

БЪЛГАРСКА АКАДЕМИЯ НА НАУКИТЕ ИНСТИТУТ ЗА ИСТОРИЧЕСКИ ИЗСЛЕДВАНИЯ	
Исходящ №	дата 201 г.
Входящ № 140	дата 19-02-2024
София 1113, бул. Шипченски проход № 52, бл. 17 тел.: 02/ 979 29 98 ; факс: 02/ 870 21 91	

1

REVIEW

on the the dissertation "Relations between Bulgaria and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) – 1990 - 1997" of Hristian Valery Yotov for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in area 2. Human science, professional direction 2.2. History and Archaeology, scientific specialty "History of Bulgaria",

by Prof. Iskra Baeva PhD, Lecturer in Contemporary History at the Faculty of History,
Sofia University „Kliment Ohridski"

1. Information about the applicant

Hristian Yotov's path to a doctorate in modern Bulgarian history was long and complicated. He graduated from the so-called Classical High School (National High School for Ancient Languages and Cultures) "Konstantin Cyril the Philosopher", after which he headed for a bachelor's degree at the University of National and World Economy, where he first showed his interest in military affairs by choosing the specialty "Economics of Defense and Security" (2012-2016). The same interest led him to study in the National Security and Defense Master's Program of the Georgi S. Rakovski Military Academy, from which he graduated in early 2018. After testing his professional skills in various other activities, Hristian Yotov took part in a doctoral competition at the Institute for Historical Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, and after winning it at the beginning of 2020, he was enrolled as a full-time doctoral student in the section "History of Bulgaria after the Second World War war" with the theme "Relations between Bulgaria and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) 1990-1997" and with academic supervisor Assoc. Prof. Dr. Evgeniy Kandilarov.

After the expiration of the doctoral studies on December 18, 2023, the "History of Bulgaria after the Second World War" section discussed Hristian Yotov's dissertation, evaluated it positively and decided to propose to the Scientific Council of the Institute for Historical Studies that a defense procedure be opened of the dissertation work for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor" (Protocol No. 7 of 18. 12. 2023). By Order No. 51 of 22.12.2023, the Scientific Council of the Institute for Historical Studies decided to open a procedure for the defense of Hristiyan Yotov's dissertation work for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor".

In parallel with the preparation of his dissertation, Hristian Yotov worked at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Arms Control and Non-Proliferation Department of the Security Policy Directorate. This professional realization of the doctoral student fully corresponded to his scientific pursuits, giving him a wider opportunity to collect information on his topic and to use important documents, including archival ones.

2. A review of the dissertation

I will begin my assessment of Hristian Yotov's dissertation with its formal characteristics. The dissertation is developed in a volume of 456 typewritten pages and is classically structured in an Introduction, three chapters, symmetrically divided into two subchapters and subordinated to the chronological-problematic principle, Conclusion and Bibliography.

As a source base for his dissertation, Hristiyan Yotov used archival sources from six larger or more specialized Bulgarian archives: the Diplomatic Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and in this case he also used the raw fund of the archive, the Central State Archive of the Republic Bulgaria, the State Military Historical Archive of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Archive of the Commission on Dossier (with an unpronounceable long official name), the Military History Library and the archive of the Bulgarian National Television. Thanks to worldwide connectivity through the Internet, the doctoral student has had the opportunity to use digitized archival or official documents from the NATO Archives, the US State Department, the British Foreign Policy, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the presidential libraries of Reagan, George W. Bush-

senior and Clinton, of the Gorbachev Foundation, the documentation of a series of international summits, of the Russian archives, of the Woodrow Wilson Science Center in Washington, of the Atlantic Club in Bulgaria, of President Petar Stoyanov.

For separate aspects of the problems, he also used three Bulgarian documentary collections, as well as 23 items from the memoir literature related to the names of participants in the events such as the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, Marshal Sergey Akhromeev, Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov, KGB Chairman Leonid Shabarshin, US Ambassador to Sofia Hugh Kenneth Hill, Bulgarian Leader Todor Zhivkov, Prime Minister Andrey Lukanov, Chairman/President Petar Mladenov, Presidents Dr. Zhelyu Zhelev and Georgi Parvanov, Prime Ministers Philip Dimitrov and Ivan Kostov, Minister of Defense Gen. Yordan Mutafov, the Chairman of the Great Parliament Academician Nikolay Todorov, the Minister of Education Academician Ilcho Dimitrov, Ambassador Ivan Garvalov.

The periodicals are also well represented. Here we find some of the most important newspapers published during the mentioned period: "Worker's Case", "Patriotic Front", "People's Army", "Duma", the official "State Gazette". The following are the magazines: "Sega", "Anteni", "Notices of the Central Committee of the CPSU" and "Novo Vreme" (which for unknown reasons was declared a newspaper), as well as the bulletins of BTA, CIA, NATO, Financial Times, etc.

Scientific publications by Bulgarian and foreign authors in Bulgarian, English and Russian (2) language number 115 positions.

In the Introduction, Hristian Yotov formulated the main goal of his work as follows: *"through a thorough critical analysis of primary documentary evidence from Bulgarian and foreign archives, as well as on the basis of the available scientific literature, to outline and critically analyze the main stages in the relations between Bulgaria and NATO during their initial and most challenging period 1990-1997, by tracking and analyzing the specific actions of the Bulgarian governments, their motives, interests and results"* (p. 7). It is reinforced by two secondary objectives: to synchronously consider the evolution of Bulgaria, on the one hand, and the transformations of NATO, on the other, as well as to outline the challenges facing Bulgaria in relation to the need to reformulate its strategy for security and territorial integrity (p. 7-8). The goals are further developed into tasks, but anyway, the goals formulated in this way show a clear

understanding of the direction in which the research was developed and the answers to which questions about Bulgaria's foreign policy orientation in the field of national security are sought.

The first chapter, titled "The End of the Cold War and the New Unipolar World (1989-1991)" and is over 120 pages, is something of a broad introduction to the subject, as it begins by introducing the two main military-political groupings from the years of the Cold War - the Warsaw Pact Organization and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. At first glance, it seems that a large part of the content of this chapter goes beyond the chronological framework of the dissertation, as well as the problems stated in the goals. In fact, however, it is very necessary for every reader, because it helps him to understand the essence of the Cold War, what were the main conflict points and counteractions of the two parts of the divided world, why it ended in this way - with the capitulation of the East and how it reflected the relationship between the main contending powers after the end of the Cold War and how the former Warsaw Pact countries were looking for their new place in the unipolar world. The strategic doctrines of the two opposing military-political blocs are convincingly presented. Special attention was paid to the processes of disintegration of the Eastern Bloc, carried out in the time between the autumn revolutions in Eastern Europe and the last months before the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Entirely within the thesis topic were the concluding paragraphs of the first subchapter and the second subchapter, "NATO and the Construction of the New European Security Architecture in 1991." It focused on the evolution in the structures and ideas of the North Atlantic Treaty and its orientation towards its new pan-European role. They seemed more distant from Bulgarian history, but extremely important for later events. The conclusions that at the end of the existence of the Soviet Union *"prevailed in the notions of building pan-European security structures, which found expression in expanding the functions and status of the Council for Security and Cooperation in Europe."* *A major shortcoming of this purely political organization is the absence of the military factor, which is ultimately decisive for guaranteeing security in all its aspects... The final confirmation of the American perception of the new North Atlantic Alliance, on the one hand, preserves a US military presence in Europe, and on the other hand, involves Western European organizations in the economic and political inclusion of Eastern European countries"* (p. 140). These processes in turn predetermine the orientation of Eastern European countries to the only

remaining functioning military alliance in Europe, which must also be transformed to accommodate them. The challenges facing Bulgaria in light of the danger stemming from its large military imbalance with Turkey and Greece were well outlined.

The second chapter "Beginning of contacts between Bulgaria and NATO (1990-1993)" as already the essence of the dissertation - the relations between Bulgaria and the structures of the North Atlantic Alliance during the first period of establishing relations. In order to present them, the doctoral student had to go deeper into the complex political evolution of our country from the first years of the transition, which is quite different from the processes in the Central European countries of the Eastern Bloc. In this chapter, based on widely used archival documents, the author has traced the slow and gradual geopolitical evolution of Bulgarian society from the East (Soviet Union/Russia) to the West (United States and NATO). The doctoral student has taken the trouble to present these processes in various environments, with the priority naturally being the military environments and those of the foreign policy department. The extremely large role of the head of state of that period, Dr. Zhelyu Zhelev, for the faster enforcement of Bulgaria's unconditional rapprochement with Western factors and especially with the North Atlantic Pact, was quite justly pointed out.

The third chapter, "The Partnership for Peace Initiative and Making NATO Membership a Strategic National Priority for Bulgaria (1994-1997)" offered a careful tracing of the events that led to the overcoming of public reservations about NATO as a major military adversary from the Cold War era. The biggest role in this process is played by the North Atlantic Partnership for Peace initiative, which aims both to overcome public suspicions of NATO in Eastern Europe and especially in the Balkans, and to prepare NATO structures for its expansion with countries, former members of the opposing military-political Warsaw Pact. And in this chapter, as in the previous ones, the historical analysis affected not only Bulgaria-NATO relations, but placed them in the wider context of the transformations of all former socialist countries of Eastern Europe and the processes that were developing in the post-Soviet space. Not to be underestimated is the more detailed look at the views of the European members of NATO and their often differing positions towards the idea of expanding the alliance.

The conclusions drawn in various parts of the third chapter are adequate and show a good knowledge not only of the official documents of the various countries, but also an understanding of the reasons for the evolution of both the large countries of the East and West, as well as of the smaller ones and dependent on the ratio of powers in the world smaller countries.

In the conclusion of the dissertation, the main conclusions formulated in the course of the presentation are convincingly presented. In them, Hristiyan Yotov presented his specific point of view on the geopolitical turn carried out by Bulgaria and traced the subsequent steps aimed at reaching full membership in the North Atlantic Alliance.

3. Evaluation of the scientific results obtained

In his dissertation work, Hristian Yotov has managed to logically and convincingly present the major geopolitical changes that occurred at the end of the Cold War and led to the creation of a new European and world order, complemented by a new security system and, in particular, the place and role of Bulgaria in this process. He did it from the Bulgarian point of view, but on the basis of a wide range of archival and official documents of the main countries and institutions that participate in these processes. I confirm the doctoral student's self-assessment that this study is the first comprehensive presentation of these processes in Bulgarian historiography, and the value of the achieved scientific result is increased by placing the Bulgarian efforts to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in the context of complex and rapidly changing international relations. One of the indisputable and well-founded conclusions of the dissertation is the rejection of the thesis about the seven lost years in the relations between Bulgaria and NATO. This conclusion can also be accepted as an original scientific contribution, since the entire dissertation is dedicated to this period.

My overall assessment of the dissertation is that it is well structured, the thesis is realistically formulated and sufficiently convincingly and reasonably presented, supported by rich source and analytical material.

4. Evaluation of the dissertation publications

In the documentation on the procedure for the defense of the dissertation, there is information about the participation of the doctoral student Hristian Yotov in scientific forums and three of his publications are presented. All of them are related to his dissertation topic: 1. „Първите контакти между България и НАТО в контекста на геополитическата трансформация в Източна Европа през 1990 г.“ (Сборник доклади от годишна университетска научна конференция 2021; Том I, „Педагогически и хуманитарни науки“, Велико Търново, 2021, с. 178-190); 2. „Политико-дипломатическите отношения между България и НАТО в контекста на Римската среща на върха през 1991 г.“ (Сборник доклади от Международната университетска научна конференция „Ползата от историята (от древността до наши дни)” 2022, Том 2, „Педагогически и хуманитарни науки“, Пловдив, 2022, с. 483-507); 3. „Присъединяване на България към инициативата на НАТО „Партньорство за мир““ (Сборник доклади от годишна университетска научна конференция 2022; Том 8, „Педагогически и хуманитарни науки“, Велико Търново, 2022, с. 283-295).

All three publications were initially presented to a wider scientific community as conference papers, which gave Hristian Yotov the opportunity to publicize his theses and enable them to be discussed and evaluated.

5. Evaluation of the abstract

The abstract has a length of 29 pages and outlines the main parameters of the dissertation work. In its first part, the main characteristics of his research work are formulated: the relevance and novelty of the research, the goals and tasks of the dissertation, its object and subject, Hristian Yotov has defended the choice of chronological boundaries, presented the methods and methodology used, as well as the various sources, on the basis of which the dissertation was written. The second part of the abstract follows adequately the structure and content of the three chapters of the study, as well as the main conclusions reached. The third part presents the self-assessment of the research's scientific contributions, the presentation of research elements and conclusions at various scientific forums, as well as the publications related to the dissertation.

The content and layout of the abstract meet the academic requirements.

6. Evaluation of the scientific indicators

The total score for the exams taken and the credits received by the doctoral student Hristian Yotov: three publications, three exams and two courses, as well as his participation in three scientific conferences means that he collects a total of 314 points. These exceed the minimum requirements for a doctoral student of 250 credits. This means that the doctoral student Hristian Yotov meets the scientometric requirements for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor".

7. Critical comments and recommendations

My overall positive assessment of Hristian Yotov's dissertation does not mean that I do not have minor critical remarks about the text that could serve to improve the text, especially if Hristian Yotov decides to publish his dissertation as a monograph, which I recommend.

My first more general remark is that the text could omit some details, especially the discussions that take place within the framework of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and which do not relate to the topic of the dissertation.

My purely chronological remarks are smaller. It is about the second key meeting of Todor Zhivkov with Mikhail Gorbachev, when the conflict between the two became visible for the first time - in the text the meeting is dated May 11 (p. 148), but in fact it was in October of this year. This is also evident from the course of events, since the conflict is due to the theses laid down in the July concept, adopted at a meeting of the Central Committee of the BKP in July, or a month and a half after the indicated date of May 11.

The plenum of the Central Committee of the BKP on November 10, 1989 was not extraordinary (p. 151), but regular. According to his agenda, it should discuss the further progress of the reconstruction, therefore Todor Zhivkov reads the main report.

After the Central Committee of the BKP voted the resignation of Todor Zhivkov as general secretary, he was expelled from the BKP not two days later as written (p. 152), but after a month and 2 days, as this happened at the plenum of December 13, 1989.

In my opinion, it is not very clear what "unexpected dividends" President Dr. Zhelyu Zhelev's support for Yeltsin in August 1991 brought (p. 185). Indeed, the following year, during Yeltsin's visit in Sofia, a bilateral Bulgarian-Russian contract was signed, but it did not lead to an improvement in relations, which remained practically frozen.

During the evaluation of the change of employees in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, carried out by Minister Stoyan Ganev under the first government of the UDF, Hristian Yotov announced that young and "ideologically unencumbered" personnel were appointed (p. 188). In fact, the newly appointed diplomats are rather from the middle and elderly generation with a variety of professions, but I do not think that they are ideologically unencumbered, since they are adherents of another ideology - anti-communism.

It seems to me that when explaining the sociological data related to the attitude towards Russia, it should be sought not only in the educational level or in the satellite syndrome of the survey participants (p. 414-415), but also in the long-standing Russophile tradition, which distinguishes Bulgaria from the other countries of the Eastern Bloc and which we can find since the Renaissance.

I do not agree with the widely popularized determination of Bulgaria's entry into NATO as a civilizational choice (p. 419). In my opinion, this thesis does not come from society, but is suggested by the political elites, who are trying to convince Bulgarians of it. I am convinced that the real civilizational choice of Bulgaria was made by Prince Boris when he forced the adoption of Christianity, and not when the country entered NATO.

I think that the PhD student's claim on pp. 433-434 and 436 that the objectives set out in the introduction have been successfully met is redundant, as this is for the scientific jury to assess.

I also have minor remarks about the bibliography. In the published documents section, I had placed the transcripts of the XIX Conference of the CPSU, as well as NATO, "PfP Framework Document," Issued at Ministerial Meeting of North Atlantic Council, January 10-11, 1994. While

from the memoirs of the participants in the events, I had excluded the books of Metodi Spasov and Rumiana Ugrchinska, which are more like studies.

I would also like to ask one question to Hristian Yotov: What does he think, why, unlike the countries in Central Europe, Bulgaria has not held a referendum on our acceptance into NATO?

7. Conclusion

Hristian Yotov's dissertation "Relations between Bulgaria and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) 1990- 1997" shows the doctoral student's ability to search for primary and secondary documentary material, to effectively use the historiography on the topic, to independently develop important problems from the historical development of both Bulgaria in the years of socio-economic transformations called transition, as well as the change in the tactical and strategic positions of the North Atlantic Treaty in the first years after the end of the Cold War and the formation of the new Pax Americana world order, to draw historical conclusions and thus contribute to the development of Bulgarian historiography.

All this gives me grounds, in spite of the remarks I have formulated, to state my conviction that Hristian Yotov has fulfilled all the academic requirements for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor", for which I will vote.

February 17, 2024 г.

Reviewer: prof. Iskra Baeva PhD