

OPINION

on the materials submitted for participation in the competition for the academic position of „Associate Professor“ in Higher Education Area 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 36/29.04.2025, and on the UF website under procedure code: ELA-AsP-0425-165, for the needs of the Department of *Ecology, Environmental Protection and Restoration* at the Faculty of *Ecology and Landscape Architecture*, the applicant is Ch. Assistant Professor Hristina Bancheva-Preslavska, PhD, Faculty of *Ecology and Landscape Architecture*, Department of *Ecology, Environmental Protection and Restoration*.

Prepared by: Mariana Genova Doncheva-Boneva, PhD, Professor, Professional Field 4.4. Earth Sciences, University of Forestry.

1. Brief biographical data on the candidate

Ch. Assistant Professor Hristina Bancheva-Preslavska completed her secondary education in 2004 at the 164th Spanish Language High School. Between 2004–2005, she studied at Trier University, Germany, where she obtained a diploma in German language proficiency. From 2005 to 2009 she studied at the University of Forestry (UF), earning a Bachelor's degree in *Ecology and Environmental Protection* (EEP). In 2010 she completed a Master's program in *Environmental Protection and Sustainable Management* at the University of Chemical Technology and Metallurgy – Sofia. From 2012 to 2017 she was a doctoral student at UF in the scientific specialty *Ecology and Environmental Protection*, successfully defending her dissertation on the topic: “*Modern Approaches to the Organization of Educational Activities in Protected Areas*.”

She has acquired a teaching qualification at UF, and at Leuphana University, Lüneburg, Germany, she specialized in *Education for Sustainable Development*.

Since 2017, the candidate has been appointed Assistant at UF, and since 2018 she has been a Chief Assistant at the Department of *Ecology, Environmental Protection and Restoration*. Between 2009–2017, Ch. Assistant Professor Hr. Bancheva-Preslavska gained extensive professional experience: Project Associate at the EcoCommunity Foundation; Coordinator at the NGO Veloevolution; Ecologist at Makmetal Holding JSC; Project Manager at the Ecocentric Foundation; teacher at Meridian 22 High School and the 164th Spanish Language High School; part-time lecturer at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, etc..

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 Ch. Assistant Professor Hr. Bancheva-Preslavska fully comply, in type and content, with the legal requirements of the *Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria* (LDASRB) and its Regulations for Application, as well as with the

requirements for holding academic positions in the *UF Regulations for Academic Staff Development* (RASD).

The self-assessment report on the minimum national requirements under Art. 2a and Art. 60, para. 4, item 8 of the UF RASD, and Appendix 1 to Art. 1a, para. 1, contains correctly completed information on the candidate's scientific activity. The submitted information shows that in certain indicators the minimum requirements for holding the academic position have been exceeded (group A – 50 pts., group B – 100 pts., group C – 241 pts., group D – 126 pts.).

Ch. Assistant Professor H. Bancheva-Preslavska participates in the competition with a total of **517 points**.

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

Ch. Assistant Professor Bancheva-Preslavska has been a Ch. Assistant Professor at the Department of Ecology, Environmental Protection and Restoration, Faculty of Ecology and Landscape Architecture, at UF since 2018. She is the principal lecturer in six courses:

- Protected Natural Areas for the specialty Ecology and Environmental Protection (Bachelor's);
- Protected Natural Areas in Bulgaria for the specialty Landscape Architecture;
- Ecotourism for the specialty Alternative Tourism (Bachelor's);
- Sustainable Tourism;
- Module: Methods in Ecological Research within the course Research Approaches and Methods in Ecology for the specialty EEP – Master's program Environmental Restoration and Ecological Monitoring.

Ch. Assistant Professor Preslavska has supervised two diploma theses, acted as a consultant for one, and has served as a reviewer for nine. She is a co-author of four curricula.

By Order of the Dean, Ch. Assistant Professor Preslavska has been appointed as a proctor during state examinations for the specialty EEP, as well as a tutor and mentor for first-year student groups in the same specialty. She actively participates in the organization and activities of the student club Ecology, Environmental Protection and Restoration. She is also involved in student recruitment campaigns, open-door days, and other events promoting education in EEP at UF.

She is a member of the Faculty Scientific Research Committee and of the Committee for defining indicators and criteria for ranking candidates under the project Young Scientists and Postdoctoral Fellows-2. She is also an academic mentor for students within the project Student Internships – Phase 2.

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

General description of the submitted materials

Ch. Assistant Professor Hristina Bancheva-Preslavska participates in the competition with:

- Monographs – 1;
- Books – 1 (based on her dissertation);

- Studies – 1;
- Publications – 29 (incl. 5 popular science articles);
- Projects – 11;
- Training manuals – 4.

4.1 Participation in scientific, scientific-applied and educational projects

Ch. Assistant Professor Preslavska has participated in 11 projects, being the project leader of two national educational projects. One was funded by the German Environmental Foundation, and the other by the National Youth Program (2016–2020) of the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

She has also taken part in three international projects – one scientific and two educational – and in six national projects (three scientific, three educational). Three of the scientific projects are directly related to the competition's field of *Protected Natural Areas*: development of monitoring schemes in two reserves (*Byala Krava* and *Savchov Chair*), wetland conservation, and research on erosion in landscapes that are habitats of protected species.

4.2 Characterization of published scientific results

For participation in this competition for Ch. Assistant Professor Preslavska has submitted a list including 24 scientific publications (excluding those related to her dissertation). Among them:

- 1 in Q2 journals,
- 2 in Q3 journals,
- 3 in Q4 journals,
- 1 indexed in Scopus,
- 5 indexed in Web of Science,
- 12 peer-reviewed.

Of these publications, 11 are sole-authored, and 13 co-authored (in 10 she is the first author, in 1 – the second, and in 2 – the third). Thirteen articles were published in English and eleven in Bulgarian.

This group of indicators also includes one book, based on her dissertation, and one co-authored study: “Integrated Approach in the Management of Protected Sites: Conservation through Eco-Education in Shabla and Durankulak Lakes.”

Ch. Assistant Professor Preslavska has participated in 13 scientific forums in Bulgaria, Romania, and Dubai.

The monograph is entitled “Management of National Parks: Approaches and Evaluation Criteria”, ISBN 978-619-90127-9-6, published by Ecocentric, and meets the requirements for a monograph.

The presented scientific works examine protected natural areas in different aspects. Some publications are dedicated to the management of protected areas, their potential inclusion in the IUCN Green List, the role of wetlands in biodiversity conservation and their threats, as well as erosion processes in protected territories (B3-1, G7-1, 2, 3, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16, 19, 20, 23, G8-1). Articles in G7 Nos. 4, 5, 6, 7 discuss the resources and potential of protected areas for developing ecological tourism in different regions of Bulgaria. A significant part of the research is devoted to

environmental education – training programs and activities for environmental conservation in protected areas (G7 – 8, 12, 13, 14, 17, 18, 21, 22, 23, 24).

The presented scientific works exceed the minimum national requirements under the LDASRB and its Regulations for Application.

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

Total– 33 citations.

By type of citations:

- Citations in refereed and indexed scientific journals, series, and conference proceedings – Web of Science and Scopus: 17;
- Citations in non-refereed peer-reviewed journals or edited collective volumes: 16.

The total number of points from group D indicators is **126**, significantly exceeding the required minimum.

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

The most significant scientific and applied-scientific contributions include:

- Establishment of key criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of national park management;
- Development of a system of 7 criteria, 27 indicators, and 27 standards for effective management, along with a self-assessment questionnaire with more than 250 questions for the directorates of Bulgaria's national parks;
- Proposal of a methodological approach with a set of criteria and indicators for effective management of national parks;
- Confirmation that the management of Bulgaria's national parks is ineffective and poses risks for ensuring biodiversity conservation within them;
- Legislative proposals for more effective management of national parks in Bulgaria;
- Assessment of the potential inclusion of sites from the Bulgarian protected area network in the IUCN Green List, identifying reliable candidates such as *Central Balkan National Park* and three nature parks (*Bulgarka*, *Belasitsa*, and *Persina*);
- Proposal of a holistic approach for the sustainable management and conservation of wetlands in Bulgaria, based on their biodiversity and informational infrastructure;
- Evaluation of the natural potential and opportunities for ecotourism development in Northwest Bulgaria and along the Northern Black Sea coast;
- Development and verification of approaches for conducting ecotourism in protected areas, focusing on its informational and educational functions that combine tourism and learning;
- Publication of four eco-education manuals targeting different groups.

5. Assessment of the applicant's personal candidate

Considering that 11 of the published articles are single-authored and that in 10 co-authored works she is the first author, it can be stated with certainty that Ch. Assistant Professor Hristina Bancheva-Preslavaska has made a significant personal contribution to the presented research works.

6. Critical remarks

I recommend that the candidate, in the future, focus more on field research in protected areas.

7. Personal impressions

I have known Ch. Assistant Professor Hristina Bancheva-Preslavska since her student years and have excellent impressions of her – she is studious, hardworking, consistent, responsible, and dedicated in everything she undertakes. She is proactive, creative, always smiling and positive, and maintains ethical relations with both colleagues and students.

8. Conclusion

Based on the above, I propose that Ch. Assistant Professor Hristina Strahilova Bancheva-Preslavska be elected Associate Professor in the discipline Protected Natural Areas, Professional Field 4.4. Earth Sciences, scientific specialty Ecology and Ecosystem Protection.

Prepared the opinion:

Opinion delivered to: 25.08.2025