

O P I N I O N

by Prof. DSc. **VALERI STOYANOV**

on the dissertation of **PETYA PAVLOVA**

Turkey in Bulgarian Politics (1989-2004)

for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the
Field of higher education 2. *Humanities*, Professional Direction 2.2.

History and Archaeology, Scientific Specialty *History of Bulgaria*
(*Contemporary Bulgarian History*)

with scientific supervisor Prof. Dr. **EVGENIYA KALINOVA**

It's rare to come across a study like this, developed as a dissertation. Usually, candidates for a doctoral degree tackle a more specific problem or problematic aspect, aiming to analyze and track its development, revealing the logical connections and building blocks of the subject they are researching. However, in this case, the topic is formulated in its entirety, which suggests a more complex holistic approach. The only limitation is the chronological framework, marked in the title of the work. The tandem of the doctoral student and the academic advisor has shown great courage, strong will, and enough ambition to bring this endeavor to a successful conclusion, offering us a comprehensive guide to the role and place of Turkey in Bulgarian politics during the post-totalitarian transition.

The result is impressive in both volume and thematic scope. Spanning almost 500 pages, it offers a panoramic view of Bulgarian-Turkish relations during the period in question, with the finest details. The analysis is backed by a wealth of source material, gathered from published memoirs and research literature, as well as from periodicals, and especially from various archival units stored in the Central State Archive and the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the President's Administration. The text is filled with descriptions of their contents and excerpts from various documents, enriching the nuances and enhancing the evidential value of this comprehensive study.

The work is classically structured, consisting of an Introduction, a Main Body with four chapters (each with a different number of paragraphs and sub-paragraphs), a Conclusion, and a Bibliography. The main goal of the author is to build on the thematic and chronological achievements in Bulgarian historiography regarding bilateral Bulgarian-Turkish relations. They aim to critically analyze significant events and detail certain stages in the preparation of bilateral agreements. The chronological framework is clearly outlined, from the end of 1989, when relations between the two countries were at their lowest, with Turkey traditionally seen as the greatest external political and military threat, to Bulgaria's accession to NATO in 2004, when the two countries gradually transitioned from adversaries to strategic allies and partners.

The author is aware that the lack of free access to much of the information, due to its sensitive nature, hinders a deeper study of some of the issues mentioned. This includes materials from so-called power departments, which are typically tasked with internal control, intelligence, and counteraction against threats to statehood. The lack of access to Turkish archives also prevents a detailed study of Turkey's position on various issues in the development of mutual contacts. This somewhat limits the scope of the dissertation, whose scientific conclusions and results are primarily based on accessible narrative and archival literature in Bulgaria. Despite these limitations, the doctoral candidate has managed to extract the maximum from the information she could access directly or indirectly, greatly enhancing the value of her work.

The first chapter reflects on the development of political relations between the two countries. Initially, Turkey is in a more advantageous position due to the negative legacy of the so-called Revival Process. It has every reason to capitalize on the events unfolding in Bulgaria, which in the fall of 1989 (and even today) no one refers to as a "Bulgarian Spring." However, the good diplomatic tradition—let's give it credit (after all, it is a former imperial power)—leads Turkey to adopt a wait-and-see approach and halt the pressure for the recognition of a "Turkish national minority" in Bulgaria and for signing an emigration agreement.

The initiative to normalize contacts was taken by the Bulgarian state. Consular relations improved, and the difficulties in issuing visas were reduced. Turkey even unilaterally abolished visas, hoping Bulgaria would do the same. However, at that time, Bulgaria was in the process of aligning its legislation with European standards and did not meet Turkey's expectations. Bulgaria's accelerated progress towards joining the European Union gave it additional weight in bilateral relations. The fact that this situation was not effectively utilized is largely due to the inexperience of the new Bulgarian politicians in defending national interests.

In this context, we should also consider the shift from the initial position, where disputed issues were to be resolved in the order they were formulated—first addressing Bulgarian property claims in Turkey, followed by settling the social issues of the resettled Bulgarian Turks. The doctoral student correctly traces the differences between the positions of the "socialist" governments and those of the "democratic forces." During the rule of Jean Videnov, Turkey was still viewed with suspicion, but significant changes occurred under Ivan Kostov, for which source information is still not accessible. The negative assessment of his cabinet's actions is intensified by the decision to sign an agreement addressing the social security of resettled Bulgarian Turks without prior agreement on satisfying Bulgarian property claims. The doctoral student notes this as a significant breach in favor of Ankara, upsetting the balance between the two countries, executed with the Bulgarian Prime Minister's signature. After Turkey's demands were met, its interest in resolving property disputes declined, leaving these issues unresolved to this day. Nevertheless, several agreements signed by Bulgaria's "right-wing" governments have managed to elevate Bulgarian-Turkish relations to a new, higher level.

The second chapter focuses on relationships in the security sphere. It explores the path to resolving the bilateral border determination at the mouth of the Rezovska River. The delimitation agreement with Turkey was signed by Ivan Kostov's government. There was a certain urgency noticed in the Bulgarian Prime Minister to solve this decades-long issue, but due to a lack of accessible information, it's unclear if any pressure was applied on him. It's clear

that the credit for establishing the contractual-legal framework for these types of relations goes to the governments of F. Dimitrov and Iv. Kostov, while others have been more cautious about interactions in defense and security. This is evident in the approach to the sensitive Kurdish issue for Turkey. Bulgarian diplomacy tends to avoid taking an official stance that could provoke Turkish dissatisfaction. However, if our "right-wing" politicians are more inclined to make concessions to Turkey on the Kurdish issue, the left-wing is traditionally more open to the "Kurdish cause." This is reflected in the participants of the international conference on Kurdistan held in Sofia (1994), which included individuals with nationalist expressions who actively supported the so-called Revival Process – Mincho Minchev, Orlin Zagarov, Stoyan Radev, Ilcho Dimitrov, Petar Petrov, Paunka Gocheva, and others (see pages 233-236).

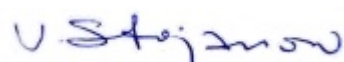
The third chapter delves into bilateral economic relations. It consists of eight paragraphs (some with additional subsections) and covers almost every possible aspect—from trade and investments, agriculture and livestock, to energy, transportation, infrastructure projects, telecommunications, tourism, and finally, the "Black Sea Economic Cooperation" initiative, of which Bulgaria became a co-founder despite some initial obstructions. The chapter carefully traces developments in each sector, noting not only achievements but also arising issues, like transportation problems due to Turkish restrictions or difficulties in telecommunications—such as the challenging reception of Bulgarian programs in Northeastern and Southeastern Bulgaria, the Eastern Rhodopes, and the Black Sea region (areas with a Turkish-speaking population). This is explained by Turkey's failure to comply with international agreements in the field. In fact, this is part of Turkey's "soft policy" to influence the population in a neighboring country. Powerful transmitters placed near the border broadcast not only entertaining programs, which undermined Dogan's idea of creating a Turkish TV channel, but also election campaign clips supporting candidates from the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF).

Chapter four covers the bilateral relations in the fields of education, science, and culture. During the period in question, these relations were less developed due to Bulgaria's preference for integration with European institutions. Any cooperation that did occur in this area was mainly initiated by Turkey. Not all of Ankara's ideas were wholeheartedly embraced, such as the proposal to establish a Bulgarian-Turkish university. Even the government of Ivan Kostov, despite showing some "flexibility," recognized the potential challenges of such a proposal. However, Turkey did assist in training teachers in the Turkish language and supported the religious life of Muslims in Bulgaria. This is evident as both the Bulgarian and Turkish flags are displayed side by side at the Chief Mufti's Office, and some teachers at the Islamic Institute were Turkish citizens. It's notable that Bulgaria adopted a more moderate stance on the right to study one's mother tongue in schools. The country resisted pressure on this issue, and the foreign ministry took a more balanced position than other departments (especially the Ministry of Education) in handling bilateral issues.

There might still be more to explore on the topic, like the role and scale of "suitcase trade," the importance of personal contacts and connections, sports cooperation with the exchange of coaches and athletes, relationships at the municipal level, and sister cities, etc. These could be tasks for future research. As it stands, the work is comprehensive and detailed, written in a good style and language with very few noticeable errors (mainly word repetitions and article use) —

things that can easily be polished when preparing the text for publication. And that's definitely needed because the work will undoubtedly be useful for training our diplomatic staff with a focus on Turkey, as well as for fellow historians and a broader audience. Perhaps a better solution can be found for the double (and in some places triple) footnote numbering, which is a bit confusing. The abstract meets the requirements; the doctoral candidate has also presented eight publications on the topic.

I wholeheartedly support voting positively and also recommend to the esteemed members of the Scientific Jury to award Ms. PETYA DIMITROVA PAVLOVA the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" in the Field of Higher Education 2. *Humanities*, Professional Direction 2.2. *History and Archaeology*, Scientific Specialty: *History of Bulgaria (Modern Bulgarian History)*.



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(Prof. DSc. VALERI STOYANOV)