OPINION

by Assoc. Prof. **Hristo Anastasov Berov,** PhD

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for a dissertation on the topic "TURKEY IN BULGARIAN POLITICS (1989 – 2004)"

for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor"

in the field of higher education 2. Humanities

Professional field 2.2. History and archaeology

Scientific specialty "History of Bulgaria (Modern Bulgarian History)", developed by **Petya Dimitrova Pavlova** , with scientific supervisor, Prof. Dr. Evgeniya Kalinova

Ms. Petya Pavlova presents to the esteemed jury a text dedicated to the specific place that Turkey and Bulgarian-Turkish relations occupy in Bulgarian political life in the extremely important period between 1989 and 2004. It is worth noting here that the formulation of the topic “Turkey in Bulgarian Politics” represents an original departure from traditional studies dedicated to relations between two countries in a specific time period. This formulation makes it possible to pay attention to all, or almost all, aspects of Bulgarian-Turkish relations and the ways in which the Turkish topic influences Bulgarian politics. This is exactly how the main goal of the study is formulated, namely, “to trace the events that are of significant importance for the formation of Bulgaria’s attitude towards Turkey and the political line it follows in its contacts with it.” (p.4) And in addition, to examine “political contacts … military, economic and cultural ties”, which “provides an opportunity for a comprehensive analysis and assessment of Turkey’s place in Bulgarian politics in the period 1989–2004 and allows us to seek an answer to the extent to which the controversial issues between the two countries and the distrust towards the Turkish side that existed at the end of 1989 have a negative impact on the development of cooperation.” (p.4)

The clearly defined goal allows Ms. Pavlova to organize the text of her dissertation in a logical structure, following the problem-chronological approach. The dissertation consists of an introduction, four chapters, divided semantically into a different number of paragraphs and subparagraphs, Conclusion and Bibliography , with a total volume of 498 pages, of which the pure text is 483 pages, and the list of used sources occupies the remaining 15. Here it should be noted the huge number of sources that the author relies on when developing her theses, as

the rich set of unpublished documents from the Central State Archives of the Republic of Bulgaria, the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Archives of the Presidential Administration, with which she worked, is particularly impressive. To these are added a rich set of published documents, memoirs, reference books, journalistic texts and periodicals, as well as a significant amount of scientific research (in Bulgarian and foreign languages, mainly English, but also a few titles in Turkish) and internet sources.

This variety of information flows enables Ms. Pavlova to apply various methods such as "situational analysis, through which ... she examines the role of external and internal factors in building the policy of the Bulgarian state towards Turkey; comparative analysis of scientific, literary and Internet sources on relations between the two countries during the period under consideration; analysis of archival documents and research related to the subject of the dissertation; functional analysis to trace the role of various institutions in the development of contacts between Bulgaria and Turkey; geopolitical analysis and historical analysis." (p.4)

In the introductory part, in addition to defining the goals, methods and briefly arguing the structure of the text, a concise overview of bilateral relations is made with emphasis on the attitude towards the citizens (subjects) of the Bulgarian state of Turkish origin, with particular attention to the "Revival Process" as a fundamental moment with fundamental importance for the development of the processes subject to research in the dissertation. Quite correctly, clarifications have also been made here related to the limitations in the use of sources, especially unpublished documents and, above all, the sensitive nature of some of the information, which is not yet subject to free access.

The first chapter focuses on bilateral relations and their development and improvement after the difficult years of the 1970s. It is organized in four meaningful paragraphs and examines the restoration of dialogue and the building of new trust. In the course of the presentation, the differences in the approaches of the left and right governments that governed Bulgaria during the period under review are noted. Ms. Pavlova gives a balanced assessment of the efforts of this period to build bilateral dialogue, while also outlining the main problems and the search for ways to solve them.

The second chapter examines the relations between the two countries in the field of defense and security in the period 1989–2004. The importance of cooperation in this area in the new conditions after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Eastern Bloc is presented in an argumentative manner. The importance of these relations for Bulgaria is significant in view of the country's main goal in this period - successful integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. Factors such as the Persian crisis and the wars during the collapse of

Yugoslavia are not overlooked, as well as the importance of topics such as the delimitation of the Rezovska River and the maritime spaces of Bulgaria and Turkey, cooperation between the Bulgarian and Turkish sides in the fight against smuggling, terrorism and illegal trafficking, the Kurdish issue in Bulgaria's relations with Turkey.

The next chapter analyzes bilateral economic cooperation. The emphasis here is on the trade and investment partnership between Bulgaria and Turkey, as well as cooperation in the field of agriculture and livestock breeding. Key moments of relations in the field of energy and transport in all its forms are also examined, as well as cooperation in infrastructure projects, with particular attention to border checkpoints. The spheres of telecommunications and tourism are not neglected. Ms. Pavlova pays special attention to bilateral cooperation within the framework of the Organization for the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, reflecting the specific nature and role that the initiative occupies in Turkey's geopolitical aspirations.

The last part examines the contacts between Bulgaria and Turkey in the fields of culture, education and science. Three paragraphs examine the partnership in the fields of education and science, with particular attention to the study of Turkish as a mother tongue in Bulgarian schools and the cooperation between national libraries and joint initiatives in the field of archival science, the partnership between the two countries in the field of culture and the signing of the Agreement on Cooperation in the Fields of Culture, Education and Science, concluded on December 4, 1997.

In the conclusion of her work, Ms. Pavlova summarizes the conclusions she reaches, summarizing that the most important element in Bulgaria's policy towards Turkey is the process of building trust. The most important point here is the radically changed attitude of the Bulgarian state towards the population of Turkish origin, which is perceived as a whole positively by the Turkish side. The search for cooperation in the context of Bulgaria's aspiration for integration into NATO and European structures is another important point, since Turkey, especially under the leadership of the cabinets of Filip Dimitrov and Ivan Kostov, is perceived as an important strategic partner. In this aspect, Ms. Pavlova does not spare some justified critical remarks regarding the concessions made in the course of preparations for signing bilateral treaties and agreements. These concessions do not bring an unambiguous positive result in relation to the great goal, but they certainly deprive the Bulgarian state of the opportunity to seek solutions to other issues (exarchate properties). The specifics of the "Turkish danger" in the domestic political dynamics in the early years of the transition to democracy and a market economy are taken into account.

Undoubtedly, the text presented to the attention of the scientific jury is a valuable and thorough study, which manages to well develop and explore in depth the various aspects of the big question to which Ms. Pavlova is trying to find an answer, namely how domestic political processes and phenomena are influenced by the dynamics of relations between Bulgaria and Turkey at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries? Skilfully and on the basis of a serious source base, the specificity of bilateral relations with all the difficulties, obstacles and "pitfalls" has been revealed, which is the basis of the changes in the perception of Turkey as a "partner", not as an "enemy". The balanced tone of the presentation, without bias towards emotional assessments and expressions, the reasoned conclusions, the demonstrated desire to delve into depth, even into difficult and uncomfortable problems, all these are indisputable merits of the text. It can be said with confidence that Ms. Pavlova convincingly demonstrates her abilities as an objective researcher, approaching a sensitive topic without prejudice.

It is natural for a text with a volume of over 480 pages to be criticized and for there to be some weaknesses in places, but they do not detract from the merits of the study. For example, it would be good to add a brief clarification on the use of the terms "Bulgarian Muslims", "Bulgarian Turks" (as was done with the terms "exarchate properties" and "cultural and historical monuments" on p. 120), not because they were used incorrectly in the course of the work or because there is some doubt that the author knows them, but from the point of view of the demonstrated precision of the approach. It is good to give brief references to individuals and organizations when they are first mentioned in the text (generally in Chapter One), and not, as is currently the case, much later in the text. In the parts clarifying the "prehistory" of the topic, it would not be superfluous to pay a little attention to the influence of the changes in Turkey in domestic political life in the 1950s and the coups in 1960, 1971 and 1980. Again, in these parts of the text, it would be interesting to add how cases of "deserters" influence especially athletes, especially weightlifter Naim Suleymanoglu on the deterioration of relations between Bulgaria and Turkey in the second half of the 1980s . It would be good if the amounts quoted on various occasions in the text were given not only in Turkish lira, but also in one of the stable convertible currencies for a specific year. Especially in the third chapter, it would be good to take into account the impact on the Turkish economy of the changes with the abolition of the gold standard in 1972 and the oil crisis of 1973-1974, the creation of OPEC. In this part, again, the text would only gain in clarity if the tables were numbered. The text as a whole would definitely benefit from conducting interviews with some of the main actors directly involved in the processes and events under consideration.

In some places, inaccuracies have been made, such as Torgut Özal being president, not prime minister, during the meeting with A. Lukanov in 1990, as stated on p. 261. Commenting on the collapse of the SFRJ, it is claimed that "The catalyst for these processes, however, was the coming to power of Slobodan Milošević and the pro-Serbian course", which is formally incorrect, since Milošević officially did not hold any federal-level positions in Yugoslavia, i.e. his power was limited within the Federal Republic of Serbia.

In several places, in an effort to go into the details of the problem under consideration, the author actually deviates from the main thread. This is the case with the comments and assessments of the social security contract signed by Iv. Kostov (pp. 96-97); when describing the privatization activity surrounding the deal with BTC; when describing the discussions on mother tongue teaching and the introduction of Turkish (especially the 1991 experiment). For me personally, the question remains open whether there is really a need for a separate section on relations within the BSEC, despite the arguments presented by Ms. Pavlova. Some repetitions are also allowed - note 99 and p. 30 (referral to the Constitutional Court for the unconstitutionality of the MRF), pp. 157 and p. 158 the issue of the delimitation of the border at the Rezovska River, etc.

All these comments and notes are intended rather to sharpen the author's attention in the future (I have no doubt about this) publication of the study in a monograph. In this regard, I would even allow myself a provocation - let Ms. Pavlova think seriously about publishing a collection of documents on the topic of Bulgarian-Turkish relations at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st centuries, given the huge volume of documentary information that has been processed and put into scientific circulation for the first time.

The formal requirements related to the number of publications on the topic as well as the layout of the abstract have been met and in the part with the publications, have been repeatedly exceeded. The highlighted scientific contributions are sufficiently well formulated and correspond to what was actually achieved in the dissertation.

In conclusion, the overall impression of the study is of a serious and in-depth work on a little-researched, but important topic from Bulgarian and Balkan contemporary political and diplomatic history, which fully meets the criteria for a dissertation that leads to the award of “doctor”, which gives me reason to confidently support the awarding of such a degree to Petya Dimitrova Pavlova.

21.09.2025 Assoc. Prof. **Hristo Berov**, PhD