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OPINION

by Professor Boyko B. Georgiev, Institute of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Research, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (IBER – BAS), on a competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor" in Research Direction 4.3. Biological Sciences (Ecology and Ecosystem Conservation) for the needs of the Section "Community Ecology and Conservation Biology" at the Department of Ecosystem Research, Ecological Risk and Conservation Biology, announced in the State Gazette, Issue №69/31.07.2026, with candidate Chief Assistant Dr. Emilia Vacheva

Dr. Emilia Vacheva is the only candidate in the competition for Associate Professor in "Biological Sciences (Ecology and Ecosystem Conservation)" for the needs of the section "Community Ecology and Conservation Biology" of IBER-BAS.

Dr. Vacheva graduated with a bachelor's degree in biology in 2012. In 2014, she obtained a master's degree in the program "Vertebrate Zoology" at the Faculty of Biology of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" with excellent results. From 2016 to 2018, she was a doctoral student in the Vertebrate Zoology Programme at the National Museum of Natural History at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, conducting research on the spatial and nutritional niches of species of three lizard families occurring in Bulgaria. In 2021, she defended her dissertation and was awarded the scientific degree "Doctor". During her doctoral studies, she published her first three scientific articles in the field of herpetology. She has been employed at IBER-BAS since 2021, initially as an assistant, and as a chief assistant since 2022.

Dr. Vacheva is perfectly integrated into the research process of the institutions at which she has worked (NMNH-BAS and IBER-BAS). From 2018 to the present, she has participated in 9 externally-funded projects, eight of which are the result of winning competitions announced by the Bulgarian Scientific Research Fund. Dr. Vacheva's research activity is focused entirely in the field of herpetology, with a particular emphasis on the biology, ecology and conservation of an ecologically important group, i.e. the squamate reptiles of the suborder Lacertilia.

Emilia Vacheva has presented a list of 34 scientific papers in connection with the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor. They are divided into groups as follows:

- Scientific works, on the basis of which a dissertation was defended – 3 pieces;

- Habilitation work – scientific articles in publications that are referenced and indexed in world-renowned databases of scientific information (WoS and Scopus) – 10 pieces;

- Scientific articles in publications that are referenced and indexed in world-renowned databases of scientific information (Web of Science and Scopus) and not included in the habilitation work – 21 pieces.

Dr. Vacheva's presented scientific output is entirely in scientific journals that are referenced in Web of Science or Scopus. This fact testifies to the high quality of her scientific work.

Dr. Vacheva has significant original scientific contributions, which are very well presented in the attached reference list. They are aptly grouped under the headings "Ecology and Faunistics", "Genetic Studies", "Karyological Studies", "Chemical Communication", "Intestinal Microbiome" and "Pathology".

I will mention some of these contributions that I find particularly important and original:

- The trophic niches of five lizard species (*Darevskia praticola*, *Lacerta viridis*, *Podarcis tauricus*, *P. muralis* and *Ablepharus kitaibelii*) and one newt species (*Triturus cristatus*) from several localities in Bulgaria have been characterized.
- The poorly known winter activity of the snake-eyed lizard in its main distribution range in Bulgaria – the Eastern Rhodopes – has been characterized.
- Cases of melanism have been described in two species of lizards in Bulgaria.
- The nocturnal activity of the green lizard in two regions of Bulgaria has been characterized and it has been shown that it is not provoked by artificial light sources.
- The habitat preferences of the Balkan subspecies of the meadow lizard (*Lacerta agilis bosnica*) have been characterized.

According to the attached reference, Dr. Vacheva's scientific works have been cited 83 times. This is evidence of their scientific value and the quality of the research conducted.

Considering the achieved scientific results as well as my personal impressions, I believe that Dr. Vacheva is an excellently-trained, active and capable researcher of the Bulgarian herpetofauna. Her scientific contributions are significant and well-known to the scientific community, as can be judged by the number of citations. I believe that she has reached the necessary qualifications to occupy the academic position of associate professor. The appointment of Dr. Vacheva as associate professor will continue the process of strengthening the herpetological research direction at the Institute of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Research at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

Based on the above, I strongly support the election of the Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Emilia Vacheva as Associate Professor in Direction 4.3. Biological Sciences (Ecology and Ecosystem Conservation) for the needs of the Community Ecology and Conservation Biology Section of the Department of Ecosystem Research, Ecological Risk and Conservation Biology.

23 November 2026

Sofia

Signature:

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Professor, PhD, DSc