

POSITION PAPER

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**in reference with a dissertation thesis for awarding a scientific and educational degree
"Doctor of Sciences" in Professional Field 3.3**

with candidate ASSOC. PROF. STEPHAN IVANOV DECHEV, NBU

I present this opinion as a member of the Scientific Jury under the competition, based on order 3-PK-350/26.09.2024 of the Rector of the New Bulgarian University, as well as the decision of the Scientific Jury under the procedure (Protocol 1 of 02.10.2024).

1. Significance of the researched problem in scientific and scientific-applied terms

The presented work has a total volume of 621 pages. It represents a historiographical study of one of the chronically relevant problems of the social and humanitarian sciences in Bulgaria - the political significance of Stefan Stambolov's rule in the post-liberation period and the use of this memory in changing political realities. The scientific significance of the researched problem can be sought in many dimensions. It is challenging as a subject of historical research - decomposing the factual and logical sequence of events. For political analysis, there is a clearly expressed scientific-applied contribution in the interpretation of the political meanings of historical events; also, through the anthropological reading of the narrative as well as through making sense of the constructions of memory in the context of a different socio-political environment. Interest in the personality and life of Stefan Stambolov has been a focus of political rivalry not only in the context of his time, but also in any other subsequent period. Systematic analysis of these events contributes to highlighting key factors in conditions of political instability and their importance for the construction of collective memory.

The dissertation work is clearly interdisciplinary in nature. First of all, it is an attempt to comprehensively research publications, documentary and many other historiographical units that are carriers of content regarding the analysis and evaluation of the politics of Stefan Stambolov after his death to the present day. It singles out, systematizes and consolidates as a resource the heterogeneous reflections on the significance of Stambolov's politics for Bulgarian

political life, subject to subsequent study and analysis. Secondly, Stefan Dechev's research approach to this large-scale array of documentary units follows the methodological framework of the anthropological aspect of political analysis through the key of the notion of constructed memory. The importance of this has a clear practical and applied result for the analysis of political processes in Bulgaria and the formation of value, cognitive and affective attitudes in the conceptual framework of the theory of political culture.

2. Justification of the objectives and tasks in the dissertation work

The title of the presented work "Memory for Stambolov - politics, states and uses (1895-2020)" highlights its main purpose, namely the constructions of memory based on the interpretation of a given historical narrative. The author has argued the grounds and scientific significance of the problem of memory and, in particular, of national memory. Although not explicitly stated, it can be assumed that this is precisely the main thesis of this large-scale dissertation research, namely that the construction of national memory is "a kind of collective memory that binds the nation as a whole and whose counter-memories are possibly absent or are significantly marginalized". The author introduces the concept of memory routinization. According to him, "in the course of time, collective memory acquires more and more the characteristics of national memory, because due to the capabilities of the nation-state, history creates a strong tradition of memory, and the national narrative builds its general framework." The goals and tasks presented in the introductory part of the text are clearly reasoned and explained. Their validity and significance for the overall analysis in the dissertation is highlighted.

3. Correspondence between the chosen methodology and research methodology and the set goal and tasks of the dissertation work

The dissertation work is interdisciplinary in its subject and this determines the mixed nature of the methodological approach. The author Stefan Dechev has successfully applied the combination of documentary analysis of historiographical research with the tools of political analysis. In the words of the author, "the emphasis in this study is on memory, which, like historiography, is firmly influenced by the power of the political." I believe that the overall exposition is subordinated to the sought and achieved correspondence between the historiographical analysis and its formation as a basis for political interpretation and conclusions.

4. Scientific and scientific-applied contributions of the dissertation work, including the presence of an original contribution in science.

The contributing nature of the results of this dissertation are formally stated in the abstract by its author. Eight contributions are listed, according to his self-assessment. On the basis of the overall analysis of the text and the self-assessment thus presented, it can be summarized that they are defensible and clearly traceable throughout the text, although they have a different weight depending on the criterion by which they are distinguished as contributions. I believe that for the needs of the dissertation procedure it is worth highlighting three summarized most essential general contributions, which can be specified in various details. First of all, it is the systematization of the memory artifacts for Stefan Stambolov and bringing them out as an independent resource for subsequent analysis. Second, it is the conceptual reading of the research object through the memory research components. The periodization of memory for Stambolov is the result of this methodological approach. This succeeds in highlighting the political dominance of periods of memory, thereby contributing to current discussions on the collective memory.

5. Evaluation of publications on the dissertation work

The publications presented in the author reference are a total of 34 after obtaining the scientific degree "doctor". They are in scholarly content-relevant editions and for the most part reflect the author's consistent interest in the subject field of memory construction across a variety of subject areas.

6. Citation by other authors, reviews in scientific publications

According to the presented reference, publications of Stefan Dechev have been cited in non-refereed journals with scientific review in 15 publications (75 points.); 8 of his publications are cited in monographs and collective volumes that are scientifically reviewed (80 points.); 7 of his publications are cited in scientific publications, referenced and indexed in world-famous databases of scientific information or in monographs and collective volumes (105 points). This reference is indicative of Stefan Dechev's active participation in scientific discussions on topics of interest to his research and the result of this participation in the global scientific field

7. Opinions, recommendations and notes.

Based on the presented analysis of the dissertation work, the following critical remarks and recommendations can be synthesized:

The studied period (125 years) and comprehensiveness of the documentary traces of the memory of Stefan Stambolov (practically everything that was created in connection with his political activity and personality) form a very large and multi-layered object of analysis. Although it is conceptualized on the basis of the subject of research - the subjective construction of memory based on the multiplicity of memory subjects and topics of interest, the observed object is too large-scale, large and heterogeneous. This presupposes the too high volume of the study – over 600 pages. I believe that the dissertation text would have benefited if some of the documentary evidence had been presented as thematically separated appendices. In this way, they would be shaped as an independent result and a research resource for subsequent searches of the wider scientific community, knowing to varying degrees the literature and documents on the political legacy of Stefan Stambolov and the various reactions to it.

My questions are two:

- 1) What is the role of memory leaders in shaping and influencing the content of the collective profile of national memory?
- 2) In the context of the opinion that whoever controls the memory of the past shapes the future, what is the role of the modern technological world and the possibilities of the electronic environment for a targeted impact on the images and content of the memory of past periods?

8. Conclusion

On the basis of all the facts cited above and in accordance with the requirements of the law and regulations, I give a positive assessment of the dissertation presented by Stefan Dechev. The dissertation is distinguished by a high scientific level, it has a clear contribution to the interdisciplinary field of historiography and political analysis. Highlighting the qualities of the evaluated work and its importance for scientific knowledge on the subject of its research, I propose to the members of the respected scientific jury to award Assoc. Prof. Dr. Stefan Dechev, the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences" in the professional field 3.3 Political Sciences.

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