

## REVIEW

of the dissertation of Prof. Dr. Darina Grigorova, submitted for the award of the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences" in the professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology, on the topic:  
**"Between the End of the Union and the Beginning of the Federation: Russia in Bulgarian Diplomatic Analyses (1990–1999)"**

The present dissertation is an in-depth study of post-Soviet Russia in the context of Bulgarian diplomatic assessments of the processes between 1990 and 1999. The author analyzes unpublished diplomatic archives, thereby introducing new sources into academic circulation. The topic is timely, as the developments in Russia during the 1990s have had a profound impact on the contemporary world. The study addresses key issues such as the post-Soviet roots of the Russia–Ukraine conflict, the evolution of Russia's stance on NATO enlargement, and most importantly, the formation of modern Russian authoritarianism. Particularly valuable is the elaboration of the concept of "strategic dualism" in Russian foreign policy, which describes the complex dynamics between Russia's geopolitical ambitions and its actual capabilities during the transitional period following the collapse of the USSR.

The research is based on an interdisciplinary approach, incorporating both historical and political analysis. The author uses a broad range of sources, including 213 unpublished archival documents from the diplomatic archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, official state documents from Russian, American, and Ukrainian archives, as well as a rich body of scholarly literature in Bulgarian, Russian, and English. The periodical press and the memoirs of direct participants in the events further enrich the study.

The text is structured into an introduction, three main chapters, a conclusion, a source base, and a bibliography. The research is well-organized, with each part logically following the previous one and contributing to the overall analysis.

Chapter One spans 109 pages (pp. 18–127) and is divided into two main sections that examine the internal and external factors leading to the dissolution of the USSR. This part of the dissertation analyzes key processes such as political movements, the economic crisis, ideological transformations, and diplomatic scenarios concerning the future of the Soviet Union. The chapter is divided into two main sections: "The 'Spontaneous' Factor: The Informal Ideological and Political Instrument for the Dissolution of the USSR" (pp. 18–70), and "Diplomatic Analyses, Forecasts, and Scenarios for the 'Triune Crisis' of the USSR (1990–1991)" (pp. 71–127).

The first part of the chapter focuses on the role of informal movements, social and political groups that played a significant role in accelerating the dissolution of the USSR. According to the author, the USSR did not collapse solely under the pressure of economic problems or external factors, but also as a result of internal ideological movements that created alternative forms of political legitimacy and undermined traditional communist structures. This section presents the People's Fronts and their role in the deconstruction of the USSR (pp. 18–23). Examples such as the Baltic People's Fronts (in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia) are discussed, as they were the first to openly raise the issue of independence.

Differences between democratic, nationalist, and patriotic movements in Russia and other Soviet republics are analyzed. The crucial role of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia—who were the first to articulate the idea of sovereignty and independence in the late 1980s—is explained. One notable event examined is the Baltic Way (23 August 1989), in which 2 million people joined hands in protest against Soviet rule. Special attention is given to the specific situation in Belarus, where anti-Soviet movements remained weak compared to other republics. According to the author, this was due to a stronger communist identity and the absence of influential dissident circles. A particularly interesting aspect of the study is the presentation of the role of the Catholic Church, especially in Lithuania and Poland, which acted as a center of anti-communist resistance. The influence of Pope John Paul II and his policy toward Eastern Europe is also discussed. The informal movements in the RSFSR (Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic) and their influence on Russian political life are also examined (pp. 49–70). Liberal-democratic, social-democratic, and nationalist trends in Russian politics are outlined. Special attention is given to the disintegration of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) and the rise of Boris Yeltsin as a political leader.

The second part of the chapter offers a detailed analysis of the diplomatic scenarios developed in Bulgaria and other Eastern European countries concerning the possible future of the USSR. The term “triune crisis” is introduced to describe the convergence of political, economic, and social crises in the USSR. According to diplomatic documents from the period, these three elements rendered the Soviet collapse inevitable. The struggle between Yeltsin and Gorbachev, which ultimately led to the disintegration of Soviet authority, is analyzed. The Bulgarian diplomatic response to the August Coup (1991) is presented (pp. 86–99). The use of American forecasts and intelligence scenarios regarding the USSR’s collapse is also particularly useful (pp. 99–110).

Further in the chapter, special attention is paid to the Ukrainian factor in the dissolution of the USSR (pp. 110–127). The role of Kyiv is emphasized as a decisive element in the final breakup of the Soviet Union.

Chapter One presents a detailed, well-argued analysis of the causes behind the dismantling of the USSR. The author employs a broad range of sources and offers an original diplomatic perspective on the events. The chapter stands out for its in-depth approach, analysis of various ideological currents, and rich documentary material. At the same time, the author's position on key issues is clearly visible. From a stylistic point of view, the frequent use of Russicisms leaves an unpleasant impression. Already at this stage, a problem becomes apparent with the technical formatting of the scholarly apparatus, which unfortunately persists in the following chapters as well.

Chapter Two spans 107 pages (pp. 128–235) and is structured into two main parts that examine the formation and development of the political system in Russia during the 1990s. The main focus of this part of the dissertation is on the processes of institutional development of the Russian Federation following the dissolution of the USSR, the consolidation of presidential power, the struggle between democratic and authoritarian tendencies, and the role of foreign policy factors in shaping Russia's political trajectory.

The structure of the chapter includes the following two main sections: The Formation of the Russian Presidential Republic (pp. 128–192) and The Presidential Political System after December 12, 1993 (pp. 194–235).

The first part of the chapter traces the formation of Russia's political system, focusing on the centralization of power within the presidential institution, the conflict between the presidency and the parliament, and the adoption of the new Constitution of the Russian Federation. At the beginning of this section, various terms used to describe the crisis between President Boris Yeltsin and the Supreme Soviet of Russia are discussed. The chapter explores how the events were portrayed in Russian, Bulgarian, and Western diplomatic analyses. A chronology of the “president–parliament” conflict is presented, detailing the key stages of the political crisis of 1992–1993 that culminated in the armed confrontation in Moscow in October 1993. The dynamics of the clash between Boris Yeltsin and the leaders of the Supreme Soviet, who opposed the strengthening of presidential power, are explored. In the next section, Prof. Grigorova introduces the concept of “dual power” as a key element of Russia's political instability in the early 1990s. The legal, institutional, and political arguments of both sides in the conflict are analyzed. The center–periphery aspect of the conflict is also examined, analyzing how different Russian regions responded to the centralization of power. Detailed case studies are included of key regions that sought greater autonomy or even independence.

The role of propaganda in the “president–parliament” conflict (pp. 162–182) is also explored. The chapter analyzes how Russian media and political leaders represented the 1993 crisis. Bulgarian diplomacy analyzed the conflict as an indicator of Russia's future trajectory. Reports from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs predicted that Yeltsin would consolidate power—but at the expense of democratic processes. Especially compelling are the presented diplomatic analyses and forecasts regarding Russia's future after October 3–4, 1993 (pp. 188–192).

The second part of the chapter focuses on the adoption of the new Russian Constitution and the concentration of power in the hands of the president. The adoption of the 1993 Constitution of the Russian Federation is analyzed, and the extent to which the new constitution provides democratic mechanisms or reinforces authoritarianism is assessed. The process of expanding presidential powers at the expense of the parliament is presented in detail.

Special attention is given to social divisions and political ideologies (pp. 206–212). The division between democratically minded citizens and those nostalgic for the Soviet system is described. The analysis explores how the Russian state attempted to shape a new national identity after 1993. This section of the chapter also examines relations between Russia and Belarus, which began to develop around the idea of a “Russian-Belarusian Union.”

The chapter concludes with a relatively brief presentation of the post-Yeltsin period of 1998–1999, outlining the political instability at the end of the 1990s and evaluating the role of Vladimir Putin as a potential successor to Yeltsin. Chapter Two also analyzes and presents the formation of Russian authoritarianism, as prof. Grigorova

introduces the term “enlightened authoritarianism,” which carries strong references to the imperial political tradition of Russia.

For me, it is not entirely clear what exactly constitutes the "enlightenment" in Yeltsin's model. At the same time, there is an undeniably clear trajectory emerging, tied to the construction of authoritarian governance structures already at this early stage.

Chapter Three spans 117 pages (pp. 238–355) and focuses on Russia’s foreign policy in the 1990s, tracing key geopolitical conflicts, the country’s strategic ambitions, and the foreign policy dilemmas faced by the newly formed Russian Federation.

The chapter’s main emphasis is on the concept of “strategic dualism,” introduced by the author, which describes Russia’s vacillating foreign policy orientation—between efforts to integrate with the West and its aspiration to reassert influence over the post-Soviet space.

The chapter consists of two main sections: "The 'Strategic Sensitivity' of Russian Foreign Policy" (pp. 238–295) and "The Russian–Ukrainian ‘Cold War’ in the Battle for the Soviet Legacy" (pp. 295–355).

The first section analyzes how Russia responded to global geopolitical shifts and how its foreign policy was shaped in the period after 1991. Particular attention is paid to the transition from Soviet to Russian diplomatic tradition, the efforts to cooperate with the West, and the key geopolitical dilemmas the country faced.

This part begins with a chronology of events from 1992 to 1999 and explores how Russia’s foreign policy evolved over time, depending on domestic political circumstances and the international context.

The development of Russia’s foreign policy doctrine is analyzed—from early 1990s cooperation with the West to a more assertive posture by the end of the decade. Special focus is given to NATO enlargement. The chapter explains how the eastward expansion of the Alliance was perceived by the Russian political elite as a threat. Russia’s diplomatic response to the accession of Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary to NATO in 1999 is thoroughly examined.

Particularly interesting is the section dedicated to Russia’s Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) (pp. 253–257). The analyses of the Russian intelligence agencies regarding the international environment and their forecasts for the global balance of power are examined. This is followed by the Bulgarian perspective on the evolution of Russia’s position toward NATO. Bulgarian diplomatic reports are presented, analyzing how Russia perceives NATO enlargement and its implications for the Balkans. The chapter discusses how Russia attempted to present the “Partnership for Peace” initiative as an alternative to NATO expansion.

A very important passage is devoted to the ideological transformation occurring in the Russian Federation. The idea of Russia as a “Eurasian civilization” is analyzed, as well as how this concept stands in opposition to Euro-Atlantic integration. The competition between Russia and Turkey for influence in the Balkans—including in Bulgaria—is very well presented. Special attention is given to the “Zhirinovsky Syndrome” and the role of nationalist ideas in Russian foreign policy. The study explores the influence of radical nationalist and Eurasian concepts in shaping Russian foreign policy.

The second part of the chapter examines the growing tensions between Russia and Ukraine and the struggle for control over the Soviet legacy—territories, resources, the military, and international influence. The discussion of these contradictions begins with the Crimea issue, continues through the Black Sea Fleet dispute and Russian claims over naval bases in Sevastopol. The political activity of pro-Russian forces in Eastern Ukraine is also analyzed, along with how Russia uses these movements to exert influence.

The agreement on Ukraine's nuclear disarmament and Russia's policy on the matter are discussed. The study also evaluates how Bulgarian diplomacy perceived the rise of nationalist tendencies in Ukraine.

Chapter Three offers a detailed analysis of Russia's foreign policy during the 1990s, demonstrating Moscow's strategic hesitation between the West and the post-Soviet space. The introduction of the concept of "strategic dualism" is a major contribution of the author, providing a new framework for understanding Russian geopolitics.

Nonetheless, the study is not without certain issues. In Chapter Three, particularly in the section on Russian-Ukrainian relations, the presentation appears unbalanced, with greater emphasis placed on Ukrainian policies and internal problems. Due to the nature of the research, the study lacks a classical chronological approach and a clear linkage with political history. In Chapter Two, economic issues receive relatively limited attention, despite being one of the primary causes of the tensions between the presidency and parliament.

Still, these remarks are minor when compared to the overall scale and significance of the research.

The concluding section of the dissertation summarizes the main findings of the study and offers an interpretation of the key trends in Russian politics during the 1990s. The work contributes in several important areas, the most significant being the introduction of new diplomatic documents into academic circulation, the development of the concept of strategic dualism, and the analysis of the state-building processes in Russia.

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 a scientifically grounded and in-depth work that makes a significant contribution to the understanding of post-Soviet Russia. The analysis is well-argued, the sources used are wide-ranging, and the conclusions drawn possess high scholarly value. Based on all of the above, I believe that the esteemed academic committee can fully and justifiably confer upon Prof. Dr. Darina Grigorova the academic degree of Doctor of Sciences in the professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology.

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July 8, 2025

**Prof. Dr. A. Sivilov**

