Appendix 2.25

REVIEW

by Prof. Veselina Nikolaeva Ilieva, PhD
Konstantin Preslavsky University of Shumen

of the materials submitted for participation in the competition
for the academic position of Associate Professor in
higher education area 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences,
professional field 3.4. Social Activities,
specialty: Counselling and Competence in Social Work

Chief Assistant Professor Zhaneta Nikolaeva Tsoneva, PhD, is the candidate in the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor, announced in the State Gazette, issue 53 of 9 June 2026, and on the website of the Technical University of Gabrovo, for the needs of the Department of Social and Economic Sciences at the Faculty of Economics.

1. Brief biographical information.

Chief Assistant Professor Zhaneta Nikolaeva Tsoneva, PhD, is an established university lecturer with many years of academic experience and consistent professional development in Social Activities. Her educational and professional career is distinguished by purposefulness, perseverance and lasting commitment to social work as both an academic discipline and a profession. In 2006 she obtained a Bachelor's degree and in 2007 a Master's degree in Social Activities from the Technical University of Gabrovo. In 2014 she successfully defended her doctoral dissertation, "A Model of Social Work with Drug-Dependent Individuals", at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", earning a PhD in professional field 1.2. Pedagogy. Her academic career is associated with the Technical University of Gabrovo, where she began working as an Assistant Professor in 2010 and has held the position of Chief Assistant Professor since 2015. Her teaching covers a broad range of subjects concerning the theory and practice of social work, demonstrating substantial professional preparation and a sustained interest in contemporary challenges in the social sector.

Over the years, Chief Assistant Professor Tsoneva has developed an academic profile in which teaching, research and organisational activities complement and enrich one another. Her participation in scientific forums, publication record and involvement in research projects demonstrate a commitment to continuous professional improvement and the development of social work education. Particularly noteworthy are her experience in coordinating Master's programmes and her active participation in the professional community, including membership of the Management Board of the Bulgarian Association for Social Work Education from 2019 to 2023. Her overall academic development reflects consistency, responsibility and commitment to preparing future social workers. I consider her professional biography convincing evidence of the qualities of a dedicated teacher and researcher who, through competence, perseverance and active engagement in academic life, contributes to the consolidation and development of social work education.

2. General description of the submitted materials.

The materials submitted by Chief Assistant Professor Tsoneva for the competition for Associate Professor in professional field 3.4. Social Activities, specialty "Counselling and Competence in Social Work", provide compelling evidence of her development as a researcher and lecturer. Her scholarly output includes the monograph "Counselling in the Helping Professions", a textbook, teaching aids, journal articles and conference papers published or presented nationally and internationally. The thematic coherence of these works is particularly striking, with two prominent areas of focus: counselling as an essential component of professional social work and the development of competencies required of contemporary social workers. The candidate also addresses current issues concerning support for children and families, social innovations and the potential use of new technologies. Rather than suggesting a fragmented research agenda, this range of subjects demonstrates a sustained development of scholarly interests and an effort to understand social work in its contemporary dimensions.

What I find especially valuable about the materials is that they reveal an educator who does not confine herself to theoretical examinations of social problems but seeks their practical significance and their application in the training of future professionals. This is especially evident in her teaching publications on social competencies, work with children at risk and the development of students' research skills. The scholarly output demonstrates persistence, professional commitment and a desire to make accumulated knowledge useful both to academia and to social work practice. In my view, these materials present Chief Assistant Professor Tsoneva as a mature and consistent researcher capable of connecting scientific knowledge with the actual needs of the profession. This relationship between theory, education and practice lends particular value to her work and provides substantial grounds for my positive assessment of her scholarly and teaching publications.

On the basis of the submitted statement of compliance with the minimum national requirements and the supporting documents, I consider that Chief Assistant Professor Tsoneva meets all minimum national scientometric requirements for the academic position of Associate Professor in professional field 3.4. Social Activities. Under indicator group A, she has the required 50 points for the PhD degree; under group C, she submits the habilitation monograph "Counselling in the Helping Professions", worth 100 points. Under group D, covering research publications, she has 245 points against the required minimum of 200. Her performance under group E also merits a positive assessment: 14 citations are reported, amounting to 70 points against the required 50. Group F does not prescribe a compulsory minimum score for this academic position. The candidate thus achieves a total of 465 points against the minimum requirement of 400, confirming compliance with the national scientometric criteria.

It is also encouraging that Chief Assistant Professor Tsoneva meets the additional requirements of the Technical University of Gabrovo identified in the submitted statement. She presents 20 research publications against a requirement of 15, including 17 single-authored works against a minimum of four. Two publications with an indicated SJR metric, 14 citations against the required five, one textbook and two teaching aids are also reported. These results demonstrate not only quantitative compliance with the criteria but also sustained scholarly and teaching activity. I assess the submitted scientometric results unequivocally positively and consider that they strongly support Chief Assistant Professor Tsoneva's candidacy for Associate Professor. To me, these figures represent years of focused work, perseverance and professional dedication that deserve recognition and provide a sound foundation for her further academic development.

3. Impact of the candidate's publications within the scientific community (known citations).

The citations submitted by Chief Assistant Professor Tsoneva provide further persuasive evidence of the significance of her research and the interest her topics have attracted among other scholars. The accompanying statement lists 14 citations of seven of her publications, which merits a positive assessment. It is especially encouraging that her studies are cited in research addressing different aspects of social work, pedagogy and social processes. This indicates that the questions she examines are relevant beyond the specific subject of each publication. Interest is evident in her research on social innovations, support for children and families, emotional resilience and social competencies. I regard this as an important positive indication that her works do not remain merely part of her personal publication record, but enter a broader academic dialogue and provide points of departure for further research.

I would particularly emphasise that the value of citations lies not solely in their number, but above all in the way an author's ideas reach other researchers and continue to develop through their work. It is in this sense that I positively assess Chief Assistant Professor Tsoneva's citations. They show that she is steadily establishing a presence within the scholarly community and that her research topics resonate across a range of research contexts. Particularly valuable is the fact that some citations appear in recent publications, demonstrating the continuing relevance of her interests. I view this as deserved recognition of years of work, perseverance and her commitment to addressing issues of genuine importance to social work. The citations complement her overall academic profile and justify my high assessment of her research activity, while also providing a promising basis for broader scholarly recognition and further academic advancement.

4. Overview of the content and results of the submitted works.

In the two research publications presented, Chief Assistant Professor Tsoneva addresses current issues concerning quality and contemporary approaches in the education of future social workers. She examines the relationship between professional and socio-emotional competencies, convincingly highlighting the importance of empathy, communication and personal qualities for successful professional practice. Her pilot study identifies a positive relationship between these competencies and outlines opportunities to improve university education. She also examines the use of artificial intelligence in teaching, with experimental findings indicating a positive influence on students' motivation and learning effectiveness. I particularly appreciate Chief Assistant Professor Tsoneva's ability to bring together the human dimension of social work and the possibilities of contemporary educational technologies in her research.

The monograph "Counselling in the Helping Professions", the textbook "Social Competencies", and the teaching aids "Developing Social Competencies in Social Work with Children at Risk" and "Methodological Guide to Preparing a Graduation Thesis" reflect a consistent and carefully considered scholarly and teaching endeavour. In her monograph, the author examines in depth the nature, approaches and techniques of counselling, emphasising the consultant's professional and personal qualities and the importance of effective interaction with people. The textbook and teaching aid devoted to social competencies further develop these themes by focusing on communication skills, emotional resilience, self-reflection and the ability to respond to complex situations, particularly when working with children at risk. The co-authored methodological guide complements this approach with useful practical guidance for developing students' research skills. In my view, an undeniable strength of these works is Chief Assistant Professor Tsoneva's determination to transform scientific knowledge into an accessible and practically useful resource for future social workers without losing sight of the human dimension

of their profession. To me, these publications convincingly demonstrate pedagogical maturity, professional dedication and genuine commitment to the quality of social work education. Their value lies not merely in the systematic presentation of scientific knowledge but also in their aspiration to prepare thoughtful, confident professionals sensitive to human problems, which merits my strongly positive assessment.

5. General assessment of the candidate's activities.

Teaching and educational activities (work with students and doctoral candidates).

Chief Assistant Professor Tsoneva's teaching activities merit high praise both for their scope and for her consistent commitment to preparing future social workers. The development of 50 course syllabi, supervision of 22 graduation students, participation in the assessment of graduation theses and coordination of Master's programmes demonstrate substantial teaching experience and professional responsibility. I particularly value the attention she pays to the development of students' practical skills and independent thinking. Her involvement in student research sessions and the broader organisation of the teaching process further reinforces the impression of a dedicated lecturer who regards education not merely as a professional duty but as a responsibility towards the future of social work.

5.2. Scientific and applied research activities.

Chief Assistant Professor Tsoneva's scientific and applied research activities are distinguished by continuity, thematic consistency and a clearly practical orientation. Her involvement in a national project and ten university research projects, alongside participation in scientific conferences and peer review of research papers, reveals substantial commitment to academic life. Particularly noteworthy is her effort to direct research towards the actual needs of social work and improvements in professional training. These factors justify my assessment of her research as valuable, promising and beneficial to the development of the professional field.

Implementation and knowledge-transfer activities.

The practical applicability of Chief Assistant Professor Tsoneva's results is particularly evident in her educational-methodological and project work. The development of a lecture course and digital educational resources within a national project, together with teaching publications and practical exercises, constitute concrete ways of transferring scientific knowledge into educational practice. I consider this especially significant because it demonstrates a determination to ensure that research findings are applied and support the development of professional competencies. This link between scholarly knowledge and its practical use is one of the strengths of the candidate's academic work.

6. Contributions (scientific, scientific-applied and practical).

The scientific, scientific-applied and practical contributions set out in the author's statement are clearly differentiated, logically organised and very well formulated. They convincingly reflect the main results of the candidate's research in counselling, professional competence development and social work with vulnerable groups. I fully accept the contributions claimed by Chief Assistant Professor Tsoneva and consider them well substantiated, significant and an accurate representation of the scientific and practical results achieved. Their particular value lies in their orientation towards improving the education of future social workers and the development of contemporary social work practice.

7. Assessment of the candidate's individual contribution.

Chief Assistant Professor Tsoneva's personal contribution is clearly identifiable in her scholarly output, the consistent development of her research interests and the practical focus of her teaching. Her independently authored works and participation in joint scientific and educational initiatives demonstrate professional maturity, initiative and an ability to engage in fruitful academic cooperation. In my view, behind these results stands not only a well-prepared researcher but also a lecturer with a genuine commitment to her profession, her students and the development of social work. I consider her individual contribution substantial, convincingly demonstrated and fully deserving of a highly positive assessment.

8. Critical remarks and recommendations.

I have no critical remarks concerning the submitted scholarly output or Chief Assistant Professor Tsoneva's overall academic activity. I believe that her research works, teaching and professional development deserve a highly positive assessment. They demonstrate consistency, depth and genuine commitment to advancing social work education. It is especially gratifying to see a lecturer whose academic achievements are accompanied by a determination not merely to generate new knowledge but to make it useful to students and social work practice.

My recommendations to Chief Assistant Professor Tsoneva are entirely intended to support and encourage her future academic development. I would encourage her to broaden her research in counselling and professional competencies while deepening international academic cooperation and participation in interdisciplinary research teams. I believe that her accumulated experience offers an excellent foundation for developing innovative educational approaches more actively, involving students in research and strengthening the relationship between university education and social work practice. I wish her continued intellectual curiosity, professional energy and dedication, as these provide the strongest foundation for future academic achievements and valuable new contributions to social work.

9. Personal impressions.

Although my direct professional contacts with Chief Assistant Professor Tsoneva have not been numerous, they have left me with exceptionally positive impressions. Opportunities to work together during meetings and joint activities at the Technical University of Gabrovo have led me to regard her as responsible, well-disposed and dedicated to her profession, and as a colleague with whom communication and cooperation are easy. I gained a further opportunity to become better acquainted with her research as a reviewer of her monograph "Counselling in the Helping Professions", which reinforced my positive assessment of her scholarly preparation, professional maturity and serious approach to research. I would also acknowledge the impressions formed through exchanges among colleagues in the professional field of Social Activities in Bulgaria. Our academic community is relatively closely connected, and a lecturer's good reputation is established not only by scientific achievements but also by their attitude towards others, integrity and willingness to cooperate. In this regard, favourable views shared in collegial conversations complement my personal assessment. To me, Chief Assistant Professor Tsoneva is among those colleagues whose professionalism, humanity and sincere dedication to social work contribute not only to the advancement of academic knowledge but also to goodwill and mutual respect within our professional community.

10. Conclusion:

In view of the foregoing, I recommend that Chief Assistant Professor Zhaneta Nikolaeva Tsoneva, PhD, be elected to the academic position of Associate Professor in higher education area 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, professional field 3.4. Social Activities, specialty "Counselling and Competence in Social Work".

26 October 2026 Reviewer:

/Prof. Veselina Ilieva, PhD/