

Statement

From: Prof. Dr. Nikolay Dobrinov Natchev, Department of Biology, Faculty of Natural Sciences, Shumen University “Bishop Konstantin Preslavski”, elected as a member of the Scientific Jury and appointed by order of the Director of IBEI-BAS No. 29/04.04.2025, in connection with a procedure for the ONS “Doctor” in the professional field 4.3. Biological Sciences, scientific specialty, “Ecology and Conservation of Ecosystems”, at the Section “Ecology of Communities and Conservation Biology”, Department “Ecosystem Research, Ecological Risk and Conservation Biology” at IBEI at BAS.

Subject: Competition for the ONS “Doctor” in the professional field 4.3. Biological Sciences, scientific specialty “Ecology and Conservation of Ecosystems”, at the Section “Ecology of Communities and Conservation Biology”, Department “Ecosystem Research, Ecological Risk and Conservation Biology” at IBEI at BAS.

In the announced procedure, the only candidate is MS Niya Lyubenova Toshkova. I have reviewed the attached documents in detail and in my opinion all the necessary attachments required by the ZRASRB, the Regulations for the implementation of the ZRASRB, the Regulations for the conditions and procedure for acquiring scientific degrees and occupying academic positions of the NPNM-BAS are available. In my opinion, the documentation for the competition is complete and organized in a convenient way for work. The documents describe and present the scientific activity of MS Toshkova.

Candidate's biographical data

Niya Toshkova is a bachelor from Sofia University in the specialty Ecology and Environmental Protection and defended her thesis in 2014. She enrolled in a master's degree at Sofia University in the same year and in 2019 defended her master's degree with a thesis. She also prepared an additional thesis in the field of Mycology. Since 2020, she has been a PhD student at the Institute of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

Professional experience

M.S. Toshkova has been associated with the NPNM-BAS since 2009 and has been appointed to the National Museum of Natural History at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences as a zoologist since 2020, and since 2023 she has been an assistant professor at this institution. She has research experience in several areas of the Biological Sciences, with the combination of zoological specializations and those in the field of fungal systematics and microbiology being particularly

valuable. Niya Toshkov also has a long experience as a teacher and lecturer, both in professional courses and as a popularizer of science. She was a part-time assistant at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". She has participated in almost all modern national mapping projects, as well as in numerous international scientific projects on the territory of at least three continents. She speaks several foreign languages, and the majority of her publications are in English. Niya Toshkova has completed numerous specializations in various scientific fields and geographical areas, with three of these specializations being carried out during her doctoral period.

Personal impressions

I do not know M.S. Toshkova personally, but I have spoken to her in connection with her dissertation. I have no joint publications and have not worked with her on scientific articles or projects. My impressions are entirely based on the dissertation work, the other documents on the procedure and the scientific production of Niya Toshkova. In my opinion, this is a particularly valuable specialist for Bulgarian science, formed in an international environment in the process of working with scientists of the most elite level. Mag. Toshkova has acquired knowledge and skills in areas that harmonize extremely well for the development of multidisciplinary research - informatics, bioinformatics, statistics, mycology, ornithology, microbiology, genetics, chiropterology, etc. The biographical data and publication activity of Niya Toshkova are extremely impressive to me, and the skills, knowledge and international contacts of the candidate guarantee rapid future academic development. In this context, Niya Toshkova is a very valuable asset for the scientific institution that will manage to attract her to an employment contract. I strongly hope that this will be a Bulgarian institution.

Scientific activity and publications

Niya Toshkova is the author or co-author of over 40 products, of which over 20 are scientific articles, as well as co-author of book chapters. She is the author of a manual for collecting data on bats. She has over 200 citations and an N-index of 7. I have also separately examined reports and methodologies that Mag. Toshkova has developed. These indicators are naturally not typical for such a procedure for obtaining a PhD degree, so there is no point in discussing them in detail. It is very impressive how many products in journals from the most elite quartiles have been realized and how many of these articles are with the leading participation of Niya Toshkova. Such publication activity is more typical of postdoctoral students from the most elite Research Institutes in the world. Even for lecturers from elite universities, such indicators are usually reached at a much later stage of academic development

Scientometric indicators of the competition and quality of the dissertation work

The Scientific Secretary of IBEI-BAS has awarded a total of 296 credits to the production presented by Niya Toshkova. I find no contradiction with this decision and confirm the credits from the "Assessment of the Preparation of the Doctoral Student". By all criteria, the candidate exceeds the requirements by a large margin

Three publications in Bulgarian journals have been submitted under the current competition, respectively from quartiles Q2 (two) and Q3 (one). The articles are on a similar topic and fit well within the framework of the dissertation, especially in view of the very well-written introductory and concluding chapters of the work. The option of including entire articles as parts of the Dissertation is optimal in modern conditions. Translating already published articles into Bulgarian is a time-honored practice, and I strongly welcome the decision of M.Sc. Toshkova to choose a modern format for her dissertation and thus strengthen the foundation for future procedures that will save PhD students, who are already stressed at this stage of their careers, from completely pointless work. Undoubtedly, M.S. Toshkova's dissertation is leading in terms of technical production, presentation, structure, and ease of use. Nia Toshkova has a talent for transforming a text written in strictly scientific language into a pleasant-to-read and fascinating product - for me, this is one of the most important and rarest qualities in an author's arsenal. I would also like to specially note the originality of the ideas underlying the research in the dissertation. The preparation of this dissertation suggests new and unconventional thinking.

Contributions to the competition and abstract

For me, describing contributions to such a dissertation is a pure formality and I do not think that a discussion is needed on how this was done by the candidate and the scientific supervisor. It is clear that the dissertation contains very important, new information that is key to understanding the ecology of bats and their conservation. Whether the contributions are formatted as eight or n in number is completely irrelevant, because the new knowledge gained is key in the field. The abstract is also completely redundant in its form. Once again, I will call for easing the procedures for protection from formalities!

Conclusion

After a detailed analysis of the documentation submitted under the procedure, I can state that it fully meets the requirements for the Award of the "Doctor" according to the ZRASRB 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. 29/04.04.2025, I give a positive assessment and vote "For" the awarding of the title of "Doctor" to Mag. Niya Lyubenova Toshkova in the professional field 4.3. Biological Sciences.

16. 06. 2025

Burgas
Nikolay Natchev)

Prepared by:

(Prof. Dr.