

REVIEW

by Jordan Angelov Baev, Professor of Contemporary International History

member of the scientific jury according to Order No. RD-38-18/13.01.2025 of the Rector of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

of the scientific publications presented in the competition for the full-time academic position of professor for the needs of the Department of "Modern and Contemporary History" in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional field 2.2 "History and Archaeology (Modern History - History of the USA and Latin America)"

announced in the State Gazette, issue 99 of November 22, 2024

of the candidate Alexander Mihaylov Sivilov - Associate Professor of the Department of "Modern and Contemporary History" at the Faculty of History of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

In the announced competition for a professorship in the Department of Modern and Contemporary History at the Sofia University, only one candidate participated – Associate Professor Alexander Mihaylov Sivilov. For the needs of the competition, the candidate submitted two monographs and eleven scientific studies and articles for review, four of which were in English.

Alexander Sivilov received a master's degree in history (Modern History of Russia and the USSR) in 2003, and a doctorate in history with a dissertation on the topic "Transitions in Chile 1970-1993" in 2009. He is a graduate of the Faculty of History of Sofia University, where he completed his studies in all three levels of higher education. In 2010, he began his academic career initially as an assistant professor, from 2011 as a chief assistant professor, and from 2016 as an associate professor in the Department of Modern and Contemporary History. He has scientific specializations in university centers in Japan, the USA, Russia, Argentina and Chile. He was the coordinator of the VIAEVRASIA Center and the Center for Latin American Studies at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" on research projects of the National Research Foundation. Since November 2019, Assoc. Prof. Sivilov has been the head of the Department of Modern and Contemporary History.

In his scientific research for two decades, Alexander Sivilov has consistently studied three thematic circles of the world political history of the 20th century – Russian history in the Bolshevik and post-communist periods, Latin American history in the period of military dictatorships and post-dictatorial restructuring of civil society, the domestic political history of the United States and its reflection on the foreign policy concepts of the leading world superpower. These problematic topics are studied in a comparative plan, but also in their particular interaction and confrontation as peculiar phenomenal markers for the specific political processes and manifestations of power over the past century. The latest monographic study "The Gangsters of the Prohibition Regime and the Great Depression in the Social History of the United States" presented for review is an original work without analogues in Bulgarian historiography. The book reveals specific social phenomena, characteristic especially of the United States,

which at a certain point led to the delegitimization of the institutions of power. On the other hand, these historical events motivated the pervasive expansion of the secret services as part of the “deep state”, as will be seen later in the post-war history of the FBI and its unchanging director J. Edgar Hoover. All this tectonic crisis in the bowels of America inevitably led to the reform of the system with the “New Deal” policy of President Franklin Roosevelt. The author’s conclusions are logically justified and contribute to the perception of this particular period in the development of the most powerful global power in the modern world. I would recommend that when analyzing the first “Red Scare” psychosis, in addition to the anarchist groups, the massive campaign in 1918-1921 against the most militant trade union organization “Industrial Workers of the World” (IWW) be added, especially since one of its ardent activists was the Bulgarian Georgi (“George”) Andreychin, declared a “public enemy” by Hoover personally.

The second original monographic study by Sivilov is “Leaders, Authoritarianism and Transitions. Following the Example of Russia and Chile”. This work demonstrates the author’s approach to building on his previous studies in a symbiotic comparative project, taking advantage of some techniques of “transitology” as a modern scientific school. The theoretical framework of “totalitarianism” is discussed not only in the first chapter of the book, but also in a separate previous study, proposed for review. In the conclusion, Sivilov dwells in more detail on the “role of leaders in political transitions”. Probably to answer the dilemma “if leaders are not leaders”, he adds the final conclusion that “democratization is not a linear process”, and “authoritarianism often remains deeply rooted”. In view of subsequent author additions to the topic, the discussion of the “Yeltsin era” could be expanded with a discussion of the possible alternatives (for example, Gaidar/Kozyrev vs. Primakov) and the similar proto-substrate of oligarchic supremacy in almost all post-Soviet republics. In the case of the “Chilean example”, it would be good to supplement it with more comparisons of the analogous examples of Argentina and Brazil. Especially in the specific cases with the tactics of the extreme left – how communists and socialists in Chile abandoned the “armed path”, and from their side the Argentine communists shockingly supported the dictatorship of Gen. Galtieri during the Falklands/Malvinas conflict.

Special attention deserves the publication of Assoc. Prof. Siviloff “The Comintern, the World Revolution and the September Uprising”, mainly due to two circumstances. The topic of zig-zags in the political line and the special structure of an international organization such as the Comintern has unfortunately not been seriously studied in our country, and the discussions about the September Uprising demonstrate extremely opposed one-dimensional and highly politicized schemes without any experience of balanced syncretic multi-factor approaches. In addition to the author’s conclusions about two fundamentally different periods in the activities and leadership of the Communist International, I will recall the aphoristic thought of an US diplomat in Moscow about “Lenin’s concept of the Soviet state as an instrument of the world revolution and Stalin’s concept of the Comintern as an instrument of Soviet state”. I will allow myself to comment on two problems that are not fully clarified in the publication. Dimitrov’s role in the BCP hierarchy at that time was overestimated, which was influenced by his later leading role after the Leipzig Trial. In 1923, however, before Dimitrov in the hierarchy, in addition to Kolarov, there were undoubtedly the organizational and political secretaries of the BCP, Todor Lukanov and Hristo Kabakchiev, but the specific political position of Georgi Dimitrov is clearly expressed in those seven articles on the “united front” from August - September 1923, which are significantly broader than the generally accepted views in the leadership of the Communist International and were similar to the original views of Antonio Gramsci and José Carlos Mariátegui at that time. On the other hand, it is also a good idea to use the valuable documentary collection on the national question in the Balkans and the Comintern (edited by Prof. Rita Grishina), which shows that from the end of July the Bolshevik leaders in Moscow no longer paid attention to Bulgaria until September 27, as they were completely absorbed in the “maturing revolution in Germany”, where Radek and other Comintern functionaries were urgently

sent. Milyutin's several consecutive reports from Vienna were not answered at all, and the Comintern emissary Alexander Abramovich ("Chetuev", "Albrecht") arrived secretly in Sofia after the decision to prepare an uprising was made.

The monographs, studies and articles submitted for review are distinguished by a vivid figurative style and a clearly expressed author's position. They are the personal work of the candidate and represent an original contribution to Bulgarian historiography on a number of discussion problems in modern world history. I have not identified any signs of plagiarism.

In addition to scientific production, in the competition for a "professor" the teaching activity of the candidates for this academic position is also of great importance. The annual classroom workload of Assoc. Prof. Alexander Sivilov is nearly 500 hours with nine bachelor's and five master's lecture courses, including in English under the Erasmus program. He is the scientific supervisor of five doctoral students in the department. The scientific production developed by him corresponds to the taught academic disciplines and can be successfully used as teaching aids and recommended additional literature. Alexander Sivilov has participated in five research projects, in four of which he is the director or coordinator.

The overall assessment of the candidate's research and teaching activities is positive. Assoc. Prof. Alexander Sivilov shows an unwavering interest and desire to develop significant and poorly known research topics in our country, introducing into scientific use various documentary sources, creative application of various scientific methods and approaches and conscientious use and interpretation of the existing specialized literature on the discussed issues. The attached reference certifies that the scientific production of Assoc. Prof. Sivilov exceeds the minimum scientific requirements for holding the position of "professor" in professional field 2.2. (History and archaeology).

Considering the candidate's scientific achievements, significant teaching experience and active participation in the management of the department and a number of scientific projects, I would like to confirm that what he has achieved fully meets the legal and regulatory requirements and criteria, including those specified in Art. 115 and Art. 119 of the Regulations on the conditions and procedure for acquiring scientific degrees and occupying academic positions at Sofia University, for occupying the academic position of "professor". I strongly support the candidacy of Assoc. Prof. Alexander Mihaylov Sivilov in the competition for "professor" in the Department of "New and Contemporary History" at the Faculty of History of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

Member of the scientific jury: Prof. Dr. Jordan Baev

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