

OPINION

by prof. Rositsa Stoyanova, Institute for Historical Studies – BAS
in connection with the competition for the academic position of *Professor*,
announced by the Institute of Balkan Studies with the Center of Thracology–BAS

Issue 55 of the State Gazette, dated 15.07.2022, announces an Academic Competition for the position of “Professor” in the higher education field 2. Humanities, professional strand 2.2. History and Archaeology (Bulgarian-Greek Relations during the 19th – 20th centuries) for the needs of section “Modern Balkans” at the Institute of Balkan Studies and Center of Thracology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BSCT-BAS). Assoc. Prof. DSc. Yura Toteva Konstantinova has been admitted to participate in the competition. The fellow scholar has a Master’s degree in History with second specialty Greek Philology from Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. In 2006 she acquired the scientific and educational degree of Doctor at the BSCT, and in 2020 she defended a dissertation for the acquisition of the scientific degree of Doctor of Sciences. She has been an Associate Professor at the “Modern Balkans” section of the BSCT-BAS since 2014.

Konstantinova is a renowned and authoritative scholar with a clear profile of research among the historian community within the country and abroad. Her interests and scientific quests target various directions, but mostly in the field of history of Greece and the Bulgarian-Greek relations. For the procedure, the candidate has chosen to present herself with two monographic works, eight articles and studies and two published chapters from collected monographs.

The central place among these works is taken by the research study “*Bulgaria and Greece in a Labyrinth of Monologues*”, *Sofia: BSCT, 2022, 350 p.* Only a scholar possessing the erudition, the experience and the manner of work of Konstantinova would dare to approach working on this topic with such volume and chronological scope – from the formal establishment of the diplomatic relations between the two states in 1880 until their severance during the Second World War (1941). The author provides a full, wholesome and summarized view on the development of the bilateral relations between the neighbouring Balkan states. This is made possible owing to the approaches, undertaken by the author. Konstantinova chooses to “not discuss in detail” the Macedonian and the Thracian issues, which are a central issue in the disputes between the two countries. By taking this point of view, the author examines the

problems mainly in the context of their influence on the bilateral relations, the public sentiments and stereotypes. I find this approach of hers successful, as only then the researcher can cover the problems and outline a summarized and balanced panorama of the Bulgarian-Greek relations and contacts. Secondly, the author presents in a summarized manner a number of issues, elaborated in detail in scholarly works, while using in a critical manner and referring to the sources and the studies preceding her work.

A sine qua non for the quality of a historical work is the availability of a substantial source base and historiographic awareness of the author. The source base of the study includes materials from numerous institutional, public organizations', personal and family archive collections, kept in Bulgarian and Greek archival repositories, published documents, circulations of print editions, works of memoir, travelogue, journalism and fiction, etc. Some of them are already known and used in the field of science, others have been discovered by the author and introduced for scientific use for the first time. In both cases however, the author approaches the sources critically, combining the information they provide while maintaining the distance to the subject of study, mandatory for any historian. The scientific literature used by Konstantinova is extremely rich and once again, used critically and with respect to the work and the achievements of her fellow scholars.

Structurally, the monograph contains the mandatory introduction and conclusion, as well as 4 chapters, organized thematically: development of Bulgarian-Greek political relations; consular networks of both countries and their economic relationships, the fate and the problems of the Greek communities in Bulgaria and the Bulgarian ones in Greece, the propaganda and the public sentiments, the organizations for Bulgarian-Greek mutual knowledge and friendship.

The contribution inputs of the reviewed work are numerous – both in view of factual nature and questions raised, and in view of approaches, findings and conclusions. I will try to highlight the ones I find most significant, apart from those already mentioned above. Undoubtedly, the leading position is taken by the overall nature of the research, which allows to gain general overview of the development of the bilateral relations in the various spheres, to outline their major characteristic features, the periods and sub-periods in their progress, the reasons for the lack of real and beneficial dialogue, the impact of this lack on the public sentiments in the two neighbouring states and on the fate of the relevant national minorities thereby. It is positive to see that throughout the text, the author succeeds in being detached and

preserving distance from both Bulgarian and Greek arguments, which are usually diametrically opposed. The distance is evident also in regard with the opinions, given by Bulgarian and Greek researchers, as well as in regard with the data, available in the sources and the judgements of the contemporaries. As in a number of prior publications of hers, the author competently uses the comparative approach in the exposition and the analysis parts, which allows her to make a convincing case with her findings and conclusions. In view of the more specific contribution, I would highlight the study of the creation and the development of the consular network of both countries, the exposition on the bilateral economic relations, the pages, uncovering the view of the diplomats towards the neighbouring people and political elite. The extensive source and historiographic basis, the research approaches ultimately allow Konstantinova to draw and defend her general conclusion on the nature of the Bulgarian-Greek relations. And specifically: “inability to achieve agreement” due to the “maximalistic national programmes”, defended by the political elites from both sides of the border, but also adopted by both peoples. The lack of dialogue and compromise, described by the author in the title as “monologues”, practically leads to “lack of real relations”. And the consequences for both peoples were the thousands of lives lost in military conflicts, broken human destinies, the drama of the minority groups, the accumulated hatred and prejudices.

Konstantinova is presenting herself in the competition with one more research work – regarding the Bulgarian community in Ottoman Thessaloniki. The book is a revised and supplemented version of her dissertation for acquisition of the scientific degree of Doctor of Sciences and characterizes one of the consistent directions of work undertaken by the author in the recent years.

The topic on the fate of the minorities and the minority related policies of the two states (especially that of Greece) also engages the candidate’s attention. Apart from her monographic studies, it was also studied in two chapters from collective monographs with her participation. In them, the author objectively justified the thesis about the “vague consciousness” of the Orthodox Bulgarian-speaking population came within the borders of the Greek state as a result from the wars between 1912 and 1919; traced the roots and the development lines of Greece’s Balkan policy, the reasons behind undertaking such resolutions, etc.

The application documents presented for the competition provide me with the reason to conclude that the candidate not only covers, but exceeds the requirements, set out in the Law for

the Development of Academic Staff of the Republic of Bulgaria. The scientific production of the author possesses an original character, and the contributions are correctly reflected in the author reference, attached to the documents.

On the grounds of the elaborated positive assessment of the research and scientific qualities of the presented works of Assoc. Prof. DSc Yura Konstantinova, I find that she fulfils all the requirements and conditions for the acquisition of the Academic Degree of "Professor". Thus I hereby dare to propose to the esteemed members of the Scientific Jury, as well as to the Scientific Council of the Institute of Balkan Studies with Center of Thracology at the BAS, to support the academic growth of Assoc. Prof. DSc. Yura Konstantinova, as will do I with most conviction.

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