To
The Scientific jury
Institute for Population
and Human Studies – at the
Bulgarian Academy of sciences

REVIEW

by Prof. Veselin Hristov Tsankov, Ph.D.
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of the dissertation,
presented by Assoc. Dr. Spas Angelov Tashev,

on the topic: BULGARIAN COMMUNITIES IN ALBANIA AND KOSOVO

SOCIO-POLITICAL PROCESSES AND DEMOGRAPHIC CONSEQUENCES
(1913 – 2023)

For awarding the scientific degree "Doctor of Science"

Dear members of the scientific jury,

By order of the Director of the National Academy of Sciences and Arts, c. Sofia, I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury.

I submit a review prepared on the basis of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff (ZRAS) and the Regulations for the Implementation of the ZRAS and the specific requirements "RULES FOR THE WORK OF SCIENTIFIC JURIES IN INCH - BAN ON PROCEDURES FOR THE DEFENSE OF DISSERTATIONS for the acquisition of an educational and scientific degree "doctor" and the scientific degree "doctor of science".

Relevance and significance of the studied matter
General picture

The changing place and role of the nation-state and its communities abroad in the modern world.

I will point out only some facts and objective circumstances - the election of Donald Trump as American president and his views on the US nation-state and Americans around the world.

Rise of nationalism and right-wing parties in Austria, Germany, France, the Netherlands and others; Unilateral closing of the borders by Germany, Italy, Poland and other countries of the so-called "Schengen area / zone" and the related economic consequences for people.

Economic recession and related migration processes in search of work and fair pay. In this regard, the interests of both the persons from the traditional Bulgarian communities abroad, and the Republic of Bulgaria, as a democratic state, which seeks its place and role among other countries and conditions for the prosperity of its citizens and the communities abroad.

Specific current situation in Albania and Kosovo

According to the author Assoc. Tashev The Bulgarians in Albania and Kosovo are one of the oldest overseas communities, the beginning of which is associated with the creation of the Bulgarian state in the Balkans. Specifically for Albania, the efforts of the Bulgarian governments to officially recognize them as a minority began in 1913, when the country was freed from Ottoman rule.

With some interruptions, Bulgaria's diplomatic actions to support Albanian Bulgarians have continued for more than 100 years and in 2017. Albania officially recognizes the Bulgarians on their territory as a national minority. Towards the Bulgarians in Kosovo, Bulgarian state policy has been significantly more inconsistent. Except for the First World War period and sporadic attempts in the 1930s, after 1999. the slow rediscovery of the Bulgarian community in Kosovo began. According to Assoc. Spas Tashev: "..the Bulgarians in Albania and Kosovo are among the oldest Bulgarian communities in the region of the Western Balkans. They fall into the category of "historical Bulgarian communities" according to the characteristics laid down in Decision No. 30.41 of 23.07.2014, by which the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria adopted the National Strategy for Bulgarian citizens and historical Bulgarian communities around the world". Actions in this direction are followed with marked interest not only by the Bulgarian public, but also by European institutions related to the problem. The specific regional interests of Albania, Bulgaria, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Serbia directly reflect on their different treatment of persons of Bulgarian origin.

According to the data provided by the author: "At the beginning of the 90s of the 20th century, the number of persons of Bulgarian origin in Albania was between 40,000 and 50,000 people. However, they started migrating to the interior of the country in 2011 as well. only 20% of them remain living in their historical dwellings. According to the 2023 census data. it is clear that 7,057 people identified themselves as Bulgarians in Albania, of which 3,691 were men and 3,366 were women. At the same time, the number of persons who declared themselves as Macedonians was 2,281. The territorial distribution of these persons is reflected in the respective tables. Statistical data on the population of settlements in Kosovo, populated compactly with a population of Bulgarian origin, show that as of 2003. the number of their inhabitants is 26,500 people. Since, however, in the country from the war of independence until 2024. no census has been taken, they are subject to clarification".

General characteristics of the dissertation - volume and structure

The candidate has submitted a dissertation and an abstract. The dissertation consists of an introduction, three main chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography of used sources and literature, a list of abbreviations and appendices, with a total volume of 265 pages.

From the review of the available historiographical material, the author formulates the following tasks of the present work: Tracking the dynamics in the number and territorial distribution of the Bulgarian community in Albania and Kosovo from the period before 1913, when it was officially recognized, to the present day.

The structure of the present work logically follows the tasks thus set. For their achievement, in addition to the publications mentioned in the historiographic review, some of which have so far not been the subject of research or comments by Bulgarian scientists.

When developing the topic, a critical review was made of the implemented policies, legislation and existing practices oriented towards the Bulgarians in Albania, and to the extent that there are any, also towards the Bulgarians in Kosovo.

When presenting current events or positions of officials dealing with various aspects of the problems of the population of Bulgarian origin in Albania and Kosovo, the bulletins of state information agencies were used, as well as the official websites of the institutions that organized or participated in these events.

Literary awareness and theoretical preparation of the candidate;

From the historiographic review, it is clear that most modern studies on the topic of Bulgarians in Albania and Kosovo are interdisciplinary, and only a small part are strictly specialized in linguistics, ethnology, demography, law. All the publications indicated in the historiographic review, containing analyses, documents, travelogues, ethnographic descriptions, school registers, etc., were used. Valuable information has been extracted from periodicals in Bulgaria, Albania, Yugoslavia and of the Bulgarian and Albanian emigration to the USA.

Memories of eyewitnesses and participants in the events under consideration, as well as official publications from population censuses conducted in Albania and Kosovo, were used. Special attention is paid to the publications of the population censuses of Albania and Kosovo carried out by France and Austria-Hungary (1918) and Italy (1942) in their capacity as supreme wartime sovereigns.

Methodological approaches;

The analysis of the described processes by its nature represents a historical-demographic interdisciplinary study. The author Assoc. Spas Tashev uses principles and methods characteristic of historical demography, modern demographic statistics, ethnology, geography, linguistics and other sciences relevant to the researched issues.

In the analysis of the described processes, principles and methods typical of ethnology, geography, linguistics and other sciences related to the studied issues were used. This gives the study a historical-demographic interdisciplinary character.

I will focus in particular on several significant contributions to the research with an immediate scientific and practical-applied nature.

The scientific contributions in the presented monograph are expressed in the further development and enrichment of the existing knowledge of social significance through the study of current historical-legal and demographic issues of the Bulgarian communities in Albania and Kosovo. The monograph is the first comprehensive scientific study of the historical-legal and demographic aspects in the development of the Bulgarian communities in Albania and Kosovo in our recent history. The monographic work presents an extensive review and analysis of the evolution in the development of the Bulgarians in Albania and Kosovo.

A special contribution of a conceptual nature is the thesis of a freer perception of religious orientation. As an example, the author points out that the majority of persons of Bulgarian origin profess Islam, but there are families in which the children have different religious orientations and affiliations - Catholicism, Islam, Christianity, etc.

Next, according to the author, among persons of Bulgarian origin in Albania and Kosovo, the prevailing attitudes are for temporary labor migrations and meeting the needs of the labor market in Bulgaria, and not for permanent settlement in the country.

As a result of the research, the author Assoc. Spas Tashev offers a method for establishing a blood relationship with persons (i.e. "ascendants" or ancestors) who until 1944 lived in settlements whose population was recognized as Bulgarian according to Bulgarian or foreign legislation. According to Bulgarian legislation, the descendants of these Bulgarians recognized in the past are persons of Bulgarian origin.

Another very important contribution is the author's ideas on how to create better conditions for economic cooperation in mutual interest - both for persons of Bulgarian origin and for the respective countries. Borrowed the idea of Mark Zuckerberg - in the USA that only the most capable and progressive individuals come, and for this purpose a change in the migration policy, time and money are needed. The author justifiably claims that among the Bulgarian communities in Albania and Kosovo there are such persons - alert, enterprising, resourceful, who, under appropriate conditions, could develop their potential.

General conclusions:

The presented contributions in the scientific production and the obtained results are the personal merit of the candidate for participation in the competition.
Upon deeper and more careful reading, it is found that there is a fact of upgrading and further development in the sources used and in the views of the researcher.

The paper would have benefited if the author's findings and conclusions were more clearly expressed at the end of each chapter and in the Conclusion.

There are certainly interesting views, ideas and approaches to their implementation.

Conclusion:

I definitely give a positive assessment of the research and teaching activities of Assoc. Spas Tashev. Presented by Assoc. Dr. Spas Angelov Tashev's dissertation work is a fully completed author's research, which brings a number of contributions to the delineation of the demographic picture of Bulgarians in Albania and Kosovo.

That is why I am convinced to vote "YES" in the procedure for awarding Assoc. Dr. Spas Angelov Tashev for the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences".

Sofia, 25.11.2024

Prepared the review:
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