

**SCIENTIFIC OPINION**

by

Assoc. Katya Antonova, PhD

Department of Business, Investments, Real Estate

University of Economics - Varna

Regarding the dissertation on the topic: **Sustainable management of agricultural lands from the State land fund in Bulgaria**

PhD student: **Dimitar Dimov Varbanov**

**1. General information**

The opinion was prepared in pursuance of Order No. *RD-06-27/28.01.2026*. of the Rector of the University of Economics – Varna for the formation of a Scientific Jury for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" in the professional field 3.8. "Economics", PhD program "Agricultural Business" according to an announced procedure by the University of Economics - Varna.

The topic of the dissertation is "Sustainable Management of Agricultural Lands from the State Land Fund in Bulgaria" authored by Dimitar Dimov Varbanov.

**2. General presentation of the dissertation**

The submitted dissertation meets the requirements set by Article Art. 27, para. 2 of the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria. The dissertation comprises 156 pages, structured in an introduction, three chapters with three paragraphs, a conclusion and a list of references, including 135 sources.

**3. Publications**

On the topic of the dissertation, the PhD student has three independent publications, including one scientific article and two scientific reports, which adequately present the main findings of the research. It is noteworthy that they consider the main points of the study, such as the participation of the state administration in the creation of land-use blocks, as well as finding optimal solutions for achieving sustainable development and effective management of agricultural land from the State Land Fund in the regional directorates of Agriculture.

#### **4. Assessment of the structure and content of the dissertation**

The structure and content of the dissertation are in accordance with the requirements under Article 34, paragraph 2 and paragraph 3 of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the University of Economics – Varna.

The dissertation is dedicated to a topical and significant problem for the sustainable management of agricultural land by the State Land Fund in Bulgaria.

In the introduction are formulated the object, subject, purpose and tasks of the study. The PhD student has formulated a basic research thesis. Some limitations are indicated, the information base, as well as the scientific and practical tools of the study.

Chapter One has a theoretical and methodological character, in which the PhD student reviews many modern literature sources related to the evolution of the idea of sustainable management of natural resources, land and public assets. The essence of land reform and the State Land Fund (SLF) is considered. A parallel is made with the models for management of state land in Bulgaria and in some European countries. On the basis of this, a conceptual model for the sustainable management of agricultural land by the State Land Fund is developed, in which management is presented as a two-layer conditional structure, taking into account the sustainability of the management and the sustainability of the effects (results).

In Chapter Two, an empirical study and assessment of the sustainable management of agricultural land by the State Land Fund in Bulgaria for the period 2007-2024 is made. A methodology for assessing the sustainable management of agricultural land by the SLF has been developed, which presents the criteria and indicators for assessment, as well as the conceptual logic for measuring sustainability. The presented evaluation framework allows sustainability to be measured through two complementary logics – sustainability of functioning and sustainability of the result.

An analysis of the State Land Fund as a public asset, the management of which is realized through a portfolio of statutory regimes, is presented. The portfolio logic is specified through the mechanisms under Art. 24a, Art. 37 and Art. 24v of the Agricultural Land Ownership and Use Act.

On the basis of the analysis, important conclusions have been drawn, such as that the land management by the SLF maintains a significant active fund and exercises

strong control under territorial pressure, but does not demonstrate consistent feedback and adjustment mechanisms.

The market mechanism under Art. 24a operates on a large scale, but with high process variability and significant losses between announcement and negotiation, which limits predictability and implies a deficit of process learning. The socio-ecological regime under Art. 37 produces an operational result, including through para. 13, but without a sustainable strategic logic of compensation and without verifiable coordination with 24a. The mechanism under Art. 24v shows high selectivity as a form of public control, but also high variability of permeability, which raises questions about the predictability of the regime.

The third chapter of the dissertation presents some opportunities for improving agricultural land management, presenting stakeholder assessments, guidelines for improving the sustainability of management and the sustainability of the SLF, and proposing a package of measures to increase sustainability.

A survey was conducted to assess sustainability as a result of land management by the State Land Fund by measuring perceptions of the social, economic and environmental effects of land use and lease. The results of the study outline a strong position in terms of the environmental dimension and the existence of public economic benefits, but also identify deficiencies in social sustainability - mainly in terms of information asymmetry and visibility of control. On this basis, three complementary mechanisms have been formulated, which lead to the identification of three priorities for management measures to improve the sustainability of functioning. The PhD student proposes *a package of three blocks of measures* that can be used as a management framework to increase sustainability.

### **5. Compliance of the abstract with the requirements**

The abstract actually reflects the achievements in the dissertation. It contains the necessary structural components in line with the good practices adopted in this regard.

### **6. Contributions to the dissertation**

In the dissertation, the PhD student has stated four contributions, which I distinguish into three scientific-methodological and one practical. I accept these contributions as logical.

### **7. Has plagiarism been found?**

I am not aware of any form of plagiarism in the dissertation or related publications.

### **8. Recommendations and questions:**

My question to the PhD student is: You consider the SLF as a portfolio of mechanisms, but you find that they are fragmented and poorly integrated. In your opinion, what is the most significant obstacle to achieving synergy between different modes of use and how do the proposed manageable levers ensure the systemic sustainability of the State Land Fund?

### **9. Conclusion:**

In my opinion, the presented dissertation of PhD student Dimitar Varbanov is an original scientific research, it is developed at a high academic standard, contains significant contributions and provides solutions that would be useful for the sustainable management of agricultural land by the State Land Fund.

Based on this, I propose that the esteemed scientific jury of Dimitar Dimov Varbanov be awarded the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" in the professional field 3.8. "Economics", doctoral program "Agricultural Business".

19.03.2026

Varna

  
(Assoc. Prof. Katya Antonova, PhD)



## STATEMENT

by **Assoc. Prof. Elena Yordanova Shopova, PhD**

member of the scientific jury for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "**Doctor**" in the professional field **3.8. Economics**, doctoral program "Agricultural Business" according to the announced procedure by the University of Economics – Varna

### 1. General information

**Prepared by the opinion:** **Assoc. Prof. Elena Yordanova Shopova, PhD**, Department of "Agrarian Economics", SA "D. A. Tsenov" - Svishtov, field of higher education: 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field: 3.8. Economics, Scientific specialty: "Economics and management (Agrarian economics)"

**Basis for writing the opinion:** According to the Order of the Rector of the University of Varna No. RD-06-27/28.01.2026 and the Decision of the first meeting of the Scientific Jury

**Author of the dissertation:** Dimitar Dimov Varbanov - PhD student in professional field 3.8. Economics, doctoral program "Agricultural Business"

**Topic of the dissertation:** "Sustainable management of lands from the state land fund in Bulgaria"

### 2. General presentation of the dissertation

The dissertation is a logically well-constructed study with a volume of 156 standard pages and includes an introduction, a main statement in three chapters (135 pages), a conclusion, a list of references from 135 literary and Internet sources. The text is illustrated with a total of 23 figures and 22 tables, which creates greater clarity and overview and facilitates the formulation of systematized conclusions.

The relevance of the dissertation is determined by the tendency for sustainable management of agricultural lands from the State Land Fund (SLF) to be among the key issues of state management in land use. It turns out that this trend is strengthened by the fact that sustainability of state resources is not limited to "achieving a result", but also includes sustainability of the functioning of management over time: predictability of rules, process rationality, risk manageability, coordination between instruments and the ability of the system to respond consistently to pressure and changes. The study draws attention and emphasizes that the sustainability of DPF management should be assessed both as a result (economic, social and environmental effects) and as a process (quality and stability of the functioning of the mechanisms).

*The subject of the study* is the economic, social and environmental sustainability of the results, as well as the sustainability of the functioning of the management mechanisms in the management of agricultural lands from the State Land Fund. The object of the study is the agricultural lands from the State Land Fund (SLF) in Bulgaria.

*The research goal of the dissertation* is, based on a theoretical analysis of sustainable management, to develop and apply a methodology for assessing the sustainable management of agricultural lands from the State Land Fund (SLF) in Bulgaria, and on this basis to formulate opportunities for improving the studied management mechanisms. To achieve the set goal, the following tasks have been defined: to systematize theoretical statements for sustainable management and to derive criteria for assessing the sustainability of the management of agricultural lands, state property; to develop a conceptual framework that considers the



management of SLF lands as a system of interconnected mechanisms, and to substantiate the analytical approach and logic of the assessment; to develop a methodology for empirical assessment through a combination of outcome and process indicators; to apply the methodology and assess the sustainability of management based on secondary data for the period 2007–2024; to analyze the assessments of stakeholders and to formulate priority guidelines and practical measures for improving the management of agricultural lands from the State Land Fund (SLF).

### **3. Publications and participation in scientific forums.**

The PhD student presents 3 publications (1 article and 2 reports) on the topic of the dissertation, which meet the minimum national requirements for awarding the educational and scientific degree "PhD", according to Art. 2b, para. 2 and para. 3 of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, as well as the quantitative requirements under Art. 35, para. 1, items 1-4 of the Regulations on the Development of the Academic Staff at the University of Varna. Through the presented publications on the topic of the dissertation, the PhD student has made his main ideas, scientific research and results publicly available.

### **4. Assessment of the structure and content of the dissertation work**

The structure and content of the dissertation work comply with the requirements of Art. 34, para. 2 and para. 3 of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the University of Economics - Varna. The volume of the dissertation work of 156 pages is optimal and balanced in structural and content terms and allows the PhD student to present and defend the thesis. The main text of the dissertation work includes an introduction, three chapters and a conclusion. The introduction includes the main required attributes: relevance of the topic, purpose of the study, object, subject, research tasks and a thesis according to which the management of the lands of the State Agricultural Fund is sustainable only when it simultaneously achieves economic, social and environmental goals and when the mechanisms for provision and institutional control work predictably and consistently over time. In the first chapter, the PhD student systematizes theoretical statements on sustainable management and derives criteria for assessing sustainability in the management of agricultural land as a state resource. A conceptual framework has been developed that considers the management of DPF lands as a system of mechanisms and the analytical logic of the integrated assessment as a process and result has been substantiated. In the second chapter, the developed methodology for empirical assessment of sustainability by combining process and result indicators is of interest. Quantitative profiles of the functioning of the three mechanisms have been derived and diagnostic conclusions have been formulated for the sustainability of management over time. In the third chapter, the assessments of stakeholders (farmers - users of DPF lands, and employees in municipal agricultural services) have been analyzed and key discrepancies in perceptions of sustainability, trust, information and procedural fairness have been identified. On this basis, priority guidelines and a package of practical measures have been formulated to improve management mechanisms and to increase the sustainability of both the results and the functioning of management. The conclusion summarizes the tasks completed by the author of the dissertation work and confirms the research thesis.

The bibliography includes diverse, authoritative, and up-to-date sources that are cited correctly, and the literature used is relevant to the topic of the dissertation. The issue is defended by the PhD student with arguments and is significant for the theory and practice in the field of sustainable management of lands from the state land fund in Bulgaria. The research thesis is defended by the PhD student logically and purposefully. The structure of the dissertation is balanced and corresponds to the general standards for a comprehensive scientific study.



Conclusions and recommendations are made, with which the PhD student demonstrates a high degree of knowledge of the research topic. In terms of content, the study is characterized by precision of analysis, free interpretation, author's opinions, correctness of references and citations. The lexical selection and style of presentation is scientific and logically consistent.

The author skillfully analyzes the achievements in scientific literature and practice. The purpose of the study is formulated clearly and specifically, it is interpreted in the research tasks, which have been successfully completed, and an answer to the questions posed for consideration by the author is presented.

The abstract of PhD student Dimitar Varbanov, in terms of content and structure, meets the established standards for a synthesized presentation of a dissertation and correctly reflects the main points of the overall content of the work.

### **5. Identification and evaluation of the scientific and applied scientific contributions in the dissertation work**

I accept the contributions of the dissertation work stated by the PhD student. The reference presented in the abstract objectively reflects the scientific and applied scientific contributions significant for the research area, as follows:

- The PhD student has developed a conceptual framework for assessing the sustainable management of agricultural lands from the DPF, which presents the management of the DPF as a land portfolio and integrates the three legally distinguished mechanisms under the ZSPZZ (Art. 24a, Art. 37i and Art. 24c) into a common analytical logic for access management, socio-ecological guidance and control under territorial pressure.
- Of particular interest and emphasis is the author's developed methodology for integrated assessment, which allows sustainability to be measured simultaneously as the sustainability of functioning (predictability, process rationality, selectivity under pressure, coordination and "learning") and as the sustainability of results (economic, social and environmental effects) over a time horizon.
- In terms of application, a contributing point is the testing of the methodology in a study based on annual secondary data on management flows and the "requests-consent-contracts" chain for a relatively long period of time (2007-2024), supplemented by a survey among key stakeholders, which allows upgrading the quantitative assessment with a dimension of social legitimacy and perceptions of efficiency and justice.
- An original author's contribution is also the formulated scientifically based practical guidelines and a package of measures to improve the management of VPFs, structured as "manageable levers" (rules, guidelines, transparency/information assurance, control and coordination between mechanisms), thus offering a framework for prioritizing management interventions to increase sustainability.

### **6. Plagiarism detected or not detected in the dissertation and abstract**

I have not detected plagiarism in the dissertation and abstract, as well as the use of incorrect data or incorrect references to other people's scientific works.

### **7. Critical remarks and recommendations**

I have no significant specific critical remarks. I recommend that the doctoral student expand and deepen his research on the chosen topic, due to its relevance and opportunities for improving scientific interests.

### **8. Questions for the PhD student**

I have no questions for the PhD student




## 9. Conclusion

The overall impression of the presented dissertation work of PhD student Dimitar Varbanov shows in-depth theoretical knowledge, skills for independent research thinking and competence of the author in the specifically studied topic and its issues. In the scientific work we find active and original author's participation, scientific opinion on the topic and in-depth knowledge of the researched problem.

The dissertation is up-to-date and contains sufficient scientific and applied contributions. The requirements of the ZRASRB and the Regulations for the implementation of the ZRASRB have been achieved.

As a member of the scientific jury (Order of the Rector of the University of Varna No. RD-06-27/28.01.2026) under an open procedure for public defense of a dissertation work developed by PhD student Dimitar Dimov Varbanov, for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "PhD", under the doctoral program "Agricultural Business" on the topic "Sustainable Management of Land from the State Land Fund in Bulgaria", I give my positive opinion on the presented work and recommend to the Scientific Jury to award the scientific degree "PhD" to Dimitar Dimov Varbanov.

16.03.2026 г.  
Svishtov

Signature:   
(Assoc. Prof. Elena Yordanova, PhD)



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## OPINION

for dissertation work on the topic "SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF AGRICULTURAL LANDS FROM THE STATE LAND FUND IN BULGARIA"  
with author DIMITAR DIMOV VARBANOV

Reviewer Prof. Dr. VALERIE YORDANOV VELKOVSKI - Academy of National and Information Security - Plovdiv, member of the scientific jury according to order No. RD 06-27/28.01.2026 of the Rector of the University of Economics - Varna for conducting a procedure for awarding the scientific degree "Doctor" in the professional field 3.8. "Economics" doctoral program "Agricultural Business".

### Information about the dissertation candidate

Dimitar Dimov Varbanov was born in 1976. He holds a bachelor's and master's degree in "Agrarian Economics" - degrees acquired at the University of Economics - Varna.

The doctoral candidate Varbanov worked in the province of "Provence" - France, where he was responsible for the timely and high-quality implementation of the assigned task in the vineyard.

Dimitar Dimov Varbanov was on a student internship in England, where he was responsible for the modern and high-quality implementation of the assigned work in vegetable gardens.

The good economic preparation of the dissertation candidate also includes several months of specialized training at the Bois de Boulogne College in Montreal, Canada.

Also, for almost four years, the dissertation candidate Varbanov also worked in Canada, as an employee in the Distribution department of the Richter software company.

Based on his extensive professional experience, the dissertation candidate Varbanov holds management positions in the Regional Directorate "Agriculture" - city of Shumen and for a long time was also the Director of the same directorate.

Currently, the dissertation candidate Varbanov is engaged in an accounting firm.



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From 29.01.2018 by order No. RD 17-181, Dimitar Dimov Varbanov was enrolled in full-time doctoral studies in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences: professional field 3.8 Economics, under the doctoral program - "Agricultural Business" at the Department of "Agricultural Economics", University of Economics - Varna.

After passing the exams included in the program and fulfilling the other requirements, Dimitar Dimov Varbanov was enrolled with the right to defend within a period of five years, starting from 01.02.2021.

**General characteristics of the dissertation work**

The presented dissertation has a total volume of 156 pages, of which 5 pages are an introduction, an exposition in three chapters with 135 pages of main text, a conclusion of 4 pages, 12 pages - used literary sources, figures, tables, etc.

The topic of the doctoral dissertation "Sustainable management of agricultural lands from the state land fund in Bulgaria" is relevant and significant for theory and practice due to the fact that it draws attention to the sustainable management of agricultural lands from the State Land Fund and their important role in the agricultural sector of the Republic of Bulgaria.

The dissertation work of the dissertationist Varbanov consists of an introduction, 3 chapters, 23 figures, 22 tables and formulas.

The list of literature used consists of 135 sources, in Bulgarian and English.

The relevance of the topic is determined by the specificity and scope of the issues under consideration and the guidelines for the development of the State Land Fund.

The structure of the dissertation follows the classical scheme of scientific research, which has allowed the author to present his research tools and the achieved results in the necessary completeness.

In terms of content, the scientific work of the dissertationist Varbanov is characterized by precision of analysis, free interpretation, author's opinions, and correctness of references and citations.

The introduction includes the elements necessary for any scientific study – object, subject, goal, tasks, thesis, limitations. The relevance and significance of the topic is well defended.



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The general impression of the presented dissertation work of the dissertation candidate Varbanov is that the author demonstrates in-depth theoretical knowledge, skills for independent interpretation and analysis of trends, and specific research on the topic and its issues.

### **Evaluation of the content of the dissertation work**

Thesis candidate Varbanov focuses his research on the sustainable management of agricultural lands from the State Land Fund, which is among the key issues of state governance in land use, revenue generation, economic realization, and land conservation as natural capital.

The first chapter is devoted to the development of the theoretical basis and conceptual framework. The author comes to the understanding that the land reform in Bulgaria is a structurally defining context for any study of the sustainable management of agricultural lands from the State Land Fund and that it is not just a “historical background”, but a source of lasting institutional and spatial consequences.

In the second chapter, the dissertation student Varbanov presents an empirical study, applying a methodology and assessment of sustainability based on secondary data. There is a clearly expressed analytical nature of the study, regarding the management of lands from the State Land Fund. Here, the focus is on how legal regimes function as an instrumental portfolio and how they produce observable management results over time.

Also, high praise deserves the competitive analysis, through regression models and mechanisms and the conclusions drawn, developed in the form of strategic guidelines.

The third chapter analyzes the assessments of stakeholders and identifies priority directions, research tasks and measures for improving the sustainable management of lands from the State Land Fund. It is applied-management and builds on the results of the empirical analysis, moving from “diagnosis” to “development opportunities”. In addition, in the third chapter, the dissertation candidate Varbanov explores how to improve the management of the State Land Fund through specific areas for changes - in rules, procedures, control and design of instruments, so as to reduce the identified imbalances, to prioritize solutions according to real barriers and incentives, in order to achieve sustainability in management.



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The in-depth analysis, as well as the study of a sufficient volume of literary sources, enable the dissertation candidate to critically analyze, correctly interpret, and formulate well-founded conclusions. All this speaks of the ability of the dissertation candidate Varbanov to present, analyze, and verify existing, but also his own, scientific ideas, through scientific approaches, methods, and appropriately selected tools.

What is essential and worthy in the dissertation of the dissertation candidate Varbanov is its emphasized scientific and practical-applied focus on improving the sustainable management of lands from the State Land Fund in the Republic of Bulgaria.

The proposed dissertation work by the dissertation candidate Varbanov and the overall assessment categorically speak of the good preparation of the dissertation candidate and his ability to implement the set scientific and research tasks.

### **Evaluation of scientific and scientific-practical contributions**

The dissertation work and the publications with the scientific views and results of the research of the dissertationist Varbanov, demonstrate scientific competence, skills in analyzing trends and dependencies, assessments and understanding.

The presented scientific contributions reflect to a high degree the achievements of the author. Among them are:

1. Theoretical models and sustainability in the context of the agrarian economy have been systematized and adapted to improve the sustainable management of lands from the State Land Fund in the Republic of Bulgaria;

2. An original theoretical and methodological framework has been developed for the study of land management from the State Land Fund in the Republic of Bulgaria, which combines analysis, survey research and attitudes towards management strategies;

3. Guidelines for the development of management levels have been formulated.



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### **Evaluation of dissertation publications**

From the report on the fulfillment of the minimum national requirements, it is evident that the publications of the dissertation candidate Varbanov, related to the topic of the dissertation, form the required minimum of 30 points, which means that the necessary conditions for the award of the Educational Scientific Degree "DOCTOR" have been met.

A total of 3 scientific publications on the topic of the dissertation work have been presented.

Publications are proof that important parts of the dissertation have become public knowledge and have gained notoriety and recognition in the scientific community.

### **Evaluation of the Abstract**

The abstract reflects to the necessary extent the main results of the dissertation work of the dissertation candidate Varbanov. In terms of content, the contributions indicated in the abstract objectively reflect the achievements of the dissertation candidate Varbanov, with which I support the scientific and applied contributions brought out by the author.

The abstract for the dissertation is within 54 pages, prepared according to generally accepted requirements and provides the necessary and clearly presented information about the structure, content and results of the dissertation research. It is accompanied by a reference to the contributions to the dissertation, a list of publications, and a declaration of originality.

No plagiarism has been found in the dissertation and the abstract.

### **Critical notes, recommendations and questions**

I have no serious and critical remarks towards the dissertation candidate Varbanov.

The positive aspects of the dissertation work categorically dominate my overall assessment of it.



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I recommend that the dissertation candidate Varbanov continue his publication activity in refereed scientific journals with an impact factor and impact rank (Web of Science & Scopus) in the future.

**Conclusion**

The dissertation presented by the dissertation candidate Dimitar Dimov Varbanov on the topic "SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF AGRICULTURAL LANDS FROM THE STATE LAND FUND IN BULGARIA" possesses the necessary qualities and represents a conscientiously implemented, original scientific and applied research in an area of significant relevance in contemporary conditions.

The presented dissertation meets the requirements of the Act on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for its implementation.

This gives me reason to give a **POSITIVE ASSESSMENT** to the dissertation work and to propose to the esteemed Scientific Jury to award the dissertation candidate Dimitar Dimov Varbanov the educational and scientific degree "**DOCTOR**" in the scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Agricultural Business)".

Date 16.02.2026  
Sofia City

Signature:   
/Prof. Dr. Valeri Velkovski/ 