

REVIEW

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On the dissertation of **Maria Sashkova Valkova** entitled “**Andrey Toshev – statesman, diplomat, politician**” for the award of the Ph.D. degree – Occupational field: 2.2 History and Archaeology. History of Bulgaria / Modern History of Bulgaria (1878 – 1944)

Introduction. I have been appointed by Rector’s Order No. RD-38-105 / 24. 02. 2023 as a member of the scientific jury for the dissertation defense of Maria Valkova, a Ph.D. student at the Faculty of History of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. In this capacity, I submit the following review.

Biography of the Ph.D. student. Maria Sashkova Valkova is a Bulgarian citizen. She was born in Vratsa. She completed her secondary education at the “Ioan Ekzarh” Language School in her hometown. In 2017 she graduated with a Bachelor of History and Geography from the Faculty of History of Sofia University. She obtained an MA degree in Geographic Information Systems and Cartography at the Faculty of Geology and Geography of the same university. From 2017 to 2020, Valkova taught history and geography at the “Quest” Private

Elementary School, in Sofia. Since 2020, she has held the esteemed position of teaching geography at the “Akad. Lyubomir Chakalov” National Mathematical High School in Sofia. The colleague is fluent in Spanish and English and has demonstrated proficiency in various computer skills. Additionally, she has earned a certificate as a tourist guide. Valkova's professional experience and the interdisciplinarity of her education are notable qualifications that serve as a strong foundation for her successful Ph.D. journey and future contributions to the academic realm.

Ph.D. procedures data. In 2019, after winning a contest, Maria Valkova was enrolled as a Ph.D. student at the Department of History of Bulgaria of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. The title of her dissertation was “Andrey Toshev – statesman, diplomat, politician”. During the course of her Ph.D. training, Valkova successfully passed the compulsory exams in her specialty and in a foreign (English) language. Three of her articles were published. Valkova's commitment, responsibility, and disciplined approach have established her as a promising Ph.D. student and a rising scholar with significant potential.

Topicality: Andrey Toshev was a famous Bulgarian public figure who served as a diplomat for nearly 20 years and held the position of Prime Minister on the eve of World War II. Currently, there exists a dearth of any comprehensive research examining his persona, and the role he played in Bulgarian politics and public life, or, as Valkova notes in her introduction, “this man does not seem to have been of particular interest to scholars and contemporaries”. This research gap inherently underscores the relevance of exploring this subject of inquiry.

Dissertation and abstract data. Maria Valkova's dissertation is entitled: “Andrey Toshev – statesman, diplomat, politician”. It consists of 375 standard pages and includes an introduction, three chapters (10 subchapters in total), a conclusion, and a bibliography. The title suggests that the paper is a biography with the object of research – the Bulgarian public figure Andrey Toshev. In the

introduction, Valkova successfully argues her choice and conceives five tasks of the study. The sources and historiographical overview are also presented.

The first chapter (four subchapters total), entitled “From Stara Zagora to Athens”, examines Toshev's early years and his first positions in the Bulgarian diplomatic corps until 1908. The first subchapter concerns Toshev’s early years. The narrative here is based mainly on Toshev’s memoirs and is generally laconic. The lack of information is an objective reason for that. However, facts from Toshev's childhood, his student years in Adrianople, Geneva, and Brussels, his teaching in Thessaloniki, and his scientific pursuits in botany are presented. The second subchapter traces Toshev’s activities as a Bulgarian commercial agent in Bitola. From the outset, Valkova demonstrates her knowledge of the most important dimensions of the so-called Bulgarian national issue. She provides the necessary explanation of the phenomena of commercial agents in Bulgarian diplomacy, demonstrates knowledge of the consequences of the Ilinden-Preobrazhenie Uprising, the nature of the reform projects concerning Macedonia (Vienna and Mürzsteg reforms), the Bulgarian-Turkish treaty of 1904, the Bulgarian-Greek struggle for influence in Macedonia, etc. Valkova presents comprehensively and analyzes Toshev’s reports in his capacity as a commercial agent and thus reveals important details in the following directions. 1. Toshev’s personal views on the Macedonian issue and what should be the Bulgarian policy on it; 2. Toshev’s concrete actions in defense of Bulgarian interests in Macedonia; 3. The institution of the commercial agent as a position in the Bulgarian diplomatic corps. Valkova demonstrates the necessary detachment from the object of her research and critical attention to the sources. Sometimes she argues against Toshev’s statements. The second subchapter examines Toshev as a diplomatic agent in the Montenegrin capital Cetinje. Here, Valkova provides an overview of Bulgarian-Montenegrin relations in general but also informs the readers about Toshev’s views on the main political problems in the small Balkan state and its

complex relations with Serbia and Italy. The third subchapter depicted Toshev as a diplomatic agent in Athens. Here, on the basis of a presentation and analysis of his reports to the Bulgarian foreign ministry, Valkova points out Toshev's views on the Macedonian issue and, above all, the reasons why Bulgarian diplomacy should not retreat from its standpoint on a non-partition of Macedonia.

The second chapter, entitled "From Independence to the Wars of National Unification", explained Toshev's diplomatic activities from 1908 to 1918. Nearly a third of the text of the dissertation comprises information about Toshev's stay in the Serbian capital. In her study, Valkova focuses on Toshev's views on Bulgarian-Serbian relations and the Macedonian issue, his concrete actions to prevent Serbian propaganda in Macedonia, Belgrade's behavior towards the declaration of Bulgarian independence, and Serbia's relations with the Great Powers. An important part of the subchapter analyzes Bulgarian diplomacy on the eve of and during the Balkan Wars. Here, the accentuations are the diplomatic preparations for the First Balkan War, Bulgarian-Serbian relations during the fighting, and Balkan relations on the eve of the Inter-Allied War. Valkova highlights Toshev's intransigent views on Serbian claims in Macedonia, his willingness to make concessions to Greece, and his disavowment by the Bulgarian government in the negotiation process preceding the formation of the Balkan Union.

The second subchapter (of Chapter Two) analyzes Toshev's mission to Constantinople. Here, the author points out Toshev's role as Bulgarian delegate at the peace negotiations in the Ottoman capital in September 1913, his actions as the Bulgarian minister plenipotentiary there, his concerns regarding a possible anti-Greek Bulgarian-Turkish alliance, and above all his consistent view in favor of maintaining neutrality in World War I and a possible inclusion of Bulgaria in Great War at the latest possible stage. The last part of the chapter is devoted to Toshev's stay in Vienna and Bern. The Ph.D. student presents Toshev's views and

actions in the context of the negotiations for Bulgaria's entrance into the Great War and Bulgarian diplomacy during the world conflict. The loyalty of the Bulgarian diplomat to the government despite the fact that his personal perceptions contradicted the officially adopted course, is emphasized. A significant part of the narrative describes Bulgaria's relations with its allies and Toshev's views on the disputes with Turkey (the Maritsa issue) and Germany (the Dobrudja issue).

The third chapter explores Toshev's career after the First World War. Quite naturally, the emphasis is concentrated on his ministry in 1935 – specifically focusing on the circumstances of the formation of the cabinet and its domestic and economic policies. The narrative of Toshev's life between 1919 and 1935 is far shorter but, as the author confesses, “the evidence of this period (of his life) is relatively sparse”. However, Valkova highlights Toshev's participation at the Bulgarian-Albanian negotiations in 1932 and at the meetings under the auspices of the Balkan Conference in 1933. In the last part, the author presents the scientific and journalistic activities of the Bulgarian diplomat after the Great War.

There are many positive points in the dissertation. Valkova demonstrates knowledge and understanding of the problems of Bulgarian diplomacy and international politics in the 1900s and 1910s – including the Macedonian issue, the relations between the Balkan states, Bulgarian independence, the diplomatic preparations of the Balkan wars and their course, Bulgaria's entrance and participation in the First World War, the relations between the member states of the Quadrilateral Union, and the internal political situation in Montenegro, Serbia, Austria-Hungary. As noted, there is a lack of in-depth biographies of Andrey Toshev. In this sense, Valkova's study fills a gap in Bulgarian science. The Ph.D. student demonstrates a thorough knowledge of Toshev's views and activities as a Bulgarian diplomat. Valkova's approach is critical. The sources are correctly cited and analyzed. In most cases, the author's conclusions are solidly argued. The

narrative of Toshev's ministry is comprehensive and valuable. The dissertation fills a gap in historical science as well.

The paper is written in an academic style. The citation and layout of the bibliography follow academic standards. The text is original. No plagiarism of any kind is noticeable. The abstract meets the academic standards in terms of structure and content. In it, Valkova points out the aims and objectives of the dissertation, provides a brief historiographical overview, and summarises the content of the chapters.

Of course, in such a voluminous paper, remarks are inevitable. Some qualifications, like “populist experiment” (regarding the Republic of Gyumyurdzhina) are not stylistically sound. In an effort to demonstrate comprehensive knowledge of Bulgarian politics, Valkova goes into detail about events that are famous and do not directly relate to Toshev's personality (the politics of the Nineteenth-Mayers, the course of the Inter-Allied War). The author agrees with Toshev's views on maintaining Bulgarian neutrality and entering World War I “at the last moment”. Here, the question arises as to what extent such a tactic would guarantee the realization of the so-called Bulgarian national ideal. In some places, there is an overuse of footnotes.

Participation at scientific conferences and scientific publications. In 2016, Maria Valkova participated in the annual scientific conference organized by the Regional History Museum in Kyustendil. Subsequently, the colleague took part in the student readings organized by Sofia University and the University of Veliko Tarnovo. Valkova submitted three articles. Two of them – “Andrey Toshev's Early Years” and “Andrey Toshev as Bulgarian Minister Plenipotentiary in Athens and the Macedonian Issue” – were published in 2020 and 2021 in the electronic journal “Anamnesis”. The third one is part of the proceedings of a conference at the University of Veliko Tarnovo. All the articles research Andrey Toshev. Their content is implemented in the Ph.D. dissertation.

Conclusion. Maria Valkova meets the minimal national requirements set by the legislation of the Republic of Bulgaria for the successful completion of a Ph.D. procedure. Her dissertation is full-fledged scientific research with a contributory character to the field of science. I declare that I will vote “Ya” for the award of a Ph.D. degree in favor of Maria Valkova.

Sofia, May 19th, 2023

Assoc. Prof. Svetoslav Zhivkov, Ph.D.