

БЪЛГАРСКА АКАДЕМИЯ НА НАУКИТЕ ИНСТИТУТ ЗА ИСТОРИЧЕСКИ ИЗСЛЕДВАНИЯ	
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POSITION

by Prof. Veselin Kostov Yanchev, PhD, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" for the scientific papers submitted under the competition for the academic position "Associate Professor", Area of Higher Education 1. Humanities; Professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology; Scientific specialty History of Bulgaria (Bulgarian diplomacy 1879-1944) for the needs of the Modern Bulgarian History Section, Institute for Historical Studies, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, announced in the "State Gazette" № 63 of 6th August 2022

Two candidates have submitted documents for participation in the announced competition: Chief Assist. Prof. PhD Voyn Konstantinov Bozhinov, and Chief Assist. Prof. PhD Aleka Alexandrova Strezova. Both are graduates of the Faculty of History of Sofia University, who found their professional fulfillment at the Institute for Historical Studies of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. Both are excellently prepared, highly qualified and established scientists, known not only to the historical guild at home and abroad, but also to the general public.

Already during his studies, Voyn Bozhinov showed a lasting interest in the modern and most recent Bulgarian history and specialized in this field. His master's thesis (2001) and his PhD (2005) are dedicated to key figures in Bulgarian public and political life - Konstantin Muraviev and Andrey Lyapchev. Based on the PhD work, in 2005 and 2006, he published two books, one of which is popular science. Dr. Bozhinov continues and expands his research in thematic and chronological scope as an assistant professor and chief assistant professor at the Institute for Historical Studies.

Aleka Strezova focuses her scientific attention on the foreign policy and diplomacy of the Principality and Kingdom of Bulgaria. It is not by chance that she graduated from a second higher education "International Relations" and acquired a master's degree in international relations. As a doctoral student at the Institute for Historical Studies in 2013, she defended his PhD thesis on the topic "Bulgarian diplomats 1879-1912".

Both candidates have presented a scientific output that not only meets, but significantly exceeds the minimum national requirements regulated in the existing normative basis in Bulgaria – the relevant law, the Regulations for the terms and conditions for acquiring scientific degrees

and for holding academic positions at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and the Institute for Historical Studies.

Voyn Bozhinov participates in the competition with 8 monographs, in 2 of which as a co-author, and 39 studies and articles. Three of his monographs - "Republic of Macedonia in Modern Geopolitics". S., 2017, "Socialist Yugoslavia in agony 1980-1989". S., 2019, "Socialist Yugoslavia in Disintegration 1989-1992", S., 2021, his author's part in the collective monograph "Republic of Macedonia in Modern Geopolitics and the Place of the Bulgarian National Interest", S., 2018, as well as six of the presented articles, do not correspond to the scientific specialty and the chronological framework of the announced competition.

The rest of Dr. Bozhinov's publications can be grouped into several areas. A part of them are related to or derive from the topic of his PhD work, dedicated to A. Lyapchev - G7.1, 3, 5, 10, 16, 19, 20, 23, 25, 31. They deal with the Bulgarian-Turkish relations on the eve and after the declaration of Bulgarian independence, during the Great War, as well as the circumstances surrounding Bulgaria's exit from the war and the consequences of its participation in it. The second part of the publications presents the biographies of political figures or prominent figures of the Macedonian national liberation movement - G7. 6, 13, 15. The third part examines Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations on the eve of the Second World War - G7. 26, 32.

It is worth noting the articles by Dr. V. Bozhinov, dedicated to the right-wing political ideas and organizations in Bulgaria - G7. 7, 18, 22, 34. Some of them are included in the collective monograph co-authored with N. Poppetrov "Nationally powerful and united Bulgaria. The formations of the radical right and the national question", S., 2014. The study is dedicated to a problem that remained outside the attention of the historians although important to reveal the overall political atmosphere in the country and specifically with regard to the national question after the end of the First World War. V. Bozhinov presented the organizational development and positions of the "Bulgarian National Defense" Union, the Union of Fighters, the National Partnership for Political Revival, the People's Social Movement of Al. Tsankov, the National Socialist Bulgarian Workers' Party, the Political Circle "Zveno" and significantly adjusted the understandings and assessments of their nature.

Part of V. Bozhinov's publications - G7. 2, 8, 14, 29, 35 were used in the main habilitation work presented by him "The Governing of the 19 May 1934 coup d'état politicians - January 22, 1935". IK "Arka", S., 2017.

The May 19 coup d'état in 1934 and its consequences have long been the focus of historians such as I. Dimitrov, V. Georgiev, Vl. Migev, G. Markov. The very title hints that the main emphasis will be placed on a less studied problem – the governing itself, but in practice only half of the monograph's content is devoted to it. In the brief "opening remarks", what happened on May 19 was defined as both a coup and a riot, although the two concepts are not identical. In the first case, it is about a forcible seizure of power through unconstitutional means, and in the second, at least as defined by the Criminal Law in force at the time, art. 138., the riot is a crime against the authority and is expressed in the action of a crowd gathered with the purpose of using force or threat to prevent the Bulgarian government or the National Assembly or any other public authority or its body from freely exercising its rights and duties. It is argued that this coup has forever buried "so-called bourgeois democracy" and that this is the "swan song" of bourgeois democracy, but no explanation is given as to how many types of democracies exist. A definition of "19 May politicians" is given – as aggregation of the members of the Political Circle "Zveno" and of the Military League, but with explanations that limit this concept and its authenticity to January 22, 1935. From that could follow a conclusion that the rule of the Military Union until April 21, 1935 is not one of the 19 May circle. The introduction lacks a historiographical overview, which is justified by the political biases of the writers on the issue and the "moral understandings" of the author. This approach obviously spares negative assessments but it would be correct to highlight at least the contributions of the predecessors and to indicate the researchers who have dealt with the problem, which, despite the author's promise, are not mentioned in the study. The traditional for a scientific research bibliography with sources and literature is also missing.

As stated above, half of the content of the monograph has the nature of an introduction, examines the "flaws" of the Bulgarian statehood" as well as the path of "Zveno" and the Military Union to power. The approach is fully justified but at least in the first part it is so general that it is not clear what exactly prevents the continued existence of the model set by the Tarnovo Constitution, especially since the power change in 1931 is defined as a "celebration of constitutionalism". Many of the undoubtedly existing shortcomings of this model are presented through the eyes of its opponents and critics but this is based on unproven claims from the published memories and are not a result of analysis and facts. It is difficult to accept the assertion that the coup is "a way out of the block rule without an alternative" – a rule which

despite all its shortcomings managed to deal with many of the problems facing the country. The Military Union is presented too succinctly and mainly through the Valkov-Velchev conflict, and not through its organizational and ideological development. As for Political Circle "Zveno", the external influences on its leaders are precisely indicated, but the primary basis of their views and intentions can be sought even after the end of the war, under the agrarian and 9 June administrations.

As a contribution of the author we can point out the objective presentation of the "republicanism" of the organizers of the coup d'état, of the ideology of the 19 May politicians as well as the presentation of the composition of their cabinet and its activity. The aspiration for an objective and sometimes critical description of the radical reforms undertaken in the political field, in the administration, in the public sphere, in the economy and finance, in the judicial system and the infrastructure is evident. The study is mainly based on the "State Gazette" and information from the periodicals. The archives of the Council of Ministers and of the individual ministries are not studied, except for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Confessions, the Directorate of Police, the Statistical Yearbooks of the Kingdom, the archives of the Army Headquarters, the Office of the Ministry have not been used of the war, of the Intelligence Department, of the Military Court - all first-class historical sources, which would significantly contribute to clarifying the picture of the 19 May rule.

The afterword presents a justification and endorsement of the authoritarian rule of the 19 May politicians – a rule that most brutally attacked and buried constitutionalism, parliamentarism and freedom in Bulgaria. And as one of their anchors, P. Karavelov, says: "The best cure for most, if not all evils, is freedom."

Aleka Strezova participates in the competition with two monographs, 4 studies, 10 articles and 1 chapter from a collective monograph. All the mentioned publications are in the field of the scientific specialty "History of Bulgaria", with a small part dealing with issues from the Renaissance, but those dedicated to the modern Bulgarian history are definitely dominant.

The monograph "Bulgarian Diplomacy. Institutions and Representatives. 1879-1918". S., 2017 complements and builds on her PhD work. The research fills an essential deficit in the institutional memory of our society, describing a significant period of the creation and

functioning of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Confessions. On the basis of authentic archival material, with the expertise of a good researcher, the organizational and structural evolution of the diplomatic agency, its normative base and financing has been reconstructed. The creating of the diplomatic network and its gradual expansion is also presented as well as the contributions of the heads of state, ministers and officials for the modernization of the ministry. The text is illustrated with numerous tables, diagrams and photographs. As the second part of the study, the biographies of 76 foreign ministers and diplomats are presented, many of them little known or even unknown to the general public. With enviable persistence, a huge and of varied sources material was searched for and studied, which contributes significantly not only to presenting the professional career but also the early years, education, public presence of the diplomats in question.

The destiny of the Bulgarian diplomacy and its representatives are the subject of studies and articles by Dr. Al. Strezova that followed. They expand the chronological scope of the topic, add new touches to the portraits of Bulgarian diplomats, reveal the positions of foreign diplomatic representatives. The establishment and development of the Bulgarian trade agencies in the Ottoman Empire has been studied and presented.

Apart from this topic, Strezova searched for and published documents stored in the Istanbul Ottoman Archives about the revolutionary activities of the Bulgarians in the years 60-s and 70-s of 19th century as well as about V. Levski. She participated in the preparation and publication of several documentary and encyclopedic collections. Strezova has the main merit for the revival of such remarkable personalities from the new Bulgarian history as P. Mateev and N. Stoyanov through the publication of their memoirs and diaries.

Dr. Strezova presented as the main habilitation thesis the monograph "The Last of His Kind. Dr. Georgi Valkovich (1833-1892)", V. Tarnovo, 2022". I would like to note that the study demonstrates the author's professional maturity and solid scientific capacity. It logically fits in and is a consequence of her aspiration to methodically present the personalities that form the foundations of modern Bulgarian statehood. The goal set in the introduction - to present the life and professional biography of Dr. G. Valkovich is fulfilled in a remarkable way, bringing not only knowledge, but also aesthetic pleasure. This was done by overcoming many difficulties arising from the subject of her research - a cosmopolitan personality, the product of two eras, who shot to the highest professional and administrative echelon of the Ottoman Empire, Eastern

Rumelia and the Principality of Bulgaria. The achieved result would be impossible without the scrupulous attitude to the documentary heritage, huge and scattered, left by or for Dr. Valkovic, without the detailed knowledge of the Bulgarian and foreign historiography that is used in an extremely correct way. The work also impresses with the exact recreation of the atmosphere and environment in which Dr. Valkovich was born, brought up, educated and realized as a doctor, politician and diplomat. The harmonious and balanced presentation of the many circumstances, factors, personalities related to Dr. Valkovich enables the author to describe his multifaceted image convincingly. This allows the author to penetrate and reveal new and unknown pages from the past of the Bulgarian community in the Ottoman Empire, from the political and social life of Eastern Rumelia and the Principality of Bulgaria, to detail and specify otherwise known problems of our post-liberation history and foreign policy. As indisputable contributions, the presenting of Dr. Valkovic's many-sided activities as a director in Eastern Rumelia and as a foreign minister managing the Ministry of Public Buildings, Agriculture and Trade and chairman of the State Council in the Principality during the Powers of Attorney regime can be pointed out. His great merits in settling the "difficult relations with the suzerain" are highlighted. No less complicated are the relations with the liberating Russia, an aspect that has escaped the attention of the author. The presenting of Dr. Valkovic's diplomatic carrier in Constantinople as the culmination of his political and public career is backed in an impressively convincing manner. The circumstances and factors related to the murder of the notable politician and diplomat have also been clarified impartially and objectively. In parallel with tracking the social-political activity of Dr. Valkovich Al. Strezova manages to build his vivid image, revealing the intimate sides of his character, his relations with the family, his daughter, his son-in-law.

The monograph, as well as the entire scientific production of Dr. Aleka Strezova, testify to a rich general historical training and competence, to a precise and analytical attitude to the documents and facts of the past, to thoroughness and argumentation of the conclusions and assessments made.

Taking into account the qualities of the scientific works submitted for participation in the competition, I rank the candidates in the following way:

1. Dr. Aleka Strezova
2. Dr. Voyn Bozhinov.

As a member of the Scientific Jury, I will vote for Dr. Strezova to be elected to the academic position of "associate professor".

Sofia, 5 December 2022

Professor PhD Veselin Yanchev