

EXPERT OPINION

in connection with the defence of a PhD thesis
for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree “PhD”
in the field of higher education: 3. Social, economic and legal sciences
Professional field: 3.8. Economics (Financial markets)
PhD program: “Finance, Insurance and Assurance”

**Topic of the PhD thesis: „Financial and legal aspects of the fight against organized crime
in the world and the Balkan countries Bulgaria, Albania and Northern Macedonia”**

Author of the PhD work: Julinda Shehai

**Academic supervisors: Prof. Dr. Mariela Deliverska
Prof. Dr. Ljupco Stoichesky**

Author of the opinion: Prof. Dr. Tsvetan Iliev

1. General presentation of the received materials

This opinion has been prepared on the basis of Order №258/27.06.2023 of the rector of University of Insurance and Finance (UIF) – prof. Boris Velchev, PhD, in accordance with art, 4(2) of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and art 30(2) of the Regulations for the implementation of this Act, as well as in accordance with art47(7) of the Rules for admission and training of PhD students in UIF.

The documentation provided to me under the completion includes: dissertation, abstract, list of scientific publications, abstracts of publications for participation in the procedure, reference for compliance with scientific requirements, CV, declaration of authorship and conscientious development of the dissertation. In compliance with the requirements of art. 6(1) and (2) of the LDASRB there is evidence of possession of a Master’s Degree and a dissertation on “Financial and legal aspects of the fight against organized crime in the world and the Balkan countries Bulgaria, Albania and Northern Macedonia”.

The presented gives me grounds to point out that the normative requirements for admission to participation in a dissertation procedure for adjudication of educational and scientific degree “PhD” have been complied with.

2. Brief biographical data about the PhD student

PhD student Julinda Shehai was born on 24.10.1992 in Albania. In the period 2011-2014 she graduated for the Faculty of Law of the University of Tirana with a Bachelor's Degree. In 2017 she obtained her Master's Degree in Public law at the same university and in 2020 she got a Master's Degree in Criminology and Detective at the International University of Struga, North Macedonia.

Professionally, PhD student Shehai has focused her development in the field of legal counseling and legal aid and since August 2020 she has held the position of Crime Investigation Specialist at Tirana Police Directorate. She is fluent in written and spoken English and Italian, as well as Spanish.

3. Topicality of the topic and appropriateness of the set goals and objectives

I can define the research area chosen by PhD student Shehai as topical. The protection of the international and national order from the contemporary forms of pressure is impossible without identifying, organizing and implementing continuous and synchronized measures between institutions and organisations at national, international and global levels. Organized crime is a negative phenomenon that has the ability to use favourable conditions for development and penetration into social life and to adapt to a specific socio-political and economic situation not only on the territory of a country, but also internationally. Research on the economic and social effects of organised crime activities at local, regional and international levels is ongoing. At the same time, it cannot be said that the problems have been studied to the end, on the contrary – there is a serious development of them today, especially in the conditions of accelerated implementation of new technological achievements in social life. This gives me a reason to define the research problem identified by the PhD student as topical and dissertationable.

On this basis, I find that PhD student Shehai has defined realistically and in achievable dimensions the goal of her dissertation – to propose a model of an effective national system for protection against the different forms of organized crime in the Balkan countries of Bulgaria, Albania and North Macedonia. A well-described and tested methodology for working at national level, linking the different subsystems for countering organised crime, should take priority in the system. For the realisation of the so-defined aim in the dissertation research 6 tasks are set for implementation. I accept them as creating a real opportunity to achieve a goal.

In view of the set aim and objectives, the PhD student defines the object of study as the activity of the institutions at national and international level to deal with the activities of organised crime. The subject of the PhD thesis is the legal and financial aspects of the activities of organised crime in the international context and, in particular, in the Balkan countries – Bulgaria, Albania and North Macedonia. In order to prove her thesis, the PhD student tests three main hypotheses.

4. Knowledge of the problem

A good impression is the fact that a PhD student Shehai is familiar with the research work of a number of foreign authors. She aptly emphasizes that despite the huge amount of research on this issue, new aspects always arise especially with the digitalization of socio-economic relations today. From the presentation of the dissertation I can certify that the PhD student demonstrates knowledge in the various aspects of the research problem and this enables her to go in-depth into it.

5. Methodology of the study

In order to achieve the goal defined in the development, PhD student Julinda Shehai uses adequate research methods: induction and deduction, comparative analysis, description of phenomena and processes and logical modelling. To a considerable extent, they make it possible to achieve the research tasks

6. Characterization and evaluation of the dissertation

The dissertation has a total volume of 161 standard pages and corresponds to the subject, object and purpose of the study. Structurally, it consists of: introduction, an exposition of three chapters, a conclusion and a bibliography including 91 sources, mostly in English.

In Chapter One of the dissertation, PhD student Shehai reviews the essential characteristics of the activities of organised crime, applying the approach of scientific deduction. The author's attempt to classify the activities and in this basis to identify some specific features is very impressive. This review is based on a wide range of studies by various authors and international organisations on the issue.

Another important feature of the dissertation research in this part is the attempt to identify the causes of the emergence of different forms of organised crime on the basis of their practical manifestations. PhD student Shehai divides the established prerequisites for emergence into two groups – psychological and business-based. Some financial dimensions of the effects of criminal activities have been identified based on data from international crime fighting organisations. In her presentation, the author gives the most general assessment, without going into depth. It would be more appropriate not just to present figures, but to attempt to create an analytical model to assess the effects.

In Chapter One, it is worth nothing to PhD student Shehai's assessment of the global dimensions of organised crime. This gives me reason to emphasise that there is a

demonstrated ability to move across different levels of problem-solving – from the national to the regional to the global level.

Chapter Two is devoted to the legal framework for combating organised crime. According to the author, the international experience is the leading one. Where it is emphasized that globalisation facilitates international trade and exchange of goods, but also makes it more difficult to regulate activities such as trade in illicit goods and to implement legislative measures to prevent criminal activities.

The most significant group of measures are those of a preventative nature. As an example in this direction, the following are taken from the normative acts of various organizations under the auspices of the United Nations. Key aspects of the EU regulatory framework are also examined. Among them, measures implemented on the basis of international cooperation between member states are presented in the foreground.

In Chapter Three, PhD student Shehai pays attention to the forms of manifestation of the activities of organised crime in the countries of the Balkan Peninsula and more precisely: Bulgaria, Albania and North Macedonia. The geopolitical and economic situation in this region of the world in the last 30 years is used as a starting point for the presentation. Similarities and differences have been identified in the practices of organised crime groups in the three countries mentioned above. It is skilfully concluded that criminal acts have no ethnic, geographical and religious barriers. On this basis, recommendations for independent and joint actions to fight organised crime are defined.

The conclusion of the dissertation contains more important findings than those presented in the three chapters. This gives me reason to define PhD student Shehai as an author with a critical and thorough research view on the problems of social and economic nature arising from the actions of organised crime.

7. Contributions and importance of development for science and practice

The scientific contributions of the PhD student mentioned in the report I accept that they correspond to what is shown in the dissertation.

8. Evaluation of publications on the dissertation

Scientific publications on the topic of the dissertation work, in which the author's ideas are promoted – three articles – also speak for a formed research outlook. The indicated research work of the author corresponds to the requirements for the procedure for acquiring the degree “PhD”.

9. Personal participation of the PhD student

The dissertation, abstract and publications of PhD student Yovanova presented to the attention of the scientific jury I accept as a personal achievement of the author. The literature and information sources indicated in the bibliographic reference are used correctly.

10. Abstract

The abstract is developed according to the requirements and has all the necessary requisites for such a development. It fully reflects the structure and content of the dissertation. Its volume is 36 standard pages.

11. Critical notes and recommendations

Like any such development, the dissertation presented by PhD student Julinda Shehai has some drawbacks. For example, the author's attention is primarily focused on the journalistic style of presenting the issues and less on the analysis and resulting assessments. Secondly, the paper attempts to construct a model for assessing the actions of organized crime with its inherent normative and practical solutions. However, it needs to be presented more explicitly and specifically. That way the work would benefit more. In this sense, my main recommendation to the author is to continue and deepen her research activity, which will bring her positive results in her chosen professional field.

Thirdly, the legal principle prevails over the economic and financial one in the solution of the problem.

These criticisms do not diminish the achievements of the PhD student and should not be taken as serious shortcomings. Taking them into account in future work by J., Shehai on the subject I would only bring positives for her and shape her as a thorough researcher.

A question on which the PhD student needs to take a stand during the defence:

- 1. Will the EU membership of Albania and North Macedonia help the fight against organised crime in these countries and in what way?**
- 2. What specific joint initiatives can the three countries take to address their common problems with organised crime?**

12. Personal impressions

I do not know the PhD student and have no personal impressions of her. In preparing my opinion, I was guided only by what was presented in her dissertation and her publications.

13. Recommendations for future use of dissertation contributions and results

The main recommendation I make to PhD student Shehai is to focus more of her efforts on evaluating the practical aspects of the researched processes and phenomena.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I believe that PhD student Julinda Shehai meets the scientific and legal requirements for awarding educational and scientific degree “PhD” in the field of Higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences; Professional field 3.8. Economics (Financial markets) and has the necessary professional and personal qualities. Therefore, I confidently give my positive assessment of the conducted research, presented by the above-reviewed dissertation, abstract, achieved results and contributions, and I propose to the honourable jury to award the educational and scientific degree “PhD” to Julinda Shehai.

10.08.2023

Signature:

/Prof. Tsvetan Iliev, PhD