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OPINION

by Assoc. Prof. Hristo Berov, PhD, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Faculty of History,
member of the scientific jury according to Order No. [number and date of the order] of the
Director of the Institute for Historical Research at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
regarding

competition for the academic position of "associate professor" in professional field 2.2. History
and archaeology (scientific specialty "History of Bulgaria"), announced in the "State Gazette",
issue 46 of 19.05.2026, for the needs of the "Contemporary Bulgarian History" section at the
Institute for Historical Studies - BAS

with candidate: Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Irina Georgieva Grigorova

1. Data about the competition and the procedure

The competition for the academic position of "associate professor" in professional field 2.2. History and archaeology, scientific specialty "History of Bulgaria", for the needs of the section "Contemporary Bulgarian History" was announced in the "State Gazette", issue 46 of 19.05.2026. The only candidate admitted to the evaluation was Irina Georgieva Grigorova, whose scientific production and documents are evaluated in this opinion.

2. Brief biographical and professional data about the candidate

Irina Georgieva Grigorova graduated with a bachelor's degree in history in 2002 and a master's degree in "Contemporary World History (20th century)" in 2003 at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". In 2004–2007 she was a doctoral student at the Institute of History at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. In 2008 she obtained the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in the scientific specialty 05.03.06 "History of Bulgaria" with a dissertation on the topic "Bulgarian-French relations during the presidency of General de Gaulle (1958–1969)", certified by a diploma of the Higher Attestation Commission No. 32762 of 29.12.2008. Since April 1, 2009 she has been a research associate, II degree, and since October 1, 2011 she has held the position of "chief assistant" at the Institute for Historical Studies - Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

Her professional development is also related to the scientific and organizational work of the institute: in 2012–2013 she was a member of the Scientific Council as a representative of young scientists, in 2014–2015 she took minutes of its meetings, and in 2025–2026 she participated in the Accreditation Commission and served as secretary of the "Contemporary Bulgarian History" section. Participation in national and international projects and scientific forums complements this sustainable professional profile.

It is worth noting at the outset that Dr. Grigorova's research interest in Franco-Bulgarian relations in the 20th century is consistent and long-standing. It was also stated in the monograph "Bulgarian-French Relations During the Presidency of General De Gaulle (1958–1969)" (Sofia, 2009) and is supported by a series of studies and articles in "Historical Review", "History", "International Relations", "Bulgarian Historical Review", etc., dedicated to both diplomatic issues and specific cases from economic history. The habilitation work presented for the competition is not an isolated occurrence, but a natural result of this accumulated research experience of nearly two decades.

3. General characteristics of the submitted materials and fulfillment of the minimum requirements

The presented scientometric report covers 37 scientific publications: the habilitation monograph, a book based on the defended dissertation work and 35 articles, reports and studies, of which 12 in refereed and indexed publications in world-renowned databases and 23 in non-refereed journals with scientific review and in edited collective volumes. To these is added the joint compilation and editing with Raya Zaimova of the French edition of the autobiography of Grigor Parlichev (Istanbul, 2012). All publications are independent, and the language distribution – 25 in Bulgarian, 5 in French, 4 in English and 1 in Russian – expands international access to the results. The 2009 book is reported under indicator 5 and should be distinguished from both the habilitation work and the rest of the production.

The scientometric indicators have been arithmetically verified and correspond to the summarized values in the report: 50 points for group A, 100 for group B, 760 for group D and 810 for group E, or a total of 1720 points with a total national minimum of 400, including 78 citations. The requirement is met for each individual group, and not just for the total, including against the higher thresholds according to the regulations of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and the Institute of Scientific Research – Bulgarian Academy of Sciences – 220 points for group D and 60 for group E.

4. Evaluation of the habilitation work

4.1. General characteristics, structure and design

The main habilitation work is the monograph "*Bulgaria in the Foreign Policy of France during the Cold War*". The book is structured in an introduction, four chapters, an appendix, a conclusion, an epilogue and an extensive bibliography, with a summary in English attached.

The introduction is strongly conceptual in nature and goes beyond the usual presentation of tasks and chronological boundaries. The author formulates the thesis that the Cold War narrative has long been constructed on the dualistic Washington-Moscow scheme and that the monopolistic emphasis on the two superpowers unjustifiably underestimates the role of the countries defined as "middle powers", which introduce corrections to the otherwise predictable positions of the two hegemonies. Hence the choice of France – a country that professes a concept of international order different from the American-Soviet "co-dominance". The second part of the introduction is dedicated to the tools of French foreign policy, with cultural diplomacy examined at its three levels – official, public and informal – with the necessary support on theoretical literature (J.-Henri Sutto, Fr. Bozo, J. Ginou-Hecht, Fr. Leland, etc.) and with a historical excursion into the deep roots of the French cultural presence in the Balkans since the time of the Ottoman Empire.

4.2. Chapter One. "The Adaptation of French Foreign Policy in Response to New International Conditions after World War II" (pp. 43–114)

The first chapter carries the heaviest structural burden in the book: it introduces the post-war framework of French policy in Central and Eastern Europe, outlines the regional comparative network, and traces the Bulgarian plot from the fall of 1944 to the mid-1950s. Its core is the thesis that, exhausted by the war, France consciously chose cultural diplomacy as a substitute for the missing economic levers – institutionalized with the Directorate General for Cultural Relations at the Quai d'Orsay (April 1945). The argument is quantitative and convincing: 3,000 students at the French Institute and the Alliance Française in 1946/1947 and another 10,000 in French religious schools, compared with the far weaker result in Poland. The turn in the interpretation of the trade agreement of June 10, 1947, as an instrument of cultural policy, with quotas for books, periodicals and films included in the export list, was also convincing. The work with negative arguments in the closure of French cultural institutions in 1950 was also convincing.

4.3. Chapter Two. “The Ambitious Plans of Gaullist France to Maintain Leading Western Influence” (pp. 115–149)

The second chapter is shorter, but methodologically more ambitious: the author moves from chronological to thematic organization, because the subject of the analysis is no longer events, but mechanisms. The most original is the section on diplomatic devices, where Gaullist rhetoric is reconstructed as a recognizable technique - flattering national self-esteem by emphasizing the antiquity of the host, applied successively in Greece, Poland, Romania, Turkey and Bulgaria. The comparison of the programs for the stay of the Polish and Bulgarian prime ministers is indicative, in which the same triptych stands out: an object of cultural and historical heritage, "technical France" and a meeting under French patronage. Also valuable are the pages built on the reports of Ambassador Mazoyer, from which the author concludes that the image of Bulgaria as a passive executor does not withstand examination with documents. The central thesis received budgetary support: the General Directorate's funds increased from 180 to 575 million francs between 1958 and 1963, reaching 52% of the ministry's budget.

4.4. Chapter Three. “Reaffirmation of French National Interests in the Context of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Subsequent American-Soviet Tensions” (pp. 150–194)

The most voluminous chapter offers an original way to write about Helsinki – not through the negotiation baskets, but from below, through the bilateral micro-negotiations, in which the “Third Basket” turns into specific demands. The files on the sale of French newspapers and the import of books are exhaustively traced and end with an indicative result: 250 copies of “Le Monde” sold among 60,000 French tourists and 123 subscriptions for official institutions. The contradiction between the careful monitoring by the authorities and the ban on the population is interpreted accurately – the wide command of French makes the distribution risky precisely because it is effective. The construction of the first section around an absence is also a successful analytical move: so is the failed presidential visit. The new archival material on the cooperation with the French “party companies” also falls here, as well as the excellently narrated episode with Michel Jobert’s question about the Struma border, assembled from a Bulgarian transcript and French references.

4.5. Chapter Four. “Challenges to Traditional Paris Diplomacy in the Last Decade of the Cold War” (pp. 195–229)

The architecture of the fourth chapter carries an independent statement: cultural diplomacy goes through decline and rise, economic diplomacy – through change and collapse, that is, in the decade when the French economic presence in the region is collapsing, the cultural is restored. The explanatory key is COCOM and the loyalty with which Paris applies the restrictions; hence the paradox that France advertises a “technical France” with increasingly impressive delegations, while at the same time refraining from selling precisely the technologies that would make this image credible. The conclusion that it finds itself on the periphery of the region’s commercial interest and will start after 1989 from a lower level than its competitors is among the most significant in the work. The budget curve of the Directorate General – from over 50% during the Gaullist five-year plans to 30.12% in 1988 – is the best empirical basis for the book’s thesis. Mitterrand's three-time postponed visit, which only took place in January 1989, has also been convincingly traced.

4.6. Appendix, conclusion and epilogue

The appendix (“Examples of industrial cooperation between France and Bulgaria”) presents the case studies of Renault and other emblematic brands. Here, the author consciously goes beyond

the Bulgarian framework to reconstruct the company's regional strategy and the role of the Soviet factor, and reaches the balanced conclusion that the two competing explanations for the cessation of production in Plovdiv – economic disadvantage and pressure from Moscow – are not mutually exclusive, but are simultaneously valid. This is a telling example of Dr. Grigorova's research style: a preference for an explanation that combines motives rather than arranging them hierarchically.

The conclusion and epilogue summarize the observations and take them beyond 1989, tracing how Francophone continuity was reproduced in the first years of transition.

4.7. Source base

The source base deserves a separate and high evaluation. The research is based on documents from the Archives diplomatiques du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (Série Europe 1961–1970 and 1970–1976, sub-série Bulgarie), from the Diplomatic Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and from the Central State Archives – both the microfilm array KMF-12 with documents of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the funds of the Politburo and the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party, of the Department of Foreign Policy and International Relations, of the Bulgarian Legation in Paris (f. 382K), of the Alliance Française (f. 564K), of sectoral ministries and business associations, as well as personal funds. The published Documents Diplomatiques Français, periodicals and memoir literature were also drawn upon. The bibliography is impressive in volume and is balanced between Bulgarian, French and English-language literature.

4.8. Critical notes and recommendations

The notes I will allow myself do not diminish my overall high assessment and rather outline directions for future work.

First of all, the ratio between the rich factuality and the theoretical reflection is in favor of the former. The concepts of “soft power”, “cultural diplomacy” and “public diplomacy” are correctly introduced in the introduction, but in the presentation itself they work more as implied frameworks than as analytical tools, the explanatory power of which is tested on the material. Related to this is the question of the criterion for success: cultural diplomacy is measured primarily by the inputs – teachers, scholarships, protocols, course participants – and not by the result.

The periodization follows the French presidential cycle, which is logical from the point of view of the title, but leaves open the question of how much a similar framework is valid for the Bulgarian side. This approach also poses another structural problem: from the second chapter onwards, the sections are arranged thematically, which is why the chronology is torn in places.

In the otherwise impressive source base, a certain asymmetry stands out in favor of diplomatic departmental funds. The attraction of archives of business entities and cultural institutions, as well as documents of Yugoslav and Greek origin for the comparative passages, would give additional weight to the conclusions, which currently rest mainly on French documentation. This also applies to the internal Bulgarian decision-making in the first chapter, where the conclusion about the closure of French institutions in 1950 remains more inferred than documented. The change in the source base in the fourth chapter stands apart. While the first three rely on ADMAE, here the French documentation is present mainly through inventories and inventories, and the weight is transferred to f. 1B, op. 81A – reports of the mission in Paris and information from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party. The reason is undoubtedly in the regime of access to the newer French funds, but the consequence is that French politics in the last decade is seen to a large extent through its Bulgarian observers, and Bulgarian politics – through reports whose authors report on their own

work. This is an objective limitation, not a drawback, but it deserves to be stated in the text because it changes the perspective of the narrative.

The quantitative data throughout the paper are drawn from sources with different reporting methodologies and would benefit from being summarized in tables accompanied by a note on their comparability.

The exposition also suffers from several disproportions. In the first chapter, the comparative excursions to Greece, Turkey, Poland and Czechoslovakia sometimes exceed the volume of the Bulgarian material. In the third chapter, the section on Lyudmila Zhivkova relies mainly on secondary literature and does not reach the level of the others, and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe itself remains overshadowed by the micro-plots about newspapers and books. The fourth chapter, on the other hand, takes up the most overloaded decade in the smallest volume, with the essential conclusion – that France enters the post-socialist competition from a weaker position than its rivals – being transferred to the epilogue, although it is among the main results of the study.

I would also recommend that the appendix be more closely integrated into the main text in a possible next edition, as well as expanding the English summary, which is disproportionately short for a work with such international potential.

5. Evaluation of the remaining submitted publications

Publications outside the habilitation thesis outline several related thematic areas: Bulgarian-French relations and French policy in the Balkans; economic modernization and technology exchange; Bulgarian participation in multilateral diplomacy and relations with the European Economic Community; decolonization and relations with Algeria; state policy in the field of sports. The studies have been published in "Historical Review", "Bulgarian Historical Review", "History", "Revue des études sud-est européennes", "International Relations", "Dzyalo", institute and museum publications and thematic collections. What they have in common is the aspiration, through specific archivally documented cases, to clarify the interactions between political restrictions and practical economic and cultural interests.

The article "French Cultural Diplomacy on the Balkans in the Aftermath of the Second World War" (2025) deserves special attention. Its comparative approach allows us to highlight the common goals and different national conditions of French cultural diplomacy in the 1940s and 1950s. It is indicative of the shift from a bilateral narrative to a regional analysis and of the author's ability to present her results to a foreign-language audience.

The study "Bulgaria's efforts to overcome restrictions on its trade with the Common Market within the framework of CMEA – EEC relations (1960s – 1980s)" (2023) examines Bulgarian efforts to negotiate more favorable trade conditions with the Common Market. Its contribution lies in tracing the specific mechanisms through which Sofia sought to combine national economic interest with political loyalty to Moscow. The distinction between official positions and informal contacts makes the analysis more precise than the general opposition between dependence and independence.

In "PAL, SECAM, NTSC ou bien ... ? L'implémentation du procédé de télévision en couleur en Bulgarie (les années 1960 – le début des années 1970)" (2022) the technological choice is examined in its financial, institutional and diplomatic dimensions. Tracing the contradictions between Bulgarian institutions and the inconsistent decisions shows why political agreements alone do not explain the implementation of a given technology.

The article "The Introduction of Renault Car Production in Bulgaria – Successes and Failures" (2013) reconstructs the contractual relations, the currency difficulties and the cessation

of Bulgarreno production. Its value lies in distinguishing the documented economic circumstances from the assumption of Soviet intervention, derived from indirect information. This approach allows a well-known and often speculatively discussed plot to be placed on a verifiable source basis.

The studies on "Technoexportstroy", on the industrial development of Vratsa and on the perfumery and cosmetics industry expand the observations to specific enterprises and management practices. The works on Algeria and on French policy towards China add a non-European perspective, and the publications on sports show the connection between domestic state policy and international prestige. Taken together, this production complements the habilitation research and testifies to independent and consistent scientific work.

6. Teaching, project and expert activities

The autobiography lists participation in ten scientific projects and collective research endeavors. Among them are work on volume X of the multi-volume "History of Bulgaria" (since 2011), "Studies in the Contemporary History of Bulgaria – State and Prospects" (since 2022), "The Study of World History and Bulgarian Historical Science" (2019–2022), "Bulgaria: Economy and Politics during the Détente in the 1960s–1970s" (2018–2021) and "Bulgaria – Sources and Documents" (2013–2015). International cooperation is represented through the Bulgarian-Slovak project "Contacts and Exchange in the History of Central and Southeastern Europe, 19th–21st Century" (2025–2026) and the project "Bulgaria and Russia: Dialogue in the Historical and Cultural Space of Southeastern Europe 18th–21st Century." (2012–2014).

The work on joint projects of the Institute of Industrial History – BAS and the Regional Museum of History – Gabrovo is also sustainable: "Industry, Industrial Heritage, Museums" (2023–2024), "Economy, Politics, Ecology in the Historical Perspective of the 20th–21st Century" (2024–2025) and "Economy, Power and Society in the Conditions of Globalization" (2025–2027). These participations are thematically related to publications on economic history and support cooperation between the academic and museum communities.

International scientific activity includes a report at the conference "France, the USSR, and the End of the Cold War, 1975–1991" in Paris (January 24–25, 2014), participation in the Second Russian Congress of Slavists in Moscow (November 5–6, 2013), as well as in Bulgarian-Hungarian historical conferences and the Third International Congress of Bulgarian Studies. The report on the legal framework of the activities of the French Diplomatic Archives at the conference in Sofia on July 10, 2014 is related to the practical conditions for research work with this documentation.

The editorial activity finds concrete expression in the joint preparation with Raya Zaimova of the French-language edition of Grigor Parlichev's autobiography (2012), which expands the access of foreign researchers to this historical source. Participation in the Scientific Council, the Accreditation Commission and the organizational work of the section complements the scientific activity with institutional contribution.

7. Scientific contributions

I accept the statement of contributions presented by the candidate. For my part, I would highlight the following:

1. Introduction into scientific circulation of a significant array of unpublished documents from French and Bulgarian archives, which in itself represents a lasting contribution to the source base of research on the Cold War in the Balkans.

2. Overcoming the dualistic optics of bipolarity by bringing the “middle powers” back into the analysis with a reasoned approach. The French case is presented not as a derivative of American policy, but as an independent line of conduct with its own logic.

3. A well-founded thesis about the primacy of cultural diplomacy over economic diplomacy in the Bulgarian case, derived not declaratively, but from the structural connection of the Bulgarian economy with the CMEA, which predetermines the narrow boundaries of every French economic undertaking.

4. Highlighting Francophonie and Francophilia as a long-term, historically accumulated resource that ensures Bulgaria's continuity of political dialogue with Paris - unlike other countries in Central and Eastern Europe.

5. Consistent insertion of the Bulgarian case into a regional comparative framework (Yugoslavia, Greece, Romania, Turkey), which allows the specificity of Sofia to be measured, not just declared.

6. Reconstructing the mechanisms through which cultural and economic diplomacy are assembled into a single instrument – from protocols for the stay of heads of state to the binding of trade agreements to quotas for books and films.

7. Explaining the failure of French economic expansion in the region in the 1980s through the loyal application of COCOM restrictions – a conclusion that has significance beyond the Bulgarian case.

8. The specific business cases in the appendix are also of a beneficial nature, combining the diplomatic and business perspectives and offering a new explanation of a well-known plot.

8. Conclusion

The habilitation thesis submitted for the competition is an independent, mature and original study, built on a solid archival foundation and organized around a clearly formulated thesis. Dr. Irina Grigorova is well-versed in the historiography on the topic – Bulgarian and foreign – works precisely with documents and is able to draw generalizations without imposing them on the material. Along with her other scientific publications, her project and expert activities, the thesis shows a researcher with an established and recognizable profile, whose results fill a real gap in research on Bulgarian foreign policy and the Cold War in the Balkans.

Based on everything stated so far, the scientific contributions of the candidate and the results of the presented scientometric report, I give my positive assessment and will confidently vote "FOR" the election of Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Irina Georgieva Grigorova to the academic position of "Associate Professor" in professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology, scientific specialty "History of Bulgaria", for the needs of the "Contemporary Bulgarian History" section at the Institute for Historical Studies - BAS.

I suggest that the esteemed scientific jury make a decision in the same sense.

18.09.2026

Sofia

Assoc. Prof. Hristo Berov, PhD