

БЪЛГАРСКА АКАДЕМИЯ НА НАУКИТЕ ИНСТИТУТ ЗА ИСТОРИЧЕСКИ ИЗСЛЕДВАНИЯ	
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## OPINION

from **Prof. Dr. Evgenia Kalinova**, Department of History of Bulgaria,  
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for the dissertation of **CHRISTIAN VALERY YOTOV**,  
PhD student in the department “History of Bulgaria after the Second  
World War” at the Institute for Historical Research - Bulgarian Academy of Sciences,  
professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology,  
scientific field “History of Bulgaria”  
with scientific supervisor Assoc. Prof. Evgeniy Kandilarov

on the topic: “**RELATIONS BETWEEN BULGARIA AND  
THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION (NATO) 1990-1997**”

Christian Yotov's dissertation is a comprehensive study of an issue of particular importance for Bulgaria in the first years after the collapse of the communist regime and in the context of the disintegration of the Eastern bloc. In the process of Bulgaria's geopolitical reorientation and the construction of its new security strategy, relations with NATO occupy a special place. Reconstructing all the steps that these relations went through in the period 1990-1997 with an emphasis on their political, diplomatic and partly military dimensions is a serious challenge, and I would like to note at the beginning of my opinion that the PhD student has done an excellent work. Christian Yotov's training received at the National Lyceum for Ancient Languages and Cultures and then at the Bachelor's degree programme at the UNWE certainly contributed to this result. He built on the knowledge acquired in the Master's programme in National Security and Defence at the Military Academy “G. S. Rakovski”. His current professional engagements in the Arms Control and Non-Proliferation Department of the Directorate of Security Policy at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are also relevant to the dissertation problems.

Besides the abundance of publications in Bulgaria, in one way or another related to NATO, the number of actually serious scientific studies is still small. In this sense, the choice of the dissertation topic by the PhD student, his supervisor and the research unit seems to me to be fully justified. The qualities of the dissertation are directly dependent on the documentary basis on which it is built, as well as on the author's ability to analyse the collected information thoroughly and to formulate precise conclusions. My assessment is that the serious primary source base, collected and comprehended by Christian Yotov, is among the important merits of the dissertation. Christian Yotov brings into scientific use documents from the fonds of the Central State Archive of the Republic of Bulgaria, the Diplomatic Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the State Military History Archive. He has also retrieved materials on the subject from the digitized archival collections of Presidents Mikhail Gorbachev, Boris Yeltsin, George

Bush Sr. and Bill Clinton, as well as from the digitized archives of the US State Department and NATO.

The archival sources are supplemented by memoirs of Bulgarian and foreign politicians and diplomats, as well as newspapers and other printed publications on the subject from the period under review. The PhD student is well acquainted with the literature on the subject, which is evident from the historiographical review in the introduction, from its correct use in the exposition, and from the attached bibliography. The section "Scientific Literature" in it counts 115 titles in Bulgarian and English (some of them, however, are of reference books and publicist works and should be moved to other sections). The analysis of this rich database of sources is another significant contribution of Christian Yotov, as it has been carried out professionally, objectively, with serious knowledge of both the specific facts of the Bulgaria-NATO relations and the general background of international relations.

The dissertation consists of an introduction, three chapters, each of which is divided into paragraphs and sub-paragraphs, a conclusion and a bibliography in a total of 456 pages. I find the structure perfectly acceptable because it is in line with both the chronological approach, which allows highlighting the cause-and-effect relationships, and the main thematic emphases in the history of the first years of NATO-Bulgaria relations. In the introduction, Christian Yotov has included the main obligatory elements - the object and subject of the research are formulated, the aims and objectives are clearly outlined, as well as the applied research methods. The chronological limits of the dissertation are convincingly argued (pp. 11-12).

The first chapter, entitled "The End of the Cold War and the New Unipolar World (1989-1991)", is an introduction and is necessary to outline the starting points from which the contacts between Bulgaria and NATO began. The historical background of these contacts, whose main feature is the transition from the sharp East-West confrontation to the beginnings of a dialogue between the two superpowers in the late 1980s, is presented convincingly enough. The PhD student has also included an overview of the events that led to the creation of NATO and the Warsaw Pact, the crises in the two politico-military blocs and their strategic doctrines. A special sub-paragraph presents the crisis in the Eastern bloc and the formulation of Soviet foreign policy strategy in the perestroika years as a factor in the Moscow-Washington dialogue, which is discussed at length. Drawing on documents from the Diplomatic Archive of the Foreign Ministry and American archives available on-line, the PhD student traces the processes and analyses the factors that led to the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact (including the Bulgarian and Soviet reaction) and the transformation of NATO in response to the new situation in Europe (including the important issue of the alliance's expansion to the East), which I would assess as an academic achievement. A special place in the chapter is devoted to the role of NATO in the construction of the new European security architecture in 1991. He analyses the documents approved at this forum and the consensus reached between different visions of NATO's future and presents his conclusion that "the most fundamental change in NATO was its transformation from a military-political to a political-military alliance" (p. 128).

The second chapter of the dissertation covers the period from 1990 to 1993, in which the initial contacts between Bulgaria and NATO are traced. The first subchapter logically presents the process of reorientation of Bulgarian foreign policy in the context of the political changes after November 10, 1989. In my opinion, the paragraph on the political changes in the country in the period 1989-1991 could, if not be dropped, at least be shortened, referring to the conclusions already presented in the academic literature, which the PhD student knows well. Chr. Yotov traces the main moments in the foreign policy actions of the cabinets of A. Lukanov, D. Popov, F. Dimitrov, L. Berov in the direction of coordinating the country's policy with the USA, and the documents which the author has retrieved on Washington's pressure for the destruction of the SS-23 missiles and the conclusions drawn on the basis of these documents are worthy of high praise (pp. 171-174). In these pages, the doctoral student's ability to lay the necessary accents, to critically and independently reflect on the steps taken by Bulgarian politicians and to draw adequate conclusions is evident. The subchapter "First political and diplomatic contacts with NATO structures 1990-1993" points to the main problem of the dissertation. The author well reveals the initial (until the late spring of 1990 - p. 198) attempts of the government to guarantee national security by seeking a balance between its "traditional ally the USSR" and the USA. With reference to archival documents, he proves that until the autumn of 1990 the line of diplomatic contacts with NATO countries was on an upward trend and then traces the contacts between Bulgaria and NATO at various levels, again demonstrating a critical reading of events. The detailed tracing of the steps towards rapprochement on the basis of original primary source material is a serious academic contribution of the thesis.

The third chapter is under the title "The Partnership for Peace Initiative and NATO Membership as a Strategic National Priority for Bulgaria (1994-1997)". The PhD student outlines the geopolitical preconditions for NATO enlargement - the debates in the US administration about the "opening" of the pact, Bill Clinton's assumption of the presidency, the military conflict in Yugoslavia. He analyses the new US approach to Eastern Europe and the adoption of the idea of a gradual expansion and restructuring of NATO, facilitated by "the absence of formal legally binding documents - between Washington and Moscow on the one hand, and between Moscow and NATO opposing the Alliance's expansion on the other" (p. 290). Using ample and various documents, Christian Yotov reveals the reactions of different European countries to the idea of NATO enlargement. He provides adequate assessments of Russian President Yeltsin's positions on the issue and traces other countries' reactions to these positions, and the conclusions the PhD student reaches are clear and thorough (pp. 303-305). The Partnership for Peace initiative is presented in detail in terms of its conception and implementation and how it has been viewed in Europe and the United States. One can see both Christian Yotov's awareness of the factual side of these events and his ability to highlight the most important points and analyze them in depth.

Such an assessment, in my opinion, deserves also the presentation examining Bulgaria's accession to the Partnership for Peace initiative and the process of making our country's NATO membership a strategic national priority from 1994 onwards. The PhD student has retrieved and

analyzed newly declassified documents from the Diplomatic Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is a serious scientific contribution. The stages through which both the political elite and public opinion passed regarding the necessity of joining NATO are traced in detail. Christian Yotov's efforts to gain insight into the behaviour of individual political actors (Presidents Zhelev and Stoyanov, the government of Jean Videnov) lead to the highlighting of significant moments in our most recent history, which contributes to filling in some "white spaces" in it.

In the final part of the dissertation, the summarized conclusions reached by the PhD student in the study of the main problems are presented. I find it appropriate to include a brief presentation of the subsequent post-1997 efforts towards full NATO membership. However, the text would only benefit from removing the repetition of conclusions that have already been repeated several times, as well as the unnecessary self-assessment at the end of the conclusion. The style of presentation in the dissertation is very good - academic and at the same time readable, unencumbered by the "language of the document". The conclusions that the author draws in each of the chapters and in the final conclusion of the dissertation are thorough and well argued and are a testament to his analytical skills. The bibliography is well designed. Christian Yotov has three scientific publications on the topic of the dissertation in the proceedings of scientific conferences. In the period of his PhD he received 314 credits for scientific publications, participation in scientific conferences and from passing the compulsory PhD examinations (with a compulsory minimum of 250). Thus, he fulfils the minimum national requirements for the educational and scientific degree "Doctor". The dissertation has an original character and I find no elements of plagiarism in it. The abstract complies with the requirements and correctly reflects the main points of the dissertation, the PhD student's publications and self-assessment of his scientific contributions.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize once again that the dissertation of Christian Yotov fully meets the criteria for serious scientific research. My assessment of it is entirely positive and therefore I will vote with conviction to award Christian Yotov the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in History.

22 February 2024

Prof. Dr. Evgenia Kalinova