

OPINION

by Prof. Yura Konstantinova,

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on a dissertation of Kristian Stefanov,

a PhD student at the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University
'St. Kliment Ohridski'

for obtaining the educational and scientific degree of 'Doctor' in professional field 3.3.
'Political Science'

The dissertation, titled *'Prerequisites for the Radicalisation of the Social Democratic Movement in Bulgaria, 1891–1923. The Bulgarian Workers' Social Democratic Party (narrow socialists) – from social democracy to communism'*, prepared under the scientific supervision of Prof. Nikolai Naydenov, addresses an interesting and significant topic. This importance is further underscored by the highly ideologized assessments traditionally associated with the subject, both in public discourse and in the scientific literature. Already in the introduction of his work, Kristian Stefanov declares that he aims to distance himself from polarised interpretations and, through the analysis of various macrosocial factors, to contribute to a more balanced understanding of political radicalisation and violence in Bulgarian society in the first half of the twentieth century (pp. 5–7).

The theoretical framework and methodology of the dissertation are clarified in the introductory chapter. This chapter contextualises the Bulgarian case within broader European processes of political radicalisation, emphasising the importance of the First World War and its consequences for radicalisation. The chronological scope of the thesis—spanning from the founding of the BWSDP in 1891 to the radicalisation of the communist movement during the September Uprising in 1923—is justified and logical. The structure of the dissertation follows the main factors that, according to the author, led to the radicalisation of the BWSDP (n.s.). Each of the five chapters focuses on a distinct factor: rural protest politics, driven mainly by modernisation pressures; extreme nationalism; the impact of the long war period; the influence of the international communist movement; and the escalation of political violence in the post-war period. Notably, each chapter concludes with a standalone summary that encapsulates Stefanov's key findings on the topics presented. The conclusion of the dissertation adheres to

the requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff (LDAS) in the Republic of Bulgaria and its Implementing Regulations, offers a synthesis of the research finding, highlighting the PhD candidate's contribution to the field.

Kristian Stefanov defines his research as a case study of the radicalisation of the Bulgarian left, within a broader comparative perspective of the similar processes in different European societies (p. 36). This ambitious approach requires extensive familiarity with both Bulgarian and international literature on the subject, a skill which the PhD candidate has demonstrated successfully. The impressive list of sources and bibliography at the end of the dissertation proves his thorough knowledge of the main scholarly works on the discussed issues. An important contribution of the dissertation is the use of archival material and unpublished memoirs, as well as the extensive use of published sources such as memoirs, pamphlets, call letters, and press data from the era. This comprehensive approach has enabled the doctoral student to craft a vivid and convincing narrative about the social problems and transformations in Bulgaria during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. By engaging deeply with historical sources, Kristian Stefanov has avoided stereotypes and inaccuracies, while the introduction of new archival evidence ensures the originality of his work. Another notable strength of the dissertation is the successful combination of historical and political science methods.

The PhD candidate has met his research aims and has formulated three mechanisms of political radicalisation in the Bulgarian context: radicalisation driven by electoral demand, external factors (in the case of the early 20th century, this factor is embodied mainly by the pressure of the Comintern) and the securitization of political life. Social tensions are correctly highlighted as a major driver of radicalisation. The dissertation convincingly illustrates the significance of so-called 'war decade', whose consequences generated widespread discontent not only in the army but also among the whole Bulgarian society that went beyond the scope of protest voting. Furthermore, the analysis appropriately emphasises the roles of authoritarianism, nationalism, and repression in the dynamics of political violence. In the post-war context, the influence of the Russian Communist Party on the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) and the securitisation of political life, leading to the categorisation of communists as a national security threat, are explored in detail.

Before submitting the dissertation to the National Centre for Information and Documentation, the PhD candidate should address several technical issues. These includes correcting spelling and punctuation errors and ensuring consistency in formatting of centuries, years, upper and lower case letters, quotation marks, ect. These adjustments will avoid

diminishing the achievements of the thesis. I would also like to pose two questions to Kristian Stefanov, mainly regarding the historical context of his research. First, how does he explain the close ties between the left wing in the IMARO and representatives of the BWSDP, such as Vasil Glavinov, Pavel Deliradiev, Nikola Kharlakov, given that he claims that the international ideology of the Bulgarian socialists in the late 19th and early 20th centuries opposed them to the prevailing nationalist discourse and isolated them from political life in Bulgaria? Secondly, has he identified any overlap between the circles responsible for anti-Greek and anti-Jewish pogroms in Bulgaria?

These remarks and questions do not detract from the significant accomplishments of the PhD candidate, who has demonstrated a deep and sustained interest in studying modern Bulgarian history with a particular focus on social and national conflicts during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Kristian Stefanov has already published three articles (one in print) on the topic of his dissertation, and has other publications, some of which are closely related to his dissertation topic. Additionally, he has participated in a large number of scientific forums.

Based on the above, I have ground to believe that Kristian Stefanov meets the necessary requirements for obtaining the educational and scientific degree of ‘Doctor’ – the minimum requirements of the LDAS and its Implementing Regulations have been fulfilled, as well as the educational component of the doctoral program. The presented dissertation contains original scientific results that constitute a contribution to science, as well as evidence that its author is capable of conducting independent scientific research.

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