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OPINION

from prof. Nadia Boyadjieva, PhD in History, Doctor of Science in "International Law and International Relations" at the Institute of Balkan Studies & Centre of Thracology "Prof. Alexander Fol" of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

member of the scientific jury for awarding the academic position of "professor" in the field of higher education 2. Humanitarian sciences, professional direction 2.2. History and Archeology (International Relations on the Balkans in the 1940s)

1. General presentation of the procedure and the candidate

I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury with Order No. 112 RD-16/1.08.2022 by the Director of the Institute of Balkan Studies & Centre of Thracology "Prof. Alexander Fol" (IBSCT) to conduct a competition for the academic position of "professor".

Assoc. Prof., doctor of historical sciences Bisser Petrov Petrov participates as the only candidate in the competition for the academic position of "Professor", announced in the State Gazette, no. 55 from 15.07.2022 and on the website of the Institute of Balkan Studies & Centre of Thracology of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (IBSCT-BAS) for the needs of Modern Balkans Section in the Institute of Balkan Studies & Centre of Thracology "Prof. Alexander Fol" of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (IBSCT-BAS).

Assoc. Prof. Bisser Petrov has many years of experience as a researcher and academic. Before he joined BAS, he acquired valuable administrative experience, practical skills, and knowledge as a specialist in the State Agency for Bulgarians Abroad to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Cultural and Educational Center "V. Aprilov" to the Ministry of Education in the Republic of Bulgaria. He graduated with a M.A. in history and philosophy as well as a M.A. in Russian philology. He began his academic career as a doctoral student at the Institute of Balkan Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, where he obtained the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" (Ph.D.)

of History with a dissertation devoted to the non-communist resistance in the occupied Balkan countries (1997), and two years later held the position of research worker II degree at the Institute of Balkan studies of the BAS. Since then, Assoc. Prof. Petrov's academic career has been linked to his research and scientific work at the same institute, where he continues to work to this day.

His scientific interests are related to the study of various aspects of Balkan history and international relations in the Balkans, in particular the policy of the Great Powers towards the Balkan states. An expression of his scientific preferences is also the demonstrated interest in the development of the problem of collaborationism in Albania, Serbia, and Greece in all its manifestations during the Second World War, the product of which is his habilitation work presented in the competition for the academic position of research worker II grade (associate professor) at the Institute of Balkan Studies, BAS (2010, HAC). The high evaluation of the research work of Associate Professor Petrov is also logical and natural when he was awarded the scientific degree of "Doctor of Sciences" in 2019 after defending his dissertation work "*Bulgaria and the New Slavic Movement, 1941 – 1948*" (Diploma from BAS, 2019).

The submitted documents and materials meet the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for its Application, as well as the Appendix to the Regulations of the Scientific Council of the Institute of Balkan Studies & Centre of Thracology "Prof. Alexander Fol" of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences regarding the terms and conditions for acquiring scientific degrees and holding academic positions.

2. Evaluation of Contributions

The scientific works submitted for review in the competition can be thematically arranged in <u>three groups</u>.

To the <u>first group</u> I would refer the habilitation book and a few works related to the International Relations and Balkan History during 1940's. In this group I also

include the following articles: Petrov. B. „*Great Britain and Resistance in Albania, 1943-1944.* " – Etudes Balkaniques, 2006, № 2, 87-118; *Petrov, B. British Policy towards Albania: April 1939 – April 1941.* – Etudes Balkaniques, 2004, № 4, 51-68; Petrov, B. *The Neglected Ally: Zog of Albania in British Military Plans.* - Etudes balkaniques, 2013, No. 3-4, 38-58, Petrov, B. *The Soviet Military Mission in Greece and the British-Soviet Division of the Balkans into Spheres of Influence.* – Military History Review, 2015, No. 2, 71-83. [In Bulgarian], and a few others.

The mentioned works undoubtedly fit into the theme of the announced competition. Each of the mentioned titles is original, interesting and deserves separate attention. They study different aspects of British policy towards Balkans and specifically to Albania during the WWII. Due to the specificity of the opinion and the limitations regarding the volume of this review, I will point out just some of the merits of the habilitation work here. The book with the intriguing title "*Diplomacy and Subversion in the Balkans: British Policy towards Albania during and after the Second World War.* "Sofia: Gutenberg Publishing, 2020, 306 pp. ISBN: 978-619-176-178-4.

The author's original approach to the chosen topic of interest deserves special attention. Within 306 standard pages, assembled into a classic scholarly monograph of introduction, two chapters (each consisting of five sections), a conclusion, and a summary in English, Bisser Petrov provides a valuable survey of British policy toward Albania during the Second World War and in the first several years of the Cold War. He covers the devastating impact of the war on Albania, the outbreak of civil war, the seizure of power by Communist guerrillas led by Enver Hoxha, the gradual consolidation of Hoxha's regime in Albania, and the failed efforts of British and U.S. intelligence agencies to overthrow Hoxha's regime.

Although Petrov does not draw on Albanian archival sources, he has done very impressive work in the British archives as well as online research with declassified U.S. sources. He has skillfully blended the archival evidence with important testimonies from participants in the events and has produced an illuminating and smoothly flowing account. He has also draw on key literature published in English. Among

them are important books such as Nicholas Bethell's landmark book *The Great Betrayal: The Untold Story of Kim Philby's Biggest Coup* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1984); David Smiley's book *Albanian Assignment: The Memoir of an SOE Agent in World War Two* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1984); and Albert Lulushi's seminal book *Operation Valuable Fiend: The CIA's First Paramilitary Strike Against the Iron Curtain* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2014).

In addition, Petrov has incorporated and made use of the valuable compilation of interviews conducted by Lord Bethell for his 1984 book, which were edited by Robert Elsie and Bejtullah D. Destani and published under the title *The Albanian Operation of the CIA and MI6, 1949-1953: Conversations with Participants in a Venture Betrayed* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2016).

Even though Petrov has done admirable research, I would recommend additional sources and literature, especially some recently published works by foreign authors discussing important issues related to the topic of Bisher's book. These include chapter 4 ("Britain's Secret Cold War Offensive: Ministers, Subversion, and Special Operations, 1948-51") in David W. B. Lomas, *Intelligence, Security and the Attlee Governments, 1945-51: An Uneasy Relationship?* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2017), pp. 116-148, which focuses in detail on MI6's ill-fated covert operation in Albania; chapter 2 ("The Albanian Backflip") in Norman M. Naimark, *Stalin and the Fate of Europe: The Postwar Struggle for Sovereignty* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019), pp. 54-87; Alfred J. Rieber, *Storms over the Balkans during the Second World War* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2022); and Elidor Mëhilli, *From Stalin to Mao: Albania and the Socialist World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017), as well as various articles published in recent years in the *Cold War International History Bulletin* and the *Journal of Cold War Studies*. In addition, I hope that, in the future, Petrov will make use of declassified documents from the Central State Archive (*Arkivi Qendror Shtetëror* -- AQSH) of Albania, esp. sectors 1 and 2; and declassified documents from the central archive of the Authority for Information on Former State Security Documents (Autoriteti për

Informimin mbi Dokumentet e ish-Sigurimit të Shtetit – AIDSSH), containing the records of the former Sigurimi (Albanian State Security). The Albanian archives are quite disorganized, but researchers on this topic will have no problem gaining access to valuable collections of materials, especially in the AQSH.

The second group of presented works unites the monograph published based on the defended work for obtaining the scientific degree "Doctor of Science" Petrov, B. *Bulgaria, and the New Slavic Movement (1941 – 1948)*. Sofia: Gutenberg Publishing, 2019, 315 pp. ISBN: 978-619-176-156-2 and few articles and studies from those listed for review. Among them are the following: Petrov, B. *The Bitter End of the New Slavic Movement, 1947 – 1948*. - History, 2021, № 3, 244-255. [In Bulgarian]; Petrov, B. *The Slavic Factor in the Foreign Policy of Fatherland Front Bulgaria*. – In: Bulgaria and the Balkans in XX Century: Foreign Policy and People's Diplomacy. Comp. and ed. by E. Kalinova. Sofia: Sofia University Press "St. Clement Ohridski", 178-190. [In Bulgarian].

To the third group, I would refer the articles and studies that the author has proposed for evaluation, but which do not fit into the above-mentioned topics that he explores. In this group I would also include the other articles and studies that the author has submitted for evaluation, which are dedicated to different topics but are in the chronological period of the announced contest. Assoc. Prof. Petrov explores issues such as the anti-urbanism of the Serbian collaborationists during the Second World War, specific themes in the political history of Greece and the statesmanship of its leaders; the state administration of Albania, etc., as well as articles devoted to various political and social issues from Bulgarian history; specific nuances of the state administration of Albania, etc., as well as articles devoted to various political and social issues from Bulgarian history. Among them I would mention the following studies and articles: *B. The Monarchy in Albania during World War II.* – Etudes balkaniques, 2002, № 2, 3-14, *Petrov, B. Was the Guerrilla Warfare in the Balkans in WWII Legitimate?* – In: Central Europe and the Balkans, XIX – XX Century. – Collective Volume in Honour of Prof. Milcho Lalkov. Sofia: Sofia University Press "St. Clement Ohridski",

2019, 275-288. [In Bulgarian] and *Petrov, B. The Collaborationist Idea of Turning Serbia into a Peasant State during World War II.* – Balkanistic Forum, 2020, № 1, 63-75. [In Bulgarian].

They testify to the broad scientific outlook of the author, who does not hesitate to confidently study various political and social topics from the history of the Balkan states, intertwined in the cycle of turbulent events of the 1940s. I find it necessary to share my opinion that all the listed titles are interesting as a choice of topic. They are presented in an original and creative way and contribute to filling gaps in the study of Balkan international relations in the field of this competition.

In addition to the above-mentioned valuable contributions, the academic works of Assoc. Prof. Bisser Petrov have received recognition and appreciation from the Bulgarian and foreign academic community, which is evident by the high citation rate of his scientific works, on the one hand, and on the other - the publication in established and highly rated scientific journals, as well as the noted citations in authoritative Bulgarian and foreign journals. The high impact factor of his works is testimony to the indisputable qualities of the candidate's scientific output.

The scientific projects' activity of Assoc. Ph.D. Bisser Petrov also deserves a high rating. He also shows interest for teaching, which found expression in the development of lecture courses in Bulgarian and in English at the Training Center - BAS and the publishing of a lecture course in this connection.

Regarding the set of documents and materials for evaluation can be subjected to a few recommendations about the schematic presentation of the contributions in the author's statement of contributions. I attribute the latter to the modesty of the scientist. My recommendations to Assoc. Prof. Petrov regarding the future use of scientific and applied science contributions are contained in the wish that he would use them more actively for the purposes of academic work - in the Training Center at the BAS and/or in Bulgarian universities, as well as for the development of more methodological and educational aids and textbooks, especially necessary for the learning process in Balkan history, history of international relations in the Balkans, etc.

The specified qualities of Assoc. Prof. Petrov's scientific works and the high number of citations in prestigious scientific publications are undoubtedly evidence of his recognition among the scientific circles in Bulgaria and abroad as an established, erudite, and respected scientist and modern author, recognizable by his works in Bulgarian and foreign languages.

3. CONCLUSION

The above gives me the reason to give a well-deserved high assessment of the scientific works and the overall academic activity of Assoc. Prof. Bisser Petrov. His research is original and represents a valuable scientific contribution to the development of Bulgarian historical science and the history of International Relations in the Balkans.

I will definitely cast a "positive" vote for awarding the academic position of "professor" to associate professor Bisser Petrov and I recommend to the Scientific Jury to prepare a report-proposal to the Scientific Council of IBSCT-BAS for the election of Bisser Petrov to the academic position of "professor" in IBSCT-BAS in the field of higher education 2. Humanitarian sciences, professional direction 2.2 History and Archeology (International Relations on the Balkans in the 1940s).

Sofia, 27 November 2022

Reviewer:

(Prof. Nadia Boyadjieva, D.Sc.)