

OPINION

by prof. Rositsa Stoyanova PhD,
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on the dissertation work of Maria Sashkova Valkova
for the acquisition of the PhD degree,
in scientific field 2. Humanities, professional direction
2.2. History and Archaeology, History of Bulgaria
themed: "Andrey Toshev - Statesman, Diplomat, Politician"

Maria Valkova is a graduate of Sofia University, where she graduated in History (with a Bachelor's degree) and Geography (with a Master's degree). In 2019, she was enrolled as a full-time doctoral candidate within the History of Bulgaria Department at the Faculty of History of the Sofia University. The scientific supervisor of the doctoral program is Prof. D.Sc. Veselin Yanchev.

The choice of the dissertation's topic - "Andrey Toshev - Statesman, Diplomat, Politician" is appropriate and promising. Historiography lacks a special study devoted to his life and activities. Set in this way, the topic gives a wide range of possibilities beyond defining the specific events in the character's life path. The dissertation aims, for example, to make an attempt to understand the motivation of his behavior, to formulate more general conclusions about the place and role of diplomats in the development of the foreign policy line of the state, to enrich the characteristics of the so-called "non-party regimes", etc. The author elaborates some of these problems, touches on others, and skips others in this work.

The topic is developed in three chapters - introduction, conclusion, bibliography. In the introductory part, the colleague clearly and precisely formulates the goals and tasks she sets for herself. Valkova focuses her attention in two directions - A. Toshev's activity as a diplomat and his participation in power as Prime Minister in the period 21st April - 23rd November 1935. Apart from these two main emphases, the doctoral candidate presents the family environment in which he grew up and forms the personality of the future diplomat and statesman, his interests and scientific pursuits, his activity as a public figure.

The search and use of sufficient source material and a good knowledge of historiography are obligatory conditions for writing such a study. Valkova has coped with both requirements.

For the construction of the text and her analyses, she draws on a documentary array rich in content and diverse in origin. Institutional and personal archival funds, published documents, materials from the press, memories and diaries, the writings of Toshev himself, etc. were used. The doctoral student knows, uses and correctly cites the studies in which the activities of her character are examined in detail or more peripherally. There are also some gaps in this direction, such as the works of A. Strezova, J. Konstantinova (about the Bulgarians in Thessaloniki, about Bulgarian-Greek relations), M. Mateeva, Al. Kostov and others.

Structurally, the text logically follows the vicissitudes of the character's life path. In the first chapter, the author examines the early years of his life (family environment, education, his activity as a teacher and lecturer) and his diplomatic appointments in the period 1903-1908 in Bitola, Cetina and Athens. The second part is dedicated to the diplomatic activity of A. Toshev in the key posts as plenipotentiary minister in Belgrade, Constantinople, Vienna during the fateful years for the country from 1908 to 1919. When structuring the last part, the author adopts the chronological-problematic presentation in the first two paragraphs. The last paragraph is devoted to the overall scientific and journalistic activity of A. Toshev. Each separate part of the presentation ends with short summaries, enriched and presented as general conclusions in the final part of the dissertation.

The adoption of such a structure is justified and gives the opportunity to enter fully into the character's being, to present his ideas and behavior in development. Taking it in principle, I cannot help but note the imbalances in the volumes of the individual parts – the first and third chapters are developed in 50 pages each, while the second part covers over 250 pages of the entire text. At the same time, there are a couple of paragraphs of 2 pages each and some technical omissions.

The biographical genre is not among the preferred ones in Bulgarian historiography. One of the reasons for this lies in the requirements for the preparation of the researcher who has undertaken such a task. A good, objective, but also fascinatingly written biographical reading requires from its author in-depth knowledge of the time, events and processes, of historical figures and social circles, of the relationships between them, skills in handling sources of diverse nature and origin, knowledge of a wide a range of regional problems, etc. From this point of view, I congratulate my colleague Valkova for the courage and ambition she demonstrated by writing the dissertation. Her contributions and successes are both in purely event terms and in the

attempt to summarize and analyze the diverse activities of A. Toshev in the field of diplomacy, politics, journalism. The colleague uses and presents in detail his diplomatic reports, knows his official record as a diplomat, his positions in the months when he assumed the post of Prime Minister, etc. The pages devoted to his contacts and relationships with the Montenegrin monarch Prince Nikola, his participation and opinion in the process of preparing constitutional changes in Bulgaria in 1935 were particularly interesting for me, as well as the conclusions that the author makes about A. Toshev's attitude and positions on the Macedonian question, about his judgments about interstate relations with the countries where he represented Bulgaria, about Bulgarian neutrality at the beginning of the First World War. I also agree with the general image that Valkova builds of A. Toshev - erudite, with broad interests in various fields of science and public life, possessing perfect training and insight into the international scene, a sober assessment of interstate relations, with a high sense of responsibility, ready to ignore the personal element and occasional insults in the name of fulfilling his duties as a Bulgarian diplomatic representative.

In view of the improvement of the text and the future development of the colleague as a researcher, I would allow myself to point out some gaps in the dissertation. The family environment and early years of A. Toshev are presented schematically. The text could be enriched and developed with more data about the town and the social environment in which he grew up, about his ancestry, about the educational institutions where he studied and taught, about the atmosphere in the said institutions. The use of A. Toshev's reports made during his diplomatic service is fully justified in view of the topic. But in many places the colleague got carried away either in retelling them or in quoting them verbatim. The negotiations and the conclusion of agreements during the period of the Balkan Wars and the First World War are examined in too much detail. They are explained at length in the Bulgarian historiography, and the task of the author, in my opinion, is to highlight the personal contribution, position, views of Toshev, his characteristic features as a diplomat.

In conclusion: The presented dissertation work is a completed study, with a certain scientific contribution. The author's demonstrated ability to search for and analyze documentary sources of different origins, the correct and conscientious use of scientific literature, the balanced conclusions she reaches determine my positive assessment of the work. Based on these reasons, I propose to the respected Scientific Jury to award Maria Sashkova Valkova PhD degree in

scientific field 2. Humanities, professional direction 2.2. History and Archaeology, History of Bulgaria.

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