

Review of the Doctoral dissertation of Kiril Iliev

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Kiril Iliev's dissertation "Bulgaria and the Neo-Slavic Movement in the Balkans (1908-1913)" is dedicated to an important period in Bulgarian and Balkan history. The topic is well chosen: Neo-Slavism is a multi-layered and international movement, which due to the circumstances of a domestic and international nature had a short life and failed to realize its plans, but nevertheless left its mark in international relations. In contemporary literature in Bulgarian language, with the exception of Emilia Lazarova's monographic study, which was not written, however, by a historian, there are several studies and articles on some aspects of the movement. Therefore, I consider Iliev's dissertation to be a bold attempt to return to the original sources, to examine the various external and internal aspects, to outline the main contradictions between the Slavic peoples. Certainly, the scientific guidance by probably the most competent contemporary Bulgarian historian on the subject was essential for the success of this attempt.

The 310-page exposition is harmoniously arranged in three chapters. The second chapter, related to the preparation, problems and organization of the Sofia Sabor, takes the central place. Three articles published in prestigious publications deal with some aspects of the dissertation. One of the articles compares the ideas of Pan-Slavism and Neo-Slavism. When analyzing Pan-Slavism, I would recommend including Tina Georgieva's monograph "The Slavic Idea in Russia". At the beginning of the 20th century, the connection between Neo-Slavism and Pan-Slavism in Russia was rather "generational" (as Iliev correctly notes, most of the Russian participants in the movement did not radically change the old ideas about the dominance of Russia over the other Slavic peoples).

The dissertation sets a clear research goal – the impact of the ideological trend of Neo-Slavism on the Slavic peoples, with a focus on the Balkans. I believe that it has been successfully accomplished. New documentary material has been included, discussions in Bulgarian society as well as the positions of Serbia have been precisely reviewed and analyzed, all conclusions are logically justified. Reference to studies by Czech authors would have complemented the picture and clarified that the "genetic" ideological connection of Neo-Slavism has been primarily with Slavic cooperation within the Habsburg Empire since 1848. When in 1906 the Czech art magazine "May" conducted a survey in connection with the upcoming 100th anniversary of the Slavic Congress of 1848, it turned out that readers showed exceptional interest in organizing another similar forum. The specific idea for organizing it, however, came from the Odessa professor A.A. Borzenko, who allocated a considerable sum for this purpose, while at the

same time promoting his idea in a series of letters to the Slavic deputies in the Vienna Reichsrat on the one hand, and to the Russian Prime Minister P.A. Stolypin on the other. At the end of November 1907, 17 Slavic deputies in the Vienna Reichsrat discussed Borzenko's proposal. An Organizing Committee was formed to prepare the forum. Although there were only two Czechs in the committee, thanks to Kramarz - as Iliev correctly notes - Neo-Slavism remained primarily the fruit of Czech political circles.

The fall of the autocracy and the beginning of the constitutional era gave hope that liberal Russian circles would adopt the motto of neo-Slavism for freedom, equality and brotherhood of all Slavic nations as their guiding principles. The support among constitutional circles from the moderate right, the center, the Cadets and the Octobrists, and the intelligentsia during the first visit of Central European deputies to St. Petersburg in 1908 was obvious: representatives of various political and ideological trends participated in the local organization to prepare the future congress - the "Committee of Public Figures" (N.A. Khomyakov, Yu.N. Milyutin, N.N. Lvov, etc.) At that time, only the extreme left and extreme right parties showed no interest in the initiative.

In addition to the main purpose of the visit to the Russian capital - talks on the forthcoming Pan-Slavic forum - Kramarz also set out with an additional mission - to mediate in improving the situation of the Poles in Russia. The neo-Slavist supporter was aware that without smoothing out the conflict between the two largest Slavic peoples, the idea of the new movement would be emptied of content. The neo-Slavist leader interceded with the official Russian authorities for softening the attitude towards the Poles in the empire. Although he was not hostile to the idea of reconciliation, Stolypin gave only vague promises. Kramarz also established direct contacts with the Polish representatives in the Duma, attracting to the idea of Neo-Slavism Roman Dmowski, the leader of the Polish National Democrats, who expressed his desire to participate in the upcoming congress. Subsequently, however, the impossibility of resolving the conflict naturally led to the Poles withdrawing from the movement. The "touchstone" of yet another movement for Pan-Slavic cooperation was once again the attitude towards Russia.

In fact – as Iliev rightly notes – the movement also polarized Russian public circles, which in turn had an impact on the neo-Slavic movement itself. In the Danubian Monarchy, support for the future forum was expressed primarily by the parties that were trying to reach an agreement with Vienna. But it was precisely this loyalty to the suzerains and borders, advertised by the neo-Slavists, that caused irritation among the pro-Serbian oriented parties of the South Slavs in the monarchy, with official Belgrade remaining the most hostile to the idea. No wonder that they delayed their reaction to the Czech invitation to organize a Slavic council and did not show particular enthusiasm.

Iliev presents the Bulgarian participation in the preparatory meeting in Prague in July 1908, organized in honor of the 60th anniversary of the first Slavic Congress of 1848. The hosts naturally predominated among the participants (deputies from the Reichsrat and the Sejm, journalists, cultural figures, representatives of associations with industrial, commercial, tourist and sports purposes). The agenda included, above all, issues of economic and cultural cooperation, exchange, tourism and literary exchange. It was decided to set up organizing committees in the main cities of the Slavic countries, which would work in five directions: cultural, economic, tourist, journalistic, and for the development of the Sokol movement. At the Prague Meeting, Kramarz established himself as the main ideologist of the New Slav movement. He repeatedly stressed that it was nothing like the old Russian Slavophilism, because it insisted on the equality of the Slavic peoples and on cultural cooperation. Two of the decisions taken – to create a Slavic Bank and a united book market – continued to be on the agenda of the subsequent preparatory meetings.

A special contribution of the dissertation work is the presentation of the meetings of the preparatory committee in St. Petersburg in 1909, the discussions and especially the consequences of these meetings for Bulgarian-Serbian relations. The study sheds new light on the connection between the figures of the Neo-Slavist movement and the formation of the Balkan Union. This detail is well-founded, I would only add that there is a lot of information on this issue in the Austrian archives (the Interior Ministry in Vienna has been receiving information since the time of the first preparatory meeting, held in Prague in the summer of 1908), which would illuminate the Central European perspective. There are probably similar materials in the Russian archives as well. But even without them, Iliev argues well enough and correctly analyzes the attempts of the Romanov Empire to monopolize the new Slavic movement. After the death of the main leader of the movement in Russia, Gen. Volodimirov, liberal public circles gradually withdrew from the movement. On the other hand, more and more representatives of conservative circles joined. Most of those who came to the Bulgarian Council of 1910, were "repainted" Pan-Slavists.

The first two serious blows to the movement were the withdrawal of the Poles, i.e. the impossibility to resolve the Polish-Russian conflict, and the Bosnian crisis. For Kramarz himself, after the Bosnian crisis of 1908, the dilemma of "Slavic solidarity - "Austrian loyalty" became increasingly difficult to implement. The contradictions between Slavic peoples also intensified. The Sofia Council in 1910 was nevertheless held, although with fewer participants (the Poles, the Ukrainians and Belarusians did not send their representatives). It is the author's achievement to overcome the established cliché and carefully to analyze the arguments of the supporters and opponents of the Council in Bulgarian society. As for the hosts, as Iliev notes, the organizers' ambition was

to create an "image" before Russia that Bulgaria has the potential to be its main ally in the Balkans. The Sofia Council became possible only when national contradictions were abandoned at the door of the meeting hall - and this is what happened. When Serbian representatives attempted to protest against the annexation of Bosnia and Vienna's policy, Kramarz categorically stated that if such statements were allowed, the Czech delegation would leave the forum. (He later noted in his memoirs that Sofia Conference made it clear that the disputes could no longer be resolved.) Sofia forum remained a non-political event, with the main meetings being held in two sections - cultural and economic. It is worth noting the participation of prominent figures in Bulgarian cultural and political life (V. Zlatarski, L. Miletich, I.E. Geshov, St. Danev). Iliev rightly argues that it was precisely these circles that became the "resource bank" from which the architects of the Balkan Union were recruited two years later. In this regard, the special study of the IX Congress of Slavic Journalists also makes a contribution. It is well explained why the idea of creating a joint Czech-Bulgarian-Serbian telegraph agency also failed, and was never implemented.

A separate article presents a detailed analysis of the Macedonian question in the context of the Sofia Council. It is true to assume that the event focused on cultural, economic and financial projects for Slavic cooperation, while at the same time the participants "turned a blind eye" to the national problem, although it was clearly stated in the memoir of the Macedonian Brotherhoods. Iliev also correctly presents the reasons for the disagreements between the two camps in Bulgarian society - while liberal circles (Pencho Slaveykov, Peyo Yavorov, Krastyu Rakovski) believed that without resolving the national question, Slavic unification could not be achieved, the Russophile circles around S. Bobchev continued the well-established tradition of cooperation with the Russian representatives of the right-wing parties who came to the congress. It was precisely these right-wing parties that could not free themselves from the old Slavophilism with which Neo-Slavism wanted to break with its slogan of freedom, brotherhood and equality between the Slavic peoples. Disappointed by the Russian policy towards the Poles, the honorary chairman of the forum and leader of the movement, Dr. Karel, figuratively reminded that those who "oppress other Slavic peoples have no right to call themselves Slavs". This was precisely the slogan that appealed to the hosts, because they hoped to use it against Serbian propaganda in Macedonia.

Neo-Slavic cooperation attracted various social and professional circles (journalists, doctors, lawyers, beekeepers, representatives of gymnastics organizations), and also found expression in smaller-scale initiatives: a floating exhibition, a Russian literary exhibition in Sofia, a congress of Slavic journalists in Belgrade, a "Sokol" council in Zagreb, a theological forum in Velehrad and Prague. Scientific contacts between Slavists also deepened in the educational sphere. Although the idea of a pan-Slavic bank was not implemented, a Russian-

Bulgarian bank was established in Sofia, and a Czech-Polish bank - in Warsaw. With a view to make mutual acquaintances, excursions were periodically organized. Iliev dedicated a separate article to the second largest Neo-Slavic event after the Sofia Council - the Ninth Congress of Slavic Journalists in Sofia. In addition to bringing new, previously unknown details about the event, I consider pointing out the role of the periodical press and the printed word in general, especially among the Slavs in Austria-Hungary, to be of particular significance.

The next congress planned for 1912 in Belgrade, however, did not take place due to the outbreak of the Balkan War. The final chords of the movement were heard with the outbreak of the Second Balkan War. Iliev's conclusion that the collapse of the movement was not the result of the outbreak of war between the former allies in the Balkans, but was rather the logical outcome of unresolved, long-suppressed conflicts, is particularly significant.

It is interesting to note that even after 1913, Kramarz did not abandon the idea of Slavic cooperation (in a letter dated July 28, 1913 to the chairman of the Czech-Slav Union, he reassured the Slovaks not to despair that "those down there have fought" (the Inter-Allied War) – Slavism would not perish from this). On the very eve of the First World War in May 1914, Karel Velikanovitch (as he was called in Russia) drafted a memorandum in which he outlined the contours of a future pan-Slavic state under the scepter of the Russian Tsar, which reached the Russian Foreign Ministry. It is interesting to note that Bulgaria, which had been at war with Serbia, was also included in this pan-Slavic state, with the so-called "undisputed zone" in Macedonia.

The scientific style of Iliev's dissertation thesis is precise in terminology and written in a sophisticated language. I have not noticed any cases of plagiarism. Bearing scientific features, the dissertation is a contribution and represents a higher stage in the development of a multi-layered and contradictory phenomenon, such as pre-war Neo-Slavism. All this gives me sufficient reason to give my positive vote and to propose to the esteemed jury to award the candidate the scientific and educational degree "Doctor".

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