

## **OPINION**

On the dissertation of ZUO XIAO,  
Doctoral Candidate at the Department of History of Bulgaria,  
Faculty of History, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

On the topic:

"BULGARIAN-YUGOSLAV RELATIONS (1953 – the end of 1960s)"

For obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"  
In the field of Higher Education 2. Doctor of Philosophy and Humanities  
Professional Field 2. 2. History and Archaeology  
Doctoral Program "History of Bulgaria" (Modern Bulgarian History 1878 – 1944)

By Assoc. Prof. Dr. Vanya Petrova Stoyanova,  
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Geographical and linguistic proximity, as well as a shared past, connect the peoples of Bulgaria and the former Yugoslavia, but that same past also divides them in many ways. In this sense, the history of Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations is a challenge for researchers of Bulgaria and the Balkans in modern and contemporary times. The Cold War period deserves special attention. At that time, the national and interstate conflicts inherited from the previous era were compounded by bloc and ideological confrontation and dependence, which defined the boundaries of Bulgarian foreign policy in a bipolar world and left their mark on relations with its Balkan neighbor.

Academic research has given due consideration to the political and ideological aspects of Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations after World War II and the place of the Macedonian question in them. Well acquainted with the achievements of Bulgarian and Yugoslav historiography from the socialist period, as well as contemporary publications devoted to Bulgarian foreign policy towards Yugoslavia, doctoral candidate Dzuo Xiao has chosen to approach the topic in a comprehensive manner. Focusing on the period from 1953 to the end of the 1960s, she broadens her research by including, alongside the political dimensions of bilateral relations, the

hitherto neglected economic and cultural aspects, examining them in unity and interaction. This approach enables her, on the one hand, to fill in the gaps in historiography, clarifying the processes of economic cooperation and cultural exchange, as well as the unfolding of public articulation on the Macedonian question. On the other hand, it allows her to outline a broad picture of Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations during the period in question and provides a more complete understanding of their dynamics in the context of the Cold War.

The dissertation, comprising 245 pages, consists of an introduction, four chapters structured according to a problem-chronological principle, a conclusion, and a bibliography. Its coherent and logical structure is impressive, as well as the precise naming of each section and subsection, reflecting a deep understanding and comprehension of the subject matter.

The introduction justifies the choice of topic and presents the aims and objectives of the study. The overview of the literature and sources used demonstrates a very good historiographical awareness and orientation regarding the informative value of archival materials.

The first chapter examines the development of Bulgarian-Yugoslav political relations from their post-war rupture to the 1980s. The focus is on the period from 1953 to the end of the 1960s. The doctoral student traces their cyclical improvement and deterioration, which largely reflected the changes in Soviet policy towards Yugoslavia.

The second chapter is devoted to the Macedonian question, which occupied a central place in Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations. There are a number of studies on this issue, which, as is evident from the text, the author is well acquainted with. Her focus here is on the evolution of the policy of the Bulgarian state and party leadership on the Macedonian question and the process of its publicizing, in an attempt to combine ideological loyalty with national interests. The doctoral student assesses T. Zhivkov's restrained position in the public articulation of the Macedonian question also from the point of view of political pragmatism, aimed at improving the inter-state climate, economic relations, and cultural contacts between the two countries.

The third chapter, which examines Bulgarian-Yugoslav economic relations, is a contribution to historiography. It is written on archival sources from the Ministry of Foreign Trade in the Central State Archives, articles from the official periodical *Vanshna Targovia* (Foreign Trade), information and publications from Yugoslav archives and periodicals. The doctoral candidate traces the restoration and expansion of economic ties from the mid-1950s onwards; examines the challenges in economic relations between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia

arising from the clash between the Bulgarian centralized and planned system and the liberalized and market-oriented Yugoslav economy; analyzes the interdependence between politics and economic ties in relations between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia.

The fourth chapter, based on unpublished archival materials from the Committee for Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries and documents from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, examines in detail Bulgarian-Yugoslav cultural relations from 1953 to the end of the 1960s. Their analysis shows that despite its expansion in the 1960s, bilateral cultural cooperation remained limited due to ideological, political, and bureaucratic obstacles.

The conclusion summarizes the findings in the previous chapters in the context of Cold War constraints.

The dissertation of doctoral candidate Dzuo Xiao contributes to the study of Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations during the Cold War. New, unpublished archival sources are introduced into scientific circulation, shedding light on the economic and cultural contacts between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia that have remained in the shadow of politics. The dissertation examines these contacts from both the Bulgarian and Yugoslav perspectives.

The study offers an in-depth and multilayered analysis of the interconnected political, economic, and cultural relations between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia and the process of publicizing Bulgaria's position on the Macedonian question. It provides a model for interpreting the foreign policy of a small country from the socialist bloc and a Soviet satellite, seeking a balance between ideology, national interest, and political pragmatism.

As a minor comment on the text, I would like to point out the repetition of a passage on pp. 174–175 and the references in some places to "in the paper" instead of "in the dissertation," probably as a result of the preparation of parts of it for publication. They in no way detract from my excellent impression of the work.

The abstract adequately reflects the content of the dissertation and the contributions mentioned in it correspond to the achievements.

The publications on the subject meet the requirements of the Act on the Academic Staff Development and the Regulations for its implementation.

With her dissertation, the doctoral candidate demonstrates her qualities as a thorough researcher and promising young scholar who is able to work independently, critically analyze sources, and formulate original theses and convincing conclusions. As a member of the

Scientific Jury, I will vote without hesitation that the educational and scientific degree of “Doctor” be awarded to Zuo Xiao.

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Sofia

Assoc. Prof. Vania Stoyanova, Ph.D.