

OPINION

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on the academic research and teaching work and professional skills of Chief Assistant Prof. Dr. Lyubomir Tsvetanov Krastev, candidate for the academic position of “Associate Professor” in History and Archaeology (Modern History: History of Great Britain in the 19th Century), in a competition announced by the Faculty of History of Sofia University, published in State Gazette, No 24 / 17.03.2023.

In the announced by Sofia University open competition for habilitation in the field of the 19th century British history participates one candidate- Assist. prof. Lyubomir Tsvetanov Krastev, PhD. For any conscientious and demanding researcher and educator, competition with themselves is often the most difficult challenge. I am confident that Mr. Krastev is no exception to this rule. Unlike a number of older and young colleagues, however, he is not only guided by a deceptive ambition for self-proof and a narcissistic striving for self-embellishment with academic titles, but successfully copes in the competition he has announced himself and in keeping high the reputation of the Department of Modern and Contemporary History of Sofia University enjoys in academia.

In the correctly completed and signed by the applicant reference for the fulfillment of the national requirements under art. 2b of the ZRASRB (the relevant law) shows that both in terms of the number of points from published works and in terms of the number of citations and reviews, his works significantly exceed the minimum established thresholds. Moreover, in the list of author's studies with which he participates, out of a total of two monographs, one study and eleven articles eight publications, monographs included, are entirely on the topic of the announced competition. All this gives me reason to take seriously the work of Assist. prof. Krastev and obliges me to thoroughly justify the assessment of his achievements.

I highlight several thematic circles in the detailed list of studies submitted for participation in the competition. The main one concerns the history of Great Britain in the 19th c. (British foreign policy, the role of public opinion and the specific attitude of London towards the Northern Empire (Russia)). The second includes problems from the history of the Middle East in the 19th-20th c. The third presents Krastev's views on the importance of epidemics in the history of Modern Europe.

The habilitation work “Palmerston’s War: Great Britain, the Crimean War and the Balance of Power” (Sofia: Sofia University Press, 2023) is the centerpiece in the outlined first thematic circle. It is a natural result of Dr. Lyubomir Krastev's knowledge and experience in his professional studies with modern British history over the past few years. Without being another boring narrative

based on war plans, the reports from the front and international negotiations the book draws a complete and vivid picture of one of the most important conflicts of the Nineteenth century. By presenting the British involvement in the Crimean War, the author demonstrates his broad awareness of the 19th c. in both British and European History and easily expands the scale of his research by combining narratives from the fields of diplomatic, military, and social history. It also features new moments, such as the British spy-mania in the first half of the 1850s (pp. 140 – 148), Prussia's role in the arms trade, circumventing restrictions imposed on Russia (pp. 142 – 144), or the ingenious use of lime juice to combat the cholera epidemic in the Allied camp (pp. 186 – 187). There are also several author's observations and conclusions, which unfortunately sound relevant today, given the war waged by the Russian Federation against Ukraine and in particular on the Crimean Peninsula. I notice such on pp. 72, 94, 149, 190, 192, 256. A well-deserved place is given to the weight of public opinion and the press in the formulation of the foreign policy of the government- Krastev's contribution to the dismantling of the persistent in Bulgarian historiography myth that British civil society was formed only with the Eastern crisis of 1875 – 1878.

The Crimean War is not a new topic. But in the vast historiography on the problem, Dr. Lyubomir Krastev successfully finds his niche. There are two vivid moments in it: the personality of Lord Palmerston and the combination of his politics with the traditional 19th-century dogma of balance of power. As for Palmerston, the candidate continued and deepened his interest in the role of personality in history, with which he debuted in his PhD thesis. Here, however, the achievements are much more substantial. The British statesman is represented in the fullness of his many roles as a politician who is not among the favorites of the royal court; a skillful diplomat who built modern British diplomacy; guardian of the home security on the British Isles; a visionary strategist defending the Empire, but also organizing Europe against Russia's quest for dominance; a person with overarching interests, incl. in scientific discoveries and their application in practice; A cunning manipulator of public opinion. The latter raises a question, which, however, remained unanswered in the book. Namely, where does the strategist end and where does the populist Palmerston begin?

As for the specific attitude of Palmerston towards a policy of balance of power, here I find a weakness that, in a sense, deprives the book of a solid theoretical framework. Although Krastev often uses the phrase "balance of power", incl. in the title, the author refrains from commenting on the essence of this kind of policy and how it is considered in historiography and in the theory of international relations, and why not give his own reading of the basic principle of the construction and functioning of the system of international relations in Europe between the Congress of Vienna and the outbreak of the First World War. A direct consequence of the omission is the lack of extensive analysis of Palmerston's views on the strategy he himself waged. It is true that on p. 108 one can find a short passage from his speech in the House of Commons in which,

according to the author, he “gives an explanation ... What is the formulation ‘balance of power’, but the few quoted sentences are not enough for the purposes of such a thorough study.

I accept without remark all the contribution moments of the book listed and justified by Dr. Krastev and with due respect for the efforts I underline his enormous work in finding, selecting, and using so many primary sources from official documents and shorthand records through letters, memoirs and diaries to press articles. He not only relies on already published documentary collections or collections with online access, but he flipped through the archive materials on the spot. I am convinced that without his work at the BNA, the RA in Windsor, the NAM, LMA and the British Library collections, the research would not have made its all-round contributions and this high scientific value.

Among the other works of the candidate, two articles attract attention with the number of positive citations - an unbiased attestation of their good reception by the scientific community. The short article “Epidemics as Everyday Life in Early Modern Europe” (In: Georgieva, T., Simova, A., Krastev, L. (eds.) Early Modern Europe. Boundaries and Contradictions. Sofia: Sofia University Press, 2022, pp. 145 – 153) focuses on the role of diseases in the lives of Western Europeans in the transition period from the Middle Ages to the Modern Times. Based on a variety of source material, including documents, but also literary works, the author rightly points out the strong influence the Christian religion (even in the face of the first Protestant theologians), and especially superstitions, exerted in the search for the causes and subsequently in dealing with epidemic outbreaks. To the hunt for the “servants of the Satan” and their cruel treatment he aptly opposes the first scientific methods in the fight against infections and emphasized the early successes in dealing with smallpox, for example.

In “Reflections on Russophobia in Britain in the First Half of the 19th Century” (History, 2021, Vol. 4., pp. 371 – 385) Dr. Lyubomir Krastev traces the path of Russophobic sentiment to Britain and the evolution of the country to the most outspoken opponent of the expansion of conservative Russia. He analyzes very accurately the main Russophobic works of the time and on this basis points out how hatred of the Russian despotism and its designation as a factor with a predominantly retrograde focus not only escalated in British society in the 1830s and 1840s, but became an important element of British political debates, government and ultimately the specific British worldview.

These articles prove the abilities of the candidate to work with complex research matter and with specific sources that are far from the spirit and meaning of our time, despite the continuing relevance of the issues of epidemics and distrust of Russia. To them I add an interesting material, standing outside the above outlined thematic circles, but again with a topical twist. Behind the provocative title “Crime or Enlightenment? On the Work of the Marquis de Sade” (History, 2018, vol. 3, pp. 239 – 246) hides the experience of Assist. prof. Krastev to examine the works of the

infamous figure in their natural historical and moral context. I mention the study rather as an example of the confidence, but also the ease with which he enters, not only in the field of diplomatic and political history but also in that of social and cultural history. An important point presenting him as one of the few scientists of his generation who take into account the complex nature of the Modern History and strive to present it multifacetedly.

In general, the publications prove Krastev's professionalism in the handling of historical sources, some of which little known and therefore rarely used documents, his awareness of the achievements of contemporary British historiography, ability to clearly formulate original theses. Knowledge, abilities and competence, complemented by flawless professional ethics. In the works of Dr. Krastev there are no traces of plagiarism, nor is there the practice of compilation from a limited number of works, which is an unequivocal sign of a serious and conscientious approach. Admiration deserves Krastev's critical attitude to the developed problems- *conditio sine qua non* for the successful realization of every young scientist.

Particular attention should be paid to the teaching activities of Assist. prof. Krastev. The presented reference for his university courses confirms the breadth and diversity of his interests. Along with the Modern European history, it reveals to the students of the bachelor's and master's programs of the Faculty of History and the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology complex problems of the history of international relations, the conflict in the Middle East, the past of the Jewish people, the evolution of British foreign policy doctrines and English colonial policy. The choice of many students to develop theses under Krastev's tutorship is a testimony to his personal commitment, to his active and, above all, well-done lecturing.

In my capacity as a lecturer of Lyubomir Krastev in BA in "History" (from 2009 to 2011) and MA "Crises, Conflicts and Diplomacy in World Politics" (from 2011 to 2013), and after 2014 as a colleague at the Department of Modern and Contemporary History I cannot fail to note that his education and his entire professional career are related to the Sofia University. Dedicated to historical science, he is a well-received lecturer and a respected expert who in a short time built his authority. For nearly 15 years Dr. Krastev has impressed me with the enthusiasm and energy with which he embarks on new topics, courses and projects, with his initiative and active participation in the Faculty of History, with his loyalty to the professional community, with the ability to build his professional and personal networks and keep the balance in interpersonal relations, with his quiet but firm ambition, with his firm positions on academic cases and controversial public issues, as well as with his enviable working capacity.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that I highly appreciate the quality of the research and teaching activities of Mr. Lyubomir Krastev, who presents him as an erudite young scientist with his own academic style and indisputable contributions to the field of 19th century British

history. The evidence presented by him to meet the criteria for habilitation established by the Bulgarian Law and the Rules of Sofia University, are completed. Therefore, **I support the election of Chief Assistant Prof. Dr. Lyubomir Tsvetanov Krastev to the academic position of “Associate Professor”** in History and Archaeology (Modern History: History of Great Britain in the 19th century).

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Sofia

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