

REVIEW

by

Prof. Dr. Jordan Angelov Baev,

on the competition for the defense of a dissertation by Prof. Dr. Darina Grigorova Grigorova from the Department of "New and Contemporary History" at the Faculty of History, Sofia University on the topic: "Between the End of the Union and the Beginning of the Federation.

Russia in Bulgarian Diplomatic Analyses (1990-1999)" submitted for the award of the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences" in the professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology (New and Recent General History - History of Contemporary Russia) in accordance with the Order of the Rector of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" No. RD-38-231/07.05.2025 and v.z. No. RD-38-296/16.06.2025.

The dissertation proposed for public defense is a comprehensive study on an extremely topical issue, previously unexplored in Bulgarian historiography. The author has taken advantage of the unique opportunity to reveal previously inaccessible archival collections from the first Post-Cold War decade, thereby expanding the chronological scope of historical research to the period up to the beginning of the 21st century. At the same time, the dissertation is a logical continuation of a previous original monography by Prof. Grigorova "The Phoenix Empire: Between the Soviet Past and the Eurasian Future" (2015). Structurally, the dissertation is developed in three main chapters, each of which is structured with two paragraphs and a conclusion. The significant geopolitical horizons and thematic directions have required additional internal composition and differentiation of numerous problematic topics, which contribute to the identification of clear and complete discussion questions on a wide range of acutely conflicting challenges characteristic of the post-Soviet geopolitical space.

The chosen scientific approach to presenting through Bulgarian diplomatic reports and analyses the tectonic collapse of the "Soviet empire" and the chaotic path to building the new "presidential republic" in Russia implies several problematic levels and subjects of research. On the one hand, it is about the information potential and analytical and predictive capabilities of the Bulgarian diplomatic corps, both locally ("on the ground" in embassies and consulates general) and in the "center" (MFA). Moreover, in the conditions of a parallel radical transformation in Bulgaria and a reorientation of Bulgarian foreign policy from East to West with at least two complete reorganizations in the Bulgarian foreign ministry with a significant replacement of diplomatic personnel. Next, the created legal-normative vacuum and bipolar

rivalry between the executive (presidential) and legislative branches in Russia, reinforced by spontaneous contradictions between the center and the periphery, give rise to new “civilizational-ideological vectors” that require a more in-depth and critical understanding. Third, the transformation of the bipolar model of international relations into a “unilateral” international order with a dominant role of the sole superpower and with a parallel transformation of the global military-political union (from an organization for “collective defense” into an organization for “cooperative security”) requires that the “Russian world” be viewed through the prism of “international factors”. Last but not least, the complex ethno-national, political and economic relations of the Russian Federation with the former Soviet republics in Europe (including in strategic areas such as nuclear security) form another significant circle of crisis interactions and dilemmas. For Bulgarian diplomatic representatives, timely and reliable clarification of the status and real situation of the Bulgarian national diaspora in the post-Soviet space is of particular importance.

This entire “kaleidoscope” of acutely problematic topics contains significant challenges for every researcher. Prof. Darina Grigorova has not used a pretext to avoid any of them, but conscientiously and honestly, with the critical approach necessary for serious historical science, consistently offers her multifaceted analysis. The study is based on a significant number of diplomatic documents from the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Sofia for the entire period under study 1990-1999 (op. 47-1 – op. 56-7). The disclosure of socio-political phenomena and processes specific to Russia is carried out in the dissertation with the additional introduction of numerous documentary and memoir testimonies and expert-analytical publications (including an attempt at content analysis of nearly twenty Russian periodicals), which significantly contributes to the comprehensive clarification of the problems under study. The additional use of U.S. official sources helps to understand the different positions and points of view, for example, on the controversial issue of NATO expansion in Eastern Europe. The dissertation also introduces a necessary degree of interdisciplinary political science analysis, especially in connection with the clarification of a new categorical-conceptual apparatus (with terms such as “enlightened authoritarianism”, “power-centrism”, “strategic dualism”, etc.)

The proposed dissertation unconditionally confirms the author's conclusion that Bulgarian diplomatic documents are “a source that has a very serious potential for refining the historical view” of socio-political events in Russia during the first “dramatic decade” of its independent post-Soviet development. The four main contributions summarized by Prof. Darina Grigorova, including the proposed systematic typology, are justified, and the formulated

conclusions are correctly reflected in a synthesized form in the dissertation abstract. On the topic of the dissertation in recent years, there have been six author's publications, five of which published abroad. According to the submitted report on the fulfillment of the minimum national requirements under Art. 26 of the ZRAS RB, Prof. Grigorova not only meets, but also exceeds the legally required numerical dimensions by groups of indicators.

Despite the limited scope of the presented Reviews, I will allow myself some questions and recommendations in view of the possible subsequent publication of the dissertation in a separate monograph, which I strongly recommend. In addition to the mentioned archival documents, was it possible to also see reports, references and confidential cables from inventories P and Sh in the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs? In the "Coordination and Analysis" department of the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the 1990s, there was a practice of publishing weekly bulletins and separate thematic situational analyses (marked "Confidential"/"For official use") – to what extent is there currently access to such analytical documents? Given that the references, reports and memoranda are very often signed by their authors, is it possible to make a generalized assessment of the leading Bulgarian diplomats in the "Russian direction" at the individual stages? This would contribute to avoiding the anonymity of "diplomatic analyses" and to a more specific assessment of the personal expert potential in Bulgarian foreign policy during the period under review. Also, some of the confidential reports were sent to the presidential institution and the parliamentary committee on foreign policy, which are already available for the research period (CDA, fund 117 and fund 1224). The provision of specific journalistic information and comments in the daily Bulgarian press is useful, but the summarized expert commentaries of diplomats, military specialists, economists, etc., published in specialized magazines such as "International Relations" and "Military Journal", are of no less value. It would also be useful to use the documentary materials from Bill Clinton's presidential archive declassified in 2018, including the digital collection of nearly 600 sheets of transcripts of meetings and phone conversations between Boris Yeltsin and Bill Clinton in the period 1996-1999. The National Security Archive (NSA) is not a US government agency, but an independent non-governmental organization at George Washington University, created to pressure the US government to declassify archival documents under the FOIA. Therefore, the NSA does not store original documents, but only copies of documents provided to them. Since 1993, they have also had a "Russian collection" in which copies of extremely valuable documents are stored (from the RGANI, the AVP RF the AP RF, the personal records of Gen. D. Volkogonov, etc.).

Considering the undoubted merits of the dissertation and the undeniable contributions to the research, I propose to the members of the esteemed Scientific Jury to vote positively for awarding Prof. Darina Grigorova Grigorova the scientific degree of "Doctor of Sciences" in professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology (New and Recent General History - History of Modern Russia).

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