



Statement

by **Prof. Elenka Stoilova Georgieva, PhD,**
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regarding the contest for the academic position "**Professor**"
in higher education area 4. Natural sciences, mathematics and informatics,
4.3 Biological Sciences, professional field Medical Biology

I. Analysis of the career profile of the candidates

In the contest for “Professor” described in order No. 35/19.04.2024 г. and announced on the website of the Medical University - Plovdiv (MU-Plovdiv), for the needs of the Department of “Medical Biology” at the Faculty of Medicine, one candidate participate, namely: **Associate Professor Maria Hristova Kazakova-Velinova, PhD.**

According to the presented CV, the candidate Maria Kazakova-Velinova graduated with a Bachelor 's degree in Molecular biology at the Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski”. In 2006, she received a Master's degree in Cell biology at Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski”. She also has a Master's degree in Innovation and research management at the Faculty of History and Philosophy at Plovdiv University. She defended her dissertation thesis in 2013 in the field of Immunology. Along with this, during the period 2016-2018, she received a professional specialization in Leadership: Creating Public Value by Harvard University. In terms of her professional realization, Maria Kazakova-Velinova worked at the Plovdiv University in 2005, first as a biologist at the Department of Developmental Biology and in 2007 she worked as an assistant professor in the Department of Medical Biology, MU – Plovdiv, later during 2014-2016 she acquired the academic position chief assistant at the second Department. Since 2016 she is associate professor at the Department of Medical Biology, MU – Plovdiv, and from 2024 she is also the head of the same Department. Other occupied administrative activities are: 2019 - 2023 - member of the Council for educational activities, as well as member of the Council for scientific and research activities of the MU - Plovdiv. Since 2024, she is a member of the academic activity council of the Faculty of Medicine, MU – Plovdiv.

The candidate Assoc. Prof. Maria Kazakova-Velinova is a member of the Union of Scientists in Bulgaria and the European Immunology Society. She has been an examiner of candidate student competitive works in biology at the MU – Plovdiv. In 2023, she was the chairman of the candidate student committee in Biology in Bulgarian and English. Assoc. Prof. Maria Kazakova-Velinova participated in academic juries for the acquisition of different academic positions. She is a member of the state examination commission for the specialty "Medical Biology" for acquiring a specialty in the field of health care. She is the supervisor of doctoral students and specialists. She completed numerous specializations in Bulgaria and abroad.

II. General description of the submitted materials for the competition

The presented documents meet the set of criteria and indicators for the academic position of “Professor”, according to the ASDARB, the Regulations for its implementation and the Regulations for the occupation of the academic position, adopted in the Regulations for the organization and activity of MU-Plovdiv.

Assoc. Prof. Maria Hristova Kazakova-Velinova presents 28 publications in scientific journals, 6 are indexed in Scopus and Web of Science, equated to habilitation work. The 16 publications were published in scientific publications, indexed in Scopus and Web of Science. A list of publications with IF is presented as well. Articles and reports published in non-refereed peer-reviewed journals or in edited collective volumes are (6 of total) also presented. Lastly, a list of citations and reviews in scientific publications, referenced and indexed only in Scopus and Web of Science or in monographs and collective volumes is presented.

Assoc. Prof. Maria Kazakova-Velinova presents: scientific guidance of 1 successfully defended doctoral student who acquired his/her PhD in the specialty "Medical Biology"; participation in 4 national and 2 international projects; supervising of 2 national and 2 international scientific projects. She participated in the publication of 1 university textbook and 10 university handbooks. Activities related to teaching activity, participations and certificates are also presented. I accept all the required documents (official notes, certificates, references for participation in projects, etc.) supporting the candidate achievements.

III. Evaluation of the scientific work of the candidate/s for the academic development.

The scientific production and publication activity along with the other submitted materials present Assoc. Prof. Maria Kazakova-Velinova as an ambitious and promising scientist. In regards to the scientific and scientific-applied activity, 22 papers indexed in Scopus and Web of Science and 6 publications in non-refereed scientific journals were presented. According to Indicator V 6 publications equivalent to a habilitation work were presented with a total of 110 points of the required 100. According to Indicator G7, the publications of Assoc. Prof. Maria Kazakova-Velinova are classified as follows: Q1 – 6, Q2 – 5, Q3 – 3, Q4 – 1, 1 paper - 10 points (14 publications with impact factor (total IF = 53.76). Without impact factor, 2 papers were presented. Regarding Indicator G8, 6 articles published in non-refereed journals or in edited collective volumes were presented, which give a total of 60 points. According to Indicator D, the candidate presents a list of citations and reviews in scientific publications, indexed in Scopus and Web of Science of 119 citations = 238 points. From reviews - 14 points or a total of 252 points out of the required 100 points were submitted. Associate Professor Maria Kazakova-Velinova has Scopus H-index = 11.

The scientific interests and original contributions of Assoc. Prof. Maria Kazakova-Velinova are related to first studies on the serum levels of the YKL-40 protein in healthy, asymptomatic individuals from the Bulgarian population. A mechanism for the regulation of YKL-40 by miRNA-214 in patients with systemic sclerosis (SS) is proposed, based on *in silico* and *in vitro* experiments in blood samples, as well as a mechanism for the control of protein synthesis. The clinical significance of tissue expression of YKL-40 as a prognostic marker in metastatic colorectal carcinoma is presented for the first time. Gene and protein expression of LAMP-1, which is associated with tumor progression in high-grade gliomas, as well as, LAMPs and YKL-40 in acute CNS infections, were investigated.

The biological activity of new fluorenyl spiro-hydantoin, the structure and biological properties of substituted fluorenylspirohydantoin are determined for the first time. In addition, a metabolic profile in patients with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), changes in mitochondrial activity in a Bulgarian patients and correlation with YKL-40 protein levels are also reported for the first time.

Associate Professor Maria Kazakova-Velinova actively participated in the development of a total of 4 national and 2 international scientific projects, in 4 of which she was the leading research-

er/supervisor. She is also a member in professional organizations and has attended many scientific forums.

IV. Evaluation of the monographic work or equivalent publications submitted for participation in the contest for the academic position “Professor” by the candidate/s

For her participation in the contest and according to Indicator V, Assoc. Prof. Maria Kazakova-Velinova presented 5 publications Q1 - 5 and Q2 - 5 and with a total number of points – 110 out of the required 100 points, which are equated to a habilitation thesis – a monograph. All presented materials meet the requirements of the ASDARB.

The scientific publications presented in the competition are co-authored. I consider the candidate's participation in all submitted works to be equal.

V. Reflection (citation) of the candidate's publications in national and foreign scientific literature (publication image).

The list of citations and reviews of Associate Professor Maria Kazakova-Velinova referenced and indexed in Scopus and Web of Science are a total of 119 (238 points), as well as reviews in refereed peer-reviewed journals (total 14 points) or a total of 252 points under indicator D11 of the required 100 points.

VI. Complex, qualitative evaluation of the teaching-methodical and teaching activity, incl. scientific guidance of students, PhD students, specialists

Assoc. Professor Maria Kazakova-Velinova was the supervisor of 1 successfully defended doctoral student (+ 50 points) in 2021 and of another doctoral student in 2022. She acquired a specialty in Medical Biology (+ 40 points). She actively participated in writing and co-authoring the publication of 1 university textbook and 10 university handbooks, thereby supporting the preparation of students in the disciplines taught at the department.

In her educational and teaching activity, Assoc. Professor Maria Kazakova-Velinova has a total of 17 years of work experience with a total of +1486 points (+786 points from lectures and exercises and from an academic position +700 points).

Shen actively participates in the activities of the Department of “Medical Biology” and MU - Plovdiv as: member of the committee for examination in the specialty “Medical Biology” and head of the specialization in “Medical Biology”. Since 2024, she has been the head of the same department. Also she is a member of the academic activities council at the MU - Plovdiv for the period 2019-2023 and 2024-2028.

She participates in MU teaching academy - Plovdiv on the following modules: "Language rules for the academic style of writing - in Bulgarian and English"; "Pedagogical skills"; "Communication and presentation skills"; "On-study guide for doctoral students" held in 2018. She is a member of the Bulgarian Society of Immunology, the Scientific Society of Medical Biology and the Union of Scientists in Bulgaria.

To increase the quality for application in a foreign language, she has attended courses in: terminology for the specialty of medicine; foreign language training at the International Center for Training and Tourism, Plovdiv; English to learn professional terminology at the New Bulgarian University - Center for Foreign Languages; Italian language level A1-A2.

VII. Critical notes and recommendations

I have no critical remarks on the content of the material presented by the candidate.

VIII. General assessment of the applicant's compliance with the minimum national requirements under Art. 2b, para. 2 and 3, respectively, to the requirements under Art. 2b, para. 5 of the ASDARB and the requirements specific to MU - Plovdiv by direction and for units with/without clinical activity, defined in the Regulations for Academic Development at the Medical University - Plovdiv.

After studying all the materials and scientific works, and based on the analysis of their scientifically-applied significance and contributions, **I confirm** that the candidate – **Assoc. Professor Maria Kazakova-Velinova** meet the minimum national requirements under Art. 2b, para. 2 and 3, respectively, to the requirements under Art. 2b, para. 5 of ASDARB and those specific to MU - Plovdiv for the occupation of the academic position of "Associate professor" higher education area 4. Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Informatics, 4.3 Biological Sciences, professional field Medical Biology.

When summarizing the points for the individual indicators Assoc. Professor Maria Kazakova-Velinova has a total of 2 669.29 points, which exceeds more than twice the required 1210 points.

IX. Conclusion

Based on the above, I declare that the candidate **Assoc. Professor Maria Kazakova-Velinova, PhD** meets the mandatory minimum of scientific criteria and I therefore give my yes to her application for the academic position “Professor” in 4. Natural sciences, mathematics and informatics, 4.3 Biological sciences, professional field Medical Biology.

X. Proposal for Ranking/Occupation

According to the presented scientific indicators, I recommend that the scientific jury **award the academic position “Professor” to Assoc. Professor Maria Kazakova-Velinova, PhD** in higher education area 4. Natural sciences, mathematics and informatics, 4.3 Biological sciences, professional field Medical Biology.

Заличено на основание
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Prepared: .

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(Prof. Elenka Georgieva, PhD)