OPINION

by prof. Rositsa Stoyanova PhD,

Institute for Historical Studies – Bulgarian Academy of Sciences,

on the dissertation work of Vesselin Kostov Yanchev

themed: “Army, Public Policy and Internal Security: September, 1923. The Failure of a Commissioned Uprising”

for the acquisition of the scientific degree of Doctor of Sciences,

professional strand 2.2. History and Archaeology

The dissertation work submitted for public defence is a comprehensive, complex, interdisciplinary in nature research. Its author, Prof. Vesselin Yanchev, is a renowned and authoritative scholar with a clearly outlined research profile, known and esteemed by the historian community within the country and abroad. His interests and scientific quests are oriented towards various directions, but in the recent years, they have been focused on the exploration of the problems regarding the internal functions of the army during the peacetime periods of the Third Bulgarian state.

So far as precisely the army and its employment during peacetime are in the focus of Yanchev’s scholarly pursuits, the submitted work initially raises expectations towards a high level of scientific expertise. And those do not remain vain. Only a scholar possessing the erudition, the experience, the manner of work and the perseverance of the colleague would be able to present and analyse in depth, fully, without purposeful assumptions, a theme, subject to decades of discussions, often deviating far from science. The significance of the problematics is beyond any doubt – the events from September–October 1923 drew lasting dividing lines in Bulgarian society, predetermined the actions and the behaviour of the political subjects during the following decades, left lasting marks in the public memory.

The title of the research suggests that the focus will be directed towards the army and its role in the events. And this has been undeniably fulfilled. The text, however, covers and discusses far wider range of problems in view of contents and chronology. Essentially, the research is a successful attempt to make, in hindsight, scientific history of the September Uprising with its background history, focusing on the processes taken place in Bulgarian society after the First World War, on the positions of the internal political and other factors, on the schemes and the influence of the internal forces and mostly on the primary role of the Third Communist International (CI) and the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) for the events.

A sine qua non for the quality of a historical work is the availability of a substantial source base and the historiographic awareness of the author. In this case, these two features are a part of Prof. Yanchev’s specific profile, to which he remains faithful in the hereby reviewed research work as well. The source base of the dissertation is huge, I would even describe it as overwhelming in quantity. The used archive resources from the State Military History Archive alone, add up to 52 in number. The numerous institutional, organizations’ and personal archive collections in various Bulgarian and foreign archival repositories, published documents, memoir works, periodics, etc. should be mentioned hereby as well. A part of the materials is already known and used in science, but other documents have been introduced for scientific use by the author for the first time. In both cases – whether the documental data is known, or new to science, the author’s manner of work is consistent: he approaches it critically, combines and compares the data with that, extracted from other materials, while maintaining the distance to the subject of the research, mandatory for any historian. The mentioned attitude towards the documents and their handling, allow the author to provide multiple contributions in regard to specification of the events’ chronology, to the number of the participants thereby, to outlining their positions, whereas the confrontation in September-October 1923 is described in terms of days and hours. Yanchev elaborates and provides his opinion on the “battle for the victims”, ongoing for decades already, in a substantiated manner. The critical analysis of the rich source base provides the author with the arguments to formulate a new interpretation of the events, different from the existing one.

The colleague’s approach to scientific literature follows the similar manner of work – involving practically all scientific publications regarding any of the aspects of the researched matter (the bibliographic reference at the end of the dissertation includes a total of 20 pages); being not simply acquainted with them, but demonstrating a deep and critical understanding of all the work done before. Analysing the documents of the time and the post-dated ones, Yanchev succeeds in reconstructing the purposeful misinterpretation of facts and interpretations regarding the positions of the Bulgarian Communist Party and the actions of major party figures, and the conversion of those into axiomatic theses in the historical science.

The contributory nature of the submitted dissertation work is beyond any doubt. I would like to put a special highlight on the approach to the topic, as it is the approach that predetermines the quality of the research. For the first time in Bulgarian historiography, the analysis and the assessment of the events from September 1923 is being made in terms of state and institutional principles and values in a straight-forward and comprehensive manner. Naturally, the shift of the focus completely alters the assessments of the events, the behaviour and the responsibility of the involved internal and external factors, the nature of the uprising, etc. Among the numerous new theses, convincingly argued by the author, I would mention the assessments on the nature of the uprising, the participants, the primary role in the events of the external factor represented by the CI and the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (B), the behaviour of the key persons, etc. The author’s approach to the problems also modifies his assessments regarding the legislative measures undertaken by the government in the beginning of 1924. The analysis proposed by Yanchev is unbiased, with consideration of the differences among the governing powers and the opposition in their attitude towards the Law for the Protection of the State, towards the amnesty granted, towards the amendments in the Court-Martial Act.

I hope and recommend that the dissertation work will be published and will reach both the professional fellowship and a wider readership as well. Hence the reason for some recommendations I would dare to propose. Part of them are quite specific: on p. 282 the author has written that at the Elections for a Parliament on 18 November 1923, the Democratic Alliance entered the elections with a joint list of candidates with the Bulgarian Social Democratic Workers Party (unified) and the coalition “won an overwhelming majority of 200 mandates, distributed between democrats, national progressists, alliance-ists, radicals and social democrates”. This wording might slightly confuse the reader and leave them with the wrong impression that the coalition is between all of the above listed parties. In the course of the exposition regarding the parliamentary debates on the amendments in the Court-Martial Act, on p. 320-330 Yanchev elaborates in detail on the speech of N. Mushanov. Probably mislead by the very parliamentary diaries, the author identifies Mushanov as one of the “governing people”. I would like to draw attention to the fact that the democrats around Al. Malinov left the Democratic Alliance and reestablished the autonomous existence of the Democratic Party in March-April 1924. Mushanov fully supported this step and was a member of the Central Bureau of the party. Officially, the parliamentary group of the Democrats was constituted in the late October 1924, but in July 1924, during the debates in question, the figures who supported the party separation were already acting as an opposition. And two more recommendations with a view to a further availability of the future monograph to a wider range of readers: Interesting and significant facts and explanations, put by the author in footnotes, could enter the main body of the text. The exposition abounds in names of persons with key roles in the events. It would be nice, at the colleague’s discretion, to provide biographic data about some of them.

The abstract has been compiled in accordance with the legal requirements, and the text adequately reflects the structure, the methodology, the contents and the main outcomes, achieved in the research. There has been provided a list of publications, 20 in total, published in authoritative scientific journals. Their significance is being proved by their numerous citations by native and foreign authors.

In conclusion, the dissertation work titled: “Army, Public Policy and Internal Security: September, 1923. The Failure of a Commissioned Uprising” is a complete and representative historical study, with conceptual and contributory character. The work contains theoretic conclusions on significant scientific problems and discovers new fields of research. By giving my positive assessment for the successfully carried out study, represented in the dissertation work, the abstract, the obtained outcomes and contributions, I hereby propose to the esteemed scientific jury to award Vesselin Kostov Yanchev with the scientific degree of a Doctor of Sciences in the professional strand 2.2 History and Archaeology.

Sofia, 21.11.2022 prof. Rositsa Stoyanova