REVIEW

by Jordan Angelov Baev, professor of modern international history

member of a scientific jury according to Order 112 RD-16/01.08.2022 of the Director of the IBCT

of the scientific works presented in the competition for filling a full-time academic position of professor for the needs of the "Modern Balkans" section in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional direction 2.2 "History and archeology (International relations in the Balkans in the 1940s of the twentieth century)"

announced in the State Gazette, no. 55 of 15 July 2022

of Biser Petrov Petrov - associate professor in the "Modern Balkans" section of the IBCT

In the competition for a professor in the scientific section "Modern Balkans" of the Institute of Balkan Studies with the Center for Tracology at the BAS, only one candidate participated - Associate Professor Doctor of Historical Sciences (DrSc) Biser Petrov Petrov. For the needs of the competition, the candidate submitted for review two monographs and thirteen scientific studies and articles.

Biser Petrov is a graduate of the Faculty of History of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". In 1997, he received a PhD degree on the topic "Non-communist resistance in the occupied Balkan countries", and two years later he was appointed a research assistant (assistant professor) at the Institute of Balkan Studies. In 2010, he was elected as an associate professor with a habilitation thesis presented "The Allied Occupier: Collaborationism in Albania, Serbia and Greece during the Second World War (Social, Political and Military Aspects)". In 2019, he successfully defended a dissertation to obtain the scientific degree "Doctor of Historical Sciences" (Dr.Sc.) on the issue "Bulgaria and the New Slavic Movement 1941-1948".

The list of author's publications in the last three decades comprises of 69 works, including four scientific monographs, as well as 12 more reference reviews. Almost

all of them are dedicated to issues that directly correspond to the theme of the competition "International relations in the Balkans in the 1940s". Of these, 27 were published in foreign languages in the journal "Etudes Balkaniques", and five in foreign editions.

The newest monographic study presented for review "Diplomacy and subversion in the Balkans. British policy towards Albania during and after the Second World War" has the character of a habilitation thesis, therefore I will examine it in more detail. The theme of the work logically continues Biser Petrov's scientific pursuits of the previous three decades, which consistently reveal mutually conditioned but antagonistic phenomena - the non-communist resistance and collaborationism in the Balkans during the Second World War. In contrast to the studies of a number of foreign authors, who consider this topic in a more limited historical period - during the war or the first post-war years - Petrov sets himself the more ambitious goal of studying British policy and concrete actions over more than one decade, considering events and processes "in their continuous succession and close interrelation". Although only implied in the title of the work, the policy of one of the leading European powers was clarified through its two essential strategic manifestations (especially in the conditions of armed confrontation) – diplomacy and intelligence.

The study of British policy towards Albania WAS based on extensive research and analysis of key archival documents in the British National Archives (TNA) and published document collections. The declassification in the last years of the previous century of the extremely valuable documents of Special Operations Executive (SOE) for the period 1940-1945 caused an "explosion" of research by British experts in intelligence history, from which took advantage Biser Petrov to present for the first time in Bulgarian historiography a detailed reading of the British secret operations in Albania and the main actors in them. It could be possible, indeed, to specify other key moments in the activity of the most prominent of those personalities. For example, when it comes to SOE's deputy head of the Balkans department, Julian Amery, it is

not superfluous to recall his two secret missions in 1940 to Bulgaria and his confidential talks with Dr. G. M. Dimitrov (Gemeto) about opposing against the inclusion of the Kingdom of Bulgaria in the Tripartite Pact. As for Captain (later with the rank of Colonel) David Smiley, in addition to his role in Albania, facts are already known about his subversive activities in other secret "missions", including the most secret sabotage operation of 1947 against the Jewish emigration in Palestine or his involvement in Operation MANGO in Yemen in 1963. Also, Elizabeth Barker was not just a "journalist" and a "Foreign Office employee", namely in the period 1942-1945 she headed the Balkan Department of the Political Warfare Executive in British Foreign Intelligence. Biser Petrov's long-term research on the subject enables him to competently, impressively and synthesizely recreate the various trends and directions in the Albanian resistance and the dynamic interaction of their leaders with the British political and intelligence missions in northern and southern Albania. As the author of the monograph successfully noted, British military activity did not end with the expulsion of the Nazi troops from the territory of the Balkans, but, similar to the situation in neighboring Greece, was transformed into a new political and military activity in the first post-war years. It is no coincidence that it was the British uncompromising armed intervention in "allied" Greece that caused the first "hot spot" of the Cold War in Europe, before the doctrinal concepts and symbolic-institutional boundaries of the so-called "Iron Curtain" between the West and the East had even been outlined. In the context of the concept of the "weakest link" in the Soviet bloc, it seems logical that the first covert British-US subversive operation against the establishment of Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe began precisely in Albania as early as 1949. Again, Biser Petrov had the opportunity to take advantage of the 2005-2015 declassification of vast amounts of CIA and MI-6 documentation for the first post-war decade, including the joint sabotage operation in Albania codenamed Valuable/BGFIEND (since 1952 OBOPUS). The digitally accessible 31 folders of over 2,800 pages of detailed CIA documentation on the operation in Albania provide

valuable concrete data on the various forms and stages of British-American covert action, including from the territories of Greece, Italy, Turkey and West Germany.

Biser Petrov carefully analyzed and interpreted the available documentary and memoir evidence and critically used the existing scientific and expert literature. This has enabled him, for instance, to truthfully reflect the discussions about Kim Philby's role in uncovering and the failure of the armed operation in Albania. A comparison of the real facts, the author pointed out in his monograph, clearly shows that there is no way Philby was "responsible" for the failure of the first armed groups transferred to Albania in August-September 1949, since he arrived in Washington as a representative of British Intelligence services only on October 10, 1949. Kim Philby left Washington in early March 1951 and thereafter had no involvement in the ongoing covert operation. Therefore, Petrov's assumption that sources of intelligence information about Moscow and Tirana should also be sought among the Albanian political emigration in Italy is entirely plausible. I would recommend that in a new edition of the book, this topic should cover the last stage of the British-US operation, which was stopped only after the public trial against the "British and American spies" in Tirana in the spring of 1954. It would be good to reflect the propaganda aspects as well of the operation with the transfer of over 700,000 leaflets and brochures to Albanian territory and the beginning of intensive "gray" and "black" radio propaganda from the summer of 1951 against the regime of Enver Hoxha.

I would like to specifically point out that some key moments of Biser Petrov's monograph are presented in a synthesized form in a new publication that appeared in a collective volume on "history of diplomacy and intelligence in the Balkans" published by the New York branch of the academic publishing house Peter Lang . As one of the international editors of the collection, I can confirm the high evaluation that was given by several prominent European specialists in diplomatic and intelligence history, and this is an indisputable sign of the promising wider response

of Assoc. Prof. Petrov's achievements among the international professional community .

A few articles, published in "Etudes Balkaniques" (2002, No. 2; 2004, No. 4; 2006, No. 2) on the fate of the monarchy in Albania and on British toward Albania (1939-1944) are related to the monographic study, but presented in a more comprehensive manner. The author's thesis makes an important and necessary addition to Bulgarian historical research on the beginning of the Second World War in Europe. Based on available archival material from the Foreign Office records, Petrov convincingly showed that Britain's position was in tune with the Chamberlain government's policy of "appeasement" of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, previously demonstrated by the Munich Agreement, as well as of "neutrality" to the conquest of Abyssinia and annexation of Czechoslovakia and the Italo-German military intervention in Spain. Bringing up this topic once again proves that the beginning of the Second World War in Europe did not began on September 1, 1939 with the attack on Poland, but on a more global scale was even referred to even earlier with the Japanese armed aggression in China in July 1937. The attitude of the British Government to a possible restoration of the royalist regime in Albania varied according to the particular situation and the development of the various tendencies in resistance to the Axis powers. As Petrov concluded in his last monograph, "the British think of Zog and really include him in their plans only when they urgently need his services".

The research on the Soviet military mission in Thessaly in July 1944 expands the scope of the scientific pursuits of Petrov on the subject of the Balkans and the politics of the great powers during the Second World War. But instead of referring to the indirect information of the Danish historian Lars Baerentzen from 1986, it was good to use the monograph of Prof. A. Ulunyan from 1994, where, based on authentic Russian archival documents, the purpose of the mission was clearly revealed, headed by colonels G. M. Popov and Chernetsov and their conversations with the secretaries

of the Central Committee of the KKE G. Syantos and J. Ioannidis. The sending of this secret mission was in response to a request of the leadership of the KKE, delivered in June 1944 to Gen. Korneev from the Greek representative at the headquarters of Tito A. Dzimas.

The monograph "Bulgaria and the New Slavic Movement (1941-1948)" represents in edited form the dissertation work of the candidate for the scientific degree "Doctor of Historical Sciences", which received an appropriate positive assessment, including from members of the current scientific jury. This is the first comprehensive study of the specific socio-political phenomenon characterized as the "Slavic factor" and an element of the policy of one of the leading European powers in the 1940s. Three more publications submitted for review are devoted to issues that are also addressed in the monograph and therefore will not be evaluated separately.

The chronological framework of the "Slavic" trend in Soviet foreign policy and propaganda is clearly limited to the period from the attack of Nazi Germany against the USSR in June 1941 to the flare-up of the Stalin-Tito conflict after June 1948. As for the politics of Bulgaria, the "Slavic factor" continued to be exploited in the following four decades, but with a modified content. Biser Petrov analyzed the essential differences between the old Russian pan-Slavism of the 19th and early 20th centuries and the "new Slavic movement" initiated by the Kremlin in the years of the Second World War. The monograph convincingly revealed the process of institutionalization of the "Slavic idea" and its manifestation at the same time as a foreign policy paradigm and a mass social movement in the post-war conditions of Eastern Europe. The research is based on a large number of archival documents, periodicals and the existing memoir and scholarly literature. I would recommend for new publications on the subject to study also other Bulgarian archival funds, for example references and correspondence of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (fund 1477), information and propaganda materials in the fund of Radio Station "Hristo Botev" (fund 209B), the personal funds of Vladimir Poptomov (fund 214B) and

Georgi Dimitrov (fund 146B), which contains correspondence with Blagoeva, Gonevski, Gundorov, Mochalov, Chervenkov and other political and public figures in connection with the activities of the All-Slavic Committee in Moscow and the Slavic Committees in Eastern Europe, North and South America.

Three more publications submitted for review are related to the third main area in Biser Petrov's scientific work - about the specific nature and role of collaborationist regimes in the Balkans. And while the issue of the policy of the satellite government of Georgios Tsolakoglou in Greece was later developed by the author in his monographic study, the theme of "anti-urbanism" and the "agrarian state in the policy of Milan Nedić in Serbia is a new original contribution of this problematic in the context of the conservative European ideas from the first half of the XX century (Oswald Spengler and other Western thinkers). Petrov analyzed the development of such ideas in pre-war Yugoslavia after the establishment of the dictatorship of King Aleksandar Karađorđević and the role of the Serbian Orthodox Church in propagating similar patriarchal "rural anti-utopias".

Provocative, but also topical, is one of the last publications (2021) of the applicant with an attempt to clarify the legal-normative aspects of the apparently debatable question of the legitimacy of the illegal guerrilla war against the Axis occupation forces during the Second World War. The theme also has wider dimensions, since unlike Italy and Yugoslavia, for three post-war decades in Greece the right of the Leftist Guerrilla Army (ELAS) to be an integral part of the general anti-fascist resistance was rejected. The formal reference to the Hague Conventions of 1907 could be followed by the need arising at the end of the Second World War to condemn the policy of Nazi Germany and its allies of extrajudicial killing, mass repression and ethnic cleansing against unarmed civilian population. All this caused the development of international military and humanitarian law and clear definition of terms such as "war crimes", "crimes against peace", "crimes against humanity", "genocide" through the London Charter of the International Military Tribunal and the

"Nuremberg Rules" of 1945 -1946, the 1948 UN Genocide Declaration and the 1949 Geneva Conventions.

The attached reference includes a total of 28 noticed citations and reviews of author's works, of which 20 are abroad. This clearly shows that Associate Professor Biser Petrov is a well-known and established author not only in Bulgarian historiography, but also in the circles of the Balkan and European historical community. Probably, his cited publications are significantly more, since he did not indicate some of them (for example, "US intelligence and Bulgaria", Sofia, 2021, p. 43). The candidate has indicated participation in five institutional research projects of the Institute for Balkan Studies, in one of which he is the team leader.

Regardless of the fact that Biser Petrov's professional career has passed in a scientific research institute of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, I would recommend that in his future activity he also comply with the additional recommended requirements for the scientific position "professor", specified in art. 61, item 3 of the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, namely - teaching activity with the preparation of lecture courses in elective disciplines and special courses and supervision of doctoral students.

CONCLUSION

The publications of Associate Professor Biser Petrov are his personal deal and represent an indisputable contribution to the Bulgarian specialized literature on the problems of international relations in the Balkans in the middle of the XX century. They are the result of long-term scientific research using a large number of new archival documents and correct interpretation of the research of other Bulgarian and foreign authors.

Bearing in mind the scientific achievements of the candidate, I would like to confirm that what he has achieved meets the legal and normative requirements and quality criteria for occupying the academic position of "professor" in accordance with Law (ZRAS) and the Regulations for its implementation, as well as the Regulations for the conditions and procedures for acquiring scientific degrees and occupying scientific positions at the BAS. I support the candidacy of Associate Professor Dr. Sc. Biser Petrov Petrov and I call on the respected members of the scientific jury to vote positively for his election as "professor" in professional direction 2.2. "History and Archaeology".

Member of the Scientific Jury:

/Prof. Dr. Jordan Baev/

Sofia, 23.11.2022