

Prof. Alexander Tassev, PhD

70 YEARS OF THE ECONOMIC RESEARCH INSTITUTE AT THE BULGARIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES*

This anniversary coincides with the big anniversary of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences – 150 years since the national spiritual centre was created with the establishment of the Bulgarian Literary Society in 1869. Along with the recognition of the Bulgarian Exarchate a year later, it was a worthy finale to the national spiritual revival, initiated by Paisii Hilendarski. The first President of the Bulgarian Literary Society, Prof. Marin Drinov, and its members – prominent Bulgarian writers, representatives of the Bulgarian national revival, such as Dragan Tsankov and many others – participated in the First Great National Assembly in Tarnovo and in the writing of the first Bulgarian Constitution, which affirmed Bulgaria's place on the political map of Europe. We should not forget that as the spiritual growth and consolidation of a people transforms it into a nation with its own state system, the ruining of the spiritual achievements of a nation leads to its disappearance from the political map of the world. In the remaining months until the official celebration of the anniversary, we, who work in and are associated with the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, should remind and convince the Bulgarian society that this is a very important celebration of our whole nation and not only of the people who work at the Academy.

A national, spiritual and scientific centre such as the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences holds spiritual values and knowledge that are materialized through its institutes. The Institute of Economics, which was established in 1949, is one of the first institutes and is a successor of the traditions of the "Society of Bulgarian Economists and Academicians", which was established in 1929. Its first director is Academician Ivan Stefanov. Academician Jacques Nathan, Academician Evgeni Kamenov, Corresponding Member Todor Vladigerov, Corresponding Member Krastyo Dobrev, Professor Kiril Kiryakov, Professor Alexander Dimitrov, Professor Garabed Minassin and Professor Mitko Dimitrov have also held the director's position at the Institute through the years. A number of prominent scientists-economists, such as Academician Evgeni Mateev, Professor Assen Chakalov, Professor Petar Shapkarev, Professor Dobri Bradistilov and many others, have worked at the Institute.

The research topics and the organizational structure of the Institute have changed over time according to the needs of the development of science and socio-economic practice. In all the years since its establishment, both before and after 1989, the Institute has defended its views, which have always been the result

* Welcome speech, delivered by Professor Alexander Tassev – the Director of the Economic Research Institute at BAS.

of an objective assessment of the economic processes in Bulgaria and have not always coincided with the views of the government.

In recent decades, the activity of the Economic Research Institute at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences has made it its mission *to support the economic development and the successful integration of Bulgaria into the EU through research, assessments and proposals for the economic policy of the country, as well as through the training of scientists and specialists who receive high qualification and international recognition.*

Among the Institute's more important achievements over the last few governing mandates, the following should be noted:

- In 2009, the BAS and its institutes were evaluated by an International Expert Committee of the European Science Foundation (ESF) and the European Federation of Academies of Sciences and Humanities (ALLEA). The Institute received a very good rating (BAA) for its overall activity, which was among the highest in the field of social sciences. Particularly significant is the "A" rating for the prospects for the future development of the Institute. This allows it to develop as a nationally responsible and independent institution, providing competent expert assessments and recommendations for the economic development of the country.

According to the 2016 Report of the Permanent Expert Committee of the Ministry of Education and Science on the monitoring, evaluation and analysis of scientific research carried out by scientific organizations and higher schools, the Economic Research Institute has been ranked in first place, together with 6 other institutes at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, in group 1 – elite. The Institute is the only one to hold the first place position in group 1 in the national ranking of scientific organizations and faculties of higher schools in the category "Economic sciences (including business sciences)".

- In recent years, according to the RePEc publications and citations rating system, the Institute is among the top 10% of the world's leading institutes registered in the international database. In this ranking, the Economic Research Institute at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences holds a leading position in Bulgaria. About half of the first 25% of the Bulgarian authors cited in RePEc are members of the Economic Research Institute.

- A closer alignment of the topics of the research projects with the priorities of the country and the economic science was achieved. Some nationally significant projects, organized by the Institute and implemented with the participation of representatives from other institutions, were implemented.

After the first contemporary "Economic Encyclopedia" was published in 2005, two reports were commissioned by the President of the Republic of Bulgaria: "Strategy for the Accelerated Economic Development of Bulgaria" (2007) and "The Global Financial and Economic Crisis and Bulgaria" (2009).

In 2014, projects commissioned by the Council of Ministers concerning the problems of deindustrialisation and reindustrialisation and the indebtedness of the companies in Bulgaria were implemented.

At the end of 2015, a report, entitled “Objectives, priorities and policies for the implementation of the demographic development strategy of Bulgaria”, which was assigned to the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Labour and Social Policy of Bulgaria, was completed successfully.

In 2017 and 2018, the Institute participated in the development of a project titled “Measures to overcome the demographic crisis in the Republic of Bulgaria”, which was assigned to the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences by the Government.

A Resolution of the Council of Ministers, dated 15.12.2016, asked the question about what the possibilities for the realization of the assets of “Belene” NPP are. The answer to this question requires a complex assessment of a number of factors that electricity consumption and power generation depend on. In connection to this, on 30.01.2017 a contract was signed between the “Bulgarian Energy Holding” EAD and the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences for the development of a National Energy Strategy with a focus on electricity and a vision for its development up until 2050. The project assigned by the Government was the largest in the post-1989 period and was successfully completed. More than 50 scientists and experts took part in it. More than 80% of the project activity was taken on by the BAS with the participation of the following institutes:

Leading institute – the Economic Research Institute;

Participant institutes:

The National Institute of Meteorology and Hydrology;

The Institute of Electrochemistry and Energy Systems;

The Institute for Population and Human Studies;

The Central Laboratory of Solar Energy and New Energy Sources;

The Institute of Metal Science, Equipment and Technologies;

The Institute of Chemical Engineering.

Since 2012, the traditional annual report of the Institute, titled “Economic Development and Policies in Bulgaria”, has been restored and is presented to the Bulgarian public every spring through the BTA. We should be proud that we are the only institution in Bulgaria to make a comprehensive analysis of the country’s economy for each passing year and prepare a three-year forecast for its development. In this report, the Institute continues to meet its requirements for objectivity and usefulness to the Bulgarian society. While this does not always appeal to the government, objectivity and usefulness to society are part of the spiritual values of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, and I am convinced that we will stand up for them in the future too.

Presenting the results of our scientific and applied projects of public significance is of increasing interest and is largely covered by the electronic and print media.

In the Institute, there have worked and continue to work colleagues who, with their expertise, have held positions in the top-level of government. I would like to emphasize that, even without going back, to the present day the Institute continues

to benefit from the great expert experience of people who have combined science and practice, taking on the positions of Deputy Prime Ministers of Bulgaria, ministers, deputy ministers and members of Parliament.

Researchers from the Institute are representatives of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences at the National Council to the Minister of Economy, the Consultative Council to the Minister of Regional Development, the INTERREG Greece – Bulgaria Monitoring Committee 2014-2020, the Inter-Departmental Working Group on Demographic Issues at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Inter-Departmental Working Group on Mapping and Assessment of Ecosystem Services at the Ministry of Environment and Waters, and others.

At the beginning of 2019, the Economic Research Institute at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences was appointed by the Council of Ministers as a partner of the Global Partnership Centre of the "16 + 1" Initiative.

Last but not least, I have to mention the training programs for Master's and PhD students. The Institute has achieved a great success over many years of joint Master's programs (lasting more than 10 years) with universities such as the University of Veliko Tarnovo "St. St. Kiril and Methodii" and the Trakia University in Stara Zagora, which ended in the past few years.

The Institute maintains and continues to have an accreditation for 7 PhD programs.

Regarding its publishing activity, with its two specialized journals, the Institute holds a leading position among the economic publications in Bulgaria.

The "*Economic Studies*" journal is the only journal in the country with an impact factor in the field of economics – the SJR rank of SCOPUS. The journal is international and is published in English.

The other journal – "*Economic Thought*", is the successor of the "Economic Thought" journal, which was founded in 1929 as a scientific body of the Society of Bulgarian Economists and Academics and is the oldest economic journal in Bulgaria. Since 2018, the journal has been indexed in the ERIH PLUS.

In recent years, the Institute's international activities have intensified, resulting in a number of agreements for joint research cooperation with the relevant institutes of the national academies and higher education institutions in Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Ukraine, Northern Macedonia, Serbia, Italy, Korea, Vietnam, China and others.

There is much more that can be said about the activities and achievements of the Economic Research Institute at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, but the brief outline presented here is enough to illustrate its capabilities and to understand its immense usefulness to the Bulgarian society. For that, the Institute has been awarded state and public distinctions and prizes, and its members have been awarded for their active creative activity and achievements in science with the medals "Stara Planina", "St. St. Kiril and Methodii", the honorary sign of the BAS "Prof. Marin Drinov" on ribbon and more. All these achievements would be impossible without

the human factor, the different generations who have worked at the Institute since its creation and still work there to this day.

I would like to express my deepest respect and gratitude to our teachers and older colleagues for the established scientific traditions in this Institute and the confirmed objectivity requirements for the analysis and the results of our research. I hope our generation will pass on the torch to the next one, which, like us, will carry on the established scientific traditions.

I would like to thank all our colleagues, former and current, for their efforts, diligence and dedication to building the great public authority of the Economic Research Institute. I am proud of all the young people who have grown up as individuals in the Institute and have earned their place as researchers and lecturers.

On the 70-year anniversary of our Institute, I extend my most sincere and cordial wishes to all the scientists and employees. I wish to all of us to have good health, to continue the traditions laid down in the activity and development of the Institute, and to preserve the spiritual values left to us by our ancestors who, 150 years ago, have established the Bulgarian national spiritual centre of which we are a small but valuable part today.