

REVIEW
OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS OF LYUBKA NIKOLAEVA NAYDENOVA

THE LIBERAL PARTY (RADOSLAVISTS) (1908 – 1912)

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ACADEMIC DEGREE**

**IN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA: 2. HUMANITIES, PROFESSIONAL FIELD: 2.2.
HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY,**

DOCTORAL PROGRAMME: HISTORY OF BULGARIA (NEW BULGARIAN HISTORY)

Lyubka Naydenova completed her secondary education at Hristo Botev Secondary Comprehensive School in the town of Dragoman, and her higher education at the St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo, majoring in History. She has had a rewarding career as an educator and administrator – teacher, deputy headmaster, and headmaster of a school. By Order No. PД-10-110 of 14.01.2019 of the Rector of Konstantin Preslavsky University of Shumen, she was enrolled as an extra-mural doctoral candidate in the Doctoral Programme: History of Bulgaria (New Bulgarian History), with Academic Advisor Professor Boris Georgiev, Doctor of Historical Sciences, and topic of the doctoral thesis: *The Liberal Party (Radoslavists) (1908 – 1920)*. The selection of the topic is logical, bearing in mind the doctoral candidate's research interests, but primarily due to the fact that her academic advisor is the most prominent expert and scholar of the activities of Doctor Vasil Radoslavov and the Radoslavists, as well as a leading academic in the field of the Party's history. In the course of the collection of the empirical material, the doctoral candidate and her academic advisor decided that the chronological scope of the doctoral thesis was too large, and by Order PД-10-685 of 29.10.2020 of the Rector the topic was amended, in the sense of limiting the scope from 1908 to 1912, i.e. to the beginning of the wars for national unification. This step is legitimate, timely, and correct, which is proven by the volume and content of the thesis submitted for defence.

On 14 April 2021, by Order PД-10-221 of the Rector, Mrs. Lyubka Naydenova was admitted to defending the thesis, having met the educational, methodological, teaching and academic research requirements included in her individual curriculum. The academic paper was submitted for consideration to the colleagues from the History and Archaeology Department, and was rated highly, which was attested by the comments at the Department meeting (held on 15 May 2021), as well as by the opinions in writing submitted by prominent experts on the subject. As a logical consequence, the doctoral thesis was scheduled for public defence, and the administrative procedure has been followed strictly, in compliance with the regulations.

The doctoral thesis is structured into Introduction, three chapters with a total of eight paragraphs, Conclusion, Bibliographical References, and Appendices – a total of 444 pages, a volume considerably exceeding the traditional requirements for this kind of research. The Introduction substantiates the selection of the topic, clearly and specifically formulates the objectives of the doctoral thesis. The primary aim of the study is the examination of the organizational development of the Liberal Party, which requires thorough knowledge of the party life in the country – and of the Radoslavists, in particular – in the preceding decades. As early as the first lines of the study, we can see the intent to revise the stereotypes with regard

to the Liberals, created by the earlier generation of Bulgarian historians, which is not surprising, as the academic advisor of Lyubka Naydenova is one of the first, and most consistent academics who have been working on “changing the tone” when talking about the place and the role of the Liberals and of Doctor V. Radoslavov in Bulgarian political life.

Within the framework of this primary aim, the doctoral candidate sets herself specific objectives, which should also be the focuses of the exposition. The Introduction shows the intent to present, to the reader and to the academic community, a study which, through the traditional and general academic methods, will achieve considerable academic contributions, in the selection, presentation, generalization, and analysis of historical facts, as well as conceptually, and, most importantly, in proving the significant place of the Liberal Party (Radoslavists) in the Bulgarian political life on the eve of the wars for national unification. There follows an extensive analytical review of the sources and historiography used. L. Naydenova has worked in all central archive repositories in Bulgaria, containing information on the Liberal Party or on some of its prominent party functionaries – the Central State Archive, the Academic Archive at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, the Bulgarian Historical Archive at the St. Cyril and St. Methodius National Library, as well as in some regional archives. In writing the doctoral thesis, extensive use has also been made of the National Assembly diaries, memories and diaries of participants in political life, periodicals – particularly the party newspapers and magazines, journalistic literature, etc. The volume of historical research used in writing the doctoral thesis is impressive. Even the thorough consideration of their list cannot find significant omissions. At the end of the Introduction, the structure of the study is substantiated – it combines the chronological with the thematic approach in structuring the chapters and paragraphs of the exposition.

Chaper One: *Organizational development of the Liberal Party (1908 – 1912)* should be considered the basis of the doctoral thesis, insofar as the priority aim of the study mentioned above is precisely this. As volume, this Chapter can also be regarded as central. The author adopts a very interesting approach to examine the evolution in the organizational development of the Liberal Party comparatively – she compares the state of the Party at different stages of its development. Extensive use is made of the materials connected with the preparation and proceedings of the Fifth and the Sixth Congress of the Party, the publications in the People’s Party newspaper, etc. The party development is considered in the context of internal politics, primarily in the situation of preparation for participation in the elections for the XIV Ordinary National Assembly and in connection with the amendments to the election law in 1909. The increased weight of the Liberals in internal politics is proved, tracing in detail and reliably demonstrating the growth of the number of Liberal units and party members. In the second paragraph, the focus is on the Sixth Congress of the Party and the amendments to the Programme and the Statutes, aimed at its organizational consolidation. The third paragraph studies the Party’s life in 1911 and 1912. L. Naydenova has sought out a lot of new data and thus considerably enriches the information on the Radoslavists’ internal party life. Another contribution is the focus on the proceedings of the Party Conference of July 1912, on the establishment of the Mutual Credit Fund – the first one in Bulgaria, which had a political character, according to the author’s claim. In this Chapter, a large amount of statistical information is used; the exposition is substantiated by many facts about the activities of the leadership and of the local structures. This weighs down on the historical narrative which, however, could be “justified” by the fact that for the first time in Bulgarian historiography the development of the Liberal Party during this historical period has been examined in such detail.

Chapter Two: *The Liberal Radoslavists and the Domestic Policies of the Bulgarian Governments up to the Wars 1908 – 1912* traces a dynamic period in Bulgarian and Balkan history: the events around the declaration of the Independence of Bulgaria in September 1908, the crises brought about by this act, the preparation and formation of the Balkan Pact. Although these events concern foreign policy, they exerted a strong influence on the domestic policies of the governments of the day - of Alexander Malinov and Ivan Evstatiev Geshov, and also on the opposition parties, one of which was the Liberal Party. The author makes very interesting evaluations of the Radoslavists' response to the actions of the governments and of the role of Tsar Ferdinand in the Bulgarian political life. The first paragraph contains an examination of the activities of the Liberals in opposition to the government of the Democratic Party, their attitude being defined as moderately critical.

A separate paragraph is devoted to the amendments to the Tarnovo Constitution of 1911 and the Radoslavists' attitude to them, an apt substantiation is given of the ambiguous political line followed by the Liberal deputies during the sessions of the Grand National Assembly, as well as of their vacillations with regard to the monarch, from whom they expected to shortly receive the power.

The following, third paragraph, examines the opposition activities of the Liberal Party in the period from March 1911 to September 1912. L. Naydenova does not hold back on the conjunctural nature of some of the Liberal's stands, the populism of their leaders, and certain wrong ideological positions and political actions. She uses a number of documentary testimonies to substantiate her findings, thus demonstrating a clear academic approach in describing and interpreting historical facts and events.

In **Chapter Three:** *The Liberal Party (Radoslavists) and the Foreign Policy of Bulgaria in 1908 – 1912*, a detailed cut is made of the attitude of one of the largest Bulgarian parties to the significant events in Bulgarian foreign policy in a period defining the direction for the development of Bulgaria for decades ahead. It has been mentioned above that in that time frame the foundations were laid of the legally independent foreign policy in the context of events which exerted a decisive influence on the destiny of the Peninsula, and – more broadly – on European politics and on the path of the Old Continent to a global world conflict. Logically, the first paragraph examines the Liberals' attitude towards the Independence of Bulgaria and the subsequent events around its recognition. Within the context of the internal political struggles and their striving for power, the leaders of the Liberal Party maintained the stance that the monarch played the leading role in those events.

The second paragraph: *The Liberal Party, the Bulgarian National Question, and the Politics in the Balkans 1908 – 1912* presents not so much the events in the European vilayets of the Ottoman Empire and the exacerbation of the "Macedonian question", but rather the attitude of the Radoslavists in opposition to the government's policy in that respect, defined as passive. Precisely the structure of the exposition in this paragraph evinces Naydenova's maturity as an academic – the events of foreign policy character are presented as a background against which the narrative of the Liberals' attitude to the national question and the actions of the governments of A. Malinov and Iv. Evst. Geshov unfolds. The opposition did not have access to information on the foreign policy initiatives and negotiations around the formation of the Balkan Union and that distorted the Liberal Party's positions – this has been successfully taken into consideration in the pages of the doctoral thesis, and Mrs. Naydenova does not draw back from giving less than flattering evaluations of the Party leadership's actions, which attests to her detachment from the subject of her research – another indication of academic maturity. For instance, she considers the renewed claims for

the Bulgaria of the San Stefano Treaty and the Liberals' intransigence as to the principle of the indivisibility of Macedonia to be serious political errors. Despite the contentiousness of such a position, we should not overlook the fact that the author attempts to defend her point of view and successfully does so.

In the **Conclusion**, the doctoral candidate does not repeat the inferences presented in the separate chapters and paragraphs, but elaborates on them focusing on the academic contributions. This is one more proof that the stage of automatic transposition of information and analyses has been overcome, and L. Naydenova has mastered the intricacies of historical interpretation, and we have to congratulate both her and her academic advisor on that.

The ten Appendices are interesting, well thought-out as structure and content; none of them is redundant. A diagram is given of the political growth of the Liberal Party, a chart reflects the completed hierarchical structure of the Liberals at the end of the period studied, some interesting documents and illustrative materials are included, enriching the text of the doctoral thesis.

The Abstract of the doctoral thesis reflects - in summary form - the main content of the paper. L. Naydenova has also enclosed the documents accompanying the procedure, a list of four publications, one of them to be published. The text of this publication is integrated in the doctoral thesis but there is also additional information, which, for one or another reason, is not included in the paper which is a positive indication that the doctoral thesis is the fruit of thorough research which has taken several years.

I fully agree with the contributions cited in the Statement of Contributions accompanying the procedure. In it, they are shown not as a numbered list but as a logically structured text, citing first the conceptual contributions, and then - the specific contributions. It is precisely thus that contributions can be best presented - starting from a conceptual contribution, covering the primary aim of the doctoral thesis to study *the organizational state of the Liberal Party (Radoslavists) and its significance for the political activities of the Party*, through the refraction of the Liberals' actions through the prism of internal political struggles and aspirations to be given the power by the monarch, to the specific factological contributions, which are many, in view of the fact that the subject under consideration has so far been in the periphery of the research interest of Bulgarian historians.

The few points I want to make are formal in character: some stylistic inaccuracies and technical errors, which are an inevitable part of this type of studies, as well as the occasional burdening of the text with too much specific factological information, which could be given as footnotes or as additional appendices. It is evident that these points of mine do not prejudice my positive opinion of the doctoral thesis, which is written in a style which seems to me to be classic rather than readable and attractive, but still quite appropriate for a doctoral thesis.

The merits of the doctoral thesis cited, the clearly formulated contributions which correspond to the real contributions of the paper, the abundance of documentary material and historical research used when writing the text, the clear and logical structure - all this gives me grounds to find that Lyubka Naidenova's thesis is a serious historical study, exceeding what is required from a doctoral thesis for the award of a doctoral academic degree.

All this gives me grounds to vote *positively* for the doctoral academic degree to be awarded to Lyubka Nikolaeva Naydenova in Higher education area: 2. Humanities,

Professional field: 2.2. History and Archaeology, Doctoral Programme: History of Bulgaria (New Bulgarian History).

13 June 2021.

the town of Shumen

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'S. Minkov', written in a cursive style.

(Associate Professor Doctor S. Minkov)