



OPINION

on the materials submitted for participation in a competition for the academic position of “Associate Professor” in the field of higher education 4. Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Informatics, professional field 4.4. Earth Sciences, scientific specialty “Ecology and Ecosystem Protection” in the discipline “Protected Natural Areas”

In the competition for Associate Professor, published in the State Gazette, issue 36 / 29.04.2025 and on the website of the University of Forestry under procedure code ELA-AsP-0425-165 for the needs of the Department of Ecology, Protection and Remediation of the Environment at the Faculty of Ecology and Landscape Architecture, as a candidate participate Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Hristina Bancheva-Preslavska, Faculty of Ecology and Landscape Architecture, Department of Ecology, Protection and Remediation of the Environment.

Prepared the opinion: Dr. Dilyanka Ivanova Bezlova, Professor in professional field 4.4. Earth Sciences, at the University of Forestry /retired/

1. Brief biographical data for the candidate

Hristina Bancheva-Preslavska was born in 1985 in Burgas. She received her secondary education at the Spanish Language School “Miguel de Cervantes” in Sofia. From 2005 to 2009 is a student, specialty Ecology and Environmental Protection, bachelor's degree. She graduated as a Master of Science in 2010 under a joint program of the University of Chemical Technology and Metallurgy (Bulgaria), the “D. A. Tsenov” Economic University (Bulgaria), the Queen's University of Belfast (Great Britain), the Flemish Institution for Technological Research (Belgium), the International Technological University of UNESCO (France) in the specialty “Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development”. She specialized at Leuphana University, Lüneburg – Germany on the problems of education and sustainable development, and within the UNESCO University – on the management of biosphere reserves and the development of sustainable tourism. She has worked as an ecologist, manager of environmental projects, and teacher. In 2017, she defended her PhD dissertation on “Modern approaches to organizing educational activities in protected areas” at the University of Forestry, Department of Ecology, Protection and Remediation of the Environment. In 2017, she was selected in a competition for an assistant professor at the Department of Ecology, Protection and Remediation of the Environment, and in 2018 – for a chief assistant professor.

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 submitted documents are in accordance with the requirements of the Rules of the Development of academic staff at the University of Forestry.

3. Assessment of the candidate's educational and pedagogical activities (work with students and PhD students)

Since 2023, Chief Assistant Professor Hristina Bancheva-Preslavska has been the principal lecturer of the disciplines "Protected Natural Areas", "Ecotourism" and "Sustainable Tourism" for the specialty of Ecology and Environmental Protection, "Protected Natural Areas in Bulgaria" for the specialty of Landscape Architecture and "Ecotourism" for the specialty of Alternative Tourism, participating in the development of the updated curricula attached to the submitted documentation. She was the bachelor and master thesis supervisor of one graduate student and co-supervisor of three. She has prepared bachelor and master thesis reviews of 6 graduate students. She has 4 publications with students and graduates. She has taken an active part in organizing the Department Circle at the Faculty of Ecology and Landscape Architecture and for the period 2017-2020 maintains the web page of the specialty Ecology and Environmental Protection. She actively participates in the Project "Student Practices" of the University of Forestry, as well as other initiatives with students, such as: "Ecology Day", "Eco triathlon Competition", etc. She participated in committees of the Faculty of Ecology and Landscape Architecture related to academic activities. She was a mentor to 1st year students in Ecology and Environmental Protection. She also actively participated in activities of the Center for Continuing Education at the University of Forestry.

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

Candidate Chief Assistant Professor Hristina Bancheva-Preslavska participated in the competition with:

- Monographs - 1
- Book based on defended doctoral thesis - 1
- Study - 1
- Publications - 24

Of these: in foreign refereed journals - 3; in Bulgarian refereed journals - 9; in non-refereed journals - 12; with impact factor - 6;

- Publications in scientific forum proceedings - 2;
- Popular science publications - 5;
- Invited papers - 11;

Most publications are in national journals and about 25% are in foreign journals. In Bulgarian have been published 9 articles, 1 monograph, 1 study, 1 book, and in English - 15. There are 11 independent articles, 1 monograph, 1 book, with one co-author - 8 articles, 1 study and with two co-authors - 5. Regarding the indicators in group "I", the 241 points obtained exceed the required minimum number of 200 points.

4.1 Participation in scientific, scientific-applied and educational projects

Chief Assistant Professor Hristina Bancheva-Preslavska has participated in 6 national and 3 international scientific and educational projects in the field of ecology and environmental protection. She is a leader of 2 national projects.

4.2 Characterization of published scientific results

The publication activity of Chief Assistant Professor Hristina Bancheva-Preslavska is in the professional field, scientific specialty and discipline for which the competition is announced. The topics covered are related to the management, study and conservation of protected areas, as well as the development of ecotourism and educational activities, as part of their main functions. Publishing in national and foreign scientific journals allows for the dissemination of results to a wider specialized audience. The use of several foreign languages gives her access to a wide base of scientific information. As a co-author in some of the publications, I declare equal participation of Chief Assistant Professor Hristina Bancheva-Preslavska in the research of literary sources, the results and conclusions from the research. I would like to pay special attention to the monograph, in which, based on her own research and world experience, an original criteria system for assessing the effectiveness of national park management has been developed.

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

- Total - 33 citations.

By type of citations:

- In refereed journals and proceedings of scientific forums - 16 citations and 1 review;
- In monographs, non-refereed journals etc. - 16 citations.

The presented citations reflect the interest to the publications of Chief Assistant Professor Bancheva-Preslavska. 17 of the citations are from Bulgarian authors, and the rest are from foreign authors. The number of points collected from the citations is 126, which many times exceeds the required minimum of 50 points.

4.4 Contributions to the candidate's work (scientific, scientific-applied, applied)

I accept the contributions indicated by the candidate. I consider it logical to separate them into the three groups: Current state and management of protected areas of national and international importance; Opportunities for the development of ecotourism in protected areas, including the development of approaches for implementation; Approaches in teaching ecology and environmental protection. The first two groups correspond to the purpose and main functions of protected areas, and the third one is directly related to teaching activities at the university.

I will point out the more significant, in my opinion, scientific and scientific-applied contributions.

In the first group

A significant contribution to the scientific production of Chief Assistant Professor Hristina Bancheva-Preslavska is the published monograph focused on the problems of effective national park management in Bulgaria. Based on in-depth studies of existing policies, strategies and approaches in world practice to ensure efficiency in national park management, the development of legal regulation for their management in Bulgaria and the

international agreements to which our country is a party, as well as on the analysis and assessment of the current state and management of the three national parks - Pirin, Central Balkan and Rila, an original methodological approach has been proposed with a set of criteria and indicators for effective management of national parks, which takes into account the established results and conclusions from the literature analysis and own research. This scientific approach has been applied to develop a system of 7 criteria, 27 indicators and 27 standards for effective management and a questionnaire with over 250 questions for self-assessment, qualitative analysis and improvement of the activities of the national park directorates in our country.

In the articles, included in this group, I would emphasize:

- ✓ conducted analysis of the IUCN Green List Standard in the context of the Bulgarian regulatory framework for protected areas management and the possibilities for including sites from the Bulgarian network of protected areas in the List. Based on the analysis of 49 natural sites (3 national parks, 11 nature parks and 35 managed reserves), it was found that the most suitable candidates are the administrations of the Central Balkan National Park, Bulgarka Nature Park, Persina Nature Park and Belasitsa Nature Park. It is recommended that they start the application process and join the IUCN network;
- ✓ proposed holistic approach for sustainable management and conservation of Bulgarian wetlands, based on their biodiversity and information infrastructure. The approach is based on criteria for effective communication of their ecological significance;
- ✓ developed approaches and methodologies for managing information and educational activities in protected areas;
- ✓ assessment of the current state of the protected areas network in Northwestern Bulgaria focusing on the importance for biodiversity, nature conservation and management regimes;
- ✓ proposed approaches for erosion control in protected areas.

In the second group

- ✓ developed various methodological approaches for organizing ecotourism and creating eco-routes, including sites from the protected areas network with different management regimes;
- ✓ developed and verified approaches for conducting ecotourism in protected areas with a focus on its informational and educational functions, which combine ecotourism and training;
- ✓ developed communication criteria that support the effective functioning of wetland visitor centers.

In the third group

- ✓ integrating the pedagogical perspective in natural sciences, based on an analysis and assessment of the state of higher education in Bulgaria in the context of education for sustainable development.

5. Assessment of the applicant's personal candidate

I highly appreciate the candidate's personal contribution to the submitted documentation for the competition, considering an independent monograph and book, 11 independent articles, first author in most articles with more than one author.

6. Critical remarks

I do not have critical remarks. I would recommend:

- ✓ future studies should include field observations and analyses of the current state of environmental components in different protected areas categories
- ✓ publishing of teaching aids

7. Personal impressions

I know Hristina Bancheva since her bachelor's degree studies in Ecology and Environmental Protection at the University of Forestry. Highly motivated, thorough, and precise in her work. She shows creativity and initiative. She further developed these qualities as a doctoral student and lecturer at the University of Forestry. Even as a student, she was highly appreciated after a competition held by the Swedish Embassy and was awarded the "Mini Nobel" in the field of ecology. She maintains very good contacts with students.

8. Conclusion

In connection with the above, I propose that Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Hristina Bancheva-Prešlavska be elected as an „Associate Professor“ in the discipline “Protected Natural Areas” in the Professional field 4.4. “Earth Sciences”, scientific specialty “Ecology and Ecosystem Protection”.

Prepared the opinion:
/Prof. Dr. Dilyanka Bezleva

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