REVIEW

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of the habilitation thesis by Chief Assistant Prof. Boris Plamenov Boev, PhD,

"Migration Policy in Bulgarian Legislation between the Two World Wars (1919–1939)"

1. Introduction

The habilitation thesis by Chief Assistant Prof. Boris Plamenov Boev, PhD, *"Migration Policy in Bulgarian Legislation between the Two World Wars (1919–1939)"*, represents a comprehensive and in-depth study of a significant and insufficiently researched problem in Bulgarian history. The author is an established scholar in the field of historical demography, working at the Section of Historical Demography of the Institute for Population and Human Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. His research interests focus on demographic processes, migration, and their impact on Bulgarian society, and the present study constitutes a natural continuation of his scholarly trajectory to date.

The monograph is substantial in scope (over 180 pages of main text, excluding appendices and bibliography) and is clearly structured into three major chapters, preceded by an introduction and concluding with a synthesizing conclusion. Each chapter consistently examines a different aspect of migration policy: immigration and the refugee issue, emigration policy, and internal migration and urbanization processes. The study is grounded in an analysis of normative acts and the legislative activity of the Bulgarian state, which the author examines within a broad historical and social context.

2. Relevance of the Topic

The choice of topic is more than timely. Issues of migration and migration policy rank among the key themes in contemporary social sciences – not only because of current migration crises and demographic challenges, but also due to the need for a historical understanding of these processes. Bulgaria, as a country situated at the crossroads between East and West, has a long history of intensive migratory movements that have significantly shaped its demographic, social, and economic dynamics.

The interwar period (1919–1939) is particularly important in this respect. Following the Treaty of Neuilly and the ensuing territorial changes, the country was confronted with a massive influx of refugees from neighboring states, which necessitated the development of a comprehensive policy for their settlement and integration. At the same time, economic hardships and social transformations generated emigration flows, both labor-related and political in nature. Against this backdrop, the state faced the need to formulate, adopt, and implement legislative measures capable of addressing these complex migration challenges.

Despite the significance of the issue, historical scholarship has rarely treated migration policy as a systematic and multi-layered state strategy. Most studies have focused on individual aspects, such as the refugee question, labor migration (seasonal or overseas), or urbanization. The present study by Dr. Boev succeeds in integrating these strands into a coherent synthesis, which makes it a valuable contribution both to the field of historical demography and to the broader domain of historical and social research.

3. **Characteristics of the Study**

The habilitation thesis by Dr. Boris Boev is built upon a clear and logical structure that fully corresponds to the stated aims and research objectives. Following the introduction, in which the author substantiates the relevance of the topic and outlines his research tasks, the study proceeds with three main chapters, each possessing its own internal logic and thematic coherence.

The first chapter is devoted to immigration policy, with a focus on the legal regulation of the refugee question. It traces the formation and development of the concept of settling Bulgarian refugees through the main normative acts: the Law on the Settlement of Refugees and Securing Their Livelihoods (1920), the Law on the Refugee Loan (1926), and the Law on the Agricultural Settlement of Refugees (1926). The author's approach is detailed and nuanced – each law is examined within the socio-economic conditions under which it emerged and in light of its impact on specific refugee groups.

The second chapter focuses on emigration policy. Dr. Boev analyzes the normative framework, beginning with the Law on Emigration of 1908, its amendments of 1927, and the regulations concerning foreign passports and travel tickets. In this section, the author also examines more specific legislative measures, such as the encouragement of seasonal labor migration in horticulture (market gardening), facilitation measures for Bulgarian students studying abroad, and political emigration. This chapter convincingly demonstrates that the Bulgarian state faced not only the challenge of immigration, but also the problem of population outflow, whose social and economic dimensions affected the overall demographic structure.

The third chapter examines internal migration processes and urbanization policy. The focus is placed on legislative measures aimed at alleviating housing shortages (1920–1924), the encouragement of construction activity, and the Law on the Homeless of 1928. The author combines legal analysis with the socio-economic dimensions of urbanization processes, emphasizing the role of the state in regulating internal migration and shaping the urban environment.

The monograph concludes with a Conclusion summarizing the main findings and scholarly contributions of the study. This is followed by an extensive source base and bibliography, as well as a list of abbreviations.

From a methodological perspective, the study is grounded in a historical-demographic and historical-legal approach, combined with an interdisciplinary perspective. The author successfully integrates the analysis of legal texts with social and economic history, thereby

achieving a more comprehensive understanding of migration processes and their institutional regulation.

The source base is impressive and diverse. Of particular note is the extensive use of normative documents – laws, decrees, and regulations – which are subjected to in-depth analysis. These are complemented by archival materials, documents from international organizations, and a substantial body of published literature, both Bulgarian and foreign. The bibliography is extensive and demonstrates a solid familiarity with prior scholarship, encompassing both classic works and more recent publications, which ensures the relevance and robustness of the conclusions drawn.

4. **Analysis of the Content**

Chapter One. Immigration Policy in Bulgarian Legislation: Legal Regulation of the Refugee Question (1919–1939)

The first chapter constitutes an in-depth study of the refugee question in Bulgaria after the First World War and its impact on state policy. The author systematically traces the development of the normative framework through which the state sought to regulate the status of tens of thousands of Bulgarian refugees arriving from territories that remained outside the borders of the country.

The first section analyzes the Law on the Settlement of Refugees and Securing Their Livelihoods (1920), through which the state for the first time formulated a comprehensive concept for the reception and integration of refugees. The author emphasizes the significance of this law as both a legal and a social instrument for the settlement of refugees and for the creation of conditions enabling their economic and social integration.

The second section is devoted to the Law on the Refugee Loan (1926), which further develops the concept of permanent settlement by providing specific financial mechanisms to support this process. Dr. Boev convincingly demonstrates that the loan was not merely a financial measure, but also an instrument of state policy aimed at stabilizing the refugee population and stimulating the national economy.

The third section examines the Law on the Agricultural Settlement of Refugees (1926), which definitively shaped the concept of the durable and sustainable integration of refugees into the country's agricultural structure. Here, the author shows how legislation reflected attempts to address demographic, social, and economic problems simultaneously – both through the allocation of land and housing and through the strengthening of employment in rural areas.

Chapter One is particularly valuable in that it situates the refugee question within a broad socio-economic and demographic context. The author demonstrates excellent command of the normative framework, combining legal analysis with statistical data and demographic assessments. In this way, the complex interrelationship between state policy and the real problems faced by refugees is revealed.

Special attention should also be given to the contribution of this chapter to expanding knowledge of the role of the state in regulating immigration processes. Whereas previous studies have often been limited to a descriptive presentation of refugee legislation, Dr. Boev

analyzes these laws as an integrated policy concept that was developed and refined throughout the interwar period.

The second chapter of the monograph is devoted to the emigration policy of the Bulgarian state and traces the normative acts through which it sought to regulate the outflow of population abroad. The author presents emigration as a multi-layered social process whose impact is not only economic, but also political and cultural.

In the first section, Dr. Boev analyzes the Law on Emigration of 1908 and its amendments of 1927, demonstrating how, in the post-war context, the law acquired new significance. He objectively emphasizes that the state began to recognize the dual nature of emigration – on the one hand, as a means of alleviating social tensions, and on the other, as a risk of demographic losses.

The second section focuses on legislation concerning foreign passports and travel tickets, which became the main instruments for controlling population movement. The author demonstrates in-depth knowledge of the subject matter by examining not only the legal provisions themselves, but also their practical implementation.

The third section analyzes legislative measures aimed at encouraging *gurbetchi* market gardening – a specific and important phenomenon in Bulgarian economic and social history. Dr. Boev convincingly shows how the state used labor emigration as a form of "economic safety valve," while at the same time seeking to maintain migrants' ties with their homeland.

The fourth section traces incentive measures for Bulgarian students studying abroad. The author presents legislative actions in this field as part of a strategy for the formation of new national elites who would bring knowledge and experience from abroad without severing their connections with Bulgaria.

Particularly noteworthy is the fifth section, devoted to political emigration. It examines state actions toward political opponents who sought refuge abroad, as well as measures aimed at limiting their influence. Dr. Boev successfully combines legal analysis with the broader political history of interwar Bulgaria, highlighting the interrelationship between domestic political stability and the foreign policy dimensions of emigration.

Overall, Chapter Two is especially valuable in that it presents emigration policy not merely as a state reaction to social processes, but as an active instrument for managing national demographic and cultural resources. The author demonstrates that emigration was not viewed in unambiguous terms – it was simultaneously a challenge and an opportunity, and the legislation reflects the state's effort to balance between these two poles.

The third chapter of Dr. Boris Boev's study, entitled *"Internal Migration and Urbanization Policy in the Context of Bulgarian Legislation (1919–1939): Concepts, Measures, and Instruments for Their Implementation,"* examines a specific yet extremely important aspect of migration processes in Bulgaria during the interwar period – internal migration and urbanization policy. Unlike the previous two chapters, which focus on population movements across state borders, this chapter places the emphasis on the internal redistribution of the population and its impact on the country's social and economic structure.

In the first section, the author traces the formation of a state concept for internal migration policy. The state was confronted with the need to regulate settlement and population

movement processes under conditions of refugee inflows, social transformation, and economic instability. Dr. Boev convincingly demonstrates how legislation reflected the aspiration to create a more sustainable internal distribution of human resources.

The second section is devoted to urbanization policy and the laws aimed at alleviating housing shortages (1920–1924). Here, the author analyzes how the state sought to respond to the growing housing deficit in cities caused by rapid urbanization and the influx of refugees. Legislative measures are examined as a social mechanism for mitigating tensions and creating conditions for more balanced urban development.

The third section examines the laws promoting construction activity (1920–1924), through which the state actively sought to stimulate building activity. The author traces the effects of these laws on the economy and urban infrastructure, emphasizing the interrelationship between legislation and the dynamics of urbanization processes.

The fourth section is devoted to the Law on the Homeless (1928), which represents a kind of culmination of state efforts to address the housing problem. Dr. Boev shows how this law is directly linked to internal migration and urbanization policy, aiming simultaneously at social protection and the regulation of demographic processes.

Chapter Three demonstrates the strength of an interdisciplinary approach that combines legal history, social policy, and demographic analysis. The author succeeds in constructing a comprehensive picture of how the state attempted to manage the internal redistribution of the population through legislative mechanisms. In doing so, the chapter offers a new perspective on the understanding of Bulgarian modernization and statehood during the interwar period.

A significant contribution of this chapter lies in its emphasis on internal migration and urbanization as an integral part of the state's overall migration policy. While these processes are often treated separately in the literature, Dr. Boev presents them as organically connected to immigration and emigration, thereby outlining the systemic character of state migration policy.

5. **Scholarly and Applied Contributions**

The habilitation thesis by Dr. Boris Boev contains a number of original and significant contributions that distinguish it within the fields of historical demography and historical-legal studies. These contributions may be summarized in several main directions:

- **Contribution to the Study of Migration Policy in Bulgaria**
  For the first time in Bulgarian historiography, the state's migration policy in the period 1919–1939 is examined as an integrated system encompassing immigration, emigration, and internal migration. The author also proposes his own definition of the concept of "migration policy," which brings together the legislative, administrative, and social mechanisms employed by the state to regulate population movement.

The author demonstrates that legislative measures were not isolated acts, but rather elements of a coherent strategy reflecting the state's efforts to respond to complex demographic and social challenges.

Dr. Boev formulates a clear periodization of the development of migration policy during the interwar period: 1919–1923 (institutionalization), 1923–1929 (refinement through specialized

legislation and financial mechanisms), and 1930–1939 (adaptation to international and economic conditions). This periodization represents an original contribution and enhances understanding of the process as a dynamic system.

- **Historical-Legal Contribution**
  The study offers a detailed analysis of the normative framework – laws, decrees, and regulations related to migration policy. This analysis is accompanied by an assessment of their practical implementation and socio-economic effects, thereby going beyond classical legal interpretation by incorporating concrete historical and demographic dimensions.

Dr. Boev demonstrates how these legal acts functioned in practice and what their actual social and economic consequences were, further enriching legal analysis with empirical historical and demographic evidence.

- **Demographic and Socio-Economic Dimensions**
  The author successfully links legislation with real demographic processes – refugee waves, emigration flows, and internal population mobility. In doing so, he integrates legal, social, and demographic perspectives through an interdisciplinary approach. In this respect, the study makes not only a theoretical but also a methodological contribution.

The research shows that migration policy is inextricably connected with urbanization, labor market development, housing issues, and social stability.

- **New Interpretations**
  The study offers a new interpretation of the refugee question, presenting it not only as a humanitarian issue, but also as an economic and demographic problem whose resolution constituted a state priority.

In the field of emigration, it highlights the role of labor migration (*gurbetchi* practices) and student mobility as forms of "reverse investment" in human capital.

Urbanization policy is analyzed in the context of state-led modernization efforts, rather than merely as a reaction to the housing crisis.

- **Source Base and Methodology**
  A significant contribution is the extensive source base, which includes original archival materials, normative acts, stenographic records, statistical data, and international documents of the League of Nations, lending authenticity and scholarly weight to the research.

The interdisciplinary methodology, combining historical, demographic, and legal perspectives, allows for a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the problem.

- **Scholarly and Applied Dimensions**
  The conclusions of the study have direct relevance for contemporary demographic and migration policy, offering opportunities to draw lessons from historical experience and to identify parallels with present-day challenges.

The monograph may serve as a teaching aid for students and doctoral candidates in the fields of history, demography, political science, and law.

The results also have broader societal relevance, as they place migration within a wider historical context, thereby contributing to a more informed understanding of current processes.

6. **Critical Remarks**

Despite the considerable merits and contributions of the study, several remarks may be made that are constructive in nature and should be understood as recommendations for future research:

- **Comparative Context**
  The comparative European context could be further strengthened. In future studies, it would be useful to situate Bulgaria's migration policy alongside that of countries such as Greece, Yugoslavia, or Romania, which also faced mass migration and refugee challenges. Such a comparative framework would further enhance the conclusions regarding the specific features of the Bulgarian case.
- **Quantitative and Statistical Dimensions**
  Despite the effective use of archival sources, the statistical analysis could be expanded through the inclusion of more quantitative data, where available, to illustrate regional trends in migrant settlement patterns.
- **Regional Aspects**
  The study addresses national policy as a whole; however, regional variations in the manifestation of migration processes remain somewhat in the background. A stronger focus on specific regions—such as Southern Dobrudzha, Macedonia, or Thrace – could further enrich the analysis.
- **Conceptual Framework**
  At certain points, a degree of inconsistency can be observed in the use of conceptual terminology. Terms such as "migration," "resettlement," "emigration," and "refugee movements" occasionally overlap without their meanings being fully differentiated. Greater terminological precision would enhance analytical clarity.
- **Style and Presentation**
  The style of exposition is academically sound and consistent, but in some places it is overly detailed, which may hinder readability. In future work, the author might aim for a greater degree of synthesis in the presentation of empirical material.

In addition, a more rigorous standardization of bibliographic references would facilitate the work of future researchers.

It should be emphasized that these remarks are intended as recommendations and do not detract from the scholarly value of the study. On the contrary, they outline possible directions for further research and for building upon the results already achieved.

7. **Conclusion**

The habilitation thesis by Chief Assistant Prof. Boris Plamenov Boev, PhD, *"Migration Policy in Bulgarian Legislation between the Two World Wars (1919–1939)"* represents a thorough, well-argued, and highly contributory study devoted to a key yet insufficiently explored aspect of Bulgarian history. The author succeeds in constructing a comprehensive and systematic analysis of the state's migration policy, examining it in its three main dimensions - immigration, emigration, and internal migration/urbanization.

The study is distinguished by a rich source base, the accurate use of scholarly apparatus, and the consistent application of an interdisciplinary approach. It achieves significant results in historical-legal, demographic, and socio-economic terms. The author offers new interpretations and original contributions that build upon existing historiography and open up promising avenues for future research.

The remarks that may be addressed to the study are of secondary importance and have the character of recommendations for the further development of the topic. They in no way diminish the scholarly and applied value of the work.

Overall, Dr. Boev's study constitutes a high-level scholarly achievement that contributes both to the advancement of historical demography and to a broader understanding of Bulgarian statehood and modernization processes during the interwar period. By virtue of its relevance, depth, and original contributions, the work fully meets the requirements for a habilitation thesis for the acquisition of an academic position.

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