

PEER REVIEW

for the needs of a jury for a PhD public procedure in field 3.3 Political Science

By: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Atanas Dimitrov Georgiev
Department of Industrial Economics and Management, Faculty of
Economics and Business Administration, SU "St. Kliment Ohridski"
Scientific field 3.8. Economics, "Industrial economics and management -
energy"

Subject: dissertation for the award of the educational and scientific degree
"doctor/PhD" in scientific field 3.3 Political Science - Political Science
(International Relations) at the Faculty of Philosophy of SU "St. Kliment
Ohridski".

Grounds for presenting the opinion: Order of the Rector of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski"
No. RD 38-26 / 16.01.2024

Author of the dissertation:
Dimitar Nikolaev Ivanov

Dissertation topic:
Energy geostrategies in the conflict in Syria

1. information about the PhD student

The PhD student Dimitar Ivanov studied for a doctorate at the Department of Political Science at the Faculty of Philosophy of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in scientific field 3.3 Political Sciences - Political Science (International Relations) according to the decision of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philosophy and order of the Rector of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski". The doctoral student graduated with the right of defence. The scientific supervisor is Prof. Dr. Sci. Maria Pirgova.

Dimitar Ivanov holds a master's degree in "European Integration and Diplomacy of the EU" from the Faculty of Philosophy of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" with a master's thesis on the topic "Energy policy of the EU towards the countries of the Cooperation Council in the Persian Gulf and Iran". Before that, he graduated from the "International Relations" major

at the Faculty of Law of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" and has a number of professional specializations in diplomacy.

He has professional experience as a Junior Expert and before that as an Intern at the Diplomatic Institute at the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He has additional experience as an expert, volunteer and intern at the Ministry for the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU, at the Bulgarian National Bank and at the United Nations Society in Bulgaria and other organizations.

He speaks English, German and French.

I have personal observations about the doctoral student from my work as a guest lecturer in trainings and projects organized by the Diplomatic Institute at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. My impressions of his work as a lecturer in trainings, participant in the preparation of scientific publications of the Diplomatic Institute, expert and organizer in a number of trainings are excellent. He has demonstrated a consistent research interest in multidisciplinary topics related to political science, international relations, energy and economics.

2. General characteristics of the dissertation

The dissertation proposed for defense has a total volume of 307 pages and consists of an introduction, eight thematic chapters, a conclusion, appendices (one thematic with an analysis of the current situation in the region; one with a description of the scientific contributions; one with the doctoral student's publications) and a list of the literature used. The bibliography includes 231 sources in Bulgarian and in foreign languages.

The doctoral student sets as **the main research question** of his dissertation to what extent the intervention of global and regional actors in the Syrian conflict is motivated by their interests to advance their energy geostrategies in the Middle East region.

main hypotheses related to the research question , which can be briefly summarized as follows:

- 1) The linking of the policy of Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Qatar in the war in Syria with the passage of competing cross-border gas pipelines - "Qatar-Turkey" and "Islamic Gas Pipeline", which should pass through Syrian territory;
- 2) Assumption that around the construction of the two gas pipelines, coalitions of countries are forming that support or oppose the respective Iranian/Qatari gas

pipeline, which would pass through Syrian territory, through their proxies on the ground in Syria.

- 3) Correlation between the collision/failure of the two gas projects and the turning of the attention of external powers to the oil sector in Syria - with an attempt to impose control over the oil fields and participate through their own companies in their commercialization.

The author explicitly limits the research - it is bound only to the examination of oil and gas energy facilities and companies, as well as specifically to seven countries for which the relevant analyzes were carried out. The time frame of the research is correctly limited to events until the end of 2022, and further events are analyzed in an appendix.

The abstract (with a volume of 39 pages) correctly reflects the content of the dissertation work and summarizes its scientific contributions. 4 independent publications of the doctoral student on the subject of the dissertation are indicated (exceeding the minimum national requirements for acquiring the PhD degree according to the Regulations of the national legislation).

The object and subject of the research are correctly outlined in the introduction. The object of the dissertation is the conflict in Syria. The subject of the study is the energy geostrategies of seven countries (USA, Russia, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Israel) within the framework of the Syrian conflict.

The methodology of the research process is described correctly. The methods used are qualitative, as they are summarized in the introduction: political science method, process tracing, multidisciplinary approach, as well as secondary methods such as historical and statistical analysis, desk research and processing of primary and secondary sources of information.

The presentation of the individual chapters of the exhibition follows the goal and tasks set in the introduction, examining the geostrategic positions and roles of the countries interested in the development of the conflict. In the conclusion of the dissertation, the author reflected the stages of his research and the logic of its individual stages.

Some of the main conclusions are related to the development of the studied projects, the role of external forces in it and the overall assessment of the conflict. The author finds that the gas infrastructure and deposits do not represent a primary motive in the interventions of the external actors in the war. At the same time, however, the oil trade and oil fields are said to be of interest to almost all the countries involved except Saudi Arabia and Qatar. One conclusion is that various energy companies linked to the political elites in the US, Russia, Turkey, Iran and Israel are seeking to impose control over the country's oil fields and commercialize them for their own benefit and the benefit of their partner organizations on the ground.

3. Main contributions

In the dissertation, the author correctly summarized the claimed contributions:

1. The scientific work derives an up-to-date theoretical definition of the term "energy geostrategy" corresponding to the most modern political processes.

2. The dissertation systematizes the energy geostrategies and regional geopolitics of the seven countries discussed in the text in relation to the conflict in Syria - the USA, the Russian Federation, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Israel.

3. The study identified a uniform approach of the countries analyzed (five out of seven, excluding Qatar and Saudi Arabia) towards the Syrian oil and gas sector.

4. The work innovatively analyzes the methods of foreign companies in their penetration of the Syrian energy market, by using relatively small capitalization energy enterprises, with the aim of exploiting the Syrian oil deposits and building a new gas infrastructure, which are directly connected to the military-political elite in the respective countries. Examples are given for each individual case, and their direct connection with the military-political elite is also traced.

The contributions have a scientific and scientific-applied character and are worthy of a dissertation work. Through them, new scientific and scientific-applied knowledge is reached in the researched field, and their interdisciplinary nature also contributes to research in neighboring fields of knowledge.

4. Critical notes:

The previous critical comments from the internal defense and from the preliminary discussions of the dissertation within the Department are reflected. I have no further critical remarks at this time.

5. Conclusion

The dissertation proposed for defense on the topic "Energy geostrategies in the conflict in Syria" of the PhD student Dimitar Nikolaev Ivanov is innovative and uses an interesting toolkit for researching a current topic with global dimensions. The PhD student demonstrates a good knowledge of research methods and has conducted extensive independent research. In this sense, the dissertation has a scientific and scientific-applied value and **fully meets the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ZRASRB), the Regulations for the Implementation of the ZRASRB and the Regulations on the Terms and Procedures for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and Holding academic positions at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", and the doctoral student meets the national requirements for acquiring the PhD Degree.**

This gives me the reason, after reviewing the dissertation work, the abstract, the results and the contributions, to propose to the members of the Scientific Jury to award Dimitar Nikolaev Ivanov the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" (PhD) in scientific field 3.3 Political Sciences (Political Science - International Relations).

Sofia, 29.03.2024

Signature:



/Assoc. Prof. Dr. Atanas Dimitrov Georgiev/