

REVIEW

By Professor, Doctor of Military Sciences, Georgi Vasilev Bakhchevanov, part-time teacher at NBU, professional direction 9.1. National Security
on the scientific papers for participation in a competition for the academic position of "associate professor", by professional direction 9.1. National Security, announced by the New Bulgarian University in SG no. 84/21.10.2022,
with candidate chief assistant doctor Michael Minev Dimitrov

I. Assessment of compliance with the minimum national requirements and the requirements of the New Bulgarian University

After reviewing the evidentiary materials provided by the chief assistant Dr. Michael Minev Dimitrov for all groups of indicators regarding the fulfillment of the minimum national and additional requirements of the NBU for holding the position of "associate professor", I report that the candidate has a total of 700 points, out of the required 570 points.

The candidate presents scientific production and materials exceeding the minimum national and additional requirements of the NBU.

II. Research activity and results

The list of scientific works and publications presented by the candidate for participation in the competition contains 22 titles (excluding those provided during the defense of the dissertation work for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "doctor". The indicated titles are distributed as follows: monograph - 1 issue; published book on the basis of a protected dissertation work for the award of the educational and scientific degree "doctor" - 1 number; articles and reports - 20 numbers. The amount of publications is representative and I estimate as fully sufficient for participation in a competition for the acquisition of an academic position "associate professor".

The candidate's research interests are directed to the study of current theoretical and applied problems covering several areas of the theory and practice of national and international security: regional security theory; political processes in the countries of the Western Balkans; energy security of the countries of the Three Seas region.

In the course of all research, an adequate toolkit of scientific analysis was applied, including qualitative and quantitative methods, which take into account many of the basic features and specifics of most of the studied objects. The publications are in specialized scientific publications. The candidate's style is thorough, approachable, academic.

1. Evaluation of the monographic work.

The monograph "The Western Balkans in the Battle for Rome" is an in-depth study of the nature, character, place and weight of the factors affecting the military-political situation in the Western Balkans, modeling of the forming relations and preparation of scenarios for the possible future states of this subsystem.

The relevance of the study is determined by the fact that in the last decade we have observed events that significantly influence the critical indicators guiding both domestic politics and the factors on the basis of which the systemic relations between the countries of the Western Balkans are built.

The author's statement that "The importance of this region for the relations between the leading centers of power should not be overstated, but at the same time there were sufficient numbers and magnitudes with the necessary intensity that turned this historically problematic area into a field for the promotion of influence and formation of circles both at the state and sub-state level, in turn being used as conduits for foreign geopolitical interests' is true.

The monograph explores issues related to uncovering the distinctiveness of the region, its geographically 'spatially meaningful' position and the political instability that leaves it outside the EU.

Based on the analysis in the first chapter, the author outlines the main variables on which the security of the countries of the Western Balkans depends: maintaining the momentum of European and Euro-Atlantic integration; developments in the normalization process between Serbia and Kosovo; preserving the stability and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina; accelerated integration of Albania into the EU.

The significance of the study is determined by the usefulness of the analysis revealing the way in which energy issues influence the political dimension in the Western Balkans region, a region that in itself problematizes its content with the fact that its geopolitical foundations go beyond the question of integration in the two main integration groupings on the European continent, NATO and the EU. According to the author, the traced processes argue for the conclusion that EU

accession will not eliminate the concept, which will continue to be defined by the distinctive feature of increased vulnerability.

The analysis of the list of references attached to the monograph shows that the author knows in detail the existing developments on the subject. The topic of the monograph fully corresponds to the main content of the development. The monograph deals with issues related to the importance of military-political forecasting for the security of the Western Balkans. According to the author, "the lines of opposition introduced in the Western Balkans demonstrate precisely the existence of a dichotomy regarding the concept of "domus" of individual societies and the inapplicability of the slogan "towards a future without a past".

The application of specialized software MACTOR has allowed the author to analyze the interaction between all stakeholders in a given competitive field and outline the convergences and differences in relation to a set of stakes and goals.

The assessment of the state of the problem at the time of publication of the monograph is correct. The methodology of the research was chosen properly and correctly. It is aimed both at achieving the goals and objectives of the research search, and at proving the main scientific idea. The analytical feature of the monograph gives a positive assessment of both the credibility and the relevance of the contributions and.

The study presents a scientific development in which concrete, useful and practically feasible solutions, based on clearly formulated approaches, are proposed for the effective implementation of the idea of a regional security community. The problem of the efficacy of the developing regional security community has been revealed - an inability to overcome the narratives built in the past, aimed at creating conflict potential to be used in the interest of one or another leading power center. Scientific and scientific-applied contributions have been achieved in the monograph. They can refer to the accumulation of new knowledge related to the (geo)political processes giving expression to the contemporary interstate relations in the Western Balkans. The contributions enrich the existing knowledge, prove and develop essential aspects of the existing scientific problems revealed by the author.

2. Evaluation of the contributions in the other attached publications.

The applied scientific works for participation in the competition are divided into three thematic groups, with reasoned contributions, as follows: Theory of regional security; Political processes in the countries of the Western Balkans; Energy security of the countries of the Three Seas region.

2.1. Regional Security Theory (2.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.16, 3.18). In this group of publications, the thesis about the leading role of regional spaces in understanding the behavior of subjects in the international environment is argued.

the prerequisites for the inadequacy of the historical-geographical grounds in the delineation of distinct subsystems of state-social actors and a general line for applying an adapted structuralist approach based on repeated sets of relations defining role positions is proposed.

Overcoming the challenges accompanying efforts to assist decision-makers regarding a state's foreign policy behavior requires optimizing the level of approximation in tracking relevant processes and phenomena. This turns regional research into a promising platform for capturing local dynamics and reflecting its intersections with the interventions of external factors. In parallel, attention is paid to the multifaceted nature of the forming subsystems, which contributes to the introduction of an additional dimension in the practical implementation of the analytical work.

The publications in this group are aimed at formulating methodological positions and mechanisms by means of which to operationalize regional spaces, as an optimal starting point for studying the military-political situation. The designed approach has a practical-applied orientation and aims to increase the efficiency of the information-analytical activity carried out.

2.2. Political processes in the countries of the Western Balkans (1.1, 3.1, 3.4, 3.5, 3.7, 3.9, 3.10, 3.13, 3.14, 3.15, 3.19, 3.20). In this, second group of publications, points of impact originating from the countries of the Western Balkans, critical for the implementation of the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria, are highlighted. The tendencies to change the GDR in the regional participants have been tracked and the unlocking and restraining factors for actions to transform their geopolitical orientation have been systematized. In addition, the predominant forms of exerting influence in the countries of the Western Balkans by regional powers and external actors with a high potential for intervention are revealed. In this regard, the main directions are outlined, on which the efforts to reformat the relevant areas of public life are focused, including with a subsequent effect on ethnic and religious homeostasis. The latter is assessed as having a significant destabilizing effect and the potential to provoke a redistribution of power with catastrophic consequences for the regional security community.

Conclusions are formulated, contributing to enriching the understanding of the means of conducting indirect violence and exerting a generally limited impact in the modern context of socio-technological evolution.

2.3. Energy security of the countries of the Three Seas region (3.6, 3.8, 3.11, 3.12, 3.17). A third group of publications is devoted to the energy determinants of the political process in the countries of the "Trinity". The connection between the development of the gas transmission infrastructure in the region and the general strategic line of the interested external parties is revealed, with an emphasis on the export policy of Gazprom. Prospective directions are outlined both in the narrower context of the Western Balkans and the overall situation affected by the construction of new diversification routes and the corresponding countermeasures implemented by the Russian Federation.

The role of the so-called "low-energy" natural gas liquefaction infrastructure and its possibilities for "driving" new geo-economic axes in the Eurasian space.

I believe that the papers are the candidate's independent work and successfully defend the claims for scientific and scientifically applied contributions made by him in the reference.

3. Quoting from other authors.

There are 9 cited in the self-assessment report, 8 of which are in monographs and collective volumes with scientific review and one in a non-refereed journal with scientific review.

The number of citations, the nature of the scholarly works cited, and the authors allow me to say that the candidate is well known in the national security research community.

4. Main scientific results and contributions.

1. A methodology has been created for deriving the structure of regional spaces:

1.1 An approach that goes beyond the substantive notions of the concept of "region" is proposed, based on a synchronic reading of phenomena and processes (2.1, 3.3).

1.2 A formalized presentation of the military-political situation in the Western Balkans was carried out, in which sustainable roles were defined, recurring in different paradigms of organization of the studied region (1.1).

1.3 A classification of regional spaces has been drawn up, with a view to deriving regularities in conducting the foreign policy line of leading centers of power in relation to them (2.1, 3.2).

2. Revising the main mechanisms through which external actors exert influence in the countries of the Western Balkans:

2.1 The changes in the relative weight of the means, methods and forms of manifestation of active measures aimed at vulnerable areas of the countries subject to interventions are shown (1.1, 3.1, 3.10, 3.14).

2.2 Unlocking and restraining factors for the development of internal political dynamics, caused by external influences, are formulated (3.4, 3.5, 3.7, 3.15).

3. Systematization of the directions of use of the various forms of natural gas transmission in the Russian energy strategy:

3.1 The approach of the Russian state leadership to create contradictions in the EU by means of natural gas pricing that does not correspond to market logic and using the available transmission capacities as a lever for influence is defined (1.1, 3.12, 3.17).

3.2 The place of the low-tonnage natural gas liquefaction infrastructure in the general development line of the Russian oil and gas complex has been revealed and justified (3.6, 3.8, 3.11).

III. Learning and teaching activity

1. Auditory and non-auditory employment, work in the electronic training module "MOODLE - NBU", provision of student practices and internships, work with students and doctoral students.

Chief Assistant Dr. Michael Dimitrov lectures in courses at the OKS "Bachelor" and OKS "Master". The applicant's annual average classroom and non-auditory employment exceeds the minimum required. Dr. Dimitrov is involved in both updating and creating new curricula.

He is the author of the study documentation of three courses: NISM222 "USA, NATO and Russia"; NISM224 "Geopolitics and Security"; OOOK060 "Security and Uncertainty in a Global World".

Chief Assistant Dr. Michael Dimitrov has also developed a course SECB029 "Dynamics of Security in the Trimorie Region" at BP "Civil and Corporate Security" (starts from spring semester 2020). There is a guaranteed internship in the course CRIM391 Internship: Ministry of Justice.

In addition to these activities, he was the supervisor of two graduate students who successfully defended their diploma theses. He has reviewed six student theses. He participated in almost all examination committees of the National Academy of Medical Sciences.

2. Work with Erasmus students.

The candidate is an Erasmus+ academic coordinator of the Department of National and International Security.

The average score from the student satisfaction surveys with the candidate's activity is 4.84 points, with a maximum of 5.00.

IV. Administrative and public activity

1. Participation in collective management bodies of the NBU.

The candidate is a member of both the program and departmental councils of DNMS. He is a member of the Organizing Committee of three scientific conferences: "Applied Criminology in Bulgaria", held on 14-15.10.2021 at the New Bulgarian University, organized by the Department of National and International Security, the Department of Law and the Bulgarian Criminology Association ; "Crisis and Security - Correlations and Challenges", held on 14.05.2021 at New Bulgarian University, organized by the Department of "National and International Security" and "Broad Security", held on 27.03.2020 at New Bulgarian University, organized from the Department of National and International Security.

2. Public activity.

The candidate is the chairman of the Management Board of the association "Bulgarian Hub for the United Balkans" (EIC: 205590304).

Chief Assistant Dr. Michael Dimitrov is the authorized representative of the National and International Security Department before the National Security Agency.

Chief Assistant Dr. Michael Dimitrov takes part as a lecturer in the Advanced Research Workshop G5667 "Integration of the Western Balkans in NATO as a Guarantee for Regional Stability", held in the period 18-19.05.2021, sponsored by the "Science for Peace" program and Security" of NATO. Material on "Malevolent external influences in the Western Balkans" is presented.

V. Personal impressions of the candidate (if any)

I know chief assistant Dr. Michael Dimitrov as a student in the bachelor's, master's and doctoral programs of the National and International Security Department of the NBU.

He is distinguished by very good awareness, analytical thought and diligence.

VI. Opinions, recommendations and notes on the activity and achievements of the candidate

My recommendation to the candidate is to strengthen his activities in the following areas: development of textbooks; work in scientific research projects in the field of national security; teaching mobility; publications in scientific publications, referenced and indexed in world-renowned databases of scientific information.

Conclusion

The documentation and scientific production provided by the candidate, chief assistant Dr. Michael Dimitrov, meet the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff and the regulations for its application for the occupation of the academic position of "associate professor". My assessment of the scientific works of chief assistant Dr. Mihael Minev Dimitrov, participant in the competition for the academic position "docent" NBU, in a scientific field (field of higher education): 9. "Security and defense" and professional direction: 9.1. "National security" is "positive".

Chief Assistant, Dr. Michael Minev Dimitrov, may be elected by the NBU Academic Council and hold the academic position of "associate professor".

Date 02/03/2023

Signature

Prof. Bahchevanov