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REVIEW

by Prof. Rositsa Stoyanova, PhD, Institute for Historical Studies, BAS
about the scientific production and activities of Assoc. Prof. Petar Stoyanovich, DScHist
in connection with the participation in the academic competition for the academic position of
Professor, in professional field *2.2 History and Archeology*, scientific specialty *History of
Bulgaria (the Monarchical Institution and the Third Bulgarian State)*,
announced by the Institute for Historical Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
for the needs of the New Bulgarian History Section

At the competition announced in the State Gazette, issue 10 of 4 February 2022, for the academic position of *Professor* in professional field *2.2. History and Archeology*, scientific specialty *History of Bulgaria (the Monarchical Institution and the Third Bulgarian country)* for the needs of the New Bulgarian History Section of the Institute of Historical Studies, the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, as sole candidate appeared Assoc. Prof. Petar Stoyanovich, DScHist.

The participant in the competition was born in 1967. He was awarded a Master's degree in History by the University of Vienna, Austria in 1995. His scientific career started at the same university as a PhD student at the Institute of Eastern and Southeastern European History. In 2015, he acquired the scientific degree *Doctor of Historical Sciences* in the University of Shumen. Since 2016, he has been holding the academic position of *associate professor* at the New Bulgarian History Section of the Institute for Historical Studies, and in 2018, he was elected a professor at the University of Shumen.

The list presented by the candidate includes 3 monographs issued by renowned Bulgarian and foreign publishing houses, 13 studies and articles, also published in authoritative scientific journals and in thematic collections, 2 textbooks. He has been the scientific adviser of a PhD student who has successfully defended his/her dissertation and participated in three scientific projects. As shown by the completed and attached tables of science metric indices, the candidate exceeds the requirements laid down by the Law on Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria.

The big topic of the monarchical institution in the new Bulgarian history is at the centre of his scientific interests. He addresses it in two main aspects: the different options for the

election of the Bulgarian knyaz and the fight between them in the period 1886-1887; a study on the personality of Knyaz/Tzar Ferdinand I and an outline of his role between his rising to the throne in 1887 and the beginning of the Balkan wars in 1912. In 2017, his monographic study *The Interregnum, the Crisis and the Battle for the Bulgarian Throne (1886-1887): Soloists and Extras - from Battenberg to Coburg - Looking at Their Media Coverage* was published. The so-called "Bulgarian crisis" has been the subject of numerous publications. However, Stoyanovich finds a different angle to look at the topic and succeeds in contributing to its development. In the context of the complex relationship between the great powers, he has been challenging the possibilities for restoration of Knyaz Alexander I from the time of his abdication to his death and, in particular, he details all candidates for the Bulgarian throne. The monograph ends with the vicissitudes around the election of Prince Ferdinand as a Bulgarian knyaz.

The published monograph *The Road to Sofia. Origin, education and motivation of Prince Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha and the mission in Bulgaria*. Veliko Tarnovo, Faber: 2021. 254 pp. ISBN 978-619-00-1341-9 is presented as main habilitation thesis. Stoyanovich was aware of the scope of the tasks he set himself, of the objective difficulties that awaited him, of the subjective objections that would inevitably arise – he himself described his research project as a “challenge of life”. His approach is also consistent with its complexity and comprehensiveness – before proceeding to elucidate Ferdinand’s position and role as head of state, He has scrupulously, but also with inspiration, explored in this work of his the “huge background” of the young prince. He has done so on the basis of impressive documentary material sought out in archival repositories mainly in Austria, Slovakia, Germany and partly in Russia and to a lesser extent (for understandable reasons) in Bulgaria, on the basis of published sources and memoir literature. He has widely used the European press of that period and he himself emphasized its significance as a source, the opportunities that journalistic publications, even with their contradictions and errors, provide to the researcher for relevant conclusions and corrections. The author is not merely familiar with the entire available scholarly literature, but has used it correctly, thoroughly and critically, while also offering, in the preface, to the attention of the reader a broad analytical review of what had been written before him.

Most generally, there are four research layers. The author has defined them as follows: the personality, environment and milieu of young Ferdinand in the decades leading up to his ascension; the process of his upbringing and motivation as a future ruler; a picture of the era; an

in-depth overview of the historical and other heritage of some of his lesser-known ancestors – the aristocratic Koháry family.

The narrative is organized in 7 chapters, where these layers are unfolded autonomously or in parallel. In the first part, entitled *Bulgaria and the Balkans – image and likeness*, Stoyanovich uses as a basis travelers' notes, memoir records, literary and journalistic samples, etc. to mark the notions of Europe of that time about the southeastern part of the continent. He devotes special attention of the ignorance vis-à-vis the realities in the Bulgarian lands on the part of the intelligentsia and the aristocracy of Russia as well. The overall narrative is intended to reveal the initial knowledge and impressions of the young aristocrat, with which he set out for Bulgaria. But also his ambition, as a typical representative of the then “enlightened world”, “to shed beneficial light on the darkness, dispelling ignorance, eradicating backwardness and associating the periphery with the centre” (p. 47). At this point Stoyanovich has also formulated his main thesis, which he will probably develop and substantiate in a future study – Bulgaria's irreversible movement along the European path in the following decades was a conscious mission and main merit of Prince/Tsar Ferdinand. The next part is dedicated to the public image or images of the prince. The author relays the narrative of his origin in an adept manner and with a lot of knowledge. In addition to its purely cognitive nature, it also highlights the discrepancies in the views of the then liberal press in Austria-Hungary and Ferdinand himself. While the press referred to him as the heir and bearer of the “freedom-loving Orléans spirit“, he himself “nowhere and under no circumstances emphasized his roots in the Orléans heritage, but only in the Bourbon heritage” (p. 64). In this part the author has also analyzed profoundly and on the basis of various sources including his personnel file, the issue of the “military career” of the young aristocrat. His conclusions are generally rich and nuanced and prove that the public image of the Prince, created by the Central European press in the period before his coronation, provided no clue to the mission, for which he was prepared by his mother: to be “a ruler, somewhere, of some kind, under certain circumstances” (p. 79). Central to the study are the pages devoted to Ferdinand's family, mother, and education. The family environment is featured on the basis of factual substance with fully-justified emphasis on the leading role of Clémentine of Orléans in the preparation of her son for the throne. Stoyanovich had every ground to reject as untrue the allegation of the “Bulgarian fixation” of this preparation; he has traced elaborately the education and nurture specific for a nobleman of that time, the preferences and interests of the young man,

etc. In the following part, *Campaigns Against the Origin*, the author focuses the narrative on two strands: the history of the aristocratic Koháry family, whose descendant Ferdinand was as well, and the ungrounded “false” and “deliberately misleading” claims of the British press of the 1840s about its representatives; the attacks on the manner and orientation of the young aristocrat's upbringing and his mother's role in this process. The chapter where the author draws a comparison between Alexander I, the first Prince of modern Bulgaria, and Ferdinand is interesting, but also somewhat controversial to my mind. The last two parts of the publication examine the actual preparation for the new mission, the journey to Bulgaria itself and the coronation.

After the brief summary of the content of the monograph, I would like to highlight its scholarly contribution. It transpires in the recounted abundant facts about his family environment, about his early biography, about the trips abroad, protocol visits, in the scientific expeditions of the young prince; in the corrections made with regard to erroneous statements about his education; in the in-depth analysis of his military personnel file; in the attempt to provide, on the basis of new sources, an approximate idea of the property status and wealth of the Saxe-Coburg family and part of the Orléans estate of the Princess Mother. But the author's major contributions, in my opinion, are those in the approach and assessments, in the in-depth psychological portraits, both of the Prince himself and of his mother, of key figures in his entourage; in the greater depth and comprehension of the penetration in the aristocratic ancestral relations; in the aspiration to present comprehensively the formative environment of the young Prince – both family and societal. As a result, Stoyanovich has firmly refused to adhere to the familiar black-and-white schemes of portraying the personality of the future ruler and guides the reader to the logical conclusion that Prince Ferdinand was born to be a monarch, he was brought up as such and came to Bulgaria with a mission to modernize, to Europeanize.

The third monograph which the candidate presents as part of the production with which he takes part in the competition is: *Zar Ferdinand I. (geb. Prinz von Sachsen-Coburg und Gotha): Seine Herkunft, Bildung, Motivation und der Aufbau des modernen Bulgariens 1861 - 1887 – 1912*. The author studies the place and the role of Knyaz/Tzar Ferdinand for the Europeanisation/modernization of the country. There is a wide view of the modernization processes in the peace period until 1912.

I fully share the view of the need for a balanced, objective and modern reading of the place occupied by Knyaz/Tzar Ferdinand I in the development of a new Bulgaria. The scientific contributions of P. Stoyanovich in this regard are undeniable. In various versions, his thesis has been formulated in many places in the books. With some of its conclusions, I can fully agree. For example: "The Bulgarian ruler Ferdinand I cannot always be directly responsible for this process (*modernization - my remark*) but in his figure, the political class, the economic figures, the military and intellectual elite - those who introduce the progress in the country - find their own patron, motivator, and ally (*The Road to Sofia*, p. 48). At the same time, there is an enthusiasm for the knyaz/tzar's personality and an overexposure of his merits

On the basis of everything that has been said about the candidate's scientific achievements, I recommend that the members of the honourable jury and the Scientific Council of the Institute for Historical Studies at BAS should vote in favour of the election of Assoc. Prof. Petar Stoyanovich, DScHist to hold the academic position of professor.