

Review

by Assoc. Prof. Tina Nikolaeva Georgieva, PhD

on the doctoral dissertation of Kiril Georgiev Iliev — full-time doctoral candidate in the professional field 2.2 History and Archaeology

entitled “Bulgaria and the Neo-Slavic Movement in the Balkans (1908–1913)”

The doctoral dissertation of Kiril Iliev is devoted to a topic which, due to its political relevance, has not lost its topicality even today, despite the passage of time. In recent years, certain aspects of Neo-Slavism have been the subject of scholarly research; however, the movement has rarely been examined in the context of the Balkan events of the early twentieth century, which makes such studies particularly significant.

The presented text consists of an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, and a bibliography, with a total length of 310 pages. In preparing the study, published documents were used, along with a substantial number of materials from the periodical press, as well as archival sources from the collections of the Central State Archives, the Bulgarian Historical Archive at the National Library “St. St. Cyril and Methodius,” and the Scientific Archive of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, related to the leaders of the Bulgarian Neo-Slavic movement (Stephan Bobchev, Stephan Kostov, Nikola Bobchev, etc.).

In the introduction, the author provides a well-argued justification for the choice of topic, the chronological scope, the object and objectives of the research, as well as a brief overview of the historiography on the problem under study.

The first chapter examines the development of Neo-Slavism in the period 1908–1909. It presents, on the one hand, the key moments in the history of the movement, such as the Slavic Congress in Prague (1908) and the Slavic conferences in Moscow and St. Petersburg (1909), and, on the other hand, those events that influenced the evolution of Neo-Slavism and the positions of its leaders, such as the Bosnian Crisis. The second chapter is devoted to the Slavic Congress held in Sofia in 1910 and the accompanying Slavic initiatives. The third chapter explores the development of the Neo-Slavic movement before and during the Balkan Wars. It traces the final Slavic initiatives of this period, the intensification of the activities of Slavic organizations during the war, and the collapse of the movement, which coincided with

the end of the Second Balkan War. According to the author, in the period 1911–1912 in Bulgaria the idea of Slavic solidarity was interpreted through the prism of Bulgarian–Serbian and Bulgarian–Russian relations and became a leading motive in the consolidation of the alliance between Bulgaria, Serbia, and Montenegro. Neo-Slavism constituted the foundation upon which the Balkan states embarked on the path to war, and its outcome was perceived not only as a territorial but also as an ideological victory.

The chosen structure enables the author to elucidate the fundamental principles of Neo-Slavism, the objectives the movement set for itself, and the main issues discussed in the course of the organized pan-Slavic congresses. Particular attention is paid to problematic topics—such as the Russian–Polish conflict and the related Ukrainian question, as well as the fate of Macedonia—which proved to be stumbling blocks to the concept of Slavic solidarity. At the same time, K. Iliev skillfully demonstrates how, under the influence of the changing international environment, both the priorities of the new Slavic movement and the viewpoints of its leaders evolved.

A central emphasis of the study nevertheless remains the Bulgarian dimension of Neo-Slavism. The text consistently traces Bulgarian participation in Neo-Slavic initiatives. Special attention is devoted to the attitudes of various socio-political circles in Bulgaria toward the revived Slavic movement, which I regard as a significant contribution of the dissertation. The author highlights the divisions within Bulgarian society regarding Neo-Slavism and its ideas, and the analysis of the highly nuanced positions of individual parties and political actors clearly brings out the link between the Slavic idea and attitudes toward Russia, on the one hand, and the fate of Macedonia, on the other.

Kiril Iliev demonstrates a solid command of the researched problem, of the international environment in which Neo-Slavism developed, as well as an ability to interpret events in the context of the evolving political situation and shifting public attitudes. The conclusions drawn in the dissertation are also convincing: for most Slavic peoples, Neo-Slavism functioned as a means to achieve specific national objectives. For the Bulgarian participants in the movement, the idea of Slavic solidarity served as a way to draw closer to Russia, which was a key factor in resolving the Macedonian question. This, in turn, explains why the Bulgarian leaders of the Neo-Slavic movement took into account the views of the Russian side and adjusted their positions in accordance with changes in Russian Neo-Slavism. The debates within Bulgarian society are rightly assessed by the author as a continuation of

the long-standing dispute over whether Bulgaria's foreign policy should be based on the recognition of Russia as an indispensable ally.

Kiril Iliev identifies seven scholarly contributions in his work; among them, I would single out the introduction into academic circulation of previously unpublished documents, the analysis of Bulgarian perspectives on Neo-Slavism, and the examination of the influence of the foreign policy situation on these views.

The author has three publications on the topic in scholarly journals and has submitted all the documents required for the dissertation defense procedure.

Among the critical remarks on the text, I would point to the need for more careful handling of concepts such as "Pan-Slavism" and "Slavophilism," as well as greater precision in assessing their nature. The frequent use of the theme of Pan-Slavism makes it necessary to clarify what content is attributed to this term—whether it refers to political, literary, or some other form of unity. If Russia's claims to be the natural leader of the Slavic world are regarded as Pan-Slavism, this should be explicitly stated. If, however, Pan-Slavism is understood as a political union of the Slavs under Russia's aegis, then to speak of Pan-Slavism as an almost state-driven Russian policy and a concept supported by Russian society is, to say the least, an exaggeration.

Such inaccuracies are evidently the result of a certain overreliance on the sources used by the author—scholarly studies, but especially materials from the periodical press. A significant part of the texts addressing Pan-Slavism and Russian policy consist of political or party statements with a pronounced propagandistic intent, which presupposes that they be approached with the necessary degree of critical distance. The lack of sufficient analytical detachment leads to overtly inaccurate assertions, such as the claim about "Pan-Slavic principles of 'Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality' proclaimed by Sergey Uvarov" (p. 23), and the equation drawn between "Pan-Slavists and Slavophiles of the old type" (p. 59).

The text also contains certain inaccuracies, such as repetitions (pp. 199, 203 concerning the delegates to the future congress; pp. 198, 203 concerning economic issues) and contradictory statements (regarding the participation or non-participation of Polish representatives at the medical congress - pp. 218–219), which should be corrected in the event of a future publication of the study.

Nevertheless, the remarks made do not alter the overall positive assessment of Kiril Iliev's work. Therefore, I recommend that the distinguished jury confer upon Kiril Iliev the academic degree of Doctor.

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