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OPINION

of Assoc. Prof. Nadya Dimitrova Filipova, PhD

Institute for Historical Studies – Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

for the academic appointment of an Associate Professor in Higher education 2. Humanitarian Sciences, Professional line 2.2 History and Archeology, announced by the Institute for Historical Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Department “Contemporary Bulgarian History”, (Darzhaven vestnik, issue 46/ May 19, 2026)

Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Irina Grigorova is the sole candidate for the competition for the above mentioned appointment of an Associate Professor. The candidate submits the required habilitation work – a monograph. In addition, Irina Grigorova presents 34 publications in Bulgarian and foreign scientific journals, including in periodicals that are indexed in the databases Web of Science and Scopus. The monograph, published in 2026, and the other publications demonstrate a very high level of publication activity and clear recognition among the Bulgarian and international scientific community for Dr. Grigorova as a specialist in contemporary Bulgarian history. The cited references also demonstrate the recognition of Irina Grigorova in scientific circles. The publications and citations far exceed the national minimum requirements for the position of "Associate Professor". Dr Grigorova has held the position of "Senior Assistant Professor" at the Institute for Historical Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences for eleven years, thus meeting the regulatory requirements in this area. She has participated in 10 projects, 4 of which are international. Through these projects, Irina Grigorova has played an active role in the activities of the Institute for developing international cooperation and conducting joint scientific initiatives with Bulgarian museums to preserve and promote Bulgarian cultural and historical heritage.

Entitled ‘Bulgaria in France’s Foreign Policy during the Cold War’, the monograph offers a specific academic focus on the diverse aspects of France’s foreign policy in the Balkans and Eastern Europe during the Cold War. This area has not been studied in its complexity in Bulgarian or international academic literature. This approach highlights the specific objectives and initiatives of this leading Western European state in the context of the Cold War competition and the dynamic relations between states to the west of the 'Iron Curtain'. The objectivity of the study and its conclusions are based on original Bulgarian and French diplomatic and other archival documents. In this sense, the monograph makes a significant

contribution to both contemporary Bulgarian history and the history of international relations. The study enables an academic comparison of the foreign policy objectives and approaches of France and, more broadly, other Western states towards the various Eastern European satellite states of the Soviet Union.

The monograph consists of an Introduction, four chapters, an Appendix, a Conclusion, an Epilogue and a Bibliography section. Translating the Table of Contents and Conclusion into English facilitates the dissemination of the research.

The introduction outlines the instruments of French foreign policy (including in a historical retrospective) and presents the documentary basis. However, it is unclear why the introduction refers to both Eastern Europe and the Balkans (pp. 11 and 42) as the general context of French foreign policy towards Bulgaria without providing an explanation for grouping these two geopolitical regions together.

In Chapter One, the author outlines the initiatives taken by the Bulgarian Fatherland Front government to foster a positive image of Bulgaria within French diplomatic circles and presents evidence of growing French political interest towards Bulgaria by the end of 1945 (p. 48), despite Paris's preference for supporting 'the Greeks and the Turks' (p. 49). Irina Grigorova presents the general context of French foreign policy towards Bulgaria in the fields of the economy, culture, and education immediately after the Second World War. She analyses Paris's initiatives in Central and Eastern Europe and, to some extent, the Balkans. Outlining the changes that followed the conclusion of the peace treaties, Grigorova also analyses the restrictions that were imposed on French institutions and initiatives in the fields of culture and education in Bulgaria and the other countries of the Soviet bloc, as well as the curtailment of trade links. The thesis that 'the Soviet-aligned states in Eastern Europe gradually began to adapt French cultural events to their own tastes by inviting only communists' is substantiated, as is the flexibility of official French diplomacy regarding this approach (p. 82). Of interest too is the view that 'even along party lines (i.e. communist)' in Bulgaria, French propaganda could find its way in (p. 93). However, I consider it an exaggeration to claim that Soviet actions in Iran in 1945 were a manifestation of the 'export of communism' (p. 76). There is also no convincing evidence for the claims of Soviet pressure behind the Bulgarian anti-French actions in the late 1940s and early 1950s, given the time lag between Bulgaria's actions and those of the other Soviet satellites.

To develop the analysis in Chapter Two, Irina Grigorova outlines the general foreign policy goals and approaches of Paris during the presidency of Gen. Charles de Gaulle, with an emphasis on the opposition to the ambition for American dominance through the strengthening

of France's relations with the Soviet bloc. Alongside the diplomatic and political initiatives of the early and mid-1960s, the inclusion of football matches between French and Bulgarian teams in the monograph (pp. 118-119) is of interest, adding new nuances to the ascending process of improving of bilateral relations. The comparative analysis of French methods in diplomatic and other initiatives toward Eastern European countries, including taking into account the specificities of their cultural and historical heritage, is also of interest. In my opinion, more evidence (including that given by Irina Grigorova herself) is needed to support the claim on p. 120 that in the mid-1960s, the Eastern Balkans were a priority in French "Eastern" policy.

Chapter Three is dedicated to French foreign policy towards Bulgaria during the dynamic eighth decade of the twentieth century, in the context of maintaining France's strategic goals and priorities under the administrations of Georges Pompidou and Valéry Giscard d'Estaing regarding the country's leading position in the European space and the leading role of Western European partners in international relations. The presented documentary data suggest that Sofia was frequently the party maintaining the development of bilateral ties. Paris's weak and selective interest in the Soviet satellites in the late 1970s is evidenced by the provided examples of unfulfilled political contacts at the highest level (pp. 152-154).

Of interest in Chapter Three is the analysis and conclusions regarding France's insufficient flexibility, as well as its limited interest, in the field of trade and economic relations with Bulgaria and the other European socialist countries compared to the interest of nations such as West Germany, Italy, and Japan. The provided examples of French ambitions and approaches to increasing the number of French newspapers and magazines in Bulgaria – argued by the goal of increasing the number of French tourists in the country (p. 169) – also bear a contributing character as part of Paris's general strategy to find ways to influence public opinion in the Soviet bloc. France's very limited success in this regard is also proven by the poor results in the distribution of French books in Bulgaria. In contrast, the author demonstrates that the Bulgarian authorities tolerated the distribution of French entertainment films, and by the late 1970s, French cultural diplomacy achieved more significant success in the state perceived in the West as the Soviet Union's most loyal satellite.

In order to analyze French foreign policy regarding Bulgaria during the final decade of the Cold War, in Chapter Four Irina Grigorova presents the specificities of Paris's foreign policy strategy toward Moscow and its satellites in the context of the crises in the Eastern Bloc, the "Bulgarian connection" in the assassination attempt on Pope John Paul II, the renaming of Bulgarian Turks, and Soviet foreign policy in the Middle East. French cultural diplomacy in Bulgaria and in the other Central and Eastern European countries under Soviet control is

examined in a comparative light. Deepening the study regarding France's trade and economic initiatives and their outcomes would expand the contributions to the research on French foreign policy during the Cold War years. Chapter Four well-justifiably highlights the hardening of French policy aimed at undermining the technological progress of the Soviet bloc states.

In the conclusion, the main findings resulting from the analysis in the four chapters are briefly set out, while the epilogue summarizes and analyzes the baseline data on French foreign policy after the end of the Cold War along the issues and directions discussed in the four chapters. The articles with which Irina Grigorova participates in the competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor" are dedicated to diverse and significant problems of contemporary Bulgarian history and to aspects of bilateral and multilateral relations and policies of individual states during the Cold War period. A portion of them examine Bulgaria's economic cooperation with the European Economic Community and the import of technologies from France during the Cold War, which proves the subordination of mutual interest on both sides of the "Iron Curtain" for the development of economic cooperation to the pulsations in political relations and strategies. Dr. Grigorova's interest in economic issues is evidenced by the publications dedicated to private Bulgarian enterprises established in the period before the Second World War and functioning during the years of socialism, including those related to French investments and markets. The study dedicated to the overall activity of the state overseas construction organization "Technoexportstroy" is also of contributing significance.

Another large group of publications is dedicated to cultural diplomacy as an important component of the strategies and policies of contemporary states. In this direction, the publications on Bulgarian initiatives in the field of culture regarding France, and French initiatives regarding Bulgaria and Eastern Europe during the Cold War years, bear a contributing character.

Bulgarian historical literature is also enriched by Dr. Grigorova's research on broader issues of international relations after the Second World War, such as the political and other processes in the Mediterranean region, the economic and cultural policies of Western European states towards China, as well as French foreign policy towards Algeria and in the Balkans.

An interesting component of the academic research is that dedicated to the policy of the Bulgarian state regarding sports and physical education during the years of socialism. A portion of the publications are results of the implementation of Bulgarian and international projects, which proves Dr. Grigorova's contribution to the academic activity of the Institute for Historical Studies.

Conclusion: The publications, citations, and proofs of other scientific activities presented by Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Irina Grigorova justify that her candidacy meets all regulatory requirements for occupying the academic position of "Associate Professor". This, as well as the contributions of the monograph and articles, gives me reason, in my capacity as a member of the Scientific Jury, to vote "YES" for her appointment to the academic position of "Associate Professor" in Higher education 2. Humanitarian Sciences, Professional line 2.2 History and Archeology, scientific specialty "History of Bulgaria" at the Institute for Historical Studies – BAS, for the needs of the "Contemporary Bulgarian History" Department.

September 16, 2026

Assoc. Prof. Nadya Filipova