

## OPINION

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on defense of a dissertation 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 scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences" in the professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology.

One of the first things I want to emphasize is that this is a discursive and original topic, the implementation of which is at a high level. The title unites two main lines – the processes in Russia in the 1990s and the Bulgarian diplomatic point of view towards them. These two main elements are intertwined in the presentation in an appropriate way. The chronological framework set is logical and natural and well-founded in the Introduction. I will also highlight the following from the first component: “As a valuable addition to the diplomatic analysis of contemporary Russia, the Bulgarian public political resonance to key events is also examined”. In my opinion, this additional emphasis contributes to the construction of the Bulgarian idea of the processes that are developing in the until recently extremely close ally.

In view of the fact that the text of Prof. Grigorova is proposed for the scientific degree of "Doctor of Historical Sciences", it is logical that a well-composed typology of the documents used is present. There are official and unofficial channels for obtaining information from the Bulgarian diplomatic staff, which implies a comprehensive approach on the part of the Bulgarian side. Meanwhile, the American analyses and documents present allow for a comparison with the Bulgarian ones.

A brief “Report on Diplomatic Relations between Bulgaria and Russia” in the period under review is intended. In my opinion, a more serious quantitative and qualitative characterization of the Bulgarian diplomatic staff - number, education, as well as the structure of the embassy in Moscow and the individual consulates - would be extremely useful for the quality of the text. This would make it clearer who writes the analyses, information and forecasts. I would also ask one additional question: is the volume of Bulgarian documents towards the USA and the EU larger and smaller compared to those that “come” from the disintegrating union?

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Chapter 1: “Factors for the Dismantling of the USSR (1990-91)” – in the second half of the 1980s this is a process that begins for a variety of reasons. The first factor is the “self-made” – or “from below”; however, it becomes clear that the disintegration is actually happening “from above” because of the role of the KGB. It seems to me that the specifically Bulgarian point of view on the Popular Fronts, of which there are three types, is missing. It is probably not clearly highlighted in the documents of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but this can be clearly stated in the text. Still, Bulgaria clearly has an interest not only in the center, but also in the periphery.

The internal factor is presented geographically, but also in terms of the significance of the influence: first the Baltics and Eastern Europe; then the South Caucasian republics (Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan). The formation of the individual Popular Fronts seems to be a parallel process, but purely geographically they have completely different goals and intentions and, accordingly, the projection of actions according to the specifics and history of the respective zone. From the conversation between Brzezinski and Yakovlev it becomes clear how important the Baltics are for Moscow. There is a logical connection between the entry into public discourse of the idea of the NF and the events in the Caucasus, Nagorno-Karabakh, which are explosive due to historical conflicts. There are no Popular Fronts in the Central Asian republics, which practically removes them from the center-periphery contradiction. In the conclusion it becomes clear why the Baltics (with the help of the former ideological enemy, i.e. the West) and Russia provoke disintegration. The text also examines other factors for the disintegration: the religious (the Catholicism-Orthodoxy contradiction), the market economy, understood as a way to differentiate from the USSR; the "party dual power", which is actually a fierce personal battle.

The second sub-chapter is dedicated to diplomatic analyses, i.e. the Bulgarian point of view on the collapse of "Big Brother". The archive material from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs presented is analyzed; the comparison of Bulgarian and American documents is an additional element that enriches the presentation. The finding of the coincidence in the visions of Bulgarian and British diplomatic analyses shows the height of the Bulgarian expert assessment.

The focus of the native diplomatic representatives includes all the key events of the period 1990-1991. Of particular interest is the presented reaction of Bulgarian politicians to the August Putsch, which is a key event for the Disintegration of the USSR. This subchapter also presents additional factors for the disintegration of the Soviet Union - i.e. the Slavic-Ukrainian factor, which has additional weight. However, presented in this way, this new factor, this geographical/concentric shift, evokes a feeling of chaos. The emancipation of Ukraine (are there actually Popular Fronts in it?) also raises the Crimean question, which further strengthens the existing contradictions.

Finally, there is a Summary of the factors, very complex, for the collapse of the USSR; and the bringing to the first place of the dual power as the most significant factor for this process, completely surprising for contemporaries - both for professional diplomats from all over the world and for politicians.

After the collapse of the Union, it is time to build a new structure. Chapter Two: "Enlightened Authoritarianism" is dedicated to these processes. The Russian political system (1992-1999). An important stage is the construction of the Russian presidential republic (1992 - 1993). A contribution to Bulgarian historiography is the terminological and factual clarification of the events of September-October 1993; personal points of view are presented, according to the profile of people. Bulgarian documents cover all processes: the battle between institutions at the state level; and as a second layer - the battle between the center and the periphery, presented through the prism of 4 regional cases. Centrifugal trends in Russia itself turn out to be significant for the construction of the federation. In this main component, the Bulgarian political and public reaction to what happened in early October 1993 is particularly interesting.

The next subchapter examines the construction of the presidential political system after December 12, 1993, which is moving in the direction of a clear strengthening of the power of the presidential institution. These processes also go through the search for a new national idea

that would be distinctive compared to the past. The importance of the state ideology imposed "from above" is emphasized. The rapprochement with Belarus has an impact on the internal political processes in Russia, respectively the full-fledged construction of the federation. Although in 1998-1999 President Yeltsin was still in power, Professor Grigorova successfully calls the period "post-Yeltsin" with the argument that the process of building the federation, whose main ideologist was Boris Nikolaevich, is ending. The conclusion emphasizes the "power factor", the personification of which is Yeltsin.

Chapter three is entitled: "Strategic dualism. Geopolitical interests of the Russian Federation". Moscow's desire to maintain large-scale leadership positions in international relations is defined by the author as "strategic sensitivity", in my opinion justified. The factors leading to its emergence and realization are reflected: heritage, historical tradition, as well as external ones, caused by the beginning of the process of NATO expansion along the borders of the Russian Federation. Bulgarian diplomacy quickly captures the Russian desire for the country not to lose the role of a key player in international relations. Our diplomats also pay attention to Russian-Turkish relations, sensing Turkish fear of the Russian Federation. The deterioration of Bulgarian-Russian relations quite logically enters the focus of diplomatic analyses and forecasts, with the author bringing to the forefront their professional compilation by our diplomats.

The second sub-chapter is devoted to the topic of Russian-Ukrainian relations through the prism of the affirmation of the two states. All the problematic points between Russia and Ukraine are consistently considered. Bulgarian documents show serious interest in Russian-Ukrainian contradictions and emphasize the Russian ethnic character of Donbas, which is one of the most "disputed" regions. The critical position of Bulgarian diplomacy "on the ground" regarding Ukraine's Crimean policy is also highlighted. Bulgarian documents offer a logical explanation for Ukrainian behavior. In view of the fact that a Bulgarian diaspora lives in some of the problematic geographical regions, the interest of our native diplomats is completely reasonable and professional. Here, the need for competently compiled analyses and forecasts is particularly clearly evident. However, the extent to which they are taken into account at the highest level is another question. One of the last issues that come into the focus of attention of diplomatic personnel is that of Ukrainian nationalism, which definitely creates tension for them. Kiev's nationalism, along with its unpredictability, makes people in our missions careful and precise, because they recognize danger in it.

In the Conclusion, Prof. Grigorova clarifies the term "strategic dualism" she introduced, which consists of several main components. The assessment of Bulgarian diplomatic documents is precisely composed by the author, who emphasizes the high level of our native diplomats.

I would like to ask several questions, namely: what is the frequency of the documents? Is there an evaluative element in Bulgarian diplomatic documents? An initially interesting question is what is missing in Bulgarian documents?

In the criticism column, I will mostly say that there are passages that "burden" the text, for example: p. 33 - the historical reference to the return of Lithuania to Vilnius (it is in brackets); p. 60 - the clarification of the Shevernadze - Baker agreement - also; as well as on p. 291 - the explanations about Sharapov's activities on November 10, 1989. In my opinion, they should be in a note, the presentation will be lighter and more coherent.

The present text is definitely built on a large-scale, truly impressive documentary basis. This definitely makes it an unconditional contribution to Bulgarian historiography. This criterion is fully covered by Prof. Grigorova. The cited historiography is significant in volume and diverse in nature. The introduction of the term "strategic dualism" is also a contributing event to science. For me, another valuable moment in the present text is the comparison between the analysis of the professional diplomatic staff of what is happening and the socio-political reaction in Bulgaria to it.

My assessment of the present work is entirely positive.

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