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## THE BULGARIAN 1989

### INTRODUCTION

Two dates in Bulgarian 20<sup>th</sup>-century history are imbued with a special meaning for the country's citizens – 9 September 1944 and 10 November 1989. In the public mind, these dates have been made to symbolise *Change* with a capital letter. While 9 September stands as a symbol of Bulgaria's post-WWII embarking on the road to communism, 10 November is regarded as the watershed marking the start of another system change, this time to capitalism. Interestingly enough, coups were carried out on both dates – a coup d'état on 9 September<sup>1</sup> and an intra-party coup on 10 November.

With the passage of time, 10 November and 1989 have become rather interchangeable in their symbolic meaning, with both of them standing for the nation's parting with communism. And as symbols tend to do, '1989' has the remarkable capacity of expanding in scope and covering not only diverse in character events and processes, but also ones related to a somewhat broader period.

### TIME FRAME

In the case of Bulgaria, the processes that led to the events of 1989 started to develop in the middle of the 1980s. This is not to say that prior to that there had been lack of activities and expressions of dissent in the country. As early as 1945–1955, the *Goryani*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> As a result of the coup, the legal government was replaced with a Fatherland Front coalition government consisting of representatives of the Bulgarian Workers' Party (Communists), the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union "Pladne", the Bulgarian Workers' Social Democratic Party (Broad Socialists), and the "Zveno" political circle. The fact that the Soviet Union had declared war on Bulgaria on 5 September and the Red Army had entered the Bulgarian territory on 8 September was of definite aid to the communists who in the following months proceeded in taking full control of the country. The Dimitrov Constitution of 1947 proclaimed the coup d'état a 'people's uprising' and the Zhivkov Constitution of 1971 declared it to have been a 'socialist revolution.'

<sup>2</sup> For transliteration, the Streamlined System for the Romanisation of Bulgarian is applied, with the exception of the names of Bulgarian authors, transliterated differently in their publications in English.

armed resistance movement was active, regrettably widely unknown outside of Bulgaria. It is not possible to explain in short to a foreign reader all the connotations of the word *Goryani*<sup>3</sup>. Suffice it to say here that what made the members of this movement go underground, to the relative safety of the mountains and forests, were the forceful imposition of communism and sovietisation of the country<sup>4</sup>.

Members of the *Goryani* attachments were people from all strata of society – well-to-do and poor, representatives of the intelligentsia and peasants, agrarians and anarchists, democrats and disenchanting communists, Christians and Muslims... Added to the strenuous conditions they were acting under, this diversity made coordination between the various attachments difficult, and there was not a united commanding centre to direct their activities. While at the start people joined the movement to a large extent out of the desire to defend themselves against the authorities, after the start of the Korean War (1950–1953) hopes grew that an impending U.S.-Soviet collision might spread to Bulgarian territory and eventually free the country. The number of *Goryani* grew, to reach according to some data 7,000 members with no less than 40,000–50,000 helpers among the local population. However, repeated attempts at getting in touch with representatives of Western countries did not bring the expected results, and after the end of the Korean War and the West's obvious disinclination to give an aiding hand during the 1953 Berlin events and the ones in Budapest in 1956 left no illusion whatsoever for a possible change in the status quo<sup>5</sup>.

Another not well known manifestation of dissent, a rather short lived one, and ending with blood spilled, was the strike of the tobacco workers in the spring of 1953 in Plovdiv, dealt with by the communist authorities by ordering the militia on 4 May 1953 to shoot some of the leaders and participants and sending many others to camps and prisons<sup>6</sup>.

The outer world is not totally unaware of people like journalist and poet Georgi Zarkin (1940–1977), sentenced to prison for disseminating in 1965 leaflets calling for the overthrow of Todor Zhivkov's government, since his poems were read on Radio Free Europe. Nevertheless neither Zarkin's works, with "March of the Bulgarian Political Prisoners" among them, nor his struggle against suppression and his brutal murder in the Pazardzik prison on the eve of the 1977 International Writers Conference in Sofia<sup>7</sup> have received their due attention.

<sup>3</sup> An attempt to explain the roots of this term and the significance it carries in Bulgarian is made by Marian Gyaurski and Konstantin Kasabov. – M. Gyaurski, K. Kasabov, "Vazmozhna li e kategorizatsiya i periodizatsiya na goryanskoto dvizhenie", in: *Saprotivata sreshthu komunisticheskiya rezhim v Bulgaria (1944–1989 g.)*. *Sbornik materialni ot natsionalna nauchna konferentsiya, NBU, 23–24 III 2011*, ed. L. Stoyanov, Zh. Lefterov, ebox.nbu.bg/anti, p. 118.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 121.

<sup>5</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 117; M. Ivanov, "Antikomunisticheskata vaorazhena saprotiva v Bulgaria, 1944–1955 g. – obobshtenie na literaturata", in: *Saprotivata sreshthu komunisticheskiya rezhim v Bulgaria (1944–1989 g.)*..., pp. 111–114. For more information about the *Goryani* movement see D. Sharlanov, *Goryanite. Koi sa te?*, Sofia 1999; *Goryanite. Sbornik dokumenti*, t. 2: 1949–1956, ed. N. Grozeva, E. Bugorcheva, Sofia 2010.

<sup>6</sup> H. Markov, "Malko izvesten protest (stachka) na plovdivskite tyutyunorabotnitsi ot proleta na 1953 g.", in: *Saprotivata sreshthu komunisticheskiya rezhim v Bulgaria (1944–1989 g.)*..., pp. 174–181.

<sup>7</sup> The authorities were apprehensive of foreign writers – participants in the conference possibly expressing a wish to meet with Zarkin and arranged for his murder by two criminal prisoners. – *Komunisticheski zverstva*:

Eduard Genov, co-founder of the Youth Organisation for National Freedom in 1964 and one of the students sent to prison for organising a campaign against the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia, recalls:

A misconception has been formed about Bulgaria. It is considered [to have been] quiet and meek and that the Bulgarians accepted the Soviet domination with pleasure. This is not true, and we are next to none in this respect. But information neither entered, nor went out of Bulgaria. Journalist Georgi Zarkin was murdered in prison. Has anyone heard about that? We were not the first ones with that declaration. There had been several attempts before ours, but what happened to the people [who made them] only State Security knows. We were just lucky. Greater courage was required from the people who acted against the authorities in Bulgaria. Because we were alone, there was no one to rely on<sup>8</sup>.

The fact is, however, that until the late 1980s, dissident<sup>9</sup> activities in the country consisted rather of separate, uncoordinated acts of individuals or groups, sufficient for raising concerns among the authorities who answered with immediate suppression, but not nearly enough for undermining their position.

And then, processes began developing and accelerating – both externally and internally – conducive to a change in pace for the people displeased with the status quo.

## ENVIRONMENT AND MAIN ACTORS

### International

With the beginning of Gorbachev's *perestroika*, the Soviet Union's hold on the rest of the Eastern Bloc countries slackened enough to allow for local forms of loosening the grip on societies. At the same time, Moscow had what to say in regard to who would lead the particular bloc members. In regard to Bulgaria, the relations between the coun-

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*Sluchayat Georgi Zarkin*, 13 IV 2009, <https://dariknews.bg/regioni/shumen/komunisticheski-zverstva-sluchaqt-georgi-zarkin-347585>.

<sup>8</sup> D. Gorcheva, *Toy beshe edin ot maltsinata istinski balgarski disidenti*, 18 XII 2009, <https://www.mediapool.bg/toi-beshe-edin-ot-maltsinata-istinski-balgarski-disidenti-news159980.html>. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Bulgarian are mine.

<sup>9</sup> A lot of effort has been put into formulating the most accurate descriptions of 'dissidence.' In regard to the questions whether, when and to what extent dissidence had its manifestations in Bulgaria, special mention deserve the publications of Natalia Hristova. – N. Hristova, *Spetsifika na balgarskoto "disidentstvo." Vlast i inteligentsiya 1956–1989*, Plovdiv 2005; *eadem*, *Balgarskiyat debat za "disidentstvoto"*, Working Paper, New Bulgarian University, Scholar Electronic Repository, 2018, [eprints.nbu.bg/3820](https://eprints.nbu.bg/3820). See also E. Ivanova, *Balgarskoto disidentstvo 1988–1989*, part 1, Sofia 1997, pp. 3–13; M. Badzhakov, "Balgarskoto disidentstvo s i bez kavichki", in: *Saprotivata sreshtu komunisticheskiya rezhim v Bulgaria 1944–1989 g.*..., pp. 67–74. In this study, when discussing dissidence, I take into consideration both its dimensions – the kind of disagreement with the regime that sought to 'repair' it, and the openly anticommunist manifestations of dissent whose ultimate goal was the change of the system itself. At the same time, I do not abstain from showing, when I deem necessary, the not so thin line between the two.

try's long-standing leader Todor Zhivkov (1911–1998)<sup>10</sup> and Mikhail Gorbachev, though seemingly friendly at the start, were tense. Zhivkov did not have much trust in his younger Soviet colleague. Gorbachev on his part looked upon his Bulgarian counterpart as a representative of the old guard, a hardliner like Erich Honecker or Gustáv Husák<sup>11</sup>.

Alarmed by the worsening economic situation, Todor Zhivkov undertook steps in two directions – introduction of new concepts of economic development aimed at a radical turn within the country<sup>12</sup> and proposals for reorganisation and a new kind of relations within the COMECON. In his memoirs Zhivkov says that at that time he considered the COMECON to have turned into a parasite institution harmful to the common cause. He saw his ideas for changes in that organisation as well as about the course of *perestroika* in general as strongly differing from the ones Gorbachev proclaimed. With certainty, this approach to problems did not gain him the Soviet leader's sympathy<sup>13</sup>. And, regardless of Moscow's seemingly loosened grip on its allies, there do not seem to be doubts in regard to the Soviet leadership's key role in the 1989 changing of the guard in Bulgaria<sup>14</sup>.

As for the stand on developments in Bulgaria on the part of what is generally rather broadly defined as the 'West', with the United States in the forefront, interest in matters Bulgarian was mild at best<sup>15</sup>. Reflecting on the 'Russian view' of developments in Bulgaria, prominent Bulgarian journalist and publicist Toma Tomov, who had had repeated meet-

<sup>10</sup> First Secretary (4 March 1954 – 4 April 1981) and General Secretary (4 April 1981 – 10 November 1989) of the Bulgarian Communist Party; Prime Minister (27 November 1962 – 9 July 1971); Chairman of the State Council (9 July 1971 – 17 November 1989).

<sup>11</sup> On the conflict between the two leaders see I. Marcheva, "Konfliktat Mihail Gorbachov – Todor Zhivkov (Ili oshte vednazh za savetsko-balgarskite otnosheniya v konteksta na perestroykata prez vtorata polovina na 80-te godini na XX vek)", in: *Istoriyata – profesiya i sadba. V chest na chlen-korespondent d. ist. n. Georgi Markov*, Sofia 2008, pp. 577–593.

<sup>12</sup> Attempts at reorganising the economy had been made earlier, including the New Economic Model introduced without particular success in 1981, the Concept for Technological Renewal in Bulgaria (March 1986), as well as the so called July Concept – a 1987 programme of the Central Committee of the BCP for changes in the planned economy. In January 1989, however, market reforms were started by issuing the so called Decree No 56 according to which economic activities in the country were to be "undertaken on the basis of all forms of property." It is considered that Zhivkov may have intended to follow China's way of development. – *Ukaz 56*, [http://www.omda.bg/public/arhiv/Realii/Ukaz\\_56.htm](http://www.omda.bg/public/arhiv/Realii/Ukaz_56.htm). Valuable information about Todor Zhivkov's visit to China in May 1987 and his impressions from the achievements of his Chinese hosts shares the member of the Bulgarian delegation Boyan Traykov, Director General (1981–1990) of the Bulgarian News Agency, in his book "10 November the Coup 1989." Traykov also tells of his private conversation with Deng Xiaoping, whom he quotes as having said that Zhivkov had interesting views but unfortunately it would be difficult for him to put them into practice as he would be seriously hindered. – B. Traykov, *10 noemvri Prevratat 1989*, Sofia 1999, pp. 21–24. In his memoirs Zhivkov himself speaks rather warmly of the talks he had during that visit with Mao Zedong, Jiang Zemin and Deng Xiaoping. – T. Zhivkov, *Memoari*, Sofia 1997, pp. 515–528.

<sup>13</sup> T. Zhivkov, *Memoari...*, pp. 343–349; B. Traykov, *10 noemvri Prevratat 1989...*, p. 21; I. Marcheva, "Konfliktat Mihail Gorbachov – Todor Zhivkov..."; *Zashto Gorbachov i Zhivkov ne namirat obsht ezik? Imalo li e vaobshite lichna druzhba mezhdu tyah?*, „168 chasa“, 18 I 2019, <https://www.168chasa.bg/article/7251568>; H. Hristov, *Todor Zhivkov. Biografiya*, Sofia 2009, pp. 100–106.

<sup>14</sup> See for instance J. Baev, 1989: *Bulgarian Transition to Pluralist Democracy*, "Cold War International History Project Bulletin" 2001, 12/13, p. 166; D. Nenov, *Porivi i pokrusi. Sazdavaneto na SDS i borbata za demokratsiya 1989–1992*, Sofia 2014, p. 18.

<sup>15</sup> D. Dineva, "The Initial Stages of Bulgaria's Transition to Democracy and U.S. Policy", in: *Rethinking the Past – Looking to the Future: Proceedings of the Ninth Joint Meeting of Bulgarian and North American Scholars*, Eugene, Oregon, May 31 – June 1, 2012, ed. A. Miltenova, C. Vakareliyska, C. Holden, Sofia 2015, pp. 54–55.

ings both with Mikhail Gorbachev and close associates of his like Alexander Yakovlev, says, “During the whole time I was aware that Bulgaria was a very small, secondary episode of the Big Game, the battle for Europe. Figuratively speaking, if a battle is being fought for the Reichstag, what was happening in Bulgaria was like switching on the lighting in a small building on one of the side streets<sup>16</sup>.” Events, however, showed that the ‘eastern’ participant in the ‘Big Game’ was more concerned with developments in Bulgaria.

It is interesting to note that the ‘organs’ in Bulgaria had noticed a growing frequency of the meetings between the Soviet ambassador to Sofia (26 February 1988 – 22 April 1992), Viktor Sharapov, and the U.S. ambassador (4 September 1987 – 17 August 1990), Sol Polansky. This must have been one of the rare cases, though concealed, of unanimity and common interest between a Soviet and a U.S. ambassador, Boyan Traykov comments. Some of the ‘organs,’ he says, were even ready to assume there was interaction for the ‘democratisation’ of the government of the country<sup>17</sup>. It seems, however, that neither Sol Polansky, nor officials in Washington, D. C. dealing with Eastern Europe had known anything in advance of Zhivkov’s overthrow. On 9 November 1989, a day before the coup, ambassador Polansky informed the State Department that it was clear that people in Bulgaria wanted changes, but that no one was prepared to mount a direct challenge to Zhivkov. “We tend to agree (...) that there probably will not be major personnel changes”, he said<sup>18</sup>.

Speaking of the international environment during the period discussed, a factor to be remembered was the isolation of the country due to the regime’s policy in relation to the Bulgarian Turks. The authorities’ name-changing campaign – the so called ‘revival process’ – that started in 1984–1985, targeting Bulgarian Muslims with Turkish or Arabic names, resulted in about 311,000 Bulgarian Turks leaving the country between 3 June 1989 and 21 August of the same year, when Turkey closed its border with Bulgaria<sup>19</sup>.

Throughout the years, the Bulgarian communist leadership’s policy towards Bulgarian Turks underwent, to use the words of a Bulgarian researcher, an initial period of “relative ‘toleration,’” followed by the “more integrationist policies of the 1960s and mid-1970s”, to reach, during the last phase of its rule, the stage of concerted efforts towards “intense assimilation”. Both domestic and external factors played a part in shaping this

<sup>16</sup> T. Tomov, *Prevratat na 10 noemvri*, <http://www.omda.bg/public/biblioteka/toma-tomov/prevratat-kare.htm>.

<sup>17</sup> For the two sides to have gone thus far is hardly likely in Traykov’s opinion. “But”, he says, the “games between the ‘Great’ ones are incredible.” – B. Traykov, *10 noemvri Prevratat 1989...*, p. 47.

<sup>18</sup> J. Baev, 1989: *Bulgarian Transition to Pluralist Democracy...*, pp. 166, 179–180.

<sup>19</sup> Later, about 150,000 of them returned to their country of birth. – L. Petkova, *The Ethnic Turks in Bulgaria: Social Integration and Impact on Bulgarian-Turkish Relations, 1947–2000*, “The Global Review of Ethnopolitics” 2002, 4, pp. 47–49; A. Krasteva, “Bulgarian Migration Profile”, in: *Proliferation of Migration Transition: Selected New EU Member States*, ed. F. Medved, European Liberal Forum 2014, p. 196. According to Bulgarian researcher Darina Vasileva, “The sociological analysis shows that the motives moving the Turks to Turkey were not only those of escape from violence or of religious, cultural and moral character,” but that Turkey as well “attracted the Turks of Bulgaria with its potential promises for a better life, more money and perhaps the possible status of labour migration to Western Europe.” – D. Vasileva, *Bulgarian Turkish Emigration and Return*, “The International Migration Review”, vol. 26, no. 2, 1992, p. 348.

kind of policy<sup>20</sup>. Whereas some researchers regard the ethnic conflict as one of the crucial factors for the collapse of the communist regime, others, though recognizing the negative consequences of the policy towards the Bulgarian Turks, consider it somewhat farfetched to perceive it as a regime-eroding factor<sup>21</sup>.

### Internal

Within the country, three main factors are seen as underlying the change in late 1989: political ambitions and infighting among representatives of the highest party echelon; the ethnic tensions brought about by the authorities' name-changing campaign, and the growing social discontent<sup>22</sup>.

While the 'revival process' may have been considered a useful tool in the hands of the regime, providing it with the opportunity to lessen the degree of the political crisis in the country and postpone the necessary changes<sup>23</sup>, the mass population exodus it caused in the summer of 1989 did not bode well for an economy already in a crisis.

Neither the introduction of agricultural-industrial complexes, nor the New Economic Model had succeeded in turning the negative tide in economic development. Successive steps towards reforms could not alleviate the effects of the surge in foreign indebtedness and inflation Bulgaria had been struggling with since 1985<sup>24</sup>. Reduced living standards served to deepen social discontent among Bulgarians.

## MAIN ACTORS FROM THE RULING ELITE

The leading figures among Zhivkov's adversaries in the ruling elite were Andrey Lukanov (1938–1996)<sup>25</sup> and Petar Mladenov (1936–2000)<sup>26</sup>, both graduates of Soviet universities and relying on close ties with members of the Soviet leadership. Lukanov was also known for his good contacts among Western politicians and magnates such as

<sup>20</sup> V. Paraskevov, "Insecurity and Control: Bulgaria and Its Turkish Minority", in: *Ethnicity, Nationalism and the European Cold War*, ed. R. Knight, London–New York 2012, p. 122.

<sup>21</sup> See D. Vasileva, *Bulgarian Turkish Emigration and Return...*, p. 342; V. Stoyanov, *Turското naselenie v Bulgaria mezhdu polyusite na etnicheskata politika: Bulgaro – Turcica 2*, Sofia 1998, pp. 215–216.

<sup>22</sup> J. Baev, 1989: *Bulgarian Transition to Pluralist Democracy...*, p. 165.

<sup>23</sup> Darina Vasileva reminds of the role of ethnic conflicts as "safety valves" used to prevent graver social conflicts in both Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union since the 1980s. – D. Vasileva, *Bulgarian Turkish Emigration and Return...*, p. 343.

<sup>24</sup> About the 1980s crises and the government's attempts at dealing with them see R. Avramov, D. Gnjatovic, *Stabilization policies in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia During Communism's Terminal Years: 1980s Economic Visions in Retrospect*, Athens 2008, pp. 8–19, 25–29, 33–34; J. Wight, M.L. Fox, *Economic Crisis and Reform in Bulgaria, 1989–1992*, "Balkanistica" 11, 1998, pp. 129–130. On the country's foreign debt policy see M. Ivanov, Ts. Todorova, D. Vachkov, *Istoriya na vanshniya darzhaven dalg na Bulgaria, 1878–1990*, part 3, Sofia 2009, pp. 219–300.

<sup>25</sup> Associate Member of Politburo (1979–1989), Deputy Prime Minister (1976–1989), Prime Minister (8 February – 21 September and 22 November – 20 December 1990).

<sup>26</sup> Member of Politburo (1974–1989), Minister of Foreign Affairs (1971–1989), Chairman of the State Council (17 November 1989 – 3 April 1990), President of Bulgaria (3 April – 6 July 1990).



Robert Maxwell<sup>27</sup>. Around them gathered both higher-echelon members whom Zhivkov had removed from their posts such as Aleksandar Lilov, Chudomir Aleksandrov and Stoyan Mihaylov, and members until recently of his inner circle like the Minister of Defence Dobri Dzhurov and Prime Minister Georgi Atanasov<sup>28</sup>.

A part of the elite dismissed in 1982–1985 consisted of liberal leaning intellectuals from the circle around Todor Zhivkov's daughter Lyudmila (1942–1981) who had been Member of the Politburo and Chairman of the Committee for Art and Culture (1975–1981). Some of these people evolved into so called “*perestroika*-dissidents<sup>29</sup>.”

Andrey Lukanov and Petar Mladenov maintained close contacts with the Kremlin mostly via the Soviet ambassador, KGB Major-General Viktor Sharapov and Valentin Terekhov, counsellor at the Soviet embassy and by his own account, a very close friend of Lukanov's. Interestingly enough, the plot for Zhivkov's ousting was kept secret from the KGB representative in Sofia, General Vladilen Fyodorov, apparently for fear of a possible leak<sup>30</sup>. According to Valentin Terekhov, instead of turning for cooperation to General Fyodorov, an “undoubtedly clever and experienced, but rather cautious” person, the plotters won over Colonel Albert Odintsov, former KGB resident in Yugoslavia<sup>31</sup>.

In his memoirs, presented by journalist Toma Tomov in 1998 in the “Trud” daily, Valentin Terekhov speaks in detail about the preparations for Zhivkov's ousting. But while his description of the Bulgarian dictator's character<sup>32</sup> rings rather true, his constant praise of his friend Lukanov and especially his diligence in trying to convince the readers of the conspirators' detachment from the Moscow decision centre and of the preparations for the coup having been all but singlehandedly made overplay his hand. Commenting on this last aspect of Terekhov's memoirs, Boyan Traykov says, “Will the future readers believe that a Soviet diplomat prepares a coup against the head of the state where he is accredited without a clear permission, not even instructions by his seniors, just like that, merely out of friendly feelings and consentience with one of the local leaders? It is very doubtful. But he is bound to make up such a tale.” The conclu-

<sup>27</sup> T. Tomov, *Prevratat na 10 noemvri...*; E. Kalinova, I. Baeva, *Balgarskite prehodi 1939–2002*, Sofia 2002, p. 250; J. Baev, 1989: *Bulgarian Transition to Pluralist Democracy...*, p. 166.

<sup>28</sup> E. Kalinova, I. Baeva, *Balgarskite prehodi 1939–2002...*, p. 250.

<sup>29</sup> See R. Kolarova, D. Dimitrov, “The Round Table Talks in Bulgaria”, in: *The Round Table Talks and the Breakdown of Communism*, ed. J. Elster, Chicago–London 1996, pp. 179–180.

<sup>30</sup> J. Baev, 1989: *Bulgarian Transition to Pluralist Democracy...*, p. 166.

<sup>31</sup> T. Tomov, *Prevratat na 10 noemvri...*

<sup>32</sup> “Undoubtedly, a remarkable personality – sharp (not very educated, indeed, and more precisely – uneducated), with peasant cunning and perfidious, tough and even cruel. [He was] often merciless. [And he was] totally unprincipled. He paid homage to only one God – personal and family power. To protect and preserve it, he was ready to do anything, including [committing] crimes. Our man in Bulgaria! In his soul, of course, he was anti-Soviet, despite shouting loudest of all about love and friendship with the CPSU and the USSR. He was a remarkable demagogue and a good businessman.” Terekhov's description of the way the Bulgarian leader guarded his position rings true, too: “Zhivkov's monarchy relied on the party and its ‘blade’ – the security services, which literally pierced all the structures of society. And just in case there was near Sofia a division of the services, complete with thugs armed to the teeth, even with tanks.” – T. Tomov, *Prevratat na 10 noemvri...*

sion: any suspicions that Gorbachev may have had something to do with the activities described had to be dispelled<sup>33</sup>.

## MAIN DISSIDENT ORGANISATIONS

The Bulgarians actively opposing the authorities in the late 1980s belonged to two rather different groups. The first group consisted of people who were either members of, or connected to the Communist Party. Though critical of the regime, they shared one characteristic – a wish not for a radical change of the system but for some kind of ‘humanisation’ of the existing order. The second group, whose members were for the most part former political prisoners persecuted by the authorities, were ardent opponents of communism and had a clear view of the need for changing the system<sup>34</sup>.

People representing the latter group founded in January 1988 the Independent Society for Protection of Human Rights in Bulgaria, headed by Ilia Minev (1917–2000). Minev, called by many ‘Bulgaria’s (only) true dissident,’ spent thirty-three years in communist prisons, longer than Nelson Mandela’s twenty-seven years behind bars. His staunch anticommunism, his having been prior to 9 September 1944 among the leaders of the Union of Bulgarian National Legions, an organisation with sympathies towards the National Socialist ideology, as well as his refusal to bend to the will of his communist persecutors despite all the torture, humiliation and suffering, stood in contrast to the many freshly coined dissidents. When poet and journalist Petar Manolov (1939–2016), secretary of the Independent Society for Protection of Human Rights was arrested and all his manuscripts were confiscated, he went on a hunger strike. In support of his fellow-dissident, Ilia Minev went on a hunger strike too (during his long years of persecution, deprived of other means of expressing his protest, he spent a total of 460 days on hunger strikes). In the meantime, world media reported Petar Manolov’s arrest and hunger strike and Kurt Vonnegut, Norman Mailer, Isaac Asimov, Allen Ginsberg, William Styron and other prominent figures expressed their support for him and in May 1989 he was extradited from Bulgaria<sup>35</sup>.

Human rights were in the centre of dissident activities during this period. The Committee for Protection of Religious Rights, Freedom of Conscience and Spiritual Values was established in October 1988, with Hristofor Sabev, nuclear physicist and priest at the head. On 25 December 1988, the Citizen Initiative Movement was established.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 50.

<sup>34</sup> See K. Lakov, *The Transition That Never Happened: At Least Not the Way That Was Recommended*, Sofia 2014, pp. 85–87. In her study on Bulgarian dissidence, Evgenia Ivanova points to the juxtapositions of communist – anticommunist, elite members – plebeians, from the capital city – from the country, and intellectuals – prisoners when discussing the two main groups of dissidents in the country. – See E. Ivanova, *Balgarskoto disidentstvo 1988–1989...*, pp. 7–11.

<sup>35</sup> I. Gadjev, *Neprimirimiya Ilia Minev – ot parvo litse i drugite za nego*, Sofia 2003; H. Hristov, *V pamet na choveka, chiito ubezhdeniya mu kostvaha 33 godini zad reshetkite*, 7 I 2013, <https://www.mediapool.bg/v-pamet-na-choveka-chiito-ubezhdeniya-mu-kostvaha-33-godini-zad-reshetkite-news.201363.html>; *Istoriya na SDS (07.12.1989 – 07.12.2009). Dati, sabitiya, lichnosti*, ed. D. Boteva, Sofia 2012, pp. 203, 229–230.



The protection of social and work-related rights was the goal of the people who founded on 8 February 1989 the Independent Trade Union “Podkrepa” (later Confederation of Labour “Podkrepa”) set to themselves.

The first public demonstration against the regime, however, had to do with ecology. On 28 September 1987, a relatively small group of mothers pushing perambulators gathered in the centre of the town of Ruse in protest against the poisoning of the air with chlorine from the Romanian chemical plant in Giurgiu on the opposite bank of the Danube that had been going on for seven years. The next demonstration gathered several thousand people, angry at the passivity of the authorities in the face of a true ecological catastrophe. Prominent intellectuals, mainly members of the Communist Party, took the problem to heart and the chlorine pollution of Ruse, until then a taboo subject, finally started gaining publicity. On 8 March 1988, after a showing of the documentary “Breathe” about the unbearable situation in Ruse, in a Sofia cinema the Public Committee for Ecological Protection of Ruse was established. Due to strong pressure and persecution by the State Security however this organisation did not succeed in carrying out any activities. Years later, the chairman of the Ruse Committee Georgi Mishev said that its demands had been purely political ones, despite having been expressed euphemistically, resorting to the *perestroika* vocabulary. The demands were political, he said, since the problem of the ecological threat required most of all a political decision<sup>36</sup>.

At the beginning of November 1988, the most prominent organisation of the adherents of ‘humanisation’ of the existing order was established – the Club for Support of Glasnost and Perestroika (later Club for Glasnost and Perestroika). Among its members were communist intellectuals like philosopher Professor Kiril Vasilev, poet Hristo Radevski, Academician Aleksey Sheludko, film director Ducho Mundrov, and poet Radoy Ralin. Philosopher Zhelyu Zhelev, future president of Bulgaria and poet Blaga Dimitrova, future vice president, were also founding members of the Club. Its programme centered on problems related to the state of the national economy, human rights and civil liberties, demography, ecology, culture, and unresolved issues concerning the history of the country<sup>37</sup>.

When the French President François Mitterrand expressed the wish to meet with members both of the Independent Society for Protection of Human Rights and the Club for Glasnost and Perestroika during his January 1989 visit to Bulgaria, the Bulgarian authorities arranged only for his meeting with twelve ‘independent intellectuals.’ At the breakfast at the French Embassy in Sofia on 19 January 1989, the intellectuals in question, most of them members of the Club for Glasnost and Perestroika, were rat-

<sup>36</sup> *Rusenskiyat komitet. Dokumentalen sbornik s materialy ot Tsentralniya darzhaven arhiv i arhiva na Obshtestveniya komitet za ekologichna zashtita na grad Ruse*, ed. G. Mishev, V. Dareva, Sofia 2002, pp. 9–10; 28.9.1987 g.: 25 g. ot parvata demonstratsiya sreshu totalitarniya rezhim v Ruse, 28 IX 2012, [https://www.bltz.bg/obshtestvo/2891987-g-25-g-ot-prvata-demonstratsiya-sreshchu-totalitarniya-rezhim-v-ruse\\_news156719.html](https://www.bltz.bg/obshtestvo/2891987-g-25-g-ot-prvata-demonstratsiya-sreshchu-totalitarniya-rezhim-v-ruse_news156719.html); M. Spasov, *Sazdavaneto na SDS 1988–1991 g.*, Sofia 2001, pp. 27–29.

<sup>37</sup> K. Lakov, *The Transition That Never Happened...*, p. 86; M. Spasov, *Sazdavaneto na SDS 1988–1991 g...*, pp. 29–32; Programme Declaration of the Club for Support of Glasnost and Perestroika – E. Ivanova, *Balgarskoto disidentstvo 1988–1989...*, pp. 62–64.

her reserved in their description of the situation in the country. None of the Bulgarian guests used the opportunity to put the question about the arrest several days earlier of thirteen members of the Independent Society for Protection of Human Rights and Petar Manolov's ensuing hunger strike. When asked about it later, Blaga Dimitrova said that it "had not been worth it."<sup>38</sup>

The French press was very critical of President Mitterrand's breakfast meeting with the Bulgarian intellectuals. According to "Quotidien de Paris", the president had demonstrated an unusual discretion in regard to the most delicate problem - human rights. Mitterrand was content, the paper said, to meet with several official intellectuals of the regime whose only daring was to sing in a loud voice the praises of Mikhail Gorbachev's merits and his *perestroika* policy. "Figaro" had a question about the breakfast guests, "Are they truly oppositionists?" "Libération" reminded the readers that during their meeting with Mitterrand in Prague earlier the Czech dissidents had presented a list of humanitarian cases. In Sofia, it was said, the twelve moderately critical intellectuals preferred to share with him their admiration for Mikhail Gorbachev<sup>39</sup>.

A comparison between the memberships of the Independent Society for Protection of Human Rights and the Club for Glasnost and Perestroika shows the fundamental differences between them in terms of political views, social position, and life stories. According to information at the disposal of State Security, all of the Society's twenty-five pre-1989 members were non-party members, with seventeen of them convicted of anti-state crimes. Eight persons were university graduates, with two of them with theological education, and seventeen had finished secondary or primary school. Behind their proclaimed goals of protecting human rights and democracy, the information said, they hid their "hatred and total denial of the socialist system." In early 1989, new members were enlisted, "nationalistically disposed" persons and Orthodox clergymen<sup>40</sup>.

A rather different picture was presented in the data State Security and BCP structures had about the members of the Club for Glasnost and Perestroika. According to it, among the eighty-seven co-founders of the Club scholars in the social sciences predominated, with two academicians, two corresponding members, and thirty-one professors. Twenty-five members were writers. Of the eighty-seven co-founders, forty-eight were members of the Bulgarian Communist Party, with twelve Active Fighters Against Capitalism and Fascism (ABPFK) among them<sup>41</sup>.

Inevitably, the differences in background and outlook translated into differences in the goals and the methods chosen for their achievement. This applied as well to other

<sup>38</sup> Some days later prominent Bulgarian intellectuals, with members of the Club among them, started a campaign for the protection of Petar Manolov. - D. Ludzhev, *Revolutsiyata v Bulgaria 1989-1991*, vol. 1, Sofia 2008, pp. 72-74, 77-79; M. Spasov, *Sazdavaneto na SDS 1988-1991 g.*, pp. 33-34; *Istoriya na SDS...*, p. 12.

<sup>39</sup> I. Bakalov, *25 godini ot zakuskata s Miteran - skromnoto balgarsko disidentstvo (Iztupano ot arhiva)*, e-vestnik.bg/19712, 18 I 2014.

<sup>40</sup> D. Ludzhev, *Revolutsiyata v Bulgaria 1989-1991...*, p. 76.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 58-59. It should be noted that in the People's Republic of Bulgaria the holders of the ABPFK status and their families enjoyed significant privileges, including free vacations at special resorts, free medicines, free public transportation, high pensions, and exceptional access to university education and prestigious secondary schools.

protest groups and organisations that were set up in the country in the late 1980s. Researchers have noticed a certain phenomenon in regard to them, namely that they declared themselves to be non-political and named themselves “independent” – the Independent Society for Protection of Human Rights, the Independent Committee for Environmental Protection of Ruse, the Independent Association “Ekoglasnost” as well as others. And when freedom of association was guaranteed in December 1989, all these associations split with half their leaders embracing non-political goals and the other half including such goals in their programmes<sup>42</sup>.

## MAIN EVENTS

In 1989, the sense of crisis was rapidly growing in both the citizens and the ruling elite. The worsening economic conditions, the mass May demonstrations of the Bulgarian Turks, the suppression of which led to loss of human life, and the growing number of cases of publicly expressed discontent – all this coupled with news about rapidly unfolding events in other countries from the Eastern Bloc, only intensified the anxiety among the BCP leadership.

The exodus of Bulgarian Turks during the summer months was followed by a ‘hot’ autumn of protest actions. During the International Ecological Forum in Sofia (16 October – 3 November 1989) activists of the Independent Association “Ekoglasnost”, supported by other dissident organisations and availing themselves of the presence of foreign journalists in Sofia, started gathering signatures for a petition against large construction projects for the Rila Mountain and the Mesta River. On 26 October, members of the group that was gathering signatures in a small garden near the Central Military Club were beaten and arrested by the militia (police), an event widely publicized by foreign media. Despite the violent reaction of the authorities, on 3 November more than 10,000 people took part in a demonstration in support of the petition which was publicly submitted to the National Assembly.

Meanwhile, the anti-Zhivkov members of the BCP leadership, while, according to Valentin Terekhov’s account, in constant contact with Moscow, were preparing for the final battle with Zhivkov<sup>43</sup>. The first shot was fired by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Petar Mladenov on 24 October 1989 with his letter addressed to the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party<sup>44</sup>. In the letter Mladenov explained that prior to a meeting with the U.S. ambassador Sol Polansky, scheduled for the previous day, he had been told by Deputy Foreign Minister Ivan Ganev and then in a telephone conversation by Zhivkov himself that he should tell the ambassador that the United States was grossly interfering in Bulgaria’s internal affairs. Zhivkov had told him that meetings like the one he was going to have with Polansky were unnecessary, as at them they talked

<sup>42</sup> R. Kolarova, D. Dimitrov, “The Round Table Talks in Bulgaria”..., p. 182.

<sup>43</sup> T. Tomov, *Prevratat na 10 noemvri...*

<sup>44</sup> The letter was published for the first time, in an English translation, by Jordan Baev. – J. Baev, 1989: *Bulgarian Transition to Pluralist Democracy...*, pp. 169–170.

only gibberish. Mladenov had told him that the meeting was necessary for Bulgaria, that in his work he had always tried to “avoid damaging and irrelevant discussions”, but that the extent to which he was “permitted to do this was quite a different matter.” Further the letter read:

In connection with this episode (...) I request that the CC of the BCP and the Politburo take a position on this rude, indecorous, and totally unwarranted attack on me. I feel that, in view of the attitude of comrade Zhivkov – who is Secretary General of the CC of the BCP and Chairman of the State Council – I cannot continue to discharge my duties either as a member of the CC of the BCP and the Politburo or as Bulgaria’s Minister of Foreign Affairs. I request that this letter be taken to mean that I am resigning from these posts.

Mladenov continued in a harsh tone, saying that Zhivkov had led the country “into a deep economic, financial, and political crisis” and that his political agenda, consisting of “deviousness and petty intrigues”, and intended to keep him and his family in power “at all costs and for as long as possible”, had isolated Bulgaria from the rest of the world. He said that in a changed world Bulgaria would have to act in a modern way. And sent the clear message, “If we do not believe in anything else, we should at least believe in the Soviet Union and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.”

Undoubtedly, without confidence in the Kremlin’s backing for his foray, Petar Mladenov would not have had the courage to confront Zhivkov in such a bold manner. From that moment on, events followed rapidly. Zhivkov asked for a meeting in Moscow with Gorbachev, but his request was turned down. Meanwhile Petar Mladenov, still acting as Foreign Minister, made a stop in the Soviet capital on his return from a visit to China. In Sofia, Soviet ambassador Sharapov continued to exert pressure on the Bulgarian leader during all their meetings on 3, 7, and 8 November, telling him among other things that his resignation from his posts (declared as a wish earlier with the certainty it would not be accepted) was met with approval in Moscow. With not enough supporters left, as even old associates of his like Minister of Defence (1962–1990) Dobri Dzhurov, Politburo member Yordan Yotov and Secretary of the Central Committee of the BCP Dimitar Stanishev were drawn to the side of the enemy, at the 9 November Politburo meeting Zhivkov agreed his resignation to be tabled at the next day’s plenum. On 10 November, at the plenum of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party, his resignation was accepted from the posts of General Secretary of the BCP and Chairman of the State Council. The Bulgarian long-time leader’s ousting was complete<sup>45</sup>.

Immediately after the news of the change at the top spread, dissident organisations accelerated their activities. Old Bulgarian parties, done away with by the communists in the second half of the 1940s, were re-established. On 7 December 1989, in a step towards the consolidation of the opposition, the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) was established, its founding members being the Independent Society for Protection of Human Rights (headed by Rumen Vodenicharov)<sup>46</sup>, the Committee for Protection

<sup>45</sup> See D. Ludzhev, *Revolutsiyata v Bulgaria 1989–1991...*, pp. 204–209; D. Nenov, *Porivi i pokrusi...*, pp. 18–21.

<sup>46</sup> The Society for Protection of Human Rights had split in July 1989, with the leader of the Sofia faction Rumen Vodenicharov gaining the upper hand over Ilia Minev and pushing him aside.

of Religious Rights, Freedom of Conscience and Spiritual Values, the Confederation of Labour “Podkrepa”, the Independent Association “Ekoglasnost”, the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union “Nikola Petkov”, the Bulgarian Social Democratic Workers’ Party (United), the Club of the Repressed after 1945, the Citizen Initiative Movement, and the Independent Students’ Association. The Club for Glasnost and Perestroika did not join the UDF at the start as it did not agree with the consolidating organisation’s status as a union or a political coalition. A day later, however, the Club joined the UDF, to be followed in 1990 by the Radical Democratic Party, the Democratic Party, and the Green Party of Bulgaria<sup>47</sup>.

Initially, the UDF and its leadership was not in favour of radical changes, which was not surprising, bearing in mind the number of Communist Party members in many of its member-organisations. Some of the more prominent co-founders of dissident organisations such as Chavdar Kyuranov, Svetlin Rusev, Krastyu Goranov, and Sonya Bakish returned to the BCP even before the start of the Round Table talks (3 January – 14 May 1990). It was only months later that the UDF started contemplating the possibilities of overthrowing the ruling Communist Party<sup>48</sup>.

Both at the first post-coup mass demonstration of about 50,000 people on 18 November 1989 in Sofia, and at the second one on 10 December (with between 50,000 and 100,000 participants according to different sources) a significant part of the speakers had a communist background. Bulgaria’s longest-standing dissident Ilia Minev, however, was not allowed to speak to the people gathered at either of the demonstrations. There was an ugly scene as Chavdar Kyuranov stood in Ilia Minev’s way to the tribune, while the soon-to-become Secretary of the UDF Petar Beron was calling the militia (police) and future UDF speaker Georgi Spasov, Angel Wagenstein, Petko Simeonov and others were telling Minev that this was what had been ordered<sup>49</sup>.

Commenting in later years on the divisions in the UDF and its consequent split, Petko Simeonov speaks of the ‘revival’ in that early period of the 1940s fight between fascists and antifascists. He regards the wish for the democratic process in Bulgaria to be “pushed in the framework of the Second World War” in the light of the “ideological and propaganda pressure of the Communist Party that felt comfortable and secure in the old fascists-antifascists pattern.” For months on end, Simeonov says, the communists were persuading the public that the UDF members were hooligans and violators and that the Union wanted a civil war to break out in the country<sup>50</sup>.

Both the Communist authorities and the moderates in the opposition played the card of the danger of violence and bloodshed that in their view too much protesting and demands for radical changes would lead to. The subject of the risk of events acquiring a violent character was exploited so much in that period that some researchers abroad

<sup>47</sup> *Istoriya na SDS...*, pp. 25–26.

<sup>48</sup> K. Lakov, *The Transition That Never Happened...*, p. 87.

<sup>49</sup> I. Gadjev, *Neprimirimiya Ilia Minev...*, pp.134–137; H. Hristov, *V pamet na choveka...; Hronologiya 1988–1989*, <http://www.decommunization.org/Communism/Bulgaria/1988-89.htm>.

<sup>50</sup> P. Simeonov, *Raztseplenieto*, 23–29 I 1992, [http://old.omda.bg/arhiv/interviews/interviews\\_1992\\_5.htm](http://old.omda.bg/arhiv/interviews/interviews_1992_5.htm).

became ready to regard proneness to violence in political life as part of the Bulgarian national character<sup>51</sup>.

## CONSEQUENCES

A lot has been said about the way Lech Wałęsa and his mostly KOR-related advisors alienated part of the Polish opposition. In comparison, the Bulgarian opposition was young enough not to have suffered from inner divisions, but as it has already been said, it was quick to catch up on this kind of development. Some opposition members were left outside of the negotiation process at the Bulgarian Round Table, while ‘perestroikists’ were well represented in both negotiating teams. An “opposition conceived in a test tube” could not have performed according to the expectations of the truly democratically minded Bulgarians<sup>52</sup>. Decades after the start of transition, sociological data show that the majority of Bulgarians regard the development of the country after 1989 as unsuccessful<sup>53</sup>.

It is interesting to know that according to one of the conclusions reached by the team of researchers that carried out a three-year project titled “The Transition – Voices, Images and Memory”, the conspiracy version about the transition in Bulgaria is dominant in Bulgarian society. The changes that started in 1989 are regarded as having first been negotiated at the highest level between Mikhail Gorbachev and George H.W. Bush, and then, in the next stage, having brought to an arrangement between the communists and the opposition, in particular between Andrey Lukanov and the dissidents<sup>54</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

Looking at the events described from the perspective of time, I would like to suggest that we speak of the ‘long 1989’ in the mode of Ilya Ehrenburg’s and Eric Hobsbawm’s “long nineteenth century” (1789–1914)<sup>55</sup>. My reason for that has to do with the fact that

<sup>51</sup> See D. Dineva, *The Round Table Talks in Poland and Bulgaria: Consequences and Assessment*, “Warsaw East European Review” 2011, vol. 1, pp. 51–52.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 54–55.

<sup>53</sup> D. Dineva, *The Disillusionment with the Cost of Transition*, “Bulgarian Historical Review” 2015, 3–4, pp. 42–43.

<sup>54</sup> The team that carried out the research and conducted interviews concentrated on the view from “below.” “The conspiratorial interpretation of the transition is categorically dominating ‘below,’” says the leader of the project Mihail Gruev and adds, “Sure enough, it is being continually fed up with what is happening ‘above.’” - *Prehodat v Bulgaria – pameti i refleksii*, sast. M. Gruev, Sofia 2013, p. 8; Y. Nikolov, *Mihail Gruev – proekt “Prehodat – glasove, obrazi i pamet”*, „Sega”, 18 VI 2013; M. Velkovska, *Dots. Mihail Gruev: “Konspirativnata interpretatsiya na prehoda e dominirashata”*, 11 V 2013, [https://www.dnevnik.bg/intervju/2013/05/11/2055815\\_doc\\_mihail\\_gruev\\_konspirativnata\\_interpretacia\\_na](https://www.dnevnik.bg/intervju/2013/05/11/2055815_doc_mihail_gruev_konspirativnata_interpretacia_na).

<sup>55</sup> Trying to avoid appropriating someone else’s idea, I have looked up ‘long 1989’ and come upon one instance of usage of this expression. In his book *1989: Bob Dylan Didn’t Have This to Sing About* (University of California Press, 2009) Joshua Clover entitles the introduction “The Long 1989.” Unlike Owen Hatherley, who considers the title of Clover’s book a “minor misnomer, as it covers the popular music of a wider period, roughly bookended by glasnost at one end and the Yugoslavian civil war at the other - 1988 to 1992, more or less” (“New Statesman”, 5 XI



in the perception of many people, both contemporaries of the events and researchers, the immediate pre-1989 period, during which activities preparing the ground for 1989 were carried out, and most of all the year or two after 1989, are all encompassed by the notion of the 'revolution(s) of 1989.' In the case of Bulgaria, for instance, 1989 brought with itself not much more than a palace coup and its immediate effects. The characteristics of a revolutionary change were yet to develop.

A case in point here is Dimitar Ludzev's two-volume study on the "Revolution in Bulgaria 1989–1991." In his aptly named work, the author<sup>56</sup> speaks of the 'gentle' intra-party coup of 10 November 1989, which "under the new conditions in the world and in Eastern Europe turned into the beginning of the 'great change,' into a prelude to the 'gentle' Bulgarian revolution and a transition to democracy<sup>57</sup>."

Would the 'revolution of 1989' be possible without Gorbachev's 'non-policy towards Eastern Europe,' Soviet 'non-involvement'<sup>58</sup> and 'permissiveness'<sup>59</sup>? The truth is - no, it would not. But it is also true that generally, when speaking of Soviet 'involvement' we have in mind the kind of engagement the Brezhnev doctrine provided for. At the same time we cannot help noticing that there was interference on the part of the Kremlin, conducted through local players, in the events of late 1989 in Bulgaria. And that at least during the initial period this fact affected the pattern of transition adopted in the country.

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2009, <https://www.newstatesman.com/books/2009/11/pop-history-end-clover-music>), I am inclined to consider it as somehow corresponding (despite treating a fairly different matter) to my view of 1989's scope.

<sup>56</sup> Member of the Union of Democratic Forces since 1990, participant in the Round Table talks (3 January – 14 May 1990), Deputy Prime Minister (20 December 1990 – 8 November 1991), Minister of Defence (8 November 1991 – 20 May 1992).

<sup>57</sup> D. Ludzev, *Revolution in Bulgaria 1989–1991...*, p. 209.

<sup>58</sup> V.M. Zubok, *New Evidence on the "Soviet Factor" in the Peaceful Revolutions of 1989*, "Cold War International History Project Bulletin" 2001, 12/13, pp. 5, 14.

<sup>59</sup> J. Lévesque, *Soviet Approaches to Eastern Europe at the Beginning of 1989*, "Cold War International History Project Bulletin" 2001, 12/13, p. 49.

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## The Bulgarian 1989

The article treats the main processes and events constituting the 'long 1989' in Bulgaria. It discusses the internal and international environments at the time, the growing tensions in the economic, social, political, and ethnic spheres as well as the activities of the main actors from both the ruling Communist Party elite with its internal divisions (ultimately leading to an intra-party coup) and the circles standing in various degrees of opposition to the official line. Both earlier manifestations of dissent in the country and the activities of the dissident organisations of the late 1980s are examined. Special attention is paid to the two main trends in Bulgarian dissidence – the one striving for a radical change of the system and the other aspiring to 'humanise' the existing order, as attitudes ensuing from the former or the latter would be among the underlying factors behind Bulgaria's choice of the way for its future development.

### KEYWORDS

long 1989, trends in Bulgarian dissidence, intra-party coup

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