

REVIEW

by Prof. DSc Yura Konstantinova,

Institute for Balkan Studies & Center for Thracology, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

for the PhD Dissertation of Borislav Yordanov Dinev,

doctoral student in free-form studies at the Faculty of History of Sofia University 'St. Kliment Ohridski',

presented in candidacy for the Educational and Scientific Degree Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Professional Field 2.2. 'History and Archaeology', Doctoral Program 'History of Bulgaria – Modern Bulgaria History 1878 – 1944'

The following review is prepared in accordance with Order No ПД-38-263 from 27.05.2025 г. of the Dean of Sofia University 'St. Kliment Ohridski', as well as in conformity with Protocol No 1 from the first meeting of the Scientific Committee from 26 June 2025.

Borislav Yordanov Dinev graduated from Sofia University 'St. Kliment Ohridski' with a first degree in 'Bulgarian Philology' and a second degree in 'History'. For many years he worked as a specialist in telemechanics and telecommunications in departments of the Ministry of Transport, while simultaneously developing his scientific interests in the field of Modern and Contemporary Bulgarian history. He is the author of two monographs, a book chapter, 10 articles in scientific journals and numerous texts in popular publications. The doctoral student has an active editorial activity and media presence, as well as a significant number of participations in scientific conferences.

Borislav Dichev's dissertation, 'The Bulgarians in Aegean and Western Macedonia during the Second World War', was supervised by Prof. DSc Veselin Yanchev. Parts of the topic have been researched in Bulgarian historiography, but there is room for new and important contributions to Bulgarian history. Based on previously unpublished archival data, the doctoral student further develops the historiographical line represented most prominently by Prof. Georgi Daskalov, whose works 'Bulgarians in Aegean Macedonia – Myth or Reality. Historical and Demographic Study 1900–1990' (1996) and 'The Fate of Bulgarians in Aegean Macedonia 1936–1946' (1999) are conscientiously and correctly cited in the dissertation under review. The expansion of the research field by adding Western Macedonia to the topic of the dissertation contributes to its originality, as

the fate of this region has been studied to a greater extent in terms of the relations between the allies of the Tripartite Pact.

It is precisely the dual focus of the work, centred simultaneously on the Aegean and Western Macedonia, that determines its division into two parts, each devoted to the fate of Bulgarians in the respective geographical area during the period under research. The internal structure of the two parts is also logical, with each divided into three chapters dealing respectively with the struggle of the Bulgarian population for representation in local government bodies, for the restoration of the school network, and for the restoration of Bulgarian church institutions. The structure of the dissertation includes the mandatory introduction, conclusion, and list of sources and bibliography, bringing the total volume of the dissertation to 421 pages. It is excellent that the chapters in the first part of the dissertation end with a summary of the main facts and observed trends. I think the work would benefit if such summaries were also included in the chapters of the second part.

The introduction to the dissertation explains its territorial and chronological scope and clearly defines the goals and tasks that the doctoral student has set for himself. The detailed analysis of the historiography on the subject shows that Borislav Dichev is familiar with the main bibliography related to his dissertation and can assess its strengths and weaknesses by analysing it in relation to the period in which it was created. I would recommend that the doctoral student familiarize themselves with the monographs by Prof. Biser Petrov, 'Diplomacy and Diversion in the Balkans: British Policy towards Albania during and after the Second World War' (2020) and 'From Resistance to Civil War. Non-Communist Resistance in the Occupied Balkan Countries' (2000), which will be useful for the overall context of his research and specifically for the parts concerning Bulgarians in Western Macedonia. Among the more significant omissions in the dissertation's bibliography, I would highlight the absence of Prof. Dilyan Nikolchev's study 'The Struma-Drama Diocese (White Sea Region, 1941–1942) and the Dram Diocese (1943–1944)' (2020), which, like the last chapter of Goran Blagoev's work 'Church and Identity in the Balkans. The Bulgarian Exarchate and Vardar Macedonia until the End of the Second World War' (2020), which would have enriched the study in its section on Bulgarian church policy during the Second World War.

The introduction also lists the main sources on which the doctoral student relies in his work. It is noteworthy that, in addition to the archival documents from the collections of the Ministry of

Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Public Health, which are typical for the development of such a topic, this dissertation also draws on documents from the collections of the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Trade, Industry, and Labour, the Ministry of Railways, Post, and Telegraphs, the Directorate of National Propaganda, the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, and others. In addition to the archival collections stored in the Central State Archives, the doctoral student has used documents from the State Military History Archives in Veliko Tarnovo, the Scientific Archive of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, the National Military History Museum, as well as published collections of documents, diaries, memoirs, brochures, and periodicals from the era. The main achievement of the dissertation lies in introducing rich and previously unused source material into scholarly discourse and integrating it with historiographical data.

The most significant limitation of the reviewed dissertation is the fact that Borislav Dichev bases his work exclusively on Bulgarian sources and historiography. Although the dissertation was developed in the doctoral program ‘History of Bulgaria – Modern Bulgarian History 1878–1944’, enriching it with foreign sources and historiography would have allowed the author to look at the issue from a different perspective, avoid some inaccurate statements, and delve deeper into the topic. I will limit myself to just one example concerning the persecution of the Bulgarian population by the Greek authorities after September 1944. The author’s pain and indignation are understandable when he says that at that time the Greeks undertook a ‘fierce campaign against Bulgarian identity’, beginning looting, repression, ‘unbridled violence’, and legal persecution of Bulgarians (pp. 90–93). From a professional standpoint, however, it is important for the doctoral candidate to acknowledge the fact that between 1941 and 1944 Bulgaria was an ally of the Third Reich and, as such, occupied and laid claims to Greek territories—a circumstance that to a large extent explains the Greek counter-reaction. Placing of the dissertation within a broader Balkan context would contribute to a fuller and more comprehensive understanding of the topic.

I recommend that Borislav Dichev adopt a more critical approach in his use of historical sources and historiographical data. This issue in the dissertation is most evident in the section on demography, where the data are often contradictory and appear further distorted in an attempt to substantiate specific political goals. For example, relying on the research of Prof. G. Daskalov, B. Dichev claims that there were 11,000 Bulgarians in Thessaloniki in 1941 (pp. 34–35), which cannot

be true given that in May 1913, i.e., at the height of the Bulgarian community in the city and before the expulsions following the Second Balkan and First World Wars, there were 6,263 Bulgarians.

In connection with the explanations of the terminology used in the dissertation, provided in the extended abstract, I would like to draw B. Dichev's attention to the fact that the terms 'Slavophones' and 'Bulgarophones' ('Bulgarian-speaking' is a translation of 'Bulgarianophones'), along with 'local', 'Slavic Macedonians', etc., have been widely used among Greek activists since the beginning of the 20th century, and then in the 'New Lands' of the Kingdom of Greece and through Greek collaborators, they penetrated the terminology of the Italian occupation authorities in Aegean Macedonia. Again, in relation to terminology, I would like to ask the doctoral student what he means by 'andartski cheti' and whether they differ from the partisans, as it appears on pp. 89–90, p. 95, p. 97, etc., or whether andart and partisan are synonyms, as stated on p. 176.

The comments made so far are intended to improve the dissertation, given the likelihood that it will be published as a monograph. They do not dispute B. Dichev's conclusions, which are based on the understanding that the restoration of the national life of Bulgarians in Aegean and Western Macedonia depended on the policies of the occupying powers—Germany and Italy—each pursuing different objectives in the territories of Greece and Yugoslavia that they had conquered. According to the doctoral student, the German occupation authorities sought to secure the economic interests of the Reich and its communications with the theater of operations in North Africa, which is why they balanced between the Bulgarians and the Greek collaborationist authorities. For its part, Italy sought to establish itself as a permanent political and economic factor in the southwestern Balkans, and therefore sought to gain the support of the Albanian and Greek populations, limiting Bulgarian educational, religious, economic, and other initiatives.

Secondly, the doctoral student demonstrates an understanding that the situation of Bulgarians in the German and Italian occupation zones depended on the dynamics of the military-political situation in Europe and the overall course of the Second World War. In the early years of the Second World War, which were favorable for the Axis powers, certain concessions were made to the Bulgarian population in the German occupation zone: a Bulgarian club and a Bulgarian school were opened in Thessaloniki, a church community was established in the city, two churches were provided to the Bulgarians, Bulgarian mayors were appointed in many Bulgarian villages, the delivery of Bulgarian literature was permitted, radio broadcasts in Bulgarian were arranged, etc.

During this period, the Italian occupation authorities did not support Bulgarian demands and changed their policy only in 1943, and only in the Kostur region, because they needed an ally against the growing Greek resistance movement. They then supported the creation of a Bulgarian police, allowed Bulgarian language education, permitted the use of Bulgarian in church services, and replaced Greek mayors with Bulgarians. Between 1943 and 1944, the German occupation authorities reorganised the Bulgarian police units and incorporated them into battalions under German command. After Italy's withdrawal from the war, the German authorities sought to enlist the Albanians as allies against the communist resistance, and therefore subordinated the Bulgarian local authorities in Western Macedonia to the central administration in Tirana.

There is no doubt about B. Dichev's third main conclusion that the Bulgarian state and its institutions provided comprehensive assistance for the restoration of the national life of the Bulgarian population in Aegean and Western Macedonia during the period 1941–1944.

The doctoral student has the three publications required by required by the Implementing Regulations of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff of the Republic of Bulgaria, namely: Dichev, B. Activities of the Bulgarian Military Representation in Thessaloniki during the Second World War, 1941–1944. *VIS*. Vol. 1/2023, pp. 7-16; Dichev, B. The Bulgarian Primary School 'St. St. Cyril and Methodius' during the Second World War. *Minalo*. Vol. 1/2024, pp. 77-88; Dichev, B. The Italian-Albanian Denationalization Policy in Western Macedonia in 1941–1943. *Minalo*. Vol. 2/ 2025, pp. 52-63.

CONCLUSION: I provide a positive evaluation for the awarding of the educational and scientific degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in the professional field 2.2. 'History and Archaeology', doctoral program "History of Bulgaria – Modern Bulgarian History 1878–1944' for the dissertation of Borislav Yordanov Dichev 'The Bulgarians in Aegean and Western Macedonia during the Second World War'.

Sofia, 15 August 2025

Prof. DSc. Yura Konstantinova