

БЪЛГАРСКА АКАДЕМИЯ НА НАУКИТЕ ИНСТИТУТ ЗА ИСТОРИЧЕСКИ ИЗСЛЕДВАНИЯ	
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OPINION

By professor PhD Rositsa Stoyanova,
Member of the scientific jury

For the announced competition, for holding the academic title “Associate professor”,

Field of higher education 1. *Humanitarian sciences*;

Professional direction 2.2. *History and archaeology*;

Scientific major *History of Bulgaria* (Bulgarian diplomacy 1879-1944)

For the needs of section “*New Bulgarian history*” in the Institute for Historical Studies to the
Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

The competition was announced in State Gazette, edition 63 dated 06.08. 2022. According to the resolution passed by the Standing commission of humanitarian sciences and arts to the National Evaluation and Accreditation Commission dated 18.11.2020 section “New Bulgarian history”, for whose needs the competition was announced, is among the divisions (five within the institute) that ensure the PhD program “History of Bulgaria” from organizational, scientific and personnel point of view. By tradition and in conformity with the Strategy for development of the Institute for Historical Studies for the period of 2019-2028 the division studies the issues of history of the Bulgarian state and society within the period of 1878-1944 – institutions, party and political system, political, business, social and cultural history, historiography and memory, influences and self-perception between Bulgarians and the world etc. Section’s personnel development is namely predefined by the guidelines and problematic fields being elaborated, the necessity of specialized research work and qualified specialists in particular fields. From this point of view and in conformity with article 24, paragraph 1 of the Rules on the terms and conditions for conferring scientific degrees and holding scientific titles in the Institute for Historical Studies, the division defended before the Scientific Board the need of habilitated researcher in diplomatic history (Minutes of the session held by section “New Bulgarian history”, 13.07.2022). In turn, the Scientific Board took into consideration and accepted section’s motives and announced the competition.

Two applicants filed documents for participation: chief assistant PhD Voyn Konstantinov Bozhinov and chief assistant PhD Aleka Aleksandrova Strezova. I present the data about applicants and the evaluation of their scientific papers individually, in alphabetical order of their surnames.

Chief assistant PhD Voyn Bozhinov graduated major “History” with master’s degree in Sofia University “Saint Kliment Ohridski” in 2001. Full-time PhD candidate to the department “History of Bulgaria” in the Faculty of History of Sofia University. In 2005 defended PhD thesis of the topic “Andrey Lyapchev – politician, statesman, public figure.” Assistant (2005-2006) and chief assistant (since 2008) in the Institute for Historical Studies.

Conformity with the minimum national requirements:

For participation in the competition, PhD Bozhinov presented production that is volumetric and versatile in view of the concerned topics – 6 monographies, 39 studies and articles and 2 heads of collective monographies. Among them, three individual monographies: “Republic of Macedonia in modern geopolitics”, Sofia, 2017; “Socialistic Yugoslavia in agony 1980-1989“. Sofia, 2019 and “Socialistic Yugoslavia in disintegration 1989-1992”, Sofia, 2021, go beyond the scientific major “History of Bulgaria”. The same is in effect for the author’s text by the colleague Bozhinov in the collective monography “Republic of Macedonia in modern geopolitics and the place of Bulgarian national interest there. Sofia, 2018, and with six of the articles, included in the List of publications under the following numbers: Г. 6/1; Г. 7/ 12, 21, 24, 33, 36, 37. The monography “Andrey Lyapchev”, Publishing House Kama, Sofia, 2006 is also inaccurately reflected in the reference of the individual scientific-metric indicators, prepared by PhD Bozhinov. Since it is not among the publications presented to the documentation, I take the data from the National register of the books published in Bulgaria of the National library “St. St. Cyril and Methodius”. There it was qualified as “scientific-popular” edition whose theme is “sociology and philosophy”. On the grounds of what is presented until here, I accept that PhD Bozhinov participates in the competition with two monographies (one of them based on his PhD thesis that I would not review), a chapter of collective monography and 31 studies and articles. Furthermore, some titles of the scientific publications are erroneously reflected in the List of publications and in the Reference cited above. I underline these seemingly not that significant imprecisions and mismatches made by the applicant since according to me they demonstrate his comprehensive attitude towards the competition procedure. Additionally, in my capacity of jury member I faced unconformities found in paper’s metadata presented by Bozhinov as habilitation one. The paper copy deposited in the competition documentation of the monography “The rule by those who seized power on the nineteenth of May, 19th of May 1934 – 22nd of January 1935“, Publishing house “Arka”, Sofia. 2017 includes the names of two reviewers: professor Andrey

Pantev and associate professor Dimitar Mitev, whereas no such were noted in the e-copy attached in the same documentation. All the other data, including year of publishing, publishing house, ISBN etc. coincide and it was nowhere stated that the research work underwent second edition. In my opinion, such a replacement is inaccurate and misleading, to say the least, and the difference in copies attached in the documents seems to me like lack of respect for the procedure and the people that would evaluate the production. I accept to review the defined monography as habilitation paper based on the opinion expressed by the National library on the correspondence of both versions, as well as because of the fact that as of the date of publishing the book in the Academicians' Development of the Republic of Bulgaria Act there was no explicitly stated requirement for the monographic research papers to have scientific editor and/or scientific reviewers.

Except for the abovementioned corrections, the information about scientific production and the data about scientific references demonstrate that the applicant satisfies and exceeds the requirements regulated in the Academicians' Development of the Republic of Bulgaria Act, as well as the ones of the Rules on the terms and conditions for conferring scientific degrees and holding scientific titles in the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and the Institute for Historical Studies.

Evaluation of applicant's scientific production:

AS main habilitation paper, PhD Bozhinov presents the monography "The rule by those who seized power on the nineteenth of May, 19th of May 1934 – 22nd of January 1935", Publishing house "Arka", Sofia. 2017. The significance of the selected topic is beyond doubt – the coup d'état on the 19th of May 1934 and the subsequent rule by the Military Union and Political circle "Zveno" influenced country's development in the long term. In general, they were not subject of individual research which does not mean the historical science has not set its eyes on them. On the contrary, prehistory and the events surrounding the coup d'état itself, various aspects of the legislative initiatives of the cabinet and its implementation in reality, the relations between the head of state and the rulers, controversies and struggles within the Union and others have been presented and analysed in numerous publications. Author's contributions are mainly in the last chapter of the paper, where he presents in greater detail and comments on some of the events undertaken in the period of the 19th of May 1934 – 22nd of January 1935 – the elimination of the multiparty system of the country, of IMRO, the administrative reforms, personnel policy,

concept and creation of the Directorate for public renewal etc. The text is easily readable and is accessible to wide audience.

In addition to its strong points, the habilitation paper has serious deficits that are greatly predefined by two main circumstances. The first one is related to the source base of the research work. In order to reconstructs the events, PhD Bozhinov mainly relies on information in the print media of those times and published in memoirs. Two marvellous sources, but only if these could be combined with archive materials. Nevertheless the latter are presented to limited degree in research work's information basis. I should only mention that he has not used even the archive funds of the state institutions. Paper's other systematic problem is the lack of historical review. It is well-known that one of the prerequisites for creating a quality scientific product is the skill "to read like scientists", "evaluate the papers by of his/her predecessors and colleagues in literate manner".¹ I could not say which are the reasons that made PhD Bozhinov neglect the research works by his colleagues – lack of knowledge/ agreement/ total neglect or a little bit of everything? Yet the lack of not only historiographic analysis, but of referrals in general, even if of the nature of disagreement of what was written in the last 30 years is startling. The combination of these two shortages – of resource basis that is rich and versatile in terms of its origin and contents, and of author's historiographic knowledge predefine paper's other deficits – schematic pattern of the presentation (especially in the first two chapters), predefined and/or insufficiently reasoned conclusions and evaluations, passing by numerous issues, including important legislative decisions of the cabinet. The particular examples are more than one and could be found in the exhibition about the Tarnovo Constitution and its significance to the state development, and the analysis of role and legitimacy of the monarchic institution, and in the presentation and characteristics of the party system and the political regimes in the country after World War I, and in the stated (but not proven) theses in terms of important events, for example the coup d'état on the 9th of June 1923. I would not perceive as reasoned the evaluation of the coup d'état on the 19th of May 1934 as "non-alternative outcome of the block rule" (page 82), as a "necessary evil" (page 247) or the qualification of the Government of those who seized power on the nineteenth of

¹ Tsvetkova, Milena. Ersatz science. 5th of August 2013 [Available from: <http://www.newmedia21.eu/analizi/erzats-naukata/>]

May 1934 as “typical military junta made of kernels and generals in military coats already too small for them” (page 117). Colleague’s style is attractive, beyond doubt, yet oftentimes this is achieved on account of objectivity. There is significant misbalance within monography’s structure – the problems stated in book’s title are reviewed as late as in the last, third chapter within 117 pages (of a total 247).

Finally, I would like to underline that these and many other recommendations towards the reviewed text were made within its discussion during joint extended session of seminars by the sections “History of the Bulgarian national question” and “New Bulgarian history” as soon as on 20. 06. 2017 before the issuance of the book itself. PhD Bozhinov did not take into account the opinion and good-willed remarks made by the colleagues.

The other publications presented by the applicant demonstrate his vast scientific interests. Most of them are short – 29 of a total of 31 publications are in the pattern of article, from 5 to around 10-15 pages. They have been published in the scientific periodicals and in the thematic collections with scientific review. These could be grouped into several main thematic circles – about personalities (about A. Lyapchev, Al. Tsankov, Iv. Mihaylov etc.), devoted to foreign political issues, the history of right political formations in the country. Among them, I would like to pay special attention to the parts whose author is V. Bozhinov, in the collective monography “Nationally powerful and united Bulgaria. Formations of the far-right and the national question”, Sofia 2014, co-author: N. Poppetrov. In addition to the general exhibition on the Bulgarian national question in-between the two world wars, he elaborated the texts devoted to the Union “Bulgarian native defence”, the National coalition for political revival, People’s social movement of Al. Tsankov and others. According to me, these elaborations represent particular contribution in the Bulgarian historical science both in terms of approaches towards the topic and research of the program documents, the structure of the concerned formations, the creation and development of their ideological concepts.

Chief assistant PhD Aleka Strezova is graduate of Sofia University “Saint Kliment Ohridski” where she graduated with master’s degree the major “History” in 2006 and second higher education “International relations” (once again, with master’s degree) in 2008. She is full-time PhD candidate in the Institute for Historical Studies, where in 2013 she defended PhD thesis of the topic “Bulgarian diplomats 1879-1912“. Assistant (2013-2018) and chief

assistant (since 2018) in the Institute for Historical Studies.

Conformity with the minimum national requirements:

PhD Strezova decided to apply in the competition with two monographic research works, 10 articles, 4 studies and 1 chapter of collective monography. All the defined publications are in the field of the scientific major “History of Bulgaria”, and the quantitative dimensions they provide for the applicant cover and exceed the requirements regulated in the Academicians’ Development of the Republic of Bulgaria Act, as well as the ones of the Rules on the terms and conditions for conferring scientific degrees and holding scientific titles in the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and the Institute for Historical Studies. The same is in effect for the data about references.

Evaluation of applicant’s scientific production:

As main habilitation paper, PhD Strezova presents the monography “Last of his kind. Doctor Georgi Valkovich (1833-1892)“, Veliko Tarnovo, Faber, 2022. The research work is natural continuation of colleague’s scientific development and demonstrates her permanent interests in the biographic genre and history of Bulgarian diplomacy. The choice of topic is reasoned – Valkovich is one of the interesting personalities of the generation that S. Radev suitably defines as the “builders of new Bulgaria”. Heir of the Chalakov kin, rich and with numerous merits, he acquired education that was quite superior back then, he realized his brilliant talents and capabilities in various fields – as a doctor and hospital administrator, minister and diplomat, doing this within three state unions: the Ottoman Empire, Eastern Rumelia, Principality of Bulgaria. On the grounds of the exceptionally rich source material – versatile documents maintained in the archive depositories, published documents, memoir essays and diaries, print media data etc., Strezova reconstructs in details the life pathway of her protagonist. Author’s findings are the materials found and implemented for the first time in the scientific circulation from the Library of the Diplomatic institute to the Ministry of foreign affairs and the Central State Archive. I would like to underline, in particular, the in-depth knowledge, full-value and accurate use of the scientific publications that to some degree refer to Valkovich or treated events in which he took part. Paper’s structure is logically determined and follows the events and trials and tribulations of the “doctor”. The contributions in this quite eventful direction, as well as in terms of character, perception of the world and his performances at the public stage are numerous. On the grounds of new data, she has followed in detail the kin

history and family environment where he grew up and developed as personality, his early years, initial steps in the medical practice, stay in Damascus, his public performance in the interest of the Bulgarian deed. The exhibit is full of facts, but more importantly all these were stated within the context and on the background of Empire's changes during the Tanzimat years. The excellent knowledge of the post-liberation epoch provides the author with the opportunity to confidently situate her protagonist in the Bulgarian public, political and state life after 1878. She has problematized the participation of Valkovich in the Constituent gathering and the fact he did not sign the Constitution, his activity in Eastern Rumelia as director of agriculture, commerce and public buildings, the place he took up in public life, his personal relations with the General governor Aleko Bogoridi, his resignation and move to Sofia. Equally full of factology is the exhibition about "doctor's activity in the Principality as a minister of foreign affairs and religions (1881-1883), of head of the Ministry of public buildings, agriculture and commerce (June - September 1882), as head of the State Board (14th of January – 9th of September 1883) and finally his return to the profession as manager of military hospitals during the Serbo-Bulgarian War and of Aleksandrovska hospital in the capital city. Due place in the exhibition (115 pages) is devote to the period in which he headed the diplomatic representation of the Principality of Bulgaria in the Ottoman Empire. Here Strezova is especially confident and unfolds the story onto a broad historical background and confidently and additionally constructs the image of her protagonist, as a diplomat already. The circumstances surrounding the death of G. Valkovich on the 14th of February 1892 are outlined in a special paragraph. According to me, such an exhibition of the issue in detail is made for the first time in Bulgarian historiography. The new materials investigated and used by the author provide her with the opportunity not only to present the facts surrounding the arrangement and performance of the assassination, the tragic ending of Valkovich and the subsequent judicial process, but also make suggestions on the involved persons and their destiny.

In this kind, the research work is achievement by Bulgarian historiography and documents PhD A. Strezova's growth as researcher who demonstrates in-depth knowledge of the time, events and processes, of historical personalities and public circles, their interrelations who has cultivated skills to handle sources of various nature and origin, and has acquired knowledge of broad range of regional problems.

The second monographic research work, presented as part of the competition documentation is entitled “Bulgarian diplomacy: institutions and representatives 1879-1918“. Sofia, 2017. Its contributive nature is ensured by the selected approach towards the topic, as soon as that – without isolating the problems of foreign policy, the author focuses her analysis onto the institutional development of Bulgarian diplomacy and onto its personal representatives. The implementation of this approach relies on a huge massif of documents and provides the opportunity to unveil the specific model of developing state structure of a modern type and model collective biography of Bulgarians who inhabited the international diplomatic stage from 1879 to 1918. Monography’s first part is dedicated to the development of the administrative appearance and structure of the Ministry of foreign affairs and religions and the diplomatic network abroad. The study is of impressive volume and is the first of its kind in the Bulgarian historiography. It tracks the gradual development of the ministry, the increase of personnel, the creation of diplomatic representations abroad, funding the institution. The author pays special attention to the fruitful efforts made for modernizing the institution by several ministers and long-term employees such as G. Valkovich, D. Grekov, K. Stoilov, Gr. Nachovich. D. Stanchov, the omnipresent Georgi Vernatsa. According to Strezova, in the eve of the Great War, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religions already had “completed internal structure and well-established foreign political network”. Since I know better the period in-between the two World Wars, when according to contemporaries every change of power brought about drastic changes in the personnel of the central institutions, including in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religions, to me the empirical material, analysed in the book and the conclusions made by the author were unexpected. In convincing manner, supported by data, numbers and tables she demonstrates that there was no significant turnover within the ministry, the senior officials in the central institution, as well as in the diplomatic representations abroad, generally speaking they kept their work position, irrespective of the party alternations in the executive authority, the party employments were not usual practice. Strezova does not pass by monarch’s role in recruiting the diplomatic personnel.

In the second part entitled “Bulgarian diplomats. Biographies” she has presented 76 representatives of the Bulgarian diplomacy, ordered alphabetically, according to their surnames. She has covered all the ministers of foreign affairs and the foreign representatives. The only exception of the accepted principle is the inclusion of an article devoted to Georgi Vernatsa,

whereas the author reasons her decision with the role of this personality in the process of developing Bulgarian diplomatic service. The prosopographic reading of the personal stories of 76 Bulgarian diplomats is based on solid quantity of historical, sociological, statistical, ethnographic and other data sought in all the possible sources. I would like to especially note the circumstance that namely Strezova uses for the first time in practice and in systematic manner the professional files of the employees of Ministry of foreign affairs stored in file 176K in the Central State Archive. In addition to the mandatory biographic data – education, career growth, professional realization, the articles contain purposefully selected information about the origin and family position, language preparation, awards, public activity of the people that for shorter or longer term find their realization in diplomacy. As a result, in the second part of the book we have not just biographies, but an attempted social-cultural profile of every diplomat. Some of them are well-known persons, yet other were just known by their names until then. This provides the opportunity to outline the formal and informal connections in Bulgarian diplomacy and opens up fields for future research work and conclusions.

The other publications with which PhD Strezova has decided to take part in the competition, additional construct her profile of researcher of Bulgarian diplomacy. Meanwhile these and the attached list of publications in greater detail attest her as a scientist with extensive interests in kin researches, issuance of documents etc.

In conclusion, everything said so far and most of all the qualities of the presented habilitation papers give me the grounds to make the following ranking of applicants:

1. PhD Aleka Strezova;
2. PhD Voyn Bozhinov.

In my capacity of member of the Scientific jury, I would vote for proposing PhD Strezova at the Scientific Board of the Institute for Historical Studies to hold the academic title “Associate professor”.

Sofia, 28.11.2022