

OPINION

from **Prof. EVGENIA KALINOVA**,

Faculty of History, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”

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 obtaining the scientific degree “Doctor of Sciences”

in professional field: 2.2. History and Archaeology (History of Contemporary Russia)

The author of the present dissertation, Prof. Darina Grigorova, is a renowned specialist in Russian modern and contemporary history. Her research interests in this field date back to her undergraduate specialization in history of Russia at the Faculty of History of Sofia University. She has a PhD in Russian Studies from the University of St. Kliment Ohridski - her dissertation "Russian Liberalism in the 1880s-90s" was successfully defended in 2002. Grigorova habilitated with a research paper on Eurasianism in Russia, and in 2019 she became Professor of Modern and Contemporary World History - History of Russia, with the habilitation thesis "Empire-Phoenix. Between the Soviet Past and the Eurasian Future". Her teaching activity is completely associated with the above-mentioned issues, and five PhD students have defended under her supervision dissertations on topics of Russian history.

The present dissertation is a logical extension of D. Grigorova's study of contemporary Russian history. In it, however, she draws on a new and so far out of the sight of historians and not brought into scientific circulation documentary collection - diplomatic documents in the archive of the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Through their prism, D. Grigorova analyzes the processes from the collapse of the Soviet Union to the formation of contemporary Russia in the 1990s. The author emphasizes that the object of the study is not the Bulgarian-Russian relations, but "the Bulgarian diplomatic interpretation of contemporary processes in Yeltsin's Russia, which is a unique analytical and prognostic view, described in real time, according to professional diplomatic experience and fieldwork" (p. 6). Reflecting on my experience in

researching contemporary Bulgarian history and my work with the document collections in the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I would like to mention that such an approach is relatively rare and deserves great esteem not only for its specific factual and analytical contributions, but also as a demonstration of its potential for discovering new research fields. In my opinion, Darina Grigorova undoubtedly deserves high recognition for the successfully chosen perspective on the processes in Russia at the end of the twentieth century. I would also like to note, at this point, that the author has achieved results that can be perceived as a contribution to Bulgarian history science.

In line with the main goal of the study, it "stands" on an impressive volume and variety of sources, as well as a serious amount of scientific literature. For the first time in scholarly circulation, documents from the analytical departments of the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs have been brought into use, and the introduction to the dissertation provides an overview of the types of archival materials from this array. It is supplemented and enriched with a number of published documents, including those from electronic databases, containing important for the topic materials from Russian and American archives. A positive point of the study is the inclusion of a large number of Bulgarian and Soviet/Russian newspapers, as well as memoirs of leading Russian politicians of the period under review. Darina Grigorova has an excellent knowledge of the academic literature on the topic of her dissertation - the bibliography lists over 230 titles in Bulgarian, Russian, French and English, which are correctly used and cited.

The structure of the dissertation includes an introduction, three chapters (each with two paragraphs), a conclusion, sources and references in a total volume of 420 pp. This structure adheres to the traditional problem-chronological approach and corresponds to the aims and objectives set by the author. Between the introduction and the first chapter, Darina Grigorova has opted to place a short text entitled "Reference to diplomatic relations between Bulgaria and Russia for the period 1990-1999". Presenting these relations as a background to the further analyses I find important and necessary, but it seems to me that the study would only gain if it did not look like a chronicle. Despite the author's remark that bilateral relations are not the focus of her attention, a more comprehensive and analytical text ending with relevant conclusions would have added value to the study.

The first chapter of the dissertation covers the short period from 1990 to 1991 and examines the factors behind the "dismantling" of the USSR. The first paragraph traces the emergence and

development of the Popular Fronts in the period 1988-1991 in the Soviet republics, which the author defines as "a specific part of the so-called informal movement of late perestroika in the USSR" that led to the transformation of this perestroika into an "anti-Soviet project". The focus is on the fronts in the Baltic republics because of their role in the collapse of the USSR, in addition to the assessment of Bulgarian diplomats of what was happening there, as well as the official Bulgarian position. Valuable information is provided on the dialogue with the Vatican as a factor in the transformation of the USSR, although it was not "perceived" by Bulgarian diplomats. Naturally, a significant place is given to the informal movements in the Russian Federation, which, according to D. Grigorova, were "the ideological instrument for the destruction of the Soviet community". At the same time, this special place is determined by the fact that these movements attracted the attention of Bulgarian diplomats and they reflected them in detail in their analyses.

The second paragraph of the first chapter is an excellent illustration of the main objective of the dissertation - to reconstruct the complex processes in the USSR through the eyes of Bulgarian diplomats. Darina Grigorova has managed to track down and compare with other sources the analyses and forecasts of the Bulgarian diplomats on the development of the political, economic and international crisis in this country in 1990-1991, and her conclusions are that they have adequately oriented themselves and predicted the imminent collapse of the USSR. Logically, the focus of the diplomatic reports is on the 'Yeltsin-Gorbachev battle', and the analysis of the Bulgarian diplomatic and political reaction to the August 1991 putsch draws on heterogeneous source material and sheds further light on the behaviour of Bulgarian political circles. Important aspects are highlighted in the sub-paragraph on the 'Ukrainian factor', which occupies a place of its own in Bulgarian diplomatic reports mainly because of the large Bulgarian minority in Ukraine, but also because of the key role of this factor in the collapse of the Soviet Union. Darina Grigorova shows the adequacy of the Bulgarian diplomats, who in their analyses manage to detect the main problems in the development of the situation in Ukraine, including the problem with the "rebellious Crimea". There is a separate conclusion to the chapter where the author very convincingly systematizes and assesses the various factors that led to the collapse of the USSR.

The second chapter of the dissertation examines in two paragraphs (with an internal boundary at the end of 1993) the construction and main characteristics of the Russian political system in

the period 1992-1999, refracted through the prism of Bulgarian diplomatic documents. D. Grigorova provides an in-depth analysis of the terms used in these documents, compares them with Russian and American documents, memoirs and press and on this basis reveals the factors that led to the establishment of the presidential republic in post-Soviet Russia. It presents the two centres of power, the president and the parliament, and the conflict between them that culminated in the establishment of the presidential republic by the constitution of 12 December 1993. The centre-periphery opposition is examined in parallel with the most prominent regional cases (the Ural, Siberian, Tatar and Chechen). The important points related to the support Yeltsin received from the USA in his struggle with the Parliament, which did not go unnoticed by the Bulgarian diplomats, are also integrated into the summary of events.

Special place D. Grigorova devotes to the reaction to the events in Russia of 3-4 October 1993 from Bulgarian politicians, parties and the press, as well as to the analyses prepared by Bulgarian diplomats on the foreign and domestic political consequences for Russia after the end of 1993, and on Bulgaria's place in these processes. In detail and depth, combining information from Bulgarian diplomatic documents and Russian academic studies, the author outlines the nature of the presidential republic, the socio-economic situation ("the gap in social differentiation between the 'two Russias' into which Russian society is divided") and ideological trends. In addition, the second chapter concludes with a summary of the main factors that contributed to the establishment of the presidential republic in post-Soviet Russia.

The third chapter of the dissertation is devoted to the foreign policy of the Russian Federation in the period 1992-1999. Understandably, Bulgarian diplomats pay special attention to the processes in this sphere, which to one degree or another also affect Bulgaria. Darina Grigorova introduces the term "strategic dualism" for the main specificity of the country's foreign policy. The term includes various dimensions - ideological, institutional, and civilizational. The author's analysis of the reports of Bulgarian diplomats reveals the stages of the formation of Russian foreign policy with their main accents and with attention to the relations with the USA, NATO and Germany. Arguments are given for defining the first stage as "Western-centric" and for its transformation between 1994 and 1996 into a stage of "dualism", "combining cooperation with the West with protection of national interests". Darina Grigorova makes a successful attempt to compare the views of Russian politicians and the US and NATO on the future of their relations and Europe's place in them and concludes that "NATO's and Russia's understanding of strategic

balance in Europe after the end of the Cold War turns out to be fundamentally different". Important elements of Russia's policy towards the Balkans and Bulgaria in particular are not overlooked. The picture of the Bulgarian-Russian relations, which the author recreates, is dense and objective and confirms the conclusion drawn about the two parallel directions in these relations - "the economic one, which is stabilizing, and the foreign policy one, where there is a divergence of geopolitical goals".

The second paragraph of the last chapter focuses on Russian-Ukrainian relations after the collapse of the USSR. These are traced through Bulgarian diplomatic reports, defining them as a "cold war", in which the disputes over the Soviet legacy with the key role of the "Crimean Knot", the Black Sea Fleet, Soviet nuclear weapons, as well as Ukraine's foreign policy orientation are the leading issues. The author's assessment is that the analyses and forecasts of Bulgarian diplomats and experts cover all aspects of Ukrainian domestic and foreign policy and demonstrate "professional depth".

In the conclusion of the dissertation Darina Grigorova outlines the significance of the diplomatic documents used from the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and their historical value. Additional terminological clarifications and conclusions on the topic of the dissertation are made.

From the attached reference on the fulfilment of the minimum national requirements for the History of Modern Russia, professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology, it is evident that Prof. Darina Grigorova has the needed total number of points in the individual indicators for the degree of Doctor of Science. The submitted abstract correctly reflects the main points of the dissertation structure and the most important conclusions in it.

In view of the future publication of the thesis, which I strongly recommend, I would like to make some comments. It is incomprehensible to me why the author has chosen to leave the authors of the analytical documents from the Foreign Ministry Archive in complete anonymity. Obviously, these are Bulgarian diplomats, whose professional biography would not only be interesting for future readers, but would also allow new nuances in the work of the Foreign Ministry and its staff in the first years of the Transition to be highlighted. In some cases, events and personalities are mentioned without any explanations, which would make the text difficult to be understood by a broader and unfamiliar audience. Some intriguing statements in the Bulgarian diplomatic analyses are left without comment by the author, while the historical distance and the

professional competence of D. Grigorova allow them to be further clarified or at least to be addressed. (e.g. on p. 57: "The 1990 diplomatic analysis of Soviet society notes the observation that 'the activity of building political opposition structures is directed by Western special services'"). The dissertation also includes important issues for which the information is not from Bulgarian diplomatic documents, and it would be interesting to clarify why Bulgarian diplomats did not pay attention to these issues in Russia (e.g. the sub-paragraph "Ideologizing the 'Market Future'", itself important and interesting, lacks documents to show that these processes were tracked by Bulgarian diplomats). There are "inserted" topics in the paper (e.g. the sub-paragraph "American forecasts and CIA scenarios for the future of the USSR") which at first glance seem to be aside from the main topic of the coverage of the processes in Russia in the Bulgarian diplomatic documents. Therefore, it would be necessary to clarify the relationship (and there certainly is one) of such "side" texts to the main topic of the dissertation. In my opinion, the bibliography is unnecessarily overburdened in listing all the archival items used, which have already been listed with their full description in the footnotes - in the established standard of formatting the sources used in the bibliography, it is only appropriate to list the archives and the names of the funds.

However, the above remarks are only suggestions and recommendations and do not revise my excellent evaluation of the submitted dissertation. It is a proof of the high professional level, achieved by Prof. Darina Grigorova. With her theoretical contributions and her original approach to present the problems of post-Soviet Russia through the prism of Bulgarian diplomatic documents, she outlines new research fields and sets directions for future research. With this, Prof. Darina Grigorova fully meets the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Science and I will vote for its award by the esteemed scientific jury.

July 10th, 2025

Prof. Evgenia Kalinova, PhD