

OPINION

Regarding the procedure for acquiring the science degree “Doctor of Sciences”

Candidate

Associate Professor, Doctor Martin Ivanov Ivanov

Title of the dissertation

Sailing Against the Wind: The Bulgarian Textile Crafts and their Transformation into a Manufacturing Industry, 1800-1912

Professional field

3.1 Sociology, anthropology and culturology (Sociology)

Opinion from:

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Appointed as a member of the panel according to Order № ПД 38-147/15.03.2021 of the Rector of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” and to decision of the Faculty council of the Faculty of Philosophy, Minutes № 11/02.03.2021

1. Overall features of the dissertation

The dissertation contains 502 pages and comprises: 198 pages body text including the introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, 15 tables and 1 figure.; 252 pages with 12 annexes, containing 43 tables; a bibliographical list with 1098 references.

2. Facts and personal impressions about the candidate

I got acquainted with Martin Ivanov in 1997 when he was a junior fellow at the Institute for historical studies of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. Since then and during his different academic and administrative tenures (Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, Archives State Agency) we have continuously been in touch while exploring close fields in economic history, discussing scholarly matters, and working on common projects. I have been one of the reviewers of his PhD thesis (1999) and I have presented publicly several of his books; we have co-initiated and convened a seminar series on economic and social history which hold 130 meeting during 2004-2014; we cooperated in the frame of the international team organized by the Bulgarian national bank and other central banks in the region with the mission to compile and publish (2014) comparable monetary and economic historical time-series for the South-Eastern European countries from the 19th century to WWII. During this long intellectual communion, we have always been open vis-à-vis to each other, and uncompromising regarding the scientific standards. I have been a critical reader of his contributions, namely the most important of them which include his works on the history of the Bulgarian foreign debts; the enquiries on the country’s financial institutional history (the „Bulgarian Trade Bank”; the networks among the Bulgarian elites); and the pioneering estimates of the Bulgarian gross domestic product from 1870 to 1945.

3. Assessment of the candidate’s achievements in the dissertation

- Within its immediate topic, the dissertation is a deep and original study on a key branch in the economy of the Bulgarian lands and the Bulgarian state during the long 19th century. The actual research program, however, is much broader. It targets the conflic-

tive encounter of the economy with modernity, touches upon important aspects of everyday life, traces economic, political, and family roots of the national elite. The approach is multidisciplinary and transcends the boundaries of economic history by entering the fields of sociology, anthropology, technologies' history, prosopography.

- The dissertation's structure is consistent. The starting hypothesis is clearly formulated in the context of the scholarly debates on the matter and is tested with vast empirical data. The key statement is that the textile industry in the Bulgarian lands and in the newborn Bulgarian state follows an asynchronous trend compared to the rhythm of the "global periphery" as outlined by the theory of "deindustrialization". According to Ivanov, the textile sector managed to face the Western competition until 1870; it was hit by the Long Depression from the last quarter of the 19th century but during the period realized the transition to machine production, allowing for the prompt recovery (an atypical "reindustrialization") in the early 20th century. In theoretical terms, the text discusses chiefly the contributions by Jeffrey Williamson and Sevet Pamuk (on the global trends), by Michael Palairret (Bulgaria and the Balkans), and, among the Bulgarian scholars, by Luben Berov and Nikolai Todorov.
- The author handles an impressive amount of primary data and of secondary sources. They are processed with his already known tenacity, precision, and creativity. The facts are integrated into scrupulously systematized descriptions or quantitatively calibrated into time-series. Ivanov correctly defines his dissertation as "a second, analytical, part of [his] study on the [Bulgarian] gross domestic product" (p. 10). Considered together, those two pieces bear comparison to the pathbreaking undertakings of the forerunners in Bulgarian historical statistics like Kiril Popov, Nikola Mihov or Assen Chakalov whose legacy has remained the reference for years.
- Of great importance is the compilation of the Fisher's index on the Bulgarian "net terms of trade" for 1840-1912 (p. 75). The values of this indicator are theoretically relevant and allow comparing the local trends with those in other regions.
- Hereafter, I enumerate some of the substantial conceptual contributions in the dissertation. 1/. The conclusion that "the economic decline after the Liberation war incited people to leave the protoindustrial areas" (p. 69) which refutes M. Palairret's argument that, on the contrary, the migration of the labor force was responsible for the economic downturn. 2/. The thesis that the resilience of the textile sector in the Bulgarian lands is due to its weaker integration in wider markets ("the role of geography") and to the structure of their export (p. 76). 3/. The nuanced breakdown by subsectors (with their "specific chronology") of the impact of the external shocks from the Crimean and the Russo-Turkish wars. (p. 83). 4/. The proof that the textile crafts' decline after the Liberation was provoked not by the foreign competition but by a set of occasional factors, the change in consumers' preferences, and mostly to the globally induced long recession (1873-1902) which depressed prices, incomes, and the domestic demand. (p. 99). 5/. The confirmation (based on the textile branch) of the fundamental role played by the capital shortages in the evolution of the Bulgarian capitalism. 6/. The assessment of the limited impact on the "reindustrialization" of the state protectionist and industrial policies adopted after intense business lobbying. 7/. The sociological profiling of the industrialists in the textile sector (Table 10), the detected generational changes in this community, and the disclosure of family (often related to political) ties among them. 8/. The identification in the textile branch (late 19th- early 20th centuries) of a characteristic hybrid model combining classical crafts, domestic manufactures, and elements of industrial production: an eclectic mix which adjourned the more decisive modernization of the sector.

- Exceptionally valuable information has been gathered, systematized, and presented in the dissertation's Annexes. They contain the compiled historical time-series; exclusive standardized data about 149 industrial plants; and biographical notes (or lists) about nearly 1000 industrialists. In relation with the corresponding methodological and source notes, the Annexes represent a major research output.

4. Approbation of the results

Part of the dissertation's methodological principles have been formulated and applied in the candidate's previous publications (№ 271-273 in the bibliography). Essays on Bulgarian entrepreneurs (№ 274-300 in the bibliography), including on some of those discussed in the dissertation, have been published in business magazines. A forthcoming paper containing results from the dissertation and coauthored with Michael Kopsidis is mentioned in the Introduction.

The dissertation complies with the minimum national requirements of the relevant Law and of the Regulation for its implementation, as well as to the additional requirements of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" for acquiring the Science degree "Doctor of Science" in the Scientific area and the Professional field of the procedure.

The dissertation does not duplicate results from previous procedures for the acquisition of a science degree or an academic position.

No instances of plagiarism are present in the dissertation.

5. Abstract

The presented abstract corresponds to the required standards and correctly reflects the content and the results of the dissertation.

6. Critical remarks and recommendations

Hereafter I share a few critical remarks and raise some questions. None of them changes my overall assessment of the dissertation as expressed in the Conclusion.

- I am wondering whether the focal problem in the dissertation (the asynchrony of one branch) is relevant enough to hold the generalizations based on it, namely the existence of a substantial Bulgarian exception. The dissertation does not contain systematic comparisons with similar cases. Reference is made to only "a handful of countries from the periphery [without naming any] which managed to preserve and then to modernize and develop their protoindustrial sector during the First globalization" (p. 196). The sole table with international data (p. 173) includes two peripheral states (Serbia and Romania), which in the early 20th century do not display values of the indicators distinctly differing from the Bulgarian ones. Moreover, the "deindustrialization" theory has been devised to explain the fate of the cotton textile in 18-19th centuries' India (p. 6). We cannot exclude the possibility of more detailed international comparisons revealing other economies/branches with a dynamic akin to that of the Bulgarian textiles.
- The terms „de“/“re“/„industrialization“ overstate the trends they are supposed to reflect. The title and the text themselves point out that the processes under scrutiny are a stage in the history of the Bulgarian textile *craftsmanship*, and even during its final phase the "industrial" production coexisted with archaic forms.
- The very notion of „re“industrialization“ is questionable as far as it refers to an in-existent previous industrialization. The author's data on the Bulgarian gross domestic product (№ 271 from the dissertation's bibliography, p. 458) indicate that the share of

the sector “Industry and crafts” (where Textile represents only a portion) has been stable until the Balkan wars: respectively 16.9% (1887), 17.3% (1895), 14.7% (1900), 16.1% (1911). Obviously, the amplitude of the fluctuations does not correspond to a statistically relevant peculiarity or transformation of the scale of “de”/“re” industrialization”. The genuine meaning of those concepts embeds a strong macroeconomic potential exceeding by far the impact of the phenomenon researched in the dissertation: then and decades later, Bulgaria remained a distinctly agrarian country.

- The text often mentions the name “Bulgaria” in an Ottoman context (i.e. before 1878). It seems inappropriate to conceive this statehood’s label as a territorial and national continuum. The economic behavior in two qualitatively different social, economic, legal, and political contexts (the Bulgarian *lands* before and the Bulgarian *state* after the Liberation) is not fully comparable. Basic economic tenets in both realms are intrinsically dissimilar. What happened in the Bulgarian territories before 1878 was not “Bulgarian” in the sense this ethnonym is used after the establishment of the new state.
- The author rightly regrets that, “as a rule the Bulgarian historiography stubbornly stays aside from the dominant drift during the last half-century towards a quantitative research of the past” (p. 9). The dissertation, however, is not a step forward in this direction if the “quantitative exploration of the past” is understood (according to the mainstream literature) as the application to the field of mathematics and econometrics (the Cliometrics). The massive presence of statistical data (in this respect the dissertation is without doubt a remarkable achievement in the Bulgarian historiography) is not yet a procedure of hypotheses testing based on the mathematical logic and apparatus.
- The myriad of time-series unavoidably raises different kind of questions. They stem from curiosity rather than from a critical stance because the work of the author could be strictly proven or refuted only by alternative calculations of the same scale. I signify four problems: the use of a *non-weighted* index of the industrial prices from 1870 to 1911 has probably a biasing effect (c. 199); the pertinence to calculate an average exchange rate of the kuruş vis-à-vis the leva in the 1870s is dubious as the leva did not still exist as a currency (c. 199); the stable (until 1900) and (until 1912, i.e. during the “re-industrialization”) even rising share of the population producing in-house, non-marketed textile output is puzzling (Table 1.3., p. 236); the conversion of the kuruş into francs, and since 1878 into levas, does not take into account the *aggio* (although the claimed reason is technical and reference is made to L. Berov’s similar approach, this choice distorts the real-life market prices). Of course, when discussing historical statistics, we must take into consideration (the author is aware of the fact) that the time-series are always a fragile construct. The numbers are highly sensitive to the accepted assumptions, and it is not unusual to have alternative versions which diverge in scale or in the direction of the trends.
- It missed in the bibliography a list with the consulted archival sources.

7. Conclusion

After having read the dissertation and evaluated the significance, quality, and novelty of its scientific achievements, I strongly **recommend** to the panel to grant to Associate Professor, Doctor Marin Ivanov Ivanov the Scientific degree “Doctor of Sciences” in the Scientific area “Social, economic and legal sciences”, and the Professional field 3.1. Sociology, anthropology and culturology (Sociology)

28 May 2021

Associate Professor, Doctor
Roumen Lubenov Avramov