

Review

By Professor Trendafil Mitev, Dr. Habil, University of National and World Economy”

For the applicant Iskren Plamenov Ivanov, Assistant Professor at the Department of Political Science, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”.

For the academic position of Associate Professor in 3.3. Political Science (International Politics and Conflict Resolution),

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Dr. Iskren Ivanov is the sole candidate for the announced position of Associate Professor in 3.3. Political Science (International Politics and Conflict Resolution). The full-time faculty is advertised by the Department of Political Science under the Order of the President of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, in accordance with the Regulations 4 and 25 from the Law for the Development of the Bulgarian Academic Staff and under the Bulgarian Regulations for obtaining academic degrees and positions.

Iskren Ivanov entered the university space of Bulgaria around the middle of the first decade of this century. At that time, the passions of the democratic transition from the 90s of the twentieth century had already subsided. education. My colleague Iskren Ivanov is among those representatives of the generation that connected his life with Political Science at the time, which took the most reasonable advantage of the situation. As a result, he has made significant strides in a visibly accelerated time frame. They are a success for him personally, as well as for the Department of Political Science, to which he belongs. As a result, today we have before us a successful and fruitful young Bulgarian scientist. Around the middle of his thirties, he was ready to acquire the authoritative university position of "Associate Professor" at the oldest Bulgarian university.

This statement of mine is based on the rich facts that the official documentation provided for the participant in the competition offers us. At the beginning of his university career, Chief Assistant Ivanov first provided one of the most important tools for the successful development of anyone who connects his life with science - excellent foreign language training. The colleague speaks English, Russian, French and Japanese. Most of them are at a high level of performance. This is essentially the first correct decision made in the career of the contestant, which has provided him with strategic advantages. Both in terms of the nature of the subject, with which he will engage in research, and in terms of the opportunities to maintain active relations with centers of world political science.

In chronological order, his main career steps have been realized in the last fifteen years. In 2007 Iskren Ivanov graduated as a "bachelor" in the Department of Political Science at Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohrid". He immediately continued his education with a master's degree. There, however, he upgraded his training with a degree in European Studies. Without wasting time, he started his doctorate immediately. After developing a dissertation, he obtained the scientific and educational degree of "doctor", in another

area of political knowledge. In 2013, he was already a "Doctor of International Relations". This educational evolution reveals the following essential element related to the general characteristics of the young scientist: He starts from the knowledge of politics and power, then enriches his training by entering the specifics of their application within the European political space to round off his professional qualifications with what the policy has achieved internationally. This is one of the best possible paths a young scientist can take today to be able to emulate his peers around the world.

Based on these indisputable advantages, which Iskren Ivanov has laid the foundation of his academic career, his commitment to serious scientific issues logically follows. The topic of his doctoral dissertation is "The United States and Global Terrorism after 9/11." This is a political conflict that has really shaken not only the United States but the world. It can even be said that the attacks on America on September 11, 2001 became a kind of turning point and watershed for the development of the whole world. In these dramatic September days, in line with my own scientific commitments, I was in Chicago. From there, I personally watched the drama experienced by the American nation at the beginning of that fall. So I saw and felt how events then charged the superpower's foreign policy with incredible energy. As a result, it implemented the largest military-political initiatives since the end of World War II to curb global terrorism. In this particular case, it is important to note one significant circumstance related to the participant in the current associate professor competition. Thanks to his information mobility, Iskren Ivanov was able only two and a half years after the events of September 11 to gather enough primary source documentary resources to write and, as a result, defend his dissertation in 2013 !? This is indeed a rare case of successful scientific work: to create a fruitful dissertation work, literally in the course of the researched world political process! At least I do not know of another such example - only two years after a major political fact in global politics, to successfully defend a doctoral dissertation related to it! The significance of these details becomes even greater if it is noted that the colleague's dissertation has already been published as a separate monograph. Since she was evaluated in his previous doctoral competition, I will not dwell on her specifically here. However, what I can't help but notice is that this is essentially the first in our country (and among the first in the world) serious research, at a monographic level, on the US policy to limit the potential of global terrorism after September 11. 2001.

The accumulated personal research experience and the opportunity for unlimited communication with the world political literature allow Iskren Ivanov to develop another, also fruitful research activity, which is beyond the specifics of his dissertation topic. As a result, today he presents twenty new, stand-alone articles for review. Thematically, they are interestingly diverse: the evolution of the neoliberal model; neo-Eurasianism as an instrument in the hybrid war in the Balkans; the importance of the Balkan region in the geopolitics of the United States and Russia; strategies and technologies in hybrid wars; the problems related to the American influence in Bulgaria, etc. These titles reveal a new emphasis in the scientific growth of the contestant. Here he turns his attention to geopolitics, already to the world's superpowers in general. Looking for their intersections and opportunities to influence the processes taking place in the Balkans and in Bulgaria in particular.

There is no doubt that this makes the author's research very useful. First of all, because they reveal the essence of the global strategies of the factors with a decisive voice in world politics. Then they highlight the specifics and leading emphases in the goals, methods and tools that global factors use to establish and maintain their influence in our region. And another important thing: this private scientific production of Iskren Ivanov has not been published only in Bulgarian, but in our home publications in Sofia. His main articles have been published in Bulgarian, English, Russian, Macedonian and even Kazakh. Relevant

collections have been published in the USA, Astana, Shtip and others. These are details that reveal the fact that after the doctoral research of the participant in the competition was realized in a wide international area. Which is a recognition both for himself as an author and for the potential of Political Science in Bulgaria. The new information resource proposed by the author can be used by the government in our country as well as in other countries in the region. One of his publications is in the authoritative American magazine "Journal of Strategic Security", where as far as I know, a Bulgarian author has not appeared before him.

The importance of the geopolitical theme, with which Iskren Ivanov connected his name, provides him with an interesting, / not only authorial /, but also factual, (physical) presence in world scientific life. In 2016, he received the opportunity to specialize in conflict management at the University of Granada. By the end of the second decade of this century, half a dozen specializations had been completed in the United States and France: in Princeton, on counter-terrorism issues; on US foreign policy at Columbia University; on national security and international relations at the University of Delaware; on international security issues at the West Point Military Academy, USA; guest researcher at the Sorbonne, Paris. In 2021, he has been invited as a guest lecturer on US and Russian foreign policy at the University of Austin, Texas. For his creative achievements, Iskren Ivanov also received a series of authoritative international awards. In general, they are owned by a few Bulgarian (and foreign) scientists! I will mention only four of them: an award on behalf of the European Commission in Brussels; from the scientific and information substructure of the US State Department; from an educational institution to the French government; as well as a scholarship from the world-famous Fulbright Foundation.

This fact gives reason to draw another important conclusion: it is obvious that the participant in the current competition for associate professor has received sufficient international recognition for his professional awareness. A popularity that far exceeds the requirements associated with his participation in the competition. I will even say something more: in the person of Iskren Ivanov, Bulgarian political science is obviously marking interesting moments of presence in international scientific life. Personally, it is a little difficult for me to draw a definite conclusion about what is the root cause and what is the consequence in this interesting process related to the creative realization of the young colleague. Have his creative achievements in the field of international relations attracted the attention of such authoritative centers of world science? Or has his presence there helped the creative accumulation of ideas and energies for the realization of what the author has written? Whatever the answer to this interesting dilemma, one thing is important in this case: Iskren Ivanov has an interesting and far from everyday practice in the career development of young scientists: to create serious science, to promote you to the most influential in your field of knowledge, and from there to take the best to enrich your new creative commitments.

Undoubtedly the most important fact related to the participation of my colleague Iskren Ivanov in the competition for associate professor is the creation and publication of an independent, comprehensive habilitation thesis. It is entitled "Orthodox Geopolitics of Russia." The study is related to the origin, evolution over the past 150 years and the current state of one of the longest-developed and defended doctrines in Russian political thought - Eurasianism. Until now, Bulgaria lacked such a comprehensive scientific work. Its appearance is an important event in our intellectual life, for at least two objective reasons. First, because at a certain stage in the overall evolution of Eurasianism / the period after the Bolshevik revolution in Russia /, it is related to the contributions of Russian scientists who live and work in Sofia. I mean Prince Nikolai Trubetsky and Professor Peter Bitsili. Bicili in particular is a lecturer at Sofia

University "St. Kl. Ohridski". Therefore, the oldest higher education institution in Bulgaria is related to the evolution of this undoubtedly interesting phenomenon in Russian socio-political thought. So it is quite logical for a lecturer at Sofia University today to study the relevant facts. And the second reason is related to the fact that Bulgaria and the Bulgarians are the object of analysis in the political projects of the Eurasian people. For the simple reason that our country and people belong to the region of the Eastern Orthodox and Slavic world.

The monograph contains an introduction, seven chapters, a brief conclusion and an extensive bibliography of primary sources and scientific literature. Structurally, the work is built on the logic of chronological sequence in the exhibition. In the opening chapters, with the help of historical retrospective research, the origin and achievements of the early, defined by the author as "classical Eurasianism" are clarified. Its representatives use a very rich and varied factology to prove the peculiarities of Russia's geopolitical position on the earth; emphasize the role of Eastern factors - especially the Tatar-Mongol influence, as well as the ties of Russian civilization with the Orthodox Slavic world in Eastern Europe. In this way, the Eurasianists seek to prove both the objectivity and the benefits of making their doctrine the basis for the development of Russia and its relations with the homogeneous and spiritually coexisting peoples of Europe. To this end, Iskren Ivanov has studied and summarized the specifics of the contributions of nearly two dozen Russian thinkers who have worked in this field of political theory. He also distinguished the specifics of the contributions of each of the prominent representatives of Eurasianism. As a result, he created a systematic idea of the stages and specific contributions of the authors in the evolution of Eurasianism and its place in the overall development of Russian and Eastern European socio-political thought.

The second main part of the monograph I define as mainly theoretical and analytical. There, with rich facts, the author has already entered the depths of Eurasian political thinking. In the beginning, this is done through a summary of the content of the three Eurasian manifestos he identified. With the first one - the Sofia one from 1921, the Eurasianists defend the thesis of the lack of universal cultures, which are applicable everywhere in the world. That is why Russia must develop its own, unique spiritual power. It must be based entirely on the value system of the Eastern Orthodox civilization, which is a spiritual reality for many Slavic peoples in Europe. And after the predicted inevitable collapse of the Bolshevik regime, Eurasianism is seen as an alternative to Russia's future and its leading role in the process of uniting the peoples of the Eurasian zone. Achieving this goal is considered possible because Eurasia has all the necessary natural resources, which makes it a self-sufficient political reality - without the need to seek assistance and maintain active ties with the West.

In terms of values, Eurasianists believe that Russian culture should have nothing to do with Catholic-Protestant views of Western society. Because they have turned man into a slave to money. It is not (and should not be) identical with the paganism of Asia. Therefore, Eurasianists argue, it is quite possible to achieve a "Russian exclusivity" spiritually and politically, because, among other things, Eurasianism is both an anti-capitalist and an anti-communist ideology. In his country, the secular government and the church will not be separated, but will work in close cooperation to maintain the self-consciousness of the people, which will ensure the protection of Eurasia in the future. Such a "unique state" is expected to be an attractive example of the unification of "fraternal peoples" into a common union, of equal ethnicities, under the spiritual auspices of Moscow. Thus, in summary, the author clarified the generalizations that Eurasian white emigrants make on the views in their doctrine after the victory of the October Revolution in Russia. No longer just as a messy theory, but as a clear and relatively comprehensive political doctrine.

Iskren Ivanov's conclusion is true that in the 1920s this case was still a political platform, mainly for "home use". That is - a theoretical project that aims to offer "another way" for the development of the Russian state. Unlike both the then-established Bolshevik political model and Western representative democracy. The problems related to Eurasia's relations with the West have not yet been presented as a leading strategic idea, in the dimensions characteristic of a geopolitical doctrine that will emerge in the 1990s.

However, Eurasianism has been widely criticized by a number of representatives of Russian political theory. The author of the peer-reviewed monograph has specifically analyzed the contributions of Nikolai Berdyaev in this direction. In his work, in essence, some of the first visible defects in the Eurasian political project stand out. The main emphasis in the critique is on the efforts for the political exploitation of Orthodoxy. If it is used as an instrument for the implementation of state policy, Orthodoxy ceases to be "God's blessing" and becomes a grim instrument for the imposition of obedience and fear. Therefore, Eurasian Orthodoxy is a political tool to legitimize the reaction in Russia. As the Eurasianists emerge as extreme Russian nationalists, it is possible that their future Eurasia will become a means of isolating the Russian nation and the world. And Russian culture has long been associated with Western. As a result, it is much more closely linked to Europe than to Asia. The great paradox of Eurasianism, according to Iskren Ivanov, Berdyaev formulates in the dilemma: why do these people flee from the ancient Greek spiritual heritage (which is the original material of modern Russian civilization) and prefer the political project of Genghis Khan, realized during the Golden Horde!

Undoubtedly, one of the most important accents in the exhibition is the analysis that Iskren Ivanov makes on the non-Eurasianism of Alexander Dugin. Conceived as a platform of a Eurasian party (which was never created), it has become a real ideology of the most powerful domestic political factor in modern Russia - the United Russia party, of President Vladimir Putin. Therefore, the author proves that Eurasianism has been taken to an even higher level there - already as a geopolitical strategy of the Moscow rulers for relations with the rest of the world after the end of the Cold War. The accents with which the neo-Eurasianists enrich the theory of this, which turns out to be the dominant current in Russian political thought, are related to Russia's policy towards the world around it. Based on the doctrine of Eurasia's self-sufficiency, neo-Eurasians identify Russia as the main enemies of the United States and the ideas of globalism. Russia must therefore defend the uniqueness of its culture by preventing its Americanization; Russia's future is seen in combining and following the covenants of both Byzantine civilization and the political experience created by the Golden Horde; everything in the field of Eurasian culture must guarantee man's loyalty to the state and its protection; there will be no Western-style "civil society" in Eurasia, but a "unified Eurasian society." It must be homogeneous in terms of values, because its task is to ensure sufficient power to oppose Russian "land" civilization against the aggression of the "maritime" geopolitics of the Anglo-Saxons; therefore, any threat to Russia's borders calls into question the future of the Russian people; however, for Russia to be geopolitically successful, it must build three foreign policy axes - with Germany, Japan and Iran. Only in this way can the possibility of lasting isolation of American foreign policy aggression be guaranteed. This, as the author of the peer-reviewed monograph rightly states, is essentially the foundation on which the modern foreign policy of Moscow's rulers rests.

Among the most important highlights of the work is undoubtedly the chapter on hybrid policy, implemented by Russian diplomacy in the Balkans and especially in Bulgaria. Putin and his entourage, the author emphasizes, understand well the important strategic location of the Bulgarian state in the center of the peninsula. So Russia's presence there is defined as a priority, guaranteeing Moscow's ability to influence the processes in the Black Sea region. As a result, different and quite diverse strategies are

applied to influence Bulgarian political thinking, in the spirit of the Eurasian doctrine of the unity of the Slavic-Orthodox peoples: diversity is introduced among Bulgarian society on current issues of world politics; Efforts are being made to mobilize hesitant groups of Bulgarian citizens in support of Moscow and to isolate pro-Western representatives of Bulgarian society; special efforts are being made to win the sympathy of the Bulgarian intelligentsia towards Russian culture; An important priority is the work to maintain the Russophile policy among the highest spiritual clergy in the BOC.

I had not read recently, in a detailed and comprehensive analysis, about the current accents of the Russian Balkan and especially pro-Bulgarian policy of modern Russia. This contribution of the author is indisputable, because it brings clarity to the current emphasis on foreign policy influences on the political and spiritual development of modern Bulgarian society. At the same time, however, it is here that I find the main reasons to address my critical remarks to the participant in the associate professor's competition. Because there he touches on the issues related to Russophile thinking and the mood among Bulgarian society. In some order, my notes can be systematized as follows:

First of all, I am left with the impression that the colleague does not take into account the specifics related to the preconditions and the essence of Bulgarian Russophilia. Apart from political reasons, the fruit of external influence from the north, this phenomenon in Bulgarian spirituality is based on some objective facts with sacred content. It was they who had a lasting influence on Bulgarian folk psychology. Why and how? Both Romania, Serbia, and Greece liberated themselves from the Ottoman Empire through wars waged by Russia with the sultan. But in all three cases, hostilities are taking place either in Bessarabia, or in Zaporozhye, or on the Crimean peninsula. But not on the territory of the three Balkan countries. Therefore, their peoples did not personally see the self-sacrifice of the Russian people with their own eyes! While for the Bulgarian deliverance, about 65,000 Russian generals, officers, doctors and soldiers are buried in Moesia and Thrace. Their self-sacrifice, for our good, is happening before the eyes of the Bulgarians. Therefore, in Romania, Serbia and Greece are missing those 1,300 monuments that were erected in our country, in celebration of a sacrifice by the Russian people, which is not made by any other great nation, for the good of Bulgaria in modern times.

Secondly, the interpretation of the reasons for the existence of pro-Russian sentiments in Bulgaria does not take into account the positive role of the Russian educational system, fiction and revolutionary literature, for the training of some of the leading representatives of the Bulgarian national intelligentsia. Both during the Renaissance and after the Liberation, and in recent times. It is enough to mention only the names of the Russian graduates Dobri Chintulov, Botyu Petkov, Bratya Miladinovi, Lyuben Karavelov, Hristo Botev and Stefan Stambolov. Not to mention the hundreds of Bulgarian engineers who have mastered in Russia the secrets of modern industry - including nuclear energy. It was these graduates of Russian high schools and universities who had a decisive influence on the modernization of the Bulgarian national political thinking and the economy of our country. Without them, they have acted as announced conductors of Eurasianism and the policy pursued by the Russian rulers.

Third, given the above, Iskren Ivanov's assertion that the part of the highly educated and cultured Bulgarians who sympathize with Russia and Russian culture and work for its spread in Bulgaria can be defined as a "pseudo-intelligentsia" creating some "Pseudo-spiritual product." That these people, for the most part, are even some kind of "lumpy intelligentsia." Because, if we just look back, we will see one Ivan Vazov in the ranks of this intelligentsia! He wrote the most memorable verses in Russian. / "Kat Russia has no second" ... etc / And one more thing: it is enough to see only the policy of the Russian graduate - Stefan

Stambolov, to limit the influence of tsarism in Bulgaria in the 90s of the XIX century to make it clear that it is the representatives of this intelligentsia, have done a lot to defend the independence of his homeland in modern times.

Fourth, the author's apparently more tolerant attitude toward the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, compared to the Russian Patriarch Cyril, is also not accurate. For more than half a century, the Ecumenical Patriarch has laid his hands on the Bulgarian churches in Istanbul and Edirne, which is why Greek priests sing there, as these temples were in "his diocese" !? And only two weeks ago, none other than Bartholomew dealt his last blow to the authority of the BOC, recognizing the autocephaly of the Ohrid Orthodox Church in the Republic of Macedonia. The Serbian patriarch, of course, immediately hurried to support him! In this way, in essence, the "Bulgarian Archbishopric of Ohrid" was buried, established by Emperor Basil II - the "Bulgarian murderer" in the XI, preserved even by the sultans of the Ottoman Empire!

These critical remarks of mine are important, but they do not radically reduce the overall positive impression of Iskren Ivanov's work. I accept his brief summary, on the doctrine of Eurasianism, made at the end of the monograph. There the author rightly outlines the isolationist and nationalist character of Eurasian political thinking. The colleague's statement is true that Eurasianism essentially seeks to limit human freedom by depriving the individual of spiritual independence and the opportunity for creative self-development of the individual. In this kind of society, dissenters are very limited and easily isolated. Because the doctrine seeks to build a "unanimous and unanimous community." And at any cost. Both inside Russia and in unity with other Orthodox and non-Orthodox peoples around Eurasia.

Because the purpose of Eurasian policy is to ensure the security of this self-sufficient, according to the authors, its state political reality. This is the reason why everything outside the supposed participants in the Eurasian community should be qualified with negative colors. An ideology that the author defines as outdated and emphatically reactionary because of its confrontational energy.

CONCLUSION: Summarized in full, the creative achievements of Iskren Ivanov are convincing and completely sufficient for the acquisition of the university position of "Associate Professor". He is a talented young scientist who already has an independent presence in the Bulgarian academic life in the field of political knowledge. His works are characterized by thematic diversity and a strong desire to explore serious, underdeveloped and current topics of the contemporary global political process. At the heart of his work is a wealth of empirical and scientific information that allows the author to make in-depth, his own analysis, as well as to formulate their own non-traditional conclusions. The style of the author's text is clear and readable. / Personally, I preferred that he had provided us with a book version of his scientific production. Because electronic media are a difficulty for the tired eyes of older reviewers. However, I believe, esteemed members of the Scientific Jury, that we have every reason to vote for the award of the university position "ASSOCIATE ASSISTANT" to my colleague Iskren Ivanov. I will personally vote in favor of this, as he has achieved significant results in his development as a scientist and university lecturer.

Sofia, June 21, 2022 prof. Trendafil Mitev