

## REVIEW

by **Assoc. Prof. Dr Georgi Nikolov Georgiev**, member of the Scientific jury according to the Order No RD 38-788. /22.12.2025. of the Rector of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”,

for a dissertation on the topic: **EVERYDAY LIFE AND THE PRESS IN YUGOSLAV MACEDONIA (1945 – MID-60S OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY)**

for awarding the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in Professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology, Doctoral program “Modern and Recent General History (Contemporary Balkan History – Political and Social History of Yugoslav Macedonia after World War II)”

by **Andoni Kirilov Andreev**

### **Information about the candidate and the procedure**

Andoni Andreev is a graduate of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. His Bachelor’s thesis and Master’s thesis, respectively entitled “*Yugoslav Macedonian Current Affairs through the Lens of the Magazine “Osten” (1971 – 1972)*” and “*Yugoslav ‘Brotherhood and Unity’ in the Pages of the Humorous Press in Skopje, Belgrade, Zagreb, and Ljubljana (1967 – 1972)*”, were later developed and integrated into the thematic framework of his doctoral dissertation.

The titles indicate a sustained and systematic interest in the internal processes characterizing the still relatively brief state history of our southwestern neighbor, at once so close and yet so distant, according to its official chronology as defined by the Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav calendar.

The doctoral thesis, entitled ‘*Everyday Life and the Press in Yugoslav Macedonia (1945–mid-1960s)*’, was completed under the supervision of Associate Professor Dr Naum Kaychev in the Department of History of

Byzantium and the Balkans, Faculty of History, Sofia University ‘St Kliment Ohridski’. It is clearly an expression of purposeful research effort.

The scientometric report and the list of publications (ten in total) submitted by the candidate confirms and strengthens this impression. The minimum academic requirements for the award of the doctoral degree have been fulfilled and substantially exceeded.

The abstract, comprising 22 pages, accurately reflects the content of the dissertation and clearly delineates its scholarly contributions. As a member of the scientific jury, I confirm that I have received and duly reviewed all documents required for the present procedure. I further declare that I have neither co-authored publication with the candidate nor engaged in any other professional activities or commitments that might give rise to a conflict of interest between myself and the doctoral candidate.

### **Overview and comments on the dissertation**

The doctoral thesis of Andoni Andreev is structured into an introduction, eleven chapters, a concluding summary entitled ‘*An Attempt at Synthesising the Results Obtained*’, a list of sources and bibliography, and comprises a total of 411 pages.

The chapters devoted to selected spheres of everyday life, chosen for their particular significance, are accompanied by a ‘Fragment’ which not only complements the thematic content but also seeks to expose an implicit logical contradiction with official interpretations and narratives. According to the author, fragments of media coverage of everyday life possess “limited temporal validity” for the propaganda apparatus, may construct an image that functions as an alternative to the dominant one, or may be positioned within a peripheral analytical register in relation to the overarching thematic focus of the respective chapter.

Presented in this manner, the chapters and their accompanying fragments constitute self-contained studies in their own right, which flow into one another so as ultimately to lend coherence and completeness to the overall text, because of the complexity of the problem. The structure is successful and convincing, despite the inevitable empirical load.

The **Introduction** sets the starting point of the research, namely – that the social history of Yugoslav Macedonia is both possible and necessary to be understood and covered through an examination of everyday life, which is framed and normalized by the centrally defined order. One of the main tools of the “new” life is the press – both a showcase and a propaganda mouthpiece that reduces to the mass consciousness what and how, in what way the population should (co)experience. This determines the object of the study as everyday life and its subject as its representation and shaping by the press. The resulting tasks are collected as thematic lines to reconstruct the socialist Yugoslav everyday life of the people of the new political entity and the appearance of the Macedonian part of the former Vardar Banovina.

The author emphasized that total reconstruction is an impossible task in its scale. The integration of the key spatial markers structuring the everyday life of the Yugoslav Macedonian is, however, attainable. The methodology preferred by Andoni Andreev is that of the *Alltagsgeschichte* „due to the greater proximity... to classical social history and considering the specifics in the development of the Povardarie after the creation of a socialist Yugoslav federal unit there (as well as the leading role of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia in the government of the same).”

In our opinion, the chronological boundaries of the dissertation work have also been chosen successfully. They cover the period from the establishment of the new Yugoslav government in Vardar Macedonia under the banners of Tito's partisans in 1945 to the Skopje earthquake in 1963, whose consequences

symbolically marked the political and economic changes at the republican and federal levels.

As might be expected, the source base is composed predominantly of newspapers and periodicals published during the specified period in Yugoslav Macedonia. The shortage of archival sources is explained by Andoni Andreev through the “peculiar regime” of accessibility and inaccessibility at the country’s principal archival repository – State Archives of the Republic of North Macedonia, during the period of his research stay there. This explanation is accepted insofar as the peculiarities of the national archival system of the Republic of North Macedonia were observed first-hand before the designation “North” was added to the country’s name.

The collected archival material is used primarily in **Chapter One**, “The Communist Party and the Creation of Socialist Yugoslav Macedonian Everyday Life”. The projections of this policy are examined sequentially, namely the school network; agriculture; the collection of information; mass culture (physical culture, theatres, and cinemas); taxation; the establishment and mass expansion of regime-sponsored organisations; agitation and propaganda; elections, rallies, and demonstrations; the initial attempts at coercive “co-operation” and “collectivization”; the imposition of the “new standard language norm”; and the struggle against “survivals of the past”. All this leads towards the “new socialist Macedonian nationality”, the culmination and quintessence of a political process of centrally managed everyday life.

**Chapter Two**, “Political Process and Everyday Life up to the Early 1950s”, traces the political mobilisation of the “new” society, driven by the post-war “Reconstruction” towards the preparation and implementation of the First Five-Year Plan, launched according to a Stalinist model of accelerated and coercive transformation of the economy, culture, social relations, and other spheres.

In the Macedonian context, this process entails not merely the creation of the “new people” of the “new Yugoslavia”. Andoni Andreev notes, in various formulations throughout the text, that the added value and long-term stake of this project lies in the creation of a distinctive Yugoslav subtype of the local population of Bulgarian ethnic origin, which we allow ourselves to describe, by analogy with the term “homo sovieticus”, as “homo macedonicus yugoslavicus”. In parentheses, one might elaborate on the author’s suggestion that this connection with the past was prohibited and stigmatised, subjected to a form of *damnatio memoriae*, and punishable in itself as a subversive act.

The rupture between Yugoslavia and the countries of the Cominform, particularly between Tito and Stalin, removed the Plan from the political agenda, albeit gradually rather than immediately. Andoni Andreev rightly characterises the Plan as “dystopian.” The author argues that the subsequent “liberalisation” was conditional, partial, and relative. It did not affect the ideological foundations or the political essence of the regime, whose specific core in the Socialist Republic of Macedonia remained Yugoslavism and the Macedonism derived from it.

We have devoted greater attention to the introduction and the first two chapters of the work, as they establish the framework, introduce the analytical apparatus, categories and concepts, and delineate the thematic directions. They lay the foundation of the study, which henceforth proceeds through the aforementioned thematic fields of everyday life in the People’s Republic of Macedonia. These, according to Andoni Andreev’s deliberate selection, are: village and everyday life; labour and everyday life; the everyday life of youth and children; leisure and everyday life; domestic everyday life and the emancipation of the socialist woman; tragedies and everyday life; humour and everyday life; and personalities and everyday life (**Chapters Three – Eleven**).

However desirable and warranted such an undertaking may be, it is not possible within the confines of the present review to examine or analyse their

content in detail, given their considerable volume. Our attention will be directed to the author's conclusions, articulated in the chapters and summarized in the concluding section of the study. The focus of propaganda shifts from images of intense and euphoric total mobilization to the benefits of a more orderly and calmer socialist society (if not prosperous, then at least improving in welfare) where everyone participates as an individual of the new Yugoslav type. In such a society, labour, creativity, leisure, harmonious and egalitarian family relations, and personal advancement toward the new era are realized as achievements of the Yugoslav model of socialism and the promoted notion of the unique Yugoslav path. It is personified in the media portrayal of Josip Broz Tito as a visionary leader and representative of the Yugoslav peoples, credited by propaganda with worldwide influence and exceptional abilities.

The obligatory reference points in the media representation of everyday life also serve as instruments of targeted influence, education, and societal disciplining. In this manner, the press and the mass media more generally both shape and depict the social environment as it is meant to be, thus carrying out the media's traditional foundational role in a controlled society. In this closed circuit of everyday life, there is nothing unique. As Andoni Andreev remarks, humour (the traditional outlet for social tension) does not seek to expose or challenge the system's inherent flaws. Instead, laughter and satire target deviations from the system, that ultimately reaffirm its legitimacy.

Even the 1963 earthquake that destroyed Skopje and resulted in thousands of fatalities was appropriated for an unprecedented spectacle of "Brotherhood and Unity", showcasing Yugoslav solidarity among citizens, nations, and republics. The tragedy allowed a New Skopje to rise from the ruins (seen as symbols of an obsolete past) supported by foreign aid and sympathy, and ready to begin anew within the established framework of everyday life. As we would argue, there is no turning back – not least because nothing remains to which a return would be

possible. Modernisation was accomplished in the Yugoslav manner and has, in many respects, outlived Yugoslavia itself.

### **Contributions of the Dissertation**

A principal contribution of Andoni Andreev's research lies in its use of the methods and stylistic approaches of social history to address one of the questions that continue to trouble Bulgarian sensibilities regarding the seemingly perpetual theme of "Macedonia". What has truly happened in the entity to the south-west of our border during the past eight decades?

Andoni Andreev has demonstrated and explained in detail, on the basis of the source material he has assembled, the character and comprehensiveness of the changes in everyday life and practices in the Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The frameworks, rules, and mechanisms structured everyday existence, and this, in turn, directed the everyday life along a single trajectory, without any possibility of deviation. The constructed social and political reality, regulated and directed by the state, shaped the new "Macedonian" individual according to a Yugoslav model.

Another contribution of the study lies in the author's analysis of how this cumulative result was produced. In examining these two central issues in contemporary understandings of the Macedonian Question, the dissertation also makes a significant empirical contribution. On a purely factual plane, the study addresses significant lacunae in what is commonly assumed to be a broadly informed knowledge of the recent history of today's Republic of North Macedonia.

### **Critical Remarks and Recommendations**

As Andoni Andreev himself notes, his study focuses on the media representation of the everyday process of social engineering in the Yugoslav

Republic of Macedonia. In its general characteristics, this process was not only typical of the other republics within Tito's Yugoslavia, but was broadly applicable to the "socialist" countries, particularly during their formative years. The Yugoslav specificities that emerged following the rupture of 1948 corresponded to the federation's geopolitical position and mode of existence between the Eastern and Western blocs. What determines the case of "Yugoslav Macedonia" as a relevant case study is the implementation of the project of a "Macedonian nation" and a Macedonian nation-state. A fundamentally defining feature of the constructed formation is that it contains, and indeed permits, no space for Macedonian Bulgarians. The process of the "everyday" examined by Andoni Andreev through the prism of the media is therefore not merely one of social and political engineering, but also (primarily) of ethnic engineering. This aspect is present and addressed in Andoni Andreev's study; however, given its significance, it is absorbed within the densely thematised content of the eleven chapters. In my view, the work would benefit from a more clearly delineation of the problem.

Certain observations may also be made regarding the stylistic and linguistic presentation of the dissertation, such as: overly long paragraphs; occasional orthographic and punctuation errors; inaccuracies in the spelling of names (e.g. Borko Temelkovski *Lyulyaka* instead of *Lilyakot*, a dialect word for "bat"); as well as unsuitable and/or unclear word combinations ("the Serbianized linguistics of the Skopje region" instead of "the Serbianized lexis of the Skopje region") and terms (such as "Povardarie"), among others. The shortcomings identified above can be addressed in the course of preparing the text for publication as a monograph. They do not alter the overall positive assessment of Andoni Andreev's work, which undoubtedly demonstrates the requisite qualities and scholarly contributions of an established researcher with a promising future.

## **Conclusion**

The dissertation submitted by Andoni Kirilov Andreev fulfils all the requirements for the award of the educational and academic degree “Doctor” in the professional field of History and Archaeology. The study is detailed, well structured, and convincingly argued. Its conclusions are original, thoughtfully developed, and balanced. The candidate has successfully synthesised and analysed a vast body of material drawn from the press of the Democratic Federal / People’s / Socialist Republic of Macedonia. I strongly recommend that, following the necessary linguistic revision, the text be published as a monograph.

In conclusion, I positively vote for the award of the educational and academic degree “Doctor” in the professional field of History and Archaeology to the candidate, Andoni Kirilov Andreev.

Assoc. Prof. Dr Georgi N. Georgiev