

REVIEW

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of the materials submitted for the competition for the academic position of 'Professor' in the sphere of higher education 2. Humanities, professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology (Bulgarian-Greek Relations in the 19th – 20th centuries)

In the competition for professor, announced in *State Gazette* No. 55 (15.07.2022) for the needs of the department "Modern Balkans" at the Institute of Balkan Studies and Center of Thracology – BAS, the only candidate is Assoc. Prof. Dr. Habil. Yura Toteva Konstantinova. The set of materials submitted by her includes all the necessary documents in accordance with the Annex to the Regulations of the Scientific Council of the Institute of Balkan Studies and Center of Thracology – BAS on the conditions and procedure for the acquisition of scientific degrees and for the occupation of academic positions (CV and the necessary diplomas and documents; list of publications with which the candidate participates in the competition, their abstracts in Bulgarian and English, author's statement about her scientific contributions as well as copies of the publications themselves; list of citations; reference to the fulfilment of the minimum requirements according to the Regulations for the application of the Academic Staff Development Law).

Yura Konstantinova has been working at the IBCT – BAS as a senior assistant professor from 2008 to 2014, and after that until nowadays she holds the academic position of 'Associate Professor' in the department "Modern Balkans". In 2020 she defended her dissertation for the award of the degree of 'Dr. Habil.' on the topic "The Bulgarians in Thessaloniki from the 1860s to the Balkan Wars".

In the present competition Konstantinova presents 12 academic texts different from those with which she received the academic position of 'Associate Professor', and other than the publications accompanying the award of the degree of 'Dr. Habil.': two monographs (one of which is based on the defended dissertation), eight studies and articles, and two chapters of collective monographs. All previous publications used for academic advancement as well as another 30 publications and more than 20 book reviews are also correctly listed by the candidate.

I will focus first on the monograph "Bulgaria and Greece in a labyrinth of monologues", which is another high quality result of Yura Konstantinova's long-standing engagement with the history of Bulgarian-Greek relations and their peculiarities. The author's expertise in this field is beyond any doubt – she is an established specialist recognized by both Bulgarian and Greek colleagues.

The monograph consists of an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion, three appendices, and a bibliography with a total of 350 pages and presents an informed discussion of Bulgarian-Greek relations from their official establishment in 1880 until their interruption during the Second World War. Konstantinova's aim is to offer an explanation of the reasons that led to the accumulation of deficits in bilateral relations, but also to highlight the consequences of these deficits (p. 8). This is not the first study of the relations between the two countries. It does, however, unlike previous studies, trace the processes over a long chronological period, adding an analysis of attitudes towards the Other in the "other" country. In addition, the author presents the first scholarly analysis of Bulgarian-Greek consular relations. Moreover, she makes, in my opinion, a successful attempt to balance the often opposing perspectives of Bulgarian and Greek researchers.

Konstantinova first focuses our attention on the political, or rather, diplomatic and economic relations between Greece and Bulgaria in the first two chapters of the monograph, then in the next two chapters she discusses the relations between Bulgarians and Greeks in each of the two countries, discussing the situation of the Greeks in Bulgaria and the Bulgarians in Greece, as well as the public sentiments towards them. Since the sentiments traced in the narrative come mainly from the accounts of active diplomats, and moreover the activities of bilateral societies in both countries are also supported and sometimes encouraged by them, I would conclude that it is diplomatic relations that are the focus of the monograph. This fully justifies the title: as a counterpoint to diplomacy, i.e. dialogue, monologue presupposes an inability to overcome the accumulated layers of images (no matter whether stereotyped or not) and discourses.

In the first chapter (*Politics and Diplomacy*, pp. 17-84) the author traces the development of relations between the two neighbour states and seeks an explanation for the impossibility of reaching an understanding. Quite deliberately, Konstantinova does not favour particular moments of bilateral relations, especially the more studied ones, but makes a successful attempt to distribute the burden evenly from both thematic and chronological points of view. It becomes clear that, in practice, the war,

and the First World War in particular does not play the role of a boundary in these relations; on the contrary, their logic remains unchanged, despite the emergence of new challenges, linked in addition to financial dimensions too. Against the general background of the development of diplomatic relations, in Chapter Two (*Consular and Economic Relations*, pp. 85-146) the author discusses the unequal positions of Bulgaria and Greece in terms of both the narrower sphere of diplomacy – the consular network, and the economy. For those who find it strange to place consular and economic relations under one “umbrella” it is worth taking a closer look at the so-called “Consular Instructions” for the protection of Greek trade and shipping and of the Greek colonies. The narrative in this part is extremely interesting and useful for the Bulgarian reader, since the consular relations, as I have already pointed out, have not been the subject of separate study so far. Their presentation and analysis by Yura Konstantinova significantly thickens the overall picture of Bulgarian-Greek relations in the period before the Second World War.

The third chapter (*Compatriots in the Foreign Nation-State*, pp. 147-226) offers us an in-depth reading of the fate of the Greek community in Bulgaria and of the Bulgarian community in Greece. Both communities occupy an important place in the collective memory of both peoples, and it is for this reason that they have a place in this text, especially when we take into account the already stated purpose of the monograph. The author clearly and justifiably traces the national ideas of cohesion and the reluctance to have minorities, as well as the main methods of achieving them: linguistic assimilation, religious inclusion, destruction of community life, dispossession, and expulsion. The final Chapter four (*Public Sentiments between Propaganda and Cognition*, pp. 227-286) introduces us to attitudes toward the Other and some attempts to change them through cultural and economic initiatives. Konstantinova traces these sentiments mostly through the opinions of diplomats well acquainted with the Other (and less through those disseminated by the press). The opinions of diplomats, while not made known to the societies in both countries, should be known to those on whom the supposed bilateral dialogue depends. Which really turns the whole text around diplomatic relations and further justifies the title. The main idea of Yura Konstantinova about the lack of dialogue in the relations between the two countries is explicitly confirmed in the conclusion of the monograph.

The text of “Bulgaria and Greece in a Labyrinth of Monologues” is accompanied by several appendices: lists of the foreign ministers of Bulgaria (1879-1942) and Greece (1880-1944), lists of the diplomatic representatives in the two capitals, with brief biographical data about them and, finally, one curious document – a transcript of the will of Zafir Saroglu of 12 May 1885, whose contestation in Greece

actually illustrates once again the impossibility of overcoming the many negative layers in bilateral relations.

Summarizing briefly my impressions of the presented monograph, I will highlight its main contributions: for the first time Yura Konstantinova presents the general picture of the development of bilateral relations between Bulgaria and Greece from the last two decades of the 19th century until the Second World War; special attention is paid, again for the first time, to the consular relations between the two countries; as another contribution the analysis of the impossibility of signing a commercial treaty between Bulgaria and Greece during the whole period under consideration should be outlined; to the hitherto known documents and numerous studies the author adds new source data from documents of the Bulgarian and Greek Ministries of Foreign Affairs, stored in the Central State Archive in Sofia and in the Historical and Diplomatic Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Greece; in addition, she bases her narrative on numerous personal archives and memoirs of diplomats and politicians as well as on the contemporary press in Bulgaria and Greece; last but not least, I would like to emphasize the comparative approach used, which is based on an excellent knowledge of both Bulgarian and Greek historiography.

This comparative approach can be singled out as characteristic of Yura Konstantinova, and she has successfully applied it in other publications on Bulgarian-Greek relations with which she participates in the competition: these are, for example, Nos. 1, 7 and 8 (Articles and Studies). Her observations and analyses lead her to the conclusion that Greek and Bulgarian politicians and intellectuals strive for similar goals (the consolidation of their nations and the expansion of the borders of their countries) with similar means; the results, however, are different: while in the sphere of ideology the Bulgarian elite largely successfully counteracts the thesis of the superiority of the Greek nation, on the political level the “game” is won by the pragmatic politics of Athens.

Several of Konstantinova's studies are devoted to the Bulgarians in the Ottoman Thessaloniki. This is the second monograph with exactly this name, “Bulgarians in the Ottoman Thessaloniki” (Sofia 2020). This first comprehensive study of the participation of Bulgarians in the political, economic and social life of the Aegean Sea city in the late Ottoman period is published on the basis of the dissertation defended in 2020 for the award of the degree of ‘Dr. Habil.’. Again, issues related to various aspects of the life of the Bulgarians in Thessaloniki are also dealt with in texts Nos. 2, 3, 4 and 5 (Articles and

Studies). Through these publications, the candidate also discusses the topic of the nationality of the Bulgarian-speaking Orthodox population that remained in the European lands of the Ottoman Empire after the Treaty of Berlin. She refutes the thesis of the “vague identity” of this population and underlines the political character of the term *Slavophones* used by the Greek historiography. The Bulgarian character of part of the population in the “New Lands” of Greece after the wars in the early 20th century is also shown by the author's research, included under No. 6 (Articles and Studies) and Nos. 1 and 2 (Published chapters of collective monographs). In these, Greece's Balkan policy is traced in its development from the late 19th to the early 21st century, by exposing the relationship of Athens' foreign policy goals to the priorities of the Greek state's domestic policy clearly.

It is well known that when analysing the achievements of a candidate for the academic position of ‘Professor’, it is not only publications that matter. Yura Konstantinova's participation in projects is no less impressive than the number and quality of her publications. She acted as a project leader of two major projects: the national “Thessaloniki and the Bulgarians: history, memory, modernity”, funded by the National Research Fund (which has given rise to a large number of publications, not only by the candidate in this competition), and the international “Vectors of historical development and national identity in the Balkans”, also funded by the National Research Fund (under a different scheme). The Thessaloniki project was singled out by the funding organisation as one of the most successful in the recent years, not least because of the good dissemination of its results and their communication to a very wide audience. I will not list the other contributions of the candidate as a team member of projects led by other colleagues, not because they are unimportant, but because they are quite numerous.

Special attention should be paid to the teaching activity of Yura Konstantinova at the Centre of Education at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. She offers there a lecture course “The Balkans between East and West. Historical Perspective”, which she has taught twice in the recent years – in 2018 and again in early 2022.

The importance of candidate's achievements in the scientific sphere is evidenced by the fact that Konstantinova's publications have been widely cited by both Bulgarian colleagues and authors abroad (see List of Citations). Her contributions to national and international conferences also testify in the same direction. The sending of graduate students from Greece to conduct their research in Bulgaria

under her supervision can be considered as recognition by colleagues too. All this convincingly completes the image of a scholar well recognized in her field and respected by the academic fellows not only at home but also abroad.

In conclusion, the documents and materials submitted by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Habil. Yura Konstantinova meet the requirements of the Academic Staff Development Law in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for the Implementation of this law and the Annex to the Regulations of the Scientific Council of the Institute of Balkan Studies and Center of Thracology – BAS on the conditions and procedure for the acquisition of scientific degrees and for the occupation of academic positions. The candidate has submitted a sufficient number of academic works differing from the materials used in previous competitions and defences (and has demonstrated the existence of other, unused ones). Her work contains original scientific contributions which have received international recognition, and a representative part of them have been published in journals and thematic volumes published by academic publishing houses of recognised authority in Bulgaria and abroad. I have not detected any plagiarism practices in the publications submitted for review. The author's record of her own scientific contributions and citations is correct.

On the basis of the presented opinion, I confidently give my positive assessment and recommend the Scientific Jury to prepare a report-proposal to the Scientific Council of the Institute of Balkan Studies and Center of Thracology – BAS for the election of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Habil. Yura Toteva Konstantinova to the academic position of 'Professor' in the department "Modern Balkans" in the professional field 2.2 History and Archaeology (Bulgarian-Greek relations in the 19th – 20th centuries).

10.11.2022

Reviewer:

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