

OPINION

by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Naoum Kaytchev,

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on the scholar activity of Assoc. Prof. Biser Petrov, Dr. habil.

a single candidate in the competition for professor in the professional field 2.2.
History and Archeology (International Relations of the Balkans in the 1940s), for
the needs of the Section "Modern Balkans" of the Institute of Balkan Studies with
Center of Thracology "Prof. Alexander Fol" at BAS,
announced in *Dărzhaven vestnik* No. 55/15 July 2022

Assoc. Prof. Dr. habil. Biser Petrov participates in the professorial competition
with two scientific monographs, six studies and seven articles in scientific journals and
collective volumes.

Assoc. Prof. Biser Petrov's scientific interests are permanently focused on the
study of the Second World War in almost all parts of the Balkans with an emphasis on the
problems of the complex political development of the occupied countries of the peninsula.
Within this thematic circle is the main monograph presented for the current competition -
"*Diplomacy and subversion in the Balkans: British policy towards Albania during and
after the Second World War*". Sofia: Gutenberg, 2020, 306 p.

The monograph is an original study that uses unpublished documents of the
Foreign Office and other British institutions held in the main repository of The National
Archives, better known by its recent name the Public Record Office. The book also draws
on other published documents and the voluminous English-language memoir literature.

The existing English-language, Bulgarian and other historiography on the problem is drawn upon, analyzed and summarized as well.

The book is a combination, on the one hand, of diplomatic history in its classic form, involving the research and analysis of numerous documents of the Foreign Office, and on the other hand, of a study of the considerable British military intelligence operations in Albania during the Second World War and after it. It shows and proves the author as a mature researcher who knows how to select facts from the many sources used to make a reasoned study, creating a convincing and logical narrative. The attitude of official London towards Albania has been searched and revealed in all the main stages of the study:

- in the run-up to and after the Italian occupation of Albania in April 1939, which was recognized by Neville Chamberlain's government in the miscalculated hope of appeasement and detracting Mussolini's Italy from its alliance with Hitler's Germany;

- the difficult reversal of course towards Albania after the Italian declaration of war on Great Britain in June 1940 and especially after the Italian attack on Greece at the end of October of the same year, which led to the planning and implementation of the first British military sabotage operation in Albania - the attempt of the Special operations executive (SOE) to stir a rebellion in Northern Albania in April 1941, which ended in failure, including due to the rapid defeat of Yugoslavia; its English leader Lieutenant Colonel D. Oakley-Hill, managed to withdraw from the country, but fell into German captivity in occupied Yugoslavia;

- the dispatch and operation of numerous British military missions in Albania between April 1943 and November 1944, both in the initial period from spring to late autumn 1943, dominated by the anti-communist inclined N. McLean and D. Smiley, and by their replacement, Brigadier E. Davies, who had opposing views but soon fell in action, also under their successors in 1944 – various officers who had divergent positions

in support of communist or non-communist resistance, ending with significant British aid to the ACP dominated partisan forces;

- the rapid decline of British influence and presence in Albania after November 1944 and the further aggravation of relations after the grave incidents in May and October 1946 in the strait between the Albanian coast and Corfu island;

- the severe failure of several MI 6 sabotage and intelligence operations in Albania in 1949-1952.

The author builds a convincing picture of the relatively weak British interest and ignorance of local conditions, leading to the logical long-term failure of British policy towards Albania even in 1943-1944 and especially in 1949-1950, when significant resources were devoted to the small Adriatic country that received a relative attention. A particular merit of the monograph is the skillful presentation of the levels of action and decision-making: the officers on the Albanian terrain, the relevant departments in the SOE or MI6, the units in the Foreign Office, the political leadership in the figure of the foreign minister and the prime minister, the parliament as a place for finalization and revealing of some official positions. The text outlines the Whitehall's alignment with various Yugoslav and especially Greek governments, affecting his Albanian policy and contributing to its modest ultimate results. A more general criticism of the book might be its exclusive focus on British policy towards Albania, with French, American and Soviet attitudes towards Tirana almost entirely absent for the period up to mid-1944 - factors which nevertheless had its influence on London.

The second monograph with which the author participates in this competition - *"Bulgaria and the new Slavic movement (1941 - 1948)"*. Sofia: IC "Gutenberg", 2019, 315 p., is a published text of a 2019 dissertation for the acquisition of the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences". As one would expect from a scholarly work of this kind, the text is a valuable and original scholarly study of a significant historical problem that has been almost entirely unexplored professionally until then.

The candidate participates in the competition with six more studies and seven articles, most of which fit into the circle of scientific problems related to the two monographs participating in the competition. Among other scholarly publications, the article *"Was Guerrilla Warfare Legitimate in the Balkans in World War II?"* stands out, offering an impressive conceptual analysis of an important historical-legal issue of World War II. Among the other publications, two texts on anti-urbanism and rural ideology, which the collaborationist regime of Nedić's Serbia is trying to develop, as well as studies on the activity and main political ideas of the first prime minister of puppet Greece, Gen. Georgios Tsolakoglu. While the study on the Soviet military mission in Greece in 1944 examines a relatively well-known problem in English-language historiography, then the publication *"The personality of the Bulgarian Exarch Stefan through the eyes of Soviet generals"* based on newly published documents in Russia and on long ago published but forgotten Soviet general's memoirs dwells on a curious but revealing detail of the international perception of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. All publications correspond to the theme of the announced competition.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. habil. Biser Petrov has earned a name and reputation as a careful, precise and responsible researcher, especially in relation to problems pertaining to the history of the Balkans during the Second World War. An indicator of this is the substantial response from his previous scientific publications in Bulgarian and abroad. According to the attached reference, an impressive 107 noticed citations of him have been registered in Bulgarian and foreign scientific publications, excluding those from the influential, but democratically and popularly written electronic encyclopedia "Wikipedia".

In the attached table for the minimum required points by groups of indicators according to the Regulations of the Scientific Council of IBCT on the conditions and procedure for acquiring scientific degrees and holding scientific positions, the candidate in Indicator 3 (Habilitation work - monograph) indicated the book *"The occupier's ally: Collaborationism in Albania, Serbia and Greece during the Second World War"* (S., 2009), which he submitted in 2010 for the academic position of 'associate professor'. This

is an obvious technical error, evident from the fact that the book in question was not submitted for participation in the current competition. The book *"Diplomacy and Subversion in the Balkans: British policy towards Albania during and after the Second World War"* Sofia: IC "Gutenberg", 2020, 306 p. should be considered his habilitation work - a monograph in the current competition for the academic position of "professor".

Regardless of this technical inaccuracy, the scientific publications and documents presented by the applicant cover or exceed the relevant minimum national requirements according to the Law on the Development of the Scientific Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for its application, as well as the additional requirements of the IBCT according to its respective regulations.

Everything stated so far gives me reason to vote positively and support the election of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Habil. Biser Petrov to the academic position of "professor" in the scientific field 2. Humanities, professional field 2.2. History and Archeology (International Relations of the Balkans in the 1940s), for the needs of the Section "Modern Balkans" of the Institute of Balkan Studies with a Center of Thracology "Prof. Alexander Fol" at the BAS.

Member of the academic jury:

(Assoc. Prof. Dr. Naoum Kaytchev)

Sofia, 27 November 2022 г.