



POSITION

by **Professor Nikolai Dimitrov SLATINSKI, PhD**,
professional field **9.1. "National Security"**
Member of the scientific jury formed by order № RD -38-27/ 16.01.2024.
of the Rector of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski",

for the dissertation of Dora Yaroslavova STOINOVA
on "RADICALIZATION AND DERADICALIZATION OF FOREIGN
FIGHTERS FROM ISLAMIC STATE (2013 - 2019)",
professional field **3.3 "Political Science"**,
for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"

1. Relevance and significance of the developed scientific problem

The dissertation of **Dora Yaroslavova Stoinova** is devoted to a very topical and of undoubted scientific value problem (rather a range of problems) of key importance for national, regional and continental (European) security, and thus for international security in its global and geopolitical dimension. The solution of this problem (range of problems) is based on a reasonably conducted and well chosen criteria-based systematic, normative, cultural-anthropological (identity) and comparative analysis and an optimally comprehensive comparison - with (delicate) consideration of the religious specificities (primarily in Islam) of the leading causes of radicalization, of its direct and indirect links to terrorism, the development of applicable, subject to democratic values and standards, procedures and practices for early warning, prevention, regulation and overcoming its consequences, and above all the approaches and practices for its timely diagnosis and treatment, i.e.i.e. deradicalisation. Of particular interest to me is the proposed model of the Radicalisation Wheel. With this model, the author retains a perimeter for scientific and scholarly activity; something significant has been "written down", it can be further developed because it is still in a sketchy form.

Dora Yaroslavova Stoinova "searches" for science in a too bureaucratized, over-regulated and burdened by all kinds of prescriptions sphere, which in the eyes of politicians and more and more officials from international structures is mostly a matter of procedure, written actions, a chain of concrete steps. What it is doing (I don't know how much it realises it) is rehabilitating science into a sensitive, often rather politically incorrect subject, and in doing so bringing back to the field of counter-terrorism and counter-radicalisation the complex and much needed arsenal of scientific approaches, methods and tools - including history and cultural anthropology, psychology and sociology, political science and security, risk and emergency management. With further development, this work may grow into a truly comprehensive and complete scientific study without analogue (not only) in our country, although there are quite a few really serious publications on the topic in our scientific literature, the leader of which is the PhD student's supervisor.

There is no argument, the dissertation is a positive realization of the main intentions and priorities stated by the author. The aims of the research have been realised at a good level and in some places with polemical passion and erudition, the working hypothesis has been basically successfully proved (but I am obliged to say as a sympathetic critic that both the aims and the hypothesis are implied, but they could have been formulated a little more clearly and even more insightfully. The same goes for most of the important conclusions.

2. Evaluation of the scientific results and contributions of the thesis

Dora Yaroslavova Stoinova shows modesty about scientific results. She speaks about *1* scientific contribution. Apart from serving as a proof of the thesis, it is also a useful theoretical and scientific tool that could serve as a basis for further research in the field. The model of the

radicalisation process sheds new light on what has been achieved so far in academia." In my opinion, the whole dissertation is a scientific result of contributory nature and of practical value. It contains generalizations, conclusions, and most importantly - ideas and proposals that undoubtedly go beyond the author's minimized self-assessment of what has been achieved and the research tasks that have been solved.

I have already said that I accept the fully formulated scientific contribution. I explicitly point out the importance of the achievements of scientific-theoretical, scientific-practical and educational-methodological significance. Radicalisation - as discussed with persuasive and emotive pathos - is an open Pandora's box. Admittedly, the colours of the dramaturgy are a little thick in places and they read like a sad tale - so vividly, clearly, with knowledge of the subject, the author analyses with a novelist's gift.

I would not want to argue with the PhD in this Opinion, but it could be argued that not every terrorist necessarily has radicalization. Yes, it seems absurd when it is tossed around like that and in a few words, but the dissertation also says that radicalization is a process. But there are examples of some people moving very quickly from "normal" life to terrorist acts. Then the options are twofold: either their radicalisation was excessive, shockingly rapid, or there was no (religiously motivated) radicalisation in their case, but other reasons. For example, revenge for a violated personal dignity or a violated honour of a sister, daughter, wife.

The author's publications are above a reasonable minimum in number. In the list, some are accessible, but for others it could be more precise and in accordance with accepted norms to indicate where they appeared.

3. Critical remarks

Every author is entitled to his achievements as well as his weaknesses and shortcomings. In a bold dissertation written not only for the sake of the defense but also for the sake of the topic, one can always find vulnerabilities, deficits at the conceptual level, and controversial statements. Such is the procedure that most often the reviewer has both more scientific "class" and more knowledge and more experience in writing scientific papers and is therefore sometimes tempted to criticize the younger and just stepping into science author. Previously, a "small" dissertation, upon successful defense, made its author a "*candidate*" of the sciences. This is, be reminded, not only and not exclusively a scientific but also an educational degree. Therefore, the review (opinion) presupposes temptations to criticize the doctoral student (all the more so since the form of the opinion requires the inclusion of critical remarks at all costs). I was also tempted to share my thoughts in the "Critical remarks" paragraph, but I told myself that in the background of so many formally written and through the fingers looked at doctoral dissertations, with the great devaluation of science in our country, I would only hurt the doctoral student undeservedly, because she not only tried, not only "hit the number" in the pursuit of the cherished "Dr." in front of the name, but she achieved a certain level and her dissertation for her is a success. Of course, this is so simple and logical with this incredibly adept supervisor and - I have no doubt - downright motherly care on her part. So I will say the same thing that I recommend, alas, it is now accurate to say - that I used to recommend - to my PhD students: since the hard part has passed and now the harder part remains, if you have serious scholarly ambitions, hurry up and develop your own scholarly style (seek it out first, insistently) as soon as possible, in order to emerge from the shadow of your supervisor, his analyses and ideas, his conceptual thinking, his theses and his influence. Yes, the dissertation is as they say - excellent, even very good, but it sounds distinctly "Dronzian", with all my scholarly respect and wonderful friendly feelings for Prof. Dronzina, which is a sign of scientific quality of the highest rank in Bulgarian science. And one more thing, actually 4 more things! *Firstly*, I would recommend the PhD student to delve much deeper into the "Security" dimension of the issues she addresses, and mainly ISIS, radicalisation and deradicalisation - how all this affects national,

regional, European and global security. To some extent, these 'things' are addressed here in their own right, and they are pieces of a much larger puzzle. Yes, the author throws up bridges to other manifestations, critical factors and triggers.... Yet a thesis dealing de jure and de facto with security should include a far more comprehensive exploration of all aspects and dimensions of security - in terms of these processes. In this way, it would go beyond the technological, procedural, institutional and somewhat bureaucratic framework and 'swim' in the deep waters of security - mainly national, but also regional, continental (i.e. European) and global. *Second*, I would also recommend that the PhD student devote even more space and even much more thought to Bulgaria, to our national security, to the impact of the processes under study and to the results (consequences, damage) of these processes on our country. Of course, it cannot be said that Bulgaria is not in the thesis, but it can be argued that Bulgaria needs to be in the thesis, but not enough of it. Much of what is written about meaningfully and insightfully is likely to turn out to be a startling memory of the future, a self-fulfilling prophecy for Bulgaria. *Third*, I would recommend a deeper analysis of what has been achieved and not achieved in relation to deradicalisation - both the successes (the constructive factors) and the failures (the destructive factors). There is much in the dissertation, and credible reflection on these issues, but in my view it has been quite a few years, it is time for retrospection, for balance sheets and conclusions not only about What Should Be Done, but also about What Has Been Done and Why Hasn't It Been Done? One part of the systematized views and suggestions of the PhD student are key and we need, a section in the dissertation "Lessons from Practice". Lessons learned not made after the fact, but also tied to the original objectives of one operation or mission or another. And *fourth*, I would recommend that the issue of double standards of the international community, especially the West in the processes under study, be addressed more thoroughly. One of the main and probably the main reason for the failures in these processes and for the complex, contradictory opinion, for the negativity that is spreading around the world towards the efforts of the West, NATO, the EU are the double standards. From this point of view, as much as they contribute to the pacification of the regions, a number of these efforts create chain reactions, "wake up" other regions and give reason to believe that the West's concern is not only for the region, but for the geopolitical interests of some of the Western countries.

I wrote these pretentious-sounding "critical remarks" because, with what the PhD student is (trying to) do, she has convinced me that she is a person of high scientific potential. And lest she feel insulted, let's assume that what I wrote is under the rubric of "What I would do in her shoes". It's always like that in life, as in science - the young mostly can, but don't yet know how, and the old know how, but can't anymore, so they generously ponder what they would do - to justify to themselves why they don't do it themselves, and give out free, panoramic advice.

4. Conclusion

The scientific work of **Dora Yaroslavova Stoynova** has well formulated main conclusions, in it is outlined argumentatively, to a large extent moderately, even restrained her scientific contribution. The verifiability of the achievements is shown and its scientific value and logical practical applicability are clearly justified. For me, the dissertation is a qualitative, independent piece of research that meets the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education and Research.

5. Dissertation evaluation

Taking into account the valuable analysis and the undoubted scientific contribution of this work, which, in my understanding and assessment, represents a meaningful and in-depth study of an important and increasingly relevant for Bulgaria both scientific and practical problem related to national security, I declare, that my assessment of it is "positive" and therefore I unhesitatingly express my support "for" its author and propose to the esteemed scientific jury to vote for the award to the

candidate **Dora Yaroslavova Stoynova** of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor of Political Science", in the professional field of "Political Science".

10.04.2024 Prof. Dr. Nikolai Slatinski

Sofia Jury member: