

UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS - VARNA**REVIEW**

Competition for occupation of academic position "Associate Professor" in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, field of study 3.8. "Economics", scientific specialty "Economics and Management" (Investment and Public Procurement), published in SG issue 100/26.11.2024 with participant Chief Assistant Dr. Sevdalina Ivanova Hristova

Reviewer: **Prof. Dr. Plamen Blagov Iliev** from the University of Economics - Varna, field of study 3.8. "Economics"

Based on the decision of the scientific jury for the announced competition, I present this review regarding the participant in the procedure for occupying the academic position of "Associate Professor" – Chief Assistant Dr. Sevdalina Ivanova Hristova. The review is in compliance with the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB) and the Regulations for its implementation (RALDASRB), as well as with the specific requirements of UE-Varna.

1. Information on the competition

The competition for the occupation of the academic position "Associate Professor" was announced in the State Gazette no. 100/26.11.2024 and on the website of UE-Varna and is for the needs of the Business, Investment, Real Estate Department. The only candidate for the competition is Chief Assistant Dr. Sevdalina Ivanova Hristova.

2. Details of the applicant

Sevdalina Hristova graduated from the University of Economics – Varna (Bachelor's Degree in 1999 and Master's Degree in 2000). In 2004 she obtained the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in code 05.02.18, scientific specialty "Economics and Management".

She has worked consecutively at UE - Varna as an Assistant and Chief Assistant from 2009 until now (in the Business, Investment, Real Estate Department from 2013 until now).

Prior to the beginning of her academic career, Chief Assistant Dr. Sevdalina Hristova has held an expert position at the "Regional Development Programming" Department at the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works (2005 - 2010), and during her teaching work she has performed expert functions at the National Revenue Agency-Varna (in the field of public procurement), Varna Municipality, Head of Project Management at the University of Economics-Varna, member and reviewer of editorial boards of scientific publications, and others.

Chief Asst. Dr. Hristova has participated in university research projects, Erasmus + projects, as well as in projects for scientific events and expert groups.

According to the documents submitted, the candidate for the academic post of Associate Professor has accumulated considerable experience in the field of project and investment management and public procurement. This is evidenced by the positions held in a number of institutions.

It can be summarized that Chief Assistant Dr. Sevdalina Hristova fully complies with the general requirements for occupation of the academic position "Associate Professor", set out in the LDASRB, RALDASRB and the specific requirements for occupation of academic positions in UE - Varna.

3. Description of the scientific work

Chief Assistant Dr. Sevdalina Hristova participates in the announced competition with a monographic work on the topic "Efficient Public Procurement", published by "Science and Economics" Publishing House, Varna, 2023 with a volume of 179 standard pages. The monography was discussed and recommended for publication by the Business, Investment, Real Estate Department at UE – Varna (Protocol No. 09/27.02.2023). The monographic work is in accordance with the requirements of UE – Varna for occupation of academic positions in the university.

Chief Assistant Dr. Sevdalina Hristova participated in the competition also with:

- two monographs co-authored with scientific peer review;
- eleven studies and scientific articles (seven co-authored), including one study and one article in indexed journals (Scopus and Web of Science) and nine co-authored scientific articles in non-indexed journals with scientific peer review;

- one paper in an indexed journal (Web of Science);
- eleven papers in scientific periodicals;
- four textbooks and teaching aids, three of them co-authored.

The publications presented are mainly in two directions (*efficiency of public procurement* - content of the procurement process, principles and regulatory framework for public procurement, trends of public procurement in the context of the objectives for efficient use of public and European funds; *investments in the "Construction" sector and in Bulgarian municipalities and regions* - European funding, development of Bulgarian municipalities and regions through project funding) and in substantive terms correspond to the professional direction of the competition - 3.8. Economics.

According to the documents presented, the candidate for the academic position of "Associate Professor", Chief Assistant Dr. Sevdalina Hristova has twenty citations in scientific journals with editorial boards.

No plagiarism has been found in the main monographic work and in the other publications of the candidate for the academic position of "Associate Professor". In this respect, a declaration of originality has also been submitted.

After reviewing the attached candidate's scientific works, I would like to give the following recommendations for her future activity:

1. The candidate's extensive practical experience in the field of investment and public procurement is a prerequisite for greater emphasis in future publications on the subject of improving the regulatory framework of the public procurement and investment process in order to increase the efficiency of the invested public funds.
2. Promotion of the candidate's research results to a wider range of public institutions and business organizations.
3. In some cases, a clearer justification of the author's opinions and recommendations.

The above recommendations do not question the quality of the candidate's publications for the academic position of "Associate Professor".

4. Teaching Work

The candidate for the announced competition has a total of 16 years of teaching experience and teaches full-time (Bachelors and Masters) in the disciplines of "Project

Management", "European Funds and Projects", "Tendering in Construction", "Local Governance and Self-Government", "Investment and Investment Process", "Prices and Pricing", "Construction Enterprise Finance", "European and National Programmes and Funds", "Public Procurement" "Management of International Programmes and Projects", etc.

To provide the learning process with specialized literature, the Chief Asst. Dr. Sevdalina Hristova uses her own publications as well as publications of well-known authors in the field of investments, European funds, public procurement and investment process.

Chief Asst. Dr. Sevdalina Hristova is one of the active participants in the preparation and implementation of the projects for new academic disciplines, which are administered by the Department of Business, Investment, Real Estate at UE - Varna.

The participation of the candidate in various working groups, scientific supervision of graduates, tutoring system, practical training of students and others is characterized by a contribution to the improvement of the quality of education in the faculty and the department and successful implementation of accreditation and post-accreditation procedures in the professional field 3.8 Economics.

In her teaching work, Chief Asst. Dr. Sevdalina Hristova is guided by modern trends in the development of economic theory and practice. This is confirmed by the presented publications, the developed teaching documentation in the taught disciplines and the expert participation in management and especially in consulting businesses and public institutions in the field of public procurement and financing with public and European funds.

5. Scientific and related contributions

The scientific interests of Chief Assistant Dr. Sevdalina Hristova are oriented in two main areas: efficiency of public procurement and investment in the "Construction" sector and in Bulgarian municipalities and regions.

After reviewing the main monographic work "Efficient Public Procurement" and together with the submitted reference to the competition documentation, it can be summarized that the scientific and applied contributions presented in the report reflect the author's achievements and find expression in the following:

1. Study of the essential characteristic of the efficiency of the public procurement process (including the refinement of the concept of "public procurement") as the main instrument for spending public funds and resources provided by European funds and programs (Chapter One).

2. Introducing the concept of "best value for money" and on this basis outlining the main factors influencing the effectiveness of public procurement and presenting a system of indicators for assessing the effectiveness of public procurement and principles for procurement (Chapter Two and Three).
3. Study of the problems and barriers faced by small and medium-sized enterprises in their participation in the public procurement market in Bulgaria (Chapter Five).
4. A thorough analysis of the state of the public procurement market in Bulgaria and on this basis the identification of opportunities to improve their efficiency (Chapter Four and Six).

Contributions of an applied nature are also contained in the other publications of the candidate for the academic position in the announced competition, which are related to the following:

1. Study of the impact of European funding on the development of the "Construction" sector and formulating recommendations for improving the quality of project proposals for successful participation of the construction sector in the cohesion policy programs.
2. Justification of proposals for greater effectiveness of project funding under the European Funds for the purpose of modernization of higher education infrastructure and promotion of research in Bulgaria.
3. Review of the changes in the main European programs in previous periods and formulation of measures to improve local investment policies in Bulgaria.
4. Argumentation of conclusions and recommendations for effective risk management in the implementation of projects with EU funding.

6. Conclusion

Considering the overall research and teaching activity of Chief Assistant Dr. Sevdalina Hristova and her professional development and achievements in the field of investment, procurement and investment management, I give a **positive assessment** of the overall activity of the candidate.

I recommend to the honorable members of the Scientific Jury of the competition to propose to the Business Faculty of the University of Economics – Varna **to elect Chief**

Assistant Dr. Sevdalina Ivanova Hristova in the academic position "Associate Professor" in the field of study 3.8. Economics.

Varna, 04.04.2025

Member of Scientific Jury:

(Prof. Dr. Plamen Iliev)

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



REVIEW

Вх. № PA20-551/07.04.2025г

regarding the competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor"

Professional field 3.8 Economics

Scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Investments and Public Procurement)"

1. General information

The review was prepared by Prof. Dr. Georgi Shinkov Zabunov - Department of Real Estate at the Faculty of Business of the University of National and World Economy, Sofia. The grounds for submitting this review on the competition are Order No. RD 06-24/28.01.2025 of the Rector of the University of Economics - Varna on the appointment of a Scientific Jury and the decision of the first meeting of the Scientific Jury of 07.02.2025.

2. Competition information

The review was prepared in accordance with the competition announced in the State Gazette, issue 100/26.11.2024 for the academic position of "Associate Professor" in the professional field 3.8. "Economics", in the scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Investments and Public Procurement)". The competition was announced for the needs of the Department of "Business, Investments, Real Estate" at the Faculty of Economics of the University of Economics - Varna.

3. Competition candidate

The only candidate in the announced competition is Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Sevdalina Ivanova Hristova. She meets the Minimum National Requirements for holding the academic position of "Associate Professor" in the professional field of the announced competition (based on Art. 26, para. 2 and 3 of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria), as can be seen from the following table:

| Key indicators | Minimum required points by groups of indicators for holding the position according to the Academic Staff Development Act | Candidate points |
|--|--|------------------|
| 1. Successfully defended dissertation for the award of a doctoral degree | 50 | 50 |
| 2. Publications on the | 30 | 70 |



| | | |
|---|-----|-----|
| dissertation | | |
| 3. Published independent monograph (habilitation thesis) | 100 | 100 |
| 4. Indicators by group "G" (various publications by type) | 200 | 277 |
| 5. Indicators by group "D" (citations) | 50 | 120 |

It should be noted that the publications in point 4 present four publications in scientific publications, referenced and indexed in world-renowned databases of scientific information, one of which is an independent study. Accordingly, point 5 reflects 20 citations, one of which is also in a publication, referenced and indexed in world-renowned databases of scientific information.

Chief Asst. Dr. Sevdalina Ivanova Hristova meets the quantitative requirements of the University of Varna (based on Art. 26, para. 5 of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the requirements in Art. 101 of the Regulations on the Development of the Academic Staff at the University of Varna.

4. Details of the applicant (personal profile):

Sevdalina Hristova is a graduate of the University of Economics - Varna. She graduated as a bachelor in the specialty "Economics and Construction Management" in 1999, and then as a master in the specialty "Economics of Construction" in 2000. She obtained the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the scientific specialty 05.02.18 Economics and Management (by industry). She holds diploma No. 29622/31.03.2005. The topic of her dissertation is "The Residential Real Estate Market in Bulgaria".

The candidate has extensive practical experience in various positions. During the period 2001 - 2005 she worked as an accountant in various companies. From 2005 to 2010 she was successively a senior expert and expert in the General Directorate "Regional Development Programming" at the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works. In the period 2011 – 2015, Sevdalina Hristova worked as Head of the "Project Management" sector at the University of Economics - Varna. After 2020, she held the positions of external expert - project evaluator under the "Youth Activities" program in the municipality of Varna, "External Expert Projects" at the "Union of Tour Guides in Bulgaria" association and chief expert in the "Logistics" department at the Territorial Directorate of the National Revenue Agency - Varna.

The candidate's academic career is also impressive. In September 2009, Sevdalina Hristova started working as an assistant at the Department of "Agrarian Economics" at the Faculty of Economics at the University of Economics - Varna. Since 2010, she has been promoted to the academic position of "chief assistant". In 2013, she moved to the Department of "Business, Investments, Real Estate".

Chief Asst. Dr. Sevdalina Hristova has taught more than 7 academic disciplines in full-time and distance learning at the educational and qualification level "Bachelor"



and 6 at the educational and qualification level "Master". The candidate has participated in teams for the development of 11 curricula and has been a scientific supervisor of 35 graduates in both educational and qualification levels. She has been a reviewer of over 30 diploma theses and has supervised practical training of students. Senior Asst. Dr. Sevdalina Hristova has participated in the writing of two textbooks and two teaching aids, one of which she has published independently. The candidate has participated in the development of 4 scientific projects, has high foreign language competence and has conducted four specializations at foreign universities.

5. Description of scientific works

In this competition, Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Sevdalina Hristova participated with a total of 38 scientific publications, of which 23 were independent. The information is systematized in the following table:

| Type of scientific publications | Total (number) | Including: | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|------------|---|
| | | Standalone | Scientific publications, referenced and indexed in world- renowned databases |
| Monographs | 3 | 1 | - |
| Scientific studies | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Scientific articles | 13 | 7 | 1 |
| Scientific reports | 17 | 13 | 2 |
| Textbooks and teaching aids | 4 | 1 | - |
| Other publications | - | - | - |
| Total | 38 | 23 | 4 |

The publications submitted for review allow us to trace the creative growth of the candidate and the gradual clarification and focusing of her creative search. Six areas can be tentatively distinguished in the presented scientific production:

Valuation of agricultural land, permanent crops, taxation of land and possibilities for using EU structural funds for rural financing (publications with leading common numbers 39, 35, 34 and 28);

The administrative-territorial structure and administrative-territorial division of Bulgaria, instruments and policies for business promotion by local authorities (publications with leading common numbers 36, 31, 29, 27, 21, 19 and 11);

General theory of project management and project financing of businesses and industries with EU funds (publications with leading common numbers 38, 30, 18 and 10);

Higher Education Issues and EU Funding Opportunities for Educational Activities (publications with leading common numbers 33, 32, 23, 16 and 14);



Investment issues and management of investment projects (publications with leading common numbers 37, 26, 25, 20, 17 and 15);

Theory and Practice of Public Procurement (publications with general numbers 24, 22, 13, 12 and 9).

In the analysis of the scientific production in the last three areas, the high quality of the candidate's scientific production is observed to the greatest extent. It is no coincidence that it is in the field of public procurement that an independent study has been published in a SCOPUS refereed journal. When reflecting the achievements of the head. as. Dr. Sevdalina Hristova scientific results I will focus on this study and the habilitation thesis.

The original title of the study is "The Impact of the Public Procurement System Reform on Bulgarian Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises". It is published in the Economic Research Journal of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. The study examines public procurement as a means through which economic and social policies can be implemented and direct support can be provided to businesses. Worldwide practice shows that the participation of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the public procurement market leads to significant benefits for contracting authorities, business and society as a whole. Studies cited by the author show inadequate performance of SMEs in this market. This calls for the introduction in 2016 of Europe-wide measures to promote SME participation in the public procurement market. The substantive part of the study examines the reforms in the public procurement system in Bulgaria, focusing on the difficulties that Bulgarian SMEs face in participating in public procurement. It analyses EU-wide measures such as the simplification of procedures and the introduction of the European Single Procurement Document (ESPD) and eCertis tools. The focus is on the impact of these instruments on SMEs' market access. Evidence shows that SMEs in Bulgaria continue to face challenges such as limited resources, high demands and mistrust of the system. Based on an analysis of the public procurement market in Bulgaria and a survey, the measures taken are assessed as insufficiently effective. The author proposes solutions in two directions: (1) how to motivate contracting authorities to more actively implement the measures introduced and (2) how to increase the confidence of SMEs in the procurement process so that they are more willing to participate in tenders. The study was conducted at a high level and the conclusions are well founded. The results are of interest to domestic and foreign researchers.

Undoubtedly, the presented monographic work "Effective Procurement" is a kind of top result in the multi-year scientific development of Assoc. Dr. Sevdalina Hristova. The monograph meets all the scientific requirements reflected in the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the University of Economics - Varna for holding the academic position of Associate Professor. The work has a volume of 179 pages, is published in an academic publishing house, is reviewed by two habilitated lecturers and represents a complete study of a topical problem with significant practical-applied orientation. The focus is on the manifestations of procurement effectiveness in the concept of "value for money". The main factors on which this



efficiency depends are highlighted: the quality of the technical specification, the chosen criterion for the evaluation of the bids and the level of openness of the procedure. The author proposes that the effectiveness of a public procurement should be judged by the level of competition achieved. This level is assessed by a system of indicators, the main one being the 'number of tenders submitted'. Opportunities for improving the effectiveness of procurement are identified, which stem from a proper understanding and application of the basic and additional principles of public procurement. The principle of free competition is defended as a guiding principle for ensuring the effectiveness of public procurement. The empirical analysis of the state and trends of the public procurement market in Bulgaria focuses on Bulgarian small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The high selection requirements and the high value of the contracts were identified as barriers to competition and preconditions hindering the participation of SMEs in the market. Two tools are proposed to overcome these barriers. The first one is the 'splitting of the subject of the contract into lots' mentioned by the author. The second tool is mainly applicable to standardized goods and services. This is centralized procurement, where significant savings of public money can be achieved through economies of scale.

For both instruments the author points out positive aspects and disadvantages. The paper argues the necessity of applying these two instruments to increase the level of competition on the public procurement market in Bulgaria, with the ultimate goal of increasing the efficiency of the use of public funds.

The monograph is summarized in four languages and takes into account the requirements of the regulatory framework in Bulgaria and the European Union. Numerous Bulgarian and foreign authors and electronic sources of information are cited. The presentation is concise and clear, with a good style and professional language in terms of terms and categories. Many of the summaries are illustrated with diagrams, which facilitates comprehension. The research toolkit used demonstrates skills in adequately combining qualitative analysis with quantitative and statistical methods.

The other monographs that Senior Asst. Prof. Dr. Sevdalina Hristova has submitted for review also contain interesting and original scientific ideas and results of practical significance. Since the indicated works are the result of collective work, they will not be considered in detail.

From all the scientific publications submitted for participation in the competition, it can be reasonably concluded that Senior Asst. Prof. Dr. Sevdalina Hristova fully meets all scientific requirements for holding the academic position of "associate professor".

6. Identification of contributions

I accept in general the contributions mentioned by the author, but I believe that they could be presented in a more generalized and systematic format. I propose the



following classification of the contributions in the scientific production of the main as. Dr. Sevdalina Hristova:

Firstly, the effectiveness of the public procurement process in Bulgaria has been comprehensively studied and specific measures for improving the legal and institutional environment of the public procurement market have been proposed in order to increase the efficiency of the procurement process.

Second, the impact of EU funding on the development of the construction sector is examined and key steps to improve the quality of project proposals are formulated.

Thirdly, the relationship of project funding and the quality of higher education in Bulgaria is investigated, and on this basis, guidelines are formulated for optimizing the mechanisms for allocating funds and for enhancing the positive effects of project funding.

Fourthly, established practices for attracting investment and developing local potential to promote local business are examined.

Fifth, theoretical and practical aspects of risk management in Euro projects are explored and adaptive approaches to managing this risk are proposed.

7. Participation in scientific projects and scientific forums

Senior Asst. Prof. Dr. Sevdalina Hristova participates in 4 research projects financed by the state budget. Three of these projects have been completed, and the fourth is in the process of implementation. Monographs have been published on all completed projects.

The candidate is a member of the organizing committee of the international scientific and practical conference "Construction Entrepreneurship and Real Estate", which is organized by the Department of "Business, Investments, Real Estate" of the University of Economics - Varna annually.

Senior Asst. Prof. Dr. Sevdalina Hristova is also a member of the editorial board of the first journal in the country in the field of human resources "Human Resources & Technologies" and is a reviewer in the electronic scientific journal "Construction Entrepreneurship and Real Estate" published by the Department of "Business, Investments, Real Estate" of the University of Economics - Varna.

8. Teaching work

The candidate has over 15 years of teaching experience at the University of Economics Varna, of which one year as an assistant and the rest as a chief assistant.

According to the official reports on the teaching workload in bachelor's and master's degrees for the last 3 academic years, senior assistant Dr. Sevdalina Hristova has a total classroom workload of 779 hours, including 134 hours of lectures. She conducts training in the disciplines "European Funds and Projects", "Project Management", "Prices and Pricing", "Local Government and Business", "Academic Research", "European and National Programs and Funds" and "Public Procurement".



As can be seen, the main part of the disciplines taught directly correspond to the topic of the announced competition for the academic position of "associate professor" at the University of Economics - Varna.

For the last ten years, senior assistant Dr. Sevdalina Hristova is a scientific supervisor of 35 graduates and a reviewer of over 30 theses in the Bachelor's and Master's degree programs.

The candidate has participated in a total of 3 mobility programs for the purpose of training, funded under the Erasmus+ program. The mobilities were carried out at the University of Applied Sciences - Nysa (Poland), the Polytechnic University - Valencia (Spain) and the Corvinus University - Budapest (Hungary).

The presented evidence provides grounds for a high assessment of the teaching work of Senior Asst. Dr. Sevdalina Hristova.

9. Plagiarism

The submitted scientific papers have been checked with the internet-based system of StrikePlagiarism.com. The system does not detect plagiarism in the candidate's monographic work. After getting acquainted with the works of Senior Asst. Prof. Dr. Sevdalina Hristova, my deep personal conviction is that they are the result of conscientiously conducted and reflected original scientific research. The literary sources are correctly cited. The declaration signed by the candidate for compliance with the requirements for copyright and for originality of the monographic work and other publications is also in this spirit.

10. Critical notes and questions to the candidate

The presented scientific production meets all requirements and standards in the academic sphere. All works are peer-reviewed and, in my personal opinion, are of high scientific and applied value. I have no significant critical remarks or recommendations, except for the collegial advice to Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Sevdalina Hristova not to slow down her pace of work. The minor inaccuracies and discrepancies I noticed do not change the overall positive perception and my high overall assessment of the quantity and quality of the presented scientific works.

11. Conclusion

The above gives me grounds for the conclusion that Senior Asst. Prof. Dr. Sevdalina Hristova meets all the requirements of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for the Implementation of the Act 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 Varna for holding the academic position of "Associate Professor" in the professional field 3.8. Economics.

I recommend that the esteemed members of the Scientific Jury propose to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Economics at the University of Varna to elect Senior Asst. Prof. Dr. Sevdalina Ivanova Hristova to the academic position of "Associate



Professor" in the professional field 3.8. Economics, scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Investments and Public Procurement)". I myself vote "FOR" with conviction.

07.04.2025

Sofia

Reviewer:

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

(Prof. Dr. Georgi Zabunov)