

STATEMENT

by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ilia Vladimirov Gjonov, Sofia University, Faculty of Biology
Member of the Scientific Jury appointed by Order No. 72/05.08.2025 of the Director of the Institute of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Research, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, in connection with the competition for occupying the academic position of “Professor,” announced in the State Gazette, issue 45 of 03.06.2025, in the field of higher education: “Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Informatics”; Professional field: “Biological Sciences”; Scientific specialty: “Parasitology and Helminthology,” for the needs of the research group “Taxonomy, Evolution and Ecology of Helminths,” section “Biodiversity and Ecology of Parasites,” Department “Animal Diversity and Resources.”

Assoc. Prof. Yassen Mutafovchiev is the sole candidate participating in the competition for Professor in Biological Sciences (Parasitology and Helminthology) for the needs of the research group “Taxonomy, Evolution and Ecology of Helminths,” section “Biodiversity and Ecology of Parasites,” Department “Animal Diversity and Resources.” He has worked as a researcher in the field of helminthology at the Central Laboratory of General Ecology – BAS, and subsequently at the Institute of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Research – BAS, since 2005, with certain interruptions. Until 2010, he held the position of “Biologist Specialist”; in 2010, he was elected “Research Associate, First Degree,” later equated to “Senior Assistant Professor”; and in 2015, he was elected “Associate Professor.” He defended his doctoral dissertation in the field of the present competition in 2009. During this period, Yassen Mutafovchiev completed a two-month specialization at the National Museum of Natural History in Paris and undertook five research visits to prestigious scientific institutions in Switzerland, France, and Italy. His taxonomic work has been supported by five personal grants under the specialized European program Synthesys, which enabled him to work in zoological collections in Germany, Austria, France, and the United Kingdom. He has participated in numerous national and international projects and currently leads a project for fundamental scientific research funded by the National Science Fund (NSF-MES). He has supervised graduate and doctoral students. He is the author of 55 scientific publications, cited over 600 times in the scientific literature. The above demonstrates the candidate’s high professional qualification, the well-defined profile of a taxonomist working on a particularly complex group of animals, and his effective scientific communication at both national and international levels.

In the competition for Professor, Assoc. Prof. Mutafovchiev has submitted 22 publications that were not used in his previous competitions for the academic position of “Associate Professor” or for obtaining the scientific degree “Doctor.”

For **Criterion B** of the minimum national requirements of the Regulations for the Application of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (RALDASRB), seven articles have been submitted, most of them published in journals ranked in the first quartile (Q1) by global scientometric platforms. These publications total **150 points**, significantly exceeding both the minimum requirements of RALDASRB and the additional requirements of the Regulations for the Acquisition of Scientific Degrees and Occupation of Academic Positions at BAS, as well as those of the Institute of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Research – BAS.

For **Criterion Г**, 15 scientific publications have been submitted: five in Q1 journals, one in Q2, six in Q3, and three in Q4. The total for Criterion G amounts to **271 points**, again considerably exceeding the minimum requirements of the aforementioned regulations.

As is evident, the scientific output presented by Assoc. Prof. Mutaфchiev for this competition is more than sufficient to meet the formal requirements. What is particularly impressive is not the quantity, but rather the quality of the publications and the candidate's personal contribution. Yаsen Mutaфchiev is first and corresponding author of seven of the submitted publications, which highlights his ability to lead the scientific process. At the same time, many of the works are co-authored with leading Bulgarian and international scientists, underlining the candidate's ability to work effectively in diverse scientific environments.

The main contributions of the submitted publications are taxonomic, with particular emphasis on the numerous newly described taxa—three genera and 19 species from seven families—as well as the revised taxonomic status of 23 species from five different nematode families. In many of his studies, Assoc. Prof. Mutaфchiev has applied an integrative approach to resolving taxonomic problems—numerous publications include data from genetic analyses, scanning electron microscopy, modern light microscopy techniques (e.g., interference contrast), phylogenetic analyses, and others. For many nematode groups, in addition to morphological descriptions and biological studies, phylogenetic hypotheses have been formulated and taxonomic identification keys compiled, reflecting a clear drive to generalize accumulated knowledge. Geographically, the candidate's research spans six continents, once again underscoring his standing as a scientist of international stature. Equally remarkable is the broad spectrum of investigated hosts—amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals.

The research of Assoc. Prof. Mutaфchiev is not limited to taxonomy—he has also studied various aspects of the biology, ecology, and epidemiology of nematodes and platyhelminths. These additional investigations are in line with the best contemporary practices in zoology.

The impact of Assoc. Prof. Mutaфchiev's scientific work, evaluated through **Criterion Д**, is clearly demonstrated by the numerous citations (339 submitted for this competition out of more than 600 in total). The accumulated **678 points** also greatly exceed the regulatory requirements.

Yаsen Mutaфchiev has successfully supervised a doctoral student to completion. He has participated in six national projects and programs and three international projects. He currently leads a project funded by the National Science Fund (MES). Thus, meeting the required minimum for **Criterion Е** is beyond doubt, as the candidate has accumulated **169 points**.

Yаsen Mutaфchiev is a dedicated scientist with a clearly defined research profile and broad general biological knowledge, enabling him to conduct high-quality, large-scale scientific work that transcends local boundaries. He also serves as an editor in several high-ranking international scientific journals, where, in my opinion, he demonstrates a high level of professionalism and competence.

In light of the above, I strongly support the appointment of Yаsen Mutaфchiev as Professor of Biological Sciences (Parasitology and Helminthology) for the needs of the research group “Taxonomy, Evolution and Ecology of Helminths,” section “Biodiversity and Ecology of Parasites,” Department “Animal Diversity and Resources.”

10.09.2025

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/Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ilia Gjonov/