

REVIEW

by Professor Dimitar Sazdov, Doctor of Historical Sciences

of the doctoral thesis of Lyubka Nikolaeva Naidenova

The Liberal Party (Radoslavists) (1908-1912.)

Doctoral Programme: *History of Bulgaria – New Bulgarian History*

Professional field: 2.2. *History and Archaeology*

Higher education area: 2. *Humanities*

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From the very introductory part, Lyubka Naidenova displays thorough knowledge of the sources and historiography she steps on to elaborate her thesis. This is promising, as regards finding questions still not sufficiently clarified about the role of the Liberal Party in the political life of Bulgaria. Here lie the motivation and the reasons for the selection of the topic and the aims of the research.

In the introductory part, in a few sentences, Naidenova outlines the history of the Liberal Party from its foundation to 1918. Here she could examine more extensively the history of the Liberal Party up to the beginning of the period studied by the doctoral candidate (1908). As regards the text shedding light on the history of the Liberal Party after the years under consideration, the narrative in the Introduction is inappropriate. It could have been covered, in outline, in the Conclusion.

What is deserving of praise is the historiographical review of publications specifically examining the history of the Liberal Party, or referring to it in other academic publications and memoirs from the end of the XIX-th and the beginning of the XX-th century. Their evaluation made here will be of use to the future researchers of Bulgaria and the Balkans during the period under examination.

From the structural aspect, the introductory part could be reworked, in the event of the possible publication of the thesis. It is inappropriate to break the historiographical part, inserting the sources, and then to continue. It would be better to devote a separate segment to the sources before or after the historiographical part.

The preliminary evaluations of the period under examination of the Liberal Party made in the Introduction are inappropriate. They should be moved to the Conclusion. I also cannot accept the author's assertion that interest in the Liberal Party has grown after 1989. Serious, in-depth studies were made before 1989 as well, primarily by the doctoral candidate's academic advisor – Professor B. Georgiev, Professor M. Palangursky, and others.

In Chapter One (p.13-185), entitled *Organizational Development of the Liberal Party (1908-1912)*, L. Naidenova extensively traces the organizational development of the Party in the initial stage of the period of examination adopted. The condition of the local party structures and the problems accumulated during a part of the period in opposition (1908-1912) are examined. The actions of the central and local party leaderships to solve the existing problems are accurately traced. Interest is aroused by the examination of the methods for the

consolidation of Doctor V. Radoslavov's authority among his supporters and followers, which are correctly identified and highlighted by the author.

This essential part of the thesis starts with the attitude of the Liberal Party to the changes taking place in the government of the country. What is pointed out is that they were ignored as possible coalition partners in government, possibly with the Democratic Party. After that, Naidenova's main research efforts are directed towards studying the condition of the regional structures of the Liberal Party. Greater attention is paid to the activities of the powerful provincial units of the Liberals – in the regions of Vidin and Pleven, in the counties of Ferdinand, Troyan, Tran, Haskovo, Plovdiv, and many other counties. The author traces the organizational activities of the local units extensively and in details. In this respect, there are a number of new academic contributions to the history of the Liberal Party. For instance, for the first time the doctoral candidate makes an attempt to determine the number of the unit members in the various areas of different sizes in the country. The rules of the statutes regulating the permanent activities of the local units are also reviewed. When the annual meetings were held, representatives of the press were allowed. As the author correctly points out, this imparted “certain transparency and democracy to the organization” and constituted an attempt “on the part of the central leadership to raise the prestige of the Party”.

Naidenova does not fail to also trace the permanent contacts of the party leaders with the membership and with the civil society. She points out that “talks” were given on problems affecting ordinary Bulgarians.

In many places in the text of this Chapter, the social composition of the local party structures is analyzed. Arguments are adduced to prove the presence of lawyers, journalists, merchants, inn-keepers, medical workers, etc. Or, as the doctoral candidate points out, the social composition of the local units was diverse, but “mid-level folks” predominated. (p.21).

Naidenova pays special attention to financial accountability. The routes of the party's financial income are disclosed, as well as how the costs were allocated by the party administrators responsible.

The consideration of the specific inner-party problems is quite impressive. The permanent contacts of the central leadership with all local party units are examined in detail. The names of a number of the local leaders of the units' bureaus are also cited.

The negative “breakaway” activities of some local structures does not elude the doctoral candidate's attention, either. On the basis of archival material, the strong-arm actions of the central leadership to ensure the “unity of the party ranks” is revealed. In March 1909 several small local units in the Lovetch region were expelled “to make an example” (p. 24).

Defining the Liberal Party by 1909 as an already “nationally represented party”, the doctoral candidate aptly compares it with the distinctive features of the Progressive Liberal Party, the Radical Party, The Bulgarian Workers' Social Democratic Party (Narrow and Broad Socialists), and even with the People's Liberal Party, which had just fallen from power. In our opinion, it is not correct to cite in this context the Young Liberals Party, which held views similar to the latter's (p.24-25).

In the following pages from 26 to 44, Naidenova traces, in details, the overall activities of the local and the central party structures. The upward development of the Party is correctly highlighted. A considerable part of the text is devoted to the preparation of the Party for the forthcoming struggle in the election process. The successful fight for the colour green for the Liberals' party ballot was seen as a “green light” for the future successes of the Party.

The internal political struggles in the country continued to be the central axis in the activities of the Liberal Party in opposition. An important place in them was allotted to the pre-election ventures of the Party. In parallel to that activity, permanent work was done to

consolidate the construction of the party on a national scale. This is what also defined its place among what was called “the big political parties in the country” cited above. It is worth noting the thorough, in-depth examination of this activity as Naidenova’s exceptionally significant contribution to revealing the party and political panorama which formed in Bulgaria in the beginning of the XX-th century.

At the end of this first paragraph of Chapter One, Naidenova carefully traces and analyzes the activities of the local party structures in the course of the preparation of the Sixth Congress of the Liberal Party, which was to be held in 1910 (p. 40-44).

A special paragraph (second) in this Chapter is devoted to the role and significance of the Party, prepared and held in March-October 1910. The problems discussed at the Congress justify the separate examination.

In the beginning of the text, the doctoral candidate correctly seeks and reveals the pre-conditions which led to the convocation of the important congress forum. The accurate analysis conducted by Naidenova justifiably determines the reasons for the convocation of the Congress. What is correctly pointed out as most important is the Liberals’ negative government in 1899-1900. Naidenova thoroughly examines and analyzes its consequences. In this context, the activities of the central and the local leaderships of the Liberal Party are extensively traced. In particular, the problems identified for solution by the Sixth Party Congress are especially thoroughly examined and analyzed (p. 51-110). Here, the doctoral candidate particularly skillfully considers and analyzes the Party Statutes, reworked by each successive Congress (p. 103-107). The conclusions drawn and the evaluations at the end of the second paragraph constitute a considerable academic contribution to the history of the Liberal Party (p. 107-110). It is not appropriate, however, to undertake evaluations of the history of the Liberal Party in 1920 (p.109).

In the last, third paragraph of Chapter One, the organizational party life in 1911-1912 is examined. This paragraph is a continuation of the first paragraph, which the doctoral candidate correctly considers separately, as they are divided by the resolutions of the Sixth Congress of the Liberal Party. Here Naidenova aptly points out the new tasks for the central and the local leaderships set by the Congress. The author correctly regards the implementation of these resolutions as obligations related to the organizational consolidation and the development of party life. Naidenova also rightly claims that they were also predetermined by the resolutions of the Fifth Grand National Assembly (June 1911) and of the Fifteenth Ordinary National Assembly (September 1911).

Frequently, important decisions of the Central Bureau of the Liberal Party were ordered for execution by the adoption of what was known as “circular directives”. For this reason, the special consideration given by Naidenova to Circular Directive No. 6 of the Central Bureau of 24 November 1910 is not only apt but also mandatory. Thus, the doctoral candidate examines the provisions for the reconstruction of the local units, in compliance with the resolutions of the Congress. Here, a significant academic contribution of the doctoral candidate’s is the detailed study of the actions of the local bureaus of the Liberals and the permanent construction and development of the Party (p.110-185). It is worth noting and appreciating the time-consuming work, on the basis of which Naidenova makes us acquainted with a number of local leaders of the Liberal Party, such as Simeon Mudev, Yordan Ts. Noyov, Andrey Stoimchev, Ivan P. Stoilov, Georgy Lazov, Ignat Nenov and many others who worked in even the smallest population centres in the country (p. 110-185). In connection with their activities, the doctoral candidate considers in detail and analyzes many party celebrations held. This enables Naidenova to draw valuable conclusions about the events connected with these activities of the Liberals’ local units (p. 122-185).

Here Naidenova extensively examines the regional struggles of the Party in the course of the local elections of 1911. For the first time, she evaluates the activities of the local unit leaderships, carried out at meetings convened for that specific purpose (p.126-185).

Naidenova correctly considers and evaluated the activities of the youth and students' organizations of the Liberals (p. 129-185). The doctoral candidate skillfully examines their construction against the background of the overall organizational development of the Liberal Party. For this purpose, Naidenova aptly acquaints us with the use the Liberals make of significant holidays, such as 11 May – the day of the Saints Cyril and Methodius (p. 153). The author does not fail to also trace the permanent activities of the Liberal Party in the regions of the country (p. 166 and the following).

At the end of this paragraph, Naidenova's significant contribution is the special consideration given to the ancillary activities of the central leadership of the Liberal Party. For the first time, she examines in detail the establishment and operations of the Mutual Credit Fund, set up under the Liberal Party (p. 168-184).

At the end of Chapter One, about a page of text contains correct evaluations and conclusions. However, they should be elaborated further, bearing in mind the intense activities of the Party, of its leaders and supporters discussed in the preceding parts of the text (p. 110-184).

In the next chapter – Chapter Two (p. 186-306) Naidenova acquaints us with the Radoslavist position on the internal policy of the parties which governed Bulgaria from 1908 to the beginning of the war period in October 1912. Here the author accurately characterizes and evaluates the Radoslavists' stands on the most important actions of the governing political forces up to the start of the Balkan War on 5 October 1912.

In the first paragraph, Naidenova examines the opposition activities of the Liberal Party under the government of the Democratic Party in 1908 – 1912. The consideration of these activities against the background of the protracted government agony in 1907 and the beginning of 1908 is correct. However, the explanation is insufficient as to the isolation in which the Radoslavists found themselves at the end of 1907 and the beginning of 1908, when Ferdinand was seeking parties or a party to replace the People's Liberals. At the same time, the author correctly traces and evaluates the activities of the Liberal Party at the time of the replacement of the People's Liberal Party and the mandate given by Ferdinand to the Democratic Party to form a government in 1908. The hope of the Liberals, cherished almost throughout 1907, that they would be "called" to govern remained an empty illusion. In this respect, the activities of the Liberals throughout 1907 have not been studied sufficiently thoroughly by Naidenova. Her consideration focuses on the intensified activities of the Liberals in 1908, in the course of the parliamentary elections and the partial municipal elections. The activities of the Central Bureau of the Liberal Party in the course of those elections and the issuance of Circular Directive No. 20 are accurately examined and evaluated by Naidenova. We also find a correct analysis and evaluation of the intense activities of the Liberals in 1909, in the course of the additional parliamentary elections on 15 April, which were to return 32 members from 30 counties. Naidenova does not fail to also reveal the contradictions which arose between the central leadership (who wanted a boycott of the elections) and the local bureaus who sought participation in the local government. The inferences and evaluations of the Liberals' stands are accurately substantiated.

Naidenova thoroughly examines the lack of party unity on issues connected with the parliamentary (12 April) and the local elections (p. 189-193).

The doctoral candidate's significant academic contribution is the examination of the debates between the Liberals and the government as to their education policy, the organization of the selection of teachers in Sofia, and the composition of the Disciplinary

Board under the Ministry of Education (p. 195). Naidenova also makes a correct evaluation of the Liberals' position in this respect.

The Liberals' opposition activities were particularly intense in 1910. A number of incidents compromising the government occurred. Naidenova adduces the most significant ones, which caused public concern. Such was the case of the wedding of the under-aged Turkish girl Saafet with her Bulgarian groom. The intervention of the police led to a violent demonstration in the town of Russe, 30 people were killed and many were wounded. The Liberals severely criticized the government (p. 195 –196). The press coverage of the tension in Russe led to a strong public response. Naidenova correctly analyzes those events and her evaluation is justified. The conclusions and evaluations at the end of the paragraph (p. 198-199) are objective but too synthesized. Here the opposition activities of the Liberal Party could have received greater recognition and more significant evaluations.

Naidenova makes an overall evaluation of the position of the Liberal Party on the Democrats' government in the internal political life as "moderately critical" (p. 198). This evaluation is substantiated in the preceding parts of the text.

The doctoral candidate gives special consideration to the Liberals' attitude to the amendments to the Tarnovo Constitution of 1911 (p. 200-225). Here Naidenova aptly presents, analyzes and correctly evaluates the Liberals' circumstantial position on Ferdinand's "Constitutional" policy and their hopes that the coalition government of the People's Party and the Progressive Liberal Party would soon fall (p. 202-203).

The subsequent pages are devoted to the internal political life of the country (p. 203-205 and the following) but the attitude of the Liberal Party is not accurately outlined, it is simply absent.

It is worth recognizing the accurate analysis and evaluation of the Liberal Party's activities in the election struggles for the Fifth Grand National Assembly (p. 210-213).

The doctoral candidate does not fail to give consideration to the Liberals' attitude to the constitutional amendments of 1911. The Liberal Party's circumstantial position on Ferdinand's personal interests is correctly examined and evaluated by Naidenova (p. 213-216). The Liberals' stand on the amendment to Art. 17 of the Constitution referring to Ferdinand Saxe-Coburg and Gotha's interest is thoroughly studied and evaluated (p. 216-224).

The conclusions drawn at the end of the paragraph - taking up less than a page – are insufficient (p. 224-225). They cannot cover the various activities of the Liberal Party considered in the preceding parts of the text.

In the last, third paragraph of Chapter Two, Naidenova goes back to the internal political life in the country, but now in the March 1911 – September 1912 period. The formation of the coalition government of the People's Party and the Progressive Liberal Party again "darkens" the Liberals' hope to come to power. Their policy and position on the events in the country of the eve of the Balkan War are thoroughly analyzed and correctly evaluated by Naidenova. The doctoral candidate also accurately evaluates the relations between the Liberal Party and the institution of the monarchy. Here the author also correctly evaluates their stand on the developing political actions of the Government. There are, however, some repetitions in the text referring to the amendments to the Constitution. In a more precise elaboration, they could be avoided.

Naidenova's work ethic deserves praise. This part of her doctoral thesis, too (p. 237-306), steps on abundant factological material, which will be of use to many other researchers dealing with the issues under consideration.

In the last chapter – Chapter Three – entitled *The Liberal (Radoslavist) Party and The Foreign Policy of Bulgaria 1908-1912* (p. 307-393), Naidenova extensively traces the Liberal Party's attitude to the most important foreign policy positions of Bulgaria on the eve of the

Balkan War. They are correctly evaluated, on the basis of the government's actions upon the declaration of the Independence of Bulgaria in September 1908 and the policy of the governments on the eve of the wars.

In the first paragraph, the doctoral candidate examines the Liberal Party's attitude to the Independence declared. This is an important problem in Bulgarian politics. Naidenova evaluates it, with the full historiographical review of specific studies, and also of studies which only touch upon the problem. The evaluation of the Independence documents published is also substantiated (p. 307-308).

L. Naidenova should, however, reveal in greater details the limitations imposed by the Treaty of Berlin, as they are the basic premise for the independence struggles.

It is worth noting the efforts made to examine and evaluate the Liberal Party's position on all attempts at overthrowing the dependence of Bulgaria.

Naidenova gives special consideration to the attitude to the Greco-Turkish War of 1897. A correct evaluation of the Liberals' stand on the war is made, taking into account the Bulgarian interest.

A considerable contribution of the doctoral thesis is the examination and evaluation of the Liberal Party's position to the issues arising in connection with the national liberation movement in Macedonia at the beginning of the XX-th century. Evaluations are also made of the government policy which, however, was not always objective. It was dictated rather by the aim to provoke the governing parties' fall from power. All these events are correctly analyzed and evaluated by Naidenova (p. 313-328).

Naidenova's profound knowledge and thorough analysis of the events in the Balkans, connected with the Bulgarian interests, are impressive. This is a good foundation for the objective evaluation she makes of the Liberal Party's attitude to such events. Naidenova's respect for previous researchers of the events she examines in relation to the intense political activity of the Liberal Party is noteworthy.

The inferences drawn in the concluding part of this first paragraph are correct but insufficient, as there is an extensive text on the research (p. 307-329).

The second paragraph of Chapter Three should be entitled *The Liberal Party and the Bulgarian National Question*. As regards the "policy of the great powers in the Balkans", mentioned in the title by Naidenova, it is covered by our correction of the title. This could be done in the event of the eventual publication of this thesis.

At the beginning of this second paragraph, the doctoral candidate does a synthesized historiographical review of the foreign policy of Bulgaria in 1908-1912 (p. 331-332). In the subsequent pages Naidenova examines the stands of the great powers on the Balkan problems and the Liberal Party's attitude to them. The author considers – thoroughly and extensively – the developing struggles in Macedonia in 1908-1912. An accurate and objective evaluation is also made of the Liberals' policy on these issues (p. 332-392).

L. Naidenova again impresses us with her profound knowledge not only of the Bulgarian, but also of the Balkan and the overall European history on the eve of the war period in the world history process. This enables her to make a thorough analysis and a correct evaluation of the Liberal Party's policy on all issues and events occurring.

The characterizations and evaluations Naidenova makes of many outstanding leaders of the national liberation movement in Macedonia are worthy of praise. She does not give an answer, however, as to why the Liberal Party was not interested in the national liberation movement in Edirne Thrace.

At the end of the paragraph thorough inferences and correct evaluations are made of the Liberal Party's attitude to the events considered in the previous parts of the text.

The “Conclusion” of the thesis (p. 394-400) is an impressive synthesis of inferences and evaluations of the Liberal Party’s attitude to the issues and events examined in the text by the researcher. There are, however, repetitions at the end of the chapters and paragraphs of the text. They could be avoided, by leaving only the new ones and adding on to them.

The appendices at the end of the thesis are also relevant. They reinforce the arguments about the problems studied.

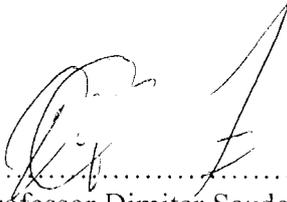
The Bibliography compiled is praiseworthy. It will be of use to future researchers.

In the structural aspect, we recommend that - in the event of the publication of this thesis -- that some of the overlong paragraphs be divided into shorter one, with appropriate titles. This will make it possible to make a more detailed evaluation of the Liberal Party’s attitude to political events.

There are four publications in collections of academic papers. One of them is a referenced edition in English.

In conclusion, I would like to declare that there are full reasons for grading Lyubka Naidenova’s doctoral thesis highly. This thesis once again shows the solid preparation the Shumen University provides for its alumni, in their career development and growth. The originality of the doctoral thesis, the existence of the required number of publications and the participation in academic events, in compliance with the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act, enable me **to reach the reasoned conclusion that all conditions are present for the doctoral academic degree to be awarded to Lyubka Nikolaeva Naidenova. I suggest that the honourable Members of the Academic Jury vote positively and without hesitation for the proposal submitted.**

10 June 2021
city of Sofia

Signature: .....
(Professor Dimitar Sazdov,
Doctor of Historical Sciences)