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REVIEW

by Prof. DSc. Milko Stoyanov Palangurski,
member of the Scientific Jury regarding the announced competition for the
academic position of “Associate Professor”,
in the field of higher education 1. *Humanities*,
professional field 2.2 *History and Archeology*
Scientific specialty *History of Bulgaria* (History of the Bulgarian Diplomacy 1879-
1944)
for the needs of "New Bulgarian History" section of the Institute for Historical
Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

1. Competition data and procedure

The competition for the academic position of “Associate Professor”, in the professional field 2.2 *History and Archeology*, scientific specialty *History of Bulgaria* was announced on a well-founded proposal of the "New Bulgarian History" section. According to the accreditation of the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency of 18.11.2020, the scientific specialty "History of Bulgaria" is provided in organizational, administrative and scientific terms by five (out of 8) sections of the Institute for Historical Studies, four of which are based on the chronological scope of studies on Bulgarian history and one on the thematic principle: "Medieval History", "Bulgarians, the Ottoman Empire and Europe", "New Bulgarian History", "History of Bulgaria after the Second World War" and "History of the Bulgarian National Question". Each section plans the staff development of its research assistants according to the need for specialized research in political, diplomatic, military, economic, social and cultural history. In this case, the “New Bulgarian History” Section has advocated the need for a habilitated researcher in the field of diplomatic history. The Scientific Council of the Institute has approved the proposal and has decided to hold a competition for Associate Professor (Protocol №10, item 1, 14 July 2022). The competition was announced in *State's Gazette*, issue 63 of 06.08.2022. After the expiry of the two-month period, the Director, on the proposal of the Scientific Council, issued Order No. 48 dated 11.10.2022 appointing the scientific jury. Pursuant to Article 24, par. 1-11 of the Regulations on the Conditions and Procedure for the Acquisition of Scientific Degrees and for Holding Academic Positions at the Institute for

Historical Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, the following candidates have been admitted to the competition: 1. Chief assist. Dr. Aleka Alexandrova Strezova 2. Chief assist. Dr. Voin Konstantinov Bozhinov. I present the data on the candidates and the evaluation of their scientific work and activities in parallel, in alphabetical order.

2. Details of the contest participants

Chief assist. Dr. Al. Strezova holds a Master's degree in History from Sofia University "Kliment Ohridski" - 2006. She has a Master's degree in International Relations from Sofia University "Kliment Ohridski" - 2008. She was a teacher and translator at BTA. She studied as a full-time PhD student at the "New Bulgarian History" Section of the Institute for Historical Studies from 2008 to 2012, with a break due to maternity. She defended her PhD in 2013 and was appointed to the section as an assistant professor the same year, and in 2018 she was elected as a chief assistant professor.

Chief Assist. Dr. V. Bozhinov holds a Master's degree in History from Sofia University "Kliment Ohridski" – 2001. He was a PhD student at the same University 2002-2005 and obtained his PhD in 2005. In the same year he was elected as a research assistant of II degree in the section "History of the Bulgarian National Question" at the Institute for Historical Studies. Since 2008 he has been a research assistant of the I degree in the same section, and since 2013 he has been a chief assistant.

3. Scientometrics

Both candidates have the required by law defended scientific and educational degree "Doctor". Chief assist. Dr. Aleka Strezova's dissertation has the topic "Bulgarian Diplomats (1879-1912)", and chief assist. Dr. Voin Bojinov - the topic "Andrei Lyapchev - politician, statesman, public figure", reviewed according to the law and verified in NACID. The submitted works - monographs and articles show that both candidates meet and significantly exceed the necessary minimum scientific requirements of the law.

4. Habilitation thesis and other publications

Both candidates have submitted their habilitation theses.

Chief assist. Dr. Aleka Strezova submitted "Last of his kind. Dr. Georgi Voulkovich (1833-1892)", 478 pp. Veliko Tarnovo, Faber, 2022. ISBN 978-619-00-1475-1. Scientific reviewers are prof. R. Stoyanova and prof. DSc P. Stoyanovich, selected during the discussion and approval of the work in the “New Bulgarian History” section.

The monograph is dedicated to the life and activity of one of the most significant builders of the new Bulgaria. It is written on the basis of a huge number of historical sources of various types and origins, which have been collected from various archival repositories, from the press, from diaries and memoirs of contemporaries of the events, etc. The author shows a very good knowledge of historiographical achievements. She presents the life path and professional career path of Dr. Georgi Voulkovich as a historical personality with his own presence and leadership positions in the two worlds of the Bulgarians - pre-liberation and post-liberation. Aleka Strezova's main aim is not only to reveal and analyze the phenomenon of "Voulkovich", but to substantiate and document her thesis about the Doctor's significant contribution to the modernization of society both in the Empire and in free Bulgaria.

The author has succeeded in this goal. She traces, quite logically, the family origins of Georgi Voulkovich, descendent of the Dzhelepi and Beglikci Chalakovi – a famous Chorbadzhi family from Koprivshitsa. Few had the opportunity to grow up in such a social environment, which on top of that is dominated by his family. Voulkovich turned to medical education, specialized in Paris, and then, quite naturally, began a career as a military doctor in the Ottoman Empire. The European example, but also his personal qualities, made him a modernizer in spirit and, through George S. Rakovsky, logically bound him to a liberating idea.

The pages devoted to his life as chief physician of the military hospital in Damascus are an undoubted scholarly contribution and show how the new times penetrated into the dark edges of the empire, and how one man simultaneously found a place among the ruling elite and how this type of people approached and identified with the Bulgarian cause, gradually leading their native community and at the same time making a breakthrough in diplomacy, also experiencing the distrust of the empire.

From this period of his life began his activity on the establishment of the Bulgarian state and the autonomous region. He was among the few who became ministers on both sides of the Balkan, participated in the drafting of the Tarnovo constitution, created the administrative systems of a Rumelian Directory and two princely ministries following the European model, and generally showed us how a formed statesman, politician and diplomat operated. And before and during the Unification, he found himself in his favourite role of military medic, as chief physician of the army's Eastern Detachment, helping to shape the parameters of the state's modern military health service.

The Bulgarian crisis unites national forces and the conservative Dr. Vulkovich cooperated with a liberal ministry assuming a diplomatic mission in Constantinople for a period of 6 years. The monograph describes the actions of the "eyes and ears" of the Sofia government in the Ottoman capital and the rescue of national sovereignty, the strengthening of the Exarchate, the development of the idea of a railway line to Macedonia and the beginning of the construction of the Bulgarian Church of St. Stefan. His behaviour and starring role were vivid enough to motivate his political assassination by a great power.

Aleka Strezova's work on reconstructing the life and activities of Dr. G. Voulcovich is essentially a combination of personal biography and history of the Bulgarian diplomatic service. This approach, as well as professional scientific and critical handling of historical sources, has provided the author with the opportunity to focus on the process of modernization of the Ottoman Empire, the Principality and Eastern Rumelia, which should be recognized as the main contribution of the study.

Chief assist. Dr. V. Bozhinov presents the monograph “The Government of the “devetnadesetomaitsi” 19 May 1934 - 22 January 1935. IC "Arka". S., 2017, 247 p. ISBN 978-954-8356-62-6. There is no evidence of scholarly editing.

The present monograph consists of three chapters, each with five to seven paragraphs. The first one is a completely unnecessary attempt to analyse Bulgarian post-war history and especially the functioning of national institutions - constitutional structure, parliament, the head of state, party structures and executive power. The aim, according to the author, is to make a comparative

analysis with the main exposition, but for me they are created without historiographical and historical analysis of the existing literature and more essentially represent personal opinion, which in science is irrelevant if not accompanied by a scientifically critical analysis of sources and historiography. Whatever opinions any historian may have of the Tarnovo Constitution, such a negative attitude cannot be accepted, not least because of the fact that the constitutional provisions have stood the test of time and are the basis of everything positive in the political history of the country. The same applies to the suggestions about the illegitimacy of the head of state and the role of the monarchy in the history of the country in general.

The other two chapters are devoted to the creation and development of the Military Union and the political circle "Zveno", the preparation of the coup d'etat, the personal motives for participation in power, the hidden political mechanisms. The main aim of the monograph is to present the nine-month power of the "devetnadesetomaitsi". The alliance between the Zveno people and the representatives of the Military League is defined by the author as "devetnadesetomaistvo" and an attempt is made to fill this term with content and its continued existence after the office of Kimon Georgiev. And here the question of the chronological framework of the study arises. The rupture of the Union, or more precisely the ejection of the Zveno representatives from power, does not automatically mean that this was the end of the "Devetnadesetomaiski" regime, since the other engine of change, the Military Union, would continue to dominate and orchestrate power for a long time before Tsar Boris III could finally get the militaries back to the barracks. It therefore remains unclear why the second coup cabinet is not considered by the author, which contradicts the title.

The attempt to reconstruct the activities of the "Zveno" against the background of European reality, making comparisons with the "sanacja" in Poland, the Portuguese regime of Salazar and the dictatorship of King Alexander in Yugoslavia is logical. However, the author does not go as far as analysing to what extent the regime was inspired and supported by external forces and avoids this angle. Along these lines, the claim that the idea of sociability was a "Zveno" affair hangs in the balance, since the ideological roots of this idea are visible without special examination, despite their presence in the Circle's programmatic documents.

The shown structure of power characteristic of the regime is acceptable and has its place in the historiographical process. The discussion with the existing historiography is correct and the rejection of some existing theses is acceptable. The sources used are well incorporated into the text. All the government actions are explored - personnel policy, the structure of the civil service, economic transformations, the Directorate for Public Renewal, etc.

The conclusions are drawn from source material, newspaper publications, memoirs, etc., but in the conspicuous absence of archives. The pages devoted to the ideology of the “devetnadesetomaitsi”, their aspiration for the renewal of the country and for the way out of the crisis are correct. The lines devoted to the introduction of a new administration and the government’s clash with the monarch are valuable. Here is the place to mention that I cannot accept statements of the type that the military coup was "alternativeless", since the author himself shows that in a short time the coup’s authors were "retired" from the historical process and thrown out of power, despite the profound "transformations" made against the democratic order, which would later prove to be an accumulation of attempts to minimize the rights and freedoms of citizens.

The participants in the competition also have published monographs that are not presented as a main habilitation work. **Chief assist. Dr. Aleka Strezova** – “Bulgarian Diplomacy. Institutions and Representatives. 1879-1918”. S., "Avanguard Prima", 2017. ISBN 978-619-160-862-1 Scientific editor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. R. Stoyanova, reviewer: Assoc. prof. Dr. Vassilka Tankova.

The monograph focuses on the development of the country's diplomatic service under the first two rulers and is an expanded version of texts used in the doctoral dissertation and brand new research achievements. It analyses the regulations that deal with the diplomatic career and the structure of the Central Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Denominations, the financing, the staff and the establishment of the diplomatic network - from the Balkan countries, to the European capitals and finally to the United States. Attention is also paid to Bulgaria's consular network. The text presents the biographies of a number of forgotten diplomats - ministers and diplomats, some of them unknown.

Outside the habilitation work, but also in the direction of his declared scientific interests is the participation of **chief assist. Dr. V. Bozhinov** in the collective monograph "Nationally Mighty and United Bulgaria. The formations of

the radical right and the national question. Gutenberg IK. S., 2014 (co-authored with Nikolai Poppetrov), 273 pp. (authorship pp. 31-45, 64-121, 156-181). ISBN 978-619-176-023-7. The pages claimed as his authorship are devoted to several organizations that have been within the scope of his research interest since his doctoral dissertation and habilitation thesis. An analysis is made of the structure, functions and activities of these organizations. An attempt is made to take into account the different programmatic and ideological views of these organisations.

The book "The Globe Does Not Stop Spinning Even If We Sleep. A Narrative of the Life of Andrei Lyapchev". S., 2005, 242 p. ISBN 954-607-679-1 is the fruit of his doctoral dissertation. Voin Bozhinov presents three monographs that cannot be attributed to the scientific specialty "History of Bulgaria" in the period of the new Bulgarian history: "The Republic of Macedonia in Modern Geopolitics". S., Gutenberg, 2017, 314 p. ISBN 978-619-176-106-7; "Socialist Yugoslavia in Agony 1980-1989". S., Arka, 2019, 240 p. ISBN 978-954-8356-67-1; "Socialist Yugoslavia in Disintegration 1989-1992". S., Arka, 2021, 280 p. ISBN 978-954-8356-69-5 On the basis of the sources used to write them, they can be attributed to political science, as the sources used are more of public origin, mainly drawn from media and the internet. The books aim to show the changes in the post-Yugoslav space on the grounds of the geopolitical rift after the end of the Cold War. However, they are completely outside the scope of the competition, and as a scholarly production I have already had the opportunity to give an opinion in another competition, which was dedicated to the Bulgarian national question.

Chief Assist. Dr. Aleka Strezova has publications in the all indicators from 6 to 10, group "G" of the minimum scientific requirements: Scientifically, they cover several areas:

There are two studies on the MVRI, one in French, and they are in an area that is central to the candidate. Also shown are the consular network, the legislative framework, budgetary costs, recruitment of diplomatic staff and staffing, etc. A separate focus is the study of the establishment, development and status of the network of commercial agencies in the Ottoman Empire and their role in the functioning of the Bulgarian ethnic element in the Empire, between the Exarchate and the IMRO.

A major focus of the candidate's work is the prosopographical profile of diplomats as a social group. Separate studies are devoted to the diplomats born and raised in Bessarabia and Constantinople, showing their formation as descendants of

Bulgarian emigrants, their origins in families of community leaders, their receipt of an excellent education for their time, and in general the unified matrix of personal formation. Studies of the activities of diplomatic representatives in Constantinople and their role in national emancipation from the suzerain naturally emerge. The article on diplomatic agents in Austria-Hungary, from the opening of the first diplomatic agency in the capital of a great power in 1889 to the recognition of the Bulgarian independence in 1909, is similarly charged and accomplished. The biographies of nine representatives in the Austro-Hungarian capital are examined, and the text analyzes how each of them contributed to the development of bilateral relations. Two articles show contacts with two of the Great Powers, the United States and Japan.

Strezova has several publications in the field of memoirs and source studies. Notable are the reports of the English Consul General William Palgrave during the work of the Constituent Assembly in 1879. A successful mix of memoir, official documents and personal art is the article on St. Petrov-Chomakov. The selected documents give a new insight into the historical process.

She is a compiler and editor of books in this field - Petar Mateev. "Autobiography. Memoirs. Activity". Ed. by A. Strezova, Str. Panayotov. S., Bulgarian Academy of Sciences Publishing House "Prof. Marin Drinov", 2017. ISBN 978-954-322-907-9. It contains two parts - an academic study, authored by Dr. Al. Strezova. On the basis of rich source and research data, the author tells about the Bulgarian, little known so far, about his life, professional and public appearance. Many of the sources, domestic and foreign, are brought into scholarly circulation for the first time. The second part of the book is the source text - the autobiography, memoirs and activities of Petar Mateev and the academic notes on the text are also by Dr. Aleka Strezova.

It should be stressed that she had an affinity for the publication of documents, because the diary of Nikola Stoyanov N. was published under her editorship. N. Stoyanov. Life and activity: memoirs (1875-1939). Diary (1940-1944). Strezova, A., K. Anchova. (comp., preface, notes). S., NBU Press, 2020, 771 p. ISBN:978-619-233-102-3. She has also contributed to documentary publications on the participation of individuals in the Balkan Wars and World War I, as well as to an encyclopedia on women in science.

The diversity and multidirectionality of Al. Strezova's research is also evident from her publications on sources from the Istanbul Ottoman archives.

They contain new and unknown data on the revolutionary movement and V. Levski, which quickly found scientific recognition and entered the historiographical circulation. The candidate also touches on themes of history, memory and the traumatic past, with her research on the memory of the First World War in Bulgaria. This is a look at a variety of material relating to the subject and aims to represent existing sentiment and perception of this important event. As well as the traditional historical view of the war, themes such as social trauma, women's history, sanitation and more emerge.

Chief assist. Dr. Voin Bojinov has also published in all indicators from 6 to 10 in group "G" of the minimum scientific requirements, except for *Indicator 8*. Studies published in scientific journals, referred and indexed in world-known databases of scientific information. The author has concentrated his attention on several areas in his articles. These are the relations with the Ottoman Empire at the time of the country's independence, others are centered around the wars, the formation and qualities of the right-wing political sector, and studies on the political fate of several major figures in the country's post-war history. A separate core of articles and studies are related to the fate of a disintegrating Yugoslavia, and which do not relate to the history of modern Bulgaria.

Both contestants have citations and reviews far exceeding the minimum benchmarks according to the possible sources indicated by law. This indicates that they are known to the scientific community and their work is in scholarly circulation. They have also participated in research projects at international and national level. Both have good methodological training and a professional attitude towards source material and the achievements of the Collegium.

Chief assist. Dr. Aleka Strezova is already an established scholar who has her own place in the historiographical process: with a very clear and precise sphere of scientific study - Bulgarian history. Her research interest is on the development of the country's diplomatic history, the Bulgarian political, economic and social elite, the history of the National Revival period, the emancipation of women, documentary heritage, etc. The analyses and source material brought into scholarly circulation is personally processed and interpreted. The theses presented by her have their place and life in the scientific space and very quickly find their reflection in the historiographical process. Since defending her educational and scientific doctorate, she has had a notable growth in scientific terms. I must emphasize that the submitted habilitation thesis and a large number of her articles

and studies are entirely devoted to the subject of the competition and cover the field of History of Bulgaria. Their diversity as areas of research shows that the competences of the candidate are sufficient to make her an authoritative researcher of the recent past of the country.

Chief Assist. V. Bozhinov concentrates his research mainly on the internal political life of the country, the history of Yugoslavia and the fate of the Republic of North Macedonia. The development after obtaining the educational and scientific degree of doctor is visible and clearly enough reflected in the scientific production. However, the analysis of the presented studies shows that they are outside the basic parameters of the scientific specialty of the competition - "History of Bulgaria (1879-1944)". They are mainly focused on international relations on the Balkans in modern times and are more in the field of the political analysis.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that the research presented and the research work carried out give me grounds to state that the participants in the competition are researchers who meet the requirements for the academic position of Associate Professor. Each of them has the necessary scientific grounds. However, taking into account the qualities of the habilitation papers, the research profile and the topic of the competition: "**History of Bulgaria (Bulgarian Diplomacy (1879-1944) "** my proposal for ranking in the selection for the academic position of "Associate Professor" is:

1. **Chief Assist. Dr. Aleka Strezova**
2. **Chief Assist. Dr. Voin Bozhinov**

Prof. DSc. Milko Palangurski