

Review

By: Prof. Dr. Nikolay Dobrinov Natchev, Department of Biology, Faculty of Natural Sciences, Shumen University "Konstantin Preslavski", elected as a member of the Scientific Jury and appointed by order of the Director of IBEI-BAS No. 22/07.03.2025, in connection with a procedure for the position of "Doctor" in professional field 4.3. Biological Sciences, scientific specialty "Ecology and Conservation of Ecosystems", at the Department "Ecosystem Studies, Ecological Risk and Conservation Biology" of IBEI-BAS.

Subject: Procedure for acquiring the degree "Doctor" in professional field 4.3. Biological Sciences, scientific specialty "Ecology and Conservation of Ecosystems", at the Department "Ecosystem Studies, Ecological Risk and Conservation Biology" of IBEI-BAS.

The only candidate in the announced procedure is Blagovesta Dimitrova Dimitrova. After a detailed review of the attached documents, it can be concluded that all the necessary elements required by the Law on the State of the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law on the State of the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations on the Terms and Procedure for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and Holding Academic Positions of the National Academy of Sciences of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences are present. The submitted competition documentation is complete, properly arranged and adequately presents the scientific and expert activity of the candidate to date.

Biographical data of the candidate

M.S. Blagovesta Dimitrova began her studies in the field of higher education in 2014, but before that she studied at an American College, which could also be considered a partially equivalent level of higher education, but in a different system. The candidate defended her first degree of higher education in 2017, graduating from the University of Nottingham (Great Britain) with a "bachelor's thesis" in the field of malacology. She continued her education in Germany, where

she was pursuing a master's degree in Ecology, Evolution and Systematics at the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich. The masters diploma thesis was in the field of ethology and sexual selection and were defended in 2019. The highest level of higher education began in 2022 at the IBEI-BAS, and the main research was in the field of Ecotoxicology. It is noteworthy that all educational degrees were defended with scientific works and this has led to the accumulation of experience in writing scientific texts and the accumulation of a large number of scientific products. The grades with which the theses are defended are very high (almost maximum).

Professional experience

Despite the candidate's young age, her CV shows that she has gained a lot of professional experience, as well as having won awards for students and young scientists. Blagovesta Dimitrova has worked as a research assistant, a specialist biologist, and also has teaching experience. In a short period of her professional development, Mag. Dimitrova was employed in private business, which certainly contributed positively to her formation as a specialist.

Lexical skills and communication competencies

The candidate uses Bulgarian and three foreign languages, with different levels of proficiency indicated, but I do not take these conventions very seriously. Given that Blagovesta Dimitrova studied at an American College and completed and defended her higher education degrees in Britain and Germany, there is no way that the level of English and German would not be of the highest quality. The candidate was teacher at a German university and it is unlikely that anyone would have given her this opportunity without her communicating in excellent German. The candidate's scientific products and her active participation in conferences show that she had mastered the scientific jargon in English in the field of ecology in detail. Blagovesta Dimitrova possesses a huge arsenal of communication skills - qualities that are especially valuable in today's scientific reality, where the presentation and promotion of scientific production is becoming increasingly important and significant.

Personal impressions

I do not know M.Sc. Dimitrova personally and have never communicated with her. We have no joint publications and we have not worked on scientific projects. My impressions are entirely from the documents submitted under the procedure and from the publications that I have read. In view of what has been stated in the previous sentences, I can say that I am completely confident in my ability to make neutral and objective decisions in this competition. This was perhaps the main reason for agreeing to participate with a review.

Public activity as an expert and project activity

The candidate in this procedure participated actively in projects in parallel with her scientific activity. Within six years, she worked on six projects with an ecological and ecological-administrative focus. Even as a student (College student), she was involved in numerous public and scientific initiatives as a young associate (I avoid the word "volunteer" as it is completely inappropriate for such type of activities). Her public activity shows a profile of a person with a professional expert orientation without unnecessary vacillations into extremes.

Thanks to her communicativeness, M. S. Dimitrova has managed to establish herself in society as a person uniting scientific competence with social accessibility. I, as a University lecturer, like such a combination extremely, because I see how important it is to popularize science in the right way and how difficult it is to convey complex ideas in an accessible way. From my relatively long career, I have been convinced how minimal is the number of people who are able to translate knowledge between different social groups and strata. I have the feeling that the candidate belongs to this type of person who possesses innate and acquired qualities to teach. I myself have recently been using quite often the educational products for working with Excel by Mag. Dimitrova and I really began to appreciate this software product even more

Scientific activity and publications

The beginning of the work with scientific topics and terminology can be considered 2013, when the candidate was an associate at a veterinary clinic and carried out field observations in protected areas. Since then, Mag. Dimitrova has presented reports at eight conferences and has written five scientific articles. The scientific articles of the candidate in the competition are exclusively co-authored, with Blagovesta Dimitrova being the first author in one of the articles and also the last author in two articles. There is no doubt that the contribution of the candidate in the competition is in absolutely all the scientific production presented in the documentation. It is striking that about 40% of the publications of the candidate are in journals from the most elite quartile, with 100% of the publications being in journals with generally recognized scientometrics. I have no doubts about the quality of Mag. Dimitrova's articles and the fact that they have been published in refereed journals supports this impression.

Scientometric indicators of the competition

Blagovesta Dimitrova participated in the competition with three of her publications, which are on the topic of the dissertation. All articles are from 2024, two of which are in a journal with Q1 and one with Q4. In one of the articles, the candidate is the first author in shared co-authorship with her scientific supervisor. This publication has already generated a citation in a journal with a Q1 rank.

Blagovesta Dimitrova has presented her "Assessment of the Doctoral Student's Preparation" in which the Scientific Secretary of IBEI-BAS recognized 261 credits. I carefully checked all the points and bullet points and in this review I can confirm the validity of the decision of the Scientific Secretary of IBEI-BAS to award the relevant credits. Personally, in my opinion, the most important indicator for a successful procedure is concentrated in point 3, and there the criteria are exceeded by over 15 units. De facto, one of the articles could have been removed from the competition and it would still have been successfully conducted. In any case, I believe that the candidate correctly included all three rooms in the procedure.

Compliance with the legislation of the Republic of Bulgaria

The elements submitted in the documentation of Mag. Dimitrova, allowing the formation of normatively compliant decisions, allow us to conclude that all the requirements for acquiring the title "Doctor" laid down in the legislation of the Republic of Bulgaria have been met. The mandatory minimum of credits in the scientific field are covered by an advance on all positions.

Qualitative assessment of the Summary

Purely formally, I can express criticism regarding the content of the Summary of the Dissertation proposed for defense. In this form it simply represents an abbreviated format of the dissertation itself, and in fact the meaning of this document is different - to allow non-specialists to enter the topic and assess the significance of the research. It is necessary that the content of the summary be very brief and that technical and specific terms be avoided as much as possible. I would like to point out again that here I am criticizing a long-overdue element of the dissertation defense procedure for the title "Doctor" in the Republic of Bulgaria. The summary of the dissertations that are defended before a jury of specialists is a completely redundant and outdated product.

Conclusions from the study and Contributions to the competition

The formation of the conclusions and contributions of the dissertation is correct in my opinion, how such sections should be presented. Since there is no specific instruction regarding the preparation of these lists, the quality assessment is highly subjective. In my opinion, the conclusions and contributions are correctly presented and correctly reflect the nature and results of the research conducted. There is no emphasis on the important data obtained in the course of the work on the behavioral ecology of the objects and in general this aspect should be analyzed in detail in subsequent publications.

Conclusion

After a detailed analysis of the documentation submitted under the procedure, I can state that it fully meets the requirements for receiving the title of "Doctor" in accordance with the Legislation and the Regulations for its implementation, as well as the Regulations for the terms and procedures for acquiring scientific degrees and occupying academic positions at IBEI-BAS. As a member of the Scientific Jury, appointed by order of the Director of IBEI-BAS No. 22/07.03.2025, I give a positive assessment and vote positively for the award of mag. Bladovesta Dimitrova Dimitrova the title "Doctor" in professional field 4.3. Biological Sciences.

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