OPINION

by Nikolay Tsv. Tsekov, Assoc. Prof., PhD

regarding the work of Assoc. Prof. Ventsislav E. Muchinov, PhD,
"Urbanization in the Bulgarian lands under Ottoman rule in the 19th century (until 1878)":
Thesis for obtaining the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences"

Tracking and studying the historical aspect of urbanization as a key to the development of both Bulgaria and human civilization, a multifaceted demographic, socio-economic and political process, is a serious challenge for scientists working in the field of historical demography (and in all humanities). The numerous difficulties in the discovery and analysis of reliable sources and statistical information about the emergence and development of urban settlements and the spread of the urban way of life on the modern territory of Bulgaria during the 19th century, which is extremely significant for its history and current times, are among the reasons for the lack of generalizing research on the subject. This deficiency has been overcome to a certain extent by Ventsislav E. Muchinov, Assoc.Prof., PhD, in his extensive research on urbanization and its universal influence on demographic and economic structures in Bulgaria under Ottoman rule in 1800-1878.

The structure of the exposition applied in the study - introduction, introduction, two parts - with four and three chapters, respectively, conclusion, bibliography and list of abbreviations with a total volume of 285 pages, helps to fulfill the main goal set in the title of the study, namely revealing the essence, driving factors, regional features and the main stages and trends in the development of urbanization in the Bulgarian lands until their liberation in 1878. The author has identified and sufficiently completed the following main tasks:

1. The development of urbanization in the Bulgarian lands under Ottoman rule at the end of the 18th and in the first decades of the 19th century has been traced, against the background of the overall demographic development of these lands during the Revival, with a focus on the political upheavals in the Ottoman Empire and the resulting migration outflows and inflows;

2. The impact of the reforms from the Tanzimat era on the development and growth of existing and the emergence of new urban centers in territorial-administrative units of different

ranks in the European part of the Ottoman Empire in the XIX century, populated mainly by ethnic Bulgarians, is clarified;

3. An in-depth study and analysis of a number of aspects underlying the heterogeneous and often divergent local and imperial policies in the field of urbanization conducted by the Ottoman authorities - demographic, economic, social, military-political, administrative, health, etc.;

4. Comparisons and parallels are sought between the rates and directions of progress in the growth and diversification of the functions of urban settlements and the rise of handicrafts, trade and partly industry and railway construction as the basis of urban development in the Bulgarian lands in the empire and in the most developed western countries - intensive manifestation of the industrial revolution in the 19th century. In this sense, the author's approach can be assessed as multidisciplinary, which is an undoubted contribution to the development of Bulgarian historical demography.

The historiographical, demographic and statistical study on the development of cities and the urban way of life in the 19th century presented by Assoc. Prof. Muchinov, PhD, is a pilot in terms of the historical-demographic studies of the settlements and the settlement network on the territory covered by the modern borders of Bulgaria through the lens of some of the most complex demographic and socio-economic phenomena, such as the industrial revolution and urbanization. An additional challenge in this case is undoubtedly the interpretation of the consequences of the impact of these phenomena observed in Western Europe and the USA in the conditions of the rapidly declining Ottoman power on the Bulgarian lands – a challenge that Muchinov successfully copes with. The findings, comparisons, summaries and conclusions made in the proposed dissertation about the course of urbanization processes during the relatively long 78-year period of the demographic history of the country prove the correctness of the methodological apparatus chosen and applied by the author.

As a suggestion for improving the distribution of the textual material, a recommendation can be formulated for deriving more conclusions in terms of number and content in the conclusion. In my opinion, the undoubted contributions to the development of the autor - the abundant source material used, the well-thought-out and applied methodology, the streamlined style and the logical justification of the exposition in the analytical core of the proposed study, together with the well-illustrated with diagrams and tables two main parts imply the synthesis of

more as number and as substantive guidelines conclusions. They would complement the author's generalizations regarding the place, similarities and features of the revealed model towards a gradual expansion of the network of urbanized and urbanizing centers in the settlement network of Revival Bulgaria against the background of the industrial revolution taking place during this era in the significantly more developed than the Ottoman Empire western countries.

Regardless of the note made, I consider the research proposed by the author to be original and pilot in its nature and place in Bulgarian historical demography, which fills a large and important niche in its development. It is completely finished and deserves a high rating because of the quality implementation and the indisputable methodological and scientific research contributions supported by an abundant source base. That is why I am convinced to vote "YES" in the procedure for awarding Assoc. Prof. Ventsislav Evtimov Muchinov, PhD, the scientific degree “Doctor of Sciences”.

Sofia,

27.10.2023 Nikolay Tsv. Tsekov, Assoc. Prof., PhD