

STATEMENT

by Prof. Gergana P. Vasileva, PhD

Institute of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Research, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (IBER-BAS), on a competition for the academic position of Professor in Area 4.3. "Biological Sciences (Parasitology and Helminthology)" for the needs of the Research Group „Taxonomy, Evolution and Ecology of Helminths“, Division of Biodiversity and Ecology of Parasites, Department of Animal Diversity and Resources at IBER-BAS, announced in the State Gazette 45/03.06.2025

The only candidate in the announced competition is Assoc. Prof. Dr Yassen Mutafchiev. The candidate works at the "Taxonomy, Evolution and Ecology of Helminths" Research Group, Division of Biodiversity and Ecology of Parasites, Animal Diversity and Resources Department at IBER-BAS. The documents submitted by Dr Mutafchiev for participation in the competition comply with the requirements of the current regulatory provisions.

Dr Yassen Mutafchiev graduated from the Faculty of Biology of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in 2003, as a bachelor in "Biology", and two years later he acquired a professional qualification "Master of Zoology". Since 2005, he worked as a biologist at the department of Biological Diversity of the Central Laboratory of General Ecology - Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (CLGE-BAS). Dr Mutafchiev successfully defended his PhD thesis in "Parasitology and Helminthology" in 2009 at the CLGE-BAS (predecessor of IBER-BAS). After a successful competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor" in 2015, the candidate habilitated and currently holds this position in the Research Group "Taxonomy, Evolution and Ecology of Helminths" (IBER-BAS).

For participation in the current competition, Dr. Mutafchiev has submitted a list of 56 publications; 3 of them are related to the PhD thesis and 31 were presented during his previous habilitation. The candidate participates in the current competition with 22 scientific publications all of which are published in international refereed journals with impact factor and impact rank. The scientific publications are distributed in the report for compliance with national requirements, as follows: 7 articles are grouped in indicator "B", equal in content and contributions to habilitation work and assessed with a total of 150 points (with a required minimum of 100 points), and 15 articles are presented under indicator "D" with a total of 271 points (with a required minimum of 220 points). The table of compliance with national requirements, presented precisely and comprehensively, unconditionally shows that the candidate's scientometric data cover and far exceed the minimum requirements of the regulatory framework, as well as the minimum criteria for this academic position, approved by the Scientific Council of IBER-BAS.

A significant part of the articles of Dr Mutafchiev are published in carefully selected international journals, including journals with high IF and SJR rank (9 articles are in Q1 and 2 in Q2). Among the specialized international journals with publications of Dr Mutafchiev are *Systematic Parasitology*, *Journal of Helminthology*, *Zoologica Scripta*, *International Journal for Parasitology*, *Parasitology Research*, *Parasites & Vectors*, etc. The citations of the candidate's publications show that he is an internationally recognized expert and taxonomist with significant results. The candidate has presented a list of a total of 339 citations of his

works in international journals indexed in Web of Science and Scopus, excluding the citations reflected in the competition for his previous habilitation.

The report on the scientific contributions presented by Dr Mutafchiev objectively and comprehensively reflects the research work of the candidate. The contributions clearly outline the scientific scope of the candidate, which comprises the studies on fauna, systematics, morphology, phylogeny and life cycles of zooparasitic nematodes of birds and mammals. A peculiar feature of his scientific work is his ability to combine the classical methods with modern ones, in search of the most precise approach to clarify the taxonomy and phylogeny of the studied group. The most significant scientific contributions of Assoc. Prof. Mutafchiev could be grouped into the following areas:

- (1) Contributions to the taxonomy, systematics, phylogeny and life cycles of the family Acuariidae (Spirurida). This group has been the subject of the PhD thesis of Dr Mutafchiev and subsequently the systematics, phylogeny and ecology of the group have been upgraded with additional studies, e.g. taxonomic contributions (description of 3 new species, new synonymies and combinations proposed, a new diagnosis of the genus *Syncuaria* and keys for species identification of 3 genera); contributions to the life-cycle of the species *Streptocara incognita*; elaboration of a phylogenetic hypothesis for the family Acuariidae based on ribosomal RNA (28S), which confirmed the monophyly of this family.
- (2) Contributions to the morphology, systematics, phylogeny and biology of other families of the order Spirurida (Spirocercidae, Physalopteridae, Aproctidae, Onchocercidae).
- (3) Contributions to the morphology, systematics, phylogeny and biology of nematodes of the closely related orders Camallanida (Micropleuridae) and Ascaridida (Heterocheilidae, Heterakidae and Kiwinematidae).
- (4) Contributions to the morphology and biology of zooparasitic nematodes of importance for both humane medicine and veterinary practice. This group also includes contributions from joint research with veterinary parasitologists, in which Assoc. Prof. Mutafchiev participated as an expert in the taxonomy of zooparasitic nematodes.

The presented report of the published taxonomic acts includes the description of 3 new genera and 19 new species, and a proposal of 23 new generic combinations. It is worth noting that in almost all studied zoonematode groups, the precise and in-depth view of morphology (often combining light and scanning electron microscopy) is supplemented by additional data on the life cycles, critical analysis of the previous records, clarification of the taxonomy and preparation of phylogenetic hypotheses supported by molecular data. All scientific contributions in the candidate's report, which I fully accept, are entirely within the scientific scope of the current competition (4.3 "Biological Sciences", scientific specialty "Parasitology and Helminthology").

Dr Mutafchiev scientific and career development is associated with the implementation of several short-term and postdoctoral specializations, conducted in some of the richest helminthological collections of the Natural History Museums in Paris, Geneva and London, as well as the long-term and fruitful cooperation with the best nematologists in the world. Dr Mutafchiev has participated in 6 national and 3 international scientific projects with external funding; he is currently the coordinator of a project funded by the Bulgarian National Science Foundation. He was the supervisor of a successfully defended doctoral student from the IBER-BAS.

I am a colleague of Yassen Mutafchiev since the beginning of his scientific career. It was clear from his very first steps that we have among us an extremely motivated, well-educated young zoologist. I was one of the witnesses of his professional development, in

which Yassen consistently and purposefully mature into an experienced and precise scientist who effectively manages to combine classical with modern methods in contemporary systematics.

Conclusion: Based on the presented data, it can be summarized that Assoc. Prof. Yassen Mutafovich is an active, productive and internationally recognized scientist with a clearly defined research profile, a preferred partner with valuable scientific results and international expertise. The research activity of Dr. Mutafovich conform the requirements of the Scientific Council of IBER-BAS for holding the academic position of professor and fully corresponds to the objectives of this competition. I'd like to recommend with full confidence to the Scientific Council of IBER-BAS the election of Dr Yassen Mutafovich as a professor in professional field 4.3. Biological Sciences, scientific speciality "Parasitology and Helminthology".

30 September 2025

Sofia

Signature:

(Gergana P. Vasileva, Prof., PhD)