UNIVERSITY OF LIBRARY STUDIES AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES

REVIEW

by

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of the monograph of Assoc. Prof. Spas Angelov Tashev on the topic:

'The Bulgarian Communities in Albania and Kosovo. The Socio-Political Processes and Demographic Consequences (1913 – 2023)', submitted for the award of the scientific degree 'Doctor of Sciences' in the professional field 2.2 History and Archaeology, field of higher education 2. Humanities.

1. CANDIDATES FOR THE COMPETITION

The only candidate for the competition is Assoc. Prof. Spas Tashev, who is an associate professor at the Institute for Population and Human Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and an associate professor at the South-West University 'Neofit Rilski', Blagoevgrad. He meets the conditions under section 4, Art. 22, 24, 26, 27 of the conditions set out in the Regulations for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree 'Doctor of Sciences' at the Institute for Population and Human Studies – BAS and the conditions set out in the Rules for the work of the Scientific Life at the Institute for Population and Human Studies – BAS and Art. 12 and Art. 13 of the Law On The Development Of The Academic Staff In The Republic Of Bulgaria.

I. **Evaluation of the monograph** submitted for the acquisition of the scientific degree 'Doctor of Sciences'.

There isn't a more sensitive component of the Bulgarian diaspora in our national memory matrix than the formation, dramatic development and tragic fate of the historical Bulgarian communities in the Balkans. One part of it (primarily Macedonia and the Western Bulgarian Outlands) has always attracted the attention of Bulgarian and foreign researchers, who have created a vast and

diverse literature about it. They reflect the multi-layered interactions between individual countries, which determine the complex and contradictory fate of these communities during different periods. But somehow aside has always remained the question of the Bulgarians in Albania and Kosovo, which over the years, depending on the changes in the internal and foreign political situation in the Balkans, has fluctuated between recognition to partial or complete denial of the Bulgarian identity and from empathy to complete loss of interest on the part of Bulgaria.

An attempt to comprehensively study the development, that is over a century, of the Bulgarian diaspora in Albania and Kosovo from its formation to the present day is offered by Assoc. Prof. Spas Tashev in his new monograph 'The Bulgarian Communities in Albania and Kosovo. The Socio-Political Processes and Demographic Consequences (1913 – 2023)'.

The presented monograph has a clearly defined topic, giving rise to an extremely topical and challenging problematic situation, which I hope will be multiplied in many new research fields. The exposition – a total of 263 pages, is organised in a three-part structure of an introduction, three chapters, conclusion, bibliography – thematically systematised in view of the nature of the sources, which makes it extremely functional with a total of over 250 bibliographical units; list of abbreviations, appendices. The beginning of the study covers the time period before the territorial changes in the Balkans in 1913, when the Bulgarian lands were within the Ottoman Empire. The end of the research period is the population census in Albania in 2023 and the preparation for conducting one in Kosovo in April 2024. The purpose of the study is to chronologically track and analyse the influence of socio-political processes on the demographic development in the territorial aspect of the Bulgarian communities in Albania and Kosovo. It can be categorically said that there is no similar independent study of demographic processes among the Bulgarian population in the two regions and that the set goal has been achieved.

The presented monograph demonstrates the rich historiographical awareness of its author, who paid due tribute to the achievements of Bulgarian, British, French, Albanian and Turkish scholars, as well as personal testimonies of representatives of the community itself. Particularly valuable, embedded in its basis, is the wealth of documents from various archival repositories and centres. Along with well-known documents of the Central State Archives of Bulgaria, Assoc. Prof. Tashev has used numerous and diverse documents – analyses, travelogues, ethnographic descriptions, school registers, periodicals, memories of eyewitnesses participating in the studied events, official population censuses, unofficial statistical data, diplomatic documents, administrative reports, field studies, the author's personal archive, interviews. These largely unknown authentic documentary evidences shed new light on various aspects of the life of the Bulgarian community in Kosovo and Albania, correct some hitherto dominant assessments in the scientific literature and reveal unexplored entire periods of the policy of the Bulgarian state towards it.

The choice to study the two communities is not random. The author explains very clearly why he chose this approach. The Bulgarian communities in Albania and Kosovo form the unified Albanian socio-cultural space. There is an identity in the manifestation of national self-consciousness between Bulgarian Christians and Bulgarian Muslims, especially in Albania. The issue is not only scientific, but is related to the defense of the Bulgarian national identity, with Bulgarian national interests and security. A comprehensive historical and demographic study has been carried out. Its object is to reveal and analyse the specifics of the various political, economic and socio-cultural factors, their relationship and influence on the demographic indicators under consideration. The chosen structure is subjected to the available information and documents. But in certain places there is repetition, the historical narrative is fragmented or repeated.

Among the main merits, of the methodological approach of Assoc. Prof. Tashev to the study of this complex issue, is its development in the broadest possible

context of the dynamically developing international situation, the development of Bulgarian-Balkan relations, the policy of the Great Powers towards minority communities, Bulgaria's efforts to preserve the Bulgarian ethno-religious presence in these areas and the fruitless period in this issue for Bulgaria (1944 – 1989). Quantitative methods were also used – numerical expression of the research processes, comparative analysis to outline the main trends in development and establishing existing patterns. This defines the work as a study with a historical-demographic interdisciplinary nature.

The introduction offers an extremely detailed conceptual framework with a precisely defined object, subject, objectives of the study, working hypotheses, time scope and research tasks. The research methods have been precisely selected in view of the interdisciplinary nature of the study. A functional systematisation of the sources on which it is built is proposed.

Chapter I. The Bulgarian communities in Albania and Kosovo during the period of recognition of their identity (1913 – 1925) has a fundamental character in view of the dynamics of the conceptual system with which such a composite study should operate. It examines the socio-political processes among the Bulgarians until 1925, when the borders of the state of Albania and the Kosovo region in Serbia were finally formed. The two periods during which these regions were ruled by Bulgaria are outlined – the 9th-10th centuries and the 12th-13th centuries. The author rightly defines these periods as a time for the affirmation of the Bulgarian national consciousness. The author's approach to the events – the Ilinden-Preobrazhenie Uprising, the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, the Albanian Uprising of 1912, the Balkan and Inter-Allied Wars of 1912 – 1913, the Ohrid-Debar Uprising of 1913, the Serbian occupation of parts of Albania in 1913 and the First World War and their influence on the demographic development of the Bulgarian community is interesting. In practice, they territorially shaped the Bulgarian community in Albania and Kosovo.

Chapter II. From partial recognition to complete denial of the identity of the Bulgarian communities in Albania and Kosovo during the period 1925 – 1990.
This is a period in which the Bulgarian community in Albania was partially recognised, and from the end of 1944 to 1990 its identity was completely denied. The II Balkan Conference of 1932 is particularly important, when the Bulgarian minority in Albania was recognised, but due to the resistance of Yugoslavia this decision was not implemented. Only bitterness and disappointment can cause the author's statement that in the period between 1944 – 1990 the Bulgarian community in Albania were 'persons of Bulgarian origin', to which the Bulgarian state showed absolute disinterest and who were subjected to Yugoslav Macedonism. Practice shows that missed Bulgarian opportunities are difficult to overcome. Here I would recommend that documents stored in the Commission for disclosure of documents and announcing affiliation of bulgarian citizens with the state security and the intelligence services of the bulgarian national army to be collected. It would be interesting to understand how the structures of the State Security of Bulgaria worked / or not / among the Bulgarian communities, what solutions they proposed, why this period was defined by the author as fruitless for the foreign policy of Bulgaria.

Chapter III. The state of the Bulgarian community in Albania and Kosovo after 1990 is a kind of continuation of the conceptual framework outlined in Chapters I and II, as this period is completely unstudied by Bulgarian researchers. Many interesting statistical and demographic data on the Bulgarian communities have been introduced into scientific circulation. A period of deep and irreversible socio-political changes in Central and Eastern Europe and the establishment of a multi-party system. The first two Bulgarian organisations in Albania were registered and Bulgarian-Albanian citizens were accepted as students. Caring for Bulgarians abroad became an integral element of Bulgarian foreign policy. In 2017, the Bulgarian community in Albania received the status of a national minority. This part of the study also indicates the efforts of our compatriots in

Kosovo to recognise a separate minority group. In my opinion, the great weight of the study is placed precisely here, building a multi-layered and multi-directional, information-rich narrative. The enormous work with voluminous and multifaceted archival documentation is impressive, allowing for objective analysis and convincing conclusions that future research could not bypass and ignore. The proposed algorithm for studying the demographic situation of the Bulgarian communities in Albania and Kosovo and their territorial distribution is an innovative approach to this complex issue. In this part of the study, territorial differentiation of socio-economic and natural processes is applied, while at the same time a complex interdisciplinary study of the structure and dynamics of the development of the regions in which Bulgarian communities live is applied. The presentation also includes a task with a practical contribution – clarifying the possibilities for certifying the Bulgarian origin of Bulgarians in Albania and Kosovo according to the requirements of current Bulgarian legislation.

The **conclusions** drawn at the end of the work are an expected synthesis of the conclusions and reasoning made during the presentation. The most significant advantage of the study is its objectivity, the huge documentary resource on which the analyses and judgments are based, as well as the generation of a number of new problematic situations, which will undoubtedly give rise to new original solutions. The internal migration of Bulgarians in Albania has been studied and its consequences for the Bulgarian identity have been clarified. Proposals have been made for effective policies to solve the emerging problems and preserve the ethno-cultural wealth of the Bulgarian population.

Studies and articles in periodicals and reports from scientific forums

The articles and studies attached to the competition documentation are distinguished by a wide thematic range. The accents are on the Bulgarian diaspora, the role of education and institutions for preserving identity. The scientific positions of Spas Tashev outline the objective basis on which state policies in the studied regions should be constructed.

Of undoubted contribution are the publications related to contemporary Bulgarian-Albanian and Bulgarian-Kosovo relations. This topic has not lost its political sensitivity to this day, especially with regard to the European and Bulgarian perspectives of the Bulgarian communities in both countries. In both articles and in the monograph, he makes proposals that support the adoption of adequate policies for supporting and preserving the Bulgarian communities. Therefore, there is not an episodic interest here, but long-term accumulations that build Spas Tashev as an expert with indisputable scientific capacity, whose experience can be shared not only in the scientific sphere.

Of exceptional importance is the general conclusion about the need for reforms in the direction of breaking the encapsulation of ethnic communities with the aim of the real integration of ethnocultural minorities.

6. CONCLUSION

The attached reference for the minimum national requirements from Law On The Development Of The Academic Staff In The Republic Of Bulgaria for acquiring the scientific degree 'Doctor of Sciences‘ in professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology meets the necessary requirements. The abstract to the dissertation work truthfully and accurately reflects the dissertation work. The attached evidentiary material is correct and comprehensive, and meets the national legal requirements.

Everything said above gives me reason to express a completely positive attitude towards the candidacy of Assoc. Prof. Spas Angelov Tashev for awarding the scientific degree 'Doctor of Sciences'; in professional field 2.2. 'History and Archaeology', to which I also invite the members of the scientific jury.

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