

ФР-3140/28.04.2025

REVIEW

on the materials submitted for participation in a competition for „Professor“ in the field of higher education 6. „Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine“, Professional field 6.5. „Forestry“, scientific specialty „Forest plantations, breeding and seed production“ in the discipline „Forest plantations”

In the competition for professor, published in the State Gazette, No 107 of December 20, 2024 and on the site of the University of Forestry with the code FOR-P-1124-153 for the needs of the Department of Forestry at the Faculty of Forestry, as a candidate participate Assoc. Prof. PhD Nasko Alexandrov Iliev, Faculty of Forestry, Department of Silviculture.

Reviewer: Milko Hristov Milev, PhD, Professor in a Professional field 6.5 Forestry, from University of Forestry /retired/.

1. Brief biographical data for the candidate

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nasko Alexandrov Iliev was born on May 13, 1967, in Sofia, Bulgaria. In 1992, he graduated with a degree in "Forestry" (Diploma No. C. B82 № 007799, issued in November 1992 by the Higher Institute of Forestry and Forest Industries) with excellent academic performance and an outstanding defence of his diploma thesis on "Forest plantations". From 1993 to 1998, he served as Head of the "Maintenance" Department at Vitosha National Park. Since 1995, he has been teaching as a part-time assistant professor in "Forest plantations" at the Department of Silviculture, Faculty of Forestry, University of Forestry (UF) in Sofia. As a PhD student under independent study, he developed and defended a dissertation on "Opportunities for enhancing the use of giant sequoia (*Sequoiadendron giganteum* (Lindl.) Buchh.) through seed and vegetative propagation", obtained a PhD degree in 1997 (Diploma No. 24802/July 4, 1997, awarded by the Higher Attestation Commission). After successfully competing in academic contests, he was appointed Chief Assistant Professor in 1998 and promoted to Associate Professor in 2005 at the Department of Silviculture, Faculty of Forestry, UF. He served as Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Forestry (2016–2020) and as a member of the Academic Council of UF (2016–2024). Since his habilitation in 2005, he has been a member of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Forestry. He participated in the establishment of and has been a member of the Association of Ornamental Plant Producers in Bulgaria since 2013. He has been a member of the Union of Foresters in Bulgaria since 2009 and of the International Plant Propagators' Society (IPPS) from 1993 to 2015.

2. Correspondence of the submitted documents and materials of the applicant according to the Rules of the Development of academic staff at the University of Forestry.

The documents submitted by Assoc. Prof. Iliev demonstrate that the procedures for announcing and applying for the competition for the academic position of "Professor" have been duly followed. The candidate has submitted all the necessary documents as specified in Article 65a, Paragraph 4 of the "Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the University of Forestry (UF)". The requirements of the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ADASRB) and its Implementing Rules (IR-ADASRB) have

been fulfilled, including the minimum national requirements for the respective professional field. This was established during the first meeting of the Scientific Jury and is recorded in Protocol No. 1 dated February 25, 2025.

In the documents submitted for participation in the competition, Assoc. Prof. N. Iliev has provided a list of 78 published works. Of these, 37 were completed prior to his habilitation for the academic position of "Associate Professor". The output following his habilitation, which is the subject of the review in the current competition, includes 41 published works (34 scientific publications, 4 textbooks, and 3 popular articles).

The candidate is participating in the competition with a monograph (under indicator B3) titled "Production of seedlings from tree and shrub species" (2015, Publishing House of the University of Forestry, Sofia, 331 pages, ISBN 978-954-332-127-8). The topic and content fully and comprehensively cover the issues related to nursery production, which is a key area within the competition's discipline. Assoc. Prof. Iliev is the first author of the publication, with a contribution share of 40%, as evidenced by a division protocol; the specific sections he contributed to are indicated in the Preface on pages 6 and 7. Given the specific book format (B5), the volume corresponds to 472 standard typewritten pages, meaning Assoc. Prof. Iliev's share amounts to 189 pages. Thus, the requirements under § 1, item 10 of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the UF and the ADASRB (Additional Provisions), as well as note 5 of the Appendix to Article 1a, Paragraph 1 of the Implementing Rules of the ADASRB, have been fulfilled.

The total number of points under the indicators included in the appendices of the Implementing Rules of the ADASRB and the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the UF for the professional field exceeds the required minimum, with a total of 1634.1 points (increased by 20 points after my verification), compared to the required minimum of 550 points.

The candidate has submitted copies of the publications listed, as well as the required documents, including official certificates and information regarding participation in international and national scientific projects, leadership of educational and applied research projects, popular science articles, participation in national and international conferences, development of secondary legislative documents, participation in national councils, working groups, and departmental committees, involvement in procedures for awarding academic positions and educational and scientific degrees, supervision of a successfully defended PhD student, among others.

3. Assessment of the candidate's educational and pedagogical activities

Assoc. Prof. N. Iliev began his teaching career at the UF in 1995 as a part-time assistant professor in the discipline "Forest plantations". The submitted official certificate (No. HR 239/January 14, 2025) covers the period from October 19, 1998, when he was appointed to a full-time position as "Chief Assistant Professor" following a competitive selection process. Since December 13, 2005, he has held the academic position of "Associate Professor" (certificate issued by the Higher Attestation Commission, No. 23493/February 27, 2006). Over the past 29 years, he has been involved in the education of students from three different programs at UF – Forestry, Ecology and Environmental Protection, and Business Management – delivering lectures, exercises, and field practices. Currently, he teaches lecture courses in

three subjects: "Forest plantations" (for the Forestry program, Bachelor's degree, full-time and part-time study), "Forest plantations" (for the Forestry program, Master's degree, full-time and part-time study), and "Protective afforestation" (for the Ecology and Environmental Protection program, Master's degree).

The candidate is a co-author of the textbook "Forest plantations – Forest seed production" (Publishing House of the UF, Sofia, 288 pages, ISBN 978-954-332-124-7; Milev, Petkova, Iliev, 2015). He is also a co-author of three student manuals for UF students. Among them, the publication "Seed materials from broadleaf species" (2004, 437 pages) meets the character and requirements of a monograph. Additionally, he has authored four other practice-oriented manuals, one of which is as sole author, and three co-authored.

Assoc. Prof. N. Iliev has completed three professional development courses: Training in propagation by grafting of woody plants (2001); Course on the Use of the Moodle E-learning platform (2024); Course on the Use of the Blackboard Learn™ E-learning platform (2014). He possesses excellent computer skills, with proficiency in Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and SPSS.

The candidate's extracurricular academic activities are active and diverse. They include:

- Academic supervision of 26 successfully defended diploma theses (15 for the Bachelor's degree and 9 for the Master's degree), with two additional Master's theses receiving excellent evaluations after the submission of the documents for the competition. Additionally, he has served as a reviewer for dozens of diploma theses for both educational degrees.

- Participation in the development and updating of three academic curricula.

- Participation in two accreditation committees, and he is currently a member of a committee working on the accreditation procedure for the PhD program in the respective professional field.

- Academic supervisor of one PhD student who successfully defended his dissertation in 2019.

Assoc. Prof. N. Iliev has made a significant contribution to the improvement of the educational process at the Faculty of Forestry through his participation as a member of the Faculty Council (2005–2025) and the Academic Council of the UF (2016–2024), as well as through his involvement in departmental councils.

4. Assessment of candidate's scientific, scientific-applied and publishing activities

Candidate Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nasko Iliev participated in the competition with:

- Monographs – 1 number;
- Textbooks – 1 number;
- Learning materials – 7 numbers;
- Books – 1 number;
- Publications – 33 numbers;
- Projects – 16 numbers.

4.1 Participation in scientific, scientific-applied and educational projects

Assoc. Prof. N. Iliev has participated in the development of a total of 16 projects, including 3 international projects, one infrastructure project, and 2 educational projects. He has served as the leader of two national projects, and since 2024, he has assumed leadership of two

research topics at the Training and Experimental Forest Range. All three international projects are related to the topic of Forest plantations: the status of the sweet chestnut (*Castanea sativa*) in Bulgaria and Macedonia; the management of Balkan pine (*Pinus peuce*); and agroforestry practices in the Western Balkans region. The national projects are also primarily within the scope of the competition's thematic area. His research has focused on forestation issues concerning major coniferous and broadleaf species, including genera such as *Pinus*, *Tilia*, *Ulmus*, as well as *Castanea sativa*, *Corylus avellana*, *Robinia pseudoacacia*, and *Picea pungens*. One of the projects (E18.6) is infrastructure-related – aimed at establishing a university laboratory for biotechnological and molecular-genetic research. Another project (E18.8) has a broader focus: the statistical study of the competitiveness of enterprises in the forestry sector. An official certificate from the Research Sector of the University of Forestry confirming his participation in research projects has been provided.

I assess that the candidate's research project activities are primarily focused on the topics relevant to the announced competition and are at the required scientific level.

In the Self-assessment report, no points were assigned to one of the projects (No. 10) under indicator E18; therefore, the points under E18 should be increased by 15 and points for group E become 353.3 (minimum requirement is 100 points). His participation in symposia and conferences totals 12, including 2 national and 10 international events. He has served as Deputy Chair of the Organizing Committee (OC) for one international conference and as a member of the OC for a national conference. He regularly acts as a reviewer for competitive research project proposals submitted to the Research Sector of the UF.

4.2 Characterization of published scientific results

The candidate's scientific work is presented in the Self-assessment report under the indicators from groups B and G, with copies of the relevant materials also provided.

The publications can be classified as follows:

By type:

- Publications in scientific journals – 28 numbers;
- Publications in proceedings of scientific – 6 numbers;
- Scientifically popular publications – 3 numbers.

By significance

- Articles in magazines with Impact Factor – 1 number;
- Articles in journals referenced and indexed in Web of Science and Scopus – 10 numbers;
- Articles in journals without Impact Factor – 17 numbers;
- Papers in proceedings of scientific forums – 6 numbers.

Place of publication:

- Articles in Bulgarian and foreign journals referenced in Web of Science and Scopus – 10 numbers;
- Articles in reference Bulgarian and foreign journals referenced outside the Web of Science and Scopus – 18 numbers;
- Articles in non-referenced Bulgarian and foreign journals – 17 numbers;
- Publications in proceedings of international scientific forums – 3 numbers;
- Publications in proceedings of national scientific conferences, sessions and seminars – 1 number;

- Publications in scientific annals of universities and institutes – 2 numbers.

Publishing language:

- In Bulgarian – 9 numbers;
- In a foreign language – 35 numbers;
- **Number of co-authors:**
- Stand alone – 2 numbers;
- With one co-author – 9 numbers (in 5 he is first);
- With two co-authors – 14 numbers (in 6 he is first);
- With three or more co-authors – 10 numbers (in 1 he is first).

The above-described publication activity of the candidate, in terms of quantity and structure, meets the competition requirements. The required 100 points under group B have been achieved, and 270.8 points under group G have been accumulated (with 200 points required). It is worth noting the high proportion (almost 80%) of publications in foreign languages. The presence of two single-author publications is attributed to the complexity nature of the competition's thematic area and the candidate's preference for teamwork. It is also a positive aspect that in a total of 14 publications, Assoc. Prof. N. Iliev is either the sole author or the leading co-author.

4.3 Reflection of Candidate's Scientific Publications in Literature (known citations)

The identified citations are presented in the Self-assessment report under group G, and copies of the publications containing the citations are included in the submitted materials. The data on the citations are as follows:

- Total – 77 citations.

By type of citations:

- In reference journals and proceedings of scientific forums – 37 citations;
- In teaching aids, monographs, dissertations, etc. – 40 citations.

In the Self-assessment report, the citation (No. 10 under D15) by Hinkov, G. 2023. Good Practices (monograph) should be under D14, not D15, meaning it should be evaluated with 10 points instead of 5. With this minor correction, the total points under group D are 860. It is in this indicator that the exceeding of the minimum requirements (100 points) is the highest – more than 8 times.

A total of 23 of the candidate's publications have been cited, representing 68% of all his publications. Only 23 of the citations (30%) are in publications in Cyrillic, including 4 in Serbian and 2 in Ukrainian. Citations in scientific journals, referred and indexed in globally recognized scientific databases, or in monographs and collective volumes (group D13) amount to 37 (48%), with 16 of Assoc. Prof. N. Iliev's publications being cited. For 15 publications, 21 citations have been recorded in monographs and collective volumes with scientific peer review (group D14). For 10 publications, there are 19 citations in non-refereed journals with scientific peer review (group D15). Citations of publications where the candidate is the sole or leading author total 36 (47%). This citation profile reflects the wide visibility of the candidate's scientific work and the popularity of Assoc. Prof. N. Iliev among experts in Forest Cultures, not only in Bulgaria but also with a particularly good recognition abroad.

4.4 Contributions to the candidate's work

I accept the contributions presented by the candidate, their grouping, and classification. It is particularly important that there are contributions in the three main areas of the discipline Forest plantation – Forest seed production, Nursery production, and Forestation. Within these frameworks, the scientific and publication activity is focused on a number of important issues, and contributions have been achieved, among which I consider the following to be the most significant:

- The scientific and practical information on all tasks of Forest seed production has been updated – seed production sources, fruiting, harvest determination, seed collection, obtaining forest seed materials, their preservation, and quality assessment (E22.1, G7.5, G7.6, G8.2, G8.8).

- The role of selection in determining and creating forest seed production sources for the sustainability and productivity of established forest plantations has been substantiated (G7.5, G8.1, G8.2).

- The scientific and practical information on all tasks of Nursery production has been updated (B3.1, G6.1, G7.2, G7.4, G7.6, G7.7, G7.9, G7.15, G7.16, G8.5, G8.6, G8.9, G8.10–G8.12).

From the topic of Nursery production, I highly appreciate the contributions of Assoc. Prof. N. Iliev, achieved through consistent scientific, experimental, and practical work, focused on the following three tasks:

- Breaking seed dormancy through appropriate pre-sowing preparations (G7.2, G7.6, G7.12).

- Vegetative production of seedlings through rooting, grafting, and *in vitro* methods (G7.1, G7.3, G7.4, G7.7, G7.12, G7.15, G7.16, G8.7, G8.10, G8.12, G8.15, G8.17).

- Application of herbicides for controlling weed vegetation (G7.9, G8.5, G8.6, G8.9).

- Research on growth and productivity and optimization of forestation technology for creating plantations of common chestnut (G8.3), common cherry (G8.4), common hornbeam (G7.5), and common maple (G7.11, G8.13), among others. Valuable recommendations have been provided for both creating monocultures and for selecting suitable species for mixing (G7.11, G7.12), including their protection using mechanical protectors (G7.10, G7.13).

- The National Forest Data Base has been researched, and the first attempt for a comprehensive review of forestation practices with common maple in Bulgaria has been made (G8.13).

- A review of the historical development of afforestation in Bulgaria has been conducted, with useful conclusions drawn from the rich experience in the country (G8.14).

- Contribution to the update of subordinate legislation includes participation in working groups of the forestry department for drafting regulatory documents, including those for nursery production – Ordinance No. 4 of 2012. This is also an expression of recognition for the candidate's knowledge and extensive expertise.

Due to the specificity of the scientific specialty, almost all publications carry scientific, methodological, and applied contributions.

5. Assessment of the applicant's personal candidate

My long-term collaboration with Assoc. Prof. N. Iliev has allowed me to accumulate the most direct impressions of his teaching, research, and publication activities. I firmly assert that the methodological support, experimental work, data reporting and interpretation, formulation of conclusions, and recommendations are largely with his personal involvement. In collective research and works, he actively participates and over time more often takes on a leading role. His involvement is particularly noticeable with his mastery of statistical tools.

A sign of the weight of his personal contribution is the fact that in 14 of the publications (41%), the candidate plays a leading role (as the sole or first author).

6. Critical remarks

I did not find any significant omissions in the presented materials. Above, I pointed out two technical errors, with which the candidate has self-deducted 20 points. A more concise style in presenting the contributions could be desired.

7. Personal impressions

I have known the candidate since his student years and have been a direct witness to his constant progress. My impressions are excellent in all aspects – as a teacher, a researcher, and in terms of his personal qualities. He shows respect and correctness towards both colleagues and students. He is also distinguished by excellent organizational skills, which allow him to handle numerous and diverse tasks on time and at a high level. He is always willing to participate and demonstrates the ability to work in a team and lead one. He is dedicated to his work with students and PhD students.

I personally take satisfaction in the fact that, many years ago, I encouraged him to focus more intentionally on nursery production and specifically grafting. Now, I am glad that, without underestimating other important tasks, Assoc. Prof. N. Iliev has earned recognition as a leading expert. His knowledge and practical skills in nursery care, vegetative propagation methods, and specifically grafting in forest tree species have reached a level that exceeds the boundaries of our country.

Assoc. Prof. N. Iliev had the opportunity to work for a long time in our team with Assoc. Prof. DSc Krasimira Petkova and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Plamen Alexandrov. I give recognition for his responsible involvement and substantial contribution to the results of our joint work. He was able to accumulate and develop the good collective spirit of correctness and goodwill, which is a prerequisite for his successful further development as a leading figure, both in the field of Forest plantations and for the Faculty of Forestry and the University.

8. Conclusion

In connection with the above, I propose that Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nasko Alexandrov Iliev be elected as a „Professor“ in the discipline "Forest plantations" in the Professional field 6.5 Forestry, scientific specialty "Forest Cultures, Selection, and Seed Production".

Signature of the reviewer:

Review submitted to: 28 April, 2025