

OPINION

for the dissertation of **STOYAN DIMITROV STOYANOV**,
full-time PhD student at the Department of History of Bulgaria,
Faculty of History, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

On the topic: "**Bulgarian-Polish Political Relations (1945-1989)**"

for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"

in the field of higher education 2. Doctor of Philosophy and Humanities

Professional field 2. 2. History and Archaeology

Doctoral Program "History of Bulgaria" (Contemporary Bulgarian History)

The present dissertation is the result of the serious efforts made by Stoyan Stoyanov, who is among the few PhD students who submit their dissertations for consideration before the expiry of the PhD period. This is a proof of his commitment and responsibility to scholarly work in history, even though his road to this field went through other specializations. Stoyan Stoyanov has a Bachelor's degree in Philosophy from the University of Veliko Tarnovo "Sv. Cyril and Methodius" and a Master's degree in International Relations and Security Problems from the Faculty of Philosophy of Sofia University of "Sv. Kliment Ohridski". His interest in contemporary Bulgarian history directed him to the doctoral program "History of Bulgaria" at the Faculty of History of Sofia University "Sv. Kliment Ohridski". His specialization at the University of Warsaw (2016-2017) and fluency in Polish are among the factors for choosing the topic of his dissertation.

The scientific significance of this choice is unquestionable, because despite the serious achievements of Bulgarian historiography in the study of Bulgarian foreign policy within the Eastern bloc, there is still no comprehensive monographic study of Bulgaria's relations with Poland. This dissertation covers the development of these relations throughout the period from the end of World War II to the collapse of socialism in 1989, focusing only on their political dimensions. It should be pointed out that the so formulated topic implies the addressing of significant scholarly issues related to the historical path of two countries that are part of the same bloc structure, but have their own specificities and face different challenges, to which they seek different ways to overcome. Studies of this kind would contribute to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the period of state socialism in Eastern Europe.

The structure of the dissertation consists of a preface, an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion, resources used and an appendix in a total of 341 pages. The chronological-thematic approach is adequate. The periodization of bilateral relations, on the basis of which the four main chapters are divided, is in line with the chronological divisions established in historiography. This is a logical approach, since it would be difficult to identify any distinct specific boundaries

in Bulgarian-Polish relations. However, this approach should be more thoroughly reasoned, as well as the corresponding chronological boundaries.

The dissertation is based on the available documentary collections in the Central State Archives, the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the so-called Commission on Dossiers. In addition to these, the PhD student has used a number of published documents and memoirs, mostly written by Bulgarian political figures, as well as by Lech Wałęsa and Adam Michnik (in Bulgarian). Of the periodicals, he pays attention only to certain years of the newspaper "Otechestven Front" and only to one year of the Polish Information Bulletin (for which St. Stoyanov explicitly states that it is "available in the NBKM [the National Library] for the years 1950-1962" - p. 8). This selection raises some doubts as to the criteria by which it was made and also leaves open the question of why other newspapers and magazines from the period 1945-1989 were not studied. At the same time, it should be emphasized that Stoyan Stoyanov has a good knowledge of and correctly uses in his dissertation a significant part of the available scientific literature on the contemporary history of Bulgaria and Poland, and the bibliography enclosed consists of nearly 90 titles in Bulgarian, 20 in Polish and as many more in English.

In the preface Stoyan Stoyanov points out that the main aim of the dissertation is to trace the "intensive contacts" between Bulgaria and Poland "in a political aspect" and to highlight and explain "both the similarities in the imposed regime and the differences in the reactions of the Bulgarian and the Polish society" (p. 4). Researching only this aspect of bilateral relations has its logic, but the doctoral student should have explained it and justified why e.g. economic, cultural, scientific, etc. contacts remained out of his sight. The preface is also the place where the argumentation for the lower and upper chronological limits of the study and for the internal periodization should be given, especially since it predetermines the structure of the thesis. The author pays due attention to the contemporary Bulgarian historiography on the issues of the Bulgarian-Polish relations until the end of the Second World War and after it, as well as to the translations of monographs on the history of Poland by Polish authors published in Bulgaria. A brief review is also made of studies on bilateral relations published in Poland.

After the preface, the PhD student provides an "introduction" in which he traces the main moments of the historical fate of Poland and Bulgaria during the Second World War. I find this "return" to a period before the one fixed in the title of the dissertation necessary, but my recommendation is to shorten the disproportionately lengthy and unnecessary (in view of the topic of the dissertation) presentation of the Bulgarian events, which will allow to highlight those that are important for the further study of the bilateral relations (e.g. the break of diplomatic relations between the two countries and the ban of the Bulgarian authorities on the passage of Polish citizens through its territory). It seems to me that the section on the fate of the Polish lands during the war also needs to be shortened, and at the end of the introduction it would have been good to have some kind of conclusion or transition to the next chapter.

In the first chapter "Bulgarian-Polish Political Relations in the First Years After the Second World War (1945-1956)" the PhD student traces the establishment of the "People's Democracy" and then the imposing of Stalinism in Bulgaria and Poland, their common actions as part of the Slavic movement (the author could have used the monograph by Biser Petrov "Bulgaria and the New Slavic Movement (1941-1948)"), the restoration of their diplomatic relations in 1945 as well as the restoration of the Bulgarian-Polish Society/Committee, the Polish defense of Bulgaria at the Paris Peace Conference, the participation of both countries in the creation of the Eastern Bloc structures. Stoyan Stoyanov compares certain elements of the policies of the one and the other country and concludes that both follow similar paths of imposing the will of the local

communist parties. Based on archival documents, the first bilateral contacts are traced. In the first two paragraphs there are many details of the Bulgarian internal political life, which are well known and unnecessary from the topic of the dissertation point of view and do not contribute to the clarification of the Bulgarian-Polish relations. Too much space in view of the subject of the dissertation is also devoted to the consideration of the Polish question at the Yalta and Potsdam conferences and the reconstruction of the ruined cities in the country. A special paragraph presents the preparation and signing of the 1948 Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance between Bulgaria and Poland (pp. 76-80). The student should have balanced the description of the facts by a more thorough analysis of the nature and the goals of these treaties concluded between the countries of the Soviet sphere and should have clarified in more detail the disputes over the Article 3 and the ways to overcome them. The fourth paragraph of the chapter deals with the period from 1953 till 1956 and the manifestations of "destalinization" in Bulgaria (presented in too much detail, but only on a limited number of academic publications, omitting the monograph of L. Ognyanov on this period and several documentary collections on it), as well as similar processes in Poland. The PhD student compares the reactions in the two countries to the events in the USSR and identifies the XX Congress of the CPSU as the event that had different consequences in Bulgaria and Poland. The description of the "Polish 1956" is presented in detail on the basis of Polish academic literature. The work would profit from additional footnotes on the personalities and events in Poland that the author mentions in the text. On the basis of Bulgarian archival documents the Bulgarian reaction to the events in Poland is traced. The author concludes that "for the Bulgarian people, who were coming to terms with and adapting to the system imposed on them, 1956 was not a tumultuous year", while for Poland it was "a turning point and inspired the Polish people with hope that a better future was possible" (p. 109).

The second chapter of the dissertation is devoted to the Bulgarian-Polish political relations from 1957 to 1970. In the first paragraph, Stoyan Stoyanov points out the differences in the behaviour not only of the authorities in the two countries, but also of different segments of Bulgarian and Polish society and tries to explain them. The emphasis is on the first meeting of the communist leaders after the turbulent 1956 - T. Zhivkov and W. Gomułka (May 1958), which is indicative of the differences on some economic and foreign policy issues (e.g. the attitude towards the USSR) between the two countries. Stoyan Stoyanov introduces documents from the Bulgarian archives related to this meeting, which show how the Polish leaders assessed and presented to their Bulgarian counterparts the political and economic processes in their country, as well as Zhivkov and Gomułka's efforts to make sense of the differences between the two countries. The return visit of T. Zhivkov to Poland in 1959 is also discussed. The author presents some documents from the archives of the Commission on Dossiers, which illustrate how the State Security collected information on the attitude towards the USSR of Polish citizens residing in Bulgaria.

A special paragraph is devoted to the place of the Macedonian question in the Bulgarian-Polish relations after the March Plenum of 1963. Here again the author could have spared some well-known details of the history of the Macedonian question, but it should be pointed out that he has managed to explain some of the reasons that made the Polish side more receptive to the Yugoslav thesis on this issue. St. Stoyanov cites archival documents revealing both the adherence of some mass media and part of the scientific circles in Poland to Skopje's positions and the attempts of Bulgarian diplomats to present Bulgarian arguments. Although he does not further deepen his analysis, the author shows the existence of a certain evolution in the position

of the Polish rulers towards a greater understanding of the Bulgarian thesis, which is also due to the activity of T. Zhivkov and Foreign Minister P. Mladenov in the 1970s, as well as the activities of the Bulgarian embassy, including the development of Bulgarian studies in Poland. This part of the dissertation has a significant value that would be more clearly expressed if the analysis of the documents were placed in the context of the main features of Bulgarian and Yugoslav policy on the Macedonian question in the 1960s and 1970s.

The next paragraph of the second chapter deals with the new Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance between Bulgaria and Poland (1967), and attempts to highlight the new aspects of the Treaty compared to the previous one of 1948, which the author explains by the changes in international relations. Unfortunately, St. Stoyanov does not compare it with the treaties with the other socialist countries in order to assess whether it reflects any specificity in bilateral relations. Logically, the fourth paragraph focuses on 1968, and the author examines in comparative terms the policy of the Bulgarian and Polish governments towards the intelligentsia and the youth, who were the main driving force in the Polish events of March 1968. This time, the disproportion is due to the brief (and therefore lacking in nuance and based on one or two sources with at least a few monographs omitted) assessment of the attitude of the BCP towards the intelligentsia in the 1960s, whereas the situation in Poland is much more comprehensively presented. The most significant contribution here is to trace, through archival documents, the way Bulgarian diplomats in Poland reflected the events of March 1968. The second chapter ends with a paragraph revealing the political cooperation between Bulgaria and Poland until the end of 1970 through the prism of bilateral high-level meetings, the relations between the security services of the two countries in the period 1965 to 1970, and the cultural propaganda through the Bulgarian Embassy and the Bulgarian Cultural Centre. The presentation is based on documents from the Central State Archive and the Commission on Dossiers, but would definitely benefit from a more analytical approach instead of retelling of these documents.

In the third chapter of the dissertation St. Stoyanov traces the development of Bulgarian-Polish political relations in the 1970s. On the basis of Bulgarian and Polish research and archival documents, the strike wave in Poland from the end of 1970 to February 1971 and its political consequences are presented in detail, as well as its coverage in the Bulgarian press, in the talks of visiting Bulgarian politicians in Poland and in the analyses of the Bulgarian embassy in Warsaw. In the second paragraph St. Stoyanov applies again the parallel examination of the priorities of the Bulgarian and Polish authorities in the first half of the 1970s and tries to explain their differences, including presenting in detail on the basis of archival documents the meetings of T. Zhivkov with Ed. Gerek and the first diplomats of both countries. I would again recommend that the descriptive approach and overly long quotations be replaced by a more in-depth analysis of these very active contacts. The same approach is also present in the next paragraph, which presents in detail the economic problems of Poland in the second half of the 1970s (however, nothing is mentioned about the Bulgarian ones), the protests there in the summer of 1976 and the bilateral high-level meetings. The author presents interesting facts from the documents of the Commission on Dossiers and the Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which shed light on the relations between the Polish state and the Church there. He has also retrieved documents showing Poland's participation in such emblematic events for Bulgaria as the Flag of Peace Assembly and the celebration of the 1300th anniversary of the Bulgarian state. The chapter ends with conclusions about the changes in international relations at the end of the decade, but not about bilateral relations.

The fourth chapter is focused on Bulgarian-Polish relations in the 1980s. At the beginning, the economic problems faced by the Bulgarian state are briefly presented (the author could also use the studies of I. Marcheva, D. Vachkov, M. Ivanov) and in much more detail - those facing Poland that led to the strike wave in the country in 1980 and the creation of the independent trade union Solidarity. The introduction of documents from the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Central State Archive, revealing the attitude of the Bulgarian rulers to these events, is a significant contribution. The PhD student has also retrieved a number of published and unpublished documents from the archives of the Commission on Dossiers, which show the reflection of the Polish events among various social strata in Bulgaria. The presentation would only have benefited if the numerous and lengthy quotations had been followed by an analysis and conclusions about the specifics of the Bulgarian position, and the coverage of the events in the Bulgarian press had not been limited to the newspaper "Otechestven Front". I find it unnecessary to reproduce in detail the well known facts about the "Bulgarian trace" in the assassination of Pope John Paul II and the "revival process". Unfortunately, the PhD student has found only few documents on the attitude of the Polish authorities and society towards these events, and this is probably due to the impossibility of using classified documents from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for certain periods, including the 1980s. The next paragraphs of the chapter mainly trace what happened in Poland in the second half of the decade, as well as Bulgarian economic and political support for the authorities in Warsaw, and St. Stoyanov uses archival documents and Bulgarian and Polish research. However, the chapter ends without the necessary conclusions and summaries.

The dissertation's conclusion begins with a promising attempt to analyze the bilateral relations, but then Stoyan Stoyanov in practice only reiterates the main points in them, without reaching deeper explanations for the differences he points out. The bibliography is well laid out, and the appendices include photographs from the newspaper "Otechestven Front", presenting the main political meetings between the leaders of the two countries. The abstract is relatively short, and against this limited length I see no justification for including such a detailed historiography. Instead, the doctoral candidate could have more clearly highlighted his contributions against the background of what has been previously achieved. He has three published articles (one is omitted in the abstract) and three in print, thus meeting the minimum national requirements for a doctor degree. The dissertation is written in a relatively good style, but needs one more revision to clear up some spelling errors and stylistic ambiguities.

My overall impression is that St. Stoyanov has made considerable efforts to find archival documents on the political relations between the two countries and to reconstruct the events in Poland for the whole period after World War II until 1989, including using Polish academic literature. The reader obtains an overview of the main moments in bilateral encounters at various levels. There are, however, disproportions in the presentation of the political development of Bulgaria and Poland, and in most places factual information and extensive quotations prevail at the expense of analytical skill. Nevertheless, I believe that the work done is more than its shortcomings and deficiencies and the dissertation meets the requirements for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in History. I will therefore vote to award this degree to the PhD student Stoyan Stoyanov.

7 May 2022

Prof. Evgenia Kalinova