

OPINION

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for the dissertation work of Kristian Stefanov on the topic: *Prerequisites for the
Radicalization of the Social Democratic Movement in Bulgaria, 1891-1923*

The dissertation submitted for doctoral defense consists of 269 standard pages and is structured in an introduction, a theoretical and methodological chapter, five main chapters, a conclusion and a bibliography. It fully meets the formal requirements according to the law. The work has clearly formulated goals and objectives and a logical structure arising from them. The language is academic and precise. The conclusions are well-founded.

Kristian Stefanov has chosen to explore important processes in modern Bulgarian history with the tools of social sciences and especially political science. His topic, related to the development of social democracy in Bulgaria from its genesis to the turning point of the September Uprising, is well known to researchers. However, the author has decided to locate it in a broad social and political context. In this way, he avoids the risks of voluntarism, interpreting the dynamics of the political space solely through the prism of the strategies and intentions of individual actors. It is no coincidence that the dissertation derives as its principle the interaction between agency and structure, which creates a fruitful basis for explaining the process of radicalization of Bulgarian social democrats.

In theoretical terms, the author has appropriately turned to the model of Stefano Bartolini, who studies the relationship between class cleavage and workers' parties in modern societies with the help of three main groups of variables. These variables are, respectively, the type of modernization, the type of political system, and the type of ideology. The political effect of these variables is filtered by two situations, such as the First World War and the October Revolution. The application of Bartolini's model to the Bulgarian case determines the directions of research in the dissertation: peasant protest politics; ideological clashes; the military crisis;

the international communist movement; and the escalation of political violence. This allows key topics such as modernization in backward societies, the principled division in the European left, and the legitimization of social and political violence to be incorporated into the problem of the radicalization of Bulgarian social democracy.

The result before us is a solid, convincing, rich study.

We observe a combination of good political science culture, referring to the successful involvement of different theoretical schools and effective operationalization of different concepts, and impressive historical expertise. The dissertation shows excellent knowledge of both classical and recent international works on the topic, but also of publications that could be discovered only by a regular visitor to libraries. At the same time, the text refers to an extremely rich set of newspaper articles, letters, diaries, memories and other unused archival sources that reproduce before us a true history of everyday life, especially in connection with the military crisis in Bulgaria. The merit of the dissertation is that it does not reduce the analysis to the opinions of social democratic intellectuals or to party documents, but tries to pose the important question of how left-wing culture arises and functions in Bulgaria.

Next, the dissertation successfully proves the heuristics of the multifactorial analysis of political radicalization through the example of Bulgarian social democrats. The balance of the individual factors is essential, and it seems to me that the author has found a strong approach to it. It is not just about the suffering of the popular masses, nor just about foreign directives, but about a set of processes, and in a broad European context, which build the picture of the interwar period. The author has skillfully outlined the spiral of political violence, moving from protest mobilizations to their party exploitation to state repression and vice versa. The tendencies reinforce each other, and the context encourages them.

Further, the dissertation offers a new and original reading of the problem of ethno-national dominance in the national political debate during the period under consideration. The cases of anti-Greek violence and antisemitic actions are interpreted from the perspective of the problem of the isolation of the pacifist social democratic party. This isolation stimulates radicalization. An additional reason for this is securitization: the targeted treatment of the social democratic party by the state as a problem for national security. It is pertinent to emphasize that the genesis of these processes precedes the period of the wars for national unification by years and decades.

I could list a number of other strengths of the dissertation. Within this brief Opinion, I will limit myself to highlighting some critical notes or discussion questions. First, despite the clear structure, there is a certain confusion between the purposes of the introduction and the theoretical chapter. Part of the research design is presented at the end of the first chapter, although in my opinion its place is much earlier. Second, the titles and subtitles in the text could be more carefully specified. For example, paragraph 1.2. in the fourth chapter is titled “Rise of the social conflict”, which perhaps does not show a perfect combination of words. Third, the dissertation does not address the interesting problem of the relationship between the separate factors of radicalization. The text subjects them to research independently of each other, although of course in certain interrelationships. The four hypotheses of the dissertation examine them one by one. We can ask ourselves whether there are dependencies between these factors, and more specifically, is it permissible to speak of fundamental and derivative factors, or is the weight of each of them methodologically comparable to each of the others. Fourth, some technical corrections can be made to the text. The tables and figures proposed by the author, for example, do not have sources indicated. In the cited literature, many of the sources are also mentioned with incomplete bibliographic information (author, title and year). Last, but not least, is the poorly composed abstract. The impression is created of literal copying of passages from the dissertation. The content of the abstract repeats the content of the dissertation itself, and the abstract itself starts from point 2. There is no focus, there are no basic parameters of the research, and there is no author’s self-evaluation of the contributions of the dissertation work. Moreover, it is difficult for me to explain why the listed publications on the topic of the dissertation (three in number, fully sufficient for the procedure) are missing two of the author’s strongest articles, published in renowned journals such as *East European Politics and Societies* and *Etudes Balkaniques*. It is the latter two publications that are evidence that the research and results of the doctoral student’s work have been presented not only to a Bulgarian, but also to an international scientific audience.

The critical remarks do not change my extremely high assessment of the dissertation. I believe that this is one of the strongest dissertations that I have had the pleasure of reviewing. It fully deserves, after minimal, mainly technical revision, to be published in the form of a monograph. I am convinced that it would attract the interest of all those interested in the intersecting fields of history and political science. I myself have cited a publication by the doctoral student in my work, his article on the peasant issue, and I see in Kristian Stefanov a promising fellow scientist and researcher.

In conclusion, without hesitation, I will vote FOR the awarding of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in Professional Field 3.3. Political Science (Political Science – National Political Process), to Kristian Stefanov.

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/Assoc. Prof. Boris Popivanov/