

REVIEW

БЪЛГАРСКА АКАДЕМИЯ НА НАУКИТЕ ИНСТИТУТ ЗА ИСТОРИЧЕСКИ ИЗСЛЕДВАНИЯ	
Изходящ №	дата 201 г.
Входящ № 9и	дата 02.02. 2024г.
София 1113, бул. Шипченски проход № 52, бл. 17 тел.: 02/ 979 29 98 ; факс: 02/ 870 21 91	

ABOUT: The Dissertation of Hristiyan Valeri Yotov

PhD student in the scientific section "History of Bulgaria after the Second World War"

in the Institute for Historical Studies (IHS) at the BAS

"Relations between Bulgaria and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) 1990-1997"

for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the field of higher education "Humanities", professional direction 2.2. "History and Archeology" scientific field
"History of Bulgaria"

by Dr. Yordan Angelov Baev - professor of new and contemporary history

at the *G. S. Rakovski* National Defense College, member of the scientific jury according to
Order No. 51/22.12.2023 of the Director of IHS-BAS

Hristiyan Yotov holds a bachelor's degree in defense economics from the UNSS/UNWE and a master's degree in national security and defense from the *G.S.Rakovski* National Defense College. Since February 2020, he has been working in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria, and since June 2021 he has been a referent in the "Arms Control and Non-Proliferation" Department, Directorate "Security Policy" in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He was enrolled as a full-time doctoral student in the Institute for Historical Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in January 2020. After successfully completing all the planned activities in the individual educational program in 2020-2022 with a total number of credits exceeding the required minimum and carrying out a large part of the planned scientific tasks, at the beginning of 2023 he was dismissed with the right of defense. After a positive assessment by the scientific supervisor, Assoc. Dr. Evgeniy Kandilarov, in an extended session of the council of the scientific section, he was directed to a public defense of the dissertation.

The presented dissertation with a volume of 456 pages is structured in three main chapters, each with two paragraphs (19 subsections in total). The introduction justifies the significance of the topics, indicates the goals and tasks of the research and the methodology used (with a choice of comparative and systematic historical analysis and a problem-

chronological approach). Although the PhD student does not have a special historical education, it gives the impression that he has mastered and successfully applied the basic research tools of historical science. The adopted chronological framework of the work is well argued. Hristiyan Yotov focuses his attention on the political and diplomatic aspects of the researched issue, with the military-political aspects being briefly touched upon in view of the general characteristics of Bulgarian politics in the period under consideration. The relevance of the proposed scientific research is determined by the formulated ambitious goals. First of all, this refers to determining Bulgaria's place in the overall "rethinking of the Alliance's conceptual philosophy" in the process of "its large-scale expansion to the East". At the same time, the dissertation consistently reveals "the specific challenges that Bulgaria faces in the search for guarantees for its national security and territorial integrity" in the individual stages of the studied period. Based on the set main goals, the main scientific tasks and research hypotheses are justified.

The bibliographic reference includes the used documentary sources and scientific and memoir literature, which shows a good literary awareness of the author. The critical analysis of the new archival collections discovered in the last decade, many of which have been put to scientific use for the first time, enhances the contribution of the study. This applies in particular to the documents used from the diplomatic archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but also from the newly declassified archival inventories of the Council of Ministers, the National Assembly and the presidential institution for the initial years of the political transition in Bulgaria. In the logical continuation of Hristiyan Yotov's research work in the coming years, a more complete familiarization with the archival documentation of the Ministry of Defense and the General Staff at the State Military Historical Archive (DVIA) in Veliko Tarnovo, which is largely already available for use for the period up to the beginning of the XXI century, will be necessary. By the way, the copies of documentary materials used by the PhD student, stored in the Military Historical Library (VIB), were created in the General Staff of the Bulgarian Army, and their originals are stored in fund 22 of the DVIA.

In the first chapter of the dissertation, two thematic circles of problems are examined, the study of which is necessary in order to reveal the basic theme of the political evolution of the Bulgarian state in the initial stage of the transition period. Until now, there is still no complete monographic study in Bulgarian historiography with a thorough and detailed critical analysis of the results and lessons learned from the country's participation in the peacetime military-political union Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO) during the Cold War years. This is a completely new experience of coalition culture and relationships in the diplomatic and

military history of the Third Bulgarian State, but three decades after the self-dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, assessments of Bulgaria's place in it continue to be incidental and episodic. And here it is not only about the politics and dominance of the leading superpower, but also about bilateral and multilateral alliance interactions with the smaller Eastern European countries, which will later again be close allies in NATO. Along with the development of crisis processes and the reasons for the subsequent disintegration of the Eastern European military-political and economic structures, Yotov makes an attempt to compare the leading concepts in the politics of the two main military-political blocs in the period of bipolar opposition.

The second paragraph of the first chapter examines in detail the essential changes in the doctrinal views of the North Atlantic Alliance in the context of the new Rome Strategic Concept of 1991, which initiated the transformation of the Alliance in the following years from an institution of collective defense to an organization of cooperative security. NATO policy is rightly viewed primarily through the prism of the policy of its leading ally, the United States. However, it would also be useful to distinguish the specific positions of the two key European countries, France and Germany, especially in the first years after the end of the Cold War. This would enrich the important topic of the historical mechanisms of coordination and interaction and overcoming the emerging crisis phenomena in the politics of the Alliance. The establishment of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) in December 1991 was the first mechanism for joint consultations and subsequent multilateral partnership with former adversaries from Eastern Europe.

The second chapter of the dissertation examines the initial stage of Bulgaria's political, diplomatic and military relations with NATO in the context of the reorientation of its foreign policy "from East to West". Although there is some chronological return and repetition of key events from the end of the Cold War, the aim is to emphasize the new elements of state policy in the conditions of political transition. Hristiyan Yotov convincingly shows that the created legal-normative and military "vacuum" after the change of the social system and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact necessitated the establishment of first contacts with NATO even under the governments of A. Lukanov and D. Popov. These initial steps were intensified during the next one-year rule of the independent government of the UDF, conditioned also by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the beginning of the internal war in neighboring Yugoslavia. At the same time, under the government of F. Dimitrov, ambiguous management decisions are observed, such as a total change of personnel in the Foreign Ministry and palliative actions with a lack of coordination between the main authorities, such as the recognition of the Republic of

Macedonia. Under the next government of L. Berov, the direction of development of contacts with NATO is preserved, but with a more balanced and planned policy and without unexpected improvisations.

In the second paragraph of the second chapter, Hristiyan Yotov analyzes in detail the initial relations with the leadership and various structures of the Alliance in the period 1990-1993. His multi-faceted overview of multilateral and bilateral relations at the political, diplomatic and military political level has an indisputable contribution, as well as detailed presentation of positions and reactions in domestic politics - from opinions and projects of different political groups, through discussions in parliamentary committees on foreign policy and national security, to decision making and actions at the level of the government and presidential institution. The importance of the overwhelmingly adopted declaration of the National Assembly of December 21, 1993 regarding the country's accession to NATO has been rightly emphasized.

The third chapter of the work is dedicated to a relatively less studied historical period (1994-1997), which led to the political and parliamentary consensus in the spring of 1997 with the declaration of Bulgaria's accession to NATO as a “strategic national priority”. Quite rightly, the PhD student has focused his attention on the particularly important issue for the development of NATO-Eastern Europe relations, the adoption of a compromise option by the US President Bill Clinton's administration by announcing the “Partnership for Peace” program. Bulgarian participation in the “Partnership for Peace” through the implementation of annual coordination events, multilateral military exercises and expert forums set out in the detailed individual IPAP Action Plan contributes to the gradual integration at the strategic and operational-tactical level with the Alliance member countries . On the other hand, it was at that time that the legal-normative “vacuum” was overcome (with the adoption of the Defense and Armed Forces Law and the National Security Concept, and later the Military Doctrine of the Republic of Bulgaria). The implementation of the new military reform through the structural transformation of the armed forces with the adoption of a corps-brigade organization of the military formations also began. The established well-functioning integration mechanism under the PfP was subsequently relatively easily reformatted in 1999 into the NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP). An important role was also played by the accession of Bulgaria to the Agreement on the Provision of Standardization Normative Documents to NATO (STANAG).

A significant contribution in the third chapter is the introduction for the first time into scientific use of a large number of newly disclosed diplomatic documents related to the specific

steps in the integration process of cooperation with NATO. At the same time, Hristiyan Yotov also thoroughly analyzes other key expert documents, such as the analytical report of the National Security Service (NSS) of March 11, 1994, or the NATO policy document “Study on the Enlargement of the Union” adopted in November 1995, where the necessary criteria and principles for “degree of democratization” and “interoperability” were established. A comparative analysis with the policy of other Central and Eastern European countries in the process of integration with NATO was also made. A number of similar expert information can be additionally found in the reports of the Bulgarian military attachés and in the summary reports of the Bulgarian military intelligence services, stored in the centralized archive of the Commission for the State Security and Military Intelligence Dossies (COMDOS).

Hristiyan Yotov carefully and critically evaluates the known inconsistency and ambiguity in the policy of Zh. Videnov's government towards more active actions and an open orientation for the country's accession to the Alliance. At the same time, based on the provided authentic documentary data, including from foreign archives, the PhD student reasonably refutes the popular statement of the US national security expert Jeffrey Simon about the “seven lost years” in the relations between Bulgaria and NATO (As is well known, this public assessment leads through 1998-1999 to the change of leadership of the Bulgarian Ministry of Defense in the government of Ivan Kostov). Yotov also did not avoid the issue of the presence in the mid and late 1990s in certain public (mainly intellectual) circles of sentiments in favor of the concept of “military neutrality and non-alignment”. In the concluding paragraph of the last chapter, the doctoral student examines the historical conditions for creating a political consensus for full membership in NATO through the actions of the newly elected president Petar Stoyanov, the caretaker government of Stefan Sofianski formed by him and the new parliamentary majority after the extraordinary elections for the National Assembly in April 1997. In the context of this clearly expressed political line, the real content of the proclaimed political slogan for the inevitable “civilizational choice” of Bulgaria was analyzed.

In the conclusion of the dissertation, a synthesized summary of the various stages in the initial period of establishing contacts and adopting the policy for Bulgaria's accession to the North Atlantic Alliance is made. It is necessary to point out that already in his main exposition, Hristiyan Yotov presents his logically justified systematic assessments and conclusions in each of the three chapters. The main conclusion is that despite some “momentary fluctuations” and contradictory actions, the process of cooperation and subsequent interaction between Bulgaria and NATO “retains its upward and sustainable trend” throughout the entire period under study.

In the conclusion of the dissertation, the main researched problematic topics and discussion questions are recalled, which determine the opinion for the fulfillment of the set research goals and tasks.

The 29-page abstract objectively reflects the content and conclusions of the dissertation. Four contributions are outlined in the study, which is the first comprehensive study of the subject under consideration using a large number of new and diverse archival sources. The indicated three scientific publications in the period 2021-2022 interpret some problematic moments discussed in the individual chapters. They are the personal work of the doctoral student and reflect his own conclusions and contributions. No reference is attached whether any of the author's articles and reports have been cited or evaluated in other authors' publications or during scientific forums. I would recommend the publication of separate contributing issues in specialized publications abroad, since with their documentary basis and generalized assessments they will be of interest to the foreign professional audience and will present the contemporary foreign policy development of the Republic of Bulgaria in a more objective and reasoned manner.

Some specific notes and recommendations could be made to the content of the dissertation with a view to possible preparation for publication of the work at a later stage in the form of a monograph. It is noteworthy that the PhD student agreed during the internal defense with most of these notes, but apparently did not have time to implement them in the final revision of the manuscript.

On p. 30, mention of the GDR in the armed intervention of Warsaw Pact armies in Czechoslovakia in August 1968 should be removed, since such planned participation was canceled at the last moment before the start of the military operation. On p. 31, claim archive data is clearly wrongly cited (CDA, f. 1B, op. 3, a.e. 1), since this inventory and archive unit refers to another historical period (1924-1938). On p. 74 (footnote no. 164) an important concept paper of 5 January 1990 on the Soviet position towards Eastern Europe is cited. However, the document placed in the NSA colleagues' collection of documents (*Masterpiece of History*, 2010) is significantly redacted and omits an essential paragraph assessing the future of the WTO. This key paragraph is quoted in my article at the collection *Encounters with History* (2020) which was cited by Yotov, while a copy of the original document can be seen in the foreign archives collection at the Central State Archives (CDA).

The second paragraph of the first chapter (pp. 129-132) talks about the role of the CSCE, and then on p. 368 the OSCE is mentioned very briefly without ever explaining the institutional transformation (as a gradual developing process) and the creation of the regional organization at the summit in Budapest in December 1994. Since the OSCE is a very important structural part of the European security system in the period under study and at one point even considered a future major pan-European organization, it should be given due attention.

On pp. 148-149 there is talk of three “key” meetings between Todor Zhivkov and Mikhail Gorbachev. In fact, the content of the meeting on May 11 is confused with a subsequent meeting omitted in the work on October 16, 1987. It was then that the Soviet leader accused his Bulgarian colleague of having pro-Western politicians in his “close entourage” and insisted on their elimination from the highest political structures, which led to the later removal of Ognyan Doinov. And after the “last” meeting on June 23, 1989 in Moscow, there was another significant meeting on July 8-9 during the meeting of the PCC of the WTO in Bucharest.

Given the specialized educational qualification of the PhD student, it is good to clarify some military-technical terms and characteristics. Indeed, under the influence of the Western names for the SS-23 missile complexes and in several Bulgarian documents they are called OTR-23, but their authentic designation, including in the Bulgarian military documentation, is P-400 “Oka”. Also, we are talking about a total of eight missile launchers (complexes), and the mentioned 80 missiles are their equipment with conventional warheads, since nuclear weapons have never been deployed on Bulgarian territory. On p. 198, it should be corrected that in June 1990, Gen.-Col. Atanas Semerdzhiev is the head of the General Staff. At that time, the head of the General Staff was Col. Gen. Hristo Dobrev, and Gen. Semerdzhiev was the Minister of Internal Affairs and soon after the Vice President of Bulgaria. On p. 284, *Washington Quarterly* should be corrected, as it is a magazine, not a newspaper. On pp. 378-379, another extremely important doctrinal document should be added between the ZOVS and the Military Doctrine - the National Security Concept, adopted by the National Assembly in April 1997.

In conclusion, I would like to express my satisfaction with the serious and in-depth attitude of the doctoral student and the ability to discover, systematize and interpret the essential interrelated causal events and phenomena on the researched topic. The separate recommendations made in the review are primarily aimed at assisting the PhD student in his next work on the researched topic for publishing the work in a separate monographic publication. I also sincerely hope that colleague Yotov will continue his research for the

subsequent historical period (1998-2004) so that an important and necessary monograph on the entire process of Bulgaria's accession to NATO can appear soon in Bulgarian historiography.

The above gives me the reason to make a justified conclusion that the dissertation in question fully meets the necessary requirements and criteria for obtaining the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in accordance with the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff of the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its Application and the Regulations for the terms and conditions for acquiring scientific degrees and for holding academic positions at the Institute for Historical Studies at the BAS. Given the above, I will vote “Yes” and call on the respected members of the scientific jury to also vote for awarding Hristiyan Valeri Yotov the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in the field of higher education “Humanities”, professional direction 2.2. “History and Archeology” (New and Contemporary General History).

Member of the Scientific Jury:

(Prof. Dr. Yordan Baev)

5 February 2024