

REVIEW
by Prof. Dr. Angelina Miroslavova Markovska, Ph.D
Veliko Turnovo University “St.st. Cyril and Methodius”
of a dissertation
for the award of the educational and scientific degree “doctor”
Scientific area 3. *Social, economic and legal sciences*
Professional field 3.3 *Political science*
Scientific specialty “*Political Science*”

Faculty of Economic and Social sciences
Department of Political sciences and National security

Author: Vladimir Bonov Slavenski

Topic: Bulgaria's Foreign Policy towards North Macedonia, The Agreement of 1 August 2017

Scientific supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Daniela Pastarmadzhia, PhD

By Order No. PД-22-2394 of 26 November 2025 of the Rector of the University of Plovdiv “Paisii Hilendarski” (PU), I was appointed as a member of the academic jury responsible for administering the procedure for the defence of the doctoral dissertation entitled *Bulgaria’s Foreign Policy towards North Macedonia: The Agreement of 1 August 2017* for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in: Field of Higher Education 3. Social Sciences, Economics and Law; Professional Field 3.3 Political Sciences; Doctoral Programme in Political Science. The author of the dissertation is Mr Vladimir Bonov Slavenski, full-time doctoral student at the Department of Political Science and National Security, under the supervision of Assoc. Prof. Daniela Dobрева Pastarmadzhieva, PhD, University of Plovdiv “Paisii Hilendarski”.

The set of materials submitted by the doctoral candidate in hard copy complies with Art. 36(1) of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of PU and includes the following documents:

- an application to the Rector of PU requesting the initiation of a dissertation defence procedure;
- a curriculum vitae in European format;
- a minutes of the Departmental Council regarding the reporting of readiness to initiate the procedure

and the preliminary discussion of the dissertation;

- the dissertation;
- the dissertation abstract;
- a list of scholarly publications on the dissertation topic;
- copies of the scholarly publications;
- a list of registered citations;
- a declaration of originality and authenticity of the submitted documents;
- a certificate of compliance with the specific requirements of the respective faculty (only for doctoral students enrolled before 04.05.2018).

The doctoral candidate has submitted four publications, of which I accept three as scientometrically valid in accordance with the regulatory framework.

With the submitted dissertation and related publications, the candidate has fulfilled the minimum national requirements under Art. 2b, paras. 2 and 3 of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ADASRB), and accordingly under Art. 24, para. 1 of the Implementing Regulations of ADASRB (for the educational and scientific degree “Doctor”).

2. Brief Biographical Information about the Doctoral Candidate

The candidate graduated from the University of Plovdiv “Paisii Hilendarski” with a Bachelor’s degree in Political Science and a Master’s degree in Business Administration. His biographical profile reflects a sustained interest in political science both in theoretical and practical dimensions. Mr Slavenski’s activity as Chair of the Student Political Science Club, his participation in numerous academic forums and competitions, as well as his current engagement as a municipal councillor, testify to consistency and determination in his development as a political scientist.

3. Relevance of the Topic and Justification of the Aims and Objectives

The dissertation topic is of high scholarly and public relevance, stemming from the continued significance of the 1 August 2017 Treaty, whose incomplete implementation continues to shape the dynamics of Bulgarian–Macedonian relations and to generate political consequences at both national and European levels. Its ineffective application led to the crisis related to the Bulgarian veto in 2020, transforming the bilateral dispute into a matter of EU-wide importance and raising questions regarding the effectiveness of the EU’s enlargement policy. The dissertation addresses a clearly identifiable scholarly gap resulting from the limited political-science analysis of relations between the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia in the 21st century. It offers a systematic

assessment of the effectiveness of the Treaty of Good Neighbourliness, including a critical analysis of the EU's mediating role, and highlights the significance of the 2022 European intervention ("the French Proposal") as an indicator of deficits in the negotiation process and its implementation.

4. Knowledge of the Problem

The author demonstrates excellent knowledge of classical and contemporary theories of international relations. The integration of various theoretical schools (realism, neorealism, liberalism, constructivism) with applied models such as the Harvard Negotiation Project and game theory is impressive. The use of more than 300 sources, including official documents, protocols, diplomatic texts, and expert interviews, attests to thorough research work. The documentary analysis of inter-governmental protocols and the comparison with the Prespa Agreement add scholarly value.

5. Methodology of the Research

The methodology corresponds to the set aims and objectives and includes analysis of normative documents, desk research, secondary processing of statistical data, and an original survey. The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, the use of semi-structured interviews, and the application of game theory to analyse the strategic behaviour of states represent a modern interdisciplinary approach.

The chosen methods are relevant to the research topic, contribute to the obtained results, and support the formulation of valid findings and conclusions. From a linguistic perspective, the dissertation is written in academic language and complies with spelling and grammatical norms.

6. Characteristics and Evaluation of the Dissertation

The dissertation meets the formal requirements for such a scholarly work and consists of 277 pages. It follows a classical structure comprising an introduction, three thematic chapters, general findings, a conclusion, bibliography, and appendices. The dissertation constitutes an original study of the researched problem, interpreted through an appropriate methodology involving both quantitative and qualitative methods.

I would like to state from the outset that, using all software tools known and available to me, I found no evidence of plagiarism, nor am I aware of any procedural violations.

Chapter One is predominantly theoretical and provides the conceptual framework of the research by systematising the main concepts of international relations, defining the role and functions of diplo-

macy, and presenting the principles and mechanisms of international negotiations and inter-state agreements.

Chapter Two offers a politico-historical analysis of the Balkans and the place of Bulgaria and Macedonia in the regional dynamics after the Cold War. The focus is on the evolution of the “Macedonian question” in Bulgarian political debate, the foreign policy transformation of North Macedonia, and the context leading to the signing of the 2017 Treaty.

Chapter Three provides a detailed analysis of the 1 August 2017 Treaty, covering its legal architecture, practical implementation, and identified weaknesses. The methodological parameters of the empirical study are presented, as well as the Treaty’s implications for Bulgaria and the EU, concluding with reflections and findings concerning the effectiveness of the process.

Additionally, the dissertation is distinguished by several strengths. The exposition is academic, stylistically refined, and clearly articulated. The author maintains good terminological consistency and demonstrates strong conceptual competence. Citations are accurately presented, and the bibliography is well aligned with the theme. The bibliography comprises 291 sources: 155 in Bulgarian, 10 in the Macedonian linguistic norm, and 126 in English. It is diverse and thematically relevant.

7. Contributions and Significance of the Work for Scholarship and Practice

The dissertation demonstrates significant and well-argued scholarly contributions, positioning it as a comprehensive and original work in the field of political science and foreign policy studies. At the conceptual level, it enriches the understanding of the negotiation processes between Bulgaria and North Macedonia by integrating models from game theory—specifically the Nash model and the Harvard Negotiation Project approaches. This enables the author to convincingly demonstrate the non-equilibrium strategic behaviour of the two parties, as well as the structural imbalance triggered by North Macedonia’s shift towards a confrontational model after 2018. The quantitative measurement of “integration potential” (57%), based on an original methodology, constitutes an important contribution to Bulgarian political-science literature, offering for the first time a quantitative instrument for assessing the effectiveness of bilateral processes of this nature.

At the empirical level, the dissertation identifies structural deficits in Bulgarian foreign policy through systematic analysis of documents, interviews, and political decisions, situating them within the context of the specificities of new democracies. The methodological framework is integrated and multilayered, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches, including a comparative analysis with the Prespa Agreement and an assessment of the EU’s mediating role.

The contributions also have clear practical value: an instrument for monitoring international agreements has been developed, and recommendations for strategic planning and enhancing institutional consistency in Bulgarian foreign policy are formulated. As a result, the dissertation offers a new model for analysing and improving negotiation processes in the Balkans, with high value for both scholarship and diplomatic practice.

8. Evaluation of the Publications Related to the Dissertation

The doctoral candidate has produced four scholarly publications on the dissertation topic, of which I accept three as scientometrically valid in accordance with and in fulfilment of the minimum national requirements under Art. 2b, paras. 2 and 3 of ADASRB and Art. 24, para. 1 of its Implementing Regulations (for the educational and scientific degree “Doctor”). The articles were published in peer-reviewed academic collections and represent papers presented at scholarly conferences. They address the dissertation topic and have undergone academic appraisal at scientific forums, which attests to their scholarly value. Participation in three academic forums further demonstrates the candidate’s engagement with research activity and his commitment to disseminating his results publicly.

9. Dissertation Abstract

The abstract consists of 32 pages and contains information related to the dissertation research, the procedure for scheduling the public defence, and the parameters of the defence itself. It presents a summarised overview of the introduction, chapters, and conclusion. The abstract concludes with the general findings, contributions of the dissertation, and the publications on the topic. This structure and the information provided are adequate and accurately reflect the research conducted. Therefore, I conclude that the abstract complies with the requirements of the relevant normative acts and reflects the main results achieved in the dissertation.

10. Critical Remarks and Recommendations

I have no formal grounds for critical remarks regarding the reviewed dissertation, as such comments would stem from my own analytical interpretations of the examined issues. Out of respect for the doctoral candidate and in recognition of the depth and professionalism of his research work, I would allow myself to offer only two constructive suggestions, which the candidate may consider in his future research on this topic:

1. A more in-depth comparative component:

The comparison with the Prespa Agreement is useful, but could be complemented by a brief

juxtaposition with other regional good-neighbourliness agreements (e.g., Croatia–Slovenia), in order to derive more broadly applicable models and regularities.

2. A stronger emphasis on alternative scenarios for political behaviour:

The dissertation points to possible more sustainable strategies, but would benefit from a more structured presentation of alternative action models—for example, by developing 2–3 clearly defined scenarios for Bulgaria’s diplomatic policy.

I would also recommend that the candidate consider publishing the dissertation as a monograph at a later stage, as I am confident that it would interest not only specialists but also a wider public.

Conclusion

The dissertation contains scholarly, scholarly-applied, and applied results that constitute an original contribution to science and fully meet the requirements of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ADASRB), its Implementing Regulations, and the corresponding Regulations of the University of Plovdiv “Paisii Hilendarski”.

The dissertation demonstrates that the doctoral candidate, Vladimir Slavenski, possesses in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional competences in the scientific field of Political Science and shows the qualities and skills necessary for conducting independent scholarly research.

In view of all the above, **I confidently give my positive evaluation of the research presented through the reviewed dissertation, abstract, results, and contributions, and I propose to the esteemed academic jury to award the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” to Vladimir Bonov Slavenski in Field of Higher Education 3. Social Sciences, Economics and Law, Professional Field 3.3 Political Sciences, Doctoral Programme in Political Science.**

01 December 2025

Reviewer:

Prof. Angelina Markovska, PhD