

REVIEW

for the dissertation of Prof. Dr. Darina Grigorova Grigorova on the topic „Between the End of the Union and the Beginning of the Federation. Russia in Bulgarian Diplomatic Analyses (1990 – 1999)“, for the award of the academic degree „Doctor of Science“ in scientific specialty 2.2. History and Archaeology, Doctoral program „New and Contemporary General History“ - History of Modern Russia, by decision of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of History of Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“ dated April 15, 2025 and order № ПД-38-231/07.05.2025 г.

by Prof. Iskra Baeva PhD, Lecturer in Contemporary History at the Faculty of History, Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“

The candidate for the academic degree „Doctor of Science“ Prof. Dr. Darina Grigorova Grigorova is presenting herself in the competition with a doctoral dissertation on the topic „Between the End of the Union and the Beginning of the Federation. Russia in Bulgarian Diplomatic Analyses (1990–1999)“, as well as the documents necessary for the defense of the doctoral thesis and six publications on the topic.

1. Personal data of the contest participant

Prof. Dr. Darina Grigorova was born on December 10, 1973 in Sofia. She is a graduate of the Faculty of History of Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“, whose main specialty she graduated in 1996 with a specialization in „History of Russia“ and a second specialty in French Philology, and the topic of her master's thesis is „Incinerated by the Party Sun: Intelligentsia and Power in the USSR in the 1920s and 1930s“. She continued her studies in Russian history as a doctoral student since 1998, but returned to 19th century history with the topic „Russian Liberalism in the 1880s and 1890s“, which she defended before the Higher Attestation Commission in 2002.

Even before defending her dissertation in 2001, Darina Grigorova won a competition for a position as a lecturer in the Department of New and Recent History at the Faculty of History of Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“. She successively went through the steps of her academic career: became a senior assistant professor in 2003, habilitated as an associate

professor in 2008 with the book „Eurasianism in Russia“, and in 2019 was elected professor with the habilitation thesis „Empire-Phoenix. Between the Soviet Past and the Eurasian Future“.

The doctoral dissertation of Prof. Dr. Darina Grigorova on the topic „Between the End of the Union and the Beginning of the Federation. Russia in Bulgarian Diplomatic Analyses (1990 – 1999)“ has been discussed in the Department of New and Contemporary History and, based on the department's positive assessment, the Faculty Council of the Faculty of History has announced the procedure for its defense.

2. Evaluation of the dissertation work

The dissertation of Prof. Dr. Darina Grigorova is dedicated to an unexplored problem in Bulgarian historiography: the transition of Russia from the Soviet Union to the Russian Federation and the Commonwealth of Independent States, which took place in the last decade of the 20th century. She wrote her research not only on the basis of Soviet/Russian literature and documentation, but also with the help of information and analytical documents prepared by Bulgarian diplomats from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The dissertation has an impressive volume of 420 typewritten pages, created on the basis of numerous research and popular literature, media publications, memoirs, but also on official documents and, most importantly, on archival documents from the Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Just as an illustration, I will point out that we are talking about 213 separate Bulgarian diplomatic documents of various nature: analytical reports, report notes, memos, stenograms, letters, messages, declarations, applications, reports, memoranda, information, assessments, etc.; Russian archival documents from the Alexander Yakovlev Foundation, the Gorbachev Foundation and the Boris Yeltsin Presidential Center – a total of 11; archival documents from the US from the National Archives, the National Security Agency and the CIA – a total of 32; 37 official documents of various nature; transcripts of meetings of the Bulgarian and Russian parliaments – a total of 7; articles from Bulgarian and Soviet/Russian periodicals, to which interviews must be added – a total of 126; 44 memoir publications; research monographs, studies and articles, for some unknown reason given in separate lists – a total of 237, as well as 10 unpublished dissertations.

The structure of the dissertation at first glance seems traditional, as the text is divided into three evenly distributed chapters-parts. according to the chronological principle, but each of the subchapters - two in each part - traces different problems, and their titles show the innovative political science approach of Prof. Dr. Darina Grigorova to historical analysis.

The entire text is divided into numerous subtitles that present different aspects of the main problems that made possible not only the collapse of the Soviet Union, but also the formation of new state formations from its territory and their complex relationships, as well as the extremely important role of external factors in these processes.

Prof. Dr. Darina Grigorova formulated the goal of her dissertation as follows: „to examine the process of the emergence of modern Russia from the moment of the collapse of the Soviet Union (1990-1991) to the end of the twentieth century through the analysis of the Bulgarian diplomatic archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs“, to which she added that the object of the research was to present „the Bulgarian diplomatic interpretation of the contemporary processes in Yeltsin's Russia, which is a unique analytical-prognostic view, described in real time, according to professional diplomatic experience and field work“ (p. 6). I can already state here that the goal and object formulated in this way are significantly narrower than the text that will follow.

In the first part of her work „Factors for the Dismantling of the USSR 1990-1991“, Prof. Dr. Darina Grigorova focused on the changing mechanisms for the functioning of the power system in the Soviet Union, which ultimately led to its collapse. In the first sub-chapter of the part, she presented them as a „self-made factor“, by which she means the awakened political activity in Soviet society as a result of the reduced control of power during the „perestroika“ of the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU Mikhail Gorbachev. Dissident movements came to the fore at the same time in other countries of the pro-Soviet Eastern Bloc, but in the Soviet Union they had a greater influence on the political process, not only because some of them reawakened old nationalist tendencies in the multinational Soviet Union, and also because some ideological movements have solid support in the leadership of the CPSU and provoke a struggle for power that proves destructive for the USSR. Prof. Darina Grigorova has traced these „self-made organizations“ in the following way: the national ones mainly through the interfronts from the Baltics and the Catholic factor, and the ideological ones based on the growth of different ideological views in the RSFSR: liberal-democratic, social-democratic, nationalist, chauvinistic.

The second subchapter is dedicated to Bulgarian diplomatic analyses, which she values very highly and which largely coincide with the author's theses expressed in her publications from the time before she used the archival documents. Another thing that is striking in this subchapter is what is found in the text of the entire doctoral dissertation, namely that it examines many more problems than are stated in the objectives of the work or in the titles. Here, the American forecasts, presented on the basis of CIA documents, are impressive. Another topic emerges that will become a leading one in the following parts, as it strongly influences the formation of the Russian Federation – relations with Ukraine, which also declared independence. The author pays due attention to the processes in Ukraine and shows profound knowledge in these areas as well.

The second chapter is entitled „„Enlightened Authoritarianism“. The Russian Political System (1992-1999)“ and follows the first chronologically. It again demonstrates the author's political science and historical approach. Prof. Dr. Darina Grigorova traces the difficult and full of crises, clashes and twists and turns of Boris Yeltsin's path to establishing his power in the Russian Federation until his unexpected resignation to cede power to Vladimir Putin. The focus of the first part of the second chapter is the clash for power between the presidential institution and the parliament, which culminated in a coup and the use of military force against the White House (the seat of parliamentary power) in early October 1993. This attention is fully justified, since the nature of the state built on the ruins of the Soviet Union depends on the resolution of this conflict. Based on numerous pieces of information and a thorough analysis of events, Prof. Grigorova proves her thesis about the „enlightened absolutism“ that has established itself in the Russian Federation. At the same time, she manages to show that the centralization of power is necessary because of the challenges to the central government, caused by the awakening of the regions and their attempts to seize more power. We are talking about regional cases such as the Urals, the Siberian, the Tatar and, undoubtedly, the most important, the Chechen. In this part of the dissertation, Bulgarian diplomatic documents also have a place, but it is significantly smaller than that of the numerous Russian studies, documents and other publications.

Overall, the second chapter is largely political in nature, as it explores the formation of the specific characteristics of the Russian presidential regime. It is unique in the European context, just as autocracy was unique within European monarchism.

The chronological section chosen for the dissertation allows Prof. Darina Grigorova to present not only the entire period of President Boris Yeltsin's rule, but also the organized transition to the new government, personified first by Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov, and then by the Prime Minister who became first interim and then elected President Vladimir Putin. The conclusions from the second chapter, dedicated to the power factor in the Russian Federation, demonstrate Prof. Grigorova's ability to see and explain the evolution of highly centralized power from different perspectives.

The topic of the third chapter, „Strategic Dualism. The Geopolitical Interests of the Russian Federation (1992-1999)“, is different, as it is dedicated to Russia's foreign policy, or more precisely, to how, in the new conditions, the Russian leadership is trying to find the place of the successor to the Soviet Union in international relations. Although the main topic of this part is foreign policy, in it Prof. Darina Grigorova has again managed to approach the theoretical political science, seeking specific terms to explain the processes. The main one is „strategic sensitivity“, by which she understands the constant Russian sense of risk, which we can liken to the Russian tradition of the surrounded fortress.

And in this part of her dissertation, Prof. Darina Grigorova is forced to place the foreign policy of the Russian Federation in the broader sphere of international relations, which precisely in the 1990s were approaching a monocentric form such as Pax Americana. A significant part of the analysis is occupied by Russia's relations with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and its expansion towards Eastern Europe, to which Russian foreign policy reacted relatively moderately at the time. However, the emerging supremacy of the West, represented by the USA and Western Europe, is directing Russian foreign policy towards a struggle for a multipolar world, as well as contributing to its turn to the East, evidence of which is the revival of the Eurasian idea launched in the first half of the 20th century. It is curious that it is precisely in the part dedicated to foreign policy that the position of the Russian Orthodox Church, represented by Metropolitan Kirill, as well as the Russian Peace doctrine, appears.

The factual material presented throughout the dissertation is so numerous and detailed that it can hardly be encompassed not only in a single review, but also in the minds of the readers. The explanation for this undoubtedly lies in the complexity of the processes in this vast country during this turning decade.

My high assessment of Prof. Darina Grigorova's dissertation does not mean that I do not have critical remarks or recommendations for improving the text. My main one concerns the use of Bulgarian archival documents. In their current version, they remain completely anonymous and without a date of their preparation, which belittles the work and analytical skills of Bulgarian diplomats. The listing of these documents in the bibliography is also strange, because usually when referring to archives, the title of the archive, the funds used, inventories and archival units are indicated, and not the formal titles, which are not arranged in chronological order, but in the incomprehensible alphabetical order of the title, as is done with other archival documents. The war that broke out between Poland and Soviet Russia in 1920 is usually presented in literature as the Polish-Soviet War, not the Russian-Polish War (p. 46). In the presentation of Bulgarian-Soviet relations, the Bulgarian side is less well represented – for example, the letter of the UDF Central Committee to the chairman of the KGB Vadim Bakatin does not indicate the sender, who is actually Filip Dimitrov (p. 91), Soviet/Russian television has been watched in Bulgaria since 1965, not 1990 (note 899), the Ukrainian flag is blue-yellow, not yellow-blue (p. 320), Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic joined NATO in 1999, not 1997 (p. 338).

3. Evaluation of scientific results

The dissertation of Prof. Dr. Darina Grigorova „Between the End of the Union and the Beginning of the Federation. Russia in Bulgarian Diplomatic Analyses (1990 – 1999)“ is of a contributing nature, as it analyzes and provides an independent assessment of the last period of the development of the Soviet Union and the difficult establishment of the Russian Federation in the 1990s. It is written on the basis of unused primary source material, such as Bulgarian diplomatic documents of the period. The author has formulated and convincingly defended a number of political science concepts to explain Russian transformations and the complex relations of the Russian Federation with post-Soviet states and regions, as well as Russian foreign policy.

4. Evaluation of the abstract

The abstract of the dissertation of Prof. Dr. Darina Grigorova, in a volume of 34 pages, meets the requirements, as it presents the objectives, the source base, the structure of

the dissertation, as well as the six publications on the topic, five of which are in foreign publications. The content and layout of the abstract fully meet the academic requirements.

5. Evaluation of the scientific indicators of Prof. Dr Darina Grigorova

The report on the fulfillment of the minimum requirements for a major doctorate shows that Prof. Dr. Darina Grigorova has 50 points from Group A, 100 points from Group B, 210 points from Group D relating to publications, where the requirement is for 100 points, as well as 120 points from Group D, relating to citations, where the requirement is 100 points.

The indicated data show that the presented doctorate of Prof. Dr. Darina Grigorova and her other publications meet the requirements of NACID for awarding the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences".

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, I believe that the doctoral dissertation of Prof. Dr. Darina Grigorova „Between the End of the Union and the Beginning of the Federation. Russia in Bulgarian Diplomatic Analyses (1990 – 1999)“ is a profound work that presents the transformation processes in the Soviet Union in a convincing and analytical manner, which in the last decade of the 20th century led to its disintegration into separate states, the most important of which was the Russian Federation, struggling to receive the Soviet legacy. Significant parts of the dissertation are contributions. The additional publications presented and the abstract fulfill the requirements of the law.

All this gives me reason to state with complete conviction that I will vote "in favor" of awarding the degree of "Doctor of Science" to Prof. Dr. Darina Grigorova, to which I also call on the other members of the scientific jury.

July 9, 2025

Reviewer: prof. Iskra Baeva PhD