

OPINION

by Assoc. Prof. Nadya Filipova, PhD, Institute for Historical Studies, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

regarding the dissertation for the award of the educational and scientific degree “PhD in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, Professional field 2.2. History and Archeology”

Topic of the dissertation: “Relations between Bulgaria and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) 1990-1997”

Author of the dissertation: Hristian Valeri Yotov

This Opinion has been prepared in accordance with:

1. Order No. 51/22.12.2023 г. of the Director of the Institute for Historical Studies – BAS Prof. Dr. Daniel Vachkov for the appointment of the Scientific Jury for the defense of the dissertation of Hristian Valeri Yotov - PhD student at the Department "History of Bulgaria after the Second World War".

2. Minutes No. 1 of the meeting of the Scientific Jury for the defence of the dissertation prepared by Hristian Valeri Yotov - PhD student at the Department "History of Bulgaria after the Second World War".

The dissertation presented by the PhD student Hristian Valeri Yotov is in a volume of 456 non-standard pages including the Bibliography section. Structurally, the study complies with the standards required for a PhD thesis: it consists of an Introduction, three Chapters, a Conclusion and a Bibliographic section. It is dedicated to an important topic for the studies of the contemporary Bulgarian (and world) history. The dissertation throws new light on the leading trends and specifics, as well as on the decision-making process in various Bulgarian institutions and political subjects on the path of the Bulgarian transition.

The object, the subject, the goals and tasks of the research, as well as the chronological scope, are motivated in the Introduction. The great volume and variety of scientific research and documentary evidence which has been drawn upon for the study in its various aspects is remarkable, but in terms of the analysis of the sources I believe that it should be more comprehensive. A broader presentation of the documentary base and scientific research against the background of the main topics in the work would allow the contributions of the dissertation work to be more clearly highlighted. However, I believe that it will be overcome in future research.

The exposition in the three chapters and their paragraphs is balanced and the division is well grounded both chronologically and thematically. However, it seems redundant to me the three-level division: chapter, sub-chapter, section.

Chapter One shows a very good knowledge of the sources, a measured and focused emphasis on details and a very good independent analysis with clear author's own theses, which is difficult for young researchers to achieve. A bridge is built between the analysis of the collapse of Eastern European structures and the study of the beginning of their formation against the background of ongoing similar processes in the Western European space under the auspices of the USA. The part presenting the military doctrines of NATO and the Warsaw Pact Organization is well developed. The theory of nuclear deterrence is analyzed. That strategy, although born in the West, was followed by both blocs throughout the Cold War period after the USSR acquired nuclear war potential.

Against the background of the dialogue between Moscow and Washington, the author presents and analyzes the concerns that were forming in Bulgaria as early as 1988 regarding the possibilities of guaranteeing the country's security, given the predictions of its asymmetrical disarmament compared to Greece and Turkey (p. 57). In general, the skillful combination in the analysis of data deriving from documentary sources and scientific research is impressive. In this sense and approach, the vacuum (military and political) in which Bulgaria remained in the process of the actual disintegration of the Warsaw Pact Organization is very well outlined.

An important element of the analysis in Chapter One is the study of the contradictions within NATO in the 1990s over the American role through NATO in shaping the European security system under the new circumstances of the collapse of the Soviet bloc. The dynamics of decisions in NATO regarding the organization's future role for European cooperation and security are very well revealed, including through the prism of the resurgent "German question" and Washington's desire to guide the development of processes in Europe through NATO.

In the context of the outlined main challenges for determining the approaches and mechanisms for guaranteeing the future of European security as a whole and of the individual countries, the Second chapter examines specifically the Bulgarian motives for the reorientation of the country towards NATO membership in the period up to 1993. This process is skillfully analyzed against the background and as a function of the general internal political debates and discussions on the country's foreign policy. The study logically identifies the Partnership for Peace initiative as a bridge to NATO's expansion to the East. The conclusion is motivated that the signing of Bulgaria's accession to the Program by the Bulgarian President in February 1994

was "the first clear commitment of Bulgaria to external military-political structures after the end of the Cold War" (p. 281).

Both, Chapter Two and Chapter Three are the most contributing parts of the dissertation. At the beginning, Hristian Yotov outlines the unipolar model of international relations that took shape in the mid-1990s, which was to a significant extent a prerequisite for NATO's decision to begin expansion to the East. The debates in NATO during the period of the collapse of the military, political and economic structures of the Eastern Bloc on the question of whether the organization should accept new members are also outlined. The position of the Russian Foreign Ministry on the preferences of the Russian Federation for the construction of a European system of collective security, in which Russia should be also included, instead of the expansion of NATO in the Eastern direction, is proven. The doctoral student skillfully compares also the processes in the "camp" of the recent enemies. It is noted that, in contrast to the rapid reorientation and declaration of requests for membership in NATO by Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary as early as 1992, in Bulgaria such an initiative was delayed (p. 292). In this context, the dynamics of Bulgarian decisions on the way to membership in the organization are also examined. It is proven for what reasons NATO's concern about Bulgaria was secondary to the interest in attracting the countries of Central Europe and how that affected Bulgarian initiatives. At the same time, the growing American interest in military cooperation with Bulgaria in 1993-1994 is emphasized. The above-mentioned processes are studied taking into account the changes in the Russian foreign policy approach, ultimately declaring an aspiration to preserve Russian influence in Eastern Europe.

The nuances in the assessments of the various institutions in Bulgaria regarding the move towards the final decision to join NATO are well outlined. At the same time, it is proven that there was a general consensus among the political forces in Bulgaria regarding the vision of the country's integration into NATO and not only continuity, but also the upgrading of the initiatives in this regard by the various governments. However, the documents prepared in connection with the reorganization of the Bulgarian army, as well as with regard to the political and other reasons for making one or another decision, are presented in too much detail. A summarized analysis would make the text easier to understand and to bring to the fore the highlights in the development of Bulgarian initiatives.

The conclusion is well organized and it draws the main deductions that Hristian Yotov makes in the main body of the dissertation. The bibliography is prepared according to the requirements for a dissertation.

The submitted Abstract meets the requirements and reflects the content of the dissertation work. The doctoral student has also fulfilled all requirements for research activity, as well as with regard to mandatory educational courses and examinations.

On this basis, I strongly recommend to the respected members of the Scientific Jury to award Hristiyan Yotov the educational and scientific degree “PhD in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, Professional field 2.2. History and Archeology”.

February 2, 2024

Assoc. Prof. Nadya Filipova, PhD