OPINION

by Prof. Lyudmila Pavlova Vekova, Ph.D

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Regarding: The materials submitted for participation in a competition
for the academic position of "Associate Professor" in the
Higher Education Field 3: Social, Economic, and Legal Sciences,
Professional Field 3.4: Social Activities,
Specialization: Social Activities (Counseling and Competence in Social Work)

The competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor" was announced in the State Gazette, Issue 53 of June 9, 2026, and on the website of the Technical University of Gabrovo, to meet the needs of the Department of Social and Economic Sciences within the Faculty of Economics. All requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB) and the Regulations for its Implementation have been met.

The sole candidate is Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Zhaneta Nikolaeva Tsoneva.

1. Overview of the Content and Results of the Submitted Works

The set of materials submitted by the candidate, Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Zhaneta Nikolaeva Tsoneva, complies with the requirements of Article 26, Paragraph 1 of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB) and its implementing regulations, as well as the Regulations for the Acquisition of Academic Degrees and the Occupation of Academic Positions at the Technical University of Gabrovo.

For the purpose of this competition, the candidate, Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Zhaneta Nikolaeva Tsoneva, has submitted a habilitation work—a monograph titled "Counseling in the Helping Professions"—along with a total of 20 publications. These include: 1 sole-authored study and 1 paper (currently in press) in publications indexed in globally recognized scientific databases (SCOPUS); 1 study and 7 sole-authored articles in peer-reviewed (but not indexed) publications; and 10 scientific papers (including 3 co-authored works) presented at international scientific conferences (held both abroad and in Bulgaria) and national scientific conferences. Of these publications, 5 are in English and 15 are in Bulgarian.

The overall publication record of Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Zhaneta Nikolaeva Tsoneva focuses on two main thematic areas: counseling and professional competencies in social work (the monograph and 9 of the publications), and competency-based models and social interventions in working with vulnerable groups (12 publications). The monograph, spanning 176 pages, presents an in-depth study of counseling—as a concept, a process, and a social phenomenon—and its application across various professional fields within the helping professions. By systematizing fundamental theoretical approaches, models, and types of counseling, the work identifies key competencies and techniques for effective practice, emphasizing their significance for the professional training and practical work of specialists in the helping professions.

Also submitted for the competition are one authored textbook, titled "Social Competencies," and two study guides (one of which was authored independently).

The 14 citations listed—primarily from Bulgarian authors—appear in peer-reviewed, non-indexed journals or peer-reviewed edited volumes; they indicate that the candidate is a recognized scholar within the scientific community, primarily at the national level.

The scholarly works submitted by the candidate align with the field of the competition and meet—or even exceed—the minimum national requirements set forth by the ADASRB and its Regulations for Implementation (RIADASRB), as well as the Regulations for the Acquisition of Academic Degrees and the Occupation of Academic Positions at the Technical University of Gabrovo, for the position of "Associate Professor."

The publications, the list of citations, and the stated contributions are presented accurately, allowing for a sound and precise assessment of the candidate's research interests, investigative work, and findings.

2. General Overview of the Candidate's Activities

2.1. Teaching and Pedagogical Activities

The academic career of Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Zhaneta Tsoneva began in 2010 within the Department of Social and Economic Sciences at the Technical University of Gabrovo. She has held the academic positions of "Assistant" (until the end of 2014) and "Chief Assistant Professor" (from the beginning of 2015 to the present). In 2014, she successfully defended her doctoral dissertation, titled "A Model of Social Work with Drug-Dependent Individuals," at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski," earning the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" (PhD).

The evidence provided in the competition documentation demonstrates a long-standing, active commitment to teaching and a significant classroom workload across both educational and qualification degrees. Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Zhaneta Tsoneva serves as the lead instructor for 3 compulsory and 9 elective courses at the Bachelor's level, as well as 9 compulsory and 7 elective courses at the Master's level. The subjects taught by the candidate are relevant to the scope of the announced competition. Between 2017 and 2026, the candidate developed either independently or in co-authorship 50 curricula and lecture courses for students. A high level of classroom teaching load has been recorded—728.1 hours for the 2025–2026 academic year, with 681.1 hours planned for 2026–2027.

Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Zhaneta Tsoneva serves as the head of three Master's degree programs within the professional field of "Social Activities" (Field 3.4): "Social Activities," "Social Work and European Policies," and "Social Innovation and Social Policies."

In addition to her active teaching work at both the Bachelor's and Master's levels, Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Zhaneta Tsoneva has supervised 22 students completing their final theses and guided students in their participation in academic forums (resulting in 27 presentations). She has also served as a group supervisor for students across various academic years during the 2020–2026 period.

The candidate's academic portfolio also includes active participation in research projects—specifically, one national-level project and ten university-based projects.

The submitted materials include evidence of the successful completion of training courses on various topics directly relevant to the scope of the announced competition. These demonstrate Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Zhaneta Tsoneva's commitment to the continuous development and enrichment of her knowledge and competencies within her areas of research interest.

2.2. Scientific and Applied-Scientific Activity

The scientific output of the candidate, Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Zhaneta Nikolaeva Tsoneva, fully aligns with the subject matter of the announced competition.

Central to these scientific publications is the habilitation work of Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Zhaneta Tsoneva. This monograph constitutes an in-depth, comprehensive study

that synthesizes the candidate's research endeavors into a holistic perspective on counseling and its significance for social work viewed as a method of support characteristic of and applicable to the helping professions encompassing specific forms of professional practice and emphasizing the practical application of theoretical knowledge.

For the purposes of this competition, Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Zhaneta Tsoneva has submitted a total of 20 publications, including: 2 publications (1 study and 1 paper) in sources referenced and indexed in internationally recognized scientific databases; 1 study; 7 articles; and 10 papers. The vast majority of these publications (17) are single-authored. Additionally, the candidate has submitted one textbook, one study guide, and one teaching resource, all co-authored. The candidate has participated in one national project under the Operational Programme "Science and Education for Smart Growth" 2014–2020, serving as an instructor responsible for developing a lecture course and digital resources for the subject "Intellectual Property in the Social Sphere." Additionally, she has been a member of research teams for 10 scientific projects at the Technical University of Gabrovo, all of which directly addressed issues relevant to the scope of this competition during the 2014–2026 period. Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Zhaneta Tsoneva has also served as a reviewer for 22 scientific papers for the UNITECH International Scientific Conference, organized by the Technical University of Gabrovo.

The structure of her scientific and applied work indicates that the candidate focuses on producing publications linked to various aspects of her research interests and teaching activities.

All of this leads me to conclude that the candidate's professional trajectory, pedagogical work, and scientific activities fully align with the requirements and the thematic scope of the announced competition.

2.3. Implementation Activities

The candidate's research findings are successfully applied within the educational process through the development of new curricula and the updating of existing ones across both educational and qualification degrees (EQDs). This includes participation in research projects, the integration of achieved results into the content of the educational process, and the peer review of scientific publications.

3. **Contributions (scientific, scientific-applied, and applied). Significance of the contributions to science and practice.**

The scientific contributions are organized within the two thematic areas that define the scope of the announced competition—counseling and the development of professional competencies in social work, as well as competency-based models and social interventions for working with vulnerable groups. These contributions encompass both theoretical-analytical and practical-applied elements.

The submitted publications offer scientific-theoretical contributions, manifested in the following ways: the systematization and critical analysis of fundamental theories, contemporary models, and standards regarding counseling and school-based social work; the development of a comprehensive counseling model for use in the practice of professionals within the helping professions; the systematization of key competencies for current and future social work professionals, viewed in the context of professional practice requirements; and the definition of the concept of parental alienation as a complex socio-psychological and legal phenomenon.

From a scientific-applied perspective, the candidate's body of work addresses a broad range of issues, demonstrating how the results achieved can be implemented within actual social practice and social work education. This includes the application of counseling across various professional fields within the helping sector, as well as the practical aspects of developing professional competencies among both specialists and non-specialists. important aspects of the educational-methodological and competency-based training of future social work professionals, achieved through the integration of theoretical knowledge, counseling approaches, and practical

guidelines; contemporary models for social work with children, families, and vulnerable communities are presented.

4. Assessment of the Candidate's Personal Contribution

I regard the scientific publications and the contributions therein as the candidate's personal achievements and the product of her own research, in accordance with the standards of academic ethics. Of the submitted scholarly works, 83% (19) are the sole work of Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Zhaneta Tsoneva, with only 3 papers and one teaching manual co-authored. This allows for a clear identification of the candidate's personal contribution and demonstrates her qualities as a serious, consistent, and responsible scholar—one who directs her research inquiries toward various facets of the subject matter and conducts independent scientific research with diligence and integrity.

5. Critical Remarks and Recommendations

I have no critical remarks. I recommend that Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Zhaneta Tsoneva increase her future publication activity and promote her research findings internationally—including through publications indexed in globally recognized databases given the topical relevance of the issues addressed in her research work.

6. Personal Impressions

My personal impressions of Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Zhaneta Tsoneva stems from our collaboration on the Management Board of BAOSR, where she served as a member from 2018 to 2023. The candidate demonstrated an active and responsible approach toward the Association's activities and the priorities it pursued during this period. These qualities complement my observations regarding her professional commitment and respectful attitude toward colleagues, and they reinforce my positive assessment of the candidate's research and teaching work.

7. Conclusion:

The documents and materials submitted by Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Zhaneta Nikolaeva Tsoneva fully comply with the requirements of the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ADASRB), the Regulations for the Application of the ADASRB, and the specific Regulations of the Technical University of Gabrovo regarding the acquisition of scientific degrees and the occupation of academic positions, specifically for the academic rank of "Associate Professor".

In light of the above, I propose that Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Zhaneta Nikolaeva Tsoneva be appointed to the academic rank of "Associate Professor" in:

Higher Education Area – 3. Social, Economic, and Legal Sciences

Professional Field – 3.4 Social Activities

Specialty – Social Activities (Counseling and Competence in Social Work)

28.10.2026

Jury Member:

/Prof. Lyudmila Vekova, Ph.D/