

REVIEW

by Prof. Dr. Stanislav Dimitrov,

professor at the Higher School of Insurance and Finance, VUZF

of the materials submitted for participation in the competition

for the academic position of **‘professor’**

at the Higher School of Insurance and Finance

in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.8

Economics, scientific specialty "Finance, monetary circulation, credit and insurance"

In the competition for 'professor', announced in the State Gazette, issue 5 of 17.01.2025 and on the website of the Higher School of Insurance and Finance, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Andrey Zahariev participated as a candidate.

1. General presentation of the received materials

By order No. 119 of 24.03.2025 of the Rector of the Higher School of Insurance and Finance, I am appointed as a member of the scientific jury of a competition for the academic position of 'professor' at the Higher School of Insurance and Finance, VUZF in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.8 Economics, scientific specialty "Finance, monetary circulation, credit and insurance", announced by the Higher School of Insurance and Finance, VUZF.

A single candidate has submitted documents for participation in the announced competition, namely Assoc. Prof. Dr. Andrey Zahariev.

The set of materials in electronic form presented by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Andrey Zahariev is in full compliance with the Regulations on the terms and conditions for occupying academic positions at the Higher School of Insurance and Finance, and includes the following documents:

- CV;
- copy of the diploma for the educational and scientific degree “doctor”;
- document for the academic position “associate professor” and “professor” held;
- monographic work with a summary;
- list of publications after holding the academic position “associate professor” and copies thereof;
- summaries in Bulgarian and English of publications after holding the academic position “associate professor”;
- certificate of the required internship under Art. 33, para. 1, item 2;
- separation protocols for joint publications;
- evidence of supervision of doctoral students appointed as lecturers in a higher education institution;
- evidence of supervision of scientific projects and other research tasks;

- certificate of fulfillment of the minimum national requirements for holding the academic position “professor”;
- certificate of original scientific contributions in the works and citations (excluding self-citations);
- consent form for the processing of personal data in connection with participation in the competition.

The documents presented by the candidate Assoc. Prof. Dr. Andrey Zahariev are characterized by orderliness and completeness.

2. Brief biographical data of the candidate

Based on the submitted documents and more specifically on the submitted autobiography, it can be concluded that the candidate Assoc. Prof. Dr. Andrey Zahariev has significant experience in scientific research, teaching and practice. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Andrey Zahariev successively obtained a Master's degree in Economics and Industrial Management and Analysis from the "D. A. Tsenov" Academy of Economics, a Doctoral degree /Scientific specialty 05.02.05 "Finance, Money Circulation, Credit and Insurance"/ from the "D. A. Tsenov" Academy of Economics, an Associate Professor since 2001 and a Professor since 2012 at the "D. A. Tsenov" Academy of Economics. The teaching experience of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Andrey Zahariev is an author and lecturer in 11 disciplines, including International Finance, Debt Management, Financial Analysis, Capital Management in the Company, Financial Management of Human Resources, Management of Municipal Budgets, Project Financing Techniques, Currencies and Foreign Exchange Transactions, Introduction to Finance, Fundamentals of Finance and Economic Theories, Financial Risk Management.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Andrey Zahariev shows significant experience in practice, as a company manager, Chairman of the Board of the National Association of Acting Chairmen of Municipal Councils in the Republic of Bulgaria (2005-2008), Chairman of the Standing Committee on Economic Development, Finance and Budget at the Svishtov Municipal Council (from July 2008 to May 2010), administrative and managerial functions at the "D. A. Tsenov" Academy of Economics, Svishtov as Dean, Head of Department, Vice-Rector, Vice-Chairman of the General Assembly, etc.

3. General characteristics of the candidate's activities

In addition to what is mentioned about the candidate in the biographical data, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Andrey Zahariev's extremely active participation in team and project management is impressive. Proof of this is his participation in the management and implementation of over 30 national and international projects.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Andrey Zahariev is the scientific supervisor of a significant number of successfully defended doctoral students, 17 people, two of whom were under joint supervision.

The scientific and scientific-applied activity of the candidate Assoc. Prof. Dr. Andrey Zahariev can be assessed as exceptionally good, fully consistent with the requirements of this competition. In the current procedure for the competition for "professor" Assoc. Prof. Dr. Andrey Zahariev participates with 42 publications, as follows:

- 1 monograph - habilitation thesis;
- 1 published monograph, which is not presented as the main habilitation thesis;
- 8 articles and reports published in scientific publications, referenced and indexed in world-renowned databases of scientific information;
- 21 articles and reports published in non-refereed journals with scientific review or published in edited collective volumes;
- 2 studies published in scientific publications, referenced and indexed in world-renowned databases of scientific information;
- 2 studies published in non-refereed journals with scientific review or published in edited collective volumes;
- 1 published chapter of a collective monograph;
- 5 published university textbooks or textbooks used in the school network;
- 1 published university textbook or textbook used in the school network.

The publications of the candidate Assoc. Prof. Dr. Andrey Zahariev have clear scientific, scientifically applied and applied contributions.

It makes a very good positive impression that the author successfully manages to develop both independent research and jointly with other authors.

Another very positive moment in the scientific activity of the candidate Assoc. Prof. Dr. Andrey Zahariev is the fact that the publications are both in various reputable journals and on the occasion of scientific conferences and round tables.

In addition, a positive certificate of the author's qualities is the fact that some of the publications are in foreign languages - in English.

From a content point of view, the monograph presented for the purposes of the competition is very relevant. The title of the monograph is “Financial Decentralization - Cross Analysis and Empirical Evidence”.

The presented work is 157 pages long and includes an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, a list of figures, a list of tables, a list of cited literature and bibliographic indicators of the monographic work.

Financial decentralization in Bulgaria is the subject of the study of the monograph. The subject of the study is the establishment, through cross analysis and empirical evidence, of the current state, problems and prospects facing Bulgarian municipalities through the prism of the responsibilities and powers of local government bodies. On p. 6 the leading thesis of the monograph is formulated, namely “*...financial decentralization is a multifaceted process of a strategic nature, combining delegation of powers with their resource provision to ensure the implementation of the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, in an environment of multiple crises and perspectives related to the country's membership in the Schengen Area and the Eurozone.*” I believe that the thesis is appropriately formulated, responds to the title, structure, content, analysis and conclusions of the study.

The research in the monograph is in-depth and shows significant authorial experience and academic contribution. Multiple sources of information have been used.

Chapter One examines empirical evidence for financial decentralization in an environment of multiple crises (2020-2025). The content of this chapter is in 9 points. The volume of the first chapter is 55 pages. The analysis in Chapter One is aimed at assessing the financial situation of Bulgarian municipalities in the period 2020-2025, assessing municipal revenues, assessing municipal debt, assessing the potential for generating revenues from municipal property management, assessing preferences for introducing shared taxes, etc.

In Chapter Two, a cross-analysis of trends in financial decentralization in Bulgaria (2020-2025) is carried out. The content of this chapter is in 3 points. The volume of Chapter Two is 40 pages. Chapter Two examines the methodology and tested secondary working hypotheses in the cross-analysis of financial decentralization from 2025 and analyzes the results, conclusions and summaries of the cross-analysis of trends in financial decentralization in Bulgaria (2020–2025).

In Chapter Three, the study contains descriptive statistics and correlation analysis of the survey results on the financial condition of municipalities and financial decentralization. The content of this chapter is in 2 points. The volume of the third chapter is 36 pages. In the third chapter, an assessment is made through descriptive statistics of the survey results for financial decentralization by 2025. A correlation analysis of selected factors and indicators for financial decentralization by 2025 is made, through analytical sectoral colorograms and a synthetic intersectoral colorogram of financial decentralization based on a survey survey from 2025.

From the point of view of the methodology used in the study, the survey method, cross analysis, graphical analysis method, descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, induction and deduction methods, modeling method, comparative analysis, etc. were applied. The survey was conducted in January and February 2025. Respondents were 50 chairmen of municipal councils, who completed the survey questionnaire electronically (80%) and on paper (20%) within the framework of a NAPOS-RB seminar held on February 10, 2025. The survey is structured in ten sections and includes 52 questions.

I accept as the author's contributions:

- National study by the beginning of 2025 for the time period 2020-2024 on fiscal decentralization in Bulgaria and strengthening the investment capacity of municipalities. Cross-analysis and empirical monitoring of the state of financial decentralization in Bulgaria from the position of municipal councils were conducted. Through the survey, the author analyzes the current state, problems and prospects for Bulgarian municipalities through the prism of the responsibilities and powers of local government bodies. This survey builds on and further develops the author's earlier monographic study, conducted at the time point of 2011 with an assessment of the first mandate of local government bodies in the context of EU membership (the period 2007–2011).
- As a result of the study, the author confirms the formulated main thesis that financial decentralization is a multidimensional process of a strategic nature. It successfully combines the delegation of powers with their resource provision. The management of Bulgarian municipalities is carried

out in an environment of multiple crises (pandemic, military conflict, peak energy prices, etc.), combined with the prospects of the country's membership in the Schengen area and the Eurozone, which poses serious challenges to financial decentralization in Bulgaria. Meeting the needs of households in municipal centers and settlements is faced with a depreciated infrastructure that hinders normal household needs such as water supply, sewage, electricity supply, street access and long-delayed reform in the waste collection and disposal sector when paying a fair municipal waste fee.

- In-depth analysis and formulation of a proposal for improvement in financial decentralization by establishing specific relationships and dependencies for exhausting the capacity of local sources of revenue, dependence on central financing and subsidies of municipalities. The study formulates a set of weaknesses and gaps in the process, leading to the deterioration of the financial stability of municipalities, combined with parallel processes of centralization of resources and decentralization of responsibilities, motivating a tangible need to restore the practice of sharing basic income taxes as an element of gross value added and a tool for achieving a consensual restoration of the balance between the center and the regions. Extraction of validated positive assessments from the group of respondents in 2025 for a favorable impact on the development prospects of Bulgarian municipalities from membership in the Schengen area, admission to the eurozone.

Based on the information presented regarding the fulfillment of national minimum requirements according to the Law on the State of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for its implementation, it can be concluded that the candidate Assoc. Prof. Dr. Andrey Zahariev meets the relevant criteria, as follows:

- group "A" - 50 points with a minimum of 50 points;
- group "B" - 100 points with a minimum of 100 points;
- group "D" - 363.41 points with a minimum of 200 points;
- group "E" - 1,530 points with a minimum of 100 points and
- group "F" - 1,305.39 points with a minimum of 100 points.

The excess of the fulfillment of the minimum requirements under the criteria in group D, group E and group F is striking, especially the significant excess in the last two groups of criteria.

4. Assessment of the candidate's personal contribution

Based on the documentation submitted under the procedure of this competition, I can make a justified assessment of the presence of a clear personal contribution by the candidate Assoc. Prof.

Dr. Andrey Zahariev in the relevant publications, and the fully formulated contributions and obtained results are his personal merit.

5. Critical remarks and recommendations

I have no significant principled or formal critical remarks and recommendations to the scientific works and activities of the candidate Assoc. Prof. Dr. Andrey Zahariev.

I can recommend Assoc. Prof. Dr. Andrey Zahariev to deepen his research in the field of issues related to the management of municipal centers in Bulgaria and financial decentralization. I am convinced that the author will contribute to the achievement of future scientific and applied scientific contributions in the research areas.

6. Personal impressions

I have no personal impressions of the candidate Assoc. Prof. Dr. Andrey Zahariev, other than those acquired during the course of this procedure.

CONCLUSION

The documents and materials presented by the **candidate Assoc. Prof. Dr. Andrey Zahariev** meet all the requirements of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ADSRB), the Regulations for the Implementation of the ADSRB and the relevant Regulations of the VUZF.

The candidate in the competition Assoc. Prof. Dr. Andrey Zahariev has presented a sufficient number of scientific works published after the materials used in the defense of the ONS "doctor" and "associate professor". The works of the candidate Assoc. Prof. Dr. Andrey Zahariev contain original scientific and applied contributions that have received international recognition, as a representative part of them are published in journals and scientific collections published by international academic publishing houses. His theoretical developments have practical applicability, as some of them are directly oriented towards academic work. The scientific and teaching qualifications of the candidate Assoc. Prof. Dr. Andrey Zahariev are undoubted.

The achievements of the candidate Assoc. Prof. Dr. Andrey Zahariev results in academic and research activities, fully comply with the specific requirements of the VUZF Regulations for the application of the ZRASRB.

After familiarizing myself with the materials and scientific works presented in the competition, analyzing their significance and the scientific, scientifically applied and applied contributions contained in them, I find it reasonable to give my **positive assessment and to recommend** to the Scientific Jury to prepare a report-proposal to the Academic Council of the Higher School of Insurance and Finance for the election of **Assoc. Prof. Dr. Andrey Zahariev** to the academic position of 'professor' at the Higher School of Insurance and Finance in the professional field 3.8 Economics, scientific specialty "Finance, Monetary Circulation, Credit and Insurance".

09.05.2025

Reviewer:

(Prof. Dr. Stanislav Dimitrov)