

## OPINION

for the submitted materials for participation in a competition for the academic position of "professor" in the field of higher education 1. Pedagogical sciences; professional direction 1.1. Educational Theory and Management (Higher Education Management)

The competition was announced for the needs of the New Bulgarian University - Master's Faculty, Department of "Foreign Languages and Cultures" and was published in the Official Gazette, 44/19.05.2023.

Reviewer: **Prof. Dr. Pelagia Mihailova Terziyska**

Candidate: **Assoc. Prof. Dr. Elena Blagoeva**

This opinion was prepared on the basis of order No. 3-PK-249/23.06.2023 of the Rector of the NBU, as well as the decision of the scientific jury on the procedure.

In the competition for "professor", the only candidate is Assoc. Dr. Elena Blagoeva.

The procedures for the contest of the competition are in accordance with the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Ordinance on the Development of the Academic Staff at the NBU.

*The candidate, Associate Professor Dr. Elena Blagoeva, has fulfilled the minimum national requirements under Art. 2b, para. 2 and 3 of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the additional university requirements.*

### ***Brief biographical details of the applicant***

Associate Professor Dr. Elena Blagoeva is a lecturer in the Department of Foreign Languages and Cultures and head of the Pedagogy section at NBU.

From the presented CV it is clear that not a small part of her main qualifications and professional experience are related to education - development of educational policies and practices in accordance with EU policies, management of higher education, creation of training programs and training materials, as well as conducting training activities. As the director of the "Pedagogy" Program Council at NBU, he participated in the development of projects for the accreditation of two professional areas in the scientific field "Pedagogical Sciences" - development of the Bachelor's program "Primary School Pedagogy and Foreign Language" and the Master's program "Leadership and Management in Education ". The many educational projects in which he participated as a trainer, expert, coordinator, manager are impressive. Among them, the Jean Monnet Program project related to the development of a module, textbook and open seminars for students and professionals on the topic of "EU Policy in Education and Culture" is of particular importance.

Following her path of continuous development, rich scientific research, expert and lecturing activities, Assoc. Prof. Blagoeva is building herself as a specialist with high professional competencies.

## ***II. Description of scientific works***

In the competition for the academic position of "professor" Assoc. Dr. Elena Blagoeva participated with **15 publications** including: **1 Monograph** - habilitation thesis; **1 book**, which was published on the basis of a protected dissertation work for the acquisition of the Educational and scientific degree "doctor"; **5 articles** in **peer reviewed journals**, one of which is co-authored; **2 studios**; **4 articles**, one of which is co-authored in **non-refereed** peer-reviewed publications or in edited collective volumes; **2 chapters** of a collective monograph.

Assoc. Prof. Blagoeva participated in **4 national projects**, 2 of which she was the head of; in **5 international** ones, of which she is the head of 4.

She is a member of the Bulgarian Association for European Integration; of the European Association for International Education community; of the Association of Second Chance Schools - Portugal.

*Analysis of the habilitation work.*

In the competition for professor, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Elena Blagoeva participates with a monograph on "Education and the Digital Transition in Europe - Policies and Attitudes" (2022).

The work is built on a comprehensive study of development trends in educational policies at the European and national levels in the context of ICT development and digital changes. On a theoretical and empirical level, the dynamics of digitization, as a priority in educational policies and feedback from users, are considered. The problems and challenges facing education, which are provoked by the digital transition and the series of crises, are clearly presented.

The monograph is structured logically in four chapters. The first and second chapters are aimed at clarifying the essence of the European Education Area, at the educational policies that are the basis of this area. The emphasis is placed on the main policies and strategies of the EU in the field of higher education and the changes imposed on it. A correct analysis of these policies and the possibilities for their practical implementation was made, as well as the main challenges facing higher education in our country.

The third chapter justifies the need for the digitization of education and EU policies in this direction, including the European competence framework in the field of digital technologies (DigComp). The trends for the introduction of digitization in education have been examined. Our national policies for its digitization are also competently presented. Attention is also directed to revealing the practical experience of e-learning in the university during the epidemic of COVID-19. On this basis, the positive sides of this training, as well as its problems, are specified.

The empirical research conducted is reflected in chapter four. The research methodology is well-argued, combining quantitative and qualitative methods. An author's survey (at the national level) of student attitudes towards online learning is correctly presented. The need for such research is emphasized. The number of surveyed students is impressive - 1,004 from different settlements, higher schools and majors. The results of the research are presented according to 14 criteria. They are illustrated with tables and graphs that support the competently and correctly made analysis.

### *Analysis of other scientific works*

The book "*The European Dimension in Education and Culture - Policies and Management*" analyzes the policies, strategies and instruments of the EU policy in the field of education and culture until 2020. In relation, it examines the weaknesses and strengths of policies that lead to strategies and how the adequacy/inadequacy of the strategy affects the quality of the instruments and hence the processes of management and administration.

The opportunities that the programs of the European Research Council provide to European scientists, as well as the challenges caused, on the one hand, by the procedures in project funding, and on the other hand, by the insufficient information and training of scientists in the different European countries, are considered in the article "Opportunities and challenges for funding quality science in the EU. The role of the European Research Council and the participation of Bulgaria".

The article "*Assessment of Intercultural Competence - a Tool for Increasing Competitiveness and Self-awareness*" reviews different perspectives and analyzes an assessment model that is suitable for assessment and for the development of training modules and programs in higher education necessary to form at high levels of intercultural competence.

The situation and the opportunities that the EU creates to integrate migrants with the help of actions aimed at their education and preparation for adequate participation in the labour market are presented in the article "*Education - A Powerful Factor for the Integration of Migrants in Europe*".

The problem of quality education in Europe and Bulgaria, of quality training of European citizens, including the application of a cyber-physical system for pedagogical rehabilitation in inclusive education, is reflected in three of the articles by Assoc. Prof. Blagoeva.

The topic of various aspects of higher education is presented in several of the articles. They seek answers to questions related to the ability of the Development Strategy to overcome the economic and systemic limitations facing Bulgarian Higher Education; questions focused on the impact of the Covid crisis on internationalization processes in higher education institutions, the subsequent reactions and possible management approaches to restore the stability of international activities. The problem of the effectiveness of online learning is considered; about possible measures adequate for Bulgarian higher education to deal with a pandemic crisis.

### ***III Scientific contributions***

On the basis of the presented publications, scientific and applied contributions of Assoc. Prof. Dr. E. Blagoeva can be highlighted and summarized:

- A large-scale study was made in the field of education management (the current strategies and policies of the EU and Bulgaria), from different points of view.
- Higher education and its digitalization are examined in detail, an objective picture of the state of e-learning in Bulgarian higher education is presented, and the achievements and main problems are outlined.

- In a relatively new problem area, the impact of the digital transition on education has been thoroughly investigated. This is relevant in the long term and is of essential importance for the processes of formation of the future society - a "knowledge-based society".
- The interrelationships between the policies and management of education, including the management processes of digitization in education, at the supra-national, national and institutional levels, as well as the specific roles and responsibilities of each of these levels, are specified.
- A medium-term approach to changes in higher education in relation to digitalization is defined, justifying the need for coherence between activities, values, methods, principles, expectations and results in order to achieve sustainable and positive change in the institution and guarantee the quality of education.
- Recommendations for possible strategies and specific measures regarding digitization are formulated.

The reference submitted by the candidate shows a total of 25 citations, of which 10 are in scientific publications, referenced and indexed in world-renowned databases with scientific information.

#### ***IV. Lecturing work***

Among the lecture courses led by Assoc. Blagoeva are Project Management (in English) and Policies and programs of the EU in education.

She is also a trainer on various projects and programs.

#### ***V. Recommendations***

I recommend that she remain active, carry out new scientific research and share new scientific ideas through subsequent publications.

#### ***V. Conclusion:***

The analysis and evaluation of the research activity, the publications presented and the educational activity carried out are grounds for supporting the candidacy of Associate Professor Dr. Elena Blagova for the academic position of "Professor" in the field of higher education 1. Pedagogical sciences, professional direction 1.1. Theory and Management of Education (Management of Higher Education) for the needs of the NBU.

Opinion's author:

17/08/2023

Prof. Dr. Pelagia Terziyska