

REVIEW

on the dissertation of Stoyan Dimitrov Stoyanov on "Bulgarian-Polish Political Relations (1945 - 1989)"

2. 2.2. History and Archaeology, Scientific specialty History of Bulgaria (Contemporary Bulgarian History) with scientific supervisor Assoc. Prof. Dr. Rumiana Marinova-Hristidi Prof. Iskra Vassileva Baeva, PhD, from the Faculty of History of Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski")

1. Data about the dissertant

Stoyan Stoyanov was born on 30 May 1991 in Peshtera. In 2014 he graduated in Philosophy at the University of Veliko Tarnovo. Then in 2017 he graduated as a Master in International Relations at the Department of Political Science of the Faculty of Philosophy of the Sofia University. He graduated with a degree in Political Science from the Faculty of Philosophy of St. Kliment Ohridski University. In addition, Stoyan Stoyanov specialised in political science at the University of Warsaw. He speaks Polish and English.

2. Data about PhD Program

On February 1, 2019 Stoyan Stoyanov was enrolled as a full-time PhD student in the PhD program "History of Bulgaria - Contemporary Bulgarian History" at the Department of History of Bulgaria at the Faculty of History of Sofia University. His scientific supervisor was Assoc. Prof. Dr. Rumiana Marinova-Hristidi. After passing the exams required by law in the specialty and in English and after discussion of his dissertation in the Department of History of Bulgaria, the doctoral student Stoyan Stoyanov was discharged with the right to defend on 18 January 2022.

During his PhD years Stoyan Stoyanov has participated in scientific forums, as well as publications in scientific journals, duly indicated in the references prepared by the PhD student.

It is clear from the above data that in practice the dissertation for the award of the degree of doctor was his first major historical work. Basic educational training always matters, but the question is whether his philosophical-political education is a hindrance or an advantage to his historical research.

There were no violations of the legal requirements in the implementation of the PhD procedure.

3. General characteristics of the thesis

The topic of Stoyan Stoyanov's dissertation is extensive. It covers a period of four and a half decades (1945-1989), a period of the so-called socialist era in the history of Eastern Europe, when state socialism of the Soviet type was imposed there. The specific content of the dissertation is devoted to the political relations between Bulgaria and Poland, two countries with a special role in the Eastern Bloc created by the Soviet Union. Bulgaria was at the centre of the Balkan sub-region of the bloc, while Poland was the leading one in Central Europe region. The topic is important for the historical interpretation of Bulgarian history in the context of the history of the Eastern Bloc and of Eastern European socialism.

For his dissertation Stoyan Stoyanov has chosen the classical structure: introduction, introduction, four chapters, conclusion and bibliography. The total volume of the dissertation is 333 standard typewritten pages, to which should be added the Appendix, containing 16 photographs of various events in the bilateral Bulgarian-Polish relations, published in the Bulgarian newspaper. "Otechestven Front" from 1958 to 1989.

The sources of the dissertation are archival documents from the main archival repositories on the subject in Bulgaria. They are: the CDA, from which 16 fonds were used, the Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, from which 8 fonds were used, the Archive of the Commission on the Dossiers (KPRDOPGBDSRSBNA), from which 6 fonds were used. The second place in the source base is occupied by 18 collections of published documents, 15 volumes of memoirs and diaries. The stream of newspaper. "Otechestven Front", albeit in inconsistent years, as well as a one-year run of the Polish Information Bulletin. It is not very clear why one reference book and one journalistic book were listed separately. In assessing the source base of the dissertation, one should also bear in mind that the PhD candidate Stoyan Stoyanov had the bad luck of his PhD falling at a time when, due to the pandemics, the main archival repositories were difficult to access, if at all.

In the section of used scientific literature the PhD student was presented 89 items in Bulgarian and 38 in Latin. I admit that I was surprised by the approach of dividing the scientific literature in Latin into two parts: first the Polish language editions are listed, then the English ones, even though some of the English language ones are by Polish authors.

The **Introduction** describes the topic of the thesis but lacks a clear statement of its

purpose. Instead, the following explanation is present: 'The contacts between the two countries in this period were intense and tracing them in political terms is the main purpose of this dissertation' (p. 4), as well as the fact that 'There is no monograph describing the relations between the two countries during the Cold War for the post-World War II period' (p. 6). Despite the lack of a statement of purpose, these two texts and the title of the dissertation make it reasonably clear what the purpose of the research was.

The **Introduction** offers a general parallel view of the development of Bulgaria and Poland up to the post-war period, but the historical narrative at times lacks explanations of events. As an example, I would point to the correct statement that the Warsaw Uprising of August 1944 was declared mainly for political reasons, but it is not explained what these were, only that the timing was not right (p. 29). At the same time, later in the text of chapter one, the journey of the Polish Prime Minister in exile, Stanislaw Mikolajczyk, to Moscow to meet Stalin (in fact, Churchill took him with him without warning Stalin) in late July and early August is presented (p. 47). It was to strengthen Prime Minister Mikołajczyk's position in Moscow that the London government's delegate for the country, Tadeusz Bór-Komorowski, ordered the uprising to begin at an inopportune time.

The **first chapter**, "Bulgarian-Polish Political Relations in the First Years After World War II (1945-1956)", traces the socio-political development of the two countries in the first post-war period. This is done, as in the Introduction, in a parallel and summarizing manner. This chapter is structured in four paragraphs that follow the general development of Eastern Europe in the first post-war decade: 'people's democracy', Stalinisation and the beginning of Destalinisation, with a thematic paragraph devoted to the 20-year bilateral Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance. And in this chapter the narrative is divided between presenting the general historical development and focusing on individual more important moments. This approach is understandable for the topic of bilateral political relations, but at times it leads to some inaccuracies, which are mainly due to the summative literature used. It always creates the danger of missing some events or leaving them unexplained.

In this period this refers to the Polish referendum of 30 June 1946 (p. 57), which has nothing to do with our referendum on the abolition of the monarchy and the declaration of a republic, because Poland did not change the form of state, and with the referendum the Polish communists tried to avoid the elections promised at Potsdam, because they were afraid they

might lose them. It seems to me that the reasons for breaking diplomatic relations between Bulgaria and the USA could have been presented more accurately (p. 70) - not because the Americans were so concerned about Traycho Kostov, but because their first diplomat Donald Reed Heath was accused of espionage and was declared "persona non grata".

In the **second chapter** "Bulgarian-Polish Political Relations in the Period 1957-1970" the doctoral student has taken a problem-chronological approach, by dividing three problems into separate paragraphs: the Macedonian question, the new treaty of friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance and the reaction of both sides to the Prague Spring of 1968. The other paragraphs are subordinated to the chronological principle. The chronological section of this chapter includes two of the social crises that periodically convulsed Polish society: the first was the student discontent of March 1968, called, not coincidentally, the 'Polish March', and the second was the workers' revolt in the coastal city of Gdańsk that led to the removal of the party leader, Wladyslaw Gomulka. In this chapter the differences in the political systems of Poland and Bulgaria are presented more clearly, but Stoyan Stoyanov seems to have missed a good opportunity to explain the phenomenon of "independent candidates" mentioned in passing (p. 112), which is absent in Bulgaria, and thus to highlight the Polish specificity. The evolution of the Polish attitude towards the Macedonian issue, which is important for Bulgaria, and why the Poles do not support the Bulgarian point of view is well traced. The same can be said of the strict follow-up of the visit of the Polish delegation to Sofia in April 1967, during which the new Treaty of Friendship Cooperation and Mutual Assistance between the two countries was discussed and signed.

In chapter two, as in chapter one, the main focus of the PhD student is on the socio-political crises in Poland. This is fully justified, given that the biggest difference in the socialist development of Poland and Bulgaria is the recurrent crises in Poland versus the relative stability of the regime in Bulgaria. Although in this paragraph too the exposition of what happened in Bulgaria and Poland is sequentially-parallel, the Polish events are traced entirely according to the Polish point of view, a positive element being the placing of the Polish crisis within the framework of the "Prague Spring" developing at the same time. The chapter ends as it begins, with an overview of bilateral relations through the prism of mutual visits, meetings and talks.

The **third chapter**, "Developments in Bulgarian-Polish Political Relations in the 1970s," follows the chronological line, beginning with the strike wave in Poland, which was overcome

after the authorities refused to follow through on their plans for economic reforms at a high cost to workers. This sets the stage for the recurring mechanism in the power-worker clash: worker revolts when prices rise, then the authorities back down and the economic gains are not realised. This conclusion is also drawn in the thesis (p. 191), although Stoyanov does not reach the next tendency: the workers decide that economic reforms are not a necessity, but are only due to the ill will of the authorities, and so there is a growing division of society between **us** (the people) and **them** (the authorities). Bulgarian-Polish relations are again traced in the same key as in the previous two chapters – centred on Polish events and Bulgarian reactions to them.

The **fourth chapter**, which is last, "Bulgarian-Polish Political Relations in the 1980s", presents the political developments in the last decade of the Eastern Bloc's existence. It again centres on events in the Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa, where the preconditions for the general crisis of socialism and its collapse in Eastern Europe took shape. The chapter now abandons the approach of presenting events in the two countries in parallel, replacing it with a focus on Polish problems and Bulgarian reactions to them. Quite rightly, the greatest space is given to another workers' revolt, thanks to which this time the lasting alternative to the socialist political system was created in the form of the NPS *Solidarność*. But the Bulgarian financial-economic and political dilemmas are not ignored either. This chapter is developed mainly on the basis of contemporary Polish historical literature, which creates a somewhat one-sided picture that corresponds only to the views of the political forces that implemented the change of the system. In this regard, a good opportunity to compare the viewpoint of *Solidarność* activists and supporters with that of the ruling PUWP could be provided by the monograph by Boyko Mladenov, which the PhD student is familiar with because he included it in the review of historiography in the introduction. This would be useful because it is known that in order to make a qualitative analysis of an event it is better to present it from different perspectives. The Bulgarian reactions to the birth of *Solidarność* are well traced, showing once again the leading role of Poland in political developments, while the Bulgarian party and state leadership acted rather reflexively. The exposition ends with the beginning of the changes in Bulgaria.

The **Conclusion** repeats the main elements of the content of the four chapters of the dissertation on Polish-Bulgarian political relations, which are occasionally supplemented by economic and cultural relations.

Overall, the **dissertation** meets the standards for the award of degrees adopted by Sofia

University "St. Kliment Ohridski". It is written in a readable style, has defensible boundaries and an appropriate internal structure. Stoyan Stoyanov demonstrates knowledge of this significant period in the history of Poland and Bulgaria, in which the two countries became allies, though not of their own free will, but as a result of the great geopolitical upheavals after Second World War.

4. Evaluation of the scientific results obtained

Stoyan Stoyanov's dissertation covers the whole era of socialism in Eastern Europe, which coincides with the Cold War. This implies and justifies the overview character of the dissertation. All Polish crises and Bulgarian reactions to them are presented in detail. Understandably, less attention has been paid to the actual political relations between the two countries as allies in the two main organisations of the Eastern bloc - the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance and the Warsaw Pact Organisation. This is because there are no major contradictions between them, apart from the details of the signing of the two 20-year treaties and the economic relations at the end of the period.

My assessment of the documentary basis of the dissertation is that, while it could be improved, it meets the conditions in which Stoyan Stoyanov's doctoral years fell. The first obstacle was the impossibility of using some of the diplomatic documents from the Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria because of the delayed process of declassifying the documents (for the periods 1963-1968 and 1984-1988). The second obstacle was more global, as it was caused by the Kovid 19 epidemic, which closed the reading rooms of the main archives for a long period. The scholarly literature used is largely summative, which is in keeping with the large chronological scope of the dissertation: the entire era of socialism in Eastern Europe.

Stoyan Stoyanov's dissertation represents the first comprehensive study of Bulgarian-Polish relations in Bulgarian historiography. Undoubtedly, individual events, especially the Polish socio-political and economic crises, have been dealt with in specific or monographic studies, which the doctoral student knows, uses and correctly indicates in the scientific apparatus. I see his own scientific contribution in the effort to summarize these achievements of Bulgarian and Polish historiography and to present them as a comprehensive history of bilateral political relations.

The structure of the dissertation, based on the chronological principle, is natural and

acceptable. It is also well defended, and Stoyan Stoyanov shows an ability to combine the chronological principle with the problem approach.

5. Evaluation of dissertation publications and participation in scientific forums

During the years of his doctoral studies Stoyan Stoyanov has participated in the scientific life of both the Faculty of History of Sofia University, where he was a PhD student, and the University of Veliko Tarnovo, where he completed his undergraduate studies. As a result of his participation in two scientific conferences in 2020 and 2021, he prepared two publications, which, however, have not yet appeared in print. One of them is an abridged version of what was written in the dissertation on the social crises in Poland for the years from 1956 to 1989, and the second one presents a problem not developed in the dissertation on the historical fate of the Polish capital Warsaw, almost completely destroyed at the end of World War II and rebuilt in liberated Poland. The other three publications briefly present important points of the dissertation - the role of the *Solidarność* in the fate of socialism, the Macedonian question and the cooperation between the security services in the Bulgarian-Polish relations. These publications enable Stoyan Stoyanov to present the results of his research to the scientific community.

6. Evaluation of the abstract

The abstract is an overview, in it Stoyan Stoyanov has very briefly and modestly formulated the aim of his work ("to trace the development of political relations between the two countries in the period 1945-1989, reflecting the meetings between their rulers"), the object, subject and methodology of the dissertation. Since this information is missing from the introduction of the dissertation, I will devote space to it here. The tasks of the dissertation are: to delineate the chronological stages in the relations between the two countries, to trace the Bulgarian reaction to the Polish crises and to show the differences between the two countries in their attempts to build a socialist society. These tasks are realized in the dissertation.

In the second part of the abstract the content of the dissertation and the conclusions are correctly reflected, the contributions are formulated and a list of publications on the dissertation of Stoyan Stoyanov is added.

7. Critical comments and recommendations

Despite my overall positive assessment of Stoyan Stoyanov's dissertation, inaccuracies and ambiguities can be found in it. I will present some of them, starting with the more general ones. In my opinion, the text is dominated by descriptiveness at the expense of analyticity. It is noteworthy that Stoyan Stoyanov describes bilateral relations mainly through the prism of inter-party relations, even when it comes to relations between state bodies and institutions. Often there is also inconsistency between the different parts of the sentence, as well as typographical errors, which in some cases are also meaningful.

My specific remarks are not a few, though mostly minor. They are about misspelling of Polish names. As minor inaccuracies, I would point out that *Nowe Drogi* was a magazine, an ideological organ of the PUWP, not a newspaper, the socialist Edward Osóbka-Morawski became prime minister not in the Government of National Unity in June 1945, but also headed the PCNL (Polish Committee of National Liberation) almost a year earlier, the bilateral agreement was signed on April 6, 1967, rather than on 6 August, Ludvík Svoboda was not "kidnapped to Moscow" on 22 August 1968 as was the case with the leadership of the ČKP, but remained in Prague and later traveled to Moscow, thus legitimizing the negotiations as officially interstate rather than the Soviet dictate they essentially were. It seems to me that no connection should be made between the American conflict with Iran in 1979 and the beginning of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan at the end of that year, as the two events had quite different genesis.

I also have some substantive comments. For example, it seems to me to be an exaggeration to say that during martial law there was no consistent policy of economic and political reform, since it was then that successful pricing reform was first implemented (1982, 1984, 1986) and the creation of public structures for controlling the authorities began, which made it possible to speak of 'consultative democracy' in Poland. It seems to me that when the dissertation presents the turbulent events of 1981, along with the first congress of the *Solidarność*, the IX Extraordinary Congress of the PUWP should also be analysed, since this was the first time that mandates for leadership positions were introduced in the Eastern Bloc and the principle of "democratic centralism" was rejected. With regard to the Polish Round Table (again, the first in the Eastern Bloc), the text does not make clear the specific decisions to hold pluralist elections, which justify calling them semi-free.

All these remarks do not change my overall assessment, as they are due to the too large time span and the presentation of numerous events in Polish history of the socialist period.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, I confirm that the legal regulation on the procedure for the defense of the dissertation has been complied with, the scientific work itself meets the standards for the acquisition of scientific degrees regulated in the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and I have no doubts about its originality.

The analysis of the content and the scientific qualities of the dissertation submitted for public defence give me grounds, notwithstanding the remarks made, to support the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" to Stoyan Dimitrov Stoyanov and to propose to the other members of the esteemed scientific jury also to vote positively.

May 2, 2022, Sofia

prof. Iskra Baeva, PhD