

## **OPINION**

**by Dr. Plamen Marinov Ralchev,**  
**Associate Professor at the University of National and World Economy, Sofia**

of the dissertation thesis for the award of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” Area of  
higher education: **3. Social, Economic and Law Sciences**

Professional field: **3.3. Political Science**

Doctoral Program: **Political Sciences**

**Author:** Vladimir Bonov Slavenski

**Theme:** BULGARIA'S FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS NORTH MACEDONIA. THE TREATY  
OF 1 AUGUST 2017

**Scientific supervisor:** Assoc. Prof. Daniela Pastarmadzhieva, PhD,  
University of Plovdiv “Paisii Hilendarski”

### **1. General presentation of the procedure and the doctoral student**

This statement is part of the procedure for the defense of the dissertation of Vladimir Slavenski, who successfully completed the doctoral program in Political Science at the Department of Political Science and National Security of the Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences at Paisii Hilendarski University. The doctoral student has fulfilled all his commitments under the individual training plan, has submitted a completed dissertation, has been granted the right to defend it, and a public defense procedure has been initiated with a scientific jury formed in accordance with all regulatory requirements.

### **2. Relevance of the research topic**

The topic is significant, relevant, and essential for Bulgarian foreign policy, European integration, and regional stability. The dissertation is distinguished by its originality, methodological clarity, and rich source material (over 280 bibliographic units).

### **3. Knowledge of the problem**

Vladimir Bonov Slavenski's dissertation is a mature, analytical, and theoretically sound study devoted to Bulgarian foreign policy toward the Republic of North Macedonia, and in particular to the Treaty on Friendship, Good Neighborliness, and Cooperation of August 1, 2017. The author examines the period 2014–2022, successfully integrating international political dynamics, domestic political processes, and the role of external actors.

The depth of the analysis and methodological precision demonstrate the doctoral student's serious scientific interest and knowledge of the problem in its complexity and dependence on multiple factors.

### **4. Research methodology**

The author uses a deductive approach and combines qualitative methods: semi-structured interviews with experts, in-depth documentary analysis, comparative approach (especially with the 2018 Prespa Agreement), theoretical frameworks: realism, liberalism, constructivism, and game theory (Nash). This interdisciplinary approach lends depth and scientific value to the analysis.

## **5. Characteristics and evaluation of the dissertation and its contributions**

The dissertation is sufficiently comprehensive and in-depth. An appropriate historical and theoretical framework has been established. The empirical part of the study is particularly impressive. The empirical analysis is well structured and includes important conclusions with practical and applied value. The empirical part is convincing, balanced, and contributes significantly to the argumentation.

Based on the content of the thesis, the following contributions stand out:

### *Scientific and theoretical*

- First comprehensive political science analysis of the negotiation process surrounding the 2017 agreement.
- Integration of classical and modern theories of international relations with practical diplomatic models.
- Development of a model for evaluating international agreements, including through concepts from Nash and the Harvard Negotiation Project.

### *Methodological*

- Creation of an analytical tool for monitoring the implementation of bilateral agreements.
- Combination of expert interviews, documentary analysis, and comparative research.

### *Practical and applied*

- The insufficient effectiveness of the 2017 agreement is demonstrated, including the chronic problems of the historical commission, the lack of control mechanisms, and the unreliability of political commitments.
- A strategic model for a more sustainable Bulgarian policy towards North Macedonia is proposed.

## **6. Assessment of publications and personal contribution of the doctoral student**

The doctoral student has four publications, including those related to the topic of the dissertation, which demonstrates the focus and consistency of his research interests. This also meets the minimum national requirements for publications for obtaining a PhD degree. The PhD candidate has also a considerable teaching experience at the Department of Political Science and National Security.

## **7. Dissertation Abstract**

The doctoral student has submitted a 32-page abstract, which accurately and comprehensively reflects the content and all important points, findings, conclusions, and syntheses in the dissertation.

## **8. Recommendations for future use of the dissertation contributions and results**

Some of the conclusions (e.g., the degree of political return) could be further supported by quantitative indicators or comparative tables. Despite the rich literature, it would be useful to add more references to the latest research on policy failure, implementation gaps, and regional security in the Western Balkans.

The analysis of the media in both countries is present, but could be further deepened, as the media environment has a significant impact on bilateral relations.

### *Questions to the doctoral student*

For the purposes of the academic discussion during the public defense, I would like to ask the doctoral student a few questions:

1. What would be the potential of the 2017 agreement if a clear monitoring mechanism similar to that of the Prespa Agreement was built into it?
2. How far does the EU's role as guarantor of the implementation of bilateral commitments extend, and how would you assess the European Commission's capacity to influence the process?
3. What risks do you see for Bulgaria in the absence of a long-term strategy towards the RNM (political, cultural, integration)?
4. What additional indicators would you include in the model you have developed for monitoring international agreements?
5. According to your analysis, is it possible to reform the historical commission so that it becomes an effective tool rather than a source of deadlock?

### **CONCLUSION**

The dissertation contains scientific, scientific-applied, and applied results, which represent an original contribution to science and meets all the requirements of the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act (DASRBA), the Regulations for its Implementation, and the relevant Regulations of the University of Plovdiv Paisii Hilendarski.

Vladimir Slavenski's dissertation is a mature, comprehensive, and valuable piece of research. The author shows off his awesome skills in international relations, political analysis, and diplomacy. The thesis has a clear structure, convincing arguments, a rich empirical base, and original scientific contributions.

Due to the above, I confidently give my positive assessment of the conducted research, presented by the above-reviewed dissertation, abstract, achieved results, and contributions, and I propose to the scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” to Vladimir Bonov Slavenski in the area of higher education “3. Social, Economic and Law Sciences”, professional field “3.3. Political Science”, doctoral program “Political Sciences”.

Statement prepared by: .....

(signature)

Assoc. Prof. Plamen Ralchev, PhD

Sofia, 19.12.2025