective, thesis, and nine hypotheses, which are divided into four levels: systemic, meso-, organizational level, and results level.

1.2. Scope

The dissertation consists of 311 pages. It includes an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, and a bibliography.

1.3. Structure

The sections of the dissertation are balanced, and the text is characterized by logical consistency and coherence. The overall logic of the research is determined by the defined objective and tasks and is based on three interrelated analytical levels: conceptualization of business social responsibility; development of mechanisms and tools for its implementation; and formation of a methodological framework for assessing and monitoring its effectiveness. The first chapter examines the conceptual-



theoretical and institutional foundations of business social responsibility. The second chapter focuses on the mechanisms, tools, and models for implementing CSR at the enterprise level and within the broader institutional environment. The third chapter explores methods for evaluation, monitoring, reputational analysis, and non-financial reporting in the context of transparency and CSR development.

1.4. Literature

The bibliography contains 183 literary sources.

1.5. Appendices

There are no appendices included in the dissertation.

II. Evaluation of the Form and Content of the Dissertation

2.1. Evaluation of the Relevance and Degree of Development of the Research Problem

The dissertation addresses a current and significant issue. A mixed research methodology is applied, including both quantitative and qualitative components. The quantitative component is based on a bibliometric analysis of publications on CSR issues in the Scopus and Web of Science databases for the period 1982–2023, with network visualization using VOSviewer; correlation and regression analyses to identify relationships between indicators of social responsibility, sustainable development, and competitiveness; and analysis of international composite indices (Global Competitiveness Index, SDG Index, Human Development Index, Global Innovation Index, World Happiness Score, and Environmental Performance Index). The research focuses on the 27 EU Member States.

The qualitative component includes a systematic literature review, comparative institutional analysis of business social responsibility models, case study analysis of corporate practices and crisis adaptation, and content analysis of international standards and regulatory documents in the field of non-financial reporting and corporate responsibility. Through the combination of these methods, the structural mechanisms through which CSR is integrated into corporate governance, monitoring systems, reputation policy, and strategic planning are identified. The obtained results are presented in tabular form, which facilitates the reader's understanding.

Based on the theoretical analysis and synthesis skills demonstrated in the dissertation, it is proven that, in the contemporary world, business social responsibility can be viewed as a structural mechanism through which businesses adapt to the growing complexity of the environment, build trust, enhance competitiveness, and participate in addressing socially significant challenges. It is emphasized that the transition from fragmented CSR practices to integrated systems of responsible governance represents one of the key indicators of the maturity of contemporary business. A methodological framework is proposed for measuring the effectiveness of CSR both at the systemic and organizational levels, while examining the dynamics of



CSR under conditions of institutional instability characteristic of post-transition economies.

2.2. Assessment of the Language, Scope, and Research Methodology of the Dissertation

From a lexical and stylistic perspective, I consider the dissertation to be developed in accordance with the contemporary academic writing standards. It is characterized by a clear scientific language and the appropriate use of terminology in the field of corporate and business social responsibility. A solid level of theoretical awareness has been demonstrated, and the key concepts have been clearly defined.

The statistical instruments employed highlight the doctoral candidate's research capabilities. Appropriate scientific approaches and research methods have been applied for the interpretation of the obtained results. A coherent analytical framework has been proposed, linking systemic indicators and regulatory frameworks with specific CSR configurations at the firm level. In this way, the dissertation addresses the fragmentation of existing research and opens new opportunities for the accumulation of theoretical knowledge. The cited literary and informational sources have been referenced correctly throughout the study.

2.3. Evaluation of the Thesis Abstract

The Thesis Abstract consists of 49 pages. It accurately and comprehensively reflects the structure of the research, as well as the conclusions and recommendations formulated by the doctoral candidate. A contemporary academic writing style has been employed. The contributions and publications related to the dissertation are appropriately presented.

III. Scientific and Applied Contributions of the Dissertation

I accept the stated contributions (Abstract, pp. 46–47), which are divided into two groups: scientific-theoretical contributions (6) and scientific-applied contributions (3). They accurately reflect the results of the conducted research.

IV. Publications and Participation in Scientific Forums

The main results of the research conducted on the topic of the dissertation have been presented in 12 scientific publications. Through these publications, the research work of Svitlana Bilan has gained academic visibility and has provided interested stakeholders with the opportunity to familiarize themselves with her achievements to date. The presented publications meet the quantitative indicators established by the minimum national requirements.

V. Established or Non-Established Plagiarism in the Dissertation and the Thesis Abstract



No plagiarism has been identified in the dissertation or in the abstract submitted by Svitlana Bilan.

VI. Critical Remarks, Recommendations, and Questions to the Doctoral Candidate

6.1. Critical Remarks and Recommendations

- There is an inconsistency in the manner in which the research aim, objectives, thesis, and hypotheses are defined in the dissertation and the abstract.
- The bibliography is not presented in an appropriate format; when preparing the reference list, the requirement for arranging the titles in alphabetical order should be observed.
- A comprehensive editorial revision of the text is necessary in order to eliminate stylistic and technical inaccuracies. In this regard, the actual length of the dissertation is 286 standard pages, while the abstract comprises 44 pages.

6.2. Questions

1. Please specify more clearly the thesis defended in the dissertation.

3. Conclusion

My overall impression of the submitted dissertation entitled "*Social Responsibility of Business: Concepts, Institutional Mechanisms, and Impact Evaluation*" is that it presents a thorough theoretical analysis and synthesis of a contemporary managerial issue of significant relevance. The dissertation possesses the necessary qualities of an independent scientific study containing theoretical generalizations. It includes scientific-theoretical and scientific-applied contributions of an original nature.

The stated research objectives have been accomplished, and the research thesis has been substantiated through the confirmation of the nine formulated hypotheses. I express my positive evaluation of the submitted dissertation and **recommend that the Scientific Jury awards Svitlana Bilan the scientific degree of Doctor of Sciences in the field of "Social Management" (Professional Field 3.7 Administration and Management) at the Department of "Management and Administration".**

May 26, 2026
Varna

Member of the Jury: *V. Radka*
(Assos. Prof. Dr. Radka)

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



OPINION

Вх. № П/20-865/20.05.2026

by Prof. Dr. Sc. Vanya Kuzdova Banabakova, Ph D
in the field of higher education 3. "Social, economic and legal sciences",
professional direction 3.7. "Administration and management",
scientific specialty "Organization and management outside the sphere of
material production",
"Vasil Levski" National Military University, city of Veliko Tarnovo

on a dissertation with author
Svitlana Anatoliivna Balan

**ON THE TOPIC: "Social responsibility of business: concepts,
institutional mechanisms and impact assessment",**
submitted for the acquisition of the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences"
in the professional direction 3.7. Administration and Management,
Doctoral Program "Social Management"

Basis for writing the review: Order of the Rector of the University of Economics - Varna
No. RD-06-92/05.05.2026 on the appointment of a scientific jury and Protocol No. 1 of
11.05.2026 from the first meeting of the scientific jury

2026



1.Date of the dissertation

Svitlana Anatolyivna Balan acquired the Doctor' Degree of Pedagogy at the National Academy of Sciences, Ukraine in 2003.

In 2011, she acquired postgraduate qualification at the University of Szczecin, Poland, in Human Resources Management.

In 2022, she was elected Associate Professor at the National University of Water Management and Environmental Management, Rivne.

From 2004 to the present, she has held academic positions, first as an assistant professor, then as an associate professor. She is currently an associate professor at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Faculty of Management, Rzeszów University of Technology, Poland.

Her main subjects are Business Ethics and Management Ethics.

She is the scientific supervisor of the Ph D student Amangeldieva Birgamym Askarkyzy, who in 2025 successfully defended her dissertation on the topic of State Regulation of the Development of the Circular Economy in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Svitlana Anatolyivna Balan is actively teaching and researching in Poland, Ukraine and Hungary.

Her main scientific interests are in the following areas: corporate social responsibility; studies of migration processes and the labor market; financial literacy and education.

She has a large number of scientific publications in refereed and indexed scientific journals in world-renowned databases of scientific information, as follows: in Scopus (as of 01.02.2026) - 52 publications, 912 citations without self-citations, h-index 18; in Web of Science (as of 01.02.2026) - 37 publications, 534 citations without self-citations, h-index 13.

She has participated in a number of scientific research projects: in 2003 - "Regional media business structures and self-governments: cooperation on the path to European integration (the experience of Ukraine and Poland)", PAUCI Foundation; in 2005 - "Together in Europe: marketing strategies for regional development", Open Society Foundation; in 2010 - "Migration of foreign labor force", West Pomeranian Labor Market Observatory, coordinator; in the period 01.02.2010 - 31.01.2013, "EUMAGINE - Imagining Europe from the Outside...", FP7-SSH-2009A, Project ID 244703.

She is a member of the Center for Sociological Research, Poland - Centre of Sociological Research (NGO).

She was the Managing Editor in the period from 2009 to 2022 of the Journal "Economy and Sociology".

She speaks Polish, Ukrainian, Russian and English.



2. General presentation of the dissertation work

The presented dissertation work explores a current international and regional scientific issue related to the social responsibility of business.

The dissertation work is developed in a total volume of 311 pages and includes an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion and a list of used literature. The dissertation work presents tables and figures. 183 literary and Internet sources were used - in different languages.

3. Assessment of the structure and content of the dissertation work

The relevance and significance of the topic of the dissertation work and the development itself are determined by the following prerequisites and conditions: corporate social responsibility (CSR) is gaining increasing importance for business management; for the modern company, responsibility to employees, consumers, local communities, the state, the environment and future generations is increasingly emerging not as an external addition to economic activity, but as an internal principle of the organization of corporate governance, decision-making and the formation of a long-term competitive advantage; there is a change in the very logic of assessing business effectiveness; the social dimension of the problem is strengthened by the fact that business is increasingly viewed not only as an economic entity, but also as a full-fledged participant in social development; The study of corporate social responsibility is gaining particular importance in countries with post-transformation economies, where institutional frameworks for responsible business behavior often remain unstable, incomplete, or contradictory; the importance of the topic is enhanced by regulatory changes that shift corporate social responsibility (CSR) from the sphere of mainly voluntary initiatives to the conditions of increasingly stringent institutionalized requirements, etc.

Despite the significant number of publications in the field of corporate social responsibility of business, scientific views are not unified. A significant part of the research is focused on large transnational corporations in developed countries, while small and medium-sized businesses, as well as companies from post-transformation economies, are incompletely represented. Also, often the economic, social and environmental aspects of CSR are analyzed in isolation, without adequately taking into account their interaction, the institutional environment, cultural factors and crisis conditions.

In the introduction to the dissertation, the relevance of the topic is justified and the object, subject, goal and eight research tasks are precisely and clearly defined.

The dissertation is developed on the basis of the research thesis that corporate social responsibility is an institutionally conditioned and organizationally integrated strategic mechanism through which enterprises



transform their interaction with stakeholders into sustainable competitive advantages. The effectiveness of this mechanism is determined by the interaction between the quality of the institutional environment, internal corporate policies and management mechanisms, non-financial reporting tools and reputational capital, which in their dynamics determine the relationship between responsible behavior, sustainable development and competitiveness at the micro and macro levels.

Nine research hypotheses have been defined to prove the research thesis.

An algorithm has been developed for the empirical verification of these hypotheses, which connects theoretical statements with measurable indicators at the systemic and organizational levels. At the macro level, national sustainable development systems are presented through integral indices (SDG Index, Human Development Index, Economic Freedom Index, Global Innovation Index, World Happiness Score, Environmental Performance Index), while competitiveness is measured through the IMD World Competitiveness Index. At the micro and meso levels, business social responsibility is assessed through indicators for the implementation of CSR/BSR practices, corporate reputation, use of non-financial reporting frameworks and characteristics of the institutional environment.

In developing the dissertation work and to achieve the goal, solve the research tasks and prove the research thesis, scientific research approaches and methods such as: induction, deduction, expert assessments, statistical methods for information processing and analysis, etc. The analyses are based on rich empirical material.

The theoretical and methodological basis of the dissertation research are the works of leading scientists in the world in the field of corporate social responsibility, as well as the application of the neo-institutional approach, which allows considering the social responsibility of business as a result of the interaction between formal and informal institutions.

In parallel with the neo-institutional approach, the following were used in the work: the theory of stakeholders; the theory of corporate reputation; the resource approach to the company; modern concepts of sustainable development; and non-financial accountability. Their combination allows the creation of an integrated analytical framework in which CSR is viewed as a multi-layered phenomenon, encompassing systemic, organizational, managerial, communication and result dimensions.

For the purposes of the study, an analysis of scientific publications on the issue of CSR in the Scopus and Web of Science databases for the period 1982–2023 was conducted.

The empirical basis of the quantitative part consists of data for 27 member states of the European Union, which makes it possible to test the hypotheses



about the relationship between the development of a sustainable environment and competitiveness, as well as the role of institutional factors in the formation of favorable conditions for the development of CSR.

Econometric models in the work are used as a tool for discovering statistically significant relationships, and not as a basis for simplified causal conclusions, which testifies to the methodological approach of the study.

The data sources are international statistical databases, materials from international organizations, corporate reports on sustainable development, results of academic research and industry assessments covering the period 1982–2023, with a particular emphasis on post-transformation economies.

The introduction to the dissertation clearly outlines the restrictive conditions for the development of the work.

All of the above determines the relevance, significance and necessity for science and practice in an international aspect of the dissertation.

The first chapter of the work provides a comparative and critical analysis of the conceptual, theoretical and institutional foundations of the social responsibility of business.

The second chapter focuses on the mechanisms, tools and models for the implementation of CSR at the enterprise level and in a broader institutional environment.

The third chapter offers the appropriate methods for assessment, monitoring, reputation analysis and consideration of non-financial reporting as a driver of transparency and development of CSR.

The conclusion of the dissertation presents in-depth summarized conclusions and proposals and the achieved scientific and applied scientific results from the research.

The content of the dissertation fully corresponds to its topic. The results obtained show that the set goals and research tasks have been fully achieved.

The first chapter solves the first, second, third and fourth research tasks, the second chapter solves the fifth and sixth research tasks, and the third chapter solves the seventh and eighth tasks.

The research thesis is proven on the basis of in-depth empirical studies and analyses and proving the nine hypotheses based on serious statistical tools. The statistical analyses in the dissertation are entirely the work of the author.

The proposed dissertation is developed consistently and logically. The individual chapters are well balanced in volume. The author shows a very good command of the terminology on the issue under consideration. He has used a rich set of research and analysis methods and a large base of empirical data. In-depth research and interpretation of the results have been carried out and innovative scientific and applied proposals have been given to increase the role



and importance of the social responsibility of business for the development of the economy and public welfare.

The dissertation contains significant scientific and applied scientific results, which represent an original contribution to science. The author offers significant scientific and applied solutions to an important practical problem with economic, public and social significance.

I believe that the presented dissertation fully meets the requirements of Art. 37, para. 1 of the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the University of Economics - Varna.

The volume of the dissertation is optimal, from the point of view of the integrity and completeness of the scientific research and from the point of view of the requirements for a dissertation for the acquisition of the scientific degree of Doctor of Sciences.

The developed dissertation is the personal work of the author, since Svitlana Anatolyivna Balan presents her personal views and the results of her empirical research in the field of the considered issues.

The abstract is developed in a volume of 50 pages. The presented abstract correctly reflects the content of the dissertation on the topic "Social responsibility of business: concepts, institutional mechanisms and impact assessment", and includes the mandatory scientific and scientific-applied contributions and a list of scientific publications on the topic.

The presented dissertation and the abstract to it meet the requirements of the Regulations for the development of the academic staff at the University of Economics - Varna.

4. Scientific and applied contributions of the dissertation work

The presented dissertation work has clearly expressed scientific and applied contributions. I accept the scientific and applied contributions formulated by the author of the dissertation work.

The following **scientific contributions** stand out as the most significant.

- The theory of business social responsibility has been further developed, and a systematic approach has been applied to its theoretical, methodological and applied understanding as a strategic institutional mechanism, by integrating its economic, social, environmental, institutional and cultural dimensions into a single analytical framework.
- The methodological tools for assessing the effectiveness of business social responsibility have been improved, by combining quantitative and qualitative indicators, integral indicators, monitoring approaches, analysis of reputational capital and mechanisms for non-financial reporting.



- The justification of the relationship between the quality of the national institutional environment, sustainable development and the competitiveness of national economies has been further developed based on an analysis of data from 27 countries of the European Union.
- The need for the application of non-financial reporting as a tool for institutionalizing the social responsibility of business, increasing accountability, verification and comparability of data, as well as for engaging stakeholders in the assessment of corporate responsibility has been proven.
- The thesis of the mutual dependence of the models for the social responsibility of business has been further developed, as it has been proven that formal regulatory mechanisms, cultural norms, management practices, digital monitoring tools and crisis conditions form a heterogeneous environment in which CSR acquires different configurations.

The following **scientific and applied contributions** stand out as the most significant.

- Approaches that can be used by organizations to integrate social responsibility relevance in: corporate strategy; stakeholder engagement mechanisms; and non-financial accountability.
- Conclusions and recommendations are formulated, with clearly expressed benefits for state and regulatory authorities in improving institutional mechanisms for supporting responsible business, and stimulating non-financial accountability and strengthening the partnership between business, the state and civil society.
- The results of the study are widely used by investors, analysts, auditors and rating agencies for a more in-depth assessment of the impact of corporate governance, accountability, reputation and institutional environment on the long-term sustainability of business.

I consider the contributions formulated in this way to be significant for science and practice.

The dissertation on the topic “Social Responsibility of Business: Concepts, Institutional Mechanisms and Impact Assessment” for the acquisition of the scientific degree of Doctor of Sciences contains theoretical summaries and solutions to significant scientific and applied science problems, which are expressed in the following: a system of interconnected theoretical, methodological and empirical results has been proposed, which deepen the understanding of the social responsibility of business as a strategic institutional mechanism of modern corporate development; the methodological tools for assessing the effectiveness of CSR have been improved; the relationship between the quality of the national institutional environment, sustainable



development and competitiveness has been substantiated; the role of corporate reputation has been proven as a two-sided mechanism, in which reputation is not only the result of effective practices in the field of CSR, but also a resource that strengthens the company's ability to maintain sustainable and systematic strategies for responsible behavior; the scientific understanding of non-financial reporting as a tool not only for communication, but also for institutionalizing the social responsibility of business, increasing accountability, and others has been further developed and enriched; there are contributions for implementation – methodologies, algorithms and models such as models of social responsibility of business and others.

The results obtained from the scientific research have a clearly expressed practical significance, which mainly consists in the fact that its theoretical statements, methodological approaches and analytical conclusions can be used in several applied directions, such as: the results of the research are of interest to economic entities that seek to integrate social responsibility into corporate strategy; the conclusions of the dissertation are useful for state bodies, regulatory bodies and political formations, because they provide grounds for improving institutional mechanisms for supporting responsible business; the results of the research can be used by various business partners for a deeper understanding of how the quality of corporate governance, accountability, reputation and institutional environment affect the long-term sustainability of business; and finally, the methodological provisions and empirical results of the dissertation can be used in the educational process.

5. Publications and participation in scientific forums

On the topic of the dissertation work, Svitlana Anatolyivna Balan has presented 55 scientific publications, of which 54 scientific publications, all in scientific journals, which are indexed and referenced in the world-famous database of scientific information Scopus, and one chapter of a collective monograph. From the presented publications, Svitlana Anatolyivna Balan forms 351,04 points with a minimum required number of 100 points.

Regarding the citationability of Svitlana Anatolyivna Balan's scientific publications, all the presented citations are in Scopus, and they are an extremely large number – 13485, which obviously shows the great interest of the scientific community in her scientific publications (minimum required points for citations 100 points).

With the presented scientific publications, Svitlana Anatoliivna Balan meets the minimum national requirements for acquiring the National Qualifications Framework Doctor of Sciences in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.7. Administration and management, according to Art. 2b, para. 2 and para. 3 of the Act on the



Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the requirements under Art. 64 and Art. 69, para. 5, items 1 and 2 of the Regulations on the Development of Academic Staff at the University of Economics - Varna.

Svitlana Anatoliivna Balan has participated in various international scientific forums in Poland, Ukraine, Hungary and other countries.

The dissertation on the topic "Social Responsibility of Business: Concepts, Institutional Mechanisms and Impact Assessment" is a fully completed scientific work and contains in-depth research on the problems posed.

6. Plagiarism found or not in the dissertation and abstract

No plagiarism has been found in the dissertation and abstract, and I have no doubts about it.

7. Critical remarks and recommendation

The dissertation fully meets the requirements for this type of scientific work. I have no critical remarks.

As a wish to Svitlana Anatoliivna Balan, it is to have many more successes in her scientific research work.

The analyses made and the proposals given in the dissertation are of high scientific and applied scientific value and significance and will certainly be of interest to scientific circles on an international scale.

8. Conclusion

The dissertation and the abstract to it by Svitlana Anatoliivna Balan fully meet the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff of the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its implementation, the minimum national requirements for acquiring the National Doctor of Sciences in the professional field 3.7. Administration and Management and the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the University of Economics - Varna.

I give a positive assessment of the dissertation work of Svitlana Anatoliivna Balan on the topic "Social responsibility of business: concepts, institutional mechanisms and impact assessment", and I propose to the esteemed members of the scientific jury that Svitlana Anatoliivna Balan be awarded the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences" in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.7. Administration and management and doctoral program Social management.

Developed the opinion:
(prof. Dr. Vanya Banabakova)

18. 05. 2026
City of Veliko Tarnovo

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



OPINION

Вх. № PA 20-899 / 26.05.2026 r.

on the dissertation for the award of a scientific "Doctor of Science" degree in Higher Education Area 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, Professional Field 3.7 Administration and management, Scientific Specialty "Social Management",
University of Economics – Varna

1. General Information Regarding the Submitted Statement

Statement written by Assoc. Prof. Evelina Bozhidarova Parashkevova-Velikova, Ph.D, D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics – Svishtov, Department of Strategic Planning

Dissertation topic: "Social responsibility of business: concepts, institutional mechanisms, and impact evaluation"

Author: Svitlana Bilan

Grounds for preparing the statement: Order № RD-06-92/05.05.2026 of the Rector of the University of Economics – Varna.

2. General presentation of the dissertation work

This opinion has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), the Regulations for the Implementation of the LDASRB, and the Rules for the Development of the Academic Staff at the University of Economics – Varna.

From the documents submitted in the procedure, it is evident that the candidate possesses the necessary knowledge and skills regarding the specific topic, demonstrates an in-depth understanding of it, and communicates it adequately within the scientific community. Svitlana Bilan demonstrates active academic and editorial work in an international environment; she has many years of experience as a lecturer, a member of research teams, and editorial boards.

The topic of social responsibility is particularly relevant due to the growing importance of ESG criteria, sustainable development, and public expectations regarding ethical business behavior in the context of global economic, social, and environmental crises. Contemporary companies are increasingly evaluated not only by their financial performance, but also by their responsibility toward employees, society, and the environment, which turns social responsibility into a key element of strategic management and competitiveness. Additional significance is added to the topic by the increasing regulatory requirements for non-financial reporting and the need to adapt social responsibility models to the conditions of post-transformation economies.

The research focuses on corporate social responsibility and the need for a comprehensive theoretical conceptualization of this phenomenon through a deeper institutional analysis of the mechanisms of its formation and implementation, as well



as the development of a methodology for assessing its impact on enterprise development and competitiveness in today's dynamic environment. Within this context, the **objective** of the dissertation is defined as follows: "*to develop an integrated theoretical and methodological framework and practical recommendations for the formation, implementation and monitoring of business social responsibility systems, understood as integrated organisational mechanisms, policies, procedures, tools and practices through which enterprises institutionalise responsible behaviour, as well as to substantiate the interrelationship between responsible business practices, organisational competitiveness and the parameters of sustainable development under conditions of institutional transformation.*"

The defined **object** of the research is the processes of corporate social responsibility within contemporary business ecosystems, which evolve under the influence of global challenges and institutional transformations. The object of the study comprises the processes of corporate social responsibility in modern business ecosystems that are evolving under the impact of global challenges and institutional transformations.

The **subject** of the research includes the theoretical foundations, institutional mechanisms, assessment methodologies, and strategic tools for the implementation and monitoring of corporate social responsibility, examined through the prism of their influence on organizational competitiveness and sustainable development.

Eight research tasks have been defined, which I consider to have been correctly fulfilled in the scientific work and which contribute to confirming the defined main research **thesis**, states that: "*that business social responsibility constitutes an institutionally embedded and organisationally integrated strategic mechanism through which enterprises transform their interactions with stakeholders into sustainable competitive advantages. The effectiveness of this mechanism is determined by the interplay between the quality of the institutional environment, internal corporate policies and governance mechanisms, non financial reporting tools and reputational capital, which in their dynamics shape the relationship between responsible behaviour, sustainable development and competitiveness at both micro and macro levels*" support of the defined thesis, nine hypotheses have been formulated. The dissertation is structured in a logical manner, and the implementation of the set research tasks is clearly traceable throughout the course of the work.

The **theoretical and methodological framework** is based on the neo-institutional approach, as well as on the postulates of major theoretical concepts that enrich the methodological toolkit. A bibliometric analysis has been applied, providing quantitative confirmation of the research results. The analytical model used to examine the context, factors, components, and consequences of the functioning of corporate social responsibility adds significant value to the dissertation. I consider that the theoretical and methodological framework is correctly presented and relevant to the defined research objectives, ensuring the scientific validation of the results.

The **limitations** related to the temporal and geographical context, as well as to the data and their interpretation, are also appropriately presented.

The dissertation manuscript comprises 312 pages. Structurally, the dissertation



includes an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, a list of references. The literature reviewed includes 183 sources. The dissertation is visually supported by 27 figures and 27 tables.

The volume, structure, and main foundations of the proposed dissertation are characterized by depth and scientific logic. The dissertation meets the established standards for a dissertation for the award of the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences" in the professional field 3.7. Administration and Management.

3. Evaluation of the Publications

A total of 12 publications have been submitted as part of the procedure documentation, reflecting issues addressed in the dissertation and ensuring the dissemination of the achieved scientific results within the academic community.

The submitted declaration report shows that the candidate has fulfilled the minimum national requirements for obtaining the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences" in field 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, professional field 3.7 Administration and Management. With Diploma DK No. 026343 of 10.11.2004 for the acquired educational and scientific degree "Doctor" with the dissertation topic "The Relationship between General Educational and Professional Components in the Language Training of Students at an Industrial College," the candidate covers the required 50 points.

Regarding group of indicators G, 54 articles published in scientific journals referenced and indexed in internationally recognized scientific databases, as well as one chapter in a collective monograph, have been presented. According to the submitted declaration report, all publications are co-authored. The verification confirms that the report is accurate and that the indicated publications are available in the scientific information databases. Through these publications, the candidate has accumulated 351.04 points, with the required minimum being 100.

Regarding group of indicators D, the candidate declares 13,485 points, with the required minimum being 100. The points are based on 899 citations indexed in Scopus, excluding self-citations, and are also traceable in the scientific database.

The available and objectively verifiable scientific information demonstrates that the candidate covers the minimum national requirements for obtaining the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences," substantially exceeding them.

4. Evaluation of the Structure and Content of the Doctoral Dissertation

The **introduction** contains the main elements required for a scientific study. It presents the relevance of the issue, the achievements in the field to date, the theoretical and methodological framework, as well as the tools applied in accomplishing the research objectives and tasks. The aim, object, subject, research thesis, hypotheses, and tasks are clearly and unambiguously defined. The methods used and the limitations of the study are also specified. The relevance of the topic is presented and adequately justified.

Chapter One examines the conceptual and theoretical foundations of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and its evolution from voluntary philanthropy into a



strategic instrument for management and sustainable development. The main CSR theories and models are analyzed, including Carroll's pyramid, stakeholder theory, ESG approaches, and the relationship between social responsibility, economic efficiency, and corporate sustainability. Special attention is paid to the cultural and institutional factors influencing the implementation of CSR, as well as to the role of the state, regulations, and international standards such as ISO, GRI, CSRD, and ESRS. The chapter also discusses examples of corporate irresponsibility and corporate scandals that affect mechanisms of accountability, control, and sustainable governance. In conclusion, a bibliometric analysis of scientific publications indexed in Scopus and Web of Science is presented, demonstrating the development of CSR as a dynamic and rapidly expanding scientific and practical field.

Chapter Two of the dissertation examines the methodology and mechanisms for the formation and implementation of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as an integrated management system connected to sustainable development, risk management, and value creation. The main CSR mechanisms and tools are analyzed, namely strategic integration, ethical codes, stakeholder engagement, environmental and social programs, non-financial reporting, and ESG approaches. Special attention is devoted to the role of digital technologies, reporting standards, and the institutional environment influencing the effectiveness of CSR and the risk of "window-dressing" social responsibility practices. The chapter transitions from the organizational to the macroeconomic level through an analysis of the relationship between sustainable development, institutional quality, and national competitiveness within EU countries. Through empirical regression analysis, it is demonstrated that innovation, sustainable development, human capital, and a favourable institutional environment are positively associated with competitiveness and create favourable conditions for the development of effective CSR practices.

Chapter Three examines the methodological and analytical foundations for the assessment and monitoring of Corporate Social Responsibility through integrated ESG and SRI approaches combining quantitative and qualitative indicators. A system for evaluating social investments and an integrated model for measuring CSR have been developed, enabling the monitoring of enterprises' social, environmental, and economic performance. International indices and standards for sustainable development are analysed, as well as hybrid models through which CSR is integrated into corporate strategy and performance management. Special attention is given to digital technologies, internal control, ESG monitoring, Scope 3 indicators, and non-financial reporting as tools for transparency, risk management, and trust-building with stakeholders. It is emphasized that CSR and ESG are key factors for corporate reputation, competitiveness, and sustainable development, while non-financial reporting is gradually evolving from a voluntary practice into a mandatory mechanism for accountability and business legitimacy.

The **conclusion** summarizes the main findings of the dissertation research and demonstrates that CSR has transformed from a philanthropic activity into a strategic mechanism for sustainable development, competitiveness, and trust-building. It is emphasized that its development depends on the institutional environment, economic,



cultural, and regulatory factors, as well as on the ability of businesses to integrate social responsibility into their management processes and non-financial reporting. It is confirmed that internal policies, ethical standards, ESG practices, and accountability mechanisms enhance companies' reputation, transparency, and sustainability. The conclusion also highlights the scientific and applied contribution of the developed methodology for CSR assessment and monitoring, which combines quantitative and qualitative indicators, reputational analysis, and non-financial reporting. Ultimately, the dissertation proves that corporate social responsibility is a key element of contemporary corporate governance and an important instrument for adapting to global economic, social, and environmental challenges. Thus, the research tasks have been fulfilled, and the main thesis stated by the author in the introduction of the dissertation has been proven.

The style of presentation is characteristic of this type of academic work. The text contains numerous references to scientific publications and studies by other authors, appropriate scientific methods have been applied, the author's own perspective is clearly evident, and the contributions are indisputable.

The **abstract** consists of 48 pages. It is properly structured and includes information relevant to the content of the dissertation.

5. Scientific and Applied Scientific Contributions of the Dissertation

Six scientific-theoretical and three scientific-applied contributions have been identified. Together, they consolidate the candidate's achievements in both the theoretical and the practical-applied dimensions.

I accept the contributions as formulated. I consider that they correctly reflect the results of the conducted research and the achievements of the author.

6. Presence or Absence of Plagiarism in the Doctoral Dissertation and Abstract

No violations of the rules of scientific ethics have been identified in the materials related to the defense procedure. Citations are properly and accurately presented.

7. Critical Remarks, Questions, and Recommendations Regarding the Doctoral Dissertation

I have no critical remarks, questions, or recommendations regarding the dissertation. I encourage the candidate to continue their active publication activity.

8. Summary Evaluation of the Doctoral Dissertation and Conclusion

The submitted dissertation possesses the characteristics of an independent study with significant scientific-theoretical and scientific-applied contributions. In terms of structure and content, I consider that it meets the requirements for a doctoral dissertation, as well as the stipulations of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), its Implementing Regulations,



and the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the University of Economics – Varna.

The dissertation is characterized by completeness, logical coherence, clearly defined foundations, in-depth research, the author's own perspective, and proposals for the development of both theory and practice in the field of social responsibility.

These facts give me reason to propose to the esteemed Scientific Jury to award Svetlana Bilan the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences" in the scientific specialty "Social Management" from the professional field "Administration and Management".

Date: 22.05.2026

Statement prepared by:
(assoc. prof. Evelina Parashkeva)

лична информация съгласно
ЗЗД и регламент (ЕС) 2016/ 679 (GDPR)