REVIEW

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For the Ph.D. Dissertation of

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Entitled

Turkey's Middle East Policy (2002–2011)

Presented in candidacy for the Educational and Scientific
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Scientific Field 2. Humanities
Professional Field 2.2. History and Archaeology

The following review is prepared in accordance with Order No. 84 RD-16/07.07.2023 of the Director of the Institute of Balkan Studies with Center for Thracian Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Prof. Dr. Rumyana Preshlenova, for the appointment of the Scientific Committee for the defense of the Ph.D. dissertation of Mariyan Dimitrov Karagyozov, a doctoral student in Section "Contemporary Balkans," as well as in conformity with Protocol No. 1/15.08.2023 from the first meeting of the Scientific Committee.

The Ph.D. dissertation submitted by Mariyan Karagyozov is dedicated to a highly significant topic for scientific research on contemporary Turkey and its relations with the Arab countries in the Middle East. The doctoral thesis consists of an Introduction, five main chapters, a Conclusion, and a Bibliography encompassing sources and secondary literature in English, Bulgarian, Russian, and Turkish, with a total volume of 255 pages. The structure meets the requirements for the preparation of a scholarly work and includes a substantial list of bibliographical references.

The efforts of Mariyan Karagyozov to build his argument for the changes in the Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East are successful, as he constructs a clear, logical

framework for unfolding the main argument. In the Introduction, the author presents the main objectives and research tasks of his work, providing a rationale for its geographical and chronological scope. In the words of the author, his research "aims to present the aims that Turkish diplomacy sets for itself in the Middle East region during the period 2002–2011, as well as the processes, developments, and stages in the Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East" (p. 4). This objective is entirely legitimate, despite the manner in which it is formulated from a linguistic and stylistic standpoint.

The author defines his approach as "syncretic," as he "adopts arguments and methods from each of the examined approaches" (p. 25). If "syncretic" is understood here as a comprehensive approach that combines the advantages of different methods, it seems fully appropriate for such a topic and even suggests a degree of interdisciplinarity. The chronological scope of the dissertation, covering the period between 2002 and 2011, is also convincingly described from the perspective of the internal processes in Turkey, as well as in light of the transformations associated with the so-called Arab Spring, which marked the beginning of a new era.

Mariyan Karagyozov focuses on Turkish policy towards the Arab states of the Middle East, justifying the exclusion of North Africa from the geographical scope of his analysis. This exclusion is based on the idea that involving North Africa in the analysis would lead to a loss of focus due to the distinct historical pasts of the two Arab regions, including their relations with the Ottoman Empire and subsequently the Republic of Turkey. Within this clearly defined geographical scope, the contemporary Arab states are logically divided into groups for analytical purposes (Iraq and Syria, Lebanon and Jordan, and the Arabian Peninsula).

It can be debated whether the justification for "circles of countries" (direct neighbors, "neighbors of the neighbors") is not a purely "technical-geographical" approach. Nevertheless, in this case the author evidently feels confident to follow a conventional path, moving from the center to the periphery. The delineation of the Middle East as a region (pp. 5-6), with its various definitions related to both (Western) foreign policies and area studies as a scholarly field, is, however, not sufficiently convincing. In any case, excluding an important country like Egypt from the Middle East region solely because the majority of its territory is geographically located in the African continent is not entirely persuasive. The Middle East is not merely a geographical but rather a transcontinental geopolitical region, and from this perspective, Egypt is not part of North Africa in the same way as Libya or Algeria, as assumed in the dissertation (p. 8).

In Chapter One, the author of the dissertation delves into presenting the historical roots of contemporary Turkish policy towards the Arab world, focusing on events and processes leading up to the beginning of the 21st century. He carefully delineates the different periods to uncover how the ideology of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) has transformed the established Kemalist order. The author is convincing when highlighting the fluctuations in Turkish foreign policy in connection with domestic processes and the ongoing re-evaluation of the Kemalist heritage. In so doing, Mariyan Karagyozov offers an in-depth analysis of the views of Ahmet Davutoğlu, whose emphasis on the philosophy of history and civilizational depth has had a significant impact on the formation of modern Turkish politics. Thus, the author logically entangles the dynamics of the significance of the Arab world as a crucial element of Turkish power to Davutoğlu's "constants," rather than to his "variables." These constants are rooted in geography, history, and culture, as opposed to variable factors such as the economy, technology, or military capacity (p. 89).

Chapters Three, Four, and Five trace Turkish policy towards the "circles" of Arab states outlined by the author in accordance with the geographical principle chosen from the outset. Mariyan Karagyozov first focuses on Syria and Iraq, also presenting the Kurdish problem as foundational for Turkish state policy. He then covers Lebanon and Jordan, followed by the countries of the Arabian Peninsula – Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. In these three main chapters, a vast amount of material is collected, including data on the economic development of the respective countries, which is undoubtedly a strength of the dissertation. However, a weakness in this case is that the exposition resembles the style of a reference book too much, while there is often a lack of inter-connections between the analyses dedicated to the individual countries (e.g., the section on Bahrain on pp. 160-161).

Nevertheless, in several instances, the author of the dissertation highlights processes that lead to transcending the geographical criterion he initially set. A successful example of such analysis is the case of Qatar (pp. 163–165), where the support for the transnational Islamist movement around the Society of the Muslim Brothers (and not *Myusyulmansko bratstvo* – "Muslim Brotherhood" – as it is called in the dissertation) turns out to be an important factor for a convergence with Turkish interests, in contrast to countries like Egypt or Saudi Arabia that oppose the Muslim Brothers. The fifth chapter builds upon the overview of the bilateral relations between Ankara and the selected Arab states, adding an analysis of the multilateral formats through which the Republic of Turkey conducts its foreign policy in the Arab Middle East.

Mariyan Karagyozov's emphasis on the significance of the Ottoman Islamic heritage for his chosen topic is logical from the outset. However, terms like "pro-Islamic," "Islamism," or "pan-Islamism" mentioned in the analysis remain insufficiently clear in terms of their etymology and definitions, occasionally sounding somewhat enigmatic. What is, in fact, the specific way in which these terms are adopted for the sake of the analysis? For example, on p. 88, there is a mention of "Turkish Islamism," and Necmettin Erbakan is described as the "founding father of Turkish political Islamism." Does this imply that Islamism may not be inherently "political"? Adding more precision to the definitions of such concepts and connecting them both to domestic processes in Turkey and Ankara's policy towards the Middle East would allow the author to reveal, from the perspective of his topic, the actual role of the Islamic factor in various periods of Turkey's history. Clarifying the terminology and its specific connotations would provide a more in-depth understanding of the dynamics in the region and the role of the "Islamic factor" in Turkey's contemporary history. The same applies to terms like "Salafist Jihadism" (p. 155) or statements that "in Kuwait, both pan-Islamism and pan-Arabism are equally a matter of concern for the small and wealthy country" (p. 168).

The conclusion as a whole convincingly presents the factors related to the formation of Turkish foreign policy in the Arab Middle East, intertwined with domestic processes in the Republic of Turkey. An emphasis is put on the significance of trade and economic interests as a factor in Ankara's relations with the Arab states. The role of "soft power" is also foregrounded as a means through which Turkey exerts influence in the Middle East region through cultural centers and media outlets. The conclusion successfully unveils how Turkey seeks to balance its commitments as an ally of the United States and the West on the one hand, and its national interests in the Middle East region on the other. The observed processes are defined as a "turning point" (p. 230), linked to factors such as an increased militarization, a focus on Islamism, and the use of civilizational discourse. Based on the rich empirical material analyzed by the author, he could have made a somewhat clearer conclusion here about the extent to which the departure from the Kemalist heritage is irreversible and what its lasting consequences might be.

The Abstract, which should present the dissertation in a concise manner, generally meets the main requirements. It summarizes the content and structure of the doctoral thesis by synthesizing the most important highlights that, according to Mariyan Karagyozov, should be brought to the fore. However, there are some inaccuracies in the description of the dissertation, e.g., on p. 1 of the Abstract, it is stated that the dissertation consists of 243 (instead of the actual

255) pages, and it mentions a "List of Literature Used," which is actually present in the dissertation itself as "Sources and Bibliography." Here, a misunderstanding has occurred not only in the discrepancy between the description in the abstract and the dissertation itself, but also in the fact that a bibliography typically includes the sources alongside the secondary literature (regardless of how they are formally structured), covering the cited literature, not just the "used" literature, to which there might not have been a direct reference.

The List of Contributions presented on pp. 16–18 in the Abstract, as well as in the separately submitted document entitled "Statement of Main Contributions," are generally well-formulated and highlight important aspects of the doctoral research. However, the presentation of some of them is not entirely convincing. For example, Contribution 1 claims that the submitted dissertation "represents the first comprehensive study of Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East during the period examined." Suffice is here to point out as an example the following monograph of 369 pages: Soner Cagaptay, *Erdogan's Empire: Turkey and the Politics of the Middle East*, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2020. Unfortunately, the author of the dissertation did not include this monograph in their analysis, even though it is clearly dedicated to the relations between Erdogan's Turkey and the Middle East, constituting a significant part of the state of the art. The dissertation does refer to a few other publications by the same author, but these are more in the realm of policy studies dealing with pressing issues of the day rather than fundamental scholarly works (see p. 252 of the dissertation). Regarding other listed contributions (e.g., No 2), there is a "blurring of genres," as they belong to the presentation of the research tasks, which are expected to be formulated in the Introduction.

The main contribution of the dissertation, in my opinion, lies in the panoramic attempt to trace the changes in Turkish foreign policy towards the Arab countries of the Middle East (excluding Egypt). This requires analytical skills to synthesize a large amount of factual material. The primary task of uncovering the goals of Turkish diplomacy in the Arab Middle East (excluding Egypt) during the period 2002–2011 has been, in general, adequately accomplished. As demonstrated in some of the three publications (articles) submitted under the present defense procedure, the author displays the skills of a competent political analyst combined with the ability to re-interpret voluminous material on the ongoing events and to process them through their own perspective. Therefore, the dissertation has the potential to also attract some broader, interdisciplinary interest.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above considerations, as well as in view of the fact that the submitted doctoral work meets the main requirements for the preparation of a Ph.D. dissertation, the overall value of which is not diminished by the critical comments made above, I propose to the esteemed Scientific Committee to award Mariyan Karagyozov the educational and scientific degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Scientific Field 2. Humanities Professional Field 2.2. History and Archaeology.

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